INSIGHTS FROM RESIDENTS

VILLAGE OF Akron AND TOWN OF Newstead

JANUARY 2020

“Social Security is insufficient to meet our needs.”

“[Housing is] expensive everywhere.”

“For a small town, we are amazing.”

“Housing is expensive everywhere.”

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

Numbers in Need IN BUFFALO NIAGARA

A Mobile Safety Net Team initiative established by The John R. Oishei Foundation
INSIGHTS FROM RESIDENTS  
2020

Village of Akron and Town of Newstead

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About this Report

This report offers a snapshot of findings for the Village of Akron and Town of Newstead, with new data on the community’s population that lives in or near poverty. It includes stories of individuals in need and perspectives from residents captured through surveys and conversations.

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

Defining Need

More than 1,640 residents in the Village of Akron and Town of Newstead (Akron-Newstead) 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 200% 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

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
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 100 residents from the community completed a two-page, 28-question survey over a two-month period in the summer of 2019. To ensure that input was representative of community members living in or near poverty, surveys were conducted at eight locations in the community. Surveys completed in other communities by residents living in ZIP Codes in Akron-Newstead were also included. An online version of the survey was also available beginning in March and distributed via social media and email. One respondent completed the survey online.

To better understand the challenges identified by survey respondents and formulate priorities and solutions, a conversation was held at the Newstead Public Library with three residents, and two residents were interviewed by phone. Participants received a $20 gift card to Pixley’s Shur Fine Food Mart as an incentive and thank you for participating.

Percent of Survey Respondents by ZIP Code

- 1%
- 2%
- 3%-7%
- 8%-90%

Survey conducted at this location
Resident Focus Group

Resident Survey was conducted at 8 locations

1 Akron Senior Strawberry Social
2 Akron Good for the Neighborhood at Newstead Senior Center
3 Quarry Hill Estates
4 Akron Sidewalk Sale
5 Legislator Ed Rath’s Annual Hotdog Roast at Newstead Public Library
6 Russell Park Family Fun Day
7 Akron-Newstead Alliance
8 Back-to-School Good for the Neighborhood at Akron-Newstead Senior Center

Resident Focus Group was held at 1 location

1 Newstead Public Library
Although the survey aimed to gain perspectives from residents representative of the overall population in need, there are some differences. Compared to the total population, respondents were more likely to be female and 65 or older and were less likely to have a child under 18 in the home.

Most respondents are retired, and fewer than a quarter of respondents have a job. Eight percent of respondents listed their employment status as “disabled.” A third of respondents have a college degree, while about the same amount did not pursue formal education beyond high school. Sixteen percent of respondents started college and didn’t finish it. Less than 10% of survey takers went to a trade school or completed a certificate program.

More than half of respondents live alone. Out of the 16 households with children, just one respondent is the only adult in the household. Most respondents own their home. Of those who rent, most do so with rental assistance. Six percent of respondents own their home but rent the lot of land it is on. Most respondents are long-time residents, with 65% having lived at their current residence for six or more years.

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<tr>
<th>Individuals and Families</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age 18-34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 35-54</td>
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<td>Age 55-64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 65+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<th>Adults in Household</th>
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<tr>
<td>One Adult</td>
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<td>Two Adults</td>
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<td>Three or more Adults</td>
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<th>Children in Household</th>
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<td>One Child</td>
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<td>Two Children</td>
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<td>Three or More Children</td>
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<td>No Children</td>
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<tr>
<th>Veteran in Household</th>
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<tr>
<td>29%</td>
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<th>Work and Income</th>
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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employed Full-time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employed Part-time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed, Looking</td>
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<td>Unemployed, Not Looking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out of the Labor Force</td>
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<td>Other Employment Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>Own</td>
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<td>Rent, with Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rent, without Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staying with Friends/Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homeless/Shelter</td>
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<td>Other Housing</td>
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<th>Time in Current Home</th>
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<tr>
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<td>3 months-1 year</td>
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<td>6-10 years</td>
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<td>More than 10 years</td>
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<tr>
<th>Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School/Equivalency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some College, No Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trade School/Certificate</td>
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<tr>
<td>College Degree (2 or 4 yr)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post Graduate Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did Not Finish High School</td>
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A lack of transportation options is a barrier to jobs and services.

Akron-Newstead is a rural community with no access to NFTA public transportation. Erie County offers a free senior transportation van, but trips are only available on certain days and must be scheduled well in advance. The Village of Akron is relatively easy to walk or bike around, but getting around elsewhere in town requires a car.

