

Community Needs Assessment Results: An Executive Summary



What did the River Region United Way learn about the needs in our communities?

A major function of the United Way’s role in advancing the common good in the River Region is assessing and identifying the community’s greatest needs.

For its 2013 Community Needs Assessment, the River Region United Way (RRUW) worked with the Auburn Montgomery Center for Demographic Research and consulted with private demographic research contractors, specialists with the United States Census Bureau, the Montgomery Education Foundation, the Alabama Department of Public Health, Baptist Health, Community Action Agencies, DHRs, 2-1-1, and many other experts to design a process of gathering information about the current needs of the five-county River Region.

With the invaluable help of these partners, a quantitative survey was crafted that garnered results from almost 1,000 respondents across the region. Focus groups were conducted

in each county of the region to gather qualitative information on thoughts and perspectives on needs and about community providers in general.

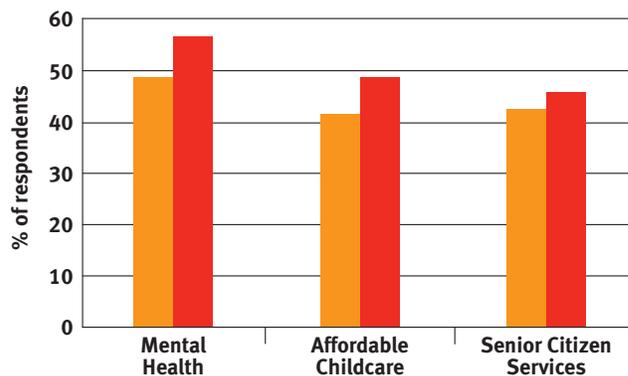
Much of the information gathered was what many of our volunteers and partners expected, given institutional shifts, as well as changes in governmental policy and public school structure. However, there were some findings that stakeholders were enlightened to discover.

The results of our survey, research and focus groups were compiled to produce this executive summary. This summary is representative of the major themes and trends represented in the full report, surveys and focus groups.

The information included here reflects some of the perspectives and opinions of almost 1,000 respondents throughout the River Region. Sometimes public opinion reflects actual need for change, and sometimes it can be an indicator that research on root causes needs to be more widely conducted.

Needs identified by respondents as Very Important

■ Non-providers ■ Providers



* Respondents included both consumers and non-consumers



Highlights from the River Region

Highlights from our Community Needs Assessment Results noted that affordability and accessibility of healthcare are major issues in rural River Region counties. Over 17% of the US population live in areas classified as “rural” (*World Bank, 2012*). Several respondents reported they had to leave their counties to receive healthcare. Today, rural communities face an array of challenges – poverty, population loss, and increasing demands for social services with fewer dollars to pay for them. Lengthy and costly commutes to routine appointments with a physician can consume a large percentage of the household budget/income.

Community Needs Assessment Results

The Research Process

River Region United Way set out with three goals for this process:

- Identify what services and programs are available in the River Region
- Ask providers and consumers of these services to share their experiences with obtaining or delivering these services
- Learn what services or programs are needed but not available

Surveys

The 2013 surveys sought the perceptions of community leaders and service consumers, residents and service providers on the needs of our River Region community. A widespread public campaign focused on inviting the community to take the survey.

Hard copies were available in various locations throughout the River Region. Emails with direct links to the survey were sent to local organizations and individuals throughout RRUW's five-county service area – Autauga, Elmore, Lowndes, Macon, and Montgomery counties. Data collection occurred from March 1-31, 2013.

Community Focus Groups

Focus groups were held in October 2012 and mid-February 2013 through early March 2013. Each group met for one session lasting approximately 1.5 hours. Focus groups were held with the goal of creating conversations about community needs among citizens of the River Region. As the survey collected quantitative information, these focus groups allowed for qualitative data collection. Focus groups included people representing ethnically and culturally diverse demographic backgrounds. Each group was facilitated by two skilled volunteers. Voice recorders were used to capture these conversations.

