

## WHO IS ALICE?

*Moderator: Deann Cook*

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Thank you for having me today. This is a report that we're really excited to share. I think it will bring a lot of what our panelists were talking about, that hunger is not an isolated condition. There are lots of intersections, and that's really what the ALICE Report goes into.

So the ALICE Report was released last summer in June of 2016. It was produced by the United Ways of Iowa, of which I am the executive director. Those of you who work with United Ways know that they are geologically bound in the ways they raise and allocate money, but they can come together around some statewide collaborative projects, like the ALICE Report or the Iowa Reading Corps. They come together under our Association for Public Policy and also for training and networking. So I think it's important to note right at the top that this is not in any way a public policy report. There are no public policy recommendations in it. This is really something United Ways just wanted to put out there to look at sort of the state of the Union in Iowa as it stands.

So ALICE – ALICE is not a person. Ambassador Quinn mentioned that, so I have the Google alert set for ALICE Iowa. There are a lot of women named Alice in Iowa. But this is not a person. ALICE stands for Asset-Limited Income Constrained Employed. So it's looking at the portion of Iowans who are above the federal poverty level but who cannot meet a basic needs budget in the county in which they live. And oftentimes people say – well, I don't really know anybody like that. We have sort of our ideas about “below federal poverty level” and working, and we kind of don't think about the middle. So that's what this report really dives into.

The report is produced by a research team at the United Ways of Northern New Jersey. They did their report about ten years ago and found it to be so useful in the way that they framed their work, so that ALICE is not a person, but it's very helpful to talk about those we serve by saying ALICE's childcare, ALICE's housing, ALICE's jobs. It really is a way to put a face on that group of folks.

So the research is conducted in New Jersey; however, each state that has done an ALICE Report has a Research Advisory Committee, and you can see those folks listed who served on ours in Iowa. They are State Department folks, community college folks, university folks, nonprofit experts who really kind of helped guide and give context for our researchers because they weren't locally based.

The report – this is the full report. It is 300 pages. We're not going to go through all that today, but I will share with you the kinds of things that you can find in the report under these

headings, because we do really want it to be a tool for anyone who's working with this population to be able to learn more and have some statistics and some contexts and some details.

So the really big number we were going for is how many Iowans are ALICE? And we learned — this is 2014 data — 12% of Iowa households live below the federal poverty level. An additional 19% of Iowa households were not able to meet a basic needs budget, although they were working and earning and above the federal poverty level. So Iowa's ALICE percentage is 19% of those that fall in that middle ground that we often don't think about. And when I talk about, from here on out, when I talk about the ALICE threshold now, we're talking about the 31% of Iowans that fall into the category that they're struggling each week, every month to make a basic needs budget, to make ends meet. So Iowa's ALICE threshold is 31%; 31% of Iowans struggle every month.

Now I mentioned that other states have done this report, so the natural question is — well, where do we fall in the hit parade. About 12 states have done United Way ALICE reports, and we are the best — 31% is the best that they've found. The highest is in New York State at 44%; their ALICE threshold is 44%. So although we are the best, I think we're probably all in this room because we can agree 31% of our friends and neighbors struggling every month is not acceptable to us.

So the first part of the report talks about the demographics. Who exactly is ALICE? And the short answer is it's everywhere; it's in all of our demographics. The racial and ethnic makeup of ALICE pretty much mirrors our state. We're fairly white, ALICE is fairly white. 28% of senior households are ALICE, and of the approximately 350,000 households in Iowa with children, a quarter of those households are ALICE, and almost a third of those are married couples. So that again is sort of breaking a stereotype that many people might have. And then there's other households, so these are folks who don't have children in their home, but they're working age. And they account for about 50% of the Iowans below ALICE threshold. So there again in a nutshell — it's everyone.

If you're a more visual person, this represents where ALICE's focus is located. So the lighter the color, the lower the ALICE threshold, the better folks are doing in the lighter-colored counties, and so on up to the darker-colored counties. So the best county we have in Iowa is Dallas, right next door to where we are now, at 21%. So 1 in 5 Dallas County households are struggling every month. That goes up to almost half of Decatur County, which is our highest.

And United Ways really liked this report because it gets down to the county subdivisions. It gives you data for any individual community in Iowa that has at least a hundred households. So we really get to get some real hyper local data, which is why United Ways particularly liked this report.

The second part talks about the budget, and I know these numbers are hard to read probably. So this really looks at the survival budget. The survival budget consists of five things — housing, transportation, food, health and childcare. So you can see, if you can read the numbers, that for a family of four (2 adults, 2 children — we're assuming they're in childcare) needs to make \$46,000 on average in Iowa to cover those five things for a year. A single person needs to make \$16,900. So there are obviously methodologies behind each of those, and I wanted to drill down into what's behind the food number.

So as Secretary Vilsack mentioned, the USDA Thrifty Plan – that’s what’s in the survival budget for ALICE. The Thrifty Plan, as he mentioned, is really reliant upon people who can get whole foods, fresh, local, in season and have skill at shopping and cooking for those. They’re able to find things on sale; they’re great shoppers, and they have a lot of time to prep food. So I think even if we just think about our own lives, probably not a lot of us do that, as they referenced, and it’s really difficult when you’re struggling and juggling all the things that ALICE is. So the Thrifty Plan is in the budget, but it’s probably pretty difficult to meet, given the way it’s designed.

