

2015
COMMUNITY
NEEDS
ASSESSMENT



INTRODUCTION

District 7 Human Resources Development Council (HRDC) administers programs in a five county service area. The focus of all programming and service delivery is to stabilize families, build self-sufficiency, and to strengthen communities by encouraging collaboration. Through its mission, HRDC serves to “empower people in need by mobilizing and developing community resources to create opportunities for success” in Big Horn, Carbon, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, and Yellowstone counties. An estimated 154,000 or 15.2 percent of Montanans live at or below the poverty line. Montana ranks 42nd in the nation for number of low-income working families, 47th for low-income minority working families, 41st for children living in low-income working families, and 42nd for jobs in occupations paying below poverty level wages. Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) requires that Community Action Agencies receiving this stream of funding conduct a community needs assessment every two years. The last needs assessment was completed in 2013. The results of the 2015 Needs Assessment Survey provide an accounting of current community needs and an evaluation tool for each agency to gauge the effectiveness of their current programs. The results of the Needs Assessment helps to identify areas where services are needed but not currently provided, to eliminate services no longer necessary, and to introduce new and or modified services as community requirements dictate. Most importantly, these data provides the basis for the Agency Work Plan. The HRDC Work Plan is not only tied to CSBG, but to the entire scope of programs, services, and activities administered by this agency.

SERVICE AREA PROFILE

The five counties served by HRDC, which include Big Horn, Carbon, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, and Yellowstone, are referred to as Community Action Agency service area. Based on 2013 U.S. Census estimates, the population for the service area is 186,034 with an average household income of \$46,230. These income estimates are skewed by the high wages earned in the mining industry, primarily by workers from Yellowstone and Stillwater counties. Average mining incomes can extend well into the middle \$150,000 range. These high wages increase income averages for the entire service area.

Data Set	Demographic	MONTANA	Big Horn	Carbon	Stillwater	Sweet Grass	Yellowstone
Population	Total Population (2013)	1,014,864	12,939	10,126	9,173	3,640	150,156
	Population under age 18	223,981	4299	1967	1997	913	35,521
	Children under age 5	61,272	1345	430	433	156	10,026
	Children ages 5-13	112,653	2244	986	1082	450	18,538
	Children ages 14-17	50,056	772	539	516	211	7,808
Race/Ethnicity	White	89.50%	4321	9813	8867	3498	135,668
	Black	0.60%	0	9	21	0	827
	Native American	6.50%	8159	6	55	0	6078
	Asian	0.80%	70	30	18	47	1122
	Hispanic	3.30%	578	217	239	61	7328
	Median age in years	40	30	49	47	47	38
Social and Economic	Median household income (2012)	\$46,230	\$36,803	\$47,030	\$53,533	\$44,179	\$50,608
	Unemployment rate (Dec. 2014)	4.20%	8.50%	3.50%	3.80%	2.20%	3%
	100% Fed. Poverty Level (2013)	15.20%	25.50%	11.10%	7.80%	13.50%	12.30%
	Families receiving TANF benefits (2012)	3282	384	11	12	3	515
	Receiving Child Care scholarships (July 2013 - June 2014)	\$20,291,475.69	\$268,738.66	\$101,249.43	\$30,342.07	\$7,227.56	\$6,000,816.35
	Families	5636	114	17	23	5	1372
	Children	8612	187	38	32	8	2199

METHODOLOGY

The 2015 HRDC Needs Assessment Survey is a key component of the (ROMA) Results Oriented Management and Accountability Modeling Cycle. ROMA Modeling is paramount to the planning and evaluation process and is tied to the 6 national goals established by CSBG. Based upon community needs, specific measurable outcomes are identified and tracked to determine progress toward established goals and benchmarks. As noted, the goals of the agency work plan are identified by the Community Needs Assessment. All outcomes are measured based upon three primary areas that include self sufficiency, family stability, and community revitalization. Collected data is both quantitative and qualitative in nature. These six national goals established in 1996 by the CSBG Monitoring and Assessment Task Force have been the focus of all community action for the last 19 years. They are:

- Goal 1 Self-sufficiency
- Goal 2 Community revitalization
- Goal 3 Community ownership and pride
- Goal 4 Partnerships among supporters and providers of services
- Goal 5 Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results
- Goal 6 Strengthen families and communities

As part of the comprehensive needs assessment for the CSBG, HRDC collected data from a broad population of residents, organizations, clients receiving services, and businesses in Big Horn, Carbon, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, and Yellowstone counties. In addition, surveys were distributed to community partners, other non-profit organizations, Office of Public Assistance (OPA), senior centers, and at Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) tax preparation sites. HRDC case managers were requested to administer the survey if a client required assistance.

