



**Health Care  
Foundation**  
OF GREATER KANSAS CITY

**A DECADE**  
*of* DIFFERENCE

**HEALTHY  
EATING  
&  
ACTIVE  
LIVING**







In 2005, the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas began making grants to Kansas City area organizations committed to eliminating the barriers to quality health for the uninsured and underserved. The foundation was created two years earlier through the sale of Health Midwest hospitals to Hospital Corporation of America. Since 2005, HCF has awarded over \$200 million to hundreds of entities.

The past decade has been a difficult period for many individuals and organizations served by the foundation. Yet it has also been a time of unmatched opportunity. Most notably, the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2010 represented a landmark event in the evolution of health care reform.

As the foundation completes its first decade, we have looked back across the health care landscape to better understand the obstacles and accomplishments surrounding care to the uninsured and underserved in the Kansas City region. Our objective is to learn from, and reflect upon, past experience in order to better inform and assist the community's collective efforts going forward.

HCF contracted with researchers to conduct a series of interviews and focus groups with health care stakeholders in the healthy eating-active living arena. The results of those conversations represent the heart of this report. More than 50 individuals participated in the process, and their reflections and insights about the past, present and future of healthy eating and active living in the region were enormously beneficial.

But even though stakeholder perceptions form the bulk of this document, the final product inevitably has been filtered through the foundation's lens. The contents therefore ultimately are the responsibility of the foundation.

This document is not meant to be an evaluation of HCF or the healthy eating-active living care grants we've funded over the past 10 years. Nor is this an assessment of population level health needs or secondary data trends. Rather, the goal was to take advantage of our unique perspective in the health care community to examine system level challenges, changes and opportunities.

This assessment has allowed us to more clearly see the enormous strides that have been made in our region since 2005. Too often, those knee-deep in the day-to-day work of bringing about change are unable to pause to appreciate the role they have played in advancing the field. A spirit of cooperation, collaboration and commitment is reflected in these pages and in these efforts, and the HCF is proud to be a part of the progress our community has experienced.





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## HEALTHY LIVING PARTNERSHIPS FLOURISH IN KANSAS CITY

Recognition that wellness and prevention are the ultimate antidotes for chronic disease and rising health care costs is driving broad-based efforts nationwide and across the region to improve community health through better nutrition, active living and healthier lifestyle choices.

The Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City (HCF) has played a central role in supporting area healthy living initiatives since the organization began grantmaking in 2005. Grant funding has allowed vital programs to take root and flourish; foundation leadership has bolstered essential stakeholder collaboration.

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**THE RESULTING EFFORTS** HAVE TRANSFORMED  
THE STATUS QUO AND **HIGHLIGHTED** THE POWER OF  
**COOPERATION** AND **INNOVATION** IN THE **FACE**  
OF SEEMINGLY INTRACTABLE **PUBLIC HEALTH** PROBLEMS.

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Although the health problems set in motion by poor diet, obesity and a lack of physical activity are complex and entrenched, the past decade has seen dramatic progress in the Kansas City region.

Over that time, an evolution has occurred in the way good health is perceived and pursued, with the focus shifting from simply educating individuals on healthy habits to embracing a holistic, community-wide approach.

Urban food opportunities have bloomed through partnerships that are bringing healthy food into underserved areas. An abundance of community gardens, urban farms and regional family farms — coupled with innovative distribution systems and purchasing incentives — have increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables. And support for active lifestyle opportunities has produced new attitudes, programs, exercise facilities, and pedestrian and bicycle pathways across the area.

“Kansas City is reaching a point of critical mass in terms of programs that extend healthy living opportunities to all levels of our society,” said Brenda Calvin, a program officer with HCF. “It’s exciting to see so many innovative and effective ideas coalesce in a community-wide push to improve both individual and community health.”







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## COOPERATION AND LEADERSHIP

A decade ago, few groups were working in the area of healthy eating and active living. But organizations such as Kansas City Healthy Kids, which has helped push many of the policy changes that have occurred in the past 10 years, soon emerged to become the architects of a local movement that relies on a systemic approach to eating well and staying active.

The growth of backbone organizations such as Cultivate KC, Weighing In and Kansas City Community Gardens further expanded the scope of the Kansas City area's healthy living efforts. That momentum has continued, and today, many organizations that didn't exist 10 years ago are working side by side to bring healthier habits and options to the area.

"This really used to be a grassroots movement, but today it has become more institutionalized and involves a far greater range of different arenas, sectors, and economic, racial and ethnic classes," said Katherine Kelly of Cultivate KC, which was created in 2005.

In 2007, the Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition was created to advocate for a food system capable of providing healthy, sustainable and accessible foods for all area residents, regardless of economic status.

Thanks in part to \$475,000 in funding from HCF, the coalition now includes dozens of organizations and individuals working together to support relevant legislative initiatives and grassroots programs in Missouri and Kansas. Key objectives include increasing purchasing of locally grown, fresh and nutritious food and reducing food insecurity for the approximately one in seven metropolitan area residents who don't have enough to eat.

Many of these groups have collaborated to achieve some significant accomplishments. Recent joint successes include:

- Helping establish the H2O to Grow Pilot Grant Fund to install water taps at community gardens and urban farms in Wyandotte County.
- Supporting legislation in Missouri to establish a land bank agency in Kansas City that allows vacant, tax-delinquent properties to be conveyed for gardens and urban farming.
- Working closely with the Kansas City, Missouri, City Council to update and codify ordinances governing urban agricultural activity.

"There are so many more non-traditional partners now," said Adriana Pecina, a program officer at HCF. "We see domestic violence agencies taking on healthy eating and active living, and we've developed unlikely allies, such as the Port Authority, which is partnering on ways to increase the distribution of farm-fresh, healthy food."



## KANSAS CITY HEALTHY KIDS

KC Healthy Kids has been dedicated to reducing childhood obesity through healthy eating and active living since its inception in 2005.

KC Healthy Kids is a leader in helping turn Greater Kansas City into a region that promotes healthy lifestyles by influencing policies that shape our food environment and the built environment. They have been involved with farm to school programs, grocery stores, community gardens and farmers markets; quality physical education and recess; safe walking or biking to school; and safe parks, playgrounds and other places to play.

HCF has awarded KC Healthy Kids eight grants totaling more than \$1 million for core operational support, food and policy assessments and policy initiatives.