So notes on Iowa: \$533 a month for a family of four – that’s what the USDA Thrifty Plan gives you, \$176 a month for a single adult. So the report looked at 2007 to 2014, and in that time of the study, costs for food increased by 20%. And food accounts for 14% of the family’s survival budget. If there are children in the home, the highest cost is childcare. And again they mention this a little bit, the methodology of the original federal poverty level in the ‘60s – the theory was that food should be a third of a family’s budget. So they took a family’s budget in the mid-‘60s, tripled it and called it federal poverty level. And I think the ALICE report can show us how out of date that is, particularly given that food no accounts for only 14% of a family budget. So really what this is saying is – federal poverty level is low.

And to that point, there are lots of studies around this kind of data. There is the federal poverty level, which gives us one gauge. There’s the ALICE Report, Iowa Policy Project, Economic Policy Institute. There’s lots of reports out there looking at this data, and their methodology varies. You can see their methodology varies, but they’re all finding the same issue. There isn’t anyone saying, “Hey, it’s easy to make it.” Everyone is finding that there is a gap between getting sort of out of and over the cliff of lots of support programs and still not being able to meet a survival budget.

So the next part of the report looks at where ALICE works and how much she earns. So the highest category in Iowa according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics is retail salespersons who make on average \$9.13 an hour. And it’s important to note, most of those jobs aren’t 40 hours a week. Most of those jobs are cobbled together, and ALICE may have two or three of them. A little bit of good news in the report was jobs paying between \$20 and \$30 an hour rose by 24% over the time of the study. And a full-time job that pays \$15 an hour grosses \$30,000 a year, which isn’t meeting the survival budget for a family of four. So again, I’ll emphasize again, there are no public policy recommendations in the report at all. But if you followed the minimum wage debate, nobody’s talking about \$15 an hour, and it doesn’t get us there anyway.

So it’s also usually at this point I say – there’s no magic slide at the end of this presentation that’s going to say, here’s how we solve it. This is really just laying out where we’re at.

So where are the jobs and what do they do? So you can see most of these jobs... And I’ll just read off the first few, because I know it’s hard to see. Retail sales, cashiers, truck drivers, food prep, office clerks and on down the line. Almost no job on there could meet a survival budget for that family. You can put two of them together and they would, but it’s a struggle, and these are jobs that we need. So when I encounter those folks who say – “I don’t know anybody like that.” – you say, well, think about your day. You got up this morning. Did you get coffee? Who made your coffee? Did you take a child to childcare? Who’s taking care of that child? Did you check on a loved one in a care facility? Who’s taking care of that loved one? Who made your lunch? Did you stay in the hotel last night to be here today? Who checked you in? Who cleaned

your room? Are you going to stop at the grocery store on the way home? Who's going to check you out? Those are ALICE. Every day, all the way through our day, we encounter ALICE.

So the next part of the report talks about the unfilled gap. To ensure every Iowan household was above the ALICE threshold takes about \$13.1 billion. ALICE earns almost half of that, and the other half comes from public and private spending – so those are programs like SNAP, like LIHEAP, like childcare assistance, and also the assistance that nonprofits put into, the nonprofits, churches, others put into supporting ALICE. And it still leaves an unfilled gap of about 74 million. So we're spending this money anyway. We're investing this anyway. So perhaps we can talk about how we do that best.

So the next part of the report: 99 of these 300 pages are a county page for every county, and the county page looks at the economic conditions in that county. The numbers that I've been giving you so far, Iowa averages, so this would give you a specific budget for that county. And the small section that you can't really read up in that corner is every community in that county that has over a hundred households and what their ALICE threshold is. I chose this county because it's interesting – everybody I share the report with, if they're an Iowa kid, they grew up here, they immediately look at their home county. They may live in Polk now or Black Hawk or wherever, but they'll go to their home county, and I was no different. That was my home county.

So the next part of the report talks about consequences, and it really drills down into all those segments of the budget – transportation, childcare, health, all of that sort of thing. I wanted to cover specifically a few related to food.

So 12.6% of Iowa residents are food insecure, and that range goes from 9% in Sioux County to 15% in Story County. There's a large segment of the population of adults and teens that don't eat fruits and vegetables every day. And a big part in this that was interesting to our researchers in New Jersey is how difficult, because they think Iowa, agriculture – there's food everywhere. And then they got into the numbers and realized that most Iowans, many Iowans don't have immediate access to fresh, healthy foods at large retailers in our urban communities. And then 50% of Iowans who live in rural communities are more than ten miles from a large food store. And if we had time to go into other aspects of the report, transportation is a huge issue. So you can see where those numbers are disheartening.

So coping strategies: People who are insecure, these are coping strategies that they reported. Almost 80 percent purchase inexpensive, unhealthy food – so the things that they can either find in those quick convenience stores that are close to them or fast food. 56% purchase food past expiration date. 63% seek charitable food assistance, like Food Bank, food pantry, that sort of thing. And almost 35% sell or pawn items to acquire funds to purchase food, so that's obviously not a good long-term strategy.

More statistics in Iowa: Again with that, around 12% experienced food hardship between 2012 and 2014. SNAP enrollment has increased from 120,000 in 2001 to 420,000 in 2014. And it is important, as the Secretaries noted, that people are on and off. ALICE is often on and off, because her work may be irregular, her hours may be irregular; it may be seasonal. And so they often are on and off of SNAP; it's not continuous enrollment.

