

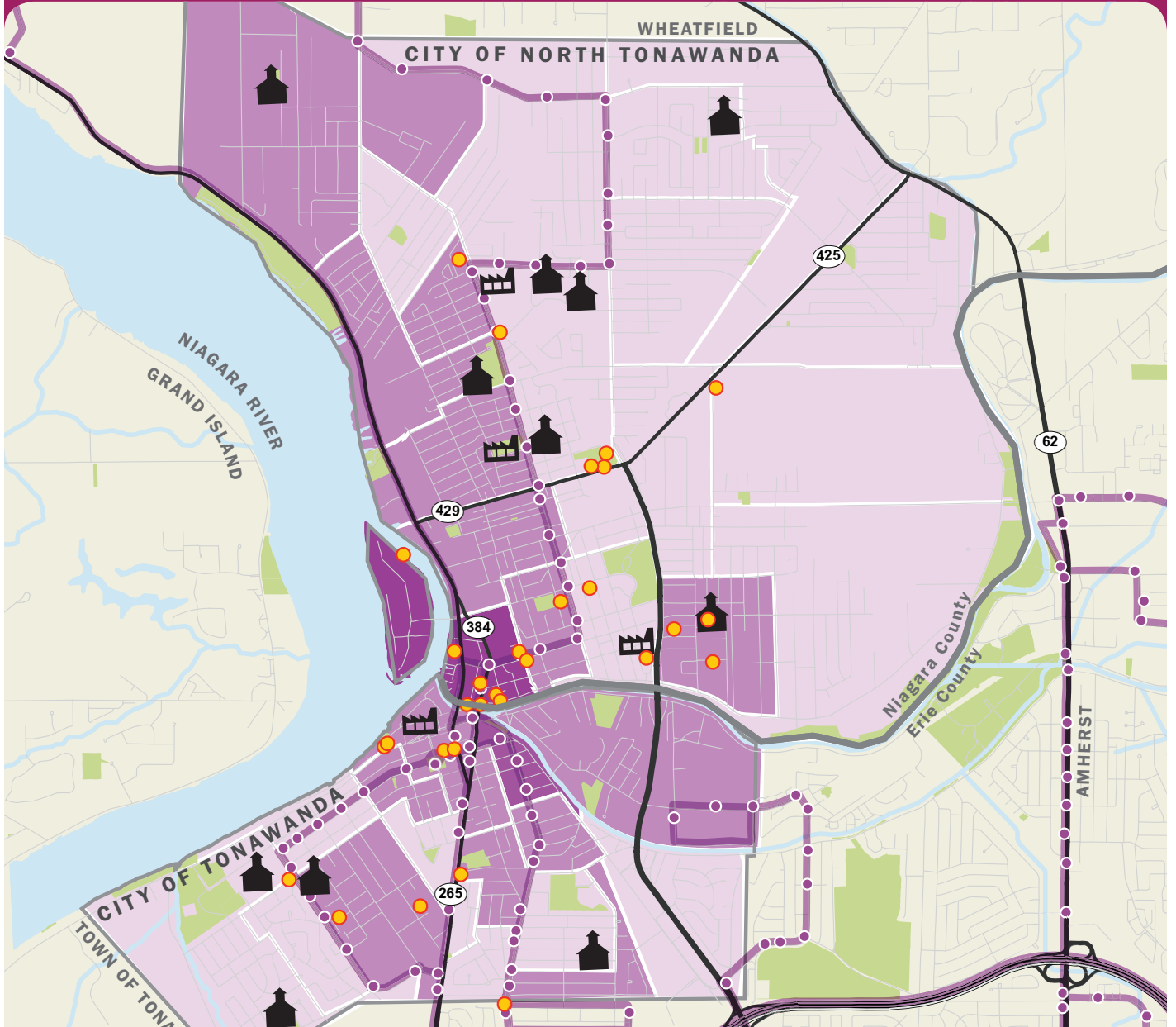
STRENGTHENING WNY's Safety Net

A COMMUNITY REPORT Cities of **TONAWANDA & NORTH TONAWANDA**



Report prepared for
The John R. Oishei Foundation
by the University at Buffalo
Regional Institute

June 2014



SERVICE PROVIDERS

There are 34 service provider sites in the Twin Cities, employing about 1,740 employees and providing a range of human services.

TRANSPORTATION

NFTA BUS ROUTES & STOPS

POPULATION IN OR NEAR POVERTY

Over 12,797 residents in the community live on incomes below or near the federal poverty level

Population in or near poverty by block group, 2010

10-25% 26-50% 51%-75% 76%-100%

SCHOOLS






Two school districts with
8 elementary schools
1 middle school
1 middle/high school
1 high school
about 5,590 students total enrolled

MAJOR EMPLOYERS

DeGraff Memorial Hospital
North Tonawanda City School District
Tops Friendly Market (2 locations)

About This Report

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Background

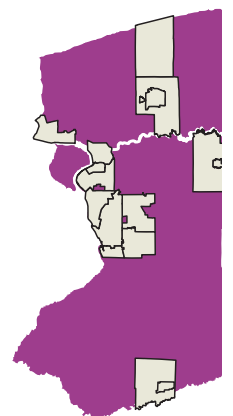
Between 2008 and 2009, employers in Buffalo Niagara shed almost 20,000 net jobs. The economic downturn, which continued into 2010, left large numbers of residents unemployed and unable to find new work for the first time in their lives. High levels of unemployment continue today. One out of 12 residents across the region seek work, and need for support continues to escalate.

While the majority of those in poverty live in urban areas like Buffalo and Niagara Falls, families in the region's suburbs and rural areas have experienced the biggest increase in poverty. One out of three with incomes below poverty now live outside urban areas where support services such as emergency food, housing and employment training are concentrated. Put another way, residents may be relatively far away from the services they need to get back on their feet. They may be unaware, too, of what's out there to help them. Meanwhile, service providers are challenged to expand capacity, improve access and generate additional revenues for expanded services, while at the same time, they may be dealing with funding cuts.

To strengthen the safety net in communities where residents are struggling the most, **The John R. Oishei Foundation created the Mobile Safety-Net Team Initiative in 2009** to go into dozens of communities in Erie and Niagara Counties to assess how the downturn in the economy is impacting residents, help connect residents with the services they need, build relationships with service providers and gather information about human service needs. The team has worked in 45 communities to date.



Twelve representative communities have been selected for additional assessment and investment as part of phase two of the Mobile Safety-Net Team initiative, which kicked off in 2012 and includes the team's partnership with the University at Buffalo Regional Institute. The purpose of phase two is to gather additional insights from residents, conduct focus groups, hear from organizations and develop a tool that will assist foundations and communities in strengthening the safety net of services. **The Cities of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda (herein referred to as "the Tonawandas" or "Twin Cities") are one of 12 communities selected for this initiative.** The in-depth analysis and recommendations contained herein are grounded in this work of the **University at Buffalo Regional Institute** and the **Mobile Safety-Net Team** and are intended to spur thought in the community on opportunities to create a stronger human services safety-net.



What Went Into This Report

Two Teams

This effort culminates months of research during 2013 and the first half of 2014 by the University at Buffalo Regional Institute team, working in partnership with the Mobile Safety-Net Team.

University at Buffalo
Regional Institute

Mobile Safety-Net Team
an initiative of The John R. Oishei Foundation

The work of the teams
within the Twin Cities
over several months...

Who We Talked to and What We Looked at

Residents and agency providers allowed us to explore how the system was currently working and gain insights into how to improve it.

Residents



Resident Survey

319 surveys were completed by residents in the Cities of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda, providing new data on the city's at-risk population, their needs, urgent concerns, utilization of human services benefits and barriers to support services.



Resident Focus Groups and Interviews

Two focus groups with residents offered insights into residents' most pressing concerns, barriers to accessing services and ideas on how the system might be improved for them.

Agencies



Agency Interviews

Several human service agency representatives shared information on their programs and perspectives on opportunities.



Agency Focus Groups

A focus group was held with almost three dozen representatives of human service providers, to gather perspectives on human services needs, barriers and strategies for improving the landscape of services.

Secondary Data



Data Sources

Information and insights were gathered from a variety of sources, including the 2010 Census, 2007-2011 American Community Survey, Social Explorer Reports, NYS Department of Health, NYS Education Department 2012 School Report Card and Reference USA.

Understanding the Report

The months of information gathering provided the structure for understanding the needs, the barriers and the strategies for improving the current system.

...led us to explore...

...which resulted in:

People



Places



Services

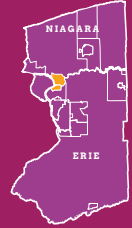


Insights &
Recommendations



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A COMMUNITY REPORT Cities of **TONAWANDA & NORTH TONAWANDA**



A large population in poverty or close to it...

Among the Twin Cities' population of 46,825...

...about **5,085**

residents live on incomes below the federal poverty level.

...an additional **7,711**

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

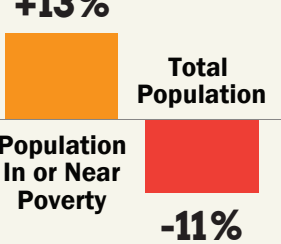
...about **12,796**

are doing poorly or struggling financially. This is over one out of every four.

Beyond poverty, other alarming indicators and trends...

Since 1990, the overall population has shrunk, while the number of vulnerable people has risen, leaving the Twin Cities and providers here with a smaller funding and resource base to support higher levels of demand.

Need is growing as population is shrinking



Once an industrial star, the Twin Cities has lost about 5,700 jobs since 2002, mostly in manufacturing. Those who can't leave for work or choose not to are more likely to be in jobs paying under \$1,250/month.

67% of families in poverty are single parents

Housing related crises - utility shut-offs and threats of foreclosure and eviction - dominate urgent concerns reported by vulnerable households, the majority of whom are homeowners and maintaining older homes that are, on average, 66 years old.

54% of urgent concerns are housing related

Juvenile arrests have been on the rise since 2008. Unstructured time out of school may contribute to delinquency. School leaders also point to mental health issues as growing challenges for youth.

Limited educational attainment contributes to residents' inability to compete for living-wage jobs, including those better jobs in the Twin Cities. Nearly half have no training or education beyond high school. While trade school offers pipelines into higher-paid employment for those who aren't college bound, only 5% of vulnerable adults report completing trade school.

Domestic violence is a concern. North Tonawanda reported 238 victims in 2012, while Tonawanda Police reports 350 calls each year, averaging one a day. Meanwhile, a grant-funded domestic violence advocate position is being eliminated because of funding.

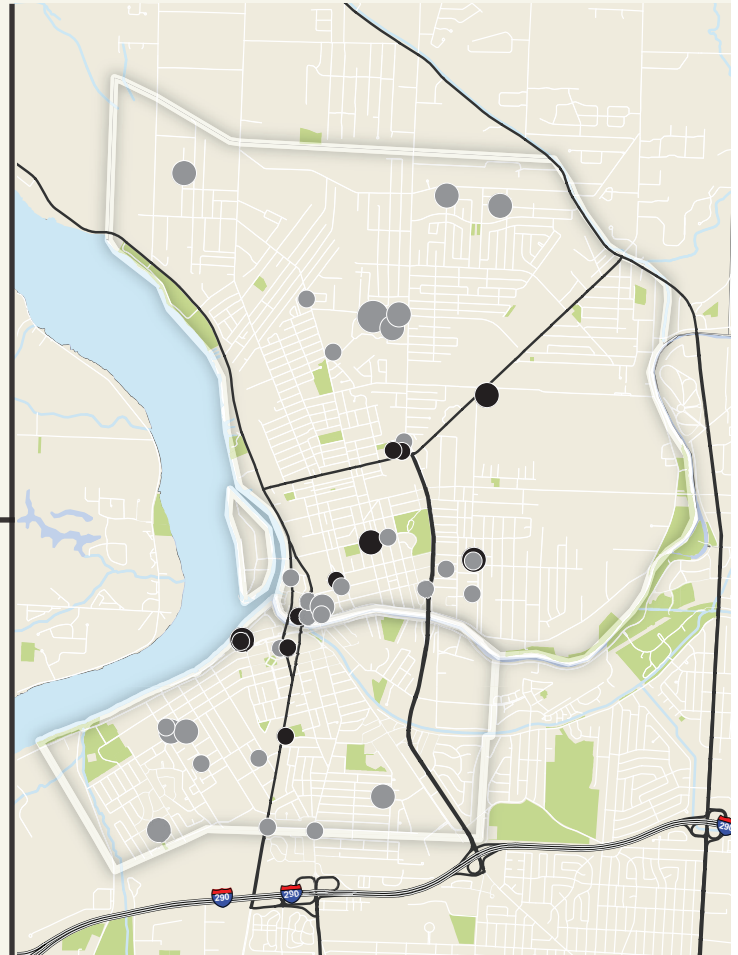
2 out of 3 non-retired vulnerable residents are working

* Findings come from a survey of 319 at-risk households across the Twin Cities, reflecting a statistically significant sample size at a confidence level of at least 95% and with a confidence interval of 5.

Twin Cities' landscape of human services providers...

34 public and private providers employ about **1,740**

The majority of providers and their employees are located in North Tonawanda where two-thirds of the Twin Cities' vulnerable reside. A small hub of providers is located in the downtown areas of each city. Others are scattered throughout the community, a distance from where poverty is most pronounced. For some service categories, such as affordable clothing, financial literacy, legal assistance, and health care, few service providers, if any, exist within the community.



strengths

Strengths of the system include an existing coalition of human services providers; a number of seniors supports to build on; two major funders; two youth courts; a crisis intervention response team for mental health needs within the Tonawanda Police Department; a history of successful service fairs that attract many from the community; and a family support center within the Tonawanda City School District that is open to all residents.

gaps

Gaps exist for affordable and flexible transportation options; child care and youth programs; affordable housing, weatherization and home rehabilitation supports; preventive mental health; and adult education with pipelines into living-wage jobs.

Barriers and systemic challenges...

1 out of 4 residents surveyed in the Twin Cities say they have encountered difficulty getting services.



More of the vulnerable in the Twin Cities live just above the federal poverty level than below it – the “working poor.” As a result, **being turned away for programs and services because of income limits was the number one barrier to programs and services residents surveyed report.**

1,500+
households without access to a vehicle

More than 1,500 households lack access to a vehicle. More of those than not are headed by someone under the age of 65, who are more likely to need a vehicle not only to access programs and services but jobs, especially those outside the community.

Options for those without a vehicle are described as poor, especially for accessing programs and services in Niagara Falls, Buffalo and Lockport. Taking the bus to Niagara County DSS from Spruce Street in North Tonawanda can take over two hours on a weekday morning. Even services within the community can be hard to reach, according to residents, with the lack of sidewalks on busy thoroughfares and safety concerns. Cuts in funding that have eliminated printed bus schedules create further barriers to public transit use.

