



## **Listening Sessions Summary**

**October 2017**

## **With Appreciation**

The Kids Win Missouri (formerly the Missouri Children's Leadership Council) extends its gratitude to the following organizations that assisted in co-hosting listening sessions on child well-being held throughout Missouri:

- Family and Community Trust (FACT)
- Caring Communities in Cape Girardeau
- Local Investment Commission in Kansas City
- The Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce and the Community Partnership of the Ozarks in Springfield
- The Alliance of Southwest Missouri in Joplin
- The Community Partnership in Rolla
- The Youth Alliance in St. Joseph
- Vision for Children at Risk in St. Louis
- Northeast Missouri Caring Communities, Inc. in Kirksville

Kids Win Missouri appreciates their partnership and looks forward to future opportunities to collaborate.

## **Complete Feedback from Listening Sessions**

Kids Win Missouri provides this document as an overview of the feedback provided by participants at the listening sessions. Comments were compiled in a matrix and categorized by issue area, type of comment and geographic region. The matrix is available at [kidswinmissouri.org/resources/](http://kidswinmissouri.org/resources/).



Kids Win Missouri hosted listening sessions across the state in August and September of 2017 to gather feedback on child well-being policies, programs and initiatives. On the tour, the organization visited Cape Girardeau, Kansas City, Springfield, Joplin, Rolla, St. Joseph, St. Louis and Kirksville.

Communities throughout the state expressed common concerns and challenges. The prevalence of poverty, the lack of transportation options for family's services, the inadequacy of services to address homelessness, the insufficiency of mental health services and the need to convince policymakers of the effectiveness of prevention were issues discussed in a majority of communities. All expressed a need for more funding to fulfill the demand for children and family services.

However, in many ways, the feedback heard at the listening sessions was as diverse as Missouri's geographic landscape. Some communities discussed how families were not aware of services available to them and how to access them, while others identified technologies employed by their communities to help families connect to needed services such as [JOHEGO](#) in Hannibal and the [Care Portal](#) in St. Joseph.

Participants in St. Louis listed more than a dozen initiatives in the region all working toward improving various facets of child well-being ranging from early childhood initiatives like St. Louis Regional Early Childhood Council to St. Louis Diaper Bank to the Integrated Health Network. After compiling the list, one person commented on the need for awareness of and collaboration between various child well-being efforts occurring in the region. By contrast, communities more compact in size and with fewer residents highlighted collaboration among stakeholders as a key to their success in serving children and their families.

A discussion point unique to St. Louis referenced the region's racial divide, which participants identified as a root cause of many of the challenges the region currently faces. Challenges specifically mentioned in this context included the segregation of resources and the health disparities clearly associated with the community's geography.

Throughout the listening sessions, participants emphasized the importance of family and the role of parents in the success of children. One added that Missouri needs "supports for parents because health starts with family where children are nurtured and safe."

## **Health and Mental Health**

Several communities have had success in introducing medical services in public schools through community partnerships. Additionally, St. Louis and Kansas City have been successful in increasing the age requirement for the purchase of tobacco products from 18 to 21.

Much of the discussion on health and mental health centered on the lack of medical and dental providers willing to accept patients with Medicaid benefits as well as a lack of access to and availability of mental health services. Many communities stressed the growing devastation of



substance abuse on children and families, which causes homelessness, child abuse and neglect and a myriad of other negative consequences on family units. Participants added that employers are increasingly feeling the effects of substance abuse, even requiring the alteration of their employment policies because of the rising prevalence of the issue.

## **Early Childhood**

Many communities identified local early childhood initiatives as successes including [Partners in Quality](#) in Kansas City, [Every Child Promise](#) in Springfield, the [PUPS Early Childhood Program](#) in the Rolla School District, [Success by 6](#) in St. Joseph and the [Regional Early Childhood Council](#) in St. Louis. Listening session participants listed strategies that have contributed to these initiatives' success including gaining support from the business community through effective message framing, media coverage of early childhood issues and partnerships with community organizations.