Owning a car is a large and ongoing expense for most people. After the upfront cost of purchasing or leasing a car, regular maintenance, gasoline, emergency repairs, insurance, and inspections all add up. But residents living in Akron-Newstead have little choice other than to own a car if they plan to travel to work, school, services, recreation, or run daily errands.

Nearly all survey respondents said driving is their primary form of transportation. More than a quarter said they experience issues with their cars, from repairs they cannot afford and failed inspections, to suspended licenses/registration and expired insurance.

Focus group participants noted a common catch-22: in order to travel to a job you need a car, but to afford a car, you need a job. Then there’s the issue of mobility. Some residents are physically unable to drive a car, either due to age or disability. This severely limits a person’s independence and ability to access jobs or much-needed resources in the community.

Even with large employers and good-paying jobs in the community, many residents struggle financially.

Akron-Newstead is home to several large employers, and residents in the focus group say those employers offer good-paying jobs. But residents also said it can be tough to get hired by these employers since many employees tend to remain in their jobs for a long time. In some cases employees need special training or education to qualify for a position.

One focus group participant had a hard time finding a job despite years of experience in the culinary and hospitality industry. Even though he’s willing to work for a fast-food restaurant, he says employers won’t hire him because of his age.

Young people often decide to move closer to the City of Buffalo in order to find better job opportunities or access education and training services, according to the focus group. But most still need a reliable car before they can pursue a job or schooling.

Some focus group members said their employment is sporadic, so they get through the summer using credit cards. Residents in similar situations may see credit card debt as the only way to get by when employment and supplemental income is not enough. This may explain, in part, why outstanding debt is residents’ number one urgent concern, and their top financial concern is consumer debt.

Health-related issues can be a financial burden.

More often than not, residents with disabilities in Akron-Newstead are unable to go to school or work. Nearly half of households surveyed had at least one person with a disability. This restriction can be financially restraining on single-earner households, especially if the earner also doubles as a caretaker for a household member. Disabilities make getting to services more difficult as well; the third most common barrier to services was difficulty leaving the home.

Health insurance coverage is widespread among survey respondents. Only 2% of respondent households have an adult without coverage. Nevertheless, 29% of respondents said they have healthcare needs they cannot afford, including dental and optical care and prescription medicine. It comes as no surprise then that medical bills are the second-most frequent financial concern among respondents.

Youth need more programs and services.

Youth arrests have remained consistently low in Akron-Newstead over the last several years. However, graduation rates slumped to 84% in 2017, a seven-year low. Focus group participants believe youth in the town need more discipline, guidance, and activities after school.

The community is not without programs for youth. The focus group shared that the C. Dee Wright Community Center offers teen activity nights on Fridays, where kids can hang out, eat pizza, play games, and listen to music. Another local organization also used to have a teen and youth program, but it shut down due to misuse. The library is also an important asset to the community and offers programs for younger children.

When it comes to youth employment, the school district is working to build connections between education and the local economy with a work-study program during school hours. The district also works with a local market to help kids connect with employment opportunities.

Despite the positive youth-focused assets in the town, residents in the focus group also said that there are many kids who get into drug use and other illicit activities. One resident said that it seems like the police ignore the issue. Creating more afternoon activities and employment opportunities could help keep youth out of trouble.
Residents of Akron-Newstead may face a variety of challenges in their lives that cannot be captured in a brief survey. But when asked about their concerns, residents indicated that some challenges are more pressing than others.

Compared to other communities, survey respondents are less likely to report urgent concerns. But those with concerns overwhelmingly said outstanding debt is a challenge. After debt, not having enough money for food and utility shut-off notices are the most common concerns.

Getting help for these urgent concerns can be difficult for some residents. One in ten experienced a barrier or difficulty getting services. Most commonly, residents experience difficulty traveling to services, in addition to mobility limitations that make leaving the home a challenge. Limited internet access is also a frequent barrier.

**TRENDS**

Today, a larger proportion of respondents have an urgent concern than in 2014 (17% vs. 10%). However, the things residents are worried about have not changed significantly. Utility shut-offs and food costs were the top two responses in 2014. A slightly smaller proportion of respondents today face barriers to services compared to 2014 (10% vs. 15%). Difficulty traveling was the top barrier in each year, but being turned away due to income limits is not as frequent a barrier today than in 2014.

