



# PROTECTING STARK'S FUTURE

A Call to Coordinate Child Poverty Strategies

2020 REPORT BY



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**Thank you** for taking the time to read this document, which we believe contains important information to improve our home, Stark County.

We were two members of the informal group that led to the publication of *Strengthening Stark* in 2017 and remain deeply engaged in the work that has grown from it. Since its publication, we have had countless conversations with people from every sector in Stark County about how to transform our community. We also examined data on more than 50 community conditions, and noticed that every single issue of concern was related to poverty in some way. Child poverty rates in particular demand our increased attention. As this document will outline, in Stark County and across the state, the younger you are, the more likely you are to live in poverty.

Therefore, **we are calling for the development and implementation of plans to reduce child poverty.** The right collective action can catalyze positive transformation. We see opportunities to reach this goal and are encouraging organizations to address this issue at the neighborhood level.

United Way of Greater Stark County and Stark Community Foundation joined together to commission this document and its companion, *Stark County Community Assessment*. As two organizations that care deeply about the strength and vibrancy of Stark County, we remain committed to investing in our community and recognize how the social fabric plays a critical role in our economy. We also believe tackling child poverty is a solid investment in Stark County’s future.

During the development of this document we have been forced to examine our own assumptions and consider new approaches. We welcome ongoing dialogue as we explore the factors underpinning Stark’s economy and society. We hope you will be as energized by this process as we are.

Sincerely,  


Maria Heege  
President and CEO  
United Way of Greater Stark County



Mark Samolczyk  
President and CEO  
Stark Community Foundation

## PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

- Examine the issues underlying the social fabric of Stark County.
- Articulate the case for a coordinated approach to address child poverty.
- Identify actions that are being taken or need to be taken to improve conditions for Stark County's residents, while enabling Stark County to be a more vibrant community in the future.

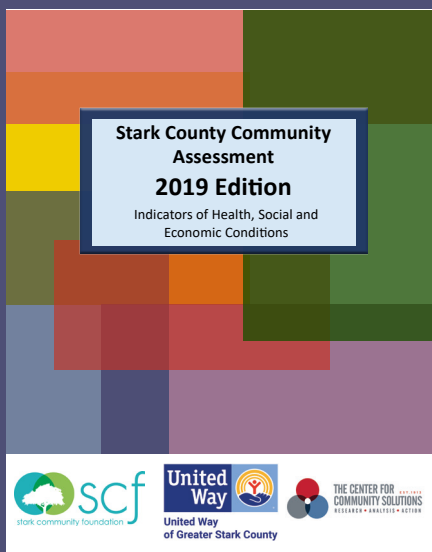
## SUMMARY OF PROTECTING STARK'S FUTURE

### OPPORTUNITY

Stark County can leverage its significant existing resources efficiently and effectively to become **wealthier, healthier, and more equitable**. Such a transformation is possible through collaboration within and across sectors that engages all our community and key stakeholders, and by targeting resources to address the needs of children living in poverty today and reduce poverty in the future.

### RISK

Failing to act decisively will allow child poverty to petrify in our community. If we become smaller, older, and poorer, **Stark County will be less able to support investments to sustain an ever-improving quality of life**. Stark County cannot afford that type of change.



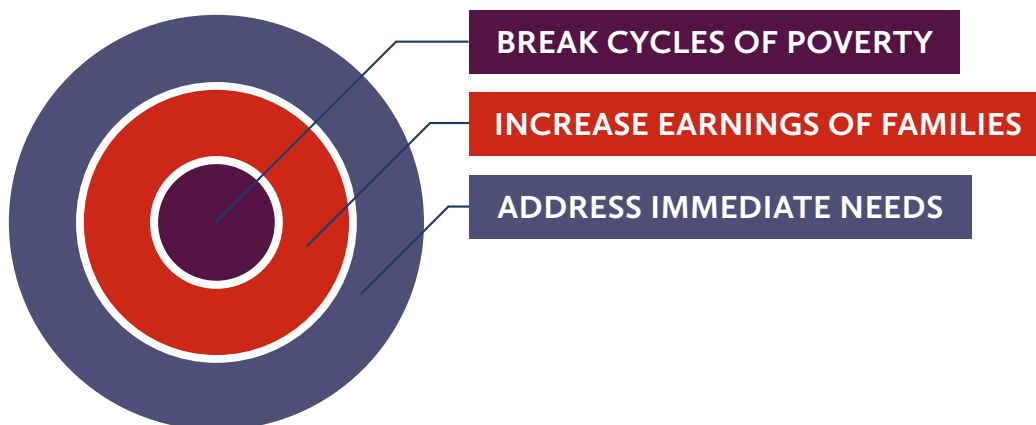
## ABOUT THE STARK COUNTY COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

