

COMMUNITY

SNAPSHOT

54,000+

live in or near  
poverty

CITY OF  
**Buffalo**  
(West of Main St)

SEPTEMBER 2019

Since 2011,  
**poverty has**  
**increased by less**  
**than 1%, while**  
**total population**  
**has held steady.**



**Numbers  
in Need**

IN BUFFALO NIAGARA



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



Prepared by



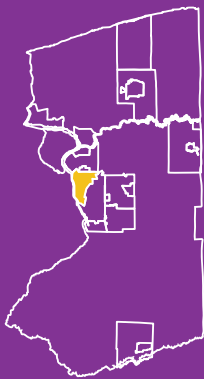
University at Buffalo

Regional Institute

School of Architecture and Planning

## City of Buffalo (West of Main St)

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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](http://NumbersInNeed.org)**

### About this Report

This report offers a snapshot of findings for the City of Buffalo (west 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.

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

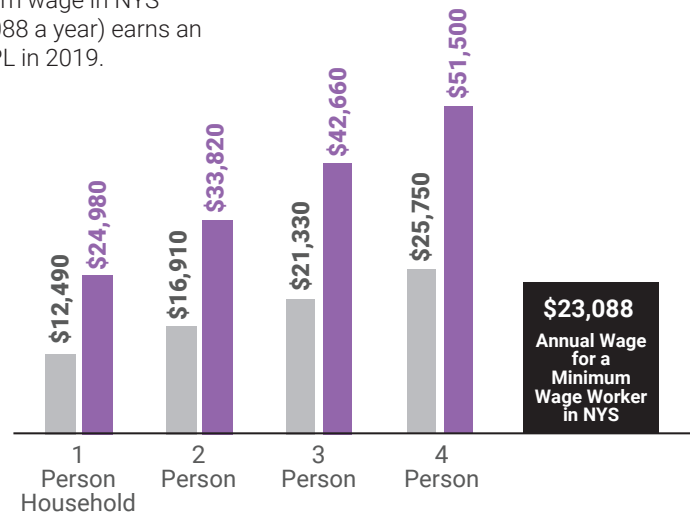
Over 54,000 residents west of Main Street in the City of Buffalo live in or near poverty with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line.

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

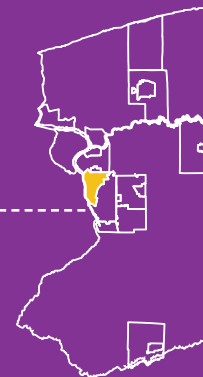
 Federal Poverty Level  200% of Federal Poverty Level



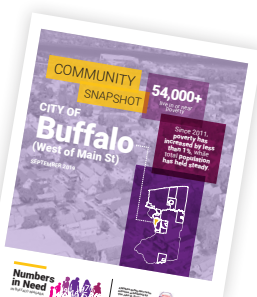
Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

## Reports for this Community

This report is part of a comprehensive suite of reports for the **City of Buffalo (West 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](https://NumbersInNeed.org)



### Community Snapshot

This report, **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.



### 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.

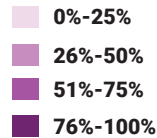


### Visit us online at [NumbersInNeed.org](https://NumbersInNeed.org)

**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.

## Population In or Near Poverty Across Buffalo (West of Main St)

Population In or Near Poverty, 2017



Among the total population of 117,906

29% ARE IN POVERTY

**33,040**

live on incomes below the federal poverty level.



