# DISRUPTING POVERTY

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of living in poverty feels far off to most of Oklahoma’s population. To the average person, the word alone can bring images to mind of people standing on street corners holding cardboard signs, or sleeping in wooded areas or dilapidated homes. We empathize and gather a couple of dollar bills to pass out the window. Sometimes it’s uncomfortable, so we lock our doors and avoid eye contact. Deep down, we may hope someone else out there will do something more.

The reality is that Oklahoma has a large and struggling population of citizens living in poverty, but they’re not all who we commonly imagine. They include individuals who work hard, individuals with children and individuals who are exactly like you and me, yet found themselves facing a work-hour cut, a debilitating injury or the death of a loved one that left them struggling to make ends meet in a time of utter vulnerability and hopelessness.

United Way of Central Oklahoma works closely with our nonprofit partner agencies and community partners who serve these vulnerable individuals every day. Through the data we collect and the research conducted for this edition of *Vital Signs*, we are even more acutely aware of the gap in meaningful resources that exists for those around the poverty level. We have identified issues specific to our community, such as high eviction rates and low wages, and acknowledge many solutions already in practice, like TEEM’s partnership with CareerTech and ReMerge’s initiative to redirect women from incarceration to treatment and resources. We address misconceptions about those living in poverty and cover the effects on children who are born into it, including lack of quality education and maladaptive behaviors.

As you read, we invite you to join us and our dedicated nonprofit Partner Agencies in this mission of disrupting poverty. We are eager to share these challenging statistics and stories in the hope that you will commit, alongside us, to creating a culture in Oklahoma that cares well for the disadvantaged by taking action.

We welcome your questions and comments, as well as the opportunity to present these findings to the community. Please email us at vitalsigns@unitedwayokc.org or call 405-236-8441.

Sincerely,

**Nick Samarripas**
Chair, Research and Community Initiatives Committee
United Way of Central Oklahoma
WHAT IS POVERTY?

Poverty is a condition in which a person or community lacks the financial means to provide for essentials. Compared to others in society, those in poverty have a diminished standard of living in terms of proper housing, clean water, healthy food and medical needs. Poverty is a well-known societal challenge, and most people have at least a general idea of its components.

In Oklahoma, the state's history of facing challenges like the Trail of Tears and the Dust Bowl provides a greater cultural significance for the experience of poverty. The historical legacy of racism in Oklahoma still has an impact on poverty in the present day.¹,² For different groups in society, a variety of family, social and community histories with the experiences of poverty may be unique.

Lived Experiences of Poverty

People experiencing poverty often struggle to secure even the most basic needs in their daily lives. Despite the hard work and effort of those with lower incomes to improve their circumstances, the struggles of poverty persist. By recognizing the social and emotional challenges people living in poverty confront every day, we can better understand the issue of poverty and what is necessary to disrupt it.

United Way Partner Agencies

Disrupting Poverty: Positive Tomorrows

Positive Tomorrows is a United Way of Central Oklahoma Partner Agency working to break the cycle of poverty by partnering with homeless families to educate their children and create pathways to success. As Oklahoma's only elementary school specifically for children and families experiencing homelessness, Positive Tomorrows provides children with stability and a quality education while their parents get the support they need to create a better life.

When Richard and Sheila first enrolled their three sons in Positive Tomorrows, they were sleeping in their van, along with all of their belongings and the family pet. They fled an unsafe situation across the country, arriving in Oklahoma with the hope of better opportunities and the promise of a place to live. Unfortunately, their housing plans fell through and the family was left stranded.

A welder by trade, Richard needed an Oklahoma driver's license to begin his job search. The family's case manager at Positive Tomorrows helped Richard secure an ID, begin his job search and enroll in the Coordinated Case Management program at the Homeless Alliance. Richard found part-time work right away, and the boys began attending school and the after-school program at Positive Tomorrows. They immediately began to thrive with space to run and play, as well as access to breakfast, lunch and a supportive environment.

Using emergency housing funds, the family was able to temporarily stay safely in a motel. They met with their case manager to establish family goals, set up school counseling and attend housing inspections. The family moved from the motel into their own home, where they have successfully lived for more than a year. Richard found full-time employment, and the family became self-sufficient.
Stigma and Narratives About Poverty

In addition to material deprivation, poverty also deprives people of feeling respected and valued within a community. Poverty shaming occurs when negative judgments are directed toward those in poverty for decisions or resources that they rely upon in their struggle to provide for themselves.

Television and print portrayals of poverty also contribute to preconceptions about people in poverty as nonworking and of racial and ethnic minority status.³

- Individuals in poverty are a diverse range of people from all races, genders and nationalities.
- Sociologists estimate that 62% of Americans between the age of 25 and 60 will experience a year in the bottom 1/5th of incomes.

For women in poverty, the experience of poverty shaming may include factors such as being judged for decisions related to caring for children. Men experience particular shame associated with not “earning a living,” often coupled with stereotypes about their character or morality. Children from low-income families face the unfortunate practice of “lunch shaming,” where unpaid meal debts may result in being singled out or having food withheld.

The experience of stigma and shame may be a contributing factor to depression in lower-income populations. While only 23.3% of Oklahomans overall identified as having a depressive disorder, 33.8% of the population earning less than $25,000 annually reported depressive disorders.⁴

Disrupting Stigma

- In 2017, Oklahoma City Public Schools announced free school breakfast and lunch at all sites, reducing stigma associated with “lunch shaming.”
- In 2019-2020, 47.8% of eligible Oklahoma schools adopted the community eligibility provision allowing low-income schools to provide breakfast and lunch to all students free of charge, up from about 32% in 2016-2017.⁵
- Life experiences of those in poverty are important to consider when determining how programs are implemented. Client or member advisory boards that give lower-income participants greater visibility are a best practice for many nonprofits and government agencies.

Poverty in Oklahoma Across All Walks of Life

Who are the faces of poverty?

