

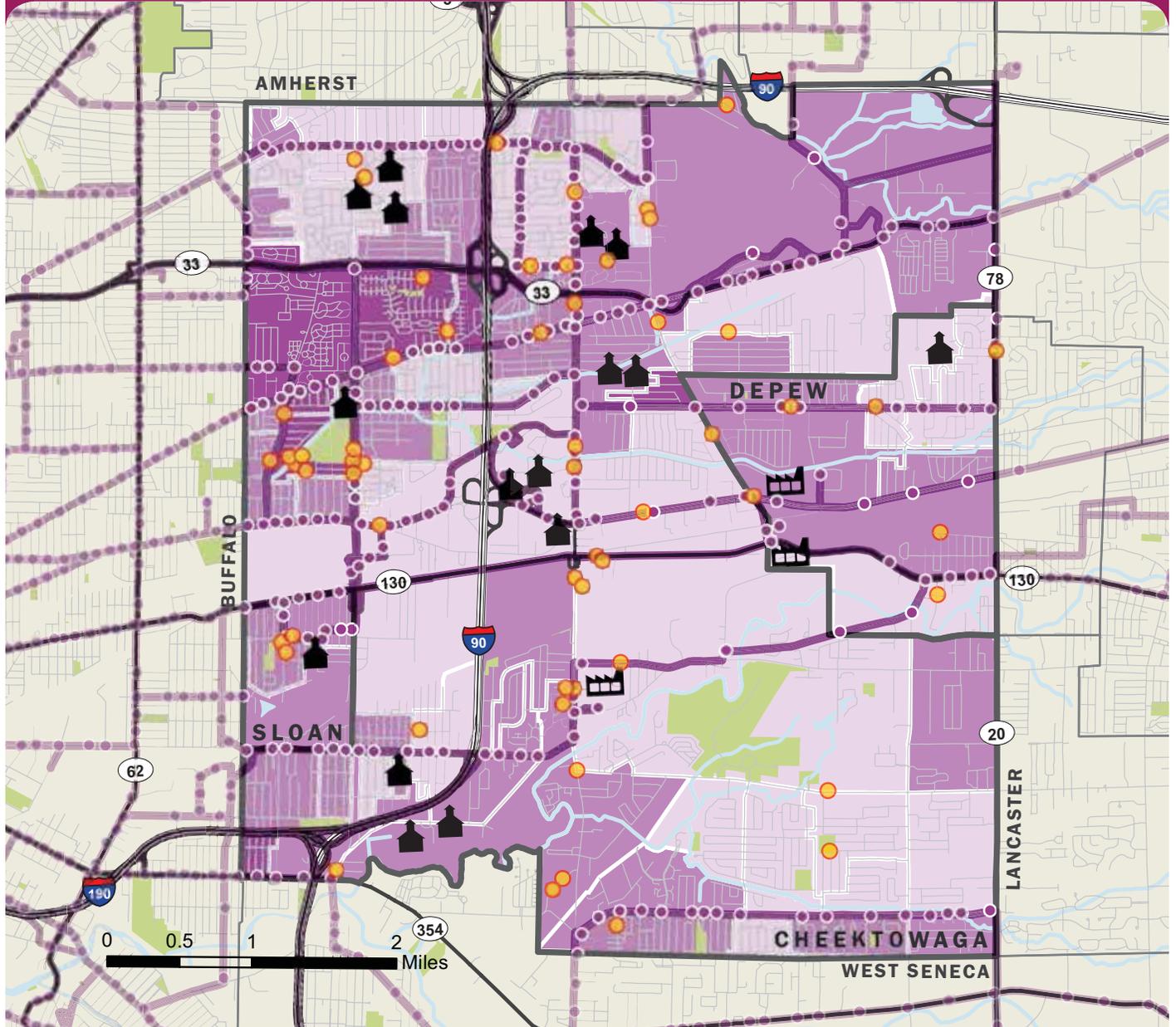
# STRENGTHENING WNY's Safety Net

## A COMMUNITY REPORT Town of CHEEKTOWAGA



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

December 2013



### SERVICE PROVIDERS

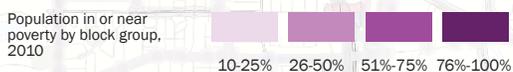
**54 service provider sites** employing about 2,210 employees exist in Cheektowaga, providing a range of human services.

### TRANSPORTATION

NFTA BUS ROUTES & STOPS

### POPULATION IN OR NEAR POVERTY

Over 25,100 Cheektowaga residents live on incomes under or near the federal poverty level



### SCHOOLS

Four school districts with  
7 elementary and primary schools  
5 middle and intermediate schools  
4 high schools  
about 7,850 students total enrolled

### MAJOR EMPLOYERS

HSBC  
Quad Graphics  
Center for Palliative Care

# About This Report

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## Background

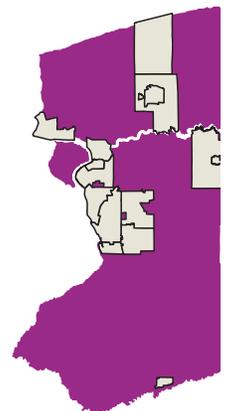
Between 2008 and 2009, regional employers shed almost 20,000 net jobs. The economic downturn, which continued into 2010, left large numbers of residents unemployed and unable to find new work for the first time in their lives. High levels of unemployment continue today. One out of 12 residents across the region seek work, and need for support continues to escalate.

While the majority of those in poverty live in urban areas like Buffalo and Niagara Falls, families in the region's suburbs and rural areas 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, service providers are 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 Town of Cheektowaga 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 Cheektowaga 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

524 surveys were completed by residents in Cheektowaga, 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 and Interviews

Focus group with senior residents, parents and food pantry users 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

Several human service agency representatives shared information on their programs and perspectives on opportunities.



#### Agency Focus Groups

A focus group was held with a group of providers of human services in Cheektowaga, to gather 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 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 Town of CHEEKTOWAGA



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

Among Cheektowaga's population of 88,225...

...about

**7,940**

Cheektowaga residents live on incomes under the federal poverty level.

...an additional

**17,185**

aren't in poverty but are close to it with incomes between 100-200% of poverty.

...about

**25,125**

are doing poorly or struggling financially. This is over one out of every four in Cheektowaga.

**Beyond poverty, other alarming indicators and trends...**

**Need is growing.** At the same time Cheektowaga's total population declined by over 5,400 since 2000, the number of residents living in or near poverty has grown by about 4,800.

**64%** of families in poverty are single parents with kids

**Single parents with children represent two-thirds of families living in poverty.** Across age groups, children are most affected, with one in seven children living in a home with great economic need. Among children under 6, half live in a family that's either in poverty or at risk, suggesting the town's newest families are the most vulnerable.

**Cheektowaga is an older community.** Persons age 65 and up account for about one out of every five residents, a greater proportion than across the county. Meanwhile, Cheektowaga's population of youth has declined 15% since 2000.

**49%** of children under 6 in poverty or at risk

**Neighborhoods of concentrated poverty exists in the town.** Pockets are deepest on the western side immediately south of Route 33 and west of Union Road where about half of families live in or near poverty.

**Food is a growing need.** Local food pantries serve thousands every month and experienced an increase over the past year. Not having enough money for food was the second most common urgent identified. Across Cheektowaga and Depew, 8,752 households depend on food stamps.

**COMMON URGENT CONCERN utility shutoff**

Nearly three out of four residents own a home, and **major home repairs and replacements, can be a burden for lower-income residents, especially those on fixed incomes.** Concerns related to housing surfaced as the most common urgent concern identified by the town's vulnerable. These included threats of utility shutoff, foreclosures, and threat of eviction.

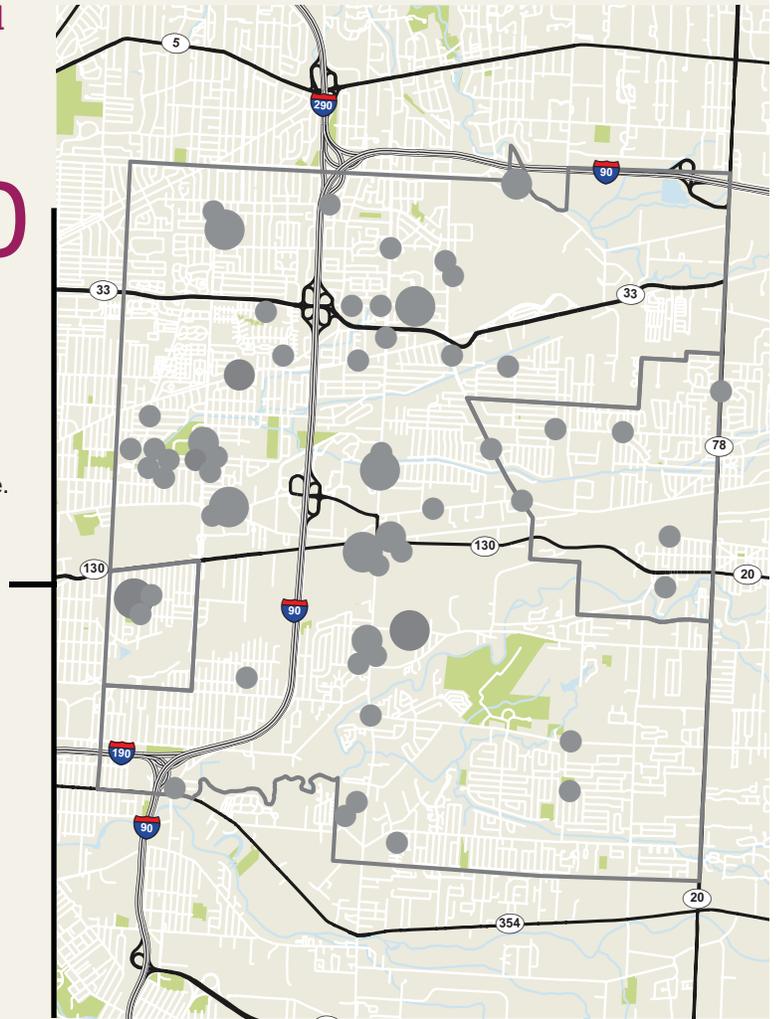
\* Findings come from a survey of 524 at-risk households in Cheektowaga, reflecting a statistically significant sample size at a confidence level of at least 95% and with a confidence interval of 4.

**Cheektowaga's landscape of human services providers...**

**54** public and private providers employ about **2,210**

These providers, nearly half of which are governmental agencies and offices, offer a variety of human services to residents, from food, clothing, education, youth programs, information services and more.

Key human service providers and supports in the community include the Town of Cheektowaga and its four school districts.



# strengths

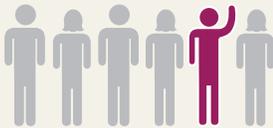
Strengths of the system include the town's Youth & Recreation Department offering myriad programming; the Cheektowaga Department of Senior Services which provides a strong suite of services for seniors; and a proactive police force committed to maintaining quality of life and connecting those with mental health needs with community supports.

# gaps

Gaps in services exist for weatherization and affordable housing rehabilitation; supports for single parents, especially those with young children and children with special needs; and gaps in supports for families in the Maryvale School District as well as those in the Cedar Grove Heights neighborhood where poverty runs deep and few services exist.

## Barriers and systemic challenges...

**1 out of 6 residents surveyed in Cheektowaga say they have encountered difficulty getting services.**



**Reduced governmental funding has forced cuts in critical supports.** Maryvale School District, for instance, was forced to eliminate all of its social workers. Meanwhile, the town's Community Development Office has lost \$150,000 over the past two years, while the budget for Cheektowaga Youth and Recreation has been cut by \$250,000.

**two town departments have taken nearly a half million \$cut collectively**

For the 3,890 households in Cheektowaga that are without a vehicle, **transportation options are limited**, especially for adults of working age, and residents describe how the NFTA has eliminated stops in the poorest Cedar Grove Heights neighborhood where the majority of residents do not have a car.

**There are long waiting lists for critical services.** The town's Economic and Community Development Office, for instance, reported during the first half of 2013 a three-year waiting list (200+ households) for its housing rehabilitation program. Waits under the NYS Weatherization Assistance Program are even longer, at 5 1/2 years for suburban areas of Erie County like Cheektowaga.

**The majority of vulnerable families in Cheektowaga have incomes that may place them slightly over thresholds for support programs** or qualify them for lesser levels of benefits, insufficient to meet their needs for food and housing.

**Lack of awareness of support programs creates barriers for some residents, especially for those newly in need.** The number of residents at poverty or at risk has increased by nearly 5,000 since 2000. Access to information and lack of information is a particular concern among residents and providers in Cedar Grove Heights, one of the poorest areas of Cheektowaga.

**Some agencies also lack awareness of human services supports, limiting their capacity to make referrals and provide information.** Human services agencies expressed interest in more regular interaction to learn about services and share information.

**additional space is needed by a home-based food pantry serving 900 per month**

**Lack of communication and coordination among providers limit their capacity to strengthen the safety net** through networking especially in the area of food where many uncoordinated efforts exist and where other food pantries have closed.

