



August 3, 2021

Thank you for completing your 2021 Community Star Individual Nominee Questionnaire!

Overview

Here is a copy of your answers for your records. All nominations will be reviewed and evaluated by members of NOSORH's Community Star Selection Committee. One Community Star will be selected per state. If you are selected as your state's Community Star, I will work with you to schedule an interview so that we can develop your outstanding story to share in our annual book of Community Stars released on Thursday, November 18, 2021.

If you have any questions, please reach out to NRHD Community Star Project Coordinator, Brea Corsaro at bcorsaro@powerofrural.org.

Your Information

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Have Questions? Contact:
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Organization or Project Website

<https://HBCAT.org>

Please describe in as much detail as possible, your role within your organization and the nature of your work in rural health?

I am a licensed social worker and actively work with our community's low income, vulnerable, and disadvantaged population for over a decade. As a social worker for the State of Kansas, investigating child abuse and neglect, I worked hand in hand with families who suffered from generational poverty, structural inequities, and systematic disadvantages. While in the role as a child protective worker, I volunteered as the leader of a grass roots organization "Visioning a Healthier Bourbon County" and was instrumental in obtaining funding and starting the City of Fort Scott's first community garden.

My role changed after several years when a social work position opened at Mercy Health Systems. Initially, in 2012, I started my journey with Mercy as the rehabilitation social worker identifying needs, arranging for discharge and advocating for patients. In addition, I was the Mothers and Infants Clinic worker. I offered low-income mothers counseling, resources, and support from initial appointment through delivery. My role expanded to assisting with home health and hospice social work consults and completing home visits.

When I earned my master's in business administration, a position became available for clinic manager. I applied and was chosen as the top candidate. As a clinic manager, my hospital president approached me to complete the first comprehensive community health needs assessment (CHNA) and community health improvement plan (CHIP) for Bourbon County, KS in 2016,

knowing I had a relationship with the poor and underserved and a pulse on the community.

The CHNA identified cardiovascular disease, lung disease, and diabetes as the top three health priorities for the community. At that time, we realized outside capital would be needed to address the upstream causes of poor health outcomes through policy, systems and environmental changes.

The Healthy Bourbon County Action Team (HBCAT) blossomed as a result of the CHNA/CHIP to address poor health outcomes in Bourbon County. In order to gain capital, there was as a joint effort between City of Fort Scott Economic Development Director, Heather Smith, and myself, now the Mercy Health System's Community Benefit Leader, to apply for grant funding through the BCBS KS Pathways to Healthy Kansas Grant. HBCAT was subsequently awarded approximately half a million dollars.

In 2018 the HBCAT hit a major road bump when our fiscal agent and hospital announced closure. Our work was (and still is) too important to end. As a board, we looked at the situation, pivoted, adapted, and moved forward. I was offered the position as the Economic Development Director for Bourbon County and eagerly accepted with the knowledge I could continue the valuable and meaningful work of the HBCAT.

At the end of 2020, as the leader of the HBCAT and Director of Economic Development for Bourbon County, I was instrumental in nurturing and developing a partnership to meet the urgent needs as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic into a program call "The Center for Economic Growth" initially funded with Federal Cares Act Relief dollars.

We developed a long-lasting collaboration with The Fort Scott Area Chamber of Commerce, PSU Small Business Development Center (PSU SBDC), Southeast KANSASWORKS, and private business BAJA Investment to address



the social determinants of health, create systems that will address economic stability, enhance quality of life and encourage economic growth. We provide microenterprise technical assistance, giving individuals, living in a historically impoverished rural community, opportunity for economic stability and wealth creation.

These services are instrumental in addressing the social determinants of health in wealth creation, enhancing quality of life, employment, and poverty. Providing local businesses expertise and guidance, particularly in these very turbulent times, has shown to be a critical resource to increase the number of business start-ups and number of available quality jobs. PSU SBDC's client list went from three in October of 2020 to almost fifty today.

During this tenure we started another regional collaboration between Bourbon, Allen and Crawford Counties to map out and create a regional tri-county bike by-way system. We spent much time engaging community members and each of the county commissions to obtain formal support through adopted ordinances. Today the "ABC Trails" has now rebranded to "Prairie Pathways" and we are actively working to install signage along the route.

In March 2021 the County reorganized and the HBCAT lost its fiscal agent (again) and I was a reduction in force. I took a leap of faith and went full time to work for the HBCAT who had no current means to pay me. For months I continued the meaningful work with no pay. I knew as a successful grant writer we could find the resources to pay my wages. Within a few months we had the resources. The HBCAT board moved to become its own non-profit and it's own fiscal agent. Without much financial resources, I went ahead and filed the paperwork for our organization to obtain a needed 501 C 3 status.



Still a Blue Cross Blue Shield Pathways to Healthy Kansas Grant recipient (now awarded a phase two 4-year grant) there are funds to match operations of our work to increase access to physical activity, healthy food, promote tobacco cessation, enhance quality of life and encourage economic growth. We applied for and was awarded the USDA Rural Business Development Grant to pay for the Center for Economic Growth's programing.

Through all this, my husband and I took on an old, condemned building in Fort Scott's downtown and entrance. The building had poles holding up the sides of it for close to a decade. Knowing the risk and working with the city to mitigate as much as we could, we took on the old building and applied for a community development block grant (CDBG). We were awarded the CDBG and brought to life the dilapidated old building that was tied to the rest of the block and would have taken down several buildings with it should it have collapsed. Through creative financing we were able to invest much of our own dollars into the project as the needed match. This project spurred many more downtown buildings to be restored and brought to life.

Although I now work on a macro level to advocate for and influence health in all policy, I still consider myself a social worker by trade. My purpose and values align with that of the HBCAT teams to help people, to offer opportunities to thrive, and to advocate for the historically marginalized and impoverished.

