**POVERTY TO POSSIBILITIES 2019**

***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 by 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-- we are tackling poverty, one family at a time.

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, 25% of households in Pierce County were considered to be ALICE with another 12% of households living at or below the poverty line for a total of 37% of families who were struggling to get by in 2014. For 2016, this percentage is now jumped to 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.

**Key themes from this year’s summit were:**

1. Affordable housing is a key factor in addressing poverty.

“Everyone has got to bring their talent to the table to have life-changing impact.”

*Bruce Dammeier*

1. Homeownership is the generational wealth creator that can break the cycle of poverty
2. Cost burden households are in ALL areas of our community
3. Housing at all levels is needed
4. Rising housing costs are outpacing rising household incomes

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

**Dr. Ali Modarres:**

“If you don’t get housing right, it’s difficult to do anything else right.”

* Those that can buy a house can leave some wealth for the next generation, which is getting harder and harder to do in Pierce County.
	+ In 2019 average costs for apartments are:
		- $819 for a studio
		- $900+ for a 1 bedroom
		- $1,200 for a 2 bedroom ($43,000 after taxes needed to afford)
		- $1,800+ for a 3 bedroom ($62,000 after taxes needed to afford)
		- $2,200+ for a 4 bedroom ($75,000 after taxes needed to afford)
	+ Largest growth in job industry in Pierce County is in the retail/service industry
	+ Of the largest occupational areas in Pierce County-Military (on average) can afford a studio.
	+ Retail/service industry can not afford anything.
* Things to Think About:
	+ Who is funding affordable housing? Who is not?
		- Largest funder of low income housing historically is the IRS-which means ALICE does not qualify

**Maurice Jones**

“Teamwork, Stamina, Audacity!”

* This is not a short term endeavor. We can’t catch up in 2-3 years. We must remain committed for a decade atleast. The works must be generational.
* Both public and private sector must be present in the conversation and action plan. This is a community challenge.
* Population and job growth are having at a faster pace than our ability to produce housing that is affordable across income scales in practically every place.
* This work must take place from the heart.
* Things to Think About:
	+ Communities that are focused on affordable housing have to address capacity.
		- Who is going to do it? Who can bring it to scale?
		- What can we do as a community to build capacity?
	+ How do we:
		- Protect people that are in places that are escalating?
		- Preserve affordable housing as our community grows?
		- Address repairs that are needed in order to keep the value of a home?
		- Include supportive services that are needed for certain communities to succeed and thrive?

Both Dr. Modarres and Maurice Jones’ sentiments were backed by a panel discussion. Homeownership is a key factor in generational wealth. Mayor Woodards acknowledged the Missing Middle: People are purchasing down because they can afford to buy up-so in turn they are taking more affordable options off the marking for lower income families. Housing needs to be built as every level so people can buy at the level they can afford and not take housing options way. Poverty can not be addressed until everyone has a place to live, and it will take a collective approach to address the common goal.

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.