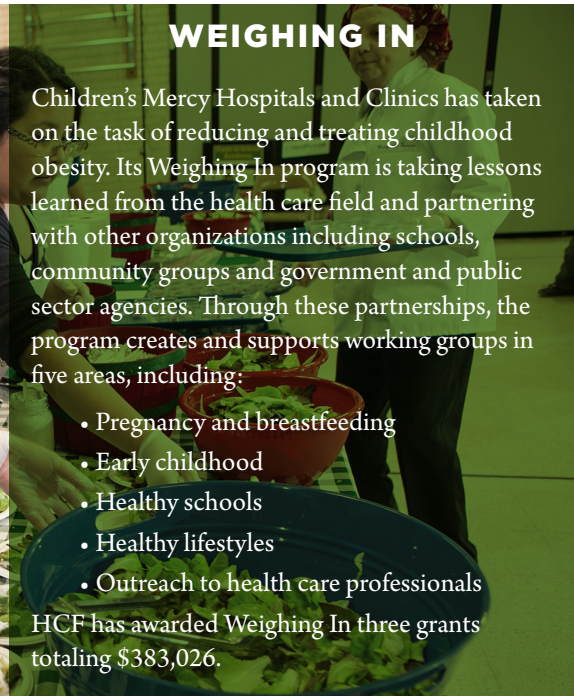


## WEIGHING IN

Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics has taken on the task of reducing and treating childhood obesity. Its Weighing In program is taking lessons learned from the health care field and partnering with other organizations including schools, community groups and government and public sector agencies. Through these partnerships, the program creates and supports working groups in five areas, including:

- Pregnancy and breastfeeding
- Early childhood
- Healthy schools
- Healthy lifestyles
- Outreach to health care professionals

HCF has awarded Weighing In three grants totaling \$383,026.





### COMMITTED COMMUNITIES

The Kansas City region's commitment to healthy living also can be measured through local governments' efforts to pursue key policy initiatives.

In Wyandotte County, change was spurred in 2009 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's inaugural county health rankings report, which put the county last in the state in overall health indicators. Concerned about the prevalence of chronic disease and a citizenry dying too young, civic leaders brought together residents and representatives from more than 50 neighborhoods and organizations to brainstorm solutions.

Leading the effort was former Kansas City, Kansas, Mayor Joe Reardon. Reardon worked to establish partnerships aimed at altering the conversation about health and its determining factors. He also committed the Unified Government of Wyandotte County to rethinking the connections between health, prosperity and government policy.

Momentum established under Reardon's leadership has been sustained by Mayor Mark Holland, and real results have been achieved. Wyandotte County is using casino tax revenue to provide grants in support of a range of healthy eating and active living initiatives.

Plans also are under way to construct a \$12 million, state-of-the-art community center near downtown equipped with a track, pool, weight room and basketball courts. The downtown area's master plan further calls for a new grocery store, multi-family housing and urban agriculture facilities that include space for a farmers market, orchards and gardens.

Citizens are part of the solution in Wyandotte County and work alongside county government in pursuit of healthy living objectives. Community gardeners, for example, are responsible for assessing garden water access applications, and bicyclist organizations provide input on how best to retrofit streets for safer bike and pedestrian travel.





## ALLEN COUNTY, Kansas

“The most important thing to come out of our community engagement is that we’ve learned to trust community members, and community members are learning to trust policymakers,” said Joe Connor, interim assistant county administrator. “It doesn’t happen overnight, but it is a very important step in developing effective solutions.”

In Allen County, Kansas, local government, schools and community advocates all are working together to improve residents’ health. David Toland, executive director of Thrive Allen County, a community organization focused on improving health in Allen County, described the combined efforts as a “marble cake” of leaders and organizations, with Thrive playing an oversight and coordinating role.

“I think it’s a sign of a powerful and sustainable movement when the efforts are not just directed or centered around a handful of people, but instead are benefiting from the energy and creativity of a lot of different stakeholders,” Toland said.

## HEALTHY COMMUNITIES WYANDOTTE

The Healthy Communities Wyandotte coalition was established in 2009 by Kansas City, Kansas, Mayor Joe Reardon and Joe Connor, interim assistant county administrator. It is a county-wide initiative to involve local leaders and residents in improving the health of the people in the community.

As community members came together to address different elements of public health, they secured government buy-in for initiatives such as a comprehensive bike route map, a new sidewalk master plan, a grant program for community garden water access, improvements to make parks more usable and a sold-out May 2014 Food Summit, under the leadership of Mayor Mark Holland.

HCF has awarded the coalition \$440,000.



### NUTRITIONAL INNOVATION

At the most basic level, good health begins with improved nutrition. As a result, efforts aimed at educating community members on how to eat better have continued to expand across the metro area. But it's just as important to ensure reliable access to healthy, locally produced food, and this can be particularly difficult in underserved, low-income areas.

Fortunately, organizations have stepped up to help fill the void. Over the past decade, the number of urban farmers, residential gardeners and school and community gardens in the metropolitan area has exploded.

Cultivate KC is working to grow both food and farms, primarily in Kansas City's urban core. The organization works to develop growers and help start sustainable farm businesses in vacant lands. They also serve as a connector between farmers and the community.

Cultivate KC, the Kansas City Community Gardens and the Lincoln University Cooperative Extension have joined forces to more efficiently provide technical assistance in support of new farm and garden implementations.

## CULTIVATE KANSAS CITY

Cultivate Kansas City was established in 2005 to be a catalyst for the production and consumption of locally grown food by farmers using sustainable production techniques in Kansas City neighborhoods.

Their efforts are focused in three areas: Educating and organizing farmers, growing food and helping farmers connect with their communities. Cultivate KC uses strategies like the Urban Farm Tour, school-based farming and internship programs to support future generations of farmers.

HCF has awarded a total of \$680,710 and six grants to Cultivate KC for organizational capacity, urban farmer development, the Juniper Gardens Training Farm and Get Growing KC project.

## KANSAS CITY COMMUNITY GARDENS

Kansas City Community Gardens (KCCG) supports community, school, church and home gardens by supplying plots and plot maintenance (such as tilling and planting assistance), water, gardening tools, resources and education.

It has expanded its efforts to work with community groups throughout the metropolitan area and now works with more than 1,000 low-income households, 210 community partner gardens and 136 school gardens. The staff also manages five large community garden sites that provide rental plots for gardening to surrounding communities.

HCF's first award to KCCG was \$5,000. It since has awarded KCCG an additional \$640,470.





KATHERINE KELLY, Cultivate KC

Ben Sharda, executive director of Kansas City Community Gardens (KCCG), said there was a time in the not-too-distant past when he was intimately familiar with virtually every community garden project in the city. No more.

The KCCG staff today works with more than 1,000 low-income households, 210 community gardens and 136 school gardens on both sides of the state line. Gardens range from small, family-sustained plots to fruit orchards and large, multi-crop production areas. According to Sharda, the benefits of urban agriculture extend beyond the production of fresh, healthy food.

