

JUNE 2026

LOWCOUNTRY MOVEMENT ON SELF-SUFFICIENCY



1 in 3 Beaufort County households and nearly half of Jasper County households fall below the self-sufficiency threshold.

THE ISSUE

Barriers to self-sufficiency and economic security are some of the most significant challenges our community and neighbors face. Study after study in our local communities and region show that too many families and residents are not able to earn adequate wages and struggle to meet the unique needs of their households. Many of our neighbors are employed, but too many do not make a living wage. Thirty-three percent of households in Beaufort County and 46% in Jasper County fall below the ALICE threshold, indicating they are asset limited, income constrained, yet employed. As a result, these individuals and families are forced to make impossible choices each day about where to live, and how to access healthcare, childcare, and even healthy food.

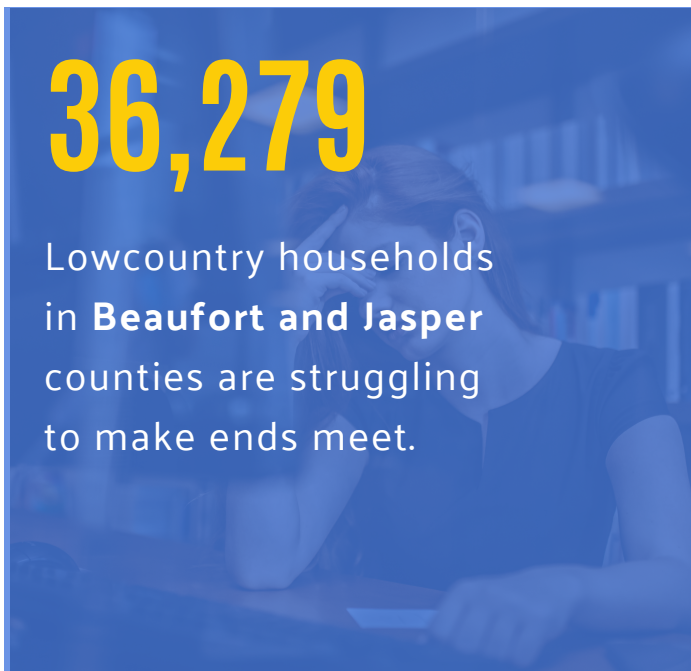
In the summer of 2024, United Way of the Lowcountry made the decision to be more intentional and strategic about working on this issue. A group of four local funders (logos below) provided the initial funding that allowed a coalition of organizations to come together to create a shared vision, philosophies, and focus areas for moving forward together. The work has been supported and facilitated by 1000 Feathers, a consulting firm specializing in organizational and community transformation. Collectively, these efforts and investments have formed a foundation for a Lowcountry movement to address self-sufficiency!



by the numbers

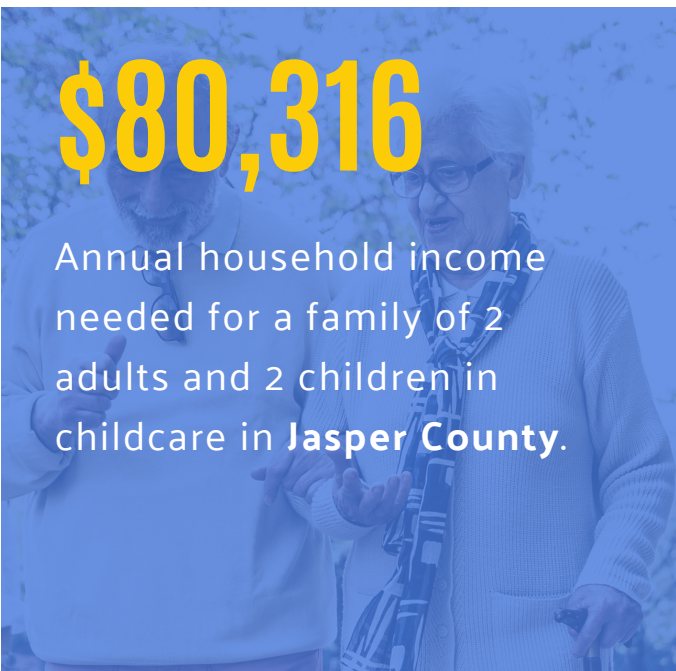
People **want** to be able to pay their bills.
They **want** to support their families.
They **want** to educate their children.
They **want** to be self-sufficient.

