



Community Action Organization of WNY 2022 Community Needs Assessment Survey Summary

Introduction

The 2022 Community Needs Assessment delves into the factors indicating the level of need for Erie County and its low-income residents. Utilizing quantitative survey data, the assessment provides a comprehensive overview of the Community Action Organization of WNY, including demographics, economic profiles, and program details.

Residential Area Overview

Buffalo emerged as the predominant area in Erie County, representing 88% of respondents, emphasizing a significant population concentration. Other areas, notably Amherst and Evans, accounted for the remaining 12%. This geographic information enables targeted community development initiatives, ensuring resources are allocated where needed.

Analysis of Postal Codes

Respondents provided diverse zip codes across Erie County, with 14215, 14211, and 14204 featuring most prominently. These insights aid in customizing initiatives to address specific needs and challenges in various regions, ensuring resources are appropriately allocated.

Benefits of Residing in Erie County

Residents highlighted strong community bonds, diverse activities, and affordability as positive aspects. These elements collectively enhance Erie County's desirability as a gratifying place to call home.

1. **Community and Social Dynamics:** A considerable number of survey participants emphasized the robust sense of community and the congenial, supportive disposition of individuals in Erie County. They conveyed a strong affinity for the tightly-knit neighborhoods and the residents' willingness to lend assistance to one another.
2. **Diversity in Activities and Resources:** Erie County presents an extensive array of cultural, recreational, and entertainment opportunities. Residents can engage in cultural events, festivals, utilize parks, and participate in sports such as those offered by the Buffalo Bills Organization. These activities contribute to fostering a vibrant and dynamic living environment.

3. **Affordability and Accessibility:** Numerous respondents highlighted Erie County's offering of an affordable cost of living, reasonable property values, and convenient access to essential services. They expressed appreciation for the convenience of having all necessities within close proximity, including stores, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions.

Negative Aspects of Residing in Erie County

In this specific section, participants were tasked with delineating three challenges encountered while residing in Erie County. Through their responses, invaluable insights were garnered concerning the difficulties and apprehensions faced by the area's residents.

Primarily, a substantial number of residents articulated concerns regarding the elevated crime rate in Erie County, particularly in specific locales. Instances of violence, shootings, and safety apprehensions were recurrently cited, all of which significantly impact the residents' overarching quality-of-life and sense of security.

Secondarily, participants underscored a perceived scarcity of job opportunities and low-wage levels prevalent in Erie County. Specific areas were identified with constrained job markets, leading to elevated rates of unemployment and underemployment. Additionally, the disjunction between meager wages and the cost of living posed challenges for residents, impeding their ability to meet daily needs.

Finally, instances of segregation, racism, and discrimination were elucidated as pervasive issues in Erie County. Some residents perceived conspicuous racial divisions across the county, adversely influencing various facets of life such as housing, education, and community development. These issues contribute to discernible social and economic disparities within the community.

These adverse aspects shed light on the challenges confronting certain Erie County residents, emphasizing the imperative areas necessitating attention and concerted efforts to ameliorate the overall well-being of the community.

Overview of Present Requirements

Following the survey of participants, researchers aimed to identify the most pressing concerns of individuals with low income. Subsequent to a comprehensive analysis of responses, four primary needs emerged as particularly pivotal:

1. **Safe, Affordable Housing:** A notable 14% of individuals residing in low-income communities underscored the imperative for secure and reasonably priced housing. This highlights the considerable challenges faced by many in securing stable and dependable living arrangements within the county.

2. **Child Care:** Another prevalent concern among respondents centered on the accessibility of trustworthy childcare services, with this need emphasized by 10% of participants. This underscores the significance of affordable and high-quality childcare options for low-income families, facilitating parental work or educational pursuits while ensuring the well-being of their children.
3. **Adult Education/Literacy:** A significant 7% of respondents conveyed apprehension regarding the availability of adult education and literacy programs. This underscores the need for easily accessible educational opportunities for adults within the community.
4. **Safety/Crime Prevention:** Safety concerns and crime prevention initiatives held a prominent position among responses, with 6% of residents expressing a desire for enhanced safety measures in their communities. This emphasizes the necessity for initiatives that effectively reduce crime and enhance overall security.

