COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

2022

UNITED community Action PARTNERSHIP

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

United Community Action Partnership (UCAP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation with a mission to eliminate poverty by empowering individuals and strengthening communities across its service area including Cottonwood, Jackson, Kandiyohi, Lincoln, Lyon, McLeod, Meeker, Redwood and Renville counties. As a Community Action Program, UCAP is required to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment every three years to provide a snapshot of community needs, available resources, and gaps in services. In the fall of 2022, UCAP gathered insights from more than 640 stakeholders broadly representing area residents, service recipients and providers, community leaders, UCAP staff/board, and other stakeholders to within their 9-county service area. This report details stakeholder insights as well as informative data from a variety of resources. UCAP will use this information to help shape the strategies required to make positive and sustainable changes in UCAP's geographic service area.

Community Needs Overview

The needs most frequently and distinctly lifted up through the various data collection methodologies were as follows (listed in order of importance based on analysis of insights):

HOUSING - The lack of available/affordable housing that is in good repair and can adequately accommodate the needs of families and/or individuals who are facing additional challenges such as limited financial resources, health challenges, or a need for specific types of housing such as senior care. The need for repairs or improvements to not only rental units, but also residential homes was lifted up as well as a need for temporary or transitional housing options.

CHILD CARE - The limitations of quality child care options that are not only available and affordable, but also offer service hours that align with work schedules. Child care is the greatest need for children ages zero to 5 years. Competition for available spots, particularly for infants/toddlers is causing increased cost burdens for parents as well as challenges for area employers as some parents have left the workforce or are difficult to attract to the area due to the lack of available child care. In addition, after-school programming for Head Start and school-age children was noted as a need.

TRANSPORTATION – Although not ranked highest for its lack of availability by survey respondents, survey comments and focus group insights revealed that this is still a significant area of need, particularly for residents in smaller, more rural communities in UCAP's service area. Most noted were the costs associated with transportation (gas, car repairs, insurance); limitations of existing transit options on weekends and evenings; or specifically options for children to/from child care or preschool. It is interesting to note that 21% of respondents indicated that they have missed work, medical appointments, jobs interviews, or other important appointments due to a lack of transportation.

HEALTH CARE – The highest needs related to health care were the lack of providers who accept critical forms of payment/insurance, mental health needs, and the costs of medical visits/prescriptions. Mental health/wellness was selected as the top concern for youth ages 13 to 18 by nearly 50% of survey respondents. A lack of mental health providers was noted as a challenge. There appeared to be limited insights as to specific needs and potential solutions for health care.

Beyond these top 4 areas of need, it is important to point out some needs among specific categories of service recipients:

Workers – Actually ranked as the third-highest need was higher paying jobs. Findings also indicated that unemployment in the UCAP service area is higher than the region's average. Exploring the barriers to employment for those who are unemployed presents a key opportunity for UCAP as well as area businesses who are facing workforce shortages.

Needs of Seniors - Assistance with household tasks and chores, grocery delivery services, and transportation services (especially in more rural communities or on weekends.) In addition, access to nutritious food is a concern for seniors living in communities without grocery stores.

Needs of Youth Ages 6 to 18 – Upwards of 50% of survey respondents referenced a need for a place for youth to gather after school or support to participate in afterschool activities Tied to this, were comments referring to a lack of adult supervision or connections with others, especially after school or while parents are working. As a counterpoint, some comments indicated concern over whether or not these options would be used by youth if offered.

Families – In addition to the top needs noted on the previous page, it was noted that families may need support with eating healthy either through education about shopping on a budget, free and reduced lunches for children, or better access to healthy food. Most noted was a need for better accessibility to food shelves and better-quality foods available at food shelf locations.

Closing

UCAP offers numerous programs and services that can address a majority of the needs identified through this assessment. For needs in which programs are already in place, UCAP may benefit by comparing services offered against the needs to determine what is working well and what might be adjusted to better serve the needs identified. All services offered by UCAP may benefit from increased awareness and marketing of services. Identifying key audiences and the best form of messaging for that audience will be essential.

Current UCAP services may be beyond the scope the health care needs identified through this assessment. UCAP may be positioned to bring together stakeholders and share the insights and knowledge they acquire directly from the people they serve. This opportunity may spur innovative programs and services in partnership with other area businesses and organizations.

Similarly, UCAP may have an opportunity to advance employment needs by working with area workforce agencies and higher education institutions to explore together the barriers to employment that are leading to the high unemployment rates and individuals choosing not to work identified through this assessment. At a time when employers are clamoring for employees, this appears to be an area that, if addressed, could have a significant and immediate impact.

By enhancing existing services through heightened awareness and continued collaboration to address some of the unique needs identified through this assessment, UCAP can continue to empower people in need - changing lives and eliminating poverty.

ABOUT UNITED COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP

United Community Action Partnership (UCAP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation established by merger of two organizations (Heartland Community Action and Western Community Action) in October of 2016. UCAP and these organizations have a rich history of helping people, changing lives, and working to eliminate poverty in the lives of people in Cottonwood, Jackson, Kandiyohi, Lincoln, Lyon, McLeod, Meeker, Redwood and Renville counties.

UCAP's mission is to eliminate poverty by empowering individuals and strengthening communities. Through community coordinated partnerships, UCAP works to help low-income individuals find the support, resources, and relationships they need to overcome economic and racial barriers that prevent them from establishing and maintain self-sufficient and connected lives. The services offered span an array of community and family services for all ages as well as specific services for people experiencing unique challenges. These services address basic needs, education, employment training, transportation, housing, after-school programs, Head Start, and more.

SERIVCE AREA DATA

The UCAP service area counties are within Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Planning Regions 6E (Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker, Renville Counties) and 8 (Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, Rock Counties). The information below was obtained through the 2022 profiles for these DEED Planning Regions. It may be noted that while these two regions are geographically adjacent, their economic profiles have some notable differences.

Population

Region 6E was home to 118,486 people in 2021. The region saw a 0.5% population increase since 2010, making it the ninth largest of the 13 economic development regions (EDRs) in total population, and the ninth fastest growing. Region 8 was home to 116,851 people in 2021, Region 8 lost 2,300 residents since 2010, a -1.9% decline, making it the 4th fastest declining of the 13 EDRs in the state. In comparison, the state of Minnesota saw a 7.6% gain from 2010 to 2021.

