



Community Conversations Report



2016-2017

An open and honest dialogue with Allen County residents about the state of our community

LIVE UNITED

**United
Way**



United Way of Allen County

www.unitedwayallencounty.org

THANK YOU

For over a year, United Way of Allen County embarked on a journey of listening to our community with the goal of letting those voices inform our work. Such a massive undertaking could not have been accomplished if we worked in isolation. It is only with the assistance of our funded partners, board volunteers and others in the community that we could bring together such a broad section of Allen County to share with us their concerns and aspirations for the place they call home. Alongside the United Way team, these volunteers played a critical role in guiding residents through these many meaningful and productive conversations.

Special thanks to the following organizations that either hosted or participated in Community Conversations:

Allen County Public Library (Main Branch, as well as Grabill, New Haven, Woodburn, Pontiac, and Monroeville branches)	SCORE Fort Wayne Community Schools Family and Community Engagement Center Fort Wayne United Good Shepherd Church Indiana Michigan Power Indiana Tech Islamic Center of Fort Wayne Ivy Tech of Northeast Indiana Lutheran Social Services McMillan Community Center Multicultural Council New Haven Middle School Northeast Area Neighborhood Association North Side High School	Parkview Community Health (PRMC and Parkview Randallia) Positive Resource Connection Purdue Extension Office Renaissance Pointe YMCA Southeast Area Neighborhood Association South Side High School The Summit Trinity English Lutheran Church Trinity Episcopal Church Turnstone Wellspring Interfaith Social Services Williams-Woodland Neighborhood Association Women's Bureau
Amani Family Services (formerly Crime Victim Care) Brightpoint Burmese Muslim Education Community Center Carriage House Center for Nonviolence Citilink City Life Center City of Fort Wayne Cornerstone Youth Center SCAN, Inc.		

GREETINGS FROM DENT JOHNSON AND DAVID NICOLE



Dent Johnson



David Nicole

We accomplished much over the past year at United Way of Allen County. We built a strong foundation for the work we will undertake in the coming months and years.

From our training with The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation in early 2016 to the completion of our first rounds of Community Conversations in December, we have been taking in as much information as we could to learn how to better position ourselves to serve the community.

For decades, United Way has been a respected convener of resources. We collected money through organization campaigns and funneled it to vetted area non-profit organizations. We put volunteers to work throughout the community with our annual Day of Caring.

Now we are adding to that work, looking at more ways we can improve the lives for all who call Allen County home. We hope the information contained in this report helps you better understand your community, and shows you ways you can work alongside United Way as hand-raisers and game-changers.

We know how much work we have done together in the past, and we look forward to seeing how much more we can do as we continue to LIVE UNITED.

Dent Johnson
2016 Board Chair
United Way of Allen County

David Nicole
President and CEO
United Way of Allen County

WE LISTENED

In early 2016, United Way of Allen County, our funded partners, and board members took advantage of a powerful relationship between The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation and the Indiana Association of United Ways. Through training at The Harwood Public Innovators Lab, we learned how to increase our organization's impact on our community.

Founded in 1998, The Harwood Institute is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that teaches and inspires individuals and organizations to solve some of the community's most pressing problems and how to work together. Nonprofit organizations from around the world, including AARP and United Way Worldwide, have integrated The Harwood principles and practice into their work, spreading the Institute's approach to thousands of communities in more than 40 countries.

At the core of the Harwood Institute's decades-long approach is this idea of "turning outward"—positioning your organization differently in the community going forward—seeing and hearing residents of the community and acting with intentionality to create change.

For us this means we must go about our work differently. We can no longer rely on our boardroom as the sole place where we devise the strategies we and our funded partners pursue in our community. We must hear voices other than our own, particularly in how we select those partners and what growth and success looks like.

United Way learned that if we turned outward, and made more intentional choices about creating change, we could have a greater impact in the Allen County community. We began to shift the approach in how we go about our work as a community leader.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The center of our approach to "turning outward" is the Community Conversations.

These kitchen-table style sessions enabled United Way to hear from a wide variety of people about the issues within a broad section of the community of the area they serve. The conversations provided a safe place for area residents to come together and share their aspirations and concerns for their community. Limited by size to about a dozen people at each meeting, the 60-90 minute conversations had one facilitator and one or two note takers to record the essence of the conversation.

