

THE “GOOD JOBS” WORKSHOP

A Strategy to Reduce Poverty and Create Opportunity in the Human Service Sector

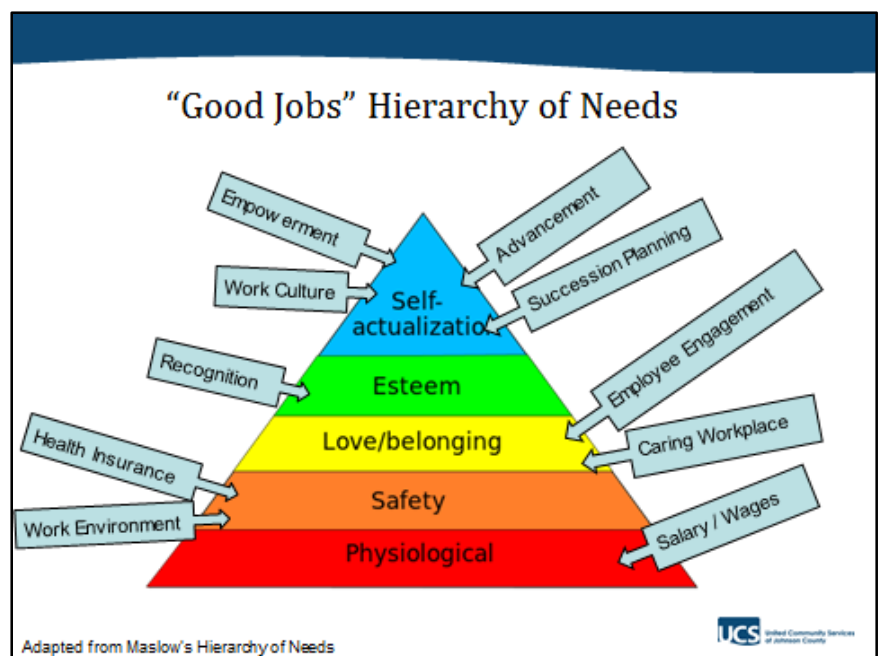
United Community Services of Johnson County (UCS) hosted a three-part workshop aimed at helping Johnson County organizations implement “good jobs”. The workshop was inspired by UCS’s 2015 release of [“A Framework for Reducing Poverty and Creating Opportunity”](#), which called on the health and human services sector to make sure every job is a good job characterized by a living wage, health benefits, predictable work schedules, paid time off, earned sick leave, strong work/life balance and advancement opportunities.

The “Good Jobs” workshop provided a unique learning opportunity to nonprofit organizations who needed tools and strategies to implement a “good jobs” framework. The organizations met as a cohort three times between November 2015 and May 2016. The workshops were facilitated by human resources professionals from Johnson County Government, the City of Gardner, and the City of Mission. Participants also learned from other local organizations who have implemented a “good jobs” strategy.

Participants included Executive Directors and Human Resources Directors from the following organizations: DCCCA, Inc.; El Centro; Growing Futures Early Education Center, Inc.; Health Partnership Clinic; Heartland RADAC; Preferred Family Healthcare, SAFEHOME Kansas, The Family Conservancy; United Community Services of Johnson County; and Workforce Partnership.

Workshop #1

The introductory session provided participants with an overview of “good jobs” characteristics and an opportunity to brainstorm ideas for implementation. A pre-workshop survey indicated that participants were interested in learning how to engage and recognize their employees beyond salary increases, and there was a brief presentation on **Employee Engagement, Recognition and Rewards**. Facilitators introduced the **“Good Jobs Hierarchy of Needs”** to demonstrate the fundamental components of a “good job” that are necessary for true employee engagement and



success. At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to take one action before the next workshop that would help them advance their “good jobs” goals.

Workshop #2

The second workshop focused on two factors that are critical for “good jobs”: **salaries and benefits**. These topics were important to participants and also aligned with UCS’s efforts to **reduce poverty by ensuring that human service sector employees have adequate financial resources to meet their basic needs**. Gordon Docking, President and CEO of KidsTLC, shared a step-by-step overview of how his organization established a universal minimum wage and moved the lowest-paid employees into higher wages. Brent Christiansen, Asst. Director of Treasury and Financial Management at Jonson County Government, offered a presentation on “Benefits, the Other Side of Compensation”, which included a sample benefits survey that participants could adapt for their own organizations. At the end of the workshop, we asked participants to prepare a brief presentation of their own “good jobs” efforts to share with colleagues at the final workshop session.



Gordon Docking and RuAnn Bottles of KidsTLC discuss employee compensation.

Workshop #3

The final workshop was an opportunity for participants to share their own “good jobs” successes, lessons learned, and barriers with colleagues. Each organization shared adaptable practices and strategies, and answered questions about the implementation process. Some highlights include:

- The board of El Centro, Inc. formed an HR committee, who developed a salary schedule to ensure that positions are competitive and attract quality candidates. The committee recommended changes to pay ranges for each position. Additionally, the board committed a portion of the endowment to pay for the salary increases over the next three years to give the organization time to adjust to the change and sustain it long-term.



Irene Caudillo of El Centro shares her organization’s “good jobs” strategies.

- The Family Conservancy implemented a new medical leave program, a practice that another participant organization had shared at a previous workshop. This benefit allows employees to earn and accrue time off for family and medical-related incidents. The Family Conservancy also implemented an extended employee assistance program (EAP) to support employees.
- Heartland RADAC conducted a time study for one month to determine how employees spend their time. This is part of a long-term strategy to review job descriptions and compensation schedules. They also offer a wellness reimbursement program that allows employees to be reimbursed for physical, mental, and emotional well-being programs.
- Preferred Family Healthcare, a multi-state behavioral healthcare organization with regional leadership, decided to focus primarily on local employee engagement strategies. Those include a peer-to-peer recognition program and regular employee rewards. The organization has seen a higher level of engagement from employees since implementing these strategies.

Broader Impact and Implications

Participants in the “Good Jobs” Workshop series expressed that it was valuable to learn new strategies and ways of operating from colleagues in the field, and having the appropriate tools to adapt them to meet their organization’s needs. The process revealed that, even amidst challenges and barriers, the human service sector in Johnson County can be a provider of good jobs.

Nearly 39,000 Johnson County residents work either part-time or full-time for a nonprofit or local government. That is 13% of all employed Johnson County residents – it is a major employer in the community. If every job in this sector was a “good job,” thousands in our community would have more financial stability and a stronger work/life balance.

Research indicates that a significant number of low-income individuals are employed but earn low wages, have unpredictable schedules and lack benefits including paid sick time, family leave or vacation. Many must juggle demands of their jobs while also caring for families, working in second jobs or going to school.

Wages, benefits and practices that encourage balance and stability are good for the employee, employer, and the community at large. **Research has shown that employees who enjoy a healthy work/life balance are more productive, motivated and stay longer in their jobs.** In addition, they have less absenteeism and lower health care costs.