



United Community Services
of Johnson County

CommunityREPORT

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Executive Director Search

In preparation for the retirement of Karen Wulfkuhle, the UCS Board of Directors has begun the search process for a new Executive Director. If you or someone you know would like to be considered, please forward a letter of interest, resume and salary requirements via email or fax to the following:

Gail Meriweather
Gallagher Benefit Services
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Karen Wulfkuhle to Retire as UCS Executive Director

Ending a run of more than 30 years working for United Community Services of Johnson County, Karen Wulfkuhle will retire as Executive Director in May. During her tenure at UCS, Karen has watched the Johnson County landscape change – always looking for effective ways that the community can come together to respond to challenges.

Karen began her career with UCS in 1984 as a planning associate; her responsibilities included providing staff support to the Drug and Alcoholism Council of Johnson County. Thanks to her unique ability to unravel complex research data and bring community members together to tackle issues, the UCS Board of Directors named her Executive Director in 1993.



Over the years, Karen has been the driving force behind a number of initiatives including the Children’s Coordinating Council in 1995. She conducted the first research to quantify homelessness in Johnson County and also spearheaded ***Navigating the Future***, a five-year plan that addressed the most pressing issues facing the human service delivery system in Johnson County.

“I recently attended a mental health forum where three programs were mentioned for their positive impact on community mental health – the Johnson County Mental Health and Criminal Justice Intercept Project; the Johnson County Health Partnership Clinic; and Johnson County’s Trauma Informed Care Task Force,” said Jill Quigley who served as the UCS board president from 2013-2015. *“All three were initiated by UCS under Karen’s leadership.”*

Most recently, UCS has successfully launched the current ***Framework for Reducing Poverty and Creating Opportunity*** project under Karen’s watchful eye. “I have always tried to take a strategic approach to what would benefit the community at that particular time,” she said.

“Karen’s leadership has made UCS the ‘go to’ organization for human services safety net information, or the lack of same, and how that ultimately affects us all,” said Gene Wilson, a UCS board member from 2010-2015. Quigley added, *“She would be the first to deflect credit but she has earned the community’s respect by quietly forming relationships across our community and documenting both the need for and effectiveness of human services.”*



United Way of
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Leading by Example: Poverty Project Update

Since UCS unveiled its ***Framework for Reducing Poverty and Creating Opportunity*** at the 2015 Johnson County Human Service Summit last June, the focus has shifted from ideas to action. Emerging from the in-depth research project was a strategy for creating opportunity by expanding **household sustaining jobs**; increasing **opportunity for healthy learning and development** for all ages; and assuring a **strong safety net** to meet and sustain the basic needs of individuals and families in crisis and on the edge of poverty.

For each of these areas – work, education and safety net – UCS issued a call to action within the health and human service sector in Johnson County. “The health and human services sector – which is made up of nonprofit organizations, faith communities and local government – can lead by example by adopting policies, programs and practices to reduce poverty and create opportunity,” said Karen Wulfschlegel, UCS executive director.

WORK: Make every health and human service sector job a good job.

A “good job” is characterized by a living wage, health benefits, predictable work schedules, paid time off, earned sick leave, wage equity, advancement opportunities, and strong work/life balance. One in eight Johnson County residents who works full-time is employed in a nonprofit organization or local government. If every human service sector job was a good one, all of the 25,000 people employed in this sector would be able to stably meet the needs of their households and fully contribute to our community.

Projections for Johnson, Wyandotte, Miami, and Leavenworth Counties indicate that the largest number of job openings through 2022 will be low-skill, low-wage jobs. Of the ten occupations anticipated to have the greatest job openings, only two have hourly wages above \$15, or about \$31,000 annual income for full-time work. Many employers may assume that low wages are necessary to keep business costs down. However, research has shown that investing in employees by offering good jobs is a strategy that leads to more productivity, happier employees, lower costs, and increased employer profits.

UCS ACTION UPDATE: Partnering with area nonprofit agencies, UCS launched the “Good Jobs” Workshop Series in mid-November. A cohort of ten human service nonprofit agencies will participate in two other workshops where they will be equipped to plan and implement “good jobs” in their organizations. UCS staff is designing a planning process to launch mid-2016, which will engage community partners in an effort focused on employment.

EDUCATION: Promote “Talk, Read, Play” with employees, clients, and stakeholders.

According to U.S. Census Bureau data, the poverty rate for children five and under in Johnson County is almost 10 percent, compared to a 6.5 percent poverty rate for the total population. Research has found that children raised in lower-income homes hear roughly 30 million fewer words by the age of three than their more affluent peers. This “word gap” can lead to a more limited vocabulary, which in turn is predictive of reading skills and later academic success.

