

INSIGHTS

FROM

RESIDENTS

CITY OF
**Niagara
Falls**

OCTOBER 2019

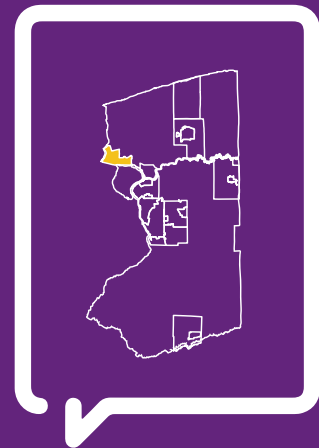
“

We don't have a lot to offer young, positive people. They live here, go away to college, and then they don't want to come back.”

“

Children are our future. If we don't encourage them, things will get worse.”

I remember when Niagara Falls was so vibrant...”



**Numbers
in Need**

IN BUFFALO NIAGARA



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



Prepared by



University at Buffalo
Regional Institute
School of Architecture and Planning

City of Niagara Falls

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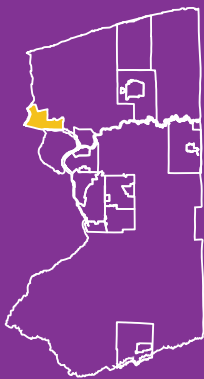
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Numbers In Need is an initiative designed to strengthen the safety-net of human services in Buffalo Niagara communities that are most in need.

Visit NumbersInNeed.org

About this Report

This report offers a snapshot of findings for the City of Niagara Falls, 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.

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



Prepared by  University at Buffalo Regional Institute School of Architecture and Planning

Defining Need

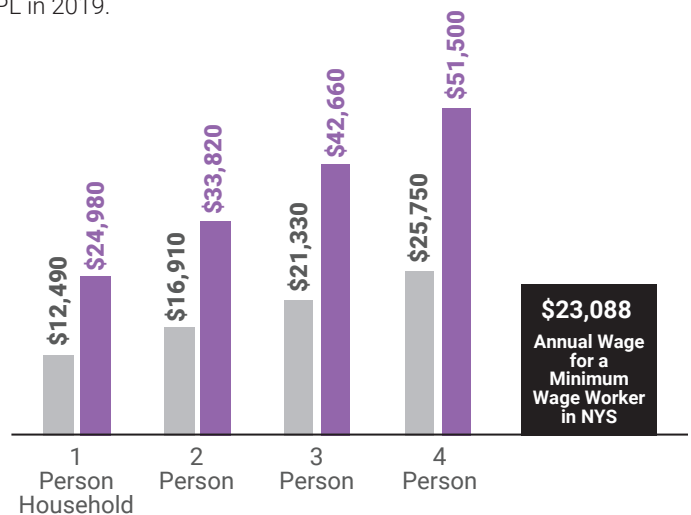
Over 23,700 residents in the City of Niagara Falls live in or near poverty with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line.

The federal poverty line (FPL) is \$12,490 for a household of one, \$16,910 for a two-person 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.

Federal Poverty Guidelines, 2019

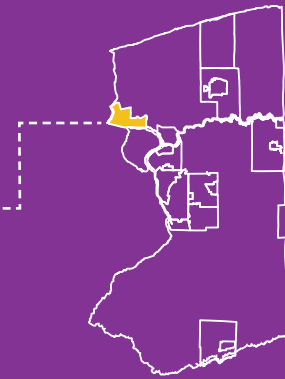
■ Federal Poverty Level ■ 200% of Federal Poverty Level



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Reports for this Community

This report is part of a comprehensive suite of reports for the **City of Niagara Falls**, 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 Residents

This report, *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.



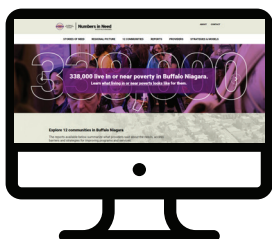
Insights from Providers

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.



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.

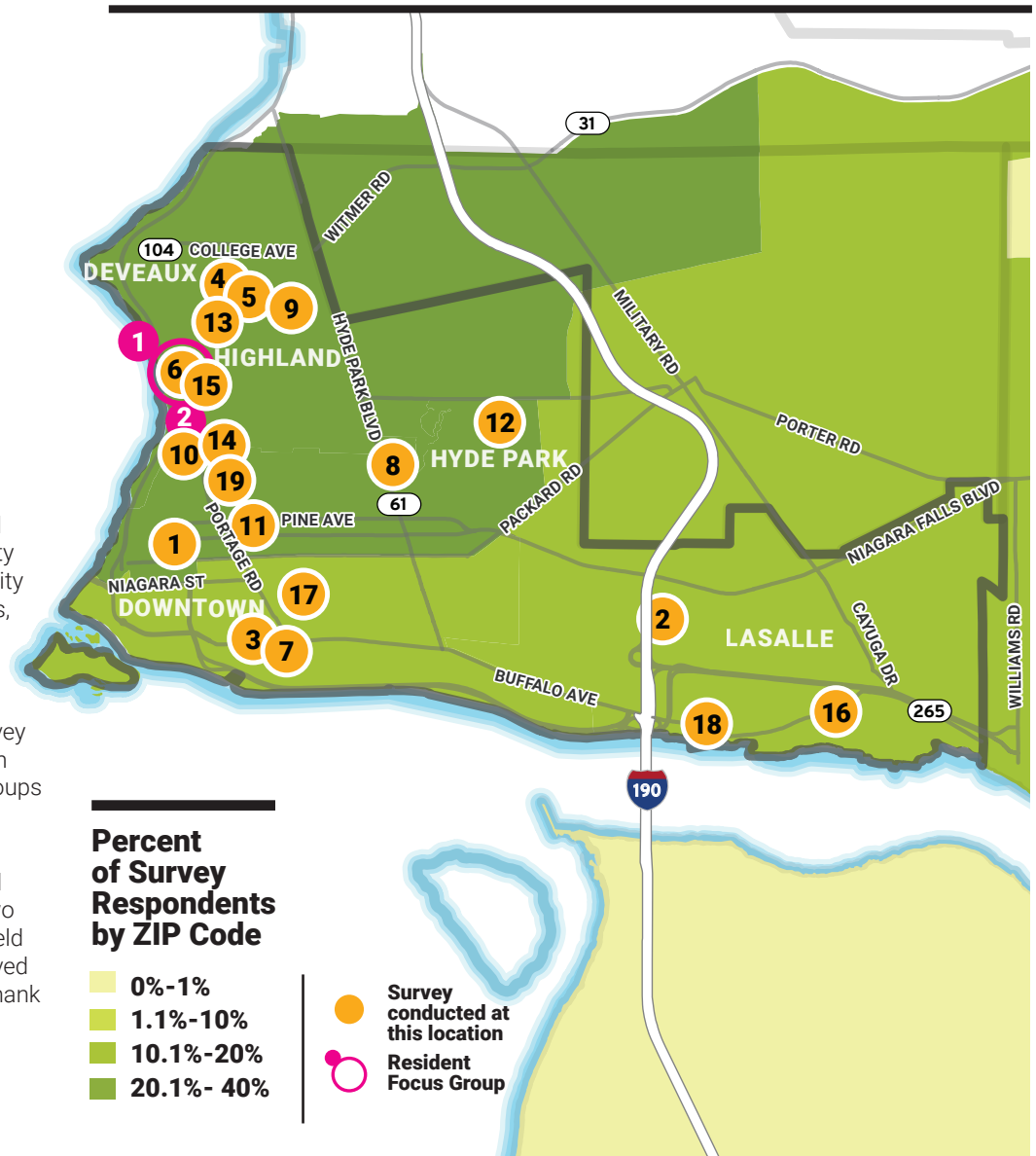
About the Resident Survey and Conversations

Exactly 332 residents from the community and users of community services completed a two-page, 28 question survey over a three month period in mid 2019.

To ensure representative input from those living in or near poverty in the community, surveys were conducted at 23 locations across the community including libraries, schools, community centers, senior centers, food pantries, housing sites and more.

The resident survey was available in Spanish and Arabic, in addition to English. An online version of the survey was also made available beginning in March and shared by community groups through email and social media.

