

**Social Capital in Kansas:
The Junction City Case Study**

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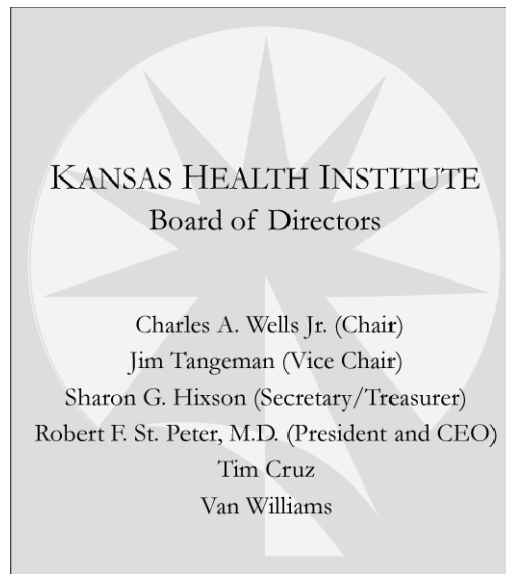
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The Kansas Health Institute is an independent, nonprofit health policy and research organization based in Topeka, Kansas.

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SOCIAL CAPITAL IN KANSAS: THE JUNCTION CITY CASE STUDY

Junction City, a growing town with a population of about 30,000¹, sits to the southwest of Fort Riley in East-Central Kansas. Junction City is home to many of the enlisted service men and women from the nearby military base. When the First Battalion (otherwise known as “The Big Red One”) was relocated back to Kansas from Germany, Junction City experienced a swell of newcomers — a population influx the town has worked assiduously to accommodate.

Overall, results from the *Assessing Social Capital in Kansas: Findings from Quantitative and Qualitative Studies*² report indicate that Junction City is a wonderful place to live and raise children. Military culture currently and historically has been a part of Junction City and most citizens view this as beneficial. Racial, ethnic and religious diversity are embraced. Parents are unusually active in school life and civility and cooperation serve as important pillars of the community. Given this dynamic, it makes sense that social trust and interracial trust were two of Junction City’s highest social capital attributes, according to the Kansas social capital study. A noteworthy result of the recent population growth has been an increase in political engagement among the residents of Junction City. Attendance at town hall meetings, for example, has increased significantly.

This report will first explain the meaning and importance of social capital and then discuss the strengths and weaknesses of Junction City’s social capital profile, including how social capital relates to health in Junction City. A commentary will outline suggestions about how to best address social capital-related challenges in Junction City, and the report will close with a series of reflective questions for community leaders aimed at providing them with ideas for strengthening community involvement.

