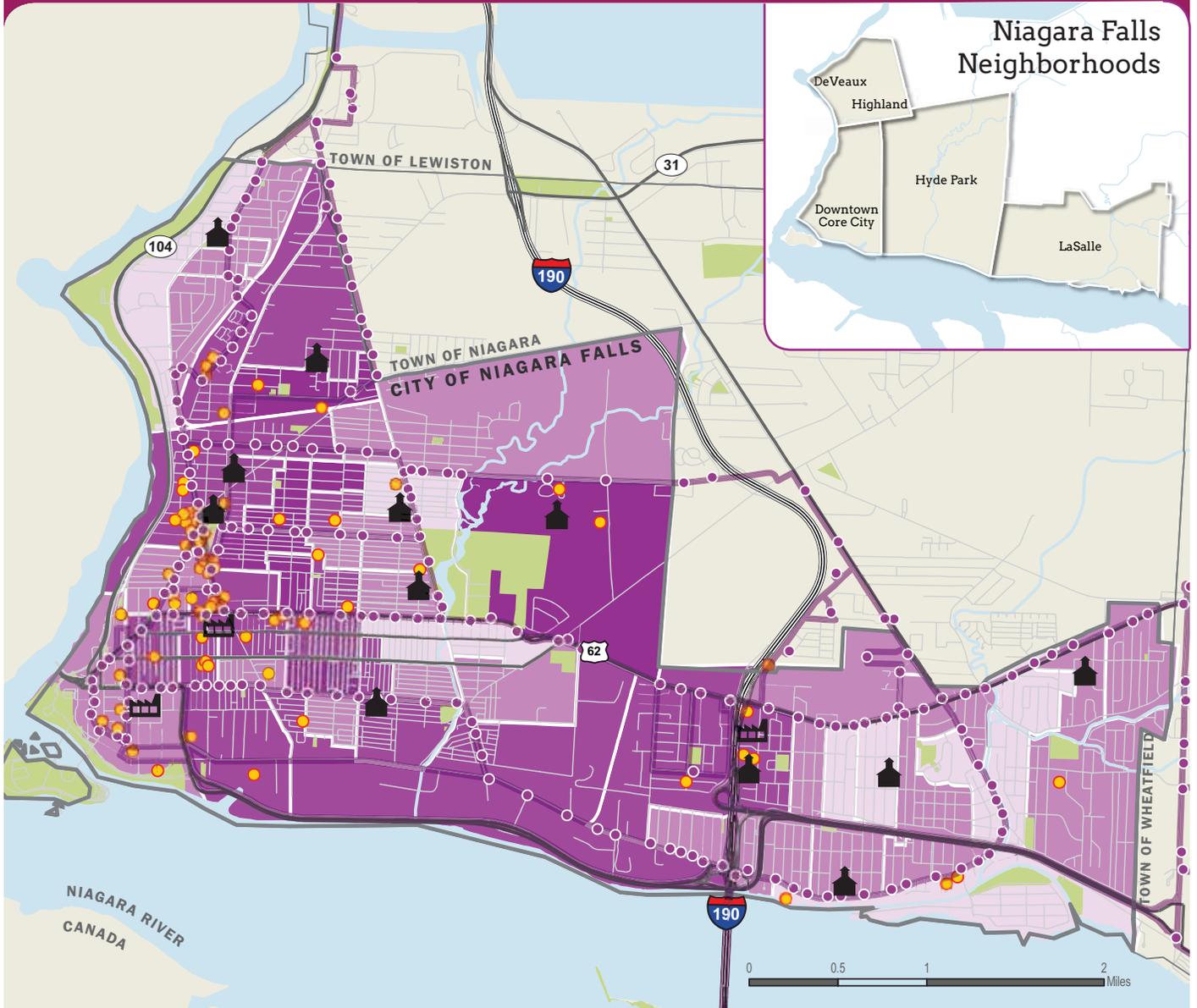


STRENGTHENING WNY's Safety Net

A COMMUNITY REPORT City of **NIAGARA FALLS**



Report prepared for
The John R. Oishei Foundation
by the University at Buffalo
Regional Institute
December 2013

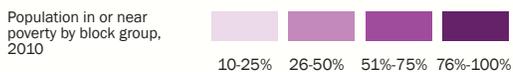


SERVICE PROVIDERS

71 service providers employing about 3,695 employees exist in Niagara Falls to provide a range of human services.

POPULATION IN OR NEAR POVERTY

Over 22,400 Niagara Falls residents live on incomes under or near the federal poverty level



TRANSPORTATION

NFTA BUS ROUTES & STOPS

SCHOOLS

Niagara Falls City School District:
8 elementary schools
2 preparatory schools
1 high school
about 7,300 students total enrolled

MAJOR EMPLOYERS

Seneca Niagara Casino & Hotel
Niagara Falls City School District
Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center

GRAND ISLAND

About This Report

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Background

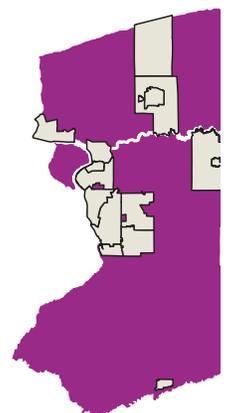
Between 2008 and 2009, regional employers shed almost 20,000 net jobs. The economic downturn, which continued into 2010, left large numbers of residents unemployed and unable to find new work for the first time in their lives. High levels of unemployment continue today. One out of 12 residents across the region seeks work, and need for support continues to escalate. Caseloads reported by Niagara County Department of Social Services have reached a high. As of February 2013, over 42,000 individuals across Niagara County, about one in five, receive some form of support. Since 2006, enrollment in food, medical, and public assistance programs has increased 84%.

While the majority of those in poverty live in urban areas like Niagara Falls and Buffalo, families in the region's suburbs have experienced the biggest increase in poverty. One out of three with incomes below poverty now live outside urban areas where support services such as emergency food, housing and employment training are concentrated. Put another way, residents may be relatively far away from the services they need to get back on their feet. They may be unaware, too, of what's out there to help them. Meanwhile, all services providers are being challenged to expand capacity, improve access and generate additional revenues for expanded services, while at the same time, they may be dealing with funding cuts.



To strengthen the safety net in communities where residents are struggling the most, **The John R. Oishei Foundation created the Mobile Safety-Net Team Initiative in 2009** to go into dozens of communities in Erie and Niagara Counties to assess how the downturn in the economy is impacting residents, help connect residents with the services they need, build relationships with service providers and gather information about human service needs. The team has worked in 45 communities to date.

Twelve representative communities have been selected for additional assessment and investment as part of phase two of the Mobile Safety-Net Team initiative, which kicked off in 2012 and includes the team's partnership with the University at Buffalo Regional Institute. The purpose of phase two is to gather additional insights from residents, conduct focus groups, hear from organizations and develop a tool that will assist foundations and communities in strengthening the safety net of services. The City of Niagara Falls is one of the 12 communities selected. The in-depth analysis and recommendations contained herein are grounded in this work of the **University at Buffalo Regional Institute** and the **Mobile Safety-Net Team** and are intended to spur thought in the community on opportunities to create a stronger human services safety-net.



What Went Into This Report

Two Teams

This effort culminates months of research during 2012 and early 2013 by the University at Buffalo Regional Institute team, working in partnership with the Mobile Safety-Net Team.

University at Buffalo
Regional Institute

Mobile Safety-Net Team
an initiative of The John R. Oishei Foundation

The work of the teams
within Niagara Falls over
several months...

Who We Talked to and What We Looked at

Residents and agency providers allowed us to explore how the system was currently working and gain insights into how to improve it.

Residents



Resident Survey

359 surveys were completed by residents in Niagara Falls, providing new data on the demographics of the city's at-risk population, their needs, urgent concerns, utilization of human services benefits and barriers to support services.

Resident Focus Groups

Six focus groups with residents were conducted to gather insights into their most pressing concerns, barriers to accessing services and insights on how the system might be improved for them.

Agencies



Agency Interviews

Over a dozen human service agency representatives shared information on their programs and perspectives on opportunities.

Agency Focus Groups

Over a dozen representatives of public and private human services providers in Niagara Falls took part in a focus group to gather agency perspectives on human services needs, barriers and strategies for improving the landscape of services.

Secondary Data



Data Sources

Information and insights were gathered from diverse sources, including the 2010 Census, 2007-2011 American Community Survey, Social Explorer Reports, NYS Department of Health, NYS Education Department 2011 School Report Card, NYS Division of Criminal Justice Statistics and Reference USA.

Understanding the Report

The months of information gathering provided the structure for understanding the needs, the barriers and the strategies for improving the current system.

...led us to explore...

...which resulted in:

People



Places



Services



Insights & Recommendations



STRENGTHENING
WNY's Safety Net

A COMMUNITY REPORT
City of **NIAGARA FALLS**



A large population in poverty or close to it...

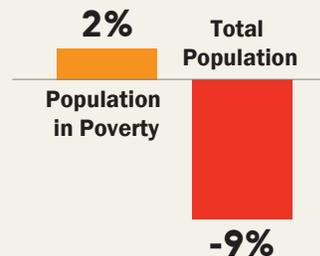
Among Niagara Falls population of 50,195...

...about	...an additional	...about
10,900	11,525	22,425
Niagara Falls residents live on incomes under the federal poverty level.	aren't in poverty but are close to it with incomes between 100-200% of poverty.	are doing poorly or struggling financially. This is nearly one out of every two in Niagara Falls.

Beyond poverty, other alarming indicators and trends...

Poverty is growing, while Niagara Falls' population is shrinking. The number of Niagara Falls residents living in poverty has grown 2% since 2000, a significant percentage when put in context of the city's overall population decline of 9% since 2000.

Poverty is Growing



About 15% of Niagara Falls' most vulnerable have urgent concerns for food. Parts of Niagara Falls have been designated as a food desert, or an area where lower-income populations do not have adequate access to groceries. Meanwhile, **at least one in four vulnerable adults lacks health insurance.***

55% of rental units are substandard

Economic vulnerability is widespread with the deepest pockets existing in certain areas of Downtown, Hyde Park and Highland. In some tracts, up to three-quarters of individuals are in poverty or at risk. (*Niagara Falls' neighborhoods are identified on the inset map on the cover.*)

Teen pregnancy and fragile young families are concerns. Teen pregnancy rates in Niagara Falls Zip Codes 14301, 14303 and 14305 are the highest across Niagara County, at 10% or more, and the rate in 14303 is the second highest rate across the region's eight counties.

One in seven has urgent needs for food

Unemployment is high with over one-third of the city's at-risk population being unemployed.*

Safe and appropriate rental housing is lacking. 55% of rental units are substandard. They either cost greater than 30% of income, lack complete plumbing or kitchen facilities and/or house more than one person per room.

Crime rates are alarming. Over the course of a year, over one out of every hundred persons in Niagara Falls will be the victim of a violent crime, either murdered, raped, robbed or assaulted.

37% of those at risk are unemployed

* Findings come from a survey of 359 at-risk households in Niagara Falls, reflecting a statistically significant sample size at a confidence level of at least 95% and with a confidence interval of 5.

Niagara Falls' landscape of human services providers...

71 public and private providers
employing about 3,695

exist in Niagara Falls to provide a range of human services to residents, from food, education, job training, youth programs, information services and more.

The city's two largest human services supports are the Niagara Falls City School District and Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center.



Strengths of the system include **strengths** its human services providers, which are already collaborating; a well-regarded school-based family resource center, Focus on Families; the long-standing commitment of Niagara University to the city; and the presence of several health institutions and health collaboratives, including a network of providers forming Niagara County's first health home, offering coordinated services to Medicaid recipients.

Gaps in services exist in terms of academic supports for children; a single point of entry to caseworker services to help residents in poverty navigate a complex system; mental health services, especially for children; healthy food; safe and appropriate housing; adequate pregnancy prevention programming; maternal and infant health supports for teen mothers; and transportation. **gaps**

Barriers and systemic challenges...

1 out of 2 residents surveyed in Niagara Falls say they have encountered difficulty getting services.



Income limits are the most common barrier reported, by 20% of those asked if they have ever experienced barriers to services. Indeed, income thresholds for subsidized child care have been recently tightened by Niagara County due to state budget cuts. Subsidies have been eliminated for families earning between 120% and 200% of the federal poverty level, those households who are most motivated to work and make progress. Meanwhile, Medicaid's income eligibility requirements prevent coverage of many low-wage workers.

1 in 5 surveyed said income limits create barriers

Traveling difficulties are the second most common barrier reported. Altogether, 4,500 households across Niagara Falls don't have access to a vehicle. This is one out of five. Proportions without a vehicle are three times as great among the most vulnerable in Niagara Falls, with 36% of those at risk reporting that they primarily walk to get places.

Niagara Falls' distance from job centers in Erie County creates barriers, too. According to a major employment and training provider, there is a perception among job seekers in Niagara Falls, even those with a car, that anything beyond the Grand Island Bridge is too far. Residents say, however, that with the price of gas, it's too expensive to drive longer distances and public transit oftentimes isn't available for those who work nights and weekends.

Criminal records are creating life-long barriers to subsidized housing and employment.

Residents with convictions are ineligible to live in public housing or participate in the Section 8 program. This is a HUD policy. Criminal records also create barriers to work. Residents describe being denied employment because of felony offenses, some committed over a decade ago as a teenager.

There is a culture of poverty in Niagara Falls

with individuals tailoring their choices to best live within the system of social services. Young girls see getting pregnant as a viable option for surviving economically. Meanwhile, aspects of the safety net encourage dependency and failure. For instance, cuts in the county's child care subsidy moved families into public welfare (TANF), while the school district lost after-school funding when its performance increased.

36% report walking as their primary form of travel

Lack of full-time job opportunities

with companies offering benefits create an economic climate where some families are working two or three minimum wage part-time jobs and are still in poverty or at risk.

Poverty affects masses of individuals and families in Niagara Falls. It's a pressing concern not only for human service providers but for political leaders. **Yet the fight against poverty is only one of many challenges elected officials are contending with. It can't, therefore, always rise to the level of importance that it deserves.**

The majority have nothing more than a high school diploma

Low levels of educational attainment and skills create barriers, too. Six out of ten of those at risk have, at most, a high school degree or equivalent. One in five reports not finishing high school. Last year, only 72% of students at Niagara Falls High School graduated with a Regents Diploma, and only 70% of those graduating intended to go to college. Meanwhile, completion rates at Niagara County Community College are low. Only a quarter of those who enroll earn an associate's degree within three years. Graduation rates are even lower for black students.

The system of human services support can be difficult to navigate, especially for those with lower educational levels.

Support programs have been created in a piecemeal fashion, by different levels of government, each with different eligibility criteria and application requirements. For instance, food stamp applications can be submitted online, while public assistance requires an in-person application and various documentation.

Residents express a lack of awareness of the programs and services in the community that can help them.

While DSS offers everyone a handbook, few read it and would rather talk with someone who can guide them to programs. Indeed, a conversation with job seekers raised awareness of several programs.

Recommendations to strengthen the safety net of human services...