To better understand the challenges identified by survey respondents and formulate priorities and solutions, two one-hour long conversations were held with 17 residents. Participants received a \$10 gift card as an incentive and thank you for participating.



Resident Surveys were conducted at 23 locations

1	Carolyn's House
2	Cataract Elementary Veggie Van
3	Community Missions of Niagara Frontier, Inc.
4	Doris W. Jones Family Resource Building
5	Harry S. Jordan Gardens
6	Heart, Love & Soul
7	Isaiah 61
8	John A. Duke Senior Center Veggie Van
9	Henry J. Kafas Elementary School Veggie Van
10	Niagara Community Action Program
11	Niagara Falls Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative

12	Niagara Falls High School Health Fair
13	Niagara Falls Housing Authority
14	Niagara Falls Public Library Veggie Van
15	Project Connect Niagara
16	St John de LaSalle Community Care
17	The Magdalene Project
18	The Salvation Army of Niagara Falls

Not mapped

19	WorkSourceOne - Trott Location
20	Niagara Falls City School District Events
21	Niagara County Fair
22	Veterans One-Stop Center of Western New York
23	North Tonawanda Summer Blast Off Event at Payne Park

Resident Focus Groups were held at 2 locations

1	Heart, Love & Soul
2	The Connection

About the Residents who took the Survey

Residents facing challenges in Niagara Falls come from a diverse range of backgrounds. Surveyors made every effort to attain a representative sample of the target population. Nevertheless, older residents, women, and black residents are overrepresented in this sample. Households without children are also more prevalent in this sample.

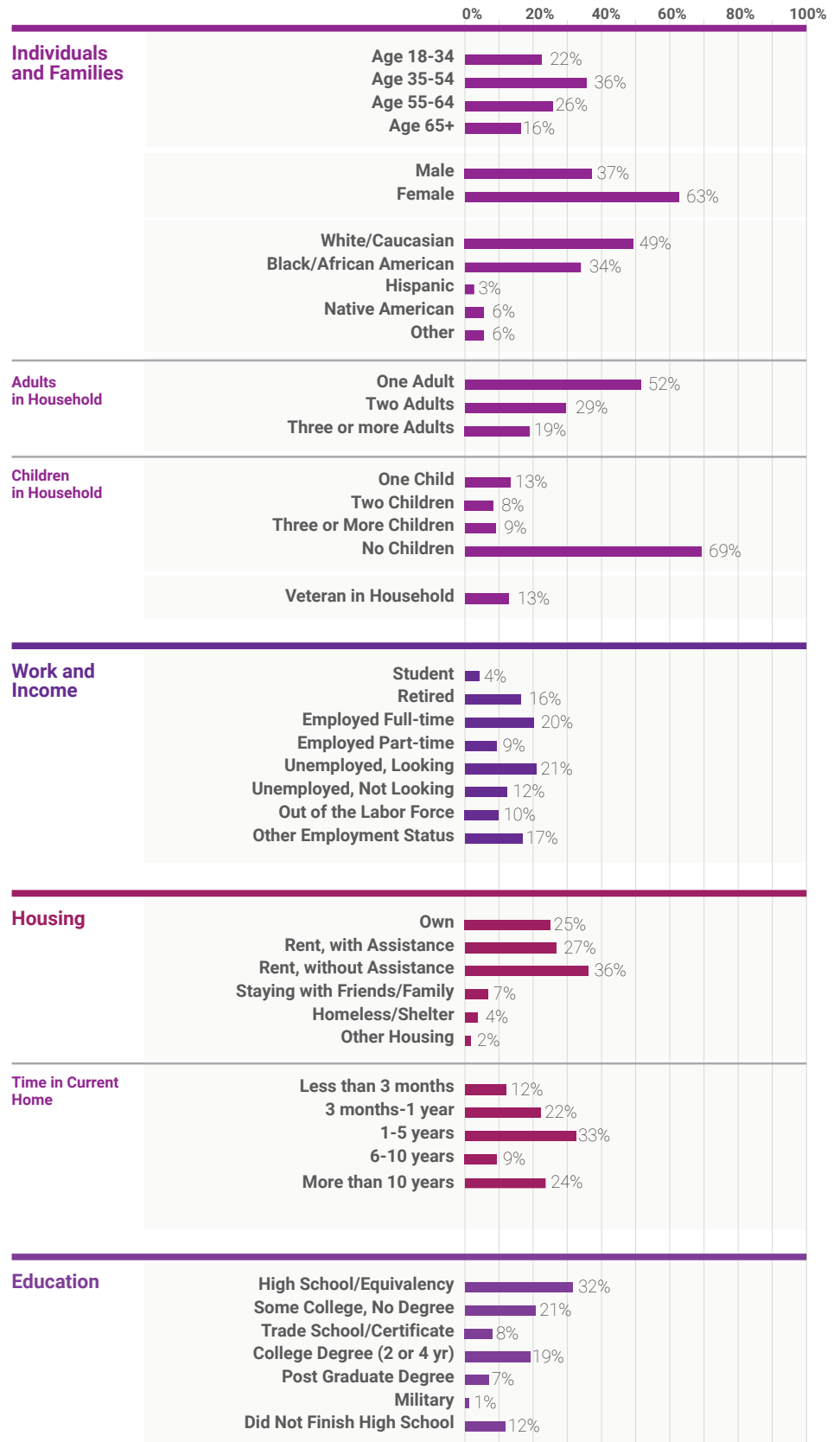
About one in five respondents is employed full time, and just as many are unemployed but currently looking for a job. Almost 40% of respondents are out of the labor force. This includes retired individuals and those who say they are unemployed and not looking for work. A third of respondents have no training or education beyond high school, and one in five started college but didn't finish it.

Although a quarter of respondents are homeowners, a majority rent their home. Less than half of these renters receive housing cost assistance.

Respondents are both long-time residents and people who have recently moved and may be new to the community. About a third moved to their current residence within the last year, while another third has lived in the same place for more than five years.



332 Residents took the survey



Key Findings from Resident Surveys and Conversations



Transportation in the community is inadequate.

Programs, services, and jobs are only effective if the people who need them most can get to them. The most common barrier to services among survey respondents is difficulty traveling to them. More respondents say they walk or bike as their primary transportation mode than those who drive, and far fewer use the bus to get around. Respondents who said they've used the bus say it takes too long to get to destinations, and service is not provided where or when they need it. Those with cars face repairs they can't afford and failed vehicle inspections.

Focus group participants echo the findings of the survey; many described how difficult it can be to reach jobs or healthcare providers outside the immediate city without a car.

Residents face a shortage of money for necessities which may lead to outstanding debts.

Survey responses show that some of residents' biggest concerns are not having enough money for food, utilities, housing costs, and childcare. But above all of those, respondents are challenged by factors such as low incomes and outstanding debt.

About half of respondents reported having a financial issue. Almost 40% of those face either consumer/credit card debt, or student loans. A third said they have outstanding medical bills.

Respondents likely have a hard time paying these expenses and debts with low incomes. Over half of respondent households earn less than \$15,000 per year (\$1,250 per month), and only a third of respondents have income from employment. This means that residents are relying on other fixed sources of income from social security programs and retirement just to get by.

Many residents receive assistance, but their need is still great.

About three quarters of respondents said they receive assistance from some kind of program. Such high percentages of respondents receiving assistance and also experiencing financial challenges may indicate that existing programs and services are simply not enough. Barriers to self-sufficiency include unemployment, low income, and disabilities that prevent people from working or furthering their education.

One of the top barriers faced by respondents seeking assistance is being turned away because of income limits. Even though 57% of respondents qualify for Medicaid, income thresholds for programs and services can disqualify residents from receiving additional help regardless of legitimate need.

Youth are the future of Niagara Falls, but they don't have the supports needed to succeed.

Resident focus group participants strongly advocated for improved and expanded youth services in Niagara Falls. Adults suggested that the young people living in Niagara Falls today could be the generation that turns the city around. But to do so, residents say that kids need leadership skills. They need to be guided away from negative influences like violence and drugs, and given the tools they need to be successful. At the same time, residents recognized the need to make Niagara Falls a place worth staying in or coming back to for youth.