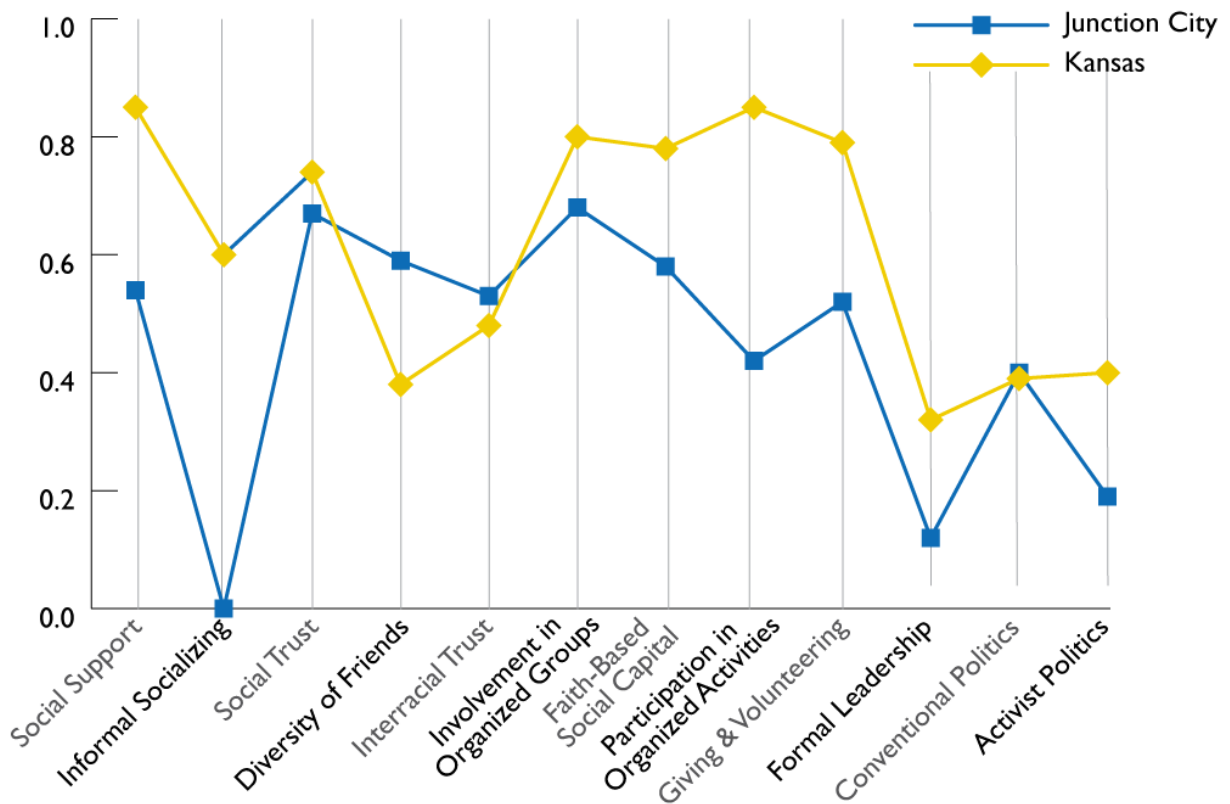
SOCIAL CAPITAL: A COMMUNITY RESOURCE

Social capital is a measure of the social connectedness among individuals and groups within a community. Social capital is beneficial to communities because it helps to create trusting relationships (bonding capital), increases the likelihood that organizations and institutions will collaborate and partner for change (bridging capital) and strengthens ties between community

members and representatives of formal institutions such as law enforcement, business, health care and legislative bodies (linking capital).

An increase in social capital can be instrumental in improving the health and welfare of Junction City. The social capital profile of Junction City (Figure 1) illustrates the kinds of social connectedness (i.e., social trust, organizational involvement) that are strongest in Junction City. The profile also illustrates aspects of social capital that are low including informal socializing and formal leadership. Interviews with a variety of stakeholders in the Junction City area surfaced ground-level perspectives about these community challenges.

Figure 1. Junction City’s Social Capital Indicators Relative to the State Average



Note: Scores here are adjusted to fit on a scale where one indicates the highest score among cities studied and zero indicates the lowest comparative score.

LOCAL RESOURCES FOR SOCIAL CAPITAL FORMATION

The inclusive mentality of the Junction City community is one of the town's strongest attributes. One excerpt from the Kansas social capital study highlights this concept:

Interviewee: Well, when we were kids I know, I mean, we did these little annual exams, you know, Scantron — they'd ask for your race and we'd always put "other," we'd put [ODIGREEN?]

Researcher: [ODIGREEN?] what does that mean?

Interviewee: That's the army — Army Green. We were like that's our race. We're Army Green.

Researcher: And that was everybody?

Interviewee: Yeah. Because that's what we felt like. We didn't see, you know, you were different because you were from Oklahoma and because you were from Kansas. You know, and that's what made you different, but we were all one big family. You know?

The engaged presence of local elected officials is another asset of Junction City. Residents commented during interviews that community leaders have been instrumental in helping the town accommodate its rapid growth, welcoming individuals from the military base and handling the high population turnover. Business leaders have also been dedicated to the cause of integrating Fort Riley into the daily activity of Junction City.

LOCAL BARRIERS TO SOCIAL CAPITAL FORMATION

The Kansas social capital study acknowledged Junction City's apparent lack of informal socializing activities as a factor preventing social capital formation. Although neighbors frequently interact with each other through everyday means, residents' social networks tend to become rather small and insular when they depend solely on geographical convenience. Raising the amount of informal socializing opportunities in Junction City, expanding the social scope of residents and attracting more people from Fort Riley may depend on the city's ability to develop more restaurants and entertainment venues. With the town's growing population, this should be easier to accomplish than in the past.

