

LIFE Report of Marathon County: 2017-2019

Section Summary Supplement

This section captures all six subcommittees' Success and Progress and Calls to Action submissions for the LIFE Report. These bullets were presented and used in the creation of the Healthy, Safe, Prosperous and Connected summary sections in the report. The submissions are listed here in their original format by their respective subcommittees.

Health and Wellness Subcommittee Summary

Success and Progress

- **Decreased number of uninsured:** The number of insured residents in Marathon County has increased, indicating that more residents are able to access needed health care services to prevent disease and treat health conditions before they worsen. LIFE Survey respondents reported decrease in medical debt compared to previous years.
- **Immunization:** Marathon County continues to have high rates of two year olds with up-to-date immunizations. Immunizations help prevent the spread of communicable diseases, benefiting not just the individuals but the community as a whole.
- **YRBS Data:** Youth Risk Behavior Survey data from all 10 school districts in Marathon County provides a rich local data source regarding the behaviors of our community's youth. The 2017-2019 LIFE Report marks the second collection of county-wide data, allowing for comparisons to prior years, and the first time middle school data is available.
- **Outdoor Recreation:** Marathon County is home to a number of parks, recreation, and open natural areas providing an abundance of opportunities for residents to enjoy the outdoors and be physically active. The majority, 80.8% of LIFE Survey respondents are satisfied with the availability of these outdoor spaces.
- **Preventive Clinical Care/Screenings:** Receipt of preventive health screenings such as mammograms and cholesterol checks, is high in Marathon County. Screenings are important for identifying health issues before they develop or worsen. Marathon County ranks 14th in clinical care among Wisconsin counties.
- **Dental Care:** Progress to improve access to dental care for Marathon County residents continues to be made. Two Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) act as consistent providers for Medicaid/BadgerCare patients and LIFE respondents report a decreased level of concern of the affordability of dental care compared to prior years.
- **Access to Health Care:** Access to health care, which helps ensure the health of residents, remains high in Marathon County with four health care systems located in the community and a primary care physician ratio better than Wisconsin's average. The majority of LIFE survey respondents report being satisfied with the accessibility of health care.
- **Decreased Tobacco Use & Increased Perception:** Progress continues to be made on reducing tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke in Marathon County. Perception of tobacco use, particularly among youth, is an important contributor to progress achieved. 89% of middle school youth report that their parents feel it would be wrong for them to smoke cigarettes.
- **Childhood Lead:** Marathon County has been proactive in adopting the Center for Disease Control's recommendation to intervene at lower blood lead levels in children. As a result, the average length of time to reduce a child's blood lead level to a safe range decreased and fewer young children in Marathon County are affected by the negative health impacts of lead exposure.
- **Low Birthweight Babies:** Marathon County continues to improve birth outcomes; particularly, the percent of babies born at a healthy weight increased. Positive birth outcomes provide children with a healthy start and minimizes their risk for health problems later in life.

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Health and Wellness Subcommittee Summary

Calls to Action

- **Substance Use:** Substance abuse and misuse continues to be of concern in Marathon County. Illegal drug use was the number one issue of concern among 2017 LIFE survey respondents and drug overdoses were the number one cause of injury related deaths among individuals aged 15-64. While alcohol remains the largest substance abuse burden in our community, rates remain unchanged among adults and youth. Furthermore, e-cigarette use is on the rise, yet, there is a low level of concern regarding their use.
- **Mental Health:** The mental health of individuals in Marathon County, especially youth, warrants attention as does the need for accessible mental health services. Suicide risk has increased among high schoolers as has the number of youth reporting feelings of hopelessness. Stigma, cost and a shortage of mental health providers (psychiatrists and dual certified therapists) remain barriers to accessing services.
- **Obesity:** Overweight and obesity rates continue to rise among Marathon County adults, putting them at risk for obesity-related chronic diseases. Youth are also at risk as the number reporting sedentary activities, such as video games, has increased in recent years.
- **End of Life Planning:** A lack of end of life planning persists both locally and nationally. As the Marathon County population continues to age, bringing awareness to the importance of advance care planning will be crucial.
- **Affordability of Health Care:** Affordability of health care, regardless of insurance status, remains a concern among Marathon County residents. LIFE Survey respondents who reported not having health insurance cited cost as the number one reason and even those who have health insurance report significant amounts of medical debt.
- **Falls:** Falls continue to be the number one cause of injury related hospitalizations and ER visits in Marathon County, particularly among residents aged 65+. Further concerning, the death rate due to falls has increased in recent years.

Basic Needs and Supports Subcommittee Summary

Success and Progress

- The community has responded to the increasing need for more food by donating to food pantries to address hunger in Marathon County.
- Effective performance by the Marathon County Hunger Coalition and the Housing and Homelessness Coalition has led to new programs to address basic food and housing needs.
- Emergency housing assistance recipients have seen increased housing stability. In 2016, 57% reported having housing stability 3 months after services were provided.
- The Coordinated Entry System in Marathon County, which prioritizes the most vulnerable chronically homeless, has resulted in more homeless people being housed.
- There has been a decrease in unmet needs. 92% of all needs request coming into the 2-1-1 system were met.
- The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program waiting list was re-opened in 2017 affording increased rental assistance opportunities for eligible families and individuals.

