



### Highlight from the 2014 Human Service Summit

The 2014 Human Service Summit on June 10 drew an audience of 170 to hear Elizabeth Kneebone, who has studied suburban poverty across the country for Brookings. Growing poverty in suburbia is a national phenomenon. The suburban poor grew in 93 of 95 metros in that same period. Kneebone told the group the county's poor population grew by 144 percent between 2000 and 2012.

This is the fourth year the summit has focused on poverty. Poverty is at home in Johnson County. In the Kansas City metro only Jackson County has more people living below the poverty line. The number of poor in Johnson County has more than doubled in a decade.

Johnson County now has 37,500 people with incomes below 100 percent of the federal poverty level - one in 15 county residents. Two-thirds of the working age poor had jobs and one-third of the poor are children under 18. Of those 25 or older, 31 percent are college graduates. More than 40 percent are in deep poverty: incomes below 50 percent of the federal poverty level.

"We are 50 years on from the war on poverty," Kneebone told the group. The geography of poverty looks different than it did 50 years ago. Population growth, movement of jobs out of the core cities, and the subprime lending crisis have contributed to suburban poverty, but it was not a product of the recession, Kneebone said. The shift began in the 1980s. By 2010 half of all jobs in the metro were more than 10 miles from downtown Kansas City - and lack of suburban transit options meant it was harder to get to those jobs.

While poverty has exploded in suburbs across the nation, the suburban safety net is often thinner there than in the urban core. Anti-poverty programs have been focused on urban areas for decades and the suburban infrastructure to deal with poverty is not up to scale, she said. Federal funding is spread across 81 programs and 10 agencies, complicating the relief system. And similar to federal programs, philanthropic dollars tend to be targeted to urban areas.

"There is no cookie-cutter approach to responding to suburban poverty. We are seeing leadership come from different places" to address poverty, Kneebone said. She pointed to examples across the nation of innovative efforts. Those efforts that have been successful, she said, have three principles in common: they achieve scale, they collaborate and integrate and they fund strategically. Those principles are being put in practice in new initiatives in places like Houston, Chicago and Montgomery County, Maryland.

In his response to Kneebone's remarks, Johnson County Manager Hannes Zacharias said Johnson County can be successful in addressing the rapidly rising rates of poverty.

Zacharias said the challenge of poverty is a moral issue, as well as an economic issue. "No one is going to save us but ourselves." The next economy is based on human capital, and everyone has a stake in building the needed human capital. Zacharias announced that the Board of County Commissioners has adopted confronting poverty in the county as its number one priority.

Karen Wulfkuhle, UCS Executive Director, told audience members that UCS will be working closely with the County to develop and implement ideas that can result in measureable improvement. Those efforts will likely engage Summit attendees and other stakeholders. Following the presentations, Summit attendees had the opportunity to participate in small group discussion activity. The summary from those discussions will be posted on the website in July.