RECOMMENDATION	STRATEGIES	MODEL TO CONSIDER
Strengthen and support the existing coalition of human services providers	<p>Explore and expand opportunities for partnerships with area colleges to increase coalition capacity by engaging students</p> <p>Use this assessment as a tool for fund development</p> <p>Expand membership to further raise awareness and generate broader buy-in for human services needs</p>	<p>The Seattle Human Services Coalition is an example of a long-standing successful group. http://shscoalition.org/</p>
Use trained volunteer advocates to help residents navigate the system and better link with supports	<p>Develop a mobile team of volunteer caseworkers to link residents in need with crucial benefits and services, through information, referrals and follow through</p> <p>Use area colleges as a source of volunteers with oversight and training by the Mobile Safety-Net Team</p> <p>Regularly assess human services needs and outcomes for coordination with the provider coalition</p>	<p>LIFT is a nationally recognized model offering individuals one-on-one assistance to help them navigate the system of social services. http://www.liftcommunities.org/</p>
Improve academic performance and increase high school graduation rates	<p>Reduce teen pregnancy and better engage parents in their child's academic outcomes</p> <p>Increase access to quality after-school programs and mentors</p> <p>Strengthen mental health and other supports that mitigate barriers to learning</p>	<p>Say Yes improves academic performance and graduation rates in inner-city school districts through supports and the promise of free college. http://www.sayyestoeducation.org/</p>
Reduce teen pregnancy	<p>Develop a vision for reducing teen pregnancy in Niagara Falls</p> <p>Adopt a structured, evidenced-based program for teen pregnancy reduction, incorporating successful components into already existing after-school programs</p>	<p>The Carrera Model Adolescent Pregnancy prevention Program has been effective in reducing teen pregnancy. http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/carrera-pregnancy-prevention</p>
Strengthen supports for mental health promotion and intervention	<p>Promote prevention and early intervention through screening in natural environments</p> <p>Explore the feasibility of school-based services</p> <p>Grow peer support programs for those with mental health needs</p> <p>Maximize opportunities created under the Affordable Care Act to expand access to mental health services and supports</p>	<p>The Peer Bridger Program is a best practice using trained peers to reduce mental health related hospitalizations and strengthen the use of outpatient supports. http://www.nyaprs.org/peer-services/optum-peer-bridger/</p>
Increase access to food and health supports	<p>Facilitate production of healthy and affordable foods through community gardening and urban farms</p> <p>Expand mobile markets of free and discounted fresh food in areas of the city that are food deserts</p> <p>Raise awareness of expanded Medicaid coverage and providers accepting payment on a sliding scale</p>	<p>The Massachusetts Avenue Project in Buffalo is increasing access to fresh and affordable food in low-income communities. http://mass-ave.org/</p>
Grow safe and affordable housing options for low-income tenants	<p>Ensure landlords who benefit from public money maintain standards of quality</p> <p>Expand educational supports for landlords and tenants</p> <p>Promote tenant choice of higher-opportunity housing options</p> <p>Engage top employers to offer home-buying incentives</p>	<p>The City of Rochester supports tenants and landlords through strong partnerships between the Housing Council, the county department of human services and Neighborhood Service Centers operated by the city. http://www.thehousingcouncil.org/</p>
Expand work-enabling supports such as affordable and flexible transportation	<p>Raise awareness of and strengthen existing supports to work, especially transportation and child care</p> <p>Raise awareness of free training and work supports for disabled adults</p> <p>Promote programs such as bonding for high-risk job seekers</p>	<p>More Than Wheels is a nationally recognized transportation plus initiative offering transportation access for low-income families as well as supports to help them achieve financial well-being. http://morethanwheels.org/</p>

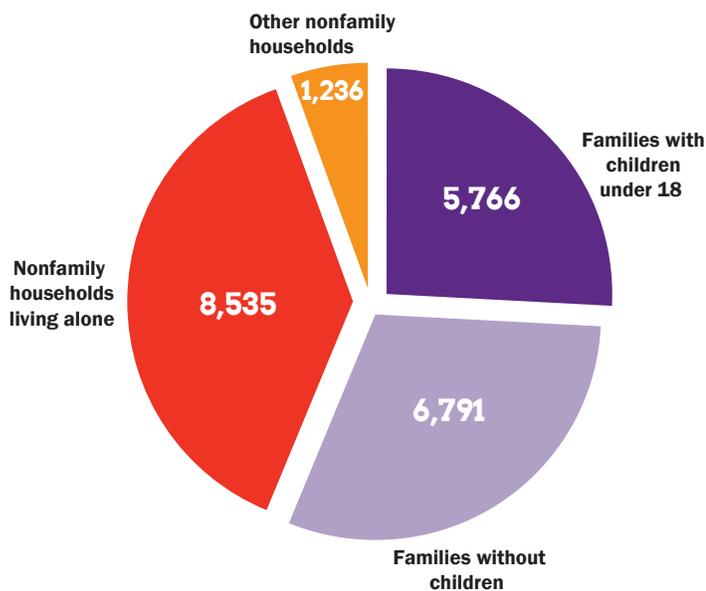
Context for Action

People in Need

Individuals
and families of
Niagara Falls,
where we work,
how much we
earn and where
we go to school

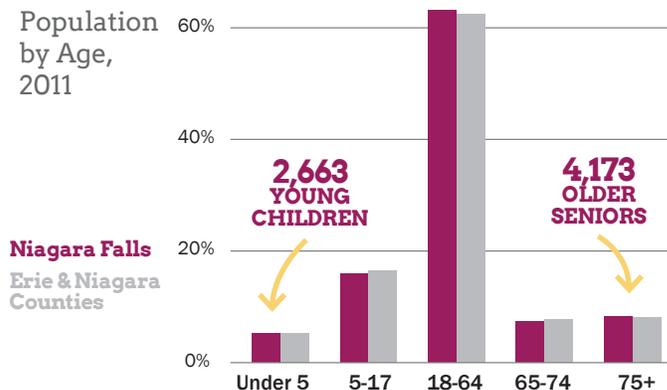


Households by Type, 2011



Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Population by Age, 2011



Potentially At-Risk Populations, 2011

Adults with HS education or less	19,083
Non-white or Hispanic	14,455
Single Parent	9,108
Veterans	3,729
Age 65+ living alone	2,909
Foreign-born individuals	2,370

Source: 2010 Census and 2007-11 American Community Survey

Individuals and Families

As of the 2010 Census, approximately 50,200 individuals resided in the City of Niagara Falls. This is a fraction of what existed in past years. It's also dangerously close to the 50,000 threshold the city must meet to qualify for millions in federal funding.

In 1950, the city's population was nearly 100,000. Indeed, Niagara Falls has been shrinking, and the exodus has continued in recent decades. Since 1990, Niagara Falls has lost a fifth of its population. A net 5,000 – one in ten – have left, or died, since 2000.

This precipitous decline has negatively impacted Niagara County, which would have seen a slight population increase since 2000, if it

wasn't for the sharp decline in Niagara Falls.

-18%
Population Loss
 Niagara Falls has 11,270 fewer residents than it did in 1990, representing an 18% decline. Since 1970, the city has lost over 35,000 residents.

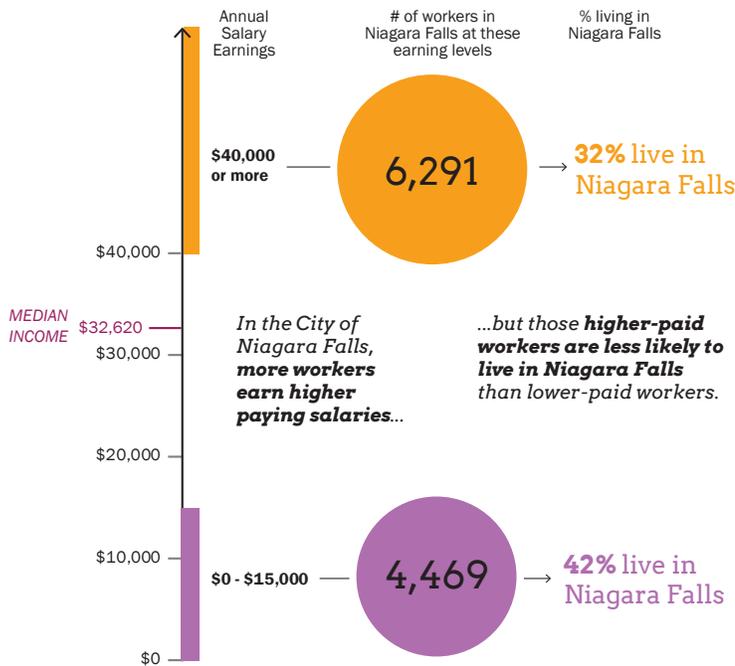
Source: 1970 and 1990 Census and 2011 American Community Survey

While Niagara Falls' population mirrors the county's in its distribution by age, it's a city where family structure is relatively weak. Nonfamily households consisting of persons living alone are the most common household category. Only one in four households in Niagara Falls are families with a child under the age of 18, and more than half of these families are single parents.

At the same time Niagara Falls has more seniors over the age of 75 than children under age five, seniors have been the fastest declining population segment, shrinking 23% since 2000. The number of children declined by a slightly lower percentage, while the number of working age adults increased slightly.

Adults with a high school diploma or less represent the city's largest population at risk, with nearly 20,000 individuals having no more than a high school diploma. With 70% of these being in their working years between 25 and 64, they may be unable to compete in a job market where employers often select college graduates for positions that traditionally have not required a degree.

Percent of Workers by Income Level Who Are Employed and Live in Niagara Falls, 2010



Source: On The Map; Median Income is from the 2007-11 American Community Survey

Niagara Falls' Top 10 Employers

Employer	# of Employees
Seneca Niagara Casino & Hotel	2,730
Niagara Falls School District	1,245
Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center	1,100
Niagara County	717
B & P Enterprises	700
Washington Mills	300
Elderwood Health Care	260
New York State Parks & Recreation	238
Sheraton-The Falls	230
ACS	220

Source: Reference USA and Buffalo Business First Book of Lists 2011

Work and Income

Slightly fewer than 20,000 jobs exist in Niagara Falls. The Seneca Niagara Casino is the city's largest employer. The Niagara Falls School District and Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center are the only other two employers with more than 1,000 employees. Governmental employers account for three of the city's top ten. Another hub for employment is Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls where about 800 are employed in retail.

The manufacturing base the city once had has largely evaporated. Thirty years ago, for instance, Occidental Chemical had about 3,000 workers; today it has two hundred. Dupont was another large manufacturer that once employed over a thousand. Today, manufacturing jobs account for only one in ten of the total, while those related to tourism (food, accommodations, retail, arts and entertainment) account for 42%. Health care and social assistance is another relatively large employment sector, with several large employers within this category.

While the Niagara Falls School District has a residency rule requiring its employees to live in the city, most workers in Niagara Falls don't live there. This is especially true of higher-paid employees. Only one-

Those who work in Niagara Falls and have relatively higher-paying jobs are less likely to live in the city.

third of those earning \$3,333 a month or more (or about \$40,000/year) live in the city, while nearly half of workers in the lowest-wage category do.

As a result of this and other factors, household income levels in Niagara Falls are skewed toward the lower end. The proportion of households with incomes under \$25,000 is 150% higher than across Niagara County as a whole. The median income in Niagara Falls is \$32,620 a year, about \$14,000 less than Niagara County's median of \$46,600.

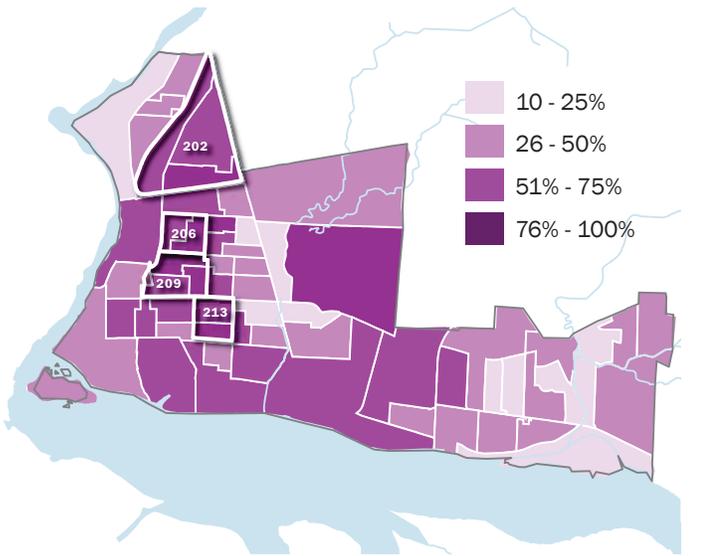
% Households by Income Levels

	City of Niagara Falls	Niagara County
\$0 - \$25K	39%	27%
\$25K - \$100K	52%	57%
\$100K+	9%	16%

Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

While Niagara Falls has proportionally fewer high earners than across the county, the city's highest earners have proportionally more wealth. The top 20% of households, in terms of income, have half of household wealth, while the lowest 20% of earners have only 3%, an indicator of the disparity between the wealthy and poor in Niagara Falls.

Population in or Near Poverty, 2010



Source 2006-10 American Community Survey

Poverty

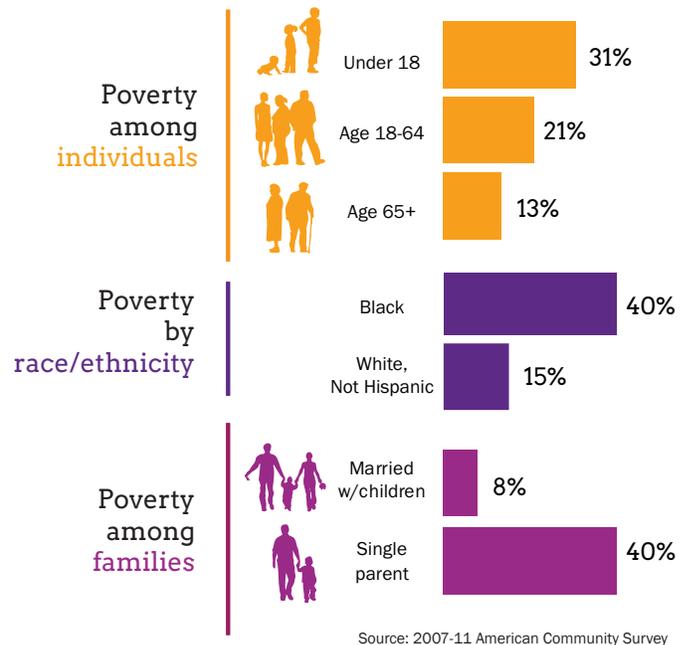
There are 10,899 individuals (22% of the total) living in poverty (or on less than \$19,090 annually for a family of three). Another 11,527 are struggling economically with incomes hovering between 100% and 200% of the federal poverty level. Altogether, 44% of the population—almost one in two—is either in poverty or struggling financially and at risk.

Hyde Park, Downtown Niagara Falls and the Highland neighborhood are hardest hit by poverty. In Census Tracts 202, 206, 209, and 213, at least two-thirds of individuals are doing poorly with incomes under 200% of poverty. Only 6 of the city's 20 census tracks are doing better than Niagara County as a whole, with lower poverty levels than the countywide average. Those areas that are faring relatively well tend to be concentrated in Deveaux, a national historic district near the Niagara Escarpment, and Lasalle, a largely middle-class neighborhood that has substantially rebounded from the Love Canal disaster.

While poverty across age groups is highest among children, with about one in three (30.5%) in poverty, working age adults represent the numerically largest population in poverty, with over 6,650 adults living below the federal threshold. Among families, single parents with children account for the large majority.

Reducing high teen pregnancy will be critical to moving the needle on poverty in Niagara Falls. With nearly 15% of all girls between the

Population in Poverty by Age and Family Type, 2011



Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

ages of 15 and 19 getting pregnant every year, Zip Code 14303 has the highest teen pregnancy rate across Niagara County. Pregnancy rates are only slightly lower in the Zip Codes encompassing Hyde Park and Downtown. On average, there are about 80 pregnancies or teen parents in Niagara Falls City School District in a given year.

