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MEDIA CONTACT

Brett Riggs, Director of Communications
briggs@sunflowerfoundation.org
785.232.3000 Ext. 113



Kelli Mark



Carlie Houchen

Sunflower Foundation names Mark, Houchen new program directors

Pair will spearhead organization's program work in Healthy Communities and Health Systems

TOPEKA – Sunflower Foundation has welcomed two new members to its health philanthropic programming team, with the recent additions of Kelli Mark and Carlie Houchen as its new directors of Healthy Communities and Health Systems, respectively.

Mark, who has worked for the foundation since October 2022 as grants and finance manager, started her new role on July 1. Houchen, who comes to Sunflower after most recently holding a leadership role in Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas' Pathways to a Healthy Kansas community grant initiative, started July 8. Both directors will report to Dr. Elizabeth Burger, a longtime program officer for the

foundation who recently was named senior vice president of programs and strategy.

“I am delighted to be working with Kelli and Carlie and welcome their individual skills and strengths, as well as the sense of collective energy and commitment they bring to the Sunflower programs team,” Burger said. “Programs and grants that are responsive to the health needs of Kansans are the bread and butter of our foundation’s operations, and this team is hungry to advance the important work we are doing in the areas of behavioral health, primary care, nutrition security, community trails, tribal health and nonprofit capacity building. You can expect to see these outstanding women out and about across the state, meeting our valuable partners and stakeholders.”

As director of Healthy Communities, Mark will spearhead the foundation’s work in food and nutrition security, as well as its Sunflower Trails program, which supports organizations and communities working to provide safe, accessible public trails and outdoor spaces where Kansans can reap the many health benefits of being more active and connecting with nature. She also will work with Houchen to lead the foundation’s Food is Medicine work, which focuses on the critical role nutrition plays in preventing, treating and managing chronic disease.

Prior to joining the foundation, Mark spent five years in the Kansas Department of Health and Environment’s Bureau of Family Health, working to improve maternal and child health across the state. While at the bureau, she served as a section chief, unit director and grants manager, before rising to bureau chief and director of administration and policy. She also spent a decade working for St. Francis Health Center, including five years as document control administrator and quality analyst.

A native of Topeka, Mark has an Associate of Liberal Studies from Barton Community College, a Bachelor of Science in Human Nutrition/Public Health from Kansas State University, and a Master of Public Administration from Wichita State University.

“I am thrilled to expand my role here at Sunflower Foundation, where the work so closely aligns with my personal values,” Mark said. “I am excited to connect with our stakeholders and grantees in a whole new way and to continue to be part of an amazing team that is doing transformational work across Kansas.”

As director of Health Systems, Houchen will oversee the foundation’s work across the state aimed at strengthening organizational capacity and investing in innovative strategies in the areas of behavioral health, public health, and the primary care safety net. In this role, she also will lead Sunflower’s work to expand Kansans’ access to integrated care, a model of care that integrates mental and behavioral health services into primary care settings.

“With a background in public health, population health and health policy, my career has always focused on improving the health of Kansans. I am excited to join an organization like Sunflower that leads catalytic work toward that very mission,” Houchen said. “I look forward to learning alongside the Sunflower team, grantees and leadership as we work together to make Kansas a place where our families and communities thrive.”

Prior to joining Sunflower, in her role with the Pathways to a Healthy Kansas initiative, Houchen worked closely with the program’s grantees to address the social determinants of health in Kansas communities. She previously worked as a senior

analyst for the Kansas Health Institute, where she worked on population health issues and led process facilitation work to support effective policymaking at the Kansas statehouse. She also led the working groups of the Special Committee on Mental Health Modernization and Reform (2020) and the Governor's Substance Use Disorder Task Force (2018).

Originally from Miami County, Houchen earned a Bachelor of Science in Human Nutrition from Kansas State University and a Master of Public Health from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. She and her family live in Roeland Park.

ABOUT SUNFLOWER FOUNDATION

Sunflower Foundation was established in 2000 as a statewide health philanthropy with a mission to serve as a catalyst for improving the health and well-being of all Kansans. The foundation believes that a thriving, sustainable nonprofit sector contributes to healthy communities, and we are committed to investing in mission-aligned nonprofits through grants, education, advocacy, collaborative learning, and capacity building. To learn more, visit www.SunflowerFoundation.org.



Sunflower Foundation | 5820 SW Sixth Avenue | Topeka, KS 66606 US

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