Region 8 has a slightly older population than the rest of the state, with 33% of residents aged 55 years and over, compared to 30.1% statewide. Consequently, Region 8 had a lower percentage of people in the 25- to 54-year-old age group, typically considered the "prime working years," but a slightly higher percent of school-aged children. A large portion of the region's population is a part of the Baby Boom generation, people born between 1946 and 1964, which is creating a significant shift in the population over time. While the number of younger and middle-aged residents was declining, the number of residents aged 55 years and over was mostly increasing.

Racial Diversity

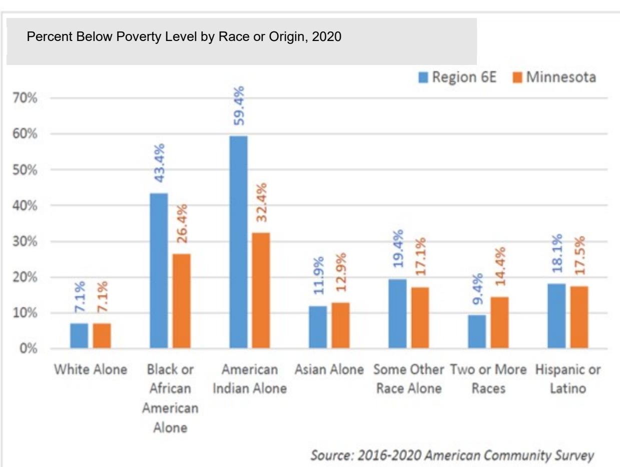
Region 8 is home to roughly 9,000 foreign born residents, or about 7.7% of the total population. The number of immigrants in the region jumped by 46.8% since 2010, outpacing the statewide growth rate of 28.3%. Over half (4,578 people) of these immigrants were from Latin America, and the second largest number were from Asia, accounting for over 33% of the region's immigrants, while the fastest growth came from Africa, which increased by 103.5% from 2010 to 2020.

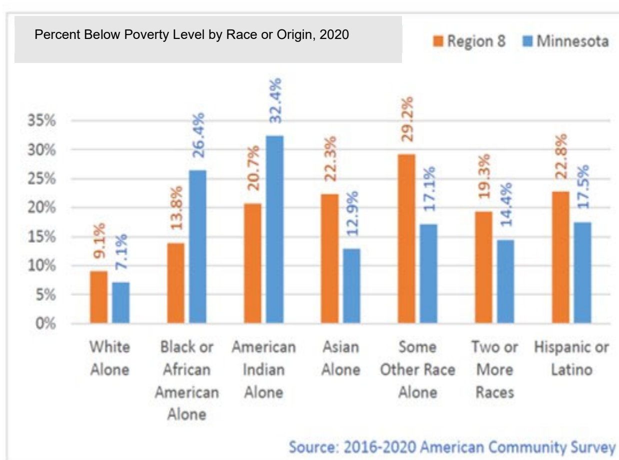
Region 6E is now home to 5,266 foreign born residents, or about 4.4% of the total population. The number of immigrants in the region jumped by 38.9% since 2010, faster than the statewide growth rate of 28.3%. Over half (3,073 people) of these immigrants were from Latin America, while the second largest number were from Africa, accounting for 20% of the region's immigrants, and the fastest growth came from Africa, with 510 additional immigrants from 2010 to 2020.

Cost of Living/Poverty

According to DEED, the basic needs budget for a typical Minnesota family (which consists of 2 adults and 1 child, with 1 full-time and 1 part-time worker) was $60,540 in 2022. The cost of living for a similar family in Region 6E was $47,868 – which was the fifth lowest of the 13 EDRs in the state. The highest monthly costs were for transportation, food, and housing. In order to meet the basic cost of living for the region, the workers in the family scenario described above would need to earn $15.34 per hour over the course of 60 hours per work week. The cost of living for a similar family in Region 8 was $45,504 – which was the lowest of the 13 economic development regions in the state. In order to meet the basic cost of living for the region, the workers in the family scenario described would need to earn $15.58 per hour over the course of 60 hours per work week.

Overall, Region 6E's poverty rate was 8.5%, which was just below the statewide rate of 9.3%. Like incomes, poverty levels varied widely by race and origin. The highest poverty levels hovered around 60% for American Indians and over 43% of Black or African American residents were living below the poverty rate in 2020, compared to 7.1% for White residents. Almost one in five Hispanic or Latino residents and people of some other race were living below the poverty rate, which was also similar to statewide rates. However, people of two or more races were much less likely to be living below poverty in the region than the state (see figures below).





Overall, Region 8's poverty rate was 10.7%, which was just above the statewide rate of 9.3%. Like incomes, poverty levels varied widely by race and origin. It was estimated that roughly 20% of every other race except Black or African American was below the poverty level in 2020, compared to 9.1% of the white population. However, because of the region's relative lack of racial diversity, nearly three-quarters of people living in poverty in the region are white, amounting to almost 9,000 people. This provides insight to the data below indicating that there are more Non-Hispanic White children in poverty in the UCAP service area than other races.

Children in Poverty by Race and Ethnicity: age 0-4[1]

County	Non-Hispanic White	Hispanic or Latino	Black or African American	Native American - Alaska Native	Asian	Some Other Race	Multiple Race
Cottonwood	37	15	0	0	0	0	25
Jackson	49	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kandiyohi	126	117	216	30	0	6	2
Lincoln	33	2	0	0	0	0	4
Lyon	59	180	52	0	14	140	47
McLeod	94	69	0	5	0	45	0
Meeker	66	0	0	0	0	0	0
Redwood	71	0	0	3	11	0	50
Renville	59	20	8	0	0	16	0
Service Area Total	594	403	276	38	25	207	128

METHODOLOGY

Three primary methods were used to identify emerging trends, current needs and service expectations from external clients, community members, and partners and compare them against regional and state measures:

1) Implementing a stakeholder survey, conducted by UCAP using Survey Monkey, to gather broad stakeholder insights about community needs and services currently offered;
2) Conducting focus groups using an interactive and engaging facilitative approach to refining, affirming, and deepening insights gathered through the survey; and
3) Gathering current/relevant data for comparison purposes from sources including: Head Start Program Information Reports, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Minnesota Department of Education, Data Center, Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), and Minnesota Compass.