- 33.9% of Oklahomans living in female-headed households with no husband present.
- 25.5% of adults without a high school diploma.
- 3.7% of full-time workers and 23.3% of part-time workers.
- 24.1% of residents without citizenship status.
- 19.5% of Native Americans, 27.6% of Black Oklahomans, 23% of Hispanic Oklahomans, 19.7% of Multiracial Oklahomans and 10.2% of white Oklahomans.
The U.S. Census Bureau establishes a poverty threshold, also known as the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), which varies by family size and number of children in the household. Beginning in the 1960s, statisticians researched an exact dollar value for a food package that could meet the basic needs of a family for one week. This cost is then multiplied by three to roughly scale to the value of all needs for a household.\(^7\)

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services establishes poverty guidelines, which simplify the census thresholds. Since nonprofits have limited resources, the guidelines help in making distinctions to target services for those with the most intense vulnerability to poverty.

**Programs That Use Poverty Guidelines:**

**Head Start**
- Established: 1964
- Reach: 20,446 children enrolled in Oklahoma in 2019\(^8\)

**Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program**
- Established: 1965
- Reach: 595,148 Oklahoma children enrolled in 2019\(^9\)

**Community Health Centers**
- Established: 1965
- Reach: 263,400 Oklahoma health center patients in 2019\(^10\)

**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**
- Established: 1964
- Reach: 804,461 unduplicated persons in SFY 2019\(^11\)

**National School Lunch & School Breakfast Programs**
- Established: 1975
- Reach: 438,037 average participation in Oklahoma in 2018-2019 school year\(^12\)

**Title I – Education Funding**
- Established: 1965
- Reach: $170 million allocated to Oklahoma in FY 2017\(^13\)
**Living Wage**
Researchers have defined the broader living wage as an alternative to the stricter poverty measure that would account for many basic costs beyond food.

- A living wage for a household with two adults and two children is $15.73/hour or $32,718/year for each full-time working adult, which is about 245% of FPL or 2.5 times the poverty level.  

**Oklahoma’s Lowest Wage Earners (2019)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCENTILE</th>
<th>WAGE</th>
<th># OKLAHOMA WORKERS</th>
<th>RANK AMONG 50 STATES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>$9.00/hour or less</td>
<td>162,000</td>
<td>5th lowest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25th</td>
<td>$11.56/hour or less</td>
<td>404,350</td>
<td>8th lowest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Limitations on the Official Poverty Measurement**

Fully understanding the nature of poverty is a complex effort. Nonprofits familiar with the spectrum of experiences associated with poverty recognize the poverty line concept has several limitations. In response to these limitations, experts created a Supplemental Poverty Measure in 2011, which is used to better target a measurement of poverty incorporating important additional considerations.

**Poverty Proximity**

Even for those with incomes slightly above poverty, a gap of thousands of dollars separates them from the median income, which was $53,434 for Oklahoma in 2018. A wide range of people who are just above poverty still face poverty proximity. This describes the position of a person’s income compared to the official poverty level. Incomes expressed as 50%, 150% or 200% of the federal poverty level help to show how living on incomes technically above the poverty level is still challenging. Situations outside of one's control, such as a modest reduction in working hours or a minor emergency, could place many families back into poverty or near-poverty status.

**Incomes Relative to Federal Poverty Levels (2019 FPL)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>50% OF FPL</th>
<th>100% OF FPL</th>
<th>150% OF FPL</th>
<th>200% OF FPL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>$6,650</td>
<td>$13,300</td>
<td>$19,951</td>
<td>$26,601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family, 2 adults, 2 children</td>
<td>$12,963</td>
<td>$25,926</td>
<td>$38,890</td>
<td>$51,853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approx. Hourly Wage at Level of Poverty</td>
<td>$3.19</td>
<td>$6.39</td>
<td>$9.59</td>
<td>$12.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LIMITATION SUMMARY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIMITATION</th>
<th>SUMMARY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Differences</td>
<td>Poverty thresholds only vary based on the cost of living in Alaska and Hawaii, but costs can be very different based on location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in Family Budgets</td>
<td>The original poverty threshold only took into consideration basic food costs, but not other necessities like housing, child care and health care. The newer Supplemental Poverty Measure addresses some of these issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strict Definition of “Income”</td>
<td>Since the official measure has a limited measure of only dollars of pre-tax income, it excludes the value of government programs and non-cash benefits such as SNAP or housing. The Supplemental Poverty Measure shows the impact of these benefits.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUBTYPES OF POVERTY

While the individual circumstances and lived experiences of those in poverty can vary, common subtypes of poverty illustrate its connection with the broader concept of socioeconomic status. The following definitions of common poverty subtypes illustrate several challenges to disrupting poverty.

- **Working Poor:** According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the working poor are characterized as those who are in the labor force, yet still have incomes close to the poverty level.

- **Deep Poverty:** Those who earn less than half of the federal poverty level, which is significantly below the level to provide for basic needs, are considered to be in deep poverty.

- **Neighborhood and Concentrated Poverty:** High levels of a population living in poverty within a small geographic area is known as neighborhood or concentrated poverty.

- **Generational Poverty:** Generational poverty describes how cycles of disadvantage are perpetuated across past, present and future generations.

**Working Poor**

In central Oklahoma, many employed adults remain in poverty.

- **Example:** Individuals who earn the minimum wage or those who cannot obtain consistent hours for a stable income.

**Myth:** Poverty is something that only happens to people who don’t work.

**Fact:** An Oklahoma worker would need to work 86 hours/week at minimum wage to afford a two-bedroom rental home at fair market rent.

**Working Poor Facts**

- The federal minimum wage is $7.25/hr, last updated in July 2009. For employees usually earning tips, the minimum is $2.13/hr.

- Since 1978, wages for those in the lowest 10% of earners only went up by 1.6%, adjusted for inflation.

- Oklahoma has the 8th highest proportion of hourly workers making at or below the minimum wage among all 50 states.

**Disrupting Poverty by Raising Incomes**

Increased wages are an essential strategy to significantly reduce poverty among Oklahomans. Oklahoma is among the minority of states with a minimum wage that is not higher than the federal floor.

- Five states do not require a minimum wage by their state law.

- Oklahoma and 15 other states have a minimum wage at $7.25.
Deep Poverty
Compared to other families in poverty, households in deep poverty endure highly precarious and distressing situations with respect to their housing, food security and other essentials.

