

Health Equity: Voices from our Community

Douglas County, Kansas | 2021



Executive Summary

Background

These conversations were held to illuminate residents' experiences of prejudice and racism, and lived experiences with the social determinants of health. We were particularly interested in how these exposures are connected with race, ethnicity, language, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and/or (dis)ability status. These conversations are informing the Douglas County Health Equity Report and Community Health Assessment, and helping the Douglas County community make policy and programmatic decisions for a just and equitable community for all.

Methods

The Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas used standard methods of participatory research (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011) to better understand factors affecting health equity in Douglas County. This included qualitative interviews and engagement with those directly experiencing issues of racism and discrimination. Participants were asked to reflect on particular aspects of their experience; including instances of discrimination, barriers to an inclusive environment, and equitable opportunities for health and development.

From December of 2020 through June 2021, a series of focus groups and interviews was held. They were convened by trusted community members and facilitated by staff of the University of Kansas Center for Community Health and Development. The conversations identified barriers inhibiting an equitable community for all Douglas County residents regardless of race, ethnicity, language, immigration status, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, and/or disability.

Due to the pandemic, conversations were held over the phone or via Zoom.

Focus groups were held to center experiences, including:

- Black residents' experiences of discrimination/marginalization (12 participants)
- Indigenous residents' experiences of discrimination/marginalization (4 participants)
- Latinx and Spanish-speaking residents' experiences of discrimination/marginalization (6 participants)
- Experiences of discrimination/marginalization due to homophobia/heterosexism/ transphobia (6 participants)
- Experiences of discrimination/marginalization due to sexism/ gender identity (8 participants)
- Experiences of discrimination/marginalization due to disability (9 participants)

Additionally, six interviews were conducted (in participants' native languages) to include residents who were unable to participate in focus groups or felt unsafe doing so.

KU staff created transcriptions of the focus groups and interviews and performed exploratory thematic analyses within and across the conversations (Guest et al., 2012). Quotes shared used the symbol [. . .] to indicate where words were omitted for brevity. Unless otherwise noted, quotes within each section emerged from participants in a conversation centering that topic.

What participants said (selected quotes)

“We say this is a Free State, but it’s not free for everyone.”

- Black resident

“We are all human.”

- Black resident

“Remember the people at the intersections – those are hit hardest.”

- Resident with a disability

“We shouldn’t have to ask other people’s permission to exist.”

- Resident with a disability

“We are invested [in improving racial equity] because we want to be alive. We don’t want our brothers, sisters, husbands to be killed. Is Lawrence and the greater community – do they have something to be invested in?”

- Black resident

“We are a community that says we value diversity and equity, but we have trouble moving outside our own patterns and experiencing discomfort, and taking more progressive, effective steps in governing to actually achieve equity for black and brown folks in our community, queer and trans folks, and low-income people.”

- Participant in the gender identity focus group

Participants' recommendations

- Create opportunities to build social connection and community
- Provide additional resources and enhance access to social services, mental health services, dental care, and health care
 - o Improve postnatal supports available postpartum to women of color
 - o Improve access to mental health services for marginalized identities and related experiences of discrimination and trauma
 - o Support development of an Indigenous Community Center to support social connection and grow awareness of available community services
 - o Consider locations of critical services, and barriers to services
 - o Provide accommodations to residents without identification
 - o Improve access to resources for Douglas County residents outside of Lawrence
 - o Improve outreach and promotion of available services
 - o Address barriers to dental and medical care
- Improve equitable access to quality Pre-K, K-12, and college education
 - o Create an equity committee that ongoingly reviews school curriculum to ensure minority representation
 - o Provide additional training for staff on supporting marginalized populations
 - Include intersectionality, including LGBTQIA, within USD 497's microaggressions/ Beyond Diversity training
 - o Reinstate the LGBTQIA+ advisory committee within USD 497
- Improve access to public transportation (extended hours, additional stops) and active transportation
 - o Grow safe routes to school and other destinations for pedestrians
 - o Extend free bus rides to Haskell students
- Improve community access for people with disabilities
 - o Access to stores, restaurants, and venues (as patrons and employees)
 - o Accessible and affordable housing
 - o Access to personal assistant services
 - o Equitable distribution of accessible resources
 - o Ensure voting ballots and other public information is accessible to citizens without higher education or for whom English is not their primary language
 - o Provide disability sensitivity training for the public
- Increase representation on boards, commissions, and in executive leadership positions
 - o Better engage diverse residents in community health improvement planning
 - o Solicit input from people most deeply affected by the issues
 - o Listen to experiences of marginalized residents
 - o Build trusted allies in positions of leadership who can carry the work so it does not all fall on marginalized populations
 - o Exercise cultural humility
 - o Provide leadership opportunities for marginalized identities
- Improve access to jobs paying a living wage
 - o Enhance opportunities for job training
 - o Raise the minimum wage to better match the high cost of living, including for professions predominantly held by women

- Provide universal daycare/ access to free and reduced cost child care
- Improve workplace diversity
- Reform the legal system
 - Discontinue racist policing practices
 - Ensure cultural competency training for police
 - Ensure the County and Sheriff's office and jail are part of the network of sanctuary policy that was created at the city level (e.g., ensure inmates at the jail are not entered into a database that ICE has access to and that immigration status is not part of intake interviews)
 - Ensure legal representation for youth
 - Discontinue the practice of shackling youth when they come to and from court
 - Collect sociodemographic data on incarcerated youth (e.g., race, ethnicity, LGBTQ status)
- Ensure housing for all: Improve access to safe, affordable, accessible housing
 - Address housing disparities
 - Ensure new construction considers accessibility
 - Grow availability of affordable housing
 - Grow pathways to home ownership for low-income people
 - Prevent evictions/ extend an eviction moratorium
- Ensure “intersectional” approaches—those that reflect multiple identities (e.g., race, gender, disability—to better understanding the overlap among marginalized identities

