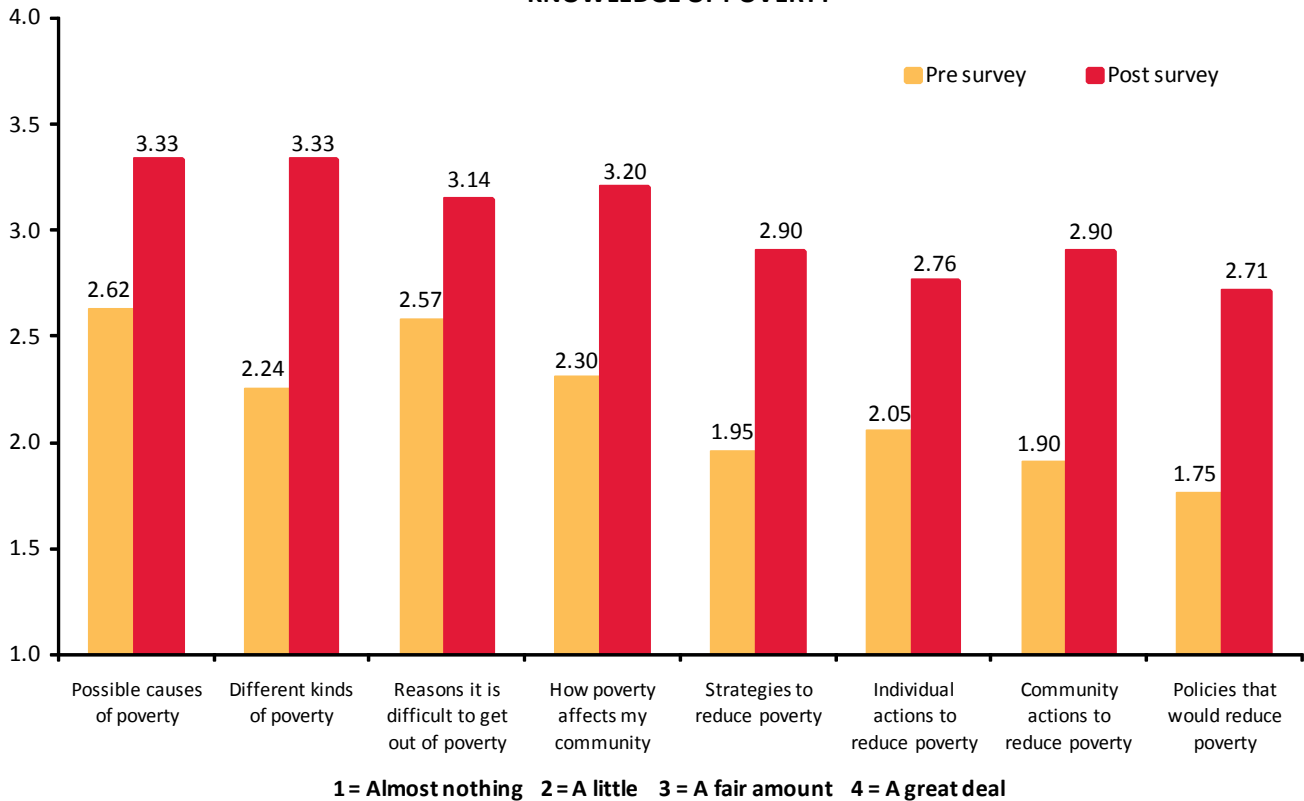


STUDY CIRCLES MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN ALDEN

Study Circles were the first phase of Alden’s Horizons program. Led by trained local facilitators, small groups discussed demographic characteristics of the poor in the community, causes of poverty, and community-based solutions. After five two-hour conversations, an action forum was held to share poverty reduction strategies with members of all the local study circle groups.

Participants completed surveys to assess knowledge and attitudes toward poverty before and after the Study Circle experience. Alden participants increased their knowledge about poverty, how it affects the community, and ways to reduce poverty. For example, participants—on average-- knew “a little” about strategies to reduce poverty before Study Circles, but reported knowing “a fair amount” after the five sessions. Survey results can be used in on-going Horizons discussions about ways to reduce poverty and build a thriving community.

**ALDEN [N=23]
COMPARISON BEFORE AND AFTER AVERAGE RATINGS
KNOWLEDGE OF POVERTY**



The Study Circles had a very positive effect on participants' attitudes. **87.0%** said they agreed that "we can make a positive difference in our community" and **91.3%** agreed that "we can work to help reduce poverty in our community." This "can do" spirit will move the Horizons project forward. In fact, actions are underway. At the conclusion of the Study Circle discussions, **56.5%** had already taken individual actions to reduce poverty and **30.4%** reported they would speak out or support policy changes to reduce poverty. Creation of a community newsletter was selected for short-term implementation. The other ideas will be revisited during the next two phases of Horizons -- LeadershipPlenty® and Visioning.

AN OUTCOME OF STUDY CIRCLES

One action idea was identified by all three Alden Study Circle groups: a community newsletter. Discussions had revealed that many residents did not know about available resources, including the local food pantry. In addition to promoting resources and opportunities, the newsletter would also ensure that all members of the community were aware of community events and had opportunities to become involved, thus fighting the isolation that can be so crippling to low-income families.

A work group was formed at the Action Forum and began work in earnest in early January. They decided on a bi-monthly publication schedule, with postal delivery to every Alden address (approximately 900 households). Initial funding from Horizons was supplemented by support from the City; on-going funding for printing and postage costs will be generated by local advertising and donations. The first issue of the newsletter was published March 15, with ensuing newsletters scheduled for the first of the month in every odd-numbered month. While the initial vision was of a one- to two-page newsletter, several early issues have been much longer than initially expected, due to high level of interest and much information to share. The response of Alden residents has been overwhelmingly positive - the community-at-large sees this first project as a terrific success, and is looking forward to more positive action as a result of Horizons in Alden!



Horizons is an 18-month program carried out by Iowa State University Extension with funding from the Northwest Area Foundation.

To learn more about the Horizons program visit www.extension.iastate.edu/horizons/ or contact Ruth Freeman, Horizons Director, roffreema@iastate.edu; 515-386-3611.

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