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Basic cost of living not attained by 43 percent of Manatee households



United Way of Florida president Ted Granger, Board member Bob Thompson, and United Way of Manatee County President Phillip Brown with the ALICE report.

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MANATEE — For many Manatee County families, an unexpected doctor's bill or plumbing repair may mean they'll have a hard time buying food.

Families in such precarious financial footing are the focus of the United Way's annual ALICE report, which the United Way of Florida released at a Tallahassee press conference Wednesday.

ALICE, a personification of the working poor, stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. The study reports how many people in Manatee, Sarasota, Citrus, DeSoto, Hernando, Hillsborough, Pasco and Pinellas counties live above poverty level but below the basic cost of living.

According to the report, Manatee had the second-highest percentage of ALICE households in the region, with 31 percent of households living below the ALICE threshold of \$20,184 annually for a single adult or \$55,944 for a family of four.

That means nearly a third of the households in the county have working adults but are just one unexpected emergency away from being unable to buy necessities. An additional 12 percent of families live beneath the poverty line. A total of 43 percent live beneath the ALICE and poverty thresholds.

"ALICE often is forced to make choices that compromise health and safety in order to make ends meet, putting both ALICE and the wider community at risk of long-term societal and economic repercussions," the report states.

"Tough choices for ALICE families may be deciding between putting dinner on the table or addressing a much needed car repair."

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The percentage of the population in Manatee County either living below the poverty limit or below the ALICE threshold

ALICE IS 31 PERCENT OF OUR POPULATION, SO IT'S EVERYONE FROM OUR POPULATION — PEOPLE WITH COLLEGE DEGREES, SOMEONE WITH A GED AND SOMEONE WHO MAY HAVE NOT FINISHED THE NINTH GRADE.

Bruce Meyer, the senior director for major gifts and corporate philanthropy for the United Way of Manatee County

In Sarasota, 25 percent of households with working adults live beneath the ALICE threshold of \$20,184 for a single adult and \$56,520 for a family of four, and an additional 8 percent live beneath the poverty level.

TOUGH CHOICES FOR ALICE FAMILIES MAY BE DECIDING BETWEEN PUTTING DINNER ON THE TABLE OR ADDRESSING A MUCH NEEDED CAR REPAIR.

Press release from the United Ways of Florida's Central West Coast.

gifts and corporate philanthropy for the United Way of Manatee County, said some government programs intended to help the poor are not available to the ALICE population because they make just too much money to qualify. And helping the ALICE population is difficult because so many different types of people fall under the ALICE umbrella.

“The solution is not the same for every person,” Meyer said. “ALICE is 31 percent of our population, so it’s everyone from our population —people with college degrees, someone with a GED and someone who may have not finished the ninth grade.”

Meyer said the United Way has focused its efforts to help the ALICE population on grade-level reading.

“Education is a huge driver to allow someone to meet their potential,” Meyer said. “If a child does not become able to read for comprehension by the time they finish third grade, the likelihood of them graduating from high school diminishes by 60 percent.”

To learn more about ALICE, see a video produced by the United Way.

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