



The Colorado  
Health Foundation™

## **CHF Statewide Listening Tour**

Southeast Tour Executive Summary

December 14 – December 15, 2015

**Purpose of Tour:** The new Foundation President and CEO, Karen McNeil-Miller, is touring Colorado in order to learn about health needs and concerns within communities across the state. The statewide #HealthiestCO Listening Tour is an opportunity for grantees, community residents and local leaders to come together and share their perspectives on health. Karen is interested in speaking with community members about the major assets as well as barriers to good health that exist within communities across Colorado. Karen believes that health is everyone's business, not just for individuals that work directly in healthcare, and this tour looks to engage community members across all sectors. The Foundation hopes to inspire communities to create and maintain a spirit of collaboration in order to come up with specific projects and focused solutions that will help to better the health of those living within their counties.

**Who participated?** The delegation included ten staff members from The Colorado Health Foundation and two staff members from Community Resource Center. The Southeast tour reached approximately 80 persons in the region, including tour session attendees as well as site visit hosts and participants.

**Where did we go?** The Southeast Region Listening Tour took place on December 14 – 15, 2015. The delegation met with representatives from Baca, Bent, Crowley, Kiowa, Otero and Prowers counties. The tour consisted of three sessions hosted in the communities of La Junta, Las Animas and Lamar, Colorado. Additionally, the delegation participated in site visits of the Health Navigator Program at Otero Junior College, Reynolds Park Project in Swink, Healthy Places Storefront in Lamar and Wiley School District in Wiley. A full itinerary of the tour is available in Appendix A.

**What did we do?** The Foundation is hoping to begin an on-going conversation with communities across Colorado to effectively address the needs of the state. In open discussions, community leaders described the region's character, existing needs, and efforts currently underway to address a variety of health related needs.

**What did we hear?** At each tour session we heard concerns of community members and various barriers to achieving overall health and wellness. While each community presented its own unique perspectives, we found overarching themes and challenges that are experienced among community members within the Southeast region. Participants used the following similar terms to describe the character of the region and its inhabitants: committed, compassionate and strong. The residents of the region highlighted their access to outdoor opportunities and their strong sense of community. The top three issue areas that were identified by session attendees were substance abuse, lack of job opportunities and the need for a more robust transportation system.

## **Regional Themes**

**Substance Abuse:** Session attendees spoke of the detrimental effects that the growing drug culture has had on both children and adults in their communities. Substance abuse involving marijuana, alcohol, methamphetamine and heroine is prevalent among teens and adults in the region. Residents spoke of the various effects that substance abuse has had on their communities including increased crime rates. Children that are exposed to substance abuse in the home often face adverse trauma and many times miss school due to an unstable home life. Additionally, children's exposure at a young age impacts their relationship with illegal substances and many times initiates a cycle of abuse. Residents of Lamar highlighted their many youth support and prevention programs that address the impacts of substance abuse in the home and help to build resilience in kids.

**Career Opportunities:** Because many large employers are now defunct or have left the region in recent years, communities struggle to attract new residents into the area. The lack of career options makes it challenging to keep high school graduates and young adults in communities. While higher education providers such as Otero Junior College and Lamar Community College serve as significant assets, the challenge is in keeping students in the area upon completion of their programs of study. The Health Navigator and Community Health Worker Programs offered at Otero Junior College hope to increase the number of health-related job opportunities and number of trained professionals within the region. Residents in Las Animas spoke of their disappearing middle class due to lack of jobs in their community and the need to attract new industries and employers into Bent County.

**Transportation:** Because municipalities within the Southeast region are often large distances apart, residents struggle to access the care they need due to lack of adequate transportation. Rural communities are largely car dependent and those without access to a car are limited in their access to healthcare and other community services. Transportation is especially vital for the elderly who may no longer be able to drive but need a way to get to frequent doctor or social services appointments. A public transportation system would help to increase access among the senior population. The Health Navigator Program at Otero Junior College is working to address transportation needs by offering transportation services and connecting community members with resources.

**Assets:** The Southeast region is equipped with recreational activities and the infrastructure to support outdoor physical activity. Communities highlighted their growing health and wellness services and initiatives in public schools. Many schools promote active living and provide healthy school lunches to students. There is also growing collaboration between schools and mental health agencies in order to target and reach at-risk families. Several communities discussed strong new partnerships between organizations that had not existed in the past. People in the region described community members as being committed to a cause, with a willingness to roll up their sleeves in order to help their neighbors.

## **Topics and Projects Unique to Specific Counties**

**La Junta (Otero County):** Community members highlighted several workplace health initiatives that employers have adopted. Through Health Links Colorado, the City of La Junta, Southeast Health Group and Otero Junior College have all been certified as healthy businesses. There has been a push to get people active not only through workplace initiatives, but through wider community efforts. Kiowa County Hospital district now offers low impact exercise courses available to seniors and the general public.