A total of 574 surveys were completed. Survey demographics are detailed on pages 6-7. Four focus groups were hosted within UCAP's service area using both virtual and in-person formats that reached across the geographic service area. UCAP facilitated several focus groups to gather more in-depth insights in response to survey results and to identify additional needs that may not have emerged through the survey.

[1] 1 US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020

Focus groups were facilitated with the following groups/locations:

- Community Assessment Focus Group Head Start Policy Council – Dec. 20, 2022; 8 Attendees representing staff, parents and community members
- Homeless and Hunger Task Force Focus Group - 1/12/23; 21 Attendees representing UCAP staff (7); WRAP, Second Harvest Heartland, McLeod County Human Services, Catholic Charities, Meeker County Human Services, Southwest Health & Human Services, UCAP-food shelves (2), MN Housing, Southwest MN Housing Partnership, and Pipestone County Food Shelf
- Community Virtual Focus Group – Jan. 13, 2023; 22 Attendees representing community members/partners (8); UCAP Board of Directors (8); and UCAP Staff (5)
- Cottonwood County Focus Group – Jan. 13, 2023; 5 community members/partners

SURVEY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

574 Total Respondents

County Representation: 15 area counties represented including Cottonwood, Jackson, Kandiyohi, Lincoln, Lyon, McLeod, Meeker, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, Renville, Rock) Other counties noted included Chippewa, Yellow Medicine, Johnson MO, Sibley (2), Le Sueur, Stearns (2), Emmet IA, Swift, Brookings County.

Greatest Representation		***Least Representation***	
Kandiyohi	32%	Pipestone	.17%
Lyon	24%	Murray	.70%
McLeod	10%	Lincoln	.87%

Spoken Languages: Nearly 90% of respondents are English-speaking. Other languages included Spanish (13.65%), Karen (5.67%), Somali (6.21%) and additional languages including Hmong, Kornian, German, Oromo, Visayan and Tagalog, and Portuguese. One respondent indicated sign language. Armed Forces – 90 % NO; 10% YES (57)

SURVEY RESPONDENT AGE GROUPS		
Under 18	7	1.22%
18-24	45	7.84%
25-54	**385**	**67.07%**
55-64	81	14.11%
65+	56	9.76%
Total Respondents:	574	

RESPONDENT HOUSEHOLD DESCRIPTION		
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Single parent	23.37%	133
Two parent	38.49%	219
Multi-generational	4.57%	26
Single person	14.06%	80
Adults-no children	15.64%	89
Non-related adults with children	0.35%	2
Other (please specify)	3.51%	20
TOTAL		569

HOUSEHOLD: CHILDREN UNDER 18		
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0	40.24%	231
1	15.85%	91
2	18.99%	109
3	12.37%	71
More than 3	12.54%	72
TOTAL		574

RESPONDENT RELATIONSHIP TO UCAP		
Person served by UCAP	**270**	**47.04%**
Other community member	159	27.70%
UCAP staff	124	21.60%
Staff from another agency	50	8.71%
UCAP Board of Directors	13	2.26%

Annual Household Income

Annual household income ranges of respondents varied across all survey categories with percentages varying only by about 8%. **Over 30% indicated annual household incomes of less than $20,000 and 67% indicated annual household incomes of less than $50,000.** This is 27% higher than regional statistics and 33% higher that statewide percentages recorded by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). DEED's SW MN 2022 Regional Profile denotes just over 40% of the households in the southwest Minnesota region had incomes below $50,000 in 2020, compared to 33.5% of households statewide.

Annual Household Incomes	
Less than $10,000	13%
Less than $20,000	30%
Less than $50,000	67%

Education Attainment Levels

Nearly 14% of respondents indicated an education level of less than high school or no high school diploma/GED and 25% had obtained a high school diploma/GED. 39% of the respondents had obtained an Associate Degree or higher.

Educational Attainment of HS Diploma/GED or less

Respondents	*SW MN Region*	*MN*
38.46%	40.7%	31.9%

Employment Status

Over half of the respondents indicated they are employed full-time. The numbers of respondents who indicated that they are unemployed was nearly 10%. A deeper analysis of those unemployed shows that only 7 of the 54 respondents were unable to or not working by choice. The remainder of those who indicated they are unemployed (38 respondents) indicated that they do not work or attend school.

Unemployment numbers as indicated by respondents are significantly higher than **current regional (1.4%) and state (2.1%) unemployment percentages** (DEED, Oct/2022).

Exploring the barriers to employment for those who are unemployed presents a key opportunity for UCAP as well as area businesses who are facing workforce shortages.

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

Answer Choices	Responses	
Full-time	56.13%	316
Part-time	16.16%	91
Two or more jobs	5.51%	31
Migrant worker	0.18%	1
Unemployed	9.59%	54
Retired, out of the workforce	7.99%	45
Unable to work	7.82%	44
Not working by choice	5.33%	30
	Answered	**563**

Unemployed Who Speak Another Language:	
Spanish	28%
Somali	7%
Other	5%

NEEDS OF CHILDREN

The childhood poverty rate of UCAP's service area is 11.9% which is slightly above the average childhood poverty rate for Minnesota (12.8%), however, two counties within the area, Kandiyohi and Lyon have childhood poverty rates that are 6% higher than the state. This has contributed to a total of 845 preschool aged children being eligible for Head Start services and nearly 1,500 children ages zero to 4 being in poverty. Of those eligible, 68% come from English-speaking homes, with Spanish as the second highest language (15%).

