POVERTY SOLUTIONS

at the University of Michigan

2016-2026

10 years of turning evidence into action.



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The Bold Idea that Became Poverty Solutions

Poverty Solutions was originally conceived at a dinner where University of Michigan leadership invited faculty to pitch their big, bold ideas for ways the university could help tackle real-world problems. I shared my thoughts on why U-M should renew its focus on poverty — a pressing issue in our own backyard, where an interdisciplinary approach to exploring interventions would be beneficial. A faculty committee formed to develop the idea, and eventually the conversations shifted from brainstorming to making the university-wide research initiative a reality.

Poverty Solutions was founded in the fall of 2016 on the premise that data, research and analysis can contribute to systems change, empowering people to live healthy and full lives. I left the initiative in February 2026 knowing that our work is succeeding in that mission, helping change many lives through policy and program changes that better serve people with low incomes.

Our analysis:

- Contributed to bringing hundreds of millions of dollars in resources to help students experiencing homelessness succeed in school.
- Helped lay the groundwork for the 2021 expanded Child Tax Credit that drove child poverty to an all-time low, according to the supplemental poverty measure.
- Was vital to the design of Rx Kids, a program now live in more than 65 communities in Michigan and Ohio that peer-reviewed research shows is improving the health of moms and babies.

Poverty Solutions has informed a Michigan housing aid program that brought evictions to their lowest point ever and the design of Michigan's unique Energy Direct program that saved tens of thousands of Michiganders from utility shut-off. Our work contributed to bringing auto insurance rates down in Detroit, reversing the tax foreclosure crisis in the city, and designing policies that have helped Detroiters build wealth through home ownership. And it prompted the Census Bureau to reevaluate how it conducts its decennial census count in very poor cities like Detroit. **My move to serve as Detroit's first Chief Executive of Health, Human Services, and Poverty Solutions was a direct result of this work.**



I am grateful to see the legacy of this work and U-M's commitment to life-changing poverty research continue beyond me.

Sincerely,

Luke Shaefer,
Hermann and Amalie Kohn Professor of Social Justice and Social Policy,
Founding Faculty Director of Poverty Solutions

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF POVERTY SOLUTIONS



Luke's letter and this impact report demonstrate well how Poverty Solutions has been a part of so many programmatic and policy changes that have had a positive impact on individuals and communities. We have been privileged to work alongside so many partners who are on the frontlines, day-to-day, doing often unrecognized work. To those partners: we hope that you see yourselves in this work, whether mentioned directly or not. A publication like this, particularly one issued at an important anniversary, is designed to highlight our achievements. But it's the people in community organizations, local and state governments and people who are generous enough to participate in research studies who make all of this possible.

When I look to the future, I see many challenges. Already, many people who rely upon crucial social safety net programs such as Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program have lost benefits. Continued implementation of federal policy changes could lead to the loss of those benefits for so many more individuals and families while also placing strains on state budgets. Federally collected data that many of us rely upon to track well-being, such as food security, has been curtailed, while research funding is more difficult to secure. We are also experiencing high levels of inflation, which has a disproportionately negative impact on families with low incomes.

These are the challenges that we will take on. Whether it be finding alternative methods to track food insecurity, examining potential downstream effects of federal policy changes, or working with communities to understand needs that might otherwise be unaddressed.

We have work to do, and we have the opportunity to build upon our strengths as well as to partner with other faculty and research centers across campus to tackle these issues. While the policy landscape may be grim for people with low incomes, we remain committed to using data, research and analysis as tools to inform policy debates and development for the public good.

Sincerely,

Kristin Seefeldt
Faculty Director of Poverty Solutions,
Associate Professor of Social Work and Public Policy



When Research Meets Purpose: A Decade of Poverty Solutions

Building on U-M's long-term investment in poverty research, **Poverty Solutions conducts policy-relevant research aimed at finding new ways to prevent and alleviate poverty and improve economic well-being.**

From addressing child poverty to responding to a global pandemic and bolstering access to stable, affordable housing in Detroit, Poverty Solutions has shown the power of actionable research to inform policy and social change. Running through these ambitious projects in a variety of policy areas has been Poverty Solutions' commitment to making broad systems — like housing, labor markets and education — work better for people with low incomes.

At this 10-year milestone, Poverty Solutions is proud of the network of scholars, students, funders, policymakers and community leaders we have convened to work together to prevent and alleviate poverty across the country. In light of rapid changes to the social safety net landscape and as AI promises to reshape the labor market, this impact report shows what's possible when U-M brings its resources to bear on pressing economic mobility issues and commits to translating research into actionable policy recommendations that advance the public good in Michigan and across the U.S.

Impact by the Numbers

Poverty Solutions has worked with faculty affiliates and departments from all 19 of UM-Ann Arbor's schools and colleges, as well as faculty from UM-Flint and UM-Dearborn, on research projects and events that convene poverty experts.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

$16M

INVESTED BY U-M IN POVERTY SOLUTIONS SINCE 2016



BROUGHT IN

$21.4M

IN EXTERNAL FUNDING SINCE 2016



AWARDED

$3.1M

TO SUPPORT U-M FACULTY'S POVERTY RESEARCH SINCE 2016



60

POLICY BRIEFS PUBLISHED SINCE 2018



125

STUDENT RESEARCH ASSISTANTS EMPLOYED, INCLUDING UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS, SINCE 2016



150+

CURRENT FACULTY AFFILIATES

Look to Michigan for Poverty Solutions

The University of Michigan aims to be the defining research university, advancing knowledge in service to humanity, the planet and the public good. Poverty Solutions makes critical contributions in the university's priority impact areas.

HUMAN HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Poverty Solutions views poverty as the result of interlinked systems — housing, education, labor markets, health care — that don't work for people with low incomes. These systems have a major impact on overall health, well-being and quality of life. Addressing issues of economic mobility at the local, state and federal policy levels can translate to improved health for society as a whole.

Monitoring Food Hardship

In August 2026, U-M's Look to Michigan Strategic Initiative Fund awarded a grant to Poverty Solutions Faculty Affiliate **Helen Levy** and Associate Faculty Director **Natasha Pilkauskas** to monitor food hardship across the U.S. over the next three years and make the data publicly available. This work follows the cancellation of the federal Household Food Security Survey that had run annually for 30 years, leaving a gap in the ability to track food-related hardship in the U.S. against a backdrop of rising prices, cuts to welfare programs and pervasive economic uncertainty. The project was funded for its contributions to the Look to Michigan impact areas of "human health and well-being" and "democracy, civic and global engagement."



LIFE-CHANGING EDUCATION

Students from all disciplines have an opportunity to engage with Poverty Solutions through research assistantships and our Real-World Perspectives on Poverty Solutions Speaker Series course. Poverty Solutions employs dozens of research assistants each year and awards research funding to doctoral candidates.

Check out some of our students' stories on pages 32 and 33!

DEMOCRACY, CIVIC & GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

Poverty Solutions shares research findings and actionable policy recommendations with policymakers, practitioners and community members to help them make well-informed decisions in their civic engagement. Poverty Solutions contributes to broader conversations about poverty issues through media

engagement; our faculty affiliates, staff, research publications and data tools generate more than 500 media mentions each year.

