

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

**July 2023
Full Report**



Introduction

MICA helps people who are experiencing poverty meet their needs, build on their strengths, and achieve their goals.

MICA is excited to present our 2023 community needs assessment. As a data-driven agency, the triennial community needs assessment is foundational for MICA. It serves many purposes – supporting organizational planning, assessing gaps, educating about the causes and conditions of poverty, and helping the community understand why our work is important. But most importantly, this report is infused with the voices of the families we serve.

Our mission calls on us to help people who are experiencing poverty to meet their needs. To do that successfully, we have to have a full and clear picture of what those needs are, both on an individual level and also on the community level. The community needs assessment is an opportunity for us to reconnect with where we can best place our resources as a community action agency to maximize our effectiveness, and an opportunity to start a dialogue about moving the needle on poverty in our communities.

We invite you to dig into the data with us!

Watch a short video about our findings here!



Key Findings

Poverty is complex. Here's what our data is telling us.

MICA analyzes the causes and conditions of poverty in our area to identify areas of top concern that need to be addressed for our communities to thrive. Here are our top four key findings.



Across our service area, hunger is a growing area of concern.

When asked to identify the top challenge facing their family today, people from both the urban and rural areas that MICA serves identified obtaining food. Rising food costs and stagnant wages are putting pressure on families to spend more of their income on food.



Families are still experiencing unaddressed mental health crises and high levels of stress, even after the pandemic.

In contrast to surveying done before the pandemic, mental health needs, trauma, and stress have stayed persistently high for families in 2020 and beyond. There are not enough mental health providers and resources in central Iowa to meet this need, particularly in rural areas.



Income for the families we serve is stagnant and key benefits like SNAP and Medicaid are less able to bridge the gap.

Most families we surveyed had similar or lower incomes than this time last year, and that trend was even more pronounced for families who identified as Hispanic or Latino. The erosion of support at the state and federal levels after the pandemic for programs like SNAP and Medicaid creates even more of a crunch for families.



Lack of availability of child care is an issue for many families in our area, causing a cascade of negative effects.

Language barriers, low to no availability of child care for second and third shifts, and the prohibitive cost of child care were some of the issues families shared with us. Community stakeholders also rated child care their number one issue of concern.

What does poverty look like in central Iowa?

We'd like to introduce you to Elise and her daughter Hannah. Elise is a representation of the experiences of a number of families we spoke with during our needs assessment process.

Elise relies on her family to make ends meet.

Child care is not an option because it is unaffordable, but Elise's mother is able to watch Hannah sometimes.

Elise survives on very little income.

Because her hours are inconsistent and her wage is low, Elise makes only about \$15,000 a year. She is extremely resourceful but sometimes she has to choose between food, rent, medicine, or other bills.

Hannah's needs always come first, even if that means Elise goes without.

Elise works hard.

She has two part-time jobs but sometimes struggles to get them to provide her consistent hours. Neither provides good benefits.

Elise worries about relying on assistance.

Not only does she not want to take from others she sees as needing the help more, Elise sometimes doesn't apply for benefits like SNAP because there are too many hurdles to justify the effort, especially when the benefits are lower than what she received during COVID.

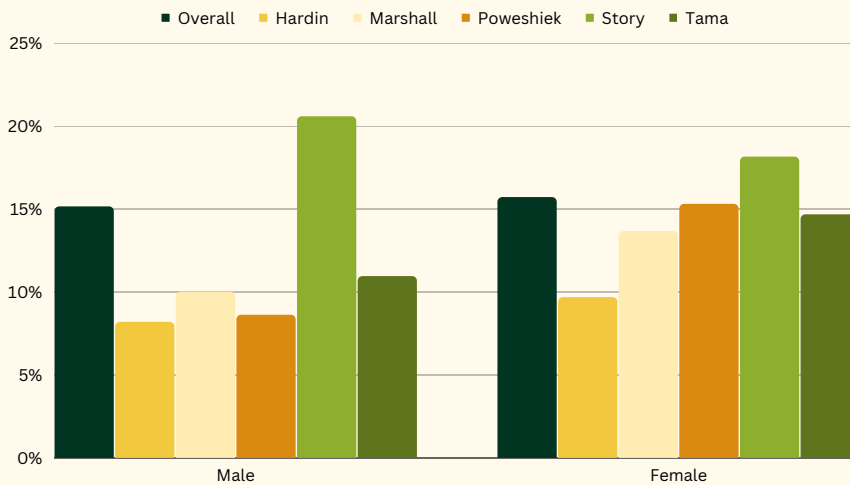
Elise has unaddressed medical needs.

Elise has persistent migraines but she has put off treatment because she can't find a doctor who will accept Medicaid.



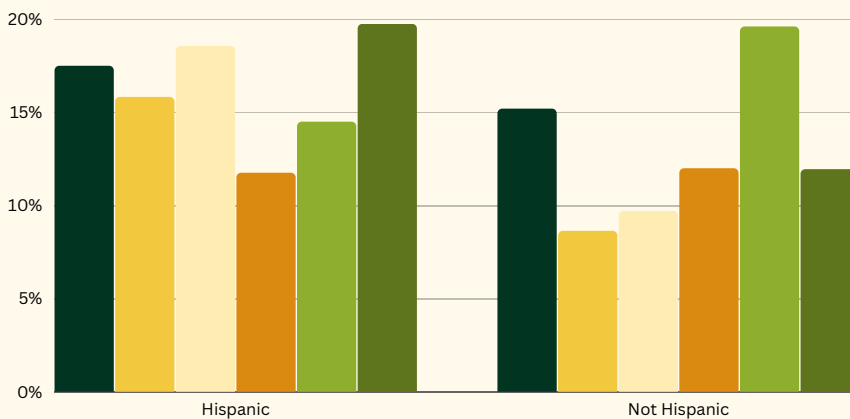
What does poverty look like in central Iowa?

The following charts represent rates of poverty by gender, ethnicity, and race throughout our service area.



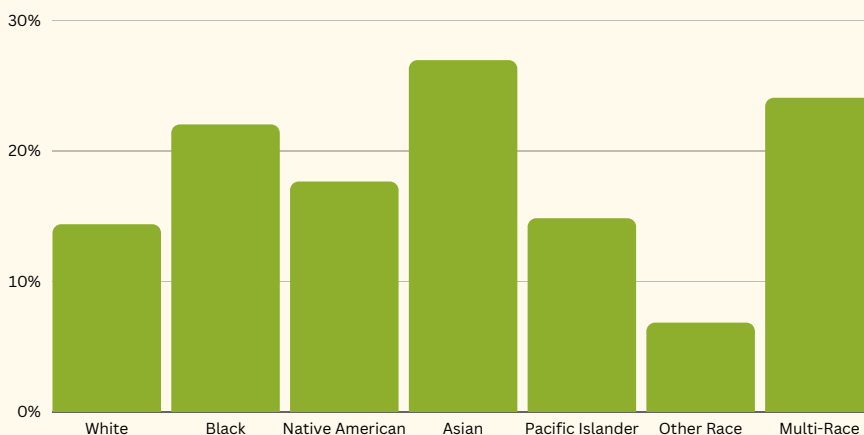
Key takeaway:

Women are significantly more likely than men to live in poverty across our service area, with the exception of Story County.



Key takeaway:

Hispanic or Latino individuals are more likely to live in poverty but this does not hold true in cities with a major secondary education presence like Ames or Grinnell.



Key takeaway:

In our service area, the rate of families in poverty is significantly higher for Black, Asian, Native American, and Multi-Race individuals.

What does child poverty look like in central Iowa?

These are some of the top needs that parents expressed to us during our data collection process.

Affordable child care is hard to find.

Child care is not as accessible or affordable as it needs to be to accommodate the needs of central Iowa's children.

Transportation to and from school is a barrier for families.

Especially for families who live inside the city limits but far from school, bus routes may not be available. This is a cause for concern and worry for parents, and can affect work schedules.

Very young children may need help dealing with recent trauma.

After the disasters (tornado and derecho) and the pandemic, parents are seeing an increase in fear, anxiety, and other trauma responses in their children that will likely need to be addressed.



