Welcome to the Poverty Solutions Five Years of Impact Report.

Fall of 2021 marked the five-year anniversary of the launch of Poverty Solutions. Since then, we have undertaken hundreds of projects, established powerful community partnerships throughout the country, and demonstrated the myriad ways we can connect our research to policy and practice. In this five-year anniversary report, we offer a brief look at some of the people and projects that have helped advance our efforts to prevent and alleviate the devastating effects of poverty.

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Since 2016

Supported the Publication of
400 Academic Journal Articles, Working Papers, & Policy Briefs

Team Members Have Testified Before Congress
4

Collaborated With More Than
140 Faculty Experts
in Efforts to Address Economic Disparities

Hosted
105 Events
Exploring the Causes and Consequences of Poverty

With More Than
1,500 Student Participants

Connected With More Than
15,000 People
in Our Efforts to Eliminate Poverty

Partnered With All
19 Schools & Colleges
on Projects and Events

In 2021

Generated
1.7M Social Media Impressions

Engaged More Than
250 Students
in Research Assistantships, Projects, and Courses

Cited
500+ Times in National & Regional Media

People
15,000
1,500
500+
1.7M+
250

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250 Students
Poverty Solutions is a presidential initiative of the University of Michigan that partners with communities to extend that impact for years to come. Our team also recognizes that structural racism plays an important role in the systems that create and perpetuate poverty. In turn, our efforts to address poverty must also commit to addressing racism. In 2021, we partnered with the U-M Center for Social Solutions to create the Confronting and Combating Racism Faculty Grant Program, which awarded grants to six action-based research projects. We have also expanded our teaching and research opportunities that prepare our students for successful careers in the field; and we have built a program of research that is innovative, participatory, and action-oriented; we have provided our researchers with teaching and research tools to identify critical issues and evidence-based solutions to inform action.
In March 2021, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act, which included an expansion of the Child Tax Credit that increased the amount of the credit, made it available to more families, and distributed it in monthly payments. Poverty Solutions Director H. Luke Shaefer and his colleagues contributed to this legislation through significant research demonstrating the poverty-reduction potential of the expanded tax credit, which mirrors the design of a near-universal child allowance used in other countries. This policy change is estimated to have already lifted millions of children out of poverty.

Shaefer’s interest in this kind of policy emerged from his work with Princeton Professor Kathryn Edin on their 2015 book, "$2 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America." The book traces the policy decisions that contributed to a sharp rise in the number of families with children who endured periods with virtually no cash income, and it profiled several families living in this kind of extreme poverty. After listening to the stories of these families, Shaefer and Edin made the case for major policy reforms including strengthening the cash safety net. The New York Times and Time Magazine have credited the book with helping to change the narrative about child poverty in a way that opened the door for an expanded Child Tax Credit.

A 2018 journal article authored by Shaefer, Edin, and eight colleagues laid out a vision for how the U.S. could transform the Child Tax Credit into a near-universal child allowance of up to $300 per child per month. Informed by this research, the American Families Act was first introduced in the U.S. Senate in 2017, setting the table for the current expanded Child Tax Credit.

During the pandemic, federal policymakers used other kinds of cash transfers to reduce poverty and buffer families against hardship during a time of unprecedented job loss. These included Economic Impact Payments and expanded unemployment assistance. Poverty Solutions researchers found that material hardship and adverse mental health symptoms fell following cash transfers from the federal government and rose in the absence of government action.

“We can see in the data the ways in which these payments are impacting families across the country, helping them pay for food, bills, and other essential expenses,” said Patrick Casey, assistant director of policy impact at Poverty Solutions. “But we can also see that there’s more work to do to ensure all eligible families receive the help they need.”

The New York Times featured Poverty Solutions’ analysis of material hardship levels over the course of the pandemic in a front page story, leading to stories in dozens of other news outlets, an appearance on PBS NewsHour, and a White House press release. In September 2021, Shaefer testified about the impact of pandemic cash transfer programs at a hearing before the U.S. House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis.

“The social safety net response ushered in by the bipartisan CARES Act and continued in the December COVID relief bill and American Rescue Plan is truly historic. A wealth of evidence now shows it has proven incredibly effective,” Shaefer said during his testimony. “I believe the success is due in large part to the speed and flexibility of a broad-based approach that prioritized putting money in people’s pockets." The major expansion of the child tax credit follows this approach.
To realize the full poverty-reduction potential of the federal safety net cash transfers during the COVID-19 era, eligible families need to claim them. Poverty Solutions worked closely with a coalition of Detroit leaders and collaborated with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to raise awareness of the expanded tax credit. In addition, in the spring of 2020, Poverty Solutions launched a website answering questions about Economic Impact Payments. By the summer of 2021, it had generated more than 13,000 visitors. Outreach efforts resulted in news coverage raising awareness of how to claim the credit from Spanish NPR podcast ¿Qué Onda Michigan?, the American Public Human Services Association, MLive, Detroit News, Detroit Free Press, Michigan Radio, and Mid-Michigan Now, among others.