ENERGY, CLIMATE ACTION, SUSTAINABILITY & ENVIRONMENTAL EQUITY

Look to Michigan

People living in poverty are especially vulnerable to climate change impacts like extreme weather, and they often lack the resources to recover from natural disasters. Discriminatory housing policies force people with low incomes and people of color into areas with higher pollution and environmental hazards. Poverty Solutions' research shows a pressing need for more resources to help low-income households afford home repairs to improve the quality and sustainability of their housing.

"For 10 years, Poverty Solutions has shown the power of bringing rigorous research together with community partnership and action. At a time when poverty and the policies shaping people's lives are changing rapidly, the initiative's commitment to evidence-based solutions has never been more important. We are proud to celebrate a decade of impact."



—**Celeste Watkins-Hayes,** Joan and Sanford Weill Dean of U-M's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy

"The Poverty Solutions initiative has accrued an impressive record for over 10 years of turning rigorous research and bold ideas into impactful societal change. The outcomes of their work can be observed both locally — in Ann Arbor, Detroit and Flint — and nationally, in policies and practices that have been adopted across the country. The Rx Kids and GIG A2 programs are powerful examples of what can be achieved when researchers, policymakers and communities work together to address families' financial pressures. Simultaneously, the Poverty Solutions initiative fosters invaluable engaged-learning opportunities for University of Michigan's students working alongside communities, learning to become changemakers themselves."



—**Valeria Bertacco**, Vice Provost for Engaged Learning, MaryLou Dorf Professor of Computer Science and Engineering, and Arthur F. Thurnau Professor at U-M


EMERGENCY EXIT
EMERGENCY
DO NOT BL
MISSING SCHOOL,
MISSING A HOME
GOODYEAR

Poverty Solutions research sheds new light on what works in addressing student homelessness

By Eric Shaw

Here's what it looks like when the system works.

A school bus driver notices a student boarding at a motel instead of the usual stop. She tells the transportation coordinator, who alerts the district's homeless liaison. The liaison contacts the family to offer enrollment protections, transportation, free meals, or housing assistance. That sequence — notice, report, connect — is what federal law intends for students who lose stable housing. But often, the driver isn't trained to report, the liaison fills multiple roles at the school or the family fears disclosing its situation.

More than 1 in 5 Michigan school districts were likely under-identifying children experiencing homelessness in 2022-23, according to Poverty Solutions' analysis of the most recent data available. Consequently, thousands of children miss support they're legally entitled to receive.

Jennifer Erb-Downward and colleagues at Poverty Solutions have spent years asking: What makes some districts better at finding these students, and what changes when they do?

WHERE THE WORK BEGAN

Student homelessness was once considered an urban issue. But Poverty Solutions' map of homelessness rates in every Michigan school district in 2015-16 showed students in rural and suburban communities also lacked stable housing — and schools were not identifying many of them.

A 2017-18 analysis found as many as 88% of children experiencing homelessness in Detroit were not identified by their schools. Detroit Public Schools Community District responded by placing a trained contact in every school, creating referral forms, expanding liaison capacity, opening a basic-needs pantry and incorporating housing questions into mental health screenings.

By 2022-23, DPSCD had identified more than 2,500 students experiencing homelessness — a 326% increase from 2015-16.

WHAT HIGH-IDENTIFICATION DISTRICTS DO

Erb-Downward, the director of housing stability programs and policy initiatives at Poverty Solutions, worked with the New York State Education Department and SchoolHouse Connection to compare districts' identification practices.

The analysis found districts that effectively identify students experiencing homelessness used housing questionnaires at the beginning of each school year and whenever an address changed. Districts that asked only at enrollment missed students whose housing changed midyear.

Bus drivers also made a difference. Effective districts trained drivers to notice motel pickups, families living in cars, changes in boarding locations, and frequent absences. Their reports were often the only way liaisons learned about housing changes.

Organizational structure mattered, too. In successful smaller districts, the liaison was a senior administrator who could train staff and respond quickly. Elsewhere, the responsibility was added to an employee's other duties.

"Families often avoid disclosing housing instability because they fear child welfare involvement or worry about immigration status," Erb-Downward said. "Liaisons offering concrete help like gas or grocery cards built trust that made disclosure safer."

WHAT DEDICATED FUNDING ACCOMPLISHED

The COVID-19 pandemic tested whether targeted investment could improve outcomes for students without stable housing. In fall 2020, schools identified 28% fewer homeless students than the previous year — roughly 420,000 children nationwide disappeared from the system as learning moved online.

Poverty Solutions and SchoolHouse Connection documented the decline, and Erb-Downward shared the findings in

their testimony for a U.S. House subcommittee. U.S. senators later cited the research while calling for the American Rescue Plan to allocate $800 million for schools to serve students experiencing homelessness. The proposal passed, bringing funding to a majority of school districts nationwide for the first time.

A 2025 Department of Education evaluation found student learning gains among funded districts. Math proficiency for students who had experienced homelessness increased from 18% to 29%, reading proficiency rose from 27% to 36% and graduation rates reached 72%, exceeding pre-pandemic levels.

Although incomplete data limit causal conclusions, the findings reflect what liaisons reported: Dedicated systems help districts identify and support more students.

MAKING THE SYSTEM WORK FOR MORE FAMILIES

Poverty Solutions is now working with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to analyze how families access homelessness services and other public benefits. The goal is to identify early interventions that could prevent shelter entry and foster care placement when housing instability drives family separation.

With Oakland County homeless service provider Lighthouse and youth leaders, Poverty Solutions also is mapping services for runaway and homeless youth across 10 Southeast Michigan counties.

"Youth are leading this project, helping us to understand where the systems that are supposed to serve them are falling short," Erb-Downward said. "That is really critical. If we want to end youth homelessness and successfully support youth in securing stable housing and achieving economic stability, their voice needs to be guiding the decisions that are made."

Lauren Slagter contributed to this article.



"The McGregor Fund deeply values how Poverty Solutions engages in community, leveraging its access, expertise and connections in service to community vision and partnership. We were thrilled to collaborate with Poverty Solutions and community partners to support this approach and capacity in alignment with Detroit youth's goals to end youth homelessness."

—**Vanessa Samuelson**, Vice President of Learning and Insight at McGregor Fund, which supported Poverty Solutions projects aimed at bringing the perspectives of people with lived experience of homelessness into policy discussions on the matter.

