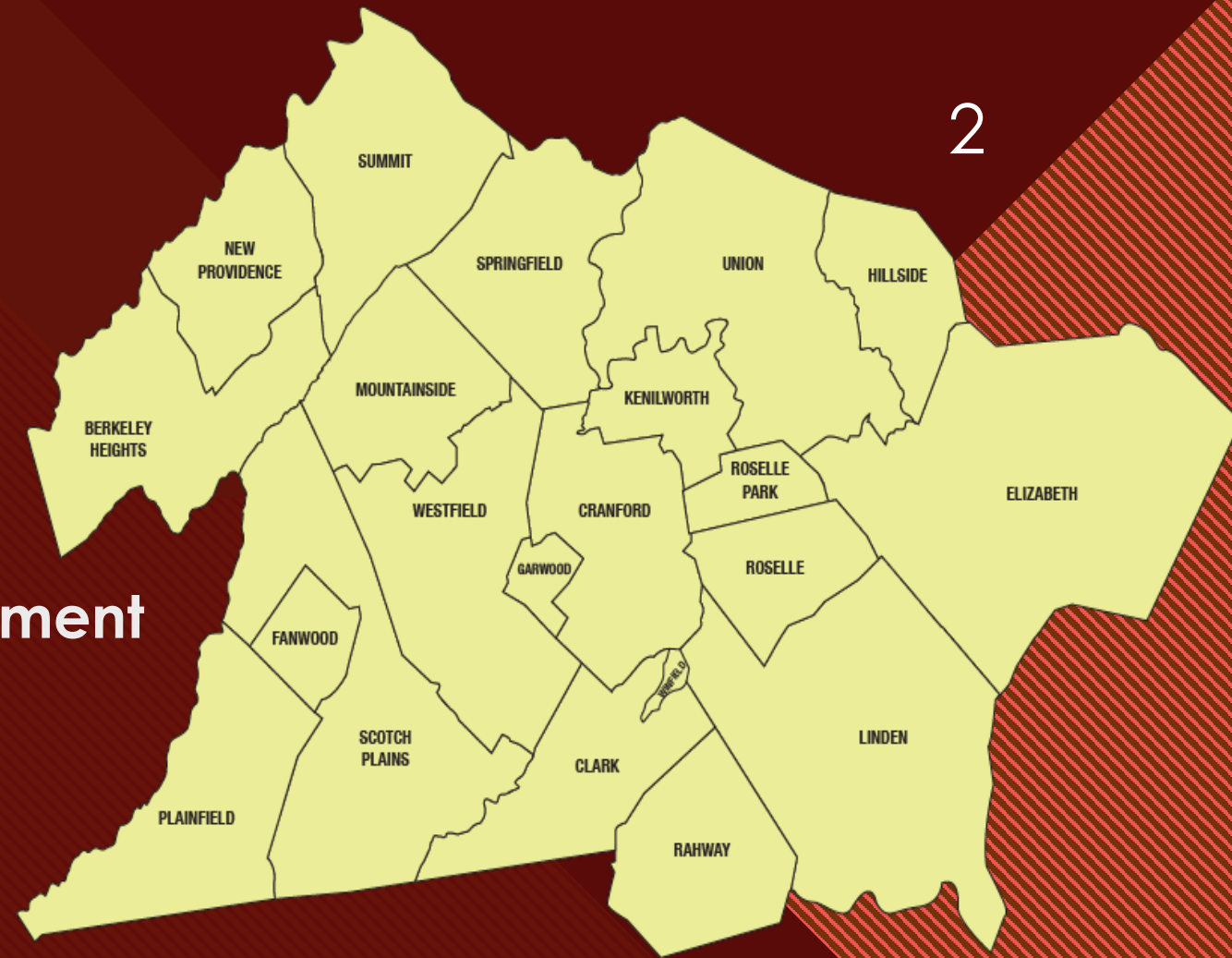




Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment for Union County, New Jersey

