

# ALLEGANY COUNTY UNITED WAY INCOME IMPACT COUNCIL

## STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES

**VISION: Provide people of all ages with the structural opportunities that result in economic self-sufficiency.**

The Allegany County United Way (ACUW) and the Allegany County United Way Income Impact Council are committed to advancing the common good and to creating opportunities for a better life for all by focusing on community-level changes that can and will improve people's lives. The ACUW and the Income Impact Council plan to improve income outcomes by mobilizing the public sector, private sector, and individuals around the systems that impact individuals' ability to attain economic self-sufficiency. A comprehensive approach to income is needed to help people build and retain assets and establish financial stability.

The Income Impact Council, with the approval of the Allegany County United Way Board of Directors, has identified the following five focus areas that will drive its income impact agenda:

1. Individual and Family Sustaining Employment
2. Income Supports
3. Savings and Assets
4. Manageable Expenses
5. Affordable Housing

Working individuals and working families living below the poverty level experience a number of personal and structural obstacles to achieving financial stability. These obstacles fall into three broad categories:

- Lack of quality education and training
- Lack of awareness of existing/surrounding resources
- Lack of access to supports and services

The evidence-based strategies and approaches in each of the five focus areas are designed to address these obstacles.

If the Allegany County United Way and the Allegany County United Way Income Impact Council are to make meaningful progress toward the community impact goals, we must think beyond the traditional avenues and identify additional 'distribution' channels that will help reach a greater percentage of the target population. One such distribution channel is the business community – a likely source of income for most low to middle class individuals and families as well as the source for healthcare, retirement, and other benefits. It is important to note that this is a dynamic process and as the work moves forward, the ACUW and the Income Impact Council expect to identify additional strategies that will be well suited to assist in the achievement of the income impact vision.

Contained within this document are advocacy and public policy approaches. The ACUW and the Council realize that advocacy is naturally embedded in the strategies and approaches; however, there are some advocacy approaches that stand alone. These approaches are noted and will be the responsibility of the Allegany County United Way and the Income Impact Council to execute; therefore they will not be open to funding.

## FOCUS AREA

### **INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY-SUSTAINING EMPLOYMENT**

**Intended Result: Working individuals and families living below the poverty level achieve and retain individual and family-sustaining employment**

**Indicator: Number and percentage of individuals and families with earned income above 250 percent of the federal poverty level.**

#### **Strategy 1: Provide supports to help individuals develop work readiness**

Result: More Allegany County residents become employed

- Remove barriers and develop support for individuals to seek and obtain employment, i.e., support systems (resume, interview skills) appropriate attire, childcare, transportation, education and training.

#### **Strategy 2: Provide supports to help individuals retain employment and advance their careers**

Results: More Allegany County residents advance their careers

- Remove barriers to retaining employment by promoting and marketing public and private income supports such as transportation and childcare subsidies where appropriate and available.
- Promote and market tax credits and incentives for both employers and employees.
- Connect youth and adult earners with career counseling and career advancement opportunities.

#### **Strategy 3: Increase enrollment in and completion of degree, certification, and training programs.**

Result: More Allegany County residents complete degree, certification, and training programs

- Conduct outreach to increase enrollment in available education, training, and occupational programs.
- Connect working individuals and families with affordable and effective basic education to increase reading, math, comprehension and work-related skills, i.e., occupational training and career and technical education programs.
- Promote opportunities for youth to access career and technical education programs, apprenticeships, internships, and school-to-work programs.
- Promote the removal of barriers to participation in education and training programs, i.e., promotion and marketing of flexible class hours and provision of transportation and childcare subsidies (such as the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit) where appropriate and available.
- Support efforts to increase high-school graduation rates.

**Strategy 4: Provide access to existing individual and family-sustaining employment in targeted industries i.e., nurses aides.**

Result: More Allegany County residents attain family-sustaining employment

- Support and market the use of workforce intermediaries to align education and training providers and employers, to low-income working individuals and families.
- Develop sector-based initiatives to connect working individuals and families with jobs that pay a sustainable income.