19% ARE NEAR POVERTY

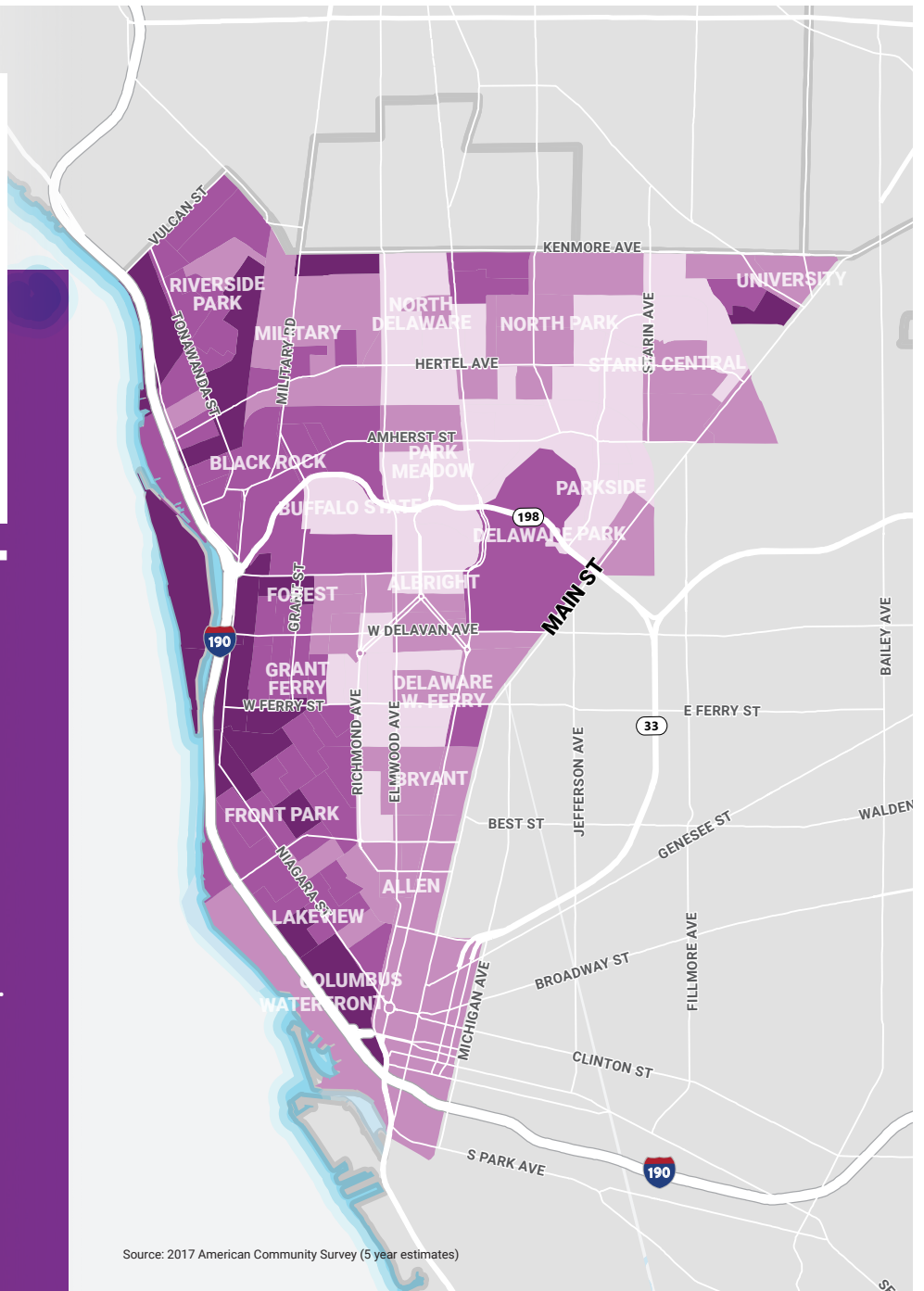
**21,021**

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

48% ARE IN OR NEAR POVERTY

**54,061**

residents are doing poorly or struggling financially.



Source: 2017 American Community Survey (5 year estimates)

**Over 54,000 individuals - 48% of the population - live in or near poverty in neighborhoods west of Main Street in the City of Buffalo. In this community, families are more likely than not to be making ends meet with an income that is under or near the federal poverty level (less than \$42,660 for a family of three).**

The Niagara corridor on the western edge of the community is where poverty is most pronounced. Neighborhoods on the west side of Buffalo are also where many immigrant communities are located. Highest-need neighborhoods where poverty rates exceed 75% of the population include Riverside, Forest, Grant Ferry, and the Lower West Side, encompassing Front Park, Lakeview and the northern section of Columbus Waterfront.



## Poverty, Need and Economic Vulnerability

Nearly half of the community's 117,906 residents live in or near poverty. Families who struggle financially often face barriers to the services they need, and many have urgent concerns in their lives beyond not having enough money.

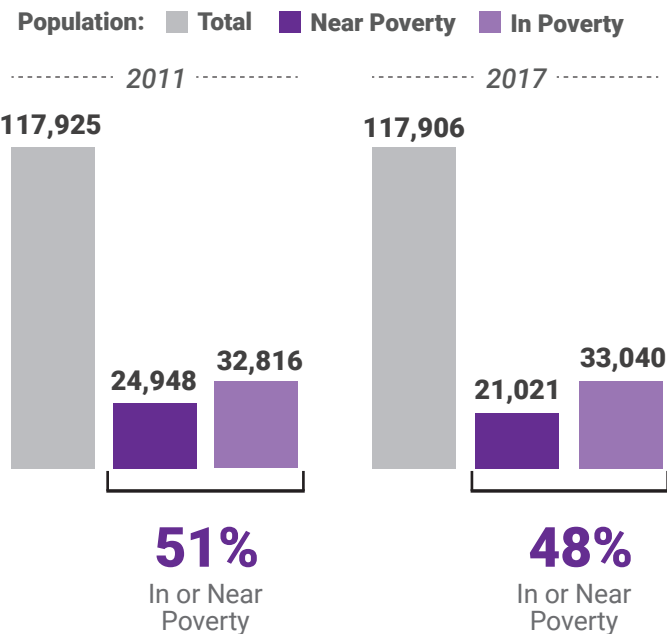
Compared to 2011, fewer residents of this community live in or near poverty. As the number of residents living in poverty has dropped by several thousand, the total number of people living in areas west of Main Street in Buffalo has only decreased by 19.

**Although it appears that the community is moving in a better direction, a large number of those in vulnerable populations are still in poverty.** More than 10,600 children and almost half of single parent families live in poverty in areas west of Main Street in Buffalo.

With 16,384 refugees and immigrants, the City of Buffalo west of Main Street is a home to many refugees and immigrants. But, this population is also extremely vulnerable to poverty due to challenges such as lack of English fluency and barriers to work, job training and human services. Close to half of refugees and immigrants in this community live in poverty.

