

“

What can we do to come up with creative solutions around transportation?”

“

This collaborative has been building; more stakeholders are coming to the table.”

“

We're getting better at sharing services, but there's still a lot of work to do, because everyone is always in silos.”

INSIGHTS

FROM

PROVIDERS

# TOWN OF Cheektowaga

MAY 2020



## Numbers in Need

IN BUFFALO NIAGARA

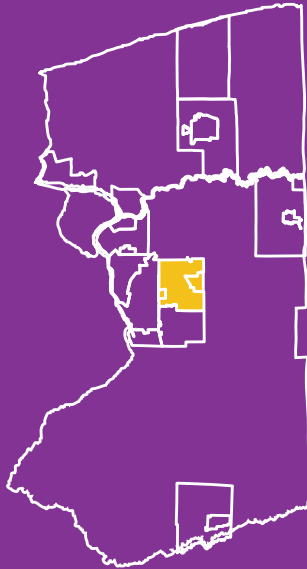


A Mobile Safety Net Team initiative established by The John R. Oishei Foundation



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

# Town of Cheektowaga



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## About this Report

This report offers a snapshot of findings for the Town of Cheektowaga, with new data on the community's population that lives in or near poverty. It includes the perspectives of human service 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 2013.

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

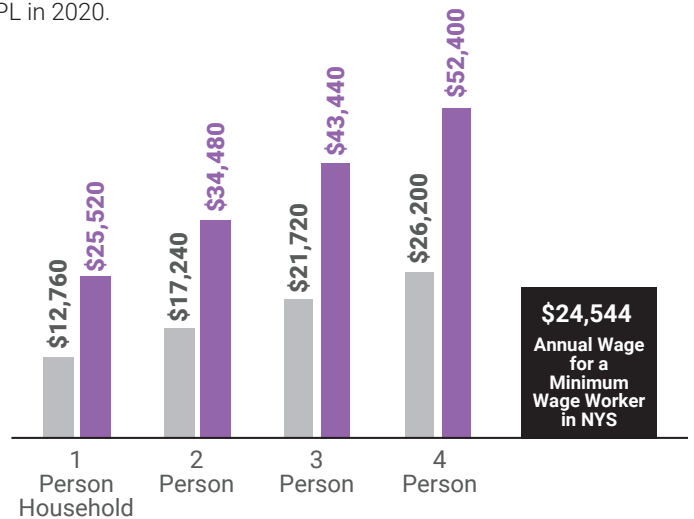
Just over 24,200 residents in Cheektowaga live in or near poverty on incomes below two hundred percent of the federal poverty line.

The federal poverty line (FPL) is \$12,760 for a household of one, \$17,240 for a two-person household, \$21,720 for a family of three, and \$26,200 for a family of four. A single parent of two who works full-time, year-round at the minimum wage in NYS (\$11.80 per hour or \$24,544 a year) earns an income just above the FPL in 2020.

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 \$52,400 for a family of four) generally do not meet income guidelines for most programs.

## Federal Poverty Guidelines, 2020

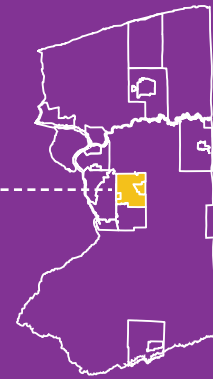
■ Federal Poverty Level    ■ 200% of Federal Poverty Level



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 **Town of Cheektowaga**, one of 12 representative communities in the Buffalo Niagara Region selected for assessment and investment as part of the Numbers in Need project.

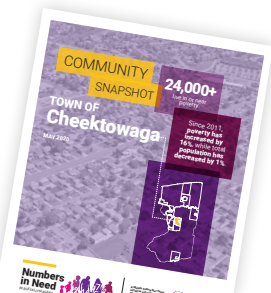


Each of these reports for this community is available online at [NumbersinNeed.org](https://NumbersinNeed.org)



## Insights from Providers

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



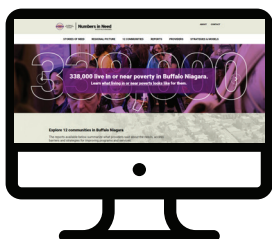
## Community Snapshot

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



## Insights from Residents

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



## Visit us online at [NumbersinNeed.org](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.

# What Went Into This Report



## Building an Updated Landscape of Providers



The 2013 Baseline Community Report was the starting point.

### Baseline Community Reports

The report completed for the Town of Cheektowaga in December 2013 offered a starting point for analyzing the landscape of services.



## Information was updated through an Agency Questionnaire.

### Agency Questionnaire

Dozens of not-for-profit and governmental human service providers completed an agency questionnaire, which asked providers for updated information on their organizations, including the programs and services they offer.



