With a vision to lift an entire community out of poverty and create systemic change from the inside out, a state-of-the-art, holistic KCK Community Education, Health and Wellness Center will break down barriers to health, education and behavioral health. This center will be a national model for nonprofit collaborations across the country.

Through collaboration, Kansas City Kansas Community College (KCKCC), Swope Health, the YMCA of Greater Kansas City, Wyandot Behavioral Health Network (WBHN), Kansas City Kansas Public Schools and CommunityAmerica Credit Union will build a $70 million, 130,000 square-foot comprehensive center that will provide services to develop the whole person.

To achieve this vision, the college and its partners will seek $30 million under the Health and Education from Strengthening People and Revitalizing Kansas (SPARK).

**Meeting Needs of Eastern Wyandotte**

To help individuals overcome the cycle of poverty, services must be developed to support the whole person. Strategically designed to meet the holistic needs of the downtown community and eastern Wyandotte County, the state-of-the-art center will offer health, wellness and education services that can elevate the community. Each partner plays a critical role in supporting the health and education of residents.

**Swope Health**

Wyandotte County ranks 104 of the 105 counties in Kansas when measuring multiple health-related outcomes. The need for improved health is essential to uplifting the community. Swope Health, the largest federally qualified health clinic in the Kansas City metropolitan area, serves 45,000 people annually and continues to partner and expand in Wyandotte County.

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**Socioeconomic Need in the Urban Core**

The center will be located in downtown Kansas City, Kansas (KCK) — a community that suffers from generational poverty. The lack of a skilled workforce contributes to two-thirds of the county’s high paying jobs going to individuals who live outside of Wyandotte County.
Swope Health will provide primary care, children’s health, dental services and women’s health at the new center. Partners envision shared clients once those presenting for care or services from one agency become aware of other opportunities for education, health and behavioral health services, community supports and other assistance.

In the fall of 2021, a young woman visited the Swope Health Wyandotte clinic late in the day with her young son in tow. During this walk-in visit, she was visibly upset. Her provider noted significant injuries, and the young woman shared that she had been abused. The team escalated her case to the emergency room. The next day, the team followed up with the young woman to provide food and shelter resources — delivering whole person care.

Wyandot Behavioral Health Network

WBHN serves as a community mental health center for children, adolescent and adult case management and outpatient mental health. Often barriers to service, such as transportation and lack of knowledge of free and low cost options, leave individuals struggling to overcome mental health challenges on their own. Research shows that a high percentage of children and adults who are underserved in Wyandotte County live in the downtown, northeast and Central Avenue areas.

Investment in this new center will allow WBHN to serve clients like Trey.

Trey struggled with outbursts that led to school suspensions and as he got older he began to abuse alcohol and other substances, leading to being admitted to inpatient care on several occasions. Trey decided to engage in mental health treatment and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Continuing to work with WBHN, he has been in recovery for more than a decade.

Kansas City Kansas Community College

For this life-changing project, KCKCC is the lead partner and will provide technical education programming to prepare graduates for successful high-wage, high-demand career fields. The college also will offer ESL, GED, other associate degrees and transfer programs. For example, through a partnership with University of Kansas Health System, new employees without a diploma can attend classes onsite with KCKCC instructors to earn their GED.

Two major expansion areas include Commercial Construction Technology and Automation Engineering, which will help meet the growing need for these high-paying careers.

In partnership with KCK Public Schools, 11th and 12th graders will attend KCKCC and receive their high school diploma and associate of applied science degree in Commercial Construction Technology simultaneously. KCKCC will triple current enrollment in Commercial Construction Technology and Automation Engineering alone, serving 300 additional students within nine years. Graduates could earn an average salary of $50,000, generating an estimated $15 million in additional economic impact.
Cassandra Puletapuai changed the trajectory of her life after graduating from KCKCC’s Construction Technology program in 2017. Upon completion of the program, she started a company that focuses on repair and remodeling projects.

Clemente Luna graduated from KCKCC in 2005. After gaining experience with other employers, he opened his own HVAC business in 2017 and went from employee to employer. He has employed as many as 30 others.