And to Secretary Veneman's point, in Iowa... And her statistics were much more recent. The statistics she quoted were more recent than this. This is a 2013 statistic. The national average

obesity then, four years ago, was 28%, but Iowa was surpassing that already then; and obviously there's been a sharp increase based on the statistics she quoted for us today.

So the final part of the report talks about again there is no magic slide at the end. I don't have the solution to this. Really, United Ways want to involve stakeholders in talking about these issues, because oftentimes ALICE isn't here to represent herself or to speak to her perspective. So it's really about shifting your mind to be thinking about this and seeing it.

So, for example, I got a tea down at Starbucks and there wasn't a tip jar. And now, since I've done this, I'm very much about tipping. So it's really shifting your mind to see and think about these issues.

So the stakeholders we want to involve are these. Family and friends are usually closest to the issues, so they're providing sort of short-term kinds of fill-ins. They help with transportation, they help with childcare, help with short-term loans, that kind of thing. And then comes sort of our United Way and nonprofit world. So a lot of what we do, we're a little bit further out in the circle, but we're connecting to resources. We're helping families latch onto the things that they can, access, given their situation.

Employers—a huge part of this is bringing on board employers to help them understand what their employees are showing up every day thinking about and struggling with beyond just doing their work that day. And how can employers help to start to kind of build those pathways for ALICE to become more financially stable.

And finally, on the way outer circle, policymakers. So again we're investing about half of what ALICE needs to survive. Can we do that differently? Can we do that in a way that makes sense for them? Can we be more helpful with that huge investment that we're all collectively making?

So the real key messages, the key takeaways... And this is available for everyone on our website. You are welcome to visit our United Ways of Iowa website and download it. But the real key takeaways are these: 19% of Iowans are above federal poverty level and still struggling. They're working, they're earning, they're paying taxes, and they're still struggling every single month. That number is 31% when you add in those below federal poverty level, so one in three households are in this situation every single month. And that's just covering the basics—food, transportation, housing, health and childcare. That's not a cell phone bill, that's not a student loan bill, that's not a birthday party. That's not any of the extras that might be in some of our own budgets. That is really just the basics.

Next, ALICE is all demographics. It's seniors, it's kids, it's married people, it's people of working age who don't have children in their home. It is everybody. There's no demographic it doesn't touch. ALICE is everywhere. The best county again is Dallas at 21%, and that goes up to almost half of Decatur County. So there is no county that could say—well, we don't have that here. That just isn't true. And again with that seven-year window of the report, ALICE was 28% of Iowa households at the beginning in 2007, and now it's up to 31%, so you can see it's increasing. So it's everybody, it's everywhere, and it's increasing. That's really the takeaways.

Now, some people ask about when we'll do this again. So the report is designed to be repeated every two years. We are ready to do that next summer and come out and see what these statistics look like two years on, and we will do that with the help of our corporate partner, Alliant Energy. So you can look for new data and a new report next year.

And just a couple last things before we bring the panel on. So our next steps again were really just to share this out, to present relevant data. This is the state of the union. We don't have a magic solution, but we want to start to engage those stakeholders in conversations, to understand ALICE's challenges and opportunities, to flip that switch in your brain and be thinking about those when you're in conversations where ALICE's life is being affected.

And finally one last tool that you could make use of in addition to being able to download the report is we recently in the last month or so launched ALICE Making Tough Choices, so that's also available on our website, but here's the address. And it's a very simple, straightforward online simulator that gives you the days of the month, and it gives you a bank balance. And it gives you several challenges that you rotate through that are taken straight from the lives of ALICE. And it helps you understand those juggling kinds of decisions that they're making every single month. So we're really excited about this. It really brings the report to life.

So thank you for letting me share and expand a little bit and bring that to a local level, what we heard about from our Secretaries panel.

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### *Panel Members*

<b>Deann Cook</b>	Executive Director, United Ways of Iowa
<b>Darlene Barnes</b>	Regional Administrator, USDA Food & Nutrition Service (FNS)
<b>Amy Meyer</b>	Executive Director, United Way of Mahaska County
<b>Ali Wilson</b>	Volunteer Engagement Director, United Way of Wapello County

### *Panel Moderator*

#### **Deann Cook**

And now I'm going to invite some other folks to the stage who will talk about some specific programs that are affecting Iowa communities. So they'll be introducing themselves, but we have Darlene Barnes from the USDA. We have Ali Wilson from the United Way Wapello County, and we have Amy Meyer from the United Way of Mahaska County. So I will let Darlene begin.

Darlene Okay, good morning, everyone. My name is Darlene Barnes, and I'm the Regional Administrator for USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, Mountain Plains Region. And my responsibility as a federal partner is to work with a ten-state region, and that includes the great state of Iowa in this ten-state region. And a big part of what we do is work with our state partners to provide oversight and technical assistance to all of the 15 nutrition assistance programs. That includes SNAP, WIC, all of the school meals programs, as well as other food distribution programs, etc.

And one thing that's really key in working with this ten-state region, we certainly work with our state partners, we also work with the local advocacy and food banks

and other stakeholders that are all involved in this fight against hunger and working for better nutrition for children and families. So at the federal level, I am able to certainly provide those dollars that go to those ten states for these programs. And we also share a lot of challenges and best practices and things that happen within those programs.

The other thing that I would say just real quickly, and then I know we'll go back to this, is that in addition to the federal dollars, there are various grants that do become available, and I will talk about a couple of them within the SNAP program when we get real specific to that.

