RWJF Culture of Health
Community Portrait

Finney County, Kansas
ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Sentinel Communities Surveillance project, conducted by RTI International in collaboration with the RAND Corporation, is sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The project, which began in 2016, will monitor activities related to how a Culture of Health is developing in each of 30 diverse communities around the country for at least five years. This community-specific report follows from the initial Snapshot report for Finney County, Kansas and provides insights into drivers of a Culture of Health in the community. The report is not intended to comprehensively describe every action underway in Finney County, but rather focuses on key insights, opportunities, and challenges as a community advances on its journey toward health and well-being for all residents.

The information in this report was obtained using several data collection methods, including key informant telephone interviews, an environmental scan of online and published community-specific materials; review of existing population surveillance and monitoring data; and collection of local data or resources provided by community contacts or interview respondents. Interviews were conducted with individuals representing organizations working in a variety of sectors (for example, health, business, education, faith-based, and environment) in the community. Sector mapping was used to systematically identify respondents in a range of sectors that would have insights about community health and well-being to ensure organizational diversity across the community. We also asked original interviewees to recommend individuals to speak with in an effort to supplement important organizations or perspectives not included in the original sample.

A total of 11 unique respondents were interviewed during spring 2017 for this report. All interviews (lasting 30–75 minutes each) were conducted using semi-structured interview guides tailored to the unique context and activities taking place in each community and to the role of the respondent in the community. Interviewers used probes to ensure that they obtained input on specific items of interest (for example, facilitators and barriers to improved population health, well-being, and equity) and open-ended questions to ensure that they fully addressed and captured participants’ responses and perceptions about influences on health and well-being in their communities. Individuals who participated in a key informant interview are not identified by name or organization to protect confidentiality, but they are identified as a “respondent.” Information collected through environmental scans includes program and organizational information available on internet websites, publicly available documents, and media reports. Population surveillance and monitoring data were compiled from publicly available data sets, including the American Community Survey; Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System; and other similar federal, state, and local data sources.

We will conduct ongoing surveillance and monitoring activities in these communities through 2020 and report updated information on their progress, challenges, and lessons learned in improving health and well-being for all residents.

Data collection and monitoring thus far has revealed common themes among otherwise distinct communities. The next phase of this project will be cross-community reports. These examine common themes across subgroups of the 30 communities (for example, rural communities, communities experiencing large demographic shifts, and communities leveraging local data for decision-making). These reports will also be posted on cultureofhealth.org.
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Introduction

In our snapshot profile of Finney County, Kansas, we explored the county’s agricultural history and the impact of the dominant meatpacking industry on residents’ opportunities and quality of life. The rapid growth of this industry has attracted a sizable immigrant and refugee population, creating unique challenges for the community beyond those shared by other rural communities across Kansas. Despite serving as a strong economic driver, the meatpacking industry offers mostly low-income, low-skill, labor-intensive job opportunities and is largely disengaged from the issues that confront the community.

The county’s rural geography and an industry that shows limited evidence of civic engagement, contribute to a sense of isolation in the face of complex economic, cultural, and social issues. At the same time, community organizations take pride in Finney County’s dynamic, multi-ethnic population and in their ability to tailor programs and outreach to meet residents’ needs. In this report, we examine how the county’s dedicated nonprofits and active collaborations are building a sustainable network of support for residents using the Culture of Health Action Framework to interpret and organize key findings. The Framework prioritizes four broad areas: 1) Making Health a Shared Value; 2) Fostering Cross-Sector Collaboration to Improve Well-Being; 3) Creating Healthier, More Equitable Communities; and 4) Strengthening Integration of Health Services and Systems, within which activities and investments can advance population health, well-being, and equity in diverse community contexts. Using the Framework, we describe the
activities underway in the community that aim to guide Finney County from reacting to its immediate challenges to working proactively to enhance health and well-being for its residents.