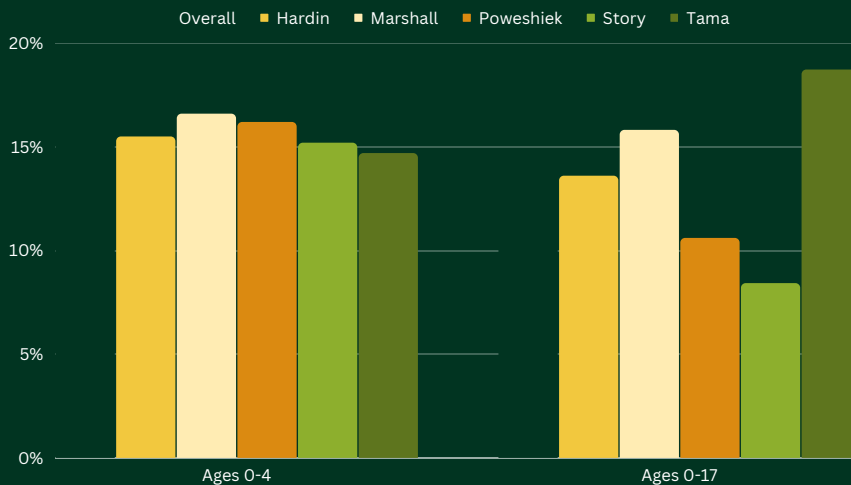
Parents wish for more support with child enrichment activities.

Both organized activities like sports and the arts as well as recreational activities can be out of reach for parents. Uniforms, dues, entry fees and other costs mean children have fewer opportunities.



What does child poverty look like in central Iowa?

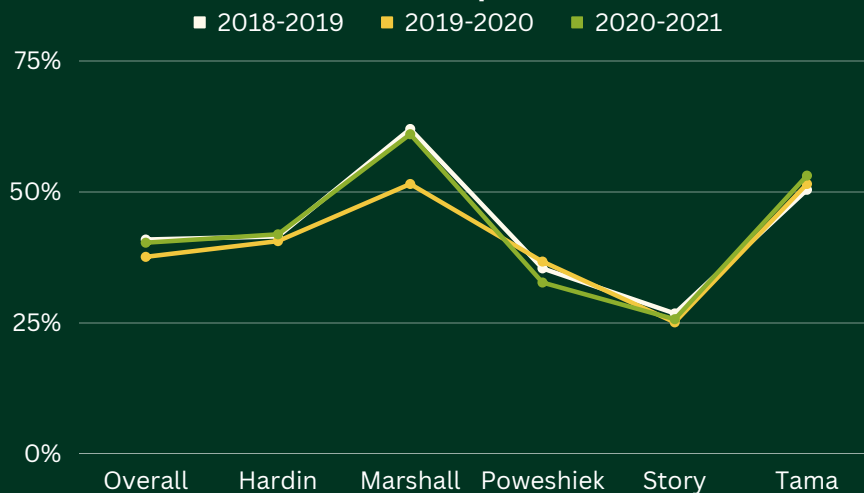
The following charts look at poverty by age in our service area, focusing specifically on child poverty.



Key takeaway:

About 1,500 very young children in our service area live in poverty (ages 0-4), an average of about 15.5%. When we look at ages 0-17, that rate lowers to 12.2%, or about 4,500 children.

Free- and reduced-price lunch rates



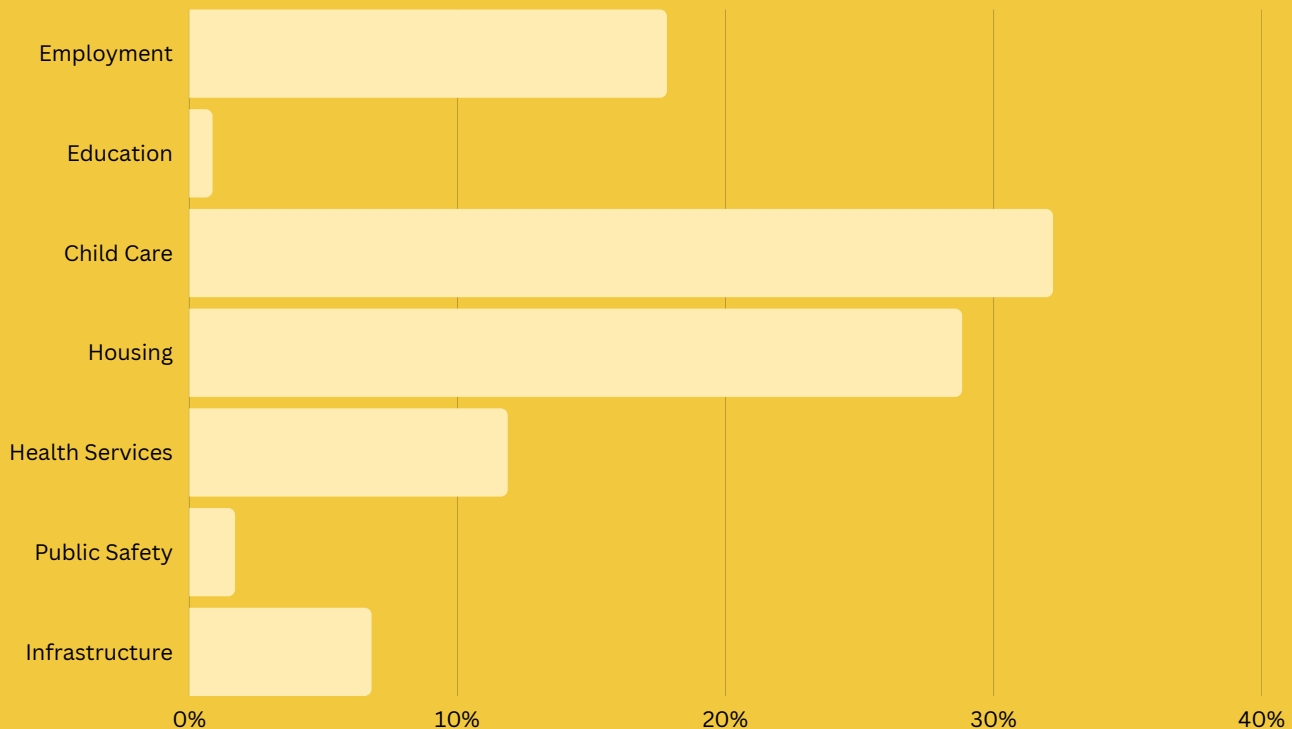
Key takeaway:

Free- and reduced-price lunch rates tell us a lot about the population of school-age children who are at risk of falling into poverty as well as those who are living in poverty. Rates have remained steady but are persistently high in Marshall and Tama Counties.

Top Community Needs

MICA asked several different stakeholder groups in our service area, including community organizations, faith-based organizations, private and public sector employees, and educational institutions what the top needs in their communities were. Here is what they said:

Which one of the following categories of need do you think your community should focus on addressing?



Child care was selected as a top need by stakeholders, followed by housing. A variety of reasons were given for this response:

"Lack of even the openings in child care centers prevents families from gaining employment, gaining income, and moving out of poverty. Lack of affordable child care is a secondary concern as finding any in Story County/Ames is the bigger issue."