These findings offer valuable insights into the immediate and critical needs of the low-income population in Erie County. They illuminate key areas requiring attention and should serve as a foundation for future community development and support initiatives. Addressing these needs is paramount for enhancing the well-being and quality of life for vulnerable individuals and families within the county.

Summary Unfulfilled Overview

The exploration of residents' perspectives aimed to assess the availability and accessibility of essential services, with a focus on identifying any services falling short of meeting demand. The obtained responses indicated that specific critical services appeared to be less accessible compared to others.

1. **Safe and Affordable Housing:** 12% of community members expressed apprehensions about the availability of safe and affordable housing. This underscores the imperative for initiatives to address the housing crisis, ensuring residents have access to suitable and affordable living spaces—affordable housing being pivotal for enhancing stability and well-being.
2. **Domestic Violence Assistance:** A significant portion of the community highlighted the demand for more accessible and effective domestic violence assistance services, with 8% indicating insufficient support in this area. Addressing domestic violence becomes a priority, necessitating resources for victims.
3. **Childcare:** Childcare services emerged as a significant concern, with 7% of respondents expressing that demand exceeds supply. This underscores the importance of affordable and accessible childcare options, facilitating parental work or educational pursuits while ensuring children's well-being.

4. **Safety and Crime Prevention:** Safety and crime prevention concerns were voiced by 6% of respondents, indicating a perception or reality of safety issues within the community. Enhancing safety measures, implementing community policing, and developing crime prevention programs are vital for creating a secure environment.
5. **Food Assistance:** 6% of respondents reported experiencing some level of food insecurity. This highlights the need to ensure regular access to necessary resources and support for individuals and families.

While the aforementioned services were frequently reported as insufficient, it's crucial to acknowledge the diverse needs within the community. The assessment provides valuable insights guiding Erie County's focus on better meeting residents' needs and enhancing their overall quality of life, underscoring the importance of responsive community programs and initiatives tailored to address the identified gaps.

Summary of Present Obstacles

Our comprehensive assessment of community concerns within the next three years sheds light on the pressing issues faced by low-income or income-challenged households in Erie County. These concerns are indicative of the urgent needs and priorities of our community.

Based on meticulous scrutiny of responses from community members, the following challenges have been identified as particularly formidable for low-income households in Erie County over the next three years:

1. **Affordable and Secure Housing:** A substantial 12% of respondents pinpointed safe and affordable housing as a significant challenge. This underscores the ongoing imperative to ensure access to housing that is not only economically feasible but also secure.
2. **Support for Domestic Violence:** An additional 8% of respondents have articulated concerns regarding assistance for domestic violence. This emphasizes the immediate need for accessible support and resources for individuals and families grappling with domestic violence.
3. **Childcare:** Childcare services emerged as a major challenge for 8% of respondents. The availability and affordability of childcare services are crucial in enabling parents to engage in work or educational programs while safeguarding the well-being of their children.
4. **Safety and Crime Prevention:** Safety and crime prevention were cited by 8% of respondents, signifying heightened community concerns about the safety and security of low-income households. It may be imperative to intensify safety measures and crime prevention efforts.

5. **Financial Assistance:** Approximately 7% of respondents have identified financial assistance as a challenge. This underscores the need for targeted programs and resources to assist low-income households in managing their finances and meeting basic needs.

In summary, Erie County community stakeholders have discerned several significant challenges that low-income or income-challenged households are anticipated to face, encompassing housing affordability, support for domestic violence, access to childcare, safety, and financial assistance.

Residents Comprehension of the Mission Statement

Most respondents (68%) believe the CAO's mission statement accurately represents the organization's work. However, 29% felt it somewhat represents the work, suggesting room for improvement. Addressing concerns raised by the 4% dissatisfied respondents is crucial for aligning perception with reality.

Feedback Summary

Feedback highlighted the need for expanded programs, improved communication strategies, resource management, and greater transparency in the mission statement.

