...there are a lot of barriers with existing eligibility requirements."

The initiatives that bring the experts into the community are having great success."

# INSIGHTS FROM PROVIDERS

# CITY OF Buffalo (East of Main St)

SEPTEMBER 2019





Prepared by Regional Institute School of Architecture and Planning

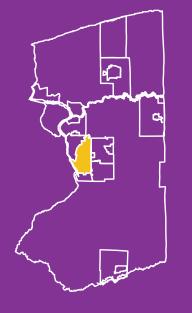




What we're seeing is people with high school diplomas who can't take tests over sixth grade."

### **INSIGHTS FROM PROVIDERS** 2019

# **City of Buffalo** (East of Main St)



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# About this Report

This report offers a snapshot of findings for the City of Buffalo (east of Main Street), with new data on the community's population that lives in or near poverty. It includes the perspectives of human services providers, the landscape of providers, and strategies that could strengthen the safety-net for individuals and families.

Research in this report was led by the University at Buffalo Regional Institute in partnership with the Mobile Safety-Net Team. It was commissioned by The John R. Oishei Foundation. This work updates and expands upon a community report completed by the research team in 2014.

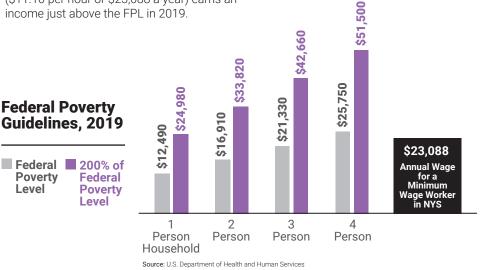


# Defining Need

Nearly 79,000 residents east of Main Street in the City of Buffalo live in or near poverty with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line.

The federal poverty line (FPL) is \$12,490 for a household of one, \$16, 910 for a twoperson household, \$21,330 for a family of three and \$25,750, for a family of four. A single parent of two who works full time, year round at the minimum wage in NYS (\$11.10 per hour or \$23.088 a year) earns an income just above the FPL in 2019.

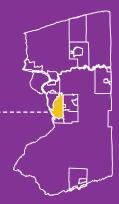
The FPL is adjusted annually by the federal government and varies by household size. It is often used to determine eligibility for programs that assist individuals and families with basic living expenses such as food, utilities, and rental housing. Households with incomes that exceed two hundred percent of the FPL (up to \$51,500 for a family of four) generally do not meet income guidelines for most programs.



Level

# **Reports for this Community**

This report is part of a comprehensive suite of reports for the City of Buffalo (East of Main Street), +------one of 12 representative communities in the Buffalo Niagara Region selected for assessment and investment as part of the Numbers in Need project.



### Each of these reports for this community is available online at NumbersInNeed.org



### **Insights from Providers**

This report, **Insights from Providers**, explores the perspectives of service providers in the community with respect to gaps in the landscape of services, barriers to reaching residents, promising developments, and strategies for strengthening the landscape of programs and services. A focus group with agency leaders informed the findings presented in this document. Agency and community leaders can use this report to shape programs and services that respond to identified gaps and barriers, while leveraging system strengths and promising developments.



### **Community Snapshot**

**Community Snapshot** presents an overview of findings from the research in this community, with new data and information on the people living in or near poverty, their barriers to programs and services, the landscape of service providers, and strategies for strengthening the community so that all residents can thrive economically. This report draws from more detailed findings available on the Numbers in Need website, as well as from Insights from Residents and Insights from Providers. Agency and community leaders can use this report to understand key findings and identify topics for further exploring.



#### **Insights from Residents**

**Insights from Residents** presents a more detailed look at the community's vulnerable populations, their needs, urgent concerns, and barriers to programs and services. A survey of residents and conversations with residents inform findings in this report. Agency and community leaders can use this document as they develop programs and services that respond to the needs of residents and remove barriers to jobs, programs and services faced by residents.



#### Visit us online at NumbersInNeed.org

*NumbersInNeed.org* is an online tool that leaders can use to understand economically vulnerable populations in the Buffalo Niagara Region, their urgent needs and concerns, barriers to services and factors that matter such as access to good paying jobs, educational attainment, and transportation options. The website features individual stories, community and regional indicators, interactive lists and maps of service providers, strategies for strengthening communities and models to consider.

# **What Went Into This Report**

Building an Updated Landscape of Providers



#### The 2014 Baseline Community Report was the starting point.

#### Baseline Community Reports

The community report completed for the City of Buffalo (East of Main Street) in February 2014 offered a starting point for analyzing the landscape of services.



