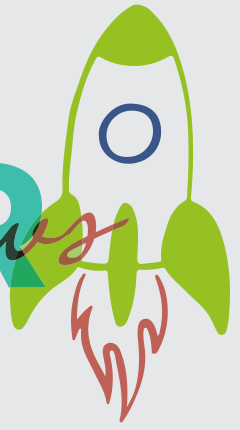




tomorrow **OUR**



Northwest Kansas Region

Colby

Sensemaking Guide

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Disruptors

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Data collected through
October 2, 2019



On April 11th, Governor Kelly challenged us all to be early childhood stakeholders.

In her remarks to the Kansas Children's Cabinet she underlined the importance of the early years—and the role of each and every Kansas community—in shaping the future of Kansas.

Kansas received a federal planning grant to facilitate a collaborative effort to shape our state's future direction for early childhood. **Parental voice and choice are paramount to this effort, with the needs and preferences of Kansas families top of mind.**

This one-year federal planning grant supports the development of a comprehensive needs assessment and strategic plan for early childhood in Kansas. Our Tomorrows engages parents, early childhood professionals, providers, educators, and others in storytelling opportunities, community meetings, and idea generation sessions.

Each story becomes part of a collective, statewide map of community strengths and needs and helps us:

- ★ Consider real-life struggles and resilience through the storyteller's own perspective
- ★ Understand how gaps in service delivery are experienced
- ★ Highlight what families think and what they want for our youngest Kansans
- ★ Shape the strategic plan for the early childhood system in Kansas

Our Tomorrows partners will use the rich dialogue and findings from this work to support decision-making that ensures every Kansas child has the best start in life. The Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund, Kansas Department for Children and Families, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, and Kansas State Department of Education are partnering to carry out this important work.

Funds for this project are provided through the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five 90TP0016-01-00 was awarded to the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE). The Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund, the Kansas Department for Children and Families, and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment are leading this work with KSDE. This information or content and conclusions should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HHS, ACF, or the U.S. Government. Any food or refreshments are not paid for by federal funds.

The Kansas State Department of Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in its programs and activities and provides equal access to any group officially affiliated with the Boy Scouts of America and other designated youth groups. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies: KSDE General Counsel, Office of General Counsel, KSDE, Landon State Office Building, 900 SW Jackson, Suite 102, Topeka, KS 66612, (785) 296-3204.

Navigating the Guide

SenseMaker is a unique approach to narrative research. The results of a SenseMaker study are meant to guide decision-making and take action in a complex environment. Below are three things to keep in mind as you begin to explore this new form of data.



The unit (n) is the story. Most graphs show percentages based on regional story counts.

Be active. The report supports your own sensemaking and decision-making. Nobody knows your experience better than you. If your interpretation and ideas differ, it's your responsibility to share.



Interpretations of the data are intentionally provocative to spur your thought process and actions. The writers of this report do not make any claim that their interpretations are the only 'right' ones.

Please email the Our Tomorrows team at ourtomorrow@ku.edu if you have questions or would like clarification.

Community Profile

Northwest



Counties

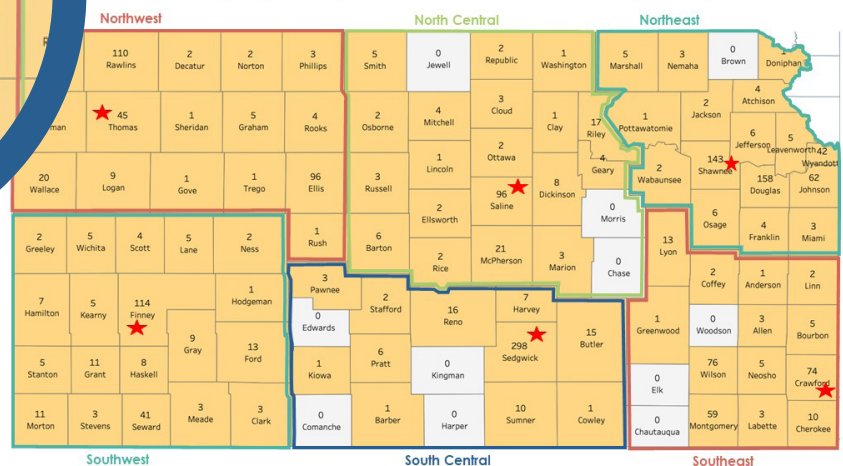
Cheyenne	Sheridan	Phillips
Decatur	Sherman	Rawlins
Ellis	Thomas	Rooks
Gove	Trego	Rush
Graham	Wallace	Sheridan
Logan	Decatur	Sherman
Norton	Ellis	Thomas
Phillips	Gove	Trego
Rawlins	Graham	Wallace
Rooks	Logan	
Rush	Norton	



Current Northwest Story Count
396 stories



1892 STORIES SHARED BY KANSANS*



Community Action Lab Region Legend
★ Regional Community Sensemaking Workshop Location

*2132 Total Stories Shared

Key Partners and Story Collection Overview

Dana Stanton – Citizen Journalist

Dana Stanton is an employee of USD 489 Early Childhood Connections in Hays and joined the Our Tomorrows project as the first Citizen Journalist in the Fall of 2018. She collected stories by utilizing her established connections in the early childhood community, social media, and by attending local events.

