



# SYNOPSIS OF POVERTY TO POSSIBILITIES EVENT - 2018

*Alignment, collaboration and partnership of systems to help  
42% of Pierce County households who are struggling*

Last year, United Way of Pierce County (United Way) put a stake in the ground around our bold goal of lifting 15,000 households out of poverty by 2028 by moving them into financial stability. We cannot do this alone - - no one can. To tackle deeply entrenched and complex social problems we need to collaborate to achieve significant and lasting social change. No single policy, government department, organization or program can tackle or solve the increasingly complex problem of poverty.

In 2014 and in 2016, we commissioned ALICE studies to measure populations in our communities who are Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained and Employed. The ALICE population represents those among us who are working, but due to childcare costs, transportation challenges, high cost of living and so much more-- are living paycheck to paycheck. In essence, these individuals/families are one paycheck away from being 'in the system.' According to the research, 36% of households in Pierce County were ALICE in 2014 and in the 2016 report, this percentage is now 42%. By working with organizations, collaborative partnerships and those directly impacted by poverty, we are committed to working along the continuum so that families can move from crisis to vulnerable to stable to self-sufficient and eventually, to thriving. The need to look at the continuum of services on the path from crisis to thriving was emphasized by many individuals at this past year's Poverty to Possibility summit.

Dr. Michael McAfee, CEO of PolicyLink, challenged our community to embody radical imagination. He said, "The magical narrative doesn't make people change...it's when you show up. The time is now - to show up. This is the vanguard of the movement." We heard this challenge and also heard yours - the citizens of our County. As a convener and catalyst for change, Uwe have an opportunity to create space for all sectors to have the authentic conversations and discourse to make the meaningful changes needed for our most vulnerable families.

"We cannot social service our way  
out of poverty."

*President & CEO, United Way, Dona  
Ponepinto*

Key themes from this year's summit were:

1. Impact of the "cliff effect" (childcare, transportation, housing) on families
2. A need for training and greater participation in advocacy issues (legislative and organizational)
3. Opportunities to address systematic challenges/opportunities
  - a. Racial equity
  - b. Health equity
  - c. Access to capital
  - d. Housing
  - e. Criminal Justice System

The following pages highlight the key themes with barriers and potential solutions of moving families ahead.

**Next Steps:**

In the next several weeks, we will work diligently to outline the timing for the next conversations and work groups focused on the above key themes and how you can get involved. We will support organizations and groups that are leading the work outlined above and strive to not duplicate efforts. For instance, we will support Project Child Success, who will lead the work on behalf of Pierce County on remedying the effects of the childcare benefits cliff on our struggling families. We will also identify the 15,000 households by both visualizing this on our Poverty to Possibilities online resource site (which we are developing) and highlight organizations that are willing to share their work with us.

We will keep you up to date on progress and learnings on our Poverty to Possibilities resource site. Our job is to create the map of intersections so that we may gain a deeper understanding for the work transpiring in Pierce County. Based on the

learnings from the summit, we are recommending the following action groups: Advocacy (specific issues to be determined); Impact of the cliff effect on families (specifically childcare); and a focus on some of the key systemic issues that are the most challenging barriers to moving families out of poverty (health and racial inequities, racial injustice, access to capital, affordable housing).

To supplement the work groups and to respond to a theme that was addressed in the summit, we will also compile a repository of items to help Pierce County citizens have a better understanding of the issue. On the online resource page, we will have the following:

1. Pierce County Data – agencies can pull various data sources to help them provide a broader story of the gaps and opportunities in various geographic footprints in the county. We welcome your data if you wish to share it with us.
2. Environmental Scan of organizations, community groups, collaborations that are supporting the bold goal of lifting 15,000 households out of poverty.
3. Advocacy Agendas – we will have a clearinghouse of various advocacy agendas from Pierce County agencies or statewide entities.
4. Equity – we will aggregate resources on diversity, equity and inclusion. The last two years have challenged our community to center conversations on race and institutional racism. While we are not

“We had 30 days to find better jobs as our rent went up by 30%. I had to find work instead of being a stay-at-home mom. I contacted our local agency that takes children as you’d call it – they have ‘slots’ for people like me. I had a list of 49 daycares within a 10-mile radius. 49 calls later – no place for both of my kids (of different ages). I could’ve quit. The diligence it took to find a place for my kids was grueling. And I work with people who give up. I wasn’t going to. Anyway, you’d think it’d get easier after I found a place for my two kids. It didn’t. Then I started working and I lost my food, WIC, and medical subsidies. You talk about a benefits cliff? Well, we dove off it head first. We are now further behind than before and we can’t get ahead. Worse off, policies dictate that if I marry my partner, we’d lose even more.”

