

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Summary 2016-2017



United Way
of the Wabash Valley

An open and honest dialogue with Wabash Valley residents about the state of our community.

As part of an increased community outreach effort to shape its work in the coming years, United Way of the Wabash Valley hosted over 35 Community Conversations with hundreds of people attending, in addition to many meetings with local business leaders. With the conversations completed and evaluated, United Way is now providing a summary of findings and sharing their plan to address the most critical social issues our community faces.

In civic problem-solving, conversations usually take place among the powerful and the influence wielders, and intentional efforts are rarely made to include the overlooked voices of the community. Community Conversations ensure these voices are heard. Each conversation focused first on learning what kind of community the participants hoped for – understanding their aspirations for our shared community. From those aspirations, the conversations sought to identify barriers and challenges to reaching those preferred futures. We looked to the community to define what it wanted to be, where it wanted to go, and what barriers were in the way. Our sessions generated hundreds of pages of notes. Every page and comment was reviewed for common themes and unique ideas with four main concerns identified.

What Our Community Said...

"Parents who suffer from these issues don't provide a good home life, and lead the kids to make the same poor decisions"

"We're not keeping the types of jobs that make us better."

"Safety in our community is important. Need to be able to be out and feel safe. Not worry about kids in the park, cannot now."

"Morale. People here don't care."

"A ten-year-old committed suicide. How were things so bad for this young child that he thought he needed to commit suicide, and how did he know about suicide?"

"Boundaries (counties) should be irrelevant, we are one big community."

"Obstacles to breaking the cycle of poverty need to be removed"

"My kids are growing up in this drug environment, and I am beginning to think I should leave to remove them from danger. I also see the lack of job opportunity for them."

"In generational poverty you will see more fast food places as the knowledge of healthy eating is not there."

Common Concerns

	Drugs	The sale and abuse of drugs have created a health and safety problem in our entire community.
	Economic Decline and Jobs	There is a lack of family-sustaining employment or an ability to attract it.
	Safe Community	Crime, violence and drug use lead to an overall unsafe feeling in many areas and neighborhoods.
	Community Pride	Lack of pride for our community has become a deep-rooted trait that shows in our attitudes of how we treat our community.

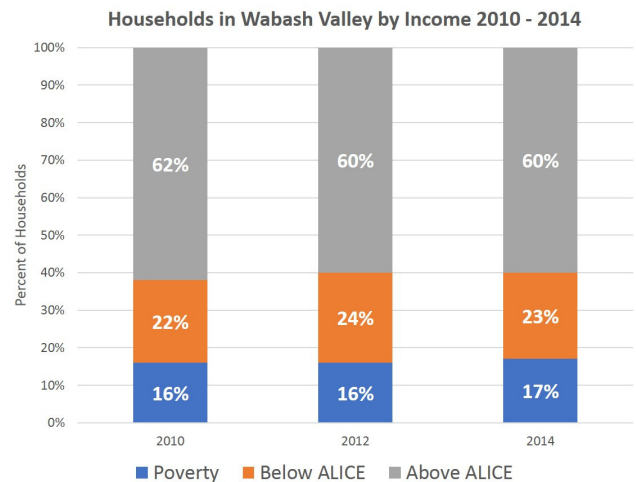
In hearing the community's voices and compiling their responses, one issue rose above and tied them all together -- the struggle to make ends meet for individuals and families. A recent multi-state study completed by Rutgers University, in partnership with United Ways around the country, showed a growing segment of our population in the Wabash Valley is working and staying above the poverty line, but not able to attain financial stability. The ALICE Report can help our community better understand how poverty is more than a federal government statistic, and involves real, struggling working families -- often the participants in our conversations.

Meet ALICE: Asset Limited • Income Constrained • Employed
ALICE is a hardworking member of the community who is employed yet does not earn enough to afford the basic necessities of life.

ALICE earns above the federal poverty level, but does not earn enough to afford a bare-bones household budget of housing, child care, food, transportation, and health care. The United Way ALICE Reports use new measures to provide a more accurate picture of financial insecurity in local communities.

For more information on ALICE visit: UnitedWayAlice.org

17% of households in our community are below the Federal Poverty line. BUT 40% are below ALICE .



This means: 

Over 30,000 Households below ALICE



United Way New Focus Areas

Struggling individuals and families face important daily decisions about what they need to do to survive. We understand that family stability and economic success can only happen if individuals are mentally and physically healthy, self-sufficient, and living in communities they are proud to call home.

As an organization, our United Way will begin a focused effort on alleviating this struggle for so many in our community and building individual and family economic success. There is no "one size fits all" answer, and no one person or organization can do it alone. That's why our United Way is changing our usual mode of business and building a collective movement of people and organizations to tackle this complex issue of poverty and the dilemma of struggling working families within our community.

The ALICE Report put data behind the many voices and provided our United Way and community a bold goal. In November 2017, United Way's Board of Directors adopted a resolution and strategic plan based on this new bold goal:



Move 10,000 families out of financial struggles and into stability!

We know that if we can tackle specific issues facing this population, it will have a positive ripple effect on those living below the poverty line and those above. United Way fights for the education, health, and financial stability of every person in our community. We believe that our role as a trusted community partner can begin to drive conversations about potential solutions to issues faced by this segment of our population.