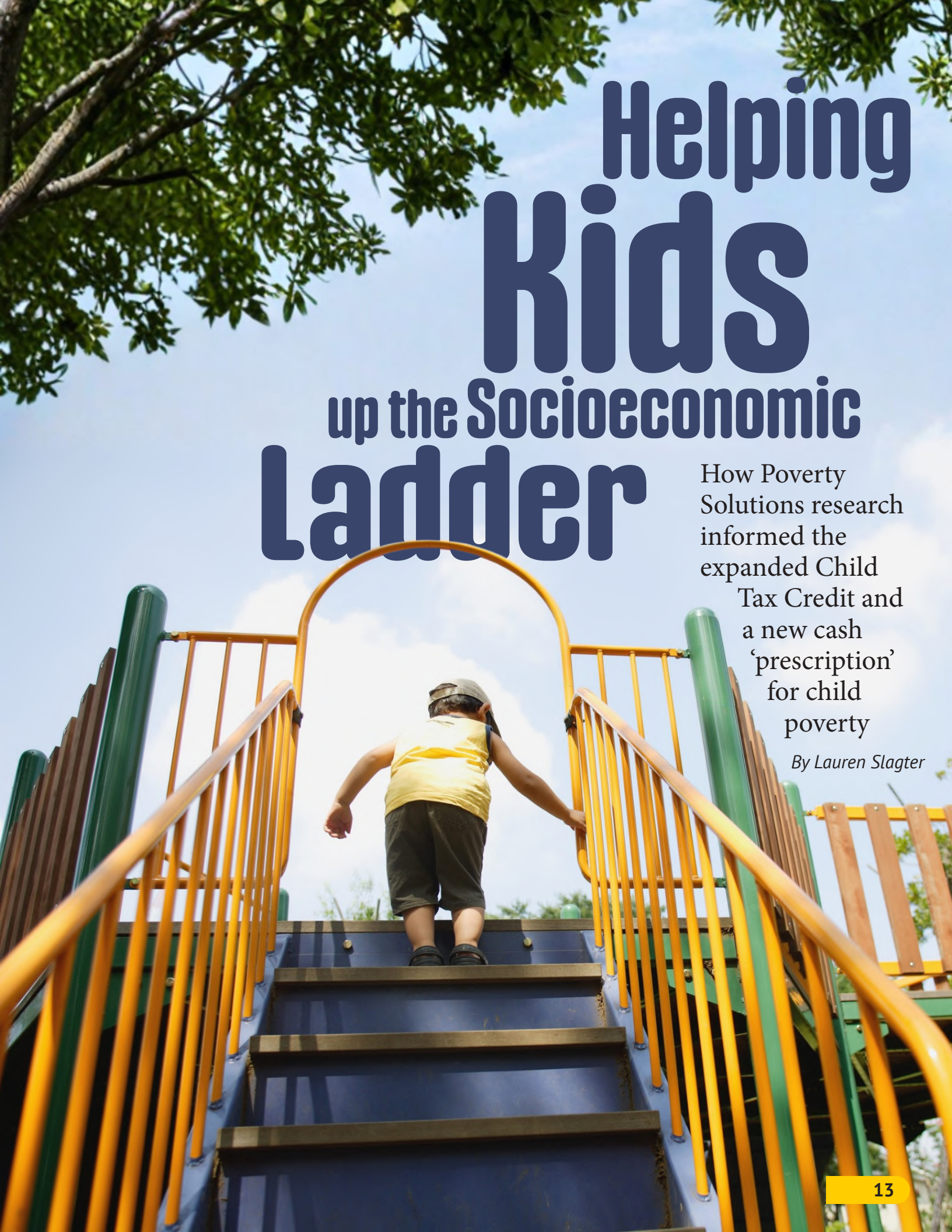
Amplifying youth voice on homelessness solutions



A multi-year collaboration between Poverty Solutions and the Detroit Phoenix Center aims to include the perspectives of Detroit youth who have experienced housing instability in conversations about homelessness response. The two organizations co-produced a mini-documentary on Detroit's rapid rehousing program designed by youth, for youth.

WATCH THE DOCUMENTARY:
https://myumi.ch/xwq3b

SCAN ME



Helping Kids up the Socioeconomic Ladder

How Poverty Solutions research informed the expanded Child Tax Credit and a new cash 'prescription' for child poverty

By Lauren Slagter

For decades, child poverty in the United States seemed intractable. Despite various approaches to public assistance and family support, nothing drastically moved the needle.

Until the expanded Child Tax Credit.

Passed in 2021 as part of the American Rescue Plan Act to promote economic recovery in the wake of the pandemic, the expanded credit increased the benefit, distributed half of the tax credit as monthly payments and half as a lump sum, and reached previously ineligible families.

Child poverty fell to a historic low of 5.2%, according to the Supplemental Poverty Measure, nearly half the rate of 9.8% in the previous year.

Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan helped pave the way to make it happen.

EVIDENCE-BASED CHILD POVERTY POLICY

In 2018, Founding Faculty Director **Luke Shaefer** and nine colleagues published a journal article that laid out the potential benefits and cost of expanding the Child Tax Credit to follow the design of a child allowance used in other countries.

Their work helped inform the proposed American Families Act, and news outlets, such as The New York Times and TIME, later credited Shaefer and his colleagues for setting the stage for the expanded Child Tax Credit in 2021.

"A crisis hit and the speed at which things happen shifted. This is a policy where we are standing up for kids and parents and saying, 'We see how much work it is to raise kids today, and we want to be there for you,'" Shaefer said.

In April 2021, Poverty Solutions launched a website with step-by-step guidance for parents on how to claim the expanded Child Tax Credit. Following up on that effort, Poverty Solutions Associate Director **Natasha Pilkauskas**; **Patrick Cooney**, former assistant director of policy impact at Poverty Solutions; and Faculty Affiliate **Katherine Michelmore** analyzed data from surveys of families with low incomes to understand which eligible families were at risk of not claiming the expanded Child Tax Credit and why.



Katherine Michelmore testifies at a 2023 U.S. Senate subcommittee hearing on the expanded Child Tax Credit.

Despite bipartisan interest in maintaining the expanded Child Tax Credit, it reverted to its previous form in 2022. Child poverty has since more than doubled, reaching 13.4% in 2025, according to the Supplemental Poverty Measure.

Without national action, Poverty Solutions turned its efforts closer to home.

RX KIDS DELIVERS A CASH 'PRESCRIPTION'

For years, Dr. Mona Hanna had wished she could "prescribe away" the poverty harming her young patients' health. Hanna is the Michigan State University College of Human Medicine associate dean for public health and a Flint pediatrician who helped expose the water crisis.

She knew families needed more resources but didn't know how to get cash directly into their hands. Then, headlines about the expanded Child Tax Credit showed that large-scale cash payments to families were possible. Inspired by that model, Hanna contacted Shaefer to learn more about the evidence behind unrestricted cash.

"Families are the poorest they'll ever be when they're bringing a new baby into the world – the most important time for child health and development," Hanna said.

In January 2024, Hanna and Shaefer launched Rx Kids, a maternal and infant health effort that is the nation's first community-wide prenatal and infant cash "prescription" program, in Flint. All Flint mothers, regardless of income, are eligible for $1,500 during pregnancy and $500 monthly for 12 months after their baby's birth, with no spending restrictions.

A critical part of the program design was tapping into Michigan's federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds. Shaefer and Hanna worked with the

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to identify a framework for using TANF. Then, Poverty Solutions Director of Data and Analysis **Amanda Nothaft** dug into the implementation details. The state of Michigan has since passed four bipartisan budgets — starting in 2024 — that allocated a portion of Michigan's TANF funding to Rx Kids.