LiveWell Northwest Kansas – Organizational Partner

LiveWell joined Our Tomorrows in February 2019 and held a story collecting competition the first two weeks of July 2019. Citizen Journalists, including high school youth, in Rawlins, Thomas, Wallace, and Cheyenne counties participated. LiveWell made a donation to the local school district of the county with the most stories. LiveWell also collected stories at food distribution events held by the local grocery store and spent a day collecting stories on-site at large community employers.



STORIES MATTER

Respondents in the Northwest are sharing meaningful stories that made a significant impact on their lives and they want others to know.

41.4% said the story they shared happened only once and 19.2% said the story they shared happens once in a while. That means the majority of stories (60.6%) were not day-to-day experiences.

70.5% of respondents selected that they would always remember their experience. This means the stories were impactful and will stick with them.

34.9% said everyone in their area should know about their experience. Only 9.6% of respondents said no one should know..

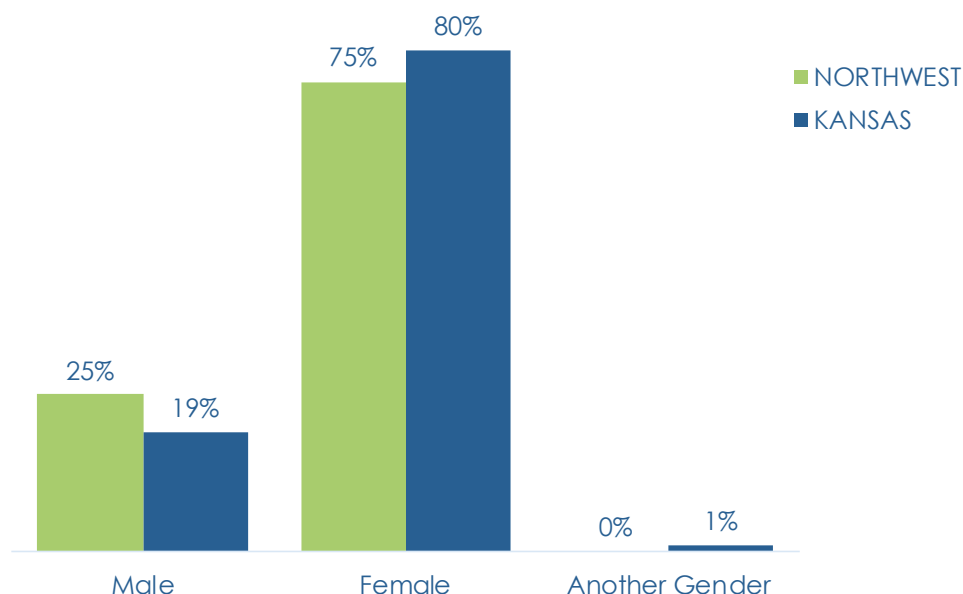
Northwest Kansas

Demographics

The following statistics reflect the demographics of people who shared their story in Northwest Kansas. Our Tomorrows data is not generalizable – the patterns we see are only based on those who chose to share their story. In some cases, these demographics will not reflect the actual demographics of the region. Help us by asking people who aren't represented to share their story!

These percentages are determined from the datasets of Northwest Kansas (n=396) and statewide (n=2,132). As people continue to share stories in your region, story counts and maps published through Our Tomorrows will be updated.

Gender



Northwest Kansas

Demographics

Race (n=396)

Northwest Kansas respondents identified as:

White	89.4%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.5%
Black or African American	0.8%
Asian	0.3%
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander	0.3%
Another Race	2.8%
Preferred not to say	5.1%

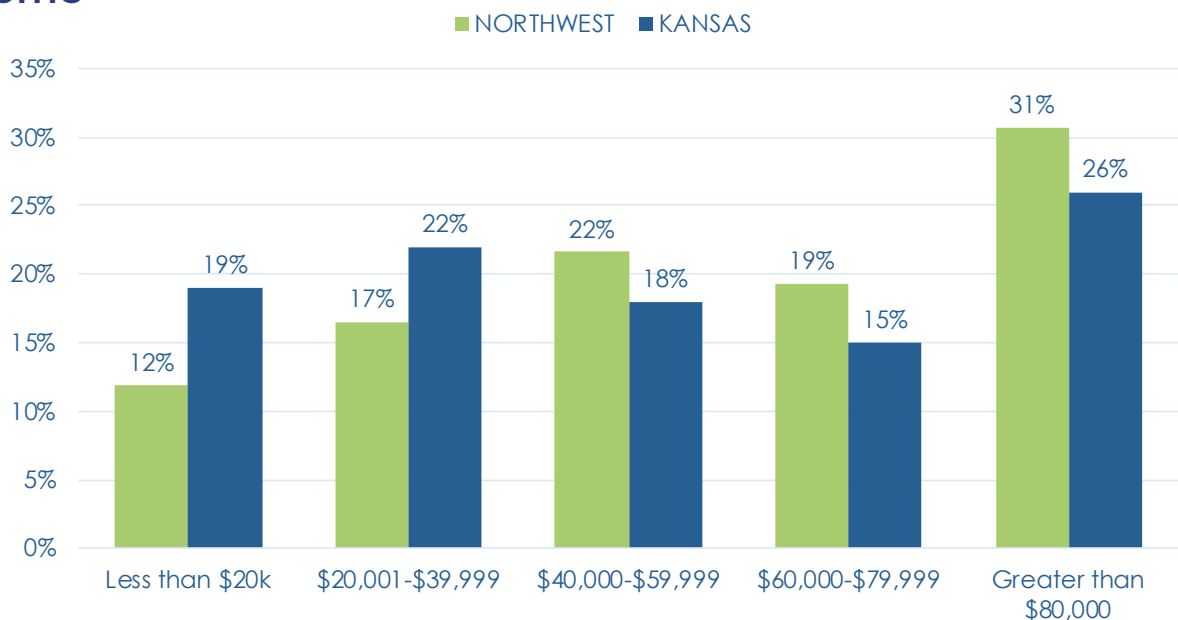
8.7% fewer Hispanic or Latinx participants in Northwest Kansas shared a story when compared to the rest of the state.