## Gaining Insights from Providers

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

Talking with agencies that provide programs and services to residents in the community highlighted challenges and barriers that preliminary data findings did not show. In some cases, providers turned our attention to new topics and areas of concern. In other cases, they offered additional insights on data and trends revealed through outreach to residents and analysis of detailed community data on poverty, housing costs, vehicle access, educational attainment, work, income and family factors that contribute to economic vulnerability.

**Community Data**

**Resident Surveys**

**Resident Focus Groups**

Preliminary findings from these activities were shared at a provider focus group meeting.

**Provider Focus Groups**

*23 representatives of not-for-profit organizations, governmental service providers and businesses participated in a focus group sharing insights on additional areas of concern, barriers, successes, and strategies for the future.*

### Participating Organizations

- Catholic Charities
- Cheektowaga Central High School
- Cheektowaga Chamber of Commerce
- Cheektowaga Office of Community Development
- Cheektowaga Senior Services
- Cheektowaga Town Council
- Dick Urban Community Association
- Erie County Department of Social Services
- Fidelis Care
- Gordon Companies Inc.
- NY State Assembly
- NY State Senate
- Presbyterian Senior Care of WNY
- Maryvale School District
- Mental Health Advocates of WNY
- Rosina Foods Inc.
- The Chapel at Cheektowaga
- Town of Cheektowaga Senior Center
- Town of Cheektowaga Youth & Recreation
- Villa Maria College
- Western New York Law Center

## Perspectives and Insights from Providers

The findings presented in this report synthesize **what we heard from providers**. Insights were captured from several providers who participated in a focus group and shared additional perspectives and information on needs of the community, barriers they face in connecting with residents, and promising developments.