But I'm really happy to be here, and I must say as a side bar, I have worked under all of those secretaries of agriculture in my career. So it's fun to see them back and to hear them talk about where the program stands with them today. So thank you.

Deann Thank you. Ali.

Ali My name's Ali. I am the Volunteer Engagement Director at United Way of Wapello County in Ottumwa. And I am here today to talk about what we call our crockpot classes. That was a new program that we developed this year in partnership with Hy-Vee and the business leadership and College of Public Health that provides, through the help of our local dietitian, we provide low income folks in our community with classes where they create healthy and affordable meals. They get to take home... And then they also receive a free crockpot at the end of that class. And it was something that we developed in response to a need that we heard from our local food pantry clients that they were not really sure of what to do with some of the foods they were receiving and/or they didn't necessarily have the tools that they needed to actually cook and prepare the food. So that was a program that we piloted this year and had seven classes and got great feedback, and that's what I'm here to talk about today. Thanks.

Deann Amy

Amy Hi. I'm Amy Meyer. I am the Director of United Way of Mahaska County. About five years ago our community started having some conversations that centered around childhood hunger, and so we at the United Way started bringing some partners together to have these discussions and to see what sort of solutions we could find for them. One of those solutions was Oskaloosa Summer Lunch, which is a USDA program that we started. We just finished our fourth summer as a summer lunch site.

And then we also... We looked at our number of kids who are needing free and reduced lunch. We have more than half of our kids eligible for that program, and so we thought, okay, they're being taken care of during the school days, but what's happening on the weekends, and what's happening over the summer. So we could take care of summer through Oskaloosa Summer Lunch, but then we also had to look at weekends. There were a lot of kids who were struggling, and teachers saw their behavior be a lot worse on Monday mornings and kind of got down to some of those issues of they maybe didn't have a reliable source of food over the weekend, so their last meal was, you know, lunch on Friday, and they weren't seeing it again 'til

they got breakfast at their school on Monday. So we wanted to address that as well, and so we started the Take-Along Weekend Food Program, which is sending the most food insecure kids in our schools home with a bag of snacks and meals that are very easy to prepare and help them have some food security over those weekends. So those are our two programs that we have in a rural community. Mahaska County is Oskaloosa, so Oskaloosa is about 12,000. Our county is about 22,000, so hope to represent some of those issues that rural communities face as far as hunger.

Deann And, Darlene, Amy mentioned the USDA, so maybe now would be a good time for you to talk a little bit more specifically about those programs.

Darlene So of the 15 nutrition assistance programs, they're SNAP, WIC, all of the school meals programs, food distribution programs like the emergency feeding program, things like that, in addition to the federal dollars, some grants that have become available – two in particular that Iowa has taken advantage of in the SNAP program... I always have to read these to make sure I get them right, and they're under Iowa's Healthiest State Initiative, for those of you all that are familiar with that. And one of the grants came from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, which is another agency within USDA, and they awarded some money, almost a hundred thousand dollars for a three-year pilot program that helps six farmers' markets in Iowa, including the one here in Des Moines. Basically, it's an incentive program to double up your food bucks.

In addition to that, there is what's called the Food Insecurity and Nutrition Incentive Grant that Iowa took advantage of for their Healthiest State Initiative, and that was also about a hundred thousand dollars, and it helps SNAP recipients increase their purchases for fruits and vegetables. And the private organizations added to that about \$250,000. And so basically what happens is the SNAP recipient will come to the farmers' market, and if they spend \$10 in fruits and vegetables, they will get an incentive of \$10 to continue to purchase fruits and vegetables. So when you heard the conversation earlier, especially from Secretary Veneman that, with the obesity rate and things like that, this is just one of several grants that are available within different programs that can help needy families.

One thing I did want to mention is that we brought a sheet that's out on the... David, I'm not sure if it's out on the exhibit table that lists all the grants within USDA. We felt that would be helpful to show not just in the nutrition assistance programs but in other areas of the USDA that could possibly be helpful as you sometimes need to partner with more than one entity to be able to apply for these grants.

Deann We had USDA come and present to a United Way statewide meeting, and it was amazing the amount of work that happens that I think we were all even unaware of, so it's worth checking out. I'll go down to Amy. Can you talk about some of the resources that were especially helpful to you in launching your program?

Amy Yeah, so partners are going to be crucial. There's really nothing that we could do on our own. And a lot of times those conversations were being started by those partners, and United Way was just really bringing them into the same room so that we can just be on the same page as we're talking about them. So churches are a huge part of summer lunch. They serve as host sites, and they supply their own

volunteers. We originally cooked in a church the first time, so you're going to really want to make sure your church communities or your places of worship communities are engaged in that.

And then the schools. You're really going to be pushing a boulder up a mountain if you are trying to do anything without the support of the schools and the buy-in of the schools. Because they have access to the kids that you're never going to have. You know, you could start the best program in the world, but chances are without the school's partnership, they're not going to know about it. So the school is the site. Just this past year we started using the school as the kitchen. So as far as summer lunch program goes, most school districts are the ones who actually run summer feeding sites. So whether they're leading it or not, you're going to want to make sure that they're really engaged. And our school district has been very supportive of that.

Yeah, so volunteer communities you're really going to want to engage. And donors are really going to want to engage. This is just such a rare opportunity as far as programs that we run in United Way to really connect volunteers with kids. And I think that that's what your volunteers... And if you're on that fundraising side as well, those volunteers will quickly turn into donors a lot of times because they're seeing the need. They're getting to be connected to those kids, so don't neglect those volunteers and donors, because when it comes to childhood hunger, you're going to find support that maybe you never felt in your community before when you were trying to sell different programs. It's a much easier sell than anything else we have to offer. Because when people really start to think about kids being hungry in their communities, they're very quick, very quick to step up.

