

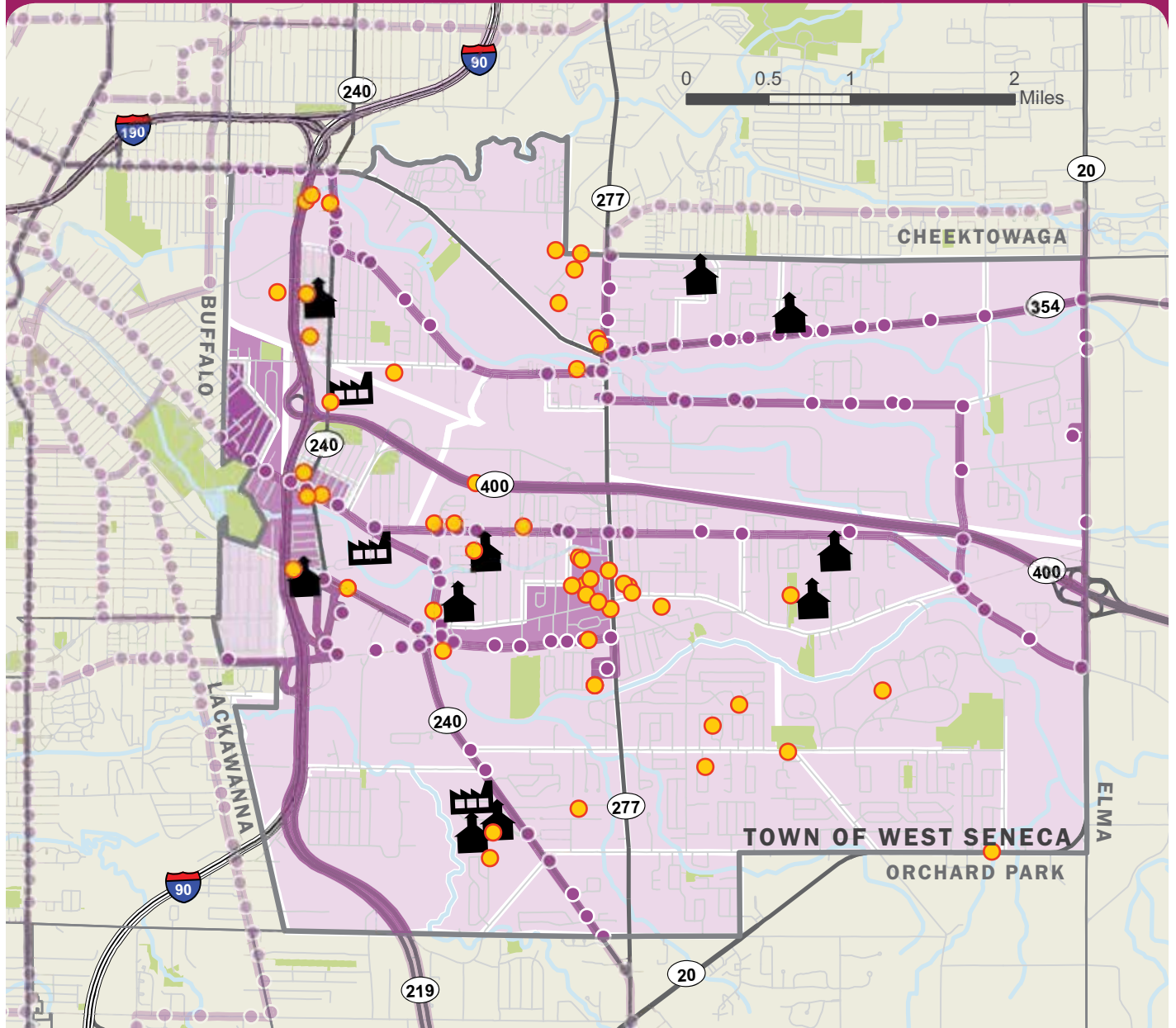
STRENGTHENING WNY's Safety Net

A COMMUNITY REPORT Town of **WEST SENECA**



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

May 2014



SERVICE PROVIDERS

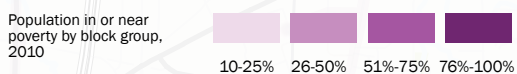
39 service provider sites employing about 1,845 employees exist in West Seneca, providing a range of human services.

TRANSPORTATION

NFTA BUS ROUTES & STOPS

POPULATION IN OR NEAR POVERTY

More than 8,600 West Seneca residents live on incomes under or near the federal poverty level



SCHOOLS

One school district with
6 elementary and primary schools
2 middle and intermediate schools
2 high schools
almost 6,500 students total enrolled

MAJOR EMPLOYERS

West Seneca Central School District
Erie 1 BOCES
Seneca Health Care Center

About This Report

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Background

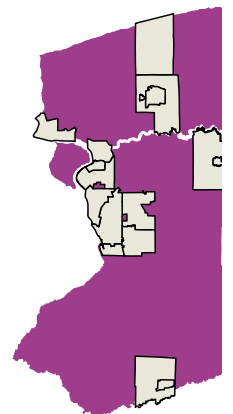
Between 2008 and 2009, Buffalo Niagara employers shed almost 20,000 net jobs. The economic downturn, which continued into 2010, left large numbers of residents unemployed and unable to find new work for the first time in their lives. High levels of unemployment continue today. One out of 12 residents 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 West Seneca 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 2013 and 2014 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 West Seneca 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

117 surveys were completed by residents in West Seneca, 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 residents were conducted at the Food Pantry at St. David's Episcopal Church and at United Church Manor senior housing complex to gather insights into their most pressing concerns, barriers to accessing services and insights on how the system might be improved.

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 West Seneca in January 2014 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 a variety of sources, including the 2010 Census, 2007-2011 American Community Survey, Social Explorer Reports, NYS Department of Health, NYS Education Department 2012 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

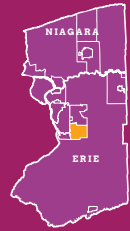


Insights & Recommendations



STRENGTHENING WNY's Safety Net

A COMMUNITY REPORT Town of **WEST SENECA**



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

Among West Seneca's population of 44,670...

...about **2,700** residents live on incomes under the federal poverty level.

...an additional **5,905** aren't in poverty but are close to it with incomes between 100-200% of poverty.

...about **8,605** are doing poorly or struggling financially. This is more than one out of every five.

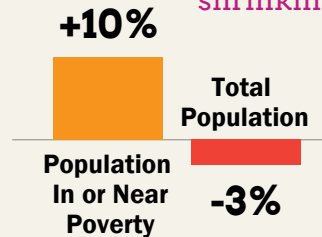
Beyond poverty, other alarming indicators and trends...

Need is growing. While the total population has declined 3% since 2000, the number of those living in or near poverty has risen 10%, leaving the town and service providers with a smaller funding and resource base to support higher levels of need.

84% of those in poverty are under age 65

West Seneca is an aging community. Roughly one third of all residents are age 55 or older and one in five is over 65. Nearly 3,000 seniors in the town live alone. Most are on fixed incomes and may be unable to manage the cost of repairs and maintenance of homes, roughly half of which were built before 1960.

Poverty is growing as population is shrinking



1 out of 3 is age 55+

More vulnerable households own their home. That means many families with stretched resources may face costly home repair or maintenance expenses they can't handle and that may force them to make painful choices between housing and food or medicine.

There are pockets of concentrated poverty in West Seneca. In one census tract near the Buffalo city line, 40 percent of children live in poverty – a figure much more like the 48 percent poverty rate in Buffalo than ten percent in the town.

COMMON URGENT CONCERN

money for food

There are fewer households with children under 18 than ever before. Roughly one quarter of households in West Seneca are families with children. Yet, **single parent families make up an increasing share of all families with children.** And single parent families are more likely to be in poverty. As a result, support for public education may be weakest at a time when the needs are increasing.

* Findings come from a survey of 117 at-risk households in West Seneca, reflecting a statistically significant sample size at a confidence level of at least 95% and with a confidence interval of 9.

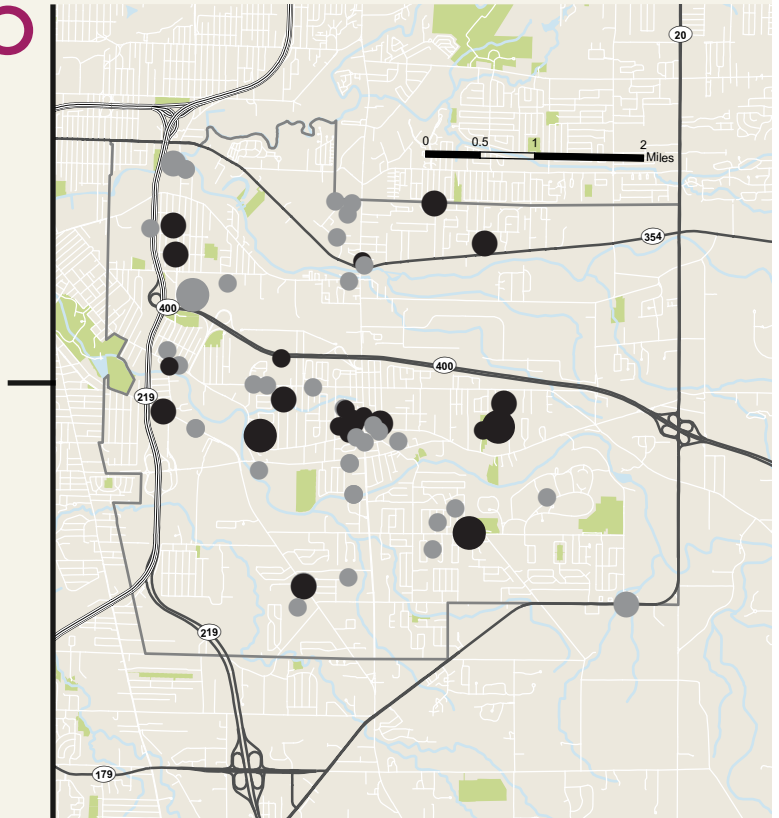
**West Seneca's
landscape
of human
services
providers...**

39 public and private providers
employing
about **1,845**

exist across the community to provide a range of services. While many offer food, education, mental health services, and youth programs, the safety-net is weaker in other service areas.

The Town of West Seneca, the West Seneca School District and Erie 1 BOCES are the largest providers. Others are smaller nonprofits, and about ten are churches.

A number are located on or near Union Road, a north-south corridor midway through town. Harlem Road is another important service corridor.



strengths Strengths of the system include an existing church-based coalition; a variety of senior supports to build on; a well-ranked school district; town-supported programs for youth offering a beginning foundation for expanding upon; a police department with a variety of community programs; and the presence of Erie 1 BOCES.

gaps Gaps in services exist for affordable and flexible transportation options; effective information and communication channels; accessible and affordable child care and youth programs, especially for disenfranchised youth; and affordable housing options and supports, particularly for seniors.

Barriers and systemic challenges...

2 out of 5 residents surveyed in West Seneca say they have encountered difficulty getting services.



Being turned down for assistance because of income limits was the number one barrier residents say they face. This is likely because more of West Seneca's most vulnerable are near poor or "working poor" – at 100 to 200 percent of the federal poverty level. They are still struggling but not eligible for some programs.

Eligibility rules create barriers for the working poor

More than 1,200 households in West Seneca lack access to a vehicle. Most of these are seniors who have recourse to county-provided van service, although this requires advance reservations. The remainder of the carless are younger people with negative impacts on job opportunities. Cuts in bus service by the NFTA have made the problems of the carless even worse.

Additional after-school programs for youth are needed, especially on the west side of town. The school district and the town both sponsor after-school programs but focus group participants say they don't fully meet needs. All school-based programs cost money, so they aren't always affordable for families. Additional indoor programs are needed near the Buffalo city line, where poverty is highest and kids hang out in the streets.

The uneven distribution of need across West Seneca may contribute to disagreement about what services the town should provide. On the east side of town, relative affluence prevails. On the west side, along the boundary with Buffalo, needs are much greater. As a result, services that are needed on one side of town are mostly paid for on the other side.