**Advocacy**

**Advocate for new jobs that provide individual and family-sustaining income**

- Encourage new businesses and/or industries to increase the supply of individual and family-sustaining jobs in the community.
- Encourage entrepreneurship and small business capitalization and development to increase supply of jobs that pay individual and family-sustaining income.

## FOCUS AREA

### **INCOME SUPPORTS**

**Intended Result: Working individuals and families living below the poverty level receive the income supports that are available and appropriate to them.**

**Indicator: Number and percentage of working individuals and families that receive all the public and private income supports that are available and appropriate to them.**

**Strategy 1: Increase the awareness of available and appropriate income supports through education and outreach efforts**

Result: More Allegany County residents increase their knowledge of income supports

- Conduct ongoing outreach, education, and benefits enrollment efforts to increase the number of eligible individuals and families that receive income supports, particularly through successful avenues like free tax preparation sites.
- Use the workplace to educate working individuals and families about eligibility for public and private income supports.
- Encourage employers to promote enrollment in employer-provided income supports.
- Use 2-1-1 and other information and referral services to provide users with information about availability of and eligibility for income supports and connect them to community services.
- Promote and market the use of informal income supports such as bartering, food co-ops, and ‘time dollar’ programs that supplement family incomes.

**Strategy 2: Streamline enrollment in income supports**

Result: More Allegany County residents utilize available income supports

- Improve coordination between public and private organizations that provide income supports to simplify benefits application procedures.
- Streamline eligibility, verification, application, and renewal procedures for income supports.
- Make enrollment in income supports easier through the use of technology, one-step centers and/or information and referral services

## FOCUS AREA

### SAVINGS AND ASSETS

**Intended Result: Individuals and families have the financial knowledge and assets to avoid financial crisis**

**Indicator: Percentage increase in number of individuals and families who have increased their financial knowledge and assets.**

**Strategy 1: Provide financial education to youth and young adults**

Result: Positive behavioral changes that lead to sound financial decisions and the creation of assets

- Develop and/or improve age appropriate curricula, to include concepts such as, but not limited to, budgeting, managing checkbooks and savings accounts, goal setting, self-esteem, and work ethic.
- Remove barriers to accessing and attaining financial education
- Provide opportunities to experience results of sound financial decision-making
- Connect individuals with financial institutions, educational institutions, and local businesses to provide learning opportunities that lead to sound financial decision-making.

**Strategy 2: Provide “whole person” financial assessment to youth and adults**

Result: Completion and utilization of assessment

- Develop and provide “whole person” assessment that would address what the individual needs to build assets and attain economic self-sufficiency
- Assist the individual in development of a personal and professional growth plan that addresses the results of the “whole person” assessment
- Provide supports to access the information and services needed to successfully utilize the personal and professional growth plan.

**Strategy 3: Improve products and systems that enable working individuals and families to save**

Result: More Allegany County residents are assisted by local financial institutions to save

- Work with mainstream financial institutions to ensure basic financial products and services are designed to meet the needs of the working individuals and families the institutions serve.
- Promote and improve the access to and utilization of mainstream financial institutions by working individuals and families.
- Improve access and utilization of products that assist in creating savings and assets of working individuals and families.

**Strategy 4: Raise awareness and promote the use of low-cost financial products and services to increase savings**

Result: More Allegany County residents increase savings by use of financial products

- Conduct outreach to increase the use of appropriate and affordable financial products by the unbanked and under-banked.
- Promote the use of low-cost financial products and services, including credit counseling, offered by any mainstream financial service provider.
- Promote the use of savings mechanisms on the federal and state income tax return.
- Connect individuals to targeted financial education on the benefits of saving and investing.
- Promote regular savings and investment behavior through the use of public and private incentives such as refundable tax credits and matched savings accounts.

**Strategy 5: Make saving easy and automatic**

Result: More Allegany County residents participate in electronic banking to develop assets

- Encourage employers to offer employees direct deposit, automatic payroll deductions to savings accounts, and “opt-out” plans for retirement savings.

**Strategy 6: Increase working individual and families’ use of long-term investment opportunities**

Result: More Allegany County residents develop long-term assets

- Connect working individuals and families with programs, such as matched savings accounts, that increase homeownership and build equity.
- Assist working individuals and families with securing insurance to protect assets.
- Connect working individuals and families with long-term savings vehicles including children’s savings accounts, lifelong learning accounts, and college savings plans.