- Panelist, Kelly Blucher

experts in this field, we will start here and in working with key community leaders, we are committed to increasing awareness and building understanding.

The Poverty to Possibilities online resource site will be a living tool. It will be updated regularly and modified to reflect findings, new information and resources. We will include your data, should you wish to share it and make it public, to help bolster the case for Pierce County neighborhoods and/or communities. We plan to create a shared dashboard focused on moving 15,000 households out of poverty. With your buy-in we can will share accountability and to uncover ways to shift the story for such a large growing portion of our county - 42% of Pierce County!

If you'd like the notes from any of our conversations, focus groups or convenings, please contact Lindsay Morgan Tracy ([lindsayt@uwpc.org](mailto:lindsayt@uwpc.org)).

## THEME 1 – Impact of the Cliff Effect (Child Care, Transportation, and Housing)

BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Benefits cliff                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do we not pull the rug out from under the struggling individuals?</li> <li>- Our biggest barrier is not being able to compromise when it comes to enacting policies.</li> <li>- “The system” almost discourages moving away from benefits or graduating from programs.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Kinship care (e.g. family members or neighbors) is not discussed and this is huge in our community. More kids are here than in “slots.”</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Government and nonprofits need to involve those who are living it.</li> <li>2. Create a place for us to see those who are involved in the benefits cliff work at local, state and national level.</li> <li>3. Greater childcare subsidy (longer term – extensions for families that have just begun employment).</li> <li>4. Incent people who are affected by this to come to the table with money.</li> <li>5. We need to provide childcare and cash incentives for those impacted by poverty or for those who are struggling to take part in leadership, programs and policy making.</li> </ol>

“The subsidy income childcare institutions receive is fixed and it’s 30% of what it really costs to care for a kid in daycare. Who is picking up the other 70% - middle to upper class families is the answer. Trust me, we don’t get into child care to hurt families. What is the system doing to us?

How did we get to this point where child care is 30% of our income? This is negligence.”

- WA Child Care Center Association, Luc Jasmin

## THEME 2 – Advocacy: Legislative Advocacy and Organizational Advocacy

BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Partners that don't reflect communities being served.</li> <li>2. Learnings are not surprising and they are: Middle class is being hallowed out, No infant care, Service sector jobs don't pay enough, Cost of living is too high, Structural racism, Unequal opportunities by zip code,– we need a different system.</li> <li>3. Lack of compromise with policies.</li> <li>4. Divisive 2-party system promotes “othering”.</li> <li>5. If I check one box, I am disqualified for aid.</li> <li>6. Assistance provides essential support for households below the ALICE threshold but cannot lift all households to economic stability – this is prevalent in government, nonprofits and health care.</li> <li>7. As a financial institution the biggest barrier to being more economically just = strict laws + regulations as a barrier to providing more inclusive access to capital.</li> </ol> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p>“What would it look like in this region if companies weren't oppressive? Nonprofits are cleaning up the businesses messes and companies justify it by giving nonprofits small funds.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- CEO of PolicyLink, Dr. Michael McAfee</p> </div>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bridge the disconnect between policy makers and people being impacted by “policy garbage”.</li> <li>2. Talk about the failures.</li> <li>3. Create state-level system of interagency credits for actions that save housing or work preventatively in ways that alleviates justice, mental health and health costs.</li> <li>4. Many nonprofits need to bond together and do advocacy together – and in a more effective way.</li> <li>5. More trainings and/or activities to be a better advocate for others.</li> <li>6. Businesses need to look at ways to empower and support employees on the career track.</li> <li>7. Get serious about creating a policy environment that creates opportunities for everyone and then show up with a heart of inclusion.</li> </ol> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p>“We value a system of crisis remediation. We talk about asthma – it's giving out inhalers yet not doing anything about the moldy houses. Most of us working in crisis remediation now have fewer resources and it's not sustainable. We have a responsibility to use health and equity with our own decisions – not just in Olympia or with our elected officials, but in our nonprofits, businesses and faith-based organizations.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Tacoma Pierce County Health Department, Jacques Colon</p> </div>