**A home-based food pantry in the northwestern area of Cheektowaga where poverty is high and few services exist lacks the additional space needed to continue meeting an increased demand for food** and other supports. It currently serves 900 a month, and exemplifies growing food needs community wide.

**The stigma associated with human services creates barriers for those in need.** It's a more common obstacle for seniors whom, providers say, would live with a leaky roof before seeking assistance through a town-based emergency assistance program.

**Waiting Lists for weatherization and housing rehabilitation are 3-5+ years**

**Cheektowaga has some of the highest tax rates in Erie County, especially within its villages, leaving little room for further tax increases to support higher levels of services** by the town, a major provider of human services in Cheektowaga.

Cheektowaga is a large town covering about 30 square miles that's made up of two villages, four school districts and distinct neighborhoods with varying levels of poverty. These **divisions may mask the prevalence of deep pockets of poverty within the town and the wide-ranging impacts.**

**Strong town-wide resources are not always located in the neighborhoods of greatest needs, and are not therefore readily accessible to those populations who might most benefit from them.** For instance, the Anna Reinstein Library on Harlem Road has only one full-time librarian and is described as paling in comparison to the resources at the Julia Reinstein Library off Losson Road, in a more affluent neighborhood of town.

**Agency budget limits impede stronger service hubs at locations that draw many vulnerable populations.** As one school district provider put it, if everyone who qualifies gets services, provider budgets would be crippled.

**Stronger, more holistic supports are needed to adequately address once rare but now increasing concerns such as hoarding,** which has recently been classified as a mental illness.

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

RECOMMENDATION	STRATEGIES	MODEL TO CONSIDER
<b>Strengthen connections among public and nonprofit human services providers</b>	<p>Establish a human services coalition open to all governmental and nonprofit providers, including the school districts and libraries</p> <p>Meet regularly to share information tackle priority concerns</p>	<p>The Seattle Human Services Coalition is an example of a long-standing group. <a href="http://shscoalition.org/">http://shscoalition.org/</a></p>
<b>Raise awareness of human services and reduce fragmentation through greater centralization of information</b>	<p>Maintain a directory of human services being created by the Mobile Safety-Net Team</p> <p>Distribute to all providers and the two libraries; post on the school district and town websites</p> <p>Work with Operation Neighborhood Outreach to distribute this information to residents, especially in the town's poorest neighborhoods</p>	<p>Libraries can play a key role in raising awareness of services among residents. The New Rochelle Public Library is a forerunner in this regard in New York State. <a href="http://www.nrpl.org/social-services/">http://www.nrpl.org/social-services/</a></p>
<b>Strengthen housing and food supports</b>	<p>Explore opportunities for relocating Evangelistic E's Outreach Ministry into a larger space</p> <p>Explore partnerships and operational efficiencies to stretch limited housing rehabilitation dollars available to the town</p> <p>Increase awareness of NYSERDA's EMPOWER program which does not have a waiting list</p>	<p>The Neighborhood Wellness Plan in Champaign, IL offers a model that tailors strategies to neighborhood needs. <a href="http://ci.champaign.il.us/cms/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/2006-2010-NW-Vision-Report_final.pdf">http://ci.champaign.il.us/cms/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/2006-2010-NW-Vision-Report_final.pdf</a></p>
<b>Strengthen supports for single parents and young children</b>	<p>Raise awareness of the Early Recognition Program offering free screening and referrals to parents of pre-school children</p> <p>Strengthen connections between day care and home to facilitate early intervention</p> <p>Explore partnerships to create support programs such as literacy promotion</p> <p>Consider ways of developing a family support center in the Maryvale School District</p>	<p>The Atlanta Civic Site is transforming neighborhoods by strengthening families. It's also a model for what's now happening in Buffalo's Promise Neighborhood. <a href="http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/CivicSites/Atlanta.aspx">http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/CivicSites/Atlanta.aspx</a></p>
<b>Expand opportunities for vocational training and workforce development</b>	<p>Strengthen the pipeline for careers in advanced manufacturing within the school district</p> <p>Expand partnerships between the school districts and regional employers</p> <p>Encourage employers and unions to provide ongoing training</p>	<p>DREAM IT DO IT offers a framework for strengthening the manufacturing pipeline that's being adopted by districts in WNY. <a href="http://www.didiwny.com/">http://www.didiwny.com/</a></p>
<b>Bolster already strong supports for seniors</b>	<p>Engage the media and the Department of Emergency Services to conduct outreach and raise awareness of valuable senior services</p> <p>Raise awareness of services such as PACE that provide services such as in-home care and transportation, as well as wheelchair-accessible options for traveling</p> <p>Increase awareness among residents and providers on how to identify, report and address hoarding; coordinate with the newly-formed Crisis Intervention Team</p>	<p>The Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) is a new model of senior care that emphasizes aging in place through the delivery of comprehensive services. <a href="http://www.chsbuffalo.org/Services/SeniorServices/LIFE">http://www.chsbuffalo.org/Services/SeniorServices/LIFE</a></p>
<b>Strengthen neighborhood service hubs, especially in high-need areas</b>	<p>Support Evangelistic E's interest in securing a nearby facility to enable an expansion of services and the creation of a service hub in an extremely high-need neighborhood</p> <p>Explore partnerships for further developing the Anna Reinstein Memorial Library as a site for human services information, literacy promotion and workforce training</p> <p>Build capacity of the Alexander Community Center</p>	<p>Food pantries are evolving into spots where residents can get much more than food. Response to Love Center on Buffalo's east side offers GED, computer training, caseworkers, health insurance sign-up and a baby ministry, all in addition to a food kitchen and pantry. <a href="http://heartloveandsoul.org/">http://heartloveandsoul.org/</a></p>

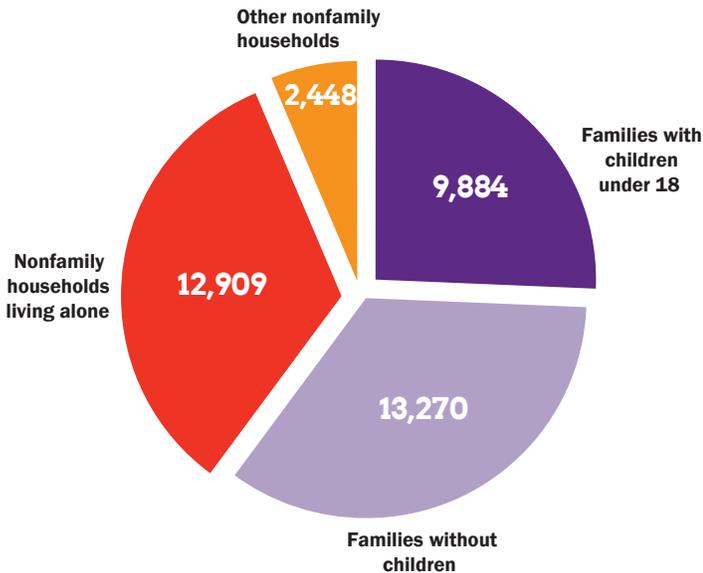
Context for Action

# People in Need

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



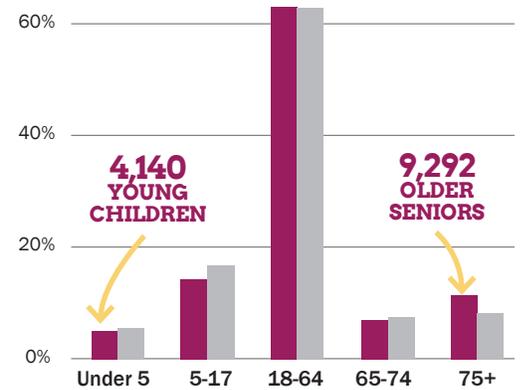
## Households by Type, 2011



Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

## Population by Age, 2011

Cheektowaga  
Erie & Niagara  
Counties



## Potentially At-Risk Populations, 2011

Adults with HS education or less	31,188
Non-white or Hispanic	11,900
Veterans	8,583
Age 65+ living alone	5,939
Foreign born	4,670
Single Parent	3,507

Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

## Individuals and Families

Cheektowaga is the third largest municipality in the region, with a population of 88,226, as of the 2010 Census. The town includes the Village of Sloan with 3,660 residents, and a portion of the Village of Depew, having a population of about 15,000. Depew spans both Cheektowaga and Lancaster, with Transit Road being the dividing line.

While about one out of ten residents in Erie County lives in Cheektowaga, the town's population has been steadily declining over the decades from a peak of over 110,000 in 1970. Since 2000, the town's loss has been 6%, double the decline reported countywide. Neither Depew or Sloan have been immune to these trends, with 13% and 4% population losses, respectively, since 2000.

### 6% Population Loss

Cheektowaga's population decline since 2000 is double that across Erie County, an indicator that the town is at a competitive disadvantage in attracting new residents and/or retaining existing ones.

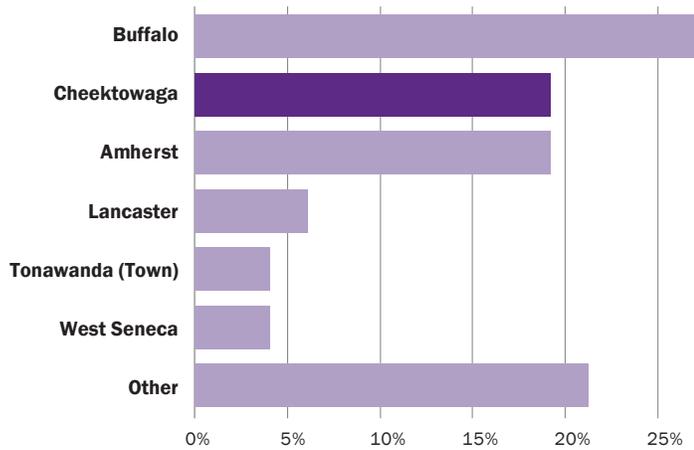
Source: 2000 Census and 2011 American Community Survey

The demographics of Cheektowaga have been evolving too. The town is older than it once was, with nearly one in five residents (18%) age 65 and up. Seniors who live alone - nearly 6,000 across Cheektowaga - are a sizable population at risk. The town's population of youth, on the other hand, has been declining, by 15% since 2000, more than double the town's overall loss.

While families continue to predominate, there are now more households in Cheektowaga with a resident age 65 and up than one with a child under age 18 (12,868 vs. 9,658). In fact, for every young child under the age of five, there are more than two seniors age 75 and up, an age cohort where disabilities can interfere with independent living. Cheektowaga also has a relatively large population of veterans, some with unique health and human service needs.

Yet, an even larger at-risk population includes the tens of thousands of residents who have nothing more than a high school diploma or less. More than half of these individuals are between the ages of 25 and 64, where access to higher-paying job opportunities more and more depends on having higher levels of education and skills.

## Where Do Cheektowaga Residents Go To Work?



Source: On The Map, 2011

## Cheektowaga's Top 10 Employers

Employer	# of Employees
HSBC Bank	1,800
Quad/Graphics Inc	820
Tops Friendly Markets	500
PCB Piezotronics Inc	499
Center-Hospice Palliative Care	450
Wegmans	414
Buffalo Niagara International Airport	400
Caring Hearts Home Care	400
Fleming Co	400
Xylem Heat Transfer	400

Source: Reference USA. This list includes largest employers and does not include employment hubs where large numbers are employed by different employers such as the Walden Galleria Mall and the Buffalo Niagara International Airport.

## Work and Income

The number of jobs that exist in Cheektowaga is greater than the entire populations of nearby municipalities like Lancaster, Clarence and Orchard Park. With over 49,000 jobs, there is at least one job for every resident in town who works. Moreover, the town has seen job growth of 5% since 2002.

Home to the region's largest mall, the Walden Galleria, and major grocers like Wegmans and Tops Friendly Market, retail trade is a major employing industry in town and accounts for nearly a fifth of jobs. This translates into more than 9,000 altogether, a plentiful supply particularly for teens, seniors and others desiring part-time work closer to home.

Other top employers are in health care and manufacturing. HSBC, which used to be a major source of jobs in downtown Buffalo, is now Cheektowaga's number one employer, located in the Village of Depew.

In addition to the tens of thousands of jobs this first-ring suburb offers, Cheektowaga's location in central Erie County positions it nearby other major job destinations in the region. This benefits residents who work, as over three-quarters in Cheektowaga

**Cheektowaga has a growing employment base**

work less than 15 miles away and therefore have relatively short commutes by car. Common work destinations outside of town include the City of Buffalo (27%) and Amherst (19%).

The level of economic development that occurred in this town may be one of the reasons Cheektowaga has a larger middle class and lower levels of deep poverty than the county as a whole. Almost two-thirds (65%) of households earn between \$25,000 and \$100,000 a year, compared to slightly over half (55%) across Erie County.