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE TOGETHER

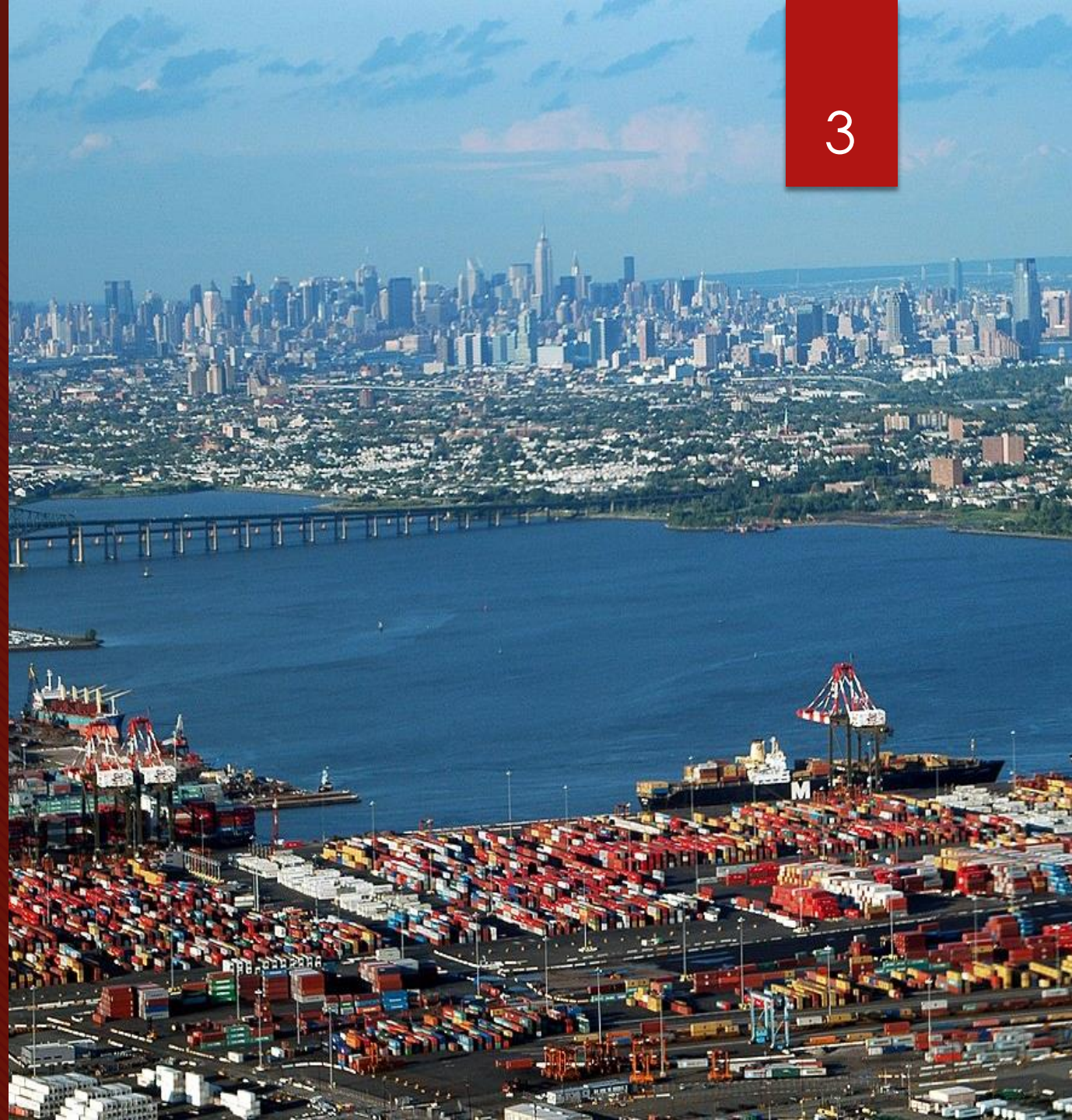


- * **Welcome**
- * **Why a Community Needs Assessment**
- * **How It Was Done**
- * **What Was Found Out**
- * **Looking into the Future Together**
Panel – State representatives

Why a
Community
Needs
Assessment
is Important

**Planning For
Now And
The Future**

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The Needs Assessment Approach



Steering
Committee to
oversee the
process



Followed a
Family and
Individual
Success
Approach



Collected and
analyzed data
and population
trends



Created
numerous
avenues for
community
voice



Formulated
Findings and
Recommendations

The Individual and Family Success Vision

Strong Families and Strong Communities = Journeys of Individual and Family Success



Goals for Each Phase of the Life Journey

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Early Childhood Success (0-8 years old) - All young children will be safe, healthy, and ready to learn.