Together, each group identified priority issues that should be addressed and barriers that prevent progress. The group helped identify potential action steps that could be taken, as well as gained insight into whom the group trusts to act and lead change.

To help set up the Community Conversation groups, United Way reached out to others in the community—civic and community organizations, houses of worship, neighborhood associations and employers—and asked them to participate in the process by hosting a conversation. We found this strategy enabled us to effectively gain community trust and participation.

We held these Conversations on buses, at churches, at library branches and elsewhere throughout the community. We listened to a variety of voices, and when we finished and looked at the demographics of the conversations, we found they nearly paralleled the demographics of the community at large.

When we sorted out what we collected in the Community Conversations, we identified some of the key issues and took those back to the community for another series of conversations. These "Deeper Dives" gave further opportunity for dialogue.

Between the original Community Conversations and the Deeper Dives, United Way of Allen County held more than 50 listening sessions and heard from more than 500 area residents over the course of 2016.

Because they remain a valuable and necessary tool, the Community Conversations will continue as part of our ongoing work.

WHAT WE HEARD

***What we heard throughout the community was consistent.
People in Allen County want...***

...to live in **safe neighborhoods** that foster a **healthy lifestyle** and a sense of **belonging**; where they can feel **connected** to each other and the resources in their community.

ASPIRATIONS FOR ALLEN COUNTY

Conversation participants expressed a desire to live in a community where:

"you feel secure and have commonality"

"friendly, peaceful, and integrated neighborhoods"

"kids aren't surrounded by violence and drugs"

"it looks like people are proud of what they have"

"designed spaces, streets, bike lanes, and sidewalks that lend themselves to healthy activities"

"access to healthy food and more farmers markets"

"you can get to know your neighbors and neighbors look after one another"

"affordable housing in all parts of the city"

"everyone has access to quality healthcare and mental health services"

"healthy, drug-free community"

"affordable, low-cost community activities for families"

"diverse not necessarily in terms of race, but in terms of skill-base, and acceptance of people's differences"

"people from all walks of life are working together"

"access to basic transportation, food, and schools"

"it is affordable with available child care and good schools"

"more jobs and job training for young people"

"everyone has a solid opportunity to be successful and make the most of their lives"



We Listened.

COMMON CONCERNS

Allen County residents most often identified the following concerns as the most critical issues compromising the vitality of our community:

SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS– Overall, residents expressed concern about the amount of **crime, violence, and drug use** in our community, especially among our youth. They also worried about the diverse **homeless** population, and the amount of services available to them. They recognized the **need for more safe and affordable housing** for low-income and working families. They would like to live in a more **aesthetically-pleasing community**.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE– Area residents recognized **a lack of resources and a persistent stigma around those with mental health issues**. They also expressed concern about **the prevalence of a variety of health issues**, as well as a clear demand for **better access to affordable healthy foods**.

BELONGING – Many believe that Allen County is **segregated**, suffering from a **lack of integration which promotes a lack of understanding and representation of diversity** (socio-economic, age, disability, sexual orientation, culture, etc.) within our community. Many feel that **people do not welcome what they do not understand**. **A lack of translation support** and present **language barriers** were also noted.

CONNECTED– **Public transportation inadequacies and lack of access to public transportation** make it difficult for Allen County residents to take advantage of resources, employment, healthcare, grocery stores and other services. Conversation participants expressed concern about **a lack of available opportunities for youth** including jobs, extracurricular activities, guidance, role models, etc. Many expressed a desire for **more job training and opportunities**, as well as access to **better education**.

