



LIFE

Snapshot of Life in MARATHON COUNTY

11TH EDITION | 2017-2019

Snapshot of LIFE in Marathon County

The LIFE in Marathon County Report has been published every two years since 1997 making the 2017-2019 Report the 11th edition. The LIFE Report is a data driven report depicting the quality of life in Marathon County. Since the very first report it has established community Calls to Action which inform the work of countless organizations. The LIFE Report has grown to serve the community as an essential tool for many organizations in securing grant funding and in setting priorities. The LIFE Report project is guided by the LIFE Project Steering Committee and made possible by the generous support of funding partners (listed on the back cover).



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.

CHANGES TO THE 11TH EDITION

With the 2017-2019 report, a new structure was adopted that encompasses four broad sections:

- Prosperous
- Healthy
- Safe
- Connected

These four categories serve as descriptors in painting a picture of the quality of life in Marathon County – where all strive to have a county that is prosperous, healthy, safe, and where residents are connected.

These four categories closely align with the 2016 Marathon County Comprehensive Plan, a plan that was structured around the goal to be the healthiest, safest, and most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

Marathon County Demographics (U.S. Census Bureau)

Marathon County is located in central Wisconsin. At 1,584 square miles it is the largest county geographically in Wisconsin.

“Building a better tomorrow starts today; the choices we make today individually and as a community will impact our natural environment for the rest of time.”

- Aaron Ruff, Marathon County Health Department

Demographics	2000	2010	2016
Population	125,836	134,063	135,603
Median Age	36.3	37.9	40.9 (2015)
Minority Population	6.6%	9.7%	11.0%
Families in Poverty	4.3%	5.0%	9.5%
Median Household Income	\$45,165	\$53,150	\$54,083
Average Household Size	2.6	2.5	2.48
Language other than English Spoken in Home	7.4%	7.8%	8.1%
In Labor Force (16+)	71.7%	72.1%	69.2%



LIFE Calls to Action

The 2017-2019 LIFE Report establishes five community Calls to Action. These community priorities are based on report data and feedback from community advisors and the LIFE Steering Committee. The purpose of these Calls to Action is to advance community dialogue and stimulate action to improve the community’s well-being.

INTERCONNECTED

The community is a system. Factors of interconnectedness between the LIFE Report sections and indicators show the need to work collaboratively to support efforts to improve the quality of life for all residents to ensure Marathon County is a great place to grow up, work, raise a family, and retire.

Understanding that a community is a system of interconnected parts is increasingly important as the issues faced become more complex. The more groups and individuals in Marathon County work collaboratively and across boundaries the more successful efforts to sustain a high quality of life will be.

THE CALLS TO ACTION

- Mental Health
- Substance Abuse
- Bullying
- Broadband Access
- Future Job Growth



Various aspects of the community are interconnected. They are linked by the impact one has on the other, or by the interplay between them.

LIFE Calls to Action



MENTAL HEALTH

The mental health of individuals in Marathon County, especially youth, warrants attention as does the need for accessible mental health services.

- Schools throughout Marathon County are struggling with managing the mental health of children as a result of childhood trauma.
- Suicide risk has increased among high school students 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.

See indicators in the LIFE Report:

- #11 – Kindergarten Readiness
- #13 – Economic Disadvantage
- #23 – Homelessness
- #26 – Premature Death
- #28 – Access to Healthcare
- #36 – Mental Health
- #37 – Adverse Childhood Experiences, Trauma, and Resilience
- #53 – Juvenile Justice
- #54 – Child Abuse and Neglect
- #55 – Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Assault
- #64 – Social Isolation

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

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.
- 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.
- E-cigarette use is on the rise, yet, there is a low level of concern regarding their use.