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Basic Needs and Supports Section Summary

Calls to Action

- More low-income affordable housing is needed. 46.1% of LIFE survey respondents stated that they spend more than 30% of their income on housing.
- Shelters and transitional housing options need to be expanded to bridge the homeless as they move toward permanent housing.
- Explore solutions to increase income for families. 84% of LIFE survey respondents indicated that they were concerned about availability of jobs that pay enough to meet basic household expenses.
- Implement more “Housing First” programming to provide permanent housing solutions to homeless individuals and families.

Energy and Environment Section Summary

Success and Progress

- Since 2008, Marathon County Government has completed 42 energy conservation projects in collaboration with Focus on Energy and Wisconsin Public Service. Marathon County is committed to being an environmentally responsible county government which includes policies and programs that conserve energy, and reduce fuel, utility, and resource consumption. This approach saves tax dollars that can be redirected to support services to the public.
- Marathon County residents recognize the benefits to our ample and clean water resources. The 2017 LIFE Community Survey indicates that 70.8% of the respondents are either very concerned or concerned about the cleanliness of local lakes and rivers. The survey also revealed a high public awareness of the importance of protecting open and natural areas.
- Marathon County residents remain committed to reducing their waste and improving the health of our local environment. According to the 2017 LIFE Survey, 78.8% of Marathon County residents recycle, donate, re-use or compost waste.

Calls to Action

- To attract young professionals, Marathon County must consider ways to become more energy conscious and invest in programs—bike paths, recycling, conservation, renewables—that help individuals use energy more efficiently.
- Marathon County streams are contributing heavily to high levels of phosphorus in the Wisconsin River. We must educate county residents on the sources of the high phosphorous levels and successful mitigation strategies to bring these levels back with safe ranges.
- Too many residents with private wells in Marathon County are still unaware of the need to have their well tested annually to ensure the safety of their drinking water.

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Economic Environment Section Summary

Success and Progress

- Marathon County is a strong economy that positively impacts the greater region. The county had a gross regional product (GRP) of 6.1 billion dollars and 10.2 billion dollars in sales in 2014.
- Marathon County is a regional economic hub that provides job opportunities for county residents and commuters from outside of the county's borders.
- Individual industries play a key role in the strength of our economy. Manufacturing generated a 1.5 billion dollar gross regional products (GRP) which produced 5.1 billion dollars in exports. The Finance and Insurance industry reported an 800 million dollar GRP with 1.1 billion dollars in exports. Healthcare had a 700 million GRP with 716 million in exports in 2014.
- Marathon County ranked 10th out of all Wisconsin counties in direct visitor spending, or tourism, in 2015. From 2014 to 2015, spending increased 2.7%, totaling 235.9 million dollars.
- There were 71,000 jobs in the county during 2016. This was a 3.1% increase from 2014 and a 9.9% increase from 2010, at the height of the recent economic recession.
- The county's labor force participation rate remains strong at 69.2% and is above both state and national averages.

Calls to Action

- Training to Job Demand - from 2012 to 2022, the North Central Wisconsin Region can expect to add between 14,000 and 16,000 more jobs to its economy. Provide a workforce with in-demand skills (technical know-how or specialize skills) to fill upcoming vacancies created by retirement and additional, new job growth, especially in health services and education.
- Marathon County households have less in buying power than they did fifteen years ago. Since 2000, incomes have not kept up with inflation while housing prices and rents hit record highs. Single-parent households with two or more children are not even meeting living wage requirements. Housing and child care costs have the heaviest impact.
- Promote training and education to those able to fill higher paying job openings.
- Organizations need to pay a living wage that allows employees to participate in the local economies.

Education Section Summary

Success and Progress

- Young Star ratings of childcare quality have increased in Marathon County.
- Good Start Grants support the affordability of childcare.
- Over 90% of children entering kindergarten in Marathon County pass literacy screening.

Education Success and Progress continued on next page

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Education Success and Progress continued

Education Section Summary

Success and Progress

- Marathon County has increasingly diverse school enrollment.
- Marathon County poverty rates continue to run below the state average.
- Students in Marathon County continue to surpass state scores in reading proficiency.
- All districts in Marathon County have a higher graduation rate than the state average.

Calls to Action

- Since 2010, Marathon County has lost more than half of its regulated child care providers and a wait list exists in 82% of programs serving children under 2 years and 71% of programs serving 2-4 year olds.
- Even with financial support through grants and the Wisconsin Shares childcare reimbursement program, the affordability of childcare continues to be a significant barrier to many families causing parents to seek often unsafe, unregulated care or preventing parents from entering the workforce.
- Schools throughout Marathon County are struggling with managing mental health of children as a result of childhood trauma.
- Marathon County schools continue to serve high numbers of children in poverty in excess of 30% and some above 70%.
- Districts throughout Marathon County and the state are struggling financially due to lack of funding increases at the state level resulting in an increase of districts seeking relief through referendum.

