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## Press Release

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### ***Pathways to a Healthy Kansas*, a Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas initiative, gives \$25,000 grant to the Food Bank of Reno County**

#### **Reno County, Kansas – February 14, 2024 –**

A special event was held Tuesday as a check for \$25,000 was presented to the Food Bank of Reno County as part of the *Pathways to a Healthy Kansas (Pathways)* grant, a Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas (BCBSKS) initiative. Participating in the check presentation event were Virginia Barnes, BCBSKS, Candace Davidson, Reno County Health Department and Heal Reno County, Karlene Clarke, BCBSKS, Penny Taapken, Food Bank of Reno County Director, and Michelle Vakulenko, BCBSKS.

The Food Bank of Reno County signed a pledge agreement that affirmed their commitment to taking on new opportunities to provide greater access to healthy food for consumers of their services. To fulfill this pledge, the Food Bank of Reno County commits to using the Healthy Eating Research nutrition standards (HER Standards.) It will assess the current conditions of the food pantry/food bank, develop a policy to phase in healthy food from a variety of food sources over the course of at least five years, work with donors, food pantry clients, food pantry staff and volunteers to implement identified changes and will share all policies with the coalition and BCBSKS to build a portfolio of best practices.

The funds received from the *Pathways* grant will be used by the Food Bank of Reno County towards a refrigerator and freezer for \$13,400, tablets for HER Standards tracking at approximately \$1,000 and a Volunteer Coordinator at approximately \$10,500. Heal Reno County will be providing an additional \$10,000 towards the Food Bank of Reno County Volunteer Coordinator role.

“We are grateful to have received the grant from *Pathways*,” said David Dubovich, Food Bank of Reno County Board Treasurer. “This collaboration with *Pathways* will provide ways for the Food Bank to help promote and educate not only to our clients to receive nutritional food but will help in ways for our community to donate nutritional food for our clients.”

The Reno County Food Bank was established in 1981 and its mission is to provide healthy, nutritious food to meet the needs of the hungry in Reno County, without judgement or discrimination. The Reno County Food Bank is located at 700 North Walnut inside the Salvation Army building and provides food for approximately 13,000 local citizens annually. According to the 2021 Hunger in South-Central Kansas report by Kansas Appleseed, (the latest information available,) the food insecurity rate in Reno County is 13.8%.

“We are excited for the opportunity to partner with *Pathways* to provide broader services to our community, greater variety, and more accessibility to those who need us most,” said Lance Patterson, Food Bank of Reno County Board President.

“The work being done through Pathways represents our sustained commitment to Kansas communities, and our belief that healthier communities benefit us all,” said Virginia Barnes, BCBSKS Director of Blue Health Initiatives. “Our friends at Heal Reno County are doing great work to ensure local residents have opportunities to make healthy choices to improve their well-being.”

*Pathways to a Healthy Kansas* is a community grant initiative launched by BCBSKS in 2016. It partners with community coalitions like Heal Reno County to improve active living, healthy eating, and commercial tobacco prevention across the state.



#### **About Pathways to a Healthy Kansas**

*Pathways to a Healthy Kansas* is the largest community grant program ever funded by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas. The *Pathways* program provides 16 community coalitions with the tools and resources needed to remove barriers and engage their communities in ways that enable healthy eating and tobacco-free, active living to become a way of life. The grant funding for each community includes a coordination grant along with the opportunity to apply for non-competitive implementation and achievements grants. For more information, visit [bcbsks.com/pathways](http://bcbsks.com/pathways).

#### **About Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas**

For more than 75 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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