See indicators in the LIFE Report:

- #23 – Homelessness
- #26 – Premature Death
- #27 – Unintentional Injuries
- #28 – Access to Healthcare
- #37 – Adverse Childhood Experiences, Trauma, and Resilience
- #39 – Alcohol and Other Drug Misuse and Abuse
- #48 – Alcohol and Drug Arrests
- #49 – Traffic Crashes
- #51 – Violent Crime
- #53 – Juvenile Justice
- #54 – Child Abuse and Neglect
- #55 – Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Assault
- #57 – Emergency Response

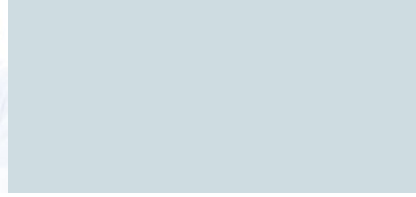
BULLYING

Bullying, the pressures of social media, and social isolation pose a threat to the security, confidence and self-esteem of both youth and adults in Marathon County.

- 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.
- 27% of students said they do not feel they have a teacher or other adult whom they can talk to if they have a problem.

See indicators in the LIFE Report:

- #13 – Economic Disadvantage
- #23 – Homelessness
- #36 – Mental Health
- #37 – Adverse Childhood Experiences, Trauma, and Resilience
- #39 – Alcohol and Other Drug Misuse and Abuse
- #51 – Violent Crime
- #55 – Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Assault
- #56 – Elder Abuse and Vulnerable Adults
- #58 – Sense of Community
- #59 – Discrimination
- #60 – Racial Disparities within the Justice System
- #61 – Income/Wage Disparities by Race and Gender
- #64 – Social Isolation



BROADBAND ACCESS

Broadband access is crucial to keep up with trends in education, employment, healthcare, 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.

See indicators in the LIFE Report:

- #1 – Regional Economic Drivers
- #4 – Training to Job Demand
- #6 – Living Wages and Income
- #8 – Poverty/Living Wage
- #13 – Economic Disadvantage
- #17 – College and Career Readiness
- #50 – Property Crimes
- #64 – Social Isolation
- #65 – Broadband Access

FUTURE JOB GROWTH

Training to job demand will be key to delivering the workforce needed with in-demand skills (technical know-how or specialized skills) to fill upcoming vacancies created by retirement and additional new job growth, especially in health services and education.

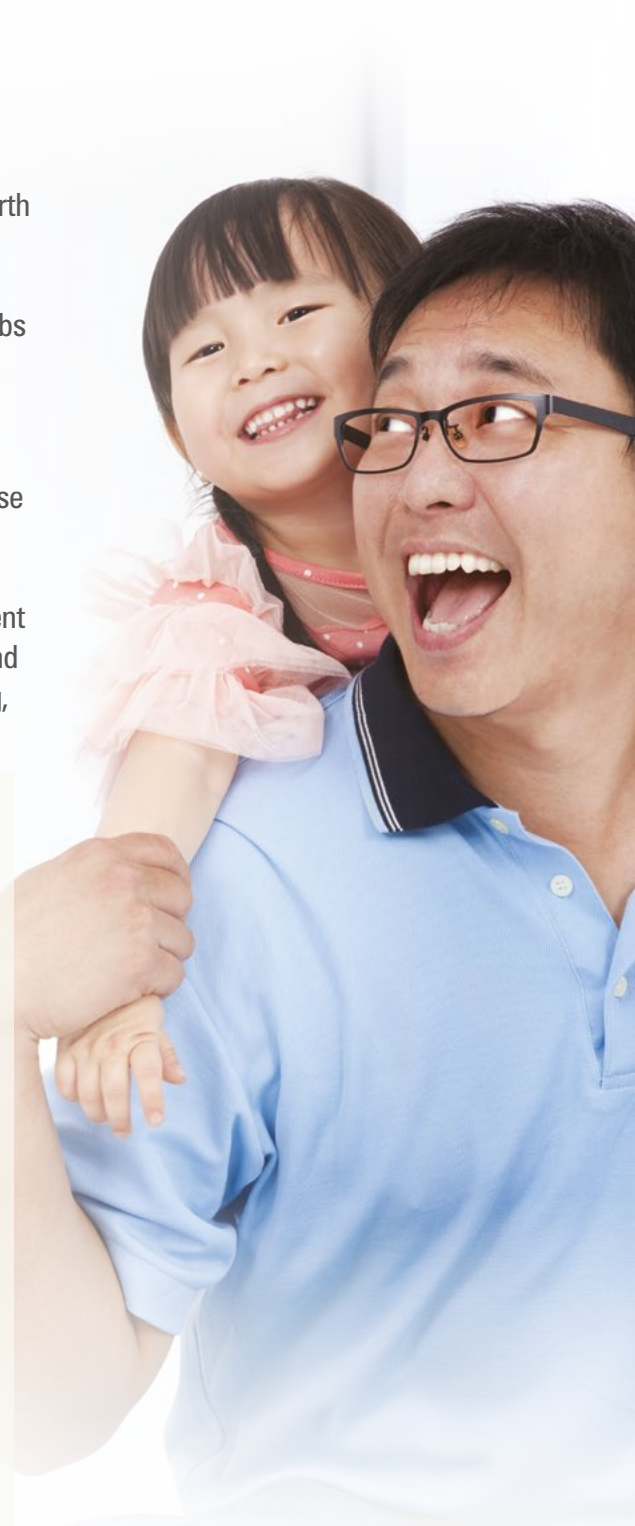
- From 2012 to 2022, the North Central Wisconsin Region can expect to add between 14,000 and 16,000 more jobs to its economy.
- There is also a need to promote training and education to not only fill those openings, but to encourage people to move into higher paying jobs. Having sufficient income helps individuals and families afford safe housing, food, and health care.