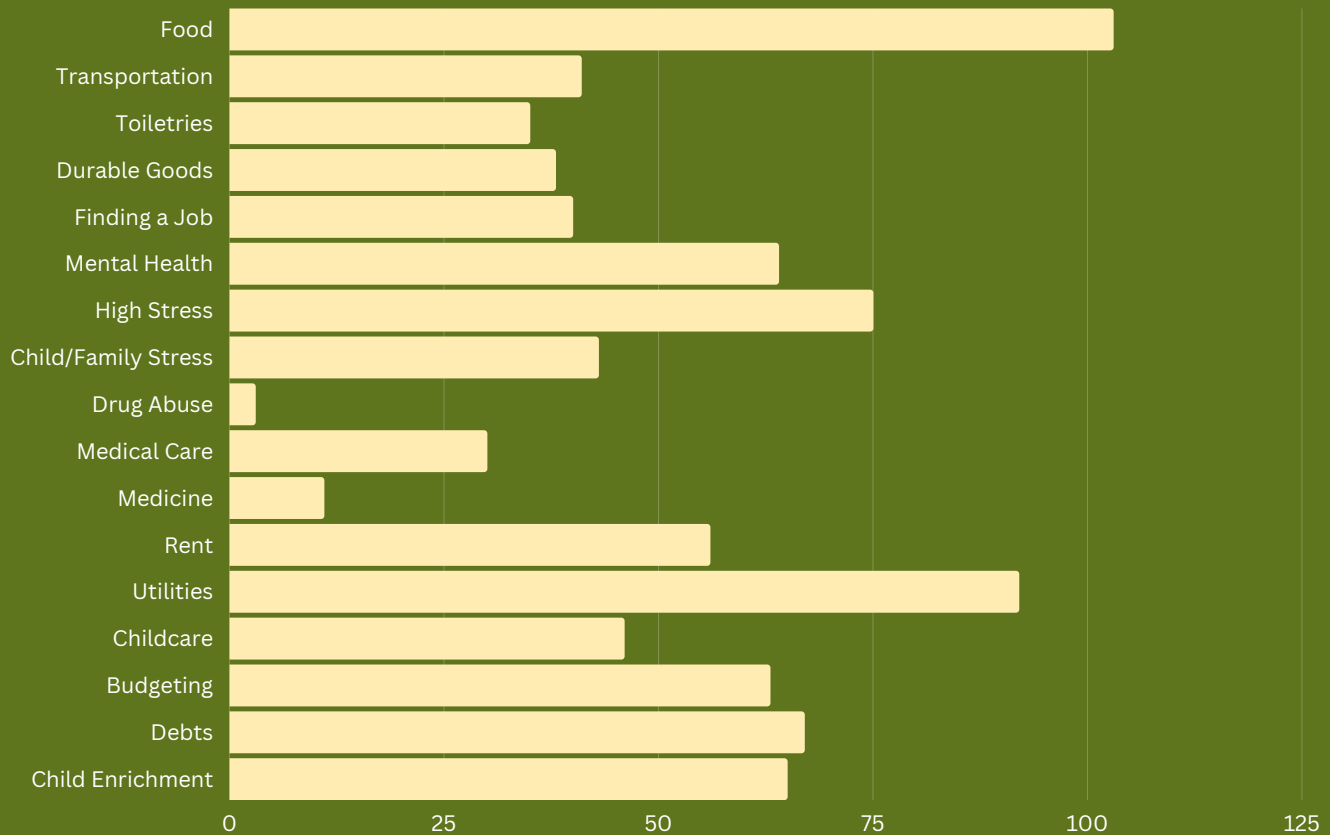
"Housing was lost [in Marshalltown] during our recent tornado and derecho events, and affordable housing was at a premium prior to those events."

"Child care challenges have been a concern each year I have lived in Grinnell. This connects to families of all income levels and backgrounds."

"Folks who qualify for Section 8 vouchers are unable to find landlords willing to work with the program. We only have one low-income building in Ames that is solely for income without other criteria needed."

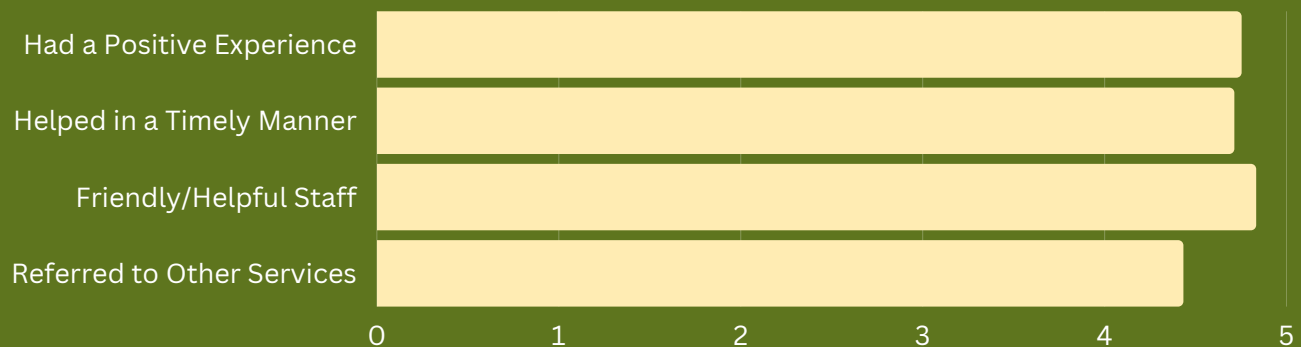
Top Family Needs

MICA asked families we serve to identify the greatest challenges their household was facing. Here are their responses:



Obtaining food topped the list, with other basic needs like utilities and rent not far behind. The number of families experiencing high stress is also significant, as well as those who are dealing with debt.

We also assessed if MICA's services were meeting those needs, or if families were satisfied with our services. In general, families had a high level of satisfaction with MICA's services. Their responses are displayed below as a weighted average, with 5 being the highest score.



Data Trends

Family needs have changed significantly over time. The comparative data tells us:



Access to food: Significantly higher over time

Access to food was a **much lower** need in our 2017 needs assessment than it was in either our 2020 or 2023 needs assessments. Over time, the need has grown substantially.



For the first time in the last ten years of our surveying efforts, getting food eclipsed energy assistance in 2023 to become the **top** need.



Help with keeping the lights on: About the same over time

In general, because MICA's LIHEAP program is our biggest single program, we can expect this need to be high. But its place in the scope of all family needs has changed slightly over time.



Light, water, and heating costs were the **top** need in our 2017 and 2020 needs assessments. They were the **second** need in our 2023 survey. Nonetheless, energy assistance applications have been very high this year, so it remains a high need.



Mental health and stress: Slightly higher over time

Taken together, mental health, coping with high stress, and helping children or loved ones cope with stress have been trending up since 2017.



Access to mental health was a **moderate** need in our 2017 needs assessment. Mental health and coping with high stress moved to a **high** need in our 2020 needs assessment and remains at a **high** level of need in our 2023 needs assessment. Many 2023 family focus groups chose to focus on mental health as a priority level need.



Dental care: Significantly lower over time

It is a fact that dental care access remains difficult in our area for families, especially those who are uninsured or have Medicaid. However, this need appears to be taking a backseat to other needs over time.



20% of families reported access to dental care and dental care costs as prohibitive in 2017. In our 2023 family focus groups, families focused instead on mental health and health care access. Satisfaction with dental care in the community had a weighted average of **3.73 on a 5 point scale**, the third highest of all categories reported.

What does poverty look like in my community?

Each county in MICA's service area is different, and poverty looks different as a result. Rural or urban, each community has its own history, challenges, and strengths. Let's dive into each county to see what the data tells us about the communities we serve!



Marshall County

Following two severe natural disasters, Marshall County is still rebuilding. With a stronger coalition of partnerships than is present in many communities of its size, Marshalltown has made great strides, especially in education. However, challenges still remain in equitable access to services, housing, child care, and food access.

Top family needs:



Food is the second highest need reported by families surveyed, and was also echoed by the Southeast Asian focus group. It was a much higher need for English speakers than Spanish speakers. A significant area of Marshall County is considered a food desert.



Utility help tops the list for Marshall County, occupying the top spot overall. It was the second top priority for English speakers (behind food) and the top need for Spanish speakers.



Transportation access is an issue for immigrant, ESL, and refugee populations in town. It is difficult to get children to school if families live within city limits but far from school. Many health options, including the hospital and primary care, have moved to the extreme south side of town. This is a barrier for families, and prevents them from seeking care. This issue was reported by both Spanish-speaking and Karen-speaking families.



Spanish-speaking families reported a linked need - the cost of child care is prohibiting parents from seeking jobs. Available jobs have restrictive schedules and the wage doesn't offset the cost of child care. This community is further restricted by a language barrier, which leaves them with few options but to stay home.



Strength in Diversity

Nearly 30% of families in Marshall County speak a language other than English at home.



What are the causes of poverty in Marshall County?



Unemployment is nearly twice that of the average for Iowa.

At 7.7% and on an upward trend, unemployment is much higher in Marshall County than in Iowa or the surrounding counties and has remained persistently high for over five years.



A high number of individuals with no high school diploma.