Young focus group participants articulately explained that there aren't many opportunities for young people to be engaged or focused in positive ways outside of sports. They believe the key to changing the future of the city's youth is investing in programs that give kids a chance to explore hobbies, higher education, career paths, creative recreation and artistic outlets, all under the guidance of people who genuinely care for their well-being. Investing in people and places that give kids hope for the future and the tools to turn that hope into action is one way to ensure youth stay on a positive path to success.

Urgent Concerns, Special Needs and Barriers for Residents

Two in five respondents has an urgent concern. Residents primarily say they are worried about issues related to lack of money for food or utilities. These challenges may be part of the reason why outstanding debt is the number one concern among respondents.

More than a quarter of respondents reported facing some kind of barrier in accessing needed services. More than half of those who experienced a barrier said they were turned away because they did not meet the income criteria for assistance, **which indicates that simply having a certain income does not always negate the need for help.** Difficulty traveling to service providers is also a common barrier.

TRENDS

In 2014, one in two residents reported difficulty getting services. Today, this has significantly improved to one in four. However, the challenges faced are still similar. In 2014, income limits and difficulty traveling were the top barriers faced by respondents.

The landscape of residents with urgent concerns has not changed much since the 2014 survey; about the same proportion of respondents had an urgent concern then as today. However, a smaller proportion of residents are concerned with foreclosure/eviction today than in 2014, but not having enough money for food or utility bills remain top concerns.

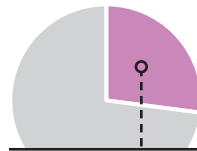


40%

REPORTED HAVING SOME TYPE OF URGENT CONCERN

TOP URGENT CONCERNS REPORTED BY THESE RESIDENTS

Outstanding Debt	38%
No Money for Food	31%
Utility Shut-off	29%
Legal Problems	20%
Other	16%
Cost/Availability of child care	10%
Foreclosure/Eviction	8%
Hurt or Threatened at home	4%



27%

REPORTED A BARRIER OR DIFFICULTY GETTING SERVICE



BARRIERS THESE RESPONDENTS FACE



55%

Turned away because income exceeds eligibility limits



55%

Difficulty traveling



36%

Other



25%

The process is confusing and it's too much of a hassle



24%

Physically difficult to leave my home



22%

Limited internet access

Detailed Findings: Disabilities and Health Care Access

More than half of respondents said that they or someone in their household is disabled. Out of that group, the vast majority say that the disability limits that person's ability to go to work or school. Most disabilities are related to physical ability and mental health.

While most children have some kind of health insurance, more than one in ten adults do not. Most respondents have some kind of public insurance through Medicaid or Medicare.

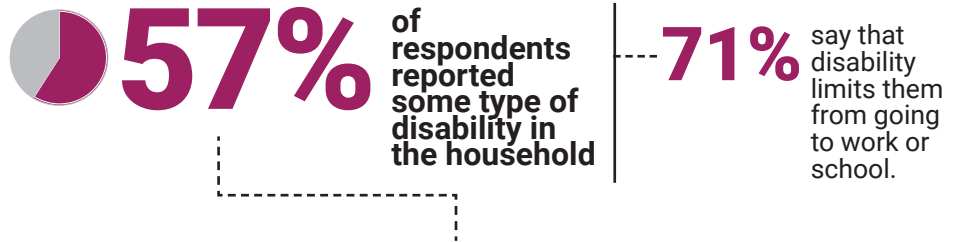
However, the survey also shows that simply having insurance isn't enough for many people. Even though most respondents are covered by insurance, two in five said they need some kind of healthcare that they can't afford. Respondents reported needing dental care, medical-related transportation, prescriptions, optical care, and other healthcare services they cannot afford.

TRENDS

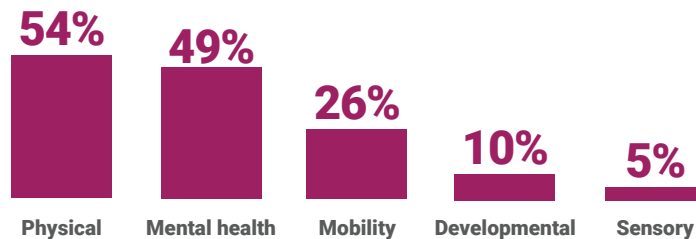
In 2014, about one in four respondents said that an adult in their household lacked health insurance. Today, this number has greatly improved to a little more than one in ten. The percentage of respondents with Medicaid or Medicare has also grown significantly, from around 65% in 2014 to 84% today.



DISABILITIES IN HOUSEHOLDS



TYPE OF DISABILITIES REPORTED IN THESE HOUSEHOLDS



HEALTHCARE

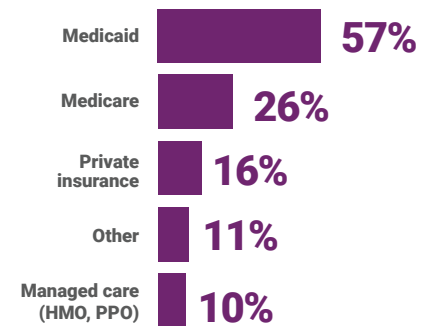
Lack of health insurance among...

13% Adults

3% Children

Most children in respondent households have health insurance. More than one in ten adults in respondent households lacks health insurance. Strategies creating better awareness of health insurance options, or that decrease the cost of health insurance could help shrink this gap.

Top 5 Types of Health Insurance Coverage Used Among Respondents



39% of respondents were in need of some type of healthcare but can't afford it.

Though a large majority of respondents have insurance, many still have medical needs they can't afford. Services not covered under many insurance plans, such as dental and optical care, or prescription medicine, can be too costly, even if these services are necessary.



Detailed Findings: Transportation

The way in which residents get around and the associated challenges of these modes of traveling affect how easy it is for people to reach services, jobs, stores, school, recreation and more.

Respondents commonly walk or bike, and almost as many drive their own car. More people rely on family and friends than use public transit, possibly due to issues that make public transit inconvenient or not practical. Car owners face challenges too, including expensive repairs and keeping up with inspections, registrations, and insurance.

TRENDS

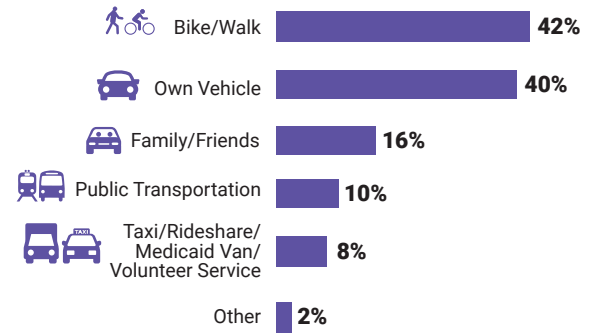
Not much has changed since 2014 when it comes to how respondents go places. The percentage of respondents who bike/walk and drive is almost the same. Use of public transportation is less common now (10%) than it was in 2014 (17%), although this may be a side effect of significant route eliminations in the past few years. In 2014, the most common reason residents didn't take public transit was that it was too expensive, something that is still an issue today but to a lesser extent compared to other issues.



TRANSPORTATION

Survey respondents most commonly get around by biking or walking, although within that group, most people walk. Driving is the next most common method of transportation. Only one in ten respondents uses public transportation, a proportion smaller than those who rely on friends and family, an indication that public transit may not be a viable or convenient option for many residents.

How respondents get around

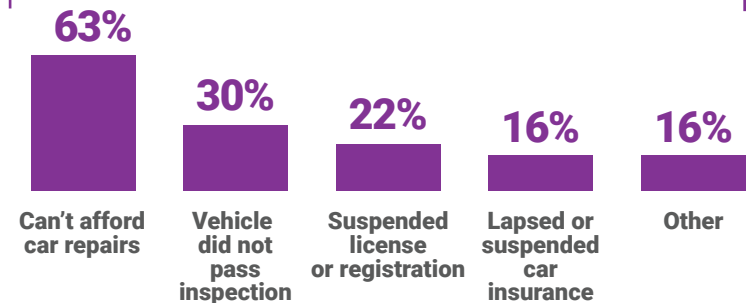


Although only 10% of respondents say public transit is their primary form of transportation, nearly half of respondents say they have used public transit and experienced some kind of issue. Most of these issues relate to inconvenience, impracticality, and the costs of using transit.