Census Bureau research shows the expanded Child Tax Credit has already contributed to a decline in food hardship among families with children. Additionally, Poverty Solutions researchers partnered with Propel, which runs the Providers mobile app used by more than 5 million families receiving food assistance, to survey families with low incomes about their receipt and usage of the initial Child Tax Credit payments. The survey responses guided ongoing outreach efforts and received news coverage from CNN, WHYY Philadelphia, the Detroit Free Press, and other media outlets across the country.

However, the expanded Child Tax Credit expired at the end of 2021. Academic research will play a key role in informing decisions to extend the Child Tax Credit or make it permanent.

Detroit’s housing crisis is multifaceted and complex. It has been shaped by an inadequate supply of affordable housing; high property tax rates often based on inflated property assessments; a lack of home repair resources; and a pattern of bulk ownership that has exacerbated displacement pressures. Each of these factors contributes to an environment in which safe, stable, and affordable housing is out of reach for many residents with low incomes. As city officials and housing advocacy organizations work to address those challenges, research supported by Poverty Solutions provides crucial feedback on what’s effective and what’s not.

Detroit News, Detroit Free Press, and other media outlets across the country.

Over the past five years, researchers at Poverty Solutions have explored a number of features of Detroit’s housing ecosystem that prevent many Detroiters—from Black—from obtaining safe, stable, affordable housing. First, predatory lending practices and the economic impact of the recession led to widespread mortgage and tax foreclosures. From 2005 to 2015, 120,000 residential properties in Detroit—nearly half of all such properties in the city—experienced at least one mortgage or tax foreclosure. During this time, Detroit shifted from a majority-owner to a majority-renter city. And while thousands of homeowners were eligible for Detroit’s Homeowners Property Tax Assistance Program (HPTAP, now called HOPE), Poverty Solutions researchers found that just a fraction of those eligible applied for this exemption that could have prevented foreclosure.

The large number of foreclosures spurred greater instability in the city’s housing market, as speculators bought foreclosed properties in bulk, generated profits, and in numerous cases evicted tenants. With banks largely unwilling to lend after the foreclosure crisis, many of these homes were also resold to Detroiters through predatory land contracts, which often carry high interest rates and little protection from eviction.

In addition, due to the city’s aging housing stock, deferred maintenance from investor-landlords, and limited enforcement of rental codes, homeowners and renters alike face significant home repair needs, threatening their health, safety, and long-term housing stability.

These factors combine to create significant barriers to Detroiters obtaining safe, stable, affordable housing. And it is these barriers that Poverty Solutions researchers have set out to tackle, in partnership with policymakers and community groups.

To help understand how these housing issues affected Detroiters, Poverty Solutions staff and faculty affiliates mapped the housing needs of residents and the housing ecosystem in a variety of ways:

• Helped identity housing in Detroit at risk of losing affordability protections.
• Interviewed 105 homeowners with low incomes to understand the barriers they faced in accessing Detroit’s HPTAP exemption.
In December 2018, Poverty Solutions faculty expert Robyn Mathias and a team of graduate students led by Alexa Eisenberg published a working paper, titled “Eviction Filing Trends in Detroit and Their Implications.”

This study revealed that in 2017, Detroit had the highest eviction filing rate among the nation’s 100 largest cities. The researchers found that 13% of Detroit tenants were evicted in 2017, compared to 7% in the United States as a whole. They also found that the number of evictions in Detroit had increased by 28% from 2012 to 2017.

The study highlighted the need for policy interventions to address the high rate of evictions in Detroit. The researchers recommended the implementation of eviction diversion programs, which provide rental assistance to tenants facing eviction, and the expansion of affordable housing options to reduce the demand for eviction filings.

In addition to policy interventions, the study also called for research and data collection to better understand the factors that contribute to the high rate of evictions in Detroit. The researchers recommended the establishment of an eviction research hub at Poverty Solutions, which would bring together researchers from across the city to conduct high-quality research and inform policy-making.

The Poverty Solutions impact report highlights the organization’s commitment to evidence-based research and policy making. The report emphasizes the importance of partnerships and collaborations with community leaders, policymakers, and other stakeholders to achieve meaningful and lasting change.

