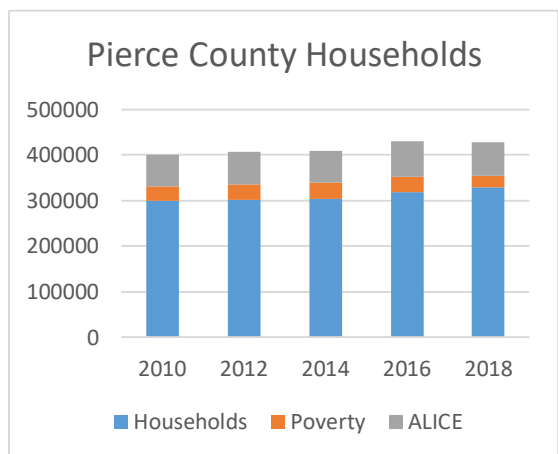


FROM POVERTY TO POSSIBILITIES 2020

A Community Approach to a Common Goal

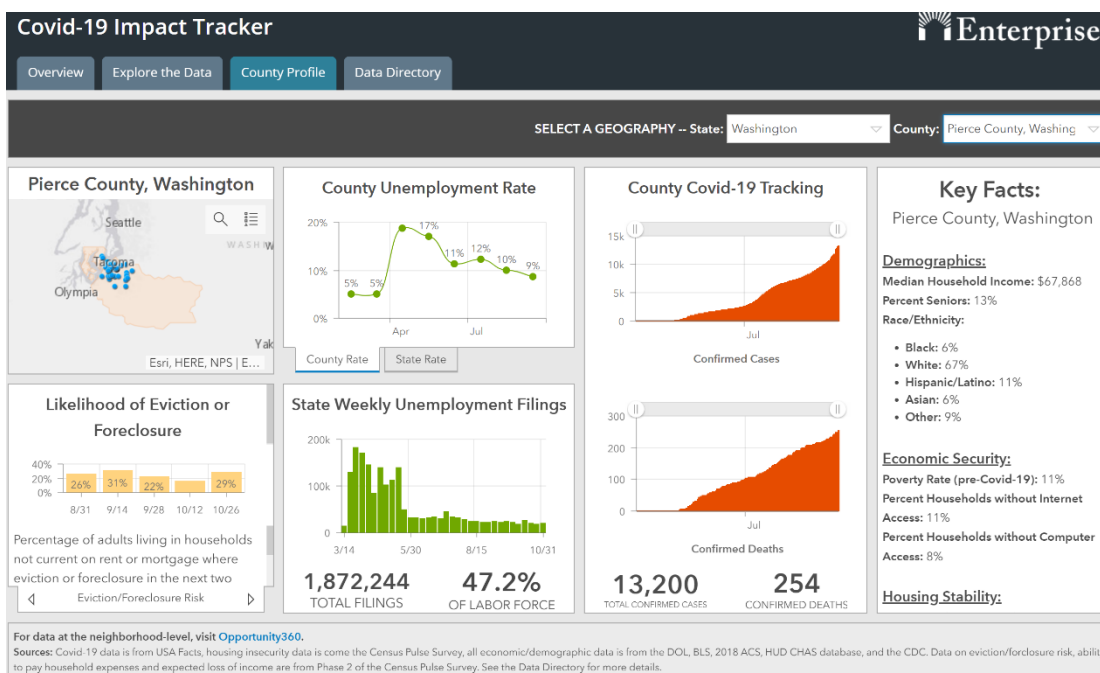


United Way of Pierce County (United Way) put a stake in the ground around our bold goal of lifting 15,000 households out of poverty by 2028 and moving them into financial stability. By addressing the interconnected issues affecting children and families in our community, we are ensuring that families are stronger, individuals gain stability and kids are more successful. We know one organization alone can't solve our community's toughest problems. Moving the needle on challenging, complex issues like poverty requires individual and cross-sector collaboration that are focused on results. United Way can and does facilitate that work--one family at a time.



In 2014, 2016, and again in 2020, we commissioned ALICE studies to measure populations in our communities who are Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, and Employed (ALICE). The ALICE population represents those among us who are working but are living paycheck to paycheck due to childcare costs, transportation challenges, high cost of living and so much more. In essence, these individuals/families are one paycheck away from being 'in the system.' According to the research, in 2018, 23% of households in Pierce County were considered to be ALICE with another 8% of households living at or below the poverty line for a total of 31% of families who were struggling to get by. For 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the poverty rate to jump to 11% with many more families struggling with lost jobs due to industry shutdowns.