14.73% of Marshall County adults do not have a high school diploma or GED. Not having completed high school seriously limits job prospects for this segment of our population.



28% of Marshall County families make under a living wage.

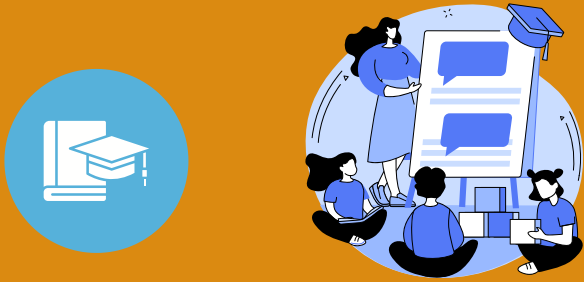
There are pockets of Marshall County, including northern Marshalltown, where this percent rises to over 40%. These families don't earn enough to meet basic expenses for the area.



Not enough child care providers to meet the need.

The number of children per open child care slot in Marshall County is higher than every other central Iowa county than Polk, and stands at around 9 children per available slot. Available child care slots may not accommodate available job shifts like 2nd and 3rd shift.

Marshall County Strengths and Resources



Biliteracy is part of the school district curriculum.

Marshalltown has embraced the tremendous variety in languages in the district and offers a k-12 dual language option that has 50-50 instruction during the school day in English and Spanish.



Marshall County has numerous effective and tenured coalitions.

From early literacy efforts to disaster relief to Marshalltown for Ukraine, Marshall County stakeholders frequently come together with purpose and passion, addressing the community's needs.



Marshalltown leads efforts to innovate childhood literacy.

For more than twenty years, Marshalltown has built an increasingly elaborate set of programming targeting early literacy, summer learning loss, and school absence. With proven effectiveness, particularly for low-income children and families, these initiatives have been nationally recognized several times.



Access to quality preschool experiences including Head Start.

Marshall County has more Head Start classrooms than any of the surrounding communities. Preschool enrollment in Marshall County is relatively high, with a third of all children ages 3-4 enrolled in a preschool experience.

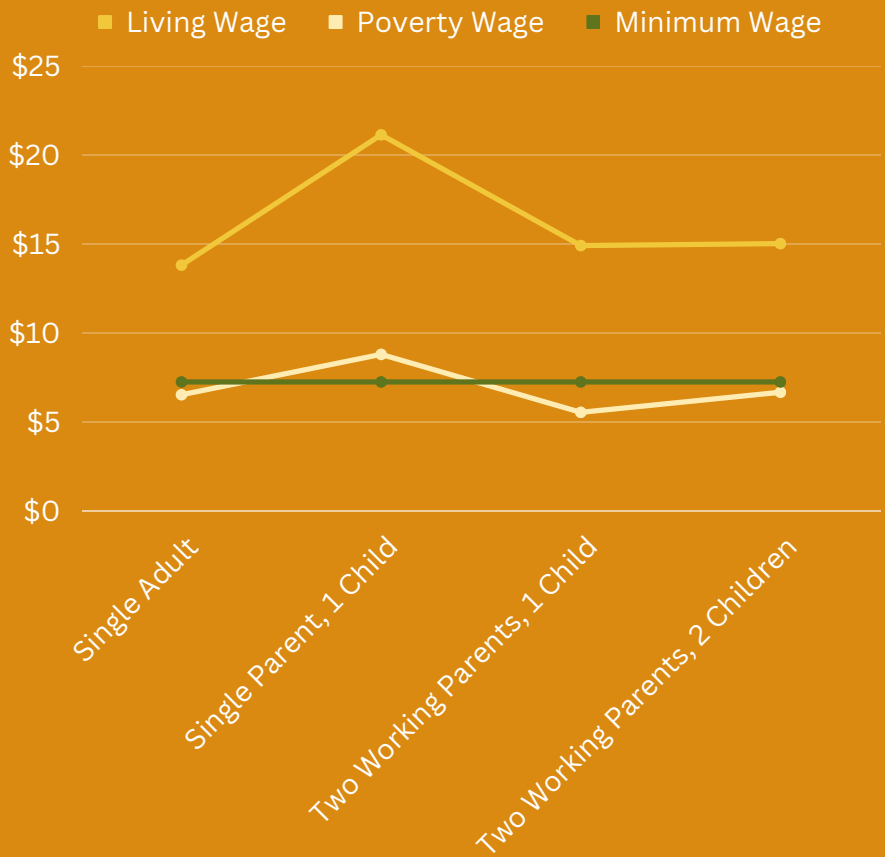
Living Wage in Marshall County

What is a living wage in Marshall County?

A living wage is highly dependent on family composition and size. For a single adult with no children, a living wage is \$13.82. For a single parent with one child, that figure jumps to \$21.15.

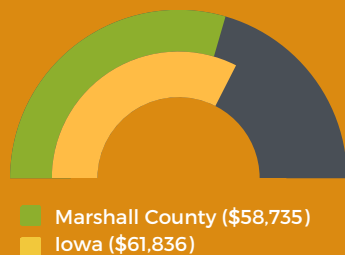
In all cases, the living wage figure is far above official poverty wages and the minimum wage.

A third of Marshall County families have children between the ages of 0-17.

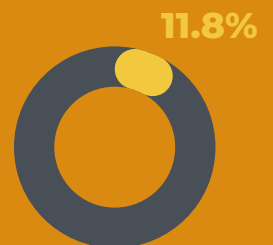


Quick Facts about Marshall County

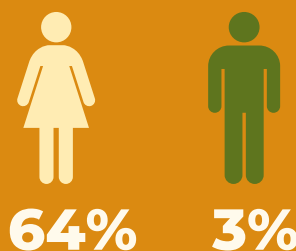
The median income for Marshall County is \$3,101 **lower** than the median income for Iowa.



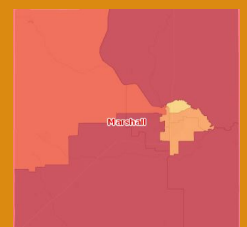
4,586, or 11.8%, of Marshall County residents live in poverty.



Of the households in poverty, 64% are female householders and 33% are married. Only 3% are male householders.



Marshall County's rural areas have a higher income than Marshalltown (deeper color = higher income)



Tama County

Predominantly rural, Tama County is home to the Meskwaki nation. Residents of Tama County have a true connectedness - they help each other, especially in the country. Having to travel out of county to Marshalltown, Waterloo, or Des Moines can be a challenge for families who are already struggling to make ends meet.

Top family needs:



Tama county families report struggling with high debts. In contrast to other counties in our service area, this need was top of mind for both English and Spanish speakers we surveyed.



Food access is a top issue for Tama county families. Families we spoke to expressed that food availability in Tama County is very limited, especially foods like formula or diets for individuals with specific needs.



Stress, helping loved ones cope with high stress, and mental health were noted by families as an area of high need. As with Hardin County, Tama residents have difficulty getting to and from medical appointments and often have to drive out of the county.



Families in the Tama focus groups shared with us that transportation and gas prices are difficult for them because there are few to no public transportation options. Access to transportation resources, including medical transportation, do not meet the existing need.



Sticking Together

Families in Tama reported supporting each other after natural disasters, especially the 2020 derecho.

What are the causes of poverty in Tama County?



High percent of youths not in school or employed.

Compared to the state average of 5.7% and a rate of 2.8% over MICA's service area, 12.45% of Tama County's youth aged 16 to 19 are not in school or working. This rate can be as high as 20% in some tracts.



High percentage of single parent households.

Tama County has the highest percentage of single parent households in MICA's service area at 22%. Single parents face additional challenges in Iowa, particularly in affording or accessing child care.



High percentage of families who lack health insurance.

Almost 10% of adults in Tama County lack health insurance, well over Iowa's average. Tama County also has the highest percentage in our service area of uninsured children. This leads to barriers accessing regular care and contributes to poor health status over time. Tama County's network of providers is limited, further exacerbating the issue.



Few transportation options for work and essential needs.

Tama County has the fewest number of citizens with a very short commute in MICA's service area. The county also has low access to food and SNAP-eligible retailers and few health care providers. This means families in Tama County likely need a car in working condition and will pay more in gas.

Tama County Strengths and Resources



The Meskwaki Nation has extensive and unique resources.