Preventive programs for mental health, especially for youth, are altogether lacking, providers say. Meanwhile, inpatient mental health services are nearing capacity and are available for only the most extreme cases.

The boundary between Erie and Niagara Counties creates barriers, especially to county-level services, as Niagara County DSS is the service provider for residents living in the City of North Tonawanda, while Erie County DSS provides services to residents in the City of Tonawanda, even though Erie County DSS is easier to get to by bus for all residents in the community. The fact the Twin Cities spans two municipalities, each with its own police department, senior services, and youth programs may pose additional barriers caused by lack of awareness and confusion over eligibility and residency requirements.

While the Cities of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda were once a hub for industry, that base has largely disappeared, at least in terms of the number of jobs. Today, **the community is challenged by having more workers than jobs, and less than half of all jobs pay enough to lift a family of three above 200% of the federal poverty level.**

Section 8 wait list is **2½ years long**

Demand exceeds funding and resources for affordable housing and related supports. In North Tonawanda, the wait list for a Section 8 voucher is two and a half years long and two-thirds of existing vouchers are used by seniors because of the lack of subsidized senior housing. As for housing rehabilitation, providers say there is no funding for this.

Although a number of out-of-school options for youth exist including a Boys & Girls Club at two sites, the North Tonawanda Community Center and programming run by the City of Tonawanda Parks and Recreation, **some describe a need for more youth programs, especially to engage teens. Lack of awareness may contribute to the perception that more programs are needed. Indeed, strong programs located nearby vulnerable families report being underutilized.**

For every **4 workers, there is only 1 job** paying at least \$40,000 a year

At the same time need is rising, resources have been cut. Niagara County DSS used to have a site in North Tonawanda but no longer does. The NFTA has reduced service for bus routes. Two years ago, Northpointe Council closed its office in North Tonawanda. Reductions such as these force residents to access services outside the community, exacerbating transportation barriers.

Churches used to play a bigger role in providing human services but this outreach has declined because of dwindling church attendance and resources.

While the community has a strong suite of services for seniors, many are described as being at or near capacity. The senior van, for instance, is so busy taking residents to medical appointments, which take priority, that it’s difficult for seniors to get rides to other destinations. Demand for affordable senior rental housing also exceeds what’s available.

Recommendations to strengthen the safety net of human services...

RECOMMENDATION	STRATEGIES	MODEL TO CONSIDER
Support the long-standing Human Services Coalition of the Tonawandas	<p>Support the coalition's effort to create a directory of human services providers</p> <p>Use this assessment as a tool to apply for funding</p> <p>Ensure broad representation on the coalition from media, economic development, grant making, elected officials and other stakeholders</p>	<p>The Seattle Human Services Coalition is an example of a long-standing group that is garnering funding and political attention for human services.</p> <p>http://shscoalition.org/</p>
Strengthen supports for early intervention and child mental health promotion	<p>Support North Tonawanda City School District's Student Intervention Program that will take a proactive, multi-faceted approach to student mental health</p> <p>Explore collaborations that might make available school-based mental health services</p> <p>Ensure that all providers have the information they need to make appropriate referrals</p> <p>Build a school-based peer mentoring program to support at-risk youth</p>	<p>Sweet Home School District's Family Support Center offers on-site counseling, among other services, via partnerships with private practitioners paid through health insurance and/or a pool of donations for the uninsured.</p> <p>http://sweethomeschools.org/District/2201-Untitled.html</p>
Increase the availability of enriching out-of-school activities for youth, especially for teens	<p>Raise awareness of existing programs by including these in the directory being created by the human services coalition. Develop informational material for dissemination to parents</p> <p>Consider developing a YES (Youth Engaged in Service) program, offering teens out-of-school volunteer opportunities that cultivate job skills through service learning</p> <p>Develop a career mentoring and internship program for teens, perhaps through the Chamber of Commerce</p>	<p>Youth Engaged in Service (YES) offers teens opportunities to cultivate skills and get work experience through service learning. Nearly 4,000 youth participate in the Town of Amherst's program.</p> <p>http://www.amherst.ny.us/pdf/youth/yes_bro.pdf</p>
Expand options for affordable and flexible transportation	<p>Explore the possibility of bringing Hearts and Hands to the Tonawandas, expanding the model to offer volunteer-driven transportation services to vulnerable seniors and others</p> <p>Explore the feasibility of expanding Buffalo Car Share to the Tonawandas, offering access to an automobile for those who need occasional access to a car</p> <p>Make sure current bus schedules are available at community hubs such as the library</p>	<p>Buffalo CarShare provides access to a car, for an hourly fee, for those who need to drive occasionally to run errands, get to job interviews or make other trips.</p> <p>http://www.buffalocarshare.org</p>
Build programs for vocational training and work-related supports	<p>Ensure that new or expanding companies benefit the local workforce via local recruiting and partnerships with the school districts for internships and apprenticeships</p> <p>Strengthen pipelines into advanced manufacturing jobs across the region by implementing programs such as Dream It Do It</p>	<p>"Dream It, Do It" offers a framework for strengthening the manufacturing pipeline that's being adopted by districts in WNY to help fill an estimated 17,000 openings through 2020.</p> <p>http://www.didiwny.com/</p>
Expand the supply of affordable, high-quality housing for vulnerable individuals and families	<p>Expand aging-in-place supports for seniors through both formal and informal support networks</p> <p>Promote weatherization and housing rehabilitation programs, some of which are underutilized</p> <p>Explore partnerships that may enable PUSH Green to expand its energy efficiency programs for homeowners to the Twin Cities</p> <p>Increase safety and neighborhood livability through the promotion and strengthening of block clubs</p>	<p>PUSH Green, a program of PUSH Buffalo, is helping homeowners in Buffalo and beyond, weatherize homes and reduce energy bills through energy assessments, upgrades and access to funding for investments that will achieve long-term savings.</p> <p>http://www.pushgreenwny.org/</p>
Strengthen supports available to victims of domestic violence	<p>Engage the YWCA Tonawandas in expanding the availability of domestic violence supports at neutral venues and offer training to those providers who may help to identify DV victims</p> <p>Explore the feasibility of restoring recently cut grant funding for the domestic violence advocate position that has been shared between the City of Tonawanda and the Village of Kenmore</p>	<p>Cut It Out is a program for reaching potential victims of domestic violence at hair salons, taking advantage of the trusting relationship that often develops and opportunities for information sharing.</p> <p>http://cutitout.org</p>

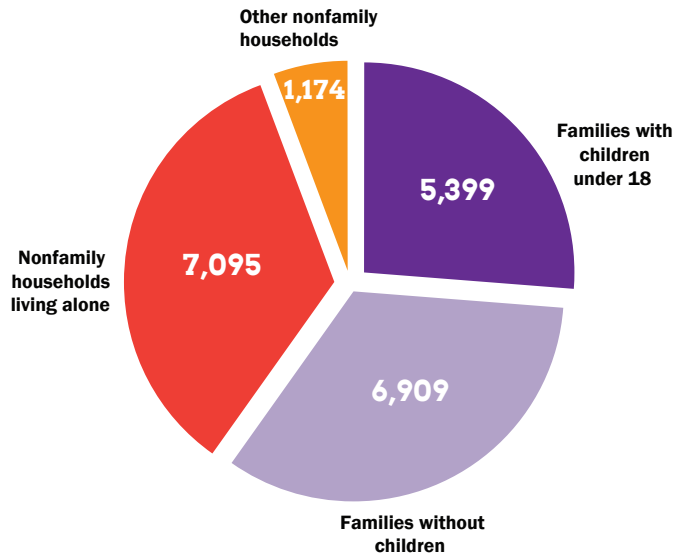
Context for Action

People in Need

Individuals and families of the Twin Cities: where we work, how much we earn and where we go to school



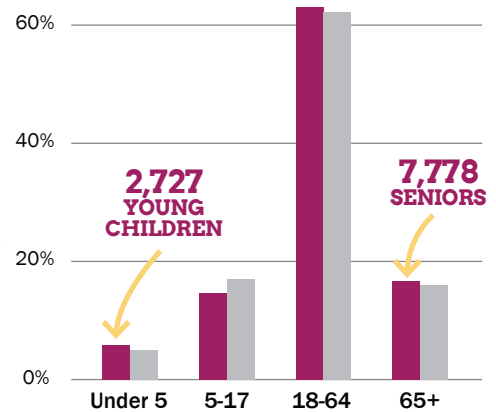
Households by Type, 2011



Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Population by Age, 2011

Twin Cities
Erie & Niagara
Counties



Potentially At-Risk Populations, 2011

Adults with HS education or less	15,335
Veterans	4,276
Single parents	1,784
Foreign-born individuals	1,541
Non-white individuals	1,461

Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Individuals and Families

Approximately 46,825 individuals live in the Twin Cities of Tonawanda, with two out of three in the City of North Tonawanda, Niagara County's second most populous city. This overall figure represents an 11% decrease in the community's population since 1990 when the total surpassed 50,000 and was larger than the City of Niagara Falls is today.

Over half the population is between age 18 and 64, and 17% is 65 years or older. One in ten are older seniors, age 75 and up, an age where demand for services and support tends to increase.

With an average of 2.3 people per household, households in the Twin Cities tend to be small, but not much smaller than they generally are throughout the region (2.4). Households with children under the age of 18 are a minority, comprising only 26% of all households in the Twin Cities. Yet, at the same time, the Twin Cities has more youth under the age of 18 than seniors age 65 and up (9,553 versus 7,778).

-11%
The Twin Cities' population decrease over the past 20 years

Source: 1990, 2000, and 2010 Census

About 34% of households are families without children and 35% are households in which individuals live by themselves, perhaps indicative of the community's population which is older than the region's with a slightly higher proportion of seniors age 75+.

Aside from young children and seniors, who are sometimes economically vulnerable because of age-related work barriers, adults with a high school diploma or less are another group potentially at risk. In the Twin Cities, there are 15,335 individuals (or 46% of the population 25 years or older) who stopped their education at high school, and as a result of their limited educational level, may lack access to higher paying jobs and are thus more likely to be struggling economically.

46% of adults 25 years or older have a high school degree or less

Veterans are another sizable vulnerable group who oftentimes have unique needs for assistance with health care, job training, and other services. Single parents are another, accounting for one out of three households with school-age children or younger and the large majority of families in poverty.

Employment by Sector, 2007-2011

	Twin Cities	Erie & Niagara Counties
Private, for-profit	71%	66%
Public sector	15%	17%
Private, non-profit	10%	10%
Self-employed/ unpaid family	3%	7%

Source: 2007-2011 American Community Survey. Unpaid family workers are those who work without pay in a family business.

The Twin Cities' Top 10 Employers

Employer	# of Employees
DeGraff Memorial Hospital	500
City of North Tonawanda School District	470
Tops Friendly Market (2 locations)	312
McGuire Group/Northgate Health Care Facility	275
City of Tonawanda School District	247
Bremner Food Group	220
Heritage Christian Services	200
Tonawanda News/Kenmore Record Advertiser	200
Niagara Sheets LLC	160
First Student	150

Source: Reference USA and the 2011-2012 New York State Report Cards for the Tonawanda and North Tonawanda City School Districts

Work and Income

The Twin Cities are not a center of employment. In 2011, there were 15,580 workers employed at jobs in the Twin Cities – fewer than the total number of Twin Cities residents who hold jobs anywhere. Although the community's employment base has declined significantly – by 28% since 2002, mostly due to losses in manufacturing – this sector remains a staple, accounting for one out of four jobs in the community. Retail, accommodation and food services account for nearly another one quarter of all jobs – all sectors where job numbers in the community are growing.

DeGraff Memorial Hospital, a facility of Kaleida Health, is the community's top employer with 500 jobs on-site. Two other top employers are also in the Health Care and Social Assistance category, a field that has seen some job growth since 2002. Other top employers include the two school districts, the local newspaper and a couple of smaller manufacturers.

As in other communities of the region, the majority of working residents – about four out of five – leave the Twin Cities for work. Residents who leave are more likely than those who stay to be in a job paying at least \$3,333 per month or about \$40,000 a year. More interesting, however, is that non-residents who work in the City of Tonawanda are more likely to be in a higher-paying, goods-

Twin Cities' employment base is shrinking

producing jobs than residents who either leave or stay. While not all residents are expected to work near where they live, the data does suggest that stronger pipelines to higher-paying jobs like the ones existing in the community may benefit residents.

Today, median household incomes in the Cities of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda (\$46,945 and \$46,203, respectively) are less than those in Erie and Niagara Counties overall. This is true even though a greater proportion of residents in the community work in the private, for-profit sector.

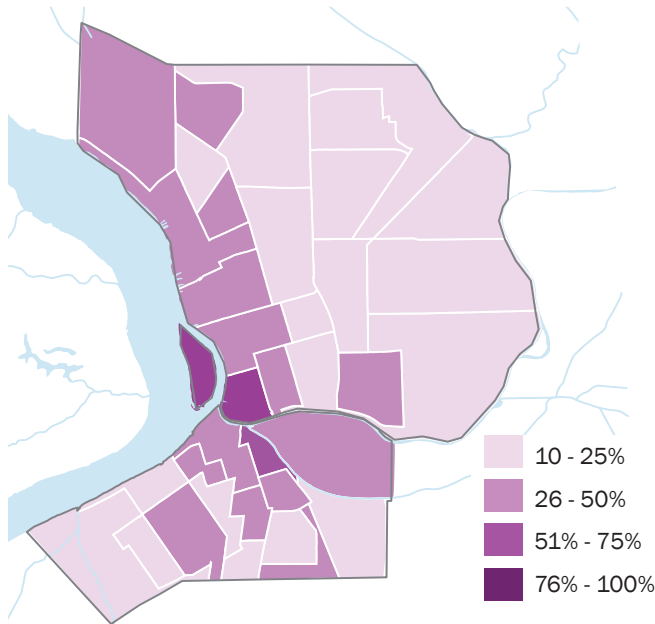
It's reflective of the Twin Cities larger proportion of middle-income householders and smaller pool of higher earners, or householders generating \$100,000 or more per year.

% Households by Income Levels

	Twin Cities	Erie & Niagara Counties
\$0 - \$25k	26%	27%
\$25k - \$50k	26%	25%
\$50k-100k	33%	31%
\$100k - \$200k	14%	15%
\$200k +	1%	3%

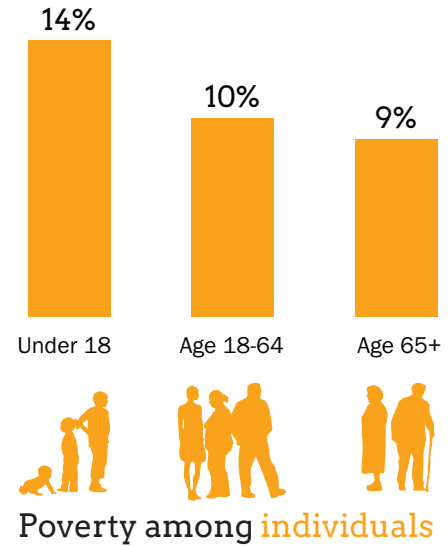
Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Population in or near poverty, 2010



Source: 2006-10 American Community Survey.