“Gardening is one of the most important pieces in the whole health puzzle,” Sharda said. “Sometimes, just starting a garden will make people begin to think about the entire spectrum of healthy living. They’re growing healthy vegetables and they are getting more exercise. And from that, they start looking for other ways to get healthier.”

The rise of community agriculture isn’t limited to urban areas. In rural Allen County, 120 plots have been made available for community gardens. A fast-growing farmers market in Iola is helping meet the needs of residents who’ve embraced the benefits of a healthier lifestyle.

“We’re not just planting seeds, we are building skills and building the community,” said Carolyn McLean, a pioneer in the county’s community garden movement. “The gardens are a place where people can come together.”

KCCG has seen a

# 25

## PERCENT GROWTH

in garden plots  
from 2011-2013.

The number of  
low-income  
gardeners has  
grown by

# 30

## PERCENT

since 2008.

KCCG now has  
more than

# 10,000

## STUDENTS

participating in  
school or  
community  
gardens.





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“SOMETIMES *just* STARTING A GARDEN MAKES PEOPLE START”

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THINKING ABOUT THE WHOLE SPECTRUM *of* HEALTHY LIVING.”

BEN SHARDA  
KANSAS CITY COMMUNITY GARDENS







### MATCHING SUPPLY WITH DEMAND

As more fresh food is produced locally and demand increases, better distribution systems become a must. Distribution involves not just the sale of fresh products, but also the steps required to bring produce to market, including processing, packaging, storage and transportation. These often-overlooked links in the food chain are critical to ensuring that healthy foods are available for those who need them most.

“Farmers aren’t going to grow something unless they know they have a market for it,” said Lorin Fahrmeier, a project coordinator with the University of Missouri Extension Office. “So right now we’re working on building this small network of producers. For example, if a school wants tomatoes, we have to have enough tomatoes to fill their weekly supply.”

The importance of distribution was apparent to Diana Endicott and her husband, Gary. The couple quit their jobs in landscaping to return to their family farm. When they grew more than they needed, the Endicotts began selling the excess to Hen House markets.

As the operation grew, the Endicotts realized that a new approach was needed to distribute and market the production of small, regional farms like theirs. With help from Bridging the Gap and Hen House Markets, they founded Good Natured Family Farms. Today, the pioneering alliance includes more than 100 local family farms working together to bring sustainably produced, farm-fresh food to Kansas City through the Hen House and Ball’s Price Chopper supermarket chains.

The alliance has helped fill a vacuum for many small growers, who frequently find that the only outlets for their products are local farmers markets. Despite demand for large quantities of fresh produce among institutions like schools, hospitals and restaurants, many buyers are reluctant to work with smaller growers due to concerns about quantity and availability.



In 2013, HCF took steps to address this problem by providing \$130,000 to help fund a year-long, regional food hub feasibility study. Food hubs are distribution centers that aggregate large quantities of small farm production to better meet the demand of institutional buyers like schools and hospitals.

“We kept hearing about the lack of infrastructure in light processing, aggregation and distribution for small and medium producers,” said Beth Low, the Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition. “So we wanted to learn more.”

Ironically, the problem of distribution for smaller producers is a relatively new one. Over the past half-century, the infrastructure needed to bring smaller local production to market has all but disappeared as agriculture and food production has scaled up and consolidated.

Whether, and to what extent, that infrastructure can be reestablished and a food hub developed in Kansas City remains to be seen. But the feasibility study marked an important start in identifying the market and policy barriers that must be overcome to make the concept work.

In lieu of broad-based solutions like food hubs, local policies are being modified to encourage alternative food production and distribution. In 2010, for example, the city of Kansas City, Missouri, created urban agriculture zones, which allow gardeners, farmers and community gardens to sell their produce in residential neighborhoods.

The following year, the city council passed an ordinance that allowed vendors at farmers markets to provide samples of their products for customers. A “chicken ordinance” also was passed to reduce restrictions on keeping chickens in residential neighborhoods.



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**IN KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, URBAN AGRICULTURE ZONES WERE CREATED TO ALLOW GARDENERS, FARMERS AND COMMUNITY GARDENS TO SELL THEIR PRODUCE IN RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS.**

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### ENSURING THE ESSENTIALS

As necessary as distribution is, urban agriculture clearly would not exist without requisite land and water. Once again, however, a collaborative approach is helping increase land and water access on both sides of the state line.

In 2012, a two-year legislative effort in Kansas City, Missouri, involving multiple organizations resulted in the creation of the Land Bank, a milestone in the evolution of area urban farming. Through the Land Bank, more than 3,500 abandoned, foreclosed or vacant lots and properties in Kansas City are being identified and cataloged. Once documentation is complete, the land can be sold, leased or rented at reasonable prices to buyers with specific improvement plans, which can include urban farms and gardens.

The program is not only strengthening urban agriculture, but also boosting community pride, home ownership and economic growth in some of the city's most economically depressed neighborhoods.

The Unified Government of Wyandotte County has implemented H2O to Grow, a program to install free water taps for urban gardens and farms that meet specific program criteria, including improvements in the lot's appearance.

Kansas City, Missouri, is working with several organizations, including KCCG, to increase water access through the KC Grow program. KC Grow helps farmers and gardeners estimate water needs and then find the resources to meet their requirements. Those who qualify can receive funding for a variety of water projects, including rainwater and storm water catchment systems, municipal water line tap and hydrant installations.

**COLLABORATION IS**  
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PRIDE AND **ECONOMIC**  
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NEIGHBORHOODS.





## EVOLVING HUNGER RELIEF

For thousands of Kansas Citians, accessing hunger-relief agencies became a necessity through the years of the Great Recession and in the lingering, uncertain aftermath that followed. Many families, in fact, no longer use food aid as a periodic supplement but instead rely on it as a primary source of regular meals.

Nearly 15 percent of all Americans today are food insecure, or lack enough food to remain healthy and active, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. That's up from 10 percent before the economic collapse of 2008.

Food assistance agencies consequently are scrambling to meet soaring demand. Most have traditionally depended on non-perishable foods to help feed the hungry, primarily because of the ease with which these products can be stored and distributed. Unfortunately, many traditional food relief items also are high in sodium, fats and sugars. Agencies are therefore searching for new ways to incorporate locally produced, fresh food into their meals and charitable distributions.

Harvesters, Kansas City's regional food bank, dispersed 15 million pounds of fresh produce throughout its 26-county service area in northwestern Missouri and northeastern Kansas in 2014. That represented about 35 percent of the organization's total distribution for the year.

