



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





**COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT JULY 2020** 

### **Town of Tonawanda**

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

Visit NumbersInNeed.org

### About this Report

This report offers a snapshot of findings for the Town of Tonawanda, including the Village of Kenmore, 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 2013.

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Prepared by T



### **Defining Need**

More than 17,400 residents in Tonawanda live in or near poverty with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line.

The federal poverty line (FPL) is \$12,760 for a household of one, \$17,240 for a twoperson 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 per 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 200% 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 200% of Poverty Level

Federal **Poverty** Level

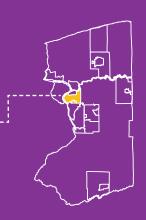


Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

## **Reports for this Community**

This report is part of a comprehensive suite of reports for the Town of Tonawanda,

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



### **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.

### Population In or Near Poverty Across the Town of Tonawanda

Population in or Near Poverty, 2017

- 0%-25%
- 26%-50%
- 51%-75%
- 76%-100%

# Among the total population of 73,044

9% ARE **IN POVERTY** 

6,200

live on incomes below the federal poverty level.



**15% ARE NEAR POVERTY** 

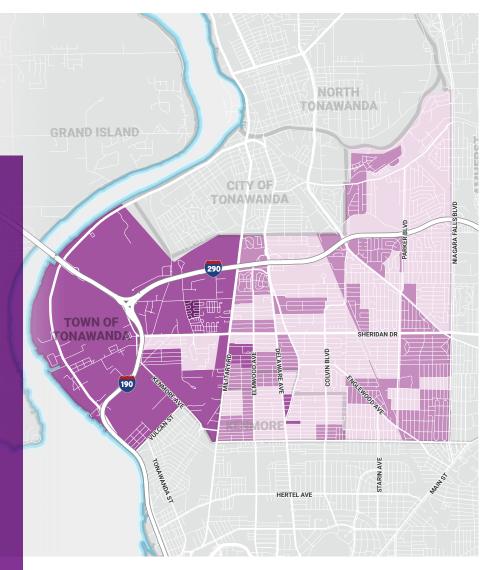
11,227

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

24% ARE IN OR NEAR POVERTY

17,427

residents are doing poorly or struggling financially.



Source: US Census, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2013-2017.

# Economic need in Tonawanda is most pronounced on the west side of town.

With 6,200 residents in poverty, Tonawanda's overall poverty rate (9%) is below the regional average (15%). But many residents who do not live *in* poverty also struggle financially—11,227 live *near* poverty, or on incomes between100% and 200% of the poverty line. Altogether, about a quarter of residents in Tonawnda (17,427) live in or near poverty.

Poverty is most concentrated west of Military Road, and in a couple of small neighborhoods along Elmwood and Delaware Avenues where more than half of residents live in or near poverty. In these areas and other small neighborhoods along Niagara Falls Boulevard, Englewood Avenue, and Eggert Road, the portion of residents living in or near poverty grew by more than 20% from 2011 to 2017.

# Poverty, Need and Economic Vulnerability

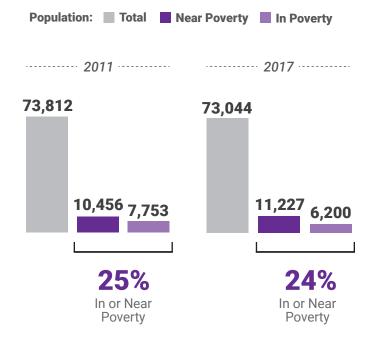
Overall, the number of residents in Tonawanda living in or near poverty declined between 2011 and 2017. Contributing to this was a 20% decline in the number of individuals living *in* poverty (from 7,753 to 6,200 between 2011 and 2017). Economic improvements in Tonawanda would have been even larger but for the 7% increase in the number of residents living *near* poverty (from 10,456 to 11,227 between 2011 and 2017).