Top reasons respondents don't take public transportation more often

- #1 Takes too long to get to places
- #2 No service to destination
- #3 Buses don't run often enough
- #4 Too expensive
- #5 No weekend/evening services

24% of respondents reported owning a vehicle and having the following issues



Even though people who drive may find the experience more convenient and practical than other ways of traveling, owning a car comes with its own challenges. A quarter of respondents say they own a vehicle and experienced some kind of issue with it. A majority of those with issues identified car repairs they can't afford, which may also explain why a third of those with issues say their vehicle didn't pass inspection.

Detailed Findings: Finances and Assets

Respondents commonly reported low incomes, predominantly from sources other than employment. These sources of income may not be sufficient in providing the bare necessities for households, as many are dealing with stressful financial situations like debt and medical bills. Many respondents feel that if they were struck with a \$500 emergency, they wouldn't be able to handle it.

TRENDS



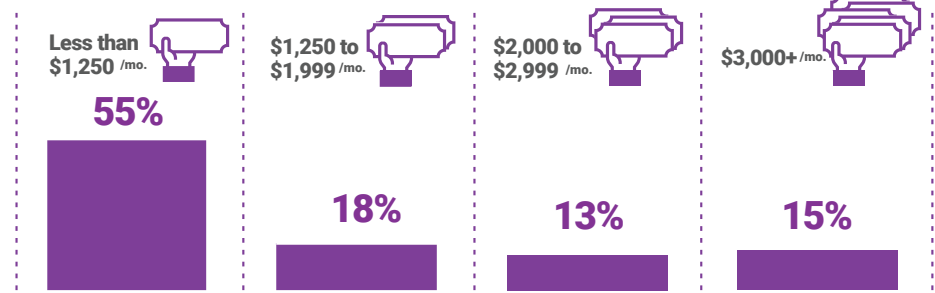
Compared to 2014, employment situations have not changed drastically. Similar percentages of respondents are employed full time and part time. A slightly smaller percentage of respondents say they are unemployed than in 2014 (33% vs. 37%).

Incomes appear to have improved slightly, with a smaller percentage of residents making less than \$1,250 per month today than in 2014 (55% vs. 71%). However, this does not consider other factors like inflation and the rising cost of living, as that money is worth less today than in 2014.

FINANCES AND ASSETS

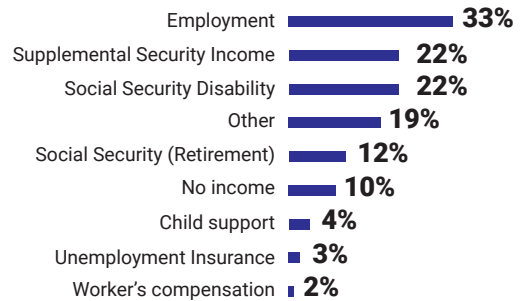
A majority of respondents make less than \$15,000 per year, which is just above the Federal Poverty Line for a one-person household and just below the poverty level for a two-person household.

Household Income, 2019

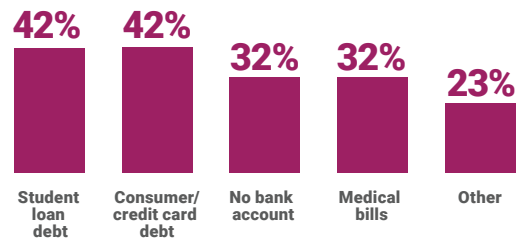


Employment is the most common form of income. Although 84% of respondents are working age (18-64) only 32% of respondents receive income from employment. Other common income sources include Social Security and Supplemental Security Income. One in ten respondents has no income at all.

Sources of Household Income



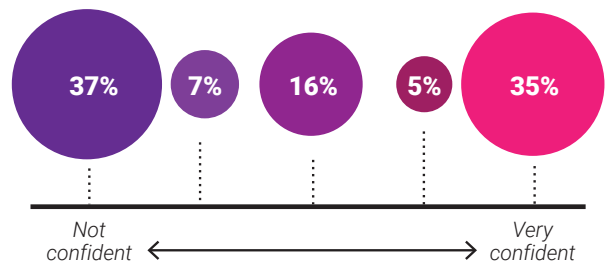
Top 5 Financial Challenges Households Experience



With low incomes and employment, it's no surprise that half of respondents are dealing with some kind of financial challenge. Respondents have debt from student loans, consumer/credit card accounts, and medical bills. Many do not have a bank account, which makes saving money for the future more difficult.

Being able to handle a financial emergency may indicate if respondents have been able to set money aside for a rainy day, or if they have a safety-net among friends and family. More than a third of respondents are not confident at all in their ability to deal with a \$500 emergency.

Confidence to Handle a \$500 Emergency



Detailed Findings: Programs, Services and Supports

Surveys indicate that respondents have a lot of need, but also that most respondents are getting assistance in some form. The fact that so many are in need while also receiving assistance may indicate that programs and services are not adequate enough to meet all household needs.

Three quarters of respondents are getting some kind of help, while about a fifth are waiting for approval from an assistance program. Programs and services most frequently used are related to food, health, and utility costs.

TRENDS

The percentage of respondents receiving assistance is nearly identical to 2014, but the percentage of respondents with pending applications doubled from 2014 to today.

Food stamps/SNAP is still the top assistance program among respondents, but a larger portion of respondents are receiving this type of assistance today. In 2014, about half of respondents received rental assistance, but today only about a quarter get help with rent. A larger portion of respondents have Medicaid than in 2014.

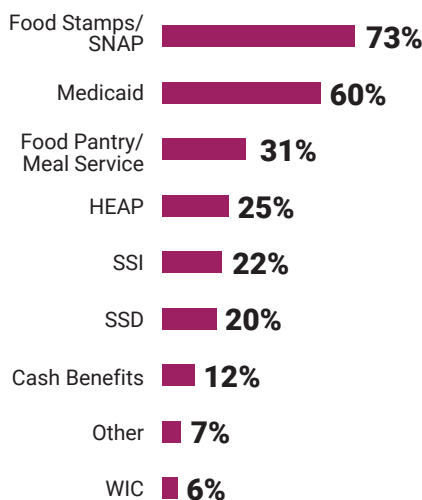


HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING SERVICES THROUGH PROGRAMS

Nearly three quarters of respondent households receive assistance from some kind of program. Most frequently, respondents said they get help with the cost of food, healthcare, and utilities.

74% of households receive one or more services

Types of Services Received

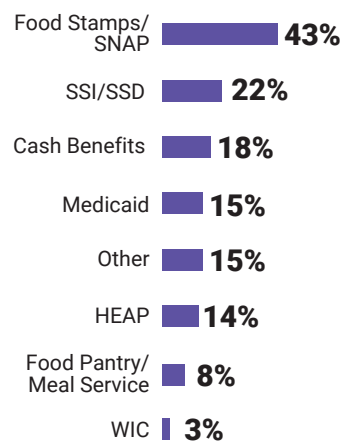


HOUSEHOLDS WITH PENDING APPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS

Far fewer respondent households currently have pending applications for programs. Food assistance is still the top priority, but applications for direct financial assistance through SSI/SSD and cash benefits are also common.

22% of households have pending applications for assistance programs

Types of Services Pending



During resident focus groups, participants completed a brief exercise where they chose the programs and services they felt were strongest in the community, and those they believed need the most improvement.

Programs/services residents felt were the strongest typically related to services provided by the locations in which focus groups were conducted. But both groups agreed there is a dearth of mental health and addiction programs, things for youth to do, and assistance for seniors in the community.

Programs/services residents identified as...

...the strongest

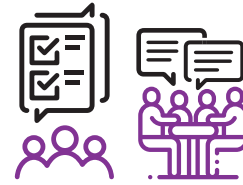
- #1 Food
- #2 Health/Wellness
- #3 Clothing
- #4 Education/Training

...in need of improvement

- #1 Mental Health/Addictions
- #2 Youth Programs
- #3 Legal
- #4 Senior Programs

Perspectives from Residents

While survey responses help us understand broader trends occurring within the community, focus groups supplement survey findings by capturing deeper, more personal reflections on the lives of residents. During two meetings held in different locations in the community, 17 residents shared their insights during hour-long conversations. They talked about strengths of the community, challenges residents face, and ideas for how residents would improve their community.