Ethnicity

Northwest Kansas respondents identified as:

Hispanic or Latino/a	4.0%
Not Hispanic or Latino/a	90.2%
Preferred not to say	5.8%

Income



Themes

Emergent Patterns



To help us understand Kansans' lived experience and augment the early childhood system needs assessment, we are focusing on the following key themes:

BRIGHT *Spots*

We have defined Bright Spots as family experiences of thriving, resilience, and support. These are the stories we want to amplify and to have more of in our communities. These can be singular events or ongoing experiences.

DISRUPTORS

We have defined Disruptors as unique and/or singular events that negatively interrupt a family's lifecourse broadly and trajectory in early childhood, specifically. Disruptors are negative experiences from which people need to "bounce back" and might indicate gaps that present opportunities for further support and programming. Disruptors include the following categories: unemployment, transportation, housing, health, safety, family separation, and new child.

NEEDS *Unmet*

We have defined Unmet Needs as ongoing needs that are persistent issues. Unmet needs are chronic even if triggered by a specific event. The following are included in this category: stress/anxiety/depression, access to childcare, parenting knowledge, safety, basic needs, and financial needs.

VOICES *Unheard*

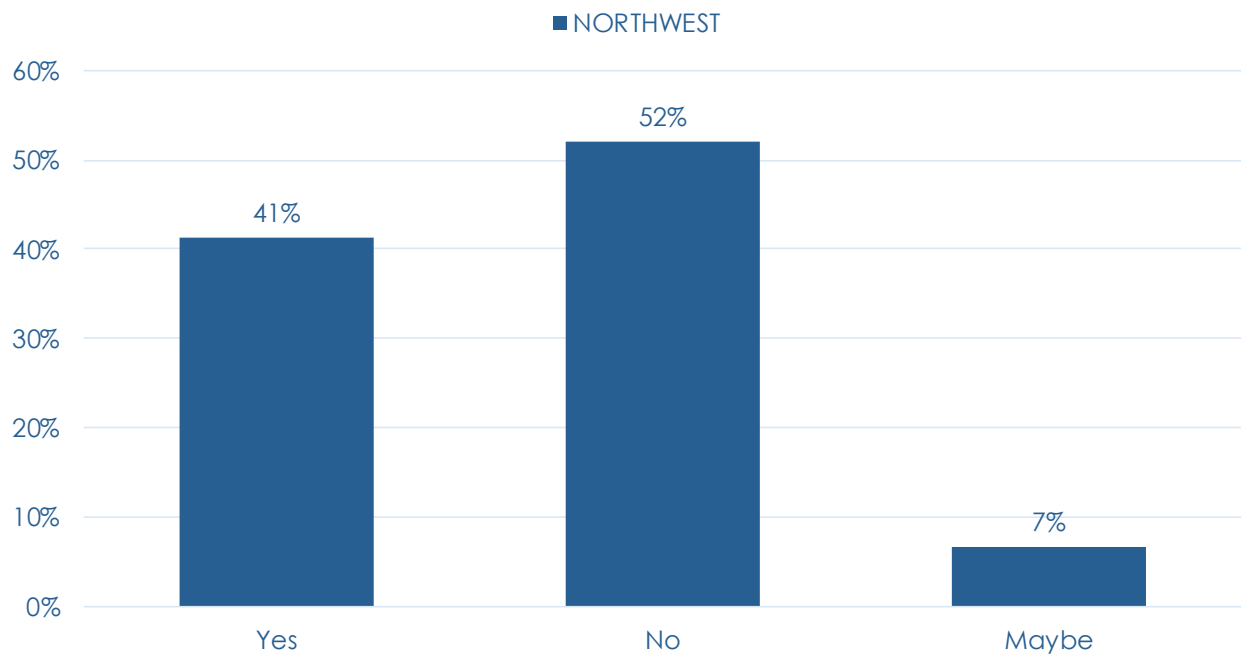
Unheard Voices are defined as Our Tomorrows experiences shared by vulnerable groups whose stories are often invisible and who do not have a seat at the decision-making table. We identified Unheard Voices when a story specifically mentions someone in one of these groups, or the storyteller self-identifies as a member of one of these groups. Unheard Voices were coded on narrative content, and are not based on demographic information. The following are often Unheard Voices we seek to elevate: Low income working families, incarcerated people, young children not in school, people with emotional, behavioral, or developmental conditions, people with special health care needs, people living in poverty in rural areas, people in the foster care system, and non-English speakers.

