

ADVANCING EDUCATION, INCOME,  
HEALTH, AND SAFETY NET

**VOICES FOR THE  
COMMON GOOD  
SOUTHERN  
KENTUCKY  
SPEAKS OUT**

**GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.**

United Way  
of Southern Kentucky

[uwsk.org](http://uwsk.org)

**LIVE UNITED**



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**Joe Tinius**, Co-Chair  
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## DEAR FRIENDS,

United Way of Southern Kentucky was founded in 1956 by a group of concerned citizens who wanted to help people in need in our community. Through their effort, strong business and individual partnerships were formed and over the next 58 years, they helped improve the quality of life for tens of thousands of residents across Southern Kentucky. Yet, even with all this good work, no significant long-term solutions to our community's needs have been made.

Times have changed dramatically and today's problems are more widespread, more complicated and more difficult to treat. What remains the same is this important question: **How do we effectively identify current community needs and gather the necessary resources to help our neighbors build a better life?**

In 2012, United Way of Southern Kentucky began the development of a Community Impact Plan and a new approach to United Way business. Designed to create long-term community change, this plan will be a road map for United Way and our partners on how to build a better community that provides opportunity for all. It will guide us in connecting the strengths and assets of our communities with opportunities to improve in measurable ways.

To start, we knew that the critical issues in our community had to be identified. But we also knew that to truly identify them, **our approach had to be different from anything that we had done in the past.** Instead of the standard needs assessment approach to developing our priority focus, we chose a community based model called Turning Outward (a process of asking and listening to the community to understand the needs and aspirations of its members) to guide strategic decision-making. By shifting the focus away from pre-determined community issues and toward this model, it allowed the residents of the community to guide the direction of our conversations, our focus and ultimately our impact work to create long-term social changes.

Over the course of 14 months, we listened to hundreds of people from across the ten-county area about their aspirations for a better community through a series of Community Conversations. We also heard from thousands of community members about the issues most important to them through a survey process. **People of all ages, ethnicities and income levels shared their thoughts and aspirations.**

Clear themes were defined, crossing all segments of the population, and what we learned from this work is detailed in the following pages. We are proud to present this report to the residents of Southern Kentucky and plan to use it as a foundational starting point to develop a focused, collaborative effort with our community to address the priority issues affecting all of us.

We would like to thank the thousands of people who participated in this process, and we look forward to continuing the work with all of you to advance the common good in our community.

We challenge each of you to be a part of the work to come... to give of your time, your resources, your skills. Together we can bring a better quality of life to every individual living in Southern Kentucky.

Sincerely,

**Joe Tinius**  
2014 Chairman of the Board  
United Way of Southern Kentucky

**Steve Wallace**  
President & CEO  
United Way of Southern Kentucky

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# A PASSIONATE VISION.

United Way of Southern Kentucky is advancing the common good in our region by providing help today in ways that strengthen tomorrow.

No other single organization has the scope, expertise and influence to bring together hundreds of businesses, human services agencies, government, private foundations and dedicated volunteers around a common vision of creating positive change to achieve long-lasting results.

We are embarking on a bold journey: one that links solid, research-based community strategies to the resources needed to implement them. But we're all in this together - change can only happen when the entire community joins together to confront an issue.

The quotes you'll see in this Report come from Community Conversations with people across our region who all share this passion for advancing the common good.

We invite you to share the passion and be part of the change.

# A NEW WAY OF THINKING.

What kind of community do you want to live in? What are your aspirations for you, your family and your community? What are the challenges standing in the way of these aspirations? What can be done to make a difference?

In 2012, United Way of Southern Kentucky committed to getting the answers to these questions. The methodology and what we learned are documented in this report.

This report should be read by all those who care about the people that live and work in our community. It is for people in leadership positions and those who provide services to residents. It is for people who aspire to serve our community. It is for anyone who wants to make our community a better place to live, work, play, and raise a family.

As you continue to read this report, ask yourself the following:

- Why do these issues exist?
- How are these issues affecting the community and those that I care about?
- **What can I do to help?**

## OVERVIEW

### Methodology:

UWSK developed a three-pronged research plan, designed to reach out into the ten-county area and seek input from as many people and resources as possible through a survey, Community Conversations and secondary data. To ensure we obtained an accurate picture of the area, the goal was to match demographics as closely as possible for gender, age, ethnicity and income level. In addition, we contracted with an independent consultant, Leadership Strategies Group, to assure impartial execution and analysis of the research.

More than 10,000 “What Do You Think” surveys designed to capture input on the most important issues for the community to address were distributed. United Way board members, volunteers, community partners and other key organizations distributed surveys through multiple sites including church groups, workplaces, direct service agencies, neighbors, community events, families and friends, as well as an online version. When completed, **4,760 surveys** from the ten county BRADD region were collected, easily making it **the most widespread nonprofit health and human service survey in this area in recent time.**

Additionally, **55 Community Conversations** were conducted with a total of 545 participants. We set out to hear from as many segments of our community as possible including neighborhood associations, high school students, church groups, senior centers, veterans, nursing home residents, manufacturing workers, and jail inmates to name a few.

Finally, **secondary data resources** were examined to identify statistical information related to the key issue areas. By using the survey results as the foundation, then layering Community Conversation input and secondary research data, it became clear that there were specific themes across every county and demographic that rose to the top.

### What We Learned:

Throughout our conversations, the love and pride of community was evident. Residents want their communities to become even better. People understand and embrace the concept that **“we all do better when we ALL do better”** and are willing to work to make it happen.

From analysis of the data, four broad categories emerged: **Education, Income, Health, and Safety Net.** At the root of it all, it was clear that these categories were fundamentally interconnected. The foundation of a quality education that leads to sustainable employment is critical to providing necessary income. Without enough income, basic needs can’t be met including rent, food, child care, and transportation. Good health keeps children on track in school and adults productive at work. It is only with the combination of quality education, sustainable income, good health, and basic needs met that families are able to stay out of a vicious cycle that can start with one crisis, one less paycheck, or one unexpected expense.

While there were minor differences in ideas and words that were shared, the connection between the survey results, conversation input and secondary research was compelling. From the merging of these data sources, seven themes within the four categories surfaced across our ten-county area that are crucial to the success of our community:

#### EDUCATION

1. Youth must be prepared with the tools and skills necessary to succeed throughout life.

#### INCOME

2. People should have the appropriate skills to maintain a living-wage employment, and there must be ample jobs available in our community to match those skills.

#### HEALTH

3. Everyone should have affordable and accessible healthcare.
4. People must be safe from violence, crime, emotional and physical abuse.

#### SAFETY NET

5. Basic needs of food, safe and affordable housing and other necessities should be met.
6. People need to know where and how to get help.
7. Multiple options for safe and reliable transportation need to be available.

As a community based health and human service agency, it is no shock that these issues exist. What is surprising though, is the consistency of the responses in the ten-county area. All roads led to the themes described above.

# EDUCATION:

Education is the cornerstone of individual and community success.

Youth must be prepared with the tools and skills necessary to succeed throughout life.

Currently:

- 50% of kindergarteners in the state of Kentucky began the 2014-15 school year deemed “not ready.”
- Only 62% of youth graduating in the state of Kentucky were deemed “College/ Career Ready” in the 2013-14 school year.
- In 5 counties in the BRADD area, 25% + of the residents who are 25 and older have less than a 12th grade education.



SOUTHERN KENTUCKY  
SPEAKS OUT:

*“We lose kids that are left behind from the beginning because they don’t have what they need from the start.”*

*“We’re taught to pass the test. We memorize enough and then forget it.”*



# EDUCATION IN SOUTHERN KENTUCKY



**THEME:** Youth must be prepared with the tools and skills necessary to succeed throughout life.

## What the survey said:

Residents throughout Southern Kentucky indicated that the education of children and youth is among the top ten issues that need to be addressed within our communities. The two community issues related to education ranked #4 and #6 in overall survey responses. The issue: “Children are safe, nurtured and ready to succeed by age six” ranked #4 overall and was consistently ranked in the top five responses across all demographics. Likewise, “Youth complete school prepared to succeed in the workforce and community” ranked #6 in overall responses and was consistently ranked in the top ten responses across all demographics. These survey responses are congruent with the aspirations expressed in the Community Conversations.

