



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/healthy-kansans-2030-wyandotte-county>

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Wyandotte County residents rallying around projects that promote health

Extension office is helping to foster community improvements

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Residents and extension staff in Wyandotte County are sowing seeds of hope for a healthier future in an area of Kansas that often falls near the bottom of the state's health rankings.

Denise Dias, director of K-State Research and Extension's office in Wyandotte County, said a series of focus group meetings earlier this year opened new opportunities to improve life in the county.

"We asked people to come and discuss with us their concerns around health and community, and a common thread in everything we heard was funding," Dias said.

The result: Residents are leading a renewed focus on health in the county's neighborhoods, discussing projects aimed at such improvements as cleaning up run-down neighborhoods, building walking trails, establishing community gardens, improving sidewalks and more.

"Some areas of our city are very run down," Dias said. "An area that we're especially focusing on is an older part of the county where the neighborhoods need to be lifted up."

In just a few months, Dias notes a new energy is building among an increasingly growing number of residents.

"People are realizing that they don't have to wait for someone else to make change or to take care of them," Dias said. "They are feeling empowered to believe that they can make choices to improve their community."

Dias hopes the momentum building in Wyandotte County will become a success story in an initiative called [Healthy Kansans 2030](#), led by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

Extension agents in Kansas are actively involved in that initiative, hoping to be a local link in making positive changes in communities across the state.

“It’s a great fit for extension professionals,” said Elaine Johannes, the Kansas Health Foundation’s Distinguished Professor of Community Health at Kansas State University. “Extension units around the state – like Denise’s group in Wyandotte County – understand their community. They understand the partnerships that can help the community improve their health, not just in preventing diseases, but also in building good places where residents can thrive.”

In Wyandotte County’s case, early focus group discussions led to a pair of very popular grant writing workshops in which residents learned where to find the money and how to write applications to bring those funds to their community. Dias said 65 residents have been trained to write grants.

“We’ve started out with little grants of just a couple thousand dollars to do something nice in their neighborhood, but those little pieces add up to helping the entire community improve,” Dias said.

Beyond that, Johannes notes, it’s opened opportunities for additional partnerships between extension agents and residents in the county.

“Denise and her team are building the capacity for the community to take on other health related issues, such as hypertension, or creating local gardens and play areas, or offering other classes,” Johannes said. “It’s really an opportunity to show that health doesn’t always reside in a doctor’s office; it resides in a community where people are working together.”

[Results of the 2024 County Health Rankings on Civic Health in the United States](#) are available online.

A longer discussion with Dias and Johannes on Healthy Kansans 2023 can be heard on [the weekly radio program, Sound Living](#), produced by K-State Research and Extension.

More information on healthy living and improving communities also is available at [local extension offices in Kansas](#).

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Healthy Kansas 2030 (Kansas Department of Health and Environment),
<https://www.kdhe.ks.gov/201/State-Health-Assessment-Improvement-Plan>

2024 National Findings Report: County Rankings on Civic Health,
<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/findings-and-insights/2024-national-findings-report>

K-State Research and Extension local offices, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/stateandareamaps.html>

Sound Living, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/news/radio-network/sound-living.html>

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