\$12.00 Amount a family of three pays for a single round trip by bus within the city without any transfers

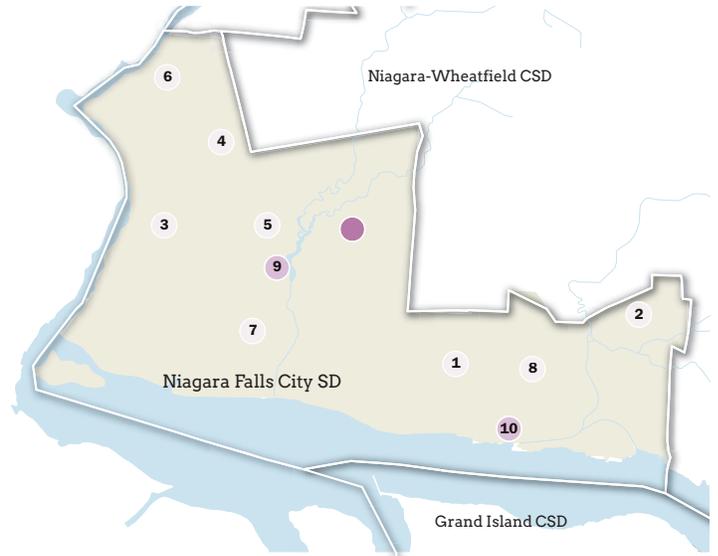
\$17.84 Maximum daily amount a family of three lives on at the federal poverty level

\$20.00 Daily cost of owning and operating a car

Source: Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, 2013 Federal Poverty Guidelines, and Edmunds.com

Schools in the Niagara Falls City School District		Enrollment, 2011	% Qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch
ELEMENTARY			
1	Cataract ES	463	77%
2	Geraldine J Mann ES	460	48%
3	Harry F Abate ES	663	84%
4	Henry J Kalfas ES	461	89%
5	Hyde Park ES	433	76%
6	Maple Avenue ES	399	50%
7	Niagara Street ES	678	84%
8	Seventy Ninth Street ES	459	58%
MIDDLE			
9	Gaskill Preparatory	504	73%
10	LaSalle Preparatory	498	60%
HIGH			
11	Niagara Falls HS	2,217	54%

Source: NYS Education Department 2011 School Report Card



Source: NYS Education Department 2011 School Report Card and NYS GIS Clearinghouse

Education

The Niagara Falls City School District enrolls about 7,300 students across 11 schools. Most are poor, with two-thirds qualifying for free and reduced price lunch. While the district offers many supports for children and their families, from Universal Pre-K to a Family Resource Center, pervasive poverty continues to create barriers to academic achievement, as it does in many districts with high levels of need.

The district ranks low academically, standing at 405 out of 430 public school districts across upstate New York, according to Business First 2012 rankings. While its standing is higher than the Buffalo City School District (ranked at 428), it falls well below districts such as Williamsville and Clarence, which are among the top 10 performing districts across Upstate and where 10% or fewer children are in need.

Rankings are based on student test scores and the percentage of students who graduate with a Regent's diploma, indicators that reveal needs for greater academic supports in Niagara Falls. For instance, during 2010-11, 1,730 students in grades 3 through 8 fell below proficiency standards in English Language Arts. This is 58% of those tested. About 1,260 students failed to meet standards in mathematics. Black students and those from economically disadvantaged families are the ones most likely to be in need of academic help. Meanwhile, 277 students dropped out of high school that year, despite several support programs to keep at-risk children in school. Of those who completed, only 70% planned to

Educational Attainment and Median Earnings of Adults Age 25+, 2007-11

	City of Niagara Falls	Median Earnings
Less than High School	15%	\$17,386
High School	41%	\$25,396
Some College/ Associate's Degree	31%	\$28,626
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	14%	\$42,284

Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

go to college, with the majority considering a two-year degree. Yet college enrollment doesn't guarantee graduation. At Niagara County Community College, only 26% of students graduate within 150% of the normal time. The graduation rate for black students is 7%.

This has contributed to limited educational attainment levels and earning capacity for Niagara Falls residents. With over half of residents having nothing more than a high school diploma, \$25,396 a year, at most, is what they can expect to earn. This amount is just above the poverty line for a family of four.

Context for Action

Niagara Falls' Most Vulnerable



Demographics,
service usage,
urgent needs
and barriers

Assessing the Need

359 Niagara Falls households responded to the Mobile Safety-Net Team Community Needs Assessment.

This one-page questionnaire gathered data and information on demographics, urgent needs, concerns and barriers experienced by residents in getting human services.

Assessments were completed at a variety of sites including Heart Love and Soul, Niagara Community Action Program's Food Express Truck, Henry E. Wrobel Towers Apartments, LaSalle Senior Center, John Duke Senior Center, Beloved Community Center, Renaissance Building, St. George's Pro-Cathedral's HEAP outreach, and the Salvation Army.

What human services are residents receiving?

The large majority of vulnerable individuals in Niagara Falls (76% of those surveyed) are receiving some form of human services support or living in a household with someone who does.

The most common types of benefits reported by those who receive support

Food Stamps	65%
Rental Assistance	49%
Medicaid Insurance	46%
SSI/SSD	22%
HEAP	21%

66%

of those receiving some form of public assistance qualify for and receive more than one kind of benefit.

Pending applications. Nearly one-tenth (9%) of respondents indicated they have an application for public assistance pending. The large majority were current public benefit recipients. Applications for food stamps, Medicaid, and SSI/SSD are most common, accounting for 73% of all pending applications.

Are there indicators of greater need?

The need for support with food, health insurance, housing costs and cash assistance is likely greater than indicated by the current number of recipients since both those receiving benefits as well as those who don't report having experienced access barriers. Altogether, about one in two of those asked (48%) say they have encountered some form of difficulty getting services.

42%

of survey takers report having an urgent concern.

The most urgent concerns of those surveyed

Homelessness Eviction Utility Shut-off	30%
No Money for Food	15%

Urgent Concerns. Forty-two percent of survey takers reported having an urgent concern. Although less than half of the total population of survey takers, this percentage is significantly greater than reported in other communities such as Tonawanda (30%) and Lockport (22%). Housing-related concerns predominate, with

almost one in three of the city's vulnerable concerned about the threat of utility shut-off, eviction and/or homelessness. Having no money for food was the second most common concern, reported by 15% of those surveyed.

Lack of Health Insurance.

One in four (26%) reported that at least one adult in their household lacks health insurance. Findings from a focus group suggest many earn too much for Medicaid but not enough to afford insurance. Children, on the other hand, are more likely to be insured; only two respondents indicated that one or more children in their household is without insurance.

What's causing this situation?

A number of factors affect Niagara Falls residents who are at-risk. Fundamentally, respondents lack jobs, job training, and/or an educational background that would enable them to climb out of poverty. The most pressing factors identified by the survey include:

Unemployment/

Underemployment. The median age of respondents was 44 years old, well-within the working prime age range of 18 to 64, however, only 18% reported working full time while another 12% reported working part time. Thirty-seven percent of respondents reported that they were unemployed, with most actively looking, and another 20% reported that they were disabled. Compounding matters, only 27% said that other adults in their household are employed full or part time.

359 surveyed

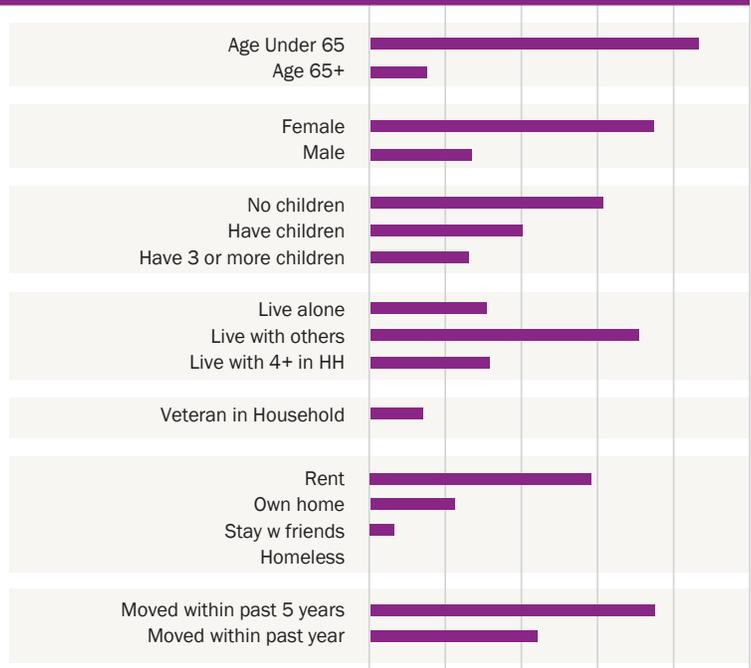
Low income. A shocking 71% of those surveyed who reported their income live in households getting by on less than \$1,250 per month. This is less than the poverty level for a household of two, the median sized household for those surveyed.

Limited Education and Skills. Forty-three percent of respondents have achieved only a high school education or its equivalent. Almost another one in five (17%) has not completed high school. Altogether, the large majority of the city's most vulnerable have nothing more than a high school diploma, at best. A mere 16% of respondents completed college or graduate school. Even fewer - 3% - report having completed any trade school where they would have attained skills for higher-paying jobs not requiring a college degree.

Transportation. Over half (58%) of respondents do not own a vehicle and may experience difficulty traveling outside of their immediate environment. Roughly 40% of respondents either walk or bike to get around, while another 17% rely on public transportation. Another 15% depends on family or friends for transportation needs. When those without a vehicle were asked why they don't use public transportation more often, the most common response was that it is "too expensive."

Long term poverty. With only 22% owning a home and 42% with a car, these survey findings suggest that the large majority of those at risk in Niagara Falls have been in poverty a long time, perhaps their entire lifetime, and have never had the capacity to acquire these basic assets. This is substantiated by the large percentage of individuals who are already receiving some form of human services.

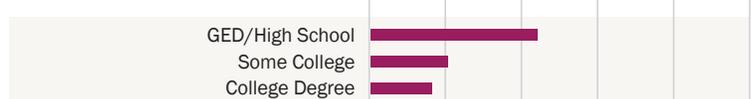
Individuals and Families



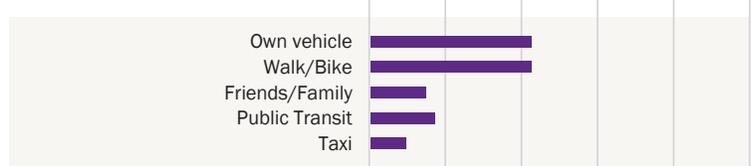
Work and Income



Education



Transportation



Source: Mobile Safety-Net Team Community Needs Assessment, 2012-13

Barriers Residents Face

A clear majority of the city's most vulnerable families live in poverty and do not have an adequate education to survive in today's economy. Compounding this startling picture, when respondents try to access services, almost 50% report barriers. One in five who offered information on barriers said they have been turned away from programs and services because of income limits. Over one in seven (15%) said traveling to get services is difficult for them, while 14% said confusing processes have created barriers for them.

Smaller percentages reported barriers such as difficulty leaving home (4%), not being able to get to an agency during their hours of operation (4%) or language-related difficulties (2%).

Conversations with residents shed further light on the barriers and challenges they face in providing for themselves and their families. Six conversations were held at the following five venues: Henry E. Wroble Towers Apartments, Beloved Community Center, Doris W. Jones Family Resource Building, John Duke

A Voice from the Community

Senior Center and Niagara's WorkSourceOne. What follows are the many barriers residents describe, illustrating how circumstances in life can readily snowball and become entrenching.

There is a lack of good jobs in Niagara Falls. Probably one of the biggest barriers to self sufficiency faced by residents

in Niagara Falls is the lack of decent-paying jobs in the city. Most are described as being temporary, seasonal, or part time. Full-time jobs are, increasingly, lower-paying and without benefits. While provisions of the Affordable Care Act contains provisions for benefits for full-time workers, one resident described how a major company he recently worked for began cutting hours of full-time workers to avoid paying benefits.

One middle-age resident expressed frustration with how employers have a laundry list of qualifications and requirements for jobs paying \$10 an hour. Kathy Beckhorn from Niagara's WorkSourceOne describes it as "the purple squirrel," that search for an ideal candidate that generally doesn't exist.

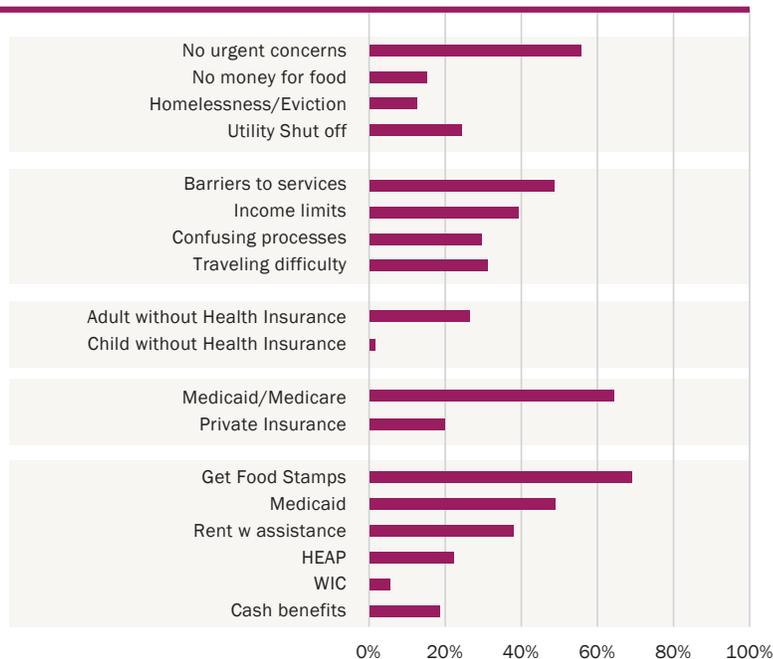
Age creates additional barriers, residents say. As one put it, "When you cross the age of 50, you are not desirable." Another

older resident describes how she used to earn \$50 an hour. Today, she earns minimum wage. Parents describe needing to work two and three jobs to make ends meet.

Indeed, even as the region's economy has been adding jobs, DSS caseloads are rising, reflective of jobs being added in lower-wage sectors such as accommodations and food services and in geographies that are not readily accessible to those in Niagara Falls without a vehicle. Others are being filled with candidates with current skills and not the longer-term unemployed.

Traveling for work outside of Niagara Falls is expensive and creates challenges of its own. There was resounding agreement in one focus group with job seekers that finding a job in Niagara Falls is important. The majority rely on public transit and said that while it's possible to get out to Buffalo or

Needs & Barriers



Source: Mobile Safety-Net Team Community Needs Assessment, 2012

1 out of 2 residents surveyed in Niagara Falls say they have encountered difficulty getting services.



Amherst where some of the jobs are, “try getting back home.” Try getting to work on weekends. You may need to walk because, off hours, public transit availability is sparse at best.

Even for those with cars, distance is a challenge because of the cost of gas. As one participant put it, if you work outside the city, you have to make sure you’re getting paid a decent wage to cover the additional cost for transportation, whether that’s bus fare or gas money. (Driving from Niagara Falls to Williamsville 5 days a week costs almost \$200 a month in gas and tolls alone.)

Distance also adds hours to the work day. An eight hour work day turns into 12 hours, and this, then, makes finding childcare difficult and expensive.

Those seeking work in Erie County perceive geographic discrimination. Residents taking part in a focus group at Niagara’s WorkSourceOne describe how simply having a Niagara Falls address puts them at a disadvantage. One gentleman described how he landed significantly more interviews when he used a Grand Island address, as compared to a Niagara Falls address. Employers in Erie County tend not to call back when they see a Niagara Falls address. When asked why this is the case, residents perceive employer concerns about reliability, if their car might break down, given the distance.

Poor credit histories pose barriers. Residents looking for work describe how employers won’t hire you if your credit is poor. It’s an indicator of reliability, residents have been told, yet it’s also a form

A Voice from
the
Community

“I used to make \$50 an hour...
I [now] make minimum wage.”

of indirect discrimination against the poor and long-term unemployed who, because of their financial situation, are more likely to have fallen behind on bills or been unable to manage large unexpected expenses such as a short stay in the emergency room.

Many lack vehicles and walk to get places. In fact, one younger adult explained that many in Niagara Falls don’t have a driver’s license for one reason or another. Getting behind on child support was one reason offered. One gentleman described how his license was taken away when he got behind. Another woman said the same thing happened to her last year when she didn’t have custody of her children. Today she has her children, but without a license, she’s having a hard time getting them where they need to go. (Driver’s license suspension is one of several procedures New York has in place to collect overdue child support from a noncustodial parent.)

Walking is common in Niagara Falls. One parent, who is not employed because of an elbow disability, says he walks places or catches rides with friends and family because “buses are simply getting to be too expensive.” Another parent agreed but said it’s difficult to walk with kids.

