



### Community Health & Well-Being Happenings

*by Ka Zoua Thao, Bilingual Community Health Worker*

Since the start of 2026, my work with UW–Madison Division of Extension in Wood County has continued to grow in depth, reach, and cultural grounding. Much of this year has centered on strengthening partnerships, expanding access to wellness programming, and supporting families through systems navigation and culturally responsive education.

Youth programming has also been a major highlight of the year. I facilitated mental wellness sessions for 7 fourth/fifth graders, 33 middle schoolers, and 18 high school students, creating space for emotional regulation, stress management, and identity-affirming conversations. In addition, I continued supporting the Pittsville School District’s after-school program, serving 20–30 elementary and middle school students each week with activities that build confidence, connection, and healthy coping skills.

Community education has remained a core part of my role. I delivered cultural awareness presentations to churches, fire departments, health departments, and school districts, helping local professionals better understand Hmong culture, trauma-informed approaches, and the importance of culturally grounded communication. I also tabled at multiple community events to increase mental health awareness within the Hmong community and connect families to available resources.

This year also included meaningful expansion of WeCOPE, the evidence-based stress-management and resilience program. I taught a full seven-week series at the Wood County Jail and with local educators, adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of each group. Each week, participants practiced mindfulness, gratitude, healthy thinking patterns, and communication skills, with time built in for reflection and discussion. At the jail, participants shared how the skills helped them manage stress, stay grounded, and navigate difficult emotions in a challenging environment. With educators, the focus centered on burnout prevention, emotional regulation, and tools they could use both personally and in the classroom. Across both settings, participants reported feeling more hopeful, more connected, and better equipped to handle daily stressors. I also continued outreach to departments and community partners to explore opportunities for offering WeCOPE during work hours to support staff well-being.

In addition to WeCOPE, I expanded our Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention offerings through a spring series that included both basic and advanced classes. The basic group learned foundational forms, breathwork, and balance-building movements, while the advanced class focused on refining flow, improving posture, and deepening mind-body awareness. Participants shared that the gentle, structured practice helped reduce stiffness, increase confidence in daily movement, and create a sense of calm. The series wrapped up with strong interest in continuing, and many participants expressed excitement for future sessions.

Across all of this work, my focus has remained consistent: building culturally grounded, relationship-centered pathways to health and well-being; strengthening cross-county partnerships; and ensuring families feel seen, supported, and connected.



# Regional Community Health Team Welcomes Ciara Schultz!

The Regional Community Health Team (RCHT) at UW Madison - Division of Extension provides training, technical assistance, and resource support to build capacity of community-based collaborators in identifying and responding to community-driven health priorities. The team consists of four regional health coordinators. A new Northeast Coordinator, Ciara Schultz, started in this role at the end of February 2026. Ciara's home base is Wood County, extending her services throughout 18 counties.

"I have called Wood County my home for the last 9 years and place of work for the last 17. I am excited to be part of the long-standing, highly reputable work of Wood County Extension," Ciara shares. The RCHT strives to maintain positive collaborative relationships with local and tribal health departments, community-based nonprofits, and other local and state organizations engaged in community health.

Ciara and the RCHT can be found working alongside local and tribal health departments providing support for their Community Health Assessment (CHA) and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) processes. This often looks like developing surveys, facilitating community conversations and focus groups, strategic planning, asset mapping, or priority goal setting and action planning.

Consultation and facilitation for capacity building and impact, particularly when new identified needs arise, is a strength of the RCHT. This could look like supporting a local coalition with strategic planning or asset mapping to help them get started. It could also look like working alongside statewide organizations to bring evidence-based practices to local communities. And so much more!

Finally, the RCHT strives to maintain a continuous presence with local community health organizations by providing on-demand technical assistance and consultation, as well as ongoing training opportunities.

## The team provides in-person or online training on a variety of topics, including:

- Focus Groups for Community Health
- Qualitative Data Analysis
- Trauma-Informed Approaches for Community Health
- Prioritization Planning for Impact
- Collaborations for Sustainability
- Partner Mapping and Relationship Building

For a complete listing of current training offerings, visit:

<https://health.extension.wisc.edu/regional-community-health-team/trainings/>

"Community health needs continue to be directly correlated with social and structural determinants of health. It takes every aspect of a community to come together and address these issues collectively. I have so much confidence in the community work of Wood County; public health, Extension, county and local government, public schools, and all the collaborative work that has always been rooted here. I remain grateful to play a small part in moving the needle toward positive health outcomes for our communities!"

Please feel free to connect with Ciara at [ciara.schultz@wisc.edu](mailto:ciara.schultz@wisc.edu).

