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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**“It’s On Us” - Caldwell Youth Forum**

CALDWELL, IDAHO. It began with 15 community volunteers, then added 58 high school students, 6 school staff, and 3 college student advocates. Place this mix of humanity on the College of Idaho campus for a one-day seminar in equipping students to step out of the bystander role and engineer positive change, and the result is the Caldwell Youth Forum, held Wednesday, September 13, 2017. The theme for the day, ‘It’s On Us,’ flowed through each of the sessions, giving students the confidence to take action in reducing destructive behaviors aimed at other students, and to replace them with constructive behaviors. Ron Bonneau, the Youth Forum Subcommittee Chair, summarized the intent and purpose in this way:

“The Caldwell Youth Forum’s outreach to students from our local high schools is to provide them with resources addressing the importance for social responsibility by embracing diversity, inclusiveness, and active involvement in their school’s community. By providing an environment in our schools where students are accepted, feel safe, and enjoy the process, confidence improves, fears are minimized, and learning becomes a priority.”

This annual event began at 9:00 am with registration and introductions, followed by activities designed to help students get comfortable with each other, and to realize that they share more similarities than differences, despite being from six different high schools. With common ground established, students were able to freely interact in discussions about who inspires them and why, as well as some of their own personal history.

During the lunch break, Mayor Garret Nancolas interacted individually with many of the students, recommending that each one get involved in activities that promote positive relationships within their school culture. He also spoke to the group as a whole, encouraging students to have the courage to intervene in difficult situations; to help those who may not be able to stand up for themselves. His primary emphasis to students: “you have the power to make change happen.”

Bukky Ogunrinola, one of the student attendees, summed up her view of this opportunity:

"When spaces like the Caldwell Youth Forum are created to hear the concerns of youth, society in turn sees students develop into passionate members of their communities. By allowing students to deviate an educational experience outside of a classroom setting and still leave intellectually stimulated, shows that youth are interested in our society's issues. Which means it is a necessity that we allow them in the room when discussing solutions to those issues."

Afternoon programming included training on identifying bullying, and how to defuse bullying and similar situations where another student is being pressured into a situation they don't want to participate in. Students then formed back into their individual school groups in order to discuss ways they might motivate other students to buy into activities that promote positive behaviors and viewpoints. The final charge to students was to develop a school-wide project within the next several months to implement positive change at their own school. As students left at the end of the day, they could be heard excitedly discussing steps they could take to bring the day's message back to their own campus.