Positive Youth Development (9-15 years old) - All school-age children and youth will be living in a permanent home, achieving in school, and connected to their families and communities.

Strong Transitions to Adulthood (16-26 years old) - Youth transitioning to adulthood will be on positive pathways to economic and social independence with strong and responsible family and community ties.

Productive Adulthood (27- 59) - adults will achieve their greatest potential for economic and social independence as responsible and contributing community members.

Successful Aging (60 and over)- aging adults will maintain their greatest level of independence, functioning, and dignity as valued members of their families and communities

Strong Families, Strong Communities – Families and communities will have the knowledge, resources, and skills to successfully support their families and community members from birth to the end of life.

Who Participated

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Participants in the information gathering process:

- **Surveys – 446**
- **Focus groups – 300**
- **Planning Body Meetings – 198**
- **Key Informants - 13**
- **Steering Committee – 26**
- **TOTAL – 983**

Major Findings - Populations

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The populations of highest concern in Union County are:

- ▶ Children, youth and adults living in poverty
- ▶ Non-English speaking people of all ages, especially undocumented individuals
- ▶ Seniors and people with disabilities
- ▶ Very young children, especially children with special needs
- ▶ Individuals with behavioral health issues, especially substance use disorders
- ▶ Grandparents raising grandchildren
- ▶ Children in foster care for more than five years

Major Findings – Pillars of Support



The conditions of highest concern in Union County are:

- ▶ Housing
- ▶ Poverty
- ▶ Substance Use Disorder
- ▶ Crime
- ▶ Healthcare
- ▶ Services for children and youth
- ▶ Transportation
- ▶ Education

Major Findings:

Family Relationships and Community Connections

- 4,521 child abuse/neglect investigations completed on Union County families (2018). Children placed outside of their homes has been declining, however, 15% of these children have been in placement for over 5 years (highest county in the state).
- Many community members raised unmet needs in the areas of affordable childcare, after school care and summer care, and recreational programs for youth.
- Issues related to transportation were raised as a priority by every group, in every part of the county.
- Accessing Resources is a significant issue for many in the county.

Highest needs identified through groups and surveys:

- Family outings /community events
- Art/music events
- Volunteer opportunities

Major Findings:

Personal Safety and Financial Security

- The number one issue raised was housing in Union County – access, affordability and availability. Issues exist related to availability of shelter beds, transitional housing, long term affordable housing, and low income housing that includes housing for seniors and people with disabilities.
- Many people in Union County are doing very well, yet there are 57,900 people in the county living in poverty, including over 11,000 children, with incomes below \$25,750 annually for a family of four (2019 Federal Poverty Level).
- While the median family income in the county is \$77,095, the *Economic Policy Institute Cost of Living Annual Cost Chart* notes that a family of four in Union County requires \$92,937 to be economically secure. *Data Source: US Census Bureau Population Estimates (2018)*
- Both violent and non-violent crime is higher in the county than the state average (5th highest in the state for violent crime).

Highest needs identified through groups and surveys:

- Affordable housing
- Public parks
- Services to make neighborhoods safer

Major Findings: Health and Well Being

- ▶ Opioid use in Union County remains a serious issue, and access to treatment and early/community education is a critical need.
- ▶ Despite county initiatives to address it, stigma exists regarding substance use disorder.
- ▶ Not enough pediatricians and mental health professionals available that speak other than English.
- ▶ Residents living on low incomes also need better access to eye and dental care.

Highest needs identified through groups and surveys:

- Dental care and coverage
- Eye/vision care, including glasses
- Health insurance /affordable medical care

Major Findings: Learning and Education

- The graduation rate in Union County is 88%, yet in some communities it is well below that.
- 13 schools in the county struggle with meeting standardized testing standards.
- Residents spoke repeatedly about job training being needed that prepares people, including people with disabilities, to earn credentials, and earn living wages.
- Issues were also raised repeatedly about school personnel not being knowledgeable about services and supports that students and their families may need.