## What the Community Conversations revealed:

Throughout the Community Conversations, participants placed a high value on the importance of education. It is clear that people in Southern Kentucky believe that the education of our youth is the foundation for the community’s success. One participant stated, “The future is no better than the training, morals, background, safety or anything [else] you put into your children for the next generation.” Residents were adamant that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, should have the same opportunities in school. We heard disappointment from a parent who expressed, “I see a difference in how my technical child is treated versus my academic child.” It is clear that no matter where a child’s aptitude lies, there is a strong belief that the training and opportunities for children to advance their skill sets should be of equal value and accessibility.

Along with the critical value of education at a young age, community members shared in the belief that education must start with parents. It was stated that, “We lose the kids that are left behind from the beginning because they don’t have what they need from the start.” Another added, “Education is the foundation. If not educated at a young age, he or she will never be able to be employed, have driver’s license, etc. It all comes back to education.” One participant said, “Education is [the] key to all of it. We have to address this [kids not being prepared] first and foremost.” One other resident followed by asking, “But does our community know kids aren’t prepared?”

In addition to the theme of ensuring children and youth have the tools and skills to succeed throughout life, there is also a desire to provide out-of-school time activities. Concerns were voiced in all conversations about the lack of quality activities for children and youth particularly during the after-school timeframe and the potential trouble created if kids are spending time alone. We heard on multiple occasions, “Teenagers need something to do... when they have nothing to do that’s trouble”. Many children are left to go home alone after school or to unhealthy and/or unsafe environments. Discussions related to the lack of out-of-school time activities were followed with the reality that oftentimes sports are the only avenue for involvement. Frustrations were stated, “Sports are big here, but not everyone is sports oriented.” Residents see sports as a great opportunity, but unfortunately not everyone is athletically inclined. Furthermore, there are many children who long to be involved in athletic and extracurricular activities, but transportation is a major barrier. One parent stated, “Bus transportation was discontinued and after-school child care went from \$1 to \$5 per day and I have three children.” Community members not only have a desire to see youth involved in productive activities that are affordable, but want to see youth encouraged to help create and take ownership of the activities. One participant explained, “We need to encourage our youth to get involved. Let’s create opportunities for kids to serve the community [and] create an atmosphere of serving.”

We heard from multiple groups about our youth being unprepared for life following high school. A great deal of concern was shared from workplace representatives who expressed the harsh reality that many employers are facing regarding youth entering the workforce unprepared and lacking the appropriate work ethic. The lack of work ethic among younger generations was depicted by one potential employer who stated, “They think they can take off work to get their nails done.” Another reported, “It’s not just low-income but affluent kids that enter the workforce



## SURVEY RESULTS:



**#4 Children are safe, nurtured and ready to succeed by age six**

**#6 Youth complete school prepared to succeed in the workforce and community**

*totally unrealistic.*" A clear problem was presented that youth are lacking the concept of what "work" truly entails. Affirming what workplace representatives shared, youth confirmed that, in fact, they are not prepared for what awaits them after high school. According to one student, she can do standard deviation, but couldn't tell you how to apply for a scholarship. Another student added, *"We're taught to pass the test, we memorize enough and then forget it."* Students were very forthcoming and honest when expressing their feeling of *"testing being shoved down our throats."* Instead of having open book and open note tests, students shared a desire to actually learn the material instead of memorizing information to make the desired grade. The desire was summarized candidly by one student who said: *"I have to check 2+2 on a calculator, it's that bad. We are raised on calculators."*

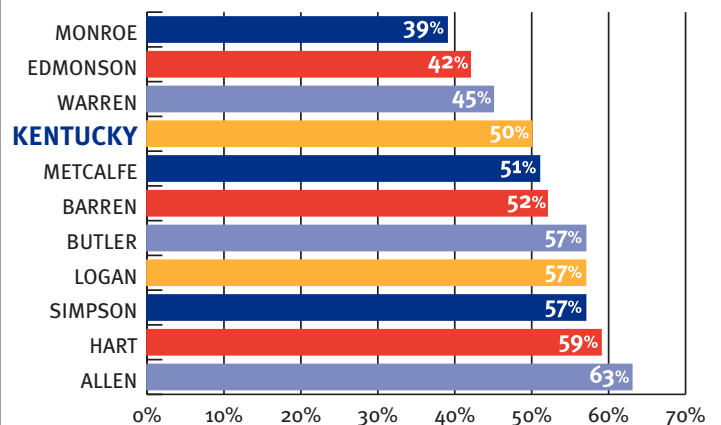
This desire to learn, accompanied by our findings that educational preparation and equal opportunity are a means to foster future success, is further supported by findings in secondary research.

### What secondary research conveyed:

According to 2014 data, **50% of kindergarteners in the state of Kentucky began the 2014-2015 school year deemed "not ready."** Simply translated, more than half of kindergarteners were not ready to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences. Scores are based on Kentucky's Common Kindergarten Entry Screener, the BRIGANCE Early Childhood Kindergarten Screen III, a tool designed to screen for skills that are critical predictors of school success, including physical development, language, academic/cognitive, self-help, and social-emotional skills. Three of the counties in United Way's ten-county service area fared better than the state average. However, scores from the other seven counties ranged from 51% to 63% *"Not Ready"* to enter kindergarten. *"For those counties that fared better, should we be willing to accept those levels of children who are not ready to succeed?"* Could this lack of early childhood preparedness be translating years later into not graduating on time or a lack of preparation for life after high school graduation?

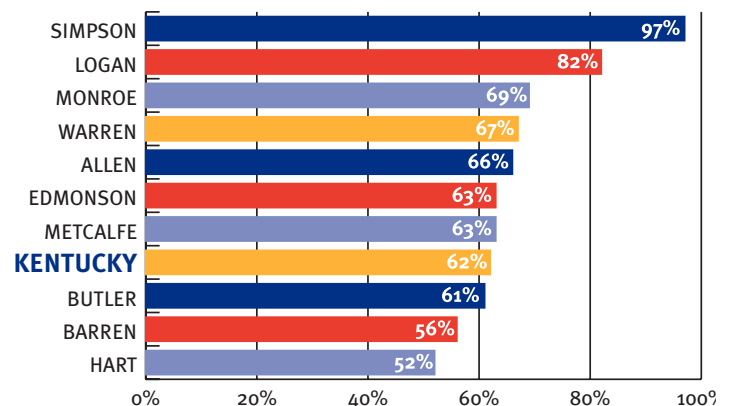
During the 2013-2014 school year, **an average of 62% of youth graduating in the state of Kentucky were deemed "College/Career Ready"**. Looking at Kindergarten NOT Readiness Scores next to the College/Career Readiness Scores, we can see some correlation. The youth in our ten county area who are deemed "College/Career Ready" (prepared for what awaits them following high school) ranges from a high of 97% in Simpson County to a mere 52% in Hart County.

### 2014 Kindergarten Readiness by County (NOT Ready Scores)



Source: Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood, 2014 Early Childhood Profile.

### 2013 High School College/Career Readiness by County (Ready Scores)



Source: Kentucky Department of Education, 2013-2014 School Report Card: College/Career-Readiness for All.



# CHANGE

A CHILD'S LIFE AND YOU CHANGE GENERATIONS



## DID YOU KNOW?

# FROM BIRTH UNTIL AGE 5, A CHILD'S BRAIN DEVELOPS MORE THAN AT ANY OTHER PERIOD IN LIFE.

One resident affirmed, *"Children need an education and there needs to be a willingness for someone to break the cycle."* As many as 31% of the population 25 and over in Metcalfe County have less than a 12th grade education, often a cycle that carries over from generation to generation and impacts many aspects of one's life including the opportunity to earn a sufficient living wage.