An estimated 29% of households are at risk of eviction when the moratorium ends in December. 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 stable to self-sufficient and, ultimately, to thriving. To make it through this crisis, however, individuals and families need to be resilient, and that was the focus of this year's From Poverty to Possibility summit.



Key themes from this year's summit were:

1. BIPOC, women, and people with disabilities are disproportionately affected by poverty
2. COVID-19 has amplified racial inequities
3. Racism is a public health issue
4. Adversity and trauma are being experienced at the community level in record numbers
5. Without policy change, we will not dismantle the apparatus that drives inequity across our communities

“We can’t have resilient individuals if they aren’t in a community that supports resilience.”

*-Dr. Wendy Ellis,
George Washington University*

The following highlights notes from Dr. Ali Modarres and Keynote, Dr. Wendy Ellis that are intended to keep the conversation moving forward.

Dr. Ali Modarres

“COVID-19 has amplified our inequities and will continue to do so if we don’t focus on racial and social justice.”

- Those in poverty and ALICE families have already experienced negative economic impacts of COVID-19:
 - Housing and food insecurity has grown and will continue to do so
 - Health impact and mental health consequences of health and economic stress
 - Historical patterns of racial injustice have been aggravated under COVID-19 meaning BIPOC communities are affected disproportionately by COVID-19 and its economic and health consequences
 - Remove systems and engines that drive racial inequities
- What to work on:
 - Poverty reduction programs and family support systems need to be scaled up
 - Our region needs to address wage gaps and income security in a serious and aggressive manner
 - We need to consider the fact that many of our service sector workers (one of our largest economic sectors) do not earn enough to sustain an equitable and reasonable quality of life
 - We need to remember that the engines that produced social and racial inequities are still in place. They have just been aggravated in the COVID-19 era. That means that our interventions and course corrections need to be scaled up as well, in order to make poverty to possibilities a reality

“How do we move from programs and practices to truly disrupting a system...we need to create the political will for change.”

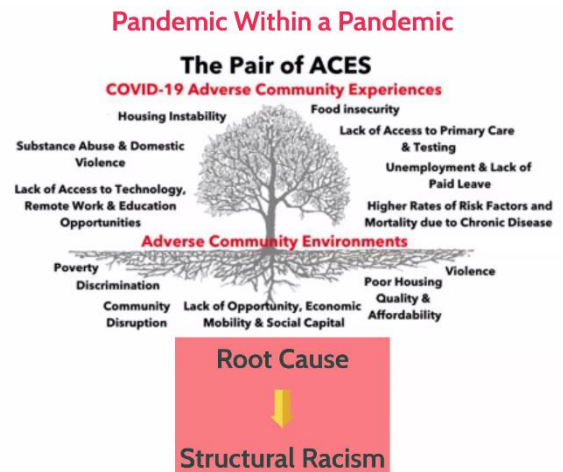
*-Dr. Wendy Ellis,
George Washington University*

Dr. Wendy Ellis

“Not about us without us!”

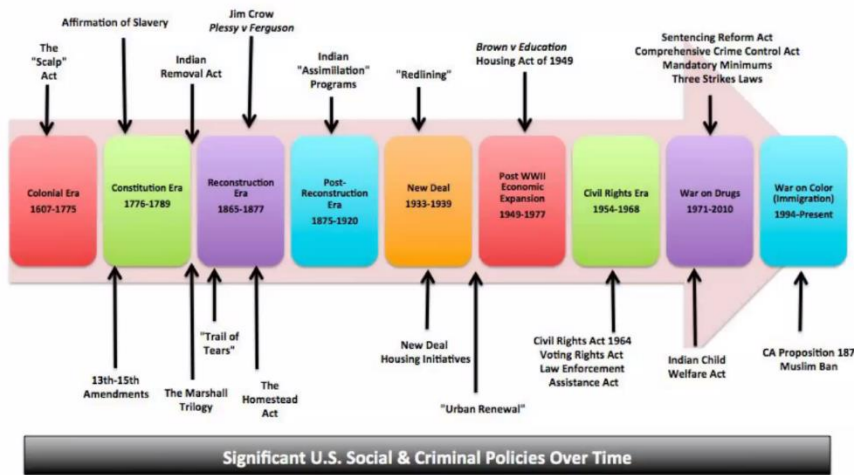
- When building community resilience, it is important to consider who should be at the table and what are the different roles we all play in creating and dismantling this process that perpetuates poverty in our communities
- We must understand the lived experience of adversity and trauma and inequity, and not just from community data, but also from the lived experience of those in the community