And as far as the summer lunch program gets subsidized heavily by the USDA, so we don't even need their dollars so much right there, so we try to say – well, we need your help with weekends. You know, weekends, we don't get any reimbursement for that, so we really need your help with that. But people, we've found, have just been really supportive when it comes to kids who are hungry.

Deann     And, Ali, how about you? Resources that are particularly helpful with your program.

Ali         I think I can echo Amy's statement on partners. So our partners in the community were the ones who helped us identify that need, the folks who are working in food banks and food pantries were the ones who helped us identify that need. And then our corporate partners like Hy-Vee – it's really crucial to the program that they make their dietitian available so that she can answer questions from the folks who are participating, if they have special dietary needs, they want to know how to customize it to make it low sodium or low cholesterol, she's able to work with them and answer those questions. So that's been a really crucial partnership.

And as well as our nonprofit partners in the community. For example, we did classes at each of the housing authority high rises in Ottumwa, and then that was something that they identified that they thought their residents would be interested and benefit from. And so it's really been our partners who have made that really successful as well as constantly getting feedback from our clients. They're the ones that told us that they needed... You know, they might not have the tools. They need some way

to cook the food. They're the ones telling us, "Hey, we're getting spinach every week, and I don't know what to do with spinach, so can you come up with some recipes that will help me use that and take advantage of what I'm getting."

So I think those are our two, what I would say are main resources.

Deann And that's such a direct response to what we were talking about, that the food budget really relies on people being able to cook a lot of interesting foods that may be unique to them. So that really addresses that issue. Darlene, can you talk about some of the resources that you look for in the communities that you're working with, and what have been most helpful.

Darlene I think in visiting on all the states that I have responsibility for, really going into the community and seeing who the partners are at the table and really looking at nontraditional partners. When they were talking earlier, one of the Secretaries was talking about the medical community. We are doing more in encouraging sort of the healthcare community to come to the table at the most local level to talk about how they could maybe be a site, maybe be a sponsor, depending on the type of organization it is. And so for me it's a real opportunity to be able to be out and about and make those connections and then share those best practices. And being here and sitting down with two people that are like working right at the local level, I get different ideas to share. And nontraditional partners is one you really need to think about. When you just think nobody could be interested, as Amy said, people are interested when they hear about hungry children especially.

Deann And I'll go back to Ali with this one. Tell us about any barriers that you encounter. This is a unique program that we see a need for, but what sorts of things did it take to get it off the ground? And what might you have encountered as barriers?

Ali So just a couple barriers that come to mind is really reaching our audience, so getting the word out and making sure folks who can really benefit from the program are aware of it. And then from their side, the people who are attending the classes, we did see some barriers with transportation, for example, being able to come to the class and being able to get home with their bags of food and the crockpot. A lot of people relied on friends or family or public transportation. One way that we kind of tried to work around that was going to some different sites, like the Housing Authority, actually going to where those folks live. And I think those have been our main barriers. We've had really good success, like I said, with our partners buying in and with clients.

Deann Good, thank you. Amy, how about you with your program? Any barriers or tough spots you had to get over?

Amy Yeah, so we had to do a little bit more work in awareness, general community awareness, than I thought we would. I think probably the people in this room might... You know, we all know what the problems are for the most part, and so when I was getting feedback of... "You know, I just don't think that this is a problem in our community." And we kind of think that that's funny, but that is a response that I got. Again in a rural part of Iowa, it's something that we think maybe that the

cities have more of an issue with. Especially when it came to kids, I would hear like, "Well, there's already programs for that. This isn't really a problem for us."

I got a call one day that said, "Quick, turn on the radio. They're talking about your program on a Des Moines radio station." And so there had been an article in our local paper, and a caller called in and said that there's this program in his community, and the post said to me, "What is going on in Oskaloosa that you have to do a program like this?" And again we think that's kind of funny, because Oskaloosa did not invent hunger. That was not a new initiative that we started. And so, yeah, we said this has been going on, this program has been going on – not even to mention kids have been hungry for a long time. This is not a new thing. And I think there was just a lot of assumptions about what it would take for a kid to be insecure, you know, a lot of blame being thrown around as to the parents. You know, I heard, "That's the parents' job. That's not your job." And things like that.

And so I think it was just overcoming a lot of different stereotypes that people had and just general awareness. Even when I just would tell them, "You know, more than half of our kids are eligible for free and reduced lunch," people would say, "That can't be true." So just kind of making it aware that it's a problem, but it's a problem that the community can really come together and address in a really effective and efficient way.

Deann Thank you. I really thought of that, too, with my United Way hat on, as Ambassador Quinn said that Norman Borlaug mentioned, you know, there's hunger in Minneapolis. And I thought, you know, that's what our 25 United Ways across the state spend a lot of time doing exactly what Amy said. And what the ALICE report does is really to point out it is an issue in our communities, no matter how you want to think about it. So we spend a lot of time with that. But those are our United Way voices. Darlene, how about barriers that you see to implementing programs?

