

Snapshot of LIFE in Marathon County



20 Year Anniversary

in **Marathon** County

10th Edition

2015-2017

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20 Years of LIFE in Marathon County – 10th Edition

For 20 years LIFE in Marathon County has provided our community a data driven report depicting the quality of life in Marathon County. Work on the first report took place in 1996, and the first LIFE report was published in 1997. Since then a new report has been published every other year, and the 2015 – 17 report is the tenth. The LIFE report has grown to serve as an essential tool for many organizations, used to secure grant funding and to set priorities.

Over the Years

Calls to Action – Each report has highlighted data-driven priorities to foster community dialogue and action. The most commonly cited priorities have been:

- Income was reported in all 10 reports (sometimes referred to as lack of affordable housing, good paying jobs, or basic needs).
- Alcohol and drug abuse was cited in eight of the reports.
- A concern for improved health was mentioned in most reports.
- A concern for developing strong families to support children and reducing domestic abuse and child abuse was a focus in most reports.
- Supports and services to assist the growing demographic of the elderly population was mentioned in the last five reports.

Demographic Shift – The County’s demographics have changed over the past 20 years:

	1996	2013
Ethnic/Racial Diversity	4.5%	10.4%
Median Age	32.7	39.8
Population Age 65+	12.7%	14.6%



The purpose of the LIFE Report is to:

- Acknowledge community strengths.
- Identify community challenges.
- Serve as a catalyst for change by advancing community conversations and partnerships around the Calls to Action.

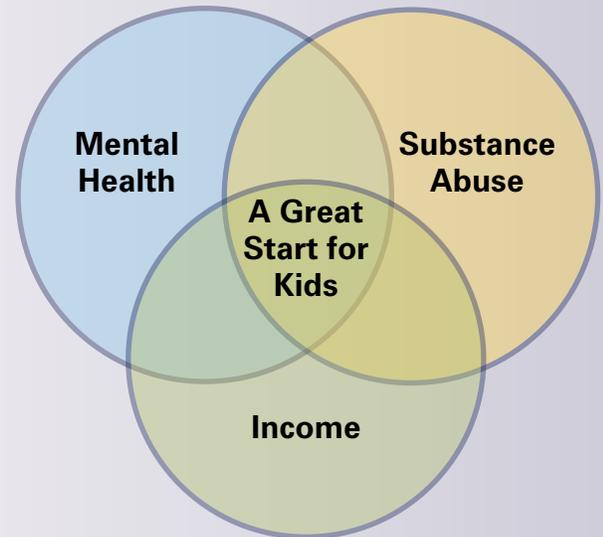
Marathon County Demographics (U.S. Census Bureau)

	2000	2010	2013
Population	125,836	134,063	135,365
Median Age (years)	36.3	37.9	39.8
Minority Population	6.6%	9.7%	10.4%
Families in Poverty	4.3%	5.0%	6.9%
Median Household Income	\$45,165	\$53,150	\$53,363
Average Household Size	2.6	2.5	2.6
Language other than English Spoken in Home	7.4%	7.8%	8.1%
In Labor Force (16+)	71.7%	72.1%	70.5%

The 10th LIFE in Marathon County Report establishes four issues as community priorities:

- **Mental Health**
- **Drug and Alcohol Abuse**
- **Income**
- **A Great Start for Kids**

These issues are viewed as root causes for many of the community's challenges captured in this year's data. The overlap and relationship of these issues make them complex community problems.



► **Mental Health**

Everybody has mental health, and mental health affects everybody's day-to-day functioning. As a community we must be willing to acknowledge that poor mental health contributes to social isolation, substance abuse, injuries, death, family violence, job loss, crimes, and binge behavior.

► **Substance Abuse**

Understanding and openly discussing substance abuse—both drugs and the more accepted use of alcohol—would put our county on the path to changing the culture and use. Abuse of alcohol and drugs affects an individual's ability to hold a job, contributes to multiple health concerns, and results in increased crimes and incarcerations.



► **Income**

Income plays a significant contributing factor to a number of the challenges outlined by the data in the LIFE report. Access to adequate wages is often the most reliable predictor of success, including health outcomes, educational attainment, and the capacity to meet basic needs such as food and housing.

► **Great Start for Kids**

The last LIFE Report introduced a long-term Call to Action: To ensure that every child in Marathon County gets off to a great start. In order to provide our kids with a great start, we must first understand what obstacles are likely to prevent that achievement. Research indicates that parents face greater challenges to providing a great start for their children when they struggle with untreated mental health or substance abuse issues and/or fail to access living wages. To improve the success of kids, we must also ensure that the adults in their lives have the means and supports to provide a safe and nurturing environment.

