

Despite all the wins and progress we've experienced as a community over the last 30 years, poverty remains a persistent and urgent problem in Greenville County.

Our local economy has flourished, but our hard-won success is fragile. Our attitudes, power dynamics, and policy choices protect economic interests for some while maintaining barriers for others, creating a fixed underclass where only a few people can reach the middle class or above.

United Way of Greenville County's 2023-2030 organizational strategy (i.e., How We Win) identifies four barriers to higher earnings for low-income households in the Greenville County region: Housing, Childcare, Education, and Transportation.

## HIGHER EARNINGS

Despite a strong local economy and continued growth, financial stability is an elusive dream for many in Greenville County. More than 60,000 people in Greenville County are living in poverty – 1/3 of which are children. People of color in Greenville County are disproportionately affected by poverty, with 21 percent of Black and 22 percent of Hispanic people living below the poverty line, compared to 9 percent of whites.

Across our community today, many families struggle to stretch their wages to meet the cost of basic needs. Though often not deemed "poor" by official poverty measures, these families lack enough income to meet the rising cost of essentials such as food, housing, transportation and health care.

**What do you mean by "earnings"?** There are many definitions we considered—earnings, income, wages, wealth—and the definitions for each varies widely. Our definition of "earnings" is inclusive of the total wages and benefits a household receives on an annual basis.

Approximately 17,400 Greenville County families have an income of less than \$25,000, which according to the [Self-Sufficiency Standard](#) in South Carolina, would barely be enough to make ends meet for a single person, let alone an entire family. Access points include:

- **Education & training.** Provide education and training programs that lead to higher-paying careers.
- **Financial services and benefits.** Increase access to tools to save and protect against a personal financial crisis, while gaining long-term assets like a home or business.

## HOUSING

Our region's substantial and steady population growth has put strains on the housing market. The market has had difficulty keeping up with demand, which has increased the competition and cost for housing. Median household income

is not keeping up with the cost of housing, decreasing the affordability of housing for families in Greenville County.

Access points include:

- **Preserve & produce.** Use legislative, operational, and financial methods to facilitate the construction of more housing and preserve and improve quality of units that are already affordable.
- **Access to private market housing.** Increase low- and moderate-income households' access to private market housing.
- **Housing stability & displacement.** Increase housing stability for tenants at risk of displacement and homelessness.
- **Permanent supportive housing.** Connect individuals experiencing chronic homelessness with stable, unconditional housing and support services.

## CHILDCARE

In Greenville County, the average household spends 18 percent of its income on childcare. Lack of access to affordable, high-quality childcare can impede parents from pursuing further education or participating in paid work and can dispossess children of the lifelong health and development benefits correlated with high-quality childcare. Access points include:

- **Early childhood workforce supports.** Promote initiatives to train, recruit, and retain educators and caregivers to deliver evidence-based childcare and early education programming.
- **Family flexibility.** Increase access to childcare during nonstandard hours.
- **Childcare & early education programs.** Support supervision, curricula, programming, and healthy learning environments for children ages 0-5.

## EDUCATION

In Greenville County, approximately 47 percent of working-age adults have a high-quality, post-secondary credential or degree. Increased educational attainment creates pathways to good, stable jobs, strengthening stability at home, and leading to better economic social, and health outcomes for families. Access points include:

- **Guidance & supports for post-secondary success.** Deliver academic, financial, and other services to youth and working-age individuals pursuing a high school diploma, general equivalency diploma, post-secondary credential, industry certification, etc.
- **Job placement services & supports.** Help residents experiencing long-term unemployment find secure jobs and stable income.
- **Sector-specific job training.** Prepare adults for careers mainly in rapidly growing industries like advanced materials, automotive, aviation/aerospace, and biosciences.
- **Transitional employment & reentry support.** Facilitate residents' transitions to full-time employment through subsidized jobs and wraparound support services.

**What do you mean by “post-secondary”?** While this term usually evokes images of 19-year-olds pursuing a 4-year higher education degree immediately after graduating high school, we expand this term to include a broader definition of educational attainment that also includes apprenticeships, re-skilling, upskilling, etc. for all working-age adults.

## TRANSPORTATION

Having access to consistent, reliable, and affordable transportation impacts residents' employment and health. In a 2015 survey, 22 percent of employed residents had trouble getting to their job due to transportation and 21 percent had trouble getting to the grocery store or pharmacy. Nearly half of car owners said, at least a few times a month, they could not drive due to the cost of gas or maintenance. Access points include:

- **Public transportation access & subsidies.** Make public transit accessible through physical infrastructure, service improvements, and financial supports. Increase public transit service hours, routes, and route frequencies countywide.
- **Traffic & street safety improvements.** Maximize the number of people—including drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians—who can safely and efficiently utilize public streets and thoroughfares.

<sup>1</sup> Low-income is defined as any household earning below twice the poverty level, the standard for self-sufficiency in Greenville County (dependent on family size). See p. 18 of the [2020 Self-Sufficiency Standard](#)

<sup>2</sup> Based on a 2020 study of Greenville City and County, over 80-90% of renters earning less than \$22,000 per year spend over 30% of their income on housing. Households spending more than 30% of their income on housing are considered “cost-burdened” and often have difficulty affording other basic needs.

<sup>3</sup> <https://greenvillehousingfund.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ghf-gcra-affordable-housing-strategic-plan.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> For two children. See County Health Rankings & Roadmaps' [County Health Rankings](#).

<sup>5</sup> <https://dashboards.mysidewalk.com/greenvillesc/growing-a-greater-greenville>

<sup>6</sup> Economic Mobility Catalog, [Post-Secondary Education & Workforce Development](#)

<sup>7</sup> pp. 42-43 of Piedmont Health Foundation's [Mobility Study](#)