Harvesters was able to boost fresh food distribution by increasing staff and shifting its delivery model. Significantly, the organization also nearly doubled its cooler and freezer space to a total of 34,000 square feet.

The USDA suggests that

**15**  
**PERCENT**  
of all Americans  
are **FOOD**  
**INSECURE.**



John Hornbeck, former president and chief executive officer of Episcopal Community Services of Kansas City, said he believes hunger relief organizations can play a major role in the fight against obesity and chronic disease. The organization provides thousands of meals annually in the Kansas City region to the homeless and working poor.

“Ultimately, hunger represents an extreme form of poor nutrition, and we’ve seen clearly how it impacts the ability of adults to work productively and children to perform well in school,” Hornbeck said. “But until fairly recently, nutrition was not a high priority in hunger relief.”

To change that, Episcopal Community Services is working with a number of organizations, including grocery stores and restaurants, to identify ways to improve the nutritional content of relief meals. The group also has established several gardens to supply food for its Meals on Wheels and food pantry programs.

At the same time, new organizations that collect, transport and distribute food that would otherwise go to waste are helping agencies like Harvesters and the Episcopal Community Services ensure that they have enough fresh produce.

The Society of St. Andrew (SoSA) is a nationwide effort that leveraged volunteers to pick surplus produce in fields, orchards and gardens. The group also picks up unused food from produce companies and distributes it to food banks and other hunger-relief organizations. This work, generally known as gleaning, is now being overseen locally by After the Harvest.



## SOCIETY OF ST. ANDREW (SOSA) WEST 2008-2013

DISTRIBUTED

**15**

**MILLION**

pounds of produce  
to feed hungry people

SUPPORTED

**1,284**

**GLEANINGS**

(from farmers, farmers markets,  
produce companies and growers)

with

**7,617**

**VOLUNTEERS**

and

**664**

**PRODUCERS**

in the Kansas City area

## MAXIMIZING FOOD ASSISTANCE

Although a growing number of families depend on hunger relief organizations for some or all of their nutritional needs, many others continue to use traditional government food assistance programs to put food on the table.

Limited resources, however, often mean that families and individuals must make hard choices between lower quantities of more expensive fresh foods and cheaper, less-healthy processed and non-perishable products.

In Kansas City, a unique solution has emerged to help resolve this dilemma and make fruits and vegetables more affordable for families on assistance. Beans&Greens encourages local residents receiving government aid to shop at local farmers markets.

When SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) or Kansas' SFMNP (Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program) benefits are spent at participating markets, Beans&Greens provides a dollar-for-dollar match on the purchases.



The match makes locally grown produce more accessible and affordable to those receiving assistance, while providing area farmers with new customers and revenues. When Beans&Greens was started in 2010, supporters were optimistic that the program could have an impact. Yet few foresaw how successful it would be.

In 2009, just \$7,900 in SNAP benefit fresh produce sales took place at Kansas City-area farmers markets. But a year later — thanks to Beans&Greens and the organizations that backed it, including the Menorah Legacy Foundation — that number had exploded to \$97,000. Even more remarkably, SNAP farmers market sales reached \$214,000 in 2011.

“The Health Care Foundation was an early supporter and provided a special initiative grant when this was just an idea,” said Gayla Brockman, executive director of the Menorah Legacy Foundation. “Since then, they’ve maintained that support and are on this journey with us. Even when every question wasn’t answered, they believed in us first.”

Thanks to programs like Beans&Greens, sustainable family farmers are seeing their customer base grow. And most importantly, families in need are sitting down to healthier meals.



### MAKING DESERTS BLOOM

Nutrition advocates more than a decade ago coined the evocative term “food desert” to describe urban or rural neighborhoods that don’t have ready access to stores stocking healthy, affordable food.

These areas typically are marked not only by the absence of healthy options, but also by an overabundance of fast food restaurants and convenience stores selling inexpensive, unhealthy food products. A lack of available transportation and often-unsafe areas for pedestrian travel compound the problem for many residents.

The United States Department of Agriculture calculates that approximately 23.5 million people live in food deserts nationwide, with more than half residing in low-income areas. Locally, officials have estimated that at least 66,000 people in Wyandotte County, Kansas, and Jackson County, Missouri, live in food deserts.

To address the problem, groups across the metro have partnered with store owners to stock healthy, affordable food. New grocery stores are being built and old ones retrofitted. And mobile solutions are being deployed in underserved areas. Residents are also given food demonstrations.

“Grocery stores are now our leading economic development focus as we try to bring fresh fruits and vegetables into areas that are extremely underserved,” said Wyandotte County’s Joe Connor.

The USDA  
calculates  
approximately

**23.5**  
**MILLION**  
**PEOPLE**

live in  
food deserts  
nationwide.





## AMONG THE AREA'S RECENT SUCCESSES:

### THE MID-AMERICA REGIONAL COUNCIL (MARC)

*has provided healthier food options for urban core residents through small, neighborhood retail convenience stores. By 2013, MARC had established four healthy corner stores in food deserts across Jackson County.*

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### TRUMAN MEDICAL CENTERS

*has developed the Healthy Harvest Mobile Market, a bus retrofitted as a mobile food market. The vehicle makes regular weekly market visits to a number of underserved neighborhoods. Within three months of going into service in 2012, the mobile market had served 2,400 customers who purchased approximately 16,000 fresh produce items.*

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### THE ARGENTINE NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (ANDA)

*raised more than \$1 million to build a grocery store in a neighborhood previously considered a food desert. Through an additional grant, a walkway was constructed from a nearby bus stop to the store's entrance. The store opened in December 2013.*



### INCLUSION OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Much of the work aimed at expanding healthy eating in Kansas City has focused on ensuring ready supplies of nutritious foods. But the harsh reality is that better nutrition is often a low priority when families and individuals are struggling just to get by.

“It’s always hard for me to talk to families about making healthy purchases when there’s not a grocery store available, or they don’t have the money because they have to pay the most and have the least,” said Nozella Brown, with the Kansas State Extension.

Learning how to effectively engage with populations in need is consequently a key objective for HCF and its partners. Part of that process involves bringing more diverse organizations and perspectives into the healthy living movement. And for HCF, an important goal has been overcoming preconceptions that surrounded the field in its early days, when many in underserved communities saw it as elitist, out-of-touch and controlled by “fit people who go to farmers markets.”

Since then, the foundation and its partner organizations have worked to alter perceptions by acknowledging and addressing cultural differences. One example: The Mattie Rhodes Center, a community organization active in Kansas City’s Hispanic neighborhoods, worked closely with the Cultivate KC and the Beans&Greens programs to establish a Latino farmers market, La Chalupa.