Red Earth Gardens, family and senior services, and child support are some of the resources the Meskwaki Nation has in place to improve the health and wellbeing of the families and children of the settlement.



Better network of child care than most other central Iowa counties.

Tama County still has a child care gap, but it is significantly lower than surrounding counties including Marshall, Jasper, Benton, Iowa, and Poweshiek.



Tama County's housing stock has greatly improved over time.

In the 2000 census, Tama County had a high number of homes which were unsafe for habitation, lacking basic sanitation and plumbing. In the 2020 census, this number has dramatically decreased, from 45 housing units to just 6.



Most Tama County residents have access to a vehicle.

Tama County has a very low percentage of families without access to a vehicle - just 3%, which is half of Iowa's average. This helps offset some of the challenges families face in a rural setting.

Living Wage in Tama County

What is a living wage in Tama County?

A living wage is highly dependent on family composition and size. For a single adult with no children, a living wage is \$13.25. For a single parent with one child, that figure jumps to \$18.14.

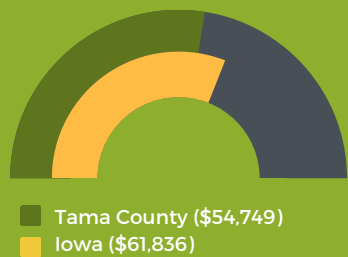
In all cases, the living wage figure is far above official poverty wages and the minimum wage.

30% of Tama County families have children between the ages of 0-17.

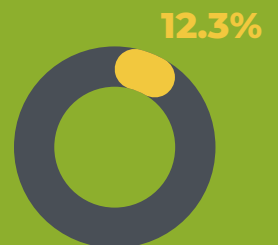


Quick Facts about Tama County

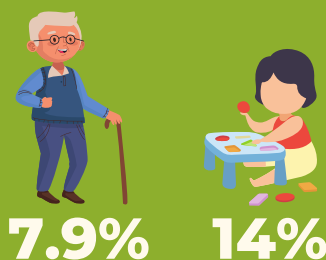
The median income for Tama County is \$7,087 **lower** than the median income for Iowa.



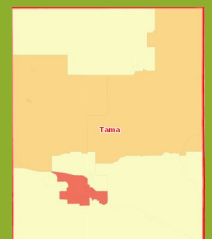
820, or 12.3%, of Tama County households live in poverty.



Of the households in poverty, 7.9% are seniors aged 65 and older. 14% have children ages 0-4.



In Tama County, poverty is the highest in the Settlement (deeper color = higher poverty)



Hardin County

Hardin County, at the heart of the river valley, is home to twelve incorporated communities including Iowa Falls and Eldora. In this predominantly rural county, MICA serves a large number of families through our food pantry. A top need is transportation issues and the need to travel for health care, especially mental health care.

Top family needs:



Food is the top need for families across the board. Hardin County families have a hard time finding meat or protein, even with the presence of the food pantry. The lowering of food stamp benefits greatly affected these families.



Basic needs like utilities, gas, hygiene and personal care items, etc. were a very high need both in the surveys and in the focus groups for families in Hardin County.



Families in the focus group emphasized the need to rely on long-distance transportation to access basic resources like medical care. Gas costs and car maintenance are significant barriers for Hardin County families.



Families in Hardin County noted that they do not have ready access to health care providers, including mental health providers. The closest resources are in Marshalltown, Mason City, and Waterloo. Families often chose to put off care.

Here to Help

Hardin County families noted that nonprofits like MICA and local churches provide a good support network.



What are the causes of poverty in Hardin County?



Low median income signals limited earning potential.

Hardin County has a lower median household income and per capita income than Iowa's average. For household median income, Hardin is almost \$7,000 lower than the average for Iowa.



Fewer families have a post-secondary degree or training.

Hardin County has a lower percentage of residents with a bachelor's degree than Iowa as a whole, though many have some college experience. Only 14.6% have a 4-year degree, compared with 20% in Iowa.



Low access to health care providers, including primary care.

There are eight health care facilities and twelve providers in Hardin County, a rate of 71 per 100,000 population. The average for Iowa is a rate of 106 providers per 100,000 population, putting Hardin County well below the norm. Mental health care is even less accessible, with just four providers in the county.



Higher population of vulnerable seniors.

The percentage of Hardin County residents who are seniors is higher than average for our service area and for Iowa, with 16% of households having a resident over 65. Additionally, more of those seniors live alone, at 45%. These are vulnerable populations who are more likely to face challenges accessing basic needs, including health needs.

Hardin County Strengths and Resources



Low number of cost-burdened households.

Hardin County has fewer cost-burdened homes than any other county in MICA's service area and also than Iowa as a whole. A family who is considered cost-burdened pays more than 30% of their income to rent or mortgage costs.

Low eviction rate and low homelessness.

Hardin County has an eviction rate that is half that of the state and lower than most surrounding counties. It also has lower homelessness rates than other counties in MICA's service area.



No food deserts and a strong presence of food assistance.

Although food affordability and variety are sometimes weak spots, Hardin County does not have any officially recognized food deserts and the percent of the low-income population with low food access is very low. The need is well covered with the existing network of resources.



Very low rates of violent crime.

Hardin County has very low rates of violent crime, half that of Iowa as a whole and less than a third of other central Iowa counties including Marshall, Poweshiek, and Tama.

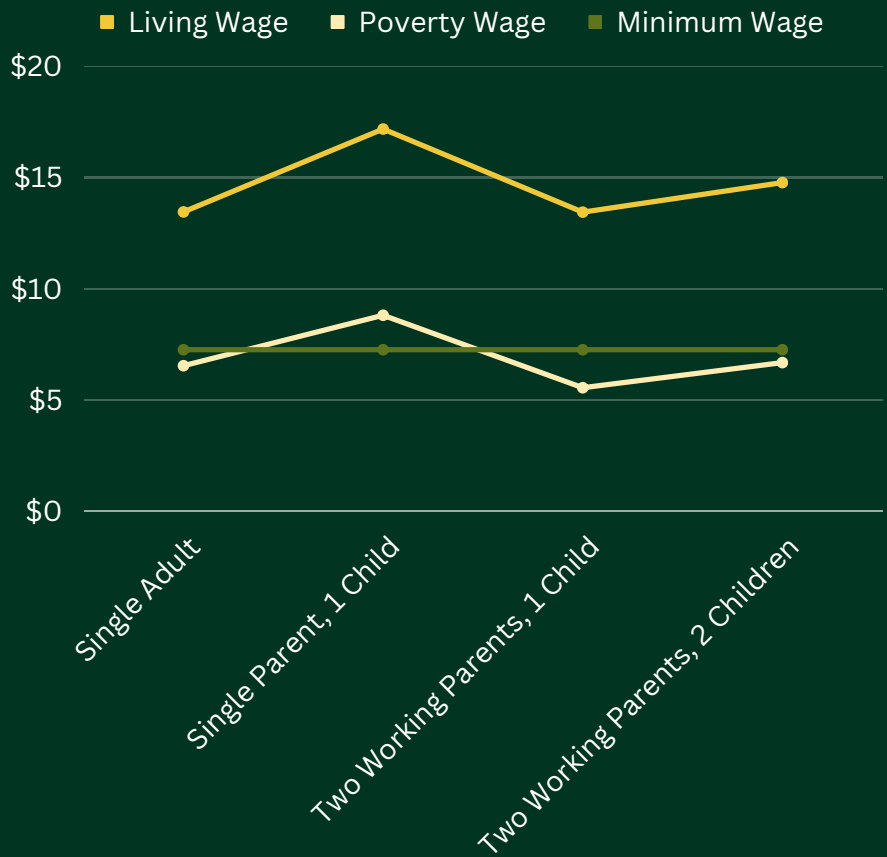
Living Wage in Hardin County

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A living wage is highly dependent on family composition and size. For a single adult with no children, a living wage is \$13.45. For a single parent with one child, that figure jumps to \$17.18.

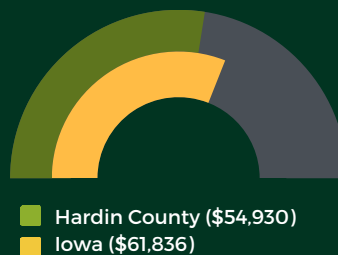
In all cases, the living wage figure is far above official poverty wages and the minimum wage.