In late 2019, Stark Community Foundation and United Way of Greater Stark County, in partnership with The Center for Community Solutions, jointly released the *Stark County Community Assessment*, a comprehensive data report. The assessment pulls together, in one place, more than 50 indicators of health, social, and economic conditions. Data sources include the U.S. Census Bureau, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and several Ohio State Agencies. The data provides the underpinning for this document. It is available online at [www.starkcf.org](http://www.starkcf.org) and [www.uwstark.org](http://www.uwstark.org).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Organizations should coordinate the planning and implementation of well-defined projects and activities toward a comprehensive child poverty reduction plan for Stark County with a specific neighborhood-level approach.
2. Child poverty reduction plans for Stark County should consider addressing immediate needs, look more heavily toward breaking the cycles of poverty by increasing the earnings of families and promoting activities that integrate financial planning, and incorporate neighborhood-level strategies.
3. Efforts to address child poverty must include work with both children and their families, promote household stability, focus on reducing disparities, and recognize that where you live matters.
4. The Stark County community should invest more resources into child poverty reduction and leverage public dollars.
5. Economic development strategies should be targeted to enhance the ability of workers to earn family-sustaining wages regardless of where they live and close gender and race wage gaps.
6. Existing best in class programs and agencies should be supported and strengthened to achieve their impact potential while encouraged to explore new partnerships through collaborative efforts, especially with agencies that are already embedded in communities and neighborhoods.
7. All organizations and institutions that care about the future of Stark County need to identify how they will help support and sustain the implementation of a child poverty reduction plan for our community.

## TARGETS FOR A CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION PLAN



## INTRODUCTION:

### LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Transformation is underway in our community. The *Strengthening Stark* report articulated a framework to achieve economic transformation focused on job creation, job preparation, and job access. The report was the catalyst for renewed energy and activity to coordinate economic development efforts.

Over the past several years, the Stark County community aligned our economic development efforts and we are beginning to see improvement. New partnerships have developed, new tools to connect employers and job seekers are being implemented, and we are leveraging technology to drill down into data and target efforts. As we respond to the economic fallout from the novel coronavirus pandemic, these changes will serve us well.

Yet the economy is only one facet of a vibrant community. The social fabric is equally important. Communities are made up of people, and too many people in Stark County are struggling. **This is holding us all back.**

As we expanded our examination beyond economic factors to include indicators of quality of life, **we noticed that every single issue of concern was related to poverty in some way.**

*Strengthening Stark* warned of a future where our community would be “smaller, older, and poorer.” **We are calling for the development and implementation of plans to reduce child poverty,** which meets the needs of our struggling neighbors while setting Stark up for a brighter future. **If successful, Stark County will become healthier, wealthier, and more equitable.**

To say that poverty is a difficult and complex problem is an understatement. It has many causes, myriad manifestations and is widespread in Stark County. COVID-19 and the reckoning around race has illuminated systemic issues across the country and here at home. Although daunting, this is far from a hopeless situation.

**“To say that poverty is a difficult and complex problem is an understatement.”**



Our community has dozens of bright spots; individuals and agencies who are already engaged in making an impact in the fight against child poverty, its causes, and symptoms. We see examples of our community mobilizing rapidly to combat pressing health and social concerns and turn the tide on challenging issues. There is much on which to build.

We can double down on what is working, bring in new approaches, and work collaboratively to reduce child poverty, address disparities, strengthen neighborhoods, and improve quality of life. This document is a call to do just that. Remaining on our current path is to accept that we are a high-poverty community.

**It is not an exaggeration to say that everyone has a role to play to address child poverty.** As with economic development, it will take government officials, nonprofits, businesses, residents, and philanthropy to develop the strategies, take action, and monitor results. Encompassing the social services, economic development, and education systems, the level of collaboration may be unprecedented. But *Strengthening Stark* shows broad-based coordination is possible in Stark County. This document is meant to help Stark County understand childhood poverty so we can identify approaches to get us to our desired future.

**We are encouraged by the progress on several challenging health and social issues.** Much more must be done if we are to realize the vision of a healthier, wealthier, and more equitable community.