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**TOP URGENT CONCERNS REPORTED BY THESE RESIDENTS**

- **Outstanding Debt** → 71%
- **No Money for Food** → 35%
- **Utility Shut-off** → 24%
- **Legal Problems** → 12%
- **Cost/Availability of Childcare for work** → 12%
- **Foreclosure/Eviction** → 12%
- **Other** → 12%

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**REPORTED A BARRIER OR DIFFICULTY GETTING SERVICE**

- **Difficulty traveling** → 43%
- **Limited internet access** → 36%
- **Physically difficult to leave my home** → 29%

- **Hours of operation don’t fit my schedule** → 21%
- **The process is confusing and it’s too much of a hassle** → 21%
- **Turned away because of income limits** → 21%
- **Other** → 21%
Having a disability may limit economic and educational opportunities for some residents. In fact, among the 45% of respondent households that have a disabled resident, more than two thirds say the disability prevents that person from being able to work or go to school. Disabilities in respondent households were most commonly physical, mobility-related, or mental health.

Nearly all adults in respondent households have health insurance, and zero children living in respondent households are uninsured. Medicare insures more than half of respondents. Private insurance, managed care, and Medicaid are the next most common types of insurance coverage.

Almost a third of residents are in need of healthcare they cannot afford. Services not typically covered by health insurance like dental and optical care are the most common. Residents also have trouble affording prescription medicine, which may require large co-pays.

**HEALTHCARE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF DISABILITIES REPORTED IN THESE HOUSEHOLDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Just two percent of respondents said an adult in their household lacks health insurance. None of the children in respondent households are uninsured.

**TRENDS**

Health insurance coverage today is much more common than in 2014. The proportion of respondents without insurance decreased from 9% to 2% for adults and from 3% to 0% for children.

**Top 5 Types of Health Insurance Coverage Used Among Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Insurance</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medicare</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private insurance</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicaid</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managed care (HMO, PPO)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the prevalence of health insurance coverage, many residents still have medical care they cannot afford, possibly because some care is not covered by insurance, or co-pays are too high.
Detailed Findings: Transportation

The number one barrier to services for survey respondents was transportation challenges. For most, a personal vehicle is the only option for accessing basic necessities like medical care, groceries, work, and school. Nearly all respondents get around by driving a car they own. Public transit service through the NFTA is unavailable in this community, although the Erie County Department of Senior Services offers a free curb-to-curb van service to those 60 and older.

As a necessity for most residents, cars can be a financial burden. Aside from the cost of buying or leasing a car, many respondents said they cannot afford needed repairs or their vehicle did not pass inspection (possibly because they cannot afford to fix issues preventing the car from passing).

TRENDS

In both 2014 and 2019, respondents most frequently drove a car they owned to get around. Alternative modes of transportation were used by 8% of respondents in 2014, and by 4% today. Difficulty traveling remains the number one barrier to services.

TRANSPORTATION

For many residents in rural Akron-Newstead, driving a car is the only practical way to get around. But residents who might not be able to drive or who don’t own a car use family or friends, taxis, rideshare, volunteer services, medical transportation, or biking/walking. However, very few respondents use these alternatives to driving.

NFTA bus routes do not serve Akron-Newstead, yet a fifth of respondents said they have used public transit in the past and encountered some kind of issue. The most frequently cited issue was the lack of service to Akron-Newstead or destinations. Some residents also said they don’t feel safe using public transportation.

Top reasons respondents don’t take public transportation more often

1. No service in my community
2. No service where I need to go
3. I don’t feel safe

25% of respondents reported owning a vehicle and having the following issues

- Can’t afford car repairs: 72%
- Vehicle did not pass inspection: 36%
- Other: 28%
- Lapsed or suspended car insurance: 20%
- Suspended license or registration: 8%

The rural nature of Akron-Newstead nearly necessitates owning a vehicle to get to work, go to school, run errands, and participate in social, recreational, and civic activities. As necessary as cars are, they can be a financial liability. A quarter of respondents face an issue owning a vehicle. Most of these issues relate to expensive repairs, and not being able to pass inspection, possibly due in part to those same expensive repairs. A few respondents who identified “other” issues said they are leasing their car, or they were in a car crash.
Detailed Findings: Finances and Assets

Survey respondents in Akron-Newstead generally have low incomes, with three in four respondent households earning less than $36,000 per year. The majority of this income comes from social security retirement, while only one in five respondents earns income from employment. Perhaps as a result of limited incomes from fixed sources like social security programs, forty percent of respondents are dealing with a financial concern.

