

ENGAGEMENT INCENTIVE GRANT PROPOSAL

PROJECT TITLE:

Bridges for Kansas Families: The role of social capital in Kansas families living in poverty

PROJECT DESCRIPTION - Need Statement:

According to the *State of the Family* report (Anderson, Deitz, Hardy, Kimmes, Gilmore, Bloom, 2015), 18.4% of Kansas children are living in poverty, which represents a 24.3% increase within the last decade. A Kansas Action for Children report (TANF: Troubling Trends in Kansas, 2014), documented that childhood poverty increased 22 percent in the past five years and that 98 of Kansas' 105 counties have an increasing trend of children receiving food assistance. These increases are amplified by reductions in publicly-funded safety net programs. Increases in child poverty are associated with increasing numbers of Kansas families living at or below 100% of the federal poverty levels which for a family of four is \$24,250. (Federal Register, 2016). Across our state, more poor children are living in more chronically poor households. In southwest Wichita alone, the poverty rate grew from 9.4 percent to 33.6 percent in 2011 and there has been little improvement over the past five years.

As poverty has increased in Kansas so have community-based, volunteer-driven initiatives intended to support families and alleviate poverty. Many of these initiatives are associated with building the capacity of families to move out of poverty permanently through strategies that increase their social connections (i.e., social capital) to community resources and opportunities. One of the most prominent initiatives is **Circles©** which is a national network of volunteer-driven non-formal education, mentoring and social capital.

Research into chronic family poverty has revealed that impoverished families experience "higher conflict, have lower means of social connection, and have greater levels of chronic stress" (Evans and Kim, 2013, p. 43). It is this lack of social connection, coupled with higher levels of stress that perpetuate the cycle of family poverty. Poverty isolates people due to the social stratification of our society which prevents individuals and families from accessing viable resources. The **Circles©** model provides a framework through which, "people can find reasons, relationships, and the resources necessary to thrive" (Miller, 2008, p. 5). However, there is a lack of information and understanding about the lived experiences and perceptions of social connectedness among poor families especially those families who are struggling through safety-net program reductions and limited living wage jobs. Without information, knowledge and improved understanding of what poverty is like it is unlikely that the public resources and opportunities necessary to alleviate poverty will be sustained much less expanded. For the economic and social well-being of Kansas families and communities it is essential that Kansas State University work alongside community partners such as Circles to understand family poverty, the connection that social capital has to poverty, and to appropriately communicate that knowledge and understanding.

Consequently, the aim of ***Bridges for Kansas Families*** is to give "ear" to lived experiences and enhance the many voices of adult family members and their adolescents living in chronic poverty. Using a community-based participatory research approach, this project will engage family members and community partners - who often go unseen and unheard - to address the social issue of family poverty and its impacts. With community-based Circles partners, the specific objectives of the project are:

a) Using semi-structured interviews and art activities tailored to adolescents, **give "voice" to the lived experiences and the social capital** of adults and adolescents living in poor households (i.e., below 185% of the federal poverty level) in Kansas. Additionally, as requested by Circles partners, support will be given to their implementation of phone interviews or focus groups of volunteers in order to assess the impact that volunteerism has on a volunteer's views of poverty and social capital.

b) **Through "community of practice" face-to-face and zoom meetings and interactions, equip community partners** (i.e., Circles chapters in Wichita, Derby, McPherson) with the skills, opportunities and connections

necessary to access the research, communication resources and affiliations of the land-grant university to effect change in the community contexts and structures that perpetuate generational poverty.

c) **Establish a sustainable partnership for university members** to collaborate with community partners in the pursuit of relevant and timely responses and interventions that impact family poverty. In short, this project directly and meaningfully enacts community engagement through its partnership with the public sector, its enhancement of learning and teaching, its preparation of citizens by helping them give voice to their experience; its strengthening of civic responsibility, its direct addressing of the critical social issue of poverty, and its contribution to the public good. It also is in line with activities supported by the Engagement Incentive Grant, particularly with the multidisciplinary team of actors, the use of CBPR, its direct application to addressing important public issues, and its aim to better the lives of underserved populations.

These objectives will be accomplished through the intentional use of a community-based participatory research approach. The project is segmented into four participatory phases which supports the intentional development of an authentic relationship for inquiry among all partners. Working through the confirmation-implementation-analysis-dissemination phases in a planned and methodological manner provides opportunities for co-learning and clear communication throughout the project. At each phase, “community of practice” meetings are held for co-learning and reflection on the project and relationships being established.

