COMMUNITY
SNAPSHOT

CITY OF
Niagara Falls

OCTOBER 2019

Since 2010, poverty increased 23%, while the total population has decreased by 3%.

23,700+
live in or near poverty

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

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

Numbers in Need IN BUFFALO NIAGARA

9% 17%
5% 8%

City of Niagara Falls

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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Federal Poverty Level</th>
<th>200% of Federal Poverty Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Person Household</td>
<td>$12,490</td>
<td>$24,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Person</td>
<td>$16,910</td>
<td>$33,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Person</td>
<td>$21,330</td>
<td>$42,660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Person</td>
<td>$25,750</td>
<td>$51,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$23,088 Annual Wage for a Minimum Wage Worker in NYS

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

*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.
Over 23,700 individuals—49% of the population—live in or near poverty in the City of Niagara Falls. In this community, about half of families live below the federal poverty line or near it, making ends meet on less than $42,660 for a family of three.

Residents most likely to experience poverty live along commercial corridors, near industrial areas, and in neighborhoods east of downtown. Some of the highest rates are in the Highland and Hyde Park neighborhoods and in the area between Pine Ave and Buffalo Ave just east of Portage Road. Trends over time show poverty growing in these areas over the past several years.
At a high level, the picture of poverty and economic vulnerability does not appear to be improving. The survey, focus groups, and analysis of background data show some things have improved in Niagara Falls; health insurance coverage among adults has increased, fewer respondents report barriers to services, and crime rates and juvenile arrests are declining. Nevertheless, the city continues to lose population, and the number and proportion of residents in or near poverty has increased since 2011.

Today, more residents in Niagara Falls live in poverty than live with incomes between 100% and 200% of the poverty line. Since 2011, the number of residents living near poverty dropped from 11,527 to 10,351, a decrease of 10%. During the same time period, the number of residents living in poverty increased 23%, from 10,899 to 13,367. This trend suggests that some of those who were on the verge of poverty in 2011, with incomes near but above the poverty line, may have become worse-off in recent years and are now living below the poverty line.

Among vulnerable populations in the city, some groups are faring better than others. Married couples with children and seniors over 75 have relatively low rates of poverty. However, children, single parents, young adults, and refugees & immigrants, all show signs of higher economic need.

Almost half of the city’s residents live in or near poverty. Niagara Falls’ total population has declined, yet the number of residents facing poverty is increasing.

Vulnerable Populations In Poverty, 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>50,570</td>
<td>48,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near Poverty</td>
<td>11,527</td>
<td>10,351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Poverty</td>
<td>10,889</td>
<td>13,367</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


More than half of single parents and 43% of children under 18 live in poverty. About a quarter of refugees & immigrants, and young adults live in poverty as well.
Factors That Matter

Economic vulnerability and poverty don’t usually happen overnight; rather, they’re the product of the interaction of economics, education, housing, transportation, safety, health, and other factors.

In Niagara Falls, six of the top employers are in tourism and retail. These industries are typically lower-paying and offer only part-time or seasonal jobs. **About two-thirds of jobs in Niagara Falls pay less than $40,000 per year.**

Achieving higher levels of education may be one way to earn higher wages for the 52% of adults in Niagara Falls with a high school diploma or less. Those with college degrees, especially graduate and professional, tend to make more than those with high school diplomas or less.

Getting to jobs can also be challenging for some; about one in five households doesn’t have a car. Improving transportation alternatives could broaden job opportunities for those without vehicles.

Crime continues to be a challenge in Niagara Falls, but the data suggests the situation is improving. Violent and property crime rates are on the decline, although still relatively high compared to the other 11 communities. Juvenile arrests have also fallen in recent years.

Community Data
Visit us online at NumbersInNeed.org
Explore more about this community and others in Buffalo-Niagara through interactive features and stories.

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**WORK AND INCOME**

Six of the top employers are tourism and retail related. Many jobs are lower-paying, part-time or seasonal.