The needs of working age adults get little attention even though they account for the majority of those in poverty. Most of the emphasis goes to the needs of seniors and youth. But single parents and the working poor – who likely take care of children, parents, or both – are hurting, too.

1,230 households without access to a vehicle

A focus group with providers revealed the need for a centralized place where residents can go for information about programs and services. Except for the electronic message board on Union Road, there is no information center, no web site, not even a directory. One town leader says that one of the most common complaints they receive is that information isn't posted. Even when information is available, it may require too much effort for residents to find it.

Lack of information is also a disadvantage to the provider community, particularly churches. People in faith-based organizations are eager to help but may not know what the greatest needs are or what services are already being provided. The charitable impulse needs better guidance.

Poverty is masked by its concentration on the west side

The ability of many residents to compete for higher paying jobs may be limited by lower educational attainment.

Only one adult in four in West Seneca holds a bachelor's degree or better. This translates into weaker credentials for many jobs, but also means that individuals lack the ability to search for employment information or even the inclination and ability to read the newspaper where jobs are advertised.

Some providers suggest that a sense of nostalgia or small-town pride may cause resistance to solutions to some of West Seneca's most difficult problems. Many active citizens who were born and raised in what was once a more squarely suburban, family-oriented community may not be ready to embrace action now necessary to address the town's increasingly urban problems.

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

RECOMMENDATION	STRATEGIES	MODEL TO CONSIDER
Form a coalition of human services providers, building upon existing partnerships	<p>Build on the existing church council to form a partner coalition that would include a wide range of human service providers from the community, including a contingent from the church council</p> <p>A first priority might be coordinating a comprehensive directory of services and its dissemination</p>	<p>Love INC of Springville, NY is a venue for mobilizing area churches in filling gaps in the community's safety-net of human services. http://www.loveincspringville.com/</p>
Raise awareness of human services through greater centralization of information	<p>Convene key players in the compilation of a comprehensive directory of human services.</p> <p>Engage the broader coalition of providers to disseminate through a variety of information channels, depending on target audience</p> <p>Target high-need neighborhoods along the West Seneca/Buffalo border with information packages</p>	<p>AROUNJA is an online information and referral tool enabling residents and providers to search for and identify resources in a particular geographic area. http://erieny.arounja.org/</p>
Fill gaps in enriching out-of-school activities for youth	<p>Raise awareness of existing programs and options, some of which are underutilized</p> <p>Explore partnerships that may expand options offered by the town's Youth & Recreation Department and YES Program</p> <p>Consider vacant space on the west side of town that could be transformed into a community center with sports and other activities geared towards teens</p>	<p>The Boys and Girls Club offers after-school programs and services to thousands of disadvantaged youth in several locations across the region, including Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Lockport, Tonawanda and North Tonawanda. http://www.bgcbuffalo.org</p>
Strengthen skill development opportunities for adults	<p>Raise awareness of existing programs such as West Seneca Community Education, Erie 1 BOCES and learning opportunities at the library</p> <p>Explore partnerships between growing employers and West Seneca Community Education and BOCES for opportunities to train locals for jobs</p> <p>Strengthen links between jobs, training and transportation</p>	<p>Advance Buffalo is a workforce development initiative to connect residents in WNY with current job openings in advance manufacturing. https://labor.ny.gov/careerservices/advance-buffalo/advance-buffalo-overview.shtm</p>
Expand transportation options for seniors and vulnerable individuals	<p>Explore possibilities of expanding the senior center van service, with its six vans, to younger vulnerable populations</p> <p>Consider ways other existing vans and buses may be used to fill transportation gaps and offer options</p> <p>Develop partnerships to enable United Church Manor to pursue NFTA grants to fill local gaps in access for seniors</p>	<p>Hearts and Hands Faith in Action is an expanding nonprofit that mobilizes volunteers from member churches to offer free transportation and other supports to seniors in several communities in Erie County. http://hnhcares.org/</p>
Bolster already strong supports for seniors	<p>Explore ways of getting a social worker at the Senior Center, if only part time. Work to increase the financial literacy of seniors to help them manage expenses while living on fixed incomes</p> <p>Partnerships with area banks and community-based organizations such as Consumer Credit Counseling may offer opportunities; Expanded satellite services could also strengthen current offerings</p>	<p>Through a town-county partnership, the towns of Amherst, Clarence and Newstead offer outreach services that connect seniors with social services in the community. http://www.amherst.ny.us/pdf/senior/sos.pdf</p>
Invest in services and supports on the west side of the town	<p>Explore the possibility of opening selected public schools to youth and their parents after hours for youth programs, adult education and training, financial literacy, and parenting workshops</p> <p>Build capacity for information, referral and mobile services at existing service sites such as the schools, churches and food pantries</p>	<p>The Orange-Ulster BOCES recently opened a LiteracyZone/Family Welcome Center to assist potential users with needs beyond training including health, mental health, parenting support, and finances. http://www.ouboces.org/AdultEd/News/2013-2014%20news/2013_middletown_litzone_ribboncutting.cfm</p>

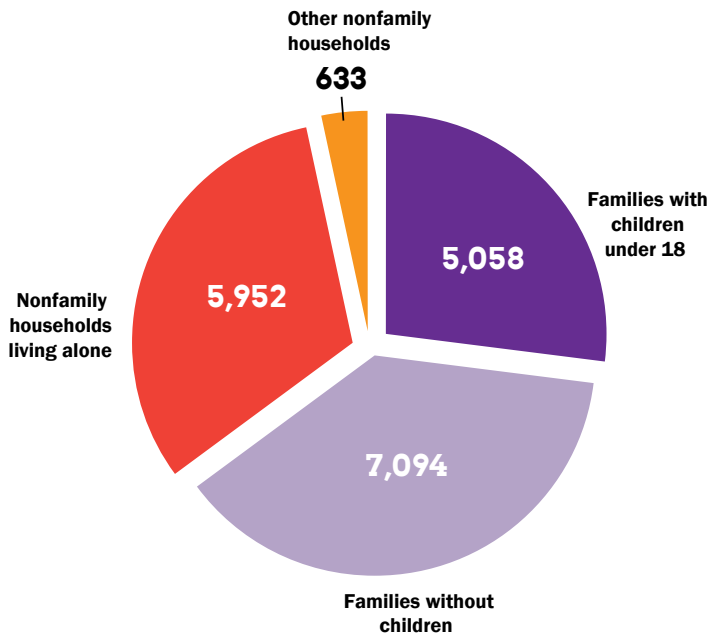
Context for Action

People in Need

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

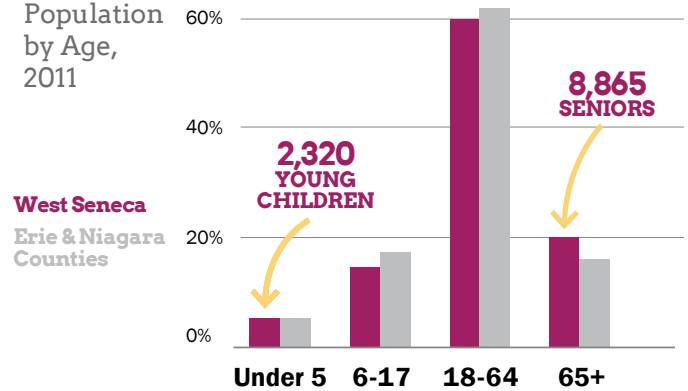


Households by Type, 2011



Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Population by Age, 2011



Potentially At-Risk Populations, 2011

Adults with HS education or less	13,646
Veterans	4,445
Foreign-born individuals	1,609
Non-white individuals	1,541
Single parents	1,327

Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Individuals and Families

There were 44,670 individuals living in the Town of West Seneca in 2010. This figure represents a 7% decrease in the town's population since 1990, when the total was 47,830. Although slightly more rapid, West Seneca's decline generally followed the downward trend experienced by Erie County during the same time period (-5%).

More than half the population is between the ages of 18 to 64, and 20% are 65 years or older. One in ten are older seniors, age 75 or older, an age where demand for services and support tends to increase.

With an average of 2.4 people per household, households here tend to be small, but they are equal to the average household size across Erie County and characteristic of a

7% Population Loss

West Seneca's population decline since 1990 is an indicator that the town is at a competitive disadvantage in attracting new residents and/or retaining existing ones.

Source: 1990 and 2010 Census

population that is aging with children no longer living at home. In fact, about 38% of households are families without children and 32% are households in which individuals live by themselves. Households with children under the age of 18 are a minority, comprising only 27% of all households in West Seneca.

20% of the population is 65 years of or older

Working-age adults who stopped their education at high school comprise the largest at-risk population. While not all live in or near poverty, they may be one job away, without the education and skills to readily compete for jobs paying a living wage.

Veterans are another sizable group of concern. With 4,445 veterans, the proportion of veterans in West Seneca is 2% higher than across Erie County. About half are 65 years of age or older, so there is a mix of Vietnam era veterans and those who served in Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere. Veterans' health and job training needs tend to be different from the population at large. Because of major combat-related stress or injuries sustained during active duty they may have – or have had – problems in readapting to civilian life. Needs may include obtaining and maintaining a job and home and supporting a family.

Employment by Sector, 2007-2011

	West Seneca	Erie & Niagara Counties
Private, for-profit	66%	66%
Public sector	18%	17%
Private, non-profit	10%	10%
Self-employed/unpaid family	7%	7%

Source: 2007-2011 American Community Survey

West Seneca's Top 10 Employers

Employer	# of Employees
West Seneca Central School District	748
Erie 1 BOCES	400
Town of West Seneca	345
Seneca Health Care Center	235
WNY Children's Psychiatric Center	200
US Foods	200
Union Concrete & Construction Corp.	150
Mayer Brothers	150
Market In The Square	120
B R & R Inc	100

Source: Reference USA, NYS Education Department and 2012 Census of Governments

Work and Income

West Seneca is not a center of employment: the number of workers employed at jobs in West Seneca in 2011 (17,265) was less than the total number of residents who hold jobs anywhere (23,522). Even for residents, the employment options were limited: only 13% were employed in West Seneca, while the rest were employed elsewhere (typically Buffalo and Amherst).

Employment options in West Seneca are limited.

West Seneca's job opportunities are primarily in the health care and social assistance, and retail industries. The top two employers are the West Seneca Central School District, which provides over 700 jobs, and Erie 1 BOCES, with approximately 400 jobs. Other major employers in West Seneca include several health care organizations and wholesale and retail traders.

Regardless of where they work, approximately 26% of West Seneca's working residents are employed in the educational services, health care and social assistance services industry, 13% are employed in retail, and 10% are employed in manufacturing. Many are occupied in professional positions (22%), in office and administrative positions (19%), and in sales (12%). Slightly less than three quarters of working residents are employed in the private sector, while 18% are employed in the public sector and 10% in the

private non-profit sector.

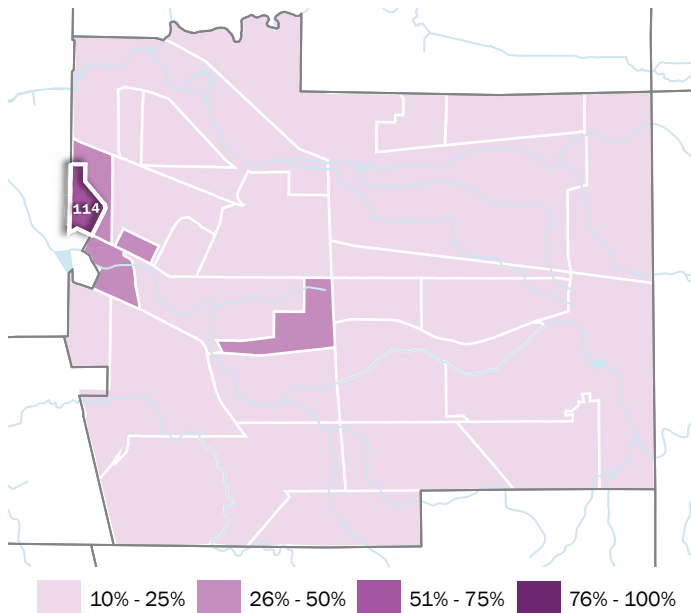
The median household income is \$54,655 per year, almost \$6,000 per year more than across Erie County. Indeed, the town has a larger "middle class" comprised of households earning between \$25,000-\$100,000 annually. Residents who leave town for work are more likely than those who stay in town to be in a job paying at least \$3,333/month or about \$40,000/year, suggesting the importance of transportation in enhancing economic opportunities.

