

# Community Concerns from ...

## November 2016



Grace E. Jones, Executive Director • Phone: 608-634-3104 • [www.couleecap.org](http://www.couleecap.org)  
All donations greatly appreciated.

## The Face of Poverty in the Coulee Region

Too often, people in poverty are invisible to us. We may live in the same neighborhoods, attend the same schools and parishes, yet are unaware of each other's financial struggles. In Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties, more than 29,000 people live at or below the poverty line, including more than 8,000 children under the age of 18 and almost 2,900 adults age 65 and older. In 2016, the federal government classifies a family of four as "poor" if its gross cash income is less than \$24,300; for a family of three, \$20,160; for a family of two, \$16,020; and for an individual, \$11,880.



Couleecap, Inc. is a private non-profit 501(c)3 charitable organization created in 1966. Our mission is to fight poverty and promote self-sufficiency, economic development, and social justice for people and communities in Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties in Wisconsin. For more than 50 years, we have been helping people living below the poverty line and low-income people (up to 200% of the poverty line) build on their strengths and become more self-sufficient. Each year, Couleecap helps more than 30,000 people work towards self-sufficiency.

### 2016 Couleecap Needs Assessment

Poverty has many faces and people living in poverty encounter a wide range of barriers. To ensure that Couleecap is truly meeting the needs of low-income people, we conduct a comprehensive needs assessment every three years to determine the needs of low-income individuals and families in our area. The most recent needs assessment was conducted in February 2016. A total of 1,230 surveys were distributed to low-income households in Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties; 901 (73%) were returned. Of the 901 households:

- 71% had annual incomes less than \$20,000
- 54% had income from wages and/or self-employment
- 4% received income from unemployment
- 45% received FoodShare benefits
- 43% had at least one person in the household limited by a physical, mental, or emotional problem
- 37% had children
- 47% of those with housing were renters
- 15% could be considered homeless
- 14% of adults and 7% of children did not have health insurance



Low-income people were asked to rate areas of need and most significant concerns in their household. The areas of need are listed in priority order and the top concerns within each area are also listed:

Area of Need	Significant Concerns
Housing	Paying for utility bills; Paying for rent / security deposit
Emergency Assistance	Getting help with utility bills; Need for food
Transportation	Paying for car insurance; Paying for car service / repairs
Health	Getting and paying for dental care; Paying for health insurance; health care, eye care, and prescription drugs
Employment	Finding a job with higher wages; Getting health benefits with job
Education	Paying for school; Getting training for a better job
Child and Family Development	Obtaining affordable, quality child care; Correcting / disciplining my child
Business Development	Getting business start-up loans; Getting business start-up help

For a copy of the 2016 Couleecap Needs Assessment, please visit [www.couleecap.org](http://www.couleecap.org).

**Couleecap is Helping**

Couleecap currently operates more than 50 contracts in the areas of housing, emergency assistance, transportation, health, employment, education, child and family development, and business development. Here is just a sampling of how Couleecap helps meet the needs of low-income households:

**Homeless and Homeless Prevention Programs**

Couleecap operates a variety of programs that assist homeless individuals and families with housing, case management, and supportive services, such as life skills training, childcare assistance, employment assistance, transportation assistance, and health and mental healthcare services:

*“Because of this program I have been able to get back on my feet for my son and provide him with a nice and safe home.”  
~Homeless Program participant*

- CTH (Couleecap Transitional Housing) is a 24-month program for homeless young adults, ages 18-24.
- New Hope is a permanent program for homeless people with a diagnosed disability or mental illness.
- Housing First is a permanent program for homeless veterans who are mentally ill and struggling with AODA issues.
- Tenant Based Rental Assistance is an 18-month program for homeless people with diagnosed mental illness.
- Social Security Outreach, Access, and Recovery is designed to help people who are homeless and mentally ill access Social Security benefits.
- Homeless Prevention provides housing counseling, eviction prevention, security deposit/first month’s rent assistance, and motel vouchers to households at risk of becoming homeless.

*"This program helps us make it through the month with good food choices."  
~Food Pantry participant*

## Food Programs

Couleecap operates a variety of programs that assist individuals and families with their food needs and help address food insecurity issues in our communities:

- The Emergency Food Assistance Program provides food to 11 food pantries in Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties.
- Emergency Food Pantries in Prairie du Chien and Sparta provide food to low-income individuals and families in Crawford and Monroe counties.
- FoodShare Outreach Project provides outreach and application assistance to individuals and families seeking FoodShare benefits.

## Business and Income Development Programs

Couleecap operates a variety of programs that assist individuals with employment skills and training or business development services, such as start-up help and loans:

*"Couleecap helped me get my education started and I have been inspired to continue my education."  
~Skills Enhancement Program participant*

- Skills Enhancement Program increases the income and economic self-sufficiency of working poor households by helping adult members acquire the skills needed to obtain higher paying jobs with health benefits. This is accomplished through financial assistance that pays towards tuition, child care, and transportation expenses related to returning to school.
- Job and Business Development Programs provide technical assistance to low-income entrepreneurs to become self-employed. Participants receive training on financial literacy, budgeting, marketing, and feasibility studies; and assistance with developing a business plan.
- Co-Mill provides low cost office/entrepreneurial space for entrepreneurs to help them develop and grow their business ideas.

## You Can Help, Too

Each of us has the power to help people find a way out of poverty. Here are some ways you can get involved:

- Educate yourself about poverty issues. Visit your local library or websites on the Internet. Some good websites are Wisconsin Community Action Program (WISCAP) – [www.wiscap.org](http://www.wiscap.org); Couleecap – [www.couleecap.org](http://www.couleecap.org); Institute for Research on Poverty – [www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp](http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp); Wisconsin Council on Children and Families – [www.wccf.org](http://www.wccf.org); and Center on Budget Policy & Priorities – [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org).
- Support and vote for local, state, and federal elected officials who care about poverty issues.
- Increase affordable housing by joining a local housing coalition.
- Support your local food pantries all year round.
- Advocate for a higher minimum wage, more assistance for child care, more assistance with healthcare costs, and more assistance with transportation costs, so working families can get out of poverty.
- Make a donation to Couleecap's People Helping People initiative. Your donation will be used to help our program participants with unmet needs. For more information about Couleecap's People Helping People Initiative, contact Kadie Brueggen at 608-634-7363 or [Kadie.Brueggen@couleecap.org](mailto:Kadie.Brueggen@couleecap.org).

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References: Couleecap, Inc.; Couleecap Needs Assessment, 2016; [www.couleecap.org](http://www.couleecap.org)  
US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010-2014; [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)  
US Department of Health & Human Services; Poverty Guidelines, 2016; <http://aspe.hhs.gov>