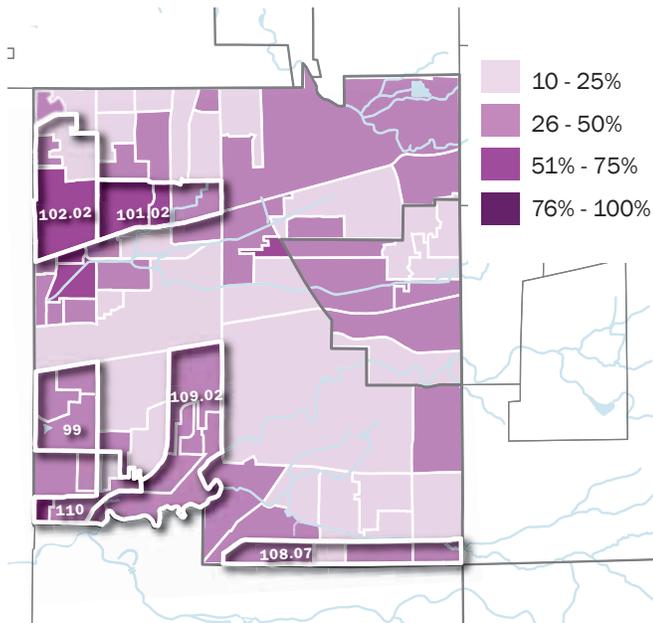
At the same time, Cheektowaga has a relatively smaller portion of high earners, likely due to its more modest housing stock. As a result, median incomes are slightly lower than the county's (\$47,520 in Cheektowaga versus \$48,805 in Erie County).

### % Households by Income Levels

	Town of Cheektowaga	Erie County
\$0 - \$25K	23%	26%
\$25K - \$100K	65%	55%
\$100K+	12%	19%

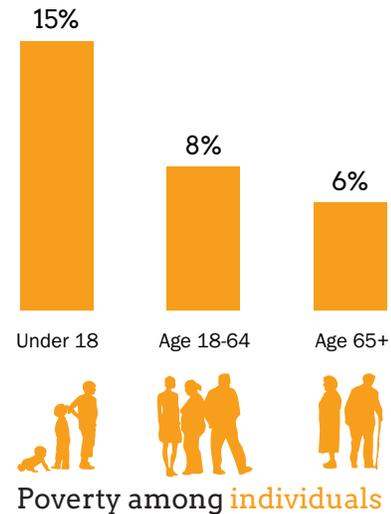
Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

## Population in or near poverty, 2010



Source: 2006-10 American Community Survey. Census tracts that are mentioned in the text below have been labeled on this map.

## Population in Poverty by Age, 2011



Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

## Poverty

There are 7,943 individuals (nearly one-tenth of the total) living in poverty (or on less than \$19,530 annually for a family of three as of 2013). Over double this number—17,184—are struggling economically with incomes hovering between 100% and 200% of the federal poverty level. Altogether, over one-quarter of the population in Cheektowaga is either in poverty or at risk financially.

Single parent families with children are disproportionately impacted and account for 64% of families in poverty. Most (93%) are single

**64%** of families in poverty are single parents with children

mothers, and the youngest families in town are most in need. Almost half of children under age 6 live in a family that is in poverty or at risk, suggesting barriers to work exist for the parents with children younger than typical school age.

Across the town, poverty isn't uniformly distributed but rather concentrated in particular neighborhoods. These high-need areas can be found on the western side of town, in Sloan and near the West Seneca border. In fact, over half of families in poverty live in six out of Cheektowaga's 28 census tracts (Census Tracts 99, 101.02, 102.02, 108.07, 109.02 and 110).

The Cedar Grove Heights Neighborhood in Census Tract 101.02 is described by residents and providers as a new "east side" (referring to the highly impoverished east side of Buffalo). High rates of unemployment and disability exist. Residents need job training, budgeting and life skills. However, few have cars and limited human services are located within walking distance (see the cover map and the map on page 25). Lower housing costs are what attracted some to this neighborhood, according to a focus group with residents.

**\$12.00** Amount a family of three would pay for a single round trip by bus

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

**\$20.08** Daily cost of owning and operating a car

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

Schools by District in Cheektowaga	Enrollment, 2011	% Qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch
<b>CHEEKTOWAGA CENTRAL</b>		
1 Pine Hill Primary	350	58%
2 Union East ES	631	57%
3 Cheektowaga MS	531	51%
4 Cheektowaga HS	752	43%
<b>CHEEKTOWAGA-MARYVALE</b>		
5 Maryvale Primary	555	41%
6 Maryvale Intermediate	457	45%
7 Maryvale MS	485	30%
8 Maryvale HS	737	23%
<b>CLEVELAND HILL</b>		
9 Cleveland Hill ES	643	58%
10 Cleveland Hill MS	324	49%
11 Cleveland Hill HS	468	42%
<b>LANCASTER CENTRAL</b>		
12 John A. Sciole ES	380	25%
<b>CHEEKTOWAGA-SLOAN</b>		
13 Theodore Roosevelt	364	46%
14 Woodrow Wilson ES	298	50%
15 John F. Kennedy MS	370	51%
16 John F. Kennedy HS	503	43%

Source: NYS Education Department 2011 School Report Card and Basic Educational Data System Day Enrollment Table

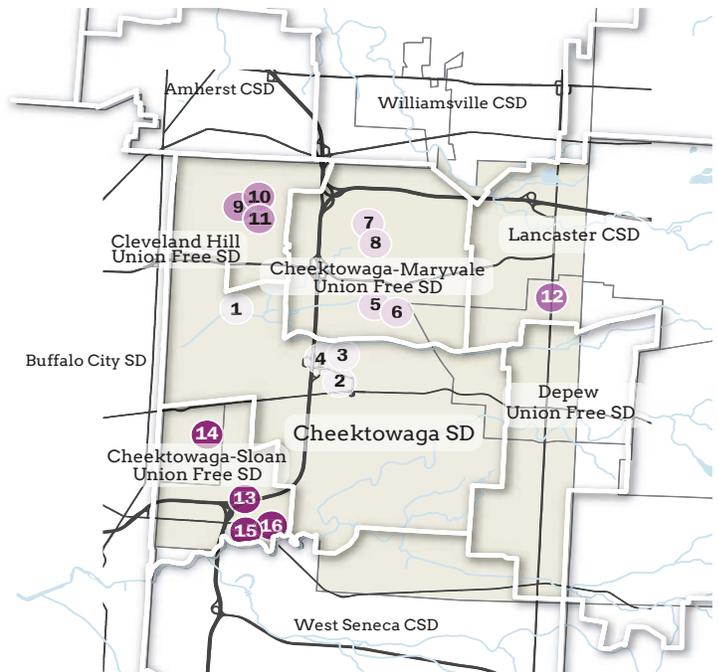
## Education

The town of Cheektowaga has five school districts with schools within town borders: Cheektowaga Central, Cleveland Hill, Lancaster, Maryvale and Cheektowaga-Sloan. Together, these districts enroll approximately 7,850 students. Cheektowaga Central and Maryvale are the largest of the five.

With the town's youngest families hit hardest by poverty, it's not surprising that district leaders report increasing need among students. In Cheektowaga Central and Cleveland Hill over half of all students come from families with incomes low enough to qualify for free and reduced price lunches. Maryvale and Cheektowaga-Sloan have percentages nearing this among elementary students.

Behind the numbers, leaders say they are increasingly called to deal with urgent needs for human services and the consequences of safety-net gaps: referrals to pantries for children without enough food and clothes, a sharp rise in behavioral issues, mental health needs with inability of families to follow through with referrals, parents who are not available and hard to engage and a growing emphasis on academic achievement.

The districts have been innovative in responding to these needs with everything from mobile health buses, anti-bullying initiatives, home visits, mentoring programs, bus tokens and taxis for travel, expansion of alternative programs and partnerships allowing service delivery within the district. Many are similar to wrap-around services offered through the recently implemented Say Yes model in Buffalo.



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

## Educational Attainment of Adults Age 25+, 2007-11

	Town of Cheektowaga	Erie County
Less than High School	12%	11%
High School	37%	29%
Some College/ Associate's Degree	32%	30%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	19%	30%

Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Yet a lingering challenge is an unequal resource level across districts to address cross-cutting threats to academic achievement. Maryvale, for instance, is without a family support center and was forced to eliminate its social workers for budgetary reasons.

While all four districts have drop-out rates under 5%, leadership for Cheektowaga Central expresses frustration with the large number of students (100 this year) who take part in BOCES's outstanding program for vocational training but select culinary arts, pet grooming and cosmetology as their major, even though the good paying jobs are in manufacturing. Moreover, with Cheektowaga's working-class roots, many students would be the first in their family to pursue college, yet they don't go because their family needs them and/or can't help them with the college application process. Indeed, Cheektowaga has a significantly smaller percentage of adults having at least a four-year degree, as compared to Erie County.

Context for Action

# Cheektowaga's Most Vulnerable



Demographics,  
service usage,  
urgent needs  
and barriers

## Assessing the Need

### 524 Cheektowaga 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 the Cheektowaga Senior Citizen Center, Evangelistic E's Food Pantry, Living Waters Food Pantry, Anna Reinstein Library, Julia Reinstein Library, Cleveland Hill School District, Maryvale School District, Cheektowaga Central School District, Infant of Prague, Cayuga Village Community Center and several resource events held by the Mobile Safety-Net Team.

## What human services are residents receiving?

Less than half (39%) of vulnerable individuals in Cheektowaga 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

HEAP	39%
SSI/SSD	38%
Medicaid	32%
SSI/SSD	36%
Food Stamps	35%

## 51%

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

**Pending applications.** Only 6% of respondents indicated they have an application for some form of public assistance pending, with 24% of pending applications for Medicaid insurance and another 20% for SSI/SSD, which are benefits for those with disabilities. All of those with pending applications were current recipients seeking additional benefits.

## 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 experiencing access barriers. Altogether, about one in six (16%) says there is difficulty getting services.

## 13%

of survey takers report having an urgent concern.

### The most urgent concerns of those surveyed

Homelessness	5%
Eviction	
Utility Shut-off	
No money for food	4%

**Urgent Concerns.** About one in eight survey takers reported having an urgent concern, a much lower proportion than other communities like Tonawanda (30%) and Lockport (22%), suggesting possible underreporting of urgent concerns. Indeed, the sample shows older-age respondents with no health insurance who reported no urgent concerns in their household. For some, living conditions associated with chronic poverty can become

the norm and not perceived as requiring immediate action.

Among urgent concerns noted, housing-related crises accounted for over half (57% of total concerns noted), followed by concerns related to not having money for food.

### Lack of Health Insurance.

Over one in ten households (11%) reported that someone in their household lacks health insurance, on par with Newstead but lower than in Tonawanda where close to one in five lacked insurance. Children are more likely to be covered, with only 2% of respondents indicating that a child in the household lacks insurance.

## What's causing this situation?

The survey results show Cheektowaga to be a relatively stable, middle-class community where even most vulnerable households own major assets like cars (86%) and homes (71%). Over half of those surveyed (60%) also reported having a degree or at least some college, and most reported either being employed or retired (73% altogether).

Those surveyed tended to be rooted in the community, with almost two out of three having lived there at least 6 years. The majority also have at least 2 adults in their household, an indicator of human capital and the relatively stronger households.

These findings, however, mask neighborhoods in Cheektowaga where pockets of poverty exist and families are in crisis. Some of these vulnerabilities were identified from a deeper dive into the survey data and include the following:

# 524 surveyed

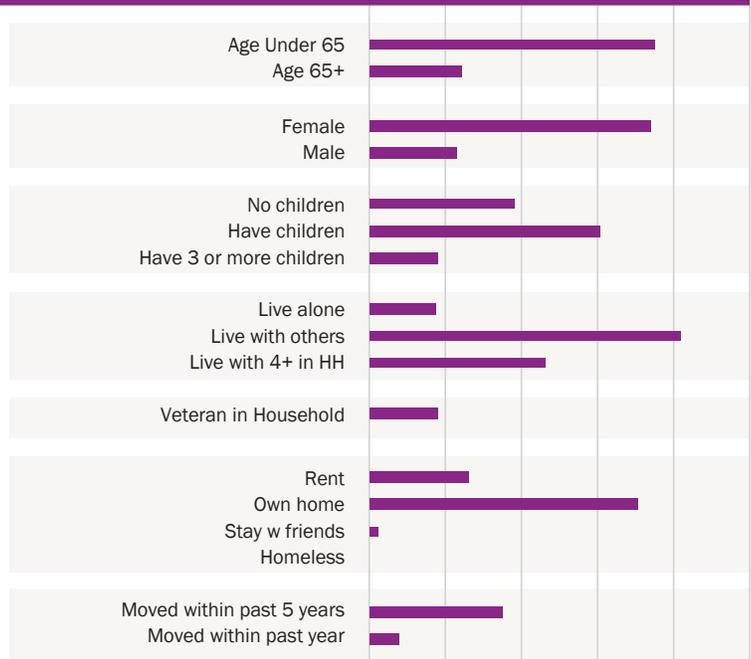
## Barriers to benefits, including stigma.

Significantly lower percentages of vulnerable residents in Cheektowaga receive assistance, as compared to those in other communities like Tonawanda (39% vs. 59%), suggesting barriers from lack of awareness to traveling difficulties and stigma associated with needing help and applying for governmental programs. Even among households earning under 130% of the poverty level (the threshold for HEAP and food stamps for a household of three) the median size in Cheektowaga, almost one in five (17%) reported not receiving any form of assistance. Moreover, only 60% of residents who completed this survey at a particular food pantry indicated that they receive food stamps.