**Top 10 Employers, 2019**

#1 Seneca Gaming Corp.  
#2 Niagara Falls Memorial Med Center  
#3 Niagara Falls City School District  
#4 City of Niagara  
#5 Niagara County Social Services  
#6 Walmart Supercenter  
#7 New York State Parks & Rec.  
#8 Sheraton Niagara Falls  
#9 Occidental Chemical Corp  
#10 US Post Office


**EDUCATION**

More than half of adults in Niagara Falls have the potential to increase their earnings by pursuing education beyond high school.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>Median Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>$18,869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>$26,668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College/Associate’s degree</td>
<td>$32,931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>$36,431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>$55,841</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

- Homeowners: 54%
- Renters: 78%


**HOUSING**

Housing costs burden proportionally more renters than homeowners in Niagara Falls.

% of Residents Without a Vehicle

- UNDER 65yr: 20%
- OVER 65yr: 22%


**TRANSPORTATION**

Seniors are slightly more likely to be without a car.

**CRIME**

Despite high poverty among youth, juvenile arrests fell by more than half since 2013.

Juvenile Arrests, 2013-2017

- 2013: 188  
- 2014: 181  
- 2015: 95   
- 2016: 78   
- 2017: 82

Source: NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, Niagara County and Erie County, 2013-2017.
### The Landscape of Providers

**114 SERVICE PROVIDERS** in the City of Niagara Falls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of services provided, by %</th>
<th>Providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information/Referral</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/Training</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Programs</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Wellness</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health/Addiction</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Literacy</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime/Safety</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing/Utility</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Programs</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless Services</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen Parent Programs</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran Services</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See more online | Visit NumbersInNeed.org to view additional maps and the listing of service providers.
Providers and Resident Needs

% of Adults (25+) without a College Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-30%</td>
<td>Light Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31%-40%</td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41%-50%</td>
<td>Medium Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51%-60%</td>
<td>Dark Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 60%</td>
<td>Dark Maroon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Providers offering Education and Training Services

% Housing Units that are Vacant, 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5%</td>
<td>Light Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6%-10%</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11%-15%</td>
<td>Medium Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%-20%</td>
<td>Dark Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 20%</td>
<td>Dark Maroon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Providers offering Crime/Juvenile and Homeless Services

There are many training providers in Niagara Falls, but in some neighborhoods where the need for training is high, trainers are not as accessible.

In many neighborhoods of Niagara Falls, well over half of adults do not have a college education and could potentially benefit from additional education or training. Across the community, there are 56 service providers offering education and training services. Most of these training providers are located in high-need neighborhoods where more than half of adults do not have a college education. However, there are some high-need neighborhoods where few training providers exist, creating potential gaps in the landscape for residents that desire additional training. Gaps can be seen in parts of Hyde Park and LaSalle neighborhoods, and east of downtown between Buffalo Ave and Pine Ave. Local training providers can extend community outreach, transportation, and other support services to these areas making it easier for people to enroll in and advance through training programs.

Some neighborhoods with a high number of vacant homes have fewer service providers dealing with issues tied to vacancy, like crime and homelessness.

High residential vacancy rates are often correlated with crime and homelessness. Neighborhoods in Niagara Falls have some of the highest vacancy rates in the region. The community has 31 organizations offering services for crime and homelessness, but these providers are often not found in neighborhoods with high vacancy. Most vacant units are in the darkest areas on the map in neighborhoods such as Downtown and Highland where 20%+ of housing units are vacant. But less than half of service providers for crime and homelessness are in these high-need areas. Providers can target outreach and other services to address safety and homelessness in neighborhoods where vacant homes are concentrated.
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?

There is increasing pressure on service providers in Niagara Falls, as poverty increased by double digits and the total population declined, with slightly fewer residents to support the city’s tax base and service landscape through donations and volunteers. Providers see potential to do more with the resources that exist through new and expanded partnerships. They also see opportunities to improve services and outcomes through how services are delivered and the power of compassion in service delivery. Providers want to see greater alignment between what they are doing and regional economic development efforts so all residents can benefit from industry investments and growth. Transportation continues to be a barrier to work and services, but there are promising developments on the horizon that may improve options for public transit for workers.