## SECTION 1:

# THE NEED FOR URGENT ACTION

Poverty threatens the social fabric of our community. It stunts the development of our children, endangers the health of our neighbors, and is a strain on the resources of our government.

**Whether a child lives in poverty is solely determined by their household income and the number of people in their family.** If the family's total income is below the threshold set by the federal government, everyone in the household is officially considered to be poor.

## 2020 OFFICIAL POVERTY INCOME GUIDELINES



Single Person  
**\$12,760**  
per year



Family of 2  
**\$17,240**  
per year



Family of 3  
**\$21,720**  
per year



Family of 4  
**\$26,200**  
per year



Family of 5  
**\$30,680**  
per year

In Stark County, 14% of people lived in poverty before COVID-19. There are many agencies working in Stark County to address poverty and its symptoms. But our persistently high-poverty rates indicate that these efforts aren't enough on their own.

Right now, thousands of our neighbors are struggling to make ends meet. About one-in-seven Stark County residents lives in poverty. The residents of some neighborhoods fare worse than others. Child poverty, especially in Canton, is at a crisis level.



### RECOMMENDATION #1

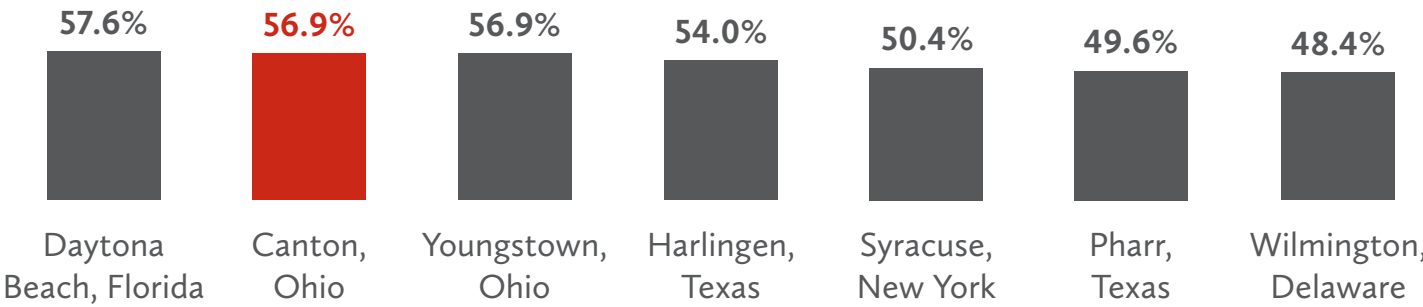
**Organizations should coordinate the planning and implementation of well-defined projects and activities toward a comprehensive child poverty reduction plan for Stark County with a specific neighborhood-level approach.**



**In Stark County and across the state, the younger you are, the more likely you are to live in poverty.** Growing up poor is linked to a host of negative economic, health, and social conditions. Studies show that children who experience poverty have more behavioral and social problems, more health issues, and lower academic achievement. The medical community has recognized that poverty is so harmful, it is considered one of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), potentially traumatic events that can have lasting effects on health and well-being.

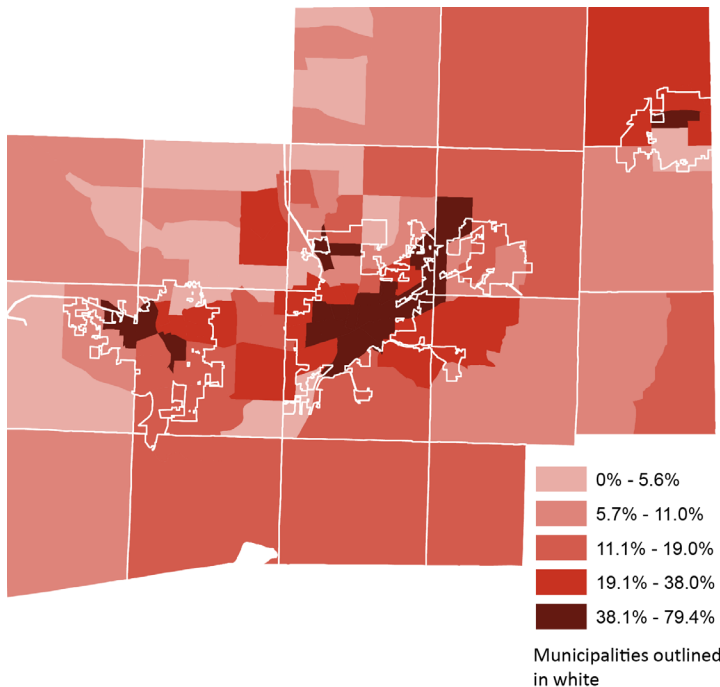
Its impact continues into adulthood, and children from poor families are more likely to develop chronic disease, more likely to commit or be the victim of crime, and less likely to be among the highest earners in a community. **Poverty is inextricably intertwined with nearly every challenge people of Stark County face.**