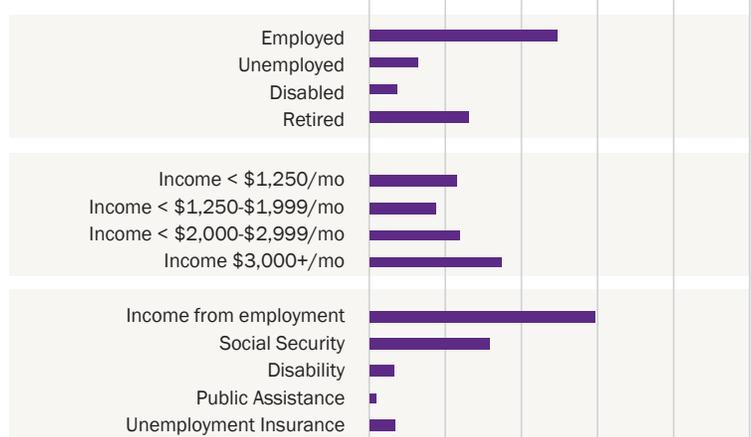
**Higher unemployment for those with fewer skills.** While 40% of those surveyed reported having a college degree and unemployment across the entire sample was 13%, the situation is much worse for those without higher levels of education and skills. One out of four of these residents was unemployed with more than not saying they are actively looking for work. Only 3% reported having any kind of trade or vocational training.

**Younger families more likely to have traveling needs.** While only 14% of households report relying on a mode of transportation other than their own vehicle, of those who did, 80% were younger adults between the ages of 18 and 64 and half had children in their household. More reported getting places by walking, biking and catching rides with friends and family than using public transit. When those without a vehicle were asked why they don't use public transit more often, the most common response was because it's too expensive and takes too long to get places.

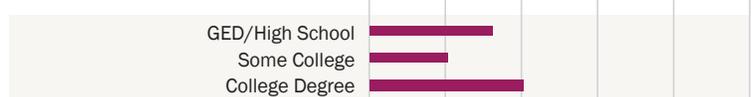
## Individuals and Families



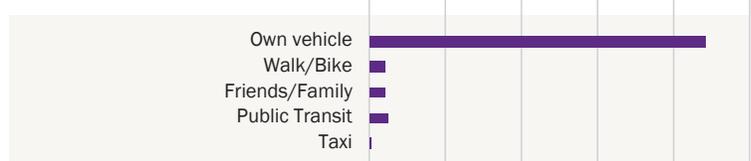
## Work and Income



## Education



## Transportation



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

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

## Barriers Residents Face

Being turned away for services because of income limits was the most frequent barrier reported, by four out of five of those residents describing obstacles to getting the services. Difficulty associated with traveling was the second most common barrier, and the majority of those with traveling difficulty are those without a car.

Focus groups with residents in Cheektowaga shed further light on these and other barriers residents face.

A Voice from the Community

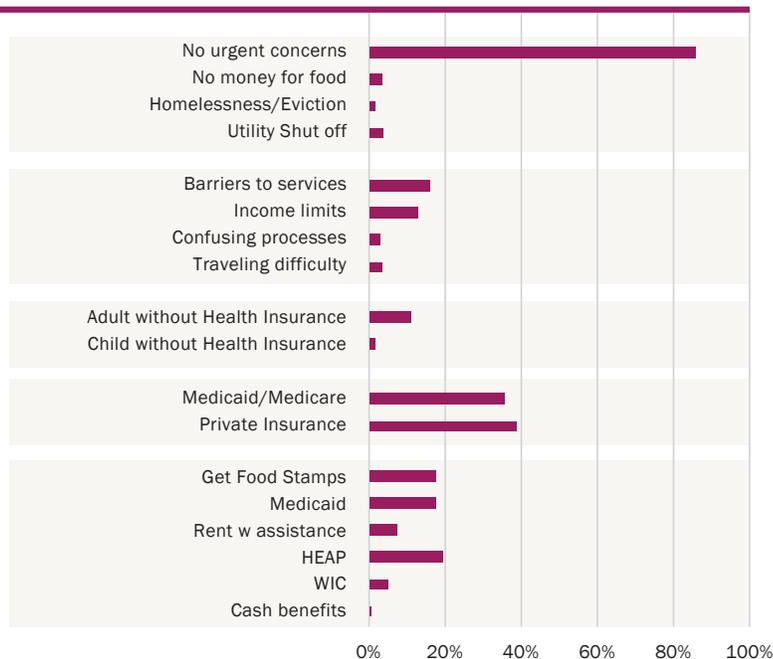
### Income Limits and Access to

**Food:** Only sixty percent of those surveyed at the Evangelistic E food pantry indicated that they receive food stamps, even though all have food needs. The majority of focus group participants at this pantry indicated that they either don't qualify for SNAP due to income limits—sometimes being a mere \$2 over the maximum— or that they receive SNAP but it is not enough to live on.

Significantly, this pantry serves an average of 900 people a month, most of whom walk to this location in northwestern corner of Cheektowaga. The lack of farmers markets, too, was mentioned, as a barrier to healthy food choices.

**Transportation:** Participants referenced transportation barriers, noting difficulty traveling to job interviews using public transportation, prohibitive transportation costs and a lack of transportation options for seniors. There is only one wheelchair van in the senior center fleet. As one participant noted, transportation is a critical piece to aging in place.

### Needs & Barriers



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

### Lack of Awareness of Services and Training:

Participants discussed the lack of awareness of job resources offered in Cheektowaga. In the Cedar Grove Heights neighborhood, some find access to job training information to be minimal. One participant referred to the Cedar Grove Heights neighborhood as a “pocket of poverty,” similar to Buffalo’s east side. Additionally, others noted that if training is offered, it is held during the daytime, which is a barrier for parents with children, who have to find child care.

**Lack of Health Insurance:** Like the most vulnerable in other communities, health care is a pressing concern for those in need in Cheektowaga. Several people talked about prohibitive costs, forgoing prescription coverage, as well as dental and eye care. Tradeoffs between food and medicine were mentioned.

### Limited Community Centers:

Although a few focus group participants used the Alexander Community Center, many found it to be inaccessible due to transportation costs and distance. Many agreed that a community center more like a “Y” with programming for adults and children is desirable.

### Lack of Special Needs

**Programs:** Parents of children with special needs noted the lack of programming. Although BOCES is available to residents, some expressed a need for more comprehensive services.

### “Camping” in Inadequate

**Housing:** Several participants know of people who camp in abandoned, foreclosed or inadequate housing. In other words, people in Cheektowaga are living in substandard housing with no electricity, running water, or heat—relying on the goodwill of friends to shower, or, sometimes, using a hose in a neighbor’s backyard to rinse off.

1 out of 6 residents surveyed in Cheektowaga say they have encountered difficulty getting services.



### Housing Rehabilitation Costs:

At a focus group held at the Senior Center, almost half of those present found navigating the system for housing assistance to be difficult. When asked about annual housing assistance information, some suggested that the town mailing only goes to certain neighborhoods. None of the 13 residents present receive the town mailing.

## Voices from the Community

### Insights and perspectives from those with first-hand experience

These are stories about real people,\* individuals in Cheektowaga who agreed to talk with us and share some of their personal accounts. We asked them about the challenges they face, the services and supports that have been helpful to them, 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*



## Jean

A working mother of two needs health insurance

Jean works a sector where jobs tend to offer benefits except for workers who are part time like herself. A single mom of two with an associate's degree, Jean has been in her office job for 5 years, but because she's part time, she doesn't qualify for health or other benefits, even though she works close to 30 hours a week and full-time during the summer. She took the job because it offered flexibility; the hours coincided with the school day, and it was close to home.

Jean has looked into options for coverage, but they are either too expensive or she doesn't qualify. Insurance for just herself is over \$1,000 a month, and to qualify for Medicaid, she'd have to cut her work hours. So Jean pays out of pocket, seeing a doctor only as a last resort. It's detrimental to the kids, she says, the way she now considers costs before her own health.

Jean's not sure how the health care changes that are under way will affect her situation. She worries things might actually worsen, if her work hours are cut to avoid paying insurance. That is one of two possible scenarios she has heard.

A Voice from the Community

While Jean describes her school district (Cheektowaga Central) and the town's youth program as enormous resources, she is less enthusiastic about other supports such as access to even basic information about where to go for help. Besides that, everything is income based. "If I were to lose my job tomorrow, I don't even know if I'd qualify." They look at your income from 6 months ago. Those who try to do the right thing, who go to work every day, cripple themselves, in some ways.



## Bernice

An energetic senior who lives alone depends on the senior van

Bernice describes herself as a former career woman and as someone who has never been shy about traveling solo, but now in her early 80s, she no longer drives. When she and her husband retired, he offered to do the driving. When he died, she preferred to find alternatives rather than take up driving again. She relies on the senior van, using it to go all over—the Senior Center, medical appointments, grocery shopping and more. What she misses are the movie theater and going out to dinner with friends, as 3 p.m. is the cut-off for the senior van. Going to the grocery store on a whim is also out of the question; two-weeks advance notice is now needed.

A Voice from the Community

Bernice raves about the leadership, programming, and energy at the Senior Center. She's been attending for three years, encouraged to go by one of the van drivers. "Anyone who doesn't join is silly," she says, as there is something for everyone. She describes the meals as "marvelous," attracting crowds of up to 120, and at \$3.50, a great buy. The Senior Center is how she became aware of other services in the community. There is an orientation for all new members. She says she would go to the center more often if she still drove, but it costs \$6 every time you use the van and that adds up.

A longer-time resident of Cheektowaga, Bernice has seen changes in the neighborhood. While she is pleased with her rental, there are nearby apartments where the police are always present. They are younger residents, more transient. They throw garbage in the yards and have motorcycles racing at night. Against this backdrop, she says there are "beautiful homes" across the street from these apartments, creating a question for how these neighbors must be impacted.

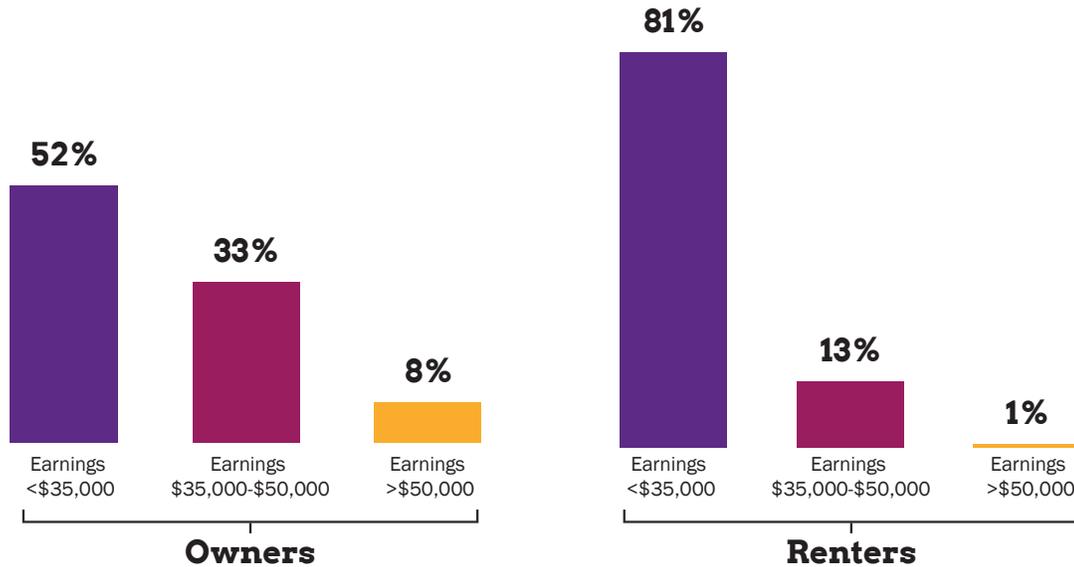
Context for Action

# Places in Need



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

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



Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

## Housing

The majority of residents in Cheektowaga are homeowners who have lived in their home at least 20 years. Of the town's 38,511 occupied housing units, 71% are owner occupied, reflecting a higher home ownership percentage than exists across Erie County. Slightly over half of homeowners report moving into the house they now live in 1990 or earlier, indicating a level of community stability that is higher than exists elsewhere in the county.

With the majority of homes valued under \$100,000, Cheektowaga is a more affordable than the county as a whole where the median home costs \$120,600. Homes in Cheektowaga tend to be smaller. Half have no more than five rooms, appropriate for newer families as well as seniors desiring to age in place with less house to upkeep.

At the same time Cheektowaga can be an affordable community for home owners, it is a relatively expensive one for those seeking to rent. The majority of rental units in Cheektowaga cost almost

**4 out of 5**  
lower-income renters  
in Cheektowaga  
are burdened with  
relatively high  
housing costs

\$750 or more a month, while the majority of renters in town can be described as lower income individuals or families, living on less than \$35,000 a year. Altogether, about four out of five lower-income renters (81%) pay more than 30% of their income on housing, costs that include both rent and utilities.

