

Press Release

July 7, 2015

Improving Vigo County Rankings

By Kristi Whitacre, Purdue University-Vigo County Extension, Community Development Educator

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) recently released a 2015 *County Health Rankings* Report providing a look into health and social-economic data including unemployment, graduation, poverty, income, crime, disease and mortality. The RWJF states the purpose of the data is not to provide best and worst county lists, but for communities to use the data to dive deeper into these issues and create evidence based solutions for change.

Out of 92 Indiana counties (1 being the best and 92 worst), Vigo County ranked 68th in health outcomes, 70th in length of life, 60th in quality of life, 74th in health factors, 57th in health behaviors, 47th in clinical care, 82nd in socioeconomic factors, and 75th in physical environment. There are 35 areas of measurement on the website that are broken out into these 8 categories.

Vigo County performed slightly better than the Indiana average in: low birth-weight, access to exercise opportunities; alcohol-impaired driving deaths; sexually transmitted infections; ratio of primary care physicians, dentists, and mental health providers; diabetic monitoring, mammography screening; some college; violent crime; drinking water violations; and long commute-driving alone.

The foundation provides the data in an interactive tool that compares counties in Indiana and the United States. The tool identifies the nine key areas for improvement that would impact Vigo County the greatest as: adult smoking, adult obesity, food environment index, sexually transmitted infections, preventable hospital stays, unemployment, children in poverty, income inequality, and children in single-parent households. They also provide plans, tools, and coaches for communities to use to address these issues.

There has been a lot of collaboration among groups within Vigo County to address these issues and many more. Collaborators include our local governing bodies; educational, health, and human services organizations; along with many local non-profit and civic organizations. Groups including the Terre Haute Economic Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, Art Spaces, Parks Departments, and Riverscape have made noticeable improvements in Terre Haute's image, community spaces, economic development and downtown. Planning by the *Terre Haute Tomorrow* group brought together groups over a decade ago that continue to work towards addressing many of these issues.

As we continue our journey to improvement, we hope to see improvement in the next report. "Data is only as valuable as the action it inspires or the lives it improves," Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. For more information and the complete data set visit www.rwjf.org.

Kristi Whitacre is a community development educator with Purdue University Extension Vigo County and can be reached at kwhitacr@purdue.edu.