41% of Northwest Stories Included Bright Spots

161 of 396 stories coded by the Our Tomorrows team.

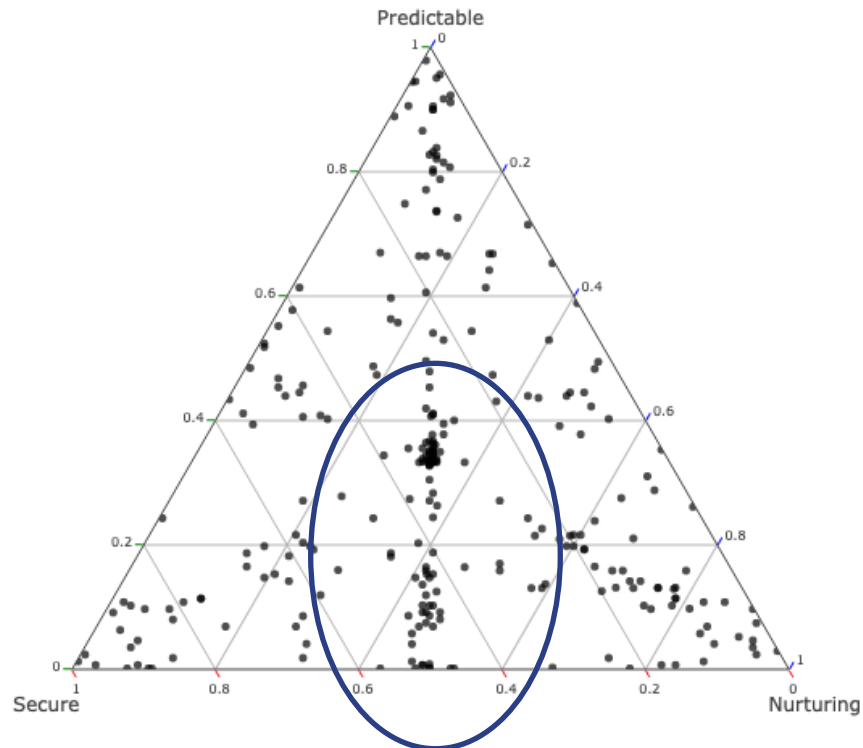
There is a lot that is already working in the Early Childhood System in the Northwest.

41.3% of the stories contained Bright Spots as coded by the Our Tomorrows Team.



In spite of adversity, secure and nurturing home environments for children were present in the majority of stories.

The most predominant clusters of stories in the Positive Homelife Triad are in the middle and at the bottom, showing that the majority of families shared experiences where home life was secure, predictable, and nurturing.



58% of Northwest Stories Included Disruptors

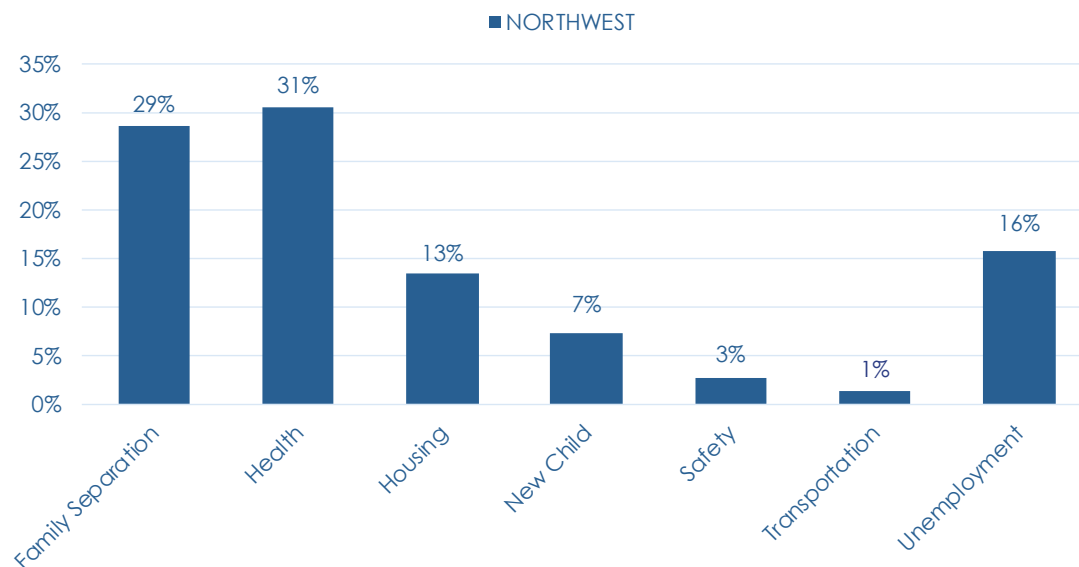
216 of 396 stories coded by the Our Tomorrows team.

Health and Family Separation were major disruptors in the Northwest.

31% of stories coded with disruptors by the Our Tomorrows team focused on health crisis, health care, or ongoing medical problems. 29% of stories with disruptors were about Family Separation, where families were broken up due to divorce, incarceration, death of a family member, or children being removed from the home.

Unemployment was also a common disruptor in the Northwest.

16% of disruptors were about unemployment or losing a job, about 5 percentage points higher than in the rest of the state.

