

Idahoans gather to help those in need

Wayne Hoffman /Idaho Freedom Foundation

On a gorgeous weekend not so long ago, hundreds of caring Idahoans gathered at Canyon Springs High School in Caldwell to help men and women — mostly strangers in their community — receive free medical screenings and dental exams.

A group called Love Caldwell organized the event, based on a model designed by Compassion Connect, of Portland, Oregon. Compassion Connect works with churches to set up free health clinics in the Pacific Northwest and across the globe.

Jim Porter, a pastor at Caldwell Free Methodist Church and a member of Love Caldwell, said the program in the past few years has made a difference in the lives of hundreds of volunteers and participants.

Compassion Connect Executive Director Milan Homola said the organization is based on the belief neighbors taking care of one another is a moral imperative, and churches — as part of church ministries — must work together for the betterment of the community.

In addition to providing standard health-care services, which one might expect at a free clinic, the Compassion Connect clinics help the poor by offering podiatry services and haircuts. The care is aimed at improving the quality of life for people who otherwise may not afford such detailed, personalized attention. These little touches go a long way toward making a difference in how the less fortunate feel about themselves, both inside and out.

Volunteer programs like these are not only a blessing to the people receiving the service but also to the people providing it. Consider the difference between Love Caldwell's clinic and programs organized and managed by government. One depends on kindness and compassion; the other depends on the use of force and coercion. No one forces anyone to serve others at a free, volunteer health clinic, and yet it happens and the results are dramatic, effective and longlasting for participants and volunteers.

In the case of compassion-based, voluntary giving, the volunteer is invested in the outcome, and that investment is entirely predicated on kindness and concern for the recipient's wellbeing. Conversely, the recipient knows the volunteers are giving freely of themselves, that they genuinely care or they wouldn't be there. The recipient can attach a face and a name to the people offering help. It's very real and very personal.

Government, on the other hand, uses force and coercion to take resources from people to give to those in need. Lest you think government doesn't use force or coercion, try not paying your taxes and see what happens. The people funding the program are disconnected from the supposed beneficiaries. These disconnects often lead to resentment and suspicion about the people on both sides of the equation — the people giving and the people receiving aid. Those receiving may complain the aid is insufficient, or that people don't care. Those forced to give may complain the services waste money or the recipients don't deserve it or appreciate it.

Porter says, "Once you see real need and poverty, you can't un-see it."

He's right. Poverty must be seen to be solved. It must be seen to build compassion for the people in real need. This can't be done by putting more needy people on bigger, carbon-copy programs administered by government officials. Poverty and need and despair can only be addressed if we are willing to witness

it and give of our ourselves — voluntarily and personally — for the betterment of people who need our help.