Since 2016, the HBCAT's work has been broadly recognized and modeled through the state of Kansas. Jody Hoener, leader of the HBCAT since inception, was awarded the Governor's Council on Fitness Kansas Health Champion honoree in 2019. In May 2018, the HBCAT was also recognized with the prestigious Kansas State of Wellness Community Champion Award. The HBCAT initiative has been identified by the Kansas Hospital Association

and Kansas Health Institute as a leader in the field and used in a toolbox for Kansas hospitals as an example of best practice approaches to address community health. In addition, in 2020 I was nominated and appointed to the Kansas Governor's Council on Fitness and serve as a council member.

What inspired you to choose your career?

When I started off my college career, I had every intention of being an aerospace engineer. While in college I worked with development disabled individuals to live in the least restrictive environments and then helped the clients obtain and keep employment. This work, helping people thrive, was very meaningful to me.

My dad died when I was 10 and my mom worked hard to keep us fed. My oldest brother was murdered in a domestic violence dispute with five gunshots to his stomach by his girlfriend's jealous ex-boyfriend. My next oldest brother ended up in the foster care system and aged out.

I felt an education, coupled with my personal and professional experiences, would put me in the best position for success. I followed my passion to where I am today.

What is the impact of your work in your community or the rural populations you serve?

The beneficiaries of our work are the community members who live, work, and play in Bourbon County. Bourbon County is a rural community, a historically disenfranchised geographic area with higher rates of poverty. Poverty is a driver of poor health outcomes and there are structural inequities in place that limit opportunities for reaching full health potential.



The quality of neighborhoods and schools significantly shapes the life trajectory and the health of the adults and children. Access to clean, safe, resource-rich neighborhoods and schools is an important factor in access to health equity and opportunities to thrive--with research indicating that one's zip code is more important to health than one's genetic code.

The problems of health inequity and social injustice are complex in nature and inextricably linked to key economic indicators. The solution requires an interdisciplinary and community-based response. We believe individuals and communities experiencing health inequity first-hand are best positioned to interact with policymakers, identifying issues and developing strategies that address social determinants of poor health.

Other beneficiaries take the additional role in becoming partners through our efforts to shift toward a healthy culture. These entities include the worksites, healthcare providers and organizations, educational institutions, governmental entities, and more. Industry and business leaders look for good health and education services when making location decisions. They also want to ensure the local labor force will meet their needs. Investment in healthcare services and initiatives has the potential to yield dividends in the form of increased labor productivity and improved quality of life for our residents.

Our solution is building healthy communities by transforming the power, building trust, and encouraging community participation. Comprehensive strategy for change includes local organizing, strategic communication, community research, creating systems, and environmental changes. Since 2016, we have applied for and have been awarded over \$1.3million in grants

to inject capital in a community that has historically lacked the needed investments to make lasting changes.

Examples of Our Work and Recent Accomplishments:

- An assessment of county wide trails systems, City of Fort Scott sidewalks and bike-ability, and unique plan for Uniontown.
- The City of Fort Scott formally adopted a master non-motorized transportation plan, referred to as the PedNet Plan.
- The City of Uniontown created and adopted a pedestrian plan to keep their school-aged youth safe when walking to and from school, the Uniontown PedNet Plan.
- Lit crosswalk between Uniontown school buildings for safe crossings.
- A Tri-County alternative transportation plan and committee made up of Allen, Bourbon and Crawford Counties.
- Acquisition of land for additional trails at Gunn Park.
- New walking trail lighting at Riverfront Park Trails and Fort Scott Community College Trails.
- Wayfinding Signs (maps of local trails) and Kiosks built and erected at local trail heads.
- Bike racks made and installed locally throughout the community.
- Bike Share Program implemented and in full swing, managed by the Fort Scott Area Chamber of Commerce.
- Our healthcare provider created a new service line, Diabetes Prevention Program, piloted with Peerless Products, Inc.



- WIC relocated once a month so pregnant mothers do not have to choose between applying for WIC or receiving prenatal care due to limited time of work or transportation issues.
- Collaboration of healthcare providers with USD 234 to create a new service, The Children Wellness Clinic, to combat childhood obesity. This is now an undertaking of CHCSEK.
- Developed Bourbon County's first Wholesale Food Directory of locally produced buyers and suppliers with a second edition recently published.
- We were able to engage 5 food retail establishments and 9 restaurants within our community who are now promoting and providing locally produced foods within their businesses when they are in season.
- We now have certified tobacco cessation specialists not only in our community, but in the region as a direct result of our work. Giving doctors, counselors, worksites, or anyone a place to refer those who are seeking help to quit tobacco.
- School aged youth and teens in two school districts now have healthier environments with water bottle filling stations, new playground equipment and gym enhancements in both Uniontown and Fort Scott School Districts.
- Worksites have implemented Workwell KS policy and environmental changes: City of Fort Scott, Fort Scott Community College, Peerless Products Inc, Landmark National Bank, USD 234, USD 235, and Bourbon County. They have implemented health worksite wellness policy and supportive environmental changes like tobacco free workplaces, access to workout equipment, standing desks, walking breaks, and more.

- Eight healthy “modeling” level policy were implementing in two school districts and 6 school buildings.
- Recently obtained 2 pledges from multi-unit housing landlords and owners in working with our Action Team to implement tobacco free housing policy.
- In Fall of 2021 we will be partnering with KU in completing a Community Health Needs Assessment in lieu of the annual community perception survey.

Have you accessed, benefited from, or worked directly with your State Office of Rural Health? If yes, please describe.

No

Are you or your organization a HRSA, Federal Office of Rural Health Policy Grantee? If yes, which grant program? If yes, which one?

No