Community assets and progress

Residents reported improvements in promoting equity, including increased awareness and action on issues, while also noting work remains to be done. Noted progress includes:

- More awareness and conversations about human rights and issues affecting marginalized groups, and people taking action
- Increased representation in positions of elected leadership
- Formation of Rainbow Kids and Families to support LGBTQIA+ students, families, and professionals feeling safe, welcome, and supported in Lawrence-area schools
- Integration of native American students on school sports teams in Lawrence
- Transportation supports for Haskell students to attend the University of Kansas
- Progress in mental health services available
- Hearing accommodations
- Lawrence Public Library education around positive interactions between librarians and trans patrons and employees

“I think it has been better in the last couple years due to incidents around the country that hopefully has opened people’s eyes to what we deal with every day.” – Black resident

“The recent election of Paula and Christina and Carole [to public office] has given a rise to the visibility [of issues affecting Indigenous residents].” – Indigenous resident

“In general, I feel like Lawrence is pretty inclusive.” – Haskell student

“I have lived here for 15 years and the truth is I love this city for its diversity and acceptance.” – Latinx resident



“There’s been a push back against the ultra-conservatism that’s happened, that was starting to happen before Trump, but really just snowballed after Trump. I think there’s been a lot of push back for people to educate themselves on issues that affect marginalized groups in general. . . Individuals, either allies or folks who are within the communities or who have family members or loved ones who are in the communities, are speaking out and acting more as well. . . I think people should keep active and keep that energy going.”

“Lawrence has a history of anti-racism, which makes me proud, although there is a shadow of a lot of racism. . . It’s the best place in the five-state area and that’s what keeps me here, and it’s what makes me advocate for Lawrence.”

“I’m fairly fortunate that I work in a place that is very welcoming to queer folks in that they will not be openly homophobic or transphobic.”

“As a queer person in Kansas, Lawrence is where you want to be if you are going to be in Kansas at all.”

“Conversations around diversity-related topics come up routinely through presentations on campus; partnerships with the community. And I think that’s helpful to at least get out in the open discussions about these topics. Which I think in communities that are not centered around a university, those topics can just be totally ignored. So, I think that’s a benefit. I think that the campus and community do some good work in partnering together.”

“There are a number of people in the community that will lend a hand. I’ve been impressed by that. The homeless shelter; Just Food; seeing people rise to the occasion when somebody has encountered something really difficult and the community-mindedness.”

“These topics are being discussed and people are coming out and doing the good work. . . of getting people to. . . care about marginalized identities.”

“We have an incredibly robust activist community that changes over time because of the churn of the university, but that’s essential for holding city leaders, police, and the university accountable to values of inclusion and equity.”

“I don’t have anything bad to say. I think Lawrence is real good people, lots of kindness. I never feel like exclusion or something like that in Lawrence.” – Spanish-speaking resident

“It is a city with a lot of diversity, there are people from different countries, and I really enjoy that there are people from different parts and we have our own cultures that are very different but it is a pleasant city that is peaceful.”

“We are not alone. Policy in the past has been made to make us feel we are separate. But you are not alone. All of us can do it together. From the top and from the bottom. If we can attack the issues in a multi-faceted way, we can make some progress. I am grateful to be a part of this conversation.” – Black resident

Black residents' comments

Black residents reported experiences of racism manifesting in microaggressions, not feeling welcome, inequitable educational experiences, discrimination when job-seeking and on the job, wage disparities, bullying in schools, stereotyping, profiling and unjust treatment by law enforcement and the justice system, fear of police interactions, disparate living conditions, lack of affordable housing, and chronic disease.

"I talk to people every day, and it's almost this dual personality, like, 'we're so progressive, we're so forward-thinking, we have this under control,' but you just see underneath the cover the housing disparities; the social disparities."

"When I was [an elected official], I was going door to door because I wanted to meet my neighbors, and I had cops called on me . . . and I'm out there just trying to meet my neighbors. And people don't realize that happens every day to people who look like us. But they're all thinking, 'We're Lawrence, we're different. This doesn't happen here.'"

"The people at the leadership tables don't have the experiences of most of the community members."

"My first couple of years at KU, I did not have a very good experience. . . People should be more receptive of people of different cultures, and different hairstyles."

"I don't want someone like you, you black [expletive], to come and help me."

"With law enforcement – no matter what, you are profiled. If you are at a stoplight; if you are handing out communion at the church. Just because you look the way you look, you can expect to be treated a certain way when people have not made it their job to become educated, to walk in marginalized shoes, to look through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion."

"When we look at the top levels of administration, we are not very diverse."

"Dr. Muhammad [City of Lawrence Director of Equity and Inclusion], your job might be harder than you thought. It's not like you're in the South where you know folks are coming from. Folks here think they are progressive, enlightened."

"As I think about health, I think about the stress of having to navigate these spaces. . . [and of] constantly being aware."

"We walk around with excess stresses and anxieties, and we take them as normal."

"There are a lot of people who want to hear the stories of what we've experienced but don't want to do anything about it. They come off as engaged, but at some point, they almost want to grab a bowl of popcorn. We need to find the right people. . . who are willing to step out there. There's a lot of talk, not a lot of action."

