



**2013 Human Service Summit  
Investing in What Works**

Finding long-term solutions to suburban poverty was the theme of the UCS Human Service Summit held on June 18, 2013. This year's event drew 160 people, including officials and representatives from Johnson County government, non-profit, for-profit, community-based organizations and community members that make up the region's human services infrastructure. Previous Summits have considered growing poverty in Johnson County and gaps in the safety net. This summer, the event focused on the best practice of creation of good jobs to reduce poverty. Good jobs are those that provide the wages, benefits, and flexibility necessary to support a family.

UCS selected the topic because all too often the poverty conversation only focuses on individual behavior and strengthening the safety net. Building individuals' skills, reducing behaviors that place impediments to their long-term employment, and providing short-term assistance to fill gaps between economic instability and stability, all are strategies that help individuals become self-reliant. No one can succeed without assuming responsibility for himself or herself. The safety net and evidence-based practices to remediate poverty help people on an individual basis in their efforts to take personal responsibility so that they can become, and remain, financially stable.

However, in order to truly address poverty, the individual cannot be the sole focus. At the same time we have to consider the structural problems that are not under an individual's control. Issues such as housing, health care, child care, transportation, lack of jobs, and low wages. These facets of community life influence whether someone successfully moves out, and stays out, of poverty - or even avoids it altogether. Not only does every individual have responsibility for their own well-being, but as a society - we too have a responsibility.

Half-in-Ten is a national organization committed to cutting poverty in half in ten years. According to Melissa Boteach, executive director, "The best ticket out of poverty is a good job. For working age adults, people have a responsibility to look for work and support themselves. In turn, we [as a society] have a responsibility to make sure there are opportunities to do that and that we're removing barriers to work."

UCS invited Half-in-Ten to bring its message to the Human Service Summit. Erik Stegman, campaign manager for Half-In-Ten, was the keynote speaker. He emphasized that work is the cornerstone of the American dream, and must be a central element to any anti-poverty strategy.

Stegman demonstrated that the U.S. has reduced poverty with strategic policies, such as the establishment of Social Security. And, it can be done again if supported by public will to enact effective policies to reduce poverty and restore economic opportunity. Growing poverty is not the result of any one factor. Income inequality and stagnant service industry wages contribute to low incomes; increasing medical expenses, housing costs and child care can quickly drain family resources.

Public policies can make the difference for individuals and families trying to make ends meet. Stegman highlighted some of the policies that are most effective, with an emphasis on those that rebuild the economy with full employment opportunities and living wages, and ones that keep families on their feet when the economy fails them.

The PowerPoint presented by Stegman at the Summit can be accessed at <http://ucsjoco.org/program-areas/human-service-summit/>.

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