In the 2026 fiscal year budget, state lawmakers designated an additional $250 million over three years for Rx Kids, which will allow the program to reach one-quarter of Michigan babies. With state, philanthropic, private and municipal funding, Rx Kids has expanded to over 65 communities in Michigan and Ohio and delivered $62 million to more than 17,000 families, as of September. In September, the program launched in parts of Cleveland, Ohio; other states are interested, and federal candidates have proposed taking Rx Kids nationwide.

THE FUTURE OF CHILD POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Poverty Solutions remains connected to Rx Kids as part of the national Rx Kids Research Network. So far, research has found the program correlates with healthier births, earlier and more consistent prenatal care, reduced housing and food hardships, lower likelihood of postpartum depression, reduced parenting stress, and reduced involvement with Child Protective Services.

"Following the launch of Rx Kids, our research shows that Flint



Rx Kids mom Angela Sintery and baby with Dr. Mona Hanna and Luke Shaefer.

saw an improvement in birth outcomes and fewer admissions to the neonatal intensive care unit. These results show that providing economic support during pregnancy can improve infant health at a population level," said **Sumit Agarwal**, a physician and health economist at U-M who works on Rx Kids and is a faculty affiliate of Poverty Solutions.

Research by Pilkauskas, Michelmore and Shaefer on the effects of the expanded Child Tax Credit on material well-being has been cited by multiple news outlets including The New York Times, as well as the White House Council of Economic Advisors and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, which is an independent organization that advises the government on public policies. Michelmore testified before a U.S. Senate subcommittee on the evidence for reinstating the expanded Child Tax Credit.

"Continuing to study the impact of the 2021 expanded Child Tax Credit as well as new state-level Child Tax Credits will give us stronger evidence to inform future child benefit policies, including changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the Earned Income Tax Credit," Pilkauskas said.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE RX KIDS PROGRAM:
RxKids.org



NAVIGATING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC WITH RAPID-RESPONSE RESEARCH

By Lauren Slagter

When the world shut down in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no playbook for what to expect.

Poverty Solutions responded by leaning into its partnerships to understand the on-the-ground impact of the pandemic and people's most pressing needs. Our core team and faculty affiliates focused on rapid-response research and policy analysis. This informed the efforts of policymakers and community-based organizations to support vulnerable Michigan families. We also developed community education tools to ensure people had up-to-date information on how to access critical resources. And we invested in faculty research aimed at confronting and combatting racism, as the pandemic and Black Lives Matter movement highlighted racial disparities in public health and economic opportunity. The following is an overview of the work that made a difference.

INFORMING THE STATE'S SOCIAL SAFETY NET RESPONSE

Going into the pandemic, former Poverty Solutions Faculty Director **Luke Shaefer** and Director of Data and Analysis **Amanda Nothaft** were working closely with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

That arrangement allowed Poverty Solutions to advise on the following state responses to the economic shutdown:

- Michigan was the first state to provide emergency food assistance — known as Pandemic EBT — to the 750,000 students who lost access to school meals due to COVID-19-related school closures.
- Michigan was one of the first states to deliver emergency allocations of food assistance with federal funds, thanks to Poverty Solutions' guidance on how to streamline the process. That $130 million helped 386,000 Michigan families receiving food benefits to put food on the table when the economy shutdown.
- The state worked with utility companies to suspend utility shut-offs and forgive a portion of residents' unpaid utility debt, while streamlining access to energy assistance; the debt pay-off was unique compared to other states that paused shut-offs.

CONNECTING RESIDENTS WITH RESOURCES

Poverty Solutions staff compiled the Michigan COVID-19 Pandemic Resource Guide to help residents and community-based organizations make sense of rapid changes to assistance programs and point them to available resources.

Poverty Solutions also partnered with design firm Civilla to create a website that gave step-by-step guidance on how to claim federal stimulus checks. The website received more than 550,000 visitors in its first year and was covered by over 70 news outlets around the country.

PROTECTING STABLE HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

Poverty Solutions faculty affiliates wrote briefs to state and local officials at the onset of the crisis that informed the state's moratorium on residential evictions. Poverty Solutions then offered ideas for eviction prevention once the moratorium lifted, including using federal money to establish a rental assistance fund.

Once the eviction moratorium lifted, former Poverty Solutions Postdoctoral Research Fellow **Lex Eisenberg** tracked trends in how Detroit courts restarted processing eviction filings. They noted in a 2023 study that $8.2 million in federal emergency rental assistance was spent at properties where landlords still moved to evict the tenants.

Poverty Solutions Director of Housing Stability Programs and Policy Initiatives **Jennifer Erb-Downward** worked with national nonprofit SchoolHouse Connection in the fall of 2020 to survey school homeless liaisons, which led to the discovery that an estimated 420,000 students experiencing homelessness had fallen out of their schools' identification systems since the shift to virtual learning. These findings later informed an extra $800 million federal allocation

for schools to serve students experiencing homelessness.

MONITORING MATERIAL HARDSHIP

With support from Poverty Solutions, **Detroit Metro Area Communities Study** fielded a series of rapid-response, representative surveys of Detroiters. The surveys offered early insights into the toll of COVID-19 on Detroiters, residents' attitudes about public health mandates, the reach and impact of stimulus checks and the impact of the economic shutdown. The survey data informed city and state officials' ongoing responses to the pandemic.

Poverty Solutions published an ongoing series of policy briefs assessing material hardship and mental health during the pandemic, based on national surveys. That analysis found that federal stimulus checks and expanded unemployment benefits played a role in stabilizing material hardship levels early in the pandemic, and the findings helped lay the groundwork for the expanded Child Tax Credit in 2021.

PROVIDING TRUSTED EXPERTISE

Shaefer and Erb-Downward testified before U.S. Congress in 2020 and 2021 about tax credits, pandemic relief, housing instability, and the educational challenges facing students without stable housing, bringing Poverty Solutions research directly to federal policy discussions.

Journalists from numerous national, regional, state and niche news outlets turned to Poverty Solutions researchers as trusted sources of credible information on how to make sense of and respond to the economic fallout of the pandemic.

CONFRONTING AND COMBATING RACISM

Poverty Solutions partnered with the Center for Social Solutions at U-M to award more than $260,000 to support faculty research on confronting systemic racism. The research projects included "Virulent Hate: Anti-Asian Racism and Resistance During the COVID-19 Pandemic," which became a definitive source for tracking and understanding anti-Asian racism, and "Beyond Rhetoric: Confronting and Combating Racism in Genesee County, Michigan," which provided a framework for Flint-area policymakers and community-based organizations to implement public health policies and systemic changes to address racism.

"Poverty Solutions has again and again made my scholarly research possible and enhanced its impact on policy. Poverty Solutions routed our recommendations on an eviction moratorium to the governor as COVID hit. Our numbers on eviction rates have been widely repeated in policy discussions. Our data on affordable housing projects' financial jeopardy continues to guide efforts to preserve those properties. Our evaluation of programs to sell homes to households with very low incomes has resulted in national webinars and training programs and the creation of similar programs elsewhere."