Darlene Well, specifically, when I had mentioned about the incentive problem, the Double-Ups program at the farmers' market, a lot of people don't know about that and don't know about that incentive. And so I think you're hearing a common theme about awareness, and sometimes the money is not where you can do outreach and what-have-you. It certainly goes into the program, but there's never enough to talk about how important these programs are, but also the SNAP recipients have access to this. And another \$10 for fruits and vegetables goes a long way.

So awareness being really the number one thing. And each community is different. When you were talking about the summer program and the outreach for summer, the challenges around trying to let the local folks know about where sites are..., because it's so different. Especially if the school is not involved, the kids aren't sure where to go. And so we're very creative within the ten states about different ways they have done to do outreach, from posters on buses to billboards to TV programs, what-have-you, but even in a movie theater showing little ads beforehand about the summer feeding program. It just takes that much just to get the information out.

Deann So thinking about the future a little bit with these programs that you've now established, we'll go back down to Amy. What are you hoping to accomplish in the next year or two? What's kind of your next thing?

Amy

So it's a little bit tricky, I think, when you're dealing with these kinds of social services of – what does growth look like? Because growth is not always increasing numbers. You know, we do a backpack of school supplies, and every year we announce the number. People are saying – well, it went down. Is that a bad thing? And it's absolutely not a bad thing. My goal is not to make everyone in the community need my school supplies. So growth doesn't have to look like numbers, but when we talk about growth we talk a lot about access. Are we confident that every kid who would be in need of this program has access to it? So we partner a lot with our local transportation.

We have a lot of sites. We have 12 summer lunch sites in a community of 12,000, which is a lot. But again that's all about we want to make sure that if a kid has no access to transportation, would they be able to get to a site if they needed it. So we see growth as kind of that growth in access.

And I think there's also a natural progression. When you first start working in nonprofits, you just start identifying a lot of gaps you need to fill, and you're just rushing to fill every gap you can find – right? Kids are hungry, let's feed them; they need school supplies, let's give them school supplies. And you start to fill those gaps. And I think that then you often take a step back and say, okay, but what are the causes of these issues? What can we be doing to not just feed them for a day but really make sure that their life is better off with your program than it would have been without it.

And so I think that it comes back to that education piece. And so we have been partnering more with summer lunch programs as far as educational pieces. So we do activities during the day. You know, middle- and high-income kids are growing over the summer as far as their education. They're going to camps. They're reading. They're doing those things, and they're growing every summer. Low-income kids are dropping every summer. They're actually worse off at the end of the summer academically than they were at the beginning. And if you expand that over summer after summer, the gap between middle- and low-income kids as far as reading levels and math levels is just really growing.

So we want to partner with the food piece of it and meet that need food-wise but then also try to address some of those educational issues. Can we be reading with these kids? Can we be distributing books at some of our sites? Can we be teaching cooking? We did partner at the end of last summer with the Kids in the Kitchen program, so the kids who came to the program could then actually sign up to become little chefs, and they came in the kitchen and they get little free hats, which are adorable, and just learn about how to actually cook food at home, similar to the healthy meals that they're getting through the Oskaloosa summer lunch program.

So I think the education piece is definitely where I see the growth, because we want to make sure that maybe even they're bringing home to their parents, like, you know, "Mom, I know what to do with spinach now." Or someone at a different hunger thing gave me a squash, and even I thought, I have no idea what to do with this squash. So how can we educate them to not just help themselves but help maybe their family as well.

Deann Great, and, Ali, how about you? Your program is a little bit newer, but what are your sort of next goals?

Ali So with this program specifically I think that we're going to look at new areas of outreach. So are there partnerships that we can meet with – a college or some other partners in the community. Because like I said, you have to go to the people rather than expect them to come to you. So are there other connections that we can make to make these services more accessible. And hopefully then we served 89 people last year, and I'm sure... We're confident there are more people in our community who would be interested and can benefit from the program.

And then kind of like Amy said, that's one piece of our overall United Way strategy of increasing financial stability in the home, increasing access to food, and making sure that people have enough to eat when they go home.

Deann And, Darlene, how about you – what are our goals for the next year or two?

Darlene I'm just waiting to see what happens with the Farm Bill. I mean, I know...

Deann That was the last panel.

Darlene Exactly, and so because of some of our programs, especially our largest one, SNAP, falls into the Farm Bill, for us as a federal career person, we're just waiting to see what happens. I know there's been listening sessions that have gone on around the country with the Senate Ag Committee, etc., so I'm not sure about all of the information that's being shared, but that will be key, as to what is in that. Other than that, I mean, we will continue to still as a region certainly support all the programs in the states that we work with share best practices like I said before and really provide any technical assistance. Or any challenges that you have that you bring to the regional office, we do the research or do what we can to figure out how to maybe... As I think it was Johannes said not one size fits all, but sometimes the regs, that's how they come out. I realize that. And so we try our best to work with our state partners and local community to see how we can help the state have flexibility in administering these programs and to keep them going and to make sure that access is there for all the children and families that need it. So we won't stop that.

Deann So access we keep hearing about, and transportation and sort of that's all tied up in our ALICE Report. Amy and I were hurting our necks over there nodding as the Secretaries were tying all that together as well. So we'll open it up for questions here in a minute. Anything else you most wanted to say before we give the opportunity for questions?