**Las Animas (Bent County):** Bent County organizations have had a history of difficulty in partnering with one another, however residents highlighted the newly collaborative spirit that has arisen within the past five years. An example of such collaboration can be seen through community efforts to repurpose Fort Lyon VA Hospital to meet the needs of the homeless population in Colorado. The facility is now the Fort Lyon Supportive Residential Community that provides recovery focused transitional housing to homeless individuals and partners with several local and statewide organizations in order to carry out its mission.

**Lamar (Prowers County):** LiveWell Prowers County is a major asset to the community of Lamar. Healthy Places Lamar provides a place for students to engage in community service, promotes physical activity in the community and gives kids the opportunity to build leadership skills and healthy relationships with their peers. Additionally, community members can come into the Healthy Places storefront to participate in a biking building workshop. Healthy Places has also partnered with residents to plan improvements to parks and trails to promote healthy living within the community.

## Appendices:

### Appendix A. Listening Tour Itinerary

#### Monday, Dec. 14

3:30 – 4:15 PM: Site Visit – Health Navigator Program @ Otero Junior College

**4:30 – 5:45 PM: La Junta Tour Session @ Otero Junior College**

#### Tuesday, Dec. 15

8:30 – 9:00 AM: Site Visit @ Reynolds Park Project in Swink

**10:30 – 11:30 AM: Las Animas Tour Session @ John W Rawlings Heritage Center and Museum**

1:30 – 2:30 PM: Site Visit and Tour of Healthy Places Initiatives in Lamar

**3:00 – 4:00 PM: Lamar Tour Session @ Lamar Community Building**

4:30 – 5:00 PM: Site Visit @ Wiley School District

### Appendix B. Session Attendees

First Name	Last Name	Organization	Tour Session
Beverley	Babb	La Junta	La Junta
Danelle	Berg	Otero County	La Junta
Brian	Burney	Oliver Manufacturing	La Junta
Audrey	Dehdouh-Berg	Otero Junior College	La Junta
Alisha	Hall	Various Nonprofits	La Junta
Lynn	Horner	La Junta	La Junta
Bill	Johnson	La Junta	La Junta
Nancy	King	Southeast Health Group	La Junta
Rick	Klein	City of La Junta	La Junta
Melissa	Magana	Valley-Wide Health Systems	La Junta
Cindy	Masias	Valley Wide Health Systems, Inc.	La Junta
Jenny	Mathews	AVRMC / Also Entrepreneur	La Junta
Stephen	Mathews	Corrections Corp. of America	La Junta
Cindy	McLoud	Kiowa County	La Junta
Criston	Menz	Oliver Manufacturing	La Junta
Janine	Pearce-Vasquez	Otero County DHS	La Junta
Joe	Pentlicki	Oliver Manufacturing	La Junta
Rick	Ritter	Otero County Health Department	La Junta
Denise	Root	Otero Junior College	La Junta
Kaysie	Schmidt	Otero Junior College	La Junta
Barry	Shiohita	Southeast Health Group	La Junta

Ryan	Stevens	La Junta Economic Development	La Junta
Charles	Thompson	USDA Rural Development	La Junta
Victoria	Valdez	Valley-Wide Health Systems, Inc.	La Junta
Victoria	Valdez	Valley-Wide Health Systems, Inc.	Las Animas
Roberta	Calkins-Mendoza	Valley-Wide Health Systems, Inc	Las Animas
Jim	Collins	City of Las Animas	Las Animas
Lana	Gardner	Las Animas School District	Las Animas
Elsie	Goines	Las Animas School District	Las Animas
Kaye	Kasza	CSU Extension	Las Animas
Paula	Shane	Las Animas - Bent County Library District	Las Animas
Rourke	Sisson	LiveWell Communnities	Las Animas
R.J.	Stavely	Bent County Healthcare Center	Las Animas
Jeremy	Summers	Bent County Healthcare Center	Las Animas
Jo	Zemba	Las Animas	Las Animas
Rick	Akers	City of Lamar	Lamar
Renee	Beebe	Healthy Places	Lamar
Morgan	Bennett	Prowers County Public Health	Lamar
Jacqueline	Brown	Southeast Health Group	Lamar
Anne-Marie	Crampton	Lamar Community College	Lamar
Susan	Crites	Book Depot	Lamar
Cecilia	Dowell	CDS Head Start	Lamar
George	Gotto	Lamar	Lamar
Lori	Hammer	Partners for HOPE Center	Lamar
Kathy	Henderson	Lamar Community College	Lamar
Laurie	Larrick	High Plains Community Health Center	Lamar
Courtney	Neuhold	High Plains CHC	Lamar
Emily	Nieschburg	High Plains CHC	Lamar
Susan	Portner	Live Well / HELM	Lamar
Tasha	Spencer	Prowers Medical Center	Lamar
Elia	Trujillo	Prowers Medical Center	Lamar