Among lower income homeowners, about half are burdened with housing costs that exceed 30% of their household income. More often, their challenge is managing large home repairs on a fixed income. Representatives from the Cheektowaga Office of Economic and Community Development say the waiting list for funding assistance with non-emergency repairs is three years long and is currently closed because of its length. For emergencies, the department has a fund from which homeowners can receive a loan to make repairs, yet department representatives say some crisis situations go unaddressed since residents may not be aware of this resource or may feel uncomfortable accepting help, even if they can't afford on their own to make the necessary fixes.

Other major housing and neighborhood concerns providers described include bank-owned residential vacancies that are unkept and are bringing neighborhoods down, homes in violation of code, hoarding, and nuisance activities (blaring music, barking dogs, and litter), all of which bear negatively on neighborhood quality.

## Public Transit Times from the Apartment Units on Linda Drive in Cheektowaga

Destination	Time of Day	One-Way Travel Time Via Bus	Notes
1 Julia Boyer Reinstein Library in Cheektowaga	<b>afternoon</b> during the week	1 Hr., 59 Min.	Requires 1.2 mile walk to the library on Losson Road from the bus stop on French Road. This walk may be particularly difficult with young children or during the winter months.
2 ECC North Campus	<b>mid morning</b>	51 Min.	It takes almost an hour to get to ECC's One-Stop Center that is 4 miles away from Linda Drive.
3 Geico in Amherst	<b>evening</b>	1 Hr., 28 Min.	Accepting an entry-level job at Geico will involve a 3-hour round-trip commute for someone living in the Linda Drive area, even though this job center is just 12 miles away.
4 Neighborhood Legal Services in Buffalo	<b>early afternoon</b>	45 Min.	The NFTA operates 4 regular routes traveling through Cheektowaga into the City of Buffalo via William, Clinton, Broadway and Genesee Streets.



## Transportation

Cheektowaga's transportation infrastructure is arguably one of the town's strongest assets. It's home to the Buffalo-Niagara International Airport as well as one of two Amtrak stations in the region. Three major expressways cut through the community (190, I190, and the 33), and the NFTA has four regular routes through the town (William, Clinton, Broadway, and Genesee).

Yet even in a place like Cheektowaga where public transit exists and appears relatively accessible, the overwhelming majority (95%) report using a vehicle to get to their jobs. While 2% say they walk, less than this percentage reports relying on public transportation (1.4%) or using alternative means such as bicycling (<0.5%).

While most residents in town are car-dependent, close to 3,900 households are without a vehicle. This is about one out of eight households, which are more likely than not to be headed by an older person, age 65 and up. They are also predominately renters.

Options for seniors without a vehicle include the Going Places van, available through the town's contract with Erie County Department of Senior Services. The van will take seniors anywhere they want to go, with medical appointments taking priority. The cost is \$3 one-way, and it's a voluntary donation. The Senior Center also has its own van that takes seniors to the senior center.

For younger residents without a vehicle, public transportation may be the most reliable and affordable way of traveling longer distances, and yet it's not always practical, especially for travel to suburban locations.

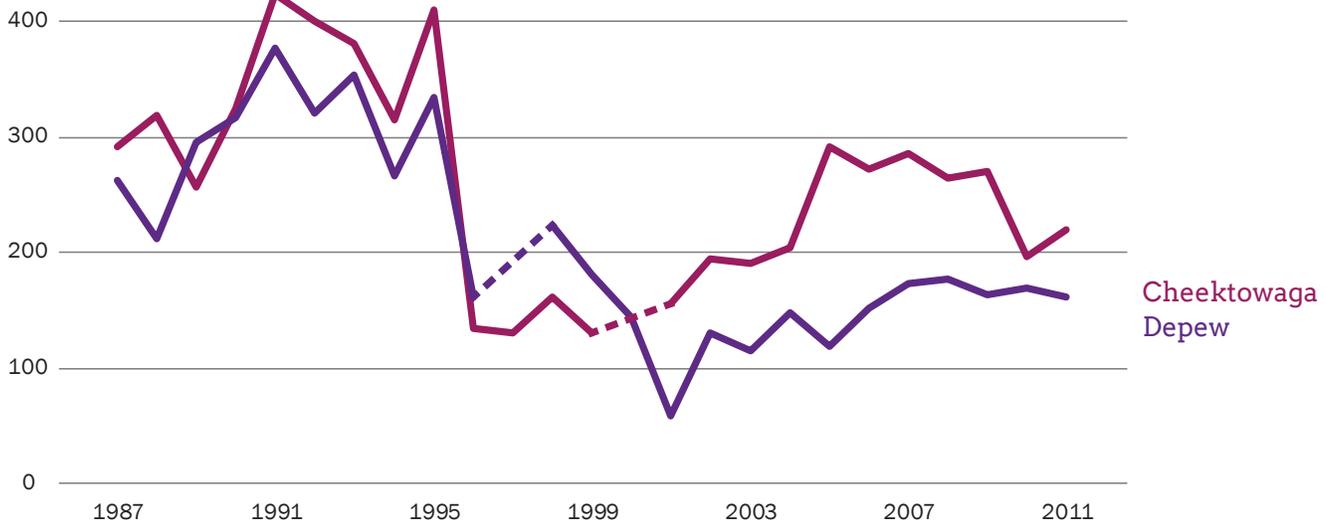
From the rental units on Linda Drive, just east of the 33/90 interchange, it takes 2 hours by bus to get the Julia Reinstein Library which offers a range of free computer training. Traveling north for a job at Geico in Amherst involves a three hour round-trip commute. Even heading four miles northeast to ECC's One-Stop takes nearly an hour. What's more efficient by bus is travel between Cheektowaga and Buffalo.

## Characteristics of Householders Lacking a Vehicle, 2011

Household by Age	# Renters	# Owners	TOTAL
Householder Under Age 65	1,176	296	1,472
Householder Age 65+	1,343	1,077	2,420
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,519</b>	<b>1,373</b>	<b>3,892</b>

Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Rates of Violent Crime Reported by the Cheektowaga and Depew Police Departments, Per 100,000 Population, 1987-2011



Source: U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting Program

## Crime

Compared to some other communities in the region, Cheektowaga is a safe place for individuals and families to live. Rates of violent crime in this inner-ring suburb are just a fraction of what they are in neighboring Buffalo (221 incidences per 100,000 versus 1,238 in Buffalo in 2011). Moreover, rates of violent crime are lower than they were during the later 1980s and earlier 1990s. Today, three-quarters of all criminal offenses in town involve theft and larceny, associated with the town's large retail sectors, especially the Walden Galleria Mall. Rates of crime in Depew, which has its own police force, have been slightly lower than in the Town of Cheektowaga over the past decade.

### Cheektowaga Police Dept. is blazing trails in the area of Mental Health

According to agency providers, Cheektowaga has a large police force that is committed to maintaining quality of life. Residents are encouraged to report suspicious activity and kids loitering in the streets.

The Police Department also leads Operation Neighborhood

Outreach, which engages all town departments, to blitz certain neighborhoods with information about town services, from youth programs to senior services and animal control. The aim is to keep up areas and maintain quality of life.

Diverting mental health cases from the criminal justice system is another area where the police department is proactive and is, in fact, blazing trails. In response to a growing number of calls involving mental health crises (about 686 in 2012, or almost 2 a day), the department is now partnering with Crisis Services to respond to incidences involving mental health needs. All officers have received training to better help them intervene and make appropriate referrals. Soon they will be participating in a Mental Health Well Visit Program under which officers will conduct home visits with residents with mental health needs who have had repeated contact with police in order to offer information and connections to supports in a non-emergency setting where it's more likely that information will be retained. The nearest police force that is doing anything of this kind is in Rochester, New York.

# Landscape of Services

Cheektowaga  
service  
providers,  
their strengths,  
system gaps,  
barriers and  
promising  
developments





	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
TOWN of CHEEKTOWAGA	33 Living Opportunities																
	34 Living Opportunities-De Paul (2 locations)																
	35 Living Waters Fellowship Food Pantry																
	36 Maryvale Union Free School District																
	37 Mid-Erie Mental Health Services, Inc.																
	38 Resurrection Life Fellowship																
	39 Sisters of Charity Hospital - St. Joseph Campus																
	40 St. Luke's Food Pantry																
	41 U.S. Veterans Affairs Department		✓														
	42 Villa Maria College - Sister Mary Josette Food Pantry																
43 WNY United Against Drug																	
44 YMCA of Greater Buffalo																	
VILLAGE of DEPEW	45 AMVETS Family Thrift Store																
	46 Buffalo City Mission Thrift Store																
	47 Depew Recreation Department																
	48 Living Opportunities																
	49 Our Lady The Blessed Sacrament - OLBS Food Pantry																
	50 Partners In Rehab																
51 Prince Of Peace Lutheran Church																	
SLOAN	52 Cheektowaga-Sloan Union Free School District																
	53 Sloan Senior Citizens - Sloan Community Center				✓												
	54 Village of Sloan				✓												

See Data Sources and Notes for definitions

## Landscape of Services

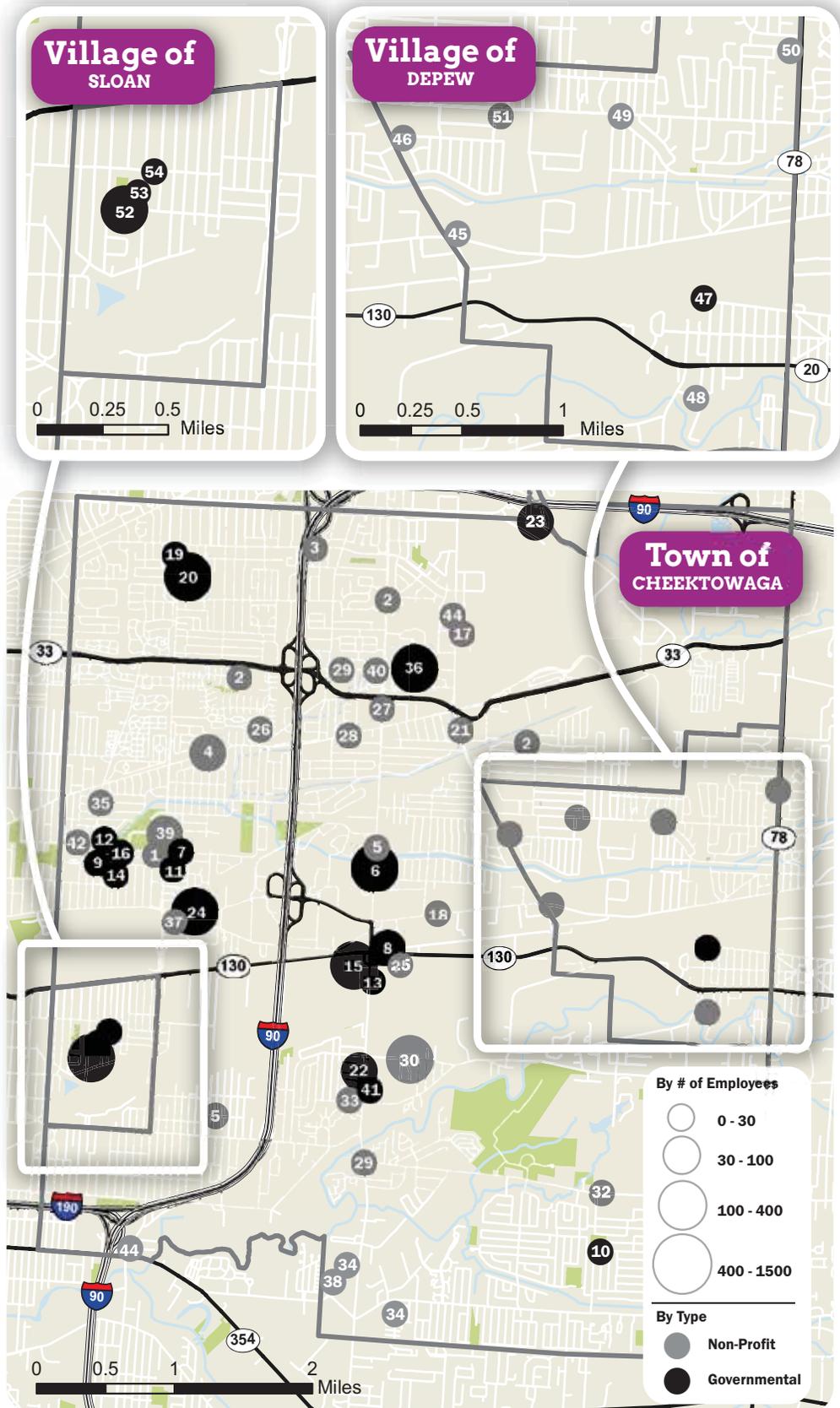
Dozens of public and private human service supports exist in the Town of Cheektowaga offering residents food, clothing, youth programs, health care, information, referrals and more.