Residents most frequently reported dealing with consumer debt and medical bills. Although debt is a broad category, it might result from the combination of low incomes and necessary expenses like food, utilities, housing, car payments and repairs and more. Similarly, medical bills are likely reported as a burden since many respondents have healthcare needs not covered by their insurance.

TRENDS

Financial comparisons between survey respondents in 2014 and today are difficult, given the fact that today’s respondents are a far older group of residents. This may explain why far fewer residents today reported having a job or earning income from work. Incomes in 2014 leaned toward the higher end of the spectrum, with 40% of respondents earning $36,000 or more in 2014 compared to 24% today. This is unsurprising, given the fact that many respondents today may rely on fixed incomes from social security, pensions, or other retirement funds.

FINANCES AND ASSETS

About two in three respondents earns less than $24,000, just above the poverty level for a family of four. Nearly a quarter of respondent households make at least $36,000 per year. However, simply making more money does not necessarily mean these households are without financial challenges.

Household Income, 2019

Given the high percentage of respondents who are older than 65, it is unsurprising that the number one source of income is social security retirement. Employment is the next most frequent source of income, but only for about one in five respondent households. The “other” category includes pensions, retirement funds, and annuities.

Sources of Household Income

- Social Security (Retirement): 61%
- Employment: 22%
- Other: 20%
- Social Security Disability: 14%
- Supplemental Security Income: 11%
- Child support: 2%
- Worker’s compensation: 11%
- Unemployment Insurance: 0%
- No income: 0%

Top 4 Financial Challenges Households Experience

Forty percent of respondents are dealing with a financial challenge. Consumer debt is by far the biggest concern, followed by medical bills. Other responses include student loans, taxes, and high lot rents.

Confidence to Handle a $500 Emergency

There are many reasons why one might feel confident in handling a $500 emergency; higher incomes, support from friends/family, resourcefulness, or emergency savings are all possibilities. Almost twice as many respondents feel very confident than not confident at all.
Detailed Findings: Programs, Services and Supports

Three in five respondents receive aid through a variety of services. Only a handful of respondent households have pending assistance.

After HEAP, which helps with the cost of utilities, frequently used services help residents with the cost of food and healthcare, and supplement income for those with disabilities.

TRENDS

A significantly larger proportion of respondents receive support through programs and services today than in 2014 (61% vs. 27%), though this shift may also be due in part to the older age of respondents in the most current survey. The proportion of residents with pending applications remained the same. HEAP, food stamps/SNAP and Medicaid are the top three services received in both years. Pending applications were also similar between 2014 and today; HEAP and food stamps/SNAP were in the top three each year.

HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING SERVICES THROUGH PROGRAMS

Three in five respondent households receive some kind of services. As in many other communities, services that aid residents with the cost of utilities, food, and healthcare are the most common.

61% of households receive one or more services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Services Received</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HEAP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Stamps/SNAP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medicaid</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Pantry/Meal Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSD</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>WIC</td>
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<td>Cash Benefits</td>
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HOUSEHOLDS WITH PENDING APPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS

Only seven percent of respondent households have pending applications for assistance. All respondents with pending applications are currently receiving some other kind of assistance as well.

7% of households have pending applications for assistance programs

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<th>Types of Services Pending</th>
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<td>HEAP</td>
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<td>Medicaid</td>
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<td>WIC</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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During resident conversations, 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.

Participants felt that education and training and senior programs are the strongest programs/services in Akron-Newstead. Residents also said transportation, affordable housing, and mental health programs need the most improvement.

Programs/services residents identified as...

...the strongest

#1 Education and Training
#2 Senior Programs

...in need of improvement

#1 Transportation
#2 Affordable Housing
#3 Mental Health/Addictions
Perspectives from Residents

While survey responses help us understand the community’s broader trends, conversations with residents reveal deeper, more personal reflections on the issues residents face. In a group conversation at the Newstead Public Library, three residents shared their insights. Two other residents were interviewed over the phone as well. In these conversations, residents discussed community strengths, challenges, and ideas for how residents and local organizations could work to improve their community.