A significant percentage of individuals in this region did not obtain a high school diploma and furthermore did not pursue any post-secondary education or training. In the category of residents 25 years old or older who have less than a 12th grade education, eight of ten counties exceeded the state's average of 18%. Metcalfe County topped the list at 31%.

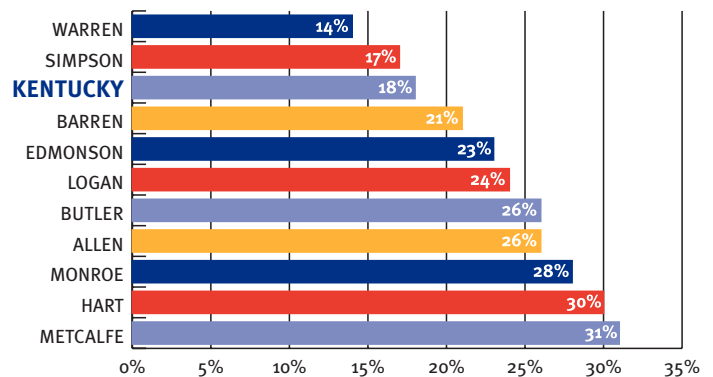
Data indicates Kentucky's graduation rate of 87% remains higher than the nation's historically high rate of 80%. During the 2013-2014 school year, Monroe County graduated 100% of its students. While only three school districts in the BRADD region graduated less students than the state average. What is preventing all districts from achieving success equal to that of Monroe County?

### Why it matters:

From the day a child is born it is imperative that parents and caregivers provide a strong early learning foundation. Research shows that as much as 90% of the brain's development has occurred by age 5. A child is far less likely to achieve academic success if he or she is unable to progress at grade level. However, creating an environment that is conducive to meeting the social/emotional needs of young children is particularly challenging when issues like hunger and unemployment are at the forefront of day to day survival.

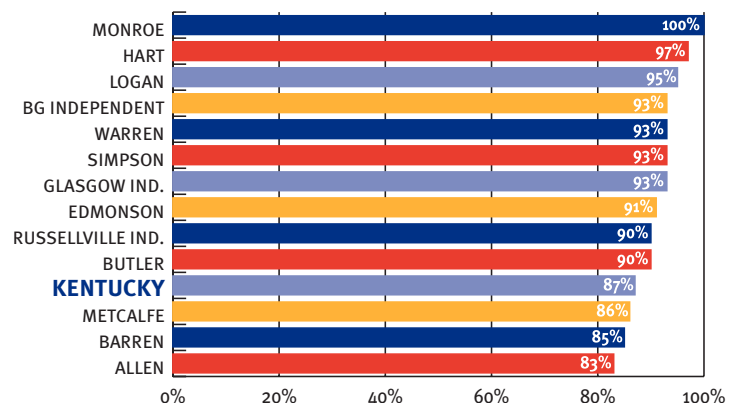
**When the proper foundation is not established and a child is unable to achieve academically, many aspects of their adult life are adversely affected,** such as the opportunity to earn a living wage, the ability to be self-sufficient and even achieve advanced education and training. The level of education and/or training one obtains and sustaining employment has a large impact on a family's earnings, healthcare, and even the ability to access the most basic of needs.

### 2012 Population 25+ with less than 12th Grade Education



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Educational Attainment, 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

### 2013-14 Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate by School District



Source: Kentucky Department of Education, School Report Card, 2013-2014 Graduation Rate: 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate Targets

## INCOME:

When families have the tools to be financially independent, they are able to concentrate on the important things in life – getting access to quality education and leading healthy lifestyles. With this, neighborhoods and communities become stronger and our businesses have a better skilled workforce.

People should have the appropriate skills to maintain a living-wage employment, and there must be ample jobs available in our community to match those skills.

That's why a focus on Income is the key to a sustainable change strategy that addresses real community conditions such as:

- Families with children under the age of five living below poverty range from 18% to 35% in the BRADD region. These numbers increase substantially when single parent homes are included.
- 4 of the 10 counties in the BRADD region exceed the state's average for unemployment.



SOUTHERN KENTUCKY  
SPEAKS OUT:

*"We need more people who are  
workforce ready."*

*"I want a productive community where  
people have jobs and are able to  
provide for their families."*

## INCOME IN SOUTHERN KENTUCKY



**THEME:** People should have the appropriate skills to maintain a living-wage employment, and there must be ample jobs available in our community to match those skills.

### What the survey said:

People in Southern Kentucky expressed that skill development, sustainable employment, and job availability are among the most important issues to be addressed in the community. In relation to income, two issues ranked #7 and #9 in the overall survey responses. The concern that *“The community retains and attracts businesses that provide good jobs”* ranked #7 overall and was listed in the top ten across a majority of the demographic groups. Additionally, the issue that *“People have the opportunities and skills to maintain meaningful living-wage employment”* ranked #9 overall and consistently ranked in the top ten responses across all demographics. The high volume in the selection of these two responses revealed a strong correlation to the concerns expressed in Community Conversations.

### What the Community Conversations revealed:

Community Conversations generated a strong emphasis on the importance of obtaining and maintaining a living wage employment. After listening to residents in Southern Kentucky, the concerns related to dependable employees, skills training, and knowledge of job availability became evident. One conversation participant addressed these issues by stating, *“We need more people who are workforce ready.”* We heard repeatedly from employers about the number of jobs available, and the struggle among employers trying to find qualified candidates. Not having an adequate workforce to fill the positions currently available is a critical issue among many of our communities, an obstacle that numerous employers are facing. This obstacle became even more evident when business representatives shared their struggle of not being able to fill open spots with local people; they’re now *“forced to go several counties outside of theirs just to obtain the trained individuals to fill the available positions.”* Potential workers not only lack the skills specific to the job, but an issue becoming even more widespread is the lack of “soft” skills possessed by potential candidates. When searching for employees, employer representatives stated, *“It’s surprising how many employee candidates in Southern Kentucky lack the basic skills of how to get a job...resumes, how to dress, and interview skills.”*



In addition to soft skills, the need for vocational and technical training became an emerging issue among residents. Many community members discussed the amount of benefit that more technical and vocational training opportunities would have on their communities. There is an understanding among residents that *“just because students receive certification, it doesn’t mean they’re certified in what satisfies the factories’ needs.”* People spoke of concerns about the stereotypical views of college education versus vocational and technical education and believe that both should be viewed equally. The concern was summarized by one resident who said: *“There’s a divide. There are children who choose technical school and then there are the children who they say [teachers, administrators, and society determine]...well, there’s nothing else we can do with you, so we’re going to send you there [to vocational school].”* Another participant further emphasized the stereotypical concern by stating *“society puts a lot of value on a college education – technical/trade school is looked down upon, you’re not as equal as someone who went to college.”* Residents and employers alike understand that the aptitude of many students lies within a skilled trade, but if pursuing a college degree continues to be pushed and carries a larger societal value, many individuals are likely to continue to deter from the technical and vocational training tract and miss a key opportunity to maintain a meaningful living wage. Job availability and the income earned were among



the discussion related to the many benefits associated with pursuing vocational and/or technical training. According to one participant, *“Those people [those who obtain vocational/technical training] make a lot more money than those coming out of college and they’ve got jobs”.*

Beyond the concern of having an adequately skilled workforce, residents expressed their desire to live in a vibrant community with ample job opportunities that provide adequate income for all sectors of the community. Living in a vibrant community was expressed by one participant who stated, *“I want a productive community where people have jobs and are able to provide for their families.”* Another added, *“I don’t want to be a bedroom community. I want jobs here.”* Not only did residents share their desire to have ample job opportunities, but there’s also a desire to see job opportunities for all people. Community members spoke of challenges individuals with a criminal record, young professionals and mothers with young children have in