**LOW-PAYING AGRICULTURAL SECTOR JOBS**

Boasting the slogan “The World Grows Here,” Finney County is nestled in the geographic heart of America in the southwestern corner of rural Kansas. Its population of about 37,000 people (72% in the county seat of Garden City) comprises long-time residents and newly arrived immigrant and refugee populations. Founded in 1879, the county’s economy has historically centered on agriculture and has survived the attending cycles of prosperity and devastation. By the mid-20th century, new agricultural investment, innovative irrigation techniques, and feed yards for cattle sparked more lasting economic growth. These innovations, along with the community’s desire to ensure future opportunity in a region vulnerable to economic decline, led to the opening of large meatpacking plants in and around Garden City by the early 1980s. Meatpacking has continued to serve as the county’s primary economic driver.

In the late 20th century, the boom in the meatpacking industry brought 6,000 new residents to Garden City, boosting the population by 33 percent and making it the fastest growing community in Kansas. The growth of this industry has also attracted a steady immigrant and refugee population, offsetting a decline among residents with long-standing local ties. With its difficult and dangerous work, the meatpacking industry has injury and illness rates more than twice the national average, according to the National Bureau of Labor Statistics. The compound influence of turnover, injury, illness, and transience explains the vital role that new workers play in sustaining the local economy and offers insight into the challenges that result.

Today, Finney County is a majority-minority community, a distinction that serves as a point of both pride and controversy. As one respondent from the nonprofit sector noted, “America is a melting pot, and Finney County is parallel to that on a smaller scale.” Its population is composed of mostly Hispanic (48%) and white (44%) residents with small percentages of Asian (4%) and black (2%) residents. Immigrant and refugee populations have grown significantly over the last few decades; foreign-born individuals now account for 21 percent of the county’s population. More than 20 languages are spoken in Finney County, with voices representing Vietnam, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Central America.

Finney County is defined as “densely settled,” with between 20 and 40 people per square mile, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. However, it is surrounded by less populated rural and frontier counties, with populations as scarce as six or fewer residents per square mile. Ringed by these sparsely populated communities, Finney County can feel more isolated than its population suggests. Most of the county is more than three hours’ drive from any community larger than Garden City (population 27,000). This isolation produces difficulties in attracting health care professionals, diversified employment, and skilled workers. Transportation other than by car also presents a “challenge,” according to one representative from the business sector, although bus service within Garden City has improved residents’ access to jobs, schools, and services.

Poverty levels are higher in Finney County than in Kansas overall and the nation. Agriculture-based jobs, which are three times more prevalent here than in the nation as a whole, also include jobs in cattle yards and on large farming operations, a respondent from the business sector noted. Outside of management jobs, many agriculture-based jobs pay low wages and are seasonal, so employment can be interrupted during slow periods. Garden City’s local economy has expanded beyond its agricultural base to include a new shopping mall with national retail businesses, which typically offer minimum wage jobs. In addition to the types of jobs available to residents of Finney County, economic opportunity may be stymied in part by low educational attainment: Only 19 percent of residents have completed a bachelor’s degree or higher. Nearly one-third (28%) of residents have not completed a high school education.

Given the prevalence of low-paying jobs, it is not surprising that residents also encounter a scarcity of affordable housing. One-quarter of Finney County residents pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing. The shortage of affordable housing results in newly arrived families living in cramped housing or large apartment complexes, which can separate them from the larger community.

Many residents of Finney County face significant challenges in gaining access to timely health care services. The shortage of primary care physicians that faces most rural areas of the United States is evident here as well, and there is a scarcity of physicians willing to accept Medicaid. Fifteen percent of Finney County residents lack health insurance, and Kansas did not expand its Medicaid program under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Lack of insurance coverage, combined with low income and education, contribute to residents’ unwillingness to seek health care services because of cost. Further complicating this issue, respondents from the social services and health care sectors reported that employers often use probationary periods that delay the effective date for insurance coverage, worsening access to care given relatively high turnover rates for unskilled laborers. Because of these factors, residents tend to use hospital emergency departments for nonemergency medical needs.