## HIGHEST CHILD POVERTY RATE IN CITIES WITH POPULATION OVER 65,000 (2019 ESTIMATES)





## POVERTY RATE IN STARK COUNTY, BY CENSUS TRACT



Data released by the U.S. Census Bureau showed Canton with the worst child poverty rate of any city in the United States in 2018 with a total population greater than 65,000. In 2019, the child poverty rate in Canton grew slightly to 56.9%, but other cities grew even more, so Canton is now tied with Youngstown as second worst. Data for 2020 won't be released until next year, but other sources indicate that even more families are struggling as a result of the pandemic.

Because this data is an estimate which carries a margin of error, it is possible that the exact percentage of children living in poverty in Canton is lower or higher. Regardless of whether Canton ranks first or is further down the list of cities, there is no question that too many children in Stark County are spending their formative years in families who are struggling to make ends meet.

A closer look at the data reveals concerning racial disparities. Black children in Canton are about 1.5 times more likely to live in poverty than their non-Hispanic white peers. However, poverty isn't just a problem for the City of Canton. Of the nearly 20,000 children living below poverty in Stark County in 2018, around 9,000 or 47% resided in communities outside the City of Canton.

We know that poor children live in poor families, often in struggling neighborhoods. The social, economic, and environmental factors where a child lives have been shown to have life-long health impacts and can make economic mobility more difficult. This is especially true in places that are racially segregated or experienced historic disinvestment. On the other hand, emerging research from the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland and others indicates that neighborhood improvement can have long-term positive benefits for residents, especially children.

## FACT:

47% of Stark County children living below poverty lived outside the City of Canton in 2018.



## RECOMMENDATION #2

**Child poverty reduction plans for Stark County should consider addressing immediate needs, look more heavily toward breaking the cycles of poverty by increasing the earnings of families and promoting activities that integrate financial planning, and incorporate neighborhood-level strategies.**

Initiatives aimed at addressing child poverty one family at a time typically take one of two approaches: they either focus on increasing household income by improving economic prospects of parents, or they provide services to help children overcome their disadvantages. Stark County has the right systems and players in place to be able to do both simultaneously. Individual, community, and systems approaches are all needed.



## RECOMMENDATION #3

**Efforts to address child poverty must include work with both children and their families, promote household stability, focus on reducing disparities, and recognize that where you live matters.**

Such efforts require strengthening partnerships while developing new collaborations. It requires a current assessment of the factors that drive poverty and a willingness to peel back the layers and find what may be holding us back. **This forces us to challenge assumptions and may uncover uncomfortable truths**, especially about interventions that aren't showing desired impact or pockets of our community being left behind.

In Stark County and across the state, life expectancy goes down as poverty goes up, according to analysis by The Center for Community Solutions. Less than 4 miles means a difference of 16.2 years in life expectancy between a neighborhood on the east side of Canton and one near the center of North Canton. Where you grow up and where you live has been shown to be correlated with health, social, and economic outcomes including employment, chronic disease, kindergarten readiness, and lead poisoning. The following sections provide a framework to move forward.

## SECTION 2:

# ADDRESSING IMMEDIATE NEEDS WHILE INCREASING THE EARNINGS OF FAMILIES

**Poverty is harming both children and adults in Stark County every day.** In this community, where tens of thousands of people are poor, the safety net is crucial to blunt the impact of living in poverty. Individuals in our community can call United Way's 2-1-1 helpline to access free and confidential counseling on where to access essential health and social services. In 2019, 64% of the 21,500 calls to United Way's 2-1-1 information and referral system were for the basic needs of housing and shelter, food, and utilities. Information is also accessed through United Way's 2-1-1 online database.

As the economic fallout of COVID-19 has made clear, we must not forget to serve those in need now as we look toward the future. Long lines for emergency food the past few months demonstrated how close to the edge many families in Stark County are living. Some of these situations are life-or-death.

Government is by far the largest provider of basic needs assistance and is a key player in addressing poverty. Public benefits help low-income and poor families with food, health care, housing, and child care. The public sector must be an active partner if our child poverty reduction efforts are to be successful.