Seniors described transportation challenges, too, primarily challenges related to getting to doctor’s appointments. While Medicaid

vans exist, there aren’t equivalent options for seniors on Medicare, said one group of ladies who meets for socializing and sewing at the Doris Jones Family Resource Building. While the Niagara County Office for the Aging offers seniors transportation for medical appointments, this service isn’t free like the Medicaid van.

Seniors we spoke with at the John Duke Senior Center describe having to take cabs sometimes to the doctor or store, which gets to be expensive. Meanwhile, residents at Wroble Towers expressed frustration with riding the bus. It’s supposedly handicapped accessible but many residents say drivers are not adequately trained to help people getting on and off.

Criminal records close doors to subsidized housing and employment long past the offense. One 30 year old single mother of four described how she received a felony conviction at the age of 18, and today, 12 years later, that conviction haunts her, creating barriers to anything other than minimum wage employment at the mall. It also bars her from living in any type of HUD-supported housing, from public housing to the Section 8 program.

Quality child care is expensive. One mother who is looking for a job says she pays \$90 a week for two days of child care that enables her to attend job fairs and otherwise look for employment. Less expensive,

home-based care is available but quality isn’t always there.

That said, home care is described as the only option for parents needing care during evening and weekend hours, and the cost goes up too. The situation is better for children of school age. Latchkey programs for kids are both safe and affordable, at about \$50 a month. One mother, however, expressed some frustration that enriching after school-based programs such as sports, dance and music require parents to pay. “We can’t do that,” she exclaimed, in thinking about how one family she knows is taking out a second mortgage so their kids can participate in dance.

Awareness is lacking. Several of those attending a job fair at Doris Jones Family Resource Building expressed disappointment and frustration that they never knew about the training offered there until that day. Participants in another focus group at Niagara’s WorkSourceOne agreed that Niagara Falls has many good resources and supports but said that awareness is a big challenge. In fact, the group of 16 benefited so much from the conversation and from hearing from each others’ experiences, a few made plans to talk further after the focus group.

Voices from the Community

Insights and perspectives from those with first-hand experience

These are stories about real people*, individuals in Niagara Falls who agreed to talk with us and share some of their personal account. We asked them about the challenges they face, about the services and supports that have been helpful to them, about barriers and their goals for the future. Through these individuals, this study's findings are humanized, and a clearer picture emerges as to the interconnectedness of issues.

*Names have been changed for privacy purposes



Tammy

A 55-year old mother and grandmother recounts where she has come from and where she wants to go

Tammy is better off today than she was a few years ago when she was unemployed, without a car and in desperate need of food. Indeed, Tammy has come a long way and is very grateful for those people and programs that helped her.

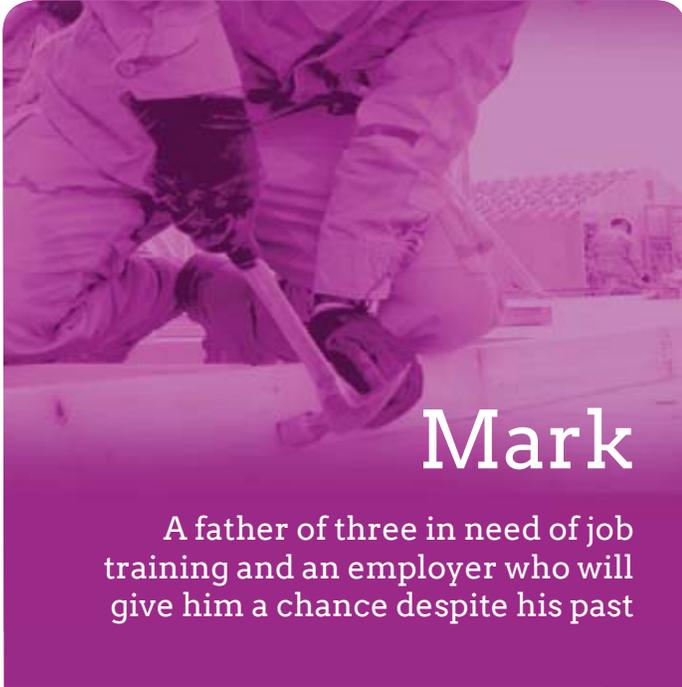
Food was one of her most desperate needs, and the pantry at Heart, Love and Soul was a lifesaver until her food stamp application was approved. Through the Department of Social Services (DSS), Tammy also connected with job training that opened doors to where she now works at the Laundromat and at a local nonprofit doing janitorial work. A high school graduate

A Voice from the Community

with some college under her belt (health issues prevented her from finishing), Tammy's dream is to eventually own her own Laundromat.

To get places, Tammy drives the van she purchased through Wheels to Work, a support that has been substantially reduced. Prior to this, she rode the bus and never had much of a problem, but Tammy admits to rarely leaving the Falls where she has lots of family nearby.

The only barrier Tammy remembers is the months it took to get food stamps. She also mentions how DSS recently informed her that they accidentally overpaid her several years ago and is now requesting the money back. Tammy sends small sums at a time, even though money is tight, and she sometimes struggles to afford things as simple as gas for her van.



Mark

A father of three in need of job training and an employer who will give him a chance despite his past

Mark is a builder by trade, and these days, he is working hard to rebuild a life for himself and his three children. If Mark could shake parts of his past, he would because it's been one of his biggest barriers. Like everyone, he has made some poor choices, but his are closing doors to employment today.

Simply put, Mark has a criminal past. Employers never call back when he puts this on job applications, and when he once failed to mention it, he was hired but fired a week later when the background check was done.

Mark still works when he can, doing roofing jobs, but that's seasonal. He needs something steady. The training he is getting from the Isaiah 61 Project will broaden his skills base beyond his GED and construction certificate, both of which were earned in prison. He's learning plumbing and electric, skills that will help him find work year-round. He'd like to eventually get a car, but he's managing now. He walks, uses mass transit and borrows his girlfriend's car. Rarely does he travel outside of Niagara Falls. Nor does he receive any government assistance. What he'd like to see are more options for children, to keep them out of trouble.

A Voice from the Community



Judy

A divorced mother of one in need of better housing, transportation, and help dealing with the paperwork and red tape

Judy and her five-year old son moved to Niagara Falls 4 years ago to start a new life for themselves after her divorce. Having grown up in Buffalo, she was drawn to the city's affordable cost of living. Yet it's at a high price. While Judy found subsidized housing in the Hyde Park area, it's "disgusting" with cigarette smoke and urine from neighbors pervading the air, especially in the summer. She keeps her windows closed and forbids her son from playing with other kids in the area. She has fears he will be harmed, introduced to drugs or that he will bring home bedbugs.

While Judy has worked a variety of jobs in the past, she was recently in a bad accident and is unable to work. Even getting to doctor appointments is hard, and she needs to get there to get disability. She has a car but can't afford gas, even if it'll be reimbursed by DSS. She gets food stamps, uses food pantries, and has applied for cash assistance. Transportation aside, paperwork and red tape are her biggest barriers.

A Voice from the Community

One brighter spot is the training she has connected with at the Isaiah 61 Project. However, without any kind of stipend, she worries about how to pay the bills. She describes how classmates have committed crimes in the past out of need and desperation. She also expresses frustration at how "crack heads" with HIV get more support than others.

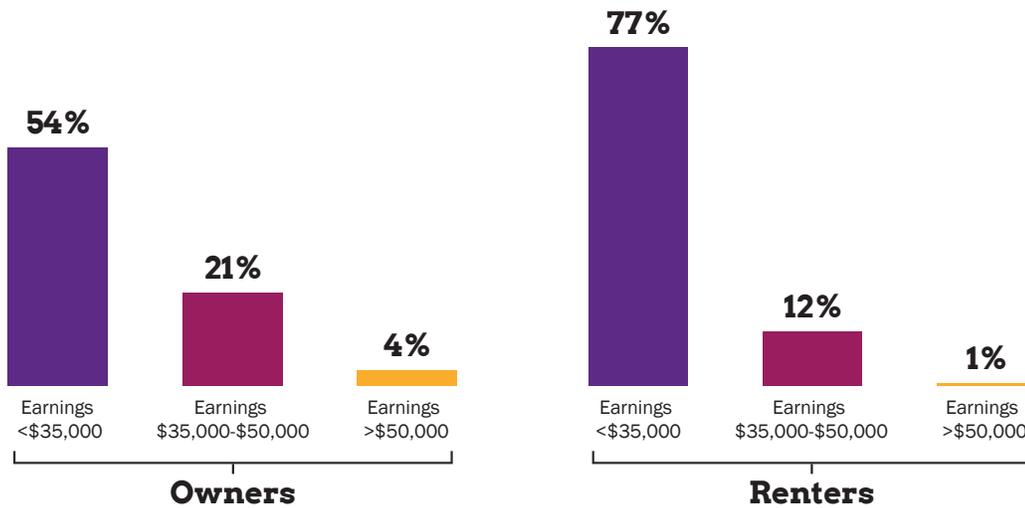
Context for Action

Places in Need



Where we live,
how we travel
and the safety
levels in our
community

Households in Niagara Falls Paying 30% or More of Their Income on Housing, by Income Category, 2011



Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Housing

There are about 22,330 occupied housing units in Niagara Falls. Fewer than six out of ten are owner occupied. Indeed, the housing market in Niagara Falls comprises a much larger proportion of renters than exists in other areas of Niagara County where the rate of home ownership is 75%.

While housing in Niagara Falls is comparatively affordable for homeowners, with \$66,500 being the median house value (compared to \$110,200 across Niagara County), affordable and appropriate housing for renters is lacking.

Over three-quarters of lower-income renters pay more than 30% of their household income on housing, and over half of all renters live in housing that is substandard, either overcrowded, lacking complete plumbing or kitchen facilities, or costing more than 30% of household income. Still others have unresponsive landlords, a major challenge in the Falls according to both residents and human service providers.

5,330+
lower-income renters in Niagara Falls are burdened with housing expenses that exceed 30% of their household income.

One resident taking part in a focus group described living without a functioning heater for two years now. He says he has complained repeatedly but nothing is done, so he resorts to using space heaters to keep warm.

Absentee landlords are common, especially in selected low-income tracts in Hyde Park and Downtown where they account for 95% or more of owners of multi-unit properties. In higher-income DeVeaux, in contrast, 30% of multi-unit housing involves an owner who lives on the premises and is more personally invested in the property and neighborhood.

While Niagara Falls Housing Authority has 849 units at five sites, alongside a range of support services, demand for subsidized housing far exceeds what's available. About 770 applications come in every year, while only about 140 units open up. Section 8 vouchers are available from the City of Niagara Falls, but the wait can be five years long. Moreover, residents with felony convictions are forever barred from these subsidized housing programs.

Vacancies are another challenge. Almost 3,150 exist across the city. In certain high-poverty areas in downtown Niagara Falls and Hyde Park, one in four housing units or more have been abandoned. Over four in 10 have been vacant for more than 3 years, a breeding ground for severe disrepair, crime and downward cycling home values.

Public Transit Times From Section 8 Rental Housing at 4600 Hyde Park Boulevard



	Destination	Time of Day	One-Way Travel Time Via Bus	Notes...
1	Geico in Amherst	morning	2 Hr., 8 Min.	Will need to catch the 9:09 AM bus to get to work on time for a customer service job beginning at noon.
2	Niagara County Community College	late afternoon	1 Hr., 36 Min.	Will need to leave home at 4 PM to get to class starting at 6 PM. If class ends at 9 PM, will arrive home at 11 PM, a 7 hour day to take a single 3-hour class 10 miles away
3	Adults Career and Continuing Education Services - Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR)	mid afternoon	1 Hr., 31 Min.	Travel from Niagara Falls to Buffalo via public transit can take three hours, round trip, the same length of time it takes to travel from Niagara Falls to Rochester and back by vehicle.
4	ATTAIN Lab at Doris Jones Family Resource Building	mid morning	18 Min.	It'll cost \$8 round trip by bus for a single mother to travel 1 mile with her child. Walking in winter isn't an option with snow and ice-covered sidewalks. Plus, there are stretches of Highland Avenue without sidewalks.
5	Niagara County Veterans Service Agency in Lockport	mid day	1 Hr., 20 Min.	Traveling about 20 miles away to Lockport requires traveling first to the City of Buffalo, then northeast towards Lockport. After 6 PM, travel back to Niagara Falls will take 3 hours one way.

Source: Travel times were calculated using Google Maps and reflect NFTA's routes and schedules.

Transportation

At the same time Niagara Falls is largely car-dependent, one out of every five households in the city doesn't have a vehicle available to them. This is about 4,500 households altogether. Proportions are more than double among the city's poorest residents, with 58% vulnerable households reporting that they travel by a means other than a vehicle they own. Close to half walk or catch rides with family and friends, limiting their ability to connect with services and jobs, or get places consistently. Most are not seniors who have become unable to drive and have given up their license. Rather, the clear majority (two out of three) are households headed by someone younger, in their working prime, but without a car.

Those who rely on public transit can anticipate spending up to several hours a day commuting, for travel outside the city of Niagara Falls. Commutes to areas of job growth in East Amherst, less than 20 miles from Niagara Falls, can be two hours long one way, since the quickest routes require first going into Buffalo or Lockport. Even travel into these two cities for, say, disability or veterans services entails about a three hour round-trip commute.

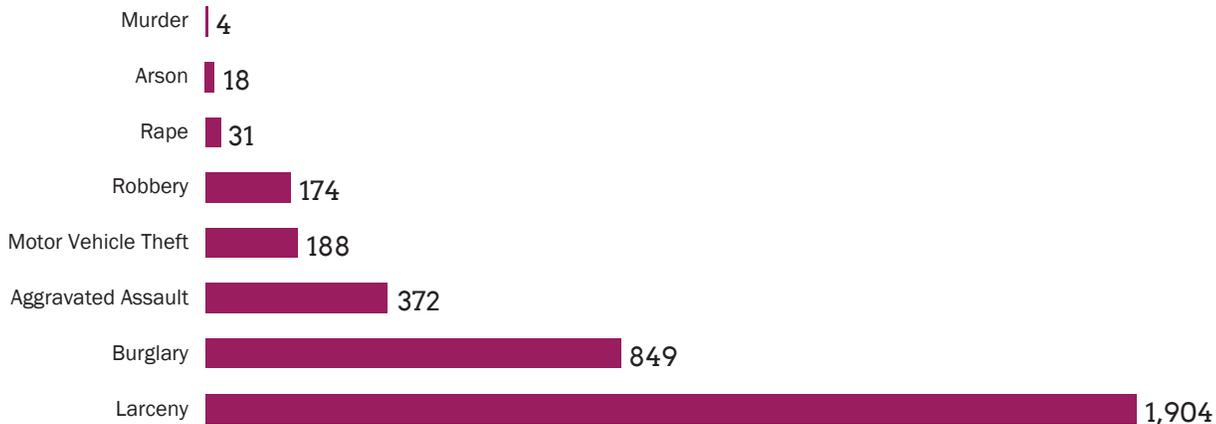
While travel by bus within Niagara Falls involves shorter commutes, the cost of public transit and safety concerns arising from crime, and walking on streets without sidewalks create further hindrances. A round-bus trip for two costs \$8, more than what an individual earns per hour in a minimum-wage job.

Characteristics of Householders Lacking a Vehicle, 2010

Household by Age	# Owner	# Renter	TOTAL
Householder Under Age 65	369	2,656	3,025
Householder Age 65+	713	765	1,478
Total	1,082	3,421	4,503

Source: 2006-11 American Community Survey

Crime in Niagara Falls, 2011



Source: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Crime in the United States 2011

Crime

Niagara Falls is a place where crime is relatively common. In 2011, about one out of every 100 individuals in the city was a victim of a violent crime: a murder, forcible rape, robbery or aggravated assault. By comparison, in the Town of Amherst, only 20 miles away from Niagara Falls, residents have only a 1 in 1,000 chance of being the victim of a violent crime. Rates in the Falls are on par with Buffalo, and the highest across New York State, among places with populations of 50,000 or more.