Highest needs identified through groups and surveys:

- Finding a better paying job
- Money for tuition for college/trade school
- Job training for a better job

Communities in Union County

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Through a combination of analysis of data, community input, and opinion, a profile emerged about communities within the county.

Communities Holding Their Own

Berkeley Heights
Clark
Cranford
Fanwood
Mountainside
New Providence
Scotch Plains
Springfield
Summit
Westfield
Winfield

Communities with Emerging Needs

Garwood
Kenilworth
Roselle Park

A number of communities can clearly be identified as "holding their own, " where residents are generally thriving.

In other communities, there appear to be emerging needs for various populations, or in various areas of needed support.

Major Findings: Communities of Opportunity

In Union County there are areas where the poverty level, unemployment, housing, substance abuse and other issues across many pillars and developmental journeys indicated a widening divide between these municipalities and the county as a whole, as well as compared to the entire state.

These communities represent areas where the barriers to individual and family success may be the greatest and where there are the greatest opportunities to improve the quality of life for residents of these communities.

These are the **Communities of Opportunity**.



Communities of Opportunity

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Communities of opportunity are places where focused attention is needed to address the issues affecting individuals and families in these areas:

- Income Disparity vs. Cost of Living
- Graduation Rates
- Substance Abuse
- Access to Healthcare
- Grandparents Raising Grandkids
- Foreign Born Residents
- Unemployment

- ✓ Elizabeth
- ✓ Hillside
- ✓ Linden
- ✓ Plainfield
- ✓ Roselle
- ✓ Rahway
- ✓ Union Township

Communities of Opportunity

Key Indicators

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- Schools with a summative score in the bottom 5% of Title I schools or with a four-year graduation rate of 67% or less. This included 13 in the Communities of Opportunity: Elizabeth-4; Hillside-1; Linden-1; Plainfield-5, and 2 in Rahway.
- In 2016 Elizabeth, Hillside, Linden, and Plainfield had higher rates of violent crime than the county average.
- In 2016 there were 23 murders in Union County. Of those, 21 occurred in Communities of Opportunity, including 2 murders in Union Township, 5 murders in Elizabeth, 1 in Hillside, 12 in Plainfield, and 1 in Rahway.
- The highest non-violent crime rates are in Elizabeth, Linden, Hillside, and the highest violent crime rates is in Elizabeth, Plainfield, Linden, Hillside.

Communities of Opportunity

Key Indicators

18

Elizabeth

- ▶ Elizabeth had **46%** of the total child abuse neglect investigations in Union County in 2017
- ▶ The high school graduation rate in Elizabeth is 72.8%
- ▶ 25% of the total grandparents raising their grandchildren in Union County live in Elizabeth.
- ▶ 75% of households speak a language other than English
- ▶ During the Point in Time Count in 2019, Elizabeth had 77% of the homeless population
- ▶ The homeowner vacant housing unit rate of 4.6 in Elizabeth is much higher than the county rate of 1.8
- ▶ 9% of individuals under age 65 do not have health insurance
- ▶ 15% of Individuals 65 and older living in Elizabeth are living in poverty, this is 1.5 times the rate of Union County
- ▶ 21% of children under 18 in Elizabeth are living below the poverty level
- ▶ The median value of owner-occupied housing in Elizabeth (\$306,100) is 80% of the amount of Union County (\$375,400)

Hillside

- ▶ 2.9% of births had no prenatal care
- ▶ 15% of children under age 18 are living in poverty
- ▶ The rental vacant housing unit rate is 1.5 compared to the county
- ▶ Median Household Income in Hillside is \$64,000, about 80% of the amount of Union County
- ▶ The median value of owner-occupied housing is \$232,500, two thirds the amount in Union County
- ▶ 16.5% of the population do not have health insurance

Communities of Opportunity

Key Indicators

18

Linden

- Linden has lower median gross income and median family income levels as compared to the county, but the percent of people in poverty is equal to the county poverty percentage of 10.3%
- 33.5% of the population of Linden is foreign-born, and 50.9% of people in Linden over age 5 speak a language other than English at home
- The birth rate per 1,000 residents in this community included a rate of 10.5% or 447 births, and 2.2% had no prenatal care.
- 23% of the population age 25 and older in Linden have a bachelor's degree or Higher, compared to 34% in Union County
- 15.3% of people in Linden do not have health insurance
- 7.4% of individuals in Linden, under age 65 are people with disabilities (2014-2018)
- 30 Narcan deployments in 2019