While government programs generally help families, some policies hold people back. Eligibility criteria for public benefits is strict, some vital programs have waiting lists, and public funds can only cover certain services. There are points on the path out of poverty where even a small raise can mean the loss of a public benefit that increases a family's monthly expenses by hundreds of dollars. In those instances, the smart economic decision is to remain at a lower income. This is known as the benefit cliff.

**We must leverage public resources and advocate for sensible government policies that help people out of poverty.** Leveraging public resources means strengthening the publicly-funded portions of the social fabric while using local dollars to fill gaps and respond to emerging conditions. Being creative with other types of government funding including housing, commercial, and neighborhood development, transportation and infrastructure, and access to technology while aligning resources could help address issues facing high-poverty neighborhoods.

## FACT:

In 2019, 64% of calls to United Way's 2-1-1 information and referral system were for basic needs.





## RECOMMENDATION #4

**The Stark County community should invest more resources into child poverty reduction and leverage public dollars.**

Dependence on public benefits is not the only social problem that arises when families don't have enough money. Poverty has been linked to crime, addiction, and teen births, to name just a few. A stable, well-paying job that provides benefits like paid time off and health insurance often dramatically improves a family's circumstances. With greater earnings, families can leave public benefits and afford to pay down debt or save for their future and take better care of their health. Local businesses who recently raised wages report that they see more productive and satisfied employees, fewer absences, and improved customer service. **Where poverty represses, quality employment elevates.**

Sometimes meeting immediate needs means helping parents overcome their challenges so they can better support their family. Addressing barriers to employment like insufficient education or training, untreated physical or behavioral health conditions, and unstable transportation or childcare arrangements is enough, in some cases, to lift a family out of poverty.

Where a child lives also plays a role in their well-being. People who live in quality neighborhoods have access to safe housing, recreation, good schools, and low crime, and are often surrounded by supportive neighbors. Children who grow up in areas with these attributes are less likely to remain poor as adults.

**“People who live in quality neighborhoods have access to safe housing, recreation, good schools, and low crime, and are often surrounded by supportive neighbors.”**

We are not suggesting that we can eliminate the need for safety net services. There will always be people in need in our community. Rather, we recommend adjusting our perspective to ask why so many people need services. In economic terms, we need to both improve the supply of services and reduce the demand for those services. One myth we must overcome is the widespread belief that if people are poor, it is because of bad decisions or laziness. The data shows the opposite. **No one chooses to be poor.**

More than 15,000 poor adults in Stark County in 2018 worked at least part time for at least part of the year. Nearly 4,000 people worked full time for the whole year and still didn't earn enough to be above poverty.

There was a time when having any steady job was enough to support a family. Those days are in the past. Someone working full time, 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year at Ohio's minimum wage of \$8.70 per hour would earn \$18,096 before taxes. That puts them below the poverty threshold for a family of three. The same person would need an hourly wage of at least \$10.25 just to reach the federal poverty level. Job creation, job preparation, and job access is needed to ensure that all Stark County residents can find employment at family-sustaining wages.

By definition, poor children live in families with insufficient household income. Simply put, their parents don't earn enough. But as a community with high levels of child poverty, Stark County can't wait for the next generation – action is needed to improve conditions today. **Helping families earn more can rapidly reduce child poverty.**

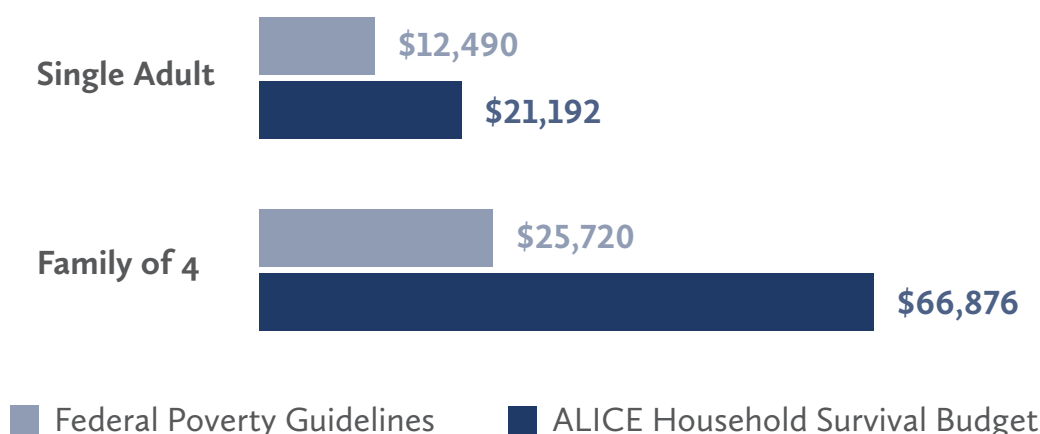
## FACT:

Nearly 45% of people over age 16 living in poverty in Stark County worked at least part time in 2018.