Of the community's most vulnerable populations, young adults and married couples with children are least likely to live in poverty. Meanwhile, about a fifth of single-parent households live in poverty. Single parents face additional challenges that exacerbate poverty, such as a single income, childcare costs, food costs, and housing costs. Due to the high poverty rate among single parents, children under the age of 18 also have a high poverty rate. However, children in Tonawanda tend to fare better than they do across the region, which has a poverty rate of 22% for children under 18.

These percentages only tell part of the story. The 13% of children under 18 living in poverty represents almost 1,700 young people, the highest total number of any vulnerable population. While there are only 220 married couples with children living in poverty in Tonawanda, there are more than two and a half times as many single parents living in poverty (589).

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

The total population and the number in or near poverty declined slightly since 2011.



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

Vulnerable Populations In Poverty, 2017

**Poverty rates** for all of the community's vulnerable populations are lower than the region as a whole. Nonetheless. some groups fare better than others. For example, single parents are still four times more likely to live in poverty than married couples with children.

Children Under 18 13%
Single Parents 21%
Refugees & 14%
Married Couples with Children 5%
Young Adults (25-34) 5%
Seniors 75+ 7%

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

# Factors That Matter

Tonawanda's top ten employers, which are predominantly manufacturers, account for about a third of all jobs in the community.

More than half of the jobs in Tonawanda pay less than \$40,000 per year, and over a quarter pay less than \$15,000 per year. One way residents can increase their incomes is through training and education. In Tonawanda, residents with even some college or an associate's degree earn more than residents across the region with the same education.

About one in ten households does not have a car. Residents who are 65 years or older are three times more likely to not have a car than those under 65. Households without cars may experience additional barriers to services due to difficulty getting reliable and affordable transportation. A vast majority of residents drive alone as their primary mode of transportation (84%), but the majority who do not drive alone carpool (9%).

The violent crime rate has fluctuated in recent years, but in 2017 it was at one of its lowest points since 2010, while the property crime rate dropped to a seven year low in 2017. Juvenile arrests are also on the decline.

### **Community Data**

### Visit us online at NumbersInNeed.org

Explore more about this community and others in Buffalo

Niagara through interactive features and stories.



### WORK AND INCOME

In a town with a rich history of manufacturing, most of Tonawanda's top employers are still manufacturers. Top 10 Employers, 2019

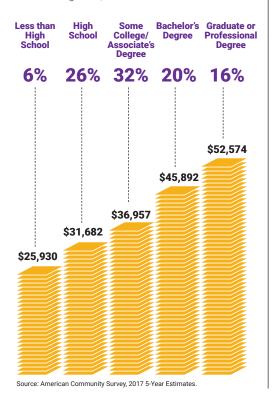


Source: InfoGroup, ReferenceUSA Business Database, 2019; Buffalo Business First, Book of Lists, 2018.

### EDUCATION

# 58% of adults have a high school diploma or some college. They earn more than residents with the same education regionally.

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



### HOUSING

# Lower-income homeowners are less likely to be cost-burdened than lower-income renters.

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



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

### TRANSPORTATION

Adults age 65 or older are about three times more likely to be without a car than younger households.