Safety Section Summary

Success and Progress

- Wisconsin Department of Transportation is dedicated to reducing traffic injuries and fatalities by addressing factors that cause them. Most traffic crashes are avoidable events caused by distracted driving (texting/cellphone use), driving under the influence drugs/alcohol, speeding, human error, etc.
- The Marathon County AOD Partnership engages the public and media about substance abuse, while educating and providing expertise to policy makers.
- Tabulating data collection and analysis of issues affecting local, state, and federal government are effective tools in planning and implementing the next best practices to combat criminal activity.

Safety Success and Progress continued on next page

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Safety Success and Progress continued

Safety Section Summary

Success and Progress

- Law enforcement has increased interaction with businesses offering information and instructions for protection and security for their employees and properties in an effort to minimize incidents. By cultivating awareness, law enforcement is helping businesses and people protect themselves against crime, further improving the safety of our communities.
- Marathon County has a compliance court for domestic violence offenders with the goal of reducing the level of violence and changing offenders' behaviors.
- Wisconsin has Safe at Home which is a statewide address confidentiality program for victims of actual or threatened abuse. More information can be found at safeathome@doj.state.wi.us.
- Area law enforcement has organized a task force to conduct Internet Crimes Against Children operations protecting our vulnerable from those who would prey upon them.
- 63.4% of LIFE Survey respondents feel safe alone in their neighborhood. This is an increase over 2015 and 2013 results.
- The Emergency Medical Services (EMS) system is seeing increases in calls for service. Call reviews identified high utilizer patients requiring care that conventional EMS and health care do not meet such as social work, psychological, substance abuse assistance and homecare.

Calls to Action

- Marathon County's current addressing system was built in the 1980's and is structured on ten rural address grids, which have conflicts such as odd and even address numbers on the same side of the road; no sequential address numbering on one or both sides of the road; inconsistent use of compass directional data in road names; roads with the same or similar names; and duplicate addressing.
- Inconsistent and duplicate addressing creates challenges when there is an emergency services response requiring mutual aid and the responding agency is not aware of the local inconsistencies of the current addressing system.
- Identify the needs of the community through assessment and evaluation, followed by advocating for policy change, including pursuing legislative action.
- Awareness of the potential issues with crowdfunding. Crowdfunding provides an alternative to the traditional banking system by creating a forum for individuals, non-profits and small businesses to raise funds across a social network or private website quickly and easily. These unregulated sites occur outside the regulated banking and financial industry providing a potential platform for criminals to defraud potential victims.

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Connected Section Summary

Success and Progress

- The community has created initiatives to acknowledge and address racial divisions such as Toward One Wausau and The Unity Project. Toward One Wausau is a grassroots effort formed in 2016 of people of many backgrounds coming together for one purpose – to move toward a vision of “One Wausau” that works for all people regardless of race or ethnic background. The Unity Project focuses on creating an inclusive and welcoming environment.
- Recent remodeling investments and a commitment for new venues will increase Wausau’s standing as a regional arts destination. Marathon County currently features two world-class venues for the arts in Wausau, and more than 30 arts organizations across the county provide participation opportunities for individuals of all ages. There has also been an increase in cultural activities and events.
- Approximately 35% of Marathon County seniors age 65+ live alone compared to 44.8% for Wisconsin and 42.8% for the U.S. To address concerns about social isolation among seniors, particularly as the senior population continues to grow, a group of community volunteers are fundraising and developing plans for The Connections Place, a senior center focusing on education, exercise and entertainment. Efforts are also underway with the Wausau Public Library.
- For the 2016 national election, Marathon County maintained a significantly higher voter turnout (87%) than the state (67%) and country (60.2%).
- 95% of LIFE Survey respondents said they have at least one person whom they could talk to if they have a problem.

Calls to Action

- 55% of respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with how welcoming the community is. That’s a 14-point drop from 2013 and an 11-point drop from 2015. Although family still is the top reason why people chose to live in Marathon County, the aging population and aging workforce requires that we attract additional younger workers. They will demand a friendly, open and diverse community. To effect change, leaders in business, education and government must support dialogue, tolerance and understanding.
- 43.5% of high school students who took the 2017 Marathon County Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicate they believe bullying at school is a problem, an increase from 40% in 2015. At the same time, 27.9% of high school students said they do not have a teacher or other adult whom they can talk to if they have a problem. Bullying, the pressures of social media and social isolation pose a threat to the security, confidence and self-esteem of our youth. Community and school officials should explore other successful anti-bullying efforts to supplement current initiatives.
- Increased availability of public transportation is needed throughout Marathon County. Currently, a public transportation system is only available in the City of Wausau, and it has limited hours on weekdays and no weekend service. Public transportation helps community members access employment, health care, shopping and other services. According to the Wisconsin Urban and Rural Transit Association, for every \$1 invested in transit, there is a return of \$3.
- Broadband access is crucial to keep up with trends in education, employment, health care and public safety. 40% of rural Wisconsin does not have broadband, according to the FCC. Costs of Internet services also tend to be much higher as areas become more rural. Marathon County needs to continue efforts to expand broadband services and improve affordability to increase access.