—**Margaret Dewar,** Professor Emerita of Urban and Regional Planning at U-M's Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. Dewar received Poverty Solutions faculty grants in 2019 and 2017 to support her research on ways to preserve low-income housing in Detroit and better understand the prevalence, patterns, and causes of evictions in Michigan.





What if We Just Gave People Cash?

The complex findings from Poverty Solutions' evaluations of different income support programs

By Natasha Pilkauskas



Although there are many definitions and types of poverty, at its core, poverty is a lack of income. I became particularly interested in income support policies — policies that supplement earnings (like the Earned Income Tax Credit), guarantee income or provide cash assistance — in part because these types of policies recognize the importance of simply providing more income to address people's needs. Cash is elegant in its simplicity; it allows families to spend money on their specific needs rather than uses dictated by a government program.

However, while my work and the work of others at Poverty Solutions has found many positive benefits of cash transfers, we have found disappointing or limited benefits as well.

In January 2024, Poverty Solutions launched two innovative cash assistance programs: **Guaranteed Income to Grow Ann Arbor** (GIG A2) and **Rx Kids**. GIG A2 delivered monthly payments of $528 to 100 Ann Arbor gig workers and entrepreneurs with low incomes for two years; another 100 people who qualified for the program participated in the research study in exchange for modest stipends, without receiving the guaranteed income payments. Designed as a randomized controlled trial by Poverty Solutions Faculty Director **Kristin Seefeldt** and funded with the City of Ann Arbor's American Rescue Plan Act funds, GIG A2 is unique in its focus on self-employed people doing gig work or running their own businesses. The ongoing research examines how the monthly guaranteed income payments affected people's entrepreneurial approach as well as their well-being. Preliminary survey results found the money had no statistically significant impact on people's ability to maintain stable housing and afford enough food to eat; however, interviews with GIG A2 participants show the money made them feel more financially secure and connected to the Ann Arbor community.

Rx Kids began in Flint as an income support program for pregnant moms and infants, and the program has expanded to more than 60 communities across Michigan, plus parts of Cleveland, Ohio. Funded by public and private dollars, Rx Kids delivers $1,500 to moms during pregnancy and $500 per month for the first six to 12 months of the baby's life. Research finds the cash assistance is linked with healthier pregnancies and babies in Flint, as evidenced by fewer preterm and low-weight births and fewer NICU admissions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I collaborated with U-M colleagues on the **COVID Cash Transfer Studies**. These randomized controlled trial studies examined the impact of a $1,000 unconditional cash payment to families with low incomes in May and October 2020. The studies found the $1,000 had no significant impact on well-being for the families overall, although the most economically disadvantaged households with children did see a reduction in material hardship and improved mental health as a result of the May payment.

In contrast to the quantitative findings from GIG A2 and the COVID Cash Transfer Studies, my research on expansions to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) has found a number of positive outcomes for families with children and for young adults. For example, the EITC reduces housing cost burdens, multiple families doubling up to live in the same space, and people crowding into small housing units. Similarly, my research on the temporary expansion of the Child Tax Credit (CTC) found the credit improved material well-being by reducing food insecurity and improving housing affordability.

While it's reasonable to expect that giving people cash would be an effective way to alleviate poverty, the research findings are more nuanced.

The flexibility of cash is both a benefit in that it allows people to decide for themselves how best to meet their own needs, and a complicating factor that makes the impact more difficult to measure. Because cash can be used to address a variety of expenses, we can't always track how families are using the cash. How we define positive outcomes also makes a difference in how we evaluate whether cash "works." While one cash assistance program aims to improve the health of moms and babies, another is focused on supporting entrepreneurs in growing their businesses —

MORE ABOUT GIGA2:
GIGA2.org

can income support accomplish both goals equally well?

Qualitative work suggests that these cash payments make a positive difference to the people receiving them, but the quantitative results are more mixed and depend on the type of cash transfer program. Reconciling these differences is challenging. Perhaps a one-time modest payment is insufficient to change people's spending and saving habits. Or maybe regular small cash transfers are insufficient when families are embedded in larger networks with high needs.

Going forward, we need to continue to try to understand when cash is particularly effective. Why do we find such big positive effects of Rx Kids, the EITC and the CTC in improving material well-being, while also seeing relatively small effects in the COVID Cash Transfer Studies? Are universal or targeted programs more effective? Does the revenue source (i.e., a government tax refund versus philanthropic aid) influence how people use the money and its effects on well-being? These are just some of the questions that U-M scholars will continue to study in the future.



"My time at Poverty Solutions was invaluable. As a public health professional, I know the influence the social determinants of health – like poverty, racism, and unemployment – can have on people's everyday lives. The Poverty Solutions team always aimed to address these big picture influences on health and well-being with programs informed by research that remained sensitive to the lived experiences of those in our communities."

—**William Lopez**, Clinical Associate Professor of Health Behavior and Health Equity at U-M's School of Public Health. Lopez was a research scientist at Poverty Solutions from 2022 through 2024. He also is a co-principal investigator on the Guaranteed Income to Grow Ann Arbor pilot program designed and evaluated by Poverty Solutions, and he received a 2018 Poverty Solutions faculty grant for his study of strategies to improve immigrants' ability to access health and social services that alleviate poverty.

What difference does guaranteed income make in people's lives?

Explore the No Strings art exhibit, curated by Povery Solutions. It illustrates quotes from guaranteed income recipients about what an extra $528 per month in no-strings-attached cash meant to them, as part of the Guaranteed Income to Grow Ann Arbor pilot program.

EXPLORE THE ONLINE GALLERY:
NoStringsGuaranteedIncome.org





SCAN ME



Advancing Economic Mobility in DETROIT



By Sam Stragand

Poverty Solutions has a proud history of joining forces with Detroiters to break the cycle of poverty in their city. In my 3.5 years managing Poverty Solutions' Detroit Partnership on Economic Mobility, I've learned there is no better place to look for opportunities to test and champion solutions to poverty than down the road from U-M's Ann Arbor campus in Detroit.

Residents have built a community brimming with creative solutions to the poverty that has gripped the city for more than 50 years. Despite successive generations of population loss, deindustrialization, widespread housing foreclosures and municipal bankruptcy, Detroit shines forth as a beacon of innovation. The growth downtown and nearby — symbolized by the new Hudson's skyscraper and the renovated Michigan Central Station — gets most of the attention. But thrifty innovation blooms across the city's scrappy neighborhoods, as I've seen firsthand living in an eastside neighborhood with a mix of long-time Detroiters and new developments.

Left behind by many, Detroiters have had to rely on community to build homegrown opportunities. Detroiters can fix just about anything, from the aging cars that keep the city moving to the aging houses that keep the city housed. But residents have continued to experience hardship as the social safety net has been cut and large-scale job opportunities fail to materialize.