Even more common is property crime, with almost 3,000 offenses reported by law enforcement for 2011. Fostered by tourism and

1 out of every 100 persons in Niagara Falls was victim of a violent crime in 2011.

the opportunity this creates for vehicle break-ins and theft, crimes against property happen more frequently in Niagara Falls than in any other larger city or town across the state, including the City of Buffalo. One out of 17 individuals in 2011 were burglarized, had something stolen or were the victim of a motor vehicle theft. One is more likely to be a victim of crime in Niagara Falls than anywhere else in the region, considering rates of violent crime and property crime combined. Crime impacts both residents and businesses in Niagara

Falls. One employer at Fashion Outlets of Niagara described losing about \$65,000 last year due to employee theft alone.

As poverty has deepened and neighborhoods have experienced further blight from rising and long-term vacancies, rates of crime have increased over the past decade, especially rates of violent crime which are 30% higher than they were in 2000. Property crime is 20% more common.

Property crime is more common in Niagara Falls than it is in any other large city across New York State.

Teens and young adults commit the large majority of crime in Niagara Falls. Persons under the age of 35 accounted for three-quarters of the 3,600+ arrests made by the Niagara Falls Police Department in 2010. Between 2006 and 2010, Niagara Falls Police Department made nearly 10,000 arrests of persons between the ages of 18 and 35, individuals with at least three decades of work life ahead of them. While this number doesn't necessarily represent 10,000 unique individuals whom will ultimately be convicted of a crime, it likely adds very significantly to the pool of adults in Niagara Falls with a criminal record to now spot their past and create barriers to employment for years to come.

Landscape of Services

Niagara Falls service providers, their strengths, system gaps, barriers and promising developments



Landscape of Services

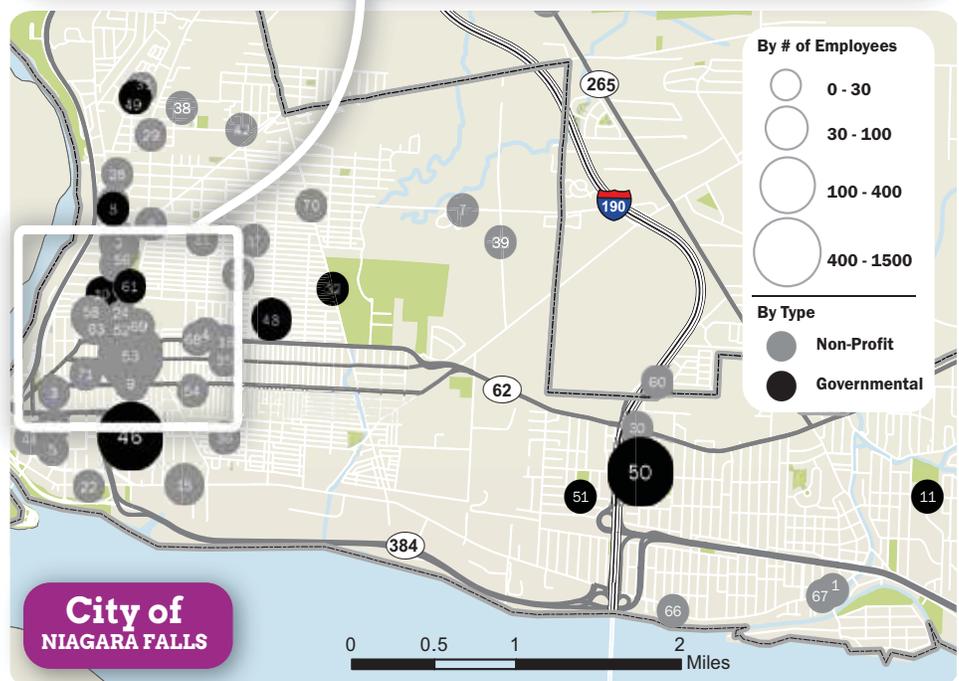
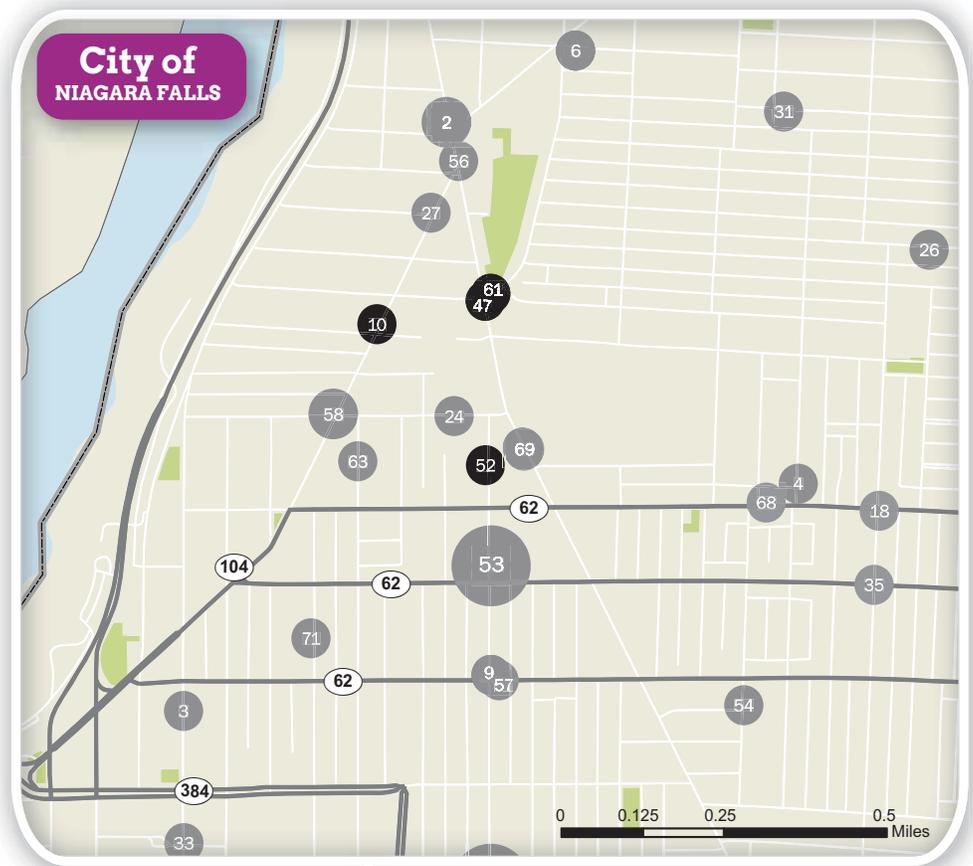
An array of public and private providers exist in the City of Niagara Falls to serve the needs of those seeking human services such as food, clothing, affordable housing, youth programs, job training and more. Many have programs targeting individuals who are particularly vulnerable such as young parents, veterans, seniors and the homeless.



The typical service provider in Niagara Falls is a small nonprofit with under 10 employees, located on the western side of the city, in neighborhoods where poverty is greatest such as Downtown, Hyde Park and Highland.

A One Stop Family Center on Main Street is one area where a number of providers are clustered, a consolidation spearheaded several years ago by Family and Children's Services and supported by both national and local foundations.

About 3,695
employees across
71 providers
in Niagara Falls
provide a range of
human services to
those in need.



HUMAN SERVICES: AGENCY NAME		Target Population				Services										
		Teen Parents	Veterans	Seniors	Homeless	Food	Clothing	Education Training	Affordable Housing	Transportation	Mental Health Addictions	Health/Wellness	Legal	Youth Programs	Financial Literacy	Crime/Juvenile Information Referral
1	American Legion		✓													
2	American Red Cross															
3	Beacon Center															
4	Boys and Girls Club															
5	Catholic Charities				✓											
	Catholic Charities Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program Site															
	Monsignor Carr Mental Health Clinics, Catholic Charities															
6	Center for Joy															
7	Center for Young Parents	✓														
8	Central City Neighborhood Development Corp.															
9	Child Advocacy Center of Niagara															
10	City of Niagara Falls, Community Development Department															
11	City of Niagara Falls, Public Works and Parks, Neighborhood Services															
12	Community Child Care Clearinghouse of Niagara			✓												
13	Community Health Center of Niagara Falls															
14	Community Health Worker Program, Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Ctr	✓														
15	Community Missions of Niagara Frontier, Inc.				✓											
16	Compeer Niagara for Kids															
17	Destination Life Fellowship															
18	Everywoman Opportunity Center															
19	Experience Works															
20	Family and Children's Services of Niagara, Inc.	✓		✓												
	Casey House, Family and Children Service of Niagara, Inc.				✓											
	The CRIB, Family and Children Service of Niagara, Inc.	✓														
21	Family Resource Center Network: Focus on Families @ NFC School District	✓			✓											
22	Fellowship House Inc.															
23	Girl Scouts of Western New York															
24	Golden Age Clubs															
25	GuildCare															
26	Hannah House, a Lighthouse International Ministries			✓												
27	Health Association of Niagara County, Inc. (HANCI)															
28	Heart, Love and Soul	✓		✓												
29	Highland Community Revitalization Committee		✓													
30	Horizon Health Services- Counseling Center															
31	Isaiah 61															
32	John A Duke Senior Center			✓												
33	Leadership Niagara															
34	Literacy New York - Niagara															

See Data Sources and Notes for definitions

*Entries that are not numbered are programs of agencies otherwise listed in the table.

	HUMAN SERVICES: AGENCY NAME	Target Population				Services											
		Teen Parents	Veterans	Seniors	Homeless	Food	Clothing	Education Training	Affordable Housing	Transportation	Mental Health Addictions	Health/Wellness	Legal	Youth Programs	Financial Literacy	Crime/Juvenile Information Referral	
35	MAD DADS																
36	Magdalene Project																
37	Mount Saint Mary's Neighborhood Center																
38	Mount Zion Baptist Church Food Pantry																
39	National Grid																
40	Native American Community Services, Inc.																
41	Neighborhood Legal Services																
42	New Jerusalem Reporting Center for Boys																
43	Niagara Community Action Program, Inc. (NIACAP)																
44	Niagara County Community College																
45	Niagara County Department of Health																
46	Niagara County Department of Social Services																
47	Niagara County Employment & Training Center - WorksourceOne																
48	Niagara County Head Start Inc.																
49	Niagara Falls Alternative School, Orleans/Niagara BOCES																
50	Niagara Falls City School District																
51	Niagara Falls Community Education Center @ NFC School District																
52	Niagara Falls Housing Authority Doris W. Jones Family Resource Building																
53	Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center																
54	Niagara Falls Neighborhood Housing Services, Inc.																
55	Niagara Falls Police Department - Gang Resistance Education And Training																
56	Niagara Falls Public Library																
57	Niagara Gospel Rescue Mission																
58	Northpointe Council Inc																
59	Northpointe Council Inc. (Second Location)																
60	Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara																
61	Orleans/Niagara BOCES. GED Program																
62	Planned Parenthood Of Niagara																
63	Potter's House Christian Community Church																
64	ReNu Niagara																
65	Rivershore, Inc																
66	Salvation Army																
67	St. John De LaSalle Community Care																
68	Summit Life Outreach Center Inc.																
69	WNY Independent Living - Independent Living of Niagara County																
70	Word Of Life Ministries																
71	YWCA of Niagara - Carolyn's House																

Strengths of the System

There are several already established partnerships and coalitions, including the Niagara County Coalition for Services to the Homeless, the Continuum of Care Network, Niagara County Human Services Coalition, the Mayor's Task Group for Creating a Healthier Niagara Falls, and a coalition of human services providers in Niagara Falls with 125 members representing 35-50 agencies.

Some very innovative human services partnerships exist. The Isaiah 61 Project is an example of an organization that giving those in poverty job skills while rehabilitating vacant housing. The Niagara Falls Housing Authority, with more than 100 community partners, is another.

A Human Services
COALITION
represents 35+
providers

Niagara Falls Housing Authority is much more than a landlord. It offers a wide range of support resources and programs for residents, from after-school programs, health and wellness workshops, GED preparation, vocational training, computers, senior services, a literacy initiative for parents with young children and scholarship opportunities.

Focus on Families is a well-regarded, grant-funded family resource center, housed within the Niagara Falls City School District. Its four staff members serve almost 100 poor families, providing parents with information, referrals and help navigating the social services system. They also offer parent classes, transportation, connections with child care, food drop-offs at home and other services.

A provider network led by Niagara Falls Memorial, Horizon Health and Eastern Niagara Health System forms **Niagara County's first health home, offering service coordination and more comprehensive health care to Medicaid recipients.** Other major health providers in the city offer strength in this service area, with their commitment to serving the vulnerable. The Community Health Program at Niagara Falls Memorial is one example.

Niagara University has a long-standing commitment to the city and a willingness to partner, with the city, the school district, Niagara Falls Housing Authority and other providers. Signaling an even greater commitment, ReNu Niagara, an initiative of NU's Institute for Civic Engagement, recently moved to downtown Niagara Falls and is helping residents and local organizations address pressing concerns. Food and urban garden is one initiative they are catalyzing.

The city's two senior centers are strong supports, offering connections with programs and services in the community, free meals, social activities, free transportation, and opportunities to meet with staff from the Niagara County Office of the Aging.

Gaps in Services

While the Niagara Falls City School District is committed to its students and the community, with an employee residency requirement, universal pre-Kindergarten, free after-school programs, including transportation, and a variety of partnerships, **the school district needs additional support to ensure that most students succeed academically, graduate from high school, and have the capacity to be successful in college.**

Greater supports for food are needed to meet increasing demand and urgent concerns for food. While NiaCAP, Community Missions, Heart, Love and Soul and the Niagara Gospel Rescue Mission are key providers, there are few smaller pantries. Nutrition is another need. Sister Beth from Heart, Love and Soul reports diabetes being rampant among clients. While healthy eating is encouraged, donations are oftentimes for cakes, pies and such.

Housing, in all of its forms, is a great need area. There is insufficient affordable and appropriate rental housing for low-income populations. Many rental units are substandard and owned by absentee landlords who do not maintain them. Moreover, the city's Zoom team lost its funding to ticket homes in violation of standards. Transitional housing for those with mental illness is also needed. Providers describe how individuals remain in emergency rooms due to lack of discharge options. Supportive housing is also needed for emancipated youth with children. Carolyn's House has a minimum age of 19; it's 19 for public housing as well.

There is a dearth of mental health providers, especially for children. There are no psychiatrists in Niagara Falls, and only one licensed provider exists, Monsignor Carr. However, because of large caseloads, they are described as taking only the more urgent cases. There is also concern that medication is being overprescribed. Supports overall are more reactive than preventive, catching those in need at crisis points such as the hospital, with little follow through afterwards.

NO OPTIONS
for child mental health

Pregnancy prevention programming is needed. While Planned Parenthood is reaching small numbers with sex education at selected venues, the school district, which could connect with the masses, says its hands are tied. State law doesn't require comprehensive sex education, and federal regulations tied to particular grants such as IDEA and ESA actually forbid it.

Except for transportation to doctor's appointments available through Medicaid, **there are few flexible and affordable options for traveling for residents without a car**, aside from public transit which can be costly and inconvenient, especially for those traveling outside the city, and difficult to access for seniors and others with physical limitations.

Barriers to Connecting with Residents

Need for human services continues to escalate. Niagara County DSS caseloads continue to increase with no sign of slowing. Over 42,000 across Niagara County receive some form of social services, compared to 27,600 at the start of 2008. Meanwhile, federal funding that has enabled additional staff hires is scheduled to sunset. Other providers also report a situation growing more dire over time, due to rising needs for food, housing, mental health and other supports, alongside limited job opportunities to move vulnerable families into greater self sufficiency.

Critical supports have been cut. For instance, due to state funding cuts, DSS has eliminated child care subsidies for families earning between 120% and 200% of the federal poverty level. State-level cuts have also substantially reduced Everywoman Opportunity Center's Wheels To Work Program. Meanwhile, Niagara Falls Memorial closed Bridges, an inpatient mental health program for children, and last year, the city council voted to eliminate funding to the Zoom team created to clean up delinquent housing. The

city's financial capacity to make investments like this is being threatened by a dispute between NYS and Seneca Nation, which has been withholding casino revenue, \$60 million to date.

