

## Keys to Embracing Aging

### The Situation

It is no secret that America is aging, and this is especially true in our most rural and frontier areas of the state. While we cannot change such trajectories, K-State Research and Extension is able to influence the degree to which our community member's age with sustained or improved health, wellness, and vitality. Ultimately, improving the way we age can increase an individual's ability to stay in their home and community for a longer period time, reduce the need for institutionalized long-term care, and ultimately reduce the health care expenditures associated with increased dependence and presence of disease. K-State Research and Extension is dedicated to improving individual, family, and community health and we are actively implementing unbiased, research- and evidence-based education into our local Kansas communities. One such effort is Keys to Embracing Aging.

### What We Did

Keys to Embracing Aging is an evidence-based educational curriculum that helps individuals establish healthy lifestyle behaviors and maintain them across their lifespan to influence optimal aging. The curriculum, based on decades of research on centenarians and the world's Blue Zones, addresses 12 aspects of physical, social-emotional, financial, mental, and interpersonal health and wellness.

Through our Extension system's grassroots presence, we were able to engage rural Kansans in interactive, purposeful learning alongside their peers and connect them with their local Extension office and other community-service providers. It is this sense of belonging and integration within communities that can encourage individuals to remain engaged and productive members of their community. As the Covid-19 pandemic forced Kansans into isolation, agents across the state offered digital sessions of the Keys to Embracing Aging program through local library channels, Facebook Live groups, and local unit websites. In addition, the research based printed materials were widely distributed through community channels such as senior meals, library book bundles and in city utility bill mailings.

### Outcomes

Participants reported they increased their knowledge related to healthy aging and well-being. Recipients of printed materials reported feeling empowered to maintain or improve their health during the Covid-19 pandemic and stay at home orders. Those who participated in the digital courses conveyed feeling more connected as a result. The areas where individuals reported making the most improvement were physical activity, nutrition, social activity, stress management, and taking time for themselves.

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