However, the largest providers of services are governmental, particularly the Town of Cheektowaga and the several school districts within the town. Altogether, public providers account for 23 out of the total or nearly half. In terms of employment, school districts and town departments providing human services account for over half of all jobs supporting the safety net in Cheektowaga.

Many providers are located both east and west of the I-90, in the corridor between Harlem Road and Union Road. At the same time, relatively few providers were identified in the northwestern corner of town where poverty is highest or in the Village of Sloan.



**About 2,210**  
employees across  
**54 providers**  
in Cheektowaga offer  
core human services  
to those in need.



## Strengths of the System

**The town offers seniors strong human service supports and seeks to be a one-stop shop for older residents.** In addition to a range of social and wellness activities supported by the town's Department of Senior Services, there are daily hot meals at seven different sites. Meals on Wheels is available to homebound seniors. Outreach services are also provided to help seniors connect with community-based support programs and navigate the system. At least 1,000 seniors were assisted in 2013. Seniors also have access to van services, including one that runs on weekends, with round trips available for a voluntary \$3 one-way donation.

The  
**TOWN**  
is a major service  
provider

**The Cheektowaga Police Department is described as responsive, proactive and progressive.** Both providers and residents credit the police force with maintaining community safety and neighborhood well being. Residents are encouraged by police to report anything out of the ordinary, including kids loitering in the streets. They are also a forerunner in diverting those with mental illness from the criminal justice system, where many find themselves. See Promising Developments on page 27 for a program they recently implemented.

At the same time resources at Cheektowaga's Youth and Recreational Services have been cut significantly, **notable programming continues to be offered.** This includes camps during summers and school recesses (both praised by working mothers); Club Mocha for middle school students; YES (Youth Engaged in Services) for youth desiring to cultivate work skills, a mother-daughter program for families, and a variety of sports and other programming. The town has three community and recreational centers. It also collaborates with Catholic Charities and the school districts to offer mental health intervention services to youth and families at no cost. In 2012, almost 300 youth were served. Referrals come from the school districts.

**Cheektowaga is one of few communities, among those selected for in-depth assessment where drug use, addiction and/or suicide among youth were not described as pressing concerns.**

**Initiatives of the school districts in Cheektowaga exemplify responsiveness to student and community needs** and include a mobile bus to provide health information, keeping school libraries open during evening hours, anti-bullying programs, mentors for students in need and active community outreach.

**The town's Office of Emergency Services provides assistance to those with disabilities and other special needs in the event of an emergency.** Their database tracks where these residents live and their needs. Moreover, when the emergency involves a senior, there is coordination between this office and the Department of Senior Services to optimize support provided.

## Gaps in Services

**Greater supports are needed for parents of children with developmental and behavioral issues, especially young children where intervention and special needs programming are lacking.** Providers describe children being kicked out of their local day care due to behavioral concerns with a disconnect between day care and home. Meanwhile, parents describe a need for more programming for children with special needs.

**Human services in Cheektowaga aren't always aligned geographically with need.** For instance, the Anna Reinstein Library on Harlem Road sits in a higher poverty area of town, yet stakeholder say its hours and staff have been cut, despite higher levels of use. It has one full-time librarian and is described as having an appalling lack of resources, as compared the Julia Reinstein library across town on Losson Road where families are more well-to-do.

Similarly, **varying resources across Cheektowaga's four primary school districts result in gaps in services for students and**

**families, depending on the district in which they live.**

**BIGGEST GAPS  
ARE IN HIGH POVERTY  
neighborhoods**

Maryvale, for instance, has no social workers, due to recent cuts, nor any kind of family support center that's available to students in the other districts, including neighboring

Cheektowaga Central. Making matters worse, transportation is described as a major barrier for families in Maryvale.

**The Cedar Grove Heights neighborhood in the northwestern corner of Cheektowaga needs space dedicated for a food pantry and other human services supports.** While Evangelistic E's Food Pantry has been in the neighborhood for 25 years and now serves about 900 a month, it's run out of the founder's home with food stored in the basement and garage. The food takes up so much space, they pay to rent storage for personal belongings. There is a dearth of other supports in this neighborhood where the majority of families are in poverty and many lack vehicles. What's described as needed are job and skills training, budgeting, information, referral, transportation and mental health.

**Hoarding is described as an increasing problem in Cheektowaga.** A senior caseworker reports seeing 20 cases over the past four years, compared to two cases in Buffalo over the same period. Yet appropriate mental health services for victims are missing. Rather, what happens is the town gets a court order and spends \$20,000 to clean out the home. It causes great mental distress to the homeowner, and without treatment, the cycle begins again.

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## Barriers to Connecting with Residents

**Despite school district partnerships with BOCES, pipelines for students into higher paid careers like manufacturing are weak and do not appeal to students** as do lower-paying professions in the culinary arts or cosmetology where students see their parents working and therefore have more role models.

**There are long waiting lists for affordable housing supports. During 2013, the wait was three years for home rehabilitation services available from the town's Department of Community Development.** It's over a five-year wait in Cheektowaga for help under the NYS Weatherization Assistance Program. Meanwhile, renters seeking a section 8 voucher face a waiting list that is 20,000 households long across Erie County.

**Both service providers and residents describe lacking awareness of what human service programs exist in Cheektowaga.** Gaps are most pronounced in the poorest neighborhoods.

**Budget cuts have reduced critical resources.** The town's Department of Youth and Recreation has seen a quarter million dollar cut in its budget over the years, even through the population

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**Long waiting lists for services prevent more proactive approaches**

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of special need children (with ADD, ADHD and behavioral/developmental concerns) is growing. Meanwhile, Maryvale School District has lost all of its social workers, and funding is described as a barrier to BOCES' training.

**Tax rates in Cheektowaga are high and leave little room for increases to fund additional services** provided by the town. Yet, at the same time, residents are described as being supportive of the services provided.

**The stigma associated with services is a barrier, especially for older residents.** Providers see senior homeowners who will live with a leak in their roof they can't afford to fix before accepting help. The stigma associated with ideas such as urban farming also limit strategies that may help the town.

**Cheektowaga is a town that is geographically and politically divided by major thoroughfares (Route 33, I-90 and I-190), multiple school districts, two villages and distinct neighborhoods.** These create communities with varying levels of needs and resources, and may mask growing pockets of poverty.

**Transportation is described as a barrier to mental health services and follow-through on appointments.** Moreover, public transportation isn't always accessible to those who need it, with routes cuts in Cedar Grove Heights, one of the poorest neighborhoods.

## Promising Developments

**An early recognition program has recently been implemented by Mid-Erie, giving parents new tools for screening their pre-school children for normal development.** Where concerns are identified, parents are connected with resources in the community. Funded under a five-year grant, services are free to parents. Mid-Erie is currently trying to get the word out, partnering with pediatric clinics and aiming to reach as many parents as possible.

**New York State is implementing a voluntary quality rating system for child care providers.** Quality Stars NY will enable parents to better select quality providers, as each provider will be given a ranking from 1 to 5.

**The Cheektowaga Police Department has been a forerunner in addressing mental health needs** that increasingly culminate in calls to the police and involuntary commitments to the hospital. Partnering with Crisis Services, a Crisis Intervention Team now responds to police calls where the incident involves a mental health issue to help diffuse the situation and get that resident connected with appropriate support. Soon, mental health well visits will be conducted by the police to offer information in a non-crisis setting, in an effort to reduce the number of mental health emergencies to which police respond to.

**New leadership in the town's Department of Economic and Community Development offers vision, new ideas and hope** for a department where resources are a fraction of community need and HUD regulations stymie efforts to stretch dollars to better meet need. Developing a proactive approach to home and neighborhood quality is a priority and differs from current operations, which today are more focused on emergency situations, particularly with respect to assisting lower-income home-owners with housing rehabilitation.

**In an effort to improve quality of life and engage landlords in this effort, Cheektowaga recently enacted a landlord licensing law.** Although providers say it will take some time for this new law to be fully implemented, it requires landlords to register with the town and imposes fines on landlords who have rentals where the police are repeatedly being called to address criminal or public nuisance activity.

## 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: over 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 Cheektowaga Police Department, Department of Economic and Community Development, Department of Emergency Services, Department of Youth and Recreational Services, Cleveland Hill School District, Maryvale School District, Child Care Resource Network, and Evangelistic E's Food Pantry.

A focus group with providers was held in May 2013. Resident input was gathered through conversations with seniors at the Senior Center, users of Evangelistic E's Food Pantry and parents at Anna Reinstein Library. In addition, the Mobile Safety-Net Team conducted a focus group with children at Club Mocha that offered insights from a younger population in the community.

Local data from secondary sources also inform these findings and recommendations.

## Strengthen connections among public and nonprofit human services providers

There was general agreement among providers taking part in an agency focus group that there is not enough communication among public and nonprofit service providers that enables them to learn about the services of each other, share ideas, collaborate and together go after funding and additional resources. Nobody was aware of any existing groups or coalitions, with part of the reason being that in Cheektowaga the town itself is viewed as the primary provider of human services, creating less need to coordinate services across many smaller, neighborhood-based nonprofits and governmental agencies, as in other communities.

### STRATEGIES

Building upon already developed town-based collaborations, establish a human services coalition open to all governmental and nonprofit providers of human services, including the school districts, libraries and neighborhood-based providers.

Meet regularly to share information and tackle priority concerns, under broad vision of human services delivery.

Expand learning opportunities for coalition members through periodic presentations that delve into the services offered by a particular provider. These could include “best practices” from within the region, such as a speaker session on Dream It, Do It, an initiative being implemented in selected school districts across Western New York.

Use this assessment as a tool for shared resource advocacy and development in areas of need.

Provide a resident perspective to the coalition through input and engagement of residents from higher-needs neighborhoods.

To further raise support and awareness of human services interests consider representation from the media such as the Cheektowaga Bee, elected officials and the business community.

### WHO NEEDS TO ACT

All providers of human services in Cheektowaga especially those in key need areas such as food, affordable housing, supports for parents, youth and seniors services, as well as the Mobile Safety-Net Team, to facilitate initial meetings as needed.

### MODELS TO CONSIDER

The Seattle Human Services Coalition is an example of a long-standing group.

<http://shscoalition.org/>

## MODELS TO CONSIDER

### ATLANTA CIVIC SITE

Funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and serving as a model for Buffalo’s Promise Neighborhood, Atlanta is designated as a Civic Site – a place where the Foundation has invested long-term to “improve the future for at-risk children.” Civic Site works with neighborhood stakeholders and families in designated neighborhoods to reach three goals of “educational achievement,” “family economic success” and “neighborhood transformation.” Using evidence-based research, data-driven programming and outcome based measurements, the Atlanta Civic Site established three entities to achieve these goals: 1)

The Center for Working Families, Inc., which provides residents with job training programs like workforce development and work support; 2) The Dunbar Learning Complex, which houses two educational institutions to ensure that children are reading at grade level by third grade; and 3) The Partnership for the Preservation of Pittsburgh, a collaboration between Sustainable Neighborhood Development Strategies, Inc., a nonprofit formed by Civic Site to coordinate development in the targeted area, and the Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association, the community development corporation in the Pittsburgh neighborhood.

<http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/CivicSites/Atlanta.aspx>



## Raise awareness of human services and reduce fragmentation through greater centralization of information

Both human service providers and residents say information and awareness of services is lacking. Information gaps are most notable among residents and selected providers in the town's poorest neighborhood, Cedar Grove Heights. Even the library on the western side of town where poverty is higher is described as having an appalling lack of resources and information, compared to what exists across town. One provider describes how she has put together her own directory, in an attempt to point clients in the right direction for services. While seniors have an outreach workers who is aware of services and makes referrals, seniors say not enough people know about this valuable service, especially those in the community not connected with the senior center.

### STRATEGIES

Maintain the directory of human services being created by the Mobile Safety-Net Team. This directory should build upon the information the town already centralizes into packets for Operation Neighborhood Outreach, which covers town-provided services.

Distribute to all providers and the two libraries; post on the websites of all school districts and town departments. Make available at the town hall as well.

Work with Operation Neighborhood Outreach to distribute this information to all homes, especially in the town's poorest neighborhoods such as Cedar Grove Heights. In neighborhoods where need is less, an abbreviated one-page reference version of the full directory could be distributed that points residents to where online and in the community they can access the full version.

Use the Cheektowaga Bee to raise awareness of the Senior Outreach Coordinator through a short article about the various ways this position can help seniors. Do something similar for other services where need is high among residents such as in the areas of food, housing and transportation.

Pursue partnerships that would enable the Anna Reinstein Library to become a stronger informational and referral resource for seekers of human services and a support for the library's single librarian. A partnership with Erie County Department of Social Services could enable the library to expand its capacity as a site where residents can learn about and apply for DSS benefits.

### WHO NEEDS TO ACT

The Mobile Safety-Net Team, all town and non-profit providers of human services, Anna Reinstein Library, school districts, Cheektowaga Police Department, and Cheektowaga Bee.

### MODELS TO CONSIDER

As information hubs and neutral spaces, libraries can play a role in raising awareness and centralizing information. The New Rochelle Public Library is a forerunner in New York State.