Home Languages Spoken by Percentage: Head Start Eligible[2]

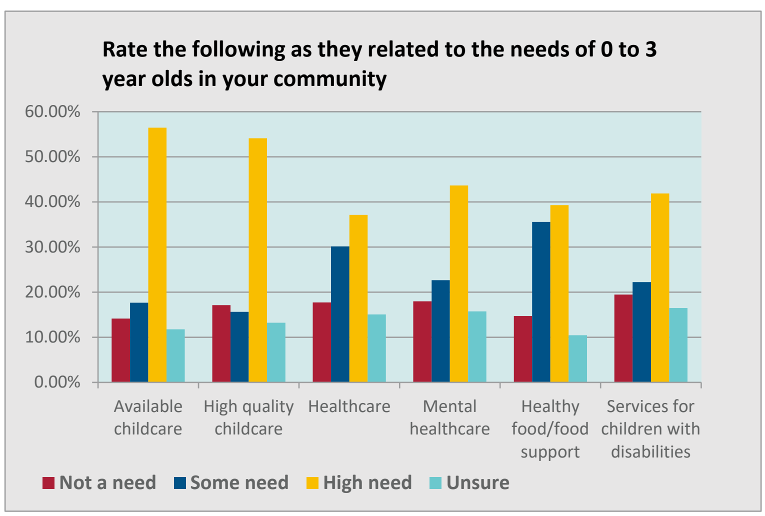
County	English	Spanish	Somali	Karen/Hmong	Other
9-County Service Area	68%	15%	8%	8%	1%

The number of eligible infants, toddlers, preschool age, and expectant mothers including geographic location[3]

UCAP Service Area County	Child Poverty Rate	Estimated Eligible Pregnant Women	Estimated Eligible Infants and Toddlers	Estimated # of eligible Preschoolers	Number of Children 0-4 in Poverty
Cottonwood	9.9%	19	37	38	75
Jackson	9.1%	12	24	25	49
Kandiyohi	17.9%	123	246	245	491
Lincoln	11.4%	10	20	19	39
Lyon	18%	83	165	165	330
McLeod	9.4%	48	95	95	190
Meeker	4.7%	17	33	33	66
Redwood	14.5%	34	67	68	135
Renville	10.3%	22	43	44	87
Service Area Totals	**12.8%**	**424**	**842**	**845**	**1,462**
Minnesota	**11.9%**				

Children Ages Zero to 3

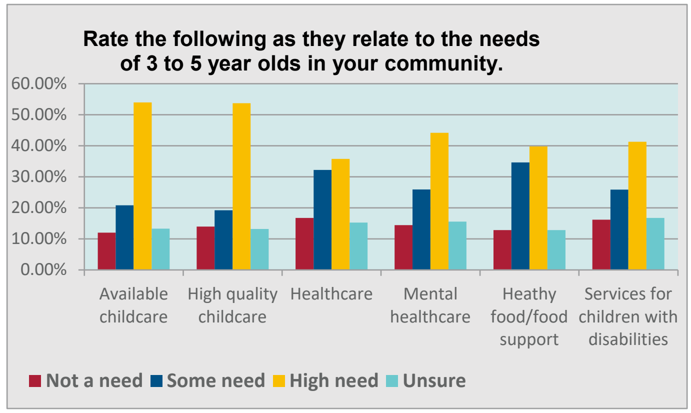
For children ages zero to 3, the categories selected as high needs by respondents were the **availability of child care (56%) and high-quality childcare (54%).**
Also noted was a high need for mental healthcare (44%), services for children with disabilities (42%), and healthy food/food support (39%). Nearly all respondents indicated some or high need for all six categories of support.



[2] 2021-2022 Head Start Program Information Report
[3] US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020

Children Ages 3 to 5 years

The high needs for this age group were listed as **available childcare (54%) and high-quality childcare (53%)**. Similarly, for children ages 3 to 5 years, all categories were selected by over 36% of survey respondents as high need and by nearly 20% as some need.



Children with Disabilities

Over 2,000 children ages zero to 4 in the UCAP service area have a disability. This represents 18.6% of the total service area. In comparison 0.6% of children under 5 years in Minnesota have one or more disability. The most common type of disability among children ages zero to 4 by percentage is developmental delay (70%). The number of children with a disability as well as the services and resources available to them varies across the counties. Approximately 70% of the services and resources are provided by public schools, with some counties having only one school providing services/resources.

Types of Disabilities by percentage[1]

Developmental Delay: 70%

Speech/Language: 19%

Emotional Disturbance: 2%

Autism: 9%

Children with disabilities, including types of disabilities and relevant services and resources provided to these children by community agencies[4]

County	Percent of Children with Disabilities	Approximate number of children 0-4 with a disability	Services and Resources
Cottonwood	21.4%	163	Windom Public Schools Mt. Lake Public Schools
Jackson	20.1%	111	Jackson County Central Schools
Kandiyohi	17.5%	503	Willmar Public Schools New London Spicer Public Schools MACCRAY School District Nolan's Place Rice Mem Hospital Speech Therapy
Lincoln	14.3%	49	Ivanhoe Public Schools Hendricks Public Schools Big Stone Therapy
Lyon	16.4%	306	Marshall Public Schools Tracy Public Schools Big Stone Therapy
McLeod	17%	350	Hutchinson Public Schools Glencoe-Silver Lake District MN Autism Center Hutchinson Health Speech Therapy
Meeker	21.8%	308	Litchfield Public Schools ACGC School District
Redwood	21.7%	203	Redwood Area School District
Renville	17.2%	149	BOLD District Big Stone Therapy
Service Area Total	18.6%	2,142	

[4] 2022 Minnesota Department of Education, Data Center, Enrollments

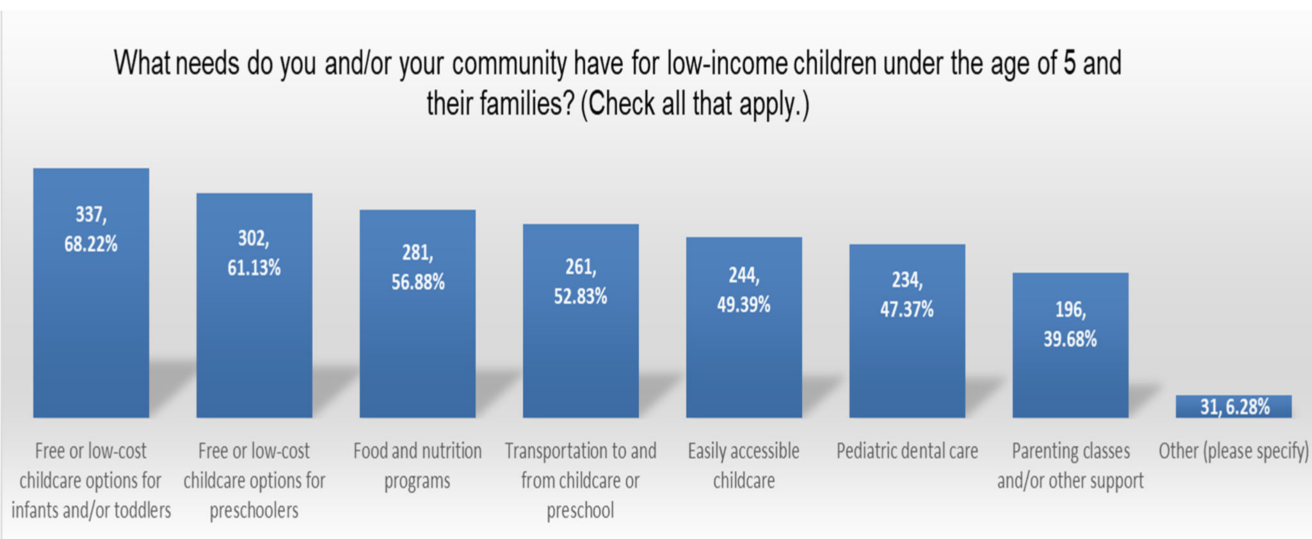
Other child development, childcare centers, and family childcare programs that serve eligible children, including home visiting, publicly funded state and local preschools, and the approximate number of eligible children served[5]