A quarter of Hardin County families have children under the age of 17.

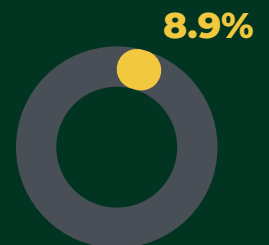


Quick Facts about Hardin County

The median income for Hardin County is \$6,906 **lower** than the median income for Iowa.



1,452, or 8.9%, of Hardin County households live in poverty.



5% of Hardin County's seniors are living in poverty, **lower** than the Iowa average of 7.3%.



Hardin County has a relatively even distribution of families in poverty (deeper blue = higher number of families in poverty)



Poweshiek County

Poweshiek County is home to Grinnell, a unique city with a culture all its own. The presence of Grinnell College translates to a significant and highly engaged population of academics and students in the county, and lots of grassroots action to address issues like hunger. Nonetheless, issues that plague Iowa's rural areas, like limited child care, are still very present in Poweshiek County.

Top family needs:



Food is the top need for families in focus groups and the second top need in the family needs survey. Poweshiek County families want better access to meat alternatives and other flexible options.



Coping with high stress is the top need in the family needs survey, and better access to mental health is the third need. Many families referenced long waits for mental health visits. They reported resorting to crisis lines and paying out of pocket.



As in Marshall County, Poweshiek County families reported that the cost of child care is prohibiting parents from seeking jobs. Available jobs have restrictive schedules and the wage doesn't offset the cost of child care. To help resolve the issue, Poweshiek County families seek other solutions such as asking friends and families to help watch children while parents are at work.



Poweshiek County families pointed to the cliff effect. There are few to no resources for families who are transitioning out of poverty and trying to earn a higher wage.



Creating Change

Poweshiek County is home to a number of coalitions and citizen groups that work to address issues like poverty and hunger.

What are the causes of poverty in Poweshiek County?



Many families are cost-burdened by high housing costs.

A quarter of Poweshiek County families are cost-burdened, meaning their rent or mortgage is more than 30% of their income. The number of families who are severely cost-burdened (50% of income or higher) is at 13%, second only to Story County in our service area.



Fewer families have a post-secondary degree or training.

Although Poweshiek County has a very high percentage of families with graduate or professional degrees, it has the lowest concentration of 2-year degrees and technical certificates in MICA's service area. Only 16% of families have a 4-year degree, compared to 20% across Iowa as a whole.



Significant rural population with lack of access to a vehicle.

Almost 8% of Poweshiek County's population does not have access to a primary vehicle. This is significantly higher than the average for Iowa and our service area. A large part of Poweshiek County's population is rural, and lack of access to a car can create numerous challenges for these families.



Higher population of vulnerable seniors.

The percentage of Poweshiek County residents who are seniors is higher than average for our service area and for Iowa, with 16% of households having a resident over 65. Additionally, more of those seniors live alone, at 45%. These are vulnerable populations who are more likely to face challenges accessing basic needs, including health needs.

Poweshiek County Strengths and Resources



Highly engaged community that is attentive to family needs.

Poweshiek County regularly supports initiatives that address the needs of families in poverty. A good example is the number of strong partnerships and ongoing events to alleviate hunger, like the Empty Bowls fundraiser and the mobile food pantry.



Vibrant partnerships with students to help address poverty.

Through the presence of Grinnell College, Poweshiek County leads research into social issues, including formal initiatives that help students engage in social justice. Several of these have helped create innovative solutions to address the conditions of poverty.



Very low unemployment rate that is continuing to drop.

Only 2.8% of Poweshiek County residents are unemployed, second only to Story County in our service area (which has been nationally recognized for low unemployment). Further, the Poweshiek County unemployment rate had the highest rate of decline of all MICA's counties in the last year, a drop of 0.7%.



Low rate of residents without a high school diploma.

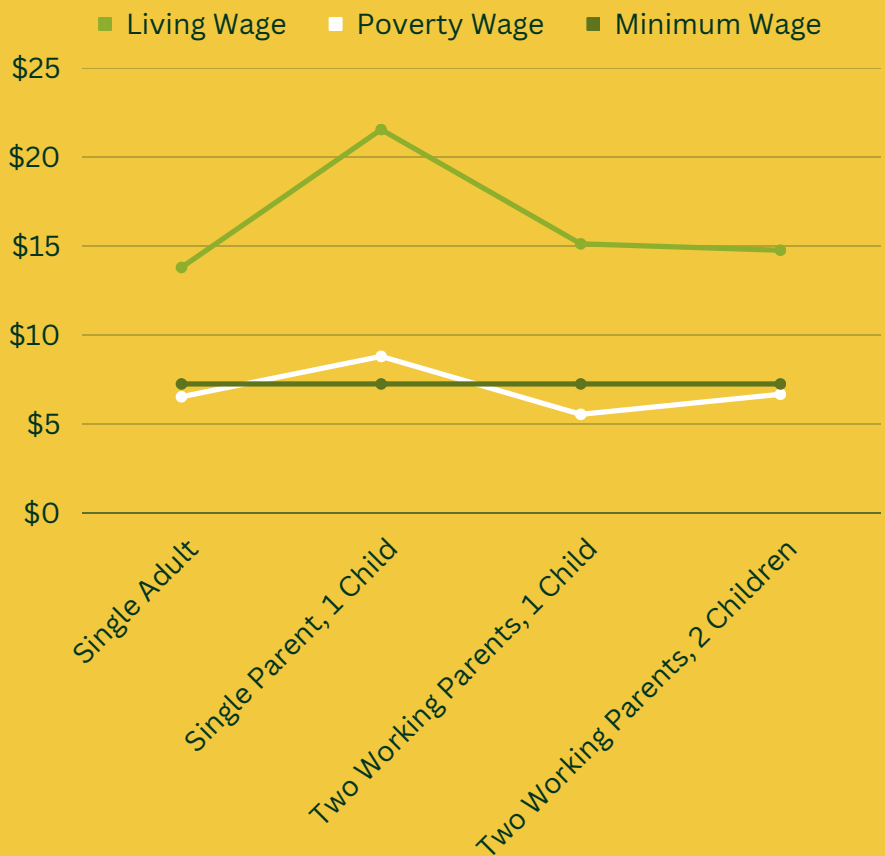
Poweshiek County has one of the lowest rates of residents without a high school diploma or equivalent in our service area, at 5.83%. This important step means fewer families will experience barriers to finding a job due to qualifications.

Living Wage in Poweshiek County

What is a living wage in Poweshiek County?

A living wage is highly dependent on family composition and size. For a single adult with no children, a living wage is \$13.80. For a single parent with one child, that figure jumps to \$21.56.

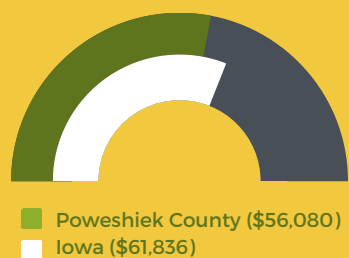
In all cases, the living wage figure is far above official poverty wages and the minimum wage.



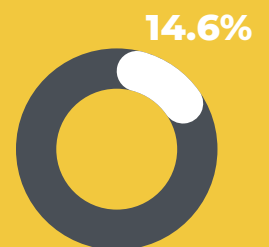
Nearly a quarter of Poweshiek County families have children under the age of 17.

Quick Facts about Poweshiek County

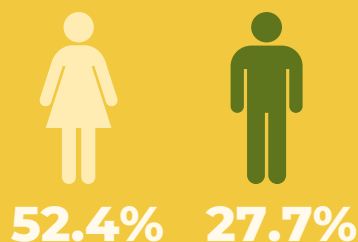
The median income for Poweshiek County is lower than the median income in Iowa.



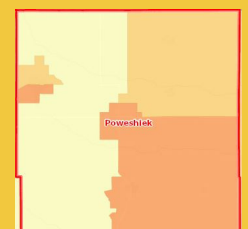
1,139, or 14.6%, of Poweshiek County households live in poverty.