Finney County’s demographics are set against a backdrop of fiscally conservative policies and aggressive tax cuts promoted for the past several years by its legislature. In addition to its refusal to expand Medicaid under the ACA, the state has grappled with a multimillion-dollar budget shortfall resulting from deep tax cuts in 2012 that failed to produce economic growth. The fiscal plan and its consequences have resulted in drawn-out battles about the adequacy of funding for public
education. By early 2017, Kansas faced a budget shortfall of nearly $350 million, threatening to drain an estimated $3.6 million from the Garden City school district. In March 2017, the state Supreme Court ruled that state spending on education failed to meet its constitutional obligation to fund schools adequately, citing a disproportionate impact on black, Hispanic, and low-income students. The Kansas high court subsequently directed the legislature to submit new plans to increase funding for K-12 public school districts and to show that its plans comply with the state constitution. The draw-out uncertainty over education funding has taken a toll, according to a respondent from the education sector. “To continue this culture of reducing what we are doing is having a negative impact on our students, and it will get a lot worse if it doesn’t turn around quickly.”

With state funding in a perennial state of crisis, Finney County depends on the resilience of its traditional and niche service providers to meet the needs of its population. Ongoing outreach is essential given the diverse and transient nature of the agriculture-based workforce. Many organizations in Finney County are highly committed to serving the immigrant and refugee communities and other residents in need. Given the fiscal constraints that organizations operate under, their efforts can produce inconsistent reach and results. To help maximize the impact of their resources, two convening organizations—LiveWell Finney County and the county’s public education system—serve as hubs that identify and collaborate with others to meet residents’ needs.

**MULTISECTOR COALITIONS SERVE DISADVANTAGED RESIDENTS**

Created as the Finney County Community Health Coalition, LiveWell Finney County was formed two decades ago to respond to the community’s pressing health needs, which included high teen pregnancy rates and a lack of safe public transportation, according to a respondent from the social services sector. Today, it serves as a convening partner with its major local funder, St. Catherine Hospital, and scores of local agencies to identify and find solutions to myriad challenges to health and well-being facing residents. Current initiatives led by LiveWell, as it is known to the community, in collaboration with local groups, include providing assistance to quit smoking, help residents manage chronic health disease issues, and find health insurance on the federal marketplace. Several respondents credit LiveWell’s success in securing grant funding and improving communication and collaboration among local groups that historically have had limited individual capacity to address community needs.

A small cadre of organizations offer services to accommodate the evolving needs of immigrants and refugees who are drawn to Finney County by the promise of jobs. One is the International Rescue Committee, a global agency working in Finney County to serve refugees whose lives have been impacted by conflict or disaster. The Catholic Agency for Migration and Refugee Services provides comprehensive legal, advocacy, educational, and pastoral resources to local communities. The most recent addition to serve the needs of immigrants in Finney County is New Hope Together, which began operations in February 2017. New Hope Together was created to bridge the gap between refugees and their health care needs and to serve as a resource for English language instruction. Due to English language limitations, challenges in getting established in a new environment, and an unfamiliarity with how local service organizations work, members of refugee and immigrant groups tend not to advocate for themselves, a respondent from the social services sector said. A growing awareness of the need for their input is emerging in recent community forums and public meetings, the respondent added.

> "TO CONTINUE THIS CULTURE OF REDUCING WHAT WE ARE DOING IS HAVING A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON OUR STUDENTS..."  
> **EDUCATION SECTOR RESPONDENT**

Despite cutbacks in education funding, Finney County’s school system has persevered in providing students with basic needs and addressing challenges to their educational progress. The county’s school system, which includes the Holcomb Unified School District and the more populous Garden City Unified School District, serve more than 8,000 students, many of whom come from impoverished homes. Within Garden City schools, more than half (56%) of children qualify for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program, and fewer than 50 percent of children are estimated to attend a structured pre-K program with a daily routine and defined learning goals. The school system partners with Head Start and collaborates with Big Brother and Big Sister programs on grant funding opportunities; discussions are underway to open a Head Start program in the school system’s early childhood center, a respondent from the education sector said.