County	#Licensed childcare centers (Minus HS)	Capacity (Minus HS)	# Family childcares	Capacity	Public Schools with Preschools
Cottonwood	1	40	24	288	3
Jackson	2	115	18	216	3
Kandiyohi	8	629	83	954	4
Lincoln	0	0	17	202	3
Lyon	13	551	74	892	5
McLeod	11	521	71	857	4
Meeker	3	366	28	318	4
Redwood	1	60	48	552	5
Renville	4	230	26	314	4
Service Area Total	43	2,512	389	4,593	35

Low-Income Children (Age 5 and under) and Their Families: Specific Needs

When asked about the needs of low-income children, nearly all categories were selected by survey respondents as needs. The above needs related to child care were reiterated. The ranking of survey respondents was as follows:

1. Free or low-cost child care options for infants/toddlers (65%)
2. Free or low-cost child care options for preschoolers (61%)
3. Food and nutrition programs (57%)
4. Transportation to/from child care or preschool (53%)



[5] Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS)
* First Children's Finance Southwest MN 2022 Child Care Need Summary

Youth Ages 6 to 12

The top three concerns for youth ages 6-12 were:

1. Places for youth to "hang out"
2. Mental health/wellness
3. Lack of adult care/supervision

These were reiterated in comments in which a few noted "not much for them to do" or "places to gather." Also noted were the costs or transportation needs associated with activities that are available for kids.

What are the top three (3) concerns you have for youth ages 6-12? (Select 3)		
Answer Choices	Response %	Responses
No place for youth to "hang out"	55.68%	299
Mental health/wellness	54.38%	292
Lack of adult care/supervision	42.83%	230
Not enough after school programming	38.73%	208
Tobacco use/vaping	21.60%	116
Other drug use	12.48%	67
Human Trafficking	12.48%	67
Criminal behavior	11.73%	63
Alcohol use	10.99%	59
None of the above	6.70%	36
Other (please specify)	2.42%	13
	Answered	**537**

"[Many] can't afford activities or get to them because they are in the evening and on weekends. Even with scholarships the kids get in the door but can't afford equipment or tournament fees."

One individual suggested that having places for kids to assemble after school when his or her children were growing up "made a real difference in their lives." Others suggested an unsurety as to whether kids would use such places even if they were available. Also noted were concerns of the impact of electronic devices and social media exposure.

"Can't afford to put kids into after school activities or programs. Also, no evening or weekend public transportation. Lonely bored kids get into trouble."

Youth Ages 13 to 18 Needs and Concerns

The top 3 concerns selected for this age group (13 to 18) were similar to younger ages:

1. Mental health/wellness
2. Places for youth to "hang out"
3. Not enough after school programming

Over one quarter (27%) of respondents also listed tobacco use/vaping as a concern and over 20% mentioned other drug or alcohol use. The lack of after school programming and/or affordable activities was also noted under *Other* as well as a need for proper sex education, concerns over smartphone addictions, and an overall culture of busyness causing stress.

What are the top three (3) concerns you have for youth ages 13-18? (Select 3)		
Answer Choices	Response%	Responses
Mental health/wellness	47.72%	272
No place for youth to "hang out"	44.74%	255
Not enough after school programming	27.19%	155
Tobacco use/vaping	26.49%	151
Lack of adult care/supervision	22.11%	126
Other drug use	20.88%	119
Alcohol use	20.70%	118
Not enough jobs available	14.39%	82
Criminal behavior	12.98%	74
Human Trafficking	8.77%	50
Unitentional pregnancies	7.19%	41
None of the above	6.67%	38
Other (please specify)	3.68%	21
	Answered	**570**

HOUSING: CURRENT REALITIES AND NEEDS

Housing was consistently lifted up as a concern for the UCAP service area. Among survey respondents, only a slight majority (51%) own a home in comparison to those indicating they rent a home or apartment (41%). The needs identified around the affordability and availability of rental units as well as the top issue of the lack of affordable homes to purchase may be tied to the large number of renters who participated in the survey.

The affordability and/or availability of rental units was noted as a concern by over 47% of respondents.

"When a home comes on the market it usually has an offer within days"

What is your current living situation?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Own a home	51.36%	284
Rental home/apartment	40.87%	226
Staying with family or friends	4.16%	23
Homeless	2.17%	12
Staying at a domestic violence shelter	0.00%	0

What are the top issues that currently prevent people from buying a home in your area? (Check all that apply.)		
Answer Choices	Responses	Response#
Lack of affordable homes to purchase	70.90%	380
Lack of funds for down payment	67.91%	364
Lack of available financing/credit issues	66.79%	358
High interest rates	51.87%	278
Lack of understanding of how to buy a home	42.16%	226
Lack of ability/desire to deal with maintenance/repairs	25.19%	135
Other (please specify)	5.97%	32

12 respondents are currently homeless

43% of respondents indicate a need for housing for the homeless

Unmet Housing Needs

The unmet housing needs also point to the availability and affordability of housing, with 61% of respondents indicating that finding affordable housing in good repair is the #1 unmet need. The next highest unmet needs are costs such as help with paying for damage/security deposits (37%) and finding low-interest loans/programs to make home repairs or improvements (37%).