Since 2018, the Detroit Partnership on Economic Mobility has helped the City of Detroit and community organizations identify and implement evidence-based strategies to expand economic opportunity and reduce poverty. Following is a selection of our most impactful work.

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

Poverty Solutions supported research connecting Detroit's mortgage and tax foreclosure crises, property speculation, eviction, and demolitions. The findings contributed to the City's legal action against some of Detroit's most notorious property speculators.

Our research has also explored low-cost pathways to homeownership for low-income households, including evaluations of the City's Make It Home and Make It Home Repair programs and an assessment of homebuyer education. Work on supportive land contracts identified policies to curb predatory contracts, which informed legislation proposed in Michigan and Maryland.

Poverty Solutions has documented the scale of home repair needs in Detroit, where aging housing stock threatens stability, and the gap in homeowners insurance leaves some homeowner's without recourse when disaster strikes. Since 2019, we also have maintained the Detroit Home Repair Resource Guide for residents and service providers.

Our research on the educational implications of homelessness for Detroit children has improved coordination between school districts and shelters to identify and serve students without stable housing.

FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

"Investing in Us: Resident Priorities for Economic Mobility in Detroit," published by Poverty Solutions in 2020,

synthesized about 400 sources reflecting Detroiters' views on economic opportunity from 2007 to 2019. Researchers analyzed neighborhood and citywide reports, news coverage, public comments at city meetings, academic articles and comments from focus groups with underrepresented populations. Co-authored by key social service providers, the report offered city leaders a comprehensive overview of residents' priorities and economic mobility agenda.

Poverty Solutions also analyzed Detroiters' financial well-being during the pandemic's first year. That research inspired United Way for Southeastern Michigan's 2022 Financial Well-Being Innovation Challenge, which committed $2 million in seed funding for pilot programs addressing barriers to financial stability. Poverty Solutions helped community groups develop evidence-based program designs for the challenge and evaluated their impact.

COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO CITY-WIDE CHALLENGES

In 2023, the Detroit Reparations Task Force asked Poverty Solutions to convene U-M scholars to prepare a "harms report" informing recommendations for city action on reparations for Black Detroiters. The report documents injustices and human rights violations against Black residents, including the dismantling of thriving Black business corridors and neighborhoods, and establishes a historical record of the City's role in perpetuating those harms. It was presented to the task force in August 2024.

Also in 2023, Detroit launched ShotStoppers, a community violence intervention program that empowers groups in neighborhoods with historically high homicide and shooting rates to implement violence-interruption strategies. Poverty Solutions evaluated the public safety impact of ShotStoppers and examined which elements of the program's design and implementation may have influenced the steep drop in gun violence.

DETROIT METRO AREA COMMUNITIES STUDY

Poverty Solutions is proud to partner with the Detroit Metro Area Communities Study (DMACS) to amplify Detroiters' voices in discussions about priorities for city government, public safety, economic development, neighborhood dynamics, and transportation. Since 2016, DMACS has used a city-wide survey to help bridge the gap between Detroit officials and residents whose voices may not always be heard in public discussions. The ongoing DMACS survey is completed by a representative sample of more than 2,000 Detroiters, and Poverty Solutions frequently incorporates the survey findings in its research.



"Working with the Poverty Solutions team was a gift – the mix of skill sets, perspectives, and areas of work came together to make something truly greater than the sum of its parts. The Detroit Metro Area Communities Study wouldn't be what it is today without Poverty Solutions. They've helped us deepen our on-the-ground partnerships and combine hard data with the qualitative insight that makes our data even richer — building a stronger, more responsive set of tools for Detroiters."

—**Mara Cecilia Ostfeld**, Research Associate Professor at U-M's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy and co-lead of DMACS. Ostfeld also served as communications director at Poverty Solutions from 2021 to 2023.

LEARN MORE ABOUT POVERTY SOLUTIONS' DETROIT PARTNERSHIP ON ECONOMIC MOBILITY:
https://myumi.ch/7JrzQ

Data to Drive Policy and Social Change

Data tools are a key way that Poverty Solutions enables policymakers and practitioners to make data-driven decisions. Nonprofit organizations use demographic data to better understand the communities they serve and shape their grant proposals. Policymakers look at data to direct resources to areas with greater need. Advocates point to the numbers to make the case for policy changes.



MICHIGAN POVERTY AND WELL-BEING MAP

Since 2017, Poverty Solutions has maintained this online interactive data map, which shows statewide, regional and county-level data on eight indicators related to poverty and economic well-being. Alongside the map, fact sheets point out regional trends in Michigan's 10 Economic and Prosperity Regions.

CHILD AND YOUTH HOMELESSNESS DATA PROFILES

In partnership with SchoolHouse Connection, Poverty Solutions created searchable data profiles in 2023 to raise awareness of the scale and impact of homelessness on children and youth and to underscore the need for action to meet their needs. The profiles — which are updated as new data becomes available — made available child and youth homelessness data at the county and congressional district levels for the first time, as well as the national, state and school district levels.



MICHIGAN OPIOID MAP

Since 2023, the Overdose Prevention Engagement Network (OPEN) has relied on Poverty Solutions to provide annual updates to the Michigan Opioid Map and analysis of opioid use hotspots across the state. The map examines opioid-related indicators alongside socioeconomic and health indicators to explore connections between opioid use and economic opportunity. The Michigan Opioid Map allows OPEN and other organizations to focus their programs, education, and resources on the Michigan counties with the greatest need.



INDEX OF DEEP DISADVANTAGE

Developed by researchers at Poverty Solutions and Princeton University, the Index of Deep Disadvantage provides a holistic measure of community-level disadvantage, using health indicators, poverty metrics, and social mobility data. Using the index, researchers found the most-disadvantaged communities are nearly all rural, and present-day disadvantage is clustered in regions with histories of exploitation. This revelation resulted in the 2023 book, "The Injustice of Place: Uncovering the Legacy of Poverty in America," co-authored by founding Poverty Solutions Faculty Director **Luke Shaefer** and Princeton researchers Kathryn Edin and Timothy Nelson.



"Poverty Solutions updated this year's Washtenaw County Opportunity Index to make it a more user-friendly tool for residents. The narrative summaries are also helpful for individuals who prefer to receive their information in a written format, versus using the interactive map itself."

—**Toni Kayumi,** Director, Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development

SEE THE WASHTENAW COUNTY OPPORTUNITY INDEX:
https://myumi.ch/e7GJW

Convening Diverse Poverty Experts



Over the past 10 years, Poverty Solutions has convened a diverse community interested in poverty issues to learn from each other across numerous events. We recognize the importance of bringing academic scholars into conversation with people with lived experience with poverty, practitioners and service providers on the frontlines of addressing poverty, students who will develop the innovative solutions of tomorrow, policymakers who influence systemic responses to poverty, and the journalists and storytellers who shape the public's perception of poverty issues.



REAL-WORLD PERSPECTIVES ON POVERTY SOLUTIONS SPEAKER SERIES

Since 2018, Poverty Solutions has hosted this annual fall speaker series to bring experts in poverty policy and practice from across the nation to campus. The lectures are free and open to the public, as well as being available to U-M students as a one-credit class. Over nine years of the speaker series, 92 people have presented, covering topics from cash assistance to the opioid epidemic, the health impacts of systemic racism, and the nuances of rural poverty.