2014

### Information was updated through an Agency Questionnaire.

### **Agency Questionnaire**

Dozens of notfor-profit and governmental human service providers completed an agency questionnaire offering information on their programs and services. This questionnaire

asked providers to update information about their organization and the services/ programs they offer.



### **Find it here:**

**Pg 5 of this report** (The Landscape of Providers)

Numbers in Need Website (Provider Tool) Gaining Insights from Providers



### We shared what we heard from residents and ..... what the data said about the community.

Talking with service providers highlighted challenges and barriers that preliminary data findings did not show. These included barriers that residents face, as well as barriers that providers experience in connecting with residents. In some cases, providers turned our attention to new topics and areas of concern. In other cases, they offered additional insights on data and trends coming out of our outreach to residents and an analysis of detailed community data on poverty, housing costs, vehicle access, educational attainment, work, income and family factors that contribute to economic vulnerability.

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#### **Participating Organizations**

Catholic Charities of Buffalo Gerard Place Goodwill of Western New York Harvest House Independent Health St. Luke's Mission of Mercy Salvation Army of Buffalo Seneca Babcock Community Association University District Community Development Association



Preliminary findings from these activities were shared at provider focus group meetings and through provider interviews.

#### Provider Focus Groups



Ten representatives of nonprofit human services participated in a focus group. The conversation gathered insights on additional areas of concern, barriers, successes and strategies for the future. Provider Interviews



Conversations with selected agency representatives offered new and additional information on human service challenges, barriers and promising developments in the community.

Perspectives and Insights from Providers

The findings presented in this report synthesize **what we heard from providers**. Insights were captured from several providers who were interviewed, who shared additional perspectives and information on their programs, and successes in connecting with residents and challenges.



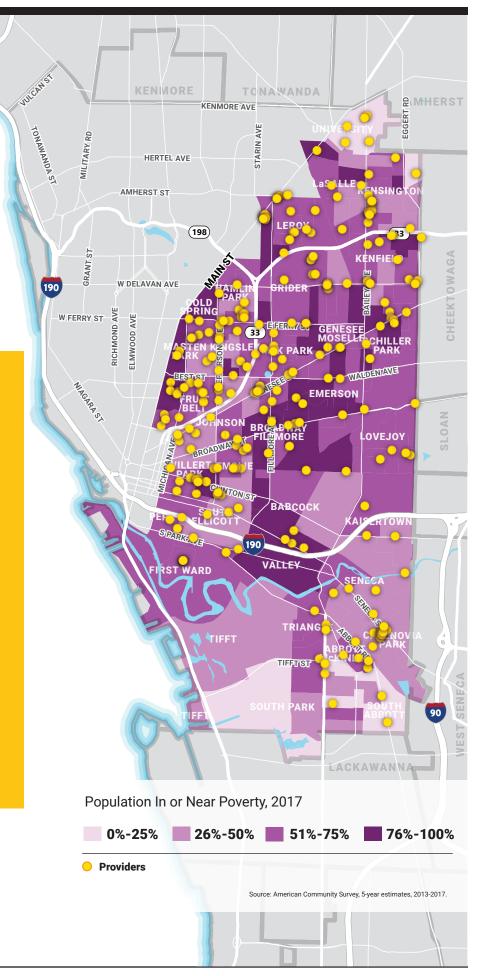
# The Landscape of Providers



Types of services provide, by %	
<b>58%</b>	Education/Training
30%	Food
30%	Youth Programs
<b>27%</b>	Information/Referral
<b>19%</b>	Mental Health/Addiction
17%	Health/Wellness
<b>12%</b>	Crime/Juvenile
11%	Clothing
10%	Financial Literacy
<b>9</b> %	Affordable Housing
8%	Senior Programs
<b>6%</b>	Homeless Services
<b>4%</b>	Transportation
4%	Teen Parent Programs
3%	Veteran Services
2%	Legal

### See more online

Visit NumbersInNeed.org ... to view additional maps and the listing of service providers.





### Nearly 250 service providers are located in the community.

Exactly 243 community service providers are located east of Main Street in the City of Buffalo. This number reflects about a quarter of all service providers in the study region's 12 communities. There are more service providers here than in any other community in Buffalo Niagara. These organizations, which are mostly smaller not-for-profits, offer a wide range of human services that help to meet the basic human needs of residents with food, clothing, shelter and health care. Other organizations offer supports such as education, training, transportation, financial literacy and youth programs, which support individuals and families as they work their way out of poverty towards financial stability.

