

# INVEST IN TOMORROW: SOLVING CHILD POVERTY IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS

April 2018 Update

## What We've Learned So Far

The Invest in Tomorrow initiative started last year when a diverse group of stakeholders came together to align our efforts toward the goal of increasing economic opportunity and ending child poverty in Maine. The Invest in Tomorrow stakeholder group is working to develop policy recommendations and a “scorecard” to measure Maine’s success when it comes to creating more economic opportunity for children and families.

Over the past year, we held four community forums in parts of Maine hard hit by child poverty: Aroostook, Androscoggin, Hancock, Piscataquis and Washington counties. We also held five follow-up community meetings in those same counties, which focused on identifying solutions to child poverty.

**We learned a lot.** Over 200 people participated in these events and each person brought with them their experience, knowledge and passion for improving their communities. Not surprisingly, we heard many good insights and ideas. What follows are common themes that emerged from the forums and meetings.

## Common Themes From the Forums on Child Poverty

- **How to increase economic opportunity for families with children:**
  - Families must be able to meet their basic needs (including housing, food and comprehensive healthcare)
  - Families need the following to obtain and sustain gainful employment:
    - Reliable, affordable transportation
    - Quality, affordable childcare and early learning
    - Smooth transition from public assistance to sustainable employment
    - Education and training opportunities
- **We need to partner and work with the business community to come up with creative solutions.** We heard about creative things local employers are doing to support their lower income employees, such as helping to facilitate transportation and child care. There were several other ideas on how employers may find ways to invest in their workforce and we would benefit by having more employer voices as part of these conversations.

- **We should take steps to eliminate the stigma of living in poverty.** We should try to address the "us vs. them" dynamic when it comes to poverty. There is a need for education for local community leaders, government officials, employers and the public in general about the reality of what families face and what we all need to succeed. If we have a shared understanding of the problems, then we may find solutions that tie us all together.

## Common Themes From the Follow-Up Community Meetings

- **We need solutions that will break down the most common barriers to sustainable employment.** Parents with low income often lack sufficient skills or training to take advantage of job opportunities that are available. Reliable transportation and childcare are necessary so that a caregiver/parent can work. Addressing these barriers will go a long way to create more economic opportunity and will set children up for a brighter future.
- **Anti-poverty programs should and could work better.** Applying for the various programs that help struggling families meet their basic needs is often confusing and cumbersome and can lead to families not receiving help they qualify for and desperately need. This is inefficient and a poor way to deliver help to people. The delivery of assistance should be streamlined and made more efficient and effective.
- **We should support existing local efforts.** Good work is being done by many of the attendees of the forums and meetings, as well as other local providers. Each of the areas we visited had local groups providing child care assistance, workforce training, transportation assistance and much more. We should strive to increase awareness of these services/programs and build on them so they can help more families.