Children from families in poverty face challenges that make regular school attendance difficult, such as food insecurity, homelessness, and health care needs, whose combined effect contributes to toxic levels of stress. The transient nature of employment in the agriculture sector can mean that families relocate regularly, with some students attending three schools in as many years. To address their developmental needs, the school district has implemented a therapeutic education program to ensure that students experiencing high degrees of stress have access to mental health services during the school day. The program has expanded from one to two classrooms and continues to grow. “We see more elementary kids between first and third grade who need the kind of support offered in our therapeutic program than we saw the first year we were doing it,” a respondent from the education sector noted.

Like the social services and education sectors, Finney County’s health system has also calibrated itself to best meet the community’s needs. Its sole hospital, St. Catherine, is part of Centura Health, a Catholic health system that also operates several outpatient health clinics in and around Garden City. Funding from St. Catherine helped to create LiveWell Finney County and target programs of greatest need to residents. The hospital continues to fund LiveWell, sits on its board of directors, and participates in its monthly meetings, according to a respondent from the health care sector. It recently opened a new clinic staffed by mid-level health practitioners to meet the demands for
primary care services, this respondent said. Genesis Family Health, a federally qualified health clinic (FQHC), provides a range of primary and preventive medical services, dental care, and social services, such as immigration documentation assistance and translation services.28 State budget cutbacks ended funding that had gone to the Finney County Health Department to provide health screening and services to refugees, a respondent from the health department noted. The health department provides vaccinations, flu shots, and low-cost testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases. Kansas funds abstinence-only sex education to students, thus preventing the health department from providing sex education or counseling in schools.37

Despite the challenges of low-wage, low-skill employment opportunities, low educational attainment, and precarious sources of revenue, Finney County appears deeply committed to the goal of promoting health and well-being for all residents. The nonprofit, education, and health sectors work in cooperation to develop strategies and outreach to enhance residents’ well-being and quality of life. Using cross-sector partnerships and key initiatives, Finney County is working to cultivate a strong sense of community, foster engagement among residents to promote healthier behaviors, and offer programmatic support for its immigrant population.

Bridging Isolation by Cultivating Shared Community Values

Finney County’s geographic isolation and deeply self-reliant roots have cultivated an individualistic notion of health and well-being that prevails regardless of the difficulties that newer residents may have experienced. Most health-related programs follow traditional models of health education and promotion that focus on how individuals can manage their health issues. This expectation exists for long-time residents and immigrant and refugee newcomers alike. The implicit consensus among stakeholders and residents of health as an individual, not a community-wide, responsibility is unlikely to change quickly. Additionally, the transient nature of some recently arrived Finney County residents limits organizations’ ability to adequately address systemic issues and makes it more difficult to measure the impact of their investments. However, efforts to establish a sense of community for all residents—recent and long-term alike—are emerging across sectors. This sensibility is reflected in new and established programs and activities, and offers promise for a shared consensus on health.

One such activity is the long-standing sponsorship of National Night Out, a community-building campaign to promote police-community partnerships, by LiveWell and the Garden City Police Department.29 This annual event is promoted specifically in immigrant neighborhoods in Garden City to promote camaraderie and establish positive relationships with local police and first responders. The National Night Out tradition has been taking place in Garden City for more than two decades, demonstrating a commitment to bringing residents and police together. Although this event is not specifically aimed at addressing health behaviors, it is an important step in bridging the gap that may exist between individuals and their community, cultivating a sense of community that may be harnessed for future efforts to enhance health and well-being.

With Finney County’s myriad challenges to health, housing, employment, and other concerns, preventing duplication of effort by nonprofit groups and service providers is essential to gaining the maximum benefit for all. By serving as a community-wide coordinator, LiveWell has helped stakeholders in key sectors avoid duplication and increase efficiency. It identifies areas where community action is especially needed and helps secure funding to support these efforts. LiveWell also organizes and hosts monthly in-person meetings, in which more than 50 local organizations regularly participate. At these meetings, organizations are given a forum to discuss their respective roles and responsibilities, examine how they can facilitate community efforts, and decide how best to foster engagement across sectors.

