

2017 LIFE Report Steering Committee

The purpose of the LIFE Report is to:

- Identify community strengths, challenges, and priorities that help guide and mobilize action to improve life in Portage County
- Be an effective tool in raising awareness in our community about quality of life issues as well as to monitor trends and underlying causes
- Serve as a resource: a centralized, easily accessible source of data, for non-profit organizations, policy makers, government entities, faith-based organizations, foundations, corporations, and others

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Sponsors

Marshfield Clinic Health System
Ascension Medical Group

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Community Foundation of Central Wisconsin
UnitedHealthcare Community Plan
Wisconsin Public Service Foundation

In-Kind

Spectra Print
JHL Digital Direct

Acknowledgements

Deanna Deising
Robert Enright
David Chunyu
Dan Dieterich
Mark Hilliker
Chris Sadler
Brianna Chipman
Barb Portzen
Sierra Bethea
John Hartman
Becca Greening
SentryWorld



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2017 LIFE Report of Portage County

Introduction

PORTAGE COUNTY LIFE REPORT

The Portage County LIFE Report is a comprehensive overview of the quality of life in Portage County, providing a picture of the many complexities within our communities. Its purpose is to inform, enlighten, and empower residents and local leaders to gain greater understanding of current community strengths, trends, and challenges. In addition, the information in this report is intended to serve as a catalyst to prompt community leaders and other residents to work collaboratively in developing action plans to address the most urgent challenges facing our community.

Purpose of the LIFE Report:

- Identify community strengths, challenges, and priorities that help guide and mobilize action to improve life in Portage County
- Be an effective tool in raising awareness in our community about quality of life issues, as well as monitoring trends and underlying causes
- Serve as a resource: a centralized, easily accessible source of data for non-profit organizations, policy makers, government entities, faith-based organizations, foundations, corporations, residents, and others

The LIFE Report project was guided by a 15-member steering committee made up of Portage County community leaders from local business, government, education, public safety, health, and social service organizations. Additionally, approximately 70 volunteer leaders served on committees, developing community indicators that reflect Portage County data, statistics, and community perspectives.

Community input was obtained through household surveys and listening sessions with key stakeholders in the community. We thank the residents and community leaders of Portage County for taking time to complete these surveys, as well as those who served as resources for the data collected in this project.

In an attempt to make the LIFE Report document reader-friendly, we have divided the report into four major sections:

- 1) **Background:** An overview of the LIFE Report and community strengths
- 2) **Calls to Action:** Identification of critical issue areas defined for future community action
- 3) **Indicators:** Summary information describing a group of 70 critical indicators spanning seven segments of our community
- 4) **Demographics and Survey:** Demographic information and survey results

We on the Portage County LIFE Steering Committee hope you find value in the pages that follow.

2017 LIFE Report of Portage County

Executive Summary

History:

The LIFE Report of Portage County is conducted every 5 years in Portage County. Here's a brief history:

- The first report was written in 2007. At that time, data was collected on 67 indicators reflecting the quality of life in Portage County.
- In 2012, these efforts expanded. A Steering Committee guided the process, and sub-committees were formed for each of the areas in the LIFE Report. For the first time, a survey was sent out to residents and to a targeted sample of low-income populations in order to elicit community input. In addition, data was collected on 66 indicators, and a survey was sent to key stakeholders. Based on the data, five Calls to Action were identified.
- In 2017, the LIFE Community Survey was again sent out to a random sample of residents as well as a sample targeted to low-income and minority residents. Open-ended questions were added to the survey to allow respondents to share what they felt were the strengths of Portage County and what changes they would like to see occur. In addition, listening sessions were held with key stakeholders, and committee members gathered data on 70 indicators. As a result of all of this information, four Calls to Action were identified.

Progress:

In 2012, five Calls to Action were identified: 1) Employment Opportunities that Generate Living Wages and Benefits; 2) Alcohol/Drug Abuse and Misuse; 3) Academic Achievement Gap; 4) Aging Population; and 5) Obesity.

The issues identified were large and complex. Thus, while none of the issues were “solved,” progress was made. Organizations in the community used this information to set priorities which led to the development of initiatives such as—

- The formation of the Born Learning Initiative, which is a public/private partnership working collectively to build a community system that creates and invests in opportunities for children to realize lifelong success
- Educational training for public school teachers around mental health detection
- A pilot Fruit and Vegetable Prescription (FVRx) program to reduce barriers to adequate fruit and vegetable intake within families
- Development and adoption of a county-wide bicycle and pedestrian plan
- Formation of the Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Awareness Coalition of Portage County
- Development and implementation of a county-wide social host ordinance through all law enforcement agencies in the county
- A series of group discussions in which people shared information and perspectives to gain a better sense of what changes in Portage County may enable more workers to earn enough income to cover the cost of basic needs without assistance
- Growth of evidenced-based health programs for senior citizens
- A dementia-friendly community initiative

These are just a few of the initiatives that arose from the 2012 LIFE Report. In addition, the LIFE Report has proven to be a valuable resource for groups in the community who use it for decision-making, priority setting, grant writing and recruitment purposes. It also provides data that is used by hospitals and public health agencies to fulfill their CHIPP (Community Health Improvement Process and Plan) requirements to assess community needs and document a plan to address those needs. The LIFE report is an excellent tool to empower local leaders and other citizens to collaborate in order to improve the quality of life in our communities.