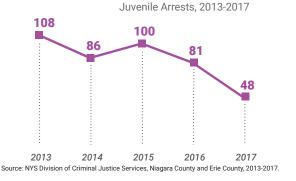
% of Residents Without a Vehicle

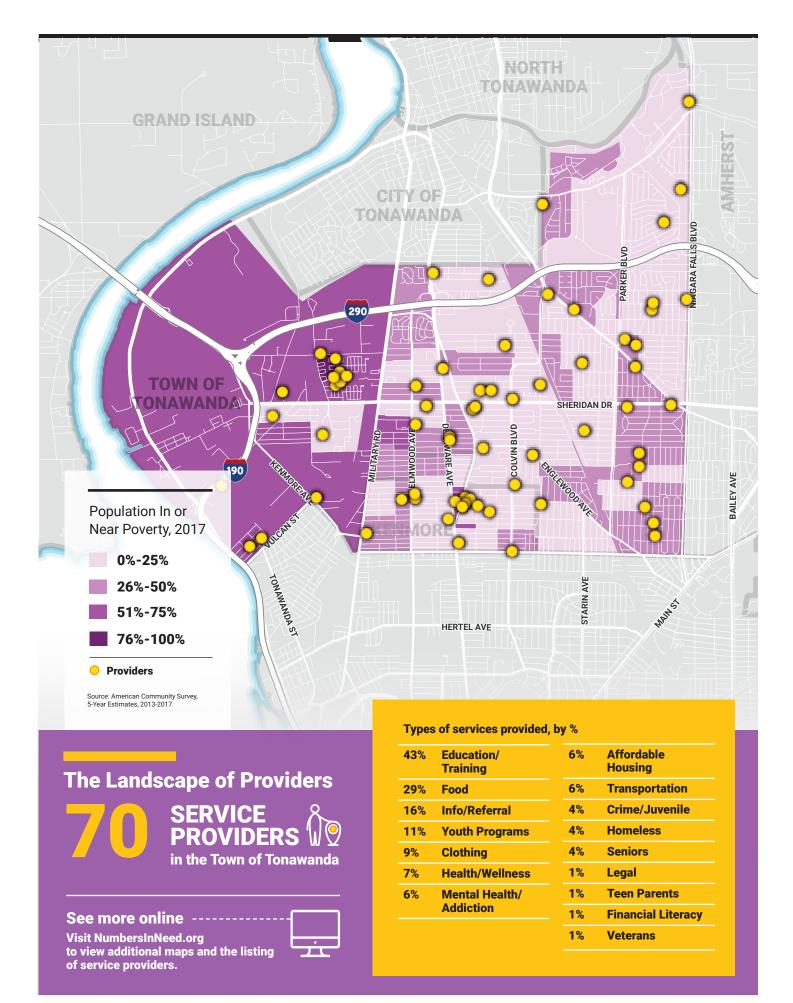


Source: American Community Survey, 2017 5-Year Estimates.

### CRIME

Juvenile arrests decreased by 55% from 2013 to 2017.



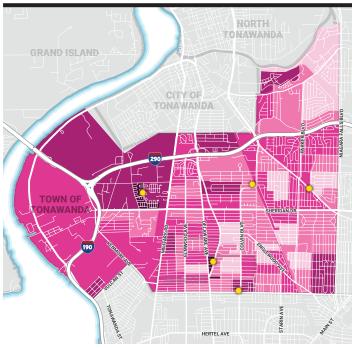


## **Providers and Resident Needs**

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

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

Providers offering financial and housing services

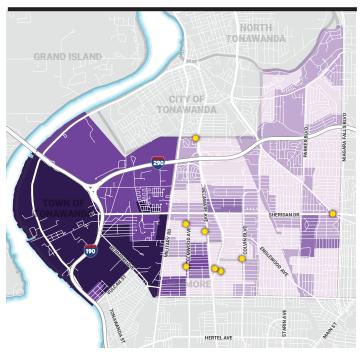


Source: US Census, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2013-2017

### % Families with Children in Poverty, 2017

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

Providers offering health and mental health services



Source: US Census, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2013-2017.

# Tonawanda has a great need for financial and housing services, but they are in short supply.

Affordable housing or financial literacy services are offered at four sites in Tonawanda. These providers, including the Kenmore Housing Authority and the Tonawanda Department of Community Development, are located near many households in need, but residents remain underserved. On average, there are over 4,900 residents in or near poverty within one mile of each of these providers. But Tonawanda has fewer of these services per capita than any of the study region's twelve communities. About 7,000 households spend over 30% of their income on housing—a greater number than any of the twelve communities outside of Buffalo. Tonawanda has a clear need for more affordable housing and financial services.