“Last year we grossed annual revenue of $2.1 million, and this year is looking like the same. So I am very grateful for the opportunities that we have gotten, but they came to us because we have exceeded many of our customer’s expectations. I couldn’t of done it alone. My team is a great team, and I am very proud of our accomplishments.”

Like Clemente’s business, there has been substantial growth in the Wyandotte/KCK business community. Manufacturing and logistic companies, such as Urban Outfitters, Amazon and General Motors, have expanded or opened new facilities in the county. They require thousands of skilled workers trained to succeed in new trades. To meet this demand, KCKCC is strategically expanding its current offerings and developing new programs. The expansion also supports growth goals from the Mid-America Regional Council:

“Continue to support growth in the manufacturing sector, particularly in those areas where the region has a competitive advantage (vehicle and food manufacturing) and areas where technology offers opportunities to attract companies to locate and grow.”

Additional space, equipment and major investment is required to continue the positive economic growth for the region. At the KCK Community Education, Health and Wellness Center, the college will implement an Automated Engineering Technology class specifically for non-traditional learners. The college also will begin a Pre-Automation Engineering Technology program and short-term training certifications in Industrial Maintenance Technology (IMT) and robotics.

In fact, the college already has partnered with the KCK chapter of the Federation of Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) — the first chapter in Kansas. Manufacturing companies who belong to FAME sponsor students to participate. Students spend time in the classroom and on-the-job in a paid internship. This earn while you learn program allows students to graduate to a high-paying job with the sponsor.

Kansas City Kansas Public Schools

KCK Public Schools serve the urban core with five high schools and more than 23,000 students. Working hand-in-hand with KCK Public Schools and other local school districts, a Commercial Construction Technology program will be created. High school juniors and seniors will attend KCKCC all day to take their college-level courses in construction technology while they also take their general education courses required to obtain both an Associate of Applied Science from KCKCC and their high school diploma from the KCK Public Schools. This positions students for high-demand jobs upon graduation.
The YMCA of Greater Kansas City

The closing of the 8th Street Family YMCA in 2018 created a void in healthy living and youth programs in the downtown KCK community. Opening the new center, the YMCA has an opportunity to continue its legacy to create greater impact in the lives of kids, families and adults in eastern Wyandotte County like they did for Levi.

Weighing 410 pounds in March 2017, the 29 year-old feared he would die of heart disease. So he and his family joined the YMCA. He lost a total of 120 pounds through exercise and healthy eating. “If I hadn’t met all of the people here at the Y, if they hadn’t taught me correctly how to change my life, I don’t think I would’ve made it to this point,” Levi said.

Given that Wyandotte County ranks 104th in health indicators in Kansas, programs will include those focused on healthy lifestyles, weight loss management and chronic diseases that can be improved through stress relief, healthy diet and exercise. The new center will offer active adult programs, lifestyle education, nutrition, youth activities and youth enrichment. Having the YMCA located in the same facility as KCKCC, the youth of KCK will be familiar with the facility and transitioning from high school to college will become a more natural process.

CommunityAmerica Credit Union

CommunityAmerica Credit Union is committed to improving the financial well-being of its more than 250,000 members and the greater Kansas City community. Their model, which is based on “people helping people,” allows them to share their profits with their members and meaningfully invest back into the community. In 2020, CommunityAmerica gave back $8.4 million dollars to members and invested more than $1 million into the community during an unprecedented time of need.

Economic Impact

The construction of the KCK Community Education, Health and Wellness Center will serve to address historically low per capita median income and high unemployment rates in eastern Wyandotte County. These economic distress numbers have been substantially amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. The center seeks to provide more equitable access to education and workforce training opportunities for individuals living in and near KCK, resulting in massive job creation in high-demand fields.

This project, an economic catalyst itself, will create 54 new jobs, resulting in approximately $2.5 million in additional income in downtown KCK annually and will serve thousands of individuals.

The center will serve the needs of its community and develop the whole person. This project will substantially increase the college’s ability to train more students in the manufacturing and construction trades and other sectors. SPARK funding will enable KCKCC and its partners to create a hiring pipeline and provide students with facilities designed to meet evolving workforce demands and propel them toward successful careers and help transform a community.