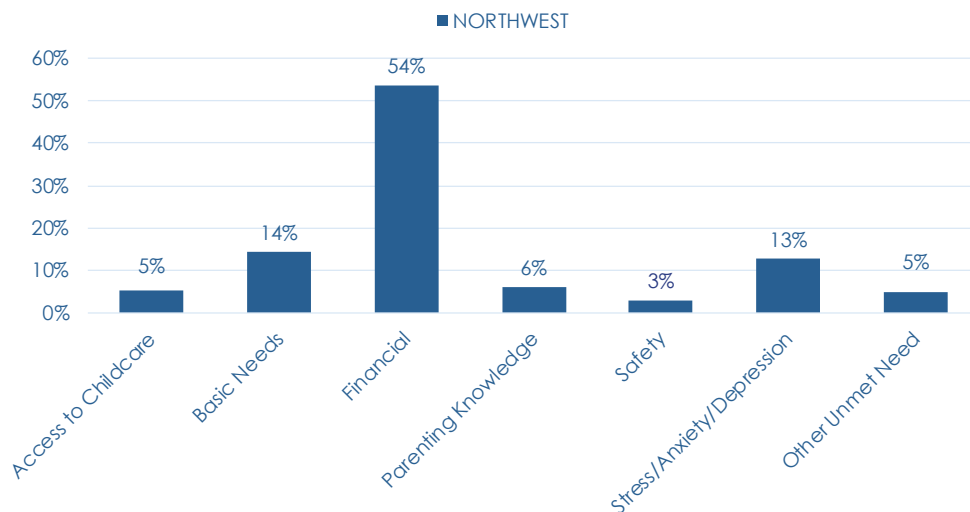


58% of Northwest Stories Included Unmet Needs

229 stories coded by the Our Tomorrows team. Some of these needs were met as part of the experience that was shared and are no longer ongoing.

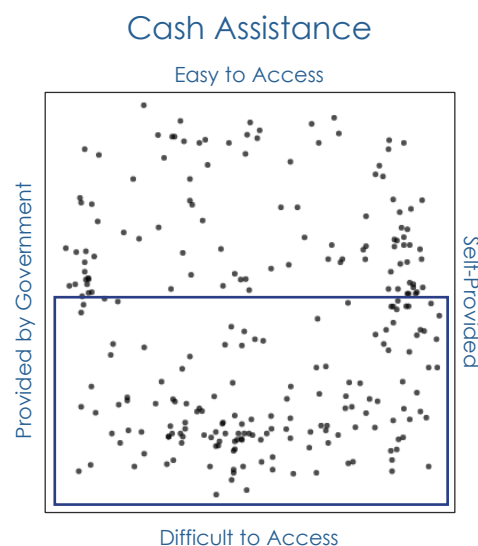
Families in the Northwest experienced high degrees of financial strain, indicating a potential lack of economic opportunity and resources in the area.

53.7% of Unmet Needs coded by the Our Tomorrows team referenced living paycheck-to-paycheck or having trouble paying bills. This is almost 21% higher than the rest of the state (32.2%).



The economic situation was also demonstrated in the difficulty to access cash and cash assistance.

58% of Cash Assistance stories were placed on the bottom half of the Resource canvas.

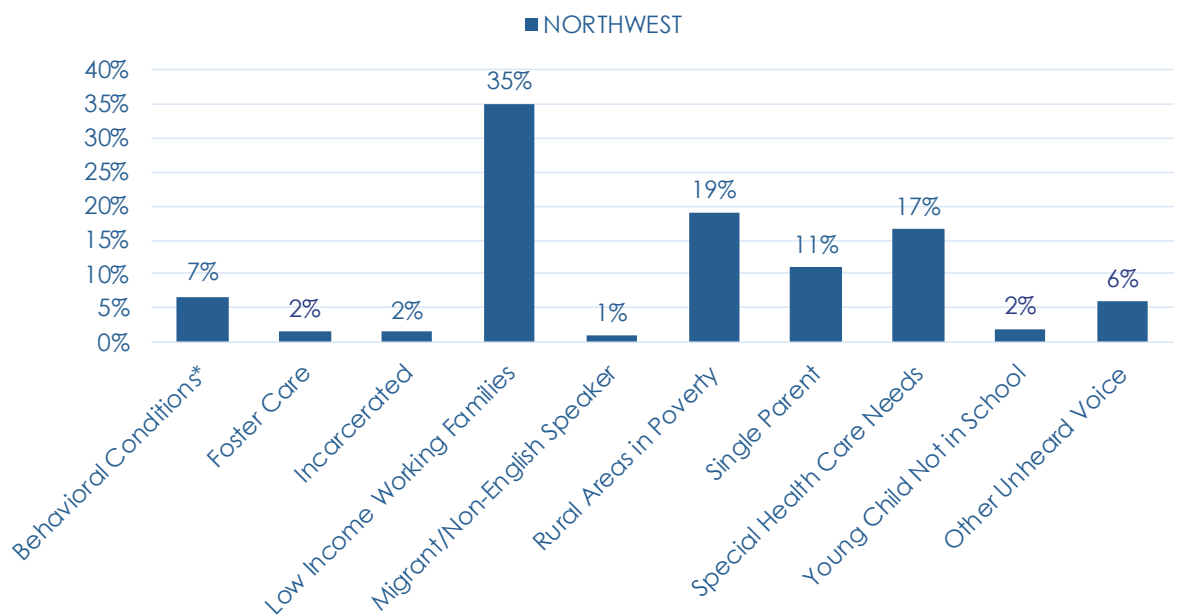


51% of Northwest Stories Included Unheard Voices

200 of 396 stories coded by the Our Tomorrows team.