WATCH PAST SESSIONS OF OUR REAL-WORLD PERSPECTIVES ON POVERTY SOLUTIONS SPEAKER SERIES:
poverty.umich.edu/speakers

SCAN ME

MIDWEST MOBILITY FROM POVERTY NETWORK

At the request of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Poverty Solutions convened a set of leading university-based poverty research centers into the Midwest Mobility from Poverty Network (MMPN). The network's goal was to shift academic research on poverty and inequality toward timely, accessible and policy-relevant analysis that engages local decision makers in the Midwest. Network members compared and contrasted their approaches to producing research, working with external partners, engaging in the policymaking process, and disseminating research findings, which culminated in a roadmap on creating university partnerships to enhance economic mobility.



The Midwest Mobility from Poverty Network also hosted **Poverty Narrative journalism conferences** in 2020 and 2021, with the goal of equipping journalists to provide nuanced, data-driven coverage of poverty issues. Pivoting to a virtual format due to the pandemic, the conferences included 10 total sessions led by academic researchers and journalists from New York Times, Outlier Media, Solutions Journalism Network and ProPublica, among others. The events drew more than 600 attendees from across the country.



STUDENT-LED CIVIC DESIGN WORKSHOPS

When U-M students wanted to explore ways to make public sector services work better for people with low incomes, they turned to Poverty Solutions to help bring their visions to life. In 2024 and 2025, we worked with students to host civic design workshops to reform debt collection practices and redesign Michigan's eviction court forms to better communicate to tenants their obligations and rights. A Service Design Weekend in the spring of 2026 brought together faculty and students from across campus to hear from guest speakers and discuss interdisciplinary, human-centered design approaches to reimagining government services.

Many Paths to Poverty Solutions

Poverty Solutions often relies on community groups and policymakers to shape its research agenda, which means being responsive to the issues that are important to them.

Early work by Poverty Solutions highlighted the **high cost of auto insurance**, which partners in Detroit repeatedly raised as a barrier to economic mobility. Data confirmed Detroiters paid the nation's highest premiums, and Poverty Solutions found auto insurance was technically unaffordable in 97% of Michigan ZIP codes. By framing this as a statewide issue and making policy recommendations on ways to limit insurer charges, Poverty Solutions' research was cited by the governor when she signed Michigan's 2019 auto insurance reform law. Our researchers then analyzed early outcomes from the reform and identified additional policy changes that would eliminate discriminatory pricing that burdened people of color and further lower auto insurance rates for all Michiganders.



Former Poverty Solutions Data and Policy Adviser Joshua Rivera testifying at a congressional subcommitteee meeting about discrimination in the auto insurance industry.

In Washtenaw County, Poverty Solutions staff helped implement a summer youth employment program called **SummerWorks** that connected young adults with internships at U-M and other local employers. Michigan Works! Southeast and Washtenaw County launched SummerWorks in 2016 and Poverty Solutions joined the following year, recruiting U-M departments to provide paid internships for youth ages 16 to 24. For 10 years, Poverty Solutions staff collected data from youth, employers, and mentors about their experiences, which was used to inform the implementation of the next summer's program. SummerWorks served about 100 youth each summer through internships, professional development, one-on-one mentoring, and group coaching. Since 2016, SummerWorks has paired more than 850 youth with over 350 Washtenaw County employers.

While exploring **childcare as a workforce issue**, Poverty Solutions' work extended to



SummerWorks 2026 participant Jeremiah Wade with SummerWorks Manager Mel Monier at the End of Summer Celebration.

Emmet County at the rural, northernmost tip of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Partnering with North Central Michigan College's Child Care Initiative, Poverty Solutions quantified the state's childcare shortage and affordability crisis, including how inadequate childcare kept parents out of the workforce. Poverty Solutions also interviewed childcare workers and parents in Southeast Michigan to better understand why care remained expensive for families while worker pay stayed low. We shared the findings with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and helped design a website to better explain how childcare providers can participate in the state's childcare subsidy program.

Assistant Research Scientist **Alexandra Murphy** and



Sadie Riley-Flemming at Blackbird Child Care Center in Harbor Springs in April 2024.

her colleagues spent years interviewing people with low incomes about their transportation needs — and yet, there was no term or tool to describe and measure what they learned. Seed funding from Poverty Solutions allowed the research team to develop the first validated measure of transportation insecurity, which is the experience of being unable to regularly move from place to place in a safe or timely manner because of a lack of resources needed for transportation.

The **Transportation Security Index** is now used by researchers, city planners, transportation authorities, and other policymakers across the country to assess residents' needs and inform transportation services.

Poverty Solutions is continuing to translate research into actionable policy recommendations, while advancing knowledge about how interconnected policies, programs and systems can work together to reduce poverty and promote economic well-being.



Detroit QLINE



"Since the housing crisis is a multi-dimensional issue, every part of a great institution such as the University of Michigan has a role to play in tackling it. By partnering with groups such as Taubman College's Collective for Equitable Housing, Poverty Solutions has helped to activate the collaborative and intersectional powers of our university.

—**Jonathan Massey**, Dean, U-M Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning



"Through consistently impactful research and practice, the Poverty Solutions initiative has been instrumental in reshaping economic opportunity for Michiganders as well as for the nation. Whether remeasuring the 2020 Census data for the City of Detroit to uncover an undercount of residents, crafting a summer employment program for youth in Washtenaw County, or partnering with key players in Flint to develop the nation's first community-wide cash 'prescription' program known as Rx Kids that is significantly reducing material hardship for families, Poverty Solutions has been at the forefront of research-based innovation for children, families and communities in economic distress. The Poverty Solutions team consistently pushes taken-for-granted assumptions about the challenge of ending poverty by enacting evidence-based solutions that make a real difference in people's lives and communities.

—**Elizabeth Birr Moje,**
Dean, U-M Marsal Family School of Education



Life-Changing Education

How Poverty Solutions is shaping the next generation of thought leaders and practitioners dedicated to poverty alleviation

In keeping with U-M's commitment to expand learning opportunities, Poverty Solutions aims to increase students' understanding of poverty, teach students how to do policy-relevant poverty research, and increase their interest and confidence in pursuing careers related to poverty alleviation.

Since 2016, Poverty Solutions has employed more than **125 research assistants**, providing hands-on learning experiences for undergraduate and graduate students. Hundreds more students have engaged with Poverty Solutions through our annual Real-World Perspectives on Poverty Solutions fall speaker series — which doubles as a one-credit course — and other events like civic design challenges, poverty simulations and policy talks. Poverty Solutions also awards grants to support doctoral student research conducted with a faculty mentor, and we have supported poverty-related research by **26 doctoral students** since 2020.

MEET TWO FORMER POVERTY SOLUTIONS RESEARCH ASSISTANTS, AND SEE WHAT THEY'RE DOING NOW.

