



United Way of Jackson County hopes to help those considered ALICE, may start with child care

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JACKSON, MI – It starts when a child is born. The worries about the future, what

schools they'll get into, how they'll become

a functional member of society, how to make sure they're getting the best of everything in this world.

United Way of Northern New Jersey has taken an interest in changing the lives of a certain group of children from the beginning, starting with the quality of child care kids get while their parents are at work.

"You have to get a good start on financial stability," said Molly Debevoise Rennie, associate director of the ALICE project. "We suddenly recognized in addition to those that were in poverty that we had this other segment of people. They often make too much to get assistance."

Those people are a part of a group known as ALICE, or "Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed."

Nearly 25,000 households in Jackson County are **struggling to make ends meet** — with more than half of those homes earning more than the federal poverty level, according to a report released on Aug. 31, 2014 by the United Way of Jackson County.

Conducted by Rutgers University, the ALICE report spotlights a large population of hard-working residents in Michigan who struggle financially and why.

New Jersey first started the report seven years ago and has used it to track ways of helping people in the ALICE category gain more financial stability.

"We looked at five basic categories for a budget: housing, child care, food, transportation and health care," said Stephanie Hoopes, director for the United Way ALICE project and a professor at Rutgers University. "It was a lot more than the poverty level. Those costs increase when there are children."



Some 14,162 households in Jackson County, or 23 percent, meet the definition of ALICE, earning more than the U.S. poverty level but less than the basic cost of living. Ken Toll, president and CEO of United Way of Jackson County, said starting with one of those basics like child care costs can be the difference between those living persistently below the poverty level and bringing ALICE above to a sustainable level.

"Small interventions can **make a tremendous difference**," Toll said. "ALICE helps us zero in on that. Where most people are skimping is on child care. You're just perpetuating that cycle then.

"If we can look at just one of those factors, then we can attack it from multiple fronts. We're not looking for a silver bullet here. We're looking for silver buckshot. We can make some real change."

Rennies said they've started to see a change in New Jersey by helping ALICE with community programs.

"It's not just a household problem," she said. "It's a community problem. When we talk about ALICE, it's people we know. You interact with ALICE all day long. It's incumbent upon all of us, to our community to take care of this."

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