Population in Poverty by Age, 2011



Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Poverty

Poverty in the Twin Cities has been increasing slowly over the past 20 years. In 1990, 21% of the population was considered to be poor or struggling, and it increased to 24% in 2000. Today, nearly 27% of the population is considered to be poor or struggling. Specifically, there are 5,083 individuals living in poverty and another 7,711 individuals managing on incomes between 100% and 200% of the federal poverty level.

Yet not all demographic groups in the Twin Cities are affected equally by poverty. Working age adults (ages 18 to 64) have a relatively low poverty rate -- 10% -- but they represent roughly three-

67% of families in poverty are single parents with children

fifths of all those people living in poverty. So, the rate is low but the need is great.

And while the poverty rate for families is relatively low at 8%, families with children where only one parent is present have a poverty rate of 36% and constitute

fully two-thirds of all family households living in poverty. People living alone are also more likely to be poor -- about 19% of all single person households. This translates into 1,370 individuals in poverty because of the large proportion of households with someone living alone.

Similarly, most poor people in the Twin Cities are white -- 91% of the total. But non-whites are much more likely to be poor. Only 10% of all whites are poor, compared to 33% of all non-whites.

Need also varies significantly by geography, with poverty being concentrated near the western edge of the border between Tonawanda and North Tonawanda. Sixty percent of children in poverty live in just four of the community's 13 census tracts.

\$12.00 Amount a family of three would pay for a single round trip by bus

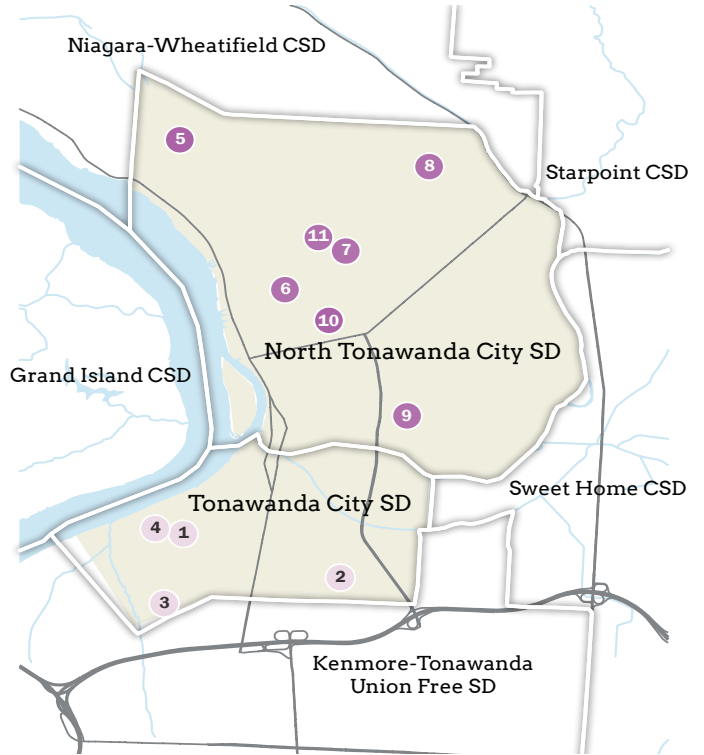
\$18.07 Maximum daily amount a family of three lives on, per person, at the federal poverty level

\$20.08 Daily cost of owning and operating a car

Source: Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, 2014 Federal Poverty Guidelines, and Edmunds.com

Schools by District in the Twin Cities	Enrollment, 2012	% Qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch
TONAWANDA CITY		
1 Fletcher Elementary (4-5)	263	38
2 Mullen Elementary (K-3)	283	40
3 Riverview Elementary (K-3)	299	53
4 Tonawanda Middle/High School (6-12)	1007	37
NORTH TONAWANDA CITY		
5 Drake Elementary (K-6)	319	37
6 Gilmore Elementary (K-6)	345	63
7 Meadow Elementary (K-6)	330	31
8 Ohio Elementary (K-6)	449	33
9 Spruce School (K-6)	434	51
10 North Tonawanda Middle School (7-8)	594	44
11 North Tonawanda High School (9-12)	1276	26

Source: NYS School Report Card SY 2011-2012



Source: NYS Education Department 2012 School Report Card and NYS GIS Clearinghouse

Education

There are two school districts in the Twin Cities: the Tonawanda City School District and the North Tonawanda City School District. Between the two, there are eight elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and one combined middle and high school. Altogether they enroll more than 5,590 students. Nearly 40% of all students qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

In 2012, children in these two districts performed as well as other children in the region and the state in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math. Sixty-two percent of students met fourth grade ELA standards and 53% met fourth grade math standards, while seventy percent met eighth grade ELA standards and 60% met eighth grade math standards.

Although the difference was not large, economically disadvantaged students were somewhat more likely to fail to meet ELA and math standards in fourth and eighth grade than students who were financially better off. For example, 44% of economically disadvantaged students did not meet fourth grade ELA standards, while only 33% of students who were financially better off failed to meet those standards. Nevertheless, the majority of even economically disadvantaged students met the standards, with the exception of eighth graders in ELA, even if it was at a lower rate than their economically more affluent fellow students. For instance, 64% of economically disadvantaged students met fourth grade math standards, while 36% did not.

Educational Attainment of Adults Age 25+, 2006-11

	Twin Cities	Erie & Niagara Counties
Less than High School	10%	12%
High School	36%	31%
Some College/Associate's Degree	34%	30%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	20%	27%

Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

The high school graduation rate in the Twin Cities is 90%, which is higher than it is throughout the region (88%) and across New York State (86%). The large majority (85%) of high school graduates plan for some level of post-secondary education. These students' educational aspiration surpasses what existing adults in the Twin Cities have actually achieved. Only 20% of those age 25 years and up have a bachelor's degree or higher. This is lower than across the region or the nation where the rate is closer to 30%.

Context for Action

The Twin Cities' Most Vulnerable



Demographics,
service usage,
urgent needs
and barriers

Assessing the Need

319 Twin Cities households responded to the Mobile Safety-Net Team Community Needs Assessment.

This one-page questionnaire gathered data and information on demographics, urgent needs, concerns and barriers experienced by residents in getting human services.

Assessments were completed at a variety of sites including the City of Tonawanda Library, City of North Tonawanda Library, City of Tonawanda Senior Center, YWCA Tonawandas, Twin City Community Outreach Pantry, Boys and Girls Club (Tonawanda/ North Tonawanda) and St. Francis of Assisi School.

What human services are residents receiving?

Fewer than half (44%) of individuals surveyed live in households receiving some form of assistance. This is low compared to other cities assessed as part of this initiative and may be reflective of lower levels of poverty here.

The most common types of benefits reported by those who receive support

Medicaid	52%
Cash Benefits	44%
Food Stamps	43%
HEAP	32%
SSI/SSD	25%

46%

of those receiving some form of public assistance qualify for and receive more than one kind of benefit.

Pending applications. The benefits residents are receiving may not be enough to meet their needs; more than half of those seeking new benefits are already receiving some other type of public assistance. In addition, the demand for human services in the Twin Cities may be increasing: 42% of those not receiving any benefits at this time say they have an application for public assistance

pending. Sixty-eight percent of pending applications are for HEAP; while 14% are for food stamps, with the remainder for other kinds of assistance.

Are there indicators of greater need?

The number of people in need of support with food, health insurance, housing and income is likely greater than indicated by the current number of people receiving such aid since both those who receive benefits and those who don't report experiencing access barriers. Altogether, about one in four (25%) says there is difficulty getting services. The most frequently reported barriers are income limits, difficulty traveling, and confusing processes.

Urgent Concerns. The large majority of residents surveyed did not identify any urgent concerns, despite the fact that many of them depend on one or more forms of public assistance. About one in five survey takers reported having

an urgent concern, a much lower proportion than other communities like the Town of Tonawanda (30%) and Niagara Falls (42%), reflective perhaps of comparatively better economic circumstances in this community. Sixty-seven percent of nonretired individuals here work either full or part time, compared to thirty-three percent of non-retired Niagara Falls residents who work.

Housing-related crises accounted for over half of the total urgent concerns mentioned, followed by concerns related to not having money for food.

Lack of Health Insurance.

More than one in ten households (13%) reported that an adult in their household lacks health insurance. Children are more likely to be covered, with only 2% of respondents indicating that a child in the household lacks insurance.

What's causing this situation?

Comparatively higher incomes.

The median household income of those surveyed was \$1,800 a month. This is over the federal poverty level for a family size of two or three (2.5 was the median here.) Indeed, just 30% reported living on \$1,250 a month or less, near the poverty limit for a household of two. Another 24% reported that their household generates between \$1,250 and \$1,999 monthly, while nearly half reported household incomes at \$2,000 or more a month. While those in poverty qualify for most benefit programs, eligibility becomes increasingly limited as household income rises (and need presumably declines.) This explains, perhaps, why less than half those sampled receive benefits and why the most

The most urgent concerns of those surveyed

Utility shut-off	54%
No money for food	37%
Foreclosure/ Eviction	25%

22%

of survey takers report having an urgent concern.

319 surveyed

common barrier reported was income limits.

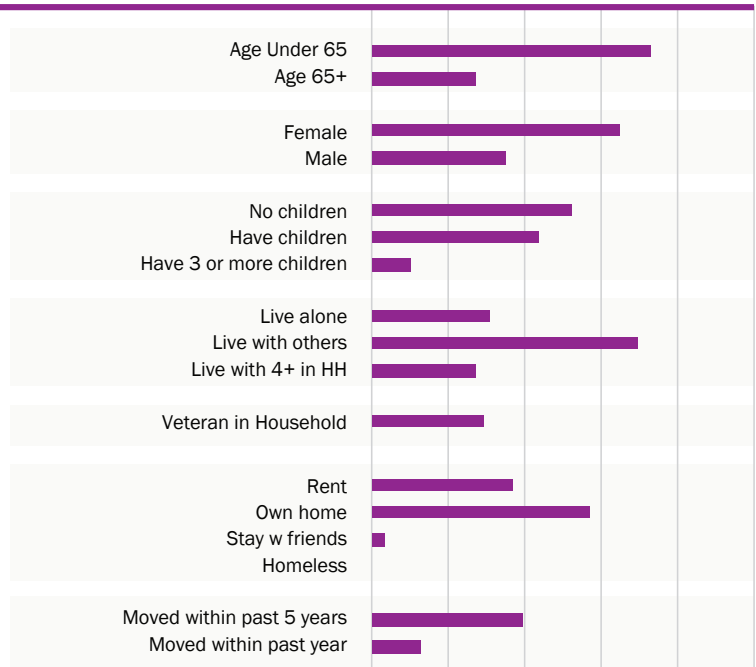
Higher working levels. Two-thirds of non-retired survey respondents reported working either full or part time. Although it may be in lower-wage jobs, full-time work was more common than part-time employment among those surveyed. That said, a quarter of this non-retired population reported being unemployed, with most of these actively looking for new work.

Education and skills. Slightly more people reported having a college degree or completing trade school than those who stopped at high school (40% versus 37%), likely explaining why the majority here have been successful in securing a job. Educational attainment levels of this sample are, in fact, slightly higher than the community at large where 46% of adults age 25 and up have no training or education beyond high school. This discrepancy may reflect nothing more than the fact that people with less education are more likely to lack access to a vehicle to get to the locations where this survey was conducted.

Home ownership. While the majority of all residents own the home they live in, the opposite is true of those receiving some form of public assistance. Most (57%) are renters. But both conditions are precarious. Renters build no equity in an asset. Low income home owners are at grave risk of losing their asset with the loss of a job, onset of a major illness, or other common misfortune.

Transportation. Four out of five say their primary form of transportation is a car they own. Among the others, walking or catching rides with family and friends are more common than public transit.

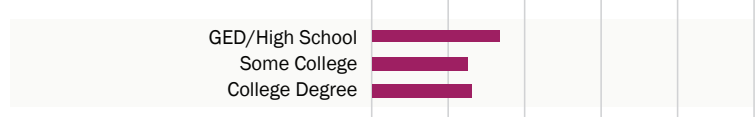
Individuals and Families



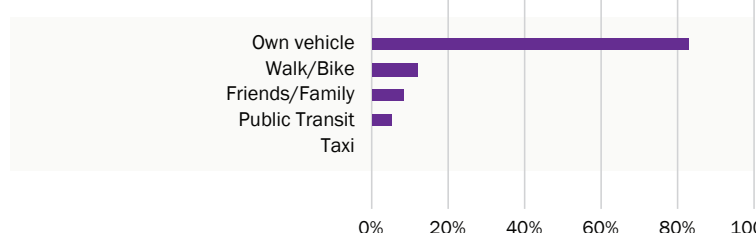
Work and Income



Education



Transportation



Source: Mobile Safety-Net Team Community Needs Assessment, 2013

Barriers Residents Face

Income limits is the most commonly reported barrier to services, suggesting that many who are struggling financially are seeking help, but cannot access services because they earn too much to qualify. The average household income of those who have been denied services due to income limits is \$1,630 per month, which is approximately just 106% over the poverty line for a family of two. The other top barriers to services are confusing processes and difficulty traveling. Those without a vehicle most commonly reported not using public transportation more often because of the lack of service where they need to go and because it takes too long to get places.

A Voice from the Community

Focus groups with residents in the Twin Cities shed further light on these and other barriers residents face. Conversations were held at Twin Cities Outreach and the Tonawanda Public Library.

Transportation: Getting around is a pervasive challenge. Without access to a car, grocery shopping or visits to the doctor can be difficult. Public transit service to the Tonawandas is so limited that trips to both Erie and Niagara County Department of Social Services require two-bus journeys that might take three hours each way. Those who are fortunate enough to own and operate an automobile frequently provide rides for friends and neighbors. Otherwise the trip is on foot. Staff at the City of Tonawanda Library report that patrons

walk all the way from Sheridan Parkside to use their services – a 45 minute journey along streets with no sidewalks. Reaching medical specialists in far-flung suburbs seems insurmountable.

Social Services Bureaucracy: Some social services clients find dealing with the bureaucracy frustrating and demeaning. They call, get put on hold or experience trouble navigating menus and submenus of telephone options. Each time they call, they have to explain their situation to a different case worker. They send in paperwork and it gets lost. And changes in their own circumstances mean that they need to be recertified even more than once a year.