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERT KNOWLEDGE

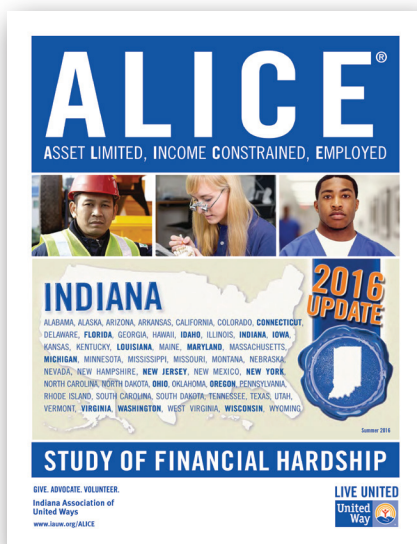
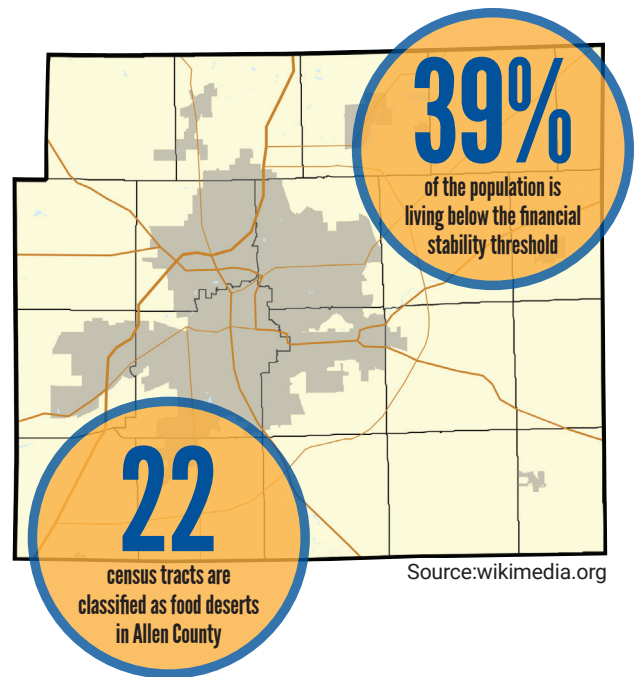
The information we collected through our listening sessions became our **public knowledge**.

Through our role in the community, we already had a significant amount of **expert knowledge** about Allen County—its makeup, education levels, employment levels and economics. That expert knowledge is already used in how we determine our work in the community.

For example:

- **\$49,124** is the median household income
- **39%** of the population is living below the financial stability threshold
- **45%** of renters spend 30% or more of their household income on rent
- **22** census tracts are classified as food deserts in Allen County
- **37%** of children ages 0-5 are in high-quality child care centers
- **18%** of their income is spent on child care for families at 200% poverty
- **49%** of public school students are receiving free or reduced lunches
- **27%** of the population aged 25 years and over have earned a bachelor's degree or higher
- **39*** in overall health outcomes (length of life and quality of life)
- **44*** in overall health factors (health behaviors, clinical care, social & economic factors, and physical environment)

*Rank of 92 counties in Indiana



Another part of our expert knowledge, one that has become incredibly valuable to our work, is the **United Way ALICE Project**. The acronym stands for Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed. This ongoing study, a joint effort between United Way and Rutgers University in New Jersey, looks at the growing number of working households in our communities who do not earn enough to afford basic necessities. The study now involves 15 states including Indiana with more coming on line in the next year.

Locally, about 33,000 households struggle to keep their financial heads above water while working one, two or even three jobs. If you add those families to the number of families living below the federal poverty guidelines, that makes up about two out of every five families in Allen County.

The Mission of United Way of Allen County is to...

Unite our community's time, talent, and treasure to cultivate and advance community solutions that address the most critical issues around basic needs, education, financial stability, and healthy lives.

THE INTERSECT

United Way needs to be more precise in our work, and look for ways to put our community's resources in the place where they will have the biggest impact.

We looked at that intersection of our expert knowledge, the public knowledge we collected and our clearly-defined mission. That place, that center of what we knew and what we learned, is what we identified as the focus of our work, where what we do can be accomplished with greater intentionality for more meaningful results.

We don't have to do everything. Many other organizations in Allen County already work to address some of the other concerns raised by our Community Conversation participants. Those concerns are valid and should be addressed.

But we are directing our focus on issues surrounding those who are working hard and struggling to make ends meet.