The survey instrument was dramatically modified from its 2013 version and questions were consolidated from 58 to 43 in number. All questions were validated and tested for reliability with the input of the executive team, directors, program managers, and HRDC staff. Unlike the 2013 survey, the 2015 Needs Assessment form is available both on-line at the HRDC website home page, www.hrdc7.org, and as hard copy. Survey Monkey was utilized as the primary software designed to collect, compile, and process data. Hard copy survey data was entered into the Survey Monkey database for processing. The average completion time for the online survey was less than 10 minutes. Four primary goals are the focus of the 2015 HRDC Needs Assessment Survey. They are:

1. Identify and quantify individual and/or family needs based upon program area
2. Identify gaps in current program services, and or eliminate services no longer relevant or needed
3. Identify barriers to self-sufficiency by program area, and add, eliminate, or modify services as required
4. Identify strategies for overcoming barriers to self-sufficiency with innovative programming.

The design of the survey categorized questions into primary cells that included: demographics, housing, transportation, employment, childcare and youth services, eldercare, food programs, health and well-being, and family and community services. The Survey opened on February 16, 2015 and closed on March 9, 2015.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In previous needs assessment surveys collected data was compiled and reported as a descriptive study. In questions where multiple responses are applicable, distribution of data is reported by the number of individuals responding to that specific option. All questions were designed as multiple-choice. Some included drop down menus to insert answers not listed in the question.

Data will be extrapolated and discussed by the primary categories. These categories include:

- Demographics
- Housing
- Transportation
- Employment
- Childcare and youth services
- Eldercare
- Food programs
- Money management
- Health and well-being
- Family and community services

The following pages summarize the information collected from the questionnaire completed by 385 respondents from February 16th through March 9th, 2015.



CONCLUSIONS

DEMOGRAPHICS

While Montana median income levels have increased from \$44,011 to \$46,230 between 2011 and 2013, the percentage of Montanans living at the poverty level has also increased from just above 14 percent to an average of 15.2 percent. As an extreme, Big Horn County has over 25 percent of its population living at or below the poverty level. While unemployment has steadily decreased in Montana, and income levels have increased across the state, poverty has actually increased as well. What is most concerning about the increasing poverty statistic is that many of the Montanans falling into the poverty classification are the “new working poor.” Minimum wage workers including those working in the retail and service industries such as fast food or Wal-Mart are seriously impacted. This cross section represents a large sample of the HRDC client base. In 2014, HRDC provided services to 16,900 qualifying recipients.

The majority profile of the HRDC client base is described as follows: Caucasian, single female, between ages 25-44, with child or children, high school graduate. We have seen an increase in the numbers of Native American and Hispanic respondents since the 2013 Needs Assessment Survey. In the five county area Native American respondents increased to a current level of 12.23 percent, Hispanic respondents to 9.78 percent, with Caucasian respondents at just less than 82 percent, demonstrating a steady growth in minority populations living in the HRDC service area. Hispanic demographic population statistics average 3.3 percent across Montana showing a significant shift in ethnicity in the HRDC service area. Native American populations are also concentrated into the service area with state average at 6.5 percent as compared to the over 12.23 percent of respondents completing this survey.

HOUSING

Just less than 26 percent of respondents own their home, 42 percent rent their home which is over a 10 percent decrease from 2013. Inferentially, this decrease could be in part due to the extremely tight rental market which has been significantly impacted by increased demand for housing spurred by higher rents and demand from the oil boom in the Bakken. This has also impacted the availability of low income housing as demonstrated by the decrease in issued Section 8 vouchers. HRDC has an allotment of 200 vouchers, but is at 80 percent capacity with approximately 160 vouchers currently distributed. It has become very difficult to secure low income rentals as housing demand has exponentially increased across the state. This higher demand has also impacted the number of homeless families with numbers more than doubled from 2013. Those living with friends and family have also doubled since the last survey.

It is disturbing to note that over 26 percent of respondents indicated that they lived with a disabled person. This in part may be indicative of the trend of multigenerational families living together as a result of lack of housing affordability. Of those responding to this survey, 34 percent indicated safety issues within their homes ranging from bad neighborhoods to mold, lead paint, pest infestations, plumbing, electrical, and disrepair problems both in rentals and owned homes. It was also of interest to note that over 27 percent of those surveyed received some type of housing assistance.

The primary barriers to securing safe and affordable housing remain insufficient funds to cover first, last, and deposit requirements for rentals, rental applications, bad credit, bad references, and

discrimination resulting from age, race, criminal record, etc. Over 45 percent of respondents identified one or more of these barriers as preventing them from securing safe and affordable housing.