"Cultural humility. Are people being listened to if they are in the space? Is the person they are engaging with humble enough to take the feedback?"

"We need to have individuals within leadership positions who can be trusted beyond just people of color doing the work. We need everyone pushing equity forward."

"If we value equity, are we putting our resources toward that effort?"

"I don't want my son to [have to] deal with this."

"Where you do see a sharp form of segregation is in the types of housing, right? Like there isn't per say a Black part of town, but renters or folks of color are disproportionately likely to be renters rather than homeowners. And renting in Lawrence is a nightmare. We have the highest rent in Kansas. Our rent increases double the national average every year, particularly now where there's like evictions that are happening. I think in many cases the most direct form of violence that I am able to observe on folks of color is happening around evictions and policing, right? But I think that if I had to identify the starkest difference operating on a racial basis in Lawrence it would be around who is in what housing and people losing that housing. Overwhelmingly disproportionate for groups of color and for women."

"So much focus gets put on what diversity and inclusivity look like in the professional level and in the academic context. I have not seen nearly as much. . . emphasis placed on what diversity and equity look like for the majority of working-class folks of color who don't have a major degree or some sort of professional standing." – participant in gender equity focus group



“LPD – huge, huge problems. I mean they ran out a black police chief who was installed specifically for the purposes of enacting reforms. And that captain’s layer of like middle management took a vote of ‘no confidence’ and ran him out. It was wild. I see I think just an incredible amount of discrimination in terms of how police investigate crimes when the victims are folks of color vs when they’re not. I get to see that pretty closely because I get to read the police reports and see the body cams and I think the biggest place that I see out and out discrimination is in the juvenile justice system and in the schools. SROs, the cops who are in schools, totally disproportionately arrest and charge students of color, relative to their population. Like it’s stark, it’s outstanding, like there are meetings where they’re confronted by this data and they just say, ‘oh well, that’s who’s committing the crimes.’ It’s ridiculous that they literally see nothing wrong with it whatsoever, right? Those disparities in even just school suspensions and school discipline on the basis of grades correlates to every other step. Like, I have a client who I represent who was involved in a shooting here and you start to trace back well how did this person get involved in this shooting? And it was because they were basically pressured into signing themselves out of Lawrence High and into the JDC day school...which is child jail and then that tracked them into juvenile and then that tracked them into a group of people who then got them involved with this shooting. I am like 100% certain that this very smart kid would have never gotten involved in this had it not been for the racism and how he was treated disciplinarily at Lawrence High. And I think the statistics back it up as well. But it’s just something I see every day and it’s heartbreaking.” – participant in gender equity focus group

“You know [my son] sits down with me the other night and says, ‘What if I’m one of the black guys that ends up getting killed by the cops?’ And when he’s living in that constant fear, we definitely have a lot of work to do [in Lawrence].”



Indigenous residents' comments

Indigenous residents reported being treated differently because of who they were (e.g., Native American), not what they did. They reported experiencing bullying, being closely watched while downtown or grocery shopping, and being pulled over by police because of tribal tags on their cars. They also reported challenges obtaining needed services, difficulty obtaining housing, especially affordable housing, and access to child care.

Additionally although there is appreciation for the opportunities available through KU, some students at Haskell Indian Nations University feel intimidated by the process to take advantage of the existing KU Exchange Project.

"A boy kept bullying [my daughter in elementary school] and calling her savage because she's native and has a darker complexion."

"I didn't feel like a part of this community until [the Billy Mills Middle School] name change happened. Because the Native American community was invisible."

"I feel when we do orientation for students, we need to prepare them for police stops, and I shouldn't have to be preparing them for. . . driving while black, driving while brown."

"When I was a student in Pocahontas Hall [at Haskell Indian Nations University]. . . it was addressed that unfortunately you'll be viewed differently because of your appearance."

"It always kind of bothered me that KU students got to ride the bus free, but Haskell students couldn't. . . I feel like a Haskell ID should qualify. Or even like different restaurants will do coupons or deals for a KU student, and I feel like a Haskell student should also get that."

"The whole legal system here is still detrimental for a lot of black, indigenous, people of color."

"Another barrier is just not being able to connect people with different resources. . . people may not be aware of services."

"On [the Haskell] campus, we all get to be a part of our 140-some tribes, we all get to be who we are. But once we cross 23rd Street, [that ends]. . . One time I did a presentation at an elementary school, and I took [speakers] and I had them tell where they were from. The little kids that were there, they were really paying attention. But the teacher, she didn't realize that we came from all over. . . I had them say a greeting in their language, and that kind of blew her mind, like, 'you don't all talk the same?'"

"We have to really look at what the people need. . . We have to listen to the people. . . We have to do stuff that will help everybody benefit, not just the few."

"My husband and I were both at KU, and when he graduated, he got a job where he was just above the poverty line. We were living in section 8 housing. And our rent skyrocketed for us; we had three [small] kids. And. . . we no longer qualified for Boys and Girls Club, we lost the free and reduced lunch program; you name it, we lost it. So, we moved in with his parents. It was so hard. . . If I could, we would have universal daycare. We made too much money to qualify for Head Start, and it didn't make sense for me to go out and get two jobs to pay for daycare. And I just stayed at home for years."

“The Ballard Center is clear on the north side of town, and while it serves a lot of folks. . .if you don’t have a car and you’re taking the bus, you’ve got to get over there. I think sometimes when Lawrence thinks about their programs, they don’t put them in the places that actually need them.”

“In our high schools, Native American males are struggling.”