- In 2020, we are addressing this pandemic within a pandemic:
 - Increased substance abuse
 - Increased domestic violence
 - Stress and mental health issues
 - Children struggling due to lack of access to technology and/or having to teach themselves because parents have to work outside the home, creating even larger learning gaps for low-income students



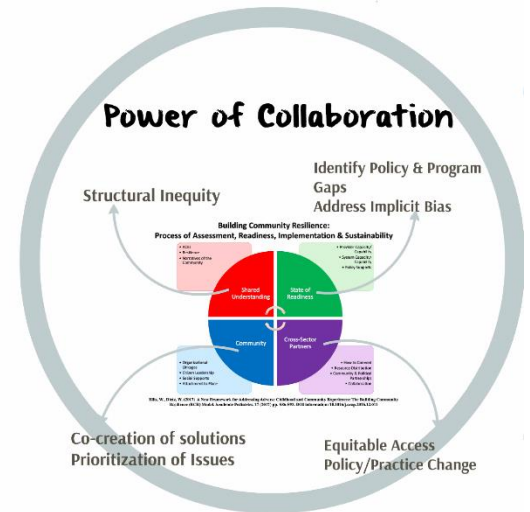
- When talking about structural racism, we must understand that we are talking about a system of policies that were designed to reinforce white supremacy, whether it is the domination and power over health, wealth or wellbeing.

Understanding the Roots of Inequity & Trauma



- When we look at our ALICE families, those in poverty, and the disproportionality for communities of color, it is not merely because of personal behaviors and personal choices. It is absolutely driven by policy and design.
- Adversities build upon themselves, for example:
 - Food insecurity
 - Lack of stable housing
 - Children without a parent to read to them because they are working 2-3 jobs
 - Missing one parent due to incarceration
 - Lack of access to supports
- Looking at community resilience means looking beyond just what support services families can access, but what are the supports and buffers that are available to the community at large:
 - Look beyond social and health services
 - Include housing, schools, infrastructure, criminal justice and law enforcement
 - It is not enough to just change policy in one sector – or practice in one sector – we have to look at how these things work synergistically together

- Families need to know they have access to safe, stable housing, a social network that supports them, stable employment, and family coherence.
- The systems need to be accessible and need to listen and be responsive to community members.
- When we have cross-sector partners around the table, we can hold each other accountable to create equitable access.
- Ensure community is at the table to not only tell us about their experience of adversity, but also to prioritize the issues and co-create the solutions. We must recognize and respect the wisdom of community side by side with all of our fancy degrees.
- A healthy community means looking at the whole ecosystem that promotes resilience.



Panel Discussion

Carol Mitchell moderated a panel, featuring Dr. Wendy Ellis, Lawrence Garrett, Dr. Lori Pflingst, Sebrena Chambers and Juanita Maestas.

Key takeaways

- *Need to celebrate that we are normalizing the conversation around structural racism and identify specific policies and drivers* – Dr. Wendy Ellis
- *There is some striking similarity between Hurricane Katrina and this current pandemic. It was at the snap of the fingers that my entire life, and many other lives, were completely turned upside down. Beyond just my physical needs, I had lost a vision for what my life was supposed to be and where it was supposed to go. When I found myself here in the Pacific Northwest trying to navigate a new life, I came across three different types of organizations:*
 1. **relationship-based organizations** – support the entire being, not just the physical needs, but also mental, emotional and social needs;
 2. **responsive-based organization** – really good at coordinated care, anticipated future needs and set up a roadmap to meet them; and
 3. **reactive-based organizations** – simply transactional, my name/my life wasn't unique, nor was it important to them.

I did not realize that I needed hope in my heart, just as much as I needed a resource in my hand – Lawrence Garrett

- *The Governor asked us for a comprehensive 10-year plan to reduce poverty and inequality, and what he got was eight strategies and 56 recommendations because this is cross-sector, cross-sectional, multi-jurisdictional, and it is going to take all of us to accomplish that goal. We did two things well from the beginning. One was to ground our work in racial justice. The other was centering on people who were disproportionately affected by poverty. It was my privilege to work alongside Juanita Maestas and her colleague Drake Jackson, who were the co-chairs of our steering committee. It is harder to judge somebody when they are sitting right next to you or sitting across from you when the power dynamic is leveled.* – Dr. Laurie Pflingst
- *Our systems were set up to exclude and punish – this is true of Health & Human Services, Juvenile Justice, Criminal Justice and Mental Health – they are set up to exclude, whether it's by race, gender, sexual orientation, immigration, disability, etc.* – Dr. Laurie Pflingst