<http://www.nrpl.org/socialservices/>

### MODELS TO CONSIDER

## Dream It. Do It.

A branding initiative established by The Manufacturing Institute in 2005, Dream It. Do It. is changing how people think about manufacturing careers. With an aim to promote manufacturing and increase young adult interest in developing STEM and other manufacturing skills, local communities partner with the national program to attract and recruit the next generation into manufacturing employment. National headquarters personnel work with local business, government and education stakeholders to design programs matched for their communities. Local leadership pays a licensing fee to either national or regional offices to use Dream It. Do It. branding, with local efforts funded by corporate sponsors, state economic development grants, and foundations. Dream It. Do It. operates 25 programs around the country, including Western New York. The Cummins Foundation is funding this program for 3 years, including the Chautauqua STEM Education Coalition, which offers curricula and training to students. Thus far, more than "7,000 students participated in over 70 events," including career fairs, tours of technology businesses, training for lean manufacturing, and robotic competitions (<http://www.didiwny.com/Home/news.aspx>). The program received a grant in 2012 from Western New York Economic Development Council to expand into Erie and Niagara counties.

<http://www.themanufacturinginstitute.org/Image/Dream-It-Do-It/Dream-It-Do-It.aspx>



## Strengthen housing and food supports

Nearly two-thirds of urgent concerns noted by vulnerable residents fall under the umbrella of food and housing, with it being common for these residents to say they don't have money for food and face utility shut off. Both providers and residents in Cedar Grove Heights describe families who camp in their home, living without running water, heat or electricity. Yet, survey data also reveal not all pantry users avail themselves to supports for food stamps and HEAP. Meanwhile key providers have inadequate resources to meet growing demand in a wholistic or proactive manner. Evangelistic E's Food Pantry serves 900 a month out of a personal residence, while the Department of Economic and Community Development has a three-year waiting list for its home rehabilitation services.

### STRATEGIES

Explore opportunities for relocating Evangelistic E's into a larger space within the Cedar Grove Heights Neighborhood that could be dedicated to the food and other needs of residents such as helping them sign up for benefits. One option may be the former B-Quik building which is now vacant, located on Maryvale Drive next to the Presbyterian Church.

Raise awareness of existing food pantries, farmers markets and nutrition assistance programs such as SNAP.

Explore partnerships, operational efficiencies, and funding to stretch limited housing rehabilitation dollars. A partnership with contractors of EMPOWER NY such as Tonawanda-based Ivy Lea Construction could benefit both providers. Additional funding for efforts the department would like to undertake (a neighborhood study, efficiency improvements, concentrated code enforcement, and a merger of functions within the department) may be available under the state's consolidated funding application process.

Offer incentives to strengthen and create block groups that will initiate projects to improve neighborhood livability and services.

Explore partnerships to enable the Matt Urban Hope Center to expand into Cheektowaga with its many housing support programs.

Increase awareness and use of currently underutilized programs such as NYSEDA's EMPOWER program, HEAP and SNAP, none of which have a waiting list and offer state and federally-funded assistance to residents in need of food, heat and weatherization.

Consider incentives that would encourage corporate investment in neighborhoods (such as award programs and matching funding).

Rally support for a local law offering tax abatement (on the increase in value for homeowners who invest in their property), as a tool for engaging homeowners in boosting neighborhood quality.

### WHO NEEDS TO ACT

All food pantries in town, including, Evangelistic E's, the foundation community, Department of Economic and Community Development, Ivy Lea Construction, town council and supervisor, homeowners and the business community, and representatives of EMPOWER NY.

### MODELS TO CONSIDER

The Neighborhood Wellness Plan in Champaign, IL offers a model that tailors strategies to neighborhood needs.

[http://ci.champaign.il.us/cms/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/2006-2010-NW-Vision-Report\\_final.pdf](http://ci.champaign.il.us/cms/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/2006-2010-NW-Vision-Report_final.pdf)

### MODELS TO CONSIDER

## RESPONSE TO LOVE

Established in 1985 after the crisis that ensued with the closing of St. Adalbert's parish on the east side of Buffalo, Response to Love is like other traditional food pantries across the nation that are encountering more and more families where job loss, under-employment, pay cuts, or loss of medical coverage have hit hard, with need increasing for many more services than simply food. Response to Love focuses on the holistic treatment of poverty. Rooted in Christian doctrine, this program relies on volunteers, who transformed the former parish building into a community center that offers hot meals, one-on-one assessments of client needs, GED programs, a thrift shop, a baby minister and computer training. The latest data suggest that in fall 2011 almost 1100 meals and 182 households were served in one month. This program is funded solely by donations from significant community businesses and private citizens. Although budget figures were not available, similar initiatives in the US had budgets of \$4.6 million per year.

<http://www.responsetolovecenter.org/index.php>



## Strengthen supports for single parents and young children

The data reveal that Cheektowaga’s youngest families are the most vulnerable, with almost half of families with young children living in poverty or at risk. Single parent families have the highest level of need and account for about two-thirds of families in poverty. Parents participating in a focus group said that what they could use the most are additional programs for children with special needs. They also liked the idea of a community center, with programming with youth and adults under a single roof.

### STRATEGIES

Raise awareness of the Early Recognition Program offering free screening and referrals. With screening available for children as young as three months, hospital maternity wards are way of reaching all new parents with this information.

Engage the Child Care Resource Network, which offers on-site technical assistance to child care providers and could assist with behavioral issues that providers note are increasing.

Strengthen connections between child care providers and home to facilitate early intervention. A first step might be for child care providers to simply raising awareness among parents of what resources exist in the community.

Support efforts by the Maryvale School District to secure funding for a family support center. The sharing of a social worker with one of the other districts, even one day a week, may enable Maryvale to develop a more competitive application in seeking funding for this much-

needed resource. The School of Social Work at UB may be another source of an affordable arrangement for the district.

Pursue partnerships to create additional support programs for parents and pre-school children, ideally through the town’s Department of Youth and Recreation, such as literacy promotion, parenting skills and mentoring opportunities. The Alexander Community Center and/or Anna Reinstein Library may offer a venue for this in a higher-need neighborhood. The Early Childhood Direction Center may be a potential partner to fill gaps in programming for special needs.

Help employer human resource offices become stronger points of connection for lower-wage and part-time employees who are most in need of human services, and in the case of parents, may experience the greatest barriers relating to time, travel and child care in learning about support programs. Bridging the Gap is an initiative of the National Human Services Assembly that offers a model for strengthening workplace connections.

### WHO NEEDS TO ACT

Mid-Erie, area hospitals, pediatric clinics, Cheektowaga Department of Youth and Recreation, WNY Child Care Resource Network, UB’s Early Childhood Research Center, Early Childhood Direction Center (a program of Women & Children’s Hospital to assist families and providers of children with special needs), Anna Reinstein Library, day care and child care providers, employers within the town.

### MODELS TO CONSIDER

The Atlanta Civic Site is transforming neighborhoods by strengthening families. It’s also a model for what’s now happening in Buffalo’s Promise Neighborhood.

<http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/CivicSites/Atlanta.aspx>

### MODELS TO CONSIDER

## Champaign, IL Neighborhood Services Department

Established in 1992 by the City of Champaign, the Neighborhood Services Department offers programs, information and funding that address inadequate and substandard housing. It is based on the concept of Neighborhood Wellness, that is, planning at the neighborhood level to identify unique needs using data and indicators. Data are gathered and updated annually, which are then used to guide department action with a “Neighborhood Wellness Action Plan” and a “Neighborhood Analysis Report.” This department then works with relevant departments across the city (e.g., police, planning and development) to strategize and problem-solve. Successes include neighborhoods that have improved across an outcomes-based continuum (e.g., from restoration to preservation to conservation to healthy). With a budget of \$3.5 million annually, it is viewed as an innovative and cost-effective approach to improving communities.

<http://ci.champaign.il.us/departments/neighborhood-services/>



## Expand opportunities for vocational training and workforce development

Cheektowaga's four high schools graduate hundreds of students a year, with one out of seven entering the job market and not going to college. While district leaders describe strong BOCES programs enabling students to cultivate vocational skills, relatively few chose career paths for jobs in advanced manufacturing, where regional employers are hiring for jobs paying good wages. Rather, they gravitate toward programs for lower-wage service jobs offering less economic security in adulthood. Indeed, unemployment among those in Cheektowaga without a higher education or vocational skills runs at about 25%, according to the resident survey. Adults participating in a focus group agreed that greater opportunities for training are needed, ideally, as part of their current employment situation.

### STRATEGIES

Raise awareness of existing workforce development opportunities available through the school districts' community education departments, BOCES 1, and other resources, both within Cheektowaga and nearby.

Strengthen the pipeline for careers in advanced manufacturing within the school districts. Dream It Do It offers a model being implemented across the region and is part of a regional strategy to grow the workforce for a sector of the economy where employers report challenges in filling good-paying jobs.

Expand partnerships between the school districts, vocational training programs and regional employers to promote promising career pathways to students. This may include opportunities for internships, apprenticeships and career mentors.

Create incentive programs or otherwise encourage local employments and unions to offer ongoing training so current workers can expand their skills and advance in their jobs.

### WHO NEEDS TO ACT

School districts (Cheektowaga Central, Maryvale, Cleveland Hill and Cheektowaga Sloan), BOCES, and area employers, especially those that project hiring over future years, libraries, Dream It Do It, Buffalo Niagara Partnership and the Buffalo Niagara Manufacturing Alliance.

### MODELS TO CONSIDER

DREAM IT DO IT offers a framework for strengthening the manufacturing pipeline that's being adopted by districts in WNY. <http://www.didiwny.com/>

## Bolster already strong supports for seniors in Cheektowaga

Although senior services is a strength and best practice, some gaps and barriers to valuable services exist. The latter include lack of awareness, particularly of the outreach coordinators, who answer questions, make referrals, help with applications, and otherwise seek to offer an "information booth" for seniors. Stigma is also a concern, as providers see seniors who will live with a leaky roof rather than accept help. Gaps exist in transportation; the town's fleet includes only one van that's wheelchair accessible, even though transportation is critical to aging in place and the town has thousands of seniors who have an ambulatory disability or serious difficulty walking. Hoarding is another growing concern, disproportionately affecting older adults.

### STRATEGIES

Engage the local media such as the Cheektowaga Bee to raise awareness of senior services, profiling services and assistance available. Featuring the story of individual users may help reduce stigma. Partner with the Department of Emergency Services, which maintains a database of adults with special needs, to conduct outreach to these homes with the directory of human services.

As trusted sources of information and referrals, ensure van drivers have the directory of services. Place at senior lunch sites and food pantries, as well.

Raise awareness of services such as Catholic Health's PACE program that provide needed services in Cheektowaga such as in-home care and transportation, as well as options for traveling for those in wheelchairs, including NFTA Paratransit, the Medicaid Van, Independence Express and Independent Living Center of WNY.

Increase awareness among residents and providers of how to identify, report and address hoarding. Explore ways the Court, Department of Senior Services, and the Crisis Intervention Team, can coordinate efforts to address cases of hoarding to ensure hoarders get mental help, including referrals to self-help such as the Hoarder/Clutterers Anonymous Support Group in Buffalo.

### WHO NEEDS TO ACT

Cheektowaga Department of Senior Service, Cheektowaga Police Crisis Intervention Team, Cheektowaga Department of Emergency Services, Cheektowaga Bee, van drivers for the town and Erie County Department of Senior Services, Catholic Health and the Mobile Safety-Net Team.

### MODELS TO CONSIDER

The Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) is a new model of senior care that emphasizes aging in place through the delivery of comprehensive services.

<http://www.chsbuffalo.org/Services/SeniorServices/LIFE>

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## **Strengthen neighborhood service hubs especially in high-need areas**

The northwestern portion of Cheektowaga contains one of the deepest pockets of poverty identified by this study. This area encompasses the Cedar Grove Heights neighborhood where on average 900 residents a month rely on a home-based pantry for food and most walk to get places because they don't have cars. Yet there are few services other than this one pantry to walk to, even though the need is vast. At the same time, other strong resources in the broader area are underdeveloped, at least in terms of their capacity to address human service needs of neighborhood residents.

### **STRATEGIES**

Support Evangelistic E's interest in securing a nearby facility that would enable it to expand services in an extremely high-needs neighborhood. Through volunteers and partnerships with providers, area universities and the Corporation for National and Community Services (supplier of Americorp volunteers), Evangelistic E could expand to offer residents outreach services (similar to what seniors have through the senior outreach coordinator) and on-site housing assistance, budgeting/skills development, counseling and other services.

Maximize capacity of the Alexander Community Center as a community center, with information and programming for children, adults and families, and as a site for mobile services, including job training and skills development.

Explore partnerships and opportunities for further developing the well-used Anna M. Reinstein Library as a site for human services information, literacy promotion and workforce training. Although a workforce/computer program in the past was not well attended, partnering with another provider (such as the Department of Youth and Recreation or Maryvale's Community Education program) could help to better promote a program or bring attendees to this venue.

### **WHO NEEDS TO ACT**

Evangelistic E's, Town of Cheektowaga, Alexander Community Center, Anna Reinstein Library, and the foundation community.

