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'First Look': New report on Kern shows areas for improvement but also provides solutions

By THE BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIAN

Kern County seems to always be labeled as a region that needs improvement in all different matters, including education, health and income. The results are not always good but that's all they show, the areas that need help.

But the newest report, [A Portrait of California](#), created by Measure of America, looks at how people are doing in the state and offers solutions to improve in areas across the board.

The key word is solution.

Della D. Hodson, president and chief executive officer of United Way of Kern County, said the new report shows Kern County "lags in many quality of life issues."

"A child born today in Kern County has a life expectancy of 77.8 years," Hodson said Monday on "First Look with Scott Cox." That's three years shorter than the state average.

The average yearly salary in Kern County is \$23,000, about \$7,000 below the state average, the report also showed.

So how do you target these problems?

"You involve the community," Hodson said.

It's one thing to create a program whose purpose is to make a difference but it's another to actually execute it and see results.

Hodson said United Way of Kern will talk to people and find out what they really want and need to succeed.

Asking questions such as what are your aspirations for yourself, family and community, is just an example of how to get the community engaged in change.

"We want to work together and create better outcomes," she said.

The report also showed that about 28.5 of grandparents in Kern County are parenting their grandchildren.

As sad as the reality is, Hodson said there needs to be support for aging grandparents raising their grandchildren.

Also on the list is to help parents see the importance of early education, like preschool.

"We are encouraging parents to be better parents and how to be their child's first teacher," Hodson said.

Reading to children at a young age and exposing them to different forms of learning is vital beginning at a young age, even before they start preschool.

Hodson said United Way of Kern will focus on breaking down the results of the report and begin to move forward with solutions.