Strengths and Assets of the Community

There is a strong sense of community in Niagara Falls. Several youth talked about how the city is small, and everyone knows each other. While one resident said this was a detriment, some others said that it contributes to a sense of community.

Some of the city's service providers are invaluable to residents. Younger and older residents alike said that some of the service providers in Niagara Falls play an important role in supporting residents' well-being, including the Social Services Department; Heart, Love, & Soul; Doris W. Jones Family Resource Building; The Connection; and various health facilities.

Niagara Falls is diverse in culture, ethnicity, and race. Many participants said the city's diversity makes it a good place to live. Residents and visitors from around the world make Niagara Falls a more interesting place to live.

Niagara Falls has a rich history. Though small, the city has produced notable figures and technological advances throughout history, played an important role in the Underground Railroad, and hosts one of the natural wonders of the world. The area is also significant in its role in Native American history.

New York State is making much needed investment in attractions and infrastructure in and near Niagara Falls State Park. Residents in the focus group see investments as key to bringing more people to Niagara Falls to support the tourism economy, as well as improving the quality of life for residents.

Healthcare facilities in Niagara Falls are an important asset. Residents named places like the Heart Center of Niagara, Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, Golisano Center for Community Health, Community Health Center of Niagara and others as places where residents can receive quality healthcare.

Challenges in the Community

Niagara Falls does not offer enough opportunity for youth. Perhaps the biggest commonality between the youth and adult focus groups was that Niagara Falls lacks opportunity for young people. Many felt that there are not enough supports to keep kids away from negative activities involving drug abuse, violence, teen pregnancy, and others. Others said kids turn to those things because they don't have positive outlets or things to do, and there isn't enough guidance from teachers, counselors, and parents. Some adult participants said that kids don't see enough opportunity in Niagara Falls, so those who leave for college rarely return. But adults also felt that youth were the best hope for the city's future, expressing the importance of making Niagara Falls more appealing for young people, encouraging them to stay and improve the city.

Getting a good-paying job is difficult. Older residents in one focus group reminisced about the Niagara Falls they grew up in, where jobs were plentiful, commercial districts were vibrant and full of people visiting, shopping, and dining at locally-owned establishments. These residents see the lack of good-paying jobs as the main reason why the Niagara Falls of the past no longer exists. They say there simply are not enough good-paying jobs available anymore. Although some services will help you find a job, it can still be tough to find one that pays the bills. Young residents said that even though they were employed, it was really tough to find a job, and without the guidance of The Connection, they might not have been able to get the job they have.

Inadequate transportation is a barrier to jobs and services. According to focus group participants, one of the biggest reasons it's hard to find a good job is poor transportation options. Many residents face a catch-22; they can't afford a car because they don't have a good-paying job, but they can't get to a good-paying job because they don't have reliable transportation. Those without cars face difficulty getting to jobs, services, and education. A participant in the youth focus group mentioned that many youth work at the mall, but buses don't run to the mall early enough on Sundays for people to arrive on time for the opening shift. Other participants talked about how buses are infrequent or don't have reliable service to enough locations. Some described how it can be very difficult to get to Buffalo for certain services or employment.

Challenges in the Community, cont'd.

The city's infrastructure is in dire need of repair. Residents discussed how a lot of the city's streets are full of potholes, sidewalks are crumbling, and properties are not maintained. Some residents feel that for the amount of taxes they pay, the city should do more to improve the infrastructure in the community.

Housing is expensive and poor quality. Despite the fact that it is losing population, Niagara Falls is a city where many residents say rents are not affordable, and landlords ask for first and last month's rent plus a security deposit to move in. Residents say that people can't afford to buy homes, let alone rent. Some focus group participants noted how programs such as Habitat for Humanity are helping to create affordable homes in Niagara Falls, but that these programs should be bolstered to better meet needs.

Crime and drug abuse are common. Several participants talked about violent crime being prevalent in Niagara Falls, especially among younger adults. Both focus groups said better guidance and things to do for youth could help keep kids away from drama and violence. Drug and alcohol abuse is also common in the community according to participants. Residents in the focus groups said that young people get caught up in drugs as an easy way to make quick money. Others noted how grandparents end up raising their grandchildren, because parents are caught up in alcohol and drug abuse. A few residents also talked about how there are a lot of sex offenders living in the community, which makes them worry about the safety of children in the city.

Ideas for Change in the Community

Find ways to get more people involved in their community.

Some young focus group participants feel that a lot of community members complain about all the things wrong with Niagara Falls, but few are actually involved in ways that would help improve the community. Some youth said they see apathy in their schools among some teachers and counselors who either don't push students to their potential, or may actively discourage students from dreaming big. Older residents said they wished the government was more actively trying to improve the community. One resident suggested these challenges could be solved by having more conversations between community groups, block clubs, residents, and government leadership to talk about the issues residents face. Some participants cited how successful Buffalo has been in recent years, and lamented that if Niagara Falls had leadership like Buffalo, the city's situation would be much better.

Improve the supports and opportunities for young people in Niagara Falls.

Most participants agree that Niagara Falls desperately needs more support for youth, and they offered a broad range of ways to achieve that goal. These ideas include increased funding for youth programs in schools and at Boys & Girls Club, increasing participation in and support for scouting programs, funding for YMCAs, building a new youth-focused community center, expanding existing college-prep programs, and funding community organizations that offer services like The Connection, The Casey House, and others.

Increase the diversity of educators, counselors, and service providers to be more representative of the community.

One student in the youth focus group shared that in all of her years as a student up through senior year of high school, she had three teachers who were black, and only four who were people of color. Other youth agreed that teachers at the school were not representative of the student population. Young residents felt that having better representation would help build more empathy between students and teachers, stronger relationships, and trust. They believe that teachers who live in and actively participate in the community that students live in would have a better understanding of the lives of their students.

Open a youth center with recreation, guidance, arts, technology, and more.

According to the focus groups, one way to better support youth is through a new youth center that offers recreation, guidance, help with school, art and media programs, technology, and other activities that could help kids escape and release the negative energy in their lives.

Create or expand programs that offer people a second chance.

Among the adult focus group, residents talked about the importance of guiding community members who are returning to society after getting out of jail. Without the right support, former inmates may fall back into old habits and end up back in jail. Residents said that some people want to change but don't know how to reintegrate into society and revert back to the life that resulted in their incarceration.

Leah

After her recovery from addiction, an older resident seeks new opportunities through job training and shares her story to help others.

Today Leah lives in an upstairs apartment not far from the Falls and the Gorge. She is 75 years young. She really likes the location and her apartment with a patio but is less keen on the long staircase leading up to her space. They are challenging but she manages for now. "Once I'm up, I'm up, when I'm down, I'm down."

Leah shared her story while riding the bus across town. A lifelong resident of Niagara Falls, she has children and extended family in the area, not to mention long-time friends. "I have a very good support team." Leah describes one friend in particular who has been in her life, through thick and thin, since they were 12 years old. "I'm so thankful to God for people like that in my life. I have several people I can say that about. I'm blessed, all the way around, I'm just truly blessed."

Leah has much to be thankful for, but her life has had its ups and downs. Not long ago Leah lost nearly everything to drugs and addiction. It pulled her in slowly, over years, and away from the things that mattered most. It came to a head after she retired, when the kids were grown and her life was less structured. "It's a very important thing, to keep myself busy, doing positive and constructive things in my life. Before I got into drugs, that's what helped me a lot... before I entered this world of darkness."



As a younger, single mother Leah was busier than most, balancing work and child rearing. She started her career in health care but she left when a job opened up at the largest manufacturing plant in town. Back in the day, it employed nearly a fifth of workers in Niagara Falls. "[N]urses got part of their pay in gratitude, but it's hard put gratitude on the table for a meal," Leah states in explaining why she jumped at the chance for the job in manufacturing.

Today Leah is exploring ways to help those in addictions recovery and encourage them through her story. Her time battling addiction included a run-in with the law, a stint in rehab, over a year in transitional housing, Narcotics Anonymous meetings, counseling, meals at Heart, Love and Soul, church groups, and her faith in God. "God is good. He is my life."