“Some of the [Haskell] students I’ve talked to decided not to go [back] to school, because they’ve had a hard time [getting online during the pandemic].”

“I know Haskell is federally funded, but I don’t know if there are ways for the City to contribute to programs or things that go on at Haskell, because I really love Haskell and the change it provides to students, and the opportunities that come from being a student at Haskell [but it needs extra funds].”

“I think it’s really noteworthy how Haskell and the large Native American population in Lawrence is consistently ignored in the public narratives we have of what it means to be in Lawrence. I first came to Lawrence as a freshman going to KU and didn’t even know that Haskell existed and was here. And I don’t think I was really aware of that until at least a year or two into college. It is a significant population and it’s a significant cultural driver, or at least it should be. But I think KU just kind of like subsumes everything as under it and we really lose Haskell and you know, the accompanying indigenous population in the meantime.” – participant in the gender equity focus group



Residents with disabilities' comments

Residents with disabilities reported difficulty accessing needed services and local amenities, such as restaurants and venues in downtown Lawrence; feeling like accommodations are viewed as an “inconvenience”; feeling like they had to be the “ADA police”; lack of affordable, safe, and physically accessible housing even amongst new development; shortage of personal assistant services to help people stay out of institutions; lack of access to needed dental and medical care; transportation barriers, including to jobs and needed services; difficulty of accessing resources outside of Lawrence; lack of representation in planning processes; and inequitable distribution of resources.

“I’m so tired of being stressed out.”

“We are the ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] police, and we can’t be.”

“I’m so beyond done. System is rigged for poor people TO DIE ON THE STREETS.”

“It is harder to access services for people with disabilities.”

“When I had jury duty, when I wrote back that I needed a personal attendant, they excused me. My perspective wasn’t represented.”

“When it comes to having ESAs or service animals. . .finding a place to rent is a nightmare. I am a person who knows the ADA and that ESAs are protected, still they tell you to rent somewhere else.”

“There is a lack of physically accessible housing with people with mobility disability. Finding decent housing or housing with accommodations isn’t possible.”

“With the new development and housing in East Lawrence, they need to ensure they are thinking about people with disabilities in those building concepts. If I’m part of the community, the community needs to make sure I’m included. A community is everyone together.”

“Downtown Lawrence is one of the perks of living in Lawrence. However, if you are in a wheelchair, you do not have access to a lot. . .How can we make our downtown a draw to people of all walks of life?”

“Someone who is not a triple amputee will not have a knowledge of the needs, such as the remodeling that will need to be done. It is not a one size fits all situation. Include people with a variety of disability needs before launching a one size fits all place.”

“For people who need personal assistant services, this is a difficult community. It limits the pool and that can drive people into institutions. That is an extreme problem.”

“There is a perception that accommodations can be an inconvenience, when in reality they are needed for a significant part of the population.”

“Even when there are resources, they are often not distributed equitably. Rock Chalk got a seated elliptical, and now have two, but there is still nothing over at the East Lawrence Rec.”

“The cost of living is completely inaccessible. The disability community has less income.”

“You can have a job, be the working poor, and your employer still not provide insurance. We need to cut the link between employment and healthcare.”

“The places they can’t access, they also can’t get jobs. The community is already really expensive. This causes stress and mental harm and trauma.”

“Transportation – if you get a job, how are you going to get there? What are you going to do if you need assistance to get ready to get there?”

“For folks who work in sheltered workshops or folks with intellectual disabilities who work at community jobs, they don’t have any access to benefits they have paid in (such as FICA and unemployment). No one can bill to do it so it is no one’s job. This impacts every person in a workshop. I’m not sure I know anyone with IDD who has successfully gotten COVID unemployment.”

“The failures of the system are everywhere.”

“I’m in so much pain in one of my teeth i can’t stand to exist. Today the pain was so bad my whole body was shaking violently and i kept going cross eyed. . . Told my therapist i had pliers, a knife and a mending kit. . .I feel like death. . .I’m trying so hard not to scream.”

“The STA Care Center has implemented a new policy that you cannot have a therapist there if you already have one. If you are seeking out a second one there, they probably need it. I NEED that, but I can’t get that. I’m being punished because I already have a therapist.”

“They really need to put another doctor’s office. . .around the Dillons on 23rd. When they moved First Med, that really made things difficult. It used to be at least somewhat within walking distance.”

“If you live outside of Lawrence, access to resources is harder.”

“If you have a disability, to get any services, you have to be a poor person. It is a loop we’ll never get out of.”

“People who through no fault of their own are disabled are forced to live in substandard housing, with no access to transportation. The housing situation frustrates me to no end. After waiting and waiting, they get Section 8 vouchers, and the housing available to them is not adequate. We would not ask people we care about to live in places with roaches or bugs or mold. It is very frustrating to know you can’t get a job to pay you enough to get off of SSI. People view it as normal that you need to go to a food pantry to get your food and live in housing inadequate for protection.”

“There are so many people in this City [whose] their voices go unheard. So many unable to participate in a public conversation like this. Be mindful that we are just the tip of the iceberg.”

“Disability can strike anybody at a moment’s notice. I challenge each and every [local elected official] to go to City Hall with a sighted guide and a blindfold on. Or to go to Waxman’s in a wheelchair. Or to put a speaker by your head in the middle of Jefferson’s and see how enjoyable that is. Folks don’t truly understand the difficulties folks have to maneuver until they are affected. Roll a mile in Ranita’s chair and then I will talk to you.”

“When you reach out and extend an offer to people to participate in the community, it is a benefit to the community.”