But in our community, for a growing number of households, self-sufficiency is not the reality.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a dark top, is looking down at a document or piece of paper she is holding. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting.

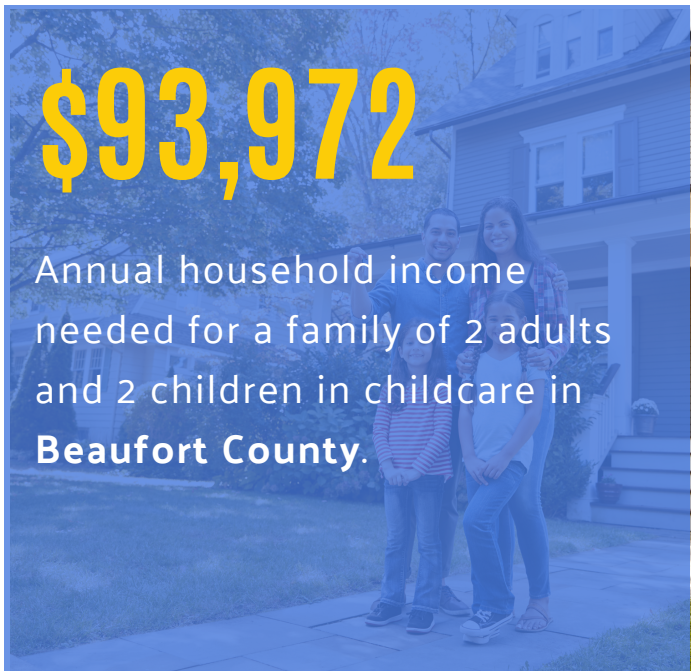
36,279

Lowcountry households in **Beaufort and Jasper** counties are struggling to make ends meet.

An elderly couple is walking outdoors. The man is on the left, wearing a light-colored shirt and glasses, and the woman is on the right, wearing a light-colored sweater and glasses. They are both smiling and appear to be engaged in conversation.

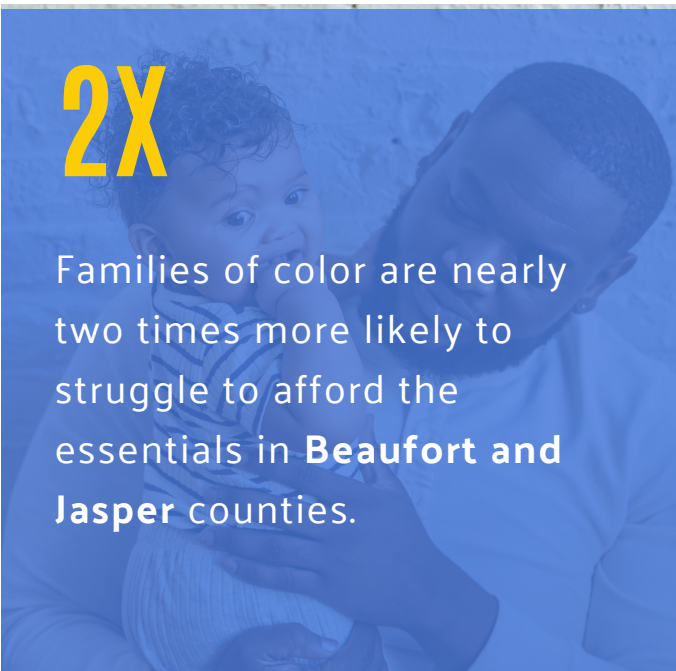
\$80,316

Annual household income needed for a family of 2 adults and 2 children in childcare in **Jasper County**.