Amy Yeah, I just wanted to speak to anyone who is thinking of starting a hunger program and that there is... People are so generous with what they want to help you do in your community, even if they've never heard of your community. People were very generous with us as we were starting. And I guess my advice would always just be – start small. Don't be afraid. Summer lunch or summer feeding is extremely flexible as a program. I know it's strange for a government program to be that flexible, but they really want you to start something in your community. And even if that's serving lunch one day a week for one month and that's all you think you can

tackle, I think you're going to find out it might be a little bit easier than you're thinking. But it's scary just to get started, so I guess that would be my advice, is – just don't be afraid to start really small and then to see that program grow. Because I really think the support's out there in your community.

Deann Ali, anything else you most wanted to say before we open?

Ali No, other than if anybody has any questions about our program afterwards, feel free to follow up with me.

Deann Anything else from you?

Darlene I think I would just share that within the ten-state region that we have, there's a lot of rural areas, and so I'm learning more about how to connect the rural community. I know that there are other challenges, and I know that there's a lot of focus with the current Secretary Perdue on rural areas and really reaching out to help families both through these programs but also really looking at ways to help from an economic standpoint. And so everything's related, as your ALICE report shows, and so the more dialogue... And I think Virginia... What's her name, I believe, that just announced the Iowa Hunger Coalition earlier. I know that in some states that we have, they do have various hunger coalitions, and then it helps the dialogue even more from county to county about what your issues are. And so I would just encourage you all to continue to do that and invite your federal partners to the table.

## Q&A Session

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Deann So we have a few minutes. If you have questions for any of us up here, we are happy to take them. Yes.

Q Everyone has mentioned the importance of partnerships. Do you have a sense for the diversity of those partnerships and the number of those partnerships that are needed to implement a change in the community?

Amy So you're asking if we're needing to see more diversity in partnerships?

Q Yeah. [inaudible]

Amy Okay. I will speak to... Five years ago when these conversations started happening in our community, I do feel like there was a tipping point, and it really started... How my own feeling with it was that I started to realize that this conversation was happening with or without me. I had people coming to my office and saying, "Hey, I'd really like to do something about childhood hunger." And I said, "Oh, were you at one of our forums," and they'll say, "No, I've never heard of that." Or, "I had never heard of that. I just had started to have this feeling." So it's a little bit touchy-feely, I think to say, but I've definitely spoken before about a tipping point as far as I feel like this is the time. I think this is the moment, because there are all these partners who are talking about it. So I can't give you a number or anything like that, but, yeah, it's never something that you're going to be able to push through, thinking

like—I think this is a problem. I'm not hearing it from anyone else, but I think it's a problem. You're just going to I think find a lot of roadblocks along the way if you go in it with that attitude.

Deann Any other comments on that.

Ali We're pretty early in our implementation of this program, but in terms of diversity, I think it was important for us to have many different sectors were represented, nonprofits and the businesses and city and government who were all identifying this, you know, hunger in general in our community – not just this program but our broader work in Wapello County around food security and increasing access to food. It was important to have all of those people at the table, because each ones brings a perspective that I think is slightly different and can inform the rest of us and how we do our work.

Darlene I mean, it's not at the community level necessarily for me, but I do see really looking at foundations coming to the table, even at the most local level, to talk about this seriousness of some of the issues and how they might be able to provide some funding. Sometimes it's... Obviously, the faith-based group is already involved, but the diversity is looking at nontraditional partners. It's not the same people that are always at the table to talk about the hunger issue.

Deann Other questions anyone might have? There's a couple over here, so I'll let... We'll go over here for these two and then catch that one.

Q Good morning. I have a couple of questions. We in our agency in the Department of Human Rights, we work with the local community action agencies. We are the state community action agencies, so I wanted to see if, for those of you who are at the local level, if in any of these programs there's an interaction with the community action agencies in your area, because they will cover the 17 community action agencies then covers the whole state, and they have association, is a good way to sort of deploy some things.

And then my second question is about – when it comes to food, even in many of our rural communities, particularly at the K-12 level, there's increasing diversity in the children culturally, etc. Is there some effort to sort of take that into account? I know here, and I don't know if there's anybody from DMARC here, I know they're working with others to stock in food pantries, etc., food that is culturally, you know, what individuals from those communities might want to eat or how to fix things. And talk about refugee population – they've spent ten years, some of them, in a refugee camp. They may not have necessarily the skills for preparation and those kinds of things.

Deann So CAP agency involvement in recognizing diversity and needs of food.

A So I can say for our program, our community action agency has been super helpful. We work with them on almost any program that we..., any direct service program that we implement. They're really fantastic about getting the word out, and we know that they touch a lot of the population that we're trying to reach. So they're an excellent partner for us.

And we also have a program that we work with in our community, the NEST program through ISU. That has been really helpful in providing volunteer translators for folks who wanted to attend the class but weren't proficient in English. And then one of the benefits for us of having the dietitian on hand is we did actually have quite a few questions about—how do I alter this to make it doable for my family, whether my family doesn't do dairy or the particular needs that someone who's coming in outside of the United States or outside of Iowa might have. So, yes, that was an issue that we found, and our partners were really helpful in helping us address that.

Amy We have kind of an informal CAP partnership, but we do call them CAP meetings when nonprofits get in a room and talk. And actually I would think it would be pretty fair to say that this started as a CAP conversation, like let's just bring all the nonprofits together and talk about hunger, is a big part of how we started.

Diversity-wise, because we're a smaller community, I think we have a little bit more capacity to really individualize things. We did find out about a growing Japanese community and were able to find someone to go out and talk specifically about the program to them. And then we saw that increase. So, yeah, we're able to kind of individualize it based on who we're seeing in our community.

And I think there was a question in the second row there.