Leah speaks highly of the supports available through Access-VR (formerly VESID). They help individuals find a job. They pay for training. They cover the cost of uniforms and a monthly bus pass. "It's a great program," explains Leah. "But you have to put the work in. You have to do a lot of footwork. You have to be fully committed to getting your life back together." Leah learned the training she seeks is available Lockport. "I don't mind taking the bus. It takes a little longer on the bus but anything worth having is worth fighting for."

Reflecting back on her experience and the wide range of programs that supported her recovery, Leah says, "It's so hard to pull yourself up. It took a lot of courage...Coming out of treatment and away from addiction, we tend to think we are ready to try our wings long before we are...It's a whole new life [that I have now]. I'm so grateful."

Maurice

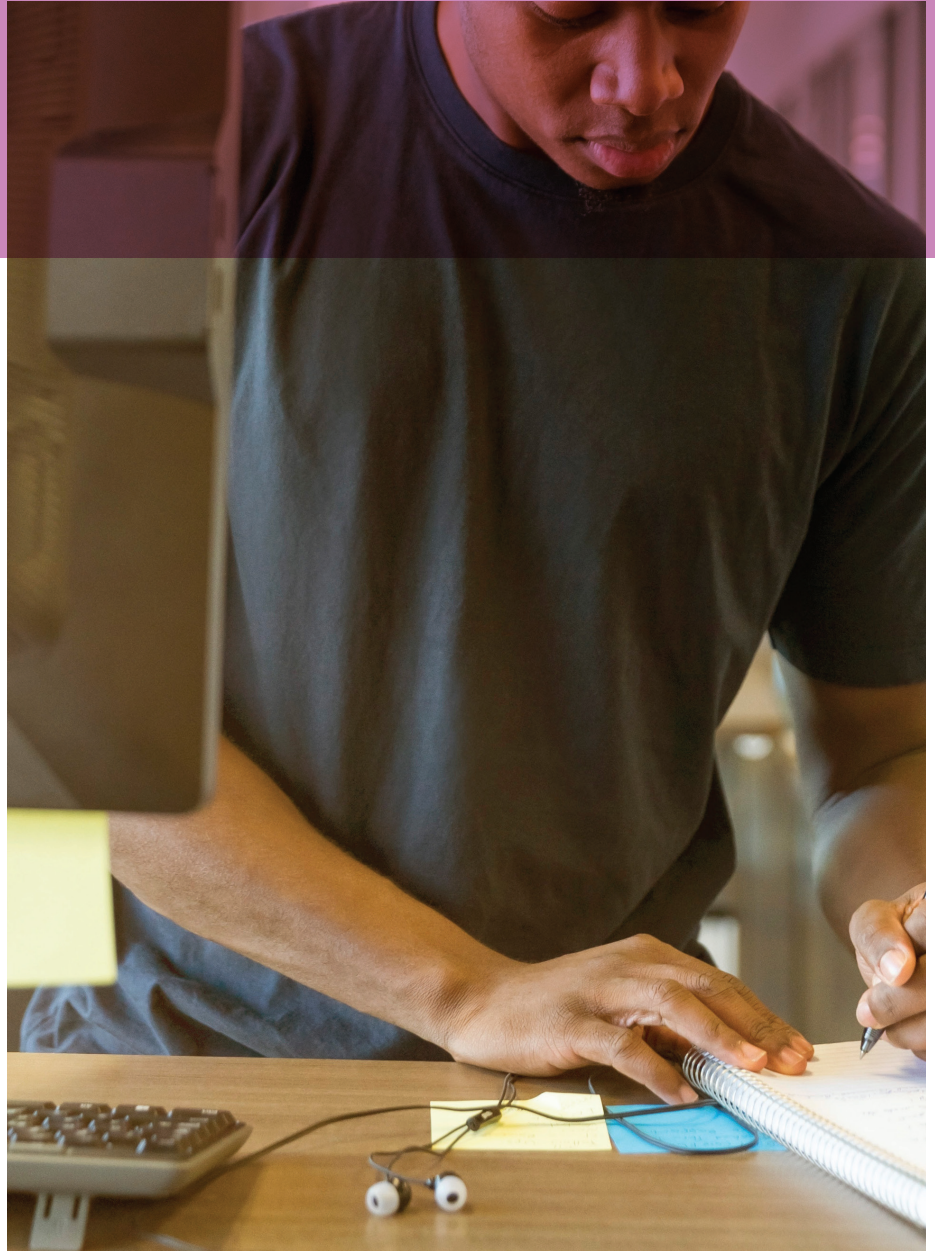
Despite challenges, a young student works towards a better future for himself.

Maurice is a 17 year-old senior at Niagara Falls High School. He aspires to go to college after graduation, but feels as though he does not have the support he needs to get there. Growing up in Niagara Falls, opportunities for exploring careers, cultivating interests, and trying hobbies were scarce.

Maurice feels there is no positive motivation from adults. "I know what I want to do, but I don't know what I want to do. I wanted to be a history professor but a lot of people told me that's not realistic." Maurice suggests that schools could have a more diverse teaching staff and organize more inclusive college fairs and career planning programs so that youth can develop ideas of what they want to do in the future.

Sometimes school has been hard for Maurice, especially when things aren't going well at home. Many of his teachers don't seem to understand or care about the challenges that Maurice is dealing with outside of school. His mom is disabled and can't work, but has had issues getting assistance through certain programs. Money is tight. Although the landlord hasn't maintained their home in years, they still pay a lot in rent. Maurice even has friends whose family was recently evicted.

Along with a need for more support and career guidance, Maurice says that youth in Niagara Falls need more creative outlets outside of school. Maurice doesn't see



anywhere for youth to be expressive. "There's just a park and a basketball court but not everybody plays basketball." There are some programs for youth, such as The Casey House and The Connection, but not many that give kids a positive outlet. "You'll have fun with your friends, but in most situations it's the wrong kind of fun, and we're labeled as bad kids." Other programs,

like Cribs, have closed down due to lack of funding. The young resident suggests that one of the best ways for the city to address this problem of limited youth spaces is by purchasing city property that has been lying vacant and converting the abandoned buildings into youth centers or other spaces that youth could utilize as safe spaces.

Data Sources & Notes

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).

Resident Survey

The resident survey was conducted from April 2019 through July 2019. Surveys were gathered at various sites across the community, all of which are listed on page four. Surveys at these locations were completed in person, administered by a Mobile Safety-Net Team Community Impact Coordinator or an agency staff member. The survey was made available in English, Spanish and Arabic. Twenty three online surveys were also completed, with a link to the survey distributed through partner agencies in the community through email and/or social media.

The analysis of the 332 responses included standardizing open ended responses and cleaning data for accuracy. Not all surveys were completed in full, and response rates for questions ranged from 202 responses to question 28 to 331 responses to question one. In cases where percentages are used, these numbers represent the percent of people who answered the question, not the percent of all people who took the survey.

Although some questions asked for respondents to choose one answer, there were several instances where respondents chose multiple responses; in these cases, all answers were included. For instance, respondents could report more than one type of disability, financial challenge, urgent concern, medical need, challenge in owning a vehicle, and barrier to programs and services.

Resident Focus Group

Resident focus groups were held on May 9th, 2019 and August 13th, 2019. Participants were recruited through the resident survey, where respondents could opt to provide contact info if they were interested in participating in a focus group. Additional participants were identified through collaboration with community partners and service providers. The focus group held in August was conducted with the Niagara Falls Youth City Council. Residents who participated in the focus group were given a \$10 gift card to Walmart as appreciation for their time. Public notes were taken during the meeting, then later transcribed.

Detailed Findings: Programs, Services and Supports, Page 10

Programs/services residents identified as strongest and in need of improvement.

Resident focus group participants were asked to identify the strongest types of programs and services in the community as well as the program and service types where need for expansion and/or investment was greatest. Each resident had three yellow dots for placing next to the strongest programs and three blue 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. The top strengths and needs/gaps are those program and service types that generated the largest number of dots from all residents.