**Strengths of the Landscape**



**Additional Gaps/Needs Identified by Providers**



**Barriers Residents Face to Programs, Services, and Jobs**



**Promising Developments**

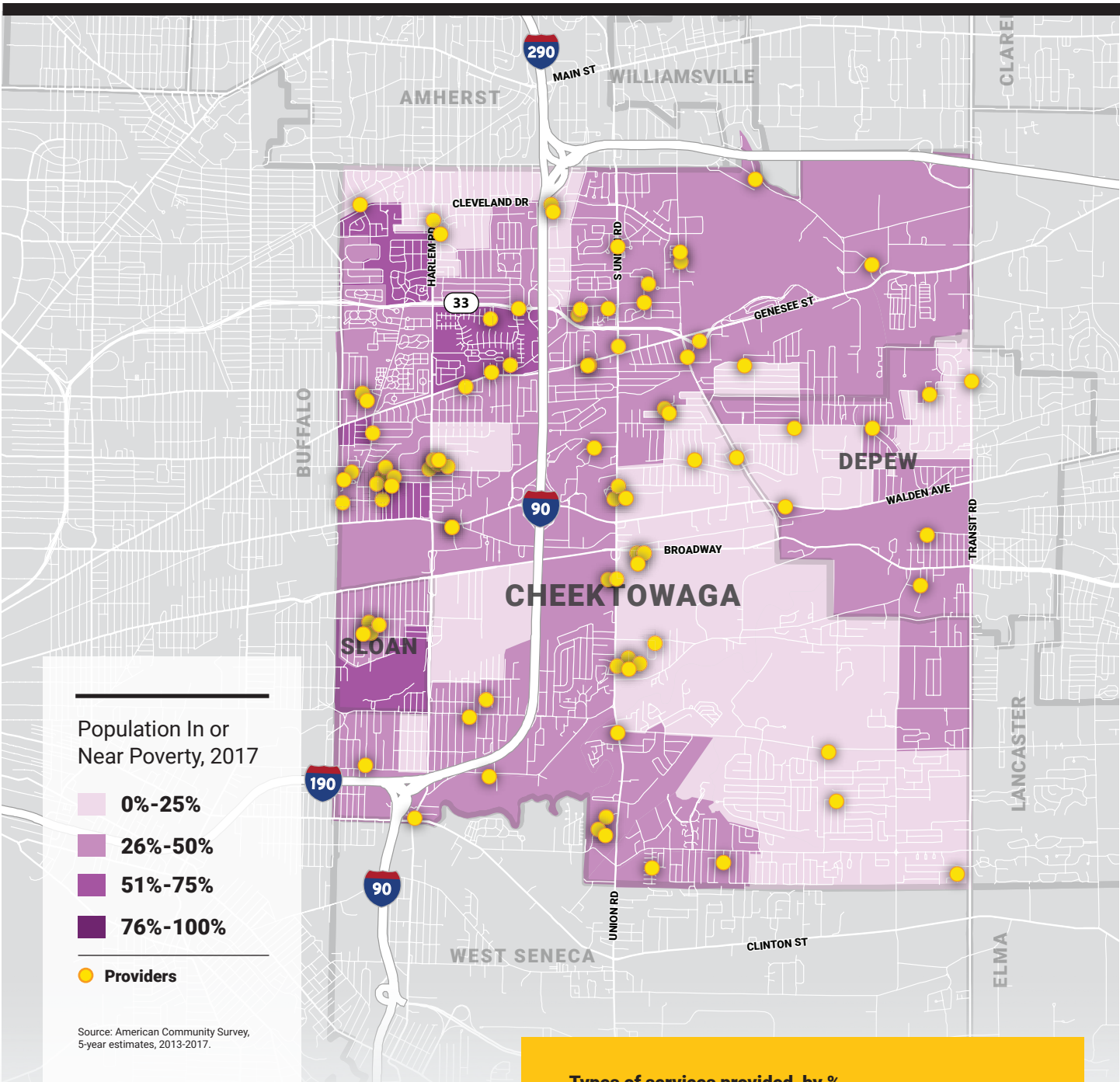


**Models to Consider**

### Find it here:

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

**Numbers in Need Website**  
*(Provider Tool)*



## The Landscape of Providers

# 89

**SERVICE PROVIDERS**  
in the Town of Cheektowaga



See more online

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



### Types of services provided, by %

52%	Education/ Training	11%	Crime/Juvenile
43%	Info/Referral	8%	Clothing
33%	Youth Programs	8%	Transportation
28%	Health/Wellness	7%	Seniors
20%	Food	3%	Teen Parents
19%	Mental Health/ Addictions	2%	Veterans
15%	Housing/Utility	2%	Homeless
12%	Financial Literacy	2%	Legal



## Strengths of the Landscape

### Nearly 90 service providers are located in Cheektowaga.

Cheektowaga has fewer service providers per capita than the study region as a whole. But in total, the town has more service providers than any community in the study region outside of Buffalo and Niagara Falls. Cheektowaga's providers are spread out across the town, but many lie on major corridors like Union Road and Genesee Street. About half the town's providers are small, not-for-profit organizations that typically offer just a few services. Twenty-five locations provide at least four types of services, including local school districts, Catholic Charities, and Aspire of WNY.

### Every type of service is offered by at least two providers in town.

Unlike most other communities in the study region, every type of service can be found at two or more locations in Cheektowaga. The most common services are education/training, information/referral, and youth programs, which are also the most widespread services across the entire study region. Moreover, some services that are often hard to find in other communities are more common in Cheektowaga. For example, health and wellness programs are offered by 29% of Cheektowaga providers, compared to 19% of all providers in the study region. Financial literacy services and crime/juvenile programs are also relatively more common in Cheektowaga than in most other communities.

### Most providers are located near thousands of residents in need.

About 24,200 people in Cheektowaga live in or near poverty. Poverty is generally more prevalent on the west side of town, near the Buffalo Niagara International Airport, and in parts of the villages of Depew and Sloan. Many of the town's service providers are also located near these areas. About half of Cheektowaga's providers are situated within one mile of 3,000+ residents living in or near poverty. Furthermore, over half of Cheektowaga's providers are within a quarter-mile of an NFTA bus stop. Residents are generally more likely to use helpful services if they are located nearby and accessible by public transit.

### Programs for seniors and food are a top community strength.

The provider focus group identified senior services as the top strength in the community's social services landscape, followed by food programs. Interestingly, these types of programs account for a smaller share of service providers in Cheektowaga than the study region overall. This suggests that despite having a relatively low number of providers, senior and food programs in Cheektowaga are high quality. Seven locations offer senior programs, including the Cheektowaga Senior Citizen Center, which also offers transportation, health, and other services. Food programs are available at 19 sites including food pantries, religious organizations, and schools. Quality services for food and seniors provide a strong foundation for the community's social service landscape.

**Every type of service is in the community. The most common services—education, information/referral, and youth programs—are available at 30 or more locations.**

Source: UBRI analysis of provider locations, 2020.

**About half of Cheektowaga's service providers are within a one-mile radius of 3,000+ residents in or near poverty.**

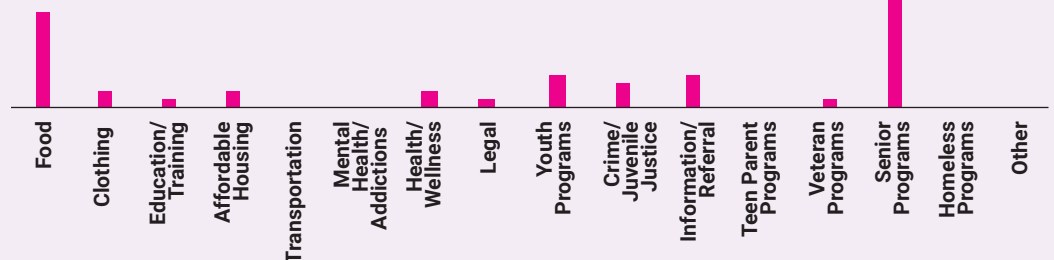
Source: UBRI analysis of provider locations relative to the population living in or near poverty, 2020.

**More than half of Cheektowaga's service providers are located within a quarter-mile of an NFTA bus stop.**

Source: UBRI analysis of provider locations and NFTA transit stops, 2020.