Example: Persons experiencing chronic homelessness with disabling physical or mental health conditions that make finding employment difficult. Chronically homeless individuals may be continuously homeless for at least a year, or on frequent occasions in a multi-year period. Securing clean clothing, transportation and forms of identification are barriers to accessing needed services for this population.

Deep Poverty Facts
- 264,068 (6.9%) Oklahomans’ incomes were below 50% of the FPL in 2018 compared to 5.9% of the overall U.S. population with incomes at this level.
- Veterans make up approximately 10% of Oklahoma City’s homeless population.
- Approximately 26% of those experiencing homelessness in Oklahoma City report mental illness.

Disrupting Deep Poverty
Individuals experiencing deep poverty often have chronic conditions and unaddressed trauma that pose a challenge for supporting themselves. Data shows that traumatic experiences are common among populations at risk of homelessness, such as for veterans and survivors of abuse.

Addressing the long-term challenges of homeless individuals through permanent supportive housing for those with disabling conditions is key to disrupting poverty in this population.

Implementing trauma-informed service approaches also assists those in deep poverty in recognizing the importance of safety and control over what happens in their lives. An ability to have a final determination regarding which services and changes they would like to initiate helps to avoid re-traumatization. The Homeless Alliance, a United Way of Central Oklahoma Partner Agency, operates the WestTown Homeless Resource Campus in Oklahoma City, which is a comprehensive resource center and day shelter that embodies many of the evidence-based principles known to disrupt deep poverty and support personal agency.

Oklahoma has made strides in reducing homelessness among veterans, with a decrease of 21% from 2011 to 2019. Significant support and coordination between nonprofits, veterans’ organizations and the federal government is also helping to address mental health and substance abuse challenges for homeless veterans.

Neighborhood and Concentrated Poverty
In addition to the struggles individuals may face, historical inequities related to housing, racism and disinvestment are key factors of concentrated poverty. Additionally, social stigma and a lack of mutual understanding and relationships with wealthier communities further isolate these areas.
Example: Concentrated poverty leads to a cycle of devaluation of housing and public institutions in specific neighborhoods. As a consequence, schools have a lower tax base and low-income students are physically or socially isolated from more prosperous neighborhoods, even just a few blocks away. 34

Myth: Neighborhoods with a high concentration of low-income and minority residents are unable to sustain economic activity.

Fact: Oklahoma is home to more than 50,000 self-employed business owners of a minority background.35 In the past decade, the historic gap in business ownership between non-white and white entrepreneurs has been narrowing.

Neighborhood and Concentrated Poverty Facts

Children residing in areas with a high concentration of poverty face several barriers to climbing ladders of opportunity. Low-income households in neighborhoods not only face limited household resources, but may also be negatively impacted by fewer opportunities to gain wealth and receive a quality education.

- Oklahoma City ranked 41st out of 53 large metro areas in racial inclusion, due to higher disparities in economic outcomes between white and minority communities. 36
- A gap of about 18 years in life expectancy exists between different Oklahoma City ZIP codes. 37

Poverty Level (%) by ZIP Code in Central Oklahoma

Disrupting Poverty in Neighborhoods

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), administered by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), support a variety of projects which primarily benefit low- and moderate-income residents. Federal funding for Oklahoma City totaled $5.8 million during program year 2018, allowing for projects to disrupt poverty through building stronger communities. 38

Oklahoma City CDBG Expenditures, Program Year 2018
Poverty Disparities by Race in the Oklahoma City Metro (2018)

The poverty rate varies significantly by racial/ethnic minority status.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Group</th>
<th>Poverty Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFRICAN AMERICAN/BLACK</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMERICAN INDIAN/NATIVE AMERICAN</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASIAN AMERICAN</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATIVE HAWAIIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER RACE</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MULTIRACIAL</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HISPANIC/LATINO</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHITE, NON-HISPANIC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall Poverty Rate in OKC Metro: 29.3%
Race and Poverty

Historically, racism has contributed to higher poverty rates through systematic exclusion of minorities in education, housing and employment opportunities. Numerous Jim Crow laws enforced racial segregation early in Oklahoma’s history, as well as laws that deprived American Indians of their rightful land and heritage. Throughout the 20th century, public policies denied mortgages and subsidized housing to Black Oklahomans and confined them to areas receiving less investment. In workplace settings, non-white Oklahomans, as well as women, were denied work opportunities for decades.

In the present day, studies have observed denial of opportunities for Black applicants, even when similarly qualified as a white peer for a job. Asian, Hispanic and other minorities of immigrant backgrounds have also been subject to a range of specific language and employment-based barriers that perpetuate poverty. Violence and physical destruction of neighborhoods such as the burning of more than 1,000 structures in the Greenwood district during the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre is one of the clearest examples of the traumatic and devastating impact of racism to human lives, safety and well-being.

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Poverty

Among the more than 1.3 million residents of central Oklahoma, nearly one in seven experienced poverty in 2018. The experience of poverty exists in both the suburbs and the core city, as well as among people of all educational levels. Poverty exists across all racial and ethnic groups, but disproportionately harms Oklahoma’s Black, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian and American Indian children. Hispanic/Latino and Black residents in the Oklahoma City area were respectively two and three times as likely to experience poverty as their white peers. Oklahoma City residents of American Indian descent faced poverty at a 50% higher rate than white residents. These disparities persist over time, even when factors such as state and national economic conditions have changed.

Children of racial and ethnic minority status are more likely to live in neighborhoods with higher poverty. Neighborhoods shape the opportunities that are accessible, and many of these, such as education, early work experience and social connections, are essential to counteracting poverty’s hardships. Parents raising their children in poverty have to painstakingly plan all aspects of their life to avoid the many pitfalls related to poverty.

In the Oklahoma City Metro area, racial and ethnic demographics are closely intertwined with income.