Even with these successes, there are still challenges. Most communities listed access to child care, especially for infants and toddlers and specifically for non-traditional work hours as a challenge. Some attendees identified the low child care subsidy rates for foster children. Additionally, participants from outstate communities noted the disparity between urban and rural child care reimbursement rates.

Feedback from communities also identified the need for Missouri to have a comprehensive way to fund early childhood education. Given the absence of a comprehensive state funding mechanism, the Springfield community is attempting to expand its program through locally generated funds.

Listening session participants in Cape Girardeau, Kansas City, Springfield and St. Louis listed barriers to improving early childhood program quality including a lack of resources to provide staff with professional development, low wages and the absence of information on how to measure the quality of early childhood care and education providers' services.

Participants from multiple communities also discussed the impact of recent cuts to state home visitation programs.

## **Youth Education and Development**

Communities shared information on initiatives focused on youth education and development, including afterschool programs, mentoring programs and programs that help youth prepare to enter the workforce. Big Brothers Big Sisters, AmeriCorps, Boys and Girls Club, Salvation Army, MERS Goodwill, [GOCAPS](#), [Your Piece of the Pie](#), Tech Wizards, [Mentoring Matters](#) and [Kids in Motion/Teens in Motion](#) were a few of the organizations and initiatives with programs in the issue area.



Challenges in the area identified by participants included a need to align curriculum with the needs of businesses and a lack of opportunities for mentoring, afterschool, and summer school programs.

## Economic Security and Revenue

While one community cited a lack of jobs as an issue, participants in three communities indicated that jobs are available if workers want them. Communities identified methods to increase economic security including raising the minimum wage, limiting payday loans and learning from the successes of programs like the [Alliance for Economic Inclusion](#) and [Money Smart KC](#) that promote “financial counseling and economic mobility.”

## Safety, Security, Family and Community

Listening session attendees identified numerous successes in this issue area including the passage of the Children’s Service Fund sales tax in Jackson and Clay Counties, local food banks, state programs and weekend backpack programs that address food insecurity issues and innovative strategies implemented by judicial circuits to address juvenile, drug and foster care issues. However, feedback from participants indicated that there is not enough financial support for foster care or education and development services for recipients of foster care. They also noted the inadequacy of resources for homeless children and families and the need for more resources to address domestic violence and food insecurity.

Many participants were appreciative of the financial support provided by the state for child advocacy centers, which address child abuse and neglect issues. One attendee outlined a lack of expertise and inadequate and unfair processes used by Child Abuse and Neglect Review Boards.

The Kansas City and St. Louis sessions were unique in raising issues impacting immigrants, specifically noting the anxiety of families that could be affected by changes to immigration laws.

## What Does Jefferson City Get Right?

One question session moderators used to generate discussion was, “What does Jefferson City get right?” Participants identified several policies that were working well, including the recently adopted legislation that creates a foster care bill of rights, benevolent tax credit programs, state supports for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), recent efforts to consolidate IT systems, the new administration’s support for foster care issues, the legislative approval of full funding for the state education funding formula resulting in the triggering of new Pre-K funding and financial incentives for child care facilities with a disproportionate share of children from families that qualify for child care subsidies.

Attendees also complimented the state workforce, noting their dedication to the issues on which they work. Participants in multiple communities were appreciative of recent changes at the Children’s Division, including the new focus on families and parenting.



## **Issues for State Policymakers**

Moderators of the sessions also asked attendees about misperceptions or issues of which state policymakers should be aware. Many participants noted the lack of understanding that policymakers have about poverty, its causes and policies that impact poverty. In various forms, session members discussed the inaccuracy or inadequacy of formulas for distributing state aid for locally administered programs.

Participants in Kansas City were frustrated with efforts by the state to preempt local policy decisions, specifically mentioning the recent state legislation to overturn the City's minimum wage increase. Attendees from more rural areas noted that they are expected to do more with less money while session members from urban areas said that many programs are designed with a rural lens with little consideration for how they might work in large cities.

While acknowledging that for anybody "it's hard to know what you don't know," participants throughout the state indicated there was a need to educate policymakers on the importance of a holistic approach to health and the effectiveness and value of programs geared toward prevention.