**Poverty is on the decline in Buffalo neighborhoods west of Main Street. Still more than 54,000 people, or almost half the community's population, live in or near poverty.**

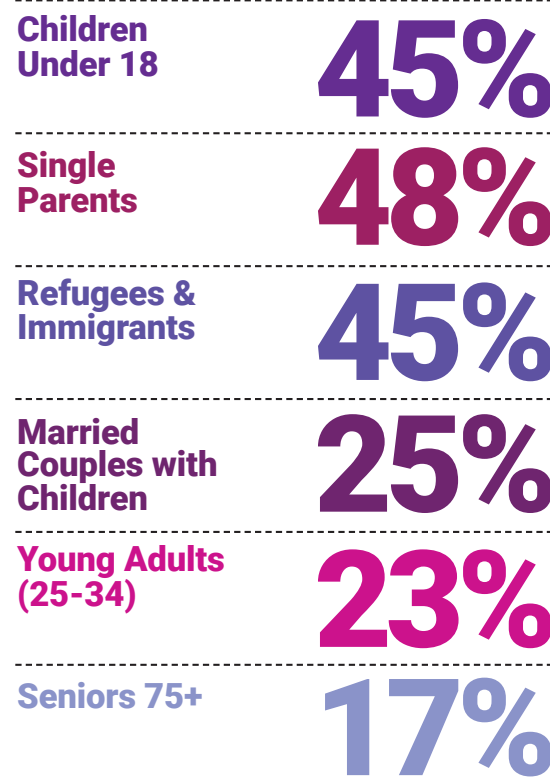
Total Population and Population In or Near Poverty, 2011 and 2017



Source: American Community Survey, 2007-11 5-Year Estimates; American Community Survey, 2013-17 5-Year Estimates

**Close to half of children, single parents, and refugees and immigrants live in poverty.**

Vulnerable Populations In Poverty, 2017



Source: American Community Survey, 2017 5-Year Estimates.

## Factors That Matter

Many factors contribute to poverty and economic vulnerability. These include access to higher-paying jobs with career pathways, education and workforce development, high-quality affordable housing, transportation to jobs and resources, and safe places to live, work and play.

Education is a strategy that prepares students for employment and career advancement. Adults in this community could boost their income by earning a college degree or completing a training program that leads to a higher-paying job. For youth, declining juvenile arrests over recent years will expand their future career prospects.

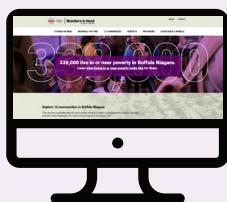
One in four householders under 65 years old do not have a car, but seniors are even more likely to use alternative modes of transportation. Improving transportation alternatives like transit, biking, and walking may also improve access to jobs, training, and services.

Creating more affordable, quality housing options may also improve economic outcomes. Three out of four lower-income households that rent pay nearly a third or more of their income on housing, leaving little income left for other household expenses or savings for future purchases.

## Community Data

Visit us online at  
**NumbersInNeed.org**

Explore more about this community and others in Buffalo Niagara through interactive features and stories.



### WORK AND INCOME

Some of the largest private sector employers in the region such as M&T Bank, BlueCross BlueShield, Rich Products and New Era Cap Company call this community home.

Top 10 Employers, 2019

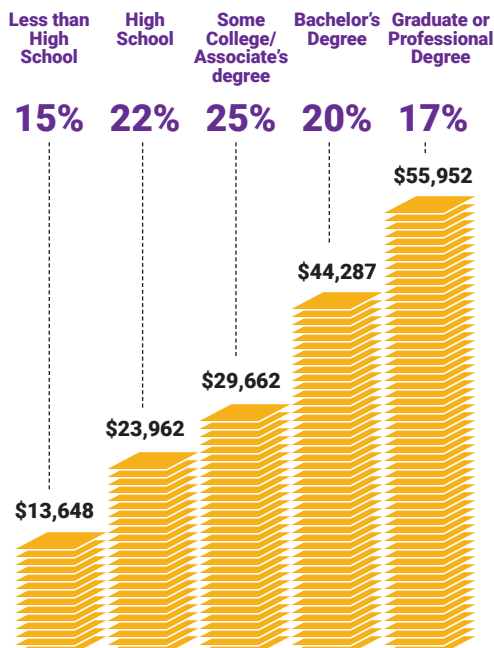
#1	M&T Bank	#6	SUNY Buffalo State
#2	Erie County	#7	Rich Products Corp.
#3	City of Buffalo	#8	Buffalo Psychiatric Center
#4	Buffalo City School District	#9	Erie County Sheriffs Department
#5	BlueCross BlueShield - WNY	#10	New Era Cap Co. Inc.

Source: InfoGroup, ReferenceUSA Business Database, 2019; Buffalo Business First, Book of Lists, 2018

### EDUCATION

**37% of residents haven't completed education beyond high school, while 25% of residents have some college or a 2-year degree. These residents with some college could boost their annual earnings by about \$15,000 by earning a bachelor's degree.**

Educational Attainment and Median Earnings of Adults Age 25+, 2017

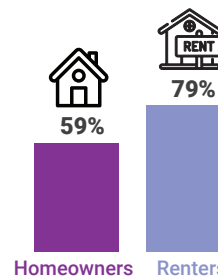


Source American Community Survey, 2011-17 5-Year Estimates.