2017 LIFE Report of Portage County

Data Overview

Below is a summary of the various sources of data that were gathered to better understand the quality of life in Portage County. A copy of the Community Survey results is located in the appendix.

LIFE COMMUNITY SURVEY The LIFE Community Survey was distributed to 4,000 randomly selected Portage County households. There were 670 households who returned the survey for a response rate of 16.8%	LIFE TARGETED SURVEY The LIFE Community Survey was given to facilities and programs that served a targeted population of low-income and minority populations. Nearly 1,000 surveys were issued and 137 were returned.
INDICATOR DATA Committee members collected local, state, and national data on 70 indicators reflecting the quality of life in Portage County.	KEY STAKEHOLDER LISTENING SESSIONS Listening sessions were held with key stakeholders to hear their input on the top priorities that need to be addressed in the community.

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The LIFE survey aimed to provide a representative sample of Portage County's population, yet the results are influenced by the individuals who chose to respond. When interpreting the survey, it is important to develop an understanding of who took it. Below is a comparison of the 2017 LIFE Community Survey participants to actual Portage County demographics:

CATEGORY	SURVEY %	COUNTY %
Gender	53.0% Female 47.0% Male	49.7% Female 50.3% Male
Educational Attainment (Highest Level Completed)	97.9% High School Graduate or Higher 43.8% Bachelor's Degree or Higher	92.5% High School Graduate or Higher 29.2% Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Age	10.5% 18-34 28.5% 35-54 47.3% 55-74 15.4% 75+	22.3% 20-34 24.3% 35-54 20.8% 55-74 6.3% 75+
Race/Ethnicity	96.6% White 3.4% Racial/Ethnic Minorities	94% White 6% Racial/Ethnic Minorities
Household Income	19.5% \$25,000 or less 26.8% \$25,000-\$50,000 23.0% \$50,000-\$75,000 13.0% \$75,000-\$100,000 17.7% \$100,000+	22.9% \$25,000 or less 25.3% \$25,000-\$50,000 21.3% \$50,000-\$75,000 12.5% \$75,000-\$100,000 18% \$100,000+

2017 LIFE Report of Portage County

Community Strengths

In this LIFE Report, we asked survey respondents what they liked best about living in Portage County. The following is a summary of the responses most frequently cited, as well as direct quotations from respondents regarding what they believe are the strengths of our community.

Recreation and Natural Resources

- An abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities, including fishing, hunting and biking
- Beautiful lakes, rivers, and streams
- Plentiful parks, trails, and green spaces
- Clean air and water

"I liked the park systems, the clean rivers & streams."

Sense of Community

- Friendly, kind and generous people
- Safe area with low crime rate
- Quiet and peaceful atmosphere
- Cooperation among community partners
- Good place to raise a family

"It is the friendliest place I have ever lived."

Size, Location, and Accessibility

- The size offers a small-town feel with some of the services and amenities of a bigger city
- Central location with easy access to the state
- Easy to get around in the community

"It is a nice size and has all the services I need. I don't have to travel too far for things I need."

Business and Economy

- A diversified economy
- A skilled, productive, and dedicated workforce
- Lively downtown
- Diverse shopping, restaurants, and retail stores
- An evolving creative economy

"Nice selection of businesses."

Education

- New efforts focused on children prenatal to age 5
- High quality K-12 school systems
- The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and Mid-State Technical College offer many opportunities for residents (courses, events, etc.)

"Portage County is a thriving community with many amenities-a college and a good school system."

Support Services/Philanthropic Community

- Solid support system for residents in need
- A volunteer community that graciously gives of its time and talents
- Generous residents, businesses, and organizations that provide financial support for our community

"Public services are available to those in need, hoping they will eventually be able to help others."

Activities

- A variety of activities, events and festivals
- Strong arts and cultural activities
- A wide variety of youth and sporting activities
- Organizations like UWSP and Sentry Insurance provide a multitude of activities

"There is always something to do. I am never bored."

Health and Wellness

- Quality health care and wellness resources
- Unique dental health resources and intervention
- Community initiatives that focus on nutrition, physical activity, and worksite wellness

"Generally concerned for healthy living and healthy natural environment."

