

More families were financially self-sufficient in central Iowa in 2016

Still, one-third of individuals in Polk, Warren, and Dallas counties struggle to cover basic expenses

Des Moines, IA (December 21, 2017) – The percentage of families in Polk, Warren, and Dallas counties who are financially self-sufficient increased in 2016 to 65.9%, (by 11,003 individuals), after remaining flat for the past three years around 65.2%. The increase moves central Iowa closer to its community Goal for 2020 of increasing the percentage of families who are financially self-sufficient to 75%.

“This increase shows that many of our community’s collaborative efforts to address poverty are working,” said Elisabeth Buck, president of United Way of Central Iowa. “Through initiatives that are helping adults obtain a high school equivalency diploma and acquire skills for better jobs, we are making meaningful progress to improve families’ lives, especially for those who are employed.”

United Way of Central Iowa uses “The Cost of Living in Iowa” study from The Iowa Policy Project to define self-sufficiency as 250% of the federal poverty level, which allows families to cover basic expenses, including rent, utilities, and child care. Above that level, families are able to save, pay loans, cover education expenses, and afford other items that help them thrive. U.S. Census data focuses on 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL), where most families struggle to afford basic needs, including food, housing, clothing, transportation, and health care.

Changes from 2015 to 2016

In 2016, 1,265 fewer individuals lived below the FPL—a decrease to 11.1% of central Iowa’s population from 11.5% of the population in 2015. Other changes over the one-year period include:

- The number of children (ages 18 and under) living below the FPL decreased to 14.9% of the population from 15.7%
- The number of seniors (ages 65 and older) living below the FPL increased to 7% of the population from 6.5% in 2015.
- The number of African Americans living below the FPL decreased to 32% of the population from 36.8% the previous year.

Changes from 2011 to 2016

Over five years, the number of central Iowans living above 250% of poverty has increased by more than 26,600 individuals, while 12,100 more individuals are living

below the 100% federal poverty level (FPL). Some of the change can be attributed to an increase in central Iowa's population. Since 2011, central Iowa's population has increased 9.3%, by 49,579 people, accounting for 61% of Iowa's population growth.

Across central Iowa, more adults took advantage of postsecondary education—a key United Way of Central Iowa strategy to increase families' incomes and help employers fulfill a need for skilled workers. The region had a 7.8% increase in the number of individuals with some college and/or an associate degree, and a 13.9% increase in the number of people with a bachelor's degree or higher.

From 2015-2017, United Way of Central Iowa-funded programs reported the following results for individuals in central Iowa:

- More than 1,400 individuals achieved a high school equivalency diploma
- 1,462 central Iowans earned a work-related credential
- 10,064 central Iowans became work-ready
- 3,987 were placed in employment

“While we are seeing some gains for those who live in poverty and are working, we also continue to have one-third of individuals in central Iowa who live in poverty,” said Renee Miller, chief community impact officer at United Way of Central Iowa. “This means we have more work to do to address the barriers faced by those living in poverty and to engage central Iowans in the OpportUNITY plan focused on improving the lives of these families.”

OpportUNITY is a collective impact initiative managed by United Way of Central Iowa that is pulling together central Iowans to fight against the barriers that keep individuals from achieving financial stability. Workgroups are addressing the major factors that impact poverty and quarterly summits increase awareness and collaboration around key issues such as food insecurity and affordable housing.

From 2011-2016, the following changes occurred for individuals living below the FPL:

- Among communities in Polk, Warren, and Dallas Counties, Waukee had a 159.1% increase in poverty, Ankeny saw a 121.1% increase, and Urbandale had an 80% increase, compared with an 18% increase in Des Moines.
- Among age groups living in extreme poverty, the number of seniors increased 57.7%, the number of children ages 18 and under increased 20.2%, and the working age population increased 21.9%.
- Among minority groups living in extreme poverty, Asians showed a population change of 109.4% and African Americans and Hispanics had a 14.3% and 14.8%

increase, respectively.

- Among family type, married couples with children, single fathers, and single mothers living in extreme poverty all increased—with single father families experiencing the greatest increase of 54.8%.

United Way of Central Iowa's legislative agenda for the 2018 session focuses specifically on fixing some of the issues that keep families from achieving financial self-sufficiency, such as the child care "cliff effect," limited career development opportunities for students, and the automatic driver's license suspension for non-driving drug offenders. View the agenda at www.unitedwaydm.org/advocate.

United Way of Central Iowa's data team analyzed data from the American Community Survey and Census 2000 Supplementary Survey. The data is collected from a sample of housing units and used to produce estimates of the actual figures that would have been obtained by interviewing the entire population using the same methodology.

About United Way of Central Iowa

United Way of Central Iowa fights for the health, education, and financial stability of all central Iowans. For over 100 years, United Way of Central Iowa has brought together nonprofits, businesses, government, community leaders, volunteers, and more to identify and tackle central Iowa's toughest challenges. Focusing on issues such as early grade reading, poverty, mental and social health, high school graduation, and career training, United Way of Central Iowa inspires central Iowans to give, advocate, and volunteer to improve lives and empower all in our community. For more information about United Way of Central Iowa, visit www.unitedwaydm.org.

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