Plainfield

- Plainfield includes 38% of the population who are foreign born
- 51% of individuals over five speak a language other than English at home
- Plainfield has 20.9% of the population who are living below poverty levels
- 27% of children under age 18 are living in poverty
- The median gross income is 25% lower than the county median gross income
- 16% of the population over age 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher, as compared to 35% of county residents
- 27.3% of the adult population in Plainfield do not have a high school diploma
- 54% of occupied housing in Plainfield is renter occupied, about 1.5 times greater than the New Jersey rate

Communities of Opportunity

Key Indicators

Rahway

- There are 25.1% foreign born persons who reside in Rahway
- 40.6% of people in this community speak a language other than English
- \$74,164 is the Median household income for Rahway
- 7.93% poverty rate
- 12.7% of individuals under age 65 in Rahway do not have health insurance

Roselle

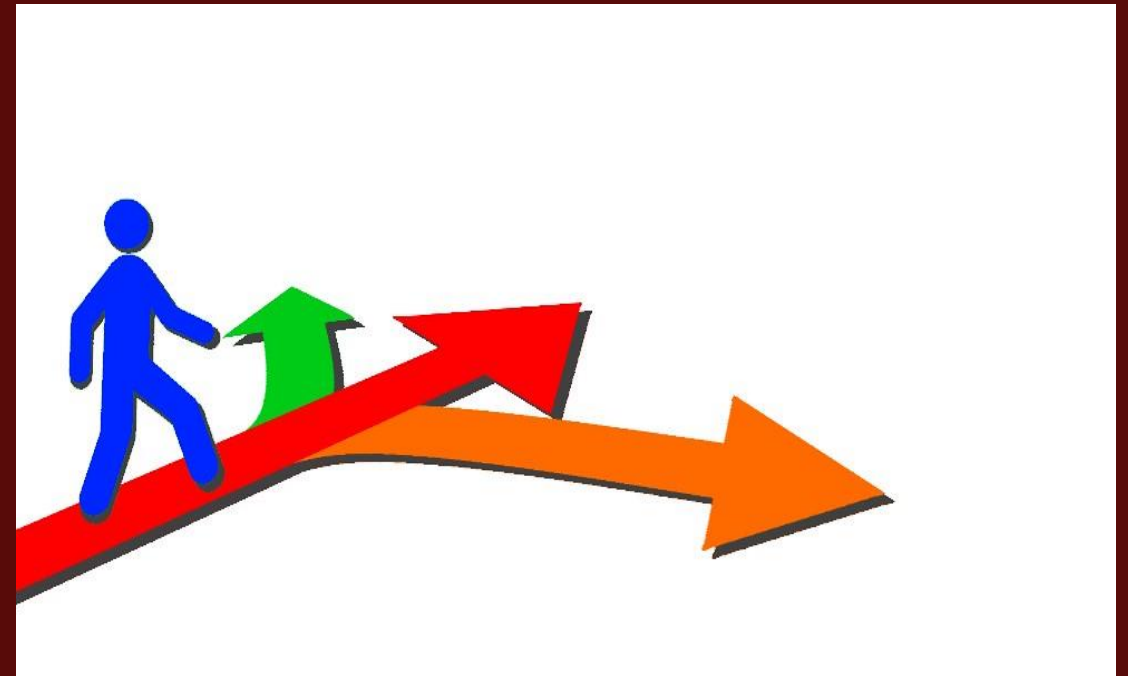
- ▶ 2.8% of women giving birth in Roselle had no prenatal care
- ▶ The graduation rate for Roselle is 88.1%
- ▶ Homeowner vacant housing rate is 2.5 times higher than the county rate
- ▶ In Roselle 10% of people are living in poverty
- ▶ 12.4% of the population under age 65 do not have health insurance