1. **Accessibility and Coverage:** Respondents articulated a desire for the expansion of programs and services into less concentrated areas of Erie County. Exploring avenues to extend services to underserved regions is deemed valuable.
2. **Communication:** Various comments underscored the necessity for alternative methods of disseminating information regarding the organization's services and activities. Enhancing communication strategies to heighten awareness of the CAO's initiatives within the community is recognized as an opportunity to bridge existing gaps.
3. **Resource Constraints:** A recurrent challenge highlighted by respondents pertains to the need for increased funding and staff. Addressing this concern and exploring innovative approaches to optimize existing resources could yield favorable outcomes.
4. **Mission Statement Clarity:** Respondents emphasized the importance of transparency in the organization's mission statement. Clearly delineating the organization's goals, methods, and target populations is perceived as pivotal for alignment with community expectations and fostering a clearer understanding of the CAO's mission and work.

In conclusion, the feedback received provides valuable insights that the CAO of WNY can leverage to enhance its operations, outreach, and mission statement. These improvements are essential to better serve the community and effectively address its evolving needs.

Overview of Key Areas of Concentration

The community envisions education, community outreach, workforce development, empowerment, housing, community engagement, professional development, and health as key areas for the CAO's focus.

Internal Feedback

The Community Needs Assessment has yielded invaluable insights into the multifaceted vision that the CAO (Community Action Organization) of WNY should strategically prioritize. This synthesized narrative encapsulates the diverse needs and aspirations of the community it serves:

1. **Education and Children's Well-being:** A future is envisioned where low-income children receive high-quality education, excel in core subjects, and graduate well-prepared for college and career success, with a foundational focus on nurturing their mental health.
2. **Community Outreach and Engagement:** Enhancing outreach and community engagement is integral, ensuring the accessibility of organization services, particularly in areas outside of Buffalo. The goal is universal awareness and benefit from CAO programs.
3. **Workforce Development:** Workforce development is seen as a pivotal means for individuals and families to break free from poverty. This includes providing employment opportunities, job training, resume building assistance, and financial literacy education for stable, living-wage job attainment.
4. **Empowerment and Self-Sufficiency:** Central to the vision is empowering low-income individuals and families to achieve self-sufficiency by equipping them with skills, resources, and confidence to break the cycle of poverty.
5. **Education and Youth Development:** Holistic youth development is emphasized, encompassing academic growth and the cultivation of social and emotional skills with opportunities beyond daily routines.
6. **Housing:** Addressing housing challenges is paramount, with a focus on creating affordable housing options for low- to moderate-income individuals and families as a fundamental step towards improving lives affected by poverty.
7. **Community Engagement:** Building community and support is essential through initiatives like community gardens, recognizing contributions, and hosting informative workshops to strengthen bonds.
8. **Professional Development and Employee Well-being:** Recognizing the pivotal role of the CAO workforce, the vision includes investing in employee professional development and providing fair compensation for the delivery of high-quality services.
9. **Transparency and Information Accessibility:** Essential to building trust and raising awareness is making information about CAO services and activities transparent and easily accessible to the community.

10. **Health and Mental Health:** The vision underscores the importance of health, including access to healthcare and mental health services for the physical and mental well-being of community members.
11. **Breaking the Cycle of Poverty:** The overarching vision revolves around breaking the cycle of poverty by providing resources and opportunities that enable families to improve their quality of life.
12. **Community Unity and Dialogue:** Encouraging community unity through social activities and open dialogues on critical societal issues is seen as a means to foster a sense of belonging and shared purpose.
13. **Resource Expansion:** Expanding services to underserved areas throughout Erie County is vital to reaching marginalized populations.
14. **Building Wealth and Generational Wealth:** Creating opportunities for frontline and vulnerable communities to build both individual and generational wealth, promoting long-term financial stability.

Closing Summary

The community envisions the CAO of WNY taking a comprehensive approach to address education, economic empowerment, housing, health, and community engagement, aiming to disrupt the cycle of poverty and foster self-reliance. The vision is characterized by openness, inclusivity, and responsiveness to evolving community needs.