- *In June of this year, the health department stood up and created a Racism and Resilience Action Response Team charged with developing strategies to address racism within our own organizations and to elevate the issues that contribute to education, housing, access to health care and health inequities. We have four strategies, focusing on data, which elevate racism as a public health crisis. We know we can't do this alone, so we are working with partners and communities to co-create solutions and policies to promote system-level change within Pierce County to move beyond equity to include the undoing of racist structures. – Sebrena Chambers*
- *We want to be heard, and you want to hear from us. You want to know what will it take to help reduce poverty. The Governor's Work Group listened to our stories, like people who can't get benefits because they've been incarcerated, people who can't get housing, people who don't have childcare to get back to work and make money to take care of their family. Our voice was the one thing that we wanted to use to help make change, and it was so amazing because they actually listened to us. – Juanita Maestas*

Hopeful Words



We are all challenged here today to go upstream, beyond designing programs, to disrupting systems – and fundamentally disrupting structural racism. Thank 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.

Breakout Session Notes

- **Group 1**

- Focus on policies not just programs. Focusing on relationships as this work is important
- Partnerships and communication
- Relationship piece warrants this with agencies and with the community
- The experience of the steering committee needs to be emphasized as a best practice so how do we invest in more of this so that communities really work together
- Policy change is so important and we won't change programs without this and need to also build up advocacy communities. This is foundational to the change.
- How can we center empathy in policies and programs?
- Network – we operate in our own worlds and if we could partner better at the front end. Interconnection of all communities
- Creating space to have conversations and figure out a way to do this authentically – with people with lived experience
- Lawrence was right – this is our moment and we need to take advantage it and build this space up on equity, justice and disrupting it. If we all see ourselves as agents of change, this task is less daunting. Who can create this roadmap?

- **Group 2**

- Enthusiasm with the room
- Collaborative energy in the community
- Targeting racial inequalities
- Racial Injustice is not a mainstream conversation
- Key piece is social capital / social connection
- Need to have sustainable relationships in a safe environment
- Need to bring diversity in table in a regular
- Resilience is bouncing forward
- One stable safe connection can change everything
- The need for a system to build for resources
- You have to hear the voices

- **Group 3**

- What gets measured, get done
- Some things that are the most powerful can't be measured but need to figure out how to quantify those as well
- The things that can't be measure are the human aspects or humanity
- Perhaps humanity is the soil under the tree
- What things can you do to build more resilience and equity

- Collaborating
- Listen to those in need or that we are trying to help as they know best what they need
- How do you reach the people who don't reach out, community develop of deeper connection?
- Trust and valued
- Nextdoor app--does it help people connect in the community and is it useful. Only those with an internet connection would have access. Is there a mechanism that would allow those, especially those living on the street, access to information and services?
- The Internet needs to be readily available to everyone

- **Group 4**
 - Mixed reaction- covering ground for things we already know about but good discussion nonetheless; suggestion: publish a report of last Poverty to Possibilities and work from the last summit; not too many new things he hasn't heard before; criminal justice not in the conversation as much as it should be; suggested book: Caste- Isabel Wilkerson
 - Spot-on presentation, connected it to her family support partnership at her work; agreed on building on what we worked on last year at the last Poverty to Possibilities; keeping track of progress/policies
 - New to the area so mostly listening in; stuck on education- where to start with progress? how can we open more jobs in the area? economic focus- how can people get a fair shake to live comfortably? how do you even get started (business)?
 - How can a small community/business take on large corporations taking over? gentrification