### Top strengths identified by provider focus group

Providers were asked to identify the community's strongest programs and services. Programs for seniors and food were considered top strengths, followed by youth services, and information/referral.





## Additional Gaps/Needs Identified by Providers

### Transportation gaps can limit economic opportunities.

Transportation is the single greatest barrier for residents looking to get to jobs and services, according to the provider focus group. In Cheektowaga, limited transportation options can reduce job opportunities and create hiring challenges. Although most major roads are served by public transportation, commuting by bus to employers in Cheektowaga can be impractical for many workers living in town or in neighboring communities. Promoting alternative modes of transportation, like walking, or taking the bus, could create economic benefits for drivers too, as residents with a vehicle are often burdened by the high costs of owning a car and could save on transportation if getting around without a car was more practical.

Focus group participants expressed concern about gaps in NFTA service creating hiring difficulties for employers. Businesses often find qualified applicants who do not own a car and are unable to get to jobs because they cannot find safe, timely, affordable transportation. And while many employers have a bus stop somewhat nearby, buses do not always make stops at the same time that workers change shifts, so waiting for the bus can add hours to the work day. And walking from a bus stop to employers along the town's busy commercial corridors can be dangerous, particularly at night. Providers said ridesharing services like Uber and Lyft can be helpful to some in the community, but costs tend to be impractical for everyday transportation. Employers and community groups are working together with regional transportation agencies and ridesharing companies to explore innovative solutions to these barriers along a stretch of Union Road, but broader efforts are needed to help the town overcome its transportation challenges.

### There's a need for more quality job opportunities, connected to existing training and education programs.

When participants in the resident and provider focus groups were asked what they would change to improve the community, adding more high-paying jobs was a common response. Providers noted that, while jobs are available, they are often lower paying, or mismatched with worker skills and training programs. Three of the top five employers in town are in retail and about two-thirds of jobs pay less than \$40,000 a year. Manufacturers and other employers offer higher-paying jobs that do not require a degree, but residents may be unaware of these jobs and may not know where to get training.

Providers attribute hiring difficulties, in part, to the lack of coordination between employers and education/training programs. While programs are available to connect employer needs with qualified workers and training programs, these services are limited and often only available to certain groups, such as individuals with disabilities. Some providers felt that many college-educated young adults from Cheektowaga move out of town after they get their degree due to the lack of higher paying jobs in the community. Focus group participants recognized that creating higher paying jobs can go hand-in-hand with enhancing the community—providing more opportunities for transportation, housing, and recreation can improve quality of life, and make Cheektowaga a more attractive place to live and work to help bring in more job opportunities and new residents.

**“Public transportation is available, but a lot of employers operate on various shifts and are outside the scope of what NFTA can provide... So what can we do to come up with creative solution?”**

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with service providers in Cheektowaga, 2019.

**“[College] students usually get their degree and move out, because of limited job opportunities and low-paying jobs...”**

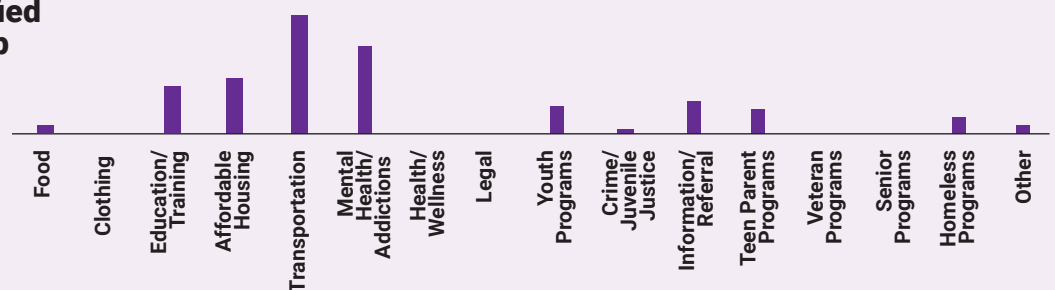
Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with service providers in Cheektowaga, 2019.

**“Schools have an opportunity to incorporate programs that help students with job readiness down the road.”**

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with service providers in Cheektowaga, 2019.

### Top gaps/needs identified by provider focus group

Providers identified service areas where expanded programs are needed. Transportation and mental health/addictions emerged as top needs, followed by affordable housing, and education.





## Additional Gaps/Needs Identified by Providers, cont'd.

### **Mental health services need to be expanded and integrated into other programs.**

Participants in the provider focus group identified mental health as one of the community's top service needs, second only to transportation. This need extends across age groups, from school-aged children to seniors. Representatives from local schools noted the difficulties in organizing long-term individualized therapy for students. These concerns, often exacerbated by issues like bullying, domestic concerns, or substance use, can lead to dire consequences, or even suicide. Providers noted that proactive outreach and follow-up services are needed to properly treat mental health issues, but this requires more collaboration between providers, and a significant amount of time and resources.