The report also details the organization’s work in a range of areas, including affordable housing, health equity, and economic opportunity. The report highlights the organization’s focus on Policy and Practice Impact, which involves the development and implementation of evidence-based policies that address the root causes of poverty.

Poverty Solutions’ work in Detroit is informed by the city’s unique challenges and opportunities. The city’s history of segregation and disinvestment has resulted in significant disparities in housing and economic opportunity. The organization’s work in Detroit is focused on addressing these disparities and creating a more equitable and just city for all residents.

The Poverty Solutions impact report serves as a testament to the organization’s commitment to evidence-based research and policy making. The report highlights the organization’s impact and demonstrates the importance of partnerships and collaborations in achieving meaningful and lasting change.
The COVID-19 pandemic made an already challenging task for school staff even more difficult: how to identify which students do not currently have a stable place to live and connect them with resources to ensure they’re able to fully participate in school.

Prior research by Poverty Solutions Senior Research Associate Jennifer Erb-Downward, who specializes in family homelessness, had already identified an undercount of students experiencing homelessness across Michigan, and especially in Detroit and parts of rural northern Michigan with high rates of student homelessness. Poverty Solutions partnered with Chalkbeat Detroit to host a virtual panel discussion on the findings that brought together Detroit educators, service providers, and people with lived experience with housing instability to discuss how schools can better identify and support students experiencing homelessness.

Meanwhile, Erb-Downward continued work on a database outlining the connections between homelessness in Michigan and chronic absenteeism, the number of midyear school transfers, graduation and dropout rates, school discipline, and student engagement. Her organization, SchoolHouse Connection, is a national nonprofit working to overcome homelessness through education, to listen to school staff about their efforts to reach students experiencing homelessness during the pandemic.

Erb-Downward recently mapped school discipline and homelessness data at the school district level to provide local stakeholders across the state with the information they need to consider school discipline reform that takes into account students’ history of homelessness.

Since 2018, the city’s shelter system and school districts have implemented a referral system to make sure schools are aware when one of their students enters a shelter. Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) has also strengthened its systems of identification and support for students experiencing homelessness with the implementation of the American Rescue Plan Act for identifying and supporting students experiencing homelessness.

A bipartisan group of U.S. senators cited findings from the homeless liaison survey with SchoolHouse Connection in a letter to the U.S. Department of Education in May 2021 on implementing the $800 million designated in the American Rescue Plan Act for identifying and supporting students experiencing homelessness.

In recent years, identification of students experiencing homelessness has increased by more than 200% at DPSCD. The district created a basic needs pantry to support students and their families and now asks all students in third through 12th grade whether they have experienced housing instability as part of a mental health screening. Erb-Downward recently mapped school discipline and homelessness data at the school district level to provide local stakeholders across the state with the information they need to consider school discipline reform that takes into account students’ history of homelessness.

On a national scale, Erb-Downward’s partnership with SchoolHouse Connection will turn to assessing current trends in identifying students experiencing homelessness as the pandemic continues. This work will inform policy recommendations and ongoing efforts by schools and service providers to evaluate what’s working in addressing student homelessness and identify opportunities to improve available resources.
DETROIT RIVER STORY LAB

David Porter, a professor in U-M’s English Department, partnered with regional leaders to develop a three-pronged approach to amplifying the history and ongoing importance of the Detroit River from an anti-racist perspective. The first part entailed co-creating a curriculum for middle and high school students on the history and enduring effects of the Detroit River’s role in the Underground Railroad from an angle that emphasized Black Americans’ history of resilience, agency, and liberation. The second component of this project entailed a partnership with Bridge Detroit to promote public discussion of the place of Black history in recent efforts to redevelop the waterfront and claim it as a site of cultural heritage. Finally, Porter used this grant to advance an ongoing bid to secure a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Site designation for the Detroit River. This included a congressional resolution, introduced by U.S. Representatives Rashida Tlaib and Brenda Lawrence, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the International Underground Railroad Monument Site designation for the Detroit River, and the creation of an International Gateway to Freedom National Heritage Corridor.

CROSS-CAMPUS PROJECTS

Poverty Solutions has engaged more than 650 students in research assistantships, projects, courses, and events representing all 19 schools and colleges. In addition, Poverty Solutions’ faculty partnerships encapsulate the full range of expertise represented across U-M departments and campuses.

