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POVERTY UPDATE REVEALS GROWING REGIONAL CRISIS

ACT Rochester and Rochester Area Community Foundation today released an update on the state of poverty and self-sufficiency across the nine-county Greater Rochester region. The report expands the present data on poverty, catalogues the growing community efforts to address it, and adds a perspective on the difference between poverty and self-sufficiency.

The ACT Rochester Report shows:

- Poverty continues to grow in our 9-county region. The most current regional poverty rate is 14.3% (up from 13.2% noted in the first report). The region is now home to more than 167,600 people living below the federal poverty level.
- The poverty rate for seniors in our region declined (from 7.8 % to 7.1%) and seniors' share of the poor population went down a full percentage point (from 8.4% to 7.4%).
- Poverty within the City of Rochester continues to be extraordinary, with 33.8% or a third of all citizens living below the poverty line (up from 31.1% in the first report.)
- Updated analysis by the Brookings Institution found that Rochester has the nation's 3rd highest concentration of poor people living in extremely poor neighborhoods (census tracts). This ranking is the same as that cited in the first report, but Brookings reports that the number of such neighborhoods in Rochester has grown from 27 to 37 since 2010.
- African Americans and Latinos are more than three times likelier to be poor than those identifying as non-Latino white, a deeply disturbing and persistent disparity in our region.

Several of the report's poverty statistics relating to family structure are troubling and showcase clear subgroup disparities:

- The region's families overall have a 10.2% poverty rate. Female-headed families with children under 18 in the region have a 42.5% poverty rate.
- For the City of Rochester, the poverty rate for female-headed families with children under 18 is nearly 60%;
- These families account for 81% of all poor children in Rochester, or slightly over 21,000 children.

"As a key source of data for community decision makers, ACT Rochester is committed to releasing regular updates on poverty to help greater Rochester understand and tackle our community's deepening challenges," said Tom Argust, chair of the ACT Rochester advisory committee.

The first report, "*Poverty and the Concentration of Poverty in the Nine-County Greater Rochester Area*" was released in December 2013. It served as a community "wake-up call" by exploring the depth of regional poverty and its extraordinary concentration. It also explored the impact of poverty on individuals, and offered observations on how poverty became so concentrated in the city of Rochester.

The second report, "*Benchmarking Rochester's Poverty*," was issued in January 2015. It updated key data from the 2013 Report and added a deeper benchmarking analysis of the 17 cities in comparably sized U.S. metropolitan areas. Both reports are available for download at ACTRochester.org/Poverty.

ACT's new report aims to:

- Update key elements from both previous studies, including poverty data for all the counties, towns and villages in the region, relying primarily on the latest U.S. Census data (American Community Survey, 2010-2014);
- Highlight the financial stress that exists in our community by differentiating between poverty and self-sufficiency; and
- Chronicle and summarize efforts of the greater Rochester community to understand and act upon our crisis.

The report extends the analysis to include data on financial self-sufficiency, generally defined as the level of income needed by individuals or families to meet basic needs without external subsidy. A "Self-Sufficiency Standard" for each county uses the actual costs of food, housing, transportation, health care, child care, taxes, and several other items of basic need.

Income needed to be self-sufficient is dramatically higher, nearly three times the federal poverty level. A shocking reality is that nearly two-thirds of all City of Rochester residents are not financially self-sufficient. And the relatively low Monroe County suburban poverty rate of 8.3% obscures the fact that nearly one third of all suburban residents are not self-sufficient either.

Jennifer Leonard, president & CEO of the Community Foundation, points out that the greater Rochester community has launched unprecedented efforts to focus directly on poverty and related issues. Leonard stated, "In addition to the data update, this report describes the efforts of six initiatives that are aligning their work and coordinating their programs to combat poverty in greater Rochester. These initiatives involve hundreds of residents, including those in poverty, collaborating together as professionals and volunteers."

Ed Doherty, project manager and editor, as well as report author and researcher for the first two reports, added some personal insights through a sidebar: "A Conversation with 3,000 Friends." This provides a glimpse of Doherty's experience presenting findings throughout the community over the last three years. Doherty notes: "There is very little shared knowledge. Even among people who seem to care deeply, there is a sense that there must be some simple solution. This seems to be the case regardless of people's political ideology. Likewise, there is not a great deal of understanding of the issue of concentration of poverty. Many people express surprise about this reality."

The new report was funded by the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation Fund for Smart Strategy at Rochester Area Community Foundation and was prepared by Strategic Community Intervention, LLC.

The report is available at ACTRochester.org/Poverty and on the Community Foundation website at racf.org/Reports.