- On average, 38% of all residents in the Oklahoma City Metro area are considered low-income.
- At the census tract level, 125 census tracts in the Oklahoma City Metro area have higher non-white (Black, Hispanic, Asian American, American Indian and multiracial) populations than the state as a whole.
- In the 100 census tracts with highest percentage of non-white residents, 68% of residents are low-income.
- In the 100 census tracts with the highest percentage of white residents, only 17.7% of residents are low-income.
Historically disadvantaged communities struggle to get equal resources for their schools, compared to wealthier neighborhoods. Predominantly Black, Hispanic and American Indian school districts in Oklahoma are estimated to receive 30% less funding on average than predominantly white districts, even accounting for wealth differences. As a result of funding disparities, high-quality course offerings in subjects like math and science in particular are less available to minority students in areas of concentrated poverty. Higher rates of poverty, as well as higher levels of Black, Hispanic or American Indian students, were found to decrease the odds of schools offering biology, physics and chemistry. Additionally, school size and status as an alternative or charter school were associated with lower chances of engagement in similar subjects.

**Generational Poverty**

Adults and children simultaneously experience the malignant effects of generational poverty. Children are denied access to many of the building blocks necessary to succeed, contributing to widening gaps between low-income youth and their higher-income peers. As children grow and develop into adults, research confirms that their early life struggles in poverty influence them throughout their lifetime. These factors prevent the income mobility necessary to avoid the poverty of prior generations.

- **Example:** A lack of transportation or internet access limits employment opportunities. Even when employment is available, inconsistent hours and low wages prevent families from becoming financially stable, increasing the chances of eviction, utility cutoffs and other aspects of unstable housing. The resulting constant stress in the household significantly impacts the lives of children, who without basic stability may suffer in their educational success.
Generational Poverty Blocks Pathways to Improve Lives

Downward Mobility
Economic downturns especially harm those in poverty, leading to downward mobility:
- Poor health outcomes
- Reduced social services
- Disparities in layoffs and reduced opportunity

Blocked Mobility
Starting from a disadvantage, children in poverty have blocked mobility for many reasons:
- Reduced access to quality education and resources
- Limited social connections to learn of opportunity
- Complexity of systems

Upward Mobility
With the proper building blocks of education, health and financial opportunity, upward mobility describes how children can disrupt the cycle experienced by their parents or other family members.

Early Development and Poverty
The youngest members of the community are among the most vulnerable to poverty. Scientists studying the developing brain have documented specific windows of time, such as the prenatal period and infancy, that are critical to later well-being. Generational poverty and its related biological and psychosocial factors are detrimental to the development of children with enduring consequences.

In recent years, progress in the downward trend of child poverty has slowed in central Oklahoma.

- In 2018, Oklahoma City had a higher childhood poverty rate than three out of four of the largest metropolitan areas.

- While two out of three of the top 100 metro areas in the U.S. saw child poverty decline, Oklahoma City’s rate increased by almost one point.

- 1,673 children would be out of poverty in Oklahoma City if our region’s child poverty rate had a comparable decline to the nation.

The Oklahoma City area appears to have diverged from the national trend in decrease of child poverty.
Poverty's Impact on Children

Longitudinal impacts of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

- Maladaptive behaviors begin in children.
- Reduced educational opportunity.

Future Generations

- Blocked pathways and lack of social capital to avoid poverty.
- Replication of family and socioeconomic dynamics.
- Neighborhood deprivation.

Biological Factors

During early childhood, models of the brain show that the frontal cortex and hippocampus need to fully develop for a child to improve their self-regulation. When a child enters the world, consistent interaction with supportive adults allows children to cope with stress and return their stress response system to a healthy level.

- In the first years of life, the human brain forms more than 1 million new neural connections per second.47
- Children in lower socioeconomic status households are at risk of atypical cortisol levels, which can be harmful to well-being.48

Psychosocial Factors

Parents who establish foundational social relationships with their children lessen the vulnerability of young children to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). ACE scores measure exposure of a child to experiences that strongly correlate with challenging life outcomes and greater difficulty breaking the cycle of poverty. Despite these challenges, protective and compensatory experiences (PACEs) help balance a child's life to be more resilient in adversity.49

- Family environments of violence and untreated mental illness are detrimental to young children.50
- Quality mother-child relationships influence brain development.51
- Single-parent families face a rate of poverty that is four times higher than two-parent families.52

Poverty's Impact on Parents

- Poverty leads to economic strain.
- Interparental conflict becomes more likely.
- Nurturing parenting declines.

Number of Lifetime ACEs for Adults (2018)53

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of ACEs</th>
<th>0 ACEs</th>
<th>1 ACE</th>
<th>2-3 ACEs</th>
<th>4+ ACEs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number (%)</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number and Percentage of Children in Poverty
Expanding the capacity of early education programs to ensure greater access can help clear pathways for children to avoid generational poverty. Among the United Way of Central Oklahoma Partner Agencies that are directly addressing the generational cycle of poverty is the Latino Community Development Agency (LCDA).

The agency’s Tony Reyes Child Development Center provides early learning opportunities for children age birth to 5, focusing on physical, cognitive, social-emotional and health needs. The center's model of services is particularly beneficial to the Spanish-speaking population of Oklahoma City, with nationally-accredited, bilingual infant-toddler programs. Services for newborn children to age 3 are provided through Early Head Start, focusing on services for low-income families. For children ages 3-5, the transitional preschool program prepares children for the education that can illuminate pathways out of poverty through school success.

For families like the Walkers, the Tony Reyes Child Development Center is not only providing early childhood education, but also offering holistic support for the family unit to reduce the negative impacts of poverty. Ms. Walker is a retiree and the primary caregiver of her granddaughter, Sophia, who attends the Reyes Center. Living on a fixed income, Ms. Walker experienced a broken-down car and she was unable to afford the repairs. Without reliable transportation, she was facing challenges in bringing her granddaughter to school, and Sophia’s attendance suffered. In addition, she often expressed concerns about providing food for Sophia at home.

Thanks to their LCDA family advocate, Ms. Walker was referred to low-cost car repair services and a food pantry. Now, she’s able to bring Sophia to school regularly and provide nutritional meals for her growing granddaughter to thrive. The LCDA family advocate meets with the family each month to identify needs and connect them with community resources, ultimately working toward the goal of self-sufficiency.

### Impact of Generational Poverty on Graduation Rates

Poverty not only impacts children in early childhood, but the disadvantages grow as children get older. The cumulative effects on children raised in poverty lead to a higher risk of dropping out of high school. Those who do graduate high school are less likely to attend college than students from higher-income families.