SUPPORTING FACULTY RESEARCH WITH REAL-WORLD IMPACT

Supporting faculty research that explores and develops strategies to address poverty from a broad range of disciplinary perspectives is a central tenet of Poverty Solutions’ mission. We prioritize action-based research that focuses on effective, real-world solutions. This past year we launched a Confronting and Combating Racism Faculty Grant Program in partnership with U-M’s Center for Social Solutions to support research addressing challenges such as systemic oppressions, organizational exclusion, institutional discrimination, neglectful policy, and violence against the minds, bodies, and cultures of people of color.

BEYOND RHETORIC: CONFRONTING AND COMBATING RACISM IN GENESEE COUNTY, MICHIGAN

On June 10, 2020, the Genesee County Board of Commissioners approved a resolution declaring racism a public health crisis. Lisa M. Lapeyrouse, associate professor in UM-Flint’s Department of Public Health and Health Sciences, aims to ensure this resolution has a meaningful impact on the health and well-being of residents of color, extending beyond mere rhetoric. To accomplish that, Lapeyrouse is leading efforts to develop a decision-making Community Action Council that is responsible for developing an evidence-based strategic plan to eliminate racist policies and practices impacting the health and well-being of Genesee County residents of color. She is also cultivating opportunities for public input on the strategic plan at virtual town hall meetings, and reaching out to key stakeholders for their insights. Finally, Lapeyrouse is developing a website of resources for anti-racist policies and practices to assist other local, state, and national organizations to assess their current policies and practices, and adopt anti-racist policies and practices that impact the health and well-being of people of color.

“Poverty Solutions facilitated many conversations with different stakeholders and helped disseminate our findings. As a junior faculty, I am really grateful for the opportunities Poverty Solutions has given me to establish myself as a researcher in this field.”

— Roshanak Mehdipanah, assistant professor, public health

“If you’re not looking at racism as a systemic problem, then it becomes a lot easier to ignore.”

— Lisa M. Lapeyrouse
Over the past five years, Poverty Solutions and partners across campus hosted more than 100 events and talks, including the annual Real-World Perspectives on Poverty Solutions Speaker Series that featured experts in policy and practice from across the nation. Some of the noteworthy speakers included:

2018
Robert Vargas, assistant professor of sociology, University of Chicago

2019
Faith Fowler, pastor of Cass Community United Methodist Church and the executive director of Cass Community Social Services
Dorian Warren, president of Community Change

2020
Michael Arceneaux, New York Times best-selling author
Lori Lightfoot, mayor of Chicago
Joneigh Khaldun, former chief medical executive and chief deputy director for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
Garlin Gilchrist II, lieutenant governor of Michigan
Nicholas Kristof, New York Times columnist and author

2021
Eric Garcetti, mayor of Los Angeles
Since its inception, Poverty Solutions has sought to equip the next generation of leaders with the skills they need to prevent and alleviate poverty. This has included offering courses that help students develop the skills related to academic writing, data analysis, interview facilitation, and stakeholder engagement, among other things. It has also supported LeFlore’s work with the City of Detroit to identify Black-owned financial institutions across the country, review their financial products, and compare them to large banks. Poverty Solutions also supported LeFlore’s work with the City of Detroit developing the Detroit Department of Transportation COVID-19 Safe Workplace Plan and real-time policy recommendations.

“Poverty Solutions is an invaluable resource at the University of Michigan that empowered my work for the communities I care about, pushing it to greater heights. There are not enough entities like Poverty Solutions to support the communities I care about, pushing it to greater heights. There are not enough entities like Poverty Solutions to support the communities I care about, pushing it to greater heights. There are not enough entities like Poverty Solutions to support the communities I care about, pushing it to greater heights.” — Christopher LeFlore

Engaging Students to Find New Poverty Solutions

Katlin Brantley, a native of Oxford, Michigan, connected with Poverty Solutions as an undergraduate student in 2019 through the Sociology Opportunities for Undergraduate Leadership Program for first-generation college students. She has continued her work as a research assistant with Poverty Solutions while pursuing her Master’s of Social Work, contributing to the Understanding Communities of Deep Disadvantage research, Detroit Metro Area Communities Study, Proxvicer-Transparency Project, and various projects for the Detroit Partnership on Economic Mobility. She also completed the Real-World Perspectives on Poverty Solutions course.

