

**News From  
Christian Action Ministries  
610 S. Sixth St., Ste. 102  
Branson, MO 65616  
For more information:  
Elizabeth Hughes  
417-527-0399**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Subject: Organizations Unite to Address Poverty in Ozark Mountain Country**

**Branson, MO**—Today, Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and CVB, Silver Dollar City Foundation, CoxHealth and Christian Action Ministries announced an unprecedented community collaboration to address poverty and the effects of poverty in the Tri-Lakes area. The announcement was made immediately following the annual Ozark Mountain Prayer Breakfast.

They named four initiatives--The Stone and Taney Counties Substance Abuse Initiative led by CoxHealth and funded by the Skaggs Foundation, Imagine Families Thriving led by the Silver Dollar City Foundation, 5 in Five led by the Branson Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce/CVB, and the Community Assessment of Poverty led by Christian Action Ministries. Representing nearly 300 organizations and businesses, these initiatives are collaborating to aid the existing efforts of area agencies and ministries and unite the community for addressing poverty and the effects of poverty.

“We are blessed to have many quality agencies and ministries doing great works to help people,” said John Baltus, Silver Dollar City Foundation President. “They are making a difference, but the bottom line is that we are all in this together, and we cannot abandon those on the front lines.”

The Substance Abuse Initiative is in full swing, and Imagine Families Thriving, 5 in Five and the Community Assessment of Poverty are in the works.

“Leaders of the initiatives came together because we know there is not a one-size, fits-all approach to addressing poverty and we are stronger together,” said Jeff Seifried, Branson/Lakes Area Chamber President. “We will work in tandem to support each other, as well as other agencies, ministries and businesses, who are already on the front lines addressing poverty and its effects.”

US Census Bureau reports the current poverty rate of Stone County at nearly 15 percent and Taney County at 17 percent. Based on those percentages, almost 15,000 people in the area live below the federal poverty line-- \$12, 140 for a household of one or \$25,100 for a family of four.

“There are some serious challenges facing Ozark Mountain Country,” explained Marietta Hagan, Stone & Taney Counties Substance Abuse Initiative Population Health Project Coordinator. “In just one decade, the poverty rates have increased by 3 percent in Stone County and 4 percent in Taney County. Unfortunately, we are seeing the cost of poverty in our community and people.”

Scores of research point to this important fact: Intrinsically linked, poverty and substance use and misuse feed off each other, and their effects strengthen a vicious cycle. Based on existing evidence, one problem cannot be adequately addressed without also attending to the other.

“The four initiatives serve as a multi-faceted assault on poverty,” said Elizabeth Hughes, Christian Action Ministries Executive Director. “For generations, God has used the Ozark Mountains as a beacon of hope and a ‘light on a hill.’ We see Him, again, at work in our land.”

Organizers of the initiatives welcome the community to get involved three ways initially: 1. By bringing awareness to the issue of poverty and its effects in Stone and Taney Counties; 2. By supporting existing agencies and ministries doing good works on the front lines today; and 3. By joining the initiatives in their efforts as they identify needs.

About each initiative:

- The Stone and Taney Counties Substance Abuse Initiative is a concentrated effort aimed at reducing and preventing use and misuse. The project, launched by the CoxHealth in 2016 and funded by a Skaggs Legacy Endowment grant, continues to educate the community on the issue of substance use and misuse, provide training for businesses, agencies, and individual to identify the warning signs of substance use and misuse and how to respond, arm the community with extensive training on the administration of Narcan (the medication used to reverse and opioid overdose) and coordinate drug take-back events to collect unused prescription drugs.
- Silver Dollar City Foundation, a nonprofit organization incorporated in 1996 dedicated to preparing the hearts of kids to become men and women with Christ-like character in the communities of Stone and Taney counties, organized Imagine Families Thriving to mobilize the community for purposeful and intentional prayer, educate and engage dialogue about the realities facing families and our workforce, and increase relevance of the Church in the lives of families.
- With more 850 members Branson Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and CVB, created 5 in Five to address the five most important community issues in the next five years. Early in 2018, it invited chamber members to provide feedback on which issues are deemed most important. Currently, the Chamber is drafting a list with action steps.
- Christian Action Ministries, a non-profit founded in 1984 that operates the food pantries and mobile food outreach in Taney County, recently submitted a grant request to fund an extensive two-county research/assessment on poverty and the health effects of poverty. The outcome of the research will provide a report that assesses population demographics, economic climate, access to health, affordable housing, transportation, public safety and educational opportunities in Stone and Taney County, as well as recommended action steps to address any red flags.

For more information:

Stone and Taney Counties Substance Abuse Initiative, Brandei Clifton, 417-335-7460;

Imagine Families Thriving, John Baltes, 417-336-7077;

5 in Five, Grant Sloan, 417-844-3633;

or the Community Assessment of Poverty, Elizabeth Hughes, 417-527-0399.