Trends: As of December 31, 2018, minimum wage in NYS was \$11.10 per hour. A resident who works 30 hours a week for 4 weeks will earn \$1,356 a month, versus \$960 a month at a wage of \$8.00 per hour, the minimum wage in 2014, when the resident survey was last conducted. Minimum wages are provided by the NYS Department of Labor.

Social Security benefits also get adjusted over time for cost of living changes, The average monthly payment under the Social Security Disability Program was less than \$1,250 in 2014 but is now, in 2019, more than \$1,250 per month, according to average monthly benefit data provided by the Social Security Administration.

Stories of Need

Stories of need reflect the voice and experience of actual residents living in Niagara Falls. Names and other identifying information have been changed to protect the identity and confidentiality of those who were interviewed. Interviews took place in July and August 2019. Interviews were conducted over the telephone and/or in person. Interviewees were recruited from the focus group with residents, or represent individuals who volunteered to share their story. Interview questions explored challenges around topics covered in community reports such as access to jobs, job training, affordable housing, healthy foods, transportation, and other barriers to jobs and services. The are intended to paint a picture of how these challenges play out in the lives of individuals and show how issues are interrelated.

Appendix

Resident Survey - English version

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.**

1 Age _____ 2 Gender _____ 3 Race _____ 4 Zip Code _____ 5 Survey Location _____

6 Including yourself, how many people are in your household?
Adults (18 and up) _____¹ Children (under 18) _____²

7 Has anyone in your household ever served in the armed forces?
 Yes¹ No²

8 What is your current employment status? *Select all that apply.*
 Student¹ Unemployed, not looking⁶
 Retired² Out of the labor force
 Employed full time³ (not working, not looking)⁷
 Employed part time⁴ Other: _____⁸
 Unemployed, looking⁵

9 What is your current living situation?
 Own¹ Staying with friends/family⁴
 Rent, with assistance² Homeless/shelter⁵
 Rent, without assistance³ Other: _____⁶

10 How long have you lived at your current address?
 Less than 3 months¹ 6-10 years⁴
 3 months-1 year² >10 years⁵
 1-5 years³ More than 10 years⁶

11 What is the highest level of education/training you've completed?
 High school/Equivalency¹ Post graduate degree⁵
 Some college, no degree² Military⁶
 Trade School/Certificate³ Did not finish high school⁷
 College degree (2 or 4 yr)⁴

12 Do you or does anyone in your household have any of the following disabilities? *Check all that apply.*
 Mental health¹ Developmental⁴
 Mobility² Sensory⁵
 Physical³ No Disability⁶

13 Do you or does anyone in your household have a disability that limits their ability to work and/or go to school?
 Yes¹ No²

14 What is your primary form of transportation?
 Bicycle¹ Medicaid van⁶
 Family/Friends² Uber/Lyft⁷
 Own Vehicle³ Volunteer service van⁸
 Taxi⁴ Public transportation⁹
 Walk⁵ Other: _____¹⁰

15 If you have ever used public transit, do you regularly encounter any of the following issues? *Select all that apply.*
 Too expensive¹ Service isn't reliable⁸
 Takes too long to get places² I don't feel safe⁹
 No service where I need to go³ Schedule is too confusing¹⁰
 No evening or weekend service⁴ Other: _____¹¹
 No service in my community⁵ None¹²
 Buses don't run often enough⁶ Have not used public transit¹³
 Too long to walk to bus stop⁷

16 If you own a vehicle, have you experienced any of the following over the last year? *Select all that apply.*
 Did not repair my car because I could not afford to¹
 Lapsed or suspended car insurance²
 Suspended license or registration³
 Vehicle did not pass inspection⁴
 Other: _____⁵
 None/Do not own a vehicle⁶

17 What are your household's sources of income? *Select all that apply.*
 Employment¹ Child support⁷
 Unemployment insurance² No income⁸
 SSI³ Other: _____⁹
 SSD⁴
 Social security retirement⁵
 Worker's compensation⁶

18 How much money is currently received from these sources to support your household each month?
 < \$1,250/month¹
 \$1,250-\$1,999/month²
 \$2,000-\$2,999/month³
 \$3,000+/month⁴

19 Are you or is anyone in your household currently receiving (any of the following)? *Select all that apply.*
 Food stamps/SNAP¹ SSI⁶
 Food pantry/meal service² SSD⁷
 Medicaid³ WIC⁸
 Cash benefits⁴ Other: _____⁹
 HEAP⁵ None¹⁰

20 Does anyone in your household have a pending application for any of the following? *Select all that apply.*
 Food stamps/SNAP¹ SSI/SSD⁶
 Food pantry/meal service² WIC⁷
 Medicaid³ Other: _____⁸
 Cash benefits⁴ None⁹
 HEAP⁵

21 Do any of the following financial issues apply to you? *Select all that apply.*
 Consumer/credit card debt¹
 Student loan debt²
 Underwater mortgage (owe more than your house is worth)³
 Unbankable⁴
 No bank account⁵
 Medical bills⁶
 Child support⁷
 Other: _____⁸

22 How confident are you in your ability to deal with a \$500 emergency expense, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means "not confident at all" and 5 means "very confident"? *Circle one.*

1 2 3 4 5
1 = Not confident at all (Expense would be a burden.) 3 = Somewhat confident 5 = Very confident (I could financially manage this expense.)

(Survey questions continue on back side.)

Resident Survey, cont'd. - English version

MOBILE SAFETY-NET TEAM COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT (continued)

23 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

24 If insured, what type of health insurance is currently used by members of your household? *Select all that apply.*

- Private insurance¹
- Managed care (HMO, PPO)²
- Medicare³
- Medicaid⁴
- Government (VA)⁵
- Health Savings Account⁶
- Other _____⁷
- Do not know/Unsure⁸
- No health insurance⁹

25 Over the last year, was there any time when you needed any of the following but did not get it because you could not afford it? *Select all that apply.*

- Health care¹
- Mental health care or counseling²
- Dental care (including checkups)³
- Optical care (including eyeglasses)⁴
- Prescription medicine⁵
- Transportation to doctor appointments or health services⁶
- Other: _____⁷
- None⁸

26 Are there any urgent concerns or special needs that you or someone in your household have? *Select all that apply.*

- Utility shut-off notice¹
- Foreclosure/Eviction²
- No money for food³
- Cost/availability of child care for work⁴
- Legal problems⁵
- Outstanding Debt⁶
- Hurt or threatened at home⁷
- Other: _____⁸
- No urgent concerns⁹

27 Has anyone in your household encountered difficulty getting necessary services (food, housing, utilities, medical care, etc.) over the last year?

- Yes¹
- No²

28 If "yes", describe what barriers were faced. *Select all that apply.*

- Traveling to get services is difficult¹
- I don't speak/read English well²
- I can't get there during 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 since the process is confusing⁶
- Limited Internet access⁷
- Other: _____⁸
- None⁹

OPTIONAL: If you would be interested in participating in a resident focus group, please provide the following:

NAME _____

Phone # _____

Resident Survey - Spanish version

EVALUACIÓN DE NECESIDADES COMUNITARIAS DEL EQUIPO MOBILE SAFETY-NET

Gracias por participar en esta encuesta. Sus respuestas nos ayudarán a comprender mejor las necesidades de la comunidad y nos ayudarán a construir una red de seguridad más sólida que conecte más fácilmente a los residentes con los servicios humanos que necesitan. Por favor seleccione una respuesta a menos que se indique lo contrario. **Sus respuestas serán completamente confidenciales.**

1 Edad _____ 2 Genero _____ 3 Raza _____ 4 Codigo Postal _____ 5 Lugar de encuesta _____

6 Incluyédote, cuántas personas viven en tu hogar?

Adultos (18 y más) _____¹ Niños (menor de 18) _____²

7 ¿Alguien en tu hogar ha servido en las fuerzas armadas?

Sí¹ No²

8 ¿Cuál es tu situación laboral actual? *Marca las que correspondan.*

- Estudiante¹ Desempleado, sin buscar⁶
 Retirado² Fuera del servicio laboral (sin trabajar ni buscar)⁷
 Empleado tiempo completo³ Otro: _____⁸
 Empleado a tiempo parcial⁴ Desempleado, buscando⁵

9 ¿Cuál es tu situación actual de hogar?