Low income working families and people from rural areas living in poverty accounted for 54% of all unheard voices in Northwest Kansas.

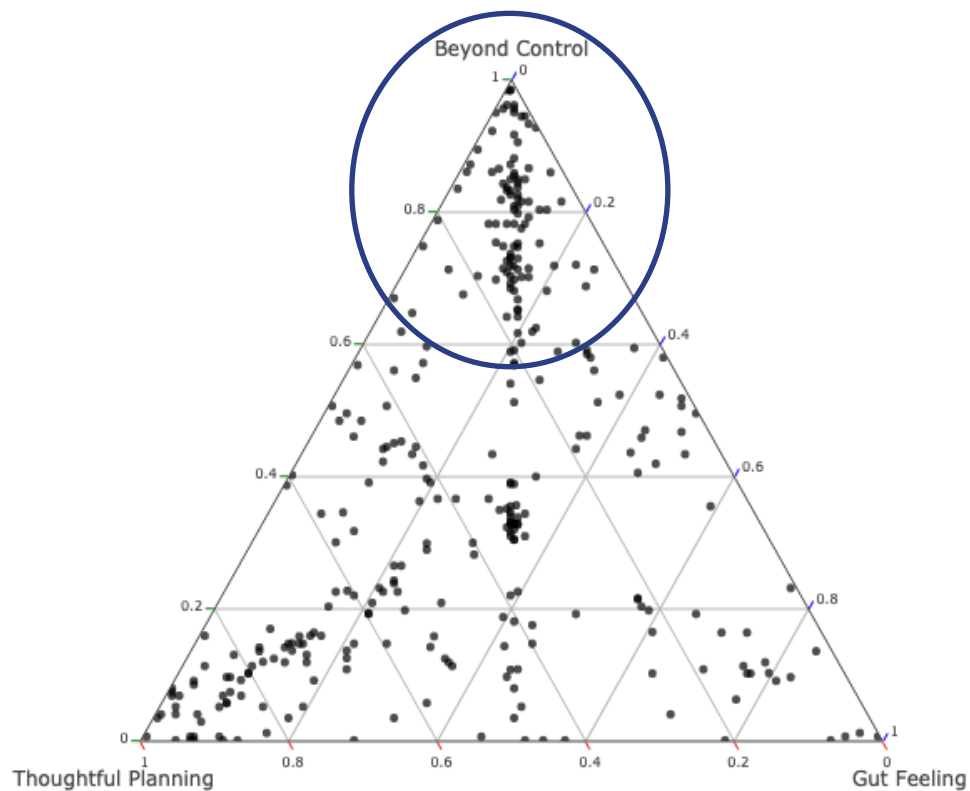
35% of stories with Unheard Voices were from low income working families and 19% were from people from rural areas living in poverty. Many stories shared were about farming and getting by.



*Full title of category: Diagnosed Emotional, Behavioral or Developmental Conditions

People who aren't usually heard or empowered to make Systemic changes are also left feeling like they are making decisions based on things beyond their control.

In the Decisions triangle, the highest density of respondents indicated that they were making decisions beyond their control. Most respondents that marked their stories this way were also low income (under \$40,000 of family income per year).



Community Sensemaking Workshop

Notes

August 1, 2019 / Colby, KS

Key TAKEAWAYS

- ★ Through the involvement of several youth citizen journalists, the sixteen participants in the Northwest workshop were able to hear and work with the stories of farmers and the challenges they face.
- ★ Financial stress and inability to meet basic needs caused stress and anxiety for the families in Northwest Kansas.
- ★ Actionable ideas from service providers, parents, and community members were focused around building on the strength of the social ties in a small community to be more welcoming to new families and develop community supports.

Activity SUMMARY

1 Introductions and Expectations

Workshop participants introduced themselves and shared what they hoped to learn from stories during the workshop.

2 Kansas Early Childhood Journey

Facilitators shared the context of the statewide Early Childhood Systems Building work and the role families' experiences play in shaping the needs assessment and strategic plan for early childhood in Kansas.

3 Sensemaking Guide

Participants were introduced to the regional Community Sensemaking Guide that highlights the demographic information of people who shared stories with Our Tomorrows and patterns related to Bright Spots, Disruptors, Unmet Needs, and Unheard Voices.

4 Working with Stories

Tables were given a story pack from key patterns found in the stories collected in North Central Kansas. Each table sorted the story pack into groups of similar stories, gave each category/theme a title, and then chose an exemplar story that best represented the category/theme. The category/theme titles and exemplar stories were then taped to a flip chart. The left side of the chart read "More Like This," indicating family experiences the group wished to see more of in the future,

and “Fewer Like That,” which included family experiences that the groups hoped to see less of in the future.

5 Group Discussion

Each small group then discussed three questions:

- 1.** What patterns did you see in your stories?
- 2.** What surprised you?
- 3.** What did you expect to see but didn't?

Each group then chose a reporter to share their findings with the large group.