% Households by Income Levels

	West Seneca	Erie & Niagara Counties
\$0 - \$25k	20%	27%
\$25k - \$100k	61%	55%
\$100k - \$200k	18%	15%
\$200k +	1%	3%

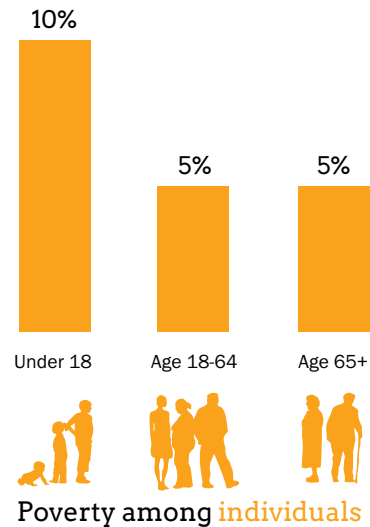
Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Population in or near poverty, 2010



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

Population in Poverty by Age, 2011



Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Poverty

Poverty in West Seneca has been increasing slowly over the past 20 years both as a percentage of the total population and in absolute terms. In 1990, 15% of the population (7,190 individuals) was considered to be poor or struggling, and it increased to 17% in 2000. Today, nearly 20% of the population is considered to be poor or struggling. Specifically, there are 8,608 individuals living in or near poverty, on incomes between 100% and 200% of the federal poverty level.

19% of residents are poor or struggling.

Yet not everyone in West Seneca is affected equally. Although only 5% of adults between the ages of 18 to 64 live in poverty, those who do account for 52% percent of individuals living in poverty. So, the rate is low, but their need, relative

to the total pool in poverty, is great.

And while the poverty rate for families is low at 4%, families with children where only one parent is present have a poverty rate of 20%, five times the overall average for families. Children are disproportionately impacted. With 10% of children under age 18 in poverty, the town's youngest residents are twice as likely as adults to be living at the lowest economic rungs.

Most poor people in West Seneca are white; but non-whites

are much more likely to be poor. Only 5% of all whites are poor, compared to 23% of all non-whites who are managing on amounts under the federal poverty level.

Need also varies by geography, concentrated near the Buffalo city line and the center of town. In Census Tract 114 on the western edge of town, 40% of children live in poverty. This is four times the town's overall poverty rate for children. The proposed addition of 100 new apartments on the west side for lower-income individuals with mentally disabilities will add to poverty and need here.

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

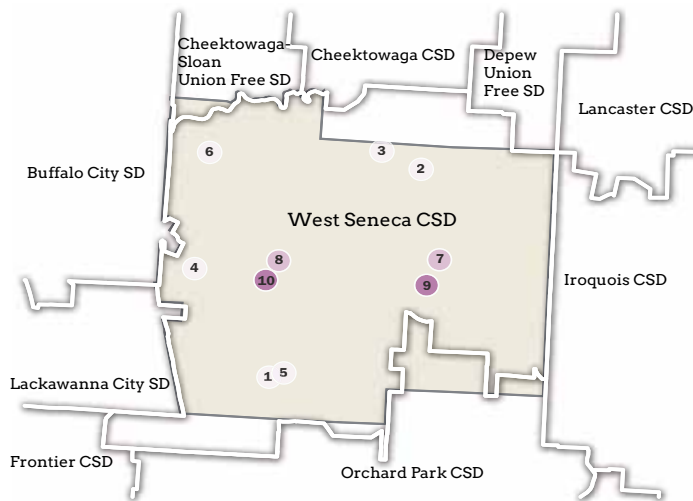
\$18.07 Maximum daily amount a family of three lives on, per person, at the federal poverty level

\$20.08 Daily cost of owning and operating a car

Source: Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, 2014 Federal Poverty Guidelines, and Edmunds.com

Schools in West Seneca Central School District		Enrollment, 2012	% Qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS			
1	Allendale ES (K-6)	490	28
2	Clinton Street ES (Pre K-6)	510	26
3	Northwood ES (K-6)	515	40
4	Potters Road ES (Pre K-6)	485	48
5	West ES (K-6)	798	23
6	Winchester ES (K-6)	345	47
MIDDLE SCHOOLS			
7	East MS (7-8)	444	29
8	West MS (6-8)	631	31
HIGH SCHOOLS			
9	East Senior HS (9-12)	909	23
10	West Senior HS (9-12)	1359	25

Source: NYS Education Department 2011-2012 School Report Card



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

Education

The West Seneca Central School District has six elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools. Altogether they enroll 6,486 students. A third of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

Students here perform relatively well, with the district ranking 64 out of 429 districts across upstate New York, in terms of academic performance. Academic indicators for students at the elementary, middle and high school levels show the large majority meeting or exceeding standards in core subject areas like ELA (English Language Arts) and Mathematics.

Even students who are economically disadvantaged generally meet or exceed standards in West Seneca. However, the data also suggest that disadvantaged students may not have the supports they need to perform on par with other students. For instance, in third grade, 84% of students who are not disadvantaged meet or exceed Mathematics standards; yet only 61% of disadvantaged students do. This is more than a 20 percentage point gap between the two groups, a difference that appears to be more pronounced in the younger grades, perhaps pointing to greater needs among the town's youngest students and their families.

The high school graduation rate in West Seneca is 98%, which is higher than it is across the region (88%) and state (86%). Among students who graduate from high school, 85% have plans to complete some level of post-secondary education. This interest in

Educational Attainment of Adults Age 25+, 2007-11

	West Seneca	Erie & Niagara Counties
Less than High School	9%	12%
High School	34%	31%
Some College/ Associate's Degree	33%	30%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	24%	27%

Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

post-secondary studies contrasts with the educational attainment achieved by the majority of adults in West Seneca. Indeed, only 24% of adults 25 years or older have a bachelor's degree or higher.

Context for Action

West Seneca's Most Vulnerable



Demographics,
service usage,
urgent needs
and barriers

Assessing the Need

117 West Seneca 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 West Seneca West High School, the Senior Citizen Center, Community Food Pantry and West Seneca Library by the Mobile Safety-Net Team.

What human services are residents receiving?

Nearly three quarters (74%) of the individuals surveyed in West Seneca report receiving some form of human services or living in a household with someone who does.

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

Food Stamps	59%
HEAP	51%
Medicaid	43%
SSI/SSD	38%

66%

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

Pending applications. The benefits residents are receiving may not be enough to meet their needs: nearly all of those seeking additional benefits are currently receiving some type of public assistance. Only two people not currently receiving benefits have an application for public assistance pending, suggesting demand for services is growing the most among those who have been struggling for some time. Ten percent

of pending applications are for Medicaid, 9% are for food stamps, and 7% are for HEAP.

Are there indicators of greater need?

The number of people in need of support with food, health insurance, housing, and income is likely greater than indicated by the current number of people receiving such aid since access barriers are reported by both those who currently receive benefits and those who don't.

44%

of survey takers report having an urgent concern.

The most urgent concerns of those surveyed

No money for food	31%
Utility shut-off	14%
Other	6%

Altogether, 38% say they have encountered difficulty getting services. The most frequently reported barriers are income limits, difficulty leaving home, and difficulty traveling.

Urgent Concerns. Slightly more than half of residents surveyed did not identify any urgent concerns. One in two survey takers, however, did report having an urgent concern. Of those who said they were in a crisis situation, 90% were public assistance recipients.

Lack of Health Insurance.

About one in seven reported that at least one person in their household lacks health insurance. For every survey taker who said there was an uninsured child in their home, about 4 said there was at least one uninsured adult.

What's causing this situation?

Selected findings from this survey are unexpected. In a town where the number of "working poor" is over double the number in poverty, it is a bit surprising, for instance, that three-quarters of vulnerable residents surveyed are receiving some form of human services. The percentage connecting with services in Cheektowaga, which has a similarly large population "just above the poverty level" is only 39%. Also, while only 13% of vulnerable residents in Cheektowaga have an urgent concern, nearly half (44%) in this town do. A number of factors may contribute, suggestive of both strengths and challenges of West Seneca's safety net:

A predominance of seniors:

Sixty-one was the median age of all survey takers. In other words, at least half of those surveyed were seniors or close to retirement age, even though seniors account for only a quarter of all adults in poverty in West Seneca. While the senior center was one of several venues where surveys were gathered, the predominance of seniors in this sample may indicate that this population is easier to engage than younger adults in need, even at neutral venues such as the food pantry and library. One human services leader described the needs of younger adults in poverty as

117 surveyed

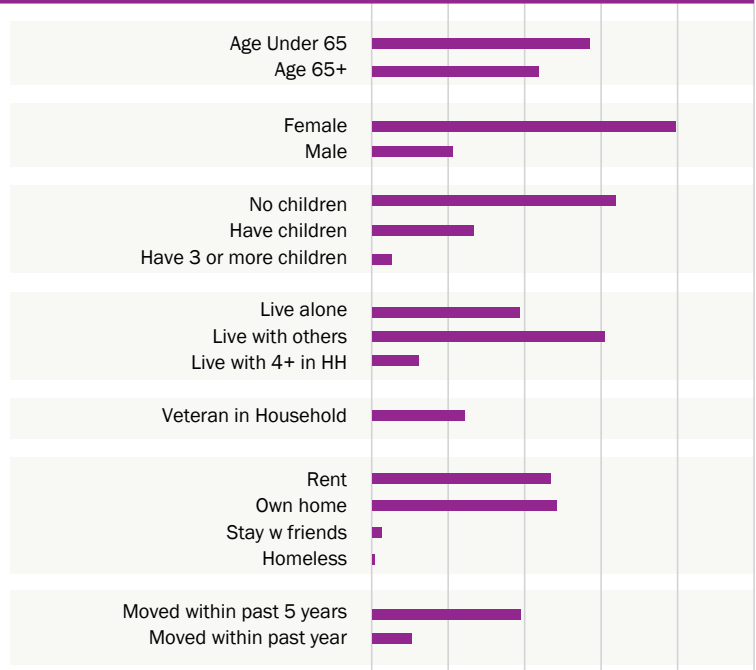
largely invisible because they are less engaged in the community, so keenly focused on work, children and aging parents.

Deep community roots: Nearly half of those surveyed report being long-time residents of West Seneca, with 61% living here for 6+ years; nearly half (44%) have been here for over a decade. Only 1 in 10 are relatively new residents who may be less aware of what helpful resources exist or where to go to find out about them.

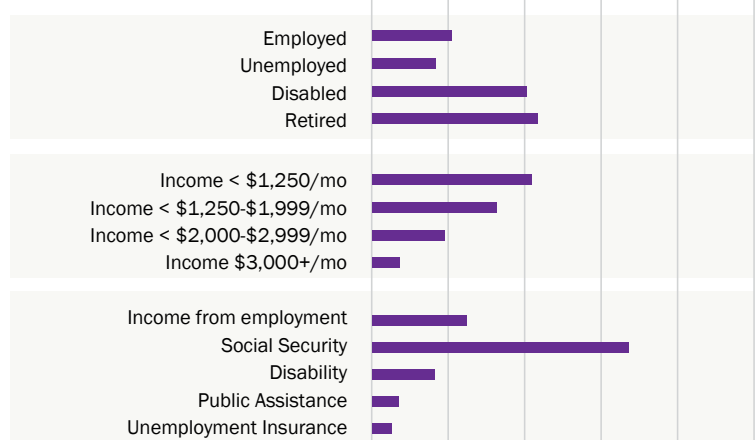
Living on a fixed income: Nearly 2 out of 3 live on fixed income sources, reporting that Social Security, a pension and/or disability contribute to their household's income sources. \$1,310/month was the median household income reported. This is near the poverty threshold for a household of two, the median reported by survey respondents, and may explain why a high percentage has been able to connect with selected benefit programs, especially those such as Food Stamps, which qualify all those under the income guidelines regardless of household assets.