See indicators in the LIFE Report:

- #3 – Workforce Projections
- #4 – Training to Job Demand
- #7 – Workforce Attraction and Retention
- #8 – Poverty/Living Wage
- #10 – Child Care Costs and Subsidies
- #13 – Economic Disadvantage
- #20 – Hunger
- #21 – Housing Assistance
- #22 – Household Utilities
- #23 – Homelessness
- #25 – Unmet Basic Needs
- #28 – Access to Healthcare
- #61 – Income/Wage Disparities by Race and Gender
- #62 – Access to Transportation
- #65 – Broadband Access

“Envisioning a Marathon County where all people enjoy the opportunities to live, learn, work, and play in healthy communities; whereby we build upon our community assets.”

-Ambassadors for Marathon County



Success | Progress | Assets

COMMUNITY SUCCESS AND PROGRESS

The LIFE Report identifies areas of success and progress based on the report data and feedback from community advisors and the LIFE Steering Committee. Seven successes and progress were identified:

- **Child Success in School** – Marathon County children are set up for success from kindergarten through high school graduation.
- **Openness to Explore Diversity** – The community has created initiatives to address racial divisions such as Toward One Wausau and The Unity Project.
- **Access to Health Care** – Access to health care 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. Residents continue to receive preventative health care and screenings across the lifespan.
- **Strong Economy** – Marathon County has a strong economy that positively impacts the greater region.
- **Substance Abuse Education** – The issue of substance abuse has been kept in the public by engaging the media as well as educating and providing expertise to policy makers.
- **Affordable Housing** – Marathon County has made strides to address affordable housing.
- **Data on Youth Risk Behaviors** – Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data from all 10 school districts in Marathon County provides a rich local data source regarding the behaviors of our community's youth.

COMMUNITY ASSETS

The quality of life in Marathon County is enhanced by its strong community assets.