Strengths and Assets of the Community

Akron-Newstead has many well-used amenities for the whole community. Focus group members discussed how the town has two nice parks, which includes a lodge for skaters and birthday parties. Residents said the town has a lot of restaurants and a great library. The C. Dee Wright Community Center offers programs for youth and teens, and has space for other community groups to have meetings and events.

The people who live in Akron-Newstead give the town a strong feeling of community. Residents feel that the people who live in the community look out for one another. Whenever there is a fundraiser, or basket raffle, or some other kind of event, people will show up to support their community.

For a small town, Akron-Newstead has a lot of large employers. Focus group participants recognize how unique it is for a small town to have large employers in manufacturing. One participant listed several employers, including Strippit, Schwapps, Perry’s, and Akron Rule. She said that once people get a job at these employers, they usually keep it.

The library is an asset to the community because of the services and programs it offers. Newstead Public Library plays an important role in the community both in the programs and services it offers, and through the information it shares with residents. Participants said the library has free internet access, meeting rooms, toddler programs, storytime, knitting programs, and reminiscing groups and card games for seniors. DVDs, CDs, and books can all be borrowed for up to 12 weeks with renewals, and items can be delivered from anywhere in the county library system. Information boards tell residents about upcoming events, programs, and services in the community.

The Akron Pennysaver is an important resource for learning about programs and events in town. Akron Pennysaver, the town’s newspaper, is a vital resource for learning about programs, services, resources, and events in the community. Each week, the paper has three free ad slots set aside for groups in the community. Some focus group members even learned about a program to help them pay for a new roof through a listing in the Pennysaver.

The school district works to help kids find employment in the community. Residents said that the school district has a work-study program, where students can work and earn money while gaining experience during the school day. The district also partners with a local market to help connect students to employment opportunities.

Challenges in the Community

Kids, especially teens, need more activities to keep them busy and away from drugs. One of the focus group participants talked about how they sometimes see kids hanging out in the park after school using and dealing drugs. Others in the group agreed that kids need more constructive activities after school. Although there are some fun, weekly programs designed for teens at the C. Dee Wright Community Center, another teen program was shut down after misuse by kids. One resident felt that schools need stricter discipline to ensure that kids are respectful of authority, and that kids should not be medicated to change behaviors.

Akron-Newstead has very limited transportation options. All focus group participants have a car, but two share one car in the household. The couple who share a car said their car is old and has issues. Other than driving, the only other options are walking and biking, which works well in the village. They also said there are options like the Senior Citizen bus or Hearts and Hands, but they are limited to medical and other important appointments. However, they also noted that residents don’t usually ask for transportation for “the little things”. One other focus group participant owns a car and has no issues with it, but noted that distracted driving is an issue, and is concerned about the state government requiring residents to purchase new license plates.

Despite large employers around town, some residents still have a hard time finding work. The prevalence of big employers doesn’t necessarily mean it’s easy for everyone in town to get a job. Residents said that sometimes, the jobs that are available are just not a good fit for everyone. Some manufacturing jobs might train employees after they are hired, but other jobs require an associate’s or bachelor’s degree. A friend of a focus group member who has a high school diploma cannot get a job in manufacturing because of physical limitations. One of the focus group members also explained that although he has many years of work experience, he cannot even get an entry-level job in his field because of age discrimination. For those looking to work outside of town, transportation can be a barrier. As one resident put it, you need a car to get a job, but you can’t afford a car unless you have a job.
Ideas for Change in the Community

Make it easier for residents to learn about services. Although the focus group listed a few places where one can find information about services, they also reiterated that it should be even easier for residents to learn about resources in the community.

Give people hope. Citing a rise in suicides in the community, one resident said she wants to be able to give people in her community hope. Although she did not elaborate further, her idea for change may take the form of improving mental health services in the community, which focus group members felt was lacking.

Enhance the enforcement of laws in public spaces. One of the focus group participants felt strongly that people, especially youth, were able to hang out in Akron's Russell Park and take part in illicit activities without consequence. He feels that when he has tried to address the issue with law enforcement, they have not taken his concerns seriously.

Challenges in the Community, cont’d.

Whether you rent or own, housing is expensive everywhere. One focus group participant described owning the home she lives in “along with the bank.” This resident was in a bind when their homeowner insurance company threatened to cancel their coverage if they did not replace their roof. Fortunately, they found a program through an ad in the Pennysaver that offers home maintenance loans that do not need to be paid back unless the homeowners pass away, or the home changes hands. The only downside is the immense amount of paperwork required to complete the application process.