Through its role as Finney County’s lead convener, LiveWell has fostered several far-reaching collaborations. For example, the organization was integral in developing the 10-year-old CityLink bus system, which has served more than 600,000 people since the system was created29 and averages about 5,000 riders per month along routes within Garden City. Before the bus system was created, Finney County had no means of public transportation to jobs, the local community college, and shopping.

Another successful example is a series of coordinated activities to reduce underage drinking that began in 200930 with a federal grant to LiveWell’s predecessor organization (Finney County Community Health Coalition). The grant underwrote the development of community-based strategies and partnerships with youth organizations, school districts, and community nonprofit groups. Parental education and outreach about the risks of underage drinking was developed and promoted in English and Spanish. The combined effect of the community-based approach convened by LiveWell and carried out in collaboration with multiple organizations reduced underage drinking in Finney County by 17 percent over the three-year grant period.30 Among the 14 Kansas counties that received this funding, Finney County used the greatest number of evidence-based strategies to prevent underage drinking, according to an evaluation of the grant program.31 LiveWell continues to coordinate various wellness initiatives to address community-specific health issues, including programs to address diabetes, hypertension, and obesity; a translator is present at all meetings to help mitigate language barriers.

Similar to LiveWell in its comprehensive approach, Finney County’s school system works to identify and address the needs of health and social needs of its student population. These needs often relate directly to a home environment where parents may work long hours and are unable to afford preschool or after-school care programs. To improve students’ chances for success, the school system has created a variety
of events throughout the year, including math and literacy events and cultural celebrations, to “get parents in the school and involved,” a respondent from the education sector noted. Parents who may be unfamiliar with the requirements for their children’s academic success learn about the critical role they can play in setting expectations and ensuring that children complete homework.

The school system also serves as a linchpin that connects students and families with mental health providers, language teachers, nutrition and wellness services, and other resources. Although nearly one-half of the school district’s 600 teachers are certified in English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, other teachers without the certification receive training on how to use ESL strategies in their curriculum development to benefit all students. To better prepare young children who are not yet ready for school, the Finney County school system funds a program called Parents as Teachers, which engages local volunteers to work with parents of preschool-age children to promote optimal early childhood development practices at home.

BUILDING SOCIAL COHESION AMONG IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

Recent national anti-immigration sentiments, coupled with a thwarted bomb attack, have sparked fear among residents of Finney County, despite the community’s established reputation as a welcoming place. Since the 2016 U.S. presidential election, “everybody believes that their green card can be pulled for any reason,” according to one respondent from the social services sector. Those fears were intensified in late 2016, when a plot to bomb an apartment complex where LiveWell maintains a space for refugees was discovered and prevented, prompting fear among Garden City’s large Somali-Muslim population. A heavily attended rally in support of the Somali community served to restore some of the confidence in Finney County’s efforts to create a safe and welcoming community for all residents. Demonstrators lined the front of the apartment complex that was the target of the attack in a show of support for their Somali neighbors. The threat mobilized widespread support for the Somali community among local schools, health care providers, churches, and neighbors. “People are working to make sure that our families know that we want them here and they are a part of the community,” according to one respondent from the social services sector.

“PEOPLE ARE WORKING TO MAKE SURE THAT OUR FAMILIES KNOW THAT WE WANT THEM HERE AND THEY ARE A PART OF THE COMMUNITY.”

SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR RESPONDENT

The support provided by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Genesis Family Health, and New Hope Together offer evidence of that commitment. With a goal of helping refugees to become self-sufficient as soon as possible, the IRC offers assistance in providing families with housing, food, a basic health assessment, and aid in enrolling children in local schools. After families’ basic needs are met, IRC staff helps refugees prepare for a job search, including developing a resume, preparing for an interview, and getting transportation for job training. Staff follow up at monthly intervals for a three-month period, according to a respondent from the social services sector. Since it was opened in Garden City in 2014, the IRC has provided this level of intensive case management services to about 700 individuals, although its budget provides funding for about one-third of that volume. It recently began a volunteer program that provides time-intensive services such as completing job applications. At Genesis Family Health, the FOHC offers not only primary and preventive medical and dental services, but also a suite of social services that address the needs of immigrant and at-risk populations, such as food and clothing assistance, financial management resources, and community referral resources.