Available online at NumbersInNeed.org

Strengths of the system

114 providers exist in Niagara Falls. There are at least four providers in each of 16 categories of programs and services.

Nearly half or more of providers offer education and training, youth activities, health/wellness programs, and information and referrals. Both residents and providers identified education and training as a programmatic strength.

Most service provider are located in high-poverty neighborhoods within one mile of thousands of individuals living in or near poverty.

In addition to being within walking distance of many residents, nearly 90% of providers in Niagara Falls are within 1/4 mile of a bus stop offering the foundation for strong public transit options.

Gaps

Providers said that compassionate service delivery is largely missing and a gap in Niagara Falls, as it is across the region and beyond.

Providers reported that gaps also exist for early intervention services for young children. While services exist, demand exceeds supply. Long wait lists result in some children aging out and becoming ineligible for the services they need for school readiness.

Providers identified substance abuse programs as an additional need not captured by the preliminary findings. They described how addiction relates to many challenges such as disability, educational attainment and employment.

Providers described how gaps in affordable, flexible childcare create employment barriers for working adults.

Barriers

Providers say that human services delivery is not closely enough aligned with economic development and this creates barriers that make it more difficult to train and prepare individuals living in poverty for higher-paying jobs.

Providers say that lack of awareness by residents is an another barrier that makes it difficult to reach residents with helpful programs.

Sometimes residents have misperceptions and believe they are ineligible for services they qualify for.

Providers say many residents they work with have not one barrier but multiple barriers to work including childcare, transportation, prior arrests, drug use and past due child support payments.

Providers identified transportation as being a major barrier for residents to access jobs and services.

Promising Developments

Compassionate Niagara (an offshoot of the 2018 Niagara County Poverty Conference) promotes compassionate service delivery.

The Homeless Alliance of WNY notes that homelessness among veterans has been nearly eliminated.

Niagara County Coalition for Services to the Homeless is community-wide coalition for tackling shared challenges.

Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan offers a strategic plan for improving food access through healthy neighborhoods, education, agriculture and more.

The Niagara Falls Bike Master plan will create a more bicycle-friendly city.

Heart, Love, & Soul will launch a Daybreak Program with new services for homeless people.

A BOCES Workforce Training Center now offers vocational training in the city.
Residents who took the survey provided a glimpse into the lives of the community’s most vulnerable.

Many residents have urgent concerns related to a lack of money for basic necessities like food and utilities. Little cash for everyday expenses may contribute to residents taking on debt. In addition to consumer/credit card debt, residents are challenged with student loans and medical bills.

The majority of respondents have medical coverage, but almost two in five still have medical needs they can’t afford, potentially contributing to outstanding medical bill debt.

Vulnerable residents often do not own a working vehicle, so many bike or walk to their destination, or rely on friends/family to get there. Those with cars often face expensive repairs and failed inspections.

Although 87% of adult respondents have health insurance and this is an improvement from 2013, many have medical needs not covered by their insurance such as dental and optical care or prescription medicine. These services are often necessary but not affordable for low-income residents.

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 percentage 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.

Half of all respondents are dealing with some kind of financial challenge. Debt is the most common problem they face. Over 40% have debt from student loans and/or consumer debt. Over 30% have medical bills. Many do not have a bank account, making saving for the future more difficult.

### TOP 3 URGENT CONCERNS REPORTED BY THESE RESIDENTS

- **Outstanding Debt**: 38%
- **No Money for Food**: 31%
- **Utility Shut-off**: 29%

### HEALTH CARE NEEDS

39% of vulnerable residents are in need of some type of healthcare but can’t afford it.

### TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

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 percentage 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.

### FINANCIAL NEEDS

Half of all respondents are dealing with some kind of financial challenge. Debt is the most common problem they face. Over 40% have debt from student loans and/or consumer debt. Over 30% have medical bills. Many do not have a bank account, making saving for the future more difficult.

### Top 5 Financial Challenges in Household

- **Student loan debt**: 42%
- **Consumer/credit card debt**: 42%
- **No bank account**: 32%
- **Medical bills**: 32%
- **Other**: 23%
Enhance career pipelines for youth into good-paying jobs in the skilled trades that do not require a four-year college degree.