### **MODELS TO CONSIDER**

Food pantries are evolving into spots where residents in need can get much more than food. Response to Love Center in Buffalo's east side offers GED, computer training, caseworkers, health insurance sign-up and a baby ministry, all in addition to a food kitchen and food pantry.

<http://heartloveandsoul.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 23 and 24 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 Newfane is from the 2011 NYS School Report Card database available from the NYS Education Department. Total enrollment reflects total students enrolled at these schools during 2010-11.

**Major Employers:** Selected large employers in Newfane are shown on the map. Employment size was determined using Reference USA's 2012 Business Database.

**Map Layers:** Boundary files for Newfane, 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.

## 1.2 Executive Summary

**Population in poverty:** The 2007-11 American Community Survey are the sources of data on individuals living in or near poverty and total. 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. Cheektowaga's total population is from the 2010 Census.

**Indicators and trends:** Population, poverty and demographic trends since 2000 are from the 2000 Census and the 2007-11 American Community Survey.

The 2007-11 American Community Survey also provides data on poverty by age, family type, and census tract.

Food pantry user numbers were gathered via interviews with selected individuals providers.

Information on urgent concerns of residents come from a resident

survey conducted by the Mobile Safety-Net Team, described in more detail on pages 14-15 and 37.

## 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 2000 U.S. Census were used to calculate changes from these dates for both the total population and trends by age group.

Cheektowaga's population for 1970 comes from the 1970 Census and reflects a sum of the population across the town's census tracts.

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 Cheektowaga 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 Cheektowaga or Erie and Niagara Counties.

**Work and Income:** The number of jobs in Cheektowaga is from the U.S. Census Bureau's Local Employment Dynamics data for 2010, the available through the OnTheMap tool. The analysis is based on 2010 data, the most current year available, and reflects all jobs. This was also the source of data on where Cheektowagae residents go to work, as well as the change in the total number of jobs since between 2002 and 2010.

Cheektowaga's top employers are from Reference USA's Business 2012 Database, which provides employment by employer and address. Employment by Tops was calculated by combining employment at their two stores in Cheektowaga (Union Road and Thuway Plaza).

Households by income level were calculated using data from the 2007-11 American Community Survey. This was also the data source on the median income in Cheektowaga and Erie County, respectively.

**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 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 Cheektowaga using 2006-11 American Community Survey data. These included Census Tracts 97.01, 97.02, 98, 99, 100.01, 100.02, 100.03, 101.01, 101.02, 101.03, 102.01, 102.02, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108.03, 108.04, 108.05, 108.07, 108.09, 109.01, 109.02, 110, and 111.

**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.

Additional data about the school district comes from the the focus group with human services providers and follow-up interviews with leaders and representative at Maryvale and Cleveland Hill.

Educational attainment levels are from the 2007-11 American Community Survey.

## Cheektowaga's Most Vulnerable

524 adults residing in Cheektowaga Zip Codes 14043, 14206, 14211, 14215, 14221, 14224, 14225, 14227 completed a one-page questionnaire providing demographic and socioeconomic data as well as information on human services needs, concerns, benefits, and access barriers. Survey takers who reported living

in a Zip Code that exists at least partially within the borders of Cheektowaga were assumed to live in the town and are included in this analysis.

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 town, including three school districts (Cheektowaga Central, Maryvale, and Cleveland Hill), Evangelistic E's Food Pantry, Living Waters Food Pantry, Julia Reinstein Library, Anna Reinstein Library, and the Cheektowaga Senior Center.

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 town. 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 524 surveys represent a sample of Cheektowaga's vulnerable population that is statistically significant with a confidence level of 95% and with a confidence interval of 4. Surveys completed by household representatives who reported a Zip Codes corresponding to an area entirely outside the Town of Cheektowaga 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 in this report. 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 household had the lowest level of responses, with 294 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 Cheektowaga's at-risk population within a 95% confidence interval +/- 10%.

The 39% 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.

Because the survey asked about benefits households are currently receiving or have applied for, responses associated with seasonal benefits such as HEAP may be sensitive to the time of year when the survey was conducted.

## Places in Need

**Housing:** Housing costs as a percentage of income for renters and owners are from the 2007-11 American Community Survey. This was also the source of information on median housing values, median rents and the proportion of residents who own and rent.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, households paying more than 30% of income on housing are considered cost burdened, as this standard is generally accepted as the cut-off for affordable housing. Those paying more than 50% are considered severely burdened. Low-income households lacking affordable housing are at particular risk of not being able to afford other necessities such as food, clothing, medical care and transportation. The U.S. Census Bureau tracks household data for both the 30% and 50% standard.

**Transportation:** Vehicle access data for households in Cheektowaga are from the 2006-11 American Community Survey. This is also the source of data on how workers in Cheektowaga travel to their jobs.

Public transit times are calculated from Linda Drive near the I-90/33 interchange since information from Reference USA's household database revealed this street to be the home of several single mothers living in poverty. Transit times are calculated using Good Maps, which estimates length of travel time based on model or travel and time of day. One-way travel times include walk times to bus stops.

**Crime:** Levels of violent and property crime in Cheektowaga and Depew are from the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services' Index Crimes Reported To Police: 1987-2011. Violent crime includes murder, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Property crime includes burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft. For selected years, there were gaps in the data with no rates being reported. These gaps are indicated by the broken lines on the chart, reflecting an interpolation of the data.

A focus group with providers, along with follow-up interviews with the Cheektowaga Police Department, was the source of additional information provided in this section.

## 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 Cheektowaga are included in this listing for the purpose of analyzing what supports residents have physical access to within the community. Organizations with sites outside the town are not included on this list, even if they offer services to many residents.

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 offered by Cheektowaga Senior Center. Alternatively, they may have significant programming for these populations (such as the emergency supports offered to those with special needs through Cheektowaga Emergency Services).

Service categories are defined as follows:

**Food** – includes food pantries as well as organizations providing on-site meals to residents such as at school or through a senior lunch program.

**Clothing** – includes clothes closets and sites where free or low-cost clothing is available, including used clothing/furniture stores such as the Salvation Army and AmVets.

**Education/Training** – includes places of formal education and early childhood education as well as sites for job training, GED, literacy skills, community/continuing education, and parenting training. Includes organizations offering support services such as tutoring, computer classes and job assistance provided at the library.

Sites for workforce development and vocational education are included, even if these are one of other programs offered by an agency. 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 loans for housing rehabilitation or emergency repairs available through the programs of Cheektowaga’s Department of Economic and Community Development.

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 Department of Senior Services). Also includes agencies that offer transportation supports such as bus tokens.

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 and organizations offering health services, preventive medical exams and/or screening, particularly for lower-income or vulnerable populations. Health services may be central to the mission (as with Hospice Buffalo or St. Joseph’s Hospital) or one of a package of services provided (as at the Senior Center or Catholic Charities). 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 such as financial education programs offered to families at Bethel Head Start.

Crime/Juvenile – includes crime prevention programs, juvenile justice, and victim assistance programs.

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?

- Yes<sup>1</sup>
- No<sup>2</sup>

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

- Utility shut-off notice<sup>1</sup>
- Foreclosure / eviction<sup>2</sup>
- Homelessness<sup>3</sup>
- No money for food<sup>4</sup>
- Domestic violence<sup>5</sup>
- No urgent concerns<sup>6</sup>
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_<sup>7</sup>

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.)?

- Yes<sup>1</sup>
- No<sup>2</sup>

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

- Traveling to get services is difficult<sup>1</sup>
- I don't speak / read English well<sup>2</sup>
- I can't get there during the hours the agency is open<sup>3</sup>
- I've been turned away because of income limits<sup>4</sup>
- It can be physically difficult for me to leave my home<sup>5</sup>
- It's too much of a hassle because the process is confusing<sup>6</sup>
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_<sup>7</sup>

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

- Employed full-time<sup>1</sup>
- Employed part-time<sup>2</sup>
- Unemployed, looking<sup>3</sup>
- Unemployed, not looking<sup>4</sup>
- Student<sup>5</sup>
- Retired<sup>6</sup>
- Disabled<sup>7</sup>
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_<sup>8</sup>

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

- Employed full-time<sup>1</sup>
- Employed part-time<sup>2</sup>
- Unemployed, looking<sup>3</sup>
- Unemployed, not looking<sup>4</sup>
- Student<sup>5</sup>
- Retired<sup>6</sup>
- Disabled<sup>7</sup>
- Not Applicable / No other adults in household<sup>8</sup>
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_<sup>9</sup>

What is your current living situation?

- Own<sup>1</sup>
- Rent, with assistance<sup>2</sup>
- Rent, without assistance<sup>3</sup>
- Staying with friend / family<sup>4</sup>
- Homeless<sup>5</sup>
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_<sup>6</sup>

How long have you lived at your current address?

- Less than 3 mos.<sup>1</sup>
- 3 mos. – 1 year<sup>2</sup>
- 1-5 years<sup>3</sup>
- 6 - 10 years<sup>4</sup>
- More than 10 years<sup>5</sup>

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

- High School / GED<sup>1</sup>
- Some College<sup>2</sup>
- College Degree (2-yr or 4-yr)<sup>3</sup>
- Post-graduate degree<sup>4</sup>
- Military<sup>5</sup>
- Trade School<sup>6</sup>
- Did not finish high school<sup>7</sup>

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

- Employment<sup>1</sup>
- Unemployment insurance<sup>2</sup>
- Public assistance<sup>3</sup>
- Social Security<sup>4</sup>
- Pension<sup>5</sup>
- Disability<sup>6</sup>
- Worker's compensation<sup>7</sup>
- Child Support<sup>8</sup>
- No Income<sup>9</sup>
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_<sup>10</sup>

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

What is your primary form of transportation?

- Bicycle<sup>1</sup>
- Family / Friends<sup>2</sup>
- Own vehicle<sup>3</sup>
- Taxi<sup>4</sup>
- Public Transportation<sup>5</sup>
- Walk<sup>6</sup>
- Car Share Service<sup>7</sup>
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_<sup>8</sup>

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 expensive<sup>1</sup>
- Takes too long to get places<sup>2</sup>
- No service to where I need to go<sup>3</sup>
- No evening or weekend service<sup>4</sup>
- Buses don't run often enough<sup>5</sup>
- It's too long to walk to bus stop<sup>6</sup>
- Service isn't reliable<sup>7</sup>
- I don't feel safe<sup>8</sup>
- Schedule is too confusing<sup>9</sup>
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_<sup>10</sup>

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

- Yes, one or more adults do not have health insurance<sup>1</sup>
- Yes, one or more children do not have health insurance<sup>2</sup>
- No, we all have health insurance<sup>3</sup>

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

- Private insurance<sup>1</sup>
- Managed care (HMO, PPO)<sup>2</sup>
- Medicare (65+, disabled)<sup>3</sup>
- Medicaid<sup>4</sup>
- Government (VA, Child Health Plus, Family Health Plus)<sup>5</sup>
- Health Savings Account<sup>6</sup>
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_<sup>7</sup>
- Do not know/Unsure<sup>8</sup>
- Do not have health insurance<sup>9</sup>

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

- Food stamps<sup>1</sup>
- Medicaid<sup>2</sup>
- Cash benefits<sup>3</sup>
- HEAP<sup>4</sup>
- SSI / SSD<sup>5</sup>
- WIC<sup>6</sup>
- Other \_\_\_\_\_<sup>7</sup>
- None<sup>8</sup>

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

- Food stamps<sup>1</sup>
- Medicaid<sup>2</sup>
- Cash benefits<sup>3</sup>
- HEAP<sup>4</sup>
- SSI / SSD<sup>5</sup>
- WIC<sup>6</sup>
- Other \_\_\_\_\_<sup>7</sup>
- None<sup>8</sup>

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 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

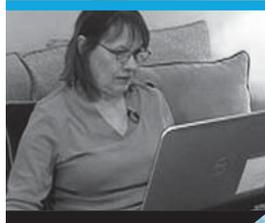
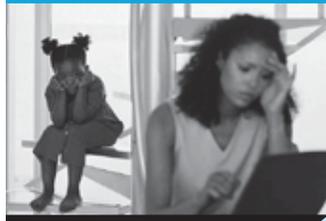
- \_\_\_\_\_ Child Care
- \_\_\_\_\_ Counseling and Treatment
- \_\_\_\_\_ Financial/Budgeting/Taxes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Food/Nutrition
- \_\_\_\_\_ Health
- \_\_\_\_\_ Housing
- \_\_\_\_\_ Jobs/Training
- \_\_\_\_\_ Legal
- \_\_\_\_\_ Referrals/Information
- \_\_\_\_\_ Safety/Crime
- \_\_\_\_\_ Senior Activities
- \_\_\_\_\_ 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 Anna M. Reinstein Memorial Library

## We Need You!



### JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Participants will be entered into a drawing for **Walmart Gift Cards** to be given away

**Free refreshments** for all

No more than 40 minutes of your time

### When and Where?

It's happening right here and now. Simply tell us you want to be part of the conversation

A COMMUNITY REPORT  
Town of **Cheektowaga**

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 Cheektowaga's 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, Cheektowaga 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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