Efforts were made to provide the market with foods and healthy recipes that were consistent with traditional cooking styles. The meat vendor, for instance, was asked to provide cuts that were favorites with Latinos. Over time, this cultural awareness has helped break down barriers that were keeping individuals away from farmers markets and the healthier foods they provided.

Closing the often-wide chasms that exist between cultures and socioeconomic groups is clearly a challenge that extends well beyond healthy living initiatives and efforts.



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“...WE’VE **TRIED** TO MAKE IT **COOL**  
TO **JOIN THIS MOVEMENT...**”

DAVID TOLAND, THRIVE ALLEN COUNTY

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Yet these programs can still play a role in stimulating greater mutual understanding, respect and shared vision. As such, their benefits ultimately may include more than just the health improvements they’re designed to create.

Creating active lifestyles and changing people’s eating behavior does not happen overnight. But the small steps many organizations are making in this region are beginning to transform attitudes about the importance of healthy eating and active living.

Toland said the goal of Thrive Allen County is to change the culture in the county. As a result, they’ve targeted many different groups to make exercise and healthy eating accessible to all.

“What we’re trying to do is make active lifestyles and healthier eating the norm, not the exception,” he said. “To do that, we’ve tried to make it cool to join this movement and to eliminate prejudices or preconceptions that some still carry about eating well and being active.”





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## GETTING ACTIVE



Like healthy eating, exercise has traditionally been viewed as a personal lifestyle choice. And ultimately, it still is: We can choose to move or sit. What's different now is the recognition that it's a lot easier to get exercise when the appropriate facilities, infrastructure and support are readily available.

Children, for instance, are more inclined to sit inside and play video games if there isn't a park or basketball court nearby. And they'll probably take the bus instead of walking to school if streets aren't safe. Nor are adults as likely to get out and walk or bike if sidewalks or paths aren't available. Planners increasingly understand that investments in community centers, swimming pools, walking and biking trails, and free public sports fields are key to engaging residents in active living.

Since 2006, Greater Kansas City LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) has strategically concentrated its resources and responded to the needs of six metropolitan area communities. Through its NeighborhoodsNOW program, LISC attracts resources and brings together influential partners to address complex problems faced by blighted urban-core neighborhoods to foster livable, safe and healthy environments.

"Over the past decade, we have seen a transformation in how local communities view active living infrastructure," said Marlene Nagel, director of MARC's Community Development department. "It is something that increasingly is seen not as a luxury but as a necessity."

“...WE HAVE **SEEN A TRANSFORMATION**  
IN HOW **LOCAL COMMUNITIES** VIEW **ACTIVE**  
**LIVING** INFRASTRUCTURE...AS A **NECESSITY.**”

MARLENE NAGEL, MARC COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

### EFFORTS BY MUNICIPALITIES

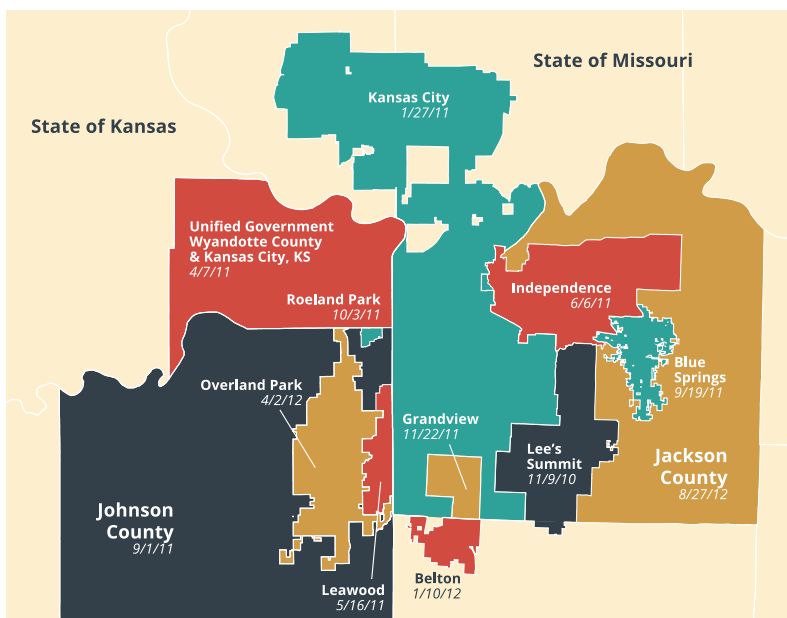
Since 2010, a dozen municipalities in the region have implemented complete streets resolutions. A “complete street” is a street that allows for multiple modes of transportation, such as walkers, bikers, bus riders and wheelchairs, in addition to cars.

Many municipalities in the region are also working to create areas more conducive to physical activity. Johnson and Platte counties have trail systems financed by dedicated sales tax. Lee's Summit and Blue Springs have developed several bike lanes. A bike/pedestrian crossing of the Missouri River has been established.

This kind of visible leadership and financial investment have played a crucial role in setting the stage for other organizations to extend and invest in the efforts.



## AREAS WHERE COMPLETE STREETS ORDINANCES ADOPTED



Kansas City, Missouri, has taken that lesson to heart and emerged as a leader in expanding active living access. In 2008, the city created Bike KC, a long-term plan to install 600 miles of bike lanes and 50 miles of trails throughout the city. So far, nearly 200 bike lanes have been added, along with signage and bike parking facilities. The city also has worked in concert with the local cycling community to improve safety by removing hazardous drainage grates and other obstacles from bike lanes and trails.

Another city program, Active Living KC, has partnered with the Hickman Mills School District to promote safe routes to school, walking school buses and more biking opportunities for the children. By 2012, the group, which is sponsored by the Kansas City Public Works Department, had established walking school bus routes at three schools and participation has continued to grow as the group has matured.

A partnership between Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City and the non-profit BikeWalkKC, meanwhile, gave rise to Kansas City B-Cycle. B-Cycle is a bike-sharing program that, for a small fee, allows individuals to check out a bike at various sites in downtown Kansas City. The bikes can be used for short bike trips and then returned to any of the bike share sites.

These efforts and others resulted in Kansas City being awarded bronze status as a bike-friendly community in 2013 by the League of American Bicyclists.

Thrive Allen County spearheaded the development of the Southwind Rail Train in 2013. Built from a converted railroad corridor between Iola and Humboldt, Kansas, the 6.5-mile stretch is now used for recreational biking and is maintained and managed by the county.