6 Moving to Action

Participants were so invested in discussing the stories they read and sharing their ideas and perceptions that the Workshop ended before there was time to share ideas for Actionables. Instead, they discussed ideas for action collectively.

Insights of **WORKING WITH STORIES**

Each Community Sensemaking workshop is an opportunity for community members to **explore patterns and themes in the ways that families interpreted their experiences**. The sensemaking work completed in these workshops was captured by the Our Tomorrows team so that it can be used to spur new ways of thinking about making change in Community Action Labs.

Outlined on the following pages are the themes and patterns that emerged while participants were working with their community's stories. Each page of notes represents the work of one group in the workshop. Each group read and interpreted one "Story Pack" from the Our Tomorrows data set.

On each page, you will see the following:

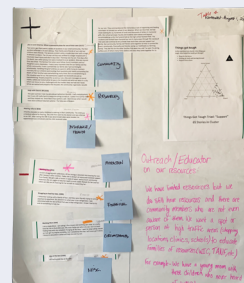
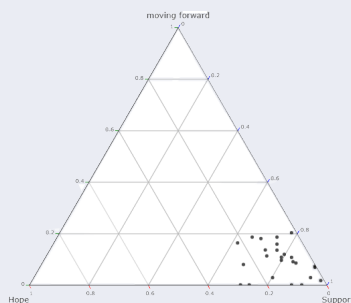
- ★ A title that shows what pattern the group worked with during the "Working with Stories" activity
- ★ A picture of the pattern from the Our Tomorrows SAVVY Dashboard
- ★ An image of the flipchart completed by workshop participants, which includes titles of themes and example stories sorted by "More like this, fewer like that"
- ★ A typed list of the main themes and example stories taken from the flipchart
- ★ A list of Actionable ideas that participants thought could change the patterns that emerged from the stories they read (this activity didn't occur at every regional workshop due to the great conversations that happened in earlier activities)

The insights that were uncovered in the Community Sensemaking Workshops can drive big changes!

THINGS GET TOUGH TRIAD

Support from Others

In the experience you shared, when things got tough, what helped the family get through?



MORE THEMES LIKE...

Community

Example: Life in Rural America: What a Community Does for One of Their Own

Resources

Example: Help with Electric Bill

Insurance/Health

Example: Hearing Referral

FEWER THEMES LIKE...

Addiction

Example: Starting Over

Financial

Example: Struggling to Feed Her Kids

Circumstances

Example: Working Mom

Misc.

Example: Day at the Lake

ACTIONABLES

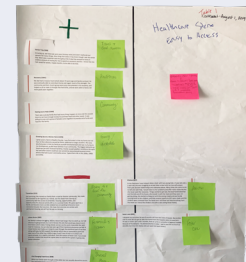
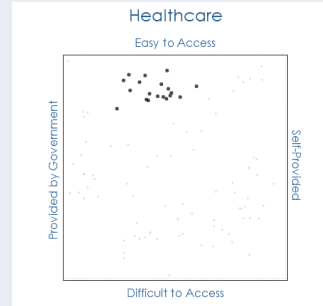
Actionables to change the experience of families in the future.

- ★ A spot or person in high traffic areas (shopping locations, clinics, schools) to educate families of resources.

HEALTHCARE RESOURCE CANVAS

Easy to Access

How do you view the following service or resource reflected in your story?



MORE THEMES LIKE...

Travel & Good Memories
Senior Trip

Healthcare
Example: Recovery

Community
Example: Raising Up to Help

Farming
Example: Growing Up on a Kansas Farm

FEWER THEMES LIKE...

Moving to and from the Community
Example: Transition

Financial and Careers
Example: Stress Factor

Sexual Abuse
Example: Life Changing Experience

Addiction
Example: Choices

Foster Care
Example: Foster Care

ACTIONABLES

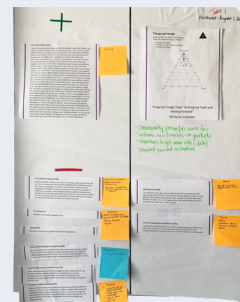
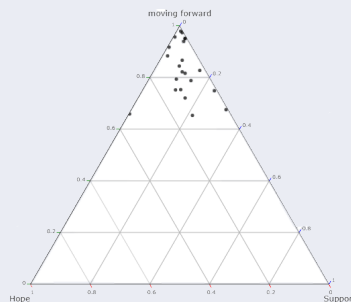
Actionables to change the experience of families in the future.

- ★ Increased puberty education and access to supplies. Provide back to school backpacks with feminine hygiene products. Make sure trash cans are available in all restroom stalls.

THINGS GET TOUGH TRIAD

Gritting my Teeth and Moving Forward

In the experience you shared, when things got tough, what helped the family get through?...



MORE THEMES LIKE...

Thriving

From Rags to Riches

FEWER THEMES LIKE...

