Curious about areas of the world when people like longer and more actively?

Read on to see some of the concepts and strategies.

What in the World is a Blue Zone?

A blue and white globe with continents

Description automatically generated

Blue Zones are areas of the world where folks tend to live longer and healthier lives.

Juan Ponce de Leon landed in Florida in 1513, reportedly searching for the “fountain of youth.” In the 1550’s Italian Luigi Cornaro wrote “The Art of Living Long.”

Perhaps inspired by these ancient thinkers, modern day Belgian demographer, Dr. Michael Poulain, circled an area where longevity occurred in Sardinia with a blue pencil on a map. Four years later, in 2004, Dan Buettner assembled a team of demographers and scoured the earth for other locations with similar longevity. He published his findings in the November 2005 edition of National Geographic under the title “The Secrets of Living Longer.” Borrowing from Dr. Poulain’s mapping convention, Buettner and his team identified additional “*Blue Zones*” of longevity in Sardinia, Italy, Okinawa, Japan, Loma Linda, California, Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica, and the island of Ikaria, Greece. In each of these areas’ folks were healthier, lived longer, and remained active throughout their lifespan. Critical to those of us reading this newsletter, this also included a delay in the onset of dementia or Alzheimer’s disease.

Following the publication of this landmark article, the researchers further analyzed the data to find or tease out the longevity secrets. They determined that there were nine distinctive practices in common, including;

1. **Move Naturally** – Move throughout the day; don’t delegate physical work but participate in gardening, walking, cleaning, etc.
2. “Hara Hachi Bu” – **Stop eating when your stomach is 80% full**. There is a difference between no longer hungry and being full. Work to stop when you are no longer hungry. Some strategies include a smaller plate, not having seconds, eat slowly and focus on enjoying your food, sit down and have a meal.
3. **Eat more plants** – The Blue Zone area foods are mainly beans, whole grains, and garden vegetables. Increase your vegetables to 4 – 6 servings a day, while limiting meat intake. Include a handful of nuts daily as well as beans.
4. **Friends at Five/Wine at Five** – Having a daily glass of red wine while relaxing with friends and/or family. Or enjoying a different beverage and handful of nuts.
5. **Purpose** – Everyone needs a purpose in their life, “ikigai” to the Okinawans or “plan de vida” for the Costa Ricans. Research has linked a sense of purpose to longevity. A purpose may be a simple one related to family or a favorite activity --- or based on a new learning.
6. **Relaxation** – Rest, relaxation, socialization are necessary ingredients. Work to reduce the use of social media and informational noise. Work to decrease stress; arrive places a few minutes early, meditate.
7. **Connect with religion and/or spirituality** - A sense of belonging and connecting to social networks is a positive factor in cultivating peace of mind.
8. **Loved Ones First** – Look back to your family for connection and closeness. Get physically closer to your family if possible – share a home. Sit down to a family meal each day. Cultivate family rituals such as Sunday dinners or a family vacation. Consider displaying family photographs and valued items --- as part of that connectedness. Consciously invest time in your family.
9. **Right tribe** – Hanging out with other folks who are also working to incorporate positives into their lifestyles really helps you. Think walking group, book club, service club, etc.

The Blue Zones concepts are now available via books, website, coaches, classes, and a huge organization. They materials are accessible to all ages, inviting, colorful and encouraging.

About us: we are part of a small Task Force that is working to bring the Blue Zones concepts to Pasadena. We are supported by Rick Cole, incoming City Council Person, as well as local agencies. Rick recently shared, “It’s when – not if – Blue Zones is coming to Pasadena.”

Please know that as parents of family members with Down Syndrome, it is our goal to use the City of Pasadena as a pilot study, specifically learning how to more effectively serve those with Down Syndrome and their families. We are motivated by the sad reality that those with Down Syndrome become afflicted with dementia at higher-than-normal rates. To date, the best way to counter early onset is to follow a set of healthy living practices that are consistent with these Bue Zone solutions. It is this exact connection that has motivated our drive to become knowledgeable about Blue Zones principles. We will be sharing our progress in this newsletter. We would also love to hear your thoughts, guidance, and suggestions as we seek to uncover helpful findings and best practices. We believe that by working together, step-by-step, we can improve the lives of those we care about.

Suzi Hoge, parent

Tom Cohenno, parent, and DSALA Board Member