Maintaining assets with rising costs: Nearly half or more own the home they live in and travel around using a car they own. Although these assets can be helpful in connecting with programs and services and weathering economic storms, they can also be expensive to maintain over the long haul for those living on fixed incomes, as expensive repairs and replacements become necessary. The prevalence of urgent concerns in West Seneca – 44% of those surveyed – may be the result of limited options for affordable living and traveling. Fewer than one in three are in subsidized housing and less than one in 10 report regularly using public transportation. The expense associated with public transit turned out to be the number one barrier to more frequent usage.

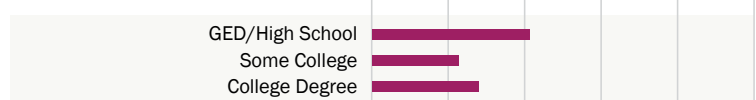
Individuals and Families



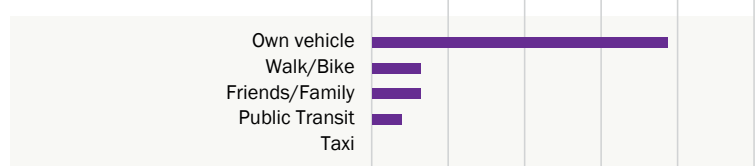
Work and Income



Education



Transportation



Source: Mobile Safety-Net Team Community Needs Assessment, 2013-2014

Barriers Residents Face

Being turned away for services because of income limits was the most common barrier reported by the West Seneca residents surveyed. One out of three persons with barriers in West Seneca say agency income limits have prevented them from accessing the programs and services they need. The second and third most frequently reported barriers were difficulty leaving home and difficulty traveling, with about one in five saying it is physically difficult for them to get out of the house or that it is difficult for them to get to the places where services are provided.

A Voice from the Community

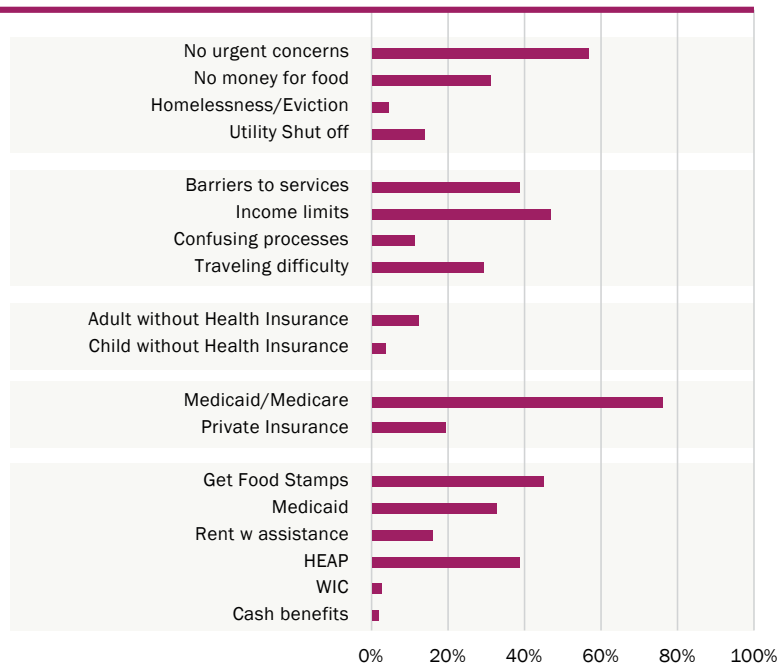
Focus groups with residents in West Seneca shed further light on these and other barriers residents face.

Transportation. For those of working age – not eligible to ride the senior van service – the lack of convenient public transit service is one of the most vexing and pervasive problems they face. It makes all of the chores of daily life – shopping, getting to work, getting to the doctor – more difficult.

This has been exacerbated by reductions in service on the 42 Lackawanna bus. Connections from Southgate Plaza to Downtown Buffalo on the 15 Seneca bus are frequent. But there's no service along Union Road where much of the way lacks sidewalks for pedestrians.

For seniors, use of the van service is reasonable – as soon as one gets used to the need to plan ahead, make a reservation and pay the fee.

Needs & Barriers



Source: Mobile Safety-Net Team Community Needs Assessment, 2013-14

Food: For the working poor or those on disability, getting enough food is a monthly struggle. Cuts in SNAP benefits have hit hard with amounts provided drastically reduced or eliminated altogether, depending on income limits.

The alternative for many is one of the food pantries in West Seneca where twice-a-month visits provide a significant portion of their monthly diet.

Seniors also rely on food stamps and must plan their meals for the month with great care to make sure they have enough.

Jobs with limited growth:

Working-age adults with limited education often find themselves in low-wage jobs they are able to reach within walking distance of their homes. If they had adequate income, they could buy a car. But without a car they are limited to the bus. When the bus doesn't go where the jobs are, they have to walk. And because those jobs pay low

wages, they still can't afford a car, which also constrains their ability to get to the heart of the problem and pursue additional education and skills.

Health insurance and health care.

Seniors tend to be reasonably well-covered for health care, thanks in large part to Medicare. But turbulence in the health insurance system has caused some confusion and lapses in coverage. Seniors would benefit from someone who could advise them on their choices and options.

For individuals of working-age the situation is even more confusing. Some are covered on Medicaid. But changes in the rules and changes in circumstances can result in sudden vulnerabilities.

Social isolation of the elderly.

Even when the basics of housing, food, and health care are taken care of, many of the oldest of our citizens live in precarious circumstances. Some depend on adult children

2 out of 5 residents surveyed in West Seneca say they have encountered difficulty getting services.



for assistance, or perhaps friends and neighbors. But there is often little social contact and obvious loneliness. The impacts of little accidents or bouts of ill-health can be devastating.

Mental health services are limited.

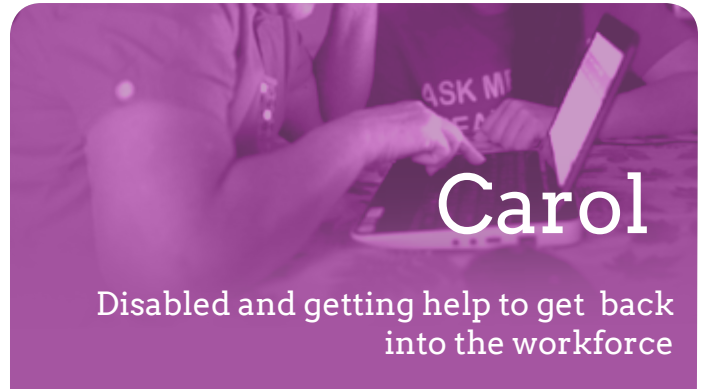
There appears to be only one alternative in West Seneca for behavioral health services that are supported by Medicaid. If that one doesn't work out, you may be out of luck.

Voices from the Community

Insights and perspectives from those with first-hand experience

These are stories about real people*, individuals in West Seneca who agreed to talk with us and share some of their personal accounts. We asked them about the challenges they face, about 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



Disabled and getting help to get back into the workforce

Three decades ago, Carol was a developmentally disabled teenager and pregnant. She lived with her parents after they moved to West Seneca and when her children were old enough she went to work in a fast food restaurant.

She liked working but management pressed her to work extraordinary hours -- "I think they took advantage of me" -- until the county put her children in foster care because she wasn't home enough to take care of them.

A Voice from the Community

She eventually got her kids back and now they are grown. But she still remembers the long journey to visit her children in foster care: "three buses, two hours, and then turn around and come back. But I did it."

Today, Carol gets a lot of help from Community Services for the Developmentally Disabled. She's taking training for leadership and empowerment. She's working towards participation in their supported employment programs. And she enjoys being part of organized activity groups -- the latest one more focused on walking than going out to dinner -- she's losing weight instead of gaining.

Still, things are far from easy. When her boyfriend moved in she lost her housing voucher and when he left she was faced with paying the full \$550 rent on her own -- a massive chunk of her monthly disability check.

"Now I have to start all over again with Belmont."

Carol is also a regular visitor to one of the food pantries in West Seneca. It helps her stretch the food until the end of the month.

Still, she says her biggest problem is the buses. Community Services provides rides to their meetings. On the other hand, if its another destination, she's on her own, and some of the routes she used to travel don't even exist anymore.



Barbara

Making the safety net work on less than \$10,000 a year

Barbara had a family and a career and a reasonably happy, normal life in another city. She worked as a nurse's aide, a waitress, and an arts administrator. Then her marriage fell apart, her health turned for the worse and she couldn't work anymore. Then her mother got in a car accident and Barbara moved to Buffalo to help.

Seven years later she is 64 and lives on a little over \$800 a month from Social Security Disability. That's what's left over after they deduct \$104 for Medicare. The rest goes to rent at her federally subsidized senior housing complex, and for food and transportation. It's a remarkably constrained economic situation, but she makes it work.

"The subsidized housing is very important to me," Barbara says, "because I can manage my money well."

She knows how much she'll get, how much she'll need and how to "work the system." She has a plan and she sticks to it. That includes using the senior citizen van provided by the town to get around, the Medicare plus Medicaid

A Voice from the Community

coverage that means she has no co-pays, and how to be proactive with her primary care physician. They paid for her gastric bypass surgery -- "it saved my life" -- and for treatment for her

bipolar disorder -- the reasons she is on disability. The bill for the surgery was a co-pay "which I paid right away, of course."

Desiring to keep active and make a difference, Barbara uses her advocacy skills to help out her older neighbors at the senior complex, runs the "I'm OK" program to check on her neighbors, and organizes "bashes" for the seniors who aren't as young as she is. Next, she hopes to volunteer at Buffalo General Hospital where her reward will be a chance to walk. "Along the way, I've really lucked out."



Angela

Off welfare but still struggling

Angela says she doesn't really have any problems. She lives in West Seneca with her boyfriend and her young son, who attends "just the best school ever."

She has a car now, too, having invested her income tax refund in a new vehicle. The long bus and Metro Rail ride she took to get to work in Buffalo is a thing of the past. Angela's got steady full time work, now closer to home, as a cashier in a retail outlet. She takes home \$250 a week or about \$13,000 a year.

A Voice from the Community

This is her second job under a welfare-to-work program requirement but the program gives her lots of help. "Downtown" chips in \$189 a month for the rental of a two bedroom apartment. She pays the rest -- \$360. It's not too bad except for the space heaters that substitute for failed central heating. Her son's room is too cold for him to sleep in during the winter, despite the plastic over the windows. And it would be better if five people weren't sharing a two bedroom apartment upstairs.

Angela also qualifies for Medicaid through the program. She has her own primary care physician and Medicaid pays for her prescriptions, including the one for diabetes, for which she was recently diagnosed. She gets SNAP benefits as part of the program, too, and augments that with occasional visits to the local food pantry.

Her boyfriend was injured on the job and can't work but has been fighting to win his claim for more than a year.

Angela never went to college, although she did graduate from high school. And she would like to further her education in hopes of someday getting a better job. But she says the folks at Social Services tell her "you have to do it on your own time." For Angela this just means "you have to work at a dead-end job until you die."