Q Thank you for the information. I wanted to find out the place for canned food, and also I need to make a quick comment on food being more like in a... It has to do with atmosphere. It's like us people eating alone, isolated, with problems. That food often will not taste that well. Do you try to create a good environment or teach people how to celebrate food in a way that is healthy and tastes good?

Ali Sure, so we don't in our program actually sit down and eat the food together, but we've found that engaging people and making the food together, we were surprised at how many people came as families, as friend groups and really had a sense of enjoyment of working on preparing those meals together that they could then take home and enjoy as a family. Even one thing we did was customize our recipes a little bit to accommodate the kids. We had more kids showing up with their parents than we thought, so we made those a little bit easier for things that kids could help with and get a little hands-on so that they felt that they were part of the process and they were contributing as well. So that's one aspect of our program.

A Yeah, and I definitely think we saw the value early on in selling summer lunch as not just a feeding program as a community program, a place where everyone could come together. Because our community is more than half free or reduced lunch, we don't have to income verify. We don't have to get names. We don't... and I think we made the mistake earlier on as pitching it was, "Hungry kids come here," and changing that into, "All kids come here." Because by making it a really open, welcoming environment that your neighbor could come to that's not... You know, if you brand something as—if you're in poverty, go there, it's not going to go very well. So we really have been pitching more the coming together. You know, if you're a stay-at-home mom, why not bring your kids here as just a place to connect with

other neighbors, because they are very just neighborhood-centered groups. So I think we do see the value, I think, in that togetherness.

Deann Darlene, comments from you on making this about more than just filling a need but also meeting an emotional need.

Darlene Yeah, there were several examples in some of the states as I traveled around during the summer program, in particular to your point about reaching all kids that are eligible for the summer feeding program. The teenagers were coming and dropping off their younger brothers and sisters and leaving, because they didn't think that the program was for them. And so like you said, it's really about coming together and that the education... Sometimes it's a local sports person will draw, you know, just getting to sit down and celebrate or know that eating, having a nice meal and sitting down and eating together can make you healthy and strong. I mean, there's so many different folks in a community that sometimes can help draw or help people realize that it is a program that is not just about good nutrition but about, like you said, coming together in your community.

Amy It's interesting what you said about teenagers didn't see the problem of, as you get older you get more embarrassed about being there. So a lot of times we would say, "Well, would you help us volunteer? We have all these kids. We really need someone to sit at the table with them and eat. And you know what? They're really uncomfortable if they're eating and you're not, so can you just eat too with them?" Kind of got creative with making sure that they were feeling welcome.

Darlene And I don't know how big the rodeo community is here in Iowa, but I can tell you that in a lot of the states that we have, a lot of the people who participate in the rodeo, whether it's the guys doing the roping and all that, to barrel racers and others—I mean, they draw, and they can talk about good nutrition. And it's been a really..., especially in this particular region of the United States, it's a unique way of looking at that sport, but I mean it draws a lot of folks, and, or a lot of kids and teenagers as well, because it's very popular. So just something to think about as you get creative with your summer programs.

Deann I think we have somebody waiting over here. There she is, standing up.

Q Hi. Doris Montgomery from the Department of Health. Darlene, I thought we might give you a chance to talk about seniors just a moment. We've had a lot about kids. The ALICE Report, which you've come and present to us at public health, 28% in that category being senior households. And nationally I think we have some shared responsibility for seniors, so USDA has some key programs. And I thought maybe you could talk a little bit about how people can be more sensitive to this hunger issue or food insecurity issue with the demographics that we're facing here in Iowa and also the area agencies and congregate meal sites are starting to really see some reductions in their ability to serve this audience.

Darlene Yeah, hi, Doris. I couldn't see you, but when I heard your voice... Yeah, for those of you that are familiar with the commodity supplemental food assistance program, it is now specifically for seniors. Before, it had reached different populations within that program, and there has been a direct focus on seniors. Also, there's a lot of myth

about the number, the amount of benefits you get in the SNAP program, I mean, very proud people who don't think that they really want to get on the SNAP program because they're only going to get ten bucks or what-have-you. So it's trying to break that myth and to share, finding ways to just sort of break that stigma for seniors.

I think, too, there's a lot of maybe bringing seniors together for a conversation. I know when you talk about bringing a community together, sometimes just focusing on the elderly themselves and bringing that group together.... I was at something in the mall in Colorado several years ago, awhile back, where we brought seniors in and just to have a conversation around nutrition assistance. And they have a lot to say about that and their experience through the years, and now the medical costs going up as you get older. So I think being more sensitive to that and a real focus on seniors—seniors' farmers' markets. I mean, there's things that are out there. It's just making sure that they're going into places where seniors will be, and I don't think we have always done a very good job of that. So should I add something else, Doris?

Q [inaudible] SNAP education, but we do this afternoon have a session also where we're working with that bigger Iowa Hunger Coalition, but we will be focusing in on seniors a little bit more, because not all the same strategies work. And we're trying to come up with some creative ways. Especially the demographics are so compelling that we cannot ignore this audience.

Deann And my apologies to those who've had to hear ALICE. I see lots of familiar faces. My husband calls ALICE my best friend, so now she can be your best friend, too. And I know we have a few more questions, but the clock tells us we need to wrap this up. What I can say is echo what Ali did, that these three ladies are very, very accessible. So if you had a question that didn't get answered, I'm sure that we can connect you at another opportunity. So thank you all very much. We appreciate your interest in what's happening in Iowa.