## FOCUS AREA

### MANAGEABLE EXPENSES

**Intended Result: Working individuals and families purchase goods and services that are fairly priced and within their budget.**

**Indicator: Number and percentage of individuals and working families that purchase financial services, credit and loan products, insurance, furniture, and groceries that are priced at or below market rate and within their budget.**

**Strategy 1: Increase financial management knowledge and skills**

Result: More Allegany County residents will develop the skills necessary to manage their finances

- Connect working individuals and families to targeted consumer education on market rate of goods and services that can help them make more informed buying decisions.
- Connect working individuals and families to targeted financial education on budgeting, spending, and understanding credit that can help them stay within their budgets

**Strategy 2: Educate working individuals and families on how to access financial products and services at affordable rates and increase the use of these products and services.**

Results: More Allegany County residents utilize financial programs to strengthen the credit history

- Connect working individuals and families with programs that help them reduce their debt and strengthen their credit score and banking history, leading to improved eligibility for better rates on financial products.

**Advocacy**

- Support efforts to ensure that all bureaus, exchanges, and additional bodies to which credit data is supplied are operating in full compliance with the Fair Credit Reporting Act.

**Strategy 3: Increase availability of and access to low-cost products and services**

Results: More Allegany County residents will utilize low-cost products and services

- Connect individuals and families to income supports that decrease the cost of basic needs and make them more affordable.

**Advocacy**

- Promote use of low-cost financial and other products and services, decreasing reliance on high-cost products and services.
- Support advocacy efforts to lower interest rates and fees charged for alternative financial services, making these products more affordable.

## FOCUS AREA

### **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

**Intended Results: working individuals and families have affordable housing**

**Indicator: Number and percentage of working individuals and families that pay no more than 40 percent of their income on housing (to include rent and mortgage payments)**

**Strategy 1: Increase and maintain the supply of affordable housing**

Result: More Allegany County residents will have access to affordable housing

- Increase construction of affordable rental, transitional, and supportive housing through zoning and regulatory reforms and through use of tax credits and other public financing options.
- Making existing housing more affordable and maintain its affordability over time.
- Improve access to affordable housing by preserving the existing stock of housing.
- Educate the public to the existing stock of housing and increase tenant opportunities to purchase housing through programs such as ‘first right of refusal’

**Strategy 2: Connect working individuals and working families with affordable housing**

Result: More Allegany County residents will purchase homes

- Connect working individuals and families with transitional and supportive housing to decrease homelessness.
- Help working individuals and families navigate the application process for publicly funded affordable housing.
- Provide individuals and families with the tools to locate affordable nonsubsidized housing
- Connect individuals and families with relocation supports and services
- Educate to make aware tax credits and first-time buyer programs, when appropriate, that increase affordability of homeownership for lower-income individuals and families. Connect individuals and families to appropriate supports and services.

**Advocacy**

Advocate for programs to help working individuals and families meet requirements to rent or purchase safe, affordable housing.

**Strategy 3: Prevent working individuals and families from losing affordable housing**

Result: More Allegany County residents will keep their homes

- Connect working individuals and families with targeted consumer education on buying and maintaining a house resulting in access to appropriate and affordable mortgage products.
- Connect working individuals and families to sustainable employment to ensure that they have a stable income to maintain their housing.
- Protect individuals and families in subsidized housing from unfair eviction and ‘expiring use’ policies.
- Connect working individuals and families with rental and mortgage arrearage assistance to keep payments current.
- Connect working individuals and families to foreclosure mediation and loan modification programs.

## **DOCUMENTS UTILIZED IN THIS PROCESS**

Census GIS Maps of Allegany County that show the following:

- Disabled population
- Impoverished Percentage
- Mental Disability Population
- Household Access to Vehicles – limited Vehicles
- Household Access to Vehicles – no vehicles
- Percentage of Population of Older Adults
- Demographic Information
- Housing Information

Allegany County United Way Community Needs Assessment

Allegany County United Way Needs Refresher

FDIC Press Release on November 15, 2010