

# SPIRIT OF CHANGE

2010 Recognition Grant Report



Kansas Health Foundation





## Spirit of hope, spirit of life, spirit of change.

Across the state, dedicated individuals, organizations and communities are working to create better futures for Kansas children, fill gaps in services and care, and reach out to diverse populations to share information about health and wellness. Organizations working at the grassroots level in Kansas form the backbone of the state's nonprofit activities.

Each year, the Kansas Health Foundation's Recognition Grants program helps support more than 100 of these nonprofit groups and agencies as they strive to meet the health-related needs of their communities. The Recognition Grants program gives us the opportunity to provide direct support to the grassroots organizations doing innovative and meaningful work around the state.

These grantees truly have remarkable stories about the ways they're able to contribute to the betterment of their communities. Their dedication, work ethic and success are the inspiration for producing this annual Recognition

Grants report. Since 2008, we've used this publication as a way to shine a light on the outstanding work of these organizations.

We invite you to spend some time reading the stories of the grantees and communities represented in this report. Each of them speaks not only to the dedication of the staff members and volunteers of these organizations, but also to the heart and spirit found in the people of Kansas.

Visit [kansashealth.org](https://kansashealth.org) to see more photos of grantee stories.



### GRANT APPLICATION INFORMATION

If you know an organization looking for funding for a health-related project, the Kansas Health Foundation invites them to learn more about our Recognition Grants program. Please visit [kansashealth.org/grantmaking/recognitiongrants](https://kansashealth.org/grantmaking/recognitiongrants) to find out complete program guidelines, criteria and deadlines. Interested organizations can also read more about past grant recipients and find the program's online application.





## Four-legged Listeners

### READ TO ROVER

Dusty, a golden retriever, lies quietly in a tent at the Kansas Humane Society as children begin filling into the room, books under their arms. A little girl joins Dusty in the tent, eyeing him cautiously.

"I don't like riled-up dogs," she says.

She relaxes when she sees how calm Dusty is. She curls up next to him, her nerves forgotten, and begins reading her book out loud.





Even the smallest animals can teach lessons to children

This is the Humane Society's Read to Rover program, which allows children who may struggle with reading to read aloud to trained service animals. It helps the kids develop their skills and build confidence in an environment where they won't feel judged.

Over the last year, Director of Youth Education Bonnie Harrell has spearheaded a number of programs that bring kids in – ranging in age from toddlers to high schoolers.

With an \$18,375 Recognition Grant from the Kansas Health Foundation, Harrell and the Humane Society

have been able to do some pretty big things not just for local animals in need, but for kids in need.

"We're doing more classroom presentations now, more outreach programs, and we're having more kids come to the shelter," Harrell says. "We've been able to not only expand our current reach, but create new programs for the kids to participate in."

At-risk adolescents benefit from the Humane Society's Teaching Love and Compassion (TLC)

program, which enables the teens to work with shelter animals that may need extra attention. This close interaction allows the youth to learn lessons in love, dependability and responsibility – and has a profound impact on the animals.

**If we've touched a child's life, then maybe we've saved an animal's life.**

"One really rewarding thing to see with an animal is the socialization skills that come from being integrated with children," Harrell says. "Seeing an animal that may be kind of shy and timid respond to a child by being gentle and loving is extremely gratifying."

But the bigger picture is perhaps the most easily overlooked: While these young volunteers are helping save animals, the very nature of their service is doing the same thing for Wichita kids. Those in need of a

little encouragement, guidance or even help with their reading skills, are indirectly learning about compassion and developing moral character.

"The overall vision for me is to ensure that children learn how to be kind to each other and to their peers," Harrell said. "To see these kids come back and see their response is so incredibly rewarding, because I know that we have touched one life. And if we've touched a child's life, then maybe we've saved an animal's life."



Children help out at the Humane Society in many ways





## Generations of Sharing

### BENDING BRAIN AND BODY

If you visit the Garnett Senior Center on a Thursday afternoon, you're likely to find yourself tapping your feet to the music.

"One, two, three, turn, five, six, seven, eight, right heel, left heel, stomp, stomp."





Everyone benefits from the Lunch Bunch interaction

It's line-dancing day for the senior center's Lunch Bunch, a group of children and seniors who meet to have lunch together and socialize.

"Abby's going to do a Hawaiian fire dance with torches, just watch," one of the ladies says.

Abby looks around at the rest of the Lunch Bunch. "I think she was just joking. I hope."

The Lunch Bunch was established by the East Central Kansas Area Agency on Aging (ECKAAA), through a \$10,903 grant from the Kansas Health Foundation. Leslea Rockers, a Special Projects Coordinator for the ECKAAA, helped organize the program.