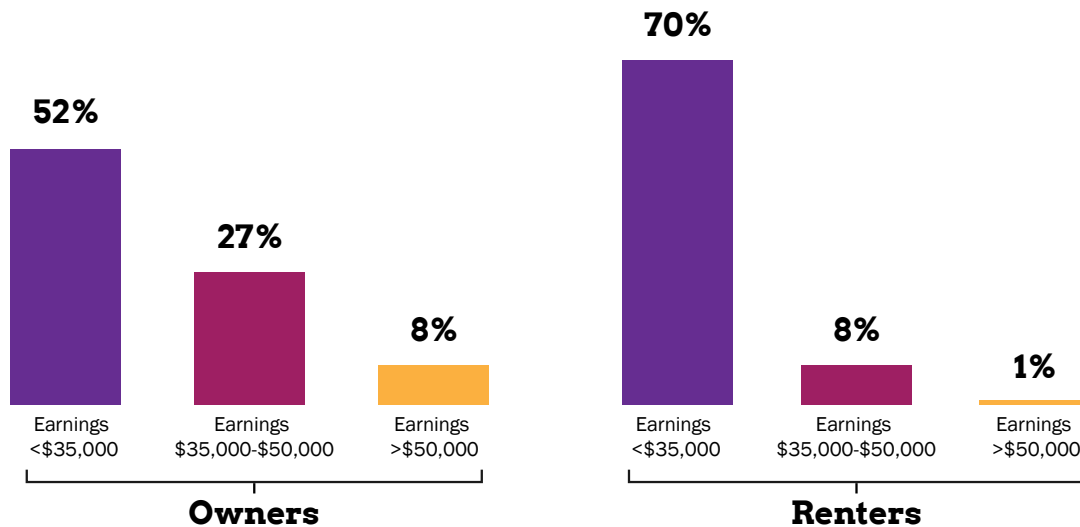
Context for Action

Places in Need



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

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



Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Housing

There are 19,406 housing units in West Seneca, many of which can be described as single family homes. Most of these houses are occupied (97%), and the vast majority (67%) of the ones that are vacant are vacant for reasons other than being temporarily for rent or for sale. In other words, these units (a total of 451) are more likely to be demolished due to long-term vacancy and structural disrepair.

3,300+
lower-income
owners and renters
are burdened with
relatively high
housing costs

The rate of home ownership in West Seneca is slightly higher than across Erie and Niagara Counties (77% vs. 66%). The median house value is \$126,300, which is about \$57,000 greater than the median home value across Erie County, making this community less affordable for families and individuals than others in the region.

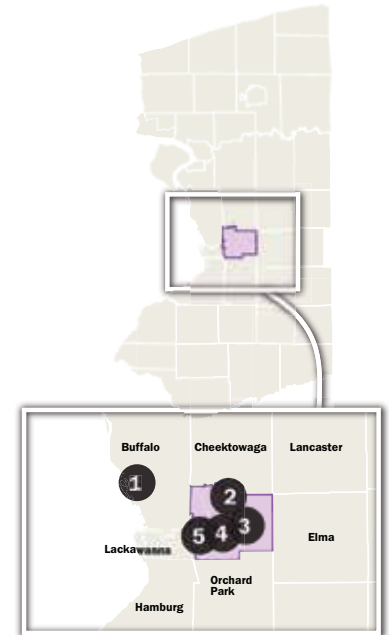
More than half of all owners pay a mortgage for their home. The median housing cost for those with a mortgage is \$1,314 and \$504 for those without one. Twenty-five percent of the units with a mortgage spend 30% or more of their household income on

housing costs, while only 16% of units without a mortgage spend this amount. Overall, less than a quarter of homeowners across West Seneca are cost-burdened, compared to 52% of lower-income households.

In contrast, there are 4,248 renter-occupied housing units in West Seneca. The median rent is \$717, which is about \$13 higher than the median rent for all of Erie County. At the same time, lower income renters are far more likely to be cost burdened than low income homeowners. About 70% of the renter households that are paying 30% or more of their income on housing costs earn less than \$35,000 a year. This is about 1,556 renter households.

Public Transit Times from the 100 Block on Aurora Ave

Destination	Time of Day	One-Way Travel Time Via Bus	Notes
1 Erie County Department of Social Services	Early Morning	38-53 Min.	Requires walking half a mile to the bus stop.
2 US Foods	Early Morning	22 Min.	Requires walking 0.6 miles to the bus stop.
3 West Seneca Central School District Community Education Program	Evening	37-57 Min.	Requires walking 0.6 miles to the bus stop and one bus transfer.
4 West Seneca Public Library	Evening	40 Min.	Requires walking 1.2 miles to the bus stop.
5 Kiwanis Youth Center	Mid Afternoon	44 Min.	Requires walking 1.2 miles to the bus stop.



Transportation

The majority of workers living in West Seneca (95%) use a vehicle to get to work. Four percent use some other form of transportation to go to work or they work at home (1.4%). Among those using other modes of transportation, less than 1% use public transit, 2.5% walk, and less than 1% ride a bicycle. For 64% of working residents, the commute to work takes approximately 10-30 minutes. Top destinations for residents employed outside the town include Buffalo and the towns of Amherst, Cheektowaga, and Orchard Park.

1,236 households across town lack a vehicle. About half of these households consist of renters, the majority of whom are 65 years of age or older. For those without a vehicle, traveling can be difficult; but it can be even more so for elderly individuals or those who have a disability. Long travel distances, coupled with the need to walk relatively long distances to bus stops and sometimes manage snow covered roads without sidewalks, factor into this decision. Even a trip to the West Seneca Public Library, a 7-minute drive away, can take 40 minutes one way during a weekday evening by bus.

While more vulnerable residents report walking over taking the bus, even this poses challenges because West Seneca is not a highly walkable community. The walkability of the community, as rated by WalkScore.com, is described as “car-dependent,” meaning that

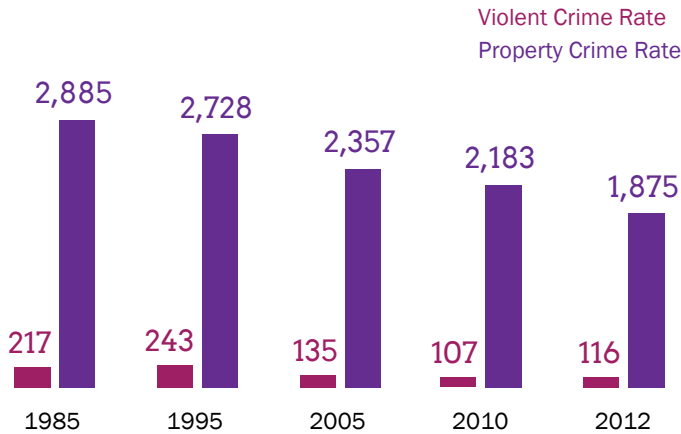
“most errands require a car.” For those who are unable to walk, isolation and dependence on the help of family and friends or private transportation services are significant barriers to services.

Characteristics of Householders Lacking a Vehicle, 2011

Household by Age	# Renters	# Owners	TOTAL
Householder Under Age 65	189	188	377
Householder Age 65+	440	419	859
Total	629	607	1,236

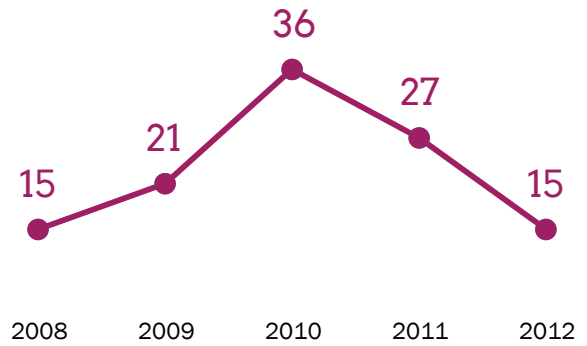
Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Rates of Crime in West Seneca, Per 100,000 Population, 1985-2012



U.S. Bureau of Justice

Juvenile Arrests in West Seneca, 2008-2012



NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services

Crime

Overall, West Seneca has remained relatively safe over the past 25 years. The rate of violent crime has remained low and steady, and the rate of property crime has been decreasing. In 2012, aggravated assaults accounted for 71% of violent crimes against persons, while larceny/theft comprised 79% of property crimes. The rate of property crimes in West Seneca is almost sixteen times higher than the rate of violent crimes.

The number of juvenile arrests in 2012 was the same as in 2008 (15 per year), after having increased slightly from 2009 to 2011. These arrests were mainly for offenses such as arson,

use of marijuana, weapons possession, criminal mischief, and simple assault.

Representatives of the local police indicate that while crime has gone down, it seems to be concentrated on the west side of town, near the Buffalo city line. They note that unemployment, poverty,

housing foreclosures, absentee landlords, vacant housing, and drug use appear to be increasing in this area. More and more, they say, the elderly are becoming the target of thefts and burglaries carried out to support drug use.

Relatively low crime rates and safety are strengths.

Police officers also report that they are increasingly responding to domestic disputes between parents and children, intervening more as counselors than as law enforcers. School teachers, too, suggest that poor or inadequate parenting, perhaps due to the challenges of being a single parent, is contributing to the behavioral issues children and youth are exhibiting at school. School and town officials also note that youth living in the west side of town have difficulty accessing the youth programs offered in the center of town and have few or no programs near them.

Landscape of Services



West Seneca
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
1	Burchfield Commons			✓													
2	Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Buffalo, Inc. (CCCS)																
3	Covenant United Methodist Church																
4	Ebenezer United Church of Christ																
5	Erie 1 BOCES																
6	Fourteen Holy Helpers Parish, incl. Sharing Committee																
7	Goodwill Industries of WNY																
8	Gustavus Adolphus (G.A.) Family Services – Therapeutic Foster Care Program																
9	Kids Escaping Drugs																
10	Lion’s Club																
11	New Hope United Methodist Church																
12	NYS Office for People with Developmental Disabilities			✓													
13	People Inc Senior Living Apartments			✓													
14	Planned Parenthood	✓															
15	Pathways of WNY, LLC																
16	Private Practices at 300 Center Road																
17	Promise House																
18	Queen of Heaven Roman Catholic Church																
19	Renaissance House																
20	Seneca Woods			✓													
21	Southtowns Family YMCA				✓												
22	Spectrum Human Services – Crossroads Erie County PROS (Personalized Recovery Oriented Services)																
23	St. John’s Lutheran Church																
24	St. Peter’s United Church of Christ																
25	Suburban Adult Service Inc																
26	Trinity Lutheran Church																
27	United Church Manor – Senior Subsidized Housing			✓													

See Data Sources and Notes for definitions

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
28	West Seneca Central School District															
	Allendale Elementary School															
	Clinton St Elementary School															
	East Middle School															
	East Senior High School															
	Northwood Elementary School															
	Potters Road Elementary School															
	West Elementary School															
	West Middle School															
	West Seneca Community Education															
	West Senior High School															
	Winchester Elementary School															
29	West Seneca Chamber of Commerce															
30	West Seneca Community Emergency Response Team															
31	West Seneca Community Food Pantry															
32	West Seneca Health Center															
33	West Seneca Masonic Lodge				✓											
34	West Seneca Public Library				✓											
35	West Seneca Rotary Club															
36	West Seneca (Town of)															
	East Seneca Fire Co District #4															
	Kiwanis Youth Center															
	Police Department				✓											
	Reserve Fire Co District #3															
	Seneca Hose Fire Co District #5															
	Senior Citizen Center				✓											
	Town Hall															
	Union Fire Co District #2															
	Vigilant Fire Co District #6															
	Winchester Fire District #1															
	Youth & Recreation															
	Youth Engaged in Service (Y.E.S.)															
37	West Seneca Woman's Club															
38	Western New York Children's Psychiatric Center															
39	Winchester Community Church															

See Data Sources and Notes for definitions

Landscape of Services

Thirty-nine public and private human service supports exist in the Town of West Seneca to offer a variety of services to residents.