The chart below compiles data for the entire Oklahoma City Commuting Zone, a geographical area similar to the entire metropolitan statistical area (MSA). High school and college graduation rates are shown by income percentile as a child. For example, for children who grow up in the lowest 25% of household incomes, 77% graduate high school and 17% graduate college.

### Graduation Rates for Oklahoma City Commuting Zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>25TH PERCENTILE</th>
<th>50TH PERCENTILE</th>
<th>75TH PERCENTILE</th>
<th>OVERALL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduation Rate</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduation Rate</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Digital Divide
Digital inclusion is essential to adapting to a changing education and employment landscape. Without access to high-speed internet and necessary devices, children are less connected to supportive adults outside the home and can fall further behind in their learning.

- 167,000 Oklahoma children were estimated by the State Department of Education to be without broadband internet access, which is a key concern due to the speed necessary to fully engage in digital lessons.  

- In the Oklahoma City Metro Area, nearly one in seven (14.1%) households did not have broadband of any type.

Lifetime Outcomes of Children Raised in Low-income Households
Oklahoma County children raised in the lowest income quartile, compared to those in the highest income quartile, are:

- 2.6 times less likely to have obtained at least a two-year degree as those in the highest income quartile

- 8.6 times more likely to be incarcerated

Adult Earnings for Children Raised in the Lowest 25% of Family Incomes:
Rankings of Central Oklahoma Counties Among All 77 Counties

- 75th Oklahoma County
- 38th Logan County
- 18th Canadian County

Cumulative Disadvantage Across Poverty Types
The challenge of rising out of poverty is further compounded by the accumulation of interlocking disadvantages. In addition to the lack of tangible resources, scarcity of key social relationships can often block pathways out of poverty.

For Children
Research demonstrates how poverty can have durational effects on children: the longer a child spends in poverty, the greater the chance is for poverty-related disadvantages to accumulate in their lives. Children are negatively impacted by multiple subtypes of poverty the longer they must remain in an impoverished home and neighborhood environment.

Growing up in an unstable home environment may prevent supportive early learning experiences. Neighborhood poverty strongly influences the resources available to local schools and community centers, creating a gap in resources necessary to support the needs of all children. In addition, social influences around the child may impact their view of education and minimize their long-term plans and aspirations.

For Adults
Transitioning out of the ranks of the working poor can be incredibly difficult. For adults in poverty, acquiring greater skills and ability to adapt to new workplaces is more challenging without access to jobs that allow for training or benefits such as educational leave. Finally, those in poverty have a disadvantage navigating the unwritten rules of gateways to opportunity such as college, particularly first-generation college attendees. First-generation students often feel intense pressure to adapt quickly to the social and financial implications of college attendance. Succeeding in college is more difficult when a student is deprived of a social network that can relate to their situation as a first-generation student. Knowledge gaps between students who have parents attending colleges and those who do not lead to disproportionate rates of financial difficulty during and after the college years.

Long-term studies, such as the U.S. Census Equality of Opportunity Project, provide evidence of the long-term connection between a childhood in poverty and later life outcomes. Researchers for the project analyzed the data for a cohort of children born in the 1970s through early 1980s, and systematically identified links between their childhood neighborhood’s poverty, parental income and later outcomes in early adulthood. This research adds to the evidence showing a strong pattern between a child’s household income and future outcomes throughout their life.
Insights into disrupting the cycle of poverty through public policy approaches have become more available in recent decades. Across the nation, researchers have had sufficient data to thoroughly review many ways to disrupt poverty.

Researchers at Harvard University analyzed 133 historical policy changes over the past 50 years in the United States and identified key patterns of how economic security programs can improve the welfare of the population:

- Programs that invest in children from low-income families at early age have high value and yield far more in benefits to children than their upfront cost.
- Programs that invest in the health and education of children at many points along their development have significant benefits.
- Programs that invest in adults have significant value, especially when they impact households also including children.

**Health Disparities Related to Poverty**

Those living in poverty also face a number of health disparities including limited access to proper nutrition and wellness resources, a standard of living that causes elevated stress levels and lack of access to medical care. Individuals who live in impoverished neighborhoods are likely to experience poor health due to a combination of factors that present obstacles to health maintenance.

**Stress, Poverty and Health**

Researchers across scientific areas are beginning to better understand the relationship between poverty, stress and overall health. Stress raises the body’s endocrine, immune and hormonal responses. Growing up in poverty can cause numerous stressors, activating a prolonged response in both the mind and body, which over time become difficult to return to a level of stasis. This condition where the body remains stuck in a high-stress response position is called allostatic load. High allostatic load taxes the body’s ability to withstand daily events and stressors of life.

**Physical Activity and Healthy Eating**

Neighborhood poverty levels strongly influence individual health decisions. Healthy eating choices and physical activity are key factors to maintaining wellness, but are more challenging with fewer resources. For example, when a family is struggling, less expensive options such as fast food may be the only affordable choices.

- In the U.S., households in poverty receive about 92% of total SNAP benefits, while those in deep poverty receive about 55% of total SNAP benefits.
- Food insecurity is correlated with poorer-quality diets and chronic health conditions.
- Only 38% of Oklahoma City residents live within a 10-minute walk to a park, compared to a national average of 55%.
- Oklahoma students participating in free and reduced-price lunch have increased 11.2% in the past decade.

**Did You Know? War on Poverty**

The federal government underwent a significantly increased role in addressing concerns of low-income citizens when President Lyndon Johnson declared War on Poverty in 1964. Many building blocks of the program were initially created under the Civil Rights Act and Economic Opportunity Acts passed that same year. In subsequent years, policymakers have introduced additional programs to disrupt the impact of poverty.
Food Security Disrupts Poverty
Access to nutritious food is essential to a healthy childhood. Several key programs fight food insecurity for low-income families, and in turn disrupt childhood poverty’s detrimental effects. Hunger contributes to delayed development, decreased language skills and increased behavior problems in children. Despite the challenges of hunger, by sustaining vital food assistance programs we can provide opportunities for poverty disruption.