Community Support

Example: An Outsider's Perspective

Healthcare

Example: The Change

Education

Example: Thriving

Example: Surfing Children Education for Immigrants

Financial

Example: The year of Noodles and Bologna

Example: Stress for Family Farms in Frontier Kansas

Housing

Example: High Rental Costs

Trauma

Example: The Tale of Survival by a Generation Xer

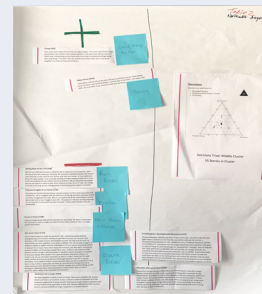
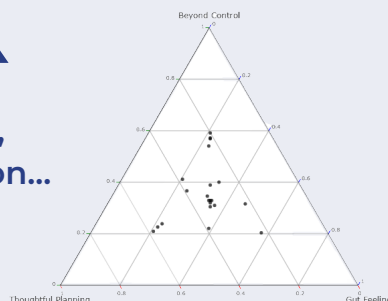
ACTIONABLES

Actionables to change the experience of families in the future.

- ★ Community picnic/resource fair
- ★ Welcome new families
- ★ Incentives to get more info (data)
- ★ Supplant current initiatives

DECISION TRIAD *Middle Region*

In the experience you shared,
decisions were made based on...



MORE THEMES LIKE...

Living through the Hard
Change

Thriving
Happy Farmer

FEWER THEMES LIKE...

Family Related
Getting Back on Our Feet

Financial
Financial Struggles of Our Family

Adult-parent Influence
Parent in Prison

Resource related

Not Much Choice

Medicaid in KS is Tough!

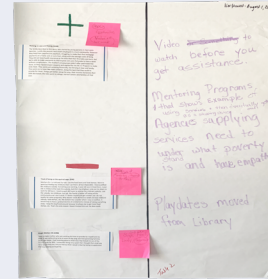
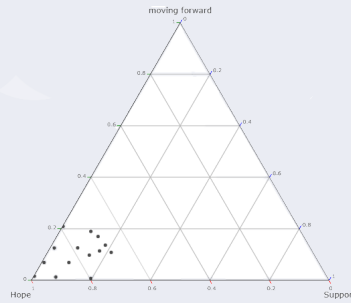
Granddaughter's Developmental Milestone

Affordable Childcare Programs

THINGS GET TOUGH TRIAD

Hope for the Future

In the experience you shared, when things got tough, what helped the family get through?



MORE THEMES LIKE...

Hope, Value of Hard Work

Thriving in Love and Family

FEWER THEMES LIKE...

Parenting, Support

Tired of Being on the Squirrel Cage

Helplessness

Single Mother Life

ACTIONABLES

Actionables to change the experience of families in the future.

- ★ Video to watch before you get assistance
- ★ Mentoring programs that show examples of using services and identify stepping stones
- ★ Agencies supplying services need to understand what poverty is and have empathy, Playdates moved from library.

Important CONVERSATIONS

Participants observed the following patterns about the local stories in their community:

- ★ There were more negative stories than positive stories overall.
- ★ Some stories were both heavy and uplifting at the same time. Some stories were
- ★ That some stories were disheartening and horrifying.
- ★ That stories were either extremely hopeful or hopeless.
- ★ Many stories were brief; participants speculated the length of stories could be rooted in literacy issues of the respondents. Further discussion related to story length led to a greater understanding of the SenseMaker tool.

Participants highlighted:

- ★ A story about accessibility to life-skills lessons for high school students.
- ★ Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is a problem in the Northwest region.
- ★ Food pantry customers oftentimes do not know how to use certain foods, which led to a conversation about nutrition education.
- ★ Some of the stories about barely surviving often ended with thriving indicating resilience.
- ★ A participant extrapolated that the inability of these folks to find hope and support where they live could indicate the demise of that community. They speculated that a lack of motivation to help one's neighbors indicated a lack of investment in the community.
- ★ Participants agreed that their major problems as service providers were related to transportation, overworked staff, and lack of qualified staff.

Participants were surprised about:

- ★ Seeing so many stories about finances.
- ★ At the lack of stories featuring intervention services.
- ★ The intimacy and openness of the traumatic stories.
- ★ The feelings of hopefulness conveyed in the stories, especially in the context of massive economic challenges faced by low-income families.
- ★ How many stories focused on immediate needs.
- ★ The number stories from farming families.

Participants expected:

- ★ To see children as the focus of most stories. Instead, many stories involved families.
- ★ To read more stories about education because education is very important in the Northwest Kansas community.
- ★ Stories that exhibited instances of community support. Instead, they were saddened to learn that many people in their region do not feel support from their community.
- ★ To see more stories about childcare.

What's Next



There are many ways for you to stay involved with Our Tomorrows and help shape the future of families and children in Kansas. Below are a few next steps:

- ★ **Send feedback on workshop notes** to the Our Tomorrows team.
- ★ **Choose a pattern you want to change** in your community.
Pick from the Our Tomorrows Sensemaking Guide.
- ★ **Plan an Actionable** that relates to the pattern chosen.
- ★ **Submit a Community Action Lab application** for funding.
Applications accepted beginning September, 2019.
- ★ **Receive funding** up to \$2,000.
- ★ **Try out your Actionable.**
- ★ **Share what you learned** with the Our Tomorrows team.
- ★ **Monitor progress** by continuing story collection with Our Tomorrows.

To apply for an Actionable and to learn more about how Our Tomorrows is using SenseMaker for needs assessments, visit ourtomorrows.kucppr.org.

To learn more about the Kansas Early Childhood Journey, visit ksearlychildhoodjourney.org.

If you have any comments, additions, or perspectives that you would like to add to this Sensemaking Guide, please email them to ourtomorrows@ku.edu.