Although not as comprehensive as IRC or Genesis Family Health in its scope of services, New Hope Together in 2017 opened in a Garden City apartment complex where many refugees live. Run and staffed by volunteers, the clinic will provide primary and preventive health services and offer a language program to help refugees learn English. This approach, according to the organization’s literacy director, helps the community “build bridges even more, and connecting people and building cross-cultural friendships, we feel the one-on-one partnerships are really going to be effective.” Efforts to embrace Finney County’s diversity and target immediate needs show how committed advocates can have an outsized impact on specific groups within the community. At the same time, the highly targeted nature of these efforts, while showing signs of success in the short term, offsets the community’s ability to address long-term, systemic equity concerns.

Summary of County’s Efforts to Build a Culture of Health

Based on the Culture of Health Framework used to guide Sentinel Community data collection and monitoring in Finney County, many residents and stakeholders appear to be committed to building a stronger, more cohesive community, as shown by efforts to reduce social isolation and combat anti-immigrant sentiments faced by the county’s large migrant population. Outreach and resettlement programs demonstrate how Finney County is Making Health a Shared Value by helping refugees gain self-sufficiency through a combination of health, medical, and social support services. The strained financial resources under which many organizations operate, because of shrinking levels of government support, requires that Finney County’s stakeholders leverage cross-sector collaborations to enhance the community’s health and well-being. Many of Finney County’s successful collaborations are the result of the convening role played by LiveWell and the participation and support from education, health, and civic organizations, such as programs to reduce underage drinking and improve management of chronic disease. The participatory nature of
Finney County faces a number of challenges over its long history, many of which stemmed from larger economic forces that residents had little or no power to influence. The decision to bring the meatpacking industry to the county arose from residents’ attempts to combat the fate that has befallen many rural communities: the loss of businesses, jobs, and eventually, people. Finney County residents remain committed to sustaining a viable place to live and acknowledge that progress may be difficult and slow. As one respondent from the business sector said, “We have a ‘can do’ attitude, and we figure out how to make things work. When you come out in the community, it is a pretty tight-knit group, and we have that small town feel. This is our group and our town, and we are going to help make things work.”

Despite the achievements that have improved many residents’ lives, Finney County is constrained in its efforts to create a healthier and more equitable community. The new volunteer health clinic is likely to be a source of pride, but the needs of newly arrived residents are significant and not quickly remedied by the local organizations that serve them. Providing basic necessities of life, access to care.

Resource-intensive immigrant and refugee needs. Finney County’s cultural diversity is a source of pride, but the needs of newly arrived residents are significant and not quickly remedied by the local organizations that serve them. Providing basic necessities of life, access to care.

Lack of voice in decision-making for newer residents. Immigrants and refugees still do not have a strong presence in decision-making or planning processes, likely because of language and cultural barriers, according to studies of immigrant groups in other states. Services provided by groups such as the IRC include best practices but, because of resource constraints, often do not incorporate community-specific feedback on programming. In addition, there is little representation within Finney County governmental and policy structures to advocate for this population.

Finney County has made remarkable strides in accommodating new and long-standing residents, but it is unclear how successful it will be in moving toward long-term solutions to promote health and well-being. One positive development may be the opening of a new dairy processing plant in Finney County, diversifying its agricultural job base and promising more jobs. However, the new jobs are tailored for a more highly trained workforce and may not be accessible to the transient and low-skilled workforce.

The role of the meatpacking industry and the new dairy plant will help determine whether residents will benefit from more jobs at higher wages and better worker benefits. In addition, the long-term problems posed by the state’s budget woes will take years to address. For now, Finney County continues its forward momentum in a state that can be best described as organized triage, in which collaboration and budget stretching are the guiding principles behind its efforts to promote health as a shared value.
References


