



Holly Patterson/R-A

**HERMITAGE — Dr. George Garrow speaks Friday during the the United Way of Mercer County's sixth-annual Economic Summit on Early Childhood Investment.**

## Speaker: Stresses of poverty affect more than one's wallet

By **HOLLY PATTERSON**  
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**HERMITAGE —** As the United Way of Mercer County continues its efforts to lift families out of poverty, it hosted a speaker Friday who detailed the deep, generational effects of severe financial struggles.

At the United Way's sixth-annual Economic Summit on Early Childhood Investment Friday, Dr. George Garrow, chief medical officer of Primary Heath Network, spoke about the stresses and physical effects associated with poverty. That includes lower birth weights, higher infant mortality, the prevalence of chronic illnesses and the effects of toxic stress — the stress caused by environmental factors — on children.

The government defines poverty by the amount of income per the average family size of four, which is \$24,230.

And there are three levels: Poor, Near poor/low income and Deep Poverty, Garrow explained, adding that according to the 2014 census,

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— *Dr. George Garrow.*

15.5 million of all children under the age of 18 lived in the poor designation.

That amounts to more than 21 percent of all U.S. children under the age of 18; while 9.3 percent of all children, or nearly 6.8 million, live in deep poverty, a designation at a level of less than 50 percent of that \$24,230 income threshold.

A shocking statistic Garrow provided is that nearly 37 percent of all children in the United States will experience poverty at some period during their childhood, and that “Even short-term spells of poverty can expose children to hardships,” such as food and housing insecurity, homelessness, loss of health care and school disruptions.

Garrow said through efforts to provide access to medical treatments, as well as social services such as supplemental nutritional programs through WIC and SNAP (formerly known as food stamp), in addition to increased early educational opportunities, the cycle of poverty can be broken.

“If we don't address poverty for the family with children, it is going to lead to another generation, which will lead to another generation,” Gar-

row said. “I think that this is really an opportunity to stop that continuing cycle of multi-generational poverty. We should respect families in poverty, as they are doing the best they can.

“As I worked with families in poverty, I have learned not be judgmental, but to try to build upon the strengths they already have,” he said. He encourages the service providers to extend compassion, understanding and respect in their approach to the poverty-stricken families seeking services.

“Sometimes navigating the waters of the health care and education communities can be very intimidating and confusing, and helping them identify and get them to the place where they can see what resources are available to them is critical,” Garrow said.

As part of ongoing efforts to lift families out of poverty, United Way Executive Director Micsky said that additional components will include family financial literacy workshops; expanded Success by Six classrooms to help prepare students for kindergarten; and a centralized database of the partnering agencies, among others.



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