



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **UNITED WAY ANNOUNCES COMMUNITY RESOURCE NAVIGATION EXPANSION**

*A Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas grant will support an enhanced program with navigators in Douglas and Shawnee Counties*

Topeka, KS—United Way of Kaw Valley (UWKV) and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas (BCBSKS) announced a new partnership today that will expand community resource navigation services and help connect community members to resources to help them thrive and live healthy lives.

"We know that health is more than health care," said Virginia Barnes, Director of Blue Health Initiatives with BCBSKS. "By increasing access to community resources through navigation, we can help ensure that Kansas communities build resilient networks to improve the health of Kansans who may not easily navigate the complex health and social systems on their own."

Through a Trailblazers grant from BCBSKS, UWKV will employ a program director and two Community Resource Navigators, one primarily serving Lawrence and the other serving Shawnee County. United Way will continue to fund a rural Community Resource Navigator in Douglas County, expanding that coverage to include Baldwin City and Lecompton as well as Eudora.

These positions will help people access a complex system of social service programs and serve as a key point of contact and source of support for community members in crisis. Navigators will help improve communication between clients and agencies, facilitate the often-complicated application process for receiving services and provide help in a way that honors every client's culture and lived experience.

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United Way has already hired a Director of Community Resource Navigation, Heather Coates of Lawrence. Applications are open for the three initial navigator positions.

UWKV CEO Jessica Lehnerr said she is proud that the groundwork for the program was laid in both the early navigation work in Douglas County and the closed-loop referral network effort in Shawnee County. “This feels like the synergy we knew was possible when we merged with United Way of Douglas County,” she said. “The time was absolutely right to build upon the years of collaboration that our Vice President of Community Impact, Brett Martin, had put in with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas.”

For more information about UWKV’s Community Resource Navigation program, please visit [www.uwkawvalley.org/community-resource-navigation](http://www.uwkawvalley.org/community-resource-navigation).

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### **HIGHLIGHTED QUOTES:**

“Expanding community health worker and navigator services is an intersecting strategy throughout our Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). United Way of Kaw Valley’s involvement in this work reflects a shared commitment to improving access to essential services like primary and prenatal care, behavioral health, childcare, food assistance and housing. Efforts to expand Douglas County’s community health work and navigation services not only help individuals navigate complex systems of care, but these efforts also foster collaboration among community partners. By implementing a coordinated network of support, we strengthen our collective ability to improve the health of our community.” – Johnathan Smith, UWKV Board Member and Executive Director of Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health

“We are grateful for the progressive vision of BCBS that recognizes the health and wellbeing impact of connecting people with necessary social services. This grant to support a systemic approach to community care coordination will be a significant difference maker across our urban and rural communities while integrating across all service providers.” – Beth Llewellyn, UWKV Board Chair

### **ABOUT UNITED WAY OF KAW VALLEY**

United Way of Kaw Valley (UWKV) serves as a community convenor, volunteer organizer, grant maker and strategic partner for the nonprofit sector in Shawnee, Douglas, Jackson and Jefferson counties in northeast Kansas. Donor dollars are invested locally and support a broad range of initiatives that benefit the whole family through Youth Opportunity, Healthy Community, Financial Security and Community Resiliency. Learn more at [uwkawvalley.org](http://uwkawvalley.org).

### **ABOUT BLUE CROSS AND BLUE SHIELD OF KANSAS**

For more than 80 years, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas has built a reputation of trust with its members and contracting providers by providing outstanding customer service while quickly and accurately processing claims; fairly administering benefit plans



and contracts; offering programs, services and tools to help members improve or maintain their health; and operating under the highest ethical standards while being good stewards of premium dollars. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association and is the state's largest insurer, serving all Kansas counties except Johnson and Wyandotte. For more information, visit [bcbsks.com](http://bcbsks.com).

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