

Press Release

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Contact

Karl Graham

Alternatives Federal Credit Union
Director of Community Programs and Outreach
125 N. Fulton St.
Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 216-3422
kgraham@alternatives.org

For Immediate Release

Ithaca NY - Alternatives Federal Credit Union announces 2017 Living Wage

How much does it cost to live in Tompkins County? According to Alternatives Federal Credit Union's biennial Living Wage Study, a single person working full time would have to make \$28,911.84 a year, or \$13.90 per hour 40 hours a week.

At its August 24 meeting, Alternatives' Board of Directors will vote on whether to raise starting wages for Alternatives' staff to the new Living Wage.

The updated study looks at housing, transportation, healthcare, and other necessities, as well as allocating a modest allowance for recreation and savings. The 2017 Living Wage figure is an increase of 0.9% from \$13.77 per hour two years ago. Two categories increased over 10% from the previous study: Communication increased 11.6% and misc. increased 10.6%. Payroll, federal and state taxes increased .9%, .5% and 2.7%. Health care increased a relatively modest 6.0%.

The rate of \$13.90 per hour represents the Living Wage for an individual whose employer provides health insurance. For employers that don't offer health insurance, a rate of \$15.11 per hour (\$1.21 more) would be needed to allow their employees to purchase the Silver Plan through NYS Health Insurance Exchange/Marketplace.

Returning to the same sources used in prior Living Wage studies, Arabella Hartino, Blake Terry, and Liam Terry, students at the Northern Light Home School Cooperative, supervised by Alison Christie worked with Karl Graham, Alternatives' Director of Community Programs and Outreach to update the study.

In 2017, members of the Living Wage Task Force, including Alternatives, the Tompkins County Workers' Center and Just Consulting conducted a brand new study to discover for the first time how the voluntary Employer Certification Program affects its workforce and who makes up that workforce. The Alternatives Fund of Ithaca, Inc., hired Just Consulting to compile and report on the study.

Tammy S. Drost Director of Brand Marketing

t: (607) 216-3454 **f:** (607) 277-6391 **e:** tdrost@alternatives.org
125 N. Fulton Street, Ithaca, NY 14850

Responding businesses who participated in Workforce Survey Certified Living Wage Workforce Study include:

Advocacy Center of Tompkins County • Alcohol & Drug Council of Tompkins County • Alternatives Federal Credit Union • Autumn Leaves Used Books • Brightworks Computer Consulting • Cancer Resource Center of the Finger Lakes • Catholic Charities of Tompkins and Tioga Counties • Center for Transformative Action • Child Development Council of Tompkins County • City of Ithaca • Colonial Veterinary Hospital • Community Dispute Resolution Center, Inc. • Community Foundation of Tompkins County • Community Nursery School of Cayuga Heights • Community Science Institute • Cornell Child Care Center • Court St. Chiropractic of Ithaca • Family & Children's Service of Ithaca • Finger Lakes ReUse, Inc. • First Unitarian Society of Ithaca • Friendship Donations Network, Inc. • Home Green Home, Inc. • Ithaca Carshare • Ithaca Downtown Business Improvement District, Inc. dba Downtown Ithaca Alliance • Ithaca Health Alliance • Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services • Ithaca Oral Surgery and Implant Center • Ithaca Teachers Association • Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency • IthacaMed • Loaves and Fishes • McBooks Press, Inc • Miller Mayer, LLP • Multicultural Resource Center • Namaste Montessori School • OAR - Opportunities, Alternatives, and Resources of Tompkins County • Ongweoweh Corporation • Planned Parenthood of the Southern Finger Lakes • Shaw & Murphy • St. John's Episcopal Church • Stone Quarry House • Strebel Planning Group • Taitem Engineering, P.C. • The Frame Shop • Tiny Timber, LLC • Tompkins County Public Library • TRC Energy Services • Trumansburg Community Nursery School • United Auto Workers Local 2300 • Village of Cayuga Heights • Viridias Property • Weaver Wind Energy

Karl Graham, Director of Community Relations and Development at Alternatives, announced the updated figures that represent a Living Wage for the Tompkins County area. Joining Graham on the panel at Alternatives on August 18 were:

Eric Levine, Acting CEO and General Counsel, Alternatives Federal Credit Union, is “very proud that Alternatives has been a community leader around Living Wage.” He believes that the Living Wage Study is very close to the heart of Alternatives’ mission to build wealth and create economic opportunity for underserved communities. He says, “Making sure the Living Wage is updated and shared with the entire community was an innovation, and it is now a tradition of which we are rightfully proud. We hope the employers in the community will take the responsibility to pay a Living Wage.”

Megan Ward, a Living Wage employee at Alternatives Federal Credit Union, meanwhile, indicates that the Living Wage has increased her pay as well as made some significant differences in the necessities that she and her family can afford. She also notes that she has been able to pay off debt that she would have never been able to before. Megan is excited that her family is looking now into buying their first home, which has never been a thought before. She said, “It’s been amazing to think that I can start saving now for my children’s education and I’m proud to work for an employer that pays a Living Wage.”

Pete Meyers is the Coordinator and one of the founders of the Tompkins County Workers’ Center, which certifies Living Wage Employers. Pete’s experience is that some believe paying a Living Wage is too complicated or it’s too difficult: “But you know what’s really complicated and difficult? Trying to live and raise a family on \$9.70 an hour, which is our present Minimum Wage in Upstate New York.” He adds that “The bottom line is that we as a community and county can no longer accept the wages that leave some unable to support themselves and their families while many others flourish and become rich at the expense of their workers. The time to make the Minimum Wage a Living Wage in Tompkins County is now.”

Rob Brown is the Office Manager/Development Associate of Tompkins County Workers’ Center and worked on the 2017 Certified Living Wage Workforce Study. About the study’s results, he says, “In the breakdown of people who responded to the survey, just a bit less than half of the Living Wage workforce has, by seeking employment with a Certified Living Wage Employer, moved themselves up to a Living Wage and the ability to create a frugally self-sufficient standard of living.”

Deb Dietrich, Executive Director of OAR, which is a small not for profit that works with formerly incarcerated people, is proud that her organization is a Certified Living Wage Employer. She says, “A living wage has reduced [OAR’s] turnover, has increased morale, and creates a sense of community that isn’t there frequently when people are paid less for their work.” While speaking about the perceived issues of paying a Living Wage, such as wage compression, Deb was firmly in support of the Living Wage. She says: “I think that the huge wage inequality [that we have in the United States] is unsustainable in a democracy.”