Another focus group member said the apartments where he lives offer financial assistance for those who need it. As a tenant, he says he’s experienced some troubling legal issues in the past when a new landlord took over and demanded back rent, even though he paid rent and had receipts going back several years. Only after finding legal counsel was the resident able to avoid having to pay nearly $2,000 in extra rent.

A parent of a focus group member experienced issues with lot rent suddenly jumping 50% when new owners purchased a mobile home park in town. Fortunately, New York State law prevented the increase from going into effect, and new tenant protections will limit future increases to 3% each year.
Diana is a single mom who retired early to move back to Akron-Newstead to care for her aging parent. She stayed in the area so her teenage son could benefit from the good public school system in Akron. Diana works part-time to supplement her income. Like many in the “sandwich” generation, Diana tries to live within her means, but sometimes struggles financially because of the demands of caring for her mother and son at the same time.

Diana and her son live in a mobile home community, and they recently faced the possibility of lot rent almost doubling due to new owners. Some of her neighbors are on fixed incomes and would have had to make difficult choices in order to afford this increase. “You have your neighbors saying, well maybe if I take half of my medicine, then I can afford lot rent.” The residents of her mobile park community mobilized in partnership with the Upstate-Downstate Housing Coalition to advocate for protections for mobile home tenants across the state.

Due in part to their efforts, the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act of 2019 was signed into law in June, preventing unreasonable increases in lot rent and limiting future lot rent increases to 3% per year.

Although she’s very happy with the sports and music programs offered by the school system, Diana wishes there was more to do in Akron-Newstead for older teens, like her son. In her view, the C. Dee Wright Community Center caters more toward younger teens between the ages of 12 and 14. For this reason, Diana feels lucky that her church offers activities for children of all ages. “If somebody is not involved in a faith-based activity, I would wonder what is out there for kids.” Diana also believes that the Akron High School’s work-study program is a good opportunity for youth to learn a trade, but without a car, it can be difficult for youth to gain work experience outside of this program.

Lack of public transportation is not just a problem for youth, according to Diana, who wishes that there were more volunteers for local organizations such as Hearts and Hands, which provides door-to-door transportation services for seniors. According to Diana, too few volunteers “results in seniors not getting to the appointments they need to get to” and contributes to the loneliness some seniors may feel who don’t have “any other connections to the outside world.” She also feels that the mobile home community in which she lives is isolated and disconnected from the community-at-large, and would like to see a bike path which would allow residents to walk and bike to amenities like stores, services, recreational activities, and jobs.

Despite some of these challenges, Diana doesn’t have any plans to leave Akron-Newstead, even after her son graduates, due to family ties and the community she’s found. “I’m planning on sticking around,” she says, “unless God has any other plans. I think He planted me here for a reason.”
Defining Need, Page 2
Minimum Wage: New York State Department of Labor, Minimum Wage (effective 12/31/18).

Resident Survey
The resident survey was conducted from June 2019 through September 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 and Spanish. One online survey was 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 100 responses included standardizing open ended responses and cleaning data for accuracy. Not all surveys were completed in full, and response rates for questions varied from 44 responses to 100 responses. 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 Interviews
The focus group conversation took place on September 18, 2019 at the Newstead Public Library. Participants for the focus group were recruited through the survey residents completed, in addition to in-person recruiting at the Newstead Public Library and through the town’s Mobile Safety Net Team Coalition. Residents who participated in interviews were given a $20 gift card to Pixley’s as appreciation for their time. Notes were taken during interviews, and recordings of conversations were used to supplement the notes at a later date.

Detailed Findings: Programs, Services and Supports, Page 10
Programs/services residents identified as strongest and in need of improvement.
Resident interview 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.

Inflation was calculated using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator, comparing buying power of $36,000 between August 2014 and August 2019.

