**COMMUNITY STRENGTHS**

Portage County is a great place to live, work, and play. Respondents to the 2017 LIFE in Portage County Community Survey told us what they liked best about living in Portage County. Below is a summary of what residents feel are the strengths of our community.

### Recreation and Natural Resources
- An abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities
- Beautiful lakes, rivers, and streams
- Plentiful parks, trails, and green spaces
- Clean air and water

### Size, Location, and Accessibility
- The size offers a small-town feel with some of the services and amenities of a bigger city
- Central location with easy access to the state
- Easy to get around in the community

### Education
- New efforts focused on children prenatal to age 5
- High quality K-12 school systems
- UW-Stevens Point and Mid-State Technical College offer many opportunities for residents

### Activities
- A variety of activities, events and festivals
- Strong arts and cultural activities
- A wide variety of youth and sporting activities

### Support Services/Philanthropic Community
- Solid support system for residents in need
- A volunteer community that graciously gives of its time and talents
- Generous residents, businesses, and organizations that provide financial support for our community

### Community Engagement
- Growing diversity of our community
- Concern for the environment
- Sustainable food options such as the Farmers Market and Food Co-Op
- Engaged and civic-minded community members

### Health and Wellness
- Quality health care and wellness resources
- Unique dental health resources and intervention
- Community initiatives that focus on nutrition, physical activity, and worksite wellness

### Sense of Community
- Friendly, kind and generous people
- Safe area with low crime rate
- Quiet and peaceful atmosphere
- Cooperation among community partners

### Business and Economy
- A diversified economy
- A skilled, productive, and dedicated workforce
- Lively downtown
- Variety of shopping, restaurants, and retail stores

*“Overall a great community with many cultural and social opportunities. Great place to raise a family.”*

*“It’s a diverse community that puts a high value on education and the environment.”*
LIFE CALLS TO ACTION

Mental Health

Why is this important in Portage County?
- Of U.S. adults, an estimated 18% (43.6 million) suffer from a mental illness. An estimated 1 in 7 children aged 2-8 has a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder.
- There was an increase in adult suicides in Portage County from 2010-2016.
- Of the respondents to the LIFE in Portage County Community Survey, 17.4% said that they or someone in their family/household struggled with mental health concerns.

Alcohol & Other Drugs

Why is this important in Portage County?
- The abuse of illicit drugs, including the non-medical use of prescription drugs remains a problem. From 2012 to 2016 there was a 77% increase in the number of persons arrested for drug offenses in Portage County.
- Wisconsin has the highest rate of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. Nearly 71% of LIFE Community Survey respondents felt drinking and driving is a problem in Portage County.
- Portage County’s drug-related school suspensions and expulsions rate was higher than surrounding counties.
Financial Stability

Why is this important in Portage County?

- In Portage County, 39% of the households struggle to afford basic necessities.
- Of residents in Portage County, 8,510 (12.1%) are considered food insecure, meaning at times there was limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods.
- In Wisconsin, 36% of the jobs pay less than the amount needed for two working parents to support their family.

Affordable Housing

Why is this important in Portage County?

- The number of households spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs has increased significantly in recent years.
- From 2014-2016, there were more than 1,000 calls to 2-1-1 regarding rental/housing assistance.
- There has been a steady rise in rental rates in Portage County during the past ten years, with a sharper increase over the past few years.
- The demand in home sales outpaces the supply, particularly for lower to moderate priced houses.

Percentage of Income Spent on Housing in Portage County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Includes rent or mortgage plus utilities, insurance, and property taxes
The LIFE (Local Indicators For Excellence) Report provides a comprehensive overview of the quality of life in Portage County. The LIFE Report of Portage County is conducted every five years. Since the last LIFE Report in 2012, progress has been made on many of the issues identified. In addition, the report has proven to be a valuable resource for groups in the community who use it for decision-making, priority setting, grant writing and recruitment purposes. The LIFE report is an excellent tool to empower local leaders and other citizens to collaborate in order to improve the quality of life in our communities.

Community input for the 2017 report was obtained through household surveys and listening sessions with key stakeholders in the community, as well as data on 70 indicators reflecting the quality of life in Portage County.

Based on report data, four Calls to Action were identified. The community is encouraged to engage around these issues with the goal of further improving the quality of life in Portage County.

- Mental Health
- Alcohol and Other Drugs
- Financial Stability
- Affordable Housing

This graphic demonstrates the interconnectedness between the Calls to Action. It is designed as a cog to reflect forward motion. Just like a cog in a wheel, these Calls to Action are intended to serve as catalysts to propel our community to move forward in addressing these issues.

**Mental Health**

Mental health issues impact daily living and functioning, and can lead to challenges including substance abuse, diminished physical health, poor performance at school/work, homelessness, and other issues.

**Alcohol & Other Drugs**

Substance abuse is harmful to individuals, families, and communities, and contributes to costly social, physical, mental and public health problems as well as increased crime.

**Financial Stability**

Many individuals in Portage County work full time but still cannot meet the basic needs of their families. These families are often forced to make difficult trade-offs, having to choose between child care, health care, transportation, and food.

**Affordable Housing**

The cost of renting and owning a home has increased in recent years. A growing number of owners and renters are allocating a larger share of income to housing, leaving less for other expenses.
Purpose of the LIFE in Portage County Project
- Identify community strengths, challenges, and priorities that help guide and mobilize action to improve life in Portage County.
- Be an effective tool in raising awareness in our community about quality of life issues as well as to monitor trends and underlying causes.
- Serve as a resource: a centralized, easily accessible source of data, for non-profit organizations, policy makers, government entities, faith based organizations, foundations, corporations, and others.

Portage County Community Demographics

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>67,182</td>
<td>70,019</td>
<td>70,432</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age (Years)</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Population</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families in Poverty</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$43,487</td>
<td>$51,456</td>
<td>$51,613</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Household Size</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>-5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak Language Other Than English in Home</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>-7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Labor Force (16 years and over)</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td>-5.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Special Thanks to Our Sponsors

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Aspirus
Portage County Government
Portage County Health & Human Services
United Way of Portage County

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