### HOUSING

**Three-quarters of lower-income renters pay more than 30% of their household income on housing.**

% Lower-Income Households (earning less than \$35k/yr) that are Cost-Burdened, 2017



Source: American Community Survey, 2011-17 5-Year Estimates.

### TRANSPORTATION

**Seniors, who are vulnerable to poverty in the community, are also more likely to be without a car.**

% of Residents Without a Vehicle

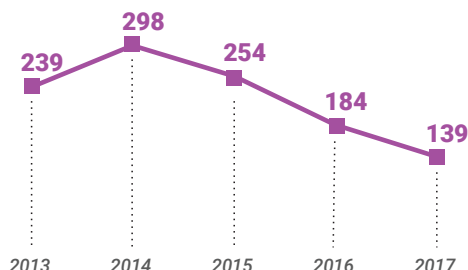


Source American Community Survey, 2011-17 5-Year Estimates.

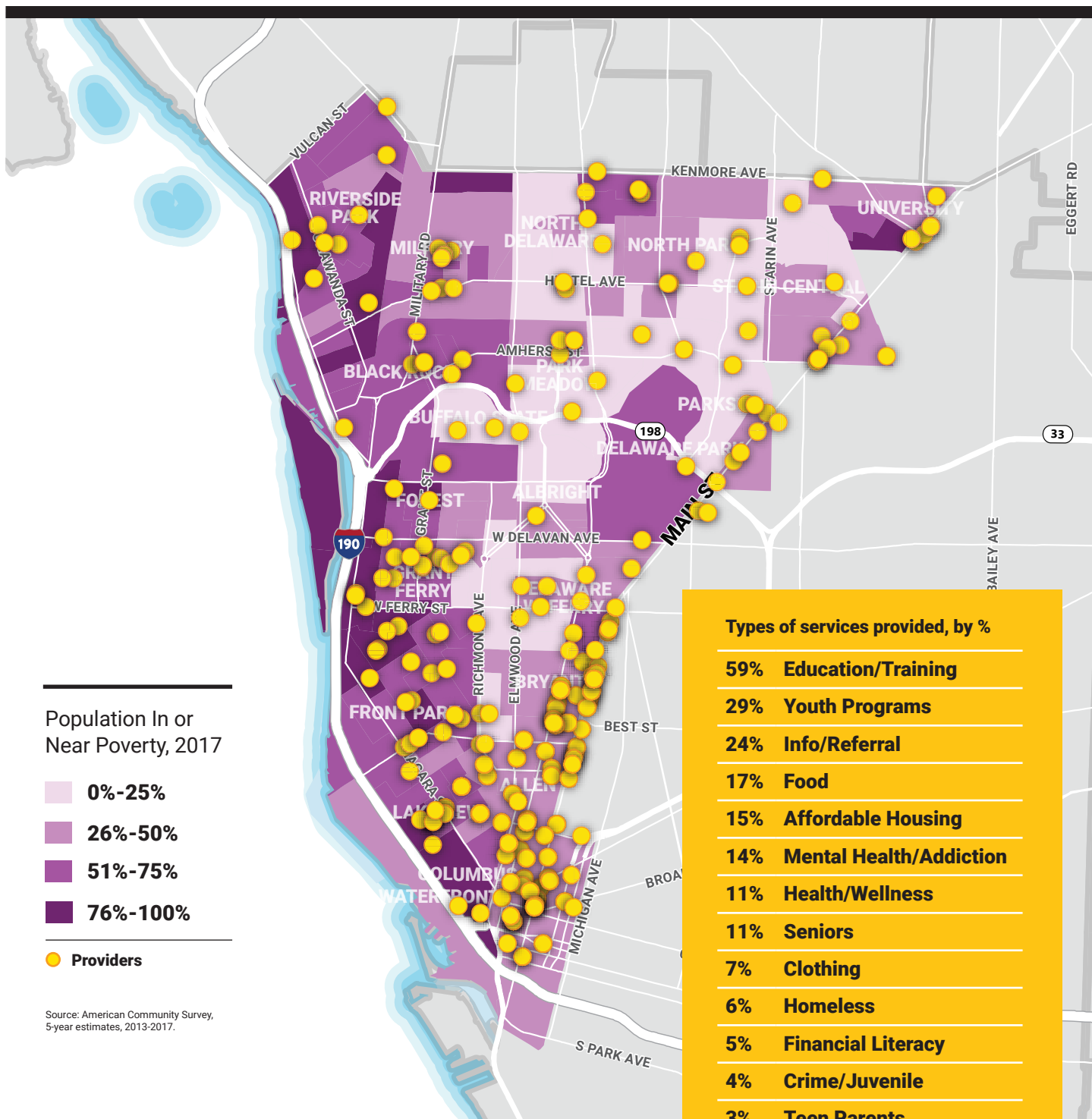
### CRIME

**As high school graduation rates rose, juvenile arrests in the City of Buffalo declined by 42% between 2013 and 2017.**

Juvenile Arrests, 2013-2017



Source NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, Niagara County and Erie County, 2013-2017.