While there are 17 providers of mental health services in Cheektowaga, these services cannot reach everyone in need, particularly when mental health issues can easily go undetected. Focus group participants said a wider variety of programs are needed to effectively address mental health needs for underserved groups such as refugees and immigrants. This work is happening within schools and other organizations, but there is room for increased outreach and cooperation between providers and community groups to help tackle the community's mental health needs.

### **Housing supports need to be strengthened and diversified, especially for seniors and young adults with lower incomes.**

Although homes in Cheektowaga are relatively affordable compared to the region, many homeowners are still burdened by housing costs. But renters are even more likely to be burdened by housing costs, as rents in Cheektowaga are above the regional average. Eighty four percent of Cheektowaga's low-income renters spend more than 30% of their income on housing. Providers in the focus group identified affordable housing as one of the community's greatest social service needs, behind transportation and mental health.

Providers said the shortage of affordable rental housing presents challenges for residents, particularly seniors on fixed incomes who may have trouble keeping up with the costs of homeownership. Some consider moving into apartments or assisted living facilities, but these options often cost more per month than their current home. Younger residents also find themselves in this situation—they lack the savings to afford a down payment on a home, but the rents they currently pay are higher than many mortgage payments in town. Residents who took part in a focus group identified affordable housing as the community's top service need. Some residents endured utility shut offs in the past to try to keep up with housing costs.

### **While recognizing recent progress, providers say there's still a need to increase collaboration in service delivery.**

Providers commended the volunteering efforts of churches and other local organizations for sharing resources and information to improve the provision of services. Many credited the Mobile Safety-Net Team and Cheektowagara Community Resource Hub for bringing community groups and service providers together on a regular basis. However, some stressed that there is still a need for enhanced collaboration in the town, and a need to bring in more providers within Cheektowaga and from neighboring communities. Some providers talked about how jurisdictional lines, and programmatic silos can create barriers to collaboration. For example, there are many facilities and services in nearby downtown Buffalo, but these resources primarily serve the city and are harder for Cheektowaga residents to access. Similarly, organizations that provide one or two services may not be aware of providers that work in other areas and may be missing opportunities to address related issues and work toward common goals. For example, a workforce training provider may need to help trainees find affordable childcare, but may not know who to reach out to for such services.

### **Mental health is one of the community's top needs, second only to transportation.**

Source: Numbers in Need, Focus Group feedback, Cheektowaga, 2019.

**“Clients tell me how much they pay for rent, and it's the same amount I pay for my mortgage. But due to lack of credit, they're unable to get a mortgage.”**

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with service providers in Cheektowaga, 2019.

**“The key thing is knowing what's out there. There are a lot of services out there that we don't know about in Cheektowaga, or even right on the borders, that can help our residents.”**

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with service providers in Cheektowaga, 2019.





## Barriers Residents Face to Programs, Services and Jobs

### Accessing basic services without a car is a big challenge.

Many providers, residents, and workplaces in Cheektowaga are within walking distance to a bus stop, but most residents find public transportation impractical. Busy, constantly changing schedules make it hard to meet daily needs using public transit, with its fixed schedules and longer travel times. Getting around by car is quicker and more reliable, which is why nine out of ten households in Cheektowaga own a car. But those without a car have a big disadvantage. One provider discussed how routine errands, like a working parent taking their child to daycare, can be a serious challenge without a car, and can even limit employment opportunities. Transportation gaps also can create barriers to health care and education. Providers discussed how time-consuming it can be to figure out night and weekend trips to and from neighboring communities on public transportation, which are common for residents in need of services, secondary jobs, or workforce training.

Seniors in Cheektowaga are less likely to drive a vehicle than younger adults, but still have important travel needs, like getting to medical appointments. Providers said the transportation programs available to seniors, like those offered by Erie County Social Services, are helpful, but these services have a hard time keeping up with the demand for flexible, reliable transportation. Residents and providers agreed that providing more affordable, safe, and reliable transportation options, and connecting these services with other programs and job opportunities, is one of the community's greatest needs.

### Financial concerns create barriers to education and training.

More than 29,000 adults in Cheektowaga do not have a college degree. Pursuing higher education can improve job prospects, but most face financial barriers. Providers talked about how teens and young adults may not pursue college if they have urgent financial concerns at home, like eviction or foreclosure. And those that do go to college often become burdened financially. Some take on significant credit card debt to cover living expenses while attending school, and many find themselves strapped to pay back student loans, whether or not they complete a degree. Financial stresses can affect academic performance and may cause some to lose financial aid or drop out.

Providers suggested New York State's Excelsior Scholarships should alleviate the costs of college for many, but agreed more needs to be done to promote quality job opportunities that do not require a college degree. This is one reason why the provider focus group identified education and training as one of the community's top service needs.

### There is a constant need for funding to improve services.

Providers emphasized the mismatch between residents need for services and the funding available to provide services. Participants in the provider focus group noted how challenging it is to advocate for more public services when many residents and businesses in the community already find the taxes burdensome, even if they see a clear need for services. Funding issues impact not only public services, but also a wide range of nonprofits which often rely on memberships or other fees to provide services.