TRANSPORTATION

Of those responding to this survey, slightly less than 22 percent do not own a vehicle. This means these respondents are dependent on others for rides, restricted to walking, bicycling, busses, or cabs. There is a significant correlation between high unemployment and lack of reliable transportation. Lack of reliable transportation significantly impacts family stability and sustainability as employment, childcare, health, and education are all impacted, especially by rural residents that have no access to services without transportation. Slightly over 12 percent of respondents receive some type of transportation services in the form of repairs, gas cards, insurance payments, or bus passes. When asked to identify barriers to reliable transportation, even the majority of respondents that owned their own vehicles cited challenges related to cost of insurance, necessary repairs, or cost of licensing. For those without vehicles, an additional barrier that impacts access is lack of bus service during needed hours, and no bus service in rural communities. These data demonstrate a significant correlation between reliable transportation and access to services. It is of further interest to note that over 51 percent of the respondents surveyed identified barriers to transportation.

EMPLOYMENT

While unemployment in the HRDC service area is low, there are two inferential factors that must be cited: first the many available jobs are entry level positions, many of which start at minimum wage. Secondly, of those surveyed only 25 percent of respondents currently have full time jobs with benefits. This translates into the other 75 percent of survey participants working full time with no benefits, part time with or without benefits, seasonal employment, and/or unemployed looking for work. The availability of full time positions with benefits is limited by education and vocational skills. Of those surveyed, almost 20 percent are unemployed. Some of this group are the chronically unemployed and have been without employment for over a year, disabled, or have dropped out of the labor force all together. Recent low oil prices have impacted employment opportunities and the availability of high paying jobs in Eastern Montana and the Bakken region. Of those surveyed, just over 13 percent are participating in some type of employment program. While not reflected in the survey, there is a clear correlation between the number of clients HRDC serves in the WoRC program and the number of the same families receiving TANF benefits. Most of the referrals received by HRDC for employment training come from the OPA and are a condition for assistance.

CHILDCARE

77 percent of those surveyed indicated they had no need for childcare services. Of the 23 percent that required these services, almost half of those that needed childcare could not afford it. Almost 25 percent of those needing childcare services indicated that they did not qualify for any assistance. Others indicated that childcare centers did not have flexible hours conducive to their work schedules, or that childcare was not available in their community. It should also be noted that some of the restrictions that impact the availability of program assistance such as Best Beginnings Scholarships are too rigid and prevented them from qualifying according to this survey. It is disturbing to note that over 60 percent of all respondents taking



this survey were not even aware of the Best Beginnings or after school scholarships which indicates an unsuccessful outreach effort by those agencies offering these programs. This was also a noted factor in the 2013 Needs Assessment Survey.

ELDERCARE

Only 6 percent of respondents indicated a need for eldercare. While this is an insignificant percentage, it is a 2 percent increase in need over 2013. Of these respondents, some did not know where to find these services, and or how to qualify. At this time, HRDC programs provide indirect services to seniors with Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP), Weatherization, Food Commodity Programs, VITA, and other related programs. These programs are tracked as low income recipients, not classified as eldercare.

FOOD PROGRAMS

Over 17 percent of respondents that participated in this survey have experienced food shortages over the last year. Of this group, around 70 percent attributed food shortages to lack of money. Others respondents indicated food stamps had run out, there were no food banks in their communities, they could not secure transportation to a store or food bank, and in some cases they were just too embarrassed to admit that they needed help. 45 percent of survey participants indicated that they received some type of emergency food assistance in the past year through commodity programs, food banks, local churches, and other sources. This is an alarming statistic and demonstrates the reality of hunger in our communities. As a case and point: according to an article published in the Family Services, Inc. winter newsletter, 2015, School District 2 saw a 20 percent increase in homeless student populations this past year. The subsidized breakfast lunch programs in these schools saw more students qualifying than ever before. Over 6144 students get free or reduced cost meals at school. This equates to hunger issues in the home, extending to siblings and parents. Lockwood now has more than half of its students receiving subsidized meals.