#### Types of services provided, by %

59%	Education/Training
29%	Youth Programs
24%	Info/Referral
17%	Food
15%	Affordable Housing
14%	Mental Health/Addiction
11%	Health/Wellness
11%	Seniors
7%	Clothing
6%	Homeless
5%	Financial Literacy
4%	Crime/Juvenile
3%	Teen Parents
3%	Transportation
3%	Legal
3%	Veterans

## The Landscape of Providers

# 229

**SERVICE PROVIDERS**  
in the City of Buffalo  
(West of Main St)



### See more online

Visit [NumbersInNeed.org](http://NumbersInNeed.org) to view additional maps and the listing of service providers.

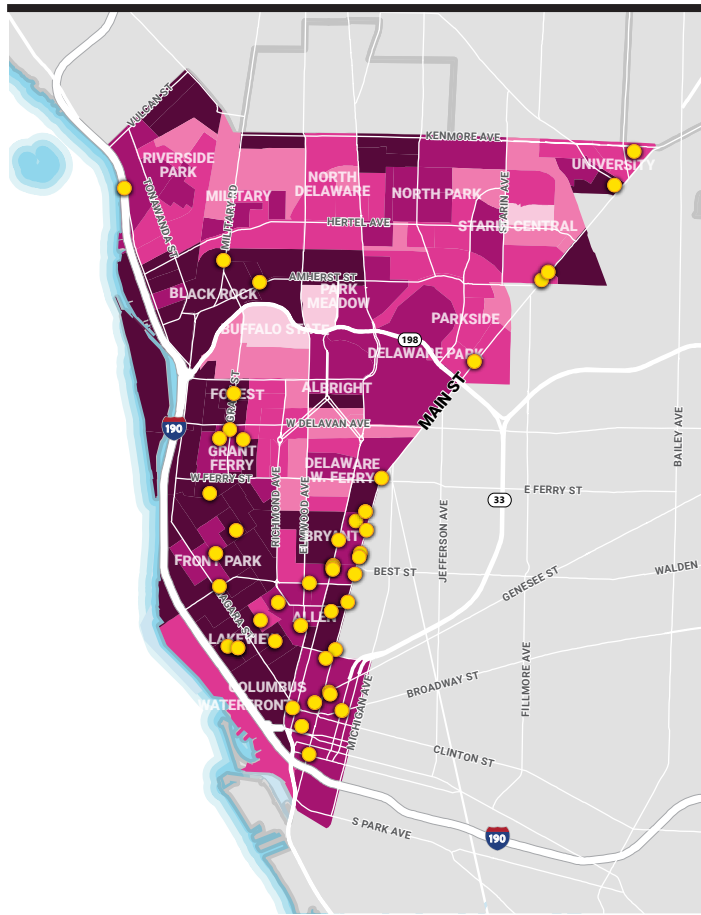


# Provider Services and Resident Needs

## % Households Spending 30% or More of Income on Housing Costs, 2017

0-10% 11%-20% 21%-30% 31%-40% Over 40%

Providers offering Housing and Financial services

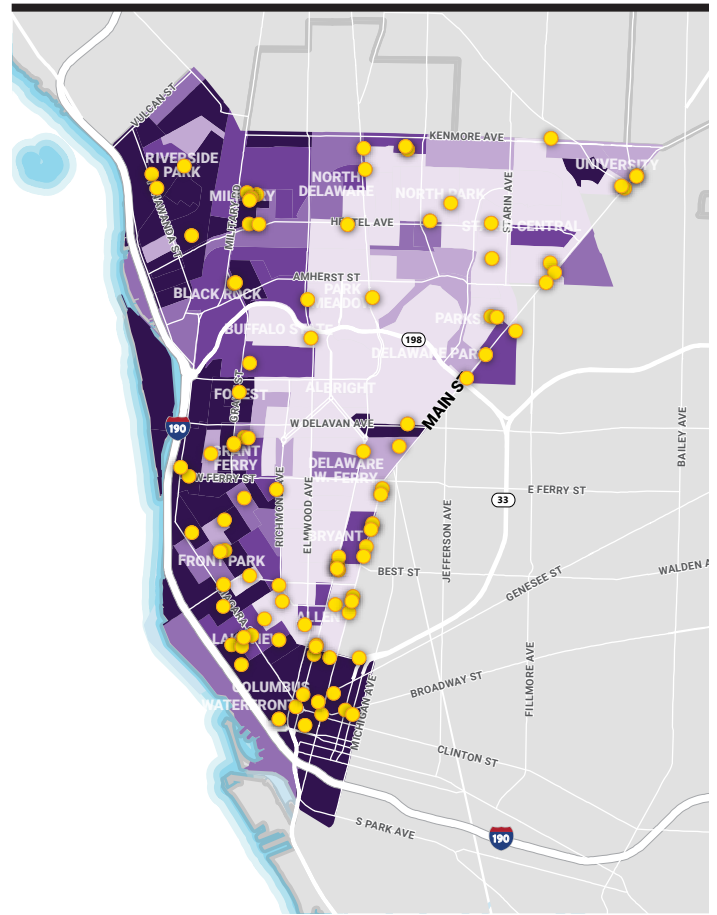


Source: American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2013-2017.