Overall, close to one out of every five children in Stark County live in households earning less than the official poverty measure. However, there is consensus that poverty thresholds do not reflect what a family needs to get by. United Way uses the term ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) to identify those who earn incomes above the federal poverty level but still can't afford basic needs like housing, food, transportation, child care, and health care. United Way's ALICE study took into consideration the costs of a bare-bones household budget and found that many more people in Stark County are living on the edge.

## POVERTY GUIDELINES VERSUS ALICE SURVIVAL BUDGET



Before COVID-19, as unemployment dropped, more people were able to find work. Yet too many jobs in Stark County paid too little. Employers have a role to play in tackling child poverty. The median income in Stark County is \$50,177. Only 27% of postings on Ohio Means Jobs in January 2020 within 10 miles of Canton paid \$50,000 or above. **Job creation needs to consider not just the number, but also the quality of employment opportunities available.** If the share of low-paying jobs is too high, Stark County will always be in a stressed position.

## FACT:

More than 35,500 households in Stark County had incomes above poverty, but less than the ALICE household survival budget in 2018.





## RECOMMENDATION #5

**Economic development strategies should be targeted to enhance the ability of workers to earn family-sustaining wages regardless of where they live and close gender and race wage gaps.**

COVID-19 triggered an economic crisis. The number of people who were out of work in Stark County nearly tripled between March and April 2020, peaking at about 30,000 unemployed workers. The unemployment rate has fallen in the months since, but is still close to twice what it was earlier this year. These unforeseen challenges illustrate how the path from poverty to prosperity is not linear. For most families, it is more like a roller coaster than an elevator with a combination of steps forward and setbacks.

The activities stemming from *Strengthening Stark* are catalyzing progress on job creation, job preparedness, and job access. Deeper connections between economic development and the social services meant to help people overcome their barriers would accelerate this transformation and is needed if we are to be healthier, wealthier, and more equitable.



## SECTION 3:

# BREAKING CYCLES OF POVERTY

While we work to disrupt the impacts of poverty and help families earn more, we must simultaneously look to the next generation so we don't find ourselves in this same situation in 20 years.

The same amenities that attract wealthier families are solutions to break cycles of poverty and poor health. These include good schools, walkable neighborhoods, parks and recreational opportunities.

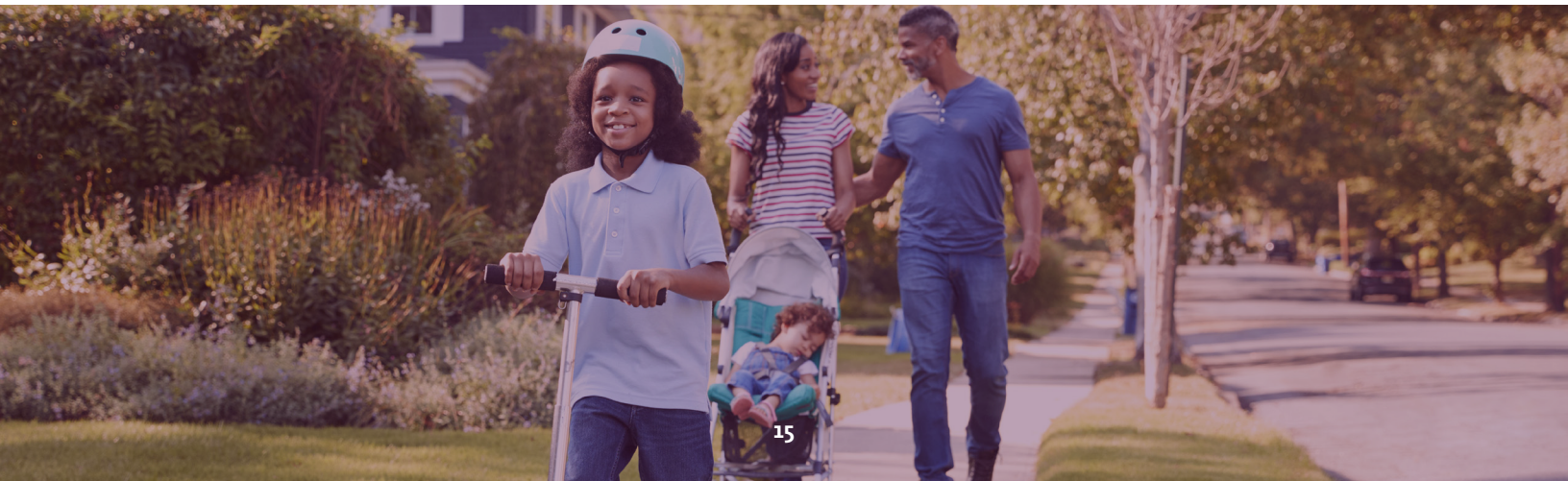
**By making Stark County an attractive place to live, we can help the community avoid becoming smaller and poorer.**