A family of four is standing in front of a two-story house. The father is on the left, wearing a blue shirt, and the mother is on the right, wearing a patterned shirt. They are both smiling. Two children are standing in front of them, one in a striped shirt and the other in a white shirt.

\$93,972

Annual household income needed for a family of 2 adults and 2 children in childcare in **Beaufort County**.

A man with a beard and short hair is holding a young child. The man is looking down at the child with a smile. The child is looking towards the camera. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting.

2X

Families of color are nearly two times more likely to struggle to afford the essentials in **Beaufort and Jasper** counties.

BUILDING A MOVEMENT

To move forward, we knew our community needed more than another plan. Addressing self-sufficiency requires a large-scale movement focused on a comprehensive, community-wide approach with broad, inclusive participation in the design of solutions. We also knew this work calls for an era of optimistic action and a focus on overcoming systemic barriers, not just implementing more programs. All of these truths energized and mobilized a group of community members, leaders, and issue experts in Beaufort and Jasper counties representing more than 25 organizations (i.e., community-based, education, faith, government, healthcare, and housing) to come together and form a Steering Committee that ultimately assumed responsibility for creating the path forward for the movement. **Our collective aim is to (re)build an entire ecosystem focused on helping families and individuals move beyond current income constraints into self-sufficiency and economic security.**

founding steering committee

Agape Family Life
Beaufort County Economic Development Corp
Beaufort County Government
Beaufort Housing Authority
Beaufort County School District
Beaufort Jasper Hampton Comprehensive Health Services, Inc.
Beaufort Jasper Housing Trust
Beaufort Memorial Hospital
Bluffton Self-Help
City of Hardeeville
Coastal Community Foundation
Community Foundation of the Lowcountry

Gullah & Latino Advisory Council
Jasper County School District
Lowcountry Food Bank
Lowcountry Legal Volunteers
Lowcountry Regional Transportation Authority
Novant Health
St. Luke's United Methodist Church
Technical College of the Lowcountry
The Children's Center
The Deep Well Project
United Way of the Lowcountry
USC Beaufort

Throughout spring and summer 2025, representatives from each of these organizations poured into a facilitated process to explore the factors that make-or-break self-sufficiency in the Lowcountry. Committee members also helped to surface relevant community resources, partnerships, and efforts already underway that could support progress. All of the discussions and content developed as a result were rooted in evidence-based approaches to movement building, systems change, and addressing the underlying factors that impact self-sufficiency.

“

We aren't one (new) service away from solving self-sufficiency.

Change has to be collective and systemic throughout the community.

There is power and strength in this group and in this community.

”

A PUZZLE TO BE SOLVED

The Steering Committee approached self-sufficiency as a puzzle to be solved. How the pieces of this puzzle come together look different for everyone, but years of community input and data gathering have made clear that this puzzle for individuals and families in the Lowcountry consists of eight interrelated components. Within these components and puzzle pieces, the idea of balance also surfaces in many different forms. Families must have the ability to balance their income and expenses; the intersection of issues requires households to balance and make tradeoffs; and, our community must balance where and how we invest time and resources to address each of the issues.

- **Living Wage:** the connective tissue of self-sufficiency
- **Food insecurity:** reliable access to nutritious food is foundational
- **Childcare:** an important construct, redefined in our community as early childhood education
- **Education & Training:** a holistic approach to life skills and education
- **Transportation:** aligned with other needs (jobs, school, etc.)
- **Housing:** everyone should have access to an affordable place to live
- **Technology:** access, adoption, and use
- **Healthcare:** more than the presence of a doctor, this is about overall wellness across the lifespan



AREAS OF IMPACT

It was clear that striking our own balance as a community would require finding the places where a strategic investment of time and dollars could make the most impact. In other words, we needed focus. The Steering Committee ultimately landed on two areas of focus moving forward.

cradle to career

a necessary reframing and intentional combination of the puzzle pieces education & training and childcare.

housing

making housing affordable and accessible provides a direct path to self-sufficiency and economic security.