Stories of Need
Stories of need reflect the voice and experience of an actual resident living in Akron-Newstead. Names and other identifying information have been changed to protect the identity and confidentiality of those who were interviewed. The interview took place in October 2019. The interview was conducted over the telephone. The interviewee was recruited from the focus group interviews 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 story is 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.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Zip Code</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Survey Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. 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?  
   - Yes | 1  
   - No | 2

8. What is your current employment status? **Select all that apply.**  
   - Student | 1  
   - Retired | 2  
   - Employed full time | 3  
   - Employed part time | 4  
   - Unemployed, not looking | 5  
   - Other: ________ | 6

9. What is your current living situation?  
   - Own | 1  
   - Rent with assistance | 2  
   - Rent, without assistance | 3  
   - Homeless/shelter | 4  
   - Other: ________ | 5

10. How long have you lived at your current address?  
   - Less than 3 months | 1  
   - 3 months to 1 year | 2  
   - 1 to 5 years | 3  
   - More than 5 years | 4  
   - 6 to 10 years | 5  
   - 10 years or more | 6

11. What is the highest level of education/training you’ve completed? **Check all that apply.**  
   - High school/Equivalency | 1  
   - Post graduate degree | 2  
   - Some college, no degree | 3  
   - Military | 4  
   - Trade School/Certificate | 5  
   - College degree (2 or 4 yr) | 6

12. Do you or does anyone in your household have any of the following disabilities? **Check all that apply.**  
   - Mental health | 1  
   - Mobility | 2  
   - Sensory | 3  
   - Physical | 4  
   - No Disability | 5

13. Do you or does anyone in your household have a disability that limits their ability to work and/or go to school?  
   - Yes | 1  
   - No | 2

14. What is your primary form of transportation?  
   - Bicycle | 1  
   - Family/Friends | 2  
   - Own Vehicle | 3  
   - Taxi | 4  
   - Walk | 5  
   - Medicaid van | 6  
   - Uber/Lyft | 7  
   - Volunteer service van | 8  
   - Public transportation | 9  
   - Other: ________ | 10

15. If you have ever used public transit, do you regularly encounter any of the following issues? **Select all that apply.**  
   - Too expensive | 1  
   - Too long to get places | 2  
   - No service where I need to go | 3  
   - No evening or weekend service | 4  
   - No service in my community | 5  
   - Buses don’t run often enough | 6  
   - Too long to walk to bus stop | 7  
   - Service isn’t reliable | 8  
   - I don’t feel safe | 9  
   - Schedule is too confusing | 10  
   - Other: ________ | 11  
   - None | 12  
   - Have not used public transit | 13

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 to | 1  
   - Lapsed or suspended car insurance | 2  
   - Suspended license or registration | 3  
   - Vehicle did not pass inspection | 4  
   - Other: ________ | 5  
   - None/Do not own a vehicle | 6

17. What are your household’s sources of income? **Select all that apply.**  
   - Employment | 1  
   - Unemployment insurance | 2  
   - SSD | 3  
   - Social security retirement | 4  
   - Worker’s compensation | 5  
   - Child support | 6  
   - Other: ________ | 7

18. How much money is currently received from these sources to support your household each month?  
   - Less than $1,250/month | 1  
   - $1,250-$2,999/month | 2  
   - $2,000-$2,999/month | 3  
   - More than $3,000/month | 4

19. Are you or is anyone in your household currently receiving (any of the following)? **Select all that apply.**  
   - Food stamps/SNAP | 1  
   - Food pantry/meal service | 2  
   - Medicaid | 3  
   - Cash benefits | 4  
   - Other: ________ | 5  
   - Other: ________ | 6

20. Does anyone in your household have a pending application for any of the following? **Select all that apply.**  
   - Food stamps/SNAP | 1  
   - Food pantry/meal service | 2  
   - Medicaid | 3  
   - Cash benefits | 4  
   - Other: ________ | 5

21. Do any of the following financial issues apply to you? **Select all that apply.**  
   - Consumer/credit card debt | 1  
   - Student loan debt | 2  
   - Underwater mortgage (owe more than your house is worth) | 3  
   - Unbankable | 4  
   - No bank account | 5  
   - Medical bills | 6  
   - Child support | 7  
   - 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”?  
   - 1 = Not confident at all  
   - 2 = Slightly confident  
   - 3 = Somewhat confident  
   - 4 = Very confident  
   - 5 = Very confident (I could financially manage this expense.)

(Survey questions continue on back side.)

