



NEWS RELEASE

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New 2016 Fox Cities LIFE Study and Community Priorities Released

The 2016 LIFE Study, funded by United Way Fox Cities, the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, and the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce, was released to the public on June 21 at Jefferson Park in Menasha and is available at www.foxcitieslifestudy.org. For the first time, a cross section of the community came together to determine priorities for community action based on key study data.

The 2016 LIFE Study, (Leading Indicators for Excellence) builds on previous data collection to present a snapshot of the socio-economic conditions in the area. Its purpose is to spark regional leaders and community members to action based upon an accurate understanding of the things going on across the community in a variety of categories.

This is the fourth LIFE Study -- compiled at five year intervals since 2001. Previous LIFE Studies have heightened awareness of important issues that led to initiatives like the Tri-County Dental Clinic, Catalpa and United Way's PATH for Students to address youth mental health, and the Community Early Learning Center.

Research for the LIFE Study was conducted by Community Research Partners (CRP), a highly-regarded research and evaluation firm based in Columbus, Ohio. The study focuses on solid data, which will be updated on an ongoing basis as important new information becomes available. Nearly 200 indicators are included, each with multiple years of data, to help show trends. Indicators are included about demographics, economy, social, and health aspects of our region. Researchers highlighted 20 themes, with key data points, across seven categories of life.

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Curt Detjen, president and CEO of the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, emphasized the direction the study provides for the community. “The LIFE Study challenges the Fox Cities to make strategic decisions on how to effectively utilize community resources to continually improve the quality of life,” he said. “By providing comprehensive information and delineating strengths and opportunities for improvement, the LIFE Study serves as a compass for collaborative action.”

A cross-section of more than 200 members of the Fox Cities’ community gathered on June 20 to hear about the results of the community assessment and to weigh in on setting priorities for community engagement. The day-long event was supported by Thrivent Financial. After reviewing the data associated with 20 themes in the study, event attendees were asked to prioritize them according to the seriousness of the theme and the feasibility that community action can create a positive change. The four priorities attendees chose for community change are: poverty, youth health, student performance, and youth safety.

Peter Kelly, president and CEO of United Way said, “Although we have identified the top community priorities it will be important not to lose sight of the other community themes. We will not stop doing the most effective things that we have been doing.”

Shannon Full, president and CEO of the Fox Cities Chamber encourages the community to share the LIFE Study the data and priorities for action with friends, co-workers, boards of directors and to dig into the research data to understand what it means for missions and programs. Full said, “Consider how you or your organization can get involved and collaborate with others to better understand and develop action plans to address the priority themes and issues we've determined together today. This will require strong leadership and community collaboration.”

Themes and key data points from the 2016 LIFE Study are included below. The top community priorities are highlighted in yellow.

CATEGORY: ECONOMY

Theme: Industry Trends

Key Data Points:

- The majority of the Fox Cities' 25 largest employers are manufacturers. The 10 year trend in the area saw a reduction in the manufacturing jobs which is in line with state and national trends.
- Between 2005 and 2014, there was incremental growth in per capita income, alongside a small increase in median household income, which are both in line with national trends.

Theme: Cost of Living

Key Data Point:

- The Housing and Transportation Affordability (H&T) Index data shows that around 7 out of 10 households can afford housing and transportation. This overall combination of factors indicates an affordable cost of living for most households, but the bottom 30% are struggling.

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Theme: Unemployment and Job Creation

Key Data Point

- Data on the creation of new businesses per 1,000 establishments shows encouraging growth of 2.5% which is slightly above the national percentages.

Conclusion: Employment in the Fox Cities' region as well as wages are on the rise. Transportation costs appear to be the major hurdle to more overall affordability of living in the Fox Cities.

CATEGORY: BASIC NEEDS

Theme: Poverty

Key Data Points:

- While there appears no significant climb in child and overall poverty rates in the past three years, there has been a steady increase in Wisconsin Works (W-2) program participants alongside an increase in the percentage of the population receiving food stamps.
- When considering slow growth in household income alongside an increase in median gross rent in the Fox Cities' counties, this suggests an increase in working poor, who may be marginally above the poverty threshold, but are susceptible to food insecurity.

Theme: Child Care

Key Data Points:

- The poverty rate for single women raising children was approximately eight times higher than the rate for married couples with children across the Fox Cities counties from 2010 to 2014.
- As costs increase, there appears to be a growing need for affordable, quality child care, especially for single-parent households which make up around 1 in 10 of all households in the Fox Cities region.

Theme: Older Populations

Key Data Points:

- The number of seniors has increased from 2006 to 2014 across the Fox Cities region, yet the 5 year poverty rate for seniors has decreased slightly from the previous 5 year rate.
- The workforce participation rate for adults age 18 to 64 decreased slightly in Calumet, Outagamie and Winnebago from 2006-2009 to 2010-2014 alongside an increase in the actual number of employees and a drop in the unemployment rate. This may be an indicator that an increased population aged 65 and older is filling an employment gap, but their age excludes them from workforce participation measures.

