

United Way report highlights families close to poverty

Isabel Mascareñas, WTSP 6:34 p.m. EST November 12, 2014



(Photo: WTSP)

Sarasota, Florida -- A stunning report released Wednesday from the United Way shows a third of Sarasota and Manatee families are dangerously close to a life of poverty.

A problem that is widespread across the Bay area.

"Just trying to get by at the moment," says Jennifer Beard as she holds her five-day-old son Jackson, the latest addition to the Beard family.

Yet Beard wishes times were better for her baby and his six-year-old big brother.

"It seems every time we take two steps up, we take three steps back all over again."

The Beards are three months behind on their rent and struggle to pay the utilities.

Jennifer and her husband both have jobs. Robert works full-time and she worked part-time until her son's birth last week. They are paid \$10 an hour.

Is it enough to meet their monthly bills?

"No, barely," says Jennifer.

She says life's surprises keep getting in the way.

"Unexpected bills. Not thinking I'd have another kid. Not thinking the car would break down."

The Beard family is not alone, but the United Way says the Alice Report brings community awareness to the problem families like the Beards face.

The Beards earn \$10 an hour but with a limited income and assets they are part of what the United Way calls "the ALICE population".

Click here to read the United Way's ALICE Report Statewide (<http://www.unitedwayalice.org/>)

"ALICE's are folks we interact with every day, folks who make this a wonderful community to work in, live in and raise a family in," says Phillip Brown, president of the United Way in Manatee County.

According to the report, a third of the households in Sarasota and Manatee counties are one pay check away from living in poverty. In Sarasota, 11% of families, and 13% of Manatee families, currently live in poverty.

The same report says for a family of four, including a preschooler and a toddler, a family needs to earn \$47,484 a year to survive and for stability bring in \$81,972 on average statewide.

Broken down by hourly wage, according to the ALICE Report, to survive, a family needs to earn \$23.74 an hour, for stability that amount nearly doubles to \$40.99 an hour.

United Way officials say employers can make a difference by offering employees daycare, transportation and more flexible schedules.

"If employers address Alice they can ensure to have a workforce that grows and stays with them," Brown says.

Despite their struggles the Beards remain positive.

"We are going to get by, I know," Jennifer says.