United Way Partner Agencies
Disrupting Poverty: Skyline
Skyline, a United Way of Central Oklahoma Partner Agency, has been providing groceries to hungry Oklahomans for nearly 50 years. Skyline’s Food Resource Center targets unemployed, underemployed, children, disabled, senior citizens and homeless households in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. Of the 20,000 Oklahomans served annually through the Food Resource Center, 81% fall into the “working poor” classification.

The Food Resource Center distributes food to patrons in two ways. First, the “Store” allows families to receive approximately 80 pounds of groceries every 30 days and also offers nutrition resources including an onsite garden, gardening at home classes, recipes and samples of healthy meal options and healthy cooking classes. Second, the “Mobile Pantry” travels to 14 sites such as independent living senior centers and low-income housing each month, distributing approximately 30 pounds of groceries per household.

“By alleviating a portion of grocery costs for low-income families, Skyline fills the gaps, enabling households to use their limited income to remain housed, pay utilities and afford needed medications,” said Rev. Deborah J. Ingraham, Skyline CEO.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides benefits to eligible, low-income individuals and families through an electronic benefit card that may be used to purchase eligible food in authorized grocery stores. Families are eligible if they have a gross monthly income of 130% of the poverty line or less.

- In 2016, SNAP lifted 3.3 million U.S. children out of poverty and 1.9 million out of deep poverty.
- Children receiving SNAP benefits report better health status and are less likely to miss days of school.67

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC)
WIC is tailored to the nutritional needs of pregnant and recent mothers, as well as children age 5 and younger. Participants are provided with benefit cards or vouchers that may be used to purchase items such as baby food and formula, as well as fruits and vegetables.

- In 2018, WIC lifted 169,000 U.S. children out of poverty.68
- For infants born to mothers of lower-socioeconomic status, receiving WIC significantly increased birth weights to a healthier level, preventing further health problems.
- WIC drives neighborhood availability of higher-quality food, with recent updates to require whole grain and reduced-fat options to provide more nutritional products.69
Medicaid Disrupts Poverty
Having health insurance at an early age boosts the ability of children to disrupt the cycle of poverty. Long-term studies of cohorts of children have found those who receive Medicaid earn more and are less dependent on future government assistance in the years beyond their childhood.

- For every $1 of initial spending on Medicaid for children, $1.78 is returned back in future earnings.\(^70\)
- Children who receive Medicaid earn more in their lifetime and are less dependent on later assistance.
- A study of generational impacts of Medicaid found that health insurance for pregnant mothers was linked to healthier birth weights and outcomes for their newborn children.\(^71\)

Education Disrupts Poverty
Education is highly correlated with many outcomes that reduce the likelihood of poverty. Ensuring educational support for children lights a pathway to a brighter future out of poverty. At each step of the educational journey, from the early years to postsecondary education, young people gain training, skills and social connections essential to reducing poverty-related disadvantages.

EmbraceOKC
In 2019, the Oklahoma City Public Schools Compact launched the EmbraceOKC Initiative to support behavioral health improvements throughout Oklahoma City Public Schools. The collaborative initiative is a comprehensive approach to achieve maximum social and emotional well-being for students and their families through school-based mental health services including awareness, prevention, early intervention and treatment.

The EmbraceOKC district-wide action plan aims to not only increase the number of school counselors in Oklahoma City Public Schools, but also to provide evidence-based training to teachers and support staff to help them identify behavioral health issues so they can intervene and connect the student and family with support services. In addition, EmbraceOKC will provide for the implementation of social and emotional learning programs to support and strengthen well-being among students and educators.

Students with depression, trauma and violence exposure or serious emotional disturbances are more likely to be absent, have poorer grades and are less likely to complete secondary education than other students. School-based social and emotional learning programs like those supported through EmbraceOKC have effects equivalent to a 10 percentage point gain in academic test performance and improvements in school attendance. In addition, school-based interventions can mitigate the negative effects of non-school risk factors such as those related to poverty disparities.

Early Childhood Education
Oklahoma has a strong, innovative early childhood education system that allows for availability and choice for low-income families. Attending early childhood education enriches the development of children at a crucial stage, particularly for those from lower-income households. Expanding capacity to reach the 45,000 children who are potentially awaiting early childhood educational services would build upon central Oklahoma’s success.\(^72\)

Universal Voluntary Pre-K: In 1998, Oklahoma became the third state in the nation to offer free, universal voluntary pre-K for all 4-year-old children, regardless of family income.

- 74% of 4-year-olds in Oklahoma are enrolled in public pre-K programs.

Educare: a nationwide network of early education programs for children from birth to age 5 that focuses on school readiness and family support.\(^73\)

- 212 Oklahoma City children are served through Educare.

After one year of enrollment in Educare, children showed significant improvements in English language, expressive skills, interaction with parents and reduced behavior problems.\(^74\)
Title I Schools and State Aid

Students residing in higher-poverty areas may have specific challenges, such as homelessness, which harm their ability to learn if left unaddressed. Supplemental funding for public schools through state and federal aid programs, such as Title I and State Aid formula grants, lessen local disparities. Investing in educational equity for children is a key element to disrupting poverty.

- Title I, Part A, the largest grant program to school districts, contributed more than $1,000 per eligible Oklahoma child in 2016.
- State Aid reached a high of $3,370 per student in the 2019-2020 school year.

Advanced Placement (AP) Classes

Students who are exposed to rigorous coursework are more prepared for further education after they graduate high school. Advanced Placement classes in schools provide students of different backgrounds an early opportunity to experience high-level courses while completing exams that can earn credit for college.

- About 50% of high-poverty schools offer advanced math, compared to 85% of their counterparts with lower poverty rates.
- In 2019, Oklahoma families were estimated to save $13 million in defrayed tuition by completing Advanced Placement classes.
- Gov. Kevin Stitt signed HB 3400 in March 2020, which sets the goal of providing AP-level classes and enrollment information to all public high schools by the 2024-2025 school year.

Training Disrupt Poverty

An essential component of disrupting poverty is to introduce young adults to career opportunities and build skills necessary to be successful in the workplace. Oklahoma’s CareerTech system prepares students for success through workforce training and supportive systems of counseling, mentorship and financial aid, reducing barriers for youth and adults in poverty.