Another challenge Junction City faces is the lack of youth involvement in the community. Although interviewees described the community's youth organizations as active, Junction City

has struggled to recruit adolescents and young adults to participate in organizations comprised mostly of older adults. Members of the community also noted that there has been difficulty in finding young people to serve leadership roles within faith-based organizations, although this finding may be related to the fact that Junction City is becoming more secular.

Nonetheless, since many community members describe a strong leadership presence as imperative to successful volunteering initiatives, it seems critical that the community primes younger residents so that they may assume these roles in the future.

Table 1. Leading Health Indicator Assets and Challenges of Geary County

Health Indicator	Geary	Kansas
Assets:		
Nitrate and Coliform Levels in Water (%)	0.7	3.1
No Dentist Visit in the Past Year (%)	22.6	28.6
Housing with Increased Lead Risk (%)	23.4	28.3
No Influenza Vaccine Shots in the Past Year (%)	62.0	66.8
Not Always Wearing a Seatbelt (%)	28.6	30.4
Physical Inactivity (%)	20.3	24.2
Secondhand Smoking (%)	23.1	26.6
Did Not Receive Needed Health Care (%)	8.5	9.8
Challenges:		
Sexually Transmitted Disease (per 100,000)	1,651.0	363.6
Violent Crime (per 100,000)	746.9	222.9
High School Non-Graduation Rate (%)	23.9	10.9
Divorce Rate (per 1,000)	7.7	3.2
Lead Poisoned Children (%)	3.3	1.1
No Adequate Prenatal Care (%)	27.3	20.3
Smoking During Pregnancy (%)	21.8	15.1
Cigarette Smoking (%)	25.3	20.4
Teen Birth (%)	12.2	10.0
Children in Poverty (%)	17.5	15.2
Low Birth Weight (%)	8.6	7.2
No Health Insurance (%)	13.8	12.4

LEADING HEALTH CONCERNS

Like other community sites of this study, Junction City has its fair share of health-related challenges. Although the qualitative social capital assessment generally produced positive reviews for Junction City, two important community health challenges that weren't specifically mentioned in the Kansas social capital study interviews, but were noted in Kansas Health Institute's *Kansas County Health Rankings 2009*³ report, included sexually transmitted infection rates and violent crime. For both measures, the incidence rates in Geary County, which includes Junction City, were higher than any other area in the state of Kansas.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Amid these various challenges, the future health of Junction City looks promising. Its residents demonstrate a profound commitment to the community, but there still remains a need to encourage youth involvement, expand social interaction opportunities and attend to the area's health concerns. Information in this analysis about Junction City's social capital and health is more likely to lead to improvements if community leaders are willing to take the necessary steps in addressing the areas that could benefit from change.

QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS

- Knowing both the Junction City's assets and challenges, what are the next steps for creating change?
- Can the information in this report aid existing initiatives in your community?
- Who else should receive a copy of this report?
- Are there any important questions that, as a community leader, you would like to address?

These questions are not meant to uncover one best answer, nor do they require a single brilliant solution. Instead, they are intended to motivate and guide willing individuals who believe in the strengths of their communities and acknowledge that change is possible.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *2000 Census General Demographic Characteristics*. Retrieved from <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

² Easterling, D., Foy, C. G., Fothergil, K., Leonard, L., & Holtgrave, D. R. (2007). *Assessing Social Capital in Kansas: Findings from Quantitative and Qualitative Studies*. Retrieved from <http://www.khi.org/documents/2007/nov/12/report-assessing-social-capital-kansas-findings-qu/>

³ Pezzino, G. (2009). *Kansas County Health Rankings 2009*. Topeka, KS: Kansas Health Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.khi.org/news/2009/may/07/kansas-county-health-rankings-2009/?research>

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The *Kansas County Health Rankings 2009* study was conducted by Gianfranco Pezzino, M.D., M.P.H., and Cheng-Chung Huang, M.P.H. (Kansas Health Institute).

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