# A small number of providers offer health and mental health services in Tonawanda.

Research published in the Journal of Social Science & Medicine shows that children in poverty are more likely to face health and mental health issues at some point in their life. Eight locations offer health or mental health services in Tonawanda. The town has about half the number of health and mental health providers per person than across the study region overall. Moreover, none of these providers are located in the western areas of town where more than one out of every three children live in poverty. Providers such as Catholic Charities, People Inc., Kenmore Mercy Hospital, and others offer a range of helpful health and mental health services. However, more of these supports are needed, especially for the over 800 families with children who live in poverty in Tonawanda.

# Opportunities and Challenges for Providers

# Read more Insights from Providers

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



### What has happened over the past five years?

The programs and services offered by Tonawanda's 70 service providers create a notable safety net of services for vulnerable residents, especially seniors, youth, and lower-income families and individuals. Many organizations are run by a small staff and large army of volunteers who are quick to respond when a community need is identified.



Still, Tonawanda has a smaller number of service providers per capita than most communities in the study region. The safety net is particularly thin for specialized services such as legal services and financial literacy, and for programs focused on specific vulnerable populations such as those for the homeless and teen parents.

Providers suggested that more can be done without any additional resources if communication channels were stronger and if providers worked more closely with each other in reaching out to residents, screening residents, identifying needs, and making referrals. Providers also said that expanded options for affordable housing, transportation, financial literacy, and health services could continue to lift more residents out of poverty.

←-- Available online at NumbersInNeed.org







### Strengths of the System

Seventy service providers are located in Tonawanda. The majority (94%) specialize in one or two types of services, but every type of service is available in the community.

### Providers are located near thousands of residents in need. On average, each service provider in the town has nearly

provider in the town has nearly 4,600 people living in or near poverty within one mile of its location.

# Education and food programs are community strengths.

Education is offered at 30 sites, and 20 providers run food programs. The number and variety of basic services are a strong foundation for social services in Tonawanda.

## There are a variety of job opportunities at all education

levels. Incomes tend to be higher in Tonawanda, especially for workers with less education. The number and variety of jobs in town provide economic opportunities for a wide range of residents.

### Gaps

Tonawanda needs more health and mental health services. It only has half the number of providers per person than the study region as a whole.

# Tonawanda has a need for more housing and financial services. About 7.000

households are cost burdened and debt was the top urgent concern of resident survey respondents.

The town's oldest residents would benefit from a senior outreach coordinator, a compilation of resources for caregivers, and expanded options for affordable housing.

More outreach is needed to connect with the town's most vulnerable families, identify needs, and make referrals.

# Funding for free and low-cost youth programs is scarce.

This limits the capacity of providers to offer programs that would benefit the town's most vulnerable youth.

### **Barriers**

Transportation is a barrier to programs and services, especially for families without a vehicle. While several agencies offer transportation for seniors, affordable, flexible options for working-age adults

# Lack of Internet access is another barrier for the town's 6.200 residents without

are very limited.

Internet access or a computer at home, especially as more resources are put online.

Better communication and closer partnerships between providers could reduce information barriers that residents face. Providers say some residents fall through the cracks because of lack of information or the difficulty they have navigating the landscape of services with the information they are given.

With no centralized spot in the community for programs, services, or information, some residents are confused about where to go for what.

### **Promising Developments**

The Ken-Ton Family Support Center's transportation fund reflects a unique partnership with the United Way and the school district. It enables staff to offer transportation via taxi to any family that needs it.

# Some providers in Tonawanda are leveraging technology to deliver virtual services to residents in their own home,

expanding options for reaching those who face transportation barriers and mobility challenges.

The town added another senior van to its fleet. This responded to an identified need and has supported a large increase in ridership.

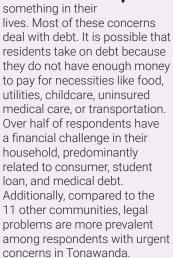
The town has grown its community policing program utilizing the police force in reaching out to vulnerable residents and making referrals.

Amazon has plans to build a warehouse in Tonawanda that will expand job opportunities for residents.