### SURVEY RESULTS:



**#7 The community retains and attracts businesses that provide good jobs**

**#9 People have the opportunities and skills to maintain meaningful living-wage employment**

obtaining jobs. One of the most difficult realities about the disparity in job opportunities was heard from one female who described: *“It was easier to manipulate the system to get what I wanted when I was using drugs and not trying to create a better life for myself...it makes it hard not to want to go back to that world.”*

One major concern consistently heard throughout Community Conversations was that many communities do not have the occupations available for young professionals to put their training to work. People talked about the need to have *“something to inspire/draw our best and brightest to stay here.”* We heard about limited job opportunities and the connection that the limitation has on the numerous communities that are losing an entire generation of young professionals. According to residents, individuals leave their hometown in pursuit of a college degree and do not return upon graduation. In one mother’s words, *“My children cannot come home because they have college degrees... they’ll have to come back when they’re older and ready to retire.”*

Also among the concerns for ample job opportunities was the issue of single mothers in need of quality childcare. In many communities, child care facilities are extremely limited or even non-existent, requiring parents/caregivers to drive a number of miles to the nearest facility or abstain from employment. A related obstacle many parents/caregivers contend with, the obstacle of working atypical “business hours” also became clearly evident. One participant put it this way: *“Unemployment and attendance problems at work may be child care related as a lot of the daycares do not accommodate all shifts. [Child care] costs too much money and most do not offer care for a sick child.”* Without quality childcare, many single parents, particularly those without family support, *“cannot work if there’s no safe place during the hours you’re working.”*

## What the secondary research conveyed:

With unemployment rates hovering around the state’s average of 8.3%, it would appear that Southern Kentucky is faring well. While it has been noted that unemployment rates have made a marginal improvement from 2012 to 2013 with some continuing improvement into 2014, rates are still trailing below the pre-recession levels and do not account for those who have given up in their search for employment or those who are underemployed. Ranging from 7% to 9.5%, unemployment rates in four of the ten counties exceed the states average of 8.3% unemployment.

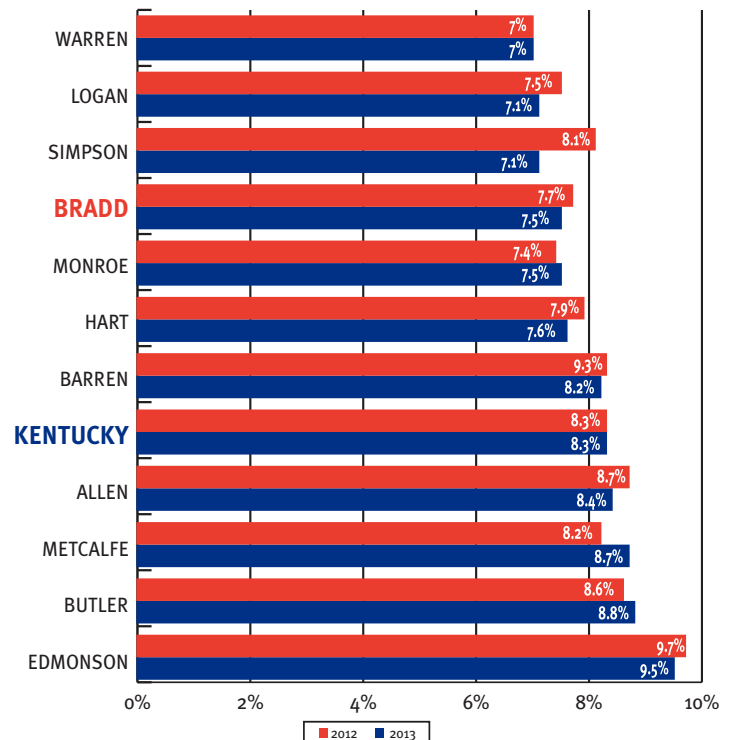
Using 2012 data, the percent of people whose income in the past 12 months was below the poverty level was magnified for families with children under five. **Families with children under five living below poverty ranged from as low as 18% in Edmonson County to a high of 35% in Allen and Hart Counties.** Six of the ten counties were at or above the state’s average of 17% of all people living below the poverty level, while nine counties exceeded the state average for families with children under five.

## Why it matters:

Research tells us that the ability to earn a living wage that is capable of providing for a family is based on many factors including educational achievement, skill set, work experience and the availability of appropriate jobs. Possessing this ability is essential on the road to becoming self-sufficient. And **when families achieve and maintain self-sufficiency, they are more likely to have access to a broader range of educational, economic and health-related opportunities.**

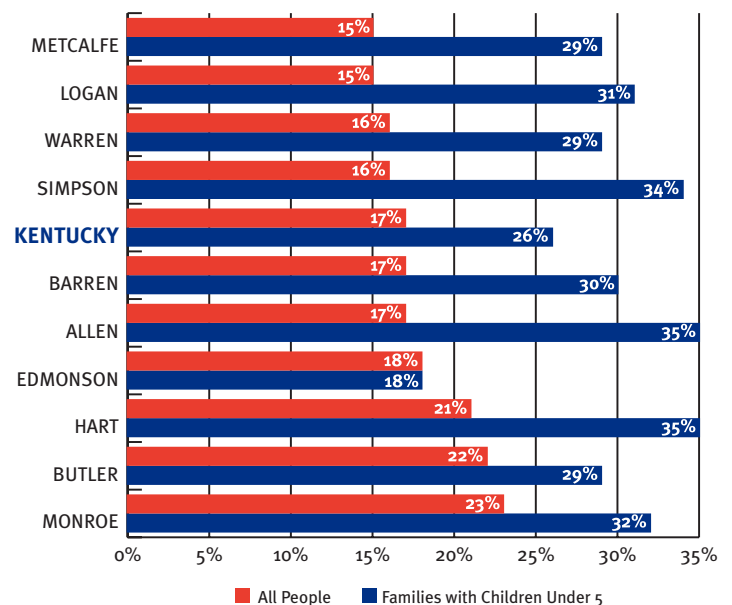
Conversely, those who are unemployed or underemployed are most likely to find themselves living in poverty with all the issues and challenges to meet basic needs. When adults must piece together more than one part time or low wage job, the need for supportive services such as subsidized child care and housing, and assistance with other basic needs like food and utilities increases.

## Unemployment by County



Source: Kentucky Labor Market Information, 2012-2013 Kentucky Labor Force Estimates

## % of People Whose Income in the Past 12 Months is Below Poverty Level - 2012



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Selected Economic Characteristics, 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates



safe and warm  
**THEY WILL BE ~~HOMELESS~~ THIS YEAR.**



**TOGETHER, WE CAN CHANGE THE STORY.**



# HEALTH:

Whether it is a neighbor without health insurance, a victim of abuse, or someone struggling with mental illness or an addiction, we must work together to address issues impacting the health of Southern Kentucky residents.

Everyone should have affordable and accessible healthcare.

People must be safe from violence, crime, emotional and physical abuse.

Currently:

- **The BRADD region represents only 6.6% of all residents in Kentucky, yet accounted for 9.5% of all Kentucky drug related arrests in 2013.**
- **In Metcalfe County, there is one primary care physician for every 10,073 persons; in Bulter County, there is one dentist for the entire population; in Allen County, there is one mental health provider available for every 6,737 persons.**



SOUTHERN KENTUCKY  
SPEAKS OUT:

*“Mental health is one of  
our biggest challenges.”*

*“Healthcare is very limited here and  
emergency care is non-existent.”*

## HEALTH IN SOUTHERN KENTUCKY



**THEME:** Everyone should have affordable and accessible healthcare.  
People must be safe from violence, crime, emotional and physical abuse.

