Facilitated by the Human Repair Workshop

There's HOPE in Luce County

What a community learning session revealed about the experiences that help children grow, how access can differ, and what Luce County may want to strengthen next.

On September 9, people connected to children and families across Luce County gathered at the Luce County Health Department for a community learning session on HOPE: Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences. Planned and hosted by the **United Way of the Eastern Upper Peninsula**, funded by **Children's Trust Michigan**, and facilitated by **Human Repair Workshop**, the session invited participants to learn the framework and apply it locally.

Early in the session, participants were asked what they hoped children growing up in Luce County would continue to have. They named caring adults and "village parents," safe places, youth activities, churches, early childhood programs, coordinated services, helpful local businesses, and a culture of helping one another.

Those strengths became the starting point for looking at Luce County through the HOPE framework.

Developed by the HOPE National Resource Center at Tufts Medical Center, HOPE organizes positive childhood experiences into four Building Blocks: Relationships, Environment, Engagement, and Emotional Growth. The session was led by Sarah Zyburt and Brooke Albert, who completed HOPE Champion training in 2025.

Participants looked at a photograph of a family living room while facilitators read a short fictional story about the family. They were then asked what they noticed first, and what might concern them.



Photo caption: Participants learning about the HOPE framework

In the image, it was clear the family was doing its best to manage a lot at once: financial strain, transportation problems, long-distance medical care, and the daily logistics of raising children.

They were asked what caught their attention.

Then they were asked to look again.

This time, they noticed books, family photographs, food in the kitchen, and a safe place for the baby to play. They also considered what the photograph could not show: grandparents, neighbors, schools, churches, friends, and other relationships or resources in the family's life.

Looking again made more of the family's situation visible, including both the challenges they were managing and the support already around them.

From there, participants kept coming back to one question:

> *What is already helping children and families thrive in Luce County, and how can more people experience those strengths?*

The HOPE framework was then applied to examine how positive experiences are created locally, who can access them, and where they can be strengthened or expanded.

One table captured the spirit of the conversation in a simple headline:

"There's HOPE in Luce County."

INSIGHTS

What became clearer through the conversation

Participants' examples revealed more than a list of community resources. They showed how support is built across many parts of Luce County and how relationships help people navigate what is already there.

1. Support is built across a community

Participants described support for children as something created across many parts of community life: families and neighbors, schools and churches, youth activities, early childhood programs, local businesses, service organizations, and the everyday ways people look out for one another.

No single organization holds that whole picture.

The same experience can also do several things at once. A youth activity may give a child something meaningful to do while also creating relationships, belonging, and a safe place to spend time. A neighbor may care for a child directly, connect a parent to information, or know the person who can help with something the family needs.

This is part of what makes community capacity difficult to see if we look only at programs or organizations. **Some of Luce County's capacity lives in the connections among people, places, and resources.**

That matters for what comes next. Strengthening positive experiences for children may not always require creating something new. In some cases, the opportunity may be to make what already exists easier to connect, navigate, and use.

2. Relationships are part of how access works

As participants looked more closely at access, another pattern became visible.

Relationships in Luce County provide care and belonging, but they also help people find their way to other forms of support.

Someone who knows the community may know which program to call, who has reliable information, where to ask for help, or which person can make the next connection. In a place where information often travels person to person, **relationships become part of the pathway to resources.**

That is a meaningful strength. It also raises an important question about who can benefit from it.

During the access discussion, participants considered who could easily reach the positive experiences they had identified, who might have a harder time, and whose perspective was missing from the room. The conversation surfaced a distinction that matters: **a resource can exist in a community without being equally reachable by everyone.**

For someone who has lived in the community for years and knows who to ask, the path may be relatively clear. For someone who is new, less connected, or simply outside the usual flow of information, the same community can be much harder to navigate. That concern also came through in the post-training debrief, where facilitators reflected on how strongly access in the area can depend on word of mouth and existing relationships.

THE QUESTION

How does someone find what is already here when they do not yet know who to ask?

Questions for further consideration

The session surfaced several questions that may be useful as Luce County continues to apply the HOPE framework. Together, they invite a closer look at what children experience, what shapes access to those experiences, and what would help existing strengths reach more families.

1. **What should no child have to be lucky to experience?**
2. **What makes positive experiences easier for some children to reach than others?**
3. **What turns an available resource into something a family can actually use?**
4. **What would make positive experiences more dependable, not accidental?**
5. **What are children learning about whether they belong from the way our community is organized around them?**
6. **Where could stronger connections between the people, programs, and places already here create something better for children?**

CONNECT WITH US

Continue the conversation

If your organization or community wants to use HOPE to look more closely at what is already working, who can access it, or where there may be room to strengthen what exists, Human Repair Workshop can help.

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ABOUT THE HUMAN REPAIR WORKSHOP

We help organizations strengthen the people, relationships, and conditions their work depends on so they can act on what matters, adapt when circumstances change, and sustain progress over time.

Meaningful change depends on more than a good idea, strategy, or plan. It also depends on what people and organizations are actually able to do. Human Repair Workshop approaches change as a question of capacity. We look at what is happening within people, between people, and around them to understand what is supporting the work and what may be getting in the way.

Our work can take the form of training, facilitation, strategic planning, community learning, or implementation support. We start by listening to what people already know, then help turn that understanding into next steps.