### Over half of providers offer education and workforce training.

Education and training is part of a strong anti-poverty strategy. This community has a large number of providers - over half of the total - that offer education and training, from cradle to career. For some, such as Buffalo Public School District or Trocaire College, education is at the heart of their mission. For others, such as Gerard Place and Goodwill Industries, it's integrated into a broader mission. Resources in this community for education and training are one of four strengths identified by providers who took part in an agency focus group. Four institutions of higher education exist here. The community is also home to Northland Workforce Training Center, a innovative, industry-driven model that prepares individuals for higher-paying, mid-skill jobs in advanced manufacturing and energy. Buffalo Promise Neighborhood is also here, focused on community revitalization through education.

### One in three providers offer food as part of their programs.

Hunger is a contributor to poverty and a result of poverty, and many areas east of Main Street in Buffalo are designated by the USDA as neighborhoods with food insecurity. To help meet resident food needs, nearly 75 providers out of the 240+ total in the community offer food through food pantries, free and reduced price school lunches, meal programs for seniors, nutrition programs for women, infants and children (WIC) and more. Feedmore WNY is in the community with expanded food programs through a merger of Meals on Wheels and the Food Bank of WNY. Provider focus group participants identified food as a strength of the community's landscape of services. Resident focus group participants did too, even though not having enough money for food was a top urgent concern identified by surveyed residents. "For the first time, I'm hearing a lot of families aren't looking to move, they are looking to stay because they finally got the quality education they were looking for..."

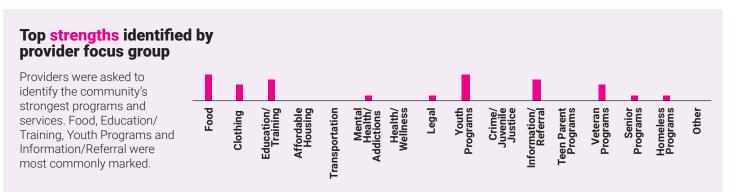
Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with community providers,

"The initiatives that bring the experts into the community are having great success. They trust us and who we are."

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with community providers,

# "In manufacturing right now, there's 3,000 open jobs that are living wage jobs..."

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with community providers, 2019





### Dozens of providers offer out-of-school programs for youth.

About half of children in this community are growing up in poverty; programs that support children from birth to high school graduation with head start programs, mentoring, sports, arts, career exposure, work opportunities and other academically enriching opportunities help children succeed. Nearly 75 organizations in the community offer programs for youth. Youth programs was the top strength of the human services landscape identified by providers taking part in the agency focus group.



### Domestic violence is not always recognized for what it is.

Providers described how they hear survivors talk about situations that fall under the umbrella of domestic violence but victims do not acknowledge it as a problem. Although the term "domestic violence" has been used historically and broadly refers to violence within the home, the term does not resonate with today's populations on the East Side of Buffalo. "They don't use those words," said one provider. Providers say a push to rename domestic violence as "intimate partner violence" would be more effective in identifying victims. "Intimate partner violence" captures a wider range of relationships that transcend marital status, gender and/or sexual orientation. Similarly, talking about domestic violence services as "healing" and "empowerment" services could also increase access by survivors.

# Support services for domestic violence survivors are insufficient.

Providers say that existing resources are not always sufficient nor effective in supporting survivors as they leave their abuser and live independently. As a result, some survivors return to their abuser. Others leave their abuser but end up homeless. The community would benefit from increased awareness of what resources exists. In the Kenfield-Langfield Projects, Jackie Garcia started a group focused on education and awareness. The time and place is kept secret, to create a safe space for survivors to drop by on the pretense that they are there simply to get a food voucher.

# Buffalo's old housing stock is expensive to repair, which creates challenges to aging in place.

Nearly two-thirds of housing stock in the City of Buffalo was built before 1940. Today, these structures are nearly 80 years old or more. Providers say that repairs and maintenance of these older homes can be financially challenging, especially for seniors living on a fixed income, who desire to age in place and can't afford expensive repairs. They said that while some programs exist to help, funding is limited and income eligibility requirements create barriers to assistance with repairs.