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CATEGORY: HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Theme: Infant Health

Key Data Points:

- The Fox Cities region sees a lower percentage of births paid for by Medicaid or BadgerCare than the state Medicaid average and a higher percentage of births with prenatal care in the first trimester.
- The percentage of children without health insurance in Winnebago decreased from 2012 to 2014, alongside state and national trends, however Outagamie saw a contrasting rise in uninsured children between 2013 and 2014.

Conclusion: The infant health data sets highlight the socioeconomic risks for low birth weight babies and teenage pregnancies.

Theme: Diabetes

Key Data Point:

- Both Calumet and Outagamie saw an increase in adult obesity between 2007 and 2011 as the prevalence of type 1 and 2 diabetes also increased, falling slightly in 2015.

Conclusion: The consultants also noted that increased prevention efforts, including increased health care coverage and increased screening vigilance may impact health outcomes, such as obesity and diabetes.

Theme: Youth Health

Key Data Points:

- The region saw a reduction in alcohol consumption and binge drinking among high schoolers between 2009 and 2015.
- The percentage of high schoolers who have attempted suicide (12%) compared to those who have seriously considered suicide (15.3%) seems high when viewed alongside the 2013 state and national averages. In 2013, 13.2% of Wisconsin high schoolers considered suicide, with 6% attempting suicide and nationally, 17% high schoolers considered suicide while 8% attempted suicide. In relation to youth health trends related to risk-related behaviors, the consultants noted that these trends may highlight a need for more intervention programs and supportive services.

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CATEGORY: EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Theme: Student Attendance

Key Data Point:

- Good attendance compared to state levels, relatively low truancy rates, and a solid graduation rate.

Theme: Student Performance

Key Data Points:

- Above the state average despite growing economic challenges as measured by free and reduced lunch.
- 40% reading proficiency and only a bit over 50% math proficiency
- Gap is closing for student with and without economic disadvantage in two of the three counties but the gap remains significant.

Theme: Investment in Education

Key Data Points:

- Educational Cost Per Students below state average in all three counties
- The total cost is rising slightly over time in two of the three counties.

CATEGORY: SAFETY

Theme: Youth Safety

Key Data Points:

- 27% of high schoolers face bullying at school and 18% have experienced electronic bullying. Both are higher than the state and national averages.
- While child abuse and neglect rates decreased, they exceed the state average in Outagamie and Winnebago County. Calumet County is well below the state average.

Theme: Crime

Key Data Point:

- Violent crime increased locally but declined nationally. The rise in violent crime was influenced by an increase in aggravated assaults in the Fox Cities area.

Theme: Drugs

Key Data Point:

- There were fewer drug arrests between 2012 and 2014. The majority of drug arrests locally and statewide are for marijuana possession.

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CATEGORY: ENVIRONMENT

Theme: Air

Key Data Point:

- From 2012 to 2014, annual Air Quality Index (AQI) data shows the Appleton metropolitan area as having good air quality 72% of the time, with moderate air quality 27% of the time.

Theme: Water

Key Data Point:

- The percentage of the population exposed to health-related risks through contaminated drinking water is a consistently low figure.

Theme: Green Living

Key Data Points:

- Renewable energy currently accounts for around 6% of the energy generated in the Fox Cities area. The highest proportion of renewable energy generating power in the Fox Cities region is hydroelectric power.
- Calumet, Outagamie and Winnebago all saw a slightly higher carbon footprint than the state and national averages in 2013. The two main areas of carbon consumption that are causing the three Fox Cities counties' average household carbon footprint to be higher are transportation and housing.

Conclusion: Environmental infrastructure impacting on the quality of life, such as water quality management, non-vehicular travel patterns, trails and parks should be evaluated in terms of economic and health benefits.

CATEGORY: CULTURE AND BELONGING

Theme: Voter Participation

Key Data Point:

- Voter participation is quite high, and the state was second highest in the country.

Theme: The Arts

Key Data Points:

- Fox Cities' creative economy is small and lagging behind the US and not growing as quickly as the creative economy of the state.
- Increases in wages, as well as the overall growth in % of arts related jobs in the state, suggest potential to grow the local creative economy.

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The Fox Cities LIFE (Leading Indicators for Excellence) Study is sponsored by United Way Fox Cities, Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, and Fox Cities Chamber Commerce of Industry to present data on the socio-economic conditions in the area that can help to drive data-driven community conversations and decisions. The study is available at www.foxcitieslifestudy.org.

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Note: In the Fox Cities LIFE Study, the Fox Cities area of Northeastern Wisconsin includes the cities, towns, and villages situated along the Fox River, as it flows northward from Lake Winnebago into Green Bay. The Fox Cities communities include the cities of Appleton, Kaukauna, Menasha, and Neenah, the villages of Combined Locks, Fox Crossing, Harrison, Hortonville, Kimberley, Little Chute, and Sherwood, and the towns of Buchanan, Clayton, Freedom, Grand Chute, Greenville and Harrison.