Engaged Activities/Benchmarks, Timeline for *Bridges for Kansas Families* project (July, 2016-Nov., 2017)

<p>PHASE 1: Confirm project roles, schedule, scope July-September, 2016</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Execute MOU with project partners • Agree to interview items, protocols, creative art activity for adolescents, and recruitment strategies (all partners) • Recruit local art therapist and/or marriage and family therapist to the partnership for management of risk • Circles partners complete appropriate/scaled Human Subjects training requirements • Recruit and select two students to assist in interviews • Complete university IRB requirements • Recruit adult interviewees: 5 per site = 15-20 • Recruit adolescent interviewees: 3 per site = 9-12 • Confirm interview locations, security, locations <p>Community of Practice co-learning topics: (face-to-face meeting) CBPR, logic models, Human Subjects, purpose and use of the results (data), generational poverty, social capital</p>
<p>PHASE 2: Implementation October, 2016-January, 2017</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cless and two students conduct interviews of adults (5 per sits = 15-20) • Cless, students, art therapist and/or marriage and family therapist conduct interviews of adolescents (3 per site = 9-12) • Distribute incentives to participating families • Secure data • Determine who will conduct the analysis (NVivo, identification of major themes) • As desired by Circles partners, support their implementation of phone interviews or focus groups of volunteers in order to assess the impact that volunteerism has had on views of poverty and social capital. • Recruit or continue two students for analysis of data <p>Community of Practice co-learning topics: (face-to-face meeting) CBPR, conflict resolution, trauma, compassion fatigue, adolescent development, building healthy relationships</p>
<p>PHASE 3: Finding meaning – Analysis of information January – June, 2017</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm partner roles in analysis of data

- Conduct analysis through NVivo and identification of major themes
- As necessary, support analysis of information collected from volunteers
- Determine authorships
- Determine and confirm distribution outlets for results
- Develop draft reports with layout and design via K-State Marketing and Communications
- Submit proposal to present at the Kansas Poverty conference (July, 2017)

Community of Practice co-learning topics: (face-to-face meeting)

CBPR, using NVivo, affirming use of the information (data), identifying “big view” issues and opportunities, reflecting on the partnership

PHASE 4: Collective Impact – Dissemination of Results

July-November, 2017

- Present findings of the partnership at the Kansas Poverty conference (July 2017)
- Establish partnership “script” for discussion of the findings
- Submit proposals for additional dissemination conferences/presentations
- Produce report of findings and disseminate
- Conduct interviews, determine spokespersons in local communities
- Schedule venues for art exhibitions, conversations and “town-hall” meetings
- Expand the project with other Circles partners and volunteer-driven poverty reduction efforts
- Determine next-steps for the partnership
- Celebrate!

Community of Practice co-learning topics: (face-to-face meeting)

CBPR, collective impact, authorship, appropriate and respect communication of results, continuing/expanding/sun-setting the partnership

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS AND ROLES:

- **Elaine Johannes** (PI and Adolescent Development specialist), School of Family Studies and Human Services, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS
- **Allison Celik**, Point-of-Contact Network Coordinator, Wichita Circles Network, Wichita, KS
- **Deann Smith**, Circles Fiscal Agent, Executive Director, United Methodist Open Door (Circles), Wichita, KS
- **Brenda Sales**, Director, Circles of McPherson County, McPherson, KS
- **Greg Paul** (Nonprofit Communication, Conflict Management, and Dialogue/Deliberation specialist), Department of Communication Studies, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS
- **Charlotte Shoup Olsen** (Family Systems and Diversity specialist), School of Family Studies and Human Services Extension, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS
- **Adam Cless**, (Project Manager and Graduate Research Assistant), School of Family Studies and Human Services, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS

OTHER ROLES: Other personnel for the project will include two students to assist in interviews, two students to assist in the analysis of data, and an art therapist and/or marriage and family therapist to assist in management of risk in the conduct of the interviews. Involvement of an art therapist and/or marriage and family therapist is important so that the interviews of adolescents, many of whom may have experienced trauma, are conducted with their best interests in-mind. Adolescents who agree to participate will complete an individual creative art activity which provides a context for sharing their insights of poverty and understanding of social capital.

POTENTIAL IMPACT FOR ALL PARTNERS:

In sum, this project involves the creation of a multidisciplinary team collaborating to address a significant public need in a way that is beneficial to all parties and that generates new knowledge. In pursuit of those goals, the project has clear objectives, clear planned engagement activities and benchmarks, a reasonable and specific timeline that creates the conditions for continued impact and readiness for national funding to expand the effort.