LIFE Calls to Action

MENTAL HEALTH

Often misunderstood, good mental health is emotional wellbeing. How to access and pay for services can be unfamiliar, and often there is a stigma associated with accessing services.

The problem: The absence of good mental health is a contributing factor to many other individual, family and community challenges such as social isolation, poor performance at school and work, alcohol/drug abuse, and criminal behavior.

Addressing the issue: We will only address those issues effectively when we understand the connections, overcome the stigma, openly talk about the issues, and provide people access to services they need. Community conversations are necessary on:

- The benefit of having good mental health across the lifespan.
- What impacts an individual's emotional wellbeing.
- The services available to address mental health issues.

"Mental health is a community issue and schools are a reflection of the community. As early as kindergarten we're seeing behavior and mental health issues. It's really hard for kids to focus in school if there are things going on at home – it's hard for them to concentrate on learning."

Kristine Gilmore, Superintendent
DC Everest School District

See indicators in the LIFE Report:

- #32 – Infant and Child Mortality
- #39 – Access to Mental Health
- #40 – Social and Emotional Development
- #41 – Social Isolation



SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Our communities would benefit from furthering conversations on what the safe use of alcohol and drugs looks like for individuals, families, and communities.

The problem: The consequences of alcohol and drug abuse are significant (i.e. negative impact on children, ruined lives, jobs lost, and death). For many individuals, alcohol is woven into pastimes, celebrations, and coping with life events.

Addressing the issue:

- Communities need to rethink current practices. Both our County and State would benefit from a conversation about substance abuse that moves beyond the extremes.
- Individuals need to shift attitudes.

"75 percent of the Marathon County jail population is there for some type of substance abuse problem, whether it be sale or trafficking, an offence while under the influence, or committing an offence to support a habit or addiction."

Scott Parks, Sheriff – Marathon County

See indicators in the LIFE Report:

- #43 – Alcohol and Other Drug Misuse and Abuse
- #44 – Tobacco Use
- #45 – Concerns of Personal Safety
- #46 – Alcohol and Drug Arrests
- #47 – Traffic Crashes
- #48 – Property Crime

INCOME

Income plays a significant role in contributing to a person's health and wellbeing and obtaining education.

The problem: Those without a high school or advanced degree have difficulty obtaining living wage jobs. Children growing up in economically disadvantaged situations are more likely to drop out of school or be unable to access higher education.

Addressing the issue: Community leaders and employers should look at what can be done to increase education levels and economic development to attract higher income jobs and increase wages for current jobs that don't provide a living wage.

"Income is a key factor for any individual or family – it's the driver for all parts of their lives. Marathon County has a great history and tradition of organizations working together. That is the only way we can really benefit families in a total encompassing way."

Jeff Sargent, Executive Director
North Central Community Action

See indicators in the LIFE Report:

- #5 – Unemployment
- #6 – Living Wage and Income
- #10 – Child Care Costs and Subsidies
- #13 – Economic Disadvantage
- #18 – Educational Attainment
- #19 – Hunger
- #20 – Housing Assistance
- #21 – Household Utilities
- #22 – Shelter for the Homeless
- #23 – Housing Options for the Aging
- #24 – Access to Transportation
- #25 – Unmet Basic Needs
- #27 – Access to Healthcare
- #33 – Childhood Lead Poisoning
- #48 – Property Crimes

"Through the Early Years Coalition we are looking at bringing best practices to the community and are working together to ensure Marathon County becomes the best place to raise kids."

Dean Dietrich, Attorney
Ruder Ware / Early Years Coalition

GREAT START FOR KIDS

Children will thrive when they are provided a stable, supportive, and nurturing environment.

The problem: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) result in toxic stress that can harm a child's brain by negatively impacting their brain development and physical, mental, and social behaviors.

Addressing the issue: The community should focus on helping families overcome challenges and building resilience in a child's ability to return to being healthy after an adverse experience.