Budget cuts often lead to the elimination of supporting roles that may not directly provide services, but can still be critical. One provider said that after budget cuts, support services, like marketing and outreach, are the first to be cut. This restrains their ability to get the word out about services, which reduces enrollment in programs, and limits their ability to provide services. Providers also described how similar service providers compete for the same funding when resources are limited, which can prevent collaboration and, ultimately, limit the quality and quantity of services available. Creative, low-cost solutions to community needs, and multiple, sustainable funding sources are needed to close the gaps in Cheektowaga's social services landscape.

**“Nearly 3,800 households in Cheektowaga do not have a vehicle.”**

Source: American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2012-2017..

**“We have employers coming to us wanting to fill positions. They have jobs available but can't get people in the jobs. But we are seeing employers waive some hiring requirements...”**

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with service providers in Cheektowaga, 2019.

**“If you have programming, it better make money or pay for itself, because if it doesn't, you cannot run it. But I still have adults who need services but cannot afford to pay.”**

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with service providers in Cheektowaga, 2019.



## Barriers Residents Face to Programs, Services and Jobs, cont'd.

### Many families face a range of barriers to youth programs.

Providers stressed the importance of providing affordable, constructive, and fun after school programs for youth of all ages, but especially adolescents. With many parents working for hours after the school day ends, teens can be at risk of falling into negative patterns or even crime. Focus group participants suggested that youth programs should involve community service and a wider range of skills training and alternative education options, so youth can explore career pathways. While recognizing the opportunity to partner with local employers, some suggested additional facilities may be needed for skills training. Although local schools may have space and facilities available, acquiring the funding to run training programs is a challenge.

Besides education, other recreational opportunities exist for youth, but some programs, like sports leagues, are unaffordable for some families. Other families face cultural barriers. One provider discussed how the community has a shortage of services for its growing population of refugees and immigrants, especially for children and young adults. Mentorship programs, or other culturally relevant services for refugees and immigrants are typically only available outside of the community, which can be a barrier for those without reliable transportation. While the community's 29 providers of youth programs are a valuable resource, providers seemed to agree that a wider range of opportunities for youth are needed. Some were concerned that resources for youth programs might even be cut back due to the town's declining youth population.

### Seniors need supports to help them age-in-place, but may not be sure how to reach out for help.

Senior programs were identified as a top strength of the community's social service landscape by both providers and residents, but there remains a need to help seniors age in place. Many seniors in town have deep ties to the community and a strong desire to stay in their home, but unexpected maintenance costs can be hard to afford in retirement. Those willing to move out of their home have a hard time finding rental units or assisted living facilities they can afford. One senior in the resident focus group said they received a forgivable loan to make an unexpected repair, which helped them stay in their home, but that others had difficulty learning about, or navigating through, similar programs. Providers noted how the lack of access to or experience with technology can be a barrier to accessing services for older adults. They also said some older residents in need are reluctant to seek help due to a negative stigma around public assistance.

### Residents face a wide range of obstacles to employment—from childcare and transportation, to age bias and drug use.

A number of interconnected barriers can limit job prospects and earnings. Parents, especially single parents, have a difficult time finding affordable childcare that fits their schedule. Providers were encouraged by new Erie County guidelines that allow more college students to receive public assistance to help cover childcare. While these new guidelines will help some parents pursue training to improve their job prospects, the shortage of affordable child care remains a significant barrier for the community.

Transportation is another obstacle. Some workers are qualified for positions they cannot accept because they do not own a vehicle, and have no affordable way to get to work. Others are qualified and experienced, but have a harder time getting hired and keeping jobs because they are approaching retirement age. One focus group participant noted that while drug use remains a barrier to employment for many residents, an increasing number of employers are waiving the requirement of passing a drug test in their hiring practices. Other employers are even lowering educational requirements to fill in-demand positions. The range of barriers residents face to higher paying employment speaks to the need for educators, trainers, and employers to work together with providers to offer wraparound services to support the various needs of residents.

**“There’s still that gap for programs and services for our kids, and that ties into everything...”**

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with service providers in West Seneca, 2019.

**“Seniors are trying to maintain their home because the options for moving into assisted living are quite expensive, and they also don’t want to leave their home.”**

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with service providers in West Seneca, 2019.

**“Adequate access to affordable childcare is affecting the workforce, and transportation is a huge issue.”**

Source: Numbers in Need, Conversation with service providers in West Seneca, 2019.