“When the state developed their plan for COVID-19, they did not include one advocacy organization or person with a disability in that consultation. We are afraid personal care attendants will not be in that first wave. Phase 1B only addresses nursing homes, no other congregate living or nursing facilities. There’s an institutional bias in many things. If you choose to remain in the community, you have to fight for everything. It could have been solved very easily by including a couple of advocacy organizations.”

“Twenty-six percent of the population has a disability. Communities are not strong - our nation is not strong - when people cannot fully participate.”

“We shouldn’t have to ask other people’s permission to exist.”

“It makes a big difference who is trying to extend the invite to participate. If members like them reach out and are going to participate and would like to extend a workable way for them to participate too, it is more likely to be effective. Better than an announcement there will be something at the library. When we are able to participate, we do. But many feel excluded from the beginning. Reach out with different types of disabilities with people that represent them, and have those people included. When I offer to give a ride to people that may not have transportation that late night even the bus doesn’t cover; simple things people without disabilities don’t understand, but we do. It can make a big difference with the ask.”

“I just want to share an experience that surprised me a few years ago. There was a women’s march in Lawrence and there was organizing on Facebook. And I got involved and asked some questions because there were no accommodations for women with disabilities. And actually, I got trolled online when I asked, ‘is there going to be an interpreter,’ ‘can women in wheelchairs participate?’ You know, ‘how can we be inclusive?’ It didn’t bother me because I’m used to it, but It was really sad that not only was it not inclusive, but it was pretty clear that we shouldn’t even be asking the questions. So, it gave me a different view of Lawrence and women and whether we were welcomed to participate. You know we always do education and try to change minds but that was, um...I didn’t expect it in Lawrence.” – participant in the gender equity focus group

“We are badly in need of more resources related to disability services and somebody who is able to advocate for, for instance, violations related to buildings. . . Curb cuts are a good start, but there is way more to access and accommodation than curb cuts.” – participant in the gender equity focus group



LGBTQIA residents' comments

LGBTQIA residents reported having to educate their service providers, trouble finding medical providers, harassment, and physical assault. They also reported deadnaming (e.g., calling a trans person by their birth name not their chosen name), mis-gendering (e.g., referring to a person as the wrong gender), and microaggressions (e.g., subtle statements and actions that show disrespect or discrimination).

"As a trans woman, [I have been] assaulted verbally, physically, and have felt tortured in Lawrence for a long time."

"I haven't experienced a lot of intense interactions because a lot of people read me as a straight woman, so most of what I've encountered. . . is a lot of microaggressions. . . especially at my workplace."

"I mostly interact with queer folks, all of my friend groups are either trans or queer. So, I have also avoided a lot of stuff by just bubbling myself, which is mostly a protective measure."

"Kids need; want; should be able to be who they want to be. . . the [USD 497] district. . . say they are pro progressive, you know being in Lawrence, but I have found out not necessarily."



“Lawrence does a very good job at telling itself it is incredibly progressive, [but] it can definitely be improved upon. I think especially when you factor in race in regard to queer identities, that’s a big issue. I think racism is a big problem in this community as well. When you compare Lawrence to maybe other parts of the state, it feels incredibly progressive. But. . . a lot of the marginalized individuals I’ve talked to, including myself, don’t have as high of an opinion as the progressivism and social equity of Lawrence.”

“I worked at one place for eleven years and was never gendered correctly. Or I was constantly deadnamed – [my bosses] used my old name. There was a hostile environment from the top down, until I was fired finally.”

“I felt mostly tokenized and excluded for the most part [when looking for jobs]. I have tried really hard to get jobs as a trans woman, I’ve never gotten a call back from a store downtown.”

“After Trump was elected, I felt very scared and I didn’t feel like there was any community that cared about my existence, so I sheltered in place quite a bit. . . It was scary out there. Just about every day, I want to move. . . I think if I felt comfortable calling [the police] because I was in danger, because I wouldn’t at this point, it might make me feel better about living in Lawrence.”

“We had run into some issues with [my child] being deadnamed or misgendered in school. So, we have folks. . . who are top rung social workers, they’re inclusive and intersectional in their work, and doing great things at one school. But then we hear that just a mile away, the school social worker or counselor won’t even let us distribute information about Rainbow Kids. Like won’t even let us give information to those kids and families. . . Every school can be so different. I know it’s scary for my son, never knowing what to expect. As a parent, it’s very scary. To [the other participant’s] point, great one cop might be trained or training, but do you trust the whole police force? I mean, so one school social worker might be a great person that has some knowledge, but do I trust all the school or all the administrators? No.”

Another parent shared, “I was just naïve to think, ‘Oh, they’re social workers and school counselors; they should advocate for kids and social justice’. . . That was a huge wake-up call – basically, a slap in the face. That was very discouraging [when my transgender child was not supported].”

“I think the district as a whole is really focused on equity in regard to race, but not necessarily when it comes to gender or sexuality. I have specifically reached out to board members about these issues and received no response. It’s just been crickets. I have had meetings, like actual WebEx meetings with higher-ups in the district and have explicitly voiced my concerns about the lack of intersectionality and I feel like the queer community gets completely left off of the table. There was literally no response. They sat there and said nothing to me in response.”

“We are kind of a middle-class liberal city that helps in a soft way, but I don’t know if there is actual help for people that really need it.”

“I wrote a song about loving Lawrence because I love Lawrence, but it doesn’t feel reciprocated.”

“Talking to students at Free State, they’ve told me that other students are pretty great, they don’t harass and bully them that much, but the teachers do, and their parents do. And so, there’s a generation gap.”