See indicators in the LIFE Report:

- #9 – Regulated Child Care and Quality
- #10 – Child Care Costs and Subsidies
- #11 – Kindergarten Readiness
- #29 – Early Prenatal Care
- #30 – Teenage Pregnancy and Childbirth
- #31 – Low Birth Weight Babies
- #33 – Childhood Lead Poisoning
- #34 – Childhood Immunizations
- #51 – Juvenile Justice
- #52 – Child Abuse and Neglect



LIFE Report Highlights

LIFE Section	Overview – Successes (S) / Challenges (C)	Expert Comment
Economic Environment	<p>S: Marathon County is a strong economy that positively impacts the greater region. Individual industries such as manufacturing, finance, insurance, healthcare, and agriculture play a key role in the strength of our economy.</p> <p>C: The County has a strong need for talent development to prepare the next generation workforce.</p>	<p><i>“The major challenge Marathon County is going to face is the lack of a labor force. Projections show we’re doing well at growing jobs, but with an aging population we need to do a better job at attracting the young workers.”</i></p> <p>Coleman Peiffer, North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission</p>
Education	<p>S: Reading proficiency rates and graduation rates in Marathon County continue to outperform state averages.</p> <p>C: Marathon County schools are observing higher levels of childhood exposure to poverty, emotional trauma, and abuse and neglect, all of which interfere significantly with education performance and long-term educational outcomes.</p>	<p><i>“One of the challenges we face is the number of students that have experienced trauma. The impact trauma has on affecting their ability to succeed in education is significant.”</i></p> <p>Jeff Lindell, Director Pupil Services – Wausau School District</p>
Basic Needs & Supports	<p>S: Marathon County has successfully increased the coordination and collaboration between basic needs providers. This teamwork has streamlined services, producing great impact at a smaller cost to the community.</p> <p>C: As the population ages the County needs to research and support the changing basic needs of the aging as they impact housing, healthcare, and quality of life.</p>	<p><i>“We are seeing a growing need and seeing families we don’t normally see. The families that are coming in are finding themselves in a difficult situation and are looking for ways to stretch the limited money they do have.”</i></p> <p>Ed Wilson, Social Service Director – Salvation Army</p>
Health & Wellness	<p>S: Children are set up for a healthy start as a result of Marathon County improving birth outcomes. Efforts focused on prenatal care and health services throughout early childhood support families with younger children.</p> <p>C: Alcohol misuse and abuse rates in Marathon County continue to be higher than national averages, and there is a continuing need for affordable and accessible mental health services.</p>	<p><i>“Many of the issues we work on are complex and interwoven. These issues take decades to address, and no one agency can solve these complex problems alone.”</i></p> <p>Joan Theurer, Health Officer – Marathon County</p>
Community Safety	<p>S: Safety organizations in Marathon County are researching evidence-based practices to control the recidivism rates of offenders returning to the County jail.</p> <p>C: Substance abuse (alcohol, illegal drugs, and prescription drug abuse) remains a challenging problem for Marathon County.</p>	<p><i>“The younger someone begins drinking alcohol the more likely they are later in life to have problems with alcohol. As a community, the more we can do to address drinking while people are young, the better off we’ll be in the future.”</i></p> <p>Ben Bliven, Patrol Captain – Wausau Police Department</p>
Environment & Energy	<p>S: Marathon County residents remain committed to reducing their waste and improving the health of our local environment. For Example 94.3 percent of residents recycle.</p> <p>C: Streams in the County are contributing heavily to high levels of phosphorus in the Wisconsin River.</p>	<p><i>“Taking care of the environment is very important, especially for my generation. The choices we make today individually and as a community will impact our natural environment for the rest of time.”</i></p> <p>Aaron Ruff, Public Health Educator – Marathon County Health Department</p>



RESOURCE RICHNESS

Marathon County is a resource rich community. The quality of life we are afforded is enhanced by the amenities, services, and supports we have at our disposal. Strengths include:

- Economic diversity
- K-12 schools
- Higher education
- Protected natural environment
- Recreation and wellness
- Healthcare services
- Arts and culture
- Emergency services
- Population diversity
- Innovation and entrepreneurship

REGIONAL CENTER

Marathon County's reach extends well beyond its borders. It is a regional center that draws people in for a wide variety of reasons. Strengths include:

- Shopping and commerce
- Employment opportunities
- Tourism and recreation
- Essential services

COALITION BUILDING

A great strength of Marathon County is that community leaders understand the value of community partnerships. As a result, a number of community collaborations have formed to implement a collective-impact approach to address complex social issues. The following is a list of community coalitions that are actively working on one or more of the issues identified in the LIFE report:

- AOD Partnership
- Coalition of Higher Education
- Domestic Abuse Intervention Team
- Get Smart Wausau
- Healthy Marathon County
- Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL)
- Housing and Homelessness Coalition
- Marathon County Early Year's Coalition
- Marathon County Hunger Coalition
- Partnership for Healthy Aging
- Partnership for Youth
- Prevent Suicide Marathon County



Full report available at United Way or on the web at: www.unitedwaymc.org

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Snapshot

Focus 2015 – 2017 – LIFE in Marathon County

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