### ENGAGED NEIGHBORHOODS

In addition to municipalities, neighborhoods also are stepping up with grassroots solutions to stimulate active living and combat the health risks associated with sedentary lifestyles. In 2008, Wyandotte County's Rosedale area, an ethnically diverse, low-income community of 14,500 people, was confronted with an alarming statistic — 51 percent of Rosedale's school-aged children were considered obese.

In response, residents — under the leadership of the Rosedale Neighborhood Association — took action. A community walking club and walking school bus were created, and Fisher Park was made more pedestrian-friendly with trail markers and benches. Community leaders also provided bicycle safety and repair classes through schools and supported Freewheels for Kids and bicycle rodeos. Additionally, five new sporting opportunities for local youth were sponsored in Rosedale, including soccer and disc golf.

“If you have a sidewalk in front of your house, you are probably more active than if you live on a busy street,” said Heidi Holliday, executive director of Rosedale Development Association. “We have the first mile of bike lanes outside our office and we just opened the first mile of trails at Rosedale Arch Park — we finally have the resources to carry out the community's vision.”

## ROSEDALE DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

The Rosedale Healthy Kids Initiative supports access to healthy foods and active lifestyles. Rosedale's efforts to increase access to healthy foods included community gardens, farmers markets and policy initiatives. Rosedale established approximately seven community and schoolyard gardens and was able to expand several in 2011 and 2012, despite drought conditions. The Development Association distributed home garden kits and planned to install five gardens at the Belrose Manor Public Housing complex. They have also worked with the Unified Government to create a Rosedale Master Plan and a Green Corridor Plan focused on a half-mile wide, 3.9-mile corridor along Southwest Boulevard/Merriam Lane.

HCF has awarded Rosedale six grants totaling \$385,578.

## IVANHOE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

The Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council was organized in 1967 and reorganized in 1997 as a 501(c)(3) organization with a mission to build a “clean, beautiful, safe and thriving neighborhood.” Since then, this neighborhood organization, which represents approximately 8,000 residents, has become one of the city’s most dynamic examples of revitalization.

HCF has awarded Ivanhoe four grants totaling \$279,514.

Ivanhoe, an ethnically diverse, low-income neighborhood in central Kansas City, through the years has wrestled with a range of problems, including high crime, struggling schools, a low owner-occupancy housing rate and a lack of local businesses.

To address the issues, the community decided to concentrate on the assets of the neighborhood. “What we saw was a group of people who were willing and committed and who wanted to stay in their homes,” said Dina Newman of the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council. “We also saw lots of vacant land and the possibilities and partnerships that could help address some of the major challenges of the neighborhood.”

Ivanhoe began working to make area streets and parks safer. Walking groups were created and vacant lots and abandoned houses were beautified. A community garden was started in 2012 on a lot provided by a local church. A new grocery store eventually came into the area, providing local jobs and improving access to healthy, low-cost foods.

“**MORE AND MORE AREAS**  
ARE SEEING **THE POSSIBILITIES** OF  
MAKING **REAL DIFFERENCES...**”

GRETCHEN KUNKEL, KC HEALTHY KIDS



“There is real excitement within neighborhoods when they know they’re in control and able to make positive changes,” said Gretchen Kunkel, president of KC Healthy Kids, a non-profit dedicated to reducing obesity and improving health among children. “More and more areas are seeing the possibilities of making real differences, and that’s why I think this kind of movement is only going to grow.”



### LEVERAGING SCHOOLS

Because children spend up to 2,000 hours each year at school, the educational environment can have enormous influence on behaviors relating to exercise and nutrition. For that reason, many school districts are changing policies and improving access to healthy eating and active living for children and families.

Much of this effort has been spurred by national legislation, including a 2004 funding law that required all schools taking part in the National School Lunch Program to create wellness policies and to develop guidelines for food and beverages sold on school grounds.

Since the legislation took effect, many schools have eliminated vending machines, changed lunch menus, created school gardens and supported programs like walking school buses.



**BECAUSE COMMUNITIES** OFTEN REVOLVE AROUND THEIR **SCHOOLS**, THEY CAN **PLAY A MAJOR ROLE** IN BUILDING **HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENTS**.

In 2010, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act mandated that school wellness policies include evaluation and public reporting on the schools' progress. The act also reauthorized child nutrition programs and included new guidelines for school lunches, which are served to approximately 32 million students annually nationwide. Implementation of the law has been rocky. Many students have rejected the foods, and lunch staffs have complained that the guidelines are cost-prohibitive.

HCF funded a study in 2012 by researchers at the University of Kansas Medical Center and Children's Mercy Hospital to examine the efficacy of area school wellness policies and programs.

Among the study's revelations was that program implementation varied significantly from school to school. The mandate to establish wellness programs has produced mixed results, with programs frequently failing to meet national recommendations for nutrition or physical activity. For example, many schools were not engaging families in wellness and parents often were pushing back on the issue. More than half of schools used junk foods and high-fat foods in fundraising. Equally troubling, food was often used to reward students, while restrictions on physical activity were used to punish.

According to Deborah Markenson, director of Weighing In, Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics, communities must move away from assigning blame when it comes to battling childhood obesity in the school environment.

New nutrition guidelines affect

**32**  
**MILLION**  
**STUDENTS**

who are served school lunches annually.

“We really need to focus on changing policies, like getting more recess time back in the school setting,” she said. “We’re squeezing out the very elements that are not only foundational to health, but also important to academic success and to an overall productive life.”

A United States Department of Agriculture initiative, the Farm-to-School Program, works to provide schools with locally grown products in support of healthier lunches. The Missouri Farm-to-School Act is supporting the program with a taskforce that includes representatives of state agriculture and educational agencies, as well as individuals involved in agribusiness and school service programs.

The task force will provide recommendations to help schools incorporate locally grown products into their food service programs. Findings and recommendations will be reported to the governor and General Assembly by the end of 2015.

Some local districts are taking part in programs such as the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. The program is a joint effort with the American Heart Association and the Clinton Foundation aimed at boosting health in schools and improving policies that affect healthy eating and inactivity.

**11 Ways TO CREATE HEALTHY SCHOOLS**

- 1.** Staff role model healthy behaviors.
- 2.** Families support school wellness goals.
- 3.** Restrict marketing of unhealthy choices.
- 4.** Assure healthy options in vending machines, school stores & à la carte.
- 5.** Reduce or avoid use of food as a reward.
- 6.** Regulate food served at class parties and other school celebrations.
- 7.** Ensure adequate time to eat.
- 8.** Regulate food sold for fundraising at all times (not only during the school day).
- 9.** Provide regular physical activity breaks for students during classroom time (in addition to recess and PE).
- 10.** Stop taking away students' physical activity times as punishment.
- 11.** Provide adequate daily recess time for elementary grades.

