The 4,036 incoming University of Kansas students who completed Jayhawks Give a Flock in 2019 should now have the knowledge and skills they need to take action in a situation like this, or any other situation where they think someone is at risk for sexual assault.

But is this mandatory bystander intervention program successfully changing the attitudes and actions of students? Now, a School of Social Welfare researcher is about to find out. Thanks to a $14,900 grant from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Juliana Carlson, AM, Ph.D., associate professor, will work with the KU Sexual Assault Prevention and Education Center (SAPEC) to evaluate eight sexual assault prevention programs the center offers students, faculty, and staff.
In addition, she will help create evaluation tools that will allow the SAPEC to measure change in students’ attitudes over their college career as they attend subsequent sexual assault prevention programs.

This work is vitally important to Carlson, who has spent her career working to end gender-based violence. Early on, Carlson worked with survivors of domestic and sexual violence at shelters in Kansas City and Chicago. After she received her master’s in social welfare at the University of Chicago, she decided to work toward preventing such abuse from occurring in the first place.

“I shifted my energy from wanting to support individuals to seeking to create community-level change. That’s where I want to focus. How do we shift from the crisis-oriented work we do in the United States and in social work to more prevention work,” she says.

Right now, there is increased focus on the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses and how to prevent it, Carlson says. Researchers like her are working to identify and address the behaviors and attitudes that can lead people to become victims or perpetrators of gender-based violence, such as rape myths. Rape myths include false views about sexual assault, such as “Men rape because of uncontrollable passion” or “Women who are raped were asking for it.”

Carlson has been supporting the work of SAPEC since it was founded in 2016. Now, thanks to this grant, she will be able to dedicate more time to developing and implementing evidence-based impact evaluation measures.

“This grant helps highlight and bring focus on the longitudinal impact of the SAPEC’s prevention work.”