### What the survey said:

Two themes that emerged from listening to residents in Southern Kentucky were the importance of affordable and accessible healthcare along with the desire to live in a safe environment. Three issues related to health ranked at #2, #3 and #8 out of the top ten overall responses. The issue, “People are safe from violence and crime” ranked #2 overall and was consistently ranked in the top three for most demographics. “People have affordable healthcare” followed right behind at #3 and consistently ranked within the top five issues across all demographics. Finally, ranking #8 overall and consistently ranked among the top ten issues for most demographics was the issue that “People are safe from emotional and physical abuse”. The survey response rankings proved to be consistent with the aspirations shared from those participating in Community Conversations.

### What the Community Conversations revealed:

Community members agreed that affordability and accessibility of care in regards to one’s health are of top concern in our community. The desire for each individual and family to have access to sufficient healthcare and to feel safe from physical, mental, and emotional abuse is apparent. Many residents voiced concerns about the extensive cost and limited availability of health care options and providers in our community. One participant pointed out: “The only thing here is a Band-aid station; you have to go to Bowling Green if you’re sick.” Additionally, another participant stated that “Healthcare is very limited here and emergency care is non-existent.” We were reminded of the high cost factor for those with a chronic illness and learned that the “main drug for cancer is \$8,000 per month”, a monthly obligation that many could never consider, especially those already having to make “the choice between buying food or medication.” Many individuals and families are left to go without proper care or seek care many miles outside their community if transportation is available.



Residents, including medical professionals, voiced concern about the lack of mental health services in our community. One participant explained the need for mental health assistance as crucial because “people who don’t have immediate or pressing medical needs with regard to [their] mental health problems fall through the cracks.” Emergency Room care is not only the choice for care for many who are uninsured and underinsured, but also for those who need help with mental health issues. One medical professional estimated that “90% [of patients] come to the ER because of a mental health issue.” Another participant added, “There are no doctors, therapists, or psychiatrists. Patients have to see a counselor first because psychiatrists are booked; it’s hard to get medications prescribed.” Hearing the message that “mental health is a huge hole here” became even more evident when one professional told us, “Mental health is one of our biggest challenges” adding that if a person “doesn’t qualify for inpatient admission, they’re stuck with no where to go, no resources.”

Furthermore, the magnitude of substance abuse and the lack of treatment options were an apparent frustration to many participants. We heard about the huge problem that prescription drugs and methamphetamines present within our community. Even more alarming, participants were in agreement about the insufficient or nonexistent source of treatment facilities available to combat the widespread substance abuse issues. One professional reported, “Kids don’t think prescription drugs are a big deal, [if] it comes out of a brown bottle, it’s ok.” Moreover, participants focused on the fact that if treatment is available, the extensive cost to access treatment is unbearable for a lot of families. One participant stated: “My family spent six months trying to get my relative into drug rehab, but we couldn’t do it without loads of money.” We heard that there are people who want to overcome their addiction, but even if their treatment is court ordered, it is cost prohibitive and, for many, the cycle of relapse and incarceration continues.

### SURVEY RESULTS:



#2 People are safe from violence and crime

#3 People have affordable healthcare

#8 People are safe from emotional and physical abuse

In addition to affordable and accessible healthcare, community members want to live in a “safe” community. People expressed their desire to live in a community that’s “safe, quiet, [and a] good place to raise your kids and grandkids.” One participant said, “There are so many hidden dangers. When my kids were kids, [I] didn’t worry about them playing in the backyard or at the park... now you can’t do that.” In addition, participants proposed that “you hear more about drugs and domestic violence than you used to.”

### What the secondary research conveyed:

Recent data shows that the rate of uninsured adults and children remains high thereby limiting access to care for many individuals and families. While changes are expected to be seen in the uninsured rates due to recent healthcare reform, data indicates that in 2013 the uninsured rates for both children and adults were above state average in the BRADD region.

The frustration heard by many as a result of the limited options for primary care physicians can be justified by statistics showing physicians and provider ratios per person generally lagging behind state averages. In Metcalfe County, 2014 data shows 1 primary care physician per every 10,073 persons. An even more compelling ratio is the number of dentists per person across our area in 2014. As evidenced by the data, in Butler County only one dentist is available for the entire county population; a statistic that supports the frustration shared by many individuals who are required to drive outside of their county to access even preventative services. The same reality is shared among the ratio of mental health providers per person. In Allen County, only one mental health provider was available for every 6,737 persons.

Supporting what was heard about the increase of drugs, the 2013 Crime in Kentucky Annual Report published by the Kentucky State Police indicated that of the 55,617 drug related arrests in Kentucky, 5,242 of those arrests were made in our ten county area, representing **9.5% of the total arrests**. This compares to **6.6% of the state’s population** in the ten county area. Furthermore, 23% of the seized meth labs were in our area. Of the 120 counties in Kentucky, 24 ranked as “highest” per capita for meth labs; five of our ten counties were included in this “highest 24” group.

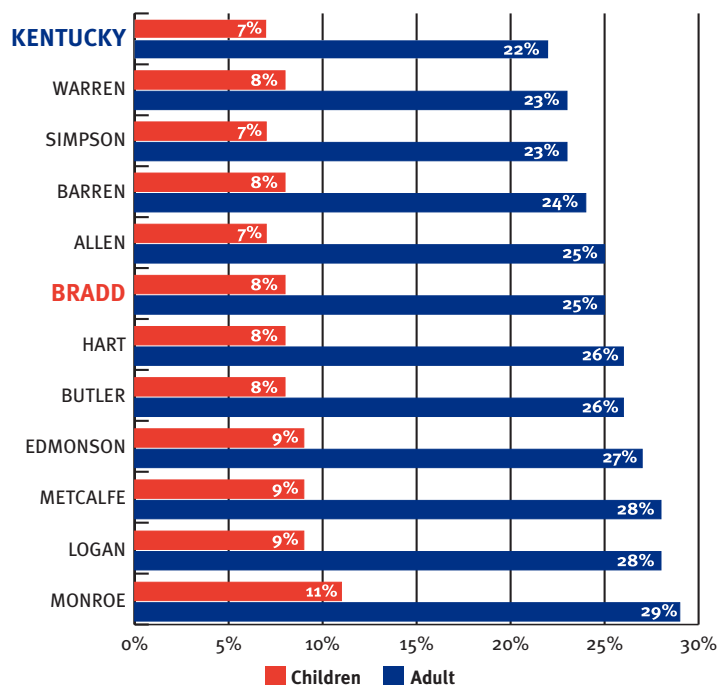
**Regarding reports of increases in domestic violence, local domestic violence statistics in 2013 outpaced our areas percent of state population:**

	EPO’s Filed	DVO’s Entered
BRADD	1234	623
State	17,630	8950
% of Order	7%	7.0%
% of Pop	6.6%	6.6%

Source: Administrative Office of the Courts,  
2013 Protective Order Documents Filed.

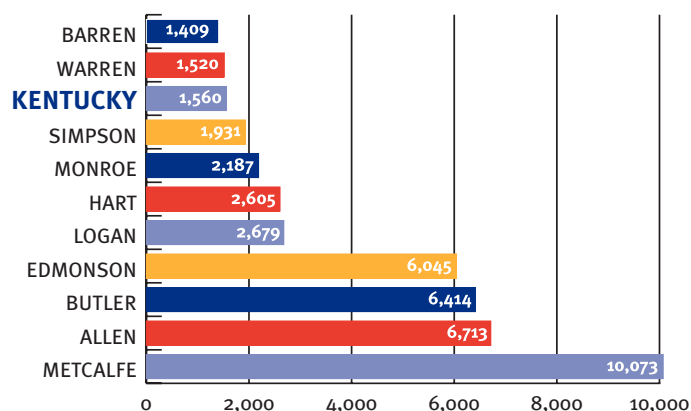
According to information provided by the Cabinet for Health and Family Services/Department for Community Based Services, 3,320 Child Protective Service Investigations (reports that met criteria for an investigation) involving 3,723 children were conducted in 2013. Of those reports, 810 were substantiated or determined that services were needed and involved 1,238 different children.

