



2013 Human Service Summit
Small Group Discussion

Attendees at the 2013 Human Service Summit worked in 12 small groups to discuss three key conditions that are necessary in our community to effectively reduce poverty – good jobs, the right skills to fill those jobs and the supports essential to maintain employment. This summary is organized by three action recommendations. For each action, public policy strategies recommended by Half-in-Ten Campaign are listed, followed by local strategies suggested by Summit participants.

Participants from every group emphasized the need to help community members better understand poverty and the challenges associated with being poor. One agreed upon way to inform the community is through storytelling – sharing real life stories of people living in poverty. Businesses and places of worship were suggested as venues for this activity. Another common theme was the importance of service providers developing partnerships with the business community and faith community.

ACTION: Develop more household-sustaining jobs.

FACT: A Johnson County mother and child require \$40,000 to meet their minimum basic needs, based on the Living Wage Calculator.ⁱ Of the jobs projected to grow the most through 2018, only three pay more than \$40,000.ⁱⁱ

Policy Strategies Recommended by Half-in-Ten Campaign:

- Ensure work pays with the Earned Income Tax Credit
- Index the minimum wage to half the average wage
- Encourage private sector jobs through the TANF Emergency Fund
- Create temporary public service employment
- Subsidize jobs for long-term unemployed and disadvantaged workers

Local Strategies Suggested by Summit Participants:

- Offer incentives to employers to create jobs that pay above minimum wage
- Educate employers about available tax credits for hiring felons
- Offer tax credits to hire the hard to employ, such as those with limited skills or education, or those in the criminal justice system
- Cities/County government establish wage policy for companies that receive tax abatement
- Target specific employers to increase wages and benefits

- Non-profit agencies set an example by paying household sustaining wages
- Non-profit agencies encourage board members to pay household sustaining wage at their places of business
- Identify innovations that benefit the community and create jobs, such as mid-level dental providers
- Encourage business growth to meet demands of changing demographics, such as the aging population
- Help businesses understand the benefits of paying higher wages, for example employee retention and regular attendance
- Conduct poverty-simulation for business leaders to help them understand the challenges of being poor

ACTION: Increase the number of individuals that have the skills and capacity to fill jobs with household-sustaining wages.

FACT: The key to getting a job that pays a living wage is education.ⁱⁱⁱ In Johnson County, workers with only a high school diploma earn on average \$28,000 annually, compared to earnings of about \$52,000 for college graduates.^{iv}

Policy Strategies Recommended by Half-in-Ten Campaign:

- Reconnect disconnected youth to education, job training and employment



- Provide more student financing policies and student supports to ensure more low-income youth complete postsecondary credentials
- Provide public funding for transitional jobs, career exploration and job placement
- Connect the education and training systems. Fund innovative education and training strategies

Local Strategies Suggested by Summit Participants:

- Make quality early learning programs available to every child
- Maintain high quality public education system
- Increase career counseling for high school students re: future work and necessary training/education
- Promote STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) and prepare students for careers in STEM
- Strengthen career training opportunities at Johnson County Community College
- Engage families with schools to support student learning and achievement
- Increase number of GED programs
- Improve literacy skills
- Offer community service opportunities to children, teens and young adults to gain work experience, leadership and communication skills
- Help people get started through activities such as internships, on-the-job training and mentoring
- Offer help with resume writing and employment interviewing skills
- Help the unemployed and underemployed develop professional networks
- Encourage entrepreneurship
- Identify creative approaches to help specific populations find employment, such as, young adults leaving foster care system, people with arrests/convictions
- Eliminate barriers to employment for people with criminal record by removing the question from the initial job application
- Increase opportunities for youth employment and summer jobs
- Training and job search help specifically for those who have dropped out of school
- Implement strategies to help people develop the “soft skills” needed for successful employment (promptness, working with others, communication)
- Subsidize training programs for low-income participants

- Address the “digital divide”. Offer training for basic digital communication skills. Increase access to computers in homes and libraries
- Help non-college bound young adults access technical training
- Educational and training centers monitor job trends and match enrollment capacity with needed skills
- Offer assistance with debt reduction and credit repair
- Develop creative alternatives to lack of transportation, such as bicycles. Need donated bikes and improved bikeways
- Improve public transportation; more routes and greater frequency

ACTION: Provide supports that are necessary to maintain stable employment.

FACT: Many lower wage workers have no access to any type of paid leave. Almost half of all workers making less than \$550/week receive no paid personal leave, sick leave, family leave, or vacation at all.^v More than one in six Johnson County full-time, full-year workers earns less than \$550/week.^{vi}

Policy Strategies Recommended by Half-in-Ten Campaign:

- Use tax policy to help low-income workers retain more of their earnings and cope with the rising costs of maintaining a household and raising children: Earned Income Tax Credit, Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, Homestead Refund for Renters
- Create responsive workplaces through policies and practices such as flexible scheduling, guaranteed minimum hours, consistent predictable hours of work
- Promote workplace flexibility for caretakers, such as paid, earned sick leave
- Reduce child care costs for low-income families; expand resources for child care, including subsidies
- Improve child support enforcement
- Maintain household purchasing power through Unemployment Insurance
- Increase affordable housing options
- Maintain safety net programs as SNAP, School Nutrition Program and Medicaid, to help families stretch earnings
- Encourage asset building

Local Strategies Suggested by Summit

Participants:

- Set regular work schedules, so that parents can plan for childcare
 - Make transportation available to get people to jobs
 - Increase access to affordable, quality childcare
 - Increase access to quality, affordable out-of-school time programs
 - Offer employer-sponsored health insurance, including employer paying portion of premium
 - Raise awareness of information and referral resources such as MyResourceConnection and United Way 2-1-1
 - Adopt flexible work policies that include paid time off for sick leave
 - Make available treatment to address issues that create barriers to work, such as mental health and substance abuse
- Offer financial education to help families learn to manage and stretch budget
 - Offer short-term loans or grants that help family avoid using payday loans
 - Provide wrap-around services for children and their families to coordinate school and social services that are needed by child
 - Reduce criminal justice or social service requirements that result in time away from work

Go to www.halfinten.org to read more about the strategies suggested by the Half in Ten Campaign. Policy recommendations related to employment are also available from CLASP, www.clasp.org.

ⁱ Dr. Amy K. Glasmeir and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. www.livingwage.mit.edu/

ⁱⁱ Kansas Department of Labor. Kansas City Kansas Region, Projections by Occupation, 2008-2018

ⁱⁱⁱ Career Clusters: Forecasting Demand for High School Through College Jobs, 2008-2018, The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

^{iv vi} United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-year estimates, 2011. Table S2001

^v United States Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (March 2012) Employee Benefits Survey, Paid Leave combinations: Access. Table 46.

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About United Community Services of Johnson County and the Human Service Summit: UCS provides data analysis, leads collaborative planning and mobilizes resources to enhance the availability and delivery of health and human services. UCS was established as a non-profit agency in 1967. Primary funding is provided by United Way of Greater Kansas City, local governments, and private grants and donations.

Each summer the Human Service Summit provides the opportunity for providers and advocates of the area's human service infrastructure to gather and focus attention on improving the quality of life through human service strategies. Through presentations and discussion, community leaders consider the challenges and trends in an effort to prepare for and respond to the community's most critical needs. UCS has hosted a Summit every year since 2002.