OUR FOCUS

We knew that more than 33,000 households, nearly 25 percent of the population, in Allen County struggle to attain financial stability, to get out of the cycle of living paycheck to paycheck or live in fear of even the smallest of crisis putting them at financial risk. This population was identified for us through the ALICE study, and is defined as households that earn more than the U.S. poverty level, but less than the basic cost of living for the county. These are people that are working, but fall through the cracks. They make too much to qualify for many federal assistance programs, but too little to meet some of their family's most basic needs.

Many of those issues we were already tackling through our own work or the work of our funded partners, such as quality and affordable early childhood education, medical transportation and access to food. We knew there was more to do.

In January 2017, United Way of Allen County's Board of Directors adopted the following resolution based on the intersection of our expert knowledge, public knowledge and existing United Way Mission:

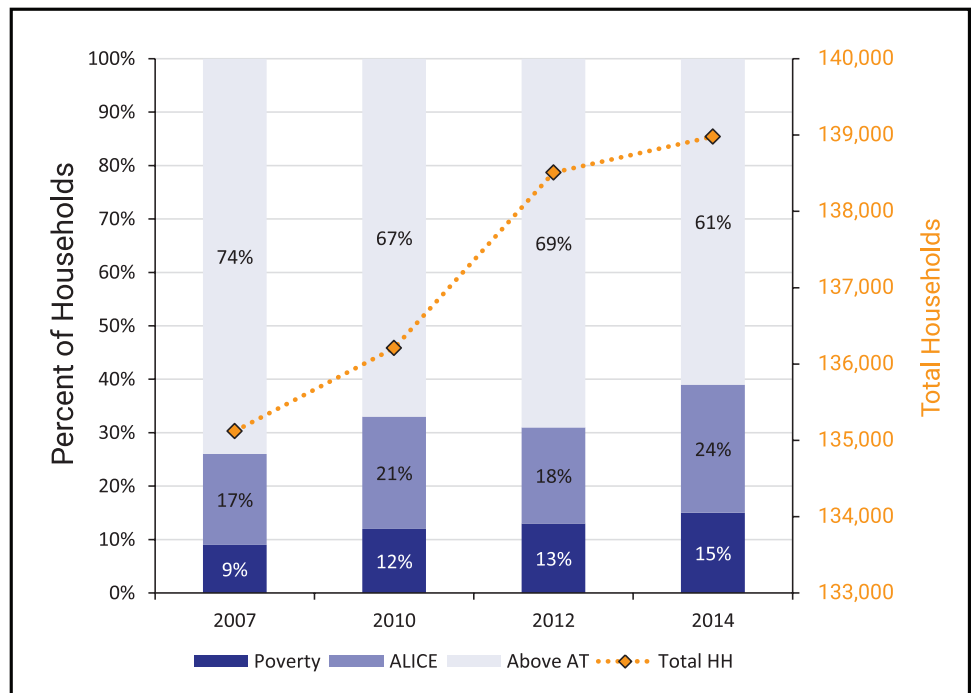
In concert with its mission, United Way of Allen County hereby resolves through community knowledge and collaboration to focus and align all future funding and resource deployment decisions to serve the needs of working populations challenged to make ends meet.

United Way of Allen County is uniquely positioned to connect our community's resources in a way that can bring real solutions to identified issues they face. In addition, we remain committed to our mission of addressing the most critical issues, such as basic needs and financial stability.

Households by Income, 2007-2014

We know that if we can address the issues facing this population, it will have a positive ripple effect on those living both below the poverty line and those above. In addition to our continued support for basic needs, we believe that by focusing more resources to address the issues faced by families struggling to make ends meet, we will have a greater impact on the entire community.

We believe our reputation as a trusted community partner can begin to drive the conversations about possible solutions to issues faced by this population. Over the next few months, we will be gathering community partners for a series of meetings in their areas of expertise to identify what is already being done and what gaps exist. Collectively, we hope to determine the best strategies and outcomes to meet the needs of our community.