MONEY MANAGEMENT

While it is fully acknowledged that money management is vital for family and community stability and sustainability, it must be recognized that acute poverty and financial disaster such as loss of a job, eviction, or foreclosure do not allow families in crisis to participate in financial education. Money management and financial education are vital components to upward mobility, but requires stability and safety before a family or individual can participate. Families in crisis are essentially eliminated. It is also of interest to note that only a third of participants taking this survey responded to the question on budgeting. Of that that group, 47 percent of respondents admitted they have no monthly budget and 83 percent indicated they had no checking or savings account. This statistic demonstrates the issue of stability as a requirement for money management. Over 23 percent do not file annual taxes, and only 22 percent had any emergency savings. Again, it must be emphasized that before money management and financial education programs are beneficial, families must be stable.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Even with the Affordable Care Act in place, many Montanans go without health coverage. This current legislature has rejected a proposal to insure up to 70,000 low income individuals and families through a proposal for Medicaid coverage, subsidized by the federal government. While the ACA is mandated with the threat of tax penalties for non coverage, if you don't pay taxes, it's of little consequence. A full third of all respondents taking this survey do not have any health coverage. Less than 23 percent had employee coverage, and less than 4 percent were covered by ACA. 31 percent of respondents were covered by Medicare or Medicaid. Almost 12 percent indicated that they could not afford to see any health care professional and have not done so in the past year. For the third of respondents that are uninsured and have seen a healthcare provider, the cost is prohibitive. Almost 26 percent of respondents have gone to emergency rooms for care, as hospitals are required by law to treat patients regardless of their ability to pay. This of course puts the burden on the rest of Montana through increased insurance premiums and higher medical costs. This is the irony of poverty. Poverty is expensive, and costs everyone regardless of where they sit on the social strata. When queried about prescription availability and affordability, 21 percent of respondents indicated that they had gone without necessary prescriptions this past year simply because they did not have the money.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

When asked about the types of programs individuals and families participate in, respondents identified 15 different categories of assistance that they currently receive. This was a multiple response question that provided for multiple answers if participants were receiving benefits in more than one category. Less than 38 percent of respondents indicated that they did not participate in any program. This leaves 62 percent that did. The most widely utilized program was Medicare/Medicaid with over 35 percent of these respondents receiving some type of assistance. 38 percent of participants in this group had received food stamp benefits. 17 percent were receiving benefits from commodity and food bank programs. Almost 10 percent received TANF, and 9 percent Section 8. The remainder of programs had smaller participation rates between 1 and 6 percent. When asked about programs to reconnect families, 24 percent of respondents indicated they would have some level of interest. Family counseling, building mother/daughter bonds, and Pathways to Fatherhood were the top three in the order listed.



As a final question, respondents were asked if they would know where to go to secure 11 different services. The highest rating for any category in this question was less than 50 percent with the lowest rating at just less than 18 which indicates that people in need do not know where to go, or how to secure services when needed. These results indicate that agencies, community organizations, government, and communities at large have not been effective in the delivery of outreach programs.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Low unemployment does not solve the problems associated with poverty. Service economy and retail industry wages coupled with higher rents and increasing home prices have exasperated the problem. As rents increase, families are forced to move to outlying areas where housing costs are more affordable. The current Montana minimum wage is \$8.05. Average area rents for a two bedroom unit range between \$700 to \$800 per month or higher. The migration to outlying areas then forces the issue of reliable transportation which is a struggle for low income families. The reality is that a wage of \$15 to \$20 per hour is necessary to sustain a family and provide the necessities of food, shelter, healthcare, childcare, and transportation needs.

Community partners must work together to align resources that address the long term problems associated with poverty. These long term issues are not easily solved by short term services such as emergency shelter, food banks, or rapid re-housing, nor by long term programs like Asset Development that provide financial education solutions over time. Communities must develop strategies that engage stakeholders to invest in programs that stabilize and sustain individuals, families, and communities. Poverty is expensive. The least cost solutions to alleviate the problem may be to provide pathways out of poverty through long term strategies.

These strategic plans require:

1. Coordination of federal, state, and local governments
2. Alignment of community organizations and businesses to maximize resources and eliminate redundancy
3. Better planned outreach efforts that provide information to families in need
4. More sophisticated client referral processes within the agency and throughout the community that refer clients to multiple resources concurrently
5. New approaches to funding which include adoption of revenue models, contract services, and alternative paradigms for building sustainable programs
6. Collaboration with public school systems, private and public post-secondary institutions, and specialized training providers in the trades to develop joint ventures that develop skills, educate, and provide sustainable employment
7. Joint ventures designed to work with the business community, chambers of commerce, Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, and others to implement workforce strategies that increase wages and local economies
8. Development of innovative childcare and youth programs that provide early development opportunities that circumvent longer term costs

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Child Care for Providers

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Employment and Training for Adults

Billings - office 406-247-4732 | fax 406-248-6971
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Energy Assistance

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Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations

406 Crook, Hardin, MT 59034
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The Home Center

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Matched Savings/Financial Education

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Youth Employment

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ASK Directory

The ASK Directory is a community resource tool to assist clients with options for locating other service providers in our service area.

To learn more visit: <http://ask.hrdc7.org>

For assistance with all other programs, email info@hrdc7.org or call the main office at 406-247-4732 or 1-800-433-1411.

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