Available amenities play a role. Studies have found that every dollar invested in high-quality early care and education can yield a return of up to \$12 to society through better outcomes in health, public safety, economic productivity, and education. Many of these impacts occur well into the future, when participating children become productive adults. Making these investments today is critical to the future of Stark County.

**Breaking cycles of poverty means targeting our efforts to those children and families most at risk of remaining or becoming poor.** It means actively and intentionally working to improve equity, so all residents benefit from our community's positive transformation.

In Stark County, there are about 10,200 families with children living below poverty. About 80% of these families are headed by a single parent. In single-parent families there is no other adult to share responsibilities for earning, caregiving, and household management. **To increase overall household income and reduce child poverty, efforts must be targeted to support single-parent families, especially those headed by women.**

**In addition, on average, in Stark County, Black women earn just 54 cents of every dollar earned by non-Hispanic white men.** It's even worse for Latina women. This wage gap could be influenced by a variety of factors, including the types of jobs held by people of different races and ethnicities, but research by the Fund for Our Economic Future showed that white workers in Ohio earn up to 30% more than their non-white peers in the same occupations.



## AVERAGE ANNUAL EARNINGS, FULL-TIME WORKERS, STARK COUNTY, 2018

Non-Hispanic White Men	\$50,242
Non-Hispanic White Women	\$37,551
Latino Men	\$35,149
Black Men	31,527
Black Women	\$24,160
Latina Women	\$20,450

In Stark County, children of color disproportionately attend low-performing schools and live in struggling neighborhoods, perpetuating generational poverty. Stark County as a whole is much more segregated than the urban centers of Alliance, Canton, and Massillon. We are just beginning to understand the toll a lifetime of experiencing racial microaggressions has on the health of people of color. Across the state, residential segregation and racial wage gaps are getting worse, not better.

Decades of population loss has hollowed communities, concentrating poverty, leaving a smaller tax base and accelerating community disinvestment. Neighborhoods have deteriorated while racial disparities sharpened.

Yet Stark County has shown that with intentional, collaborative efforts, we can reduce or eliminate racial disparities. The broad-based THRIVE (Toward Health Resiliency for Infant Vitality and Equity) initiative has enabled more babies to live to see their first birthday. THRIVE is coordinated, data-informed, community-wide, and targeted. According to the latest available data from the Ohio Department of Health, between 2017 and 2018, the infant mortality rate in Stark County fell from 9.5 infant deaths per 1,000 live births to 6.4, the largest drop of any of Ohio's larger counties. The overall decline was driven by a dramatic improvement in infant mortality for Black babies. Stark County closed the racial infant mortality gap in record time.

As happened with infant mortality, improving equity means bringing the bottom up, not forcing the top down. Systems play a role. When communities target efforts to the areas of greatest need, they often see the biggest impact. Services for everyone improve when we find ways to reach the hardest to serve. Stark County has much to gain if we focus our attention on areas where certain groups have fallen behind.

Lower poverty means higher incomes and less dependence on public assistance. It leads to both increased tax collections and lower demand for services. **When fewer people are poor, we all benefit.**



## SECTION 4:

# RESOURCES AND ACTION REQUIRED

*Strengthening Stark* revealed that our present approaches are insufficient to overcome trends that have negative consequences in Stark County. If these health, social, and economic conditions don't change, it will put a fiscal strain on every community in the county. Our county spends tens of millions of dollars every year to minimize the symptoms of poverty and other social problems. We need to continue to do so, but we should also find ways to invest much more, decreasing the demand for services by increasing incomes and eliminating the root causes of these problems, including racism.