Cuts in benefits: Many residents feel the sting of incremental cuts in basic benefits. SNAP and HEAP benefits have been reduced – when even the previous amounts provided didn't buy

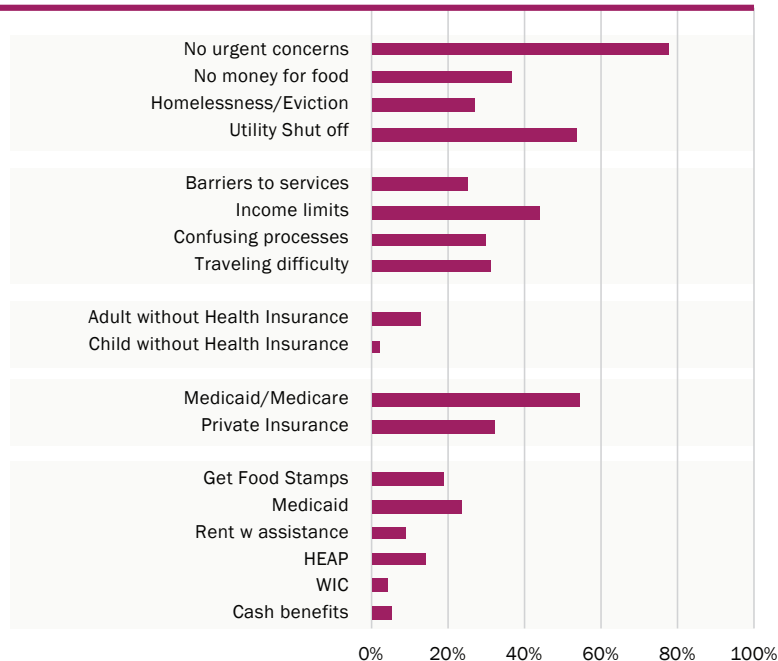
food that lasted the month or heating that covered the whole winter. After that it's off to the food pantry or St. Vincent de Paul to get the basics.

Computer access and literacy: Job searches and interface with service agencies is often limited by residents' lack of computer equipment or knowledge how to use it. Some help is available at public libraries but it is limited.

Housing and neighborhood deterioration: The long-term downturn in the local economy has left many residents on the ragged edge of poverty with the fabric of housing and neighborhoods visibly fraying. Concerns about housing deterioration, abandonment, and crime have risen.

Access to health care: The rise of urgent care centers has provided another option for residents to meet their health needs. But some are unsure about the quality of the care delivered in such settings.

Needs & Barriers



Source: Mobile Safety-Net Team Community Needs Assessment, 2013

1 out of 4 residents surveyed in the Twin Cities say they have encountered difficulty getting services.



Job Training and Placement: For those without a car and educational credentials beyond high school, the job market is just what's within walking distance – mostly low-wage jobs in retail. The New York State Department of Labor operated an office in the Twin Cities but closed it years ago. Otherwise, information on employment and access to application materials is provided by resource-thin public libraries.

Voices from the Community

Insights and perspectives from those with first-hand experience

These are stories about real people,* individuals in the Twin Cities who agreed to talk with us and share some of their personal accounts. We asked them about the challenges they face, the services and supports that have been helpful to them, barriers and their goals for the future. Through these individuals, this study's findings are humanized, and a clearer picture emerges as to the interconnectedness of issues.

**Names have been changed for privacy purposes*



Bob

Disabled worker struggling to get by

Bob worked his entire life, sometimes two jobs and 70 hours a week at places that didn't pay that well. Two years ago he started having seizures and was no longer able to work. He went on Social Security Disability and moved to North Tonawanda. Now he's 60 and survives on \$1,600 a month – about \$19,000 a year.

A Voice from the Community

His biggest problem is just getting around. Bob says that if he'd known how poor the public transit was in the Twin Cities he never would have moved there. He has heard that the NFTA is thinking about cutting the

eight trips a day of the 57 Tonawandas bus. It will take you over the canal into the City of Tonawanda or out to Niagara Falls International Airport where you can transfer to the 55 Hyde Park bus and into Niagara Falls. If the 57 gets cut, so will para-transit, and then there will be nothing.

It's a trial being on the edge of income eligibility for assistance. He had to switch health insurance and thus his primary care doctor. Then he got a new neurologist whose office is in Orchard Park. With cuts in Medicaid funding for transportation, that's a problem. And scheduling is a hassle, too. He once had to wait five hours for a second van after he missed the first. Now, he's supposed to have surgery to deal with his seizures. And the switch in insurance has made it difficult to get the right medicines. Two years ago, when he lived in Erie County, he got \$400 a month for HEAP. This year he's getting \$50.

His good friend, Bill, checks in on him regularly. Most days they walk around the neighborhood. Bob has an idea for a new bus route that would take him everywhere he needs to go and he can spell it out for you. But for right now, it's mostly just a daydream.



Darlene

Trying to stay in the working class

Darlene has lived in the Twin Cities for twenty years. She's married and has four children, two of them still at home. They've lived in the same apartment all those years and never had a problem either getting a repair or paying the rent. She loves the community because "they don't put up with much." Which is to say it's safe and orderly.

She praises the schools. The grade schools are great. Everything is neat and clean. The buses are prompt. But the middle schools aren't as good and the high school is pretty rough. Unfortunately, she expects her younger two children are going to drop out. One was diagnosed with ADHD but found the medication was worse than the malady – "overkill" – and lost interest in school. Darlene isn't signing off on them quitting but admits there's not much she can do about it.

A Voice from the Community

The bigger problem has been keeping a job and making a living. Her husband has worked in construction, but that's been intermittent. She's had a string of jobs, making doughnuts at a supermarket, doing deliveries, working as an inspector in a factory, mostly low-wage and low-skill jobs, but she had a slip-and-fall accident and she's been out of work for a while. Family sustenance has been a patchwork of wages, unemployment insurance, public assistance and visits to the food pantry.

Darlene is ready for a new job, but she says looking for a job is like trying to find water in a desert. She's got a high school diploma and two years of commercial art from BOCES "but it's not doing me a damned bit of good now." She's not particular about what kind of work it is. She just wants something that's regular and full-time.

Oh, yeah, and it should be close by. Without a car her job search is by "shank's mare" – on foot.

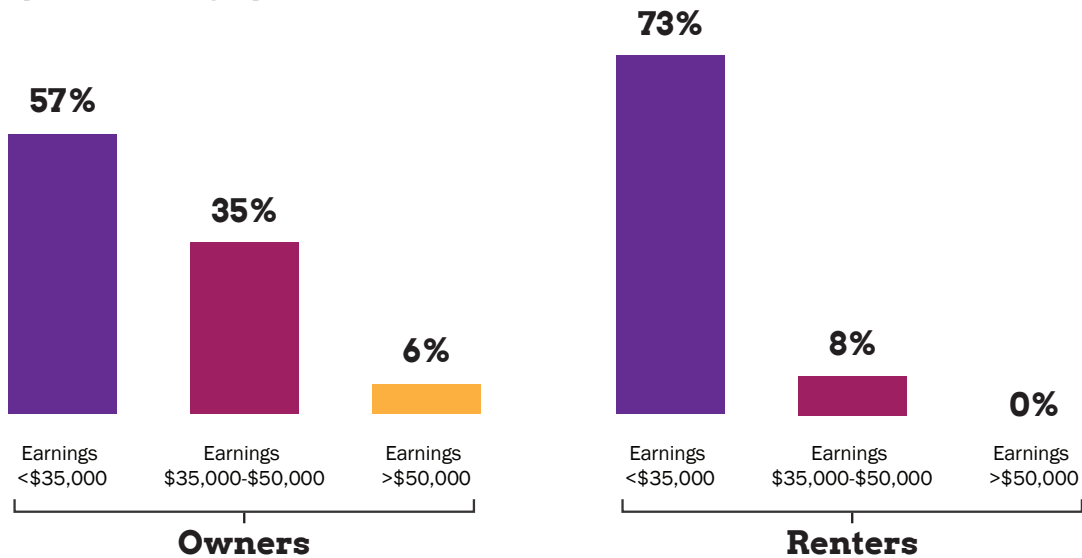
Context for Action

Places in Need



Where we live,
how we travel
and the safety
levels in our
community

Households in Twin Cities Paying 30% or More of Their Income on Housing, by Income Category, 2011



Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Housing

There are 21,588 housing units in the Twin Cities, about two-thirds of which are detached single family homes. The overall occupancy rate in the Twin Cities is high, at 95%, and indicative of a strong housing market. The rate of home ownership in the Twin Cities is comparable to that across Erie and Niagara Counties (68% vs. 66%). The median house value is \$93,905, which is about \$21,442 less than the median home value across Erie and Niagara Counties, making this community a more affordable for families and individuals.

More than half of all owners pay on a mortgage for their home. The median housing cost for those with a mortgage is \$1,176 and \$518 for those without. Twenty-eight percent of owners with a mortgage spend 30% or more of their household income on housing costs, while only 14% of owners of units without a mortgage spend this amount. Overall, only a quarter of all homeowners across the Twin Cities are cost-burdened –

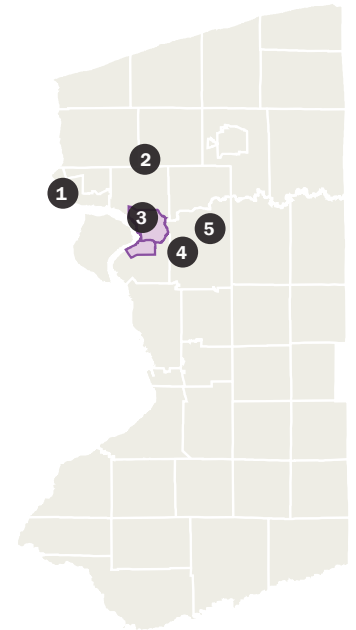
3 out of 4
lower-income renters in the Twin Cities are burdened with relatively high housing costs

paying more than 30% of their income on housing – but 57% of lower-income householders are. Human services providers taking part in a focus group pointed to the lack of supports available for housing rehabilitation to assist lower-income homeowners with expensive repairs. That said, Lumber City Development Corporation administers a HOME Rehabilitation Program through a \$400,000 state-funded grant to the city which offers housing rehabilitation to income-qualified homeowners in selected census tracts.

There are 6,544 renter-occupied housing units in the Twin Cities. The median rent is \$612, which is about \$79 less than the median rent for all of Erie and Niagara Counties. At the same time, lower-income renters are far more likely to be cost burdened than low-income home owners. Seventy three percent of the lower-income renter households are paying 30% or more of their income on housing. This is about 2,800 altogether. Providers say demand for subsidized housing exceeds what is available. For those seeking a Section 8 voucher - rental assistance for qualifying homeowners of all ages - the wait is 10 years across Erie County; it's two and a half years in the City of North Tonawanda.

Public Transit Times from Apartments on Spruce Street in North Tonawanda

Destination	Time of Day	One-Way Travel Time Via Bus	Notes
1 Niagara County Department of Social Services	Early Morning	1 hr. 20 min. to 2 hr. 40 min.	Trips require walking between 0.8 to 1.3 miles to a bus stop and 2-3 bus transfers, depending on time of day and route available. No substantial difference in travel times between Niagara Falls or Lockport offices.
2 Niagara County Community College	Mid-Morning	58 min. to 1 hr. 40 min.	Requires walking 0.8 miles to a bus stop and waiting 40 min. between bus transfers.
3 Tops Friendly Markets	Noon	27 min.	Requires walking 0.8 miles to bus stop. (Budwey's Supermarket is closer but requires 20 min. of walking because the area is not served by a bus route.)
4 Target Plaza at the Boulevard Mall	Mid-Morning	1 hr. 13 min.	Requires walking 1.3 miles to bus stop and 3 bus transfers, including walking a few minutes to the transfer stops.
5 GEICO in Getzville	Early Morning	1 hr. 40 min. to 2 hr. 27 min.	Requires walking 1.3 miles to bus stop and 3 bus transfers, including walking a few minutes to the transfer stops.



Transportation

The majority of workers living in the Twin Cities use a car, truck, or van to go to work (94%). Seven percent use some other form of transportation to go to work or they work at home (1.5%). Among those using other modes of transportation, less than 1% use public transit, 2.3% walk, and less than 1% ride a bicycle. For 60% of working residents, the commute to work takes approximately 20-30 minutes. Top destinations for residents employed outside the community include the City of Buffalo, Town of Tonawanda, Cheektowaga and Niagara Falls.

Yet 1,513 households across the two cities lack a vehicle. Nearly three quarters of these households are renters, and more than not are households headed by someone under the age of 65, in their working prime. For those without a vehicle, traveling can be difficult. It was the second most common barrier to services reported by vulnerable households surveyed.

Comparatively few here rely on public transportation. Long travel distances, coupled with the need to walk relatively long distances to bus stops and sometimes manage snow covered roads without sidewalks, factor into this decision. Even a trip to the Niagara County Department of Social Services from a subsidized apartment complex in North Tonawanda - a 20 minute drive away from Niagara Falls - can take over 2 1/2 hours one-way during a weekday morning.

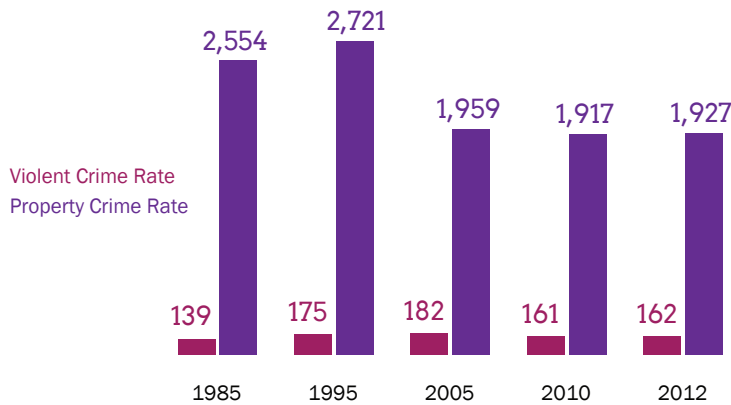
While more vulnerable residents report walking over taking the bus, even this poses challenges because the Tonawandas isn't a highly walkable community. Rather, it is rated by WalkScore.com as "car-dependent," which means "most errands require a car." The subsidized housing complex on Spruce Street is no exception, located in a neighborhood with a Walk Score of 34, on a scale of 0 (most Car-Dependent) to 100 (a Walker's Paradise).

