

**THE TALK, READ, PLAY CAMPAIGN**

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

UCS released “[A Framework for Reducing Poverty and Creating Opportunity](#)” in 2015, focusing on three key action strategies to address growing poverty in Johnson County. Education was highlighted as an intervention that can both prevent people from falling into poverty and help people escape poverty. Our research indicated that quality educational opportunities in the earliest years of life have the greatest chance at preparing children to meet their full potential in school and later in life, particularly for children living in poverty. Therefore, UCS encouraged the community to be proactive in promoting quality early learning environments for Johnson County children.

**Talk, Read, Play**

*Talk, Read, Play* is an educational campaign that encourages parents and caregivers to interact daily with young children to support early development and later success. Led by [The Family Conservancy](#), *Talk, Read, Play* is based on research which indicates that children born in low-income families hear 30 million fewer words by age three than their more affluent peers. Additionally, research



suggests that high-quality learning environments in the early years of a child’s life build a strong foundation for literacy, which prepares children to enter kindergarten ready to learn. School readiness is a key predictor for educational success and higher high school graduation rates.

Several Johnson County organizations actively promoted *Talk, Read, Play* through the distribution of flyers and informational materials. Some highlights include:

- Johnson County Government printed and distributed 2,000 copies of *Talk, Read, Play* materials to residents and county department
- The Johnson County Department of Health and Environment held a training on how to use the *Talk, Read, Play* message, which was attended by department heads and other staff
- UCS developed and shared a toolkit for faith communities to incorporate the *Talk, Read, Play* message into congregational activities.

UCS and The Family Conservancy encourages organizations to continue promoting the *Talk, Read, Play* campaign. To co-brand campaign materials with your organization’s logo, contact [The Family Conservancy](#).

## **The Raising of America**

What does science tell us about the enduring importance of early life experiences on the brain and body? What it is like to be a parent today? And what policies and structures help or hinder the raising of healthy children?

These questions help us to understand many of the issue facing children and parents living in poverty in Johnson County. UCS used a five-part documentary series called [The Raising of America](#) to start a conversation about why so many children in our community fare so poorly, and how we as a community might help them succeed.

UCS hosted five screenings of the documentary, including a public screening at the Johnson County Library, a screening for members of the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce, and a screening for members of the faith community. The Johnson County Department of Health and Environment also hosted a screening for child care providers, with the support of UCS. Each screening was followed by a conversation about *Talk, Read, Play* to encourage audience members to spread this important message.

UCS has a copy of the full documentary series available for use by community partners. If you would like to host a screening in your organization, [contact us](#).

## **The Week of the Young Child**

Partners and stakeholders promoted the *Talk, Read, Play* campaign throughout the year, culminating in a collaborative effort across multiple cities, agencies, and school districts in the Johnson community. Several organizations came together to publicly endorse the importance of early childhood education. The cities of Fairway, Gardner, Mission, Overland Park, Olathe, Prairie Village, Shawnee, and Westwood Hills issued statements declaring April 20-16 as the Week of the Young Child. Johnson County Government issued a similar proclamation at a meeting of the Board of County Commissioners.



*Ed Eilert, Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners, announces the county-wide book drive during the Week of the Young Child.*



*Hannes Zacharias, Johnson County Manager, reads books to children at the Hiersteiner Child Development Center at Johnson County Community College during the Week of the Young Child.*

That same week, UCS held a news conference to launch a month-long book drive, in partnership with The Family Conservancy and Johnson County Government. Almost 500 books were collected and distributed to child care centers that serve low-income children in Johnson County. Several school districts, including Blue Valley, Shawnee Mission, Spring Hill, and Olathe, organized activities or promotional events during that week. The [Kansas City Star reported](#) on the book drive and the collaborative efforts.