Over 20% also selected needs such as finding large enough housing; housing for people with a criminal history; help with home maintenance; help understanding and/or improving credit scores; education about rental costs, tenant rights, utilities, deposits, leases, etc.; safe housing for people fleeing domestic violence; and help to make housing more energy efficient.

What type of housing is lacking in your community? (Check all that apply.)		
Answer Choices	Responses%	Responses#
Affordable rental units	73.73%	393
Rental units for large families	49.16%	262
Income-based rental units	48.97%	261
Single family homes for sale	47.47%	253
Shelter for people who are homeless	43.34%	231
Housing for people with a past criminal history	32.27%	172
Housing for people with disabilities	26.08%	139
Senior housing	18.95%	101
Mult-generational housing	18.01%	96
Other (please specify)	5.63%	30
	Answered	**533**

A few individuals mentioned a need for greater awareness of available housing options, indicating there may be available housing options in the area, particularly in smaller communities, but people don't know about these housing opportunities. UCAP may be able to provide greater awareness of resources available and information on accessing housing assistance. In addition, continuing to work with other organizations and agencies in the area to better understanding housing availability may be beneficial.

What are your/your community's unmet housing needs? (Select up to 5.)		
Answer Choices	Responses	Response#
Finding affordable housing that is in good repair	60.90%	324
Help with paying for damage/security deposits	36.65%	195
Low-interest loans/programs to make home repairs or improvements	36.65%	195
Finding housing that is large enough for my family	36.28%	193
Housing that accepts people with a criminal history	25.19%	134
Help with home maintenance	24.81%	132
Help to understand and improve my credit score	23.31%	124
Education about rental cost, tenant rights, utilities, deposits, leases, etc.	23.12%	123
Safe housing for people fleeing domestic violence	22.37%	119
Help to make housing more energy efficient	22.18%	118
Help to prevent eviction or foreclosure	18.42%	98
Handicap accessible housing	15.04%	80
None of the above	5.83%	31
Other (please specify)	3.20%	17

***Other* responses:**

- *High deposits for rental housing*
- *Quality mental health housing*
- *Income-based or low-cost rentals*
- *Housing that accepts vouchers*

CHILD CARE NEEDS

Eligible children in the UCAP service area are served by 43 licensed childcare centers, 389 family childcares, and 35 public schools with preschools. Even though these service providers have a combined capacity of 7,105, child care availability continues to be significant need in the UCAP service area, particularly for infants/toddlers and preschoolers. According to the Southwest Minnesota Child Care Need Summary 2022 by First Children's Finance, MN DEED Regions 6E, 6W, and 8 show a need of more than 4,600 child care spots.

Southwest Minnesota 2022 Child Care Need: (4,605)*

Three of the four focus groups discussed the continued child care challenges. It was noted that both center-based and family-based options are lacking in all counties within UCAP's service area. The lack of availability is leading to increased cost burdens for parents as centers increase their prices in light of the competition for their services and increased staffing costs as they compete with other employers. After-school programming, especially for children in school or Head Start was noted. Offering weekend/extended hours and concerns surrounding the quality of available child care was also noted, lifting up the need to support child care providers with training, licensure, and financial planning.

Specific Child Care Needs:

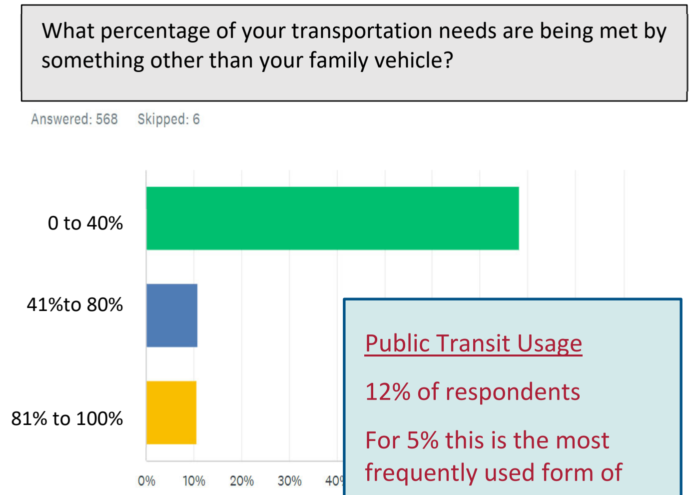
- Additional infant child care spots
- Weekend and extended operating hours
- Better-quality child care
- Support for child care providers
- Assistance with increased costs for both families and providers

Focus group participants offered several suggestions for improving child care:

- Provide additional funding to help families with child care needs (Child Care Assistance Program)
- Establish a Head Start "Uber" system
- Offer gas vouchers to people who help with after school care programs
- Provide option for parents to "pay as you go" for after school care at some Head Start facilities
- Use high school buildings for childcare programs

TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

When asked what percentage of transportation needs are being met by something other than a family vehicle, **nearly 12% of survey respondents indicated that they are utilizing other forms of transportation.** Several forms of transportation are being utilized by respondents, with the greatest percentage **(88%) being personal vehicles.** The second highest form of transportation is **walking (nearly 30%)**, and the third is **ride-sharing (20%)**. Several respondents noted that they are leaning on neighbors or family members.



Public Transit Usage

12% of respondents

For 5% this is the most frequently used form of transportation

Among survey respondents, 21% indicated that they have missed work, medical appointments, job interviews, or other important appointments due to a lack of transportation.

21% of respondents missed work or important appointments in the past year due to a lack of transportation.

The greatest transportation challenge listed by respondents was **money for gas (27%)**, followed by the **needs for vehicle repair (24%)**. Comments added by respondents largely focused on the costs associated with vehicle maintenance, gas, insurance, etc. Additional challenges included a lack of community transit on weekends, needing to share a vehicle with another household member, needing transportation for a preschool child, concerns over traveling alone, or health challenges.

Transportation Challenges

Over 50% of respondents referenced the costs associated with having a vehicle as a challenge. (Gas, Repairs, Insurance, Licenses, etc.)

Three of the four focus groups were surprised that transportation needs were not ranked higher, noting the importance of transportation for the ability to pursue employment outside of the communities in which they live and/or to seek medical or dental care that is typically located in larger communities. Discussions indicated that perhaps transportation services are adequate in the location where many of the survey respondents live; this may be a factor as the largest percentages of respondents lived in Kandiyohi or Lyon counties, both of which have community transit services that reach beyond the larger communities of Willmar and Marshall.