Characteristics of Householders Lacking a Vehicle, 2007-2011

Household by Age	# Renters	# Owners	TOTAL
Householder Under Age 65	676	189	865
Householder Age 65+	450	198	648
Total	1,126	387	1,513

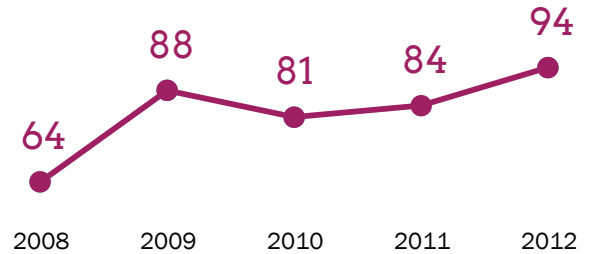
Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

Rates of Crime in the Twin Cities, Per 100,000 Population, 1985-2012



Source: U.S. Bureau of Justice

Juvenile Arrests in the Twin Cities, 2008-2012



Source: NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services

Crime

Overall, the Twin Cities have remained relatively safe over the past 25 years. The rate of violent crime has remained low and steady. Violence, in fact, happens less frequently here, per capita, than in other smaller cities of the region like Lackawanna and Lockport. The Twin Cities is even safer from violent crime than inner-ring suburbs such as the Town of Tonawanda and Cheektowaga. In 2012, aggravated assaults accounted for 68% of violent crimes against persons, while larceny/theft comprised 78% of property crimes.

Relatively low crime rates and safety are strengths

The rate of property crimes in the Twin Cities is almost twelve times higher than the rate of violent crimes. Yet its still lower than in all of the other communities mentioned above except the Town of Tonawanda which has slightly lower property crime rates.

Against this backdrop of a comparatively safe community for families, seniors and other individuals are data that point to areas where the safety-net of human services may need some strengthening. The first is juvenile arrest trends, which show an increase of 47% between 2008 and 2012, even though population estimates show a declining number of youth in the Twin Cities

over this period. The majority of these arrests are for offenses such as drug possession, trespassing, and larceny, according to Tonawanda Police, who make the majority of total arrests. While two youth courts operate in the Twin Cities and may lead to better enforcement overall, neither court is new and can account for recent trends. In fact, the City of Tonawanda's peer-run court was established in 1984 and has served as a model for others across the nation.

Representatives from the school shed more light on what's underlying recent trends, pointing to growing mental health needs among students against dwindling resources; it's a system that's reactive – the few hospital inpatient programs that still exist are packed – but prevention programs are lacking.

Domestic violence is another area where need appears to be high and/or growing, and resources are being eliminated. Tonawanda Police say they average one call a day related to domestic violence. (by comparison, North Tonawanda Police report 323 domestic incidences for 2012, a number representing a steady decline since 1999 and coverage of a larger population than in Tonawanda.) The YWCA of the Tonawandas also reports a rise and an average of ten new referrals each month. Yet funding for the advocate position the city has shared with the Village of Kenmore to help victims navigate the system has been eliminated for lack of continuing grant funding.

Landscape of Services



Twin Cities' service providers, their strengths, system gaps, barriers and promising developments

HUMAN SERVICES: AGENCY NAME		Target Population				Services											
		Teen Parents	Veterans	Seniors	Homeless	Food	Clothing	Education Training	Affordable Housing	Transportation	Mental Health Addictions	Health/Wellness	Legal	Youth Programs	Financial Literacy	Crime/Juvenile	Information Referral
1	Belmont Housing - Northtowns Office																
2	Bishop Gibbons Apartments			✓													
3	Boys & Girls Club of the Northtowns - NT Clubhouse																
4	Cancer Wellness Center																
5	Catholic Charities, Monsignor Carr Children's Clinic																
	Catholic Charities WIC Program Office																
6	Chamber of Commerce of the Tonawandas																
7	City of North Tonawanda																
	Dept. of Youth, Recreation, Parks & Senior Citizens																
	Community Development Department																
	Fire Department																
	Police Department																
8	DeGraff Memorial Hospital			✓													
9	GuildCare Adult Day Health Care																
10	Lumber City Development Corporation																
11	Lutheran Service Society			✓													
12	Niagara Community Action Program, Inc. (NIACAP)																
13	Niagara County Office of the Aging			✓													
14	North Tonawanda Inter-Church Food Pantry																
15	North Tonawanda Meals on Wheels			✓													
16	North Tonawanda Public Library																
17	North Tonawanda School District																
	Drake Elementary																
	High School																
	Meadow Elementary																
	Middle School																
	Ohio Elementary																
	Spruce Elementary																
18	Opportunities Unlimited																
19	Orleans Niagara BOCES in the North Tonawanda Learning Center																
20	Planned Parenthood of WNY	✓															
21	Salvation Army			✓													
22	The Dale Association Outpatient Counseling Center																
23	Twin Cities Community Outreach Pantry (TCCO)																
24	Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 77		✓														
25	YWCA Tonawandas																

See Data Sources and Notes for definitions

Note: Only agencies providing services in the Cities of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda are listed here and on the next page. Those that serve residents from locations outside the community are not listed. There are, for instance 325 human services providers in the Cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls, many of which provide services to residents living outside the urban core in places such as the Twin Cities.

HUMAN SERVICES: AGENCY NAME	Target Population				Services											
	Teen Parents	Veterans	Seniors	Homeless	Food	Clothing	Education Training	Affordable Housing	Transportation	Mental Health Addictions	Health/Wellness	Legal	Youth Programs	Financial Literacy	Crime/Juvenile	Information Referral
26 Boys & Girls Club of the Northtowns - Franklin Clubhouse																
27 City of Tonawanda																
Fire Department																
Senior Center				↙												
Police Department and Courts																
Parks and Recreation																
28 City of Tonawanda Public Library																
29 City of Tonawanda School District																
Fletcher Elementary School																
Middle/High School				↙												
Mullen Elementary School																
Riverview Elementary School																
30 Erie 1 BOCES																
31 People Inc				↙												
32 St Francis Parish Outreach Clothing Closet																
33 Tonawanda City - Housing Authority																
34 United Way of the Tonawandas																

See Data Sources and Notes for definitions

Landscape of Services

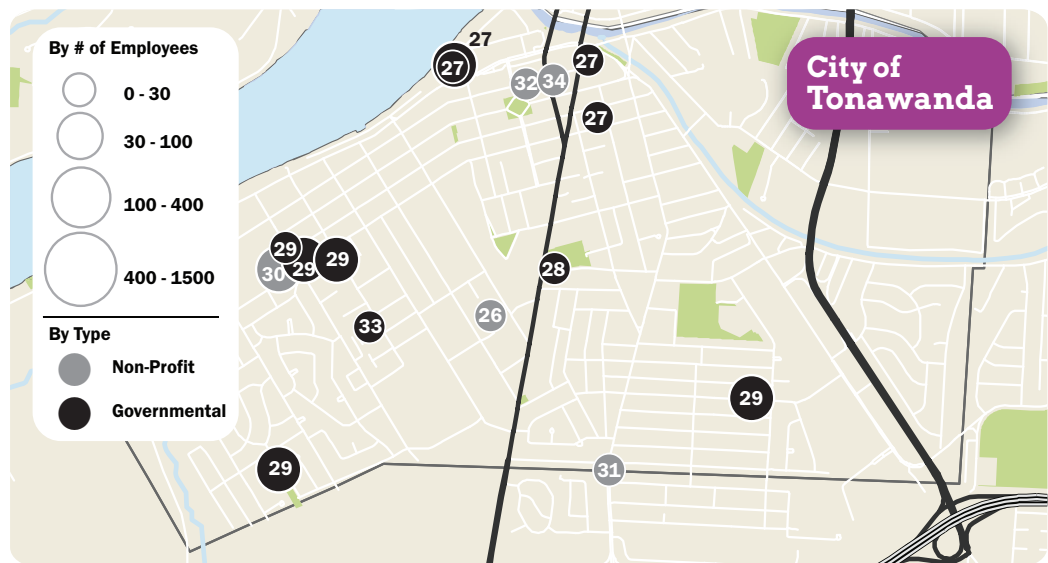
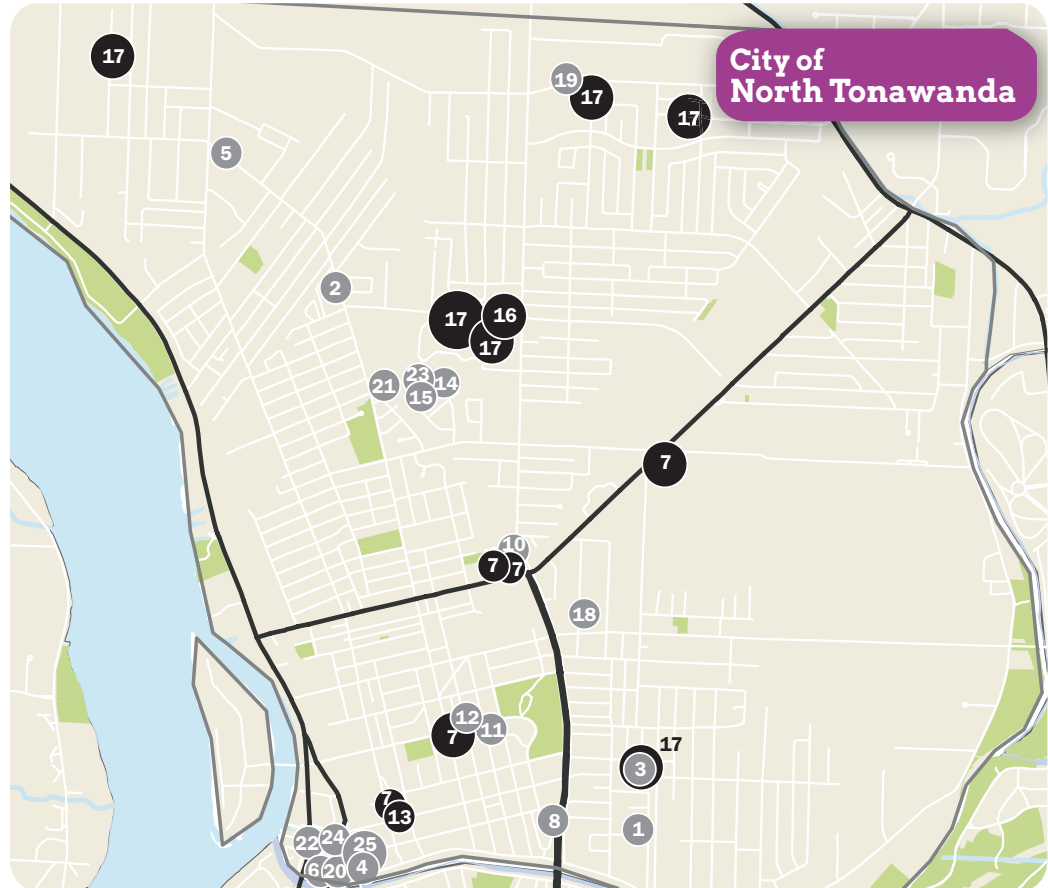
Thirty-four public and private human service providers exist in the Twin Cities. Nearly three-quarters of these are located where the majority (64%) of vulnerable people in the community live: in North Tonawanda. A hub of providers exists in the downtown areas of the Twin Cities, near the southwestern border of North Tonawanda and the northwestern border of Tonawanda, tracts where need is concentrated.



The safety-net in this community, however, is thin. In many service areas such as clothing, affordable housing, health/wellness, legal and crime/safety, there are few if any providers.

Providers here tend to be small, with the safety-net anchored by services offered by the two cities and the two school districts, particularly in the area of education, job training, transportation, seniors services and youth programs.

About 1,740 employees across 34 providers in the Twin Cities comprise a core safety-net of human services.



Strengths of the System

The Twin Cities benefits from the long-standing operation of a broad-based coalition of social services providers, the Human services Coalition of the Tonawandas. The coalition has met monthly since the 1960s and provides an opportunity for communication and collaboration across a wide range of organizations. Current projects include the compilation of a directory of local services as well as a successful and ongoing series of informational “fairs” and “forums.”

A peer-led youth court in the City of Tonawanda provides an alternative means for addressing juvenile crime.

Since 1984, high school students in Tonawanda have staffed a regular youth court, providing a means for diverting juvenile cases from regular courts and offering an educational experience for participants, as well as a model for similar programs in other states.

The Twin Cities host two significant philanthropies, putting support for new initiatives within arms reach. There is an independent United Way organization, maintaining a close relationship between funders and local needs. The East Hill Foundation, meanwhile, recently relocated its office to North Tonawanda, and while the philanthropy has interests throughout the region, it has identified the goal of making North Tonawanda the bridge between Buffalo and Niagara Falls.

Economic development efforts are strengthened by the existence the Chamber of Commerce of the Tonawandas, which is a strong resource for uniting and promoting businesses. Development of youth has also been part of its programs, with its junior board and mentoring opportunities over past years.

The Tonawandas have a strong basic platform of services for seniors. Meals on Wheels, other nutrition programs, and senior van service are all meeting a pressing need – but operating at or near capacity. North Tonawanda is also home to Guild Care, a “medical model” adult day care health center, providing comprehensive care to adults of any age with a diagnosed medical condition.

City of Tonawanda Police Department maintains a program designed to meet the needs of individuals in crisis with mental health issues. Their Crisis Intervention Response Team (CIRT) works to diffuse emergency mental health situations and then connect individuals to help and information. This helps keep individuals with mental health problems out of the regular court system.

The Tonawanda City School District maintains a family support center open to all residents of the city. The center serves as a frontline opportunity for children in difficulty to get attention, referrals to service and help for their families.

A long-standing
COALITION
of human services
providers exists

Gaps in Services

Mental health services are in short supply as police, school officials, and medical personnel report needs are growing. First-line providers report that mental health issues like anxiety, depression and suicide are increasingly prevalent. Meanwhile, North Tonawanda school district has been forced to cut mental health resources. In-patient mental health services have been cut recently too, and the two hospitals where they are still offered are at capacity. Preventive services are almost non-existent.

Affordable, flexible transportation options are not widely available. The lack of effective public transit service is well-documented. But alternatives are not in great supply, either. Senior vans are available but are typically heavily-subscribed and reserved for high-priority trips such as for medical appointments or pharmacy visits.

Demand exceeds available resources for affordable housing and home repairs. In North Tonawanda, the waiting list for Section 8 housing vouchers extends to two and a half years. In Erie County

TOO FEW PROGRAMS
for mental health
promotion

the wait is a decade. Two-thirds of existing vouchers have gone to senior citizen households, which strongly suggests there is a shortage of senior housing, even as younger families are unable to access subsidized shelter. Meanwhile, funds for home repair or weatherization are not readily available from any local agency.

Adult education programming with a pipeline to living-wage jobs seems inadequate. Service providers suggest that programming through BOCES is not well-aligned with available jobs. But often the bigger problem is transportation. Those seeking job training as much as those seeking jobs find it difficult to get to class as they will to get to work – without the benefit of an automobile. As is the case across the board, the lack of quality public transit service tends to make every problem more difficult.