- Propietario¹ Viviendo con amigos/familia⁴
 Alquiler, con ayuda² Sin hogar/refugio⁵
 Alquiler, sin ayuda³ Otro: _____⁶

10 ¿Cuánto tiempo llevas viviendo en tu dirección actual?

- Menos de 3 meses¹ 6-10 años⁴
 3 meses—1 año² Más de 10 años⁵
 1-5 años³

11 ¿Cuál es el nivel más alto de educación/estudios que has completado?

- Instituto/Equivalencia¹ Título Universitario (2 o 4 años)⁴
 Algo universitario/sin título² Postgrado⁵
 Escuela Vocacional/Certificado³ Militar⁶
 No terminó el Instituto⁷

12 ¿Tienes tú o alguien en tu hogar alguna de las siguientes discapacidades? *Marca las que correspondan*

- Salud Mental¹ De desarrollo⁴
 Movilidad² Sensorial⁵
 Física³ Sin Discapacidades⁶

13 ¿Tienes tú o alguien en tu hogar alguna discapacidad que le limita para trabajar y/o ir a la escuela?

Sí¹ No²

14 ¿Cuál es tu medio de transporte principal?

- Bicicleta¹ Uber/Lyft⁷
 Familia/Amigos² Servicio voluntario de Furgoneta⁸
 Tengo auto³ Transporte público⁹
 Taxi⁴ Otro: _____¹⁰
 Andando⁵ Furgoneta Medicaid⁶

15 Si alguna vez ha usado transporte público, ¿encuentras algunos de los siguientes problemas? *Marca las que correspondan.*

- Demasiado costoso¹ Servicio no fiable⁸
 Tarda demasiado en llegar² No me siento seguro⁹
 No llega a donde necesito³ Horario muy confuso¹⁰
 No hay servicio de tarde o fin de semana⁴ Otro: _____¹¹
 No hay servicio en mi barrio⁵ Ninguno¹²
 Autobuses no pasan a menudo.⁶ No he usado transporte público¹³
 Mucho recorrido a pie a la parada⁷

16 Si posees un vehículo, ¿has experimentado alguno de los siguientes puntos en el último año?

- No reparé el auto porque no podía pagarlo¹
 Seguro de auto caducado o suspendido²
 Licencia o registro suspendido³
 Vehículo no pasó inspección⁴
 Otro: _____⁵
 Ninguno/No poseo un vehículo⁶

17 ¿Cuáles son las fuentes de ingreso de tu hogar? *Marca las que correspondan.*

- Empleo¹ Compensación al trabajador⁶
 Seguro de desempleo² Manutención de los hijos⁷
 SSI³ Sin ingresos⁸
 SSD⁴ Otro: _____⁹
 Jubilación de la seguridad social⁵

18 ¿Cuánto dinero recibes actualmente de estas fuentes de ingreso al mes?

- < \$1,250/mes¹
 \$1,250-\$1,999/mes²
 \$2,000-\$2,999/mes³
 \$3,000+/mes⁴

19 ¿Estas tú o alguien en tu hogar actualmente recibiendo alguno de los siguientes? *Marca los que correspondan.*

- Food stamps/SNAP¹ HEAP⁵
 Banco de alimentos/servicios de comidas² SSI⁶
 Medicaid³ SSD⁷
 Prestaciones en efectivo⁴ WIC⁸
 Otro: _____⁹
 Ninguno¹⁰

20 ¿Alguien en tu hogar tiene una solicitud pendiente para alguno de los siguientes? *Marca las que correspondan.*

- Food stamps/SNAP¹ SSI/SSD⁶
 Banco de alimentos/servicios de comidas² WIC⁷
 Medicaid³ Otro: _____⁸
 Prestaciones en efectivo⁴ Ninguno⁹
 HEAP⁵

21 ¿Sufres alguno de los siguientes problemas financieros?

- Deuda de consumidor/tarjeta de crédito¹
 Deuda de préstamos estudiantiles²
 Hipoteca submarina (debes más de lo que vale tu casa)³
 No financiable⁴
 Sin cuenta bancaria⁵
 Facturas médicas⁶
 Manutención de los hijos⁷
 Otro: _____⁸

22 ¿Cuánta confianza tienes en poder hacer frente a un gasto de emergencia de \$500, e una escala del 1 al 5, donde 1 significa "nada de confianza" y 5 significa "confianza total"? *Marca uno.*

- 1 2 3 4 5
 1 = Sin confianza en absoluto (el gasto sería una gran carga) 3 = Algo confiado 5 = Muy confiado (Podría manejar el gasto sin problemas)

(La encuesta continua en la parte trasera)

Resident Survey, cont'd. - Spanish version

EVALUACIÓN DE NECESIDADES COMUNITARIAS DEL EQUIPO MOBILE SAFETY-NET (continuación)

23 ¿Alguien en tu hogar carece de seguro médico? *Marca las que correspondan.*

- Si, uno o más adultos no tienen seguro médico¹
- Si, uno o más niños no tienen seguro médico²
- No, todos tenemos seguro médico³

24 Si tienes seguro, ¿qué tipo de seguro médico utilizan los miembros de tu familia actualmente? *Marca las que correspondan.*

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seguro Privado ¹ | <input type="checkbox"/> Gobierno(VA) ⁵ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Atención administrada (HMO, PPO) ² | <input type="checkbox"/> Cuenta de ahorros de salud ⁶ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Medicare ³ | <input type="checkbox"/> Otro _____ ⁷ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Medicaid ⁴ | <input type="checkbox"/> No lo sé/no estoy seguro ⁸ |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Sin seguro médico ⁹ |

25 Durante el último año, ¿has necesitado alguno de los siguientes pero no has podido pagarlo? *Marca las que correspondan.*

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Atención médica ¹ | <input type="checkbox"/> Medicamento con receta ⁵ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Atención de salud mental o asesoramiento ² | <input type="checkbox"/> Transporte a citas médicas o servicios de salud ⁶ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Atención dental (incluidos chequeos) ³ | <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: _____ ⁷ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Atención óptica (incluidas gafas) ⁴ | <input type="checkbox"/> Ninguno ⁸ |

26 ¿Hay alguna preocupación o necesidad urgente que tengas tú o alguien de tu hogar? *Marca las que correspondan.*

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Notificación de corte de servicios (agua, gas, etc) ¹ | <input type="checkbox"/> Problemas legales ⁵ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ejecución hipotecaria/Desalojo ² | <input type="checkbox"/> Deudas pendientes ⁶ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sin dinero para comida ³ | <input type="checkbox"/> Herido o amenazado en casa ⁷ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coste/disponibilidad de cuidado infantil para trabajar ⁴ | <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: _____ ⁸ |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Sin preocupaciones urgentes ⁹ |

27 ¿Alguien en tu hogar ha tenido dificultades para obtener servicios necesarios (comida, vivienda, servicios públicos, atención médica, etc) durante el último año?

- Sí¹ No²

28 Si la respuesta es "Sí", describe a que barreras se enfrentaron. *Marca las que correspondan.*

- Viajar para obtener servicios es difícil.¹
- No hablo/leo Inglés bien²
- No puedo llegar durante las horas en que la agencia está abierta³
- Me han rechazado por mis ingresos limitados⁴
- Puede ser físicamente complicado salir de mi hogar⁵
- Es demasiado complicado porque el proceso es confuso⁶
- Acceso a internet limitado⁷
- Otro: _____⁸
- None⁹

OPCIONAL: Si estás interesado en participar en un grupo focal de residentes, proporcione los siguientes datos:

NOMBRE _____

Teléfono# _____

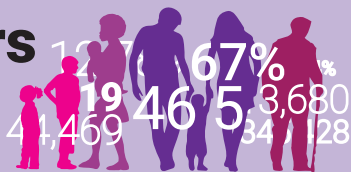
INSIGHTS FROM RESIDENTS

City of Niagara Falls

OCTOBER 2019

Numbers in Need

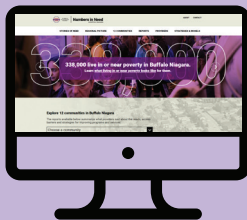
IN BUFFALO NIAGARA



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



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NumbersInNeed.org