**2 YEARS
WAIT**
for Section 8 Housing

Lack of affordable and flexible transportation options creates

barriers to medical appointments for seniors not eligible for the Medicaid van, to mental health providers outside of Niagara Falls, to training options in Sanborn and Buffalo and to jobs, especially to those outside the city and for shifts on weekends and nights.

Individual motivation to achieve and follow through can be low. Staff at Focus at Families have been told by parents that they don't want to work when encouraged through a speaker event about skills, college and jobs. Parental engagement is described as one of the school district's biggest challenges. Meanwhile, a culture of poverty exists with girls seeing getting pregnant as a "badge of honor" and a viable option for surviving economically.

Greater awareness of programs is needed. While both providers and residents say there are lists of services and agencies, they say these lists are aren't sufficient to inform and motivate follow through. Greater opportunities for human connections to ask and answer questions and hear from first-hand experiences, could generate more follow through.

Promising Developments

LiveNF is a new incentive program of the city to draw college graduates to the area, offering student loan reimbursements to those living in target areas for 2 years as well as supports for business owners.

New York State is investing in Niagara Falls as part of its Billion Dollar commitment to the region, with a plan is to foster a growing tourism industry through investments in workforce development initiatives such as NCCC's Niagara Falls Culinary Institute.

Paul Dyster is the city's first mayor in decades to be re-elected to a second term, an indicator that he has earned the respect of residents. Dyster is committed to raising quality of life in Niagara Falls, reducing corruption that has spotted the city's history and addressing the city's severe health needs through a **Task Group to Create a Healthier Niagara Falls.**

Family & Children's Service of Niagara, Inc. recently received **federal funding to open a maternity group home, The CRIB,** offering much needed supports for young women and their children and filling a service gap in the community.

On March 8, a **first-ever poverty conference was held at Niagara University, bringing together providers throughout the county to discuss the problem of poverty and possible solutions.** It was co-sponsored by the Niagara County Coalition for Services to the Homeless, Niagara County Continuum of Care and Niagara University.

A first-ever
**POVERTY
CONFERENCE**
energized providers

Spearheaded by Community Missions, the Niagara County/Niagara Falls Continuum of Care now has a **ten-year plan to reduce homelessness,** as well as a **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)** in place to help track need, build capacity, and enable agencies serving the homeless to apply for HUD funding. Moreover, a **merger of the Niagara Falls/Niagara County CoC and Buffalo/Erie County CoC was just approved by HUD,** creating a regional continuum of care for addressing homelessness.

More coordinated health care is now available for Medicaid enrollees, particularly those with mental illness and chronic conditions, through the state's new health home initiative. Niagara Falls Memorial and Horizons, along with Catholic Health and Spectrum are the two health homes available in the Falls.

The Beloved Community replaces over 100 severely distressed housing units with a mix of housing for lower-income families and an array of support services. It was created with a multi-million HOPE VI grant awarded to the Niagara Falls Housing Authority.

Insights from the Field

Recommendations and Best Practices

Where we gathered our information and what we are reporting

These insights, recommendations and strategies for achieving them are intended to spur thought and assist the community in developing its own priorities and action plans.

They come from a distillation of information gathered from a wide range of sources: more than a dozen agency interviews conducted by the Mobile Safety-Net Team, follow-up interviews and conversations conducted by the University at Buffalo Regional Institute with the Niagara Falls City School District, Focus on Families, Niagara County Department of Social Services, a Niagara Falls City Council representative, Neighborhood Legal Services, the Community Health Worker Program at Niagara Falls Medical Center, Niagara Falls Community Development Department, P2 Collaborative, Community Missions, Niagara Falls Housing Authority, Niagara Gospel Rescue Mission, Niagara's WorkSourceOne, Heart, Love and Soul, Niagara University's ReNu Niagara, Isaiah 61 Project, Everywoman Opportunity Center, Independent Living of Niagara County, ACCES-VR, and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara County.

An agency focus group was held in January 2013, with 17 provider representatives present. Resident input was gathered through focus groups at the John Duke Senior Center, Wrobel Towers, Beloved Community Center, Doris Jones Family Resource Building and Niagara's WorkSourceOne.

Local data also inform these findings and recommendations, as do findings from the Poverty Conference at Niagara University.



Strengthen and support the existing coalition of human service providers

The existing coalitions of human services providers are a notable asset and strength in Niagara Falls, with potential to take current work beyond collaboration, information and awareness to advocate for policy change and help secure funding and additional resources for human services. Indeed, human services providers participating in a focus group agreed that going after more funding and cultivating interest by foundations outside of Niagara County is a priority. Yet, this will take additional capacity.

STRATEGIES

Explore partnerships with area universities such as Niagara University and the University at Buffalo, particularly the School of Law, Social Work, and Architecture and Planning to engage students whose expertise and work could support the coalition's capacity through grant writing, research, newsletter development, policy formulation and advocacy, especially in areas such as transportation, housing and food.

Facilitate greater problem solving through subcommittees or task groups within the coalition that would tackle identified priorities.

Use this assessment as a tool for fund development, applying to national foundations focused on poverty alleviation in high

impact locales such as Niagara Falls. Another source is economic development funding available through the state's consolidated funding application process for projects related to community development, workforce development, sustainability and other priorities. More information is available online at <https://apps.cio.ny.gov/apps/cfa/>.

Explore a nominal membership fee for members that would create a budget for work on collective goals.

To further raise support and awareness of coalition interests and facilitate a broader network of partnerships, consider expanding membership to include representation from the media/newspaper, elected officials, business community, and tourism development. Provide resident perspective to the coalition through input and coordination with volunteer advocates described below.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

All members of the Niagara Falls Human Services Coalition, the Coalition for Services to the Homeless, Niagara University's ReNu Niagara, area colleges and universities, and regional foundations.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

The Seattle Human Services Coalition is an example of a long-standing successful group that has recently secured millions in additional local funding for human services and is advocating for member interests at the state level.

<http://shscoalition.org/>

MODELS TO CONSIDER

LIFT

LIFT combats poverty by working one-on-one with individuals and families to help them problem solve, navigate an oftentimes complex support system and get connected to food, affordable housing, child care, employment, training and more. The organization, started up by two Yale students in 1998 and now operating in the nation's hardest hit urban areas like Philadelphia, NYC, and LA, is founded on the principle that human relationships are key to overcoming complex challenges, especially multigenerational poverty. In Boston, LIFT is also working with the public school system to connect families with community resources. The organization seeks to fill gaps and connect dots rather than duplicate what exists. Operational costs are kept down through the use of trained volunteers, oftentimes college students, and AmeriCorps members. Funding for this model, which has gained both national attention and a political voice, comes from foundations as well as corporate and individual donors. To garner support, LIFT consistently tracks its impact in terms of clients served, jobs secured, tax dollars returned, and increases in applications for food stamps and WIC.

<http://www.liftcommunities.org/>



Use trained volunteer advocates to help residents navigate the system and better link with supports

One out of two vulnerable residents describe barriers to services such as income limits, traveling difficulty and confusing processes. Limited education levels also contribute. Sixty percent of vulnerable adults have no education beyond high school, and nearly a fifth lack a high school diploma or GED. While Focus on Families staff works with about 100 families with children a year, this is fraction of those in poverty. Human services providers agree that getting information to residents isn't always enough and that more follow-through requires a human connection.

STRATEGIES

Develop a mobile team of volunteer caseworkers to link residents in need with crucial benefits and services, through information, referrals, and follow through. LIFT offers a model for doing this, and the region's colleges and universities could supply a source of workers who could be trained by the Mobile Safety-Net Team.

Circles (see Model to Consider below) offers another model for empowering residents through support in a group setting. Establish a partnership with the Niagara Falls City School District to expand capacity of Focus on Families and reach more than the 100 families in need they already reach. LIFT's partnership with the Boston Public Schools offers a model with capacity to support ten times this number of families annually. Explore a partnership with Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center to better link vulnerable discharges with support services in the community, work that may reimbursable Medicaid's provision for trained peer specialists.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

The John R. Oishei Foundation and its Mobile Safety-Net Team, the Niagara Falls City School District, Focus on Families, Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, area colleges and universities, and human services providers.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

LIFT is a growing and largely volunteer-run initiative that is working in inner cities across the nation to combat multi-generational poverty. <http://www.liftcommunities.org/>

MODELS TO CONSIDER

CIRCLES

CIRCLES is a model being explored by groups in Niagara Falls, and it was featured at the Poverty Conference in March. Circles engages the entire community in moving the mountains that keep families in poverty. Intervention is at both the individual and community levels. For individuals, Circles pairs groups of lower-income families (circle leaders) with higher-income families (circle allies) to build relationships, help leaders develop goals, provide connections with needed supports, offer encouragement and celebrate small steps forward such as a new apartment or job interview. Groups meet weekly and the friendships that are formed help to deconcentrate poverty. At the community level, everyone is mobilized through monthly meetings that bring together circle leaders, allies, commissioners of social services, school district superintendents, human service heads and community members. The focus here is on the upstream factors that keep populations in poverty. It's a model with impressive outcomes. In Syracuse, Circles has helped 60% of circle leaders, many from intergenerational poverty, obtain and maintain jobs at the local hospital. These are full-time jobs with benefits. Circles in Syracuse is supported by Housing Visions to help sustain its mission of neighborhood revitalization and stable housing for lower-income families.

<http://www.movethemountain.org/>



Improve academic performance and increase graduation rates

Academic achievement is critical to moving the needle on poverty. Adults in Niagara Falls who don't graduate from high school are over four times more likely than those who do graduate from college to be poor. Yet there are thousands of children in Niagara Falls City School District who are falling behind in key subject areas, and hundreds who have recently dropped out. Meanwhile, concentrated poverty within the district depresses student achievement and drains existing school supports.

STRATEGIES

Reduce teen pregnancies, which are a risk factor for poor academic outcomes, and grow levels of support for teen mothers.

Improve parenting practices to better engage parents in school activities and garner their support for their child's academic outcomes.

Connect at-risk children with long-term mentors through programs like Big Brother Big Sister, which have been shown to improve educational outcomes and reduce risky behavior by youth.

Strengthen mental health supports for children and families to

remove barriers that can impede learning. To this end, explore the possibility of offering school-based services, perhaps through school-based health clinics. The Rochester City School District offers a model.

Ensure all children have access to quality after-school programming. Pursue federal dollars to reinstate the district's 21st Century Community Learning Center, which improved student performance enough to get funding for the center eliminated.

Explore the feasibility of implementing Say Yes in the Niagara Falls City School District. What's happening in Buffalo offers a model.

Advocate for federal and state-level policies and standards that consider the very real impacts of concentrated poverty on academic achievement.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

The Niagara Falls City School District, Center for Young Parents, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara County, after-school providers, Catholic Charities Monsignor Carr, parents, students, potential mentors from major area employers and the faith-based community.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

Say Yes improves academic performance and graduation rates in inner-city school districts through supports and the promise of college.

<http://www.sayyestoeducation.org/>

MODELS TO CONSIDER

SAY YES TO EDUCATION

SAY YES TO EDUCATION is a model being implemented in school districts across the nation to increase high school and college graduation rates through the promise of free college and the provision of support services to ensure academic success. Recently launched in the Buffalo City School District, the class of 2013 will be the first recipients of college scholarships, which can be used to attend trade school, a two-year college, a four-year college, or a 2+2 program. All students in the district are eligible; there is no income-cap on families. Moreover, every child enrolled will have access to a variety of supports to ensure academic success, including after-school programs.

Executive Director David Rust describes the initiative as a "landmark collaboration" of education, business, foundation leaders and the nonprofit community. Outcome studies prove the program's effectiveness in boosting graduation rates. Stronger academic achievement, higher home values, and greater community engagement are additional positive impacts reported by districts across the nation. While \$30.5 million is what it will take to fully implement the program in Buffalo, cost depends on district size and other factors.

<http://www.sayyestoeducation.org/> and <http://buffalo.sayyestoeducation.org/>



Reduce teen pregnancy

Teen pregnancy creates significant barriers to academic achievement and economic independence. It's a major contributor of poverty. Yet the school district reports that about 80 teens every year either get pregnant or have recently had a child. Teen pregnancy levels, reflecting pregnancies of girls ages 15 to 19, are highest in Zip Codes 14301, 14303, and 14305. While some supports are in place for young parents, few are preventive in nature and those that are reach only small numbers of students.

STRATEGIES

Develop a community-wide vision for reducing teen pregnancy that engages all relevant stakeholders, including teens, partners, schools, after-school providers and health professionals.

Adopt a structured, evidenced-based program for teen pregnancy reduction. Successful models include the Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program (see the Model To Consider below) and TOP, a teen outreach program in Southeast Florida that boasts a 53% reduction in pregnancy risk and improved academic performance. Teen mentoring is a feature of this after-school model, along with community service and the development of life skills.

Explore incorporating components of these models into already established programs offered by the Girl Scouts of WNY or other mentoring programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, which itself reports success in reducing teen pregnancy. In the past 20 years, only six teens have been pregnant and none have landed

themselves in jail. Today, the organization serves 200+ children from across Niagara County.

Grow the base of potential mentors from the community through outreach at churches and key employers across Niagara County such as Niagara University, Niagara County Community College, Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, and First Niagara Bank. Track results to demonstrate outcomes and help grow successful programs.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

Parents, teens, health professionals, Niagara Falls Medical Center Community Health Worker Program, Center for Young Parents, Planned Parenthood's Niagara Falls Office, Niagara Falls City School District, after-school providers such as the Girl Scouts of Western New York and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara County, and Niagara Falls Housing Authority

MODELS TO CONSIDER

In addition to the Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention program described below, Wyman's Teen Outreach Program (TOP) is a nationally recognized best practice.

<http://wymancenter.org/nationalnetwork/top/>

MODELS TO CONSIDER

CARRERA ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY PREVENTION PROGRAM

The Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program (CAPPP) was established in 1994 and is promoted as a model "with statistically proven effectiveness" for reducing pregnancy and sexual activity among disadvantaged, inner-city teens. Using a holistic approach to tackle teen pregnancy, the program encompasses the following seven components taught by youth development professionals, educators, and other specialists: education; job club; family life and sexuality education; mental health; medical and dental services; self-expression; and lifetime individual sports. The CAPPP is implemented in after-school modules, offered six days a week, and includes a summer program. In addition, an in-school module is offered, beginning in grade 6, with class time provided during advisory and guidance periods and resource time. The program's goals are to empower youth; help them develop personal goals and cultivate the desire for a productive future; improve their sexual literacy; and educate them about the consequences of sexual activity. CAPPP currently serves approximately 4,000 youth in communities facing higher than average rates of poverty, unemployment, teen pregnancy, and high school dropouts. Programs exist in New York City and at partnership sites in more than a dozen different states.

<http://stopteenpregnancy.childrensaidsociety.org>



Grow safe and affordable housing options for low-income residents

Niagara Falls lacks safe and affordable housing for its at-risk population. Over 5,300 low-income renters pay more than 30% of their income on housing, putting them at risk for homelessness and for not being able to afford basic necessities. Utility shut-off notices were the most common urgent concern reported by the city's vulnerable. Unresponsive absentee landlords are also common, as are substandard conditions that create health hazards, according to providers. While tenants have legal rights, fear of retaliation is real.

STRATEGIES

Ensure that landlords who receive public money in the form of rent subsidies are subject to standards of quality for their rental properties.

Support efforts by the Niagara County Department of Social Services to initiate inspection of rental properties to which they make referrals.

Expand education and training opportunities for both landlords and tenants, so both are aware of their rights and responsibilities under the law. Regional resources for this include HOME, Neighborhood Legal Services and Belmont.

Promote tenant choice of higher-opportunity apartments through the development of a comprehensive listing of rental properties and

the forms of rent they accept. Make list available to DSS and other housing organizations, as well as to all potential tenants.

Support seniors ability to age in place by continuing to engage faith-based missions teams that have helped seniors with painting, ramp construction and general yard maintenance in past years.

Engage top employers in and around Niagara Falls to offer home buying incentives to employees, especially lower-income ones. Canisius College's Employer Assisted Housing Program, aimed at improving surrounding neighborhoods, offers a model.