## Promising Developments

### Programs and Partnerships

**The Cheektowaga Community Hub is increasing collaboration between agencies and enhancing service delivery.** The Cheektowaga Community Hub opened in 2016. The Hub hosts resource events twice a month at the Resurrection Life Church, giving residents an opportunity to connect with many service providers at the same time and location. Hub meetings bring together 15 to 20 social service providers and can attract hundreds of residents. Providers said the Hub helps them promote programs to residents and other providers. This helps residents in need connect with more useful services and spurs collaboration between agencies. While the Hub is a successful model, providers felt that more frequent meetings and enhanced outreach could help bring in additional service providers and maximize Hub's positive impact on Cheektowaga's social services landscape. Some suggested the Mobile Hub, that travels to different locations where many residents are already assembled, like school functions, could enhance service delivery even more with expanded outreach.

**New facilities are expanding a wide range of services, from childcare and education, to housing and social services.** Providers in Cheektowaga pointed to many community concerns, one being the need for more affordable childcare. A new daycare center opened in a vacant building on Harlem Road in 2019 to help fill the urgent need. In April 2019, construction began on a residential complex for older adults and individuals with disabilities, which should help fill the need for more affordable housing options. To provide skills training for teens, the Erie 1 BOCES EDGE Academy opened on East Delavan Avenue in 2018 providing career training and other education programs for 19 area school districts. A new urgent care facility that opened on Union Road in 2019 will help be a lifeline for residents in need of emergency medical care. But perhaps most notably, the offices of Erie County's Child Protective Services (CPS) relocated to Appletree Business Park in 2019. This brought 450 jobs into the town while giving Erie County CPS added space for training and other programs.

**A coalition is working on innovative solutions to transportation challenges.** A number of major employers are working with the community and transportation providers to fill gaps in public transit service that are creating hiring challenges for local businesses along a stretch of Union Road. Employers, the NFTA, and other community representatives met with Enterprise Holdings, Inc. in August 2019 to discuss possible solutions. One option being explored is "vanpooling." This is basically carpooling, but the employers work with Enterprise to provide vehicles. Innovative transportation models will be needed more and more to fill key service gaps where low ridership numbers make conventional bus service infeasible. Conversations on implementing "vanpooling" for these employers are ongoing, but employers remain optimistic.

**Cheektowaga is investing in its youth.** Voters in the Cheektowaga School District approved a \$16 million capital improvement project in 2019 to expand the Union East Elementary School to handle a growing number of students. Youth programs also seem to be expanding in Cheektowaga. The Maryvale School District recently began an after school program after receiving grants through New York State's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. A new Cheektowaga Boys and Girls Club plans to launch in 2020 in the Alexander Community Center. These programs can help fill the community's need for after school and youth programs that providers identified. Other programs are being launched to increase food security—Villa Maria College is now home to a food pantry, and Cleveland Hill School District began offering free breakfast and lunch to all students in 2019.

**A variety of organizations in the community are promoting awareness of mental health concerns, and tackling these issues.** Local school districts are leading efforts to address mental health by creating new positions and programs. The Cheektowaga Central School district hosted mental and emotional health seminars in March 2019. The Cheektowaga Police Department hired a substance abuse and mental health specialist through Endeavor Health Services who provides mental health treatment services to residents interacting with police to help them stay out of the criminal justice system. Even the Town Highway Department is getting involved in getting the word out about mental health with a new truck painted to promote awareness of mental health concerns. Providers are hopeful that this work will spur similar efforts in other communities across the region.

# Models to Consider



Good things are happening in this community and beyond that are transforming the way human services are delivered. The models on this page offer two examples of ways service providers are tackling challenges in innovative ways that respond to the needs of the community.

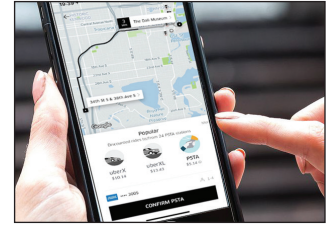
The Numbers in Need website—NumbersInNeed.org—contains additional models to consider and strategies for tackling the concerns and barriers experienced by providers in Cheektowaga. These are intended to inspire solution building and spur conversation as community leaders and agency representatives consider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



## Transportation

### PSTA Direct Connect

In Pinellas County, Florida, a partnership between the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) and Uber or United Taxi gives a \$5 discount to riders who are travelling to or from one of 24 "Direct Connect" locations in the region. Direct Connect locations are specific transit stops identified as places where first-mile and last-mile connections to transit are needed. Aside from the partnership with Uber and United Taxi, riders can also receive a \$25 discount on Wheelchair Transport to or from any Direct Connect location. The program began in February 2016 with a limited number of Direct Connect locations, but expanded to include 24 Direct Connect locations today. Subsidies are paid for by the PSTA..