## Poverty Rate for Families with Children by Block Group, 2017

0% 1%-20% 21%-30% 31%-50% Over 50%

Providers offering Youth, Food, and Clothing services



Source: American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2013-2017.

**Many providers offer housing and financial services west of Main Street, but some neighborhoods where the need for these services is high may be underserved.** There are 46 providers west of Main Street in Buffalo providing either financial or housing services. These are concentrated near the city's downtown and along Main Street, but are less common in some parts of the city with a greater need for these services. In many neighborhoods, more than 40% of households spend 30% or more of their income on housing costs. This includes lower West Side neighborhoods like Columbus and Lakeview that have many related service providers close by, but also Black Rock and Riverside where only 3 housing and financial service providers exist nearby.

**The community has numerous providers to help children in poverty, but these are not always located in neighborhoods with the highest childhood poverty rates.** There are 97 providers offering food, clothing, or youth services west of Main Street in Buffalo. These providers tend to be located in neighborhoods with a high need for these services, but some areas of the city where childhood poverty is most concentrated may be underserved. There are 4,500 families with children that live in poverty in the community. Most of these families (74%) live in block groups where childhood poverty rates are over 50%. However, only 33% of related service providers in the community are located in these block groups. The most noticeable service gaps exist in the Forest, Black Rock, and Riverside neighborhoods.



# Opportunities and Challenges for Providers

## Read more Insights from Providers

A detailed report exploring the perspectives from providers in this community.



## What's happened over the past 5 years?

As neighborhoods west of Main Street in Buffalo grew in population over the last several years, many challenges identified by providers back in 2013-14 continue to persist. These include traveling barriers for residents without a car, language and communication difficulties, especially those involving refugees and immigrants who do not speak English, lack of awareness of what helpful programs and services exist; and access to affordable, quality housing for lower-income residents who are evicted or in search of a place in the community to live. Like last time, providers talked about how the system encourages crisis and responds best to the most urgent concerns. Providers also continue to want more and better data, so they can work more effectively and demonstrate the impact of successful programs. This time providers identified education and training as a strength of the system and did not describe the same gaps that existed back in 2013-14.



← Available online at [NumbersInNeed.org](https://NumbersInNeed.org)



## Strengths of the system

**Close to 230 service providers are located in the community.**

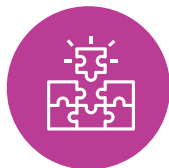
There are at least seven providers in every service category to meet the needs of residents.

**Most providers are accessible by public transit and within a mile of thousands of individuals living in or near poverty.** The typical provider has over 11,000 economically vulnerable individuals within a mile of their facility.

**Over half of providers offer education and training** along a lifelong learning continuum which includes pre-K programming to adult and continuing education.

**Dozens of providers offer out of school youth programming.**

Agency focus group participants identified youth programs as the #1 strength of the community's landscape of services.



## Gaps that Exist

Providers say improving poverty trends mask **growing challenges such as housing insecurity.**

Providers describe how some residents need **legal assistance with the title or deed to their home** to access the full range of programs available to homeowners.

Providers note how the community needs greater **food justice, food access and community garden stability.**

Providers and corporate partners desire **additional data and information** to understand what providers exist and what they do. **Literacy and consumer debt** are additional topics that could be better understood with local data.

Providers want **more accountable government and decision making that integrates resident input.**



## Barriers

Providers say **residents don't always know what resources exist and sometimes have misperceptions** about programs and services.

**Providers say they have limited capacity to effectively communicate with residents** in a community that is a melting pot for refugees and immigrants with **dozens of spoken languages.**

**Low literacy levels create communication barriers for some providers** and affect many facets of life for residents, from education and to healthcare and parenting.

Providers say residents sometimes fall through the cracks of a system with **case management without centralized tracking.**

Providers describe a **system that encourages and responds best to residents in crisis.**

**Provider say transportation as a barrier residents face** to jobs, programs and services.



## Promising Developments

NYS recently passed the **Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act of 2019.** The law offers renters additional protections, and it provides local governments new mechanisms for protecting tenants.

**Rich Products is increasingly engaged** and interested in strengthening this community where the company is headquartered.

The **Homeless Management Information System** offers a **tool that could potentially be leveraged** for expanded client service tracking for improved service delivery.

Providers are using **social and mobile technologies** to engage and communicate with residents; they have also been leveraging **community nodes** such as the school district for information delivery.

## Survey Results of Economically Vulnerable Residents

**370 residents in need took the survey**

Residents who took the survey provided a snapshot of the lives of some of those who are most vulnerable in this community.

The greatest challenges survey respondents deal with are a result of not having enough money. Residents are concerned about affording food for their family, and paying for utilities to keep their home comfortable. Car owners worry about expensive repairs or passing inspection, while those who use public transit contend with a sometimes inconvenient system. Though most respondents have health insurance, a third of still can't afford some kinds of necessary healthcare, leading residents to take on large medical bills or forgo care. On top of these challenges, many residents deal with looming consumer and student loan debt. With so many obstacles, respondents find it hard to set aside money for emergencies or to pull themselves into a more financially stable situation.