Community Engagement

- Growing diversity of our community
- Concern for the environment
- Sustainable food options such as the Farmers Market and Food Co-Op
- Engaged and civic-minded community members

"It's a diverse community that puts a high value on education and the environment."

"It's a safe enjoyable small town vibe that I truly enjoy, and I love the people here!"

"Good schools, nice people, overall a great community with many cultural and social opportunities. Great place to raise a family."

"It is home and feels good."

2017 LIFE Report of Portage County

Calls to Action



CALLS TO ACTION

Based on report data, four Calls to Action were identified:

- Mental Health
- Alcohol and Other Drugs
- Financial Stability
- Affordable Housing

This graphic demonstrates the interconnectedness between the four Calls to Action. It is designed as a cog to reflect forward motion. Just like a cog in a wheel, these Calls to Action are intended to serve as catalysts to propel our community to move these issues forward.

These issues will not necessarily be solved in five years. However, by working collectively as a community, we can make progress on these issues and further improve the quality of life in Portage County.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health issues impact daily living and functioning, and can lead to challenges including substance abuse, diminished physical health, poor performance at school/work, homelessness, and other issues. We must foster dialogue about mental health issues, reduce stigma, and provide adequate services and resources for people who need them.



ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

Substance abuse is harmful to individuals, families, and communities, and contributes to costly social, physical, mental and public health problems as well as increased crime. It is vital that we continue to develop effective strategies to reduce the misuse and abuse of alcohol and drugs within our communities.



FINANCIAL STABILITY

Many individuals in Portage County work full time but still cannot meet the basic needs of their families. These families are often forced to make difficult financial choices. By better understanding the challenges these residents face, we can identify solutions to help those struggling to achieve financial stability.



AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The cost of renting and owning a home has increased in recent years. A growing number of owners and renters are allocating a larger share of income to housing, leaving less for other expenses. It is important to support and expand efforts to increase the options for quality affordable housing.



2017 LIFE Report of Portage County

Calls to Action

MENTAL HEALTH

Why is this important to Portage County?

- Of U.S. adults, an estimated 18% (43.6 million) suffer from a mental illness. An estimated 1 in 7 children aged 2-8 has a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder.
- There was an increase in adult suicides in Portage County from 2010-2016.
- The current ratio of population to mental health providers for Portage County is lower than the state average, impacting residents' access to mental health services.
- Stigma associated with mental illness can increase a person's reluctance to participate in treatment and recovery.

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

Why is this important to Portage County?

- The prevalence of excessive drinking is higher in Portage County than in Wisconsin and the U.S.
- The abuse of illicit drugs, including the non-medical use of prescription drugs remains a problem. From 2012 to 2016 there was a 77% increase in the number of persons arrested for drug offenses in Portage County.
- Wisconsin has the highest rate of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. Nearly 71% of LIFE Community Survey respondents felt drinking and driving is a problem in Portage County.
- Portage County's drug-related school suspensions and expulsions rate was higher than surrounding counties.

FINANCIAL STABILITY

Why is this important to Portage County?

- In Portage County, 39% of the households struggle to afford basic necessities.
- Of residents in Portage County, 8,510 (12.1%) are considered food insecure, meaning at times there was limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods.
- In Wisconsin, 36% of the jobs pay less than the amount needed for two working parents to support their family.
- Families must make trade-offs between important basic needs, such as having to choose between quality childcare, food, housing, available transportation options, and health care.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Why is this important to Portage County?

- The number of households spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs has increased significantly in recent years.
- From 2014-2016, there were more than 1,000 calls to 2-1-1 regarding rental/housing assistance.
- There has been a steady rise in rental rates in Portage County during the past ten years, with a sharper increase over the past few years.
- The demand in home sales outpaces the supply, particularly for lower to moderate priced houses.

2017 LIFE Report of Portage County

Issues to Watch

In addition to the Calls to Action, there are a number of critical issues that were identified through the priority-setting process. These are issues that emerged as concerns requiring individuals and organizations to further examine and address them.

Child Abuse and Neglect

There has been a steady rise in the number of child maltreatment calls and investigations. The average child victimization rate for Portage County is much higher than that of surrounding counties and the state average. For children who have been abused and neglected, there are a host of immediate and long-term costs to individuals, families, and the community.

Community Awareness of and Advocacy for the Importance and Impact of Early Years

Investing in early childhood development can have valuable benefits, including improving health outcomes, reducing the academic achievement gap, and ultimately strengthening our workforce. Providing quality childcare is one way to invest in our youngest children. Yet low wages and lack of benefits for childcare providers continue to be a challenge.