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1. Numbers in Need  |  Insights from Residents: Village of Akron & Town of Newstead, January 2020
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 insurance
   - Yes, one or more children do not have health insurance
   - No, we all have health insurance

24. If insured, what type of health insurance is currently used by members of your household? Select all that apply.
   - Private insurance
   - Government (VA)
   - Health Savings Account
   - Other

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 care
   - Mental health care or counseling
   - Dental care (including checkups)
   - Optical care (including eyeglasses)
   - Prescription medicine
   - Transportation to doctor appointments or health services
   - Other: 
   - None

26. Are there any urgent concerns or special needs that you or someone in your household have? Select all that apply.
   - Utility shut-off notice
   - Foreclosure/Eviction
   - No money for food
   - Cost/availability of child care for work
   - Legal problems
   - Outstanding Debt
   - Hurt or threatened at home
   - Other: 
   - No urgent concerns

27. Has anyone in your household encountered difficulty getting necessary services (food, housing, utilities, medical care, etc.) over the last year? Select all that apply.
   - Yes
   - No

28. If "yes", describe what barriers were faced. Select all that apply.
   - Traveling to get services is difficult
   - I don't speak/read English well
   - I can't get there during hours the agency is open
   - I've been turned away because of income limits
   - It can be physically difficult for me to leave my home
   - It's too much of a hassle since the process is confusing
   - Limited Internet access
   - Other: 
   - None

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Edad</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Genero</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Raza</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Código Postal</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Lugar de encuesta</th>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>6</th>
<th>Incluyéndote, cuántas personas viven en tu hogar?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>¿Alguien en tu hogar ha servido en las fuerzas armadas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>¿Cuál es tu situación laboral actual? Marca las que correspondan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>¿Cuál es tu medio de transporte principal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>¿Cuánto tiempo llevas viviendo en tu dirección actual?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>¿Cuál es el nivel más alto de educación/estudios que has completado?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>¿Tienes o alguien en tu hogar alguna de las siguientes discapacidades? Marca las que correspondan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>¿Tienes o alguien en tu hogar alguna discapacidad que le limita para trabajar y/o ir a la escuela?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>¿Cuál es tu medio de transporte principal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Si alguna vez ha usado transporte público, ¿cuenten al menos con los siguientes problemas? Marca las que correspondan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 16 | Si poses un vehículo, ¿has experimentado alguno de los siguientes puntos en el último año? |
| 17 | ¿Cuáles son las fuentes de ingreso de tu hogar? Marca las que correspondan. |
| 18 | ¿Cuánto dinero recibes actualmente de estas fuentes de ingreso al mes? |
| 19 | ¿Con cuál de estas formas de pago has concordado para el último año? |
| 20 | ¿Alguien en tu hogar tiene una solicitud pendiente para alguna de los siguientes? Marca la que corresponda. |
| 21 | ¿Sufriste alguno de los siguientes problemas financieros? |
| 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 una. |

<table>
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<th>3</th>
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(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 médico
- Si, uno o más niños no tienen seguro médico
- No, todos tenemos seguro médico

24 Si tienes seguro, ¿qué tipo de seguro médico utilizan los miembros de tu familia actualmente? Marca las que correspondan.
- Seguro Privado
- Atención administrada (HMO, PPO)
- Medicare
- Medicaid
- Sin seguro médico

25 Durante el último año, ¿has necesitado alguno de los siguientes pero no has podido pagar? Marca las que corresponden.
- Atención médica
- Atención de salud mental o asesoramiento
- Atención dental (incluidos cheques)
- Atención óptica (incluidas gafas)
- Medicamento con receta
- Transporte a citas médicas o servicios de salud
- Otro: ______________
- Ninguno

26 ¿Hay alguna preocupación o necesidad urgente que tengas tú o alguien de tu hogar? Marca las que correspondan.
- Notificación de corte de servicios (agua, gas, etc)
- Ejecución hipotecaria/Desalojo
- Sin dinero para comida
- Coste/disponibilidad de cuidado infantil para trabajar
- Problemas legales
- Deudas pendientes
- Herido o amenazado en casa
- Otro: ______________
- Sin preocupaciones urgentes

28 Si la respuesta es “Sí”, describe a que barreras se enfrentaron. Marca las que correspondan.
- Violar para obtener servicios es difícil
- No hablo/leo Inglés bien
- No puedo llegar durante las horas en que la agencia está abierta
- Me han rechazado por mis ingresos limitados
- Puede ser físicamente complicado salir de mi hogar
- Es demasiado complicado porque el proceso es confuso
- Acceso a internet limitado
- Otro: ______________
- None

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

NOMBRE ____________________________________________ Teléfono# ____________________________________________
INSIGHTS FROM RESIDENTS
Village of Akron and Town of Newstead
JANUARY 2020

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

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

NumbersInNeed.org