### Landlord abuse is prevalent.

Providers say that housing conditions sometimes threaten safety and health of residents in the community. Landlords get away with it because some residents like what's happening in their neighborhood and want to stay put. Buffalo Promise Neighborhood is an example of an initiative that is creating neighborhood stability and a community where people want to live. Some landlords take advantage of this location-based demand. Other times, residents can't afford to move. Providers also describe a generational issue: younger families simply accept what is going on as the norm and don't talk about it unless there is an investigation. Providers say the community needs the city to address absentee landlords and enforce the law.

# There were nearly 3,500 reported victims of domestic violence in the City of Buffalo in 2017.

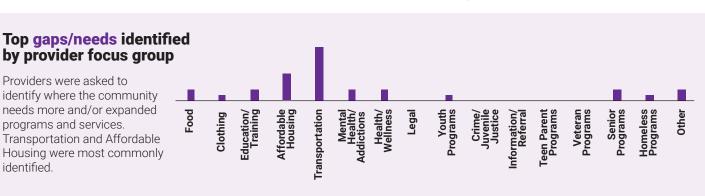
Source: NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services.

9,000+ homeowners in neighborhoods east of Main Street in Buffalo are residents age 65+.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey

Only 40% of lower income survey respondents felt confident that they could handle a \$500 emergency expense.

Source: Numbers in Need, Resident Survey, 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey.





# Transportation is an enormous barrier to jobs and services, especially in the Seneca-Babcock neighborhood.

One provider describes the Seneca-Babcock neighborhood as a bubble; if jobs, programs and services are not available in Seneca-Babcock, they won't be accessed by residents. They describe how residents don't leave the neighborhood because public transit options are so limited, and how poor connectivity to areas outside the neighborhood hurts residents. One provider described how grocery shopping is done at corner stores where prices are high and fresh food is limited. Poor nutrition, in turn, contributes to medical conditions that are not treated and symptoms that are ignored because traveling to the doctor is difficult for those without a vehicle.

### Many jobs are located far away from neighborhoods.

While this community comprises the region's downtown job center and contains multiple commercial corridors that are positioned for job growth, providers state how many job openings and hiring employers in the region are located outside the community, relatively far away from neighborhoods where residents live, thousands of whom do not have a car. The latest data available show that only about a fifth of residents who live in this community are also employed in the community. The large majority of residents leave the community for work.

# The cost of public transportation creates barriers for both providers and residents.

Providers say the cost of public transit and the phasing out of tokens limits their ability to help subsidize the cost of transportation for residents. In past years, providers handed out tokens to residents, allowing them to access public transit to reach training classes, doctor appointments and other services. Tokens, which were good for a one-way ride, were recently phased out by the NFTA. Today providers need to purchase a \$5 day pass for residents. This is a much more expensive option for nonprofit providers operating with limited resources. Providers describe how the cost of public transit also creates barriers for students in TASC classes (formerly known as GED) who cannot afford to attend 5 classes a week, so select a few nights a week to be there.

# Walkability of streets and sidewalks creates challenges to getting around within neighborhoods.

Providers described how communities and commercial corridors such as Bailey Avenue are not walkable nor safe for those on foot, and feel the Department of Public Works isn't doing enough. Faded crosswalks, potholes, cracks in sidewalks and streetlights that are out are examples of challenges faced by pedestrians. One provider painted crosswalks on the street to make walking safer for clients and visitors but said they got in trouble with the city for doing so.

# Some high school graduates are not job-ready and lack basic reading and math skills that a high school graduate should have.

Providers suggest that some students are being pushed through Buffalo Public Schools, advancing in grade level and graduating from high school, even when they can't test at grade level. The way teachers are evaluated may create an incentive for this. One provider described seeing high school graduates who can't pass a 6th grade test. It creates barriers to employment, especially in manufacturing, where employers require job candidates to pass proficiently tests in math and reading.

"What we are seeing is people with a high school diploma who can't take tests over sixth grade."

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with community providers, 2019

"Put social services in our community centers, or a kiosk in our center..."

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with community providers, 2019

"There's no jobs [here in the neighborhood]; they're not leaving the neighborhood because there's no transportation."

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with community providers,



## Underemployed workers do not qualify for funding for training.

Providers describe how some residents are in low-paying jobs. Others are working part time, or employed in jobs they are overqualified for. These residents want to earn more, but may need additional training to advance. Because of their earned income, they often don't qualify for tuition scholarships available through institutions of higher education such as Erie County Community College or Buffalo State. In addition to the cost of training, providers say that having income to cover basic household needs (food, housing, and utilities) during training creates additional barriers to investments into employment training for career advancement.

