SYNOPSIS OF POVERTY TO POSSIBILITIES EVENT

*Alignment, collaboration and partnership of systems to help
36% of Pierce County households who are struggling*

OVERVIEW

United Way of Pierce County (UWPC) is committed to creating strategies to align the system around individuals by addressing the barriers within the system to focus on meeting the needs of those who require assistance. Our goal is to create opportunities to align and direct partnerships that will catalyze change. This ultimately goes back to the important question: What can we do together that we cannot do alone?

BACKGROUND

Galvanizing the community around the social, human and economic impact of poverty in Pierce County, UWPC has committed to a bold goal of lifting 15,000 families 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 2015, we commissioned an ALICE study, which refers to the 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 child care 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' or utilizing government supports. According to the research, 36% of households in Pierce County are ALICE. By working with organizations, partnerships and those directly impacted by poverty, UWPC has created a feedback loop to ensure the work we are all doing is having a trajectory that will benefit ALICE and those in poverty.

Over the past year, we embarked on a series of community conversations with agencies across the County to acquire feedback on issues related to poverty through focus groups and community conversations. We also asked these agencies and others to join us in this bold goal since no single organization can solve poverty, yet by working in a coordinated, collaborative fashion, we know we can achieve far more together. On November 14, we led a summit called From Poverty to Possibilities. We carefully aggregated the information we collected to begin a framework of action in order to more formally address how we, Pierce County stakeholders, will address barriers and systems to make our community a great place for families to thrive.

KEY THEMES

Several key themes rose to the top:

1. Systems Change (policy/advocacy)
2. Human-Centered Design
3. Cross-Sector Partnerships
4. Resources

Race, equity and justice were reoccurring issues within each theme. It is critical that we embrace the challenge presented by Mia Birdsong who urged us…'to shift power and resources, center conversation around race and choose genuine connection over safe difference.' We believe this should be a guiding principle of all of our work. Supplementary to this overarching obligation are initiative-area barriers and solutions (such as affordable housing, healthcare costs, affordable child care and sustaining wage jobs). Please note that this overview will only address key themes.

NEXT STEPS

In the next several weeks, United Way will work diligently to outline the timing for the next conversations focused on key themes. While many targeted barriers were shared, including affordable housing, costs of childcare, re-entry after incarceration and transportation, we know that many successful organizations are leading work within those areas. Our job is to create the map of intersections so that we all may be more aware of and gain deeper understanding for the work transpiring in Pierce County. If you'd like the notes from any of our conversations, focus groups or convenings, Lindsay Morgan Tracy (lindsayt@uwpc.org) can provide them to you.

Moreover, we will continue to communicate with all of you on progress-to-date and the challenges of this work, so we can all be a part of the solution to helping our system work better together.

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

THEME 1 – Systems Change (policy/advocacy)

BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS

1. Community attitudes and beliefs
2. Wealth gap
  - Not focusing on root causes like income inequality as opposed to just focusing on social services and individual improvement
  - Savior mentality
3. Benefits cliff
  - How do we not pull the rug out from under the struggling individuals?
  - Our biggest barrier is not being able to compromise when it comes to enacting policies
  - "The system" almost discourages moving away from benefits or graduating from programs
4. Partners that don't reflect communities being served
5. Lack of compromise with policies
6. Divisive 2-party system promotes "othering"
7. If I check one box, I am disqualified for aid
8. Assistance provides essential support for households below the ALICE threshold but cannot lift all households to economic stability. Government, nonprofit and health care organizations spend $21 billion on services for ALICE and poverty-level households in the region to supplement their income, but even that total is still 25 percent short of lifting all households in the Pacific Northwest above the ALICE Threshold. (ALICE Report, 2016).
	1. Bridge the disconnect between policy makers and people being impacted by "policy garbage"
	2. Talk about the failures
	3. Reality of benefit cliff- involve those affected in policy change (know who is doing this at local, state and national level)
	4. Focus on the systems changes and shift away from symptoms (proactive over reactive)
	5. Resource list for partnerships and map of partnerships for Pierce County
	6. Systems integration- working seamlessly across sectors including between funders and social service agencies (who is doing this well?)
	7. Create state-level system of interagency credits for actions that save housing that alleviates justice, mental health and health costs idea
	8. Identify community leaders and organizations that will host continued, structured discussion on larger goals with specific timelines
	9. Greater childcare subsidy (longer term – extensions for families that have just begun employment)

THEME 2 – Human-Centered Design: Ensuring a process revolves around (and with) the people you're designing it for and that it is suiting their needs

BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS
1. Top-down approach 2. Staff doesn't reflect population served 3. Clients aren't part of the solution 4. Leadership of organizations focus on how many people are served via the quality of the service (e.g. they talked to 100 people this month, but how many of those individuals/families actually moved on a path to stability?) 5. Lack of follow up services to determine successes and failures 6. Not engaging in dialogue with people affected by poverty	1. Build in feedback loop in the beginning and follow up/monitor/check in and adapt when needed – from client 2. Approach should be unique to every person as everyone's needs are different, can't be cookie-cutter 3. Look at "whole person/family/support community" and not only wage earner 4. Using individuals who are most impacted by poverty to design solutions for service providers and partners including leading and allowing participation with accountability 5. Make genuine connections – with clients and co-workers 6. Change the strategy to connect individuals to mental health support. Student behavior changes due to the impact of being born into poverty 7. Monthly meetings in Pierce County for all resources to connect (check out Federal Way's Community Connections) 8. Empower clients by using their voice in solutions

THEME 3 – Cross-Sector Partnerships: Ensuring Public/Private/Government/Faith-Based/Foundations are Working Together

BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS
1. Alignment of multiple partnerships aren't happening 2. Partnerships are not a competition- we need to be vulnerable, honest, share experiences, be transparent, hold each other accountable and break down silos 3. Duplication of efforts 4. Authenticity 5. Who is doing it well/not well? 6. All the same people at many of the same meetings – mostly nonprofit sector leadership	1. We need to provide childcare, incentives for residents to take part in leadership, programs and policy making 2. Talk about the failures with partnerships in Pierce County 3. Agencies should partner with tech schools to have an affordable place low-income homeowners to go for home repairs/car repairs to address transportation needs 4. Need a Strategy Inventory: We need to know 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)?

