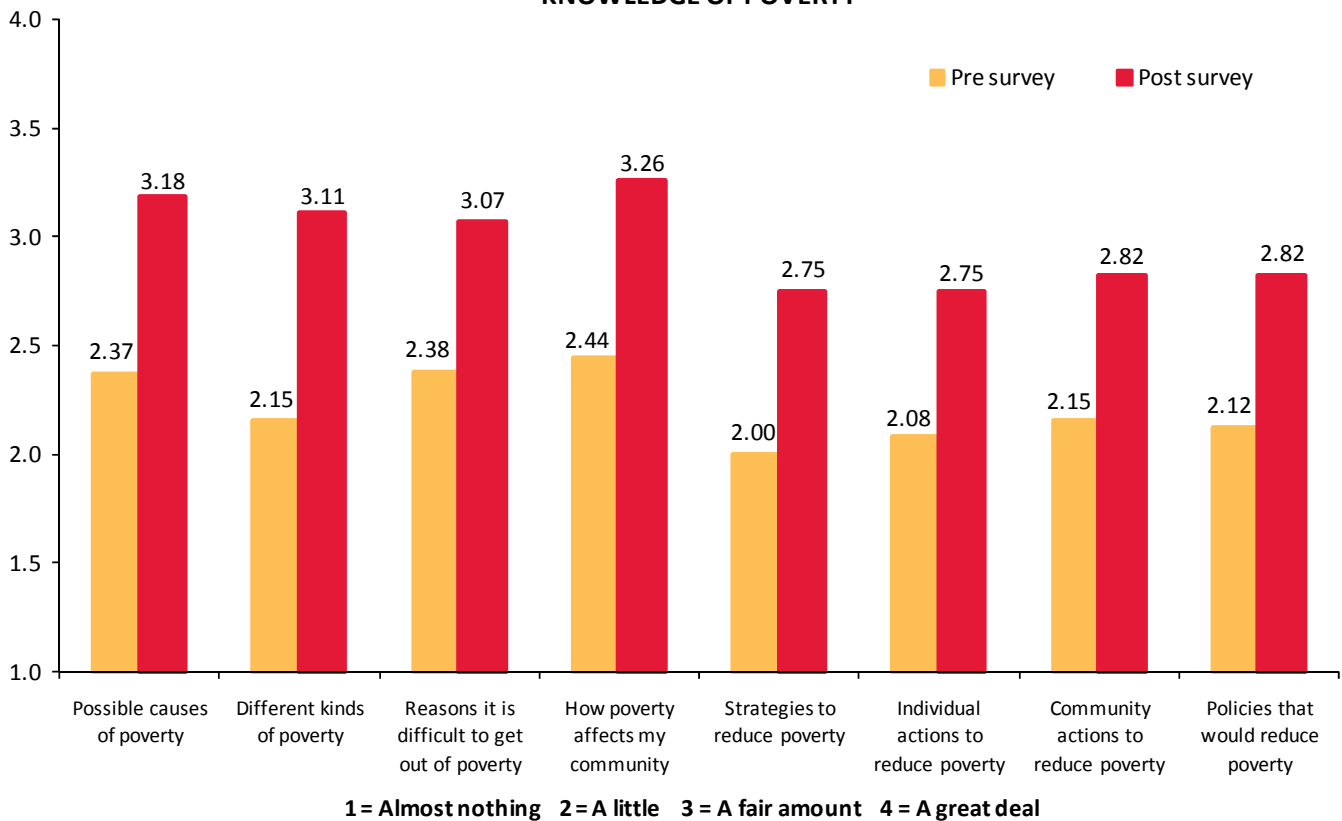


STUDY CIRCLES MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN COLUMBUS JUNCTION

Study Circles were the first phase of Columbus Junction’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. Columbus Junction 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.

**COLUMBUS JUNCTION [N=28]
COMPARISON BEFORE AND AFTER AVERAGE RATINGS
KNOWLEDGE OF POVERTY**



The Study Circles had a very positive effect on participants' attitudes. **85.7%** said they agreed that "we can make a positive difference in our community" and **85.7%** 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, **42.9%** had already taken individual actions to reduce poverty and **35.7%** reported they would speak out or support policy changes to reduce poverty. **[One Strategy]** 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

- **Approach #1 – Focus on early childhood, youth, and schools.** The youth minister at the Columbus Junction United Methodist Church is working with local youth on poverty issues. They are cleaning a local park for soccer games and skateboarding. It will also provide an area for local children to play and meet.
- **Approach #2 - Create more and better jobs** – The Columbus Junction horizons committee is very involved in the L.I.F.E organization. The mission statement for the Louisa Initiative Fund for Entrepreneurship (L.I.F.E.) is to increase the economic stability, self-sufficiency and sustainability within Louisa County's low-income population by developing small business entrepreneurs and enabling energy efficient home improvements that are environmentally favorable and lessen the costs of home ownership. Supporting agencies for the fund include the Community Foundation of Louisa County, Geode RC&D Iowa Small Business Development Centers, Louisa Development Group, Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission, Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation.
- **Approach #3 – Help people meet their urgent needs.** During study circles, the participants identified many overlooked resources in the community. The Horizons steering committee worked together to publish and distribute a local bi-lingual Resource Directory that is available in the library, local businesses and local service agencies.
- **Approach #4 – Join others to create change** – The Horizons steering committee and the senior group are joining forces to help serve lower income seniors. They are expanding the number of delivered meals and are expanding health services offered at the senior center.
- **Approach #5 – Build assets and hold onto them** – The local NEST works with their clients and other local agencies to encourage and train people to apply for Earned Income Tax Credit.
- **Approach #6 – Embrace Diversity** – Columbus Junction Horizons committee is working to eliminate barriers for Hispanic people. They are offering business and nutrition classes in Spanish at the NEST and in the community.
- **Approach #7 – Invest in community resources** - The L.I.F.E group is leveraging funds from the Community Vitality Center and the Center for Business and Industry.

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, rofreema@iastate.edu; 515-386-3611.

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