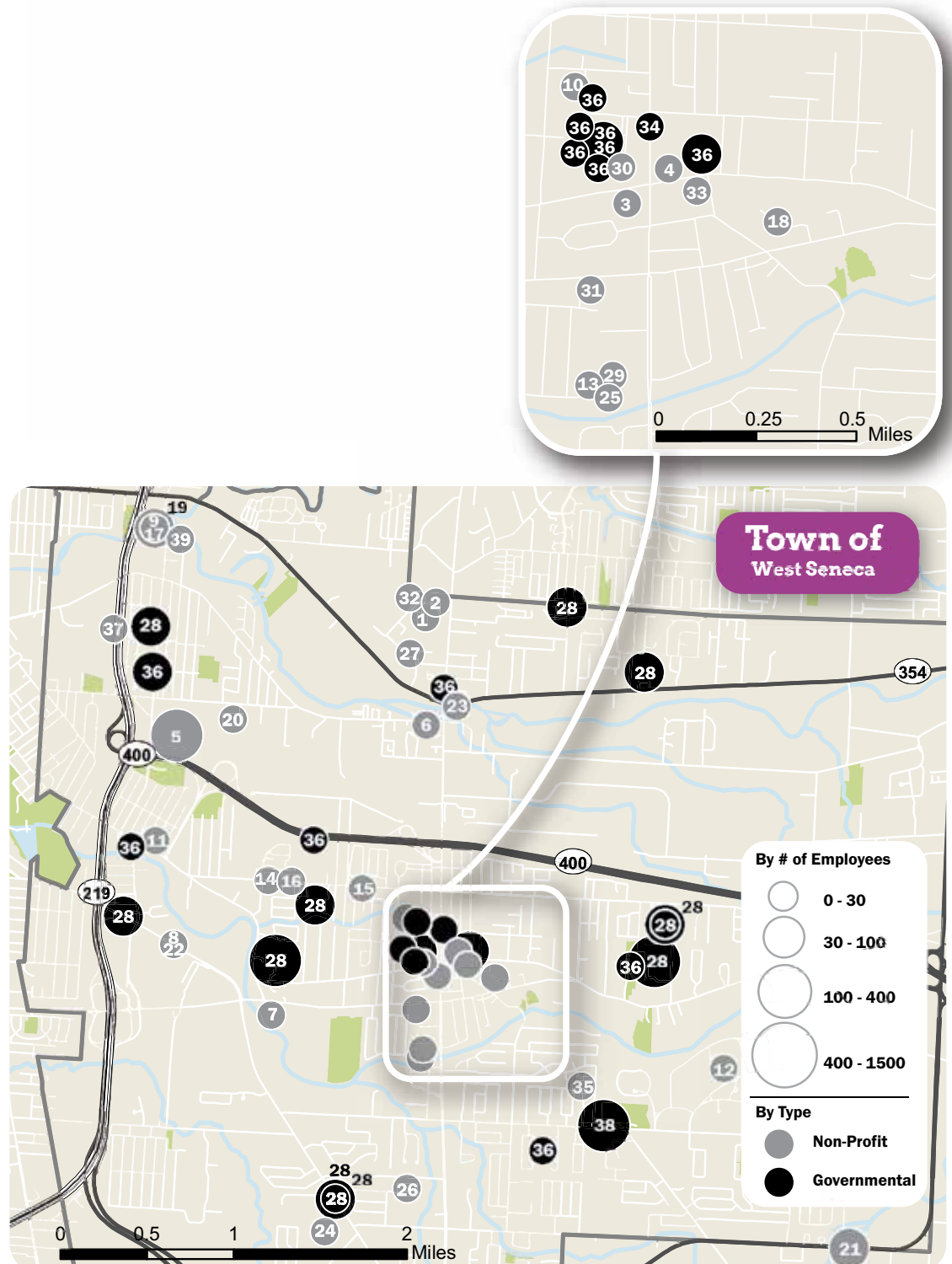
Relative strengths of the safety net are in the areas of food, education/training, mental health and youth programs. By comparison, relatively few agencies provide clothing, transportation, legal services, and/or safety/juvenile justice programs.



While the town itself and the school district are anchors, the typical provider is a small nonprofit employing about five workers. With about ten churches on the list, the faith-base community contributes significantly to human services in West Seneca, too.

The northeastern quadrant of town is where many providers are found. Locations on or near Union and Harlem Roads are common.

About 1,845 employees across 39 providers in West Seneca offer core human services to those in need.



Strengths of the System

The coalition of faith-based service providers is strong and enthusiastic. Representatives of church-based programs provide direct aid to families in need and meet on a regular basis to identify needs and coordinate their efforts. Together they represent a significant resource for the town and they are very eager to help in immediate and personal ways. As a group with some history, they also provide a potential platform for broader collaboration with public sector service providers.

A broad array of services for seniors is already being provided. West Seneca boasts an active and well-equipped senior citizens center offering a variety of programs and services, including information and referrals, a senior fitness center, convenient, comprehensive and affordable van services, and a strong Meals on Wheels program.

The West Seneca public schools are well-ranked and well-regarded. Based on student achievement scores, the school district is ranked 64th out of 429 upstate New York districts – a top 15 percent ranking. Conversations with parents of school children conducted for this report confirm a high level of satisfaction in the educational program provided. The schools also provide a robust program of support for the social needs of students with a social worker in every school, to assist or make appropriate referrals for students in need.

A progressive police department has an array of community-oriented programs and policies. West Seneca police have embraced the challenges of the changing socio-economic structure of the community and helped to keep the crime rate essentially flat even as poverty and more single-parent families have increased. The police department operates a successful youth court, an active DARE program, and supports Neighborhood Watch activities and block clubs across the town. Officers receive continuing training on working with residents with special needs. The department maintains a strong working relationship with the West Seneca schools.

Strong programs for youth are in place. A town-sponsored youth center provides recreational and after-school programs for young people and there is an active YES (Youth Engaged in Service) program that offers children 12 to 18 years old opportunities to develop skills and gain experience while working with seniors, younger children and local organizations.

A
HIGHLY-RANKED
school district is an
asset

Gaps in Services

Current offerings of after-school programs for youth don't fully meet the need. While a range of programs are provided, human services professionals suggest there is an unmet need for after-school programming, especially on the town's more urban west side. Some say that new facilities are needed as a site for programs. Others say additional programming is needed more than bricks and mortar. In either case, children and teens need more to do and someplace to go.

While three weekly newspapers cover West Seneca or portions of the town, the West Seneca Sun, which is free, isn't delivered on the west side where information needs are high and growing. More broadly, there is no centralized place where residents can go for information about programs and services. Some suggest that one of the town's biggest problems is simply communication. Some information is posted on the town web site. But not everyone has computer access; others describe this online information as hard to find. The school district has developed a directory of service providers, one which could be the foundation for a more widely

**INFORMATION
GAPS**
weaken the safety net

used resource. In any case, problems with information sharing lead to the paradoxical situation in which people perceive youth programming as inadequate even as some youth programs are undersubscribed.

Lack of information – and information sharing – is also a disadvantage for human services providers – particularly churches – in planning their programming. Faith-based organizations are eager to help others. Their members want to put their faith in action within the community. However, they don't always have a full picture of what's really needed or what is already being provided. Nor are they always well-prepared to respond to the need as they are to express their generosity. Better coordination could help a lot.

Capacity to address housing dilapidation, foreclosure and vacancy is limited. Aging housing stock, absentee landlords, deferred maintenance, rising mortgage foreclosures and other forms of neighborhood deterioration are growing problems in West Seneca. There's no town-specific entity equipped to deal with these. Just the cost or maintenance for abandoned properties is a drain on the town. Closer coordination with the new Erie County land bank could provide new resources for repair.

Behavioral and mental health resources are in short supply. With rising incidences of alcohol and drug abuse, increased numbers of calls for help with domestic violence, rising rates of gambling addiction, depression and even suicide, the need for mental health resources is growing. Some services are provided, but again, lack of information and sometimes lack of transportation are both limiting factors for potential clients.

Barriers to Connecting with Residents

Being turned away from programs and services because of income limits is a key barrier. Many of the most vulnerable in West Seneca do not live below the Federal poverty line but just above it. This means that people who need help with food, housing, education and training, health care and otherwise are often not eligible for assistance. Many others face difficult choices between seeking employment, which would disqualify them for assistance but not significantly improve their economic situation, and continued dependency. Slight increases in income that disqualify an individual or family from Medicaid are especially difficult.

There is a lack of affordable and flexible transportation options – especially for those under 65. Van service for seniors in West Seneca is generally available, convenient and affordable, although it requires some advance scheduling. Circumstances for those under the age of 65 are distinctly more difficult. Reductions in service by the NFTA – and particularly the lack of service north and south along Union Road – make access to employment, education, health care, and shopping a regular challenge. The 15 Seneca bus provides reasonably regular service to Downtown Buffalo but there's no access, for example, to the Appletree Business Park or Walden Galleria where young people might find jobs. The lack of

sidewalks on main highways even makes walking difficult.

less visible and accessible are the needs of the working poor

West Seneca's brand of small-town pride is generally a strength, but some see it translate into resistance to new solutions. West Seneca has changed a great deal, from an old farming community

to a bedroom community to an increasingly urban environment. Problems of poverty, drug abuse, domestic violence, child neglect, mental health problems and more have increased. Not everyone is ready to embrace new solutions.

Seniors and youth get a lot of attention and a lot of resources; working age adults who take care of children and elders, not so much. Programs and services for seniors are strong. Likewise, much effort is addressed to the needs of young people, although some gaps remain. In the middle are working age adults stressed by the responsibilities to both young and old, too time-pressed with work to advance their education, and finding few opportunities for community interaction.

Human needs are not evenly distributed across the geography of West Seneca. While the eastern reaches of the town are distinctly affluent, the west side of West Seneca includes the oldest housing, the poorest residents, the biggest problems and the greatest needs. Community leaders are insistent that they make no distinctions on the basis of which side of town an individual lives. But the distinctions are a matter of intense interest and conversation nevertheless.

Promising Developments

To strengthen pathways from high school into vocational careers, Erie 1 BOCES recently launched Tech Plus, a GED alternative for West Seneca high school students interested in pursuing a technical education and career.

West Seneca Central School District has begun working with a variety of mental health providers to connect students in need with behavioral and mental health services.

After recent years of notable enrollment decline, membership in the town's YES Program (Youth Engaged in Service) is poised to grow. This will be accomplished by expanding the variety of offerings for youth, engaging youth as leaders through the creation of a youth advisory board, and through the active marketing of the program with assistance from the school board.

Through themed programming geared towards teens, the West Seneca Public Library actively seeks to attract older students, filling key gaps in programming for youth. The Library has also partnered with the School District and the West Seneca YES Program to offer space for a tutoring program.

United Church Manor has been expanding the suite of services it offers to its older tenants, in an effort to help seniors remain independent and active. The recent hire of a part-time service coordinator is part of this effort and will help tenants connect with community-based programs. Transportation services are also being expanded, through a contract with Liberty Cab to take residents on non-medical errands twice a month. Meanwhile, a collaboration with the school district will bring in high school seniors to assist in a variety of ways, as these students earn community service credit.

While the original intent of the coalition of churches was conversation about cross-cutting faith-based topics, monthly meetings have evolved to address a variety of issues affecting the community and ways in which the church coalition can play a role. Understanding the importance of partnership, the Community of Churches now invites other organizations to attend monthly meetings, paving a road for a broader provider coalition.

To help address an increase in mental health calls and gaps in mental health services in the community, the West Seneca Police Department is training its officers on how to interact with people living with mental illness, including post-traumatic stress disorder and autism. This is just one of additional programs the department has in place to help address town needs and changing demographics. RUOK (Are You Okay?) is another new program of the department, offering daily check-ins with shut-ins, the disabled and others.

A proposal for a new library and civic center creates a walkable corridor in the center of town with programming, services and office space. It's being designed to promote both economic development and resident engagement.

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: interviews with agency representatives, a focus group with providers, and conversations with residents. Local data from secondary sources also inform these findings and recommendations.



Form a coalition of human services providers, building upon existing partnerships

Key public sector agencies in West Seneca -- notably the police department and the public schools -- work closely to coordinate their efforts. At the same time, members of a coalition of churches have a long history of collaboration in the provision of direct services. But neither knows enough about what the other is doing to improve on that coordination and target emerging needs. On the one side are full-time professionals; on the other side mostly volunteers. But there is an opportunity and a need to expand the realm of coordination.

STRATEGIES

Build on the existing church council and leverage the strong working relationship among police, schools and others to create a broader coalition. Each potential partner brings a useful perspective on community needs, as well as unique resources.

This group would welcome all interested human services stakeholders, including schools, elected officials, resident representatives, youth and senior service providers, economic development representatives, the police, and service providers from the west side of town, as well as representatives from the wide array of providers in the faith-based community.

Meetings of the coalition could be scheduled to follow the monthly meeting of the church council.

The effort should take advantage of the Mobile Safety-Net Team's willingness to help facilitate an initial meeting and share best practices from coalitions in other communities. However, longer term, leadership from within the community will be important.