THEME 4 – Resources (People, Funding, Metrics)

BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS

1. Fragmented programs with fragmented metrics – alignment will help us with resources
  - 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.
  - 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.
2. Punitive monitoring stands in the way of services (won't get money if 'x' isn't achieved)
3. Funders/government want to fund immediately results, and you won't get that with the systems
4. Not funding administrative overhead is a costly misunderstanding. What if the CEO of a business or a manager at a company weren't paid? They are considered overhead. Yet in the nonprofit world, donors think they should only fund direct service.
	1. Acquire list of those in Pierce County looking at the system of funders, metrics and duplication of work to look for better alignment opportunities
	2. Are there shared agendas with all the resources being allocated by various groups? There should be.
	3. Create a system of continuous change and improvement – with nonprofits, business, government, philanthropy and faith-based institutions
	4. 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. We need to figure out who does what best and partner or refer among each other. We need more collaboration with businesses.
	5. The resources are misallocated because they are not aligned or meet the needs of people. Identify the real cost of solving the problems and then align to that rather than trying to create solutions within a resource frame. 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 realities cause nonprofits to change their strategy to acquire funding.

Appendix – Other Data Sources and Notes

9 Ways to Reduce Poverty: http://www.raisingofamerica.org/9-ways-reduce-poverty

10 Solutions to Fight Economic Inequality: https://talkpoverty.org/2015/06/10/solutions-economic-inequality/

Uncovering the Economic Inequality in the Bay Area: https://uwba.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-Broken-Pathway-Detailed-Data-Report-113016.pdf

Implementing Systems Change PowerPoint

UWPC Business Leaders Breakfast Synopsis

What's Getting in our Way
- Employment
  - Job training programs that lead to the actual jobs via partnerships with local business that see the benefits of collaborating
  - Income volatility with retail, construction, etc. These sectors in Pierce County are increasing and are <u>not</u> considered "poor" the entire year
  - Family wage jobs (lots of them for 6 months but with no long-term stability)
  - Employment trainings needs direct lines to employers
  - Barriers to employment with a bankruptcy or criminal act
  - Increase education and training opportunities that are flexible while people are working so people can increase their skills
  - More than half of all jobs in the Pacific Northwest pay less than $20 per hour, with most paying between $10 and $15 per hour ($15 per hour full time = $30,000/year). These jobs — especially service jobs that pay below $20 per hour and require only a high school education or less – will grow far faster than higher-wage jobs over the next decade. Pierce County has one of the fastest growing job markets in the country. What it lacks are the skilled employees to fill those higher paying positions (ALICE Report, 2016).
- Transportation
  - Organizations set up only to serve Tacoma – access local – transportation barrier – financial
  - Transportation that doesn't take 2 hours to get from my affordable home in east Pierce County to downtown Tacoma
  - Neighborhood/Localized Services: Partner with organizations to provide services outside of the city for people who can't get to Tacoma because of lack of public transportation.
- Housing
  - Cost of housing is not correlated with inflation or wages in Pierce County
  - Wait lists for affordable senior housing – unconscionable
- Other barriers specific to Pierce County
  - Cost of child care
  - Criminal justice system reforms are aligned with this (AND, not giving individuals second chance if returning to society)
  - Mental health – easier to get drugs than to get clean
  - Ladling our college students with debt and they can't get a job after college
  - Healthcare costs and this leads to lost jobs/eviction/bankruptcy
  - The system is reactive and limits providers' ability to fix a problem until it becomes critical.
  - "Our families need help navigating. The number of resources can be overwhelming and there is a lot of red tape. If the families don't have success soon they can get discouraged and go back to what they know. It's not because they are lazy or don't care, they just get frustrated."

- o "You don't get much {assistance} anyway but if you work 20 hours they take it away so would rather not work and get full assistance or 60 hours to be able to afford childcare."

Solutions - Other
- Charge owners who rent above the market a higher property tax by the same %. If they rent units 30% above average – charge 30% increase for property tax
- Likewise, offer property tax discounts for landlords w/rent below average. Discount could be based on % under average?

Things that stood out (could be solutions)
- The depth of our connections to others will dictate success of reducing or thwarting poverty
- 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
- It is imperative, but also at times feels impossible, to stay in a mental space of abundance when nonprofits are being eroded at the national level by the president and his cabinet choices
- Reframing the challenges as opportunities, what is the messaging?
- How do we truly connect w/one another?
- Wealth redistribution needs to happen – how?
- We need to make generational change, not pocket change. The disparities are growing. Who is addressing them?
- Can we get the "we know what success takes and looks like" written down in a visual story way so the community can define our future story and have every agency nonprofit individual backward map the path together?
- 3 questions Mia asked her children. How were you kind? What mistake did you make today? How were you brave? These could be used for adults and I like how they help you question your own integrity
- We can't social service our way out of this
- 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
- Mia Birdsong's suggestions: shift power and resources, center conversation around race, choose genuine connection over safe difference
- For us stakeholders –very little "buffer" in our systems to 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
- How do we create human-centered design so the client is at the center of the approach?