Providers report that domestic violence is a growing problem with about one incident a day reported in City of Tonawanda. Police attribute the increase to a deteriorating economy and resultant stresses on families. Yet the domestic violence advocate the city had employed was expected to be discontinued because of the expiration of the grant that paid her salary.

Teen pregnancy rates and the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases among adolescents point to gaps in education, outreach and related health services. A state-developed measure called ASHNI (Adolescent Sexual Health Needs Index) ranks Zip Code 14120 (in North Tonawanda) as the second highest and most problematic in Niagara County and Zip Code 14150 (City of Tonawanda) in the top 10 out of 60 total Zip Codes in Erie County.

Barriers to Connecting with Residents

People in need are often denied services because they don't meet eligibility criteria. The Twin Cities' population of the nearly poor – households earning 100 to 200 percent of the Federal poverty line – is larger than the population of the impoverished. As a result, many people in real need are turned down for child care, Medicaid, and other assistance because they don't meet income guidelines.

More than 1,500 households in the Tonawandas lack access to a motor vehicle. Most of these are renters and nearly half are people over 65 years old. The impact for some is felt in limited access to job opportunities. For others it means difficulties in getting to shopping, the pharmacy, or to the doctor's office.

The long-term decline of the Twin City industrial base has dramatically reduced the number of jobs located here. For those with transportation, that means commutes to Buffalo, Niagara Falls or other suburbs. But for those who lack access to a vehicle it means choosing from low-wage jobs in the immediate vicinity – only one in three of which pay enough to lift a family of three above 200 percent of the Federal poverty level.

Few options exist for the 1,500+ households without a car

The decline of public transit services has left the carless with limited alternatives for getting around. Service to Buffalo or Niagara Falls is spotty and to Lockport even worse – all of which makes a visit to either County Department of Social Services

difficult and time consuming. A bus ride from Spruce Street in North Tonawanda to DSS in Niagara Falls can take more than two hours and fifteen minutes each way. The recent decision by NFTA to discontinue printing bus schedules has made using the service even more difficult for those without computers or smart phones.

The Boys and Girls Club location in North Tonawanda offers some services to children of vulnerable families at no cost but some parents avoid sending children there. It seems that the lack of a fee generates a certain stigma in some eyes and many parents would rather pay for competing after-school programming than send their children to the other center. The confusion, meanwhile, may contribute to an impression that services offered are somehow inadequate.

Information about available services may be difficult for residents to obtain. Even when programs exist, a lack of readily available information or accurate referrals means they are effectively inaccessible.

Grantsmanship is a full-time job. Although needs exist and money is available, many organizations lack the staff resources or expertise to prepare the necessary applications to get the money.

Promising Developments

Local economic development efforts seem to be gaining some traction. Business owners along Oliver Street will benefit from a recently awarded Main Street Program CFA grant. North Tonawanda's Riviera Theater is planning to expand. Redevelopment along the canal, including the adaptive reuse of the Remington Lofts has produced a sense that things might be changing for the better.

Parents at the St. Francis of Assisi School organized to fight the Diocesan decision to close the school. No specific plan is in place, but the fact that the community is rallying around one of its beloved parochial schools is a certain sign of life in the Tonawandas.

New programs are in the works to address householder needs for home energy efficiency upgrades. A tighter house and more efficient furnace can help any household improve energy performance and lower the cost burden for the occupants. NYSERDA's Assisted Home Performance Program will provide for 50 percent of home weatherization costs up to \$5,000. The program has more generous eligibility guidelines than HEAP allowing a greater number of homeowners and renters to take advantage.

The Human Services Coalition of the Tonawandas is working to create a directory of providers and programs. While additional resources are needed to expand or establish programs, utilization of existing programs can be improved when clients have better, more accessible information about what's available. The new directory should provide that.

Interest in vocational training at BOCES is up. In previous years, school officials report, two busloads of students might take a tour of the BOCES facility. This year, three buses were packed with interested students, and officials from the Niagara/Orleans BOCES report they can't meet the demand for welders and machinists. BOCES is also planning an expansion of Adult Education operations at Grant Street School to include referrals and care management.

The Twin Cities' role as a tourist destination got a boost from several projects funded through the State CFA process. These included restoration of the Herschell Carrousel Factory Museum complex, improvements at the marina basin along the Niagara River, and an extension of the Erie Canal Bike Path that will make the waterfront more accessible.

The East Hill Foundation is offering new help to non-profits, with the intent to respond to needs in its new hometown. The philanthropy plans to consider offering a grant writing workshop for agencies, if one is desired. This spring they are offering training in strategic planning.

The Niagara Community Action Program – NIACAP – is adding a food truck to its food pantry service. This will make the benefits of the pantry more widely available to those in need.

Insights from the Field

Recommendations and Best Practices

Where we gathered our information and what we are reporting

These insights, recommendations and strategies for achieving them are intended to spur thought and assist the community in developing its own priorities and action plans.

They come from a distillation of information gathered from a wide range of sources: interviews with agency representatives, a focus group with providers, and conversations with residents. Local data from secondary sources also inform these findings and recommendations.



Support the existing, long-standing Human Services Coalition of the Tonawandas in strengthening the human services sector

Human services providers in the Twin Cities have been meeting together on a regular basis to share information and solve common problems for the past thirty years. People in this network know each other and understand the challenges their colleagues face. Such is an extraordinarily strong foundation on which to build an even more effective coalition. Pitching an even larger “tent” will bring a broader range of perspectives into the conversation and expand the resources for collaboration proportionately. Expanding the coalition will also improve the prospects for better coordination of services, better information sharing with each other and the public, and provide a platform for more ambitious searches for outside funding.

STRATEGIES

Current members should target expansion of representation in the coalition to organizations in the news media, economic development, grants making, elected officials and other stakeholders. While some are engaged in direct provision of services to people, others constitute the environment in which human services providers must operate. The broader coalition can

better align and more broadly connect human services interests with opportunities to raise awareness and alleviate poverty.

Members, new and old, should support the coalition’s effort to create a directory of human services providers. The Mobile Safety Net Team has gathered information not only from providers in the community but also those outside the Twin Cities that serve residents of the Tonawandas. The “landscape of services” always extends beyond the municipal boundary. Offering members training on existing information tools such as 2-1-1 WNY could also help raise awareness of programs and services and facilitate referrals.

Use this directory as a tool to document program coverage and unmet needs as part of funding applications – especially money for workforce development, Main Street revitalization, and opportunities for SNAP recipients that is available through the New York State Consolidated Funding Application process. In the last round of awards, there were no recipients from the City of Tonawanda. The coalition should invite successful past applicants or Regional Economic Development Council staff to explain the process. Money is available and there is likelihood of success – if the coalition can share information about how to apply.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

The current leadership of the coalition needs to target key organizations for expansion of coalition membership. Development of the directory of services will require participation from coalition members across the board and outreach to others, including the Oishei Foundation’s Mobile Safety-Net Team. The coalition should reach out to local government officials, especially, to access CFA funding.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

The Seattle Human Services Coalition is an example of a long-standing group that is garnering funding and political attention for human services. <http://shscoalition.org/>

MODELS TO CONSIDER

HEARTS AND HANDS FAITH IN ACTION

HEARTS AND HANDS FAITH IN ACTION offers not only a model for providing transportation and other services to vulnerable individuals, but it also provides a success story for raising the profile of a church-based outreach from one serving primarily the needs of church members to an interfaith coalition serving the broad community. Hearts and Hands took root in 2003 when the pastor of First United Methodist Church of Akron observed how many seniors were heading for institutional care because they needed a little help with everyday activities and this help was not available. The idea was to pool ministries across churches, and have members volunteer to help elders in need. In addition to pooling human resources, at least a small amount of funding came from each church buying into the idea. The initiative also garnered an interfaith caregiving grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, raising the coalition’s profile to new heights. Still, the perception lingered that they were part of one church until operations moved from the church to more neutral ground. Today, Hearts and Hands operates through dozens of church partnerships. It has a volunteer base of 250 and serves almost 400 individuals.

<http://hnhcares.org/>



Strengthen supports for early intervention and child mental health promotion

While drug and alcohol abuse are still common problems among school-age children, the more prevalent challenge today appears to involve mental health issues like anxiety, depression and suicide. Parochial school leaders also report a need for counseling services for their students. Poverty, single-parent homes and other social stresses underly such trends. But the toll can be significant in terms of absenteeism, resort to substance abuse, and ultimately academic failure. A concerted approach is needed with more effective screening and referral and expedited access to services leading to a reduction of in-home instruction and drop-out rates.

STRATEGIES

The North Tonawanda City School District's Student Intervention Program will provide a proactive, multi-faceted approach to addressing student mental health needs. But success in the program will depend on the cooperation and close coordination of a wide range of agencies outside the schools – area in-patient hospitals, probation officials, courts, domestic violence agencies, and a wide range of direct mental services providers – with parents of the students involved and all school officials.

Beyond that, school officials should explore collaborations that might make available school-based mental health services such as a child psychologist a couple of days each week. The Sweet Home Family Support Center in the Sweet Home District offers a model.

Horizon Health Services is another potential partner that has expressed willingness in another local community to partner with the school district. Collaboration between district family resource centers in this and other areas of need may make adding services more achievable.

Ensure that all youth providers (especially schools, after-school programs) have the information they need to make appropriate referrals to community-based mental health providers. This can build on – and contribute to – the directory development referenced in a previous recommendation.

Build a school-based peer mentoring program to support at-risk youth and reduce bullying. The Cleveland Hill School District in Cheektowaga has a successful freshman mentoring program in its high school that was formed to reduce both bullying and discipline issues, while supporting student success in high school. The two schools districts in the Tonawandas could appropriate that model to good effect.

With expanded Medicaid eligibility for New Yorkers under the Affordable Care Act, providers should encourage those in need of health and mental health coverage to apply and/or reapply.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

As the front-line providers for children, the two school districts, as well as parochial school leaders, must lead the effort to meet emergent mental health needs. But assistance from mental health services providers and a wide range of other agencies is crucial if these efforts are to find success.

OTHER MODELS TO CONSIDER

The Family Support Center within the region's Sweet Home School District offers students, among other services, on-site counseling via partnerships with private practitioners who are paid through health insurance and/or a pool of donations for the uninsured.

<http://sweethomeschools.org/District/2201-Untitled.html>

MODELS TO CONSIDER

Dream It. Do It.

A branding initiative established by The Manufacturing Institute in 2005, DREAM IT. DO IT. is changing how people think about manufacturing careers. With an aim to promote manufacturing and increase young adult interest in developing STEM and other manufacturing skills, local communities partner with the national program to attract and recruit the next generation into manufacturing employment. National headquarters personnel work with local business, government and education stakeholders to design programs matched for their communities. Local leadership pays a licensing fee to either national or regional offices to use Dream It. Do It. branding, with local efforts funded by corporate sponsors, state economic development grants, and foundations. Dream It. Do It. operates 25 programs around the country, including Western New York. The Cummins Foundation has been funding this program for 3 years, including the Chautauqua STEM Education Coalition, which offers curricula and training to students. Thus far, more than “7,000 students participated in over 70 events,” including career fairs, tours of technology businesses, training for lean manufacturing, and robotic competitions (<http://www.didiwny.com/Home/news.aspx>). The program received a grant in 2012 from Western New York Economic Development Council to expand into Erie and Niagara counties.

<http://www.themanufacturinginstitute.org/Image/Dream-It-Do-It/Dream-It-Do-It.aspx>



Increase the availability of enriching out-of-school activities for youth, especially for teens

After-school programming for young people is offered by a number of agencies in the Tonawandas including the Boys and Girls Clubs with a location in each city, the North Tonawanda Department of Parks and Recreation, and to an extent by the public libraries both north and south. Nevertheless, there is an impression in some quarters that programs and services are not adequate to the need. Adults see young people at-large in their neighborhoods and assume they have nowhere to go. Part of the problem may reside in a lack of information and awareness about what is available. And there is a particular problem in the perception of two programs in North Tonawanda -- one for which there is a fee and which is popular with parents who are able to pay, the other which is free and carries some stigma in the community.

STRATEGIES

Distribution of the directory of services now being created by the human services coalition can help raise awareness of existing programs cataloged there and dispel misconceptions about what is offered. But the effort shouldn't stop there. Additional informational material should be developed for dissemination to parents via the school districts, their websites, and at events - community and

school-based - that attract large numbers of parents.

With support from the city, school district and community nonprofits, consider developing a program for teens called YES (Youth Engaged in Service). It could expand an existing school-based volunteer program in North Tonawanda and offer broader out-of-school volunteer opportunities that cultivate job skills and build personal character through experiential learning. At the same time, this could provide tangible services to people who need them.

Convene providers of after-school youth programming to explore ways they might work together to improve the reputation of all. That one program carries a stigma is unfair, unproductive and unnecessary. Collaborators should consider the possibility of establishing programmatic partnerships that will expand participation at both locations and improve how each is viewed by users and the public.

Engage the Chamber of Commerce in developing a career mentoring and internship program for teens. Young people who are able to see the opportunities and life choices that lie ahead of them are far more likely to prepare constructively for them. Those who get adult attention are also more likely to succeed.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

Each of the two school districts is an essential actor in most of these recommendations, either as a lead agency as in the YES program, as a partner in the career mentoring program, or as a conduit of information from other providers to parents. The North Tonawanda Department of Parks and Recreation and the Boys and Girls Clubs could come together on their own, although a neutral facilitator might be useful.