Continue to support initiatives like Isaiah 61 and ReNu Niagara that are rehabilitating vacant housing and exploring reuse projects.

Continue to grow the number of HMIS users to develop a solid baseline of housing need and support funding by HUD for additional capacity.

Secure legal aid to assist those with criminal records in gaining access to affordable housing.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

All levels of political leadership, Niagara County DSS, Niagara University ReNU Niagara, HOME, Neighborhood Legal Services, Niagara County Coalition for services to the Homeless, Isaiah 61 Project, human services providers, especially those offering housing supports.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

In addition to Ogden City's Good Landlord Incentive Program (see below), the City of Rochester supports tenants and landlords through strong partnerships between the Housing Council, Monroe County Department of Human Services and Neighborhood Service Centers operated by the city.

<http://www.thehousingcouncil.org/>

MODELS TO CONSIDER

GOOD LANDLORD INCENTIVE PROGRAM

Established in 2004 through municipal legislation, Ogden's Good Landlord Incentive Program incentivizes landlords to upkeep their properties by decreasing the amount of the annual "disproportionate impact fee," i.e., a fee based on the disproportionate amount of police and fire services, assessed against rental dwellings. Landlord requirements include completing a landlord training program; properly screening tenant applications, background checks, and credit checks; maintaining properties free of criminal activity, code violations and other public nuisances; and being current on city business licenses and fees. For example, if a landlord of a single-family dwelling enrolls in this program, the disproportionate impact fee is lowered from \$156 per year to \$13 per year. The goal of the program is to provide a financial incentive to landlords who maintain their properties. In the first nine months of the program's operation (Jan-Oct 2005), the City realized an 8 % city-wide reduction in dispatched calls for police and fire services. Incidences of crime among tenants declined 24%. To date, most of the city's landlords – more than 1,300 – participate in the program.

http://www.ogdencity.com/en/doing_business/business_licensing/good_landlord.aspx



Strengthen supports for mental health promotion

A lack of mental health supports, especially counseling for children, was a recurring theme expressed by providers. The gap widened when Niagara Falls Memorial Center closed Bridges, its mental health unit for children. There are now only 16 licensed psychologists in all of Niagara County (Erie County has 301), and no psychiatrists in Niagara Falls. Other roadblocks for residents, including adults with mental health needs, include lack of focus on prevention, financial barriers, and traveling to services outside of Niagara Falls. It's common for adults to seek mental health care at hospitals, which are easier to get to, with little support upon discharge.

STRATEGIES

Promote prevention and early intervention through screening in natural settings such as primary health care locations and early childhood programs. Help Me Grow is a national model being piloted locally by the Health Foundation of Western and Central New York.

Explore the possibility of creating school-based health centers that would offer mental health and other health services to students and their families at no cost, except what insurance could be billed. The Rochester City School District provides a model. An alternative would be to bring mental health services into the school on a contract basis. The Family Support Center in the Sweet Home Central School District is a local example of one that provides on-site counseling services.

Match hospital discharges with mental health needs with trained peer mentors who would help these individuals connect with support services, follow-through on discharge plans, and ultimately reduce readmissions. Peer support specialists are reimbursable by Medicaid. Independent Living of Niagara County offers peer support services and this capacity could be grown by pursuing Medicaid reimbursement.

Maximize opportunities created under the Affordable Care Act to reduce rehospitalizations and promote coordination across providers and expand access to mental health services.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

Mental health providers, medical providers, including Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, the two health networks, Niagara Falls City School District, Niagara County Head Start, and Independent Living of Niagara County.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

The Peer Bridger Program is a best practice using trained peers to reduce mental health related hospitalizations and strengthen the use of outpatient supports.

<http://www.nyaprs.org/peer-services/optum-peer-bridger/>

Increase access to healthy food and health supports

Healthy food and good nutrition lay a critical foundation for good health, but access barriers exist. Income is a large barrier, with 70% of the city's population dependent on food stamps. Not having enough money for food was the second most common urgent concern reported by one out every seven of the city's most vulnerable. Other barriers include low vehicle access and limited education. At the same time, one in four vulnerable adults doesn't have health insurance, and obesity and diabetes are common chronic diseases for the city's most vulnerable. Niagara County, in fact, ranks among the five worst counties in the state, in terms of health outcomes and high rates of premature death.

STRATEGIES

Continue dialogue advanced during the March 2013 Poverty Conference on ways to improve health and food access, expand networks and strengthen funding strategies.

Support production of healthy and affordable foods through community gardening and urban farms such as those being advanced by ReNu Niagara. The Massachusetts Avenue Project in Buffalo offers a model that provides urban farming, a mobile food truck, community education, youth development, and policy development.

Support Greenprint Niagara, a collaborative effort led by ReNU Niagara that turning vacant lots across the city into community gardens for vegetables, sculpture, herbs and other reuses.

Explore incentives to encourage healthy eating such as Detroit's Double Up Food Bucks, which doubles SNAP dollars expended at farmer's markets. Another model is the Genesis Health Project at Syracuse University, a nationally recognized award-winning initiative that is promoting good nutrition and tackling chronic disease among low-income populations in non-traditional settings such as churches and barbershops.

Expand mobile markets of free and discounted fresh food in areas of the city that have been designated by the USDA as food deserts.

Pursue federal grant funding to increase food access and fight obesity.

Raise awareness of expanded Medicaid coverage and options for free and low-cost care such as at the Community Health Center of Buffalo's Niagara Falls site.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

Providers of food support (NiaCAP, Heart Love and Soul, Niagara Gospel Rescue Mission, Food Bank of WNY), health providers (Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, Mount St. Mary's Neighborhood Center), health networks, the Mayor's Task Force to Create a Healthier Niagara Falls, ReNu Niagara, area churches and providers of information and referral.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

The Massachusetts Avenue Project in Buffalo is increasing access to fresh affordable food in low-income communities in the City of Buffalo.

<http://mass-ave.org/>

Expand work-enabling supports and promote policies that remove barriers to work

Without opportunities for work and career paths, residents in Niagara Falls will remain in poverty. Yet many employers that have added jobs or announced plans for sizable workforce increases - Geico, Citigroup, GM Tonawanda, and Yahoo, just to name a few - are not located in Niagara Falls, and many of these jobs, while they may offer on-the-job training, require the ability to work varied shifts, creating transportation and childcare barriers for the majority of vulnerable residents in Niagara Falls. Meanwhile, governmental support for subsidized day care has diminished, while the daily cost of owning and operating a used vehicle is greater than what a family at the poverty threshold lives on. Other barriers to work that residents point to include criminal backgrounds and poor credit histories.

STRATEGIES

Explore the feasibility of strengthening work supports such as Everywoman Opportunity Center's Wheels to Work Program, which has been reduced to one-on-one financial counseling due to state budget cuts. Expanded partnerships and a more diverse base would strengthen the program. Raise awareness and greater support

for related programs based outside Niagara Falls such as Child and Family Services Ways to Work Loan Program. Create similar programs for men who need flexible transportation for work.

Raise awareness of and participation in the very strong vocational rehabilitation supports available to unemployed disabled adults of working age through Buffalo-based ACCES-VR (Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation). This federally-funded program covers the cost of education and training to achieve employment goals consistent with an individual's disability, aptitude and interests. This can even include college tuition at a SUNY or community college, non-degree training at trade schools, textbooks, transportation supports (public transit costs, personal mileage reimbursement, taxis, etc.), child care and more.

Advocate for policies that limit the look-back period for criminal violations and encourage employers to take a chance on individuals who have made mistakes but demonstrate a changed life. Raise awareness among employers of Employment Tax Credits available for hiring those with a recent criminal past as well as those who have recently received welfare, SNAP or SSI.

Promote the federal bonding program, available through NYS Department of Labor, offering free insurance to companies who hire higher-risk candidates (with a criminal past, poor credit or no work history). Explore opportunities to bring into Niagara Falls additional services to facilitate reentry such as those offered by Buffalo-based Center for Employment Opportunities.

Promote financial incentives available to businesses to cover the cost of training those who have been unemployed long term.

Support initiatives by suburban employers to provide transportation to residents with transportation barriers to work.

Engage service providers in cross-promoting employment programs and support services to raise awareness among residents of job training and related resources.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

Everywoman Opportunity Center, Child and Family Services, area automobile dealers, area financial institutions, education and training providers (Niagara WorkSourceOne, Niagara County Community College, Niagara University, University at Buffalo), Independent Living of Niagara County, ACCES-VR Buffalo District Office, and providers of credit counseling services.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

More Than Wheels is a transportation plus initiative supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and recognized by President Obama that offers transportation access for low-income family as well as supports to help them achieve financial well-being.

<http://morethanwheels.org/>

Appendices

Appendix A - Data Sources and Notes

1.1 Cover Map

Service providers: The human service providers that are mapped are listed on pages 26 and 27 of the report. The cover map does not represent these providers by their employment size or organizational status as the inside map (see page 25) does.

Population in poverty: The map draws upon 2006-10 American Community Survey data at the block group level, with all municipal boundaries for the map from U.S. Census Bureau's 2011 and 2012 Tiger Line Shape files. Those in or near poverty are individuals whose income is under 200% of the federal poverty level.

Transportation: NFTA routes and bus stops are from the NFTA and reflect 2012 information.

Schools: The location of elementary and secondary schools in Niagara Falls is from the 2011 NYS School Report Card database available from the NYS Education Department. Total enrollment reflects total students enrolled at these 11 schools during 2010-11.

Major Employers: Selected large employers in Niagara Falls are shown on the map. Employment size was determined using Reference USA's 2012 Business Database, 2011 Buffalo Business First Book of Lists and the Census Bureau's OnTheMap Tool, the latter of which was used to get employment at the Seneca Niagara Casino in Niagara Falls.

Map Layers: Boundary files for Niagara Falls, including census tracts, block groups, parks, roads, water bodies and more, were mapped using data from the NYS GIS Clearinghouse and the U.S. Census Bureau 2011 and 2012 Tiger Line Shape files. Neighborhood boundaries come from Appendix B of the *Comprehensive Plan for City of Niagara Falls, USA, 2009*. See City of Niagara Falls, New York Planning Areas Bubble Map.

1.2 Executive Summary

Population in poverty: The 2007-11 American Community Survey is the source of data on individuals living in or near poverty. Those in poverty are individuals with incomes under the federal poverty level. Those near poverty are defined as those with incomes between 100% and 200% of the federal poverty level. Niagara Falls total population of 50,200 is from the 2010 Census. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.

Indicators and trends: Indicators on unemployment, lack of insurance coverage, and urgent concerns are from a survey of at-risk residents in Niagara Falls described in Data Sources and

Notes Section 1.3. See the subsection on "Niagara Falls' Most Vulnerable."

Poverty trends were calculated using data from the 2007-11 American Community Survey and the decennial censuses. Data on housing costs by income category are from the 2007-11 American Community Survey, while the incidence of crime was calculated with data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Landscape of human services: A listing a human services providers comes from data compiled by the Mobile Safety-Net Team and Reference USA's 2012 Business Database. Employment at these organization's and agencies is primarily from Reference USA's 2012 Business Database.

Barriers and systemic challenges: The percentage of residents experiencing barriers is from a survey of at-risk residents in Niagara Falls described in Data Sources and Notes Section 1.3. See the subsection on "Niagara Falls' Most Vulnerable." This survey was also the source of the percentage of residents who primarily walk to get places and have achieved no more than a high school diploma.

The number of households in Niagara Falls without a vehicle is from the 2007-11 American Community Survey. For additional related information, see "Transportation" in Data Sources and Notes Section 1.3.

Graduation data and statistics on post-graduation plans of graduates from Niagara Falls City School District are from the NYS School Report Card for 2010-11. The National Center for Educational Statistics provides graduation rates for Niagara County Community College. Rates are provided for all students as well as subgroups by race and ethnicity.

1.3 Context for Action

People in Need

Individuals and Families: Population and household counts are from the 2007-11 American Community Survey. Population data from the 1970 and 1990 U.S. Census were used to calculate changes from these dates. Population data for 1950 come from Historical Estimates of the United States, Millennial Edition Online, Urbanized Areas-Population, 1800-1990.

As defined by the Census, families are housing units where two or more persons related by birth, marriage or adoption reside. Non-family households include persons living alone or with another person not related by birth, marriage or adoption.

Population by Age: The 2007-2011 American Community Survey is the source of population counts by age group. Percentages

are calculated by dividing the number of individuals in various age groups by the total population for Niagara Falls and Erie and Niagara Counties, respectively.

Potentially At-Risk Populations: These are individuals and households that have experienced higher than average rates of poverty as a result of barriers to education and/or work, either themselves or by those they are dependent on, as in the case for young children. Counts are from and/or calculated using data from the 2007-11 American Community Survey. The listing is not intended to be inclusive of all possible groups that may be economically vulnerable but rather some of those that are significant to Niagara Falls or Erie and Niagara Counties.

Work and Income: U.S. Census Bureau's Local Employment Dynamics data for 2010, available through the OnTheMap tool, was used to determine the number of workers in Niagara Falls at various income levels, as well as the percentage of these workers living in and outside of Niagara Falls. The analysis is based on 2010 data, the most current year available, and reflects primary jobs. A primary job is the individual's highest paying job for the year, and a count of primary jobs is the same as the count of all workers, so there isn't a double counting of jobs.

Niagara Falls top employers is primarily from Reference USA's Business 2012 Database, with two exceptions. Employment at the Seneca Niagara Casino & Hotel was determined using the U.S. Census OnTheMap tool by looking at employment in the "Arts, Entertainment, Accommodations" sector within a .01 buffer of the casino's specific address in the city. Employment in the Niagara Falls City School District is from Buffalo Business First 2012 Book of Lists. Niagara County employment was calculated using Reference USA data, which provides employment by address, by summing up the number of employees the county has across various locations and departments within the city.

Households by income level were calculated using data from the 2007-11 American Community Survey. This was also the data source on household income by quintile, an indicator of income inequality in the city.

Poverty: The 2006-11 American Community Survey is the source of data on individuals and families living in or near poverty. Income relative to poverty level is provided for individuals by age group and for families by family type. Poverty rates are calculated by dividing total individuals or families with incomes under the federal poverty threshold by the total number of individuals or families, respectively. The map shows poverty rates by census block group.

The daily amount a family of three lives on at the federal poverty level is calculated by dividing the 2013 annual poverty threshold for this family size by the number of family members and the number of days in a year. The cost of the a round trip by bus for a family of three was calculated using NFTA's standard one-way fare of \$2.

Edmunds was used to calculate the cost of car ownership. The

estimate is based on the purchase of a used 2008 Chevrolet Cobalt. In addition to the cost of the car itself (about \$6,800), the cost reflects, taxes and fees, financing, fuel, insurance, maintenance and repairs. \$20.00 is the average daily cost over five years of ownership.

Poverty levels were examined by census tract within Niagara Falls using 2006-11 American Community Survey data. These included Census Tracts 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 209, 211, 212, 213, 214, 217, 221, 222, 223, 224.01, 225.

Teen pregnancy data by Zip Code is from the NYS Department of Health and reflects data over a three-year average from 2008 to 2010. Rates reflect births to females ages 15 to 19.

Education: Student enrollment figures and the percentage of children qualifying for free and reduced priced lunch are from the 2011 School Report Card database, available from the NYS Education Department. Children qualify for free or reduced priced lunch if their family income is under 185% of the federal poverty level.

Ranking data is from Business First's 2012 Upstate School District Rankings. The upstate area includes all 430 public school districts in the 48 counties of upstate New York (excluding New York City).

Academic performance data from which we calculated students performing at proficiency standards or above (levels 3 or 4) for ELA and mathematics come from the 2011 School Report Card data set. High school completion data and post-secondary plans are from the same source. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS data tool provided percentages of graduates from Niagara County Community College graduating within 150% of the normal time. Data are for 2011 and reflect full-time first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates.

Educational attainment levels and median incomes at these levels are from the 2007-11 American Community Survey. Median incomes reflect a weighted average of those for males and females age 25 and up.

