

## Vital Signs

Vital Signs is a collaboration between the Marshfield Area Community Foundation, the United Way of Marshfield, and the City of Marshfield. It represents our joint interest in and commitment to understanding our community's well-being across a series of civic, economic and social indicators affecting the quality of life in our community. Much like going to your health care provider for a yearly checkup, Vital Signs helps to point to areas where our community is doing well and those we might want to look at, make changes to, and become a healthier community.

We have looked at data over the past decade on population, new home and non-residential starts, home values, number of foreclosures, unemployment, income, number of students receiving free or reduced hot lunches, the percent of children living in families in poverty, and the number of individuals receiving economic assistance, NOW and youth mental health data. We choose these parameters because they are important and solid, objective data.

When we look at the population in the Marshfield School District, we see it has held steady at about 27,600 over the past four years. During that same time period the Wood County population has been on a gradual decline (74,793 to 74,499).

New home construction has remained flat over the past five years, averaging about 11 new homes built within the city limits of Marshfield each year. Median sale prices of single family homes fell sharply after the recession in 2008 from \$141,122 to a low of \$111,870 in 2012. Median home sale prices have now returned to \$123,591 (where they were pre-recession, in 2005).

Educational attainment for the population of people 25 years or older in the city of Marshfield has remained rather consistent over the past five years. On average, 11% of this age population does not have a high school diploma, 33% have a high school level education, and 26% of this age population have a bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree.

The gap between median household income for the city of Marshfield compared to Wisconsin and Wood County is widening. The median household income in Marshfield has fallen 4% since 2009. Conversely, Wood County median household income has increased 7.5% over the same time period.

Public assistance income recipients in Marshfield has increased by 70% since 2009. Additionally, the average W-2 caseload in Wood County has increased by 56% in the past five years. The number of FoodShare recipients in Wood County has increased by 43% since 2010. The free and reduced meal participation rate for the Marshfield School District has increased by

nearly 6% over the same time period. Also worth noting, food pantries have been the top two referrals United Way's 2-1-1 program has made to residents in the Marshfield area since 2012.

The Marshfield School District, historically, has a lower percentage of children ages 5-17 in families in poverty compared to national, state and county levels. Though Marshfield has had a lower percentage of children in poverty, the rate at which the number of children in poverty in Marshfield has grown in the past decade has been at a faster rate than all others. ( National: +29.2% ,State: +64.7% , Wood: +78.3% , Marshfield: +91.0%)

The Nutrition On Weekends program is a collaborative, community effort to target childhood hunger. The program was created in response to data collected from 8th, 10th, and 12th grades students in the 2012 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Over twenty percent of students surveyed indicated they had gone to bed hungry at least once in the past thirty days because there was not enough food in the home. The program provides healthy, easy-to-prepare nutritional foods for children during the weekend. The program started serving children in our area in October 2013. In the past year, the NOW program has expanded at a rapid rate going from serving 113 students in two school districts to now serving nearly 300 students in four school districts.

We used the 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey to look at youth mental health. This survey is given to middle and high school students at both Marshfield public and private schools. The survey is anonymous and optional. Topics the survey covers include: alcohol and drug use, violence related behavior, bullying, distracted driving, mental health, hunger and healthy lifestyle behaviors. According to the data from the survey, 20% of children's lives in our community have been affected by having feelings of sadness/hopelessness, an alarming amount, 13% have considered attempting suicide and about 6% have actually attempted suicide.

We should be proud that our community has stepped forward to help address the increase in children living in poverty. Programs like NOW and Keep Kids Warm are helping. The community has come together to help make sure children have food to eat and a warm coat in our winter months. This summer, United Way is providing boxes with fixings for a week of meals for Nutrition on Weekend participants. Youth Net is providing lunches at their location for students who qualify. It is good to know even though school is not in session; our community has new ways to help insure all children continue to have meals.

This data is critical in making informed decisions regarding the best ways to identify and address problems with increasingly scarce resources. We hope that our area's decision makers and groups use this data to make informed decisions about using those scarce resources and that Vital Signs will help. We live in a very generous community and are sure that Marshfield's Vital Signs will continue to improve, as we make the needed changes in our community, just as we would do to improve our own health.