Specific needs identified included:

- Car repair assistance or non-profit automotive repair shops
- A lack of volunteers for volunteer driver programs
- Improved transportation for seniors for access to grocery stores and health care services
- A lack of weekend and evening services (noted specifically for seniors and preschoolers)
- A lack of bus service on Sundays to help people access their faith community/church services

HEALTHCARE NEEDS AND CONCERNS

When asked to identify the top healthcare concerns, over 50% of survey respondents selected the challenge of "doctors/dentists/mental health providers not accepting Medicaid, MNCare, or my insurance plan."

Several other concerns were selected by significant percentages of survey respondents including:

- Lack of mental health providers – 31%
- Lengthy waiting list/times – 30%
- Cost of medical visits – 30%
- Cost of prescriptions – 29%
- Cost of medical emergencies – 27%

Over 50% of respondents indicated concerns over medical providers not accepting Medicaid, MNCare, or their insurance plan.

Other concerns included the lack of sensitivity among healthcare providers including cultural awareness (19%); language barriers/no interpreter (16%); no affordable/reliable transportation to medical/dental providers (14%); lack of healthcare providers (13%); no clinics or medical providers in my community (9%); lack of alcohol or drug abuse treatment providers (9%); and no emergency room in my community at convenient times (3%). 18% of respondents indicated no healthcare concerns. Comments and specific concerns added by respondents accentuated concerns over acceptance of insurance, the costs associated with insurance and/or medical expenses, and the lack of availability to specialists in the area. Several comments specifically noted the concern of limited dental services who accept MA and/or children without MA. **87% of respondents indicated that all the people in their household are currently insured** with less than 3% indicating none are insured.

HOUSEHOLDS WITH HEALTH INSURANCE	RESPONSES	
All the people in my household are currently insured.	87.10%	486
Some, but not all people in my household are insured.	9.14%	51
None of the people in my household are insured.	2.15%	12
Other (please specify)	1.61%	9
TOTAL		558

Focus group participants noted mental health service needs, sharing that many providers have closed offices, causing those who need services to drive longer distances. They also affirmed the need for providers who accept state health programs as insurance, especially dental and eye care providers.

FOOD/NUTRITION NEEDS

The USDA defines a food desert as a low-income area where a significant number of residents live more than 10 miles from a big grocery store in rural areas or one mile in urban ones. Food access continues to be a challenge in the region with several areas in our region lacking a place to buy food in within a residents own town unless purchased from a gas station…if they even have a gas station.

"The benefits we get for food and cash assistance is poor. We barely make it through the month as is and ask for help from others."

"The cost of nutritious meals. Little Debbie snacks costs less than a bag of apples!"

Survey insights on food and nutrition needs largely focused on the **costs associated with eating healthy**, with education about shopping on a budget ranking highest (41%), free/reduced lunches for children as second (40%), and access to nutritious meals as third (35%). Others emphasized help applying for food support (33%) or food shelf support challenges due to either transportation, limited availability of days/hours, or the food shelf having expired/rotten food. Focus group members shared suggestions of community gardens or partnerships with farmers to provide produce during school or for home use.

What does your community need to help people with better food/nutrition (Select up to 5)		
Answer Choices	Responses#	Percentage
Education about preparing or shopping for meals on a budget	221	41%
Free or reduced lunches for children	219	40%
Access to nutritious meals	188	35%
Help applying for food support (SNAP, NAPS, WIC, etc.)	181	33%
Flexible food shelf days/hours	158	29%
Free or reduced lunches for seniors	158	29%
Transportation to a food shelf	158	29%
Free or reduced summer meals	155	29%
Enough food to eat	135	25%
Health/nutrition education	112	21%
Access to supplies/equipment needed to cook meals	104	19%
None of the above	73	13%
Other (please specify)	29	5%
Answered	**542**	

NEEDS OF SENIORS

The greatest need for seniors noted by survey respondents is help with household tasks and chores (59%) followed by delivery service for groceries (44%) and transportation services (40%). Other needs focused on health care (prescription costs, insurance questions, medical equipment) or access to meals through delivery, or on weekends/evenings.

"I wish there was easier access to the VA supply shed on Armstrong, as this is such an amazing service for people needing walkers, commodes, wheelchairs, hospital beds, etc."

"Jackson County is aging. We need an Aging Services Coordinator similar to what Cottonwood/Nobles have through ACE."

Which of the following are needed for seniors to remain safe and independent in their homes. (Select up to 5.)		
Answer Choices	Responses	Responses-#
Help with household tasks and chores (cleaning, maintenance, repairs)	58.88%	315
Delivery service for groceries	43.93%	235
Transportation services	39.81%	213
Delivery of prepared meals	34.02%	182
Paying for prescription costs	31.78%	170
Unsure or Do not know	24.67%	132
Help with health insurance questions	24.49%	131
Help filling out applications for food support (SNAP, NAPS, etc.)	23.93%	128
Help getting medical equipment	22.06%	118
Help getting/using a cell phone	19.25%	103
Weekend meals	18.88%	101
Evening meals	16.45%	88
Senior dining at a local site	14.21%	76
Emergency food boxes	12.52%	67
Other (please specify)	2.80%	15

HIGHEST COMMUNITY & UNMET NEEDS

Once again, housing surfaced toward the top for community needs, with **66% of respondents selecting safe and affordable housing** as the top category their community needs the most help with.

Quality/affordable childcare ranked second (63%). This aligns with previous survey questions pointing to childcare as the greatest needs for children ages 0 to 5.

Which of the following do you and/or your community need the most help with? (Select up to 5.)		
Answer Choices	Response%	Response#
Safe and affordable housing	65.59%	345
Quality/affordable childcare	62.93%	331
Higher paying jobs	58.94%	310
Help with reducing debt	34.03%	179
Affordable/reliable internet service	32.89%	173
Access to food and nutritious meals	28.33%	149
Budgeting training	25.10%	132
Affordable education	17.11%	90
Free tax preparation sites	16.92%	89
Promotion of equity and inclusion	16.73%	88
Access to internet	15.97%	84
Other (please specify)	3.61%	19
	Answered	**526**

The third highest-ranked need was **higher paying jobs (59%)**. This is an area for which further exploration may be beneficial to better understand the relationship of the types of jobs available, skills required to attain them, and/or the actual wages in comparison to other areas of the state. **Help with reducing debt (34%)** was ranked fourth.