### Uninsured in 2013



Source: Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky,  
2013 Kentucky County Healthcare Profiles

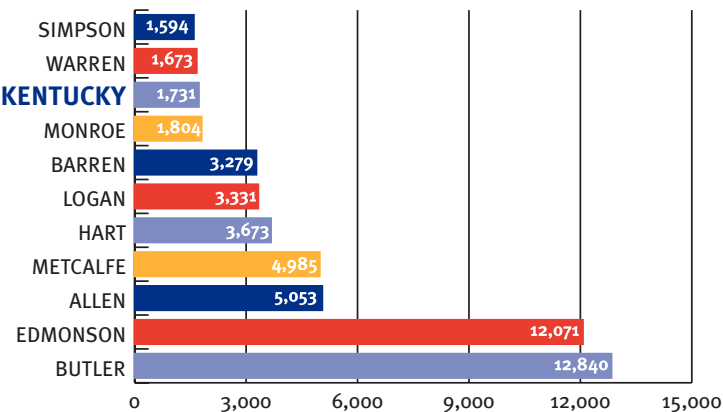
### Primary Care Physician Ratio Per Person in 2014



Source: 2014 County Health Rankings and Roadmap

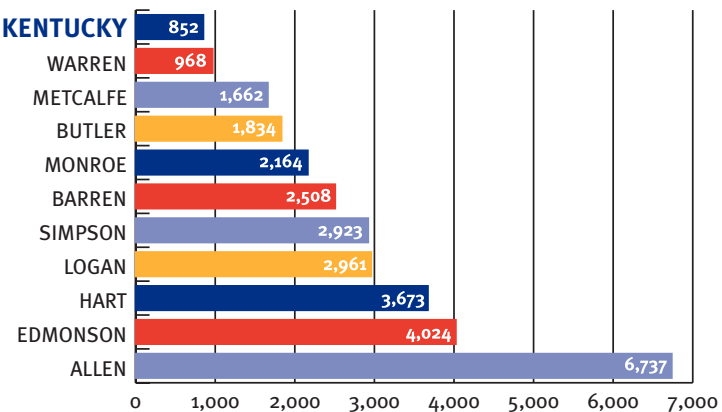


Dentist Ratio Per Person 2014



Source: 2014 County Health Rankings and Roadmap

Mental Health Provider Ratio Per Person 2014



Source: 2014 County Health Rankings and Roadmap

Why it matters:

Lack of health coverage poses serious problems for individuals and families experiencing acute or chronic illness as people are more inclined to go without preventive care and to let minor problems develop into severe medical conditions. In addition, reliance on Emergency Room treatment as primary care due to lack of coverage or lack of treatment options puts a significant burden on the healthcare system. Of equal magnitude are the consequences of untreated mental health issues: unnecessary disability, unemployment, substance abuse, homelessness and incarceration being the most prevalent. The economic cost of untreated mental illness can be staggering.

Further, the impact of violence and abuse to victims and to the community can be overwhelming. Most victims of violence and abuse are paralyzed by fear and often the cycle continues for years. Domestic violence and abuse affects the entire family and consequences may include permanent injury or disability, poor performance in school or work, job loss, homelessness and reliance on the social service system.



## SAFETY NET:

Safety Net services are essential to maintaining a livable community that cares for its own. These services intervene during times of crises by providing ongoing support to individuals and families on the path to self-sufficiency. Our network of services should react quickly to provide services in times of changing community conditions.

Basic needs of food, safe and affordable housing and other necessities should be met.

People need to know where and how to get help.

Multiple options for safe and reliable transportation need to be available.

- **In Allen and Hart Counties, 35% of families with children under the age of 5 are living in poverty.**
- **75% of households in Butler County do not have income sufficient to avoid spending more than 30% on rental cost.**



**SOUTHERN KENTUCKY  
SPEAKS OUT:**

***“You make too much money to get  
benefits, but not enough to live on.”***

***“Elderly have worked all their lives  
and are now struggling to afford food.”***



## SAFETY NET IN SOUTHERN KENTUCKY



**THEME:** Basic needs of food, safe and affordable housing and other necessities should be met.  
People need to know where and how to get help.  
Multiple options for safe and reliable transportation need to be available.

### What the survey said:

Community members surveyed agreed that having basic needs met, a safe place to live, and knowing how to get help are among the top ten most important issues to be addressed in our community. First, the concern that *“Individuals and families meet their basic needs for food, shelter, and other necessities”* ranked #1 overall and #1 across all demographics. Following closely was the concern that *“People live in safe, affordable housing”* which ranked #5 overall and was consistently ranked in the top ten amongst all demographics. Finally, ranking at #10 overall was the concern that *“People know how to get help”*, an issue that ranked in the top 12 across all demographics. In addition to those surveyed, each of these three issues strongly resonated with those participating in Community Conversations. Many believe that having access to basic needs must be a priority before any other issue can be addressed.



### What the Community Conversations revealed:

Throughout Community Conversations, the desire for community members to have access to one's basic needs of food, safe and affordable housing, and other necessities was clearly of top concern. Community residents expressed a desire to live in a community where basic needs are met for everyone. We learned that “everyone” includes community members who are right in our backyards. One participant commented that, *“All I hear is we need to feed kids overseas, but we need to take care of our own before we do that.”* Another added, *“We’ve got kids here that are starving and beg for food.”* Some participants also spoke of the challenge that they, or someone they know, have in making ends meet and providing those basic needs. According to one participant, *“People have to choose to pay for food, medicine or rent, and [they are] unable to pay for all three.”* Participants shared their view on seniors in their community who are left to make choices between basic needs, *“Elderly have worked all their lives to be in a position not to have to deal with not having food.”* We heard the frustration and defeat from those working one or multiple minimum wage jobs, trying to support their families and continuously *“take one step forward and two steps back and wonder how they can ever get out of debt.”* One participant explained it this way: *“You make too much money to get benefits, but not enough to live on.”*



We listened and learned about the critical need for safe and affordable housing in many of our communities, emphasizing that both “safe” and “affordable” are significant issues for numerous families. Participants openly shared that *“minimum wage jobs do not pay enough to even pay for your housing.”* The situation was summarized when one resident asked, *“How can you make it if your rent is \$600 to \$800 per month?”* Many went on to say that affordable housing, safe enough to live in, was an equal concern. People talked about the conditions for numerous rental houses not being fit to live in. One participant termed the living environment as “deplorable” and described the structures as similar to living “in a jail cell.” We listened to the anguish from participants who openly shared that if you do qualify and move up the lengthy waiting list for Section 8 Housing, you will live in a “bad neighborhood” and if you’re able to rent, the *“landlords are absent and do not care about the living conditions.”* One mother explained: *“Landlords do the bare minimum. I have one heat source and the house isn’t weatherized. I just want my little girl to be warm this winter and [I] don’t want to have to move.”*

We learned that *“without Section 8 Housing: you struggle, you get no help, you have to try to do it yourself, it’s hard. You’re homeless.”* Community members shared their concern for the number of homeless individuals sleeping on the stairs of churches and not knowing if there’s an adequate amount of local resources to meet their needs. Recently housed from living on the streets, one gentleman shared that he came to the community *“homeless with absolutely nothing, went to the shelter, was given canned food, but didn’t have anything to eat [the] food with.”* He added, *“What are you going to do? Six cans of food and nothing to eat it with.”*

Beyond the yearning for basic needs of food, safe and affordable housing, and other necessities to be met, the issue of residents not knowing where to go or who to call for help was a major concern that was addressed in all Community Conversations. Throughout the community, from all

### SURVEY RESULTS:



- #1 Individuals and families meet their basic needs for food, shelter, and other necessities
- #5 People live in safe, affordable housing
- #10 People know how to get help

sectors of the population, we heard from residents that many have no idea what help is available or where they can go for help. Community members *“want to live in a community where everyone knows where to go to find support for basic needs and other assistance (where to go, who to call).”*