- **Education**
 - Collaboration of educational organizations.
 - Strong birth – higher education.
- **Environment**
 - Collaboration of natural resources organizations/efforts. Active outdoor lifestyle.
 - Natural resources with specific reference to water and air.
- **Lifestyle**
 - Great place to raise kids.
 - Spiritual support is accepted and available.
 - Safe place to live.
- **Economic**
 - Numerous family-owned manufacturing companies.
 - Marathon County is the north central hub providing an attraction for others to come here.
 - Collaboration on access to broadband.
 - Educational institutions provide train-to-job demand resources.
- **Health**
 - Health initiatives are active and supported.
 - Collaboration is a way of life – active in substance abuse and among health care systems.
 - Medical College of Wisconsin is in Marathon County, has a psychiatry residency, and a focus on generating rural doctors.
- **Connected**
 - Spirit of collaboration in shared outcomes and people who care.
 - Care about diversity.
 - The LIFE Report itself demonstrates the community's commitment to quality of life.

"When we aren't open to listening to one another, we remain static as a community and not much changes. We all have a responsibility to help build a better community for every one of its members and to spread hope where there is none."

- **Maysee Yang Herr,**
University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point

*"Accountability and integrity are the foundations
community respect and trust are built upon."*

**- Scott Parks, Marathon County
Sheriff's Department**

LIFE Report Highlights

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

CONNECTED

- For Individuals:**
 - Seek awareness and understanding of the ways groups of people are stereotyped. Practice civility, listening skills and kindness. Be respectful.
 - Offer a smile to someone you don't know. Introduce yourself to a new neighbor or invite a new coworker to join you for lunch.
- For Organizations:**
 - Create a diverse workplace by considering recruitment and employment practices that seek to expand the variety of people, talent, and experience among your workforce.
 - Rally faith, service and civic organizations to partner with schools – to help families in need of assistance and to learn about diverse populations.
- For the Community:**
 - Acknowledge that disparities and discrimination still exist and work to address these issues. Challenge misconceptions and attitudes that lead to discrimination and encourage unity.
 - Explore partnerships to create innovative transportation options to connect people where they live, work, and retire to address social isolation and employment barriers caused by lack of transportation.

HEALTHY

- For Individuals:**
 - Know the risk of substance abuse and be educated on consequences of the misuse of alcohol, prescription, and illegal drugs. Develop a dialog regarding substance abuse with youth, monitor behavior of family and friends, and be supportive for their need of counseling and recovery.
 - Support family and friends experiencing personal difficulties.
- For Organizations:**
 - Leverage current programs and resources for substance abuse prevention, education, treatment, and legal enforcement.
 - Support wellness policies and incentives for those engaging in healthy behaviors.
- For the Community:**
 - Come together as individuals and organizations to look at innovative approaches to solving the community's most challenging issues.
 - Promote community conversations on the benefits of integrating mental health well-being into everyday life.

PROSPEROUS

- For Individuals:**
 - Seek educational and training opportunities that meet the county workforce needs now and for the future.
 - Serve on advisory committees and boards to assure training and education is relevant based on employer's needs.
- For Organizations:**
 - Employers and low-income families work together to eliminate barriers to full-time employment.
 - Work together to strengthen family resiliency and reduce the impact of adverse childhood experiences.
- For the Community:**
 - Recognize and advocate for change regarding poverty in our county and the adverse impact it has on our schools, children, and families.
 - Develop public/private partnerships to increase child care availability, and grant opportunities for families to afford quality child care.

SAFE

- For Individuals:**
 - Substance abuse is everyone's business. Awareness is raised when we unite together and think differently about addiction.
- For Organizations:**
 - Education and awareness on the necessity of seat belt use. Motorists who are hurt or killed in traffic crashes because they did not buckle up create excessive economic loss through medical expenses, higher insurance premiums, taxes, and other public funding.
- For the Community:**
 - Increase awareness and promote crime prevention by providing information on do it yourself security installations, developing or enhancing existing Neighborhood Watch programs, or encouraging property marking by retaining detailed descriptions and serial numbers of property.

For the complete list of Opportunities for Action, please see the full report.



The LIFE Report is made possible through the support of our sponsors:

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Full report available at United Way or at unitedwaymc.org

LIFE

LIFE IN MARATHON COUNTY REPORT

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