Nearly 25,000 young adults without children in Buffalo Niagara live in or near poverty. While 11% of them have dropped out of high school, an even higher percentage—36%—have a college education. Insights from residents suggest that a high school diploma alone does not equip youth with the skills needed to find good-paying jobs. Meanwhile, employers in industries like manufacturing and clean energy report hard-to-fill higher paying jobs in the trades, many of which require skills and training beyond high school but not a four year college degree. Training programs that prepare students for these types of jobs can lead young adults to rewarding careers.

Potential Action Steps
Develop a career mentoring and internship program for teens through the local chamber of commerce or industry association.
Consider developing a YES (Youth Engaged in Service) program that offers teens out-of-school volunteer opportunities where they cultivate skills through service learning that may help with job identification later on.
Engage area employers in sponsoring in-classroom speakers, facility tours, internships, externships, and career mentors for students.
Raise awareness among students of the longer term, higher paying job opportunities and skilled training offered by unions and apprenticeship programs.

Potential Actors in the Community
Workforce development organizations
Public school districts
Community colleges
BOCES
Business community and industry organizations
NYS Department of Labor and other government agencies
Economic and community development organizations

Models to Consider
BEGREEN P-TECH, Buffalo, NY
buffaloschools.org/Page/84607

Town of Amherst Youth Engaged in Service (YES), Amherst, NY
amherst.ny.us/pdf/youth/yes_bro.pdf
Regional Strategies and Models to Consider, cont’d.

**Regional Strategies and Models to Consider, cont’d.**

**Transportation**

**Improve the viability and safety of active modes of transportation—like walking and biking.**

Active modes of transportation, like biking and walking, are low-cost, healthy travel options. However, the feasibility of these options is limited in many communities by environmental conditions, like inadequate sidewalks and street lighting, and dispersed locations of key services. Insights from providers show that neighborhoods that are not walkable or safe for pedestrians can limit residents’ ability to access services. **Placing more jobs and services near populations in need is a straightforward way to increase accessibility and overcome transportation barriers.** Promoting environments that encourage physical activity, such as walkable neighborhoods, parks, and trails, can also encourage people to make more trips by walking or biking.

**Potential Action Steps**

Locate service providers in existing communities, particularly in areas with a high concentration of populations in need, such as older adults, individuals living in or near poverty, or in households without a vehicle.

Promote volunteerism to foster healthy, active lifestyles, especially for older adults.

Engage residents through direct outreach to promote walking and physical activity.

Advocate for the placement of senior housing and other residential developments near existing amenities and services, such as shopping, health care, and food.

Host events, walks, and bike rides to promote the use of existing active transportation infrastructure.

Partner with health care providers, hospitals, and clinics to promote biking and walking.

**Potential Actors in the Community**

- NFTA
- Private ride-sharing companies
- Transportation service providers (private, not-for-profit)
- Local governments
- Economic and community development organizations
- Health service providers
- Community organizations and block clubs

**Models to Consider**

- Albert Lea Blue Zones Program, Albert Lea, MN
  [albertlea.bluezonesproject.com](http://albertlea.bluezonesproject.com)
- Granville Greenways, Granville County, NC
  [granvillegreenways.org](http://granvillegreenways.org)
Data Sources & Notes

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Defining Need, Page 2
Minimum Wage: New York State Department of Labor, Minimum Wage (effective 12/31/18).

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Poverty, Need and Economic Vulnerability, Page 5

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.

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.

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Provider Services and Needs of Residents, Page 8
Provider Data: See note for page 6.

Opportunities and Challenges for Providers, Page 9
Insights from Providers, City of Niagara Falls, October 2019. Provider insights come from an agency focus group held in July 2019 with 16 provider representatives.

Survey Results of Economically Vulnerable Residents, Page 10
Insights from Residents, City of Niagara Falls, October 2019. Survey findings come from 332 surveys completed at 23 locations between April and August 2019.

Strategies and Models to Consider
Educational attainment of young adults in Buffalo Niagara: IPUMS, American Community Survey, 2016 (5-year estimates).
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