



A Plan to Expand Household-Sustaining Jobs in Johnson County

An increasing number of Johnson County residents do not have adequate income from employment to meet basic needs, according to the research conducted by United Community Services of Johnson County. The community lacks a strategic, coordinated response to this growing problem. As part of the overall strategy to address poverty in Johnson County, UCS has convened a planning process and is engaging critical stakeholders to assess the complex factors related to household-sustaining employment. This process will result in a comprehensive action plan to expand training and employment opportunities for Johnson County residents.

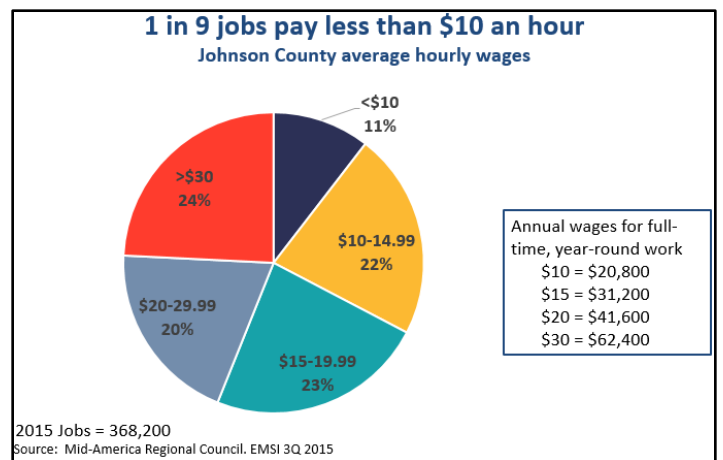
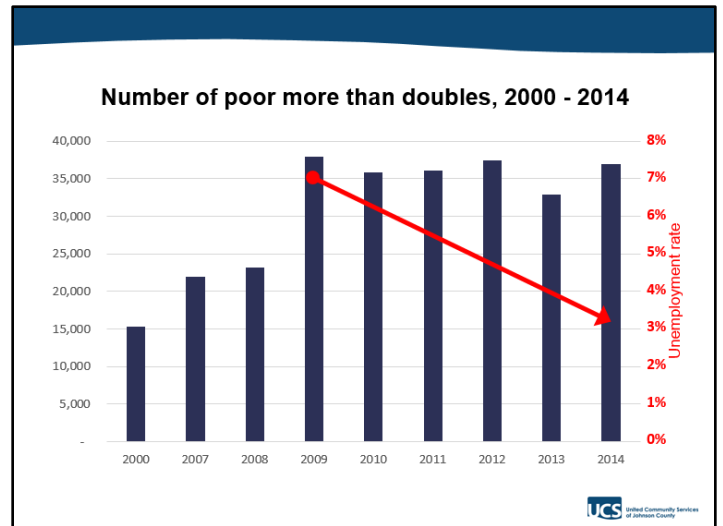
The Working Poor in Johnson County

Johnson County has seen poverty increase steadily since 2000. The poverty rate doubled between 2000 and 2010 and has remained at statistically the same level since. 37,000 county residents lived below 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL) in 2014. Another 60,000 lived between 100 and 200% of FPL.

Nearly 19,000 adults age 18-64 in Johnson County live below the poverty level and without a disability that prevents work. Nearly 1 in 6 of these adults worked full time, year-round. And yet, even with full time wages, their income fell below the federal poverty level. More than 6 in 10 worked part time or part year. Only 24% did not work.¹

While unemployment is now almost half the recession high of 7.2%, households still struggle to meet basic needs. According to data on wages paid by Johnson County employers, 1 in 9 jobs pay less than \$10 an hour. Another 2 in 9 of jobs pay between \$10 and \$15 an hour. Together one-third of jobs in Johnson County pay less than \$15 an hour, which is equivalent to \$31,200 for full-time year-round work².

These trends are unlikely to improve unless we act now. Local employment projections through 2022 suggest that of the top ten occupations projected for the most annual job openings, only two have median wage earnings above \$15 an hour.



¹ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014

² Mid America Regional Council, EMSI 3Q, 2015



A Collaborative Solution

Expanding household-sustaining employment opportunities and career pathways requires multisector collaboration, shared knowledge and practices, and a common agenda for collective impact. To advance this goal, UCS has convened a work team of key partners who possess specific skills, knowledge, and expertise related to employment and career training. This work team will identify potential opportunities, propose strategic actions, and leverage commitments from local stakeholders to implement those strategies.

The work team consists of 15 community stakeholders who have expertise in post-secondary and continuing education; understand workforce development best practices; can provide data and analysis of local labor trends and projections; possess economic development expertise; can speak from the perspective of an employer; will provide insights on the needs and challenges of both residents and employers; and/or are familiar the needs of poor and low-income households.

The work team will develop a targeted strategic plan to improve employment opportunities and increase income among low-income households, which may include:

- Strategic system improvements to implement in coming years within specific organizations
- Key partnerships to build or strengthen in order to be most effective
- New partners to engage in the process of expanding household-sustaining job opportunities in Johnson County
- Policies that could support successful implementation of the plan
- A set of goals and benchmarks for success and a design for evaluation

UCS will share recommendations and the implementation plan with partners Johnson County, seek funding for implementation from within and outside partner organizations, share policy implications with elected officials, and advocate for systems level improvements. As a result, there will be improved opportunities for low-income households to have household-sustaining jobs in the future.

The Employment Planning Project is made possible by the generous support of the McGowan Charitable Fund. UCS recognizes that complementary efforts are underway throughout the Kansas City region and intend to align with, learn from, and mutually support those efforts while focusing on local opportunities for low-income households. Additionally, UCS welcomes potential opportunities for other individuals and organizations to participate in the Employment Planning Project as the work team conducts research, engages new partnerships, and explores implementation strategies.

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