"They really enjoy having the kids down here," she said. "A lot of these people, their grandkids have moved away, and this is their only interaction with kids."

The kids seem to enjoy it, too. They have been coming all summer to dine and dance with the older adults. They come for different reasons. Some are Girl Scouts, earning a badge. Some are fulfilling community service hours for their schools, and some come with their grandparents.

"They're really nice. I like eating with them," one girl says.

The Lunch Bunch meets twice a week. In addition to Line Dance Thursday, they gather for Bingo Monday. There, the atmosphere is charged with serious anticipation. Seniors and kids hunch over their Bingo cards. The center is silent except for the caller announcing the next number.

"Bingo!" shouts a boy.

"You'd better check that card," answers one of the men. The Lunch Bunch erupts into laughter.

The Lunch Bunch isn't the only program the grant funded.

The ECKAAA also created an exercise program for seniors in five rural communities. Through pre- and post-tests, the seniors are able to measure their improvement in balance, range of motion and flexibility.

The exercise program combines armchair aerobics with mind puzzles and brain benders for a holistic approach to fitness.

## A lot of these people, their grandkids have moved away, and this is their only interaction with kids.

In addition, the grant funded Life Stories, in which a student pairs with a senior to write and professionally print a book about the senior's life; and a computer class where students teach seniors the ins and outs of the Internet, Facebook and email.

The programs are "a fun thing to do," says Betty, one of the Lunch Bunch seniors. Her grandchildren are grown and married, so she enjoys the time she gets to spend around children. She thinks the kids benefit just as much.

"I think children need to be around older people a little more," she says, "to find out they're not all grumpy old people that frown and tell them to get off the yard."

Judging by the smiles on every face, Betty is absolutely right.



A Bingo game is serious business for the Lunch Bunch





## A Trusted Friend

### P.S. IT'S MY BODY

"Happy Bear needs to know that it's OK for him to come in," says the teacher. "Can you welcome him into the classroom?"

The first graders seated on the floor are excited to meet Happy Bear. "Welcome, Happy Bear!" they all shout.





Children learn about personal safety

Personal Safety Happy Bear is a 28-year-old program designed by Sunflower House of Kansas City to teach children from kindergarten through second grade about personal safety. They serve all school districts in Johnson and Wyandotte counties.

A \$24,470 grant from the Kansas Health Foundation helped to pay for teaching staff for the program.

As Happy Bear walks into the classroom, the children begin clapping. The teacher introduces Happy Bear and explains that they will be acting out Happy Bear's day. The teacher pretends to be Happy Bear's mother, waking him up for school.

"Good morning, Happy Bear," she says. "Can we share a good morning hug?"

After Happy Bear hugs her, the teacher explains to the students that, because Happy Bear likes hugs from his mother, this is a "welcome touch." She shows the students how to make a W with their hands as the sign for welcome touches.

When Happy Bear is eating breakfast, the teacher pretends to be his sister, who likes to tickle his nose. But Happy Bear doesn't like having his nose tickled.

"Is this a welcome or an unwelcome touch?" she asks the students.

"Unwelcome," they answer.

The teacher shows the students how to turn their W upside-down with their hands to illustrate the sign for unwelcome touches.

Because Happy Bear doesn't like those tickles, the teacher asks the students what he should say to his sister.

"No!" they shout.

"He could say 'please stop' or 'please go away,'" one little girl says.

## They come to us saying "Happy Bear told me to tell." So we know the program is working.

It's clear the kids have learned how to identify and avoid unwelcome touches. If the behavior doesn't stop, the teacher explains, the next step is to tell someone you trust.

"Who is someone you could tell?" she asks.

The children begin saying the names of people they trust. "Mom, Dad, your principal, your teacher."

"That's right," she says. "And if the first person you tell doesn't listen, you just keep telling until someone helps you."

According to Bev Turner, the director of education at Sunflower House, the program has been very effective in teaching children how to recognize, resist and report unwelcome touches.

"On average, we have about three disclosures from kids after we've presented Happy Bear," she says.

"They come to us saying 'Happy Bear told me to tell.' So we know the program is working."

After discussing personal safety zones and more examples of welcome and unwelcome touches, the children are allowed to come forward and meet Happy Bear one-on-one.

"If you want to hug Happy Bear, just say, 'hug,'" the teacher says. "Or, you can just say, 'handshake,' 'high-five' or 'nothing.'"

Each child chooses to hug Happy Bear. The smiles on their faces show they've learned an important lesson on personal safety from someone they know they can trust.



Using hand-signs helps children express their feelings





## Ready to Read

### EVERYBODY READS

"Can you guess what we're going to read today?" asks Regina Blaske from her cross-legged position on the floor. "I'll give you a hint: We're goin' on a bear hunt."