Insights on the impacts of poverty and the concentration of poverty on educational attainment draw upon those presented at Buffalo Poverty Research Workshop IV taking place on March 1, 2013 at Olmsted Center for Sight in Buffalo, NY. The conference was sponsored by the Homeless Alliance of WNY, Partnership for the Public Good, University at Buffalo and WNYSLC.

Niagara Falls' Most Vulnerable

359 adults residing in Niagara Falls Zip Codes 14301, 14303, 14304, and 14305 completed a one-page questionnaire providing demographic and socioeconomic data as well as information on human services needs, concerns, benefits, and access barriers.

The survey was prepared by the Mobile Safety-Net Team with input from the University at Buffalo Regional Institute. It was administered

by the Mobile Safety-Net Team during 2012 and 2013 at several different venues across the city, including Heart, Love, and Soul, NiaCap, Wrobel Towers, LaSalle Senior Center, John Duke Senior Center, Beloved Community Center, Renaissance Building and St. George's Pro-Cathedral. Additionally, surveys were left at the Salvation Army and Focus on Families, where staff assisted residents in completing surveys.

Survey sites were selected to capture a representative sample of residents in poverty or at risk of poverty as well as a cross section of neighborhoods from within the city. Because the survey captured only those residents who are able to physically get to these sites, the survey findings may under-represent those who are unable to leave their homes due to disability or lack of transportation.

Where residents needed assistance completing the survey and the survey was conducted in the presence of Mobile Safety-Net Team members, assistance was provided by reading the survey questions to residents and helping them complete the survey instrument. Otherwise, clients completed surveys on their own.

Survey data were coded by the Mobile Safety-Net Team and analyzed by the University at Buffalo Regional Institute. The 359 surveys represent a sample of Niagara Falls' vulnerable population that is statistically significant with a confidence level of 95% and with a confidence interval of 5. Surveys completed by household representatives who reported a Zip Codes corresponding to an area outside the City of Niagara Falls were not included in the analysis.

Not all survey respondents answered every survey questions. Part of the reason for this is that the survey was expanded a bit over time. Thus, not all survey takers were asked all questions reported on in this reports. Secondly, while survey takers were encouraged to answer all questions, partially completed surveys were accepted from those who declined to answer particular questions. The question soliciting information on barriers, which was a question added more recently, had the lowest level of responses, with 129 answering this question. This number of responses still represents a sample size of 96 or better, needed to obtain a statistically significant sample size for Lockport's at-risk population within a 95% confidence interval +/- 10%.

The 75% of survey respondents who are said to receive some form of human support services or live in a household with someone who does reflect those survey takers saying they receive food stamps, Medicaid, cash benefits, unemployment, disability income, HEAP, SSI/SSD, WIC, and/or rental assistance. This information is captured by multiple questions on the survey and the findings from these questions are aggregated to calculate an overall percentage of those receiving some kind of assistance.

The chart presents selected findings from the questionnaire. The variables shown are in many cases an aggregation of two or more response categories. Where percentages across subcategories add up to over 100, it is because survey takers were allowed to select more than one category as their response to the question, as is the case of the question soliciting information on respondent household's sources of income and types of human benefits they receive.

Percentage shown are calculated based on the number of respondents answering the particular survey question, which may be less than the full sample.

Places in Need

Housing: Housing costs as a percentage of income for renters and owners are from the 2007-11 American Community Survey, which also provides counts of housing units by the number of selected physical and financial conditions they have. Conditions include: 1) lack of complete plumbing facilities, 2) no kitchen facilities, 3) having 1.01 or more occupants per room, 4) monthly cost greater than 30% of household income, and 5) gross rent greater than 30% of households income. While this data source reports the number of households with 0, 1, 2, 3, or 4 conditions, it does not specify which conditions these households actually have.

The median homes values in Niagara Falls and Niagara County are also from the 2007-11 American Community Survey. This was also the source of data by census tract used to calculate the proportion of owner-occupied multi-unit structures. Multi-unit structures are defined as those containing at least 2 housing units.

Vacancy data is from the USPS Vacant Address Database maintained by HUD and reflects vacancies by Census Tract as of 2012. Information on demand for public and subsidized housing is from an interview with the Niagara Falls Housing Authority.

Transportation: Vehicle access data for households in Niagara Falls are from the 2006-11 American Community Survey.

Public transit times are calculated from 4600 Hyde Park to various destinations in and beyond Niagara Falls using Google Maps, which estimates travel time based on mode of travel and time of day. One-way travel times include walk times to bus stops.

Niagara Falls is described as being largely car dependent because it has an average Walk Score of 42, which corresponds to "Car-Dependent, on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 represents the lowest level of walkability and 100 represents the highest level of walkability to amenities in close proximity such as schools, parks, cafes, bookstores and such. Walk scores do not take into account the existence of sidewalks or inclement weather which can further impede walkability of neighborhoods and increase car dependence.

Crime: Criminal offenses are from the U.S. Department of Justice's Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics. Data reflect offenses reported by the Niagara Falls City Police Department for 2011. Rates of crime for both Niagara Falls and other municipalities in New York State were calculated using totals for violent crime and property crime, along with population totals.

The U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics also provides annual arrests by age group. Data for 2010 is the latest available from this dataset.

1.4 Landscape of Human Services

Human services organizations typically provide food to the hungry, jobs training to unemployed adults, shelter to the homeless, youth development to children at risk, recovery to those affected by disaster, and assistance to victims of crime. The listing shown includes human services organizations as well as those that may not be officially classified as human services organizations but have been identified as providing critical services to vulnerable populations. The analysis draws upon organizational data compiled by the Mobile Safety-Net Team and supplemented by information from Reference USA's 2012 Business Database. Both nonprofits and governmental agencies are included. Only organizations with operational sites within Niagara Falls are included in this listing for the purpose of analyzing what supports residents have access to within the community.

Organizations providing services to target populations such as veterans, teen parents, seniors and the homeless are those whose organizational mission it is to connect with these particular populations (such as the services for seniors at the senior centers). Alternatively, they may have significant programming for these populations.

Service categories are defined as follows:

Food – includes food pantries as well as organizations providing meals or other food, either on site, such as at the school or John Duke Senior Citizen Center, via mobile vans (such as Niagara Gospel Rescue Mission's Mission on Wheels) or delivered to residents' home, such as through Focus on Families, as part of services regularly provided. Also includes significant connection points for food access such as the Niagara County Department of Social Services where the SNAP program is administered. Does not include food or meals provided as part of a residential program such as Carolyn's House. Nor are organizations that raise money to support food needs included in this category.

Clothing – includes clothes closets and sites where free clothing is available, as well as programs providing emergency clothing. Includes organizations offering only specific kinds of clothing such as that needed for work.

Education/Training – includes places of formal education as well as sites for job training, GED, literacy skills, community/continuing education, and parenting training. Sites for workforce development and vocational education are included, even if these are one of other programs offered by an agency such as Catholic Charities. Education and training programs for selected population are included as well, such as those offered for individuals with disabilities.

Affordable Housing – subsidized housing and other non-market rate homes and rental units available to lower-income populations. Also included are sites providing access to supports such as rental assistance, utility assistance, weatherization, emergency housing repair, and HEAP such Niagara County Department of Social Services and Niagara Community Action Program. Also includes

organizations working to expand options for affordable housing such as the Isaiah 61 Project.

Transportation – includes organizations that offer transportation via buses, vans and shuttles, as part of the suite of services they regularly provide (such as the school district and Focus on Families). Also includes agencies such as Niagara's WorkSourceOne that offer transportation supports such as bus tokens for interviews.

Mental Health/Addictions - includes sites providing mental health treatment including counseling and addictions support groups. Covers out-patient and residential programs. Does not include organizations that only serve as a source of information for mental health services.

Health/Wellness – includes sites providing health services, preventive medical exams and/or screening, particularly for lower-income or vulnerable populations. Does not include organizations that only serve as a source of medical/health insurance information. Nor does this category include programs providing primarily fitness or recreational benefits.

Legal - includes legal assistance for low-income populations, especially assistance in obtaining benefits. Includes such assistance for limited populations only such as seniors or the disabled.

Youth Programs - includes providers of after-school programs and activities for school-age youth. Also included are mentoring programs. This category does not include programming provided as part of a residential treatment program for youth. Nor does it include programs providing only information about youth programs.

Financial literacy - includes financial literacy training and budget counseling services. Includes programs for limited vulnerable populations.

Crime/Juvenile – includes crime prevention programs, juvenile justice, and victim assistance programs (such as the domestic violence services provided by Catholic Charities.) Does not include safety classes or crime prevention awareness.

Information/Referral - includes agencies, programs and positions providing information and referral to a wide variety of human support services for individuals and families.

Providers are classified as governmental if they are an arm of a local, state or federal level agency or department.

Most employment figures used to map human services organizations by employment size come from Reference USA's 2012 Business Database providing the number of employees an organization or agency has working at a particular site.

Appendix B - Resident Questionnaire

MOBILE SAFETY-NET TEAM COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your answers will assist us in better understanding the needs in the community and help us build a stronger safety net that more readily connects residents to the human services they need. Please select one response unless indicated otherwise. **Your answers will remain completely confidential.**

Age _____ Gender (M/F) _____ Zip Code _____ Location _____

Including yourself, how many people are in your household?

- Adults (18 and older) _____
- Children (under 18) _____

Has anyone in your household ever served in the armed forces?

- Yes¹
- No²

Are there any urgent concerns or special needs that you or someone in your household might have?

- Utility shut-off notice¹
- Foreclosure / eviction²
- Homelessness³
- No money for food⁴
- Domestic violence⁵
- No urgent concerns⁵
- Other: _____⁷

Has anyone in your household ever encountered any difficulty in getting necessary services they need (such as assistance with food, housing, utilities, medical care, etc.)?

- Yes¹
- No²

If you marked "yes", please describe what barriers were faced:

- Traveling to get services is difficult¹
- I don't speak / read English well²
- I can't get there during the hours the agency is open³
- I've been turned away because of income limits⁴
- It can be physically difficult for me to leave my home⁵
- It's too much of a hassle because the process is confusing⁶
- Other: _____⁷

What is your current employment status? (select all that apply)

- Employed full-time¹
- Employed part-time²
- Unemployed, looking³
- Unemployed, not looking⁴
- Student⁵
- Retired⁶
- Disabled⁷
- Other: _____⁸

What are your household's sources of income? (Select all that apply)

- Employment¹
- Unemployment insurance²
- Public assistance³
- Social Security⁴
- Pension⁵
- Disability⁶
- Worker's compensation⁷
- Child Support⁸
- No Income⁹
- Other: _____¹⁰

How much money is currently received from these sources to support your household each month (net income)?

What is your primary form of transportation?

- Bicycle¹
- Family / Friends²
- Own vehicle³
- Taxi⁴
- Public Transportation⁵
- Walk⁶
- Car Share Service⁷
- Other: _____⁸

If you don't own a vehicle and are not a regular public transit user, why don't you use public transit more often?

- Too expensive¹
- Takes too long to get places²
- No service to where I need to go³
- No evening or weekend service⁴
- Buses don't run often enough⁵
- It's too long to walk to bus stop⁶
- Service isn't reliable⁷
- I don't feel safe⁸
- Schedule is too confusing⁹
- Other (please specify): _____¹⁰

Appendix B - Resident Questionnaire (Continued)

What is the current employment status of other adults in your household? (select all that apply)

- Employed full-time¹
- Employed part-time²
- Unemployed, looking³
- Unemployed, not looking⁴
- Student⁵
- Retired⁶
- Disabled⁷
- Not Applicable / No other adults in household⁸
- Other: _____⁹

What is your current living situation?

- Own¹
- Rent, with assistance²
- Rent, without assistance³
- Staying with friend / family⁴
- Homeless⁵
- Other: _____⁶

How long have you lived at your current address?

- Less than 3 mos.¹
- 3 mos. – 1 year²
- 1-5 years³
- 6 - 10 years⁴
- More than 10 years⁵

What is the highest level of education/training you've completed?

- High School / GED¹
- Some College²
- College Degree (2-yr or 4-yr)³
- Post-graduate degree⁴
- Military⁵
- Trade School⁶
- Did not finish high school⁷

Does anyone in your household lack health insurance? (select all that apply)

- Yes, one or more adults do not have health insurance¹
- Yes, one or more children do not have health insurance²
- No, we all have health insurance³

If insured, select the type of health insurance currently used by members of your household (please select all that apply):

- Private insurance¹
- Managed care (HMO, PPO)²
- Medicare (65+, disabled)³
- Medicaid⁴
- Government (VA, Child Health Plus, Family Health Plus)⁵
- Health Savings Account⁶
- Other: _____⁷
- Do not know/Unsure⁸
- Do not have health insurance⁹

Are you, or is anyone in your household currently receiving any of the following forms of public assistance?

- Food stamps¹
- Medicaid²
- Cash benefits³
- HEAP⁴
- SSI / SSD⁵
- WIC⁶
- Other _____⁷
- None⁸

Does anyone in your household have a pending application for any of the following?

- Food stamps¹
- Medicaid²
- Cash benefits³
- HEAP⁴
- SSI / SSD⁵
- WIC⁶
- Other _____⁷
- None⁸

If you have an immediate need and would like someone to call you for assistance, please write your name and phone number on the back of this survey and a member of our team can contact you. Thank you!

Appendix C - Senior Focus Group Tool



What are the most critical human support needs facing you and your family?

Most Critical Need

2nd Biggest Need

3rd Biggest Need

- _____ Counseling and Treatment
- _____ Financial/Budgeting/Taxes
- _____ Food/Nutrition
- _____ Health Care
- _____ Health Insurance Coverage
- _____ Legal
- _____ Mortgage/Rent or Housing
- _____ Referrals/Information
- _____ Senior Activities
- _____ Safety/Crime Prevention
- _____ Transportation
- _____ Weatherization

Tell Us About Yourself

How old are you? _____

What is your gender? Male Female

How many people, including yourself, do you live with? _____

What is your Zip Code _____

Appendix C - Parent and Younger Adult Focus Group Tool



What are the most critical human support needs facing you and your family?

Most Critical Need

2nd Biggest Need

3rd Biggest Need

- _____ Child Care
- _____ Counseling and Treatment
- _____ Financial/Budgeting/Taxes
- _____ Food/Nutrition
- _____ Health
- _____ Housing
- _____ Jobs/Training
- _____ Legal
- _____ Referrals/Information
- _____ Safety/Crime
- _____ Senior Activities
- _____ Transportation
- _____ Youth Programs

Tell Us About Yourself

- How old are you? _____
- What is your gender? Male Female
- How many people, including yourself, do you live with? _____
- How many children do you have? _____
- What is your Zip Code? _____

Appendix D - Outreach Poster for Focus Group at Niagara's WorkSourceOne

We Need You!



This is your opportunity to have your voice heard and tell us how the downturn in the economy is impacting you, your family and your community in Niagara Falls.



Join a conversation

MONDAY
APRIL 8th
AT 10:00AM

Niagara's WorkSourceOne
1001 Eleventh Street
Niagara Falls, NY 14301



Meet us in the Resource Center at 10 AM for a focus group that will last no longer than 45 minutes.



Refreshments will be served to all participants.



This conversation is being sponsored by the Mobile Safety-Net Team in partnership with the University at Buffalo. The purpose is to gather insights from residents in Niagara Falls to inform recommendations and strategies on ways of making Niagara Falls a stronger community for individuals and families.

For more information, call 854-3494.

A COMMUNITY REPORT
City of **Niagara Falls**

This is a collaborative effort of the **University at Buffalo Regional Institute** and the **Mobile Safety-Net Team** established by **The John R. Oishei Foundation**. Commissioned by The John R. Oishei Foundation this assessment presents a detailed analysis of Niagara Falls' human services needs, key resources, barriers, and opportunities for strengthening the system, and in turn, residents. The insights and recommendations provided are intended to assist the foundation community, Niagara Falls human services providers and other stakeholders in closing gaps and developing comprehensive, efficient and cost-effective strategies for connecting with a greater number of economically vulnerable individuals and families.



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