San Jacinto is a town of 54,000 residents in Southern California, in which Mayor Pro Tem Crystal Ruiz promotes physical activity and health equity, ensuring that all residents have access to opportunities to improve health and wellness. Health equity is defined by the CDC as “the state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health.”

Ignite San Jacinto

To promote health, the City created the Ignite San Jacinto initiative focused on the 3 Bs: Be Healthy, Be Well, Be San Jacinto. The initiative was designed to get people excited and engaged. The City Council adopted the Healthy Eating, Active Living resolution in 2020, committing the Mayor, Council, and City to promote and encourage health and wellness in their communities. The initiative creates low-cost and free opportunities for physical activity. Over fifteen different fitness classes are offered yearly and are led by volunteer Certified Fitness Ambassadors. San Jacinto actively, and is continuously looking for ways to improve city infrastructure—parks, walking trails, and fitness equipment. San Jacinto has also invested in low-cost Community Garden space for non-profits serving the local community. The City now has nearly 200 square feet of space that can be used to grow fruits, and vegetables, or a pollinator garden.

Partnering to Reach a Diverse Audience

One of the most important strategies the city uses for reaching people of diverse backgrounds and promoting health equity is active engagement, including special efforts to reach people who don’t usually attend city events. Intentional outreach to the underserved communities in San Jacinto, the Spanish-speaking community, and nearby Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians has broadened inclusion and participation in the City’s offerings. Anecdotally, San Jacinto has seen an increase in participation resulting from this additional outreach, particularly among Spanish-speaking communities. Among the City’s most creative partners in advancing health equity is the non-profit organization, Boxing for Christ, which offers a healthy outlet for youth, particularly those that have been involved with gangs. Leaders of the organization go to city parks and other locations where youth hang out and invite them to the boxing ring. They also invite city leaders, including the Mayor and Police Chief, to serve as mentors. Providing safe places and opportunities for at-risk
a healthier community member, a healthier individual makes a healthier community, and that makes everything better."

Mayor Pro Tem Crystal Ruiz

San Jacinto believes healthy residents are the core of a strong community. This tenet is a foundation for the City's emphasis on health and well-being. Aside from the physical benefit to individuals, Mayor Pro Tem Ruiz has noticed a mental health benefit to increased physical activity, a finding backed by research studies. Mayor Pro Tem Ruiz noted that when people are fit and active, their attitudes change: they're happier and collaborate more with one another. San Jacinto’s Healthy Cities programming creates opportunities for families to bond and neighbors to connect as a community.

Moving Forward
Pro Tem Mayor Ruiz and the City Council remain committed to improving physical activity. They plan to expand the walking program and continue building the trail network over the next 1-2 years.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Get creative and try something different.** Inviting different partners to the table promotes creativity and creates opportunities to get more people involved.
- **Lead by example.** Get residents moving by moving yourself. Don't be afraid to engage in friendly competition.
- **Meet residents where they are.** Opening accessible opportunities for residents to get involved means knowing where they are, where they like to go, who they trust and listen to.
- **Create a mission that all staff members believe in.** Developing the initiative around the 3Bs—Be Healthy, Be Well, Be San Jacinto—helped build staff and community buy-in. When everyone supports the mission, it can go far.
- **Encourage staff who are building the program.** They are the critical people who are needed to make sure the work is successful.