- **Group 5**
 - It was powerful to have folks from different sectors. Specifically Lawrence sharing different institutions and how participating in them affected him. Relationship-based institutions being supportive.
 - The panel related trauma to equity and systemic trauma. We work and look at trauma as more an individualized issue but looking at it from a systemic perspective. How do we change the systems now? Big take away is systemic trauma and how do we change the systems?
 - Slide of Defining Resilience and wrapping around individuals by having individual level protective factors, family level factors, and community level factors.
 - Relationship-building is at the center/core of this work. Being willing and able to be that relationship-builder and understanding where people are coming from. Knowing and honoring people's stories.
 - Developing institutions that are relationship-based. Developing institutions that tackle the above key takeaways. Having level-specific approaches. Poverty is complex and there is not one reason why people are experiencing poverty. Fundraisers and getting executives – philanthropy to establish institutions.
 - The gap is widening in schools with remote learning. TPS has midterms coming up. How is district going to respond to high absenteeism? It goes back to the relationship. In Spring, students had relationships already. Trying to build relationships virtually is challenging. Resiliency comes through relationships. Children are struggling because they don't have those relationships with their teachers or someone connected to schools.
 - Use the pandemic as an opportunity to dismantle the education system as it currently exists. Redesigning with decision-making power in the communities who have the lived experience as historically marginalized and oppressed groups. Redesign for students and families that are furthest from social justice and comprise the opportunity gaps - if we prioritize their success, everyone's success will be achievable.

- **Group 6**
 - Political will...taking action. Not just talking about it, concrete things personal next
 - Zoom registration...all those registered, on the list...to avoid zoom bombing
 - Systemic importance of Color of green is biggest obstacle to poverty
 - 300 people present to explore possibilities and COMMIT to action will make changes.
 - ALICE was interesting concept
 - TCC counselor: thinking about resilience...individual basis, system of resilience is truly exciting.
 - What can we start doing to build a resilient and equity community?
 - TCC doing at every policy we have with an equity lens, biggest to smallest, going through them, what have we done historical that creates barriers...
 - Focus on communication skills, listening is a muscle and if we practice listening along differences.
 - Pierce county is way more diverse, how do we get out of our box, make it a practice to learn from others...

- **Group 7**
 - Easy to focus on the person or issue directly in front of you and not look at the big issues/policy level, but we need to do both.
 - It is critical to involve those who are impacted in determining the problems and solutions.

- **Group 8**
 - We need equitable opportunities to bring more BIPOC representation and leadership to the table in all discussions
 - Removing barriers that specifically muffle Latine Voices. We need to amplify their voices

- **Group 9**
 - Financial literacy is key. Breaking the system. Even with education, still can be marginalized. Homeownership, learning about credit cards, credit scores, etc. Look at the roots – limit of accessibility/access, access to entrepreneurship. This also includes healthcare services.
 - What can we do? Alignment with DSHS and nonprofits, other orgs/funders, etc. and focus on equity. Rethink and reimagine.
 - Should be not about us, but with us.

- **Group 10**
 - The need to focus more of the collaboration and interconnectedness of all of us and everything we do. Important to understand and focus from the community level. Have the community craft the solutions from housing to food. Everything is interconnected. If it isn't happening in the community and by the community, it won't gain traction and make a difference.
 - Telling that we have to invest in those that are most impacted. Homeless feel their voice gets lost—sounds easier than it is because of the issue of trust. We have to be willing to invest in the communities. We also have to take the time. Non-profits get lost in deadlines and don't give time to building trust. We need to have grace and patience with each other. If someone has figured this work out, people would already be doing it.

- Disruption-need to look clearly and recognize the systemic issues. Take the time but also act more quickly to state the problematic things we are doing. The relationship piece is important. Things that are baked into our system due to racial injustice and need to be stated, those are the things that are driving the inequities in our community. Focus on communities of color and those that are most impacted. We can't be a healthy community when so many people are not healthy. How do we listen to each other and get the voice and solutions to the table of those that are impacted? The systemic issues make it difficult to include that in the conversation.
- Break it down to the pieces. Systemic racism is in every single aspect of the community. How do you start to chip away at those foundations that have been there for 100's of years? How do we bring people along where there is a desire to eliminate the aspects of the community? Bringing more and more people to the table to help them learn about the structures. Like the murder of George Floyd, how do we encourage people to step out and take a risk to say "enough" with the other systemic systems of racism in our community.
- The systemic issues are so baked in that people don't question it. TCC is putting a questioning lens on everything that is done. How do we put that into practice continually and across sectors? How can we have a whole community conversation about how systems are racially biased and against those experiencing poverty? Questions of "why is that?" Nonprofits put up false deadlines—yes, sometimes they are real but they are also of our own doing and are they really helping those that we want to help? How can we help our whole community? We need to question everything that we do.
- Agree with the risk aspect. As we look at the election cycle it reflects a deep division. Is that a beginning of something new? Things have been this way for so long and they are baked—there are enough people that are happy with the way it was versus the people who are happy about where we are going. Historically, things that have positively changed the country are about visions. The visions help people take risks.