

Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency



Community Needs Assessment, 2015 Executive Summary

Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency (OLHSA), a (501c3) Community Action Agency, has been empowering people to succeed since 1964, over 50 years! Working with residents of all ages in Oakland and Livingston Counties, OLHSA continually strives to design and provide innovative economic and social opportunities that lead the most economically disadvantaged and vulnerable citizens toward self-sufficiency and independence.

Every 3 years, as mandated by one of its core funding streams, OLHSA conducts a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment (CNA). Representing a critical component of the overall planning process, the CNA is developed to encourage strategic thinking about the agency's capacity to impact families and the community with the overall goal of eliminating poverty.

Frank Taylor Group, Inc., was selected as the consulting partner to work with OLHSA on the CNA project. The selected planning model included the following targeted outcomes:

- Gain a better understanding of the changing demographic trends and their potential impact on poverty within Oakland and Livingston counties and affecting Agency clients;
- Gather community perceptions regarding the impacts of poverty, community need and suggestions for further addressing those needs;
- Validate community perceptions and ascertain real needs through focus groups with current OLHSA clients and community service organizations;
- From community and client input, assess current OLHSA programs and services; and
- Develop recommendations and implementation steps to address needs that take clients self-sufficiency to the next level.

Utilizing timely demographic data and economic trends, broad stakeholder input and feedback was received. OLHSA staff, board members, community partners and clients were engaged in community forums and client focus group discussions designed to stimulate understanding about the strengths and resources of the community, as well as the needs of individuals and families. Gaps in service delivery and unmet needs led to a series of recommendations for OLHSA to use as a guide for future programming and opportunities.

Oakland County Significant Demographics and Economic Trends

- The younger population is declining, while the aging population is steadily rising.
- There is a considerable increase in the ethnic and cultural make-up.

(Continued) Oakland County Significant Demographics and Economic Trends

- Households with married couples with children under 18 are declining, while female head of households are increasing significantly. Female head of households are more likely to experience economic hardship.
- In 2000, there were 171,184 at or below 200% of the poverty level, while there were 282,100 in 2013.
- The number of individuals in the workforce from 2000 to 2013, has declined by almost 16%.
- The Healthcare employment field has grown 26% from 2000 to 2013, and is projected to continue growing significantly in the coming years.

Livingston County Significant Demographics and Economic Trends

- It is projected that the population will grow by over 30% by 2030. The younger population is declining, while the aging population is steadily rising.
- From 2000 to 2013, educational attainment rates rose significantly.
- Total households increased by 23%, while female head of households rose (particularly those 65 and over).
- The number of individuals in the workforce from 2000 to 2013 has increased by 885. By 2040, a 30% growth is projected. Professional employment opportunities are increasing.
- High wage earners are experiencing a fair amount of income growth, while low wage earners income remains flat.
- In 2000, there were 16,124 at or below 200% of the poverty level, while there were 32,878 in 2013.

After a comprehensive discussion and thorough analysis of the data, the following areas were identified that require action and/or change to further client self-sufficiency in each county.

Oakland County Findings

- Offer reliable and affordable transportation.
- Basic needs must be met first in order to move toward self-sufficiency.
- Increase access to affordable child care services.
- Create a “Navigating the System” workshop. One-on-one mentoring to reach self-sufficiency.
- Create better communication and education opportunities on how resources can be obtained.
- Streamline the system of applying for and obtaining needed assistance. Create “One Stop” service centers and more mobile-type services.
- Develop more “higher wage” jobs.

Livingston County Findings

- Simplify and streamline the “system” of applying for and obtaining services. Paperwork is redundant and cumbersome. Request more personalized (one-on-one) assistance (i.e., case management etc.).
- Create a support group for “navigating the system”. Mentoring programs.
- Offer transportation related assistance (including assistance with auto insurance, tires, auto repairs, etc.)
- Offer handyman services, especially for older adults. Offer affordable minor home repair services.
- Offer affordable and accessible health and dental services (especially for the Medicaid eligible population).
- Develop more “higher wage” employment opportunities.

Observation

Although OLHSA is well recognized as an outstanding organization, many community forum and focus group participants were unaware of all the different programs and services OLHSA offers. Efforts to increase agency visibility and awareness in the community could prove beneficial.

Recommendations

The following proposed recommendations are in response to the community forum and focus group findings and confirmed by the OLHSA administrative team to increase self-sufficiency:

1. Develop and implement a “Navigating the System” workshop providing valuable resources and assistance for those in need of programs and services.
2. Develop and implement a “Peer-to-Peer Support Group” for clients. Share experiences and successes.
3. Increase remote and mobile outreach services to strategic locations within the service delivery area. Include and partner with other organizations for more of a “One-Stop” center concept. (This service would assist clients in addressing some of the transportation issues and simplify the system for them).
4. Update early childhood services programming to be relevant to today’s diverse family situations and to more fully support families’ needs for high quality pre-school education experiences that also address access to affordable child care.
5. Update older adult focused programming, including activities and events that provide more relevant value for today’s older adult population.
6. Provide increased responsiveness to multi lingual customers.

Conclusion

It was clearly expressed that OLHSA’s performance in serving the residents of Oakland and Livingston counties is nothing less than exceptional. Leadership and staff were consistently viewed as supportive, responsive, honest and respectful. OLHSA is highly regarded within the community, serving as a lead organization on many collaborative efforts that maximize resources to efficiently and effectively respond to the ever-changing needs of the vulnerable and less fortunate residents they serve.

Over the years, the “Community Action” philosophy has shifted from temporary assistance to empowerment. OLHSA has been on the leading edge of implementing a proven self-sufficiency model that provides a holistic approach to addressing the complex issues and challenges impacting their clients. This is achieved with innovative programming and leveraging resources through effective collaboration.

This document is intended to provide an analysis of the state of poverty in Oakland and Livingston counties in an effort to improve services to move individuals and families toward self-sufficiency, thereby eliminating poverty in their lives.