READ MORE ABOUT STUDENT STORIES AND PROJECTS:
poverty.umich.edu/student-engagement

SCAN ME

WHAT PROJECTS DID YOU WORK ON AT POVERTY SOLUTIONS?

During my time at Poverty Solutions, I worked on two projects. The first one was Guaranteed Income to Grow Ann Arbor (GIG A2) from October 2023 to December 2024. I helped with outreach efforts, especially by partnering with St. Mary's Catholic Church to reach the Spanish speaking community. I helped onboard participants onto the study and led qualitative interviews to gather data. The second project was a program evaluation for Brilliant Detroit, from June 2024 through February 2025. I supported a qualitative data collection plan by partnering with program managers to use culturally-sensitive approaches to evaluate the impact of Brilliant Detroit's literacy programs on Spanish-speaking families in Southwest Detroit.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR WORK NOW?

In late June 2026, I started working at LMU Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. I am the first full-time social worker to be hired by the Loyola Immigrant Justice Clinic (LIJC). In collaboration with attorney Yanira Lemus, we are creating the position to develop holistic legal services that incorporate social work staff as part of the legal team. I am also part of the teaching team for the LIJC class where I have taught law students about trauma-informed principles and interviewing techniques.

WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN TAKEAWAYS FROM YOUR TIME AT POVERTY SOLUTIONS?

When we listen to the communities that we partner with and intentionally center their voices into community programs that are developed, more people can benefit from services because communities know what's working, what's not working, and why.

HOW DID YOUR EXPERIENCES AT POVERTY SOLUTIONS SHAPE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF POVERTY ISSUES AND POLICY-RELATED RESEARCH?

It helped me understand that unless we have strong community relationships, we will have a difficult time understanding how policies are affecting people who are historically underrepresented in policy-related research. We need to form intentional and genuine relationships with communities different from us, and it is not an easy or overnight process.



Nahiely Reza

MSW AND MPH '24
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Patrick Schaefer

MSW '22
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN



WHAT PROJECTS DID YOU WORK ON AT POVERTY SOLUTIONS?

I worked at Poverty Solutions from January 2022 through spring 2023. During this time, I primarily worked on the qualitative analysis of the Detroit Metro Area Communities Study (DMACS) and various other projects as needed.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR WORK NOW?

I am the economic security policy analyst for the Michigan League for Public Policy.

WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN TAKEAWAYS FROM YOUR TIME AT POVERTY SOLUTIONS?

Poverty is ultimately a policy choice and we have the research and tools to build a better, more equitable future for all.

HOW DID YOUR EXPERIENCES AT POVERTY SOLUTIONS SHAPE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF POVERTY ISSUES AND POLICY-RELATED RESEARCH?

I feel my time at Poverty Solutions helped ground my work surrounding poverty and related policy around those most impacted by our policy decisions. Working on the qualitative component of the DMACS and listening to dozens of Detroiters talk about their daily experiences not only highlighted the significance and urgency of the work, but also reinforced that every data point was not just a number but a person who our policies have left behind and left out of prosperity.

Poverty Solutions Team – 2026

Kristin Seefeldt
Faculty Director, hired in 2019

Natasha Pilkauskas
Associate Faculty Director, hired in 2025

Megan Hague Angus
Managing Director, hired in 2025

Leonymae Aumentado
Senior Project Manager, hired in 2022

Francisco Brady
Data and Policy Analyst, hired in 2025

John Bulat
Data and Policy Analyst, hired in 2023

Jennifer Erb-Downward
Director of Housing Stability Programs and Policy Initiatives, hired in 2017

Samiul Jubaed
Senior Data and Policy Analyst, hired in 2020

Karissa Knapp
Senior Communications Specialist, hired in 2022

Mel Monier
SummerWorks Manager, hired in 2026

Alexandra K. Murphy
Assistant Research Scientist, hired in 2023

Amanda Nothaft
Director of Data and Analysis, hired in 2019

Sharon Sand
Managing Director, Detroit Metro Area Communities Study, hired in 2019

Lauren Slagter
Director of Communications and Public Engagement, hired in 2019

Sam Stragand
Senior Program Manager, Detroit Partnership on Economic Mobility, hired in 2023

We appreciate the business, administrative and communications support we receive from the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy.

Former Poverty Solutions Team

Luke Shaefer
Founding Faculty Director, 2016-2026

Trevor Bechtel
Student Engagement Coordinator and Project Manager, 2018-2026

Afton Branche-Wilson
Assistant Director of Community Initiatives, 2019-2023

Kate Brantley
Project Manager, 2023

Harley Burdette
Senior Administrative Assistant, 2022-2026

Chardae Caine
City of Detroit Youth Workforce Development Fellow, 2019-2021

Kathleen Clancey
SummerWorks Manager, 2022-2026

Patrick Cooney
Assistant Director of Policy Impact and the Detroit Partnership on Economic Mobility, 2018-2022

Morgan Cox
SummerWorks Coordinator, 2024-2026

Benny Docter
Senior Data and Policy Analyst, 2022-2023

Joshua Edmonds
City of Detroit Digital Inclusion Fellow, 2019-2020

Lex Eisenberg
Postdoctoral Research Fellow, 2021-2023

Zoë Erb
SummerWorks Coordinator and Strategic Projects Manager, 2019-2022

Cydney Gardner-Brown
City of Detroit's American Rescue Plan Act Implementation Junior Fellow, 2021-2022

Jordan Greene
SummerWorks Manager, 2019-2020

Ashleigh Johnson
Detroit Community Engagement Manager, 2018-2020

Kristen Kerecman
Director of Communications and Public Engagement, 2016-2020

Karen Otzen Kling
Assistant Director of Policy Impact, Interim Managing Director, City of Detroit Affordable Housing Fellow, 2018-2026

William Lopez
Research Scientist, 2022-2024

Kate Naranjo
Senior Strategic Projects Manager, 2017-2019

Mara Cecilia Ostfeld
Communications Director, 2021-2023

Natalie Peterson
Data Evaluations Associate, 2019-2021

Karolina Ramos
City of Detroit Workforce Development Fellow, 2021

Armeka Richey
Administrative Coordinator and SummerWorks Coordinator, 2019-2023

Joshua Rivera
Data and Policy Adviser, 2017-2019

Silvia Robles
Postdoctoral Research Fellow, 2018-2019

Richard Rodems
Postdoctoral Research Fellow, 2018-2020

Damien Siwik
Administrative Coordinator, 2017-2019

Laura Urteaga-Fuentes
City of Detroit Homelessness Policy Fellow, 2019-2020

Julia Weinert
Managing Director, 2016-2025

Deandrea White
Community Projects Fellow at the Ownership Initiative, 2024-2025

Pinghui Wu
Postdoctoral Research Fellow, 2019-2020

POVERTY SOLUTIONS IS PROUD TO ENGAGE WITH OVER 150 FACULTY AFFILIATES.

We are incredibly grateful for the support of our funders, individual donors and collaborators who make our work possible. You are the reason we can continue to find new ways to prevent and alleviate poverty and improve economic well-being.



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