It is interesting to note that the concerns of **affordability/reliability of internet service (33%) ranked significantly higher as a need than access (16%)**. Minnesota has a goal to have not only access to internet for ALL businesses and homes in Minnesota but also to ensure reliable service of at least 100 megabits per second download speed and 20 megabits upload speed by 2026. According to Blandin Foundation, several of the counties served by UCAP, are ranked toward the bottom of the state for reaching this goal.

COUNTY	2026 Goal 100/20 Mbps		Household Density	Providers
Redwood	#85	40.04%	6.74	10
Meeker	#77	53.86%	14.65	12
McLeod	#73	58.09%	28.14	11
Cottonwood	#66	67.20%	6.86	13
Jackson	#65	68.83%	5.52	14
Renville	#63	70.86%	5.78	14
Kandiyohi	#53	74.82%	20.65	14
Lyon	#38	82.31%	13.96	11
Lincoln	#7	99.03%	4.1	7
Rank is for access to 100/20 megabits per second with a total of 87 counties.				

(Table Source: Blandin Foundation Broadband; 2021)

Several counties in the UCAP service area are or have been actively working to improve internet affordability and reliability. There are significant challenges in rural areas closer to a larger community as while that community may be well served, the smaller communities or rural areas still have great need for improvements. For example, the community of Windom in Cottonwood County has service of at least 100M/20M, however the majority of the County is unserved with no wireline broadband of at least 25M/3M.

Other Highest Needs:

Other highest needs noted included; **transportation needs** (noted by 5 respondents, specifically mentioning transportation to preschool and on evenings/weekends); **mental health services** (noted by 3 respondents); and several individual responses including more and affordable/free activities for youth as well as adults; birth control education/support; and funding for low-income apartments.

"Expand affordable, accessible public transportation options on the evenings and weekends!"

UNMET NEEDS

Transportation costs (48%) rose to the top of other unmet needs, followed closely by **available work with living wages (47%)**, and **help paying utility bills (43%)**. Transportation challenges were also the most prevalently mentioned in comments, noting availability of busing on weekends/evenings. Specific items needed according to over 35% of respondents include diapers, formula, pull-ups, clothing and shoes, and furniture or other household items. Work-related items (boots, tools, uniforms, and professional clothing) were also listed by nearly 30% of respondents.

Several noted a challenge of access to affordable food, clothing, furniture, and more in smaller communities within the UCAP service area. Others noted the gap between skills, living wages, and assistance for necessities. Individuals specified additional needs in the "other" category such as:

- Stores for affordable clothing (other than Walmart)
- Resolving medical issues
- Less expensive busing for rural areas; passes for parents of children who can't ride alone
- Indoor winter activities (exercise and rec programs) to keep our community moving
- Drug recovery options

"Access and affordability… Most stores are 30 min or more away."

"People get raises and can't jump the gap; Make too much for assistance but not enough to pay for necessities."

What are other unmet needs in your community? (Check all that apply.)		
Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Affordable transportation (including gas, bus passes, insurance, repairs)	48.25%	248
Available work with living wages	47.08%	242
Help paying utility bills	43.39%	223
Diapers/formula	39.88%	205
Clothing and shoes	37.16%	191
Furniture or other household items	35.21%	181
Work related items (boots, tools, uniforms)	29.57%	152
Professional clothing for work	28.60%	147
Parenting education, information and support	25.49%	131
Assistance finding employment	19.65%	101
Personal safety	14.59%	75
Other (please specify)	5.64%	29
	Answered	**514**

COMMENTS: SERVICES MOST NEEDED

HOUSING: It is clear that housing-related services are needed, with nearly 60 references (30% of survey respondents) indicating challenges with housing ranging from affordability and access to specific requests for repair/improvement support, rental units, senior living options, and low-income housing. In addition, under housing, specific requests appeared for homeless shelters/housing, domestic violence housing, and housing options for those with criminal records.

TRANSPORTATION: The second most frequently mentioned was transportation (26 references/13% of respondents). Needs frequently reference transportation services specifically for preschool children and medical appointments and for a need for more public transportation services evenings and weekends. Also mentioned were needs related to assistance with car maintenance or repair.

CHILD CARE: Child care was also referenced many times (25 references/12% of survey respondents). Refer to the above section on child care for further insights.

Other services referenced more than 5 times each were as follows:

- A need for more **activities or places for kids/youth** to "hang out", particularly after school when adult supervision may be limited.
- A need for **mental health awareness and/or services**, particularly for teens and those facing addiction.
- A need for **dental services**, particularly those who will accept Medical Assistance or State insurance.
- **Education support i**ncluding life skills education in areas such as money management and greater access to learning centers. This area needs further discussion to define more specific needs.
- **Employment** was also referenced, largely referring to the need for higher paying jobs and assistance with gaining employment.
- **Food and nutrition services** were mentioned, mostly referring to a need for better accessibility to food shelves (times open) or better-quality foods offered.
- **Financial support** is a possible need, with several noting the challenges of higher costs.
- A need for **interpreters** was mentioned specifically six times, with one individual referencing a need for translation services.
- **Senior services** such as assistance with groceries, companionship, and other resources to help seniors living alone.

> *"I have a degree and a career job and yet in this economy, I struggle every day to pay for simple things such as gas, food, medical bills and rent because the cost of living is so high! I don't know how single parents with no money are surviving."*

AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Survey respondents were asked to rank the availability of various resources ranging from supports for child development and education to housing and financial supports. The top three greatest areas of potential need were related to housing. The resource that was ranked as the greatest potential need was **temporary housing options,** with 42% indicating that this is not available at all and another 46% indicating that this is only somewhat available. This was followed by **housing maintenance and repair programs** and **housing purchase/payment programs**, with both of these ranked as not available at all by nearly 30% of respondents.

HOUSING-RELATED	Not Available at All		Somewhat Available		Moderately Available		Adequately Available	
Temporary housing options	42.11%	208	46.15%	228	8.50%	42	3.24%	16
Housing maintenance/repair program	29.46%	147	53.91%	269	13.63