The half-dozen toddlers crowded around her at Miss Leslie's Day Care in Marysville begin clapping excitedly. "Jamberry!" they all shout.

They crowd a little closer as she begins reading the book.

"One berry, two berry, pick me a blueberry."

"I see the blueberries!" a boy says.

It is no accident that the children are reading about berries. "Jamberry" is one of the books carefully



Children learn healthy habits from a young age

selected as part of Marshall County's Everybody Reads, a program designed to encourage healthy habits while teaching literacy skills to toddlers. A \$13,240 grant from the Kansas Health Foundation helped purchase books and activity supplies for daycares in Marshall, Nemaha and Washington counties.

As an early childhood specialist, Regina understands the need for early exposure to all aspects of literacy for preschool-aged children. She visits home child care centers in three counties and provides an opportunity for reading and other literacy activities to the children.

Regina continues to read and the children join in, shouting the names of the berries and pointing them out in the pictures.

"I like strawberries!" a girl shouts.

"My favorite color is strawberry," another boy says.

After the story, Regina has a special treat in store for the children. She sends them to the restroom to wash their hands.

"Hurry back," she tells them. "We've got something yummy!"

Once the children are all seated, Regina passes out plates. She holds up a plastic tub of berries. "Do you remember what these are?" she asks as she places some on each plate.

"Blueberries!" the children answer.

She repeats this with raspberries and strawberries. The children devour them and quickly ask for more.

"These are yummy!" one boy says. "Some of our blueberries at home are old and kinda squished." Regina explains to him that it happens sometimes with berries, because they are fresh fruit.

## It really is a community effort to prepare these kids for the future.

As the children are eating, Regina tells them about the health benefits of fruit. "Berries are good for your heart," she says.

When everyone has finished, Regina hands out some activity pages to each of the kids.

"We also send nutritional information back home to the parents," she says, "to give the families an opportunity to discuss what they've learned here. It really is a community effort to prepare these kids for the future."

As she leaves the daycare, each child runs up to give her a big hug. "Bye, Miss Gina!" they shout.

One boy tugs at her sleeve before she gets to the door. "Miss Gina," he says. "I can read myself at my house." Regina smiles. This is exactly the kind of goodbye she's been working for.



Toddlers get early exposure to literacy skills





## Seeds of Health

### HEALTHY CHOICES

As children file off the buses at Rosedale Ridge Apartments, they run excitedly to the community center in the middle of the courtyard. Some begin asking for their afternoon snack, while others open up homework and ask some of the adult volunteers for help.





Urban youth benefit from interaction with adult mentors

This is Healthy Choices, an after-school program organized by the Kansas City Urban Youth Center. A \$13,256 grant from the Kansas Health Foundation helped pay for personnel, training and supplies for the program.

Nicole Murrow, the project director, says the Healthy Choices program addresses “things the kids have control over, like screen time and eating breakfast.”

The program empowers children to identify and make healthy decisions in their lives.

One aspect of the program is learning to garden. The grant helped pay for gardening beds, tools and seeds. The children helped build the beds and tend the garden in the courtyard of their apartment complex.

As children share watering duties, and some others pull weeds, Nicole is teaching them about the functions of plants.

“Remember, get the water at the roots, and the stem will suck it up like a straw.”

One little girl, while pulling weeds, finds something delicious.

“There’s a cucumber,” she says. “I want to eat it.”

Nicole explains to her that it’s not quite ready to be picked. “We’ll let it grow a little bit bigger,” she says. “Then you can eat it.”

The children have also planted large sunflowers in one of the beds. As they walk toward them, some comment that they don’t seem to be growing very well.

“It’ll look like it’s dying,” Nicole tells them, “but that’s how we’ll know the seeds are ready. Next week we’ll cook and eat them.”

When the fruits and vegetables are ready, they are divided among the children, who then take them home to share with their families.

“They get excited to take home something they grew and picked,” Nicole says.

Back inside the community center, kids are stretching and warming up for the fitness portion of their afternoon.

As the fitness instructor calls, “March it out, walk it out,” the children line up in a circle and try to follow her movements.

“I’m getting thirsty, this is really a workout,” one girl says.

“Watch this,” another boy says, adding a couple of steps to the routine.

It seems the children don’t even realize they’re learning valuable, healthy skills. They’re having so much fun, it doesn’t seem like education.

## They get excited to take home something they grew and picked.

“Can we please do this every day? I don’t want it to be the weekend,” one girl says.

As Nicole explains they will meet up again on Monday, the children file out of the center, each one hugging her as they go. Nicole knows they are leaving with new abilities to make healthful choices, lessons that will carry them through the rest of their lives.