# Not enough trainers offer the wraparound services that residents need to succeed.

Northland Workforce Training Center is unique in the wraparound services it provides to reduce the barriers students in high-poverty communities often face to employment and training. These services include career coaching, financial aid help, soft skills, reading and math proficiency, ESL training, transportation assistance, affordable childcare, housing, healthcare and more. There are a lot of workforce trainers in the community but providers say that not enough are offering these types of services that help students succeed in their studies and later on in their careers.

### While an increasing number of residents have health insurance, individuals with urgent health needs can wait weeks before getting that first appointment with a doctor.

More residents are getting health coverage through Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. However, providers describe how a 6-8 week wait for an appointment with a Medicaid provider creates barriers to care for residents with urgent medical care needs. Long waits, providers say, can put residents at risk for more serious health problems.

# Residents don't always feel safe leaving their home or community.

One provider described how black residents don't feel safe going into the predominately white suburbs to work; they want to find a job inside the city. Other residents, they say, fear leaving their homes, worried that their absence will make their home a target for a burglary.

### Stigma creates barriers to services.

The stigma associated with some services creates barriers to residents getting the help they need. Because residents do not want to be seen walking into a building or location known for providing particular services, they will not go.

"Training initiatives for staff is a start, but then you need to have support services once you've identified domestic violence."

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with community providers, 2019

"We are seeing a lot of seniors who are wanting to age in place."

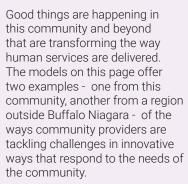
Source: Numbers in Need, Resident Survey, 2019.



# **Promising Developments**

Programs and Partnerships	<b>Northland Workforce Training Center</b> began enrolling students in 2018. The industry- driven model prepares students for higher paying, mid-skill career paths in advanced manufacturing and energy, offering wraparound services that reduce barriers to training and jobs.
	<b>Eight Days of Hope</b> is a nonprofit community revitalization and disaster relief organization that opened a northeast arm in the City of Buffalo in 2018. It is rallying volunteer carpenters, roofers, painters, plumbers and others to assist 100 households in the University Heights District with home repairs in July 2019.
	Agency partnerships have expanded service availability at the neighborhood level. For instance, programming at the <b>Seneca-Babcock Community Center</b> now includes job training classes and parent/teacher meetings through partnerships with the school district and Department of Social Services. Other providers including Harvest House partner with Kaleida Health, UB School of Medicine, Family Justice Center, Buffalo Public Schools, Erie 2 BOCES, and BestSelf Behavioral Health to bring services into the neighborhood.
	Expanded food programs and resources have resulted from the merger of Meals on Wheels and the Food Bank of WNY to form <b>FeedMore WNY</b> .
	Harvest House <b>New Hope Education Center</b> trains 1,300 annually for living wage jobs in health care through partnerships with BPS and Erie 2 BOCES.
	<b>St. Luke's Mission of Mercy</b> is exploring expanded services for the homeless, similar to what's happening in Niagara Falls. Services would offer showers, a clothes washer and more and facilitate transition into transitional housing.
	<b>Independent Health</b> is seeking to partner with community-based organizations to improve social determinants of health such as access to quality housing, safe neighborhoods, flexible transportation, and nutritious food. It's part of a new state Medicaid reimbursement system that rewards and creates incentives for coordinated care that addresses the root causes of disease and medical conditions.
Funding	The <b>Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) Program</b> recently increased income limits for funding eligibility to 100% of the area median income. While more households could qualify for assistance, this program continues to offer just a small pot of money for homeowners in need of assistance.
	Homeowners in Buffalo could tap into tax credits that would offset the cost of repairs, if neighborhoods were listed and recognized as a <b>National Historic District</b> .
	Grassroot efforts among <b>neighborhood block groups</b> have been effective in pooling resources and donations to help fund repairs for lower-income neighbors that need assistance.
	Commercial corridors play an important role in job creation, neighborhood walkability, livability and service access. Over the next five years, <b>\$50 million in capital investments</b> will be made in this community's four commercial corridors along Michigan, Jefferson, Fillmore and Bailey Avenues. Investments will promote mixed-use development, infrastructure improvements, homeownership, and quality of life.

# Models to Consider



The Numbers in Need website -NumbersInNeed.org - contains additional models to consider and strategies for tackling the concerns and barriers experienced by providers in the City of Buffalo. These are intended to inspire solution building and spur conversation as community leaders and agency representatives consider how they might partner with each other and tailor existing programming to break down walls that keep individuals and families in poverty.