“I feel like we are 10 years behind a lot of places, still. There’s good here, but there’s also all the rest.”

“What’s good about Lawrence is we’ve got good people. . .but we are still a privileged white [educated] community. . .It’s great that we have that progressive—some of those privileges, but then it sets us up because we live in that false narrative or juxtaposition where we think we’re good. . .it’s a false perception that we’re where we’re not, and we have so much work to do.”

“I hear your story and thousands of those same scarring experiences and so that's why we do Rainbow Kids [and Families], because we're trying to figure out a way to. . .not have our kids today have to go through all the same things in Lawrence. I just know the impact that [negative experience within USD 497] had on [my child] and who he is and some of it probably irreversible.”

“Advocate for everyone, educate yourself so that trans folks or queer folks - however you identify - don't have to educate their therapist. . .So that people within the community don't have to do all the work. . .there should be better allies who are also putting in the work and educating themselves and making it so that we are protected, basically. Because, technically we are, but that doesn't stop microaggressions from happening; that doesn't stop bigotry from happening, and there's only so much that we are protected from legally and there's still a lot of loopholes and there's still a lot of things that can occur to folks within the larger LGBTQ community and really individually focusing on each identity and figuring out how best to serve that community, not just LGBTQ as a whole. Because that's really limiting and you're forgetting a lot of identities that could use some help and could use some advocacy.”

“Teach teachers how to support LGBT folks cause like a lot of times like when homophobia or transphobia happens, like the teacher just doesn't know what to do, you know?. . .And then also better representation in like history books, not just for LGBT history but like all minority history.”

“Advocating for the LGBTQ community does not stop at white cis gay men. They should still be advocated for, but there are a lot of other identities under the umbrella that need to be discussed, that need to be protected, and need to have resources available. And you also have to especially take into consideration how race is an intersectional identity, along with queer identity. Black trans women specifically are targeted at alarming rates within this country, so if you're talking about like Black Lives Matter you also need to talk about queer issues that affect the communities.”

“They're not going after lesbian and gay and bisexual people right now, the politicians are targeting trans people because we're gaining a bit of rights and everyone is losing their mind about it. . .Even a joke on Saturday Night Live that trans rights was the reason Trump got elected and if there's an ounce of truth in that, then that means trans people are in danger. Cause we saw what happened in the last four years and there was a group called the Proud Boys that were like, ‘we're so proud of being boys, we don't want to be girls that we're going to be the worst of humanity and just admit our racism and our hatred and xenophobia.’ . . .There's a lot of TERFs in Kansas but most people would say, ‘what is a TERF?’ if I said that to them. And I know there's a lot of TERFs cause every time I play at a concert; one would say that I shouldn't be using the restroom or something and just like make their presence known. So . . . now is the time, and the City is quiet. There's nothing, no Transgender awareness week, day, minute.”

“Create safe healthy inclusive spaces for everyone and have a statement [and create] the mechanisms, the systems, and the practices that match it. . .There should be an equity committee that reviews [school] curriculum all the time, saying, ‘is it is reflective of all of our kids, all of our students?’”

“love to you all, keep fighting the good fight” - focus group chat to other participants

Comments related to gender and gender identity

"I have a queer child that also happens to be a person of color. . .He's graduated now thank God... But he had a teacher refer to him as "it." We want to pretend like this is a beautiful city, but if you are not [a part of KU], it might not be as much of an oasis."

"I think the only thing that's unique to Lawrence is that we claim one thing, but the actions are another behind closed doors."

"Things are moving forward but not enough."

"There's (for example) never been a woman of color on City Commission. . .[There is a contrast] between who's agitating for social change and leading activist organizations and whose sort of concerns are and should be really centered in activist work versus who is represented in our legislative delegation, but specifically city leadership."

"I think that in some ways the university promotes diversity, but like any bureaucracy it can also be very sexist, and it can be very slow to deal with sexism and abuse because bureaucracies are that way. So, in some ways it's a beacon and in other ways it's got the same crap that goes on with women who work in very low wage jobs."

"There are so many women, especially low-income women in Lawrence, that finding childcare in Lawrence is very, very difficult and it often falls on women to address that issue."

"The fact that the cost of living is so high here in Lawrence means that you can really only move to Lawrence if you qualify for particularly high-paying jobs. So, I think that is a barrier to diversity in general. And I think that there are things that Lawrence could be doing on a city-level, like raising the minimum wage further to better match our really high cost of living, if we wanted to take serious action and attract people who aren't just white-collar workers to Lawrence."

"Considering other jobs that are primarily held by women in the community like teaching, like people who are service staff at our public schools, is particularly important. And I know that for example, paraeducators at Lawrence Public Schools are paid less than Wal-Mart workers and that is both inequality and sexism happening together."

"A lot of the home care workers who keep people with disabilities and older people out of institutions are women and they are paid very low wages, and it is very hard, important work. . .Often, people have to work 2-3 jobs, and it is exhausting hard work, and it's under-valued. And it's largely women."

"One of the other areas that I found kind of a shock to my system, was that when I had my baby and I went through postpartum, and not finding enough support for women of color was really hard. And I went to the groups at LMH, but you know most were white women, and I could still feel that I wasn't entirely, not necessarily not welcomed, but I didn't receive the same support that I saw other women receiving. And I can't even imagine what our immigrant, undocumented families are dealing with as far as having kids in this community and not having enough resources...both language-wise, and daycare was a nightmare. The cost is horrible. I can't imagine what it is like for those families through the pandemic and everything. I just wanted to share that new families, new moms, childcare is a challenge nationwide, but I wish such a family-centered community like Lawrence would have more [resources]."