A first priority of this group may be coordinating a comprehensive directory of human services and the dissemination of this information, building on the information resources already assembled by the West Seneca School District.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

The effort needs comprehensive participation from human service providers in education, job training and economic development, public safety, health, housing and neighborhood development, youth and seniors and others.

Key leadership, however, is essential. The Oishei Foundation's Mobile Safety-Net Team can organize an initial convening. But current leadership of the church council and key public sectors like the Town Supervisor, Superintendent of Schools and Chief of Police need to take an active and visible role.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

Love INC of Springville, NY is an organization that mobilizes area churches in meeting needs for human services that aren't being met by existing service providers.

<http://www.loveincspringville.com/>

MODELS TO CONSIDER

Love INC. of SPRINGVILLE, NY

Based in rural Springville, New York, Love INC is a Christian-based non-profit with 17 partner churches that connects local families and individuals with a broad array of programs and services. People with food, clothing, shelter, budgeting assistance, emotional and family support and other needs are referred to the Love INC office by churches, agencies, and others who know of the ministry. Staff then work cooperatively with the person or family and local agencies to analyze the need and determine next steps and referrals. Requests for services not available through local agencies are referred to a Love INC Church Ministry Coordinator to identify the volunteer or resources within the church best suited to meet the need. A volunteer is then assigned to the resident in need. The Love INC office follows up with the Church Ministry Coordinator and the person with the original request to make certain that the service goals are achieved. Established in 1996, Love INC has grown to 5 staff members and runs three other programs – IMAGE (promotes a personal Christian connection between church volunteers and those in need); GAP Ministries (a church fills a need that has been identified through Love INC and is not being filled by any other source, such as food pantries, essentials for newborns, prescription drugs, furniture, etc.) and SCENE (promotes aging well for the elderly).

<http://www.loveincspringville.com/>



Raise awareness of human services by centralizing information about what's available

West Seneca has seemingly strong resources for sharing information about available programs and services. Three weekly community newspapers cover the town. Town government has an active web site, while the West Seneca Chamber of Commerce recently made a notable investment in its website. Meanwhile, several providers have compiled directories and/or phone books. Providers practice habits of collaboration and coordination. Yet the word about what's being done still doesn't seem to penetrate the broader public. And the ironic result is that some services are perceived as lacking while those who provide such services struggle to attract users. A greater and more strategic effort needs to be made to make sure information is getting out.

STRATEGIES

Create a comprehensive directory of human services. Build on the work of those who have created directories or are in the process of doing so, including the West Seneca School District, the Lion's Club and the West Seneca Chamber of Commerce. Incorporate information from town government, which offers services for youth, seniors and the community at large and regularly responds

to requests for information and referral. Gather information from faith-based providers about what is offered. Reach out to providers whose area of coverage extends beyond the borders of the town.

Work with the broadened coalition of service providers to make the directory available across a variety of platforms including on-line, in print and on-location such as food pantries, the library, the town and through the community of churches. Consider versions that address information needs of target audiences such as parents, youth and seniors. Information should be available across web sites maintained by schools, town government and others. A directory document should be updated annually and made available in PDF format for printing hard copies on demand.

Target those most in need in neighborhoods along the West Seneca/Buffalo border with information packages. In Cheektowaga, this is accomplished through Operation Neighborhood Outreach, a door-to-door initiative made possible through a partnership between town workers and the Cheektowaga Police.

Use local papers to raise awareness of human services, and explore options for delivering the West Seneca Sun to residents on the west side of town where information needs are greatest.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

Leadership of the broadened coalition of service providers should organize the directory effort. Key players include town government, the school district, leadership of the church council, the Lion's Club and the West Seneca Chamber of Commerce. Targeted information sharing may need special cooperation from the Police Department. Involvement by local community newspapers will be needed, both for coverage of human service initiatives and potential distribution of the directory.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

AROUNJA is an online information tool that could help providers disseminate human services directory information online. <http://erieny.arounja.org/>

MODELS TO CONSIDER

Buffalo Soccer Club

The humble beginnings of Buffalo Soccer Club, a program of Algonquin Sports, Inc., demonstrate how the simple desire to make a difference, along with a little resourcefulness, can have sizable and lasting impacts. Founder Steve Kiernan, then CEO of Algonquin Studios, a small software-development firm in Buffalo, understood personally the positive effects sports can have on the lives of children, especially those whose home life is shaky and whose future success is not a given. Friendship, sportsmanship, confidence, ethical principals and a healthy alternative to the negative social influences children often face are what this program tries to cultivate. Kiernan also observed that while soccer is popular in WNY, it didn't seem to be an option for kids living in the City of Buffalo east of Main Street. So back in 2007, in an empty field at JFK Recreation Center, Kiernan chalked the field, purchased goals, and invited kids to come. Buffalo Soccer Club was born. And over the ensuing years, it grew. Today, about 500 hundred children in the city are engaged in one of its various leagues, teams and/or clinics. Through local partnerships with the city school district, Independent Health and the United Way, the initiative has also garnered an impressive amount of support and funding from various sources, including the General Mills Foundation, the U.S. Soccer Federation, and New York State West Soccer. In 2012, a \$300,000 a Social Innovation Fund re-grant was awarded.

<http://buffalosoccerclub.org/Sponsors/AlgonquinSportsForKids>



Fill gaps in enriching out-of-school activities for youth

While the West Seneca Central School District provides a comprehensive array of after-school programs at five elementary schools and at West Seneca East High School, participation is modest compared to the population and programs might not be accessible to those most in need. Offerings include sports and recreation, supervised homework, and a wide variety of continuing education activities. But most programs are fee-based. Meanwhile, the Kiwanis Youth Center in Centennial Park lacks the facilities needed to mount a full slate of active programs. And many of the young people most in need of after-school options live on the west side of town -- closer to the high school where after-school programs are not offered.

STRATEGIES

Consider options for opening a youth/family center on the west side of town where nothing currently exists. This might be similar to the nearby Machnica Community Center in Buffalo's Kaisertown, offering sports and other recreational activities tailored for teens. The Valley Community Association in Buffalo's Old First Ward is another strong model to consider. There are many vacant buildings that perhaps could be retrofitted for this purpose, including a former church/school near the corner of Seneca Street and Orchard Park Road. With two schools in the area (Winchester Elementary and

Potter Road), existing infrastructure also exists but will require staff and funding for after-hours programming.

Develop partnerships that may expand options offered by the town's YES Program and Youth & Recreation Department. With the large number of seniors in West Seneca, intergenerational programs such as Grandparents as Reading Partners, may benefit both youth and seniors. A program in Newstead offers a successful model for this.

Raise awareness of existing programs and options, some of which are underutilized; this might include promoting strong regional programs for youth based outside of West Seneca such as Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Work to develop the capacity of the Youth Board to seek additional resources for facilities and programs. Physical expansion at the youth center or program development might be good targets for philanthropic or private fundraising.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

There's a great opportunity to expand the reach and effectiveness of a broad range of youth activities through a concerted collaboration between the Town of West Seneca parks and recreation organization, the West Seneca Central School District continuing education department, and other providers. A comprehensive analysis of current offerings, gap analysis, communications plan, and program coordination could go a long way toward maximizing the impact of such programs, especially for the most in need.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

With locations in Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Tonawanda, and North Tonawanda, the Boys & Girls Club is a long-standing provider of quality programs and services for youth from disadvantaged circumstances.

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

MODELS TO CONSIDER

HEARTS AND HANDS

HEARTS AND HANDS FAITH IN ACTION offers not only a model for providing transportation and other aging-in-place services to vulnerable individuals, but it also offers a success story for raising the profile of a church-based outreach from one serving primarily the needs of church members to an interfaith coalition serving the broad community. Hearts and Hands took root in 2003 when the pastor of First United Methodist Church of Akron observed how many seniors were heading for institutional care because they needed a little help with everyday activities and this help was not available. The idea was to pool ministries across churches, and have members volunteer to help elders in need. In addition to pooling human resources, at least a small amount of funding came from each church. The initiative also garnered a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, raising the coalition's profile to new heights. With growing local support, today, Hearts and Hands operates through dozens of church partnerships. It has a volunteer base of 300 and serves hundreds of individuals in 9 different local communities.

<http://hnhcares.org/>



Strengthen skill development opportunities for adults

Many of West Seneca's most vulnerable adults are working hard at low-wage jobs with little opportunity for advancement. Sometimes they earn just enough to be disqualified from other forms of social support. Typically, they lack two things: educational or training beyond a high school diploma or GED and access to a car. The combination of the two means their job searches are limited mainly to retail or service jobs they can get to on foot or by bus. For working parents, a third complicating factor can often be lack of affordable child care. A more focused and comprehensive effort needs to be undertaken to address the education and skill sets of a cadre of people who otherwise will be chronically underemployed and perhaps dependent.

STRATEGIES

Raise awareness of existing programs such as West Seneca Community Education, Erie 1 BOCES and learning opportunities at the library by promoting these to vulnerable residents at food pantries, churches and the library.

Explore partnerships between regional employers that are hiring (such as Catholic Health) and West Seneca Community Education and BOCES for opportunities to train unemployed and underemployed residents locally for current job openings.

Coordinate the provision of adult training programs, such as GED

courses, with offerings for youth, such as pre-school instruction or convenient and affordable child care.

Expand opportunities for teens to develop skills and cultivate experience through stronger linkages between Youth Engaged in Service (YES) and the West Seneca Chamber of Commerce.

Strengthen links between jobs, jobs training and transportation, selecting, for instance, job training sites that are more readily accessible via public transit by those most in need. Where public transit is not available, consider other options to make sure that individuals can get to training.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

West Seneca Central School District and Erie 1 BOCES should reach out to the broader workforce development infrastructure in Erie County, tapping the New York State Department of Labor, the Workforce Investment Board of Erie County, Buffalo Employment and Training Center and the UB Educational Opportunity Center to identify specific opportunities for West Seneca young adults, target training programs to the opportunity, and promote programs to this population.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

Advance Buffalo is a workforce development initiative that is helping residents from across the region connect with many current job openings in advance manufacturing.

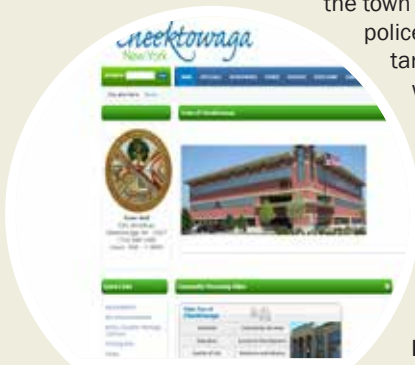
<https://labor.ny.gov/careerservices/advance-buffalo/advance-buffalo-overview.shtm>

MODELS TO CONSIDER

Operation Neighborhood Outreach in Cheektowaga, NY

Since 2009 the Town of Cheektowaga has conducted what it calls Operation Neighborhood Outreach, going door-to-door in different neighborhoods across the town to increase residents' awareness of the myriad town services they may benefit them, offer advice, and address quality-of-life issues. Seniors, for instance, are informed about the senior center, its vans and Meals on Wheels. Families receive information on the town's youth programs and community centers. The outreach is conducted by the police and other town workers. Neighborhoods along the western border were initially targeted, because of the higher levels of need and because they are transitional, with higher proportions of newer residents who may be less familiar with town services and local town ordinances. All town departments providing services participate: Youth and Recreation, Senior Services, Community Development, and the Cheektowaga Police, to name a few. Operation Neighborhood Outreach is led by the Police Department, where the effort was spawned and modeled after something similar that was happening in Buffalo. It has received positive feedback from residents, and based on its success, the town is exploring how it might be expanded, to deliver information about programs and services that go beyond what the town offers to the benefit of residents and neighborhoods.

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



Expand transportation options for seniors and vulnerable individuals

As with many other communities in Buffalo Niagara, cuts in already limited public transit service has made it difficult if not impossible for people who can't afford to maintain an automobile to travel for work, school, health care or shopping. Regular NFTA bus service connects parts of West Seneca -- along Seneca Street and Clinton Street -- with Downtown Buffalo but offers no service to connect destinations within the town along the north-south axes of Harlem Road or Union Road. Van service, meanwhile, is mostly limited to senior citizens and even then constrained by schedules and other conditions. Transportation is the problem that makes all other problems for the poor more difficult. A strong address to this lack of access and mobility is urgently needed.