A total of 6 focus groups were conducted in the River Region:

- Autauga County (1)
- Elmore County (1)
- Lowndes County (1)
- Macon County (1)
- Montgomery County (2)



Each group was asked to discuss a set of general questions about the River Region community and then questions related to their specific population. The comments from the focus groups were then compiled as part of the overall needs assessment process.

The Most Important Issues

Mental Health

Many mental health service providers in the River Region share the same sentiments: **increased demands for services, compounded by decreased resources.** Our survey respondents noted, *“a lack of timely mental health assessments and pre-crisis intervention”* as serious concerns. Additional issues included **family dysfunction, higher stress levels** and the **reluctance of clients to seek professional assistance and obtain formal diagnoses.**

Focus group participants also noted a **need for additional providers of mental health services for the growing mentally ill population to assist in preventing harm to themselves or others.** There is a need in the River Region for assistance with mental health services for those who are uninsured or underinsured. Respondents also identified a need for *“after-hours and weekend mental health care for clients age 18 and younger.”*

Affordable Childcare

Survey respondents in the River Region indicated a need for **quality childcare assistance for single working mothers.** For some, childcare subsidy programs are readily accessible, but another respondent said, *“I have been on [a] waiting list for two years.”* Some respondents' family situations require **alternative childcare options, such as overnight and weekend childcare** due to their work schedules.

Senior Citizen Services

As the number of retiring “baby boomers” increases, so does the **demand for senior services, (e.g. health care, transportation, caregiving).** There is a desire among most elderly residents in the River Region to continue to live in their homes as they age; however, this increases the need for awareness of available services and community resources.

Needs Assessment respondents indicated an increased **need for transportation for seniors.** *“[Elmore] County needs to provide more transportation services and activities for the elderly. My 83-year-old father just lost his driving privileges and the Millbrook senior center is open five days a week but only provides a shuttle two days.”*

Other issues facing seniors in the River Region include **“social isolation.”** People of any age can be socially isolated, but certain risk factors like retirement, death of a spouse or child, and/or poor health make the elderly more vulnerable. Additionally, several respondents/caregivers noted a “lack of [awareness of] available programs and services for seniors.”

Community Awareness

Our 2013 Community Needs Assessment revealed an “awareness gap” as it relates to available services in the community and those in need. Our focus groups data and survey both indicated the need for publicizing services, *“... services need more advertising,” “make knowledge of services available to everyone.”*

How Respondents Learn about Community Resources:

- #1 TV or Radio | #2 Co-workers | #3 Friends & Neighbors
#4 Church Staff | #5 Websites



People in Need

AWARENESS GAP



Community Services

The **mission** of the River Region United Way is to **advance the common good** by uniting volunteers, donors and community partners to **improve the quality of life** in the River Region.

Snapshots: How United Way is currently addressing needs in the community

The River Region United Way works closely with its 40+ affiliate agencies and community partners in three key impact areas – Education, Income and Health – the building blocks for a good life. RRUW impacts the lives of nearly 135,000 people in the River Region each year through the programs and services of its affiliate agencies, offering essential support from pre-birth to end-of-life services.