“I’ve witnessed discrimination within like medical communities, especially with trans friends of mine. There seems to be a lack of knowledge on how to medically assist. I just I know I’ve had (trans) friends that have had to bounce around a lot trying to find a doctor just within Lawrence. . . I just know that is a pretty stark problem within the community.”

“A black trans friend this past fall had her car vandalized here in Lawrence. Another queer friend a couple of years ago had some damage done to her home, based around her sexual orientation. I noticed that sort of the Captain level of the LPD, in the process of negotiating around sanctuary policy, were really likely to identify more with ICE than they were with the undocumented members of our community. And expressed sort of prejudice against undocumented people and sort of approval of or affiliation with ICE, in a way that was really concerning and I think we saw some sort of Anti-blackness or lack of concern about racism manifest when the LPD both dragged its feet on investigating the anti-BLM art or whatever that was up downtown this summer. And then also the fact that it took sort of this city’s apparatus so long to investigate the people who drove into the crowds of protesters who were present at the Occupy Mass St stuff. And then I think the fact that we had a DA who prosecuted a woman for reporting sexual assault is a deeply sexist and concerning example of prejudice and discrimination that has happened pretty recently here.”

“Women, women of color who are often struggling dealing with those family issues who are also trying to address disability issues—and this includes emotional disability, issues like ADHD, and spectrum issues related to autism—women are often left holding the bag, especially for their kids and how to manage those.”

“Look at intersectionality. . . If you are Black, if you’re a person of color, if you’re a person who is not heterosexual, the discrimination mounts and we all need to be aware of that.”

“Despite Lawrence’s image of itself, we are not exempt from participation in the school-to-prison pipeline. We need to do a lot of restructuring around that and also, we desperately need more low-income housing, both like rental stuff and as well as pathways to home ownership for low-income people.”

“I would wipe out the whole police force and start over.”

“I think you have to address the question of profit when you are talking about these issues. . . You don’t have a chance to solve inequality when people are profiting off of the creation of those conditions.”

“A female [KU] student who wore a hijab had trash thrown at her while walking on Jayhawk Blvd. That, to me, was evidence of both racism and sexism on campus and in Lawrence. It really shocked me.”

Comments from Latinx, Spanish-speaking residents, and residents indigenous to Mexico

“When I first got to [KU’s] campus, I honestly thought it would be more diverse.”

“I hold very dear everything that the Black community has done for POC in the U.S. I owe everything that I have now to them. So, I say listen to the BLM movement. . . Their requests benefit everyone, not just Black Americans. So, when you ask for a program, a service, a condition to change, listen to BLM and their defunding the police and investing in community resources. Because I think they’ve suffered the most and are very well informed on what is needed to really elevate all of us, not just them.”

“Sometimes we go to the store and people give us an ugly look. The first time I went to Walmart here (5 years ago), a black man showed me his part/privates.”

“The only barrier is language. . . I don’t speak much English. . . since I have been here, I have had difficulties many times explaining what I need and being understood.”

“[Since] we try to speak English outside of our home, we haven’t got resentment or weird looks. . . But you can tell when people are looking, they start just looking at each other [sometimes when people are speaking in a different language].”

“I was with my children in a park. . . Obviously, I speak to my children in Spanish, well because that is the only way I can, right? Perhaps, some English but not very well. Well, I was talking to my children and [an elderly] woman was very bothered and was saying, ‘If you want to speak Spanish, go to your own country. Here you have to speak English, you are in America!’”

“I clean houses and I gave out business cards. A woman calls me and asks me to clean her home, we make an appointment to meet. After she sees me, she asks me, ‘Do you have a SSN, because I am going to check your record.’ I tell her, ‘No I don’t have a SSN, I have an ID number. You can use that one.’ She tells me, ‘No. If you don’t have a SSN, you can’t enter my house.’”

“One night I was driving, when I hadn’t had much time driving in my life because in my country of Peru, we aren’t obligated to drive. Your dad—you have one car for the family, so I never learned. I used public transportation and all that. So, I learned to drive here, and I got my license in 2014. Near the end of 2014, driving from my ex’s house to mine, I think it was 5 blocks. It was late, I was tired, and I didn’t realize that my back light was off. A female police officer, she was very angry, I don’t know if it was her last—I don’t know, it was noticeable on first contact she was very angry. . . I had never been stopped by police, ever. I had started driving recently, three months, so I had like basically no experience. So, the police stopped me, and I just stopped there, maybe that’s why she was angry, but I don’t think she had a justified reason to yell at me. She asked me plainly why I just stopped there, that I should pull over more to the side. So, I say ‘Okay,’ I move and park more to the side. She comes closer and she keeps yelling, ‘Do you know your light is off?’ and I say ‘No, I didn’t realize.’ She tells me I have so and so days to fix it. And I tell her, ‘Thank you.’ She had taken my license and my car insurance. I was nervous because there had been murders of people of color by the police in other places. And from the nerves, I started to stutter. I don’t know if that made her lose her patience, but when she brought me a document, I thought she had brought me everything and so I raised the window and started to move. And she comes again and stops me and this

time she was not just angry, she was furious, furious! She told me, 'Why would you do that, you can only move when I tell you to move, and you need to understand!' I was trembling and I said, 'Okay, yes I understand, I thought we had finished.' She tells me, 'You don't know that I can put a gun to your face? And that way you'll understand me.' When she told me that, that she could put a gun in my face, I was white—I was all the colors—and trembling and everything, right? I stayed there and she left, like she pushed my car, she went to her car. She returned and brought me a ticket, she was going to give me a warning, but she gave me a ticket."