### Read more Insights from Residents

A detailed report exploring the community's vulnerable populations, their needs, urgent concerns and barriers to support services.



# 32%

**REPORTED HAVING SOME TYPE OF URGENT CONCERN**

→ **TOP 3 URGENT CONCERNS REPORTED BY THESE RESIDENTS**

**Outstanding Debt -----> 46%**

**No Money for Food -----> 36%**

**Utility Shut-off -----> 26%**

### HEALTH CARE NEEDS

# 34%



**of vulnerable residents are in need of some type of healthcare but can't afford it.**

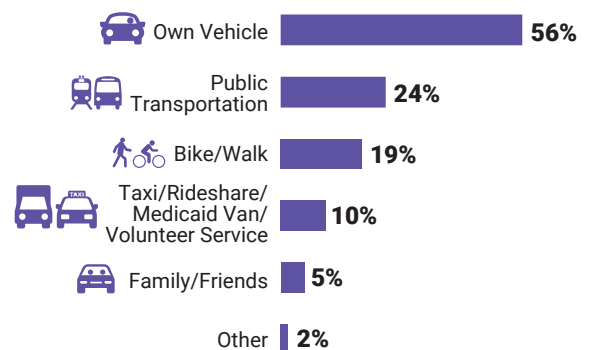
One in ten respondents say an adult in their household lacks health insurance, yet one in three needs healthcare they can't afford. Findings from a focus group suggest some earn too much for Medicaid but not enough to afford supplemental health insurance or care.



### TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

A majority of survey respondents get around using their own vehicle, but a quarter take public transportation. Logistical inconvenience and expense were reported as top issues when it came to taking public transit in the community. A fifth of car owners experienced some kind of issue as well, such as expensive repairs.

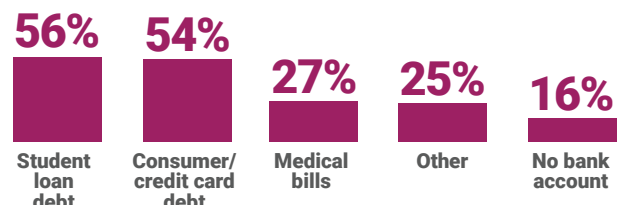
### How respondents get around



### FINANCIAL NEEDS

Almost half of respondents faced some kind of financial challenge in the household. These residents mostly struggle with student loan and consumer debt. Incomes among respondents are low; three in four makes less than \$24,000 per year, which is under the threshold for poverty in a four-person household.

### Top 5 Financial Challenges in Household



## Regional Strategies and Models to Consider



Finding solutions to community challenges begins with laying out strategies. Strategies outline potential action steps that can be implemented, name some of the actors who could be involved in completing those actions, and be supported by models of their implementation. Models from other places in the region, country, and world demonstrate how other communities have carried out a similar strategy, and serve as a starting point for understanding how strategies can be successfully implemented in this community.

The following strategies and models are only examples of all the possible solutions to this community's challenges. **Please visit [NumbersInNeed.org](http://NumbersInNeed.org) to view a more comprehensive collection of strategies and models that cover a broader range of topics.**

### See more online

Visit [NumbersInNeed.org](http://NumbersInNeed.org) to view a comprehensive collection of strategies and models that cover a broader range of topics.



## Bolster programs and services that promote economic self sufficiency of refugees and immigrants.



Refugees & Immigrants

Refugees and immigrants face a number of legal, cultural, and financial hurdles when taking steps to become financially stable, like finding a job, applying for public assistance, or starting a business. These challenges limit financial self-sufficiency. Among families with children, poverty rates for refugee and immigrant parents (39%) are nearly twice as high as native born parents in the region (20%). Service providers that tailor their programs to the needs and challenges of refugees and immigrants can ease the transition of these residents to an economically secure life in the US.

### Potential Action Steps

Raise awareness of federal requirements for language assistance through proactive outreach in neighborhoods where refugees are concentrated at cultural centers, ethnic festivals, places of worship, refugee outreach and drop-in centers, ethnic grocers, and community-based organizations.

Engage federal locally-elected leaders in advocating for a longer window of benefits provided under resettlement programs.

Increase access to ENL (English as a New Language) training, job training, mental health care and culturally preferred nutritious food. Promote access to and use of follow-up services after initial consultations with refugees and immigrants.

Include refugee and immigrant voices and perspectives in planning processes, policy development and program implementation.

Raise awareness among employers of the benefits of diversity in the workplace and support employers as they commit to hiring diverse populations. Continue to foster refugee and immigrant entrepreneurship through training, technical assistance and business development resources at area universities.

Ensure refugees and immigrants have meaningful access to HUD supported housing.

Develop an online portal where all resources are compiled, and available in different languages most commonly spoken among refugees and immigrants.