- Nearly 70,000 students in central Oklahoma were enrolled in CareerTech during Fiscal Year 2019.

Disadvantages in Higher Education

U.S. college enrollment rates immediately following high school are lower for students from underprivileged backgrounds.

- In 2019, only 38% of economically disadvantaged 11th and 12th graders gained postsecondary credit, compared to 48.3% of non-disadvantaged peers.
- In 2019, 21% of students from areas with a high concentration of poverty obtained a degree within six years. For students from areas with low concentrations of poverty, 55% obtained a postsecondary degree.
- In the first fall of graduation, 54% of students from schools with high concentrations of poverty enrolled in college, compared to 76% of those with a low concentration of poverty.

CareerTech Centers in Central Oklahoma (2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CANADIAN VALLEY</th>
<th>METRO TECH</th>
<th>FRANCIS TUTTLE</th>
<th>EASTERN OKLAHOMA COUNTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrollment</td>
<td>26,192</td>
<td>14,992</td>
<td>21,838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Job Placements</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged Students</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sub-Baccalaureate Degrees
Oklahoma has a higher proportion of postsecondary graduates in sub-baccalaureate degree programs (associate's degrees and other occupational and academic certifications) than the nation as a whole.

Percentage of Undergraduate Credentials Awarded Through Sub-Baccalaureate Programs

10.4% of all undergraduate credentials awarded in Oklahoma were in certificate or associate education programs in manufacturing, construction, repair and transportation, compared to only 5% of similar credentials awarded nationally.

Breaking the Cycle of Incarceration and Poverty
As noted earlier in this report, growing up in poverty significantly increases the likelihood of incarceration. In addition, formerly incarcerated individuals often have lower earning potential, and many end up back behind bars at some point in their lives.

Annual Percentage of U.S. Prisoners Arrested Post-Release Since 2005

71% of participants enrolled in TEEM’s reentry services secured employment in 2020.
63% of participants obtained a job credential.
84% of participants received follow-up services.

TEEM participants like Darren often lack the resources needed to get back on their feet following release from prison. When Darren connected with TEEM, he was finishing a six-year prison sentence and lacked basic necessities like housing, clothing, employment and transportation. Through the Reentry Services program, Darren built his first resume, accessed direct services for housing, food and clothing, completed trainings in construction and forklift operation and earned his OSHA10 safety certification. He also participated in cognitive-behavior courses, addiction recovery support and case management services that allowed him to obtain a driver’s license and gain employment.

Thanks to TEEM, Darren seized his opportunity at a second chance, gained his independence and is working toward the personal goals he identified for himself. Now released from prison and employed full-time, he looks to the future with excitement. “Everything is going well,” he said. “I’ve got my own place now, and I’m looking at buying a car. It’s been a hard road, but TEEM helped me every step of the way.”
Financial Stability Disrupts Poverty

Financial stability helps individuals and families disrupt the cycle of poverty. Households who are financially stable prevent the cascading consequences of unexpected bills. For example, low-income individuals often pay high percentages of their income in rent, making it more difficult to afford deposits or escalating fees and fines.

Consumers with less disposable income face daunting impacts if they miss payments, ranging from repossession of items to further negative marks on their rent or credit history. Public records related to debt collection and court proceedings negatively impact their future attempts to move out of poverty. The multiplying effects of these challenges may end in eviction or housing disruption.

- One in five (20.2%) Oklahoma adults experienced account delinquency (more than 90 days past due), compared to only 14.8% for the nation and 14.1% for our regional Federal Reserve District.

- 10% of those earning less than $40,000/year currently had unpaid legal expenses, fines or court costs, which is more than triple the percentage of those in the highest income group.

Financial Well-Being

Key elements of financial stability include, but are not limited to: feeling a sense of control over day-to-day finances, capacity to cope with a financial shock and flexibility to make choices to enjoy life. Researchers with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau have developed a Financial Well-Being Score to form a common measurement of factors underpinning financial well-being. Lower financial well-being scores are associated with higher credit rejection, material hardship and greater inability to cope with emergency expenses.

Financial Well-Being Scores of Oklahoma Adults Age 18-61

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Percentile</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowest 10% of income</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest 10% of income</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oklahoma has a 43-point gap between financial well-being scores of adults age 18-61 for the 10th and 90th percentiles of incomes, the largest gap of any state.

Poverty and Financial Well-Being in Oklahoma

Percent of the State Population in Poverty and Percent of Adults (18 and Older) With Low and Very Low Financial Well-Being Score.

Housing and Financial Stability

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a wage of $15.54/hour would be needed for an average two-bed housing unit to be affordable. It would take 86 hours/week at the minimum wage to afford this average unit, which is more than two full-time earners in a standard week.

- Every day, approximately 17-18 households are evicted in Oklahoma City.

- The likelihood of being laid off is 11%-15% higher for those experiencing eviction.

- More than 1,500 people were experiencing homelessness on the night of Oklahoma City’s Point-In-Time Count in 2020.
  - 17% were youth, age 24 and younger.
  - 28% were considered chronically homeless, of whom 72% were unsheltered.

Impact of Housing Instability on Education

When families are evicted and forced to move, the educational support for school-aged children is also uprooted. In Oklahoma City, there are 24 different school districts within the city limits. While families may only be moving a short distance, the children may be forced to not only change schools, but also have to adapt to different curriculum and codes of conduct in addition to adjusting to a new social environment.
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United Way Partner Agencies
Disrupting Poverty: Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City

Housing plays a significant role in achieving financial stability and overall well-being. Equitable experiences of homeowners are a priority for communities, with racial disparities in first-time homeowners growing after the recent recession and recovery.91

With the goal of helping African Americans, other minorities and the poor become economically self-sufficient, the Urban League has worked to ensure equity in housing and numerous other social and economic arenas for central Oklahomans since 1946. The Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City is a United Way Partner Agency that provides financial literacy education to assist potential business owners through a partnership with Bank of America.92

As part of their service to the community, the Urban League’s housing and financial literacy program coaches clients to solidify debt and money management skills. In addition to helping clients achieve savings goals and improved credit, the program assists with finding affordable housing. Currently the Urban League leases and manages affordable single and multi-family units, and conducts workshops on topics such as mortgage financing and housing valuation.

