

# I Love it when a Plan Comes Together

Sometimes a Journey Can Take a Circuitous Route

BY EVELYN HUDSON



Evelyn Hudson

**I recently had** the opportunity to facilitate a Public Health Visioning Retreat for the “Lower Eight” counties of southeast Kansas: Chautauqua, Cherokee, Crawford, Elk, Labette, Montgomery, Neosho and Wilson.

Their goal is to improve the health of the residents and workers in the region. The Lower Eight leaders that we will call the “A-Team” created an environment including the health care providers and stake holders to formulate and agree on a vision that would capture their ideas of an empowered and healthy community by 2020. After many challenges over the last year, many planning sessions and bumps along the way, their plan came together.

This process and event reminded me of the 1980s television series the “A-Team.” John “Hannibal” Smith was a master tactician (although his plans rarely turned out as they were supposed to; when asked if she thought this was going to work, Amy Allen summed it up by saying, “Hannibal’s plans never work right. They just work”). His favorite catch phrase was “I love it when a plan comes together.”

My plans as the facilitator did not work as planned, but did work. The original plans of the Lower Eight did not go as originally planned, but did work, opening the way for a perfect opportunity to create a vision statement that could help this region focus and give direction for the next phases of their future continuum of success.

As the newest colleague of Public Square Communities, I found myself in a place of wonderment and challenge as I navigated this regional community into a place of consensus by way of team work and collaboration. My immediate concern was that I could not inject

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my views, but serve as a neutral and objective facilitator as the Lower Eight moved into the arena of fashioning a futuristic statement that would harness and promote their vision of improved public health.

As the “unknown” facilitator I felt the pressure of appearing knowledgeable, skillful and somehow responsible for the enjoyment of the process to get to the vision statement. When I exhausted all of my known skill-sets, I was fearful that my plans might not work. To my surprise, the attendees laughed, engaged one another in conversation, even beyond the visioning exercises and mentioned, “They never had that much fun doing a visioning statement in the past.”

The Lower Eight counties are some of the poorest in the region, and they have some of the highest death rates in the state from heart disease and cancer. And Public Square Communities’ mission is to facilitate a process that can transform communities into areas which nourish and foster partnerships while developing and connecting civic leaders. Their need and our mission were a good fit. The result: a vision emerged to “empower all generations with mindful awareness to create an active and healthy community.”

I sensed quickly that the Lower Eight was ready: ready to press forward into the next phase of progressive movement toward better health. Developing a common vision was step One, and Lower Eight public health leaders can now say, “We love it when a plan comes together.” **KCL**

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