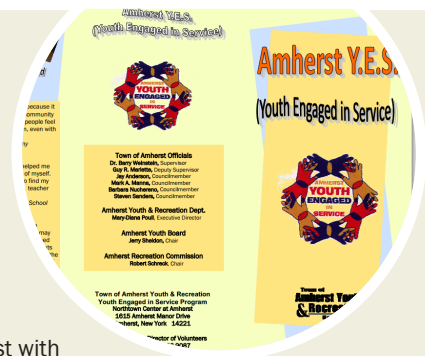
MODELS TO CONSIDER

Youth Engaged in Service (YES) offers teens opportunities to cultivate skills and get work experience through service learning. Nearly 4,000 youth participate in the Town of Amherst's program. http://www.amherst.ny.us/pdf/youth/yes_bro.pdf

MODELS TO CONSIDER

Youth Engaged in Service (YES)

Established in 1974, the YOUTH ENGAGED IN SERVICE (YES) volunteer program provides opportunities for students ages 12-21 to engage in community service. Students serve a broad array of constituents, including children, senior citizens, low-income families, persons who are mentally and/or physically challenged, and charitable organizations. Currently 375 students participate in the YES program from the Town of Amherst. Students sign up for activities on a monthly basis. These include visiting libraries to assist with children's reading activities, visiting nursing homes to assist with recreation programs, helping PTA parents attend meetings by providing child care, visiting the WNY Food Bank to sort food and volunteering at Habitat for Humanity. Youth performed more than 6,000 service hours in 2012. The program is funded through a combination of sources, including the Town of Amherst, the NYS Office of Children and Family Services, periodic donations from agencies served, and fundraising efforts. The YES program is staffed by a full-time coordinator and 5 part-time employees, whose work schedule ranges from 4 hours per week to 15 hours per week http://www.amherst.ny.us/pdf/youth/yes_bro.pdf



Expand options for affordable and flexible transportation

Lack of public transit service is the problem that exacerbates all other problems people face -- getting and keeping a job, getting access to health care, shopping, getting to school. Take any of the normal, everyday activities of life and take away the bus and, for those without a car, suddenly you have a problem. Service to Buffalo is infrequent with half the buses on the 25 Delaware and 20 Elmwood routes stopping before they get to City of Tonawanda. Residents fear that service on the 57 Tonawanda bus -- already very thin and requiring a transfer to get to Buffalo -- will be cut altogether. By appointment van service comes with restrictions on use, limits on capacity, and higher fares. Working to expand these options can open up a whole new range of possibilities for those who lack access to an automobile.

STRATEGIES

Explore the possibility of bringing a Hearts and Hands service to the Tonawandas, expanding the model to offer free volunteer-based transportation to vulnerable individuals beyond the aging-in-place services this organization provides to seniors. While declining church enrollment in the Twin Cities may limit the base of volunteers, perhaps a collaboration with Town of Tonawanda could expand the base for volunteers and offer efficiencies of scale to an entire area. Another model to monitor is "Veterans Helping Veterans," an initiative of HANCI piloting in North Tonawanda and offering free transportation to veterans to a range of services and shopping.

Explore the feasibility of expanding Buffalo Car Share to the Tonawandas. The program offers access to an automobile for those who only need to drive occasionally. Users pay a membership fee and then reasonable short-term rentals to use vehicles that are parked conveniently around the community. Buffalo Car Share is a home grown small business.

Especially on routes where service is spotty, make sure printed paper bus schedules are available at community hubs such as libraries, NIACAP, Twin Cities Outreach food pantry, Chamber of Commerce, grocery stores and downtown locations. The NFTA has discontinued the regular production of paper schedules but not everyone has access to internet or smart-phone technology to access schedule information on-line. Use the public forum the NFTA has scheduled for this July to voice concerns on changes to Route 57 and the elimination of Route 27.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

The coalition of human services agencies should identify a lead agency or convener for the volunteer ride service, preferably someone from a faith-based organization, although a volunteer civic association might also work. A broader array of church organizations in North Tonawanda, City of Tonawanda and perhaps beyond needs to be recruited.

The coalition should also reach out to Buffalo Car Share to explore the possibility of that organization expanding their services to the Twin City area.

Finally, the printing of bus schedules might be accomplished on a distributed basis with in-kind resources. A library, community based organization or other agency with a printer or copier could produce a small number of schedules for local routes without much expense and distribute these at the "front desk" or "checkout counter."

MODELS TO CONSIDER

Buffalo CarShare provides access to a car, for an hourly fee, for those who need to drive occasionally to run errands, get to a job interview or make other trips.

<http://www.buffalocarshare.org>

MODELS TO CONSIDER

Family Support Center

The FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER (FSC) of the Sweet Home Central School District is a highly regarded, state-recognized center that will soon celebrate 20 years of operation. Established by SUNY Chancellor Emeritus Bob Bennett, FSC directly works with 200 families annually, offering on-site counseling and connecting families with community supports, from food, health insurance, counseling, drug treatment, and more.

On-site counseling is provided by private practitioners and paid for through health insurance.

Where not covered, FSC has a fund through the United Way generating up to \$5,000

in donations annually. Otherwise, FCS is funded entirely by the district for the cost of the coordinator's salary. There is also a secretary whose primary role is student registration. This cross-over helps FSC identify families in need as soon as a student enters the district. In addition to counseling and referrals, FSC sponsors parenting workshops and drug and alcohol prevention programming. Strong connections within the school and with community agencies have contributed to the center's success and sustainability.

<http://district.shs.k12.ny.us/community/fsc>



Build programs for vocational training and work-related supports

The stepping stones from poverty and isolation to mobility and self-sufficiency include high school, career education, and access to a ladder of living-wage employment. Young people stuck in dead-end, low-wage jobs in retail and restaurants can have a different future if the path to jobs in the manufacturing sector can be made clearer. Residents have a lot to work with -- well-regarded public schools and strong BOCES programs to help students cultivate vocational skills. But young people need to know there are good careers on the horizon in an expanding advanced manufacturing sector. These are good jobs paying good wages. Ascending that career ladder can address the lack of mobility and insecurity -- physical and socio-economic -- that these young people typically face.

STRATEGIES

Help companies that are expanding, moving to, or starting up in the Twin Cities to benefit the local workforce through outreach and recruiting to fill job openings. Establish partnerships with school districts, BOCES and North Tonawanda's Academy of Engineering and Architecture for strong instruction in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, math), training, internships and apprenticeships for graduates.

Roughly 17,000 jobs are projected to open up in the region in the field of advance manufacturing through 2020, both new positions and replacement hires as aging workers retire. Now is the time to strengthen the pipelines preparing students and adults for these jobs. "Dream It, Do It" is a national model being implemented in many school districts regionally to prepare kids for careers in advance manufacturing. BOCES and potentially North Tonawanda School District's Community Education can provide this kind of workforce training.

Explore opportunities for "soft skill" training for unemployed and underemployed residents, at the library or through North Tonawanda School District's Community Education program. A partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, through one of its members, could make this possible.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

As with other projects, human services coalition initiative to identify a lead agency for workforce development initiatives can provide the catalyst for a wider alliance including school districts, BOCES, Lumber City Development, Corporation, workforce officials for counties and state, and area employers, especially those that project hiring over future years. The "Dream It, Do It" organization should take part as should Buffalo Niagara Partnership and the Buffalo Niagara Manufacturing Alliance.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

"Dream It, Do It" offers a framework for strengthening the manufacturing pipeline that's being adopted by districts in WNY. <http://www.didiwny.com/>

Expand the supply of affordable, high-quality housing for vulnerable individuals and families

The gradual erosion of income among many residents of the Tonawandas has left local housing stock in aging and deteriorating condition. Many homeowners lack the funds to maintain their homes. Rents don't provide the cash flow to landlords to upgrade. Energy efficiency upgrades as well as other tasks go undone. Altogether, these degrade the quality and raise the cost of housing, which, after all, includes heating and cooling. Initiatives to help homeowners, especially seniors, cope with these needs can have a strong positive impact. Building on successful existing programs is an obvious strategy. Yet much of the available subsidy for housing goes to seniors.

STRATEGIES

To better maintain the existing housing stock owned by seniors and reduce demand for senior rental housing where supply is short, expand aging-in-place supports available to seniors through the promotion of community service via programs such as YES, through block clubs and other social groups that facilitate neighbors helping neighbors, and through formal service networks such as Hearts and Hands and Canopy of Neighbors.

Promote weatherization and housing rehabilitation programs, some of which are underutilized and include EMPOWER NY, Green Healthy Housing, and HEAP. Explore partnerships that may enable PUSH Green to expand its energy efficiency programs for homeowners beyond Buffalo and the Town of Tonawanda to the Twin Cities.

Reduce crime and increase neighborhood livability and safety through the promotion and strengthening of block clubs. Successful groups in other communities have been formed in partnership with the local police departments, which often handle complaints that neighborhoods could proactively address themselves through education and outreach to new residents.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

The coalition of human services providers should identify or recruit a lead agency to spearhead development of volunteer efforts following YES, Heart and Hands or Canopy of Neighbors models. (It is uncertain whether those organizations themselves will be willing to lead).

State or state-funded weatherization programs may only need an invitation from local government or the coalition. The Tonawanda and North Tonawanda police departments should be asked to lead a block club organizing.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

PUSH Green, a program of PUSH Buffalo, is helping homeowners in Buffalo and beyond, weatherize homes and reduce energy bills through energy assessments, upgrades and access to funding for investments that will achieve long-term savings.

<http://www.pushgreenwny.org/>

Strengthen supports available to victims of domestic violence

Like many other communities throughout Buffalo Niagara, officials in the Tonawandas report a large and continuing volume of incidents of domestic violence. In the City of Tonawanda alone, police register one new domestic violence complaint each day -- roughly one household in twenty annually. Unfortunately, the domestic violence advocate who had coordinated city response to DV cases was funded by a grant which has now expired. Without the advocate there will be no one to monitor these cases when they come to court or to advise victims on available services.

STRATEGIES

Engage the Tonawanda and North Tonawanda Police Departments, along with the YWCA Tonawandas, to expand the availability of domestic violence supports at neutral venues in the community and offer training to those providers who may be in a position to identify DV victims and link them with help.

Explore the feasibility of restoring recently cut grant funding for the domestic violence advocate position that has been shared between the City of Tonawanda and the Village of Kenmore.

WHO NEEDS TO ACT

Leadership by the respective police departments is needed. Domestic violence involves crimes that prosecution, monitoring, and services can ameliorate. Participation by not-for-profit agencies can also help meet the need.

MODELS TO CONSIDER

Cut It Out is program for reaching potential victims of domestic violence at hair salons, taking advantage of the trusting relationship that often develops and opportunities for information sharing.

<http://cutitout.org>

Appendices

Appendix A - Data Sources and Notes

1.1 Cover Map

Service providers: The human service providers that are mapped are listed on pages 23 and 24 of the report. The cover map does not represent these providers by their employment size or organizational status as the inside map (see page 25) does.

Population in poverty: The map draws upon 2006-10 American Community Survey data at the block group level, with all municipal boundaries for the map from U.S. Census Bureau's 2011 and 2012 Tiger Line Shape files. Those in or near poverty are individuals whose income is under 200% of the federal poverty level.

Transportation: NFTA routes and bus stops are from the NFTA and reflect 2012 information.

Schools: The location of elementary and secondary schools in the City of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda is from the 2011-12 NYS School Report Card database available from the NYS Education Department. Total enrollment reflects total students enrolled at these schools during 2011-12, as provided by the NYS Education Department School Report Cards.

Major Employers: The top three large employers in the Twin Cities are shown on the map. Employment size was determined using Reference USA's Business Database. Data were downloaded in February 2014. Employment across Tops Friendly Markets two locations in the Twin Cities were added to calculate a combined total.

Map Layers: Boundary files for the City of Tonawanda and City of North Tonawanda, including census tracts, block groups, parks, roads, water bodies and more, were mapped using data from the NYS GIS Clearinghouse and the U.S. Census Bureau 2011 and 2012 Tiger Line Shape files.

1.2 Executive Summary

Population in poverty: The 2007-11 American Community Survey are the sources of data on individuals living in or near poverty and total. Those in poverty are individuals with incomes under the federal poverty level. Those near poverty are defined as those with incomes between 100% and 200% of the federal poverty level. The Twin Cities' total population is from the 2017-11 American Community Survey, rounded to the nearest 5.

Indicators and trends:

Population and poverty trends since 1990 are from the 1990

Census and the 2007-11 American Community Survey. The rise in vulnerable individuals reflects those living in or near poverty (under 200% of the federal poverty level).

The 2007-11 American Community Survey was also the source of data used to calculate the proportion of families in poverty who are single parents and educational attainment levels among residents. The latter reflect adults ages 25 and up.

Juvenile arrests are from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services' report on Juvenile Arrests/Criminal Activity Reported Through UCR and reflect criminal activity involving youth under the age of 16.

An interview with the Tonawanda Police was the source of domestic violence incidences and related information in this jurisdiction.

The loss of jobs in Tonawanda and incomes levels of those residents who currently work in the Twin Cities is from U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics.

Findings from the Mobile Safety-Net Team's Survey of vulnerable households in the Twin Cities was the source of information on housing related crises and the proportion of non-retired vulnerable who work.

The average home age in the Twin cities is based on the median year all structures with built, as provided by the 2007-11 American Community Survey.

1.3 Context for Action

People in Need

Individuals and Families: Population and household counts are from the 2007-11 American Community Survey. Numbers reflect combined totals for the City of Tonawanda and City of North Tonawanda. Population data from the 1990 U.S. Census were used to calculate changes over time in population numbers.

As defined by the Census, families are housing units where two or more persons related by birth, marriage or adoption reside. Non-family households include persons living alone or with another person not related by birth, marriage or adoption.

Population by Age: The 2007-2011 American Community Survey is the source of population counts by age group. Percentages are calculated by dividing the number of individuals in various age groups by the total population for the Twin Cities and Erie and Niagara Counties, respectively.

The 2007-11 American Community Survey was also the source of average household size.

Potentially At-Risk Populations: These are individuals and households that have experienced higher than average rates of poverty as a result of barriers to education and/or work, either themselves or by those they are dependent on, as in the case for young children. Counts are from and/or calculated using data from the 2007-11 American Community Survey. The listing is not intended to be inclusive of all possible groups that may be economically vulnerable but rather some of those that are significant to the Tonawandas or Erie and Niagara Counties.

Work and Income: Employment by sector reflects the Twin Cities' total employed civilian population age 16 and over, calculated using data from the 2007-11 American Community Survey.

Twin Cities top employers are from Reference USA's Business Database, as of February 2014, with the exception of employment at the two school districts which is from NYS Education Department's New York State Report Card, 2011-12, for the North Tonawanda City School District and the Tonawanda City School District.

The loss of jobs in the Twin Cities reflects trends between 2002 and 2012, calculated with data from U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics' Work Area Profile Report. Inflow/Outflow Reports from the same source provided data on what proportion of residents in the Twin Cities stay in and leave the community for work, and the earnings levels for each group.

Median incomes and households by income level come were calculated using data from the 2007-11 American Community Survey.

Poverty: The 2006-11 American Community Survey is the source of data on individuals, families and households living in or near poverty. Income relative to poverty level is provided for individuals by age group and for families by family type. Poverty rates are calculated by dividing total individuals or families with incomes under the federal poverty threshold by the total number of individuals or families, respectively. The map shows poverty rates by census block group.

The daily amount a family of three lives on at the federal poverty level is calculated by dividing the 2014 annual poverty threshold for this family size by the number of family members and the number of days in a year. The cost of the a round trip by bus for a family of three was calculated using NFTA's standard one-way fare of \$2.

Edmunds was used to calculate the cost of car ownership. The estimate is based on the purchase of a used 2008 Chevrolet Cobalt. In addition to the cost of the car itself (about \$6,800),

the cost reflects, taxes and fees, financing, fuel, insurance, maintenance and repairs. \$20.00 is the average daily cost over five years of ownership.