EDUCATION	INCOME	HEALTH
<p><i>Helping children and youth achieve their potential</i></p>	<p><i>Promoting financial stability and independence</i></p>	<p><i>Encouraging healthy lifestyles and promoting well-being</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educating youth about intolerance of drugs, violence and risky behaviors • Day remediation services for youth expelled from school • Academic, speech and language services for disabled students from birth through age 21. • Cognitive, emotional, social and physical skills of children ages 0-6 • Educational support programs to inmate mothers • Leadership development programs to build courage, confidence, and character in young girls • Early infant intervention and adult day training for individuals with disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial education for adults and teens that teaches money management and self-reliance • Assisting families with emergency utilities, food and clothing • Financial literacy and education for homeless mothers in transition • Providing a bus ticket or tank of gas to those stuck in town due to illness, injury or other situation with no way out • Financial assistance to help parents and primary caregivers pay for child care • In-home physical, emotional, spiritual and bereavement services for terminally ill patients regardless of their ability to pay • Free primary healthcare and prescriptions for low-income citizens not eligible for Medicaid or Medicare • Transitional home for homeless women with children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After-school programs focusing on health, sports, fitness and recreation • Protective home for abused and neglected youth • Residential and out-patient chemical dependency treatment for adults • 24-hour hotline, safe shelter and counseling for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault • Prenatal education and care for low-income families • Access to primary healthcare services for the indigent, underinsured and uninsured • Therapeutic riding center for children and adults with physical, cognitive, social, emotional or behavioral disabilities • Education about mental health and mental illness • Adult day programs and social, recreational and health activities for senior citizens, their families and caregivers



For more information on community services and how to access them, please call 2-1-1.

For a complete list of our 40+ affiliate agencies, visit www.RiverRegionUnitedWay.org/affiliate-agencies

Community Needs Assessment Results

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge all those who assisted with this project.

Steering Committee

Brenda Brown

City of Montgomery

Chief Deputy Derrick Cunningham

Montgomery County Sheriff's Office

Vickie Grice

Tuskegee University

Javez Henderson

Montgomery Housing Authority

Julia Henig

Baptist Health

Regina Berry-Meadows

City of Montgomery BONDS Program

Lydia Pickett

Mid-Alabama Coalition for the Homeless

Kimberly Ray

Montgomery Community Action Agency

Ann Sykes

Montgomery Education Foundation

Ghandi Williams

Alabama Department of Public Health

Timberly Williams

HandsOn River Region

Focus Group Partners

Auburn Montgomery Center for
Demographic Research

Autauga County DHR

Elmore County Public Schools

First Citizens Bank, Hayneville

Macon County DHR

Prattville Police Department

River Bank and Trust, Wetumpka

Subway, Hayneville

Special Thanks to:

Dr. Darryl Lee

U.S. Census Bureau

Dr. Don Bogie

United Way volunteer

A special thank you to the community volunteers that gave of their time to respond to the survey and shared the survey link with colleagues, families and friends.

Next Steps

The River Region United Way provides human and financial resources necessary to address community needs in the areas of education, income and health. While demand in these areas continues, the landscape of needs in our community is changing. RRUW is committed to strengthening the five-county River Region through an ongoing process of assessing community needs, acquiring the human and financial resources necessary to address those needs and accounting for donated resources. The Community Needs Assessment uncovered additional needs and illuminated areas where the community needs attention.

The commitment of the River Region United Way's Community Council, Budget & Allocations Committee, Board of Directors and staff is to continue to internally assess where we can work with our affiliate agencies to increase capacity and/or to acquire the capability to address these critical needs, or identify other means of providing needed solutions.

RRUW plans to engage the community in robust conversations around the topics identified among the most critical needs in the 2013 Community Needs Assessment. There are groups in the community, as well as in the public and private sectors, who are already convening some of these discussions. Further participation in these conversations will guide a collective approach in defining needs and providing solutions. This is a long-term effort that will require commitment and diligence.

You are invited to join with the United Way to advance the common good and improve the quality of life in the River Region. To learn more about the findings from this assessment, you can access the full report (see below) and help share those results within your own network. Or, consider being part of the change by volunteering with the River Region United Way or one of its 40+ affiliate agencies. Only when we all work together toward a common purpose do we truly LIVE UNITED. It takes everyone in the community working together to create a brighter future.



To learn more about the results of the Community Needs Assessment and to access the full report, go to www.RiverRegionUnitedWay.org/Needs or scan the QR code with your smartphone or tablet.

GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.
LIVE UNITED

Questions about the Community Needs Assessment should be directed to the River Region United Way's Community Impact Department, 334-323-2504.