For more information on this report and the Weighing In and Healthy Schools Committee, visit <http://hcfjkc.org/resources/nutrition-and-obesity>

Health Care Foundation  
 Weighing In  
 Children's Mercy Hospitals & Clinics  
 KU School of Medicine

## PE4LIFE

PE4Life was an innovative not-for-profit that helped schools and communities develop quality, daily physical education programs that emphasize lifetime sports and physical activity. They provided customized training, technical assistance and equipment to schools and were the first to introduce fitness testing and movement-generated video games into the gym class setting. Schools that adopted the PE4Life program saw significant reductions in school suspensions, improvements in academic performance and a profound reduction in the number of kids asking to be excused from gym class.

Early funders were Menorah Legacy Foundation and Blue Cross and Blue Shield. HCF provided more than \$1,400,000 for assistance in six school districts, with many of the schools in the Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, school districts.



### BUILDING INCREMENTAL CHANGE

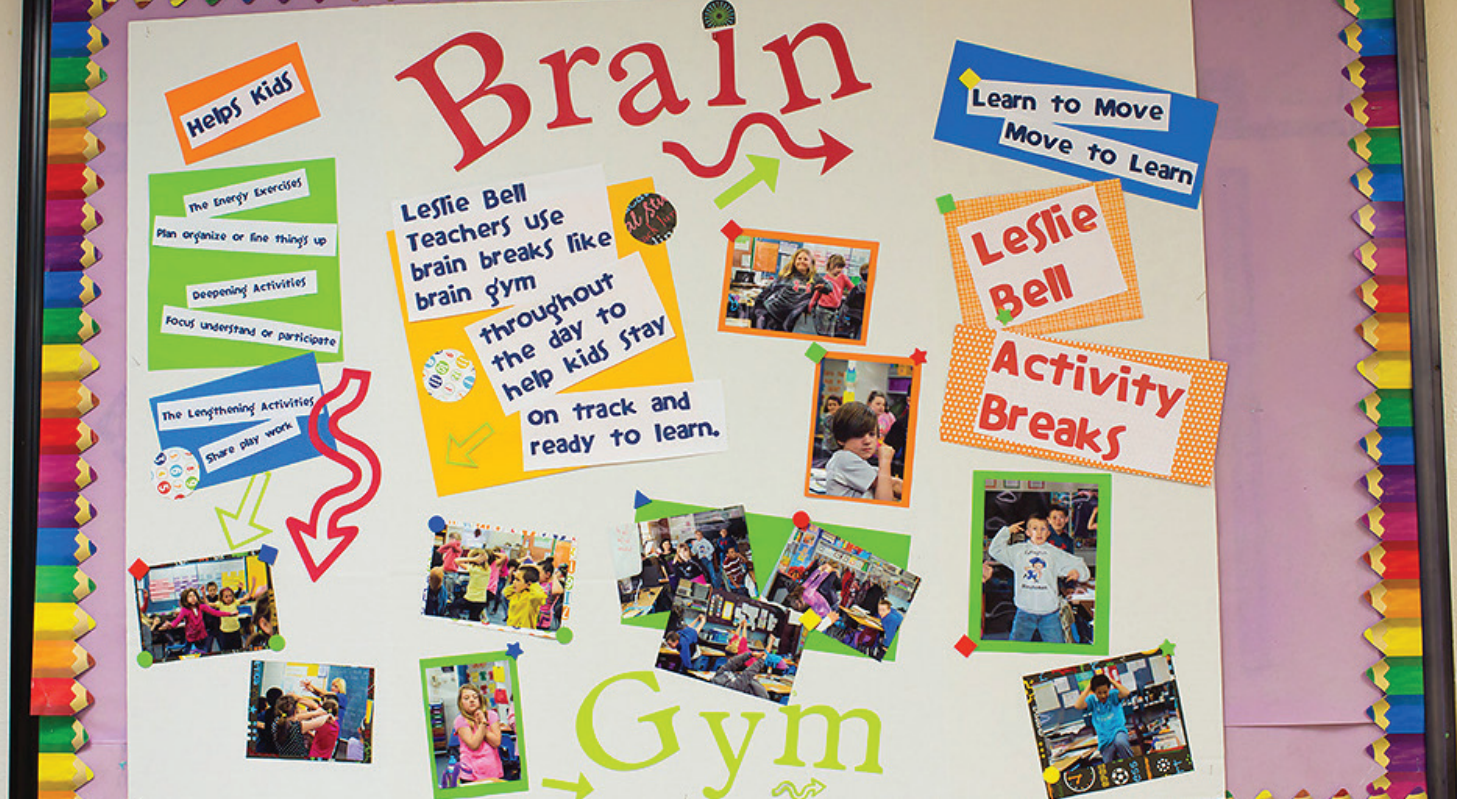
When DeLaSalle Education Center began its healthy eating and active living efforts, the school followed a fairly traditional path. This included policy changes such as providing healthier vending options for students and faculty.

Later, DeLaSalle started a community garden and developed Healthy Lifestyles Day, a program that required all educators to incorporate nutrition and physical activity content into their courses. Over time, parents and other student family members became engaged in the pursuit of healthier habits, and the school eventually hired a chef to prepare fresh food daily for students and faculty.

By moving incrementally and providing room for experimentation and discussion, the school developed momentum that ultimately has proven unstoppable.

“DeLaSalle Education Center has a philosophy that is focused on looking at a child holistically and not just academically,” said Vanessa Van Goethem-Piela, former development director at the school. “Healthy lifestyles represented a natural fit for DeLaSalle, and over the years those efforts have continued to grow.”





The Independence School District similarly realized some time ago that academic objectives could not be achieved without considering the whole student. Poor nutrition, inadequate physical activity and an alarming rise in obesity were putting learning at risk. The district began looking for ways to address these external factors.

With the financial support of HCF, the Independence district implemented preventive programs that helped reshape health in the classroom. They also built staff capacity surrounding health issues and reset the district's culture to focus on the entire student's well-being.

Later, a wellness committee was created to institutionalize these investments and a preventive health approach was extended to district faculty and staff. The district's efforts helped drive a cultural shift that, over time, has made health a key part of a school's business.

Today, district officials are working to take the next step as they move from an exclusively prevention-focused approach toward helping children and their families connect with weight-loss intervention programs.