SHARED VISION

a strong and connected community where everyone in Beaufort and Jasper counties has what they need to be self-sufficient and thriving



SHARED PHILOSOPHIES

We will create opportunities for self-sufficiency through a united approach.

No single organization or sector can solve this challenge alone, but together, we can.

We will transform policies, practices, and systems to create meaningful, sustainable change.

Our collective work targets the root causes of issues, not individual behaviors.

We will inspire action while holding ourselves accountable to progress.

Our community will be a model for others, sparking a movement toward justice and equity.

We will walk alongside our neighbors.

We will forge a shared path, guided by collaboration.

SHARED FOCUS

If we truly desire a strong and connected community where everyone in Beaufort and Jasper counties has what they need to be self-sufficient and thriving, we know at least two things must be true: safe, quality housing and career mobility must be attainable for everyone. Where those two issues intersect in our community also raises concerns about the current lack of career diversity and jobs that only pay a minimum wage.



LONG-TERM PRIORITIES



Reimagine the Lowcountry's early childhood education system—through cross-sector partnership and innovation—to expand the supply of high-quality childcare, reduce childcare cost barriers for families, and create clear, well-compensated career pathways for early childhood educators.



Create a connected and accessible workforce ecosystem where all people in the Lowcountry have what they need for the jobs of today and tomorrow.



Launch a large-scale, collective communications effort in the Lowcountry targeting local government, top employers, and private investors to **increase public-private partnerships and remove regulatory barriers to housing**.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

1

Build public, policy, and financial support for workforce housing projects that address critical community needs.

2

Build a shared narrative around housing by developing consistent messaging, audience-specific personas, and community champions who can effectively communicate the need for housing solutions.

3

Identify, recruit, and incentivize the partners needed for a pilot of the Tri-Share model across multiple jurisdictions in Beaufort and Jasper counties.

4

Lift up the early childhood education and care as a desirable career pathway through the three p's: perception, pay, and professional development.

5

Re-introduce the Centers for Excellence model, originally piloted by First Steps.

6

Encourage and maximize employee incentive programs – childcare, support services, and education credits.

7

Strengthen partnerships, outreach, and navigation efforts that connect people – especially underserved populations – to high-quality education, training, and credentials aligned with workforce needs.

8

Change focus from best place in US to retire/vacation to best place in US to work.

9

Solidify the infrastructure, staffing, and funding needed to support the effort. Of top priority is adding staff capacity focused on coordination, collaboration, and alignment of partners and providers.