The Family Conservancy, working with researchers from the University of Kansas, developed “Talk, Read, Play” to help parents and caregivers support early development and build the brain’s architecture for future learning. The campaign’s success relies on partnerships. More than 30 organizations have already made a commitment to support it.

UCS ACTION UPDATE: Since UCS issued the call to action, several organizations, including Johnson County Government, League of Women Voters of Johnson County, and the Olathe School District, have made a commitment to “Talk, Read, Play.” UCS promoted the program to audiences attending screenings of the documentary *The Raising of America*. The documentary film series explores how a strong start for all children can lead to a healthier, safer and more prosperous nation. The Johnson County Library and Overland Park Chamber of Commerce both hosted a screening. Additional screenings may be scheduled in 2016.

SAFETY NET: Increase access to safety net supports for adults without dependent children and transitional age youth.

Adults without dependent children and transitional-age youth are often left out when it comes to public and private safety net supports, yet they are among the poorest in our community. In 2014, there were more than 4,700 young adults ages 18-24 living with income below the federal poverty level. Nearly two of five of all Johnson County residents with poverty-level income fell in the category of “unrelated individuals” – those living independently with no family members.

UCS ACTION UPDATE: UCS is currently working with community partners to assess the assets and gaps of the safety net for the transitional age youth population as they move into adulthood in an effort to expand services to households without children. Assuring adequate supports and targeted assistance to these groups would improve their long-term stability and reduce future, more costly interventions.

To find out more about how your organization can participate, visit ucsjoco.org or contact Kathryn Evans Madden, UCS Poverty Project Manager at kathrynm@ucsjoco.org.

UCS Announces 2015 Award Winners

Congratulations to the following 2015 Johnson County Human Service Awards recipients who were selected by the UCS board for their contributions to improving the well-being of county residents.



UCS Excellence in Community Service - The Family Conservancy “Talk, Play, Read”

The Family Conservancy (TFC) has been helping children and families for more than 130 years. Today, the agency’s work focuses on counseling, family asset building, employee assistance programs, professional training for child care providers, and parent resources. One of the TFC’s newest initiatives is “Talk, Read, Play,” a unique educational campaign aimed at parents and child care providers to support child development. TFC is working with partners in Johnson County to promote the campaign as an action strategy to reduce poverty and create opportunity.

Kate Allen, UCS Board of Directors and Dean Olson, The Family Conservancy

UCS Citizen of the Year - Leonore (Lee) Rowe

Lee is a tireless advocate for a stronger safety net for the poor and homelessness, often sharing her perspective with elected officials. She has also put her personal commitment to helping people in poverty into action – an example of the Action Strategy to increase safety net supports for adults without dependent children and transitional age youth. Lee advises that we should volunteer, know our neighbors and our community.



Lee Rowe and Jill Quigley, UCS Board President



UCS Distinguished Public Service - Hannes Zacharias, Johnson County Manager

Hannes Zacharias demonstrates both a personal passion for addressing the needs of individuals, as well as the pragmatic understanding that addressing human needs is essential for a strong, vibrant community. His entire career has been devoted to public service. Hannes joined the Johnson County Government management team in 2001 and was named County Manager in 2009. He led the planning effort that identified poverty as the Board of County Commissioner’s top strategic priority, and now oversees the implementation of the County’s strategic plan to address poverty.

Karen Wulfkuhle, UCS Executive Director and Hannes Zacharias

New Home Supports TIC Task Force's Momentum

After almost three years of grant support from the Healthcare Foundation of Greater Kansas City, the Johnson County Trauma Informed Care (TIC) Task Force has found a new home as a committee of Johnson County's Community Violence Action Council (COMVAC). The TIC Task Force was created in 2012 to create more trauma-informed organizations and communities in response to the Adverse Children Experiences (ACEs) study.

"Learning more about trauma and its effects was a huge eye-opener in terms of the people we serve," said Kim Paul, Victim Advocate for the Johnson County District Attorney's Office. "It brought about a better understanding of the responses we were getting from the people we were serving, and a realization among staff that, 'I need to rethink how I respond to people I work with.'"

While the TIC Task Force is now a part of COMVAC, UCS staff will continue to facilitate bi-monthly meetings and chair the committee. Members will provide quarterly trainings and on-going work groups within their organizations to assure that a trauma informed culture is maintained and nurtured.

Task Force Member Organizations

- CASA of Johnson and Wyandotte Counties
- Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas
- Friends of Recovery Association
- Gillis
- Growing Futures Early Education Center
- Heartland Regional Alcohol and Drug Assessment Center
- Johnson County Court Services
- Johnson County Department of Corrections
- Johnson County District Attorney's Office/
Victim Services Unit
- Johnson County Mental Health Center
- Johnson County Sheriff's Department
- KidsTLC
- KVC Behavioral HealthCare
- Kansas Children's Service League
- Marillac
- SAFEHOME
- Sunflower House