### **Survey Results** of Economically **Vulnerable** Residents

### 147 residents in need took the survey.

More than a third of residents surveyed had an urgent concern about



Difficulty traveling is a barrier to services for many residents. Although there are multiple bus routes in the community, only 7% of respondents use public transit as their primary way of getting around. Driving a vehicle is the most common form of transportation, but the costs of gas, insurance, repairs, maintenance, and car payments are a burden for many car owners.

### Read more **Insights from Residents**

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

to support services. Numbers in Need



### -> TOP 3 URGENT CONCERNS REPORTED BY THESE RESIDENTS

Outstanding Debt	<b>73</b> %
Utility Shut-Off	21%
Legal Problems>	19%

### **HEALTH CARE NEEDS**

of respondents are in need of some type of healthcare but can't afford it.

The vast majority of respondents are insured, but two in five still need medical care they cannot afford. possibly because some care is not covered by insurance or co-pays are too high.

68% **Dental** 

53% **Optical care** 

27% Prescription

**25% Mental health** counseling

25% Healthcare

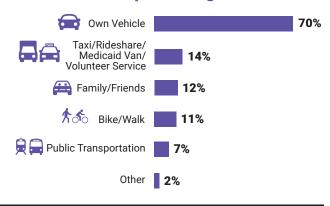
15% Other

5% **Transportation to** appointments or services

### TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

Most respondents use their own vehicle to get around. Those who do not drive are twice as likely to use a taxi, rideshare service, Medicaid van, or volunteer service than to take public transportation. Biking or walking and getting rides from family or friends are also more popular than taking public transportation.

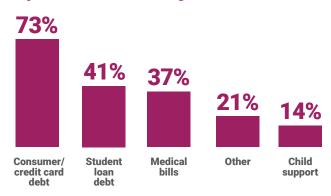
### How respondents get around



### **FINANCIAL NEEDS**

Over half of respondents are dealing with financial concerns. Consumer debt was the most common financial concern, followed by student loan debt and medical bills.

### **Top 5 Financial Challenges in Household**



## Regional Strategies and Models to Consider



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

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

### See more online

Visit NumbersinNeed.org to view a comprehensive collection of strategies and models that cover a broader range of topics.





### Transportation

# Leverage partnerships, volunteers, and technology to improve transportation options for people with mobility challenges or access barriers.

Many service providers offer transportation services for their clients. However, insights from providers show that these organizations are often limited by a shortage of funding and resources and other issues. By coordinating with other organizations, leveraging technology, and recruiting volunteers, service providers can overcome these barriers and accrue the resources they need to provide reliable transportation to the residents they serve. The need to be resourceful and inventive will only increase with an aging population, especially for seniors and those with mobility challenges in more rural areas that are disconnected from public transportation. This approach can help providers improve their ability to provide services and reach more people in need.

### **Potential Action Steps**

Provide funding, vehicles, drivers, and other resources for non-emergency medical transportation.

Leverage technology to reduce transportation costs, such as by using electric or hybrid vehicles, or route-optimization technologies.

Facilitate carpooling among current and potential customers of service providers.

Partner with ridesharing services like Uber and Lyft to provide reliable, low-cost transportation to customers of service providers.

Form volunteer organizations to provide transportation to those with mobility challenges or access barriers who need to get to critical services, like healthcare or education.

### **Potential Actors in the Community**

NFTA

Private ride-sharing companies

Transportation service providers (private, not-for-profit)

Health service providers

Religious organizations

Volunteers

Technology companies

### **Models to Consider**

PSTA Direct Connect Pinellas County, Florida

www.uber.com

Second Chances Garage Frederick, MD secondchancesgarage.org





Regional Strategies and Models to Consider, cont'd.





