



# Making a Difference

2014 – 2015

## Family and Child Development Program Focus Team Building Strong Families Action Plan Report

### Grand Challenges

K-State Research and Extension: providing education you can trust to help people, businesses, and communities solve problems, develop skills, and build a better future.

*Knowledge  
forLife*

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### Situation

Strong, stable, resilient families with adequate financial resources are crucial to the health and well-being of individuals, communities, and society. In Kansas in 2013, slightly more than 23 percent of children under the age 18 lived in families that fell below the poverty line (\$23,492 for a family of four). Of the Kansas children who live in poor families, 61 percent live with a single parent. There are approximately 50 marriages and 27 marriage dissolutions daily in Kansas with more than 9,000 minor children affected annually by divorce. During the nation's 2013 Point-in-Time count, 1,213 Kansas families were identified as homeless.

### What We Did

In an effort to build strong families, various programming initiatives across the state addressed positive family-member relationships and social-emotional interactions. These efforts address the following K-State Research and Extension grand challenges: health, developing tomorrow's leaders, and community vitality. A pilot project, Together We Can, was initiated to focus specifically on strengthening families in poverty. This project has encouraged agents to partner with local Circles USA groups. The project has seed funding through the K-State Center for Engagement and Community Development. The Circles model is designed to enable families to get out of poverty as well as to incubate changes within a community that eliminate barriers to financial stability amongst its residents. For 18 months, Circles families meet weekly with community volunteers in a safe, supportive environment to learn and build community connections. Volunteers are pivotal in helping the larger community understand and act on hindrances that families in poverty face everyday.

### Outcomes

Forty-eight program activities with 1,390 total participants for both program focus team action plans were reported throughout the state that included 180 volunteers and 539 volunteer hours and involved numerous community partnerships. In one site where an extension agent piloted Together We Can, parents reported that they plan to: communicate more with my child, take different approaches to manage my stress and anger, save money, work on parenting skills and handle stress in a more positive way, and be a better communicator. In another site, its pre- and post-evaluations revealed parents reported feeling more responsible, confident, patient, understanding, and flexible and they were spending more time with their children.

### Success Story

During this past year, several Circle Leaders (from families in poverty) experienced successful life events: two graduated from college, one Circle Leader was chosen for a Habitat for Humanity home and three have applied, one is debt free, and families report that they have doubled or tripled the number of people that they can count on in their lives.