

Study finds 42% of Wisconsinites struggle to afford cost of living

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United Way 'ALICE' Study (WLUK/Mike Moon) September 14, 2016

APPLETON (WLUK) -- A study from the United Way finds nearly half of Wisconsinites struggle to afford the cost of living and most of those having financial problems do have jobs.

On Wednesdays at the Freedom Center Food Pantry in Appleton, nearly 300 families get their groceries. A lot of parents stop by after work.

"I'd say a third to a half of our families have jobs," explained director Jo Vandermause who told FOX 11 they need help affording food for many reasons.

"Often they only make, maybe ten dollar an hour jobs. They might even have both parents working, but very large families," she said.

This situation is reflected statewide in the United Way's new Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed, or ALICE study. Those considered ALICE live above the poverty line, but in danger of slipping into poverty at any minute.

"They're working. They're very much a part of the community, but they're struggling," explained Nanci Micke the vice president of marketing for United Way of the Fox Cities.

They struggle to afford things like childcare, utility bills and yes, food.

The study found 42% of Wisconsinites are considered ALICE or in poverty.

Digging deeper, the 270 page study covers each county individually.

In Brown County 11% of the population lives in poverty, with 27% in the ALICE threshold.

In Outagamie County 10% of residents are in poverty, while 24%are in ALICE.

Of Winnebago County residents, 12% experience poverty, 29%are considered ALICE.

Experts say the problem has developed over several years.

"The paycheck hasn't kept up with the cost of living," Micke told FOX 11.

The United Way explained the study doesn't find one, single solution to this problem, but says that raising awareness is an important first step.

"To be supportive and helpful and to be thinking about what is, what could be some of those answers in making it better for all of us," Micke told us.

"I do think it's important for people to be aware that there's a need and to have compassion," said Vandermause, meaning have compassion, because as this study shows, a lot of people are in need, maybe more than you realize.

The United Way says it wants community leaders look into the findings. The hope is those leaders can use the study to better address local needs.