### **Expand aging-in-place supports for seniors.**

The population of adults age 65 and over in Buffalo Niagara is increasing, and there are now over 63,000 older adults in the region with a disability. Many older adults, including those with disabilities, prefer to remain in their own home for as long as they are able, according to insights from residents. For these older adults, having access to services that allow them to live comfortably at home and maintain their quality of life is vital. Proper planning for aging in place is critical. Expanding services that help older adults prepare to age in place, by planning for finances, changes in health, mobility challenges, and other concerns, is integral to ensuring they maintain their quality of life for as long as possible.

### **Potential Action Steps**

Increase awareness and access by seniors to affordable services for aging in place available through volunteer-based programs, church-based outreach programs, and area colleges and universities. Distribute this information through senior centers, senior programs, FeedMore WNY, doctor offices, and other community-based organizations.

Raise awareness and participation in senior dining programs, including Erie County's new congregate dining program which offers restaurant options. Increase participation by restaurants that are easily accessible by older adults, or are located near public transit routes.

Engage local media in raising awareness of valuable programs and services for older adults.

Explore and raise awareness of low-cost options for using technology that supports seniors in aging in place with meal and grocery delivery, pet food delivery, online communications with health care providers, and more. Raise awareness of low-cost, or free shipping and delivery services, including discounts for individuals with Medicaid and Electronic Benefit Transfers (EBT).

### **Potential Actors in the Community**

Housing service providers

Senior service providers/senior centers

Media

Transportation service providers

Religious organizations

Businesses

Local governments

#### **Models to Consider**

Canopy of Neighbors Buffalo, NY

#### canopy.clubexpress.com

Hearts and Hands Various locations in Erie and Niagara Counties **hnhcares.org** 





# Data Sources & Notes

#### Cover

US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007-2011 5-Year Estimates; US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2013-2017 5-Year Estimates.

### **Defining Need, Page 2**

Federal Poverty Level: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, HHS Poverty Guidelines for 2020.

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

### Poverty Map, Page 4

US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2013-2017 5-Year Estimates.

## Poverty, Need and Economic Vulnerability, Page 5

Population in or Near Poverty: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007-11 5-Year Estimates; US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2013-17 5-Year Estimates.

Vulnerable Populations: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2013-2017 5-Year Estimates.

### 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, 2013-2017 5-Year Estimates. 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, 2013-2017 5-Year Estimates,. Low-income households in this instance are defined as households with incomes below \$35,000/year.

Transportation: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2013-2017 5-Year Estimates.

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

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 for 17-year olds on October 1, 2019. While this law did not affect the juvenile arrest data shown in this report, it may affect trends in future years, beginning in 2018.

### The Landscape of Providers, Page 7

Poverty Map: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2013-2017 5-Year Estimates.

Provider Data: Information submitted by agency providers through a provider questionnaire updated a listing of providers developed for the 2013 community report for Tonawanda. Providers provided information on program and service locations, agency location, geographic scope and more. Most service providers are not-for-profit and public sector providers.

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

### **Providers and Resident Needs, Page 8**

Poverty Map, Cost-Burdened Households: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2013-2017 5-Year Estimates.

Provider Data: See note for page 7.

Being raised in poverty increases the odds of mental health issues: K.A. McLaughlin, J. Breslau, J.G. Green, M.D. Lakoma, N.A. Sampson, and A.M. Zaslavsky, "Childhood socio-economic status and the onset, persistence, and severity of DSM-IV mental disorders in a US national sample," Social Science & Medicine, 73 (7), 2011.

# Opportunities and Challenges for Providers, Page 9

Insights from Providers, Tonawanda, July 2020. Provider insights come from one-on-one interviews and a questionnaire of providers conducted during March and April 2020. Although a provider focus group was scheduled, it has to be canceled twice, first for a snowstorm and then for reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Survey Results of Economically Vulnerable Residents, Page 10

Insights from Residents, Town of Tonawanda, July 2020. Survey findings come from 147 surveys completed at 17 locations and online. In-person surveys were completed between January and March 2020. The online survey was available beginning in March 2019 and was closed to responses in March 2020.

# COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT Town of Tonawanda

**JULY 2020** 



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