



2015-16 Community Needs Assessment

Executive Summary

In 2015, the Community Relations- Social Development Commission (CR-SDC) expanded the breadth of the Community Needs Assessment it has conducted every three years as part of its ongoing strategic planning process. CR-SDC's decision to look more in depth at the poverty indicators affecting the lives of Milwaukee County's low-income citizens was informed as much by its mission as Milwaukee's Community Action Agency as it was by the mandate of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG).

In order to gain insight into how to better serve our service population, the agency collected data that would be helpful in a) framing ongoing strategic planning for our programming and advocacy work as an agency, b) fueling an ongoing dialogue on poverty for the community, and c) forming a point in time analysis from which the agency, in conjunction with other human service and governmental stakeholders around Milwaukee County.

To first meet these objectives, SDC's Quality Assurance Department partnered with Chamness Group to complete this process.

The 2015 SDC Needs Assessment was designed to meet the following goals which SDC articulated at the onset of the assessment design process:

- 1) To identify and quantify the incidence or prevalence of individual need among Milwaukee County citizens
- 2) To identify gaps in human services provision;
- 3) To identify barriers to attaining self-sufficiency, and
- 4) To identify strategies for overcoming barriers to self-sufficiency.

The 2015 assessment consisted of the following five research components:

- 1) In 2015, Chamness Group completed In-Depth Resident Interviews: With the assistance of the Community Organizers for each of the 19 Neighborhood Strategic Planning (NSP) areas, conducted door-to-door surveys of 506 households in the central City of Milwaukee. The survey was intended to identify issues related to poverty as part of the Community Relations - Social Development Commission (CR-SDC) Needs Assessment.
- 2) In-Depth Consumer Interviews: SDC worked with the Senior Companion, Education services and VITA program participants to complete the Community Needs Assessment. A total of 147 additional survey responses from our low income customers were collected.
- 3) 2016 Summit on Poverty: The Summit Planning Committee engaged community members, elected officials, both public and private sector and stakeholders to develop initiatives to address the major issues in the community surrounding poverty. SDC integrated the outcomes from the 2016 Summit on Poverty.



- 4) SDC conducted a Youth and Poverty Task Force in 2014. The focus of the task force was to examine the consequence of poverty on children in Milwaukee County from a social-emotional, educational and health perspective. The task force included 13 or 15 professionals from diverse backgrounds with expertise on this matter. Headed by co-chairs Dr. Gary Williams and Dr. Desmond Means; the charge of the task force on Youth and Poverty was to improve the lives of Milwaukee County youth who currently or potentially live in poverty. To that end, the task force focused on the following:
 - Analyzed the impact of poverty on the youth in Milwaukee County
 - Identified root causes of poverty that persist for the youth of Milwaukee County
 - Developed recommendations and practical strategies that can be implemented the root cause of poverty for youth in Milwaukee County
 - Developed recommendations for policy changes at the city, county, and state governmental levels
- 5) Review of Existing Data and Research on Poverty: Several indicators related to poverty were investigated. These indicators included: population estimates, poverty estimates, unemployment, wage data, Milwaukee Public Schools data, WIC, FoodShare, free and reduced lunch, food pantries, transportation to work, Milwaukee County Transit System data, housing stock, housing affordability, foreclosures, vacancies, tax credits, homelessness, medical care, mental health, substance abuse, health insurance, and health clinics. The Quality Assurance team generated this report through Community Commons.

Altogether, over 1,000 individuals participated in this community needs assessment. As projected, findings from the 2015-16 study enabled SDC to tailor its programs and services to improve/create services that addresses the community needs.

Synopsis of Findings

This synopsis is designed to provide a narrative of the key findings of this survey. It is the researchers' interpretation of the data shared along with recommendations and opportunities for the CR-SDC as it moves forward. As one reads through the survey report, they will see that many of the challenges are interrelated. Interrelated challenges complicate one's ability to narrow down a clear, simple solution or to suggest methodologies. The three key challenges that were most cited from respondents include:

1. Employment
2. Job Creation
3. Skill Training

It is clear that over the past seven years, as indicated by the 2009, 2013 and 2015 surveys, the key factor in what influencing poverty in Milwaukee and what could positively impact the effects of poverty in Milwaukee centers around jobs and job-creation.



In responding to questions regarding employment and training, respondents talked about many challenges they face including:

- Lack of skills needed to secure a job
- Lack of understanding where jobs can be found
- Lack of confidence or motivation in looking for work
- Transportation challenges
- Childcare or family issues
- Dependence on government support
- How to pursue a job or understanding how to compete in today's job market?

The solution to these challenges is not just about job creation but also about helping people understand the job search process and possessing the skills to become employed. Many respondents indicated that they don't currently possess the necessary skills to compete in today's job market. Some talked about soft skill training, others about specific training in trade work or technical jobs. Respondents all commented about knowing where or how to find new job opportunities.

Earning a living wage could allow respondents to more positively deal with some of the other challenges they face such as paying for health care, dealing with personal issues or furthering their education.

In addition to the employment challenges, the other top ranked areas cited by respondents that could combat poverty was helping residents deal with personal issues. There were many areas cited as challenges, but the most mentioned included:

- Alcoholism and drugs
- Felony status
- Child and family care issues
- Mental and personal health
- Dependence on government programs
- Lack of hope, motivation or direction
- Lack of good role models to lead the way

These are much bigger issues that also address underlying emotional and psychological challenges. These require a larger scale solution and/or individually tailored solutions. These challenges are not as definable as a soft skills training program or job search training program. Many of these more personal issues need a full scale effort including staff, a good plan with measurements, and long term funding support in order to positively impact the community and create change.

If there was one broad area that the CR-SDC could focus on to positively impact poverty in Milwaukee, it would center on working with residents in the City of Milwaukee on developing job



search skills and the skills needed to stay employed. The CR-SDC should also employ employers and job training agencies to match job needs with workers.

Employee Milwaukee's Key Market Study Groups

The goal of the Employ Milwaukee key market study groups was to identify ways to attract, recruit and train primarily entry level or underserved workers. The overall intention of attending these sessions was to compare how closely aligned the needs of employers match the challenges cited by respondents.

When assessing the kinds of skills most needed for workers to bring to a job, the key market groups rated needed skill sets in the following way:

1. Essential/Soft Skills
2. Operational Skills – specific skills to do the job
3. Education – Certificate programs, Associate Degree, Bachelor's Degree, etc.

Many of the employers felt that if a job applicant could come to work each day with basic, essential skills, they would be able to train these employees the skills required to do specific jobs.

The key market study groups also identified the kinds of challenges they face when recruiting new employees and those included:

- Minorities or underserved populations don't apply for positions in these market segments or know where/how to apply for them
- Underserved populations often don't have the basic skill sets to work in positions that require high customer service or technical abilities
- Child care, particularly when the business or organization has 24-hour service, can be an issue as it may be hard for employees to find child care in order to work 2nd or 3rd shifts or stay longer than their scheduled shift
- Employees being able to pass drug testing and background checks can be an issue especially in entry-level jobs or in organizations that have a zero-tolerance policy or organizations that do regular drug testing
- Transportation for employees can be an issue to those organizations that are not along a bus line or seeking to fill jobs outside of the city. This was particularly an issue for the manufacturing group
- Lack of essential/soft skills, especially with entry-level type of positions, including the ability to hold a conversation, showing up on time or writing a professional email

Employers in and around Milwaukee are in need of job ready workers. Residents need training to become job ready. Collaboration with the SDC and Employers as well as local training organizations makes sense in developing a broad job readiness program that would truly make an impact.