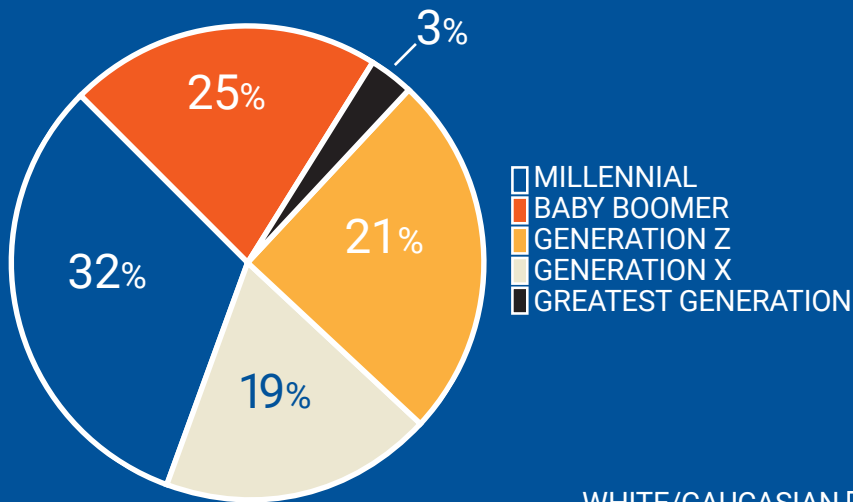
As we complete those meetings, and as we continue to gather residents for further Community Conversations, we will let you know what we are hearing and what we can do together.

United Way of Allen County continues to bring together the community's resources, convening hand-raisers and game-changers to fight for Allen County's working families.

Join us as we **LIVE UNITED.**

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION DEMOGRAPHIC SNAP SHOT *

AGE

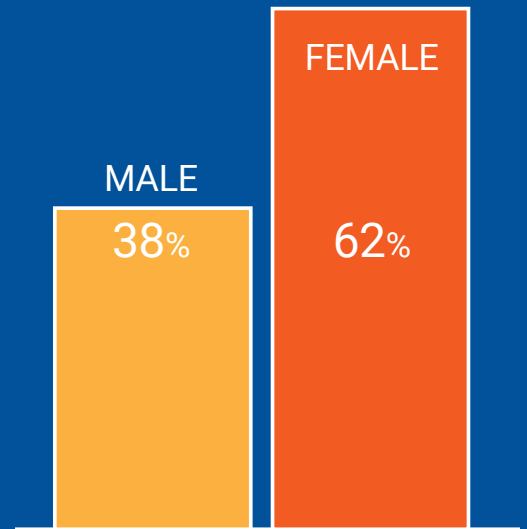


WHITE/CAUCASIAN
BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN
HISPANIC/LATINO
ASIAN
OTHER

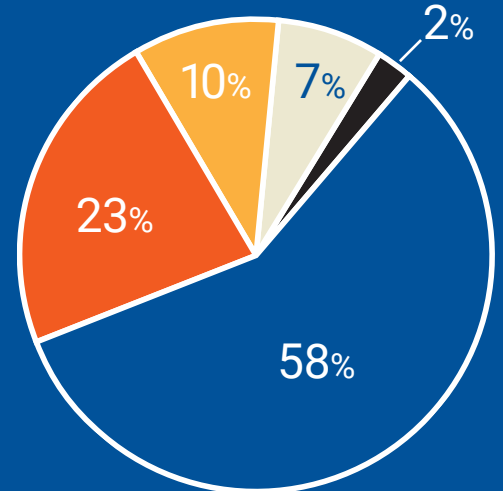
EDUCATION

- 31% 4 YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE
- 21% HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
- 17% MASTER/GRADUATE
- 16% HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE
- 8% 2 YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE
- 4% MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT
- 2% CERTIFICATION
- 1% DOCTORATE

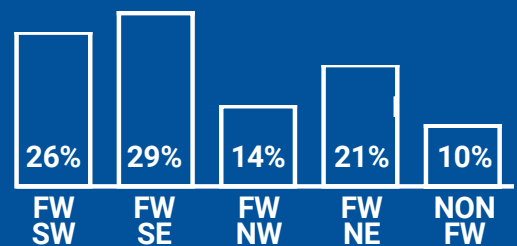
GENDER



ETHNICITY



LOCATION



Total Conversations: 52
Total Participants: 546

*Not every participant completed a demographic survey.

LIVE UNITED



United Way of Allen County

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