Poverty levels were examined by census tract within the Twin Cities using 2006-11 American Community Survey data. These included Census Tracts 76, 77, 78, and 172 in the City of Tonawanda and Census Tracts 228.04, 229.01, 230.01, 231, 232, 233, 246 in North Tonawanda.

Education: Student enrollment figures and the percentage of children qualifying for free and reduced priced lunch are from the 2012 School Report Card database, available from the NYS Education Department. Children qualify for free or reduced priced lunch if their family income is under 185% of the federal poverty level. The 2012 School Report Card database was also the source of academic performance data, which is provided for various groups of students, including those whose families are economically disadvantaged and not. Students performing at levels 1 and 2 are described as failing to meet standards, while those performing at levels 3 or 4 are described as meeting standards. Performance is rated by NYS on a scale from 1 to 4 where 1 reflects not meeting standards, 2 reflects partially meeting standard, 3 is meeting standards and 4 is meeting standards with distinction.

Educational attainment levels are from the 2007-11 American Community Survey and reflect the adult population age 25 and up. Post graduation plans of high school students are from 2011-12 School Report Card Database.

Twin Cities Most Vulnerable

319 adults residing in Twin Cities Zip Codes 14120, 14150 and 14151, completed a one-page questionnaire providing demographic and socioeconomic data as well as information on human services needs, concerns, benefits, and access barriers. Survey takers who reported living in a Zip Code that exists at least partially within the borders of the Twin Cities assumed to live in the town and are included in this analysis.

The survey was prepared by the Mobile Safety-Net Team with input from the University at Buffalo Regional Institute. It was administered by the Mobile Safety-Net Team during 2013 at several different venues across the two cities, including City of Tonawanda Library, City of North Tonawanda Library, City of Tonawanda Senior Center, North Tonawanda YWCA, Twin City Outreach Pantry, Boys and Girls Club (Tonawanda/North Tonawanda), and St. Francis of Assisi School.

Survey sites were selected to capture a representative sample of residents in poverty or at risk of poverty as well as a cross section of neighborhoods from within the town. Because the survey captured only those residents who are able to physically get to these sites,

the survey findings may under-represent those who are unable to leave their homes due to disability or lack of transportation.

Where residents needed assistance completing the survey and the survey was conducted in the presence of Mobile Safety-Net Team members, assistance was provided by reading the survey questions to residents and helping them complete the survey instrument. Otherwise, clients completed surveys on their own.

Survey data were coded by the Mobile Safety-Net Team and analyzed by the University at Buffalo Regional Institute. The survey pool represent a sample of the Twin Cities vulnerable population that is statistically significant with a confidence level of 95% and with a confidence interval of 5. Surveys completed by household representatives who reported a Zip Codes corresponding to an area entirely outside the Twin Cities were not included in the analysis.

Not all survey respondents answered every survey questions. Part of the reason for this is that the survey was expanded a bit over time. Thus, not all survey takers were asked all questions reported in this report. Secondly, while survey takers were encouraged to answer all questions, partially completed surveys were accepted from those who declined to answer particular questions. The question soliciting information on household had the lowest level of responses, with 273 answering this question. This number of responses still represents a sample size of 100 or more, needed to obtain a statistically significant sample size for Twin Cities's at-risk population within a 95% confidence interval +/- 10%.

The 44% of survey respondents who are said to receive some form of human support services or live in a household with someone who does reflect those survey takers saying they receive food stamps, Medicaid, cash benefits, unemployment, disability income, HEAP, SSI/SSD, WIC, and/or rental assistance. This information is captured by multiple questions on the survey and the findings from these questions are aggregated to calculate an overall percentage of those receiving some kind of assistance.

The chart presents selected findings from the questionnaire. The variables shown are in many cases an aggregation of two or more response categories. Where percentages across subcategories add up to over 100, it is because survey takers were allowed to select more than one category as their response to the question, as is the case of the question soliciting information on respondent household's sources of income and types of human benefits they receive.

Percentage shown are calculated based on the number of respondents answering the particularly survey question, which may be less than the full sample.

Because the survey asked about benefits households are currently receiving or have applied for, responses associated with seasonal benefits such as HEAP may be sensitive to the time of year when the survey was conducted.

Places in Need

Housing: Housing costs as a percentage of income for renters and owners are from the 2007-11 American Community Survey. This was also the source of information on median housing values, median rents and the proportion of residents who own and rent.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, households paying more than 30% of income on housing are considered cost burdened, as this standard is generally accepted as the cut-off for affordable housing. Those paying more than 50% are considered severely burdened. Low-income households lacking affordable housing are at particular risk of not being able to afford other necessities such as food, clothing, medical care and transportation. The U.S. Census Bureau tracks household data for both the 30% and 50% standard.

Transportation: Vehicle access data for households in the Tonawanda are from the 2006-11 American Community Survey. This is also the source of data on how workers in the Twin Cities travel to their jobs. Numbers reflect combined data for the City of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda.

Public transit times are calculated from the apartment complex on Spruce Street in North Tonawanda between Orchard Place and Dean Drive. Public transit times to various destinations are calculated using Good Maps, which estimates length of travel time based on NFTA bus routes and schedules. One-way travel times include walk times to bus stops.

Crime: Rates of violent and property crime in the Cities of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda are from the FBI, Uniform Crime Reports, prepared by the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data. Rates of violent index crime includes murder, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Property crime includes burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft.

Juvenile arrests are from the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services. The City of Tonawanda Police Department directly provided data and information on the number of domestic violence calls each year. A focus group with providers was the source of additional information provided in this section.

1.4 Landscape of Human Services

Human services organizations typically provide food to the hungry, jobs training to unemployed adults, shelter to the homeless, youth development to children at risk, recovery to those affected by disaster, and assistance to victims of crime. The listing shown includes human services organizations as well as those that may not be officially classified as human services organizations but have been identified as providing critical services to vulnerable populations.

The analysis draws upon organizational data compiled by the Mobile Safety-Net Team and supplemented by information from Reference USA's 2012 Business Database. Both nonprofits and governmental agencies are included.

Only organizations with operational sites within the Cities of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda are included in this listing for the purpose of analyzing what supports residents have physical access to within the community. Organizations with sites outside the Twin Cities are not included on this list, even if they offer services to many residents.

Organizations providing services to target populations such as veterans, teen parents, seniors and the homeless are those whose organizational mission it is to connect with these particular populations (such as the services for veterans offered by Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 77). Alternatively, they may have significant programming for these populations (such as the senior supports and programming offered by both cities).

Service categories are defined as follows:

Food – includes food pantries as well as organizations providing on-site meals to residents such as at school or through a senior lunch program.

Clothing – includes clothes closets and sites where free or low-cost clothing is available, including used clothing/furniture stores such as the Salvation Army and St. Francis Parish Outreach Clothing Center which offers clothing for young children.

Education/Training – includes places of formal education and early childhood education as well as sites for job training, GED, literacy skills, community/continuing education, and parenting training. Includes organizations offering support services such as tutoring, computer classes and job assistance provided at the library.

Sites for workforce development and vocational education are included, even if these are one of other programs offered by an agency. Education and training programs for selected population are included as well, such as those offered for individuals with disabilities.

Affordable Housing – subsidized housing and other non-market rate homes and rental units available to lower-income populations. Also included are sites providing access to supports such as loans for housing rehabilitation or emergency repairs.

Transportation – includes organizations that offer transportation via buses, vans and shuttles, as part of the suite of services they regularly provide (such as the school district and Department of Senior Services). Also includes agencies that offer transportation supports such as bus tokens.

Mental Health/Addictions - includes sites providing mental health treatment including counseling and addictions support groups. Covers out-patient and residential programs. Does not include organizations that only serve as a source of information for mental health services.

Health/Wellness – includes sites and organizations offering health and wellness services, health support groups, hospital care, preventive medical exams and/or screening, particularly for lower-income or vulnerable populations. Health services may be central to the mission or one of a package of services provided. Does not include organizations that only serve as a source of medical/health insurance information. Nor does this category include programs providing primarily fitness or recreational benefits.

Legal - includes legal assistance for low-income populations, especially assistance in obtaining benefits. Includes such assistance for limited populations only such as seniors or the disabled.

Youth Programs - includes providers of after-school programs and activities for school-age youth. Also included are mentoring programs. This category does not include programming provided as part of a residential treatment program for youth. Nor does it include programs providing only information about youth programs.

Financial literacy - includes financial literacy training and budget counseling services. Includes programs for limited vulnerable populations.

Crime/Juvenile – includes crime prevention programs, juvenile justice, and victim assistance programs.

Information/Referral - includes agencies, programs and positions providing information and referral to a wide variety of human support services for individuals and families.

Providers are classified as governmental if they are an arm of a local, state or federal level agency or department.

Most employment figures used to map human services organizations by employment size come from Reference USA's 2012 Business Database providing the number of employees an organization or agency has working at a particular site.

Appendix B - Resident Questionnaire

MOBILE SAFETY-NET TEAM COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your answers will assist us in better understanding the needs in the community and help us build a stronger safety net that more readily connects residents to the human services they need. Please select one response unless indicated otherwise. **Your answers will remain completely confidential.**

Age _____ Gender (M/F) _____ Zip Code _____ Location _____

Including yourself, how many people are in your household?

- Adults (18 and older) _____
- Children (under 18) _____

Has anyone in your household ever served in the armed forces?

- Yes¹
- No²

Are there any urgent concerns or special needs that you or someone in your household might have?

- Utility shut-off notice¹
- Foreclosure / eviction²
- Homelessness³
- No money for food⁴
- Domestic violence⁵
- No urgent concerns⁶
- Other: _____⁷

Has anyone in your household ever encountered any difficulty in getting necessary services they need (such as assistance with food, housing, utilities, medical care, etc.)?

- Yes¹
- No²

If you marked "yes", please describe what barriers were faced:

- Traveling to get services is difficult¹
- I don't speak / read English well²
- I can't get there during the hours the agency is open³
- I've been turned away because of income limits⁴
- It can be physically difficult for me to leave my home⁵
- It's too much of a hassle because the process is confusing⁶
- Other: _____⁷

What is your current employment status? (select all that apply)

- Employed full-time¹
- Employed part-time²
- Unemployed, looking³
- Unemployed, not looking⁴
- Student⁵
- Retired⁶
- Disabled⁷
- Other: _____⁸

What is the current employment status of other adults in your household? (select all that apply)

- Employed full-time¹
- Employed part-time²
- Unemployed, looking³
- Unemployed, not looking⁴
- Student⁵
- Retired⁶
- Disabled⁷
- Not Applicable / No other adults in household⁸
- Other: _____⁹

What is your current living situation?

- Own¹
- Rent, with assistance²
- Rent, without assistance³
- Staying with friend / family⁴
- Homeless⁵
- Other: _____⁶

How long have you lived at your current address?

- Less than 3 mos.¹
- 3 mos. – 1 year²
- 1-5 years³
- 6 - 10 years⁴
- More than 10 years⁵

What is the highest level of education/training you've completed?

- High School / GED¹
- Some College²
- College Degree (2-yr or 4-yr)³
- Post-graduate degree⁴
- Military⁵
- Trade School⁶
- Did not finish high school⁷

What are your household's sources of income? (Select all that apply)

- Employment¹
- Unemployment insurance²
- Public assistance³
- Social Security⁴
- Pension⁵
- Disability⁶
- Worker's compensation⁷
- Child Support⁸
- No Income⁹
- Other: _____¹⁰

How much money is currently received from these sources to support your household each month (net income)?

What is your primary form of transportation?

- Bicycle¹
- Family / Friends²
- Own vehicle³
- Taxi⁴
- Public Transportation⁵
- Walk⁶
- Car Share Service⁷
- Other: _____⁸

If you don't own a vehicle and are not a regular public transit user, why don't you use public transit more often?

- Too expensive¹
- Takes too long to get places²
- No service to where I need to go³
- No evening or weekend service⁴
- Buses don't run often enough⁵
- It's too long to walk to bus stop⁶
- Service isn't reliable⁷
- I don't feel safe⁸
- Schedule is too confusing⁹
- Other (please specify): _____¹⁰

Does anyone in your household lack health insurance? (select all that apply)

- Yes, one or more adults do not have health insurance¹
- Yes, one or more children do not have health insurance²
- No, we all have health insurance³

If insured, select the type of health insurance currently used by members of your household (please select all that apply):

- Private insurance¹
- Managed care (HMO, PPO)²
- Medicare (65+, disabled)³
- Medicaid⁴
- Government (VA, Child Health Plus, Family Health Plus)⁵
- Health Savings Account⁶
- Other: _____⁷
- Do not know/Unsure⁸
- Do not have health insurance⁹

Are you, or is anyone in your household currently receiving any of the following forms of public assistance?

- Food stamps¹
- Medicaid²
- Cash benefits³
- HEAP⁴
- SSI / SSD⁵
- WIC⁶
- Other _____⁷
- None⁸

Does anyone in your household have a pending application for any of the following?

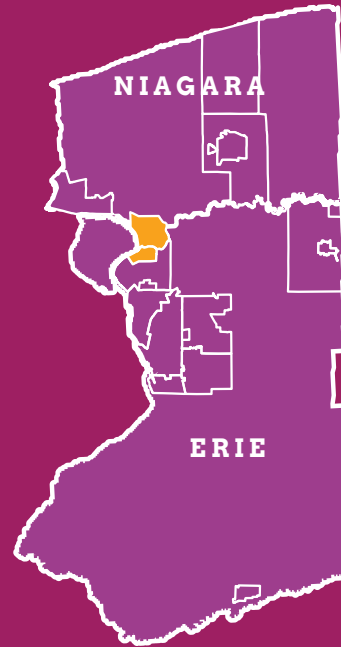
- Food stamps¹
- Medicaid²
- Cash benefits³
- HEAP⁴
- SSI / SSD⁵
- WIC⁶
- Other _____⁷
- None⁸

If you have an immediate need and would like someone to call you for assistance, please write your name and phone number on the back of this survey and a member of our team can contact you. Thank you!

A COMMUNITY REPORT

Cities of **Tonawanda &
North Tonawanda**

This is a collaborative effort of the **University at Buffalo Regional Institute** and the **Mobile Safety-Net Team** established by **The John R. Oishei Foundation**. Commissioned by The John R. Oishei Foundation this assessment presents a detailed analysis of human services needs, key resources, barriers, and opportunities for strengthening the system, and in turn, residents in the Cities of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda. The insights and recommendations provided are intended to assist the foundation community, human services providers and other stakeholders in closing gaps and developing comprehensive, efficient and cost-effective strategies for connecting with a greater number of economically vulnerable individuals and families.



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