OUR STRUCTURE

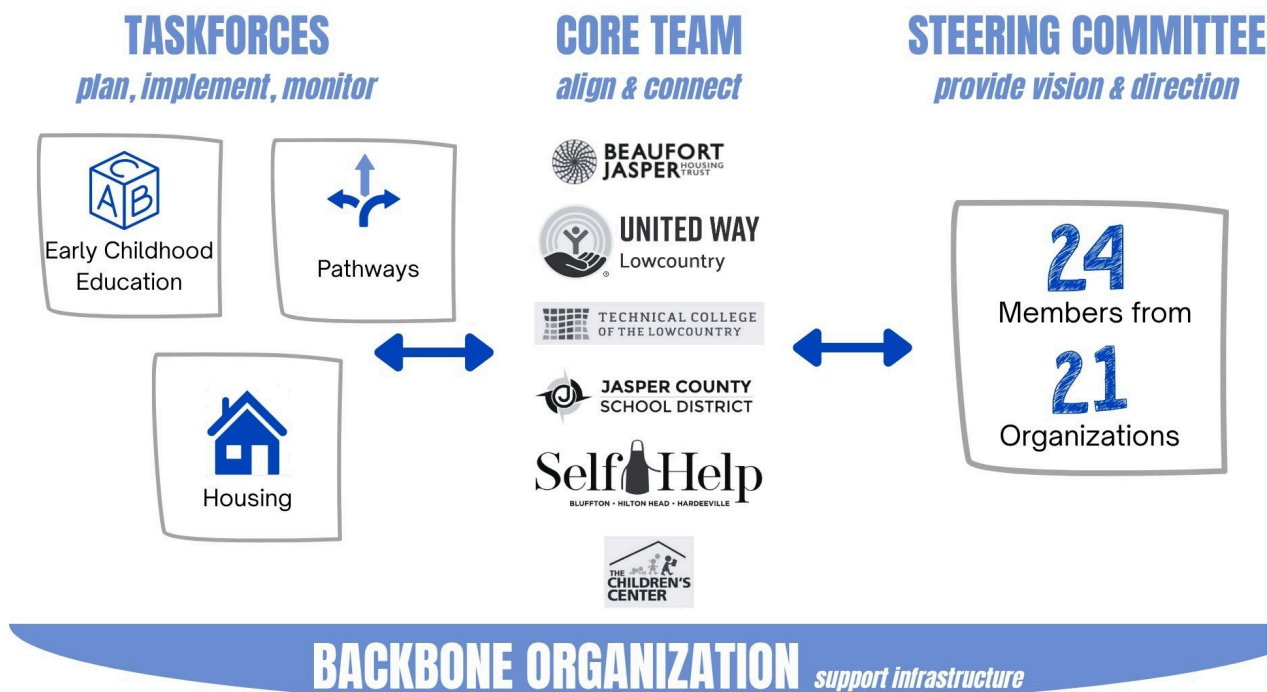
Long-term, sustained success advancing self-sufficiency requires a collective willingness to continue learning, adapting, and investing. It is important to stay committed to a structure that can ensure alignment and engagement.

Taskforces: multiple, topic-specific groups of housing and cradle to career experts, advocates, and neighbors, charged with **planning, implementing, and monitoring** the collective strategies and activities of the movement.

Core Team: a group of leadership organizations that co-facilitate and manage the taskforces, ensure **alignment and connection** with the Steering Committee, and provide general guidance and direction to the movement.

Steering Committee: capitalizing on deep experience and diverse community representation, this group maintains everyone's commitment to a **shared vision and strategic direction**, advances policy and advocacy opportunities, mobilizes resources, and champions the movement.

Backbone Organization: coordination, management, staffing, and overall **infrastructure support** is provided by the United Way of the Lowcountry. Their role also includes keeping partners focused on and accountable to the shared goal of self-sufficiency, partnership and resource development, convening, and unification.



Active Steering Committee



TECHNICAL COLLEGE
OF THE LOWCOUNTRY



LOWCOUNTRY LEGAL
VOLUNTEERS



BLUFFTON • HILTON HEAD • HARDEEVILLE



JASPER COUNTY
SCHOOL DISTRICT



BEAUFORT COUNTY
SCHOOL DISTRICT



BEAUFORT
JASPER HOUSING
TRUST



Coastal
Community
Foundation
OF SOUTH CAROLINA



THE GULLAH & LATINO ADVISORY COUNCIL
CONSEJO ASESOR DE LATINO Y GULLAH



Facilities for Business, Health, Fitness & Fun



Reaching Deep for Neighbors in Need



Whore Friends and Family Meet



UNITED WAY
Lowcountry



Beaufort Memorial

This movement will take all of us.

CONNECT

Host an outreach session at your organization or share information with colleagues/neighbors.

ENGAGE

Get involved with a Taskforce.

ALIGN

Coordinate people, partners, and resources.

For more information:

visit www.uwlowcountry.org/Moss or call United Way of the Lowcountry @ 843.982.3040