## THEME 3 – The System: Ensuring Public/Private/Government/Faith-Based/Foundations are Working Together

BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Alignment of multiple partnerships aren't happening. Partnerships are not a competition- we need to be vulnerable, honest, share experiences, be transparent, hold each other accountable and break down silos.</li> <li>2. There is a tremendous duplication of efforts.</li> <li>3. All the same people at many of the same meetings – mostly nonprofit sector leadership.</li> <li>4. Funders need to re-think outcome measures. Are they meaningful? Why do they choose measures that make nonprofits fit a square peg in a round hole? Learn from the boots on the ground.</li> <li>5. Spend way too much time/energy on paperwork over authentic connections with people/advocacy. Funders/gov't want to know cost per 'unit' and costs vary significantly depending on the varying barriers.</li> <li>6. Punitive monitoring stands in the way of services (won't get money if 'x' isn't achieved).</li> <li>7. Funders/government want to fund immediate results, and you won't get that with the systems.</li> <li>8. Not funding administrative overhead is a costly misunderstanding.</li> <li>9. Paternalistic systems punish and do so inequitably. It will take power, privilege and money holders to dismantle the systems they have created, but we are powerless (or are we powerful) to hold them accountable.</li> <li>10. It is imperative, but also at times feels impossible, to stay in a mental space of abundance when nonprofits are being eroded.</li> <li>11. Give us time (to have conversations like these) and resources (to pay for experimentation and iteration) to learn about how we can connect better between seemingly disparate orgs/institutions.</li> <li>12. When looking at the system, you can't just look at Tacoma. It has to be a blend of all of it – neighborhood, city, state.</li> <li>13. The strategies are set top down so funders who are disconnected from the realities of the work are often designing solutions that aren't in the best interest of the populations, and these funding</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Resource list for partnerships and map of partnerships for Pierce County. And list Pierce County funders, metrics and duplication of work to look for better alignment opportunities. Add where community-based organizations are meeting in specific areas (county, city, and community) and what are their areas of concentration (children/families, housing, education, adult services)?</li> <li>2. Create a system of continuous change and improvement – with nonprofits, businesses, government, philanthropy and faith-based institutions.</li> <li>3. Our community needs to maximize resources rather than duplicate efforts. We need more of a well-tuned, centralized center for working together. There are too many nonprofits/other agencies claiming that they do things better, rather than working together throughout the community.</li> <li>4. We need more collaboration with businesses.</li> <li>5. The depth of our connections to others will dictate success of reducing or thwarting poverty.</li> <li>6. This was a great conversation that needs to continue. We need to get specific and stay even if it's difficult and takes a long time.</li> <li>7. Use the framework from the Aspen Institute to determine community readiness for systems change.</li> <li>8. Collaborative work – the system – 'the capacity of the network'             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How can United Way help nonprofits not work in siloes?</li> <li>b. How can United Way help funders not work in siloes?</li> <li>c. How can United Way help businesses see they need to be a part of the solution?</li> </ol> </li> <li>9. Our system is not designed for radical change just crisis mode. What if there are less 501c and we worked bigger on system change? Philanthropy is designed to support programs not system change-prevention.</li> <li>10. Are we using our voices as leaders? How do we stand together? Authenticity can fly in face of perceived "greater good"; access capital; chasing</li> </ol>

realities cause nonprofits to change their strategy to acquire funding.

“Shift power and resources, center conversations around race, and choose genuine connection over safe difference.”

- *Keynote Speaker 2017, Mia Birdsong*

development dollars; how do we reward proactive vs reactivity; some changes will take years to see results; Decisions - How to communicate long term cost/benefits; Know the 15K - asking for the fully loaded cost of development; collective impact model - all together moving in the same direction.

11. I think as individuals, especially white people, need to be ok with being wrong and having conversations that may be hard.
12. We need honest conversations, even when they make leaders uncomfortable, about the problems and systemic racism that our community fosters. The current "cheerleading" approach just serves to cover up the actual problems. It's far more energizing to tackle real issues than to pretend everything is fine...Tacoma was far more successful in solving problems when we acknowledged and embraced our shortcomings and our scrappiness. We were willing to take risks. We listened to various voices. Now everything needs to be "pretty" and "on message" and upbeat. We need to get real.

Lastly, thank for you to those that were able to attend our annual Poverty to Possibilities event. We could not have done this without the support of our generous sponsors, our thought partners, and you – the attendees. We are very appreciative of your feedback at the event and following the event so that we could create this report for you.

We assure you that the comments and suggestions will be used as we continue to move forward to impact the 15,000 households in Pierce County. Thank you again.

An agency executive said she was going to make an immediate change after the event as she never really understood how hard it was to find child care from the ‘open slots’. She said she was going to make an immediate change to how the agency does its practice based on Kelly’s story on how hard it was to find ‘child care’ within a 10-mile radius of her home. She said she would immediately rectify the previous ‘stop to services’ when a client couldn’t find childcare in 3-5 days and provide more ample time to clients to find childcare.

- *Nonprofit director*