"The police here won't support you. I am not sure if there could be an office that you could be directed to and report something. Acts, aggressions like these...when you are verbally assaulted."

"Perhaps we don't come the 'right' way, maybe as immigrants. But also, that doesn't mean we deserve bad treatment."

"When my sister and I had first arrived here, one day we went to [buy shoes] at Wal-Mart. . . There was a mess where the shoes were. So, we take the first ones we find, we grabbed a box there that had two letters that seemed to be the same brand as the shoes. So, we put them in there, go and pay. Supposedly, the cashier checked the shoes and we left. Outside, the manager detained us and called the police. They didn't detain us in that moment, but they said we had to go to court because we stole the shoes. We had the receipt. At court I asked the question, 'Who would think that we would steal one pair and pay for the other.' It wasn't in my mind to steal, that I was going to pay for half of what I got. I told them, 'Do you not see that they were the same brand, they could've told me right there?' I don't know what box I grabbed; it was a total mess. And I told them, 'I don't know how to read much English.' Basically nothing, we knew no English when we first arrived. The shoes had the same initials as the box, so we thought to put them in there. I was pregnant and when they brought me back to the manager's office, so the police could arrive, they told me that they would put me in jail right then and there. And that they would take away my child. And they would send me alone to Mexico. So, I was very scared, I was crying with my sister. . . I would have liked to have—I don't know—help for people who have had these complicated situations. Because yeah, one is left badly traumatized. Because one sees a police officer (or security) and one thinks, 'Oh no! What could happen to me today?'"

"With the police—I stay away from them. I don't want to find myself with one, I don't want any contact with any of them because I no longer trust them. Standing here in the front of my house, a police officer stopped me to ask what I'm doing in front of my house. I have more of these stories."

"I think that the only way for justice and equity to work is through a local-level office, in a city that would pay attention to that. An office of civil protection [where there is]. . . psychological support for the victim. . . but also psychological support for the aggressor [and they have to go through] community service."

"Why don't you help everyone who is here with the same help/support?"

"[If I were speaking to an elected official], I would invite him to think about his observations on the demographics of those who vote for him and those who live in the city, who have experiences living here, and maybe invite him to a meeting to listen specifically to those who have those experiences."

"There is lots of different work to do, but knowing that you are an immigrant, they don't give you the opportunity. So, I think that to open the option for people that have those abilities, because one comes

almost always to cook or clean. But there are people who can do other things and if they were given that opportunity. . .they can have another kind of work.”

“They need to work together to fight the prejudice and stereotyping that is if you are Latino, you are going to cause harm. They need to knock that wall of prejudice down. And also, discrimination does exist. The supremacy that they put towards, ‘I was here first,’ and we know they were not here first. But in reality, that exists. People feel validated because of that. . . I saw an image once that said, the father asked his son, ‘Are there kids of other colors in your class?’ the kid responds, ‘Dad, there are just kids.’ That is what we need to plant. To fight those prejudices and stereotypes of race in general.”

“There is mass inequality in this country.”

About this Report

Many thanks to the Douglas County Community Foundation for the funding support for this effort. This report was created by Christina Holt of the University of Kansas Center for Community Health and Development. Photos were generously provided by Lawrence resident Jeff Burkhead of Backstory Photography.

We are indebted to the residents who bravely and willingly shared their stories. May we work for a more just future for all.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Questions

Please share your first name and what geographic/ identity-based communities you live in or represent, and anything else you'd like us to know.

What were your first impressions of this community with regard to diversity, inclusion, and equity? OR, How would you describe our environment for diversity?

In what ways is our community welcoming and inclusive?

In what ways is the community not welcoming and what are the barriers to establishing an inclusive environment and equitable opportunities?

Have you faced or witnessed prejudice or discrimination in our community? Describe what happened.

If you could create any program, service, or condition for change, what would it be?

Suppose you had one minute to talk with local elected leaders about diversity, inclusion and equity in our community. What would you tell them?

How can we make sure that your voice is heard when decisions are made that affect your community? What would be the best ways for us to communicate about progress being made?

What is the number one issue you would like to see address to improve equity in our community?

Appendix B: Resident Interview Questions

Where are you from? What part of XX are you from? What language(s) do you speak?

Has the community been welcoming to you?

Do you feel you've been given all the tools you need to succeed? Are there things that make it extra hard to succeed?

Have you ever felt you have been treated differently or unfairly because of the color of your skin or the way that you looked? (If so, can you tell me about a time you felt you were treated differently or unfairly?)

What would help make your life better?

What is the most important change needed in our community?

Appendix C: Service Provider Interview Questions

Can you tell me a little bit about the population(s) you serve?

How do the clients you work with experience this community's diversity, inclusion, and equity?

In what ways is our community welcoming and inclusive for your clients?

In what ways is the community not welcoming and what are the barriers to establishing an inclusive environment and equitable opportunities?

Have those you work with faced or witnessed prejudice or discrimination in our community? Please describe what happened.

If you could create any program, service, or condition for change, what would it be?

Suppose you had one minute to talk with local elected leaders about diversity, inclusion and equity in our community. What would you tell them?

How can we make sure that your client's voices are heard when decisions are made that affect your community? What would be the best ways for us to communicate about progress being made?

What is the number one issue you would like to see address to improve equity in our community?