Union Township

- ▶ 40% of the population speaks a language other than English and 30.2% of the population is foreign born
- ▶ The number of individuals age 65 and over is slightly higher in Union Township, with 16%, that of the county
- ▶ The gross median rent is more than \$200 higher than the county figure of \$1,219
- ▶ 6.9% of residents under 65 have no health insurance
- ▶ 7% of children in Union are living in poverty
- ▶ 240 Union Township residents were admitted for a substance use disorder in 2018, the fourth highest in the county with 40% of admissions for heroin
- ▶ Of the 14,900 veterans in Union County, 1,500 live in Union

Recommendations

- ▶ Meeting unmet needs and overcoming systemic obstacles to individual and family success
- ▶ Advocacy and resource development



Overcoming Systemic Barriers to Success

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Helping Residents Find What They Need

A comprehensive approach is needed to develop mechanisms and a system to help county residents become better educated about issues affecting their wellbeing, and services/supports available to help address them. CSBG funded agencies should be in the forefront of these activities, as they meet the intent of this funding.

- ▶ Develop a comprehensive online resource directory.
- ▶ Develop an array of other means to increase awareness of county residents about services available, including for non-English speaking residents.
- ▶ Continue outreach and education to expand knowledge of the Union County Department of Human Services Action Line.
- ▶ Educate and train educational personnel and police about key issues affecting community well-being, and the availability of services and supports to address resident needs. They can then serve as resources to residents who need help in identifying services and accessing them.

Overcoming Systemic Barriers to Success

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Holistic Approaches to Service Delivery

Deemed the “**Yellow Brick Road Pipeline**” by the Steering Committee – an integrated, comprehensive approach to support individual and family success is recommended as the primary way to overcome the fragmented services that exist in several key areas: early childhood success, positive youth development, aging, housing/homelessness, financial empowerment and behavioral health.

- ▶ The goal would be the development of coherent strategies and organized and integrated systems of services and supports to efficiently and effectively support Union County residents in being successful in each area/pillar, and across the life journey.



Homelessness and Housing the Highest Unmet Need in the County

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Short term:

Under the public/community partnership, create a workgroup focused on homelessness to:

- ▶ Design and implement an organized system of services for homeless individuals and families.
- ▶ Reinforce a single point of intake and service routes for homeless services.
- ▶ Consider best practice models/strategies within NJ and nationally and create strategies and projects that emphasized “housing first” and homeless prevention in addition to crisis-based services.
- ▶ Utilize a unified, consistent approach to shelter development among faith-based providers.
- ▶ Review the use of the Homeless Trust Fund in the context of emerging strategies.

Long-term:

- ▶ Engage federal, state and municipal officials, developers and landlords to create a Union County Housing Task Force to confront and resolve the many challenging issues identified in the CNA related to affordable housing and income disparities.

Poverty and Income Disparity

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- Ensure that benefits are made available to those eligible through outreach and education, extended hours at the Division of Social Services and enhanced customer service, and online services from DSS and at community locations.
- Create a Financial Empowerment Network.
- To address food insecurity, enhance coordination with the Food Bank of NJ.
- One key area where there are opportunities for enhanced coordination to support resident success is in the area of workforce development. Particularly for young adults and those residing in the Communities of Opportunity where unemployment is highest, an approach is needed to engage, educate, train, and place individuals on career paths. A public-private partnership to support an effort to help residents find and keep jobs, and have careers that allow them to support themselves and their families, would also maximize the use of available funding in this area.

Health and Behavioral Health Care

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- ▶ Using existing planning bodies, develop a full continuum to support sobriety, including clear strategies for prevention, treatment, and supports for each resident in recovery.
- ▶ Advocate with, and seek funding from, the state and federal government for inpatient treatment services within the county for residents with substance use disorder.
- ▶ Educate residents about healthcare coverage available for children; create a strategy to eliminate black infant mortality.
- ▶ Seek and support the expansion of Federally Qualified Health Centers in the County, and other options such as the increased use of Community Health Workers, to increase healthcare coverage for undocumented individuals and those with low incomes.
- ▶ Work with non-profits to educate the community about available mail-in pharmaceutical services that can reduce costs for prescriptions for low income residents.

Improving Transportation

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Short Term:

Improve knowledge of transportation options through educational efforts and pilot programs, such as:

- ▶ Asking NJ Transit to provide additional community education on how to use services, perhaps as part of resource fairs;
- ▶ Ensuring that libraries have printed material on transportation routes and times for their area; and,
- ▶ Developing pilot programs, such as volunteer transportation programs, or working with supermarkets or pharmacies to increase delivery services.