### Potential Actors in the Community

Refugee and immigrant service providers

Elected officials and policymakers

Housing service providers

Language assistance service providers

Financial education service providers

Business community

Workforce development organizations

### Models to Consider

Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians - Philadelphia, PA

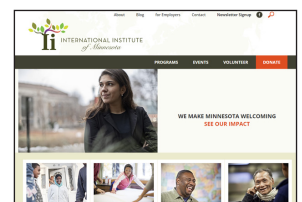
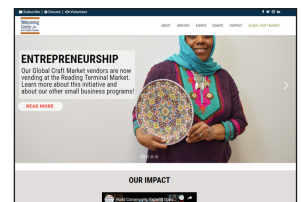
[welcomingcenter.org](http://welcomingcenter.org)

Tacoma Community House - Tacoma, WA

[tacomacommunityhouse.org](http://tacomacommunityhouse.org)

International Institute of Minnesota - Saint Paul, MN

[iimn.org](http://iimn.org)



## Regional Strategies and Models to Consider, cont'd.



### Strengthen supports to address and prevent homelessness.



#### Housing

As rents and home prices increase, so does the risk of homelessness. This is especially true for renters on a month-to-month lease just making ends meet. Insights from residents show renters often do not have enough savings or income to cover increasing rent, let alone the security deposits landlords require upfront, if they need to find a new place to rent. One local shelter reports that over a quarter of homelessness stems from evictions, foreclosures, and housing fires. In some neighborhoods where homelessness is most prevalent, based on insights from providers, more than 60% of renters are cost burdened, spending over 30% of their income on housing. Increasing access to affordable housing and providing financial assistance to cost burdened households can prevent the spread of homelessness.

#### Potential Action Steps

Expand options for safe affordable housing, especially in communities where the cost of rental housing is high or growing.

Require developers to allocate a percentage of the development to affordable housing, or rent-to-own options for lower-income residents.

Provide emergency financial assistance to individuals and families at high risk of homelessness.

Make evictions data regularly available on a local and regional level to help target investments and resources and tailor solutions to community needs.

#### Potential Actors in the Community

Housing and homeless service providers

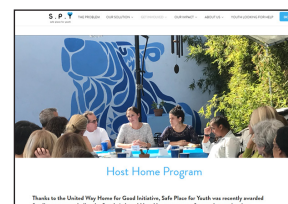
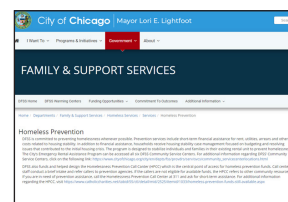
Elected officials and policymakers

Private and not-for-profit developers

#### Models to Consider

Chicago Homeless Prevention Call Center - Chicago, IL  
[chicago.gov/city/en/depts/fss/provdrs/emerg/svcs/homeless\\_prevention.html](https://chicago.gov/city/en/depts/fss/provdrs/emerg/svcs/homeless_prevention.html)

Host Home Program - Los Angeles, CA  
[safeplaceforyouth.org/host\\_home\\_program](https://safeplaceforyouth.org/host_home_program)





# Data Sources & Notes

## Cover

US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

US Census Bureau, US Decennial Census, 2000.

## 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).

## Poverty Map, Page 4

US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

Community boundaries align with census tract boundaries. Boundaries are 99.95% accurate based on where homes are located.

## Poverty, Need and Economic Vulnerability, Page 5

Population in or Near Poverty: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007-11 5-Year Estimates; US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-17 5-Year Estimates.

Vulnerable Populations: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

## Factors that Matter, Page 6

Work and Income: InfoGroup, ReferenceUSA Business Database, 2019; Buffalo Business First, Book of Lists, 2018. Top employers were first downloaded from ReferenceUSA and mapped to confirm location within the boundaries of the 12 communities. Top businesses by number of employees were cross-referenced with the Buffalo Business First Book of Lists (2018) to ensure accuracy in number of employees

at the business location, when available.

Education: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017. All income by education numbers are actual medians except those for graduate or professional degrees; these have been calculated by weighted averages of the medians, because combined medians were not available via Social Explorer.

Housing: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017. Low-income households in this instance are defined as households with incomes below \$35,000/year.

Transportation: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

Crime: NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, Niagara County and Erie County, 2013-2017. Crime data for the City of Buffalo is not available at a level less than citywide, so data for the whole city is provided for Buffalo West and Buffalo East.

In 2017, NYS passed Raise the Age legislation that deals with non-felony offenses committed by 16- and 17-year olds outside of the criminal justice system. The law went into effect for 16 year olds on October 1, 2018 and will be effective for 17 year olds on October 1, 2019. While this law did not affect the juvenile arrest data shown in this report, it may affect trends in future years, beginning in 2018.

## The Landscape of Providers, Page 7

Poverty Map: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

Provider Data: Information submitted by agency providers through a provider questionnaire updated a listing of providers developed for the 2014 community report for Buffalo (west of Main Street). Providers provided information on program and service locations, agency location, geographic scope and more. Most service providers are not-for-profit and public sector providers.

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.

## Provider Services and Needs of Residents, Page 8

Poverty Map: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

Provider Data: See note for page 6.

## Opportunities and Challenges for Providers, Page 9

Provider Focus Group, April 30, 2019.

## Survey Results of Economically Vulnerable Residents, Page 10

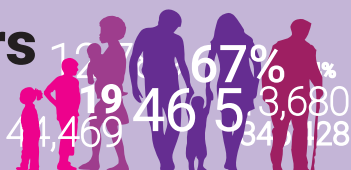
Resident Survey, March - June 2019

# COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT **City of Buffalo** (West of Main St)

**SEPTEMBER 2019**

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