Poweshiek County has the highest percentage of male householders in poverty in our service area, but female householders are still far more likely to be in poverty.



Poweshiek County families in poverty live in all areas of the county (deeper red = higher number of families in poverty).



Story County

Story County has many rural towns but most are within short distance of the urban center of Ames. Home to Iowa State University, Story County is well-resourced and has a more robust network of services than any other county MICA serves. The primary issues Story County faces are in housing, access to basic needs, and child care.



Child care access was the top ranked need for families in Story County. Families in the focus group pointed to the lack of child care for those who work outside of normal hours, particularly in the evening or at night.



Access to basic needs like food and utilities were another top need for Story County families. Although there are many food resources available in Story County, some families reported difficulties with access, especially without a car.



Story County families wanted more help with making a budget and addressing high debt loads. As many are working jobs that are not consistent with pay or hours, budgeting is a top need.



Mental health access and high stress were consistently high across all families surveyed. Many families lost jobs or experienced negative effects during the pandemic that are, to date, unaddressed.



Higher Education

Story County has the highest percentage of post-secondary educated people in our service area. 51% hold a bachelor's degree or higher.

What are the causes of poverty in Story County?



Many families are cost-burdened by high rent costs.

Nearly a third of Story County families are cost-burdened, meaning their rent or mortgage is more than 30% of their income. The number of families who are severely cost-burdened (50% of income or higher) is the highest in MICA's service area, at 17%.



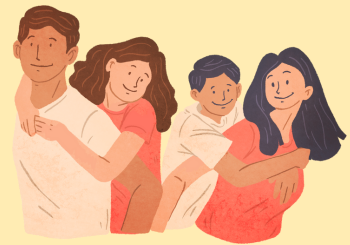
Not all families have equal access to food resources.

Story County has four tracts considered food deserts and a quarter of the low-income population has low food access. This means they live more than ten miles from the nearest grocery store.



Resources are concentrated in the Ames metro area.

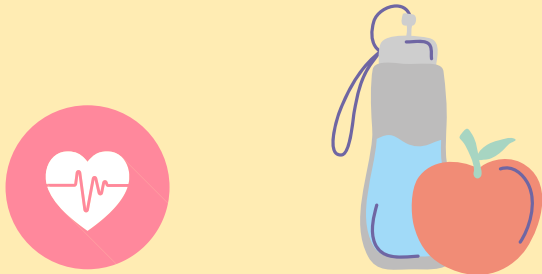
From health care providers to food, Ames is well-resourced but the rural areas do not have the same concentration of support. This puts a higher importance on transportation and transportation costs, increasing the burden on low-income families outside of the metro area.



High population of families who are stable, but nearing poverty.

Story County has a very high percentage of families who are not in poverty, but who are earning just above the poverty line. Nearly thirty percent of Story County families earn less than 185% of the federal poverty guidelines. These families are very vulnerable to a sudden financial crisis.

Story County Strengths and Resources



Better markers of health than most central Iowa counties.

Story County has markedly lower rates of obesity, physical inactivity, adults without insurance, and other key indicators of health than surrounding counties.



Presence of a major research university increases resources.

The presence of Iowa State University affects the entire county in profound ways. More data, research, and funding mean improvements in the conditions of poverty, particularly in the areas of nutrition and hunger.



Extremely low unemployment rate, holding steady over time.

Story County's unemployment rate is so low it garnered national attention before the pandemic. The five year rate has held steady at under 3%, even during the pandemic. The rate in 2002 was 1.9%.



Strong network of nonprofits and support organizations.

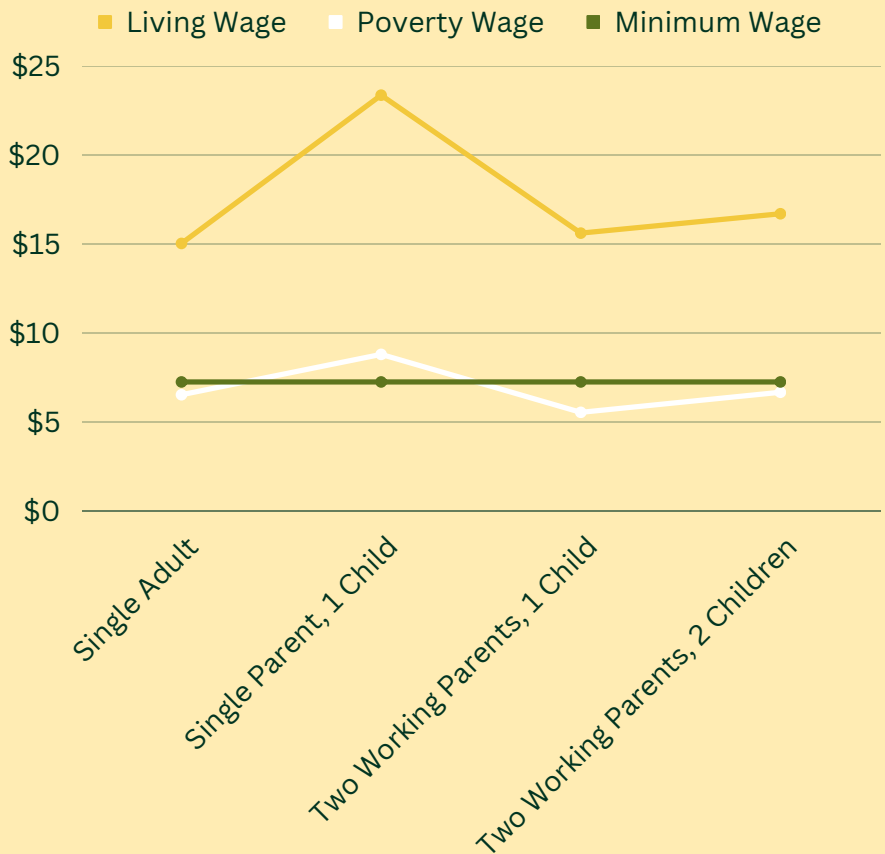
From food pantries and congregate meals to large churches and even a city/county-wide funding coalition, Story County has a robust network of resources to help families in poverty and build toward a better future in the county.

Living Wage in Story County

What is a living wage in Story County?

A living wage is highly dependent on family composition and size. For a single adult with no children, a living wage is \$15.04. For a single parent with one child, that figure jumps to \$23.38.

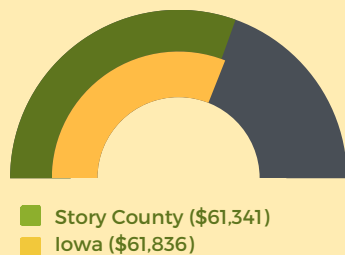
In all cases, the living wage figure is far above official poverty wages and the minimum wage.



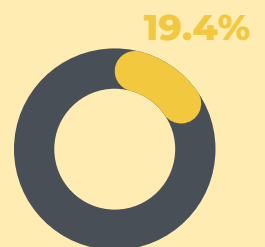
20% of Story County families have children under the age of 17.

Quick Facts about Story County

The median income for Story County is comparable to the median income in Iowa as a whole.



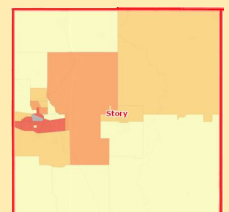
7,359, or 19.4%, of Story County households live in poverty. This is the highest rate in MICA's service area.



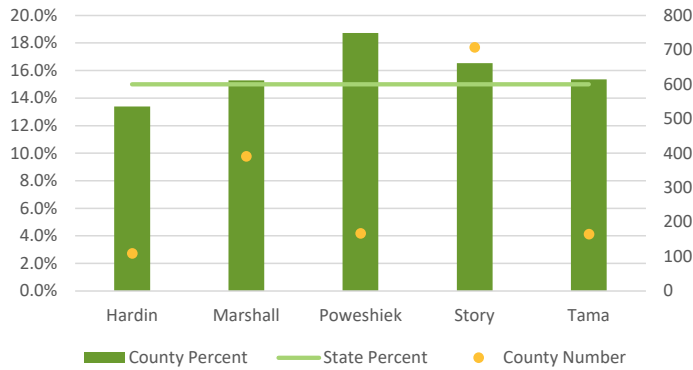
Only 8.4% of Story County children are living in poverty, **lower** than the Iowa average of 13%.