“My involvement with Poverty Solutions has allowed me to develop a more robust understanding of poverty and the various failed systems involved. Additionally, I have gained valuable skills related to academic writing, data analysis, interview facilitation, and stakeholder engagement, among others. This experience will undoubtedly shape my future practice as a social worker, particularly in how I engage with clients, communities, and systems.” — Katlin Brantley

Christopher LeFlore, a Detroit native, was a graduate student research assistant with Poverty Solutions while pursuing her Master’s of Social Work, contributing to the Understanding Communities of Deep Disadvantage research, Detroit Metro Area Communities Study, Proxvicer-Transparency Project, and various projects for the Detroit Partnership on Economic Mobility. She also completed the Real-World Perspectives on Poverty Solutions course.

“Poverty Solutions is an invaluable resource at the University of Michigan that empowered my work for the communities I care about, pushing it to greater heights. There are not enough entities like Poverty Solutions that can provide the resources, acumen, and passion to create change.” — Christopher LeFlore

POVERTY SOLUTIONS IMPACT REPORT

Architecture & Urban Planning
26 (8)

Arts & Design
5 (3)

Business
12 (7)

Dental Hygiene
6

Education
13 (7)

Engineering
4 (3)

Environmental Sustainability
10 (3)

Information
15 (3)

Law
10 (4)

Literature, Science, and the Arts
67 (19)

Medicine
31 (11)

Music, Theater & Dance
3 (1)

Nursing
7 (2)

Pharmacy
1

Public Health
16 (17)

Public Policy
51 (14)

Social Work
59 (17)

U-M Libraries
–

U-M Administration
1

U-M Development
–

U-M Entrepreneurs
19 (12)

UM-Flint
4 (3)

Institute for Social Research
18 (8)

Center for Health and Research
2 (1)

Information and Technology Services
–

Operations
–

Other Units
–

Faculty partnerships include expert network members, pilot research grants, academic publications, working papers, policy briefs, and externally funded projects. The number of individual faculty partners are included in parentheses.

Student collaborations include undergraduate and graduate student research assistants, doctoral students, postdocs, certificate enrollees, course enrollees, and student competition award winners.

SummerWorks include internship placements and professional mentors.
university and think about how I can extend the resources of the university in a sustainable way.”

“I recognize the power and privilege of participate in work that extends benefits to communities,” said Trevor Bechtel, student engagement leader, and strategic projects manager for Poverty Solutions. “I am grateful for Poverty Solutions’ work and am excited to continue working together!”

Poverty Solutions joined American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan and U-M Law School in backing the Prosecutor Transparency Project launched in January 2021 by Washtenaw County Prosecutor Eli Savit. The aim of the project—which includes Washtenaw, Oakland, and Ingham counties—is to ensure that justice is dispensed in an unbiased manner moving forward.”

In 2018, Poverty Solutions partnered with Washtenaw County’s Office for Community and Economic Development to refresh the county’s Opportunity Index, which was originally created in 2015 to map a variety of metrics related to health, access, economic well-being, education and training, and community engagement and stability by census tract. Working closely with county officials, Poverty Solutions provided technical assistance with revising the metrics included in the index, revising the index methodology, data analysis, and developing a narrative to help users make sense of the disparities revealed by the Opportunity Index. The Office for Community and Economic Development unveiled the new Opportunity Index in April 2021 (opportunitywashtenaw.org), and Washtenaw County Commissioners passed a resolution committing to use the Opportunity Index to promote equity when deciding how to allocate resources across the county.

“My goal as an elected official is to make Washtenaw County a place where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and be successful,” said Washtenaw County Commissioner Justin Hodge. “I envision us being a county where race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and ZIP code do not determine a person’s destiny, and I firmly believe that the Opportunity Index is a tool that will help make that a reality. Since formally making it part of our decision-making processes, I am already seeing the county be much more thoughtful about how we target resources and programming to address structural inequities. I am grateful for Poverty Solutions’ work and am excited to continue working together!”

“SummerWorks has allowed me to become the person that I want to be and have the opportunity to grow.”

— Zoë Erb, Poverty Solutions’ SummerWorks manager

“SummerWorks has allowed me to start the ask to start the right questions and have the right conversations about systems and policies. We hope the Opportunity Index will inform this work and help lead us toward solutions for making the changes we want to see.”

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Poverty Solutions continues to work closely with city officials, service providers, faculty researchers, nonprofit organizations, neighborhood groups, and resident leaders in Detroit on a variety of projects aimed at poverty prevention and alleviation. Highlights from the Detroit Partnership on Economic Mobility, a collaboration between Poverty Solutions and the Detroit mayor’s office launched in 2018, include:

• outreach campaigns to ensure Detroit residents received stimulus checks and the expanded Child Tax Credit during the pandemic,
• advising on evidence-based interventions to improve access to affordable, quality housing in the city,
• assessment of labor market factors and barriers to employment, and
• six economic mobility fellowships to support city staff on issues like homelessness response, digital inclusion, and spending American Rescue Plan Act funds.