STRATEGIES

Explore possibilities of expanding the senior center van service, with its six vans, to serve younger vulnerable populations, perhaps, starting off with travel to town-sponsored events such as a HEAP outreach or for traveling to food pantries.

Explore ways existing vans may be used during unused periods (e.g. after 3:30 pm weekdays and weekends, for the senior van); this could be part of a larger regional effort to fill gaps for affordable and flexible transportation, using a large fleet of vans operated by local governments and nonprofits that often sit idle.

Consider a faith-based, volunteer-driven model such as Hearts and Hands, offering seniors free transportation for errands along with a variety of aging in place supports.

Have West Seneca and its interests in public transit represented on the NFTA's Citizen Advisory Committee. Applications are accepted online. The committee offers a venue for public participation and input into NFTA programs and decision making.

Support United Church Manor as it explores options for pursuing grants available from the NFTA to fill gaps in access. The funding available would cover 80% of the cost of a vehicle for a nonprofit that partners with two for-profit entities. The cost of drivers, gas, insurance, maintenance are responsibilities of the grantee.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

Coordinating volunteer drivers with rolling stock owned and operated by public sector and not-for-profit agencies will take an extraordinary effort by key members of the broadened coalition of service providers. The legal and financial obstacles are substantial.

Meanwhile, the coalition of providers needs to prioritize public transportation improvements as one of the strategic high-leverage moves that the community needs to make. Getting a strong advocate for West Seneca -- and all first ring suburbs -- on the

NFTA advisory board should be an early action item. Reach out to Citizens for Regional Transit for assistance and advice.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

Hearts and Hands Faith in Action mobilizes a broad base of volunteers from area churches to offer free transportation to seniors in several rural communities of Erie County. <http://hnhcares.org/>

Build upon already strong supports for the town's large senior population

West Seneca has generally strong programs and services for seniors that attract a diverse population from across the town. The senior center is well-staffed, well-equipped and well-used. The senior van service provides needed mobility for many seniors. And senior housing facilities like United Church Manor provide an additional layer of service for older seniors. However, some gaps in service persist. Some seniors experience a high degree of social isolation. There are more frequent reports, meanwhile, of seniors being the victim of crimes or scams. And many seniors may be less than well-informed about what kinds of services are offered.

STRATEGIES

Explore ways of getting a social worker at the Senior Center, if only part time, to assist seniors in identifying community supports and to offer help with applications for benefits. In Newstead and the Town of Tonawanda, this is made possible through Erie County Department of Senior Service, with the part-time Senior Outreach Worker split between two communities.

Assist seniors in managing expenses while living on fixed incomes by increasing their financial literacy. Partnerships with area banks and community-based organizations such as Consumer Credit Counseling may offer opportunities for a program at the senior center.

Raise awareness and opportunities for the formation of neighborhood watches to increase the safety for seniors. West Seneca Police are available to offer support to neighborhood groups.

Ensure that senior center van drivers have access to a directory of services, as they can be a trusted source of information and referral for seniors who use the van.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

The West Seneca Senior Service Center could reach out to the

Erie County Department of Senior Services to explore possibilities for arranging on-site social worker assistance for the senior center. Likewise to set up financial literacy programming.

The senior center should form a partnership with the the West Seneca Police Department to form or develop neighborhood watch or block captain programs, taking care to coordinate these with the "I'm Okay" program.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

Through county-town partnerships, the towns of Amherst, Clarence and Newstead offer outreach services that connect seniors with social services in the community.

<http://www.amherst.ny.us/pdf/senior/sos.pdf>

Invest in services and supports on the west side of the town

The western edge of West Seneca -- along its boundaries with Lackawanna, South Buffalo and Buffalo's Kaisertown neighborhood -- contain the oldest housing, the highest rates of poverty and the greatest indicators of social need in the town. This is the area of greatest mortgage foreclosures and housing deterioration. It is the area most visibly in need of after school and recreational programs for young people. These are the neighborhoods where adults are most likely to be unemployed or stuck in dead-end jobs. And it is the area where seniors are most likely to be separated from the network of services offered in the town. A more concerted effort is needed to deal with the needs of the people in these neighborhoods.

STRATEGIES

Explore the possibility of opening selected public schools (such as Winchester and Potter Road) to youth and their parents after hours for youth programs, adult education and training, financial literacy, and parenting workshops. Partnerships with community-based organizations such as Erie 1 BOCES, the Parent Network of WNY, and the district's community education program may make this possible. Building a youth and recreation center on the west side of town is another option to fill this need.

Engage county-wide agencies to mobilize housing rehabilitation resources and vacant property management capacity to stem the tide of blight. Consider town-led action at the grassroots level to organize residents to improve conditions in their own neighborhoods, following the examples of PUSH Buffalo.

Build capacity for information, referral and mobile services at existing service sites such as the schools, churches and food pantries.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

Town government and the school district need to work together to deliver educational and recreational programs. The town's code enforcement staff should reach out to Erie County Environmental and Planning and the new land bank to address housing issues.

Meanwhile, broader outreach and information efforts, discussed elsewhere in this report, need to pay particular attention to the particular challenges of spreading the word in the "city line" neighborhoods.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

The Orange-Ulster BOCES recently opened a LiteracyZone/Family Welcome Center to assist potential users with needs beyond training including health, mental health parenting support, and finances.

http://www.ouboces.org/AdultEd/News/2013-2014%20news/2013_middletown_litzone_ribboncutting.cfm

Appendices

Appendix A - Data Sources and Notes

1.1 Cover Map

Service providers: The human service providers that are mapped are listed on pages 24 and 25 of the report. The cover map does not represent these providers by their employment size or organizational status as the inside map (see page 26) 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 West Seneca is from the 2012 NYS School Report Card database available from the NYS Education Department. Total enrollment reflects total students enrolled at these schools during 2011-12.

Major Employers: Selected large employers in West Seneca are shown on the map. Employment size was determined using Reference USA's 2014 Business Database and the 2012 NYS School Report Card database (for employment within the West Seneca School District).

Map Layers: Boundary files for West Seneca, 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. West Seneca's total population is from the 2007-11 American Community Survey.

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, as well as housing tenure, as reported.

Information on urgent concerns of residents come from a resident survey conducted by the Mobile Safety-Net Team, described in more detail on pages 14-16 and 38.

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 1990 and 2010 U.S. Census were used to calculate overall population changes between these data for both West Seneca and Erie County.

The 2007-11 American Community Survey is the source of households by type. 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 West Seneca 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 West Seneca or Erie and Niagara Counties.

Work and Income: The number of jobs in West Seneca is from the U.S. Census Bureau's OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics. Numbers reflect primary jobs of all workers in West Seneca. This was also the source of data on where West Seneca residents go to work, employing industries and pay levels for those who stay and leave.

The town's top employers are from Reference USA's Business Database, as of March 2013, which provides employment by employer and address. Employment at the West Seneca Central School District was calculated with teacher and staff counts provided in the 2011-12 New York State Report Card for the West

Seneca Central School District, available from the NYS Education Department.

Employment by sector is from the 2007-11 American Community Survey, with numbers reflecting the employed civilian population age 16 years and over. Households by income level come were also calculated using data from the 2007-11 American Community Survey. This was also the data source on the average and median incomes in West Seneca and Erie County, respectively.

Poverty: Poverty: The 2006-11 American Community Survey is the source of data on individuals, families and households living in or near poverty. Income relative to poverty level is provided by this source for individuals by age group, race 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, per-person amount a family of three lives on at the federal poverty level is calculated by dividing the 2014 annual poverty threshold for this family size by the number of family members and the number of days in a year. The cost of the a round trip by bus for a family of three was calculated using NFTA's standard one-way fare of \$2.

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

Poverty levels were examined by census tract within West Seneca using 2006-11 American Community Survey data. These included Census Tracts 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 120.01, 120.02, 120.03, and 173.

Education: Student enrollment figures and the percentage of children qualifying for free and reduced priced lunch are from the 2012 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.

The 2012 School Report Card database was also the source of academic performance data, which is provided for various groups of students, including those whose families are economically disadvantaged and not. Students performing at levels 1 and 2 are described as failing to meet standards, while those performing at levels 3 or 4 are described as meeting standards. Performance is rated by NYS on a scale from 1 to 4 where 1 reflects not meeting standards, 2 reflects partially meeting standard, 3 is meeting standards and 4 is meeting standards with distinction.

Educational attainment levels are from the 2007-11 American

Community Survey and reflect the adult population age 25 and up. Post-graduation plans of high school students are from 2011-12

New York State Report Card, as are high school completion rates.

West Seneca's Most Vulnerable

117 adults residing in West Seneca Zip Codes 14206, 14210, 14217, 14220 and 14224 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 West Seneca 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 2013 and early 2014 at several different venues across the town, including West Seneca West High School, the Senior Citizen Center, Community Food Pantry and West Seneca Library by the Mobile Safety-Net Team.

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 117 surveys represent a sample of West Seneca's vulnerable population that is statistically significant with a confidence level of 95% and with a confidence interval of 9. Surveys completed by household representatives who reported a Zip Codes corresponding to an area entirely outside the Town of West Seneca 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 98 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 West Seneca's at-risk population within a 95% confidence interval +/- 10%.

The 74% 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 vacancies, 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 West Seneca are from the 2006-11 American Community Survey. This is also the source of data on how workers in West Seneca travel to their jobs.

Public transit times are calculated from the 100 block of Aurora Ave, which runs west of Harlem Road between Mineral Strings and Indian Church Road. Information from Reference USA's household database revealed this street and the broader neighborhood to be the home of several families 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 West Seneca are from the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, which gathers crime statistics from law enforcement agencies across the nation. Violent crime includes murder, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Property crime includes burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft. Juvenile arrests are from the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services.

A focus group with providers, along with interviews with the West Seneca Police Department, were the sources 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 2013 Business Database. Both nonprofits and governmental agencies are included.

Only organizations with operational sites within West Seneca 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 West Seneca Senior Citizen Center. Alternatively, they may have significant programming for these populations (such as the assistance to senior offered by the Town's Youth Engaged in Service (YES) program.

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.

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 or one of a package of services provided. 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.

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 2013 Business Database providing the number of employees an organization or agency has working at a particular site.

Appendix B - Resident Questionnaire

MOBILE SAFETY-NET TEAM COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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

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

Including yourself, how many people are in your household?

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

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

- Yes¹
- No²

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

- Utility shut-off notice¹
- Foreclosure / eviction²
- Homelessness³
- No money for food⁴
- Domestic violence⁵
- No urgent concerns⁶
- Other: _____⁷

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

- Yes¹
- No²

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

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

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

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

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

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

What is your current living situation?

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

How long have you lived at your current address?

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

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

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

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

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

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

What is your primary form of transportation?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

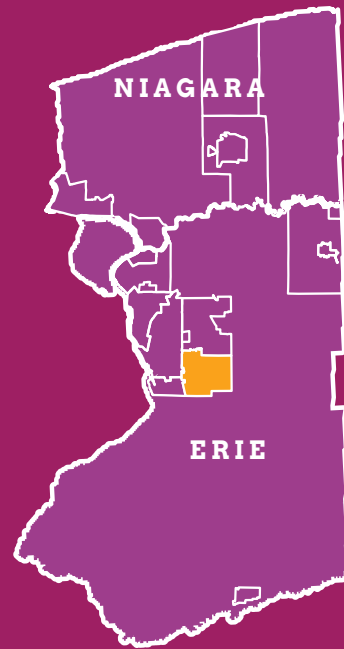
- Food stamps¹
- Medicaid²
- Cash benefits³
- HEAP⁴
- SSI / SSD⁵
- WIC⁶
- Other _____⁷
- None⁸

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

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

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

A COMMUNITY REPORT
Town of **West Seneca**



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 West Seneca'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, West Seneca 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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