

La Crosse County poverty remains high

Author: [Sarah Thamer](#), sthamer@wkbt.com

Published On: Sep 14 2016 06:53:06 PM CDT Updated On: Sep 14 2016 10:02:49 PM CDT



ONALASKA, Wis. (WKBT) -

Nearly half of the households in La Crosse County are struggling to afford basic necessities. A study conducted by the United Way of Wisconsin exposes the alarming reality in the community.

The study, conducted through the ALICE initiative (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), found 11 percent of La Crosse County households live in poverty, while 32 percent fall under the ALICE threshold.

This means people may be earning an income above the federal poverty level, but they're still struggling to afford basic necessities like healthcare, transportation and food.

Meme Maholovic and her family may seem like they're earning a salary big enough to take them on vacations. But a hard reality in La Crosse, hits close to home for the Maholovic family.

"If you have to choose between paying a bill and putting food on the table, that bill is gonna win out because you don't wanna lose your house you don't wanna lose your car," said Meme Maholovic, an Onalaska resident.

United Way officials say 43 percent of households in the La Crosse County are experiencing financial struggles.

"These are people that have full time jobs, that are working hard that are taking care of kids if they have kids, but struggle to maintain a household that meets all the bills," said Mary Kay Wolf, executive director of Great Rivers United Way.

And that's exactly the case for Meme, whose son was diagnosed with autism at the age of seven, and medical bills, added to their list of challenges.

"You have his med checks which happen every two to three months depending on the doctor so at the time he was still seeing a pediatrician and that bill was 135 to 150 dollars," Maholovic said.

And even though Meme and her husband are both working full-time jobs, United Way officials say there are specific guidelines that need to be met in order to meet the ALICE threshold.

"They make enough money to not be in poverty but they make too much money to fall into where government services might apply," said Wolf.

Meme and her husband are both making around 19 dollars an hour, but her husband's nursing hours aren't always guaranteed and she says it's just enough money to be able to support their families basic needs.

"You're just at that cusp, you know, one wrong move and the dominoes will fall," she said.

United Way officials say on a survival budget in La Crosse, a person with no children must make at least \$10.90 an hour to be able to pay just the bare minimum of bills. This doesn't include savings.

For a family with two children, they must be making at least \$27 an hour to afford child care and other bills.

Copyright 2016 by [WKBT News8000](#). All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

© 2016 Morgan Murphy Media | 7025 Raymond Road, Madison, Wisconsin 53719