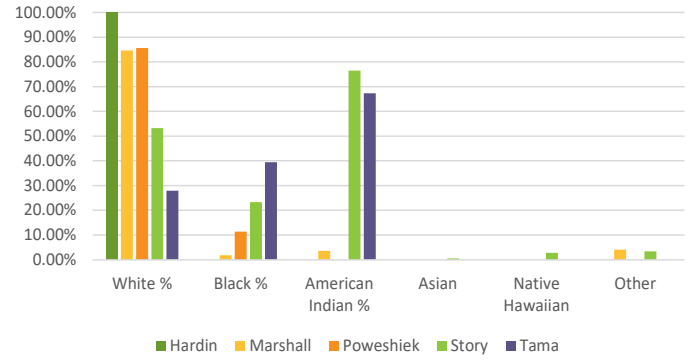
Story County families in poverty live in all areas of the county (deeper red = higher number of families in poverty)



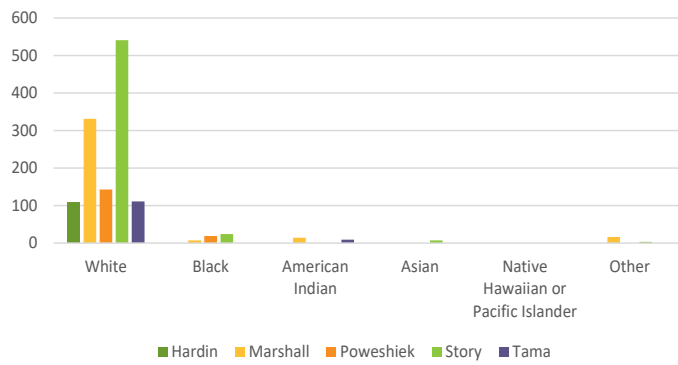
Children 0-4 in Poverty



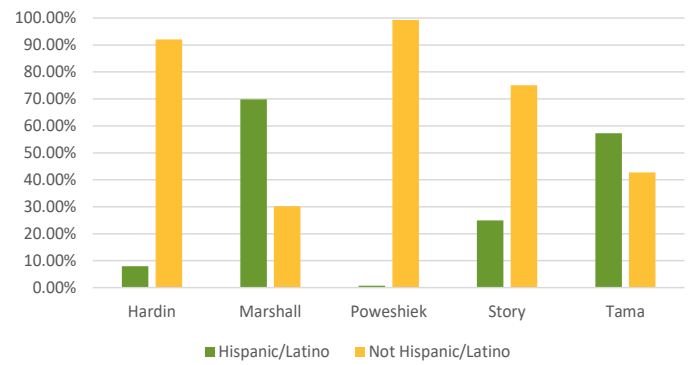
Children 0-4 in Poverty Expressed as a % by Race



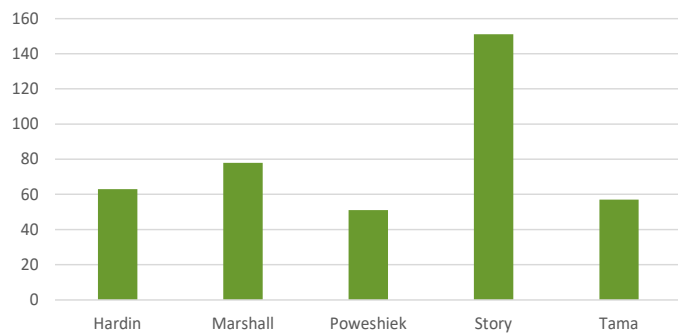
Number of Children 0-4 in Poverty by Race



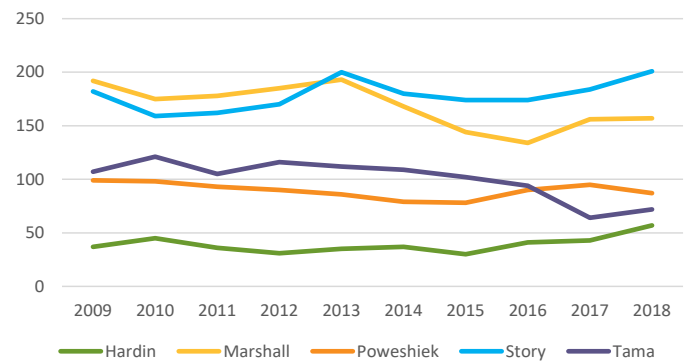
% of Children 0-4 in Poverty by Ethnicity



Women in poverty who gave birth within the last 12 months



Number of Children in Foster Care

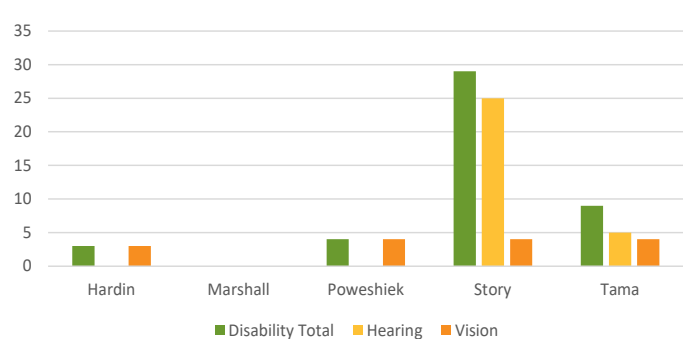


Detailed information on disability in MICA's service area

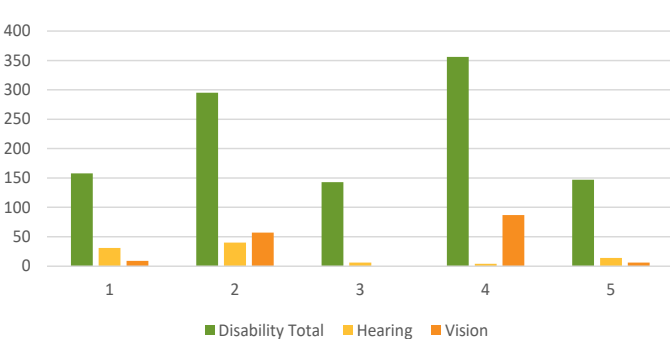
Services for Children with Disabilities

MICA collaborates with two local Area Education Agencies (AEA), Heartland AEA and AEA 267, and with local school districts in serving children with disabilities. AEA agencies are the local providers of both Part B and Part C (Early ACCESS) Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) services. These agencies provide support services for children with special needs and conduct developmental evaluations on children for determination of need for special education services. AEA and Early ACCESS work with parents and other providers, including Early Head Start and Head Start staff, to develop Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP) or Individualized Education Programs (IEP) for services to address developmental delays or disabilities. AEA and Early ACCESS deliver a range of services for parents and children from birth until they are enrolled in school. These services include Early Intervention services that support parents of children ages birth to three in providing appropriate learning experiences for their children. The agencies also provide direct services for children to obtain specific skills. Direct services include: speech and language, physical therapy, occupational therapy and service coordination. IDEA Part B special education instructional programming is provided by local school districts when children ages three years and older need the learning experiences provided in an early childhood special education classroom environment.

Children ages 0-5 - Disability including Hearing and Vision



Children ages 5-17 - Disability including Hearing and Vision



Where does this data come from?

The data presented in this assessment is a synthesis of information from the following data sources:



Publicly-available data from trusted federal sources including the 2020 U.S. Census, the 2017-2021 American Community Survey, 2015-2017 FBI Uniform Crime Reports, the Feb 2023 Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Report.



Publicly-available data from trusted state sources including the 2023 State of Iowa's Child Care Task Force Report, Common Good Iowa's Self-Sufficiency Wage Calculator, and Iowa Department of Education data.



Family focus group data from each county MICA serves. Focus groups were conducted in multiple languages including Spanish and Karen. Focus groups were conducted Sept 2022-Jan 2023.



Family surveys conducted during the month of February 2023 at all MICA sites.



Stakeholder surveys distributed to every MICA service county to MICA staff and community partners including community organizations, faith-based organizations, private and public sector employees, and educational institutions.



Head Start specific data including parent work schedules, available child care slots, and similar information was taken from family reporting and local sources.