### Healthy Corner Store Initiative

Started in 2016 as a project developed through the Mobile Safety-Net Team's North East Buffalo Coalition, the Healthy Corner Store Initiative aims to alleviate the issue of food insecurity in Buffalo's east side neighborhoods. The initiative works with corner stores in area neighborhoods



to bring fresh, healthy foods into stores that typically would only sell processed foods, while also providing technical support to store owners, and education to community members. Since it began, the Healthy Corner Store Initiative has brought healthy foods to six stores on Buffalo's east side. Outside of the support of the Mobile Safety-Net Team, the project was funded by a grant for \$118,000 from General Mills, and the initiative is also seeking additional funding from the US Department of Agriculture.

msntwny.org/our-work/healthy-corner-store-initiative/



Transportation

### **RTA Connect On-Demand**

This service supplements the RTA transit options with free or discounted door-todoor service in areas of the region where fixed-route service is non-existent or limited. Rides can be booked through the Lyft app or booked in advance through the agency's customer service.



Throughout the Miami Valley, zones are designated for use of this service. Within those zones, users can book a free trip that either starts or ends at a RTA-fixed route service transfer point. For door-to-door trips not starting or ending at a transfer point, but still within a zone, rides are \$2 (standard fare for RTA rides).

These services are available during early morning, weekend, and late night times as well, providing affordable transportation options for riders living or working in areas with no or limited transit service.

i-riderta.org/rta-connect/on-demand

# Data Sources & Notes

Most information in this report comes from conversations with agency providers. Data and information from additional sources outside of these conversations are listed below, unless otherwise notes within this report.

#### **Defining Need, Page 2**

Federal Poverty Level: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, HHS Poverty Guidelines for 2019.

Minimum Wage: New York State Department of Labor, Minimum Wage (effective 12/31/18).

#### Landscape of Providers, Page 4

Information submitted by agency providers through a provider questionnaire updated a listing of providers developed for the 2014 community report for Buffalo (east of Main Street). Providers provided information on program and service locations, agency location, geographic scope and more.

Tax records available through the IRS and National Center for Charitable Statistics were used to identify new not-for-profits with locations in the community since 2014.

### Strengths of the System, Page 5-6

Top Strengths and Top Gaps/Needs

Agency focus group participants ranked the strongest programs in the community as well as the programs where the greatest need existed. Each provider had three dots for placing next to the strongest programs and three dots for identifying where need was greatest across 16 categories of programs and services. Dots could be used to identify up to three strengths and weaknesses or several dots could be allocated to fewer categories. Highest ranking categories are those that generated the largest number of dots.

#### Additional Needs/Gaps, Page 6

Age of Housing Stock: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2017 (5-year estimates). 64% of structures in The City of Buffalo were built in 1939 or earlier.

Domestic Violence Victims: NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, Domestic Violence Victims Reported in 2017, Erie County. There were 2,887 total intimate partner victims reported by the Buffalo City PD in 2017.

Homeowners Age 65+: American Community Survey, 2017 (5-year estimates).

Ability to Handle an Emergency Expense: Numbers in Need Resident Survey, Insights From Residents, 2019. Percentage reflects residents selecting 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 representing "not confident at all: and 5 representing "very confident".

### Barriers Residents Face, Page 7

Many Jobs Are Located Far Away From Neighborhoods: OnTheMap Application. U.S. Census Bureau, accessed June 2019. LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (2015). Boundary filed for Buffalo (East of Main Street) were uploaded to complete the analysis. The community contains over 50,700 primary jobs. Residents fill 18% of these jobs.

### Promising Developments, Page 8

\$5 million capital investment: Empire State Development, Governor Cuomo Announces \$50 Million East Side Corridor Economic Development Fund to Improve Quality of Life on Buffalo's East Side, March 12, 2019.

The Buffalo News: Banks, foundations add \$8M to state's \$50M for East Side, April 2, 2019.

INSIGHTS FROM PROVIDERS **City of Buffalo** (East of Main St)

# **SEPTEMBER 2019**



A Mobile Safety Net Team initiative established by The John R. Oishei Foundation



Prepared by

Curiversity at Buffalo Regional Institute School of Architecture and Planning

Visit us online to learn more about this and other communities in need across Buffalo Niagara.



# NumbersInNeed.org