## RECOMMENDATION #6

**Existing best in class programs and agencies should be supported and strengthened to achieve their impact potential while encouraged to explore new partnerships through collaborative efforts, especially with agencies that are already embedded in communities and neighborhoods.**

There are dozens, if not hundreds of agencies, working to address the symptoms of poverty. They are feeding neighbors, mentoring students, and helping people manage their mental health and addiction issues. **Our community excels at addressing the immediate needs of the poor.**

People from all over the state and even the country come to Stark County to learn about the best practices happening in our own backyard. But unless you or someone you know has utilized these services, you may not even be aware they exist. We need to shine a bright light on these programs and agencies.

## ATTRIBUTES OF BEST IN CLASS PROGRAMS AND AGENCIES

effective, efficient, and display a willingness to partner  
adapt to the needs of each individual they serve

built on strong collaborations

deeply embedded in communities and neighborhoods

trusted by groups who are typically challenging to reach

set clear goals and measure results

innovative

data-informed and guided by evaluation

There are no simple solutions to poverty. **Many of the interventions that have been shown to be most effective are encompassing and long-term.** Their price tag is often higher, but their return on investment is great. We often focus on helping one person or family at a time. Working at a neighborhood level can have a positive ripple effect extending to entire communities.

However, too often services can often operate independently. Efforts are not coordinated. The result is a fragmented system which sometimes adequately addresses immediate needs, but never gets to root causes. Many agencies are focused on important and needed activities to ensure that immediate needs of our neighbors are met. But they do little to transform our community from one that has high levels of poverty to one able to sustain a high quality of life.

Therefore, Stark County also needs to implement new and innovative approaches. We must move out of comfort zones. Doing so reduces duplication and brings specialized expertise to bear. **The collective wisdom and action of the entire community is needed to improve Stark County's social fabric and propel economic transformation.** All communities should identify how their neighborhoods may be improved to impact child poverty. This document, and the conversation it will undoubtedly generate, is a start.

As is true for economic development, no single entity, or even small group of players, controls the complex factors that contribute to quality of life. The health and social services system is equally vast. It encompasses child welfare and adult protective services, public assistance and child support enforcement, homeless and reentry services, developmental disabilities services, and behavioral, physical and public health services, among other areas. The economic development, K-12 and higher education, and community and neighborhood development systems must also be engaged.

Some coordination is already happening. For example, Stark County Family Council brings together school districts, service providers, health systems, government agencies, and philanthropic funders to examine issues and identify solutions to impact children in Stark County. One of its focus areas is Multi-System Youth, young people who are involved with several of the traditionally siloed public systems. These children are often some of the most difficult to serve, yet Family Council has shown great success.

In other areas, scattered activity needs to be redirected, increasing coordination and collaboration. Even without additional investments, progress can be made if resources are carefully targeted to areas of most need or greatest opportunity. Services may need to expand, contract, or shift their geographic service area. These decisions must be informed by a critical examination of data.

We also need to invest more to reduce child poverty. Increased financial resources would enable more issues to be tackled more quickly in more places. There are several areas of promising activity in Stark County that are ready to be brought to scale.



## RECOMMENDATION #7

**All organizations and institutions that care about the future of Stark County need to identify how they will help support and sustain the implementation of a child poverty reduction plan for our community.**

We should continue to address the challenges of people who don't have enough money to make ends meet and focus on helping children overcome their disadvantages. But we must also shift our mindset, deepen our commitment, and align our approaches to economic development and social services to focus on reducing child poverty **now**.

Perhaps the most important resource needed is patience. **The need to act is urgent, yet we cannot expect quick fixes to cause sustained transformation without sustained effort.** Poverty persists in Stark County not because smart, dedicated people are ignoring it. Rather, the scope and depth of issues are so large that no single entity or system could ever hope to address them alone. A focus on neighborhoods is a place to start. Coordination is critical.

Low incomes mean a smaller tax base and need for public assistance. If we fail to act, Stark County can accept that we are a high-poverty community. We can tolerate the fact that our population is shrinking and aging. We can realign our expectations, learning to live with a smaller tax base, leaving government unable to make transformative investments to improve communities. We can acknowledge that Stark County's best days are in the past.

We see a different future for Stark County. One where government, philanthropy, nonprofits, and businesses work together toward a common objective. Where we align the substantial resources of our community, build on what is working and deepen our commitment to prevent Stark County from becoming older, smaller, and – most importantly, – poorer.

**If we work together, informed by data, we can reduce child poverty and strengthen Stark.**

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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