It is clear that people are frustrated by the system and need help navigating the resources that are available, as many of the resources are constantly changing with regard to criteria and eligibility. The frustration was expressed by two different participants, with one professional asking, *“At 6:00 pm on a Saturday night who do I call, what do I do?”*, while another participant expressed multiple concerns with regard to accessibility of community resources by stating, *“People need to know that there are programs out there that can help them, and they are affordable or free – right now they don’t know where to get help or are afraid to ask because they think it would be too costly.”* Statements such as these, made by both residents and professionals, paint a clear picture that no matter the amount of resources available, *“people don’t know where to go, who to contact, or what’s available to them.”*

Also of grave concern throughout all Community Conversations was the lack of adequate transportation. Straightforward comments such as, *“To be a great city, the city should provide reliable public transportation”* and *“[We] need someone beating the bushes to get transportation; lots of people don’t have cars”* were shared by residents who know firsthand the obstacle that a lack of adequate transportation services can present. From the first conversation to the last, community members shared in the struggles that many face in regards to transportation – needs as basic as getting to work, the doctor, or the grocery. We heard repeatedly about the connection between transportation and employment: *“Not having transportation to work is preventing many people from finding or maintaining employment.”* One participant stated, *“[You] cannot get a job without a car and cannot get a car because you don’t have a job – it becomes a chicken and egg problem.”* We listened and learned about the barriers not only to finding and maintaining employment, but how the transportation barrier crosses and intertwines across every theme that has been identified. One mother put it this way: *“If parents don’t have a car that means the kids aren’t doing anything after school – no tutoring, no extracurricular.”*

## What the secondary research conveyed:

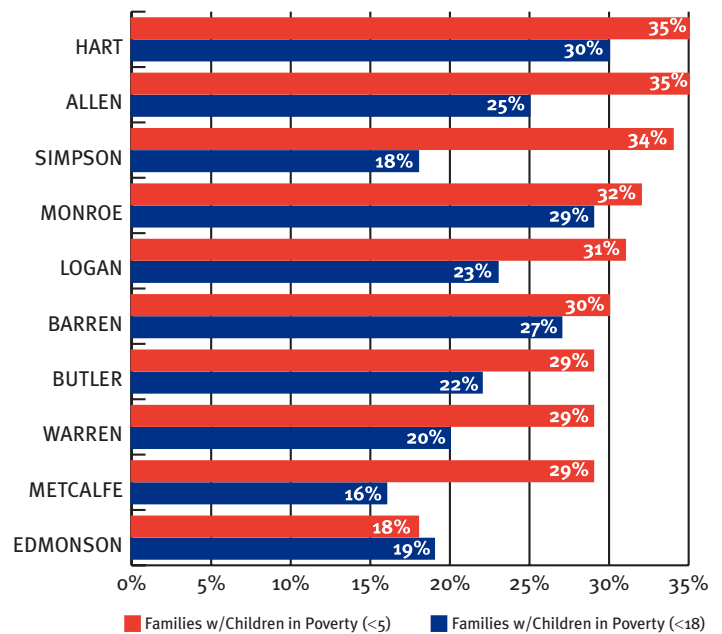
Despite reports of a recovering economy and thousands of jobs being created, people are still struggling; many are in crisis or are barely making ends meet. **What does poverty really mean?** It means that a **family is not making a living wage**, even families making up to 150% of the poverty level. According to the 2014 Federal Poverty Guidelines, a family of four living at 100% of the poverty line means they are trying to survive on less than \$24,000 (gross income) per year. Even at 150% of the poverty level, a family of four is living on less than \$36,000 per year.

According to the 2012 Census data, the percentage of families with children under the age of five who are living in poverty fares even worse. Of the ten counties, families with children under five who are trying to survive on less than \$24,000 per year range from as low as 18% in Edmonson County to as high as 35% of families in Allen and Hart Counties.

Even worse are the number of residents living below 50% of the poverty level in the ten counties.

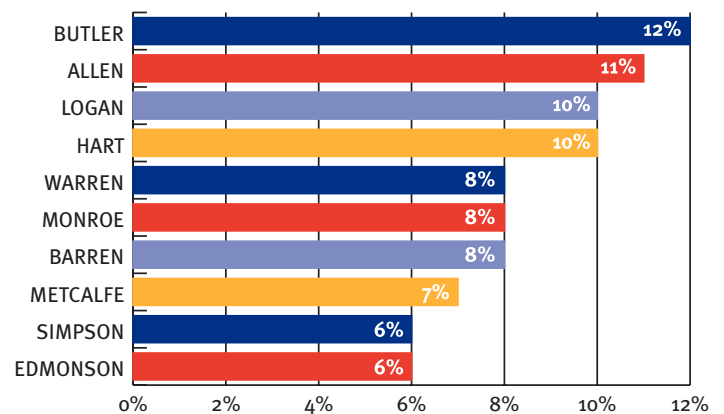
While below state levels, rental housing costs, as defined by “fair market rent”, are high. Coupled with low earnings and poverty levels,

## 2012 Poverty Levels by County



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 Selected Economic Characteristics: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

## 2012 % of Population Below 50% of Poverty Level



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.





housing costs represent a huge burden to many families. For a family to pay fair market rent (includes utilities) for a two bedroom unit in Simpson County, the hourly wage needed to keep housing costs below 30% of their income is \$13.17. Clearly, the anguish heard from community members and even single moms who earn, “\$8 an hour or less and daycare becomes almost your entire paycheck” is real.

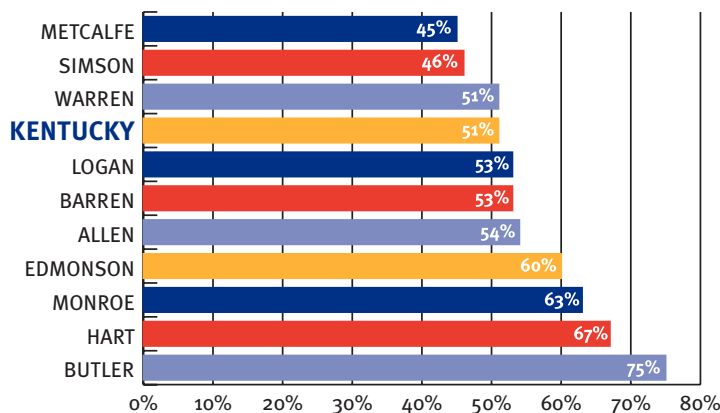
Many residents spoke of the dire need across many communities for “low-income housing that is safe and affordable.” High rental cost burden is defined as spending more than 30% of your income on housing. The percent of households across our area with a rental cost burden above 30% is high. In fact, data indicates that in 2014, 75% of households in Butler County did not have an income sufficient to avoid spending more than 30% on rental cost.

### 2013 Fair Market Rent Hourly Wage Needed

2013	Fair Market Rent	Hourly Wage Needed
Kentucky	\$661	\$12.71
Allen	\$555	\$10.67
Barren	\$575	\$11.06
Butler	\$555	\$10.67
Edmonson	\$675	\$12.98
Hart	\$555	\$10.67
Logan	\$628	\$12.08
Metcalf	\$574	\$11.04
Monroe	\$555	\$10.67
Simpson	\$685	\$13.17
Warren	\$675	\$12.98

Source: Kids Count Data Center, 2013 Fair Market Rent.

### 2014 High Rental Cost Burden



Source: Kids Count Data Center, 2014 High Rental Cost Burden

## Why it matters:

There are thousands of people in our ten-county BRADD area living in poverty every day. Often they go without food, necessary medical care and sometimes a place to call home. As food and shelter are the two most basic of human needs, lack of either almost always makes it impossible for an individual to be a healthy and fully functioning member of society. Further, those who are able to maintain housing but are forced to spend a disproportionately high percentage of their income to do so, likely find it difficult if not impossible to pay for other necessities such as food, utilities, healthcare, childcare and transportation.

