



Showcasing Solutions

ALICE FOCUSES ON HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCING FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

The Problem

The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in Wisconsin doesn't account for many households that are struggling financially – families who earn more than the FPL but not enough to afford the basics, or what ALICE defines as the ALICE Household Survival Budget. ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. In Wisconsin, 11% of households earned below the FPL in 2023, but there are an additional 24% of households that are ALICE, designating 35% of households under the ALICE threshold.

Over the last decade, the number of ALICE households in Wisconsin has risen as the cost of household basics has outpaced wage growth. Between 2010 and 2023, the number of ALICE households increased by 12%.

The Solution

ALICE is a report United Way of Wisconsin has sponsored since 2016 to provide a more realistic picture of financial hardship in Wisconsin. The information is broken down by county as well as subcategories within counties so local communities can use the data to identify areas of greatest need and direct resources there.

“By looking closely at local data, communities can better understand the needs of households living in poverty and ALICE families who are working hard but struggling to make ends meet and identify practical ways to strengthen conditions and address root causes,” said Charlene Mouille, President and CEO of United Way of Wisconsin.

The United for ALICE project calculates the cost of household essentials for each county in Wisconsin. Those costs include housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology, plus taxes and a 10% miscellaneous category. The Survival Budget also considers location and household size and composition. Location is critical as basic costs vary substantially by county.

ALICE data can be overlaid with a long list of indicators of well-being such as internet access, access to parks, and

Household Composition	Annual Income	
	FPL (2026)	ALICE (average in Wisconsin)
Single Individual	\$15,960	\$27,636
Family of 4	\$33,000	\$77,112

homeownership (among many others). This type of review allows counties to get granular and look at areas where households could be positively impacted by local initiatives.

Results

United for ALICE provides the opportunity to see people who are struggling with financial hardship in a realistic way and with dignity. The report has inspired many communities to make changes because they better understand their local needs. For example, some food pantries have adjusted their eligibility requirements to include ALICE households, and some funding opportunities require applicants to address ALICE data.

ALICE households often include those who are working two or more jobs and are still challenged to make ends meet. Many are forced to make impossible choices like pay the rent or buy food, receive medical care or pay for child care, or pay utility bills or put gas in the car.

“The United for ALICE initiative has helped us better understand the realities of people living in poverty or in ALICE households who are struggling to make ends meet,” Mouille said. “It creates space for honest conversations about real-life challenges, while ensuring the dignity of the families we seek to serve.”