Debt and Credit Barriers to Disrupting Poverty

Credit availability can be a key financial support that enables greater stability and choices. Furthermore, access to credit is a key factor in financial security, helping to supplement wages to pay bills and safely conduct transactions. Lower-income consumers unfortunately face higher borrowing costs and fees because systemic factors influence the services offered to them, even as they have lower ability to pay relative to other households.

Households of limited means may face more barriers in terms of time and complexities in their efforts to secure loans and credit. In Oklahoma, households in poverty are more likely to have a shorter credit history, as they may interact with banks and other systems less frequently.

Youth financial education can assist in closing the knowledge gaps of those growing up in poverty and their peers. Only one in 12 low-income households currently have access to quality financial education during middle and high school. Equipping young adults at an earlier age with knowledge on maintaining financial well-being can contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty.93

Percentage of Banked/Underbanked Households in Oklahoma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS</th>
<th>UNBANKED HOUSEHOLDS (%)</th>
<th>UNDERBANKED HOUSEHOLDS (%)</th>
<th>BANKED: FULLY BANKED HOUSEHOLDS (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>1,582,000</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>67.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma City Metro Area</td>
<td>520,000</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>66.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Banking and Underbanking

Access to affordable banking services allows individuals a comparatively safe place to deposit and access funds. Bank accounts have measures of security that reduce the likelihood of theft of physical assets. Additionally, a relationship with a bank gives households a standard means to transfer dollars, perhaps to family members across states or even internationally, thus facilitating generational wealth. By gradually building up assets in a savings account, retirement account or other institutional fund, individuals can strengthen their financial supports for the future.

Households who are underbanked are those who have a bank account but often rely on alternative financial services such as money orders, check-cashing services and payday loans rather than on traditional loans and credit cards to manage their finances and fund purchases. Some households are considered unbanked because they don’t use banks or financial services at all.
**Reducing Income Volatility**

Policies to ensure the income of low-wage workers is more stable and predictable can also alleviate the instability of poverty. Income volatility describes the level of earnings substantially changing, usually from week to week as work hours may vary over pay periods. Income volatility also increases family stress, making it difficult to care for children at home.

- About three in 10 adults said their income varied “slightly” or “quite often,” making it more difficult to provide a stable family environment.⁹⁴

- Employers in the private sector who limit schedule volatility in favor of more predictable schedules help workers to achieve stable incomes and reduce turnover.

**Industries with Highest Income Volatility**

Percentage of Workers Reporting Income Volatility by Industry (2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Percentage of Workers Reporting Income Volatility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Utilities</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale and Retail Trade</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources and Mining</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure and Hospitality</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Earned Income Tax Credit**

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a critical support to increase family income and reward work. Both the state and the federal government offer this tax credit, which refunds dollars as a percentage of wages earned in a year for low- to moderate-income workers. Decades of evidence support its particular impact on the well-being of young children:

- Increasing the EITC by $1,000 was found to raise a child’s math and reading test scores by 6%.⁹⁶

- For the 2017-2018 year, the state EITC was claimed on 300,000 Oklahoma tax returns.

- However, the number of claims for Oklahoma’s state EITC declined by approximately 35,000 filers from 2016 to 2017, following a change to refundability passed by the legislature.⁹⁷
FINAL THOUGHTS

After reading this edition of United Way of Central Oklahoma’s Vital Signs, Disrupting Poverty, it is evident that poverty is broad and deep. Poverty impacts rural, urban and suburban areas. Poverty is not only an economic divide, but a divide against humanity. Addressing poverty in Oklahoma is not only the “right thing to do,” it is an investment in the future of our state and our people.

Poverty is the single largest contributor to long-term reliance upon state systems, including child welfare, criminal justice and social safety nets. Helping families lift themselves out of poverty is not only an opportunity to promote success for all Oklahomans, but is a true financial investment in our community that is evidenced by research across the country.

Moving “upstream” to serve families before they are in crisis is both right, and has the potential of saving billions of dollars of limited state resources. Leveraging the efficient use of state and federal expenditures and aligning existing resources toward common objectives can multiply savings in these programs, providing opportunities for future generations to be free from dependence upon the state resources on which older generations relied.

In my opinion, building the pathways for families to lift themselves out of poverty and removing systemic barriers that prevent families from achieving their goals is the greatest single economic opportunity ahead of the State of Oklahoma. It requires intentional partnerships, visionary thinking and a resetting of the public’s perception of what poverty is. Oklahoma has the innovative spirit and selfless love for our neighbor that is required to do what no other state has done in solving poverty issues. The benefactors of this hard work are future generations of Oklahomans who can live and thrive in the best state in the nation.

Justin Brown
Secretary, State of Oklahoma, Human Services & Early Childhood Initiatives
Director, Oklahoma Department of Human Services
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Camp Fire Heart of Oklahoma
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Variety Care
YMCA of Greater Oklahoma City
Youth & Family Services, Inc.
YWCA Oklahoma City

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Girl Scouts – Western Oklahoma
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Intervention & Crisis Advocacy Network (ICAN!)
Mobile Meals of El Reno, Inc.
Russell-Murray Hospice
The Salvation Army, Canadian County Service Unit
Youth and Family Services, Inc.
Yukon Sharing
United Way of Logan County
American Red Cross – Logan County
Boy Scouts of America, Last Frontier Council
CASA for Kids, Inc.
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Girl Scouts – Western Oklahoma
God’s Food Bank
HeartLine
Logan Community Services
Logan County Council on Aging
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VITAL SIGNS
Central Oklahoma

An enduring community analysis of the health and human service needs in central Oklahoma.

A post-poverty community is possible, and we extend a sincere “thank you” to our Partner Agencies working to disrupt – and someday end – poverty for current and future generations of Oklahomans. We would also like to thank our Research and Community Initiatives Committee members and volunteer reviewers for their contributions to this edition of Vital Signs.

For more data on poverty in central Oklahoma, as well as other health and human service needs, please visit the United Way of Central Oklahoma Data Center at www.unitedwayokc.org.