[uber.com/blog/tampa-bay/uber-psta-dc/](https://uber.com/blog/tampa-bay/uber-psta-dc/)

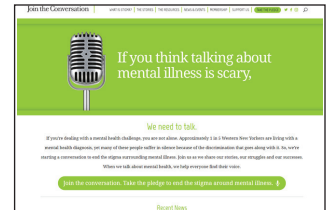


## Youth & Teens

### Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition

Sixteen organizations from across Erie County and the greater Western New York area came together to form the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition. On its website, LetsTalkStigma.org, there are educational resources aimed at dispelling negative stereotypes about mental illness, such as that people with mental health problems are violent or that they are bad employees. The coalition also aims to "remove the shame and secrecy surrounding" mental illness through its Join the Conversation campaign, which launched in 2017 and shares the stories of those who have suffered or are suffering from mental illness. On the website, one can also pledge to end stigma by, for example, avoiding using stigmatizing words like "crazy" and "psycho" in everyday conversation. As of December 2019, over 3,000 people have taken the pledge.

[letstalkstigma.org/](https://letstalkstigma.org/)



# Data Sources & Notes

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

## Defining Need, Page 2

Federal Poverty Level: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, HHS Poverty Guidelines for 2020 (posted in the Federal Register on 1/17/20).

Minimum Wage: New York State Department of Labor, Minimum Wage (effective 12/31/19).

## Landscape of Providers, Page 4

Information submitted by agency providers through a provider questionnaire updated a listing of providers developed for *Strengthening WNY's Safety Net: A Community Report for Town of West Seneca*, released in December, 2013. Providers provided information on program and service locations, agency location, geographic scope and more.

Tax records available through the IRS and National Center for Charitable Statistics were used to identify new not-for-profits with locations in the community since 2013.

## Strengths of the Landscape, Page 6-7

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

the largest number of dots.

About 15,000 people in Cheektowaga live in or near poverty: US Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey (5-year estimates).

About half of Cheektowaga's providers are situated within one mile of 3,000+ residents living in or near poverty: UBRI analysis of provider locations relative to the population living in or near poverty, US Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey (5-year estimates).

... over half of providers in Cheektowaga are within a quarter-mile of an NFTA bus stop: UBRI analysis of provider locations relative to NFTA bus stops, 2019.

## Additional Needs/Gaps, Page 7-8

Three of the top five employers in town are in retail...: InfoGroup, ReferenceUSA Business Database, 2019 and Buffalo Business First, Book of Lists, 2018.

...about two-thirds of jobs pay less than \$40,000 a year US Census Bureau, LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics, 2015.

Eighty four percent of Cheektowaga's low-income renters spend more than 30% of their income on housing: US Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey (5-year estimates).

## Barriers Residents Face, Page 9-10

Nine out of ten households in Cheektowaga own a car: US Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey (5-Year Estimates).

Seniors in Cheektowaga are less likely to drive a vehicle than younger adults: US Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey (5-Year Estimates).

More than 29,000 adults in Cheektowaga do not have a college degree: US Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey (5-Year Estimates).

## Promising Developments, Page 11

Cheektowaga Community Hub: Jim Herr, "Cheektowaga Hub connects services to the community," *Cheektowaga Chronicle*, June 20, 2018.

New facilities are expanding: Jim Herr, "Erie 1 BOCES celebrates EDGE Academy," *Cheektowaga Chronicle*, November 15, 2018; Jim Herr, "Work has started on Apple Blossom Apartments on DePaul site," *Cheektowaga Chronicle*, April 2, 2019; Jim Herr, "New daycare center to open on Harlem Road," *Cheektowaga Chronicle*, March 12, 2019; Tracey Drury, "WellNow opens Cheektowaga urgent care with extended hours," *Buffalo Business First*, June 19, 2019; "Move to new Appletree offices now complete for county CPS workers," *The Buffalo News*, July 6, 2019.

A coalition is working: Gilat Melamed, "Businesses look towards alternatives to public transportation for employees," *WKBW News*, August 14, 2019.

Cheektowaga is investing in youth: Harold McNeil, "Cheektowaga voters approve \$16.4M school capital improvement project," *The Buffalo News*, December 10, 2019; Michael Mroziak, "New Boys & Girls Club planned for Town of Cheektowaga; startup funds secured," *WBFO News*, April 18, 2019; Rebecca Thornburg, "Cleveland Hill School District will have free school breakfast and lunch for all students." *WKBW News*, July 22, 2019

A variety of organizations: Patrick Connelly, "Sarah Bonk partners with police on mental health," *Buffalo Business First*, January 17, 2020; Jim Herr, "New highway truck brings awareness to mental health and suicide prevention," *Cheektowaga Chronicle*, February 8, 2019.

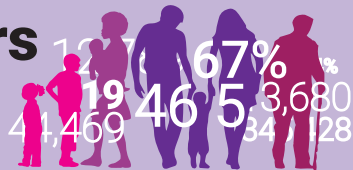
# INSIGHTS FROM PROVIDERS

## Town of Cheektowaga

MAY 2020

### Numbers in Need

IN BUFFALO NIAGARA



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

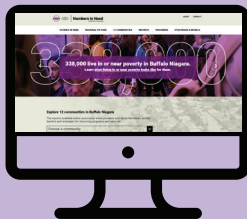


Prepared by



University at Buffalo  
Regional Institute  
School of Architecture and Planning

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



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