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**THE INDEPENDENCE  
SCHOOL DISTRICT IS DRIVING  
A CULTURAL SHIFT THAT HAS MADE  
HEALTH A KEY PART OF A  
SCHOOL'S BUSINESS.**

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## NEW PARTNERS AND CHAMPIONS

Institutions such as hospitals and universities are traditionally and understandably advocates for healthy communities. But in the past decade, the fight has attracted other organizations. Today, the business sector, social service agencies and restaurants all are working to integrate better nutrition and more physical activity into their programming, workforce options and services.

One increasingly popular approach among businesses has been the advent of wellness programs. Many of these involve smoking cessation, incentives for healthy behaviors and efforts to improve the condition of workers with chronic illnesses.

Some employers, however, are using even more inventive solutions to improve employee health. Children's Mercy Hospital, for example, has removed all sugary beverages from their vending machines, cafeterias and gift shops. In 2013, they became a member of the Karat Gold Partnership by committing publicly to increasing the amount of locally grown, sustainable food they provide to patients.

Other employers have partnered with Good Natured Family Farms (GNFF) to implement employer-based, community-supported agriculture options for employees. The Mid-America Coalition on Health Care recruited several large employers to collaborate with GNFF in providing access to fresh produce on-site to employees.

Response to the program has been overwhelming, with companies like Sprint and Hallmark getting involved. In fact, interest in the program was so high that some would-be participant companies were turned away. Local construction giant JE Dunn began modifying meals and also started offering healthy cooking demonstrations and recipes for employees. Workers noticed as the company tried to engage employees and cultivate healthier eating: JE Dunn human resources staff received unsolicited thank-you notes from employees who were grateful for the efforts.

In 2014, the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce — in partnership with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City and a number of regional health and wellness leaders including HCF — created Healthy KC.

The organization's purpose is to create high-level task forces that can focus on key health issues and bring a regional approach to health and wellness. A 16-member commission representing a broad swath of business and health care communities has been working on these topics and an action plan is scheduled to be launched this year.







*“It’s* EXCITING TO SEE *so many*  
INNOVATIVE *and* EFFECTIVE IDEAS COALESCE  
*in a* COMMUNITY-WIDE PUSH *to* IMPROVE BOTH  
INDIVIDUAL *and* COMMUNITY HEALTH.”

BRENDA CALVIN  
HEALTH CARE FOUNDATION OF GREATER KANSAS CITY



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## LESSONS LEARNED

The focus on healthy communities has expanded tremendously in the past decade. What began in the early 2000s as slow and steady efforts to educate and engage individuals, policy makers and service providers has helped fuel a boon in programming and services in the late 2000s and beyond.

Among the key lessons learned on the journey thus far:

- Multi-sector formal and informal partnerships have become common as the field has grown. Traditional hunger relief organizations and social service organizations are partnering by integrating nutrition and physical activity programming into their work.
- Support from local and elected champions has been critically important, and policy and infrastructure improvements are helping sustain momentum for healthier communities.
- School-based programming is important but cannot sustain all community and neighborhood activities. Community-based programming therefore must complement and support school-based efforts, as schools ultimately have an educational mission and limited resources to devote to health.
- The growing demand for healthier foods is putting pressure on the local food system to ramp up its supply and distribution channels, but it is also ensuring a market for producers.

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**AS IT SHOULD BE, GOOD HEALTH**  
IS INCREASINGLY BEING THOUGHT OF AS A  
**RIGHT** FOR EVERYONE, **REGARDLESS**  
OF THEIR **CIRCUMSTANCES.**





On a more direct and individual level, possibly the most important lesson has been the awareness that health is not solely the result of individual choices, but also relies on our environment. Our ZIP code has as large an impact on our health as our genetic code.

This understanding has helped foster a more holistic approach in the way people look at the issue. In the past, healthy living and active lifestyles were viewed as a luxury of the upper and middle classes. But the movement is spreading and becoming imbued into our culture. As it must and should be, good health is increasingly seen as a right for everyone, regardless of circumstances.

Kansas City's energetic and generous spirit, combined with its boundless creativity and practical, problem-solving skills, have produced a cornucopia of healthy living solutions over the past decade. Successes have been large and small, public and private. Progress has been made in the schools and at the local and federal government level. Promising partnerships are emerging in the business sector. And grassroots efforts continue to spring up to help build healthful and connected communities.

Changing people's behavior does not happen overnight and must be pursued incrementally. It will require that current stakeholders and new partners come to the table.



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## LOOKING AHEAD

The Kansas City metro area has made enormous strides over the past 10 years in improving nutrition and increasing physical activity. But much remains to be done.

Among the priorities facing the community:

### INCLUSION OF NON-TRADITIONAL VOICES

Over the past decade we have seen great improvements in the fight against obesity in almost every group. Yet the gains have not been as great in communities of color. As we move forward, we need to ensure that all voices are heard. What is often overlooked in efforts to improve opportunities for healthy eating and active living are the voices and experiences of underresourced communities. Those most impacted need to be included in these efforts.



### CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT OF MULTI-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

In order to progress in this work, we need to continue to work not only with different sectors but also on different levels and dimensions from the grassroots to the grassroops. Even those who currently work in the field, such as food retailers and health care providers, are perceived as less than fully engaged in the movement to improve nutrition and increase physical activity. On top of that, there is still a need to engage the business sector and civic leaders to a greater extent.

### ENSURING THE SUPPLY OF HEALTHY FOODS MEETS LOCAL DEMAND

One of the challenges of increasing the visibility and importance of local, healthy foods is attempting to manage the increase in demand that may result. Lorin Fahrmeier, a project coordinator for the University of Missouri Extension Office, described this in terms of achieving balance in the marketplace, so that the food system — particularly the supply chains for healthier food — is not shocked by demand that cannot be met. This could erode consumer confidence and stall transformation. It will therefore be imperative to work toward building producers' capacity to respond to increased need.



## LONG-TERM AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE IS DIFFICULT TO SUSTAIN

Sustainability concerns are particularly relevant given the very long trajectory of the changes required to create healthier lifestyles. It can take months or years for behavioral changes to take root in a population and yield significant progress on health outcomes.

## IMPROVING SCHOOL-BASED HEALTHY EATING AND ACTIVE LIVING PROGRAMS

There is still much to learn about how to most effectively change school policies in order to improve nutrition and physical activity in schools. Researchers have found that it is valuable to write policies in an explicit, comprehensive manner. Equally important, efforts must be made to monitor and enforce those provisions to promote a healthy school environment.

One area that is frequently overlooked but that will be important to address in the coming years is food offered to children outside of the school nutrition program.

Despite recommendations to the contrary, many schools continue to sell foods like candy bars and other unhealthy snacks. Frequently, these sales provide income schools need for bands and other special activities.







[HCFDecadeofDifference.org](http://HCFDecadeofDifference.org)