Healthy Weight

The obesity rate in Portage County continues to rise and a high percentage of LIFE Community survey respondents believe it is a concern. Obesity can lead to chronic diseases and poor health outcomes that decrease the quality of life for individuals. Obesity places an economic strain on our health care systems and impacts our economy through costs of medical care and lost productivity and wages.

Impact of an Aging Population on our Community

With the population of Americas aged 65 and older expected to double by the year 2030, there is a shortage of caregivers available to provide services to aging and disabled populations. Furthermore, the maturing population will increase demand for geriatric health services, long-term care facilities, and affordable housing. Reported elder abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and financial exploitation also continues to rise.

Need to Attract and Retain Talent

With the exit of the baby boomer generation and declines in available workers, many businesses are struggling to find qualified employees to fill vacant positions. There is a need to develop capacity for our community to fill the talent gap.

Transportation Options

Transportation systems include roads, bridges, bike paths, sidewalks, public transit and specialized transportation services. A mix of enhanced options may better serve people who don't or can't drive, households with fewer cars than people, people with disabilities, people struggling to make ends meet, young people, and older adults who want to remain part of the community. For lasting value, infrastructure must be built, maintained and improved with all people in mind.

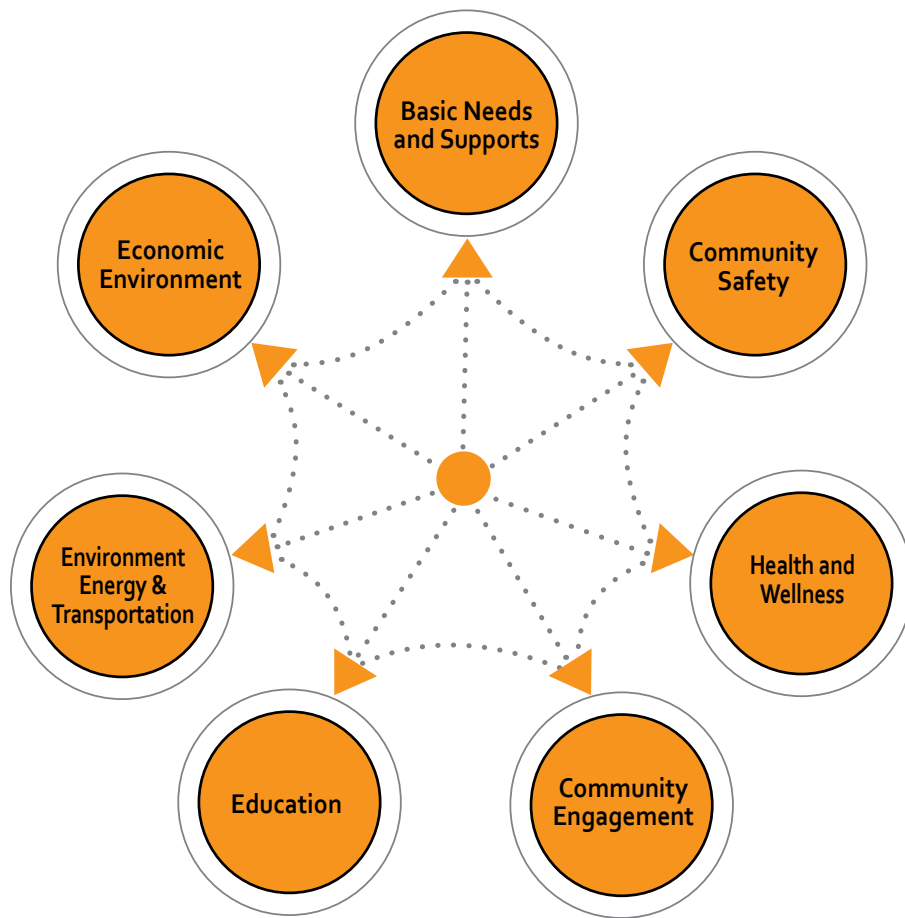


Fostering an Inclusive Community

Incidents of hate, bias, and discrimination that occur within our community have a negative impact on individuals as well as our community as a whole. As our community grows increasingly diverse, it is important that all residents feel safe and valued, and that we provide support and resources to create a welcoming, equitable, and inclusive community.

2017 LIFE Report of Portage County

Linkages



Although the LIFE Report are divided into sections, it is important to understand that they are interrelated. The challenges facing our community are becoming increasingly complex, and there are no simple solutions. Thus, we cannot afford to view these issues as isolated, but instead we must view them as a system and look for deeper patterns, connections and root causes.

LINKAGES: CALLS TO ACTION

The Calls to Action are intricately intertwined with each other as well as with other community challenges identified in the LIFE Report. In order to effectively address these community priorities, we must understand the interconnections and engage in a multi-dimensional approach as we collaborate across boundaries in order to improve the quality of life in Portage County.