Longer Term:

- ▶ Develop an array of options to meet varied transportation needs, such as:
 - ▶ Non-profits and faith-based agencies in the community could form transportation pools;
 - ▶ Development and expansion of teleservices, to replace a resident needing to travel to access a service, be explored for various services and supports;
 - ▶ Increased out-stationing of services and supports at accessible community locations to ease resident access; and,
 - ▶ A comprehensive examination of the value of utilization of Uber, Lyft, etc. to meet transportation needs.

Improving Community Safety

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A strategy is recommended that engages community members, along with the police, in keeping their communities safe.

- ▶ Communities complete neighborhood assessments on safety and crime issues and develop new solutions for crime mapping.
- ▶ “Neighborhood Watch” and other police-community partnerships to address crime and quality of life issues should be encouraged and supported by the county and its municipalities.
- ▶ Volunteer supports for these and other activities aimed at increasing community safety should be developed and supported.



Strategies for Underserved Populations

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- **Children and Youth:** Expand affordable childcare options, including summer and after school care, and recreational and tutoring programs for youth
- **Youth and adults:** ESL and Spanish classes throughout the community to foster communication among residents.
- **LGBTQ residents:** More support groups to recognize and address the stigma and other issues these individuals may be struggling with.
- **Children:** Behavioral supports for young children, especially for those who have received Early Intervention Services, and are awaiting services from the public education system.
- **Adults with disabilities:** Increased opportunities for adults with disabilities to better interact socially with other adults.
- **Children in foster care for long periods of time:** A special focus should be for the county to reach out to the NJ Department of Children and Families to assess and address the issue of children being in foster care in Union County for long periods of time, especially over five years.

Mobilize to Support Communities of Opportunity

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Priority - addressing unmet needs and overcoming systemic barriers to services and supports in the Communities of Opportunity.

- The particular challenges in each of the Communities of Opportunity should be prioritized and addressed.
- Explore the establishment of interconnected, place-based, collective impact strategies for each of the Communities of Opportunity.
- Create “Thriving Community” goals.

- ✓ **Elizabeth**
- ✓ **Hillside**
- ✓ **Linden**
- ✓ **Plainfield**
- ✓ **Roselle**
- ✓ **Rahway**
- ✓ **Union Township**

Advocacy and Resource Development

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- ▶ Advocate regarding licensing standards for sober living homes – to increase the number of these residences within the county.
- ▶ Advocate for more affordable housing development throughout the county.
- ▶ Advocate for reasonable increases in safety net programs and services that come closer to addressing the cost of living challenges.

To identify funding to address unmet needs, which is beyond the capacity of county government alone to achieve, it is recommended that strategies be developed for creative, diversified and leveraged funding to support the implementation of the Community Needs Assessment recommendations. These strategies would include:

- ▶ Developing a grants clearinghouse and creating a new entity to focus on creative financing initiatives to support CNA implementation
- ▶ Consistently exploring state and federal grants and philanthropic opportunities
Developing and enhancing private sector partnerships

Looking into the Future Together

The Details

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- ▶ Widely disseminate the results of the CNA - to educate the community about needs and to encourage the development of partnerships to influence policy and implementation of the CNA.
- ▶ Create a unified and structured public - community partnership to plan, implement and evaluate the implementation of the key findings and recommendations of the CNA, utilizing the principles of collective impact and the framework in the CNA.
- ▶ Transition the CNA Steering Committee into a streamlined body to guide and oversee the implementation of key recommendations.
- ▶ Integrate and streamline existing planning bodies to assure coherent, efficient and holistic implementation strategies.
- ▶ Review and restructure where appropriate the organization of county government personnel, processes and funding to align and support the implementation of key recommendations.
- ▶ Create quantitative and qualitative methods to support the planning and evaluation of the public/community partnership.
- ▶ Explore innovative strategies to finance implementation of key recommendations by seeking diverse sources of funding and leveraging available resources.
- ▶ Outreach to the business community and higher levels of government to participate and support the public/community partnership.
- ▶ Create a formal advocacy agenda to address long-term issues that lie beyond the authority of county government to address.

The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders



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