Obesity prevention is an important aspect of the Healthy Choices program





## Strength in Independence

### LIVING WELL WITH A DISABILITY

To most teens, 50 dollars may not seem like a lot, especially in the age of smartphones and iPods. But to the teens who complete the Living Well with a Disability program, 50 dollars symbolizes responsibility, trust and hope.





Teens learn the importance of staying fit and active

living. The course covers goal setting, healthy lifestyle choices and community resources.

Responsible, independent living is one of the main goals of LWD. The teens learn financial skills, such as comparison shopping at the grocery store and balancing a checkbook. They also have hands-on training in preparing healthy snacks and staying fit through exercise.

For the past year, Three Rivers, an independent living organization in Wamego, has organized a program for teens called Living Well with a Disability (LWD). LWD is a youth education project that promotes a healthy lifestyle and responsible independent living for teens with long-term health problems.

“We are training kids to be leaders of the disability movement,” says Lynn Niehues of Three Rivers, “because kids are the future.”

A \$25,000 grant from the Kansas Health Foundation helped to pay for the personnel, equipment and supplies needed to implement the program. Throughout LWD’s eight-week curriculum, teens are taught skills to prepare them for healthy, independent

“I didn’t know good-for-you food could taste so good!” one boy says during a lesson on healthy snacks.

One of the more popular features of the program is the Nintendo Wii, played on a flat- screen TV purchased with grant funding.

## We are training kids to be leaders of the disability movement.

“The Wii has been as useful for hand-eye coordination as it’s been as an icebreaker for the teens,” says Lynn.

Icebreakers are important in the LWD curriculum, as teens begin to open up about both their fears and their dreams for the future. During one class, they work on a collage depicting what they like and don’t like about their lives in the present, and their future goals. Many of the teens are looking forward to having their own homes, and marriage.

Once the teens successfully complete the program, they are given 50 dollars to spend however they like. The money is a tangible symbol that the teens have the skills to handle their own finances.

Upon receiving their 50 dollars, the teens have varying reactions.

“I’ve never seen a 50 dollar bill before,” one girl says. “I’m buying something for my grandmother,” says a boy.

“I’m saving mine,” another boy says.

For many of the teens, this is the first time they have been trusted to make their own decisions. Now they have confidence in their ability to live independently, responsibly and healthfully.



A Nintendo Wii provides an opportunity for interaction





## Hometown Reinforcement

### WHIRLWIND CAREER COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE CENTER

Walk into Ed Poley's office in Liberal any day of the week and you will be greeted by the smell of coffee and fresh-baked cookies. Ed runs the Whirlwind Career Counseling and Guidance Center and likes to create a cozy environment.

"Fresh coffee makes people comfortable," he says. "And my cookies are pretty good, too."





Whirlwind provides assistance to returning and retired veterans

Feeling comfortable is important at Whirlwind, where Ed provides career and personal counseling to veterans, first responders and their families. Often, when veterans return from service, they're not sure where to begin with their civilian life. That's where Ed steps in.

"I'm here to help them navigate the maze of paperwork when they get back," he says. Whirlwind also helps veterans determine what kind of civilian career they might be interested in. A \$25,000 grant from the Kansas Health Foundation purchased the Discover computer program, which uses interest inventories to suggest possible careers.

"We start with 30 to 50 occupations in a general career area," Ed says. "Then I help them narrow it down to what they think they would like to do."

Once a veteran has chosen a career path, the Discover program outlines the necessary education needed for that job. Ed then helps with the planning, enrollment and applications for college.

One veteran, TJ, had Ed's help in deciding to go back to school to become a diesel technician. TJ and Ed visit regularly to discuss TJ's progress.

"Ed's been a big help for me and lots of other people," TJ says.

## I want to go shake their hands when they get home, and tell them, "If you've got a question, come see me."

In some situations, Ed's role goes beyond that of career counseling. Once a veteran has built a relationship with Ed, they sometimes feel comfortable enough to discuss some of the deeper issues that can affect members of the military.

"Since I'm a vet myself," Ed says, "they know they're talking with someone who understands what they've been through. And if it gets too deep for me, they trust me enough to refer them to someone else who can maybe help more."

Whirlwind doesn't only offer services for returning veterans. Ed also helps answer questions about benefits and policies for retired veterans.

"Ed's done a great job for all of us," one retired veteran says. "He's real concerned about everyone getting what they need."

The Foundation's grant also helped pay for advertising for Ed to get the word out about Whirlwind.

To reach the over 500 veterans living in the region, Whirlwind has booths at local fairs and organizes events for veterans and their families. Ed is very committed to making sure returning veterans are aware that they have help when they come home.

"I want to go shake their hands when they get home, and tell them, 'If you've got a question, come see me,'" Ed says. "I may not have all the answers, but I'll find them for you."



Career and educational counseling helps many vets





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