**Extreme poverty has long-term ramifications for the whole family, especially children.** These children are less likely to do well academically, they are more likely to experience abuse and neglect, they are less likely to develop appropriate social skills and they are more likely to engage in risky behaviors that negatively impact physical and mental health.

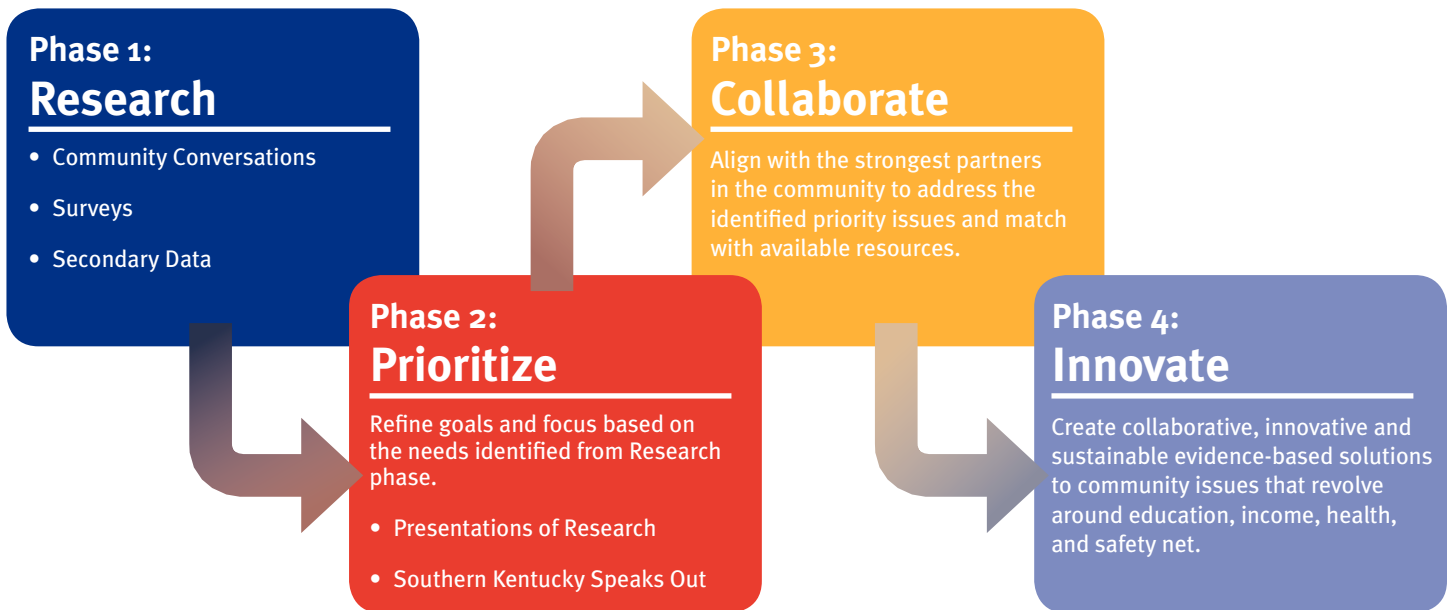


## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE

United Way of Southern Kentucky will be disseminating these findings across the ten-county BRADD region. Essentially, we will be sharing with community residents a summary of what they have so graciously shared with us.


Most importantly, **UWSK wants to reach consensus on what we as a community want to do about what was heard.** Through the building of collaborative partnerships throughout our area, we can lay the foundation for **long-term impact** on the most critical issues in our community. **Real change...real impact...that will improve the lives of generations to come.**

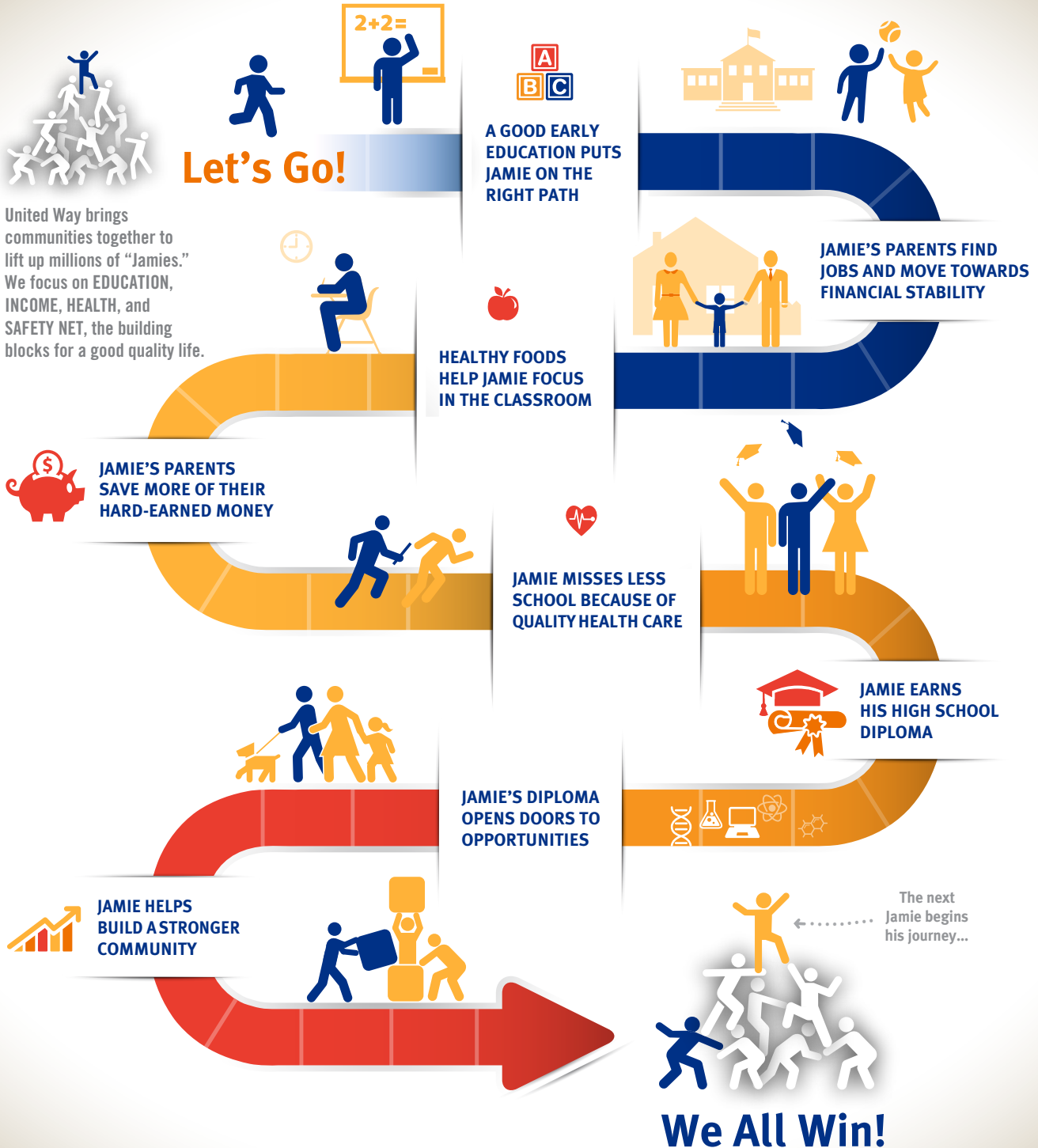
United Way of Southern Kentucky is committed to advancing the common good. We hope that you will choose to be a part of the change.



*For a listing of the Community Conversations that were conducted, a copy of the community issues survey or demographic data on research participants, please visit the UWSK website at [www.liveunitedtoday.org](http://www.liveunitedtoday.org) or contact the United Way office at 270-843-3205.*



Meet Jamie.  Jamie is a child who wants to succeed. All he needs is an opportunity.





**GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.**

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[uwsk.org](http://uwsk.org)**