

STRENGTHENING early childhood in KANSAS

"We are ALL Early Childhood Stakeholders"
Governor Laura Kelly

In 2019, Kansas has the opportunity through new federal grant funding to shape our state's future direction for early childhood by developing a comprehensive needs assessment and strategic plan. This collaborative effort invited the voices of all Kansans and resulted in an impressive cross-section of nearly 6,000 contributors. As part of this effort, individuals across the state joined to share their vision for the early childhood care and education (ECCE) system they want to see in their communities.

OUR TOMORROWS STORY COLLECTION

The **Our Tomorrows** team collected stories from across Kansas asking people to share about a time when their family was thriving or just surviving. Organizational partners and citizen journalists interviewed and amplified the voices of individuals, practitioners, and other community members to gain insight into the everyday experiences of Kansas families. These stories provided context to existing data and filled in gaps where data didn't tell the full story. By understanding the successes and the challenges that families experience every day, we can explore new ways to foster more of the uplifting stories and fewer of the stories of struggle. Ultimately, this information will shape how to best strengthen the early childhood system in Kansas.

96
Counties

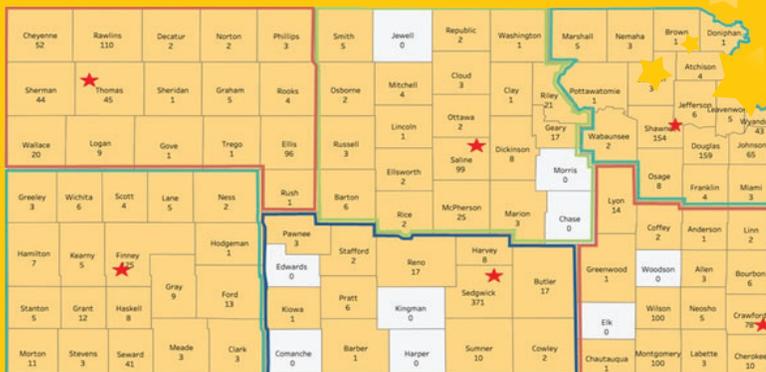
2,100
Kansas stories*

20
organizational partners

6
citizen journalists

We received stories from Kansans from all walks of life, including:

- Service Providers
- Parents
- Grandparents
- Foster care providers
- Migrant families
- Low-income families
- Rural families
- Youth



*2,468 Total stories

"There were times when we had to choose between paying a bill or having food to eat." - Young parents



What we heard from Kansans

UNIVERSAL FINDINGS

Families have basic needs that are not being met, and that is driving the way they do or do not interact with the early childhood system. These experiences differ greatly across the state.

OTHER THEMES THAT EMERGED

★ Bright Spots

- We have an opportunity to amplify what is working well in Kansas.
- 39% of statewide stories contained Bright Spots.
- Stories were coded as a Bright Spot if they contained: **resilience, hope, positive momentum, no disruptor, and no unmet needs.**
- Families benefited from a hopeful approach and strong support from others to get through tough times.

★ Disruptors

- 65% of statewide stories had a Disruptor present.
- Most common disruptors were:
 - Health** 33% of the stories focused on health crisis, health care, or ongoing medical problems
 - Family separation** 24% were about family separation, where families were broken up due to divorce, incarceration, death of a family member, deportation, or children removed from the home
 - New child** 13%
 - Unemployment/job changes** 12%

★ Unheard Voices

- 57% of statewide stories represented often Unheard Voices.
- Most common Unheard Voices were:
 - Low income working families** 33%
 - Special healthcare needs** 18%
 - Single parents** 15%
- Other Unheard Voices were families experiencing incarceration, the foster care system, diagnosed emotional, behavioral, or developmental conditions, rural poverty, and language barriers.

★ Unmet Needs

- 64% of statewide stories had an Unmet Need present.
- 53% were influenced by economic circumstances, such as food, housing, electricity, and running water.
- Most common Unmet Needs:
 - Financial** 33%
 - Basic Needs** 20%
 - Stress/Anxiety/Depression** 17%
- Other Unmet Needs include access to childcare, parenting knowledge, and safety.

“When I brought my daughter home from the hospital as a teen mom, I had no idea what I was doing. I had no family support or experience with children. PAT taught me how to interact with my child so that she would grow and learn.” - Young mother

BRIGHT SPOT

Kansans feel supported by friends, family, neighbors, services, and systems, suggesting that thriving is associated with feeling supported and not alone.

“I have a wonderful provider who cares for my child every day and I still have my job! I'm glad I had her to help me through this difficult situation.”

- Parent