“An essential ingredient to developing good policy is understanding what people want and need and how they experience their lives. At a really basic level, this is the government’s job. A lot of people don’t have an opportunity to articulate their needs, and they deserve to be represented in the policies that get made.”
—Elizabeth Gerber, professor of public policy and co-principal investigator of DMACS

“Poverty Solutions’ work is an essential part of the collaboration that is happening in Detroit to address economic mobility. They are bringing critical research and policy expertise to the table to inform city officials and community partners of the best strategies to help residents.”
—Nicole Sherard-Freeman, City of Detroit group executive for jobs, economy, and Detroit at Work

In September 2020, Poverty Solutions published “Investing in Us: Resident Priorities for Economic Mobility,” which lifted up more than a decade’s worth of input from Detroit residents on how to increase economic mobility and decrease poverty in their city. The report was the culmination of a one-year, community-based research project that included focus groups with residents and the review of nearly 400 sources of information on how Detroiters view the connections between economic mobility and housing, education, work opportunities, environmental conditions and transportation, and other issues. The research aims to provide policymakers, philanthropic organizations, nonprofits, and other service providers with clear guidance on how to define economic well-being and what strategies they think will work best to increase economic mobility. In 2021, Poverty Solutions partnered with four Detroit organizations to provide funding and technical assistance to support and evaluate projects that implement recommendations from “Investing in Us.”

“In the research world, we generate a lot of data, indicators, metrics, and maps to tell us how people are doing and how public policy might respond to the need. Often missing from this picture are the voices of residents themselves. Our goal with this project was to listen to residents, and make the voices of Detroiters our primary source of data,” said Allon Branche-Wilson, assistant director of community initiatives at Poverty Solutions and lead researcher for “Investing in Us.”

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When we need thought partners in the work and friends in the fight and boots on the ground, we think of Poverty Solutions.”
—Nicole Sherard-Freeman, City of Detroit group executive for jobs, economy, and Detroit at Work
are much less likely to receive workers' compensation problems than U.S.-born workers. Yet immigrant workers in injury, workplace fatalities, and work-related health jobs with the highest risk. Consequently, unauthorized immigrant workers are often assigned the hardest of employment. Within these industries, unauthorized workers tend to work in the most dangerous sectors significant risk to themselves and their families. These economy and society. However, they often do so at Undocumented workers play critical roles in our economy and society. Yet, often overlooked, experiences with economic analyses that illuminate the deeply consequential, partners across the state with rigorous empirical benefits. Nothaft continues to provide MIRC and other in a brief prepared for the Michigan Immigrant Rights Council (MIRC), Poverty Solutions Senior Data and Evaluation Manager Amanda Nothaft outlined how costly these jobs can be for these families. Drawing on analyses from multiple large datasets, Nothaft finds that about 1,400 undocumented workers in Michigan are injured at work each year. Among those, about 440 that about 1,400 undocumented workers in Michigan are injured to a degree that requires them to miss work. In a brief prepared for the Michigan Immigrant Rights Council (MIRC), Poverty Solutions Senior Data and Evaluation Manager Amanda Nothaft outlined just how costly these jobs can be for these families. Drawing on analyses from multiple large datasets, Nothaft finds that about 1,400 undocumented workers in Michigan are injured at work each year. Among those, about 440 are injured to a degree that requires them to miss work. Yet despite their contributions to Michigan’s social and economic fabric, undocumented workers in Michigan lose close to $3 million, or an estimated $6,620 per worker, due to lost wages that result from a workplace injury and a lack of access to workers’ compensation benefits. Nothaft continues to provide MIRC and other partners across the state with rigorous empirical analysis that illuminate the deeply consequential, yet often overlooked, experiences with economic vulnerability taking place throughout Michigan each day.

“Beyond being aware of an issue, quantifying the scope of it is the first step in understanding and addressing unmet needs. Working with partners to elucidate and measure an issue provides insight on the real, potential impacts of policy change.”

—Amanda Nothaft, senior data and evaluation manager, Poverty Solutions

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**NATIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

**UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITIES OF DEEP DISADVANTAGE**

In 2018, Poverty Solutions, in partnership with Princeton University, began a project supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to identify America’s most disadvantaged communities and better understand the mechanisms driving the struggles communities members face. Researchers identified these communities by creating an Index of Deep Disadvantage that combines income, health, and economic mobility data. The index revealed that the vast majority of the top 100 most disadvantaged communities are rural areas with histories of racial and ethnic exploitation, many of which are in the South. Academic work on poverty traditionally focuses on cities, and this finding pushed Poverty Solutions to think about the ways the lack of research further disadvantages rural areas and identify strategies that can support low-income rural communities.

To supplement the data with on-the-ground perspectives, graduate student research assistants spent time in Marion County, South Carolina, and Clay County, Kentucky, in 2019 as well as Brooks and Zavala counties, Texas, and Leflore County, Mississippi, in 2021. The graduate students sharpened their research skills and gained insights into the unique challenges and opportunities facing each community.

This project is vital because each story offers an authentic perspective on how policies directly impact people’s lives. Rural communities have unique barriers that require unique solutions, and I believe the findings will be instrumental for policymakers and advocates advancing change.

—Maricruz Meza, Poverty Solutions Graduate Student Research Assistant

**The project has already resulted in a series of “Stories from the Field” authored by the graduate students, media coverage of the Index of Deep Disadvantage by regional news outlets in the communities highlighted by the research, and a blogpost and op-ed on how the lack of social infrastructure in disadvantaged rural areas contributes to opioid use. Poverty Solutions Director Luke Shaefer and Princeton’s Kathryn Edin and Tim Nelson will elaborate on the findings in a forthcoming book that examines the historical and structural factors driving deep disadvantage in certain regions and the interventions that would help these communities thrive.”**
“To our authors, thank you for bringing Cradle to Kindergarten to us. And for your work outlining the challenges that families face, and the strategies that we can all take to ensure all children have access to quality early childhood education.”

—U.S. Senator Maggie Hassan (NH)

“Luke, your work, including your book $2 a Day, has shaped the way policymakers and the public think about poverty and justice in America. I quote you all the time.”

—Sherrard Brown, U.S. Senator (OH)

**FROM CRADLE TO KINDERGARTEN: A NEW PLAN TO COMBAT INEQUALITY**

Between 2017 and 2019, the “Cradle to Kindergarten” authors made over 70 presentations to federal, state, and local governments, academic, policy research, and advocacy organizations. This included events hosted by Poverty Solutions and the School of Education in both Michigan and Washington, D.C., where Weiland and her co-authors presented concrete plans to educators, organization leaders, and policymakers. However, since their book was first published, the world has been confronted with a pandemic that only magnified levels of socioeconomic and ethnoracial inequality. Weiland and her co-authors consequently released a second edition in 2021 in which they included updated proposals to address this new landscape, as well as guidance on how to effectively structure their proposals in a range of political contexts. Their research has played an important role in effectively structure their proposals in a range of political contexts.

**CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONIES**

Over the past five years, Poverty Solutions scholars have been recognized as thought leaders and anti-poverty experts at the federal level. Weiland and Professor at the School of Education Christina Weiland to Poverty Solutions faculty affiliate and U-M Assistant attend preschool, while most poor kids do not, according to a recent study from the University of Michigan. By age 3, the inequality is clear: most rich kids in the U.S. Michigan families can afford infant care. As every parent knows, preschool often comes with a steep price tag. In Michigan and most other states, child care subsidies are limited, and studies show that only 26% of child care costs are covered by child care tax credits and other assistance. In Michigan and most other states, child care subsidies are limited, and studies show that only 26% of child care costs are covered by child care tax credits and other assistance.

**STRENGTHENING THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET Poverty Solutions**

Director of Wealth, Poverty, and Policy Studies H. Luke Shaefer was called to Congress multiple times to discuss ways to strengthen the social safety net, especially for families with children. In 2015, he testified at a U.S. Senate Finance Committee hearing on welfare and poverty in America. At a Congressional briefing on how to promote child health and poverty, he explained how certain auto-insurance rate-setting practices have a disproportionate impact on drivers with low incomes and Black people. Rivera was invited to the hearing titled “Examining Discrimination in the Automobile Loan and Insurance Industries,” based on his analysis of auto-insurance costs in Michigan, which helped inform the state’s auto-insurance reform passed in 2021.

**AUTO INSURANCE COSTS AS AN ECONOMIC MOBILITY ISSUE**

Joshua Rivera, formerly a senior data and policy analyst at Poverty Solutions who now is the Economic Stability Administration policy director at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, testified before the U.S. House Financial Services Committee’s Oversight and Investigative Subcommittee in May 2019. Rivera commented on how the high cost of auto insurance perpetuates the cycle of poverty and explained how certain auto-insurance rate-setting practices have a disproportionate impact on drivers with low incomes and Black people.

**BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE TO PROVIDE NEW ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY**

Joshua Edmonds, the City of Detroit’s director of digital inclusion and a former Detroit economic stability fellow supported by Poverty Solutions, spoke at a hearing on “empowering and connecting communities through digital equity and internet adoption” held by the U.S. House Communications and Technology Subcommittee in January 2020. Edmonds outlined how digital equity and internet access affect access to online banking, health care, job opportunities that require tech skills, participation in Census 2020, and kids’ ability to do their homework. He shared his strategy for developing public-private partnerships to help bring digital inclusion to low-income and rural communities and the need for more federal support to bring those efforts to scale.

**USING DATA TO IMPROVE SERVICES FOR HOMELESS YOUTH**

Jennifer Erb-Downward, a senior research associate at Poverty Solutions who specializes in family homelessness, testified at a virtual hearing held by the U.S. House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education in May 2021.

**SAFETY NET**

THE SOCIAL STRENGTHENING CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONIES

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE TO PROVIDE NEW ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

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Our communities have faced profound challenges over the past few years. These challenges have highlighted the urgency of the work that Poverty Solutions is doing to reduce poverty in the U.S. and promote policies that reduce it at the local, state, and federal level. Address the connections between poverty and structural racism and support the work that U-M’s Center for Social Solutions is leading to explore potential avenues for community-based reparations.

There is still much to be done to prevent and alleviate poverty, and the initiative plans to build on its momentum. Over the past five years, Poverty Solutions has come a long way. There is still much to be done to prevent and alleviate poverty, and the initiative plans to build on its momentum to achieve a much larger impact in the years ahead. We will continue to:

- Analyze how policies and systems affect rates of poverty in the U.S. and promote policies that reduce it at the local, state, and federal level.
- Strengthen partnerships with community organizations in Detroit, Washtenaw County, and northern Michigan to ensure Poverty Solutions’ research is responsive to real-world needs.
- Provide undergraduate students, graduate students, and early-career professionals with research support, training, and coursework to build the next generation of leaders working to eliminate poverty; and
- Deepen relationships with city governments and the State of Michigan to inform the design and implementation of eviction and foreclosure prevention efforts, child care subsidy outreach, and other public assistance programs.

Our communities have faced profound challenges over the past few years. These challenges have highlighted the urgency of the work that Poverty Solutions is doing to reduce and eliminate poverty. We hope you will partner with us to confront and address these challenges together.

Building on Our Momentum

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Section 3

Next Steps

Our Team

Faculty Directors:
- Faculty Director: H. Luke Shaffer
- Associate Faculty Director for Educational Programs: Martha Schaeffel
- Associate Faculty Director and Director of Communications: Marc Student Engagement & Strategic Projects Manager: Trevor Boehl
- Assistant Director of Community Education: Aiko Branco-Wilson
- Assistant Director of Policy Impact: Patrick Cosney
- Summer Works and Strategic Projects Manager: Zoe Erb
- Senior Research Associate: Jennifer Eric Dowd
- Data and Policy Analyst: Samantha Judson
- Senior Strategic Projects Manager: Karen Oxen King
- Senior Data and Evaluation Manager: Amanda Nethal
- Data and Evaluation Manager: Natalie Peterman
- Administrative Coordinator: Arminka Richley
- Project Lead: D.MACS: Shareem Sandy
- Senior Communications Specialist: Lauren Slager
- Web Designer: Liz Smith
- Managing Director: Joel Weinert
- Postdoctoral Fellow: Aria Steinberg
- Detroit Fellows: City of Detroit Youth Workforce Development Fellow: Chardae Caine
- American Rescue Plan Act Implementation Fellow: Audrey Brown
- American Rescue Plan Act Implementation Fellow: Cyndie Gardner-Brown

Senior Advisors:
- Margaret A. Danser: Director of Urban Planning, U-M Tadmor College of Architecture and Urban Planning
- Robert Gordon: Former director, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
- William D. Lepsig: Clinical Assistant Professor, U-M School of Public Health
- Robert Henry: Associate, School of Public Health; Professor of Biostatistics
- Michelle E. Colón: Colón, Dean, School of Social Work; Carol T. Mowbray, Dean, School of Social Work; Carol T. Mowbray (Chair) Lynn Videka (Chair)
- Karen Otzen Kling: Senior Strategic Projects Manager
- Ryan Bonman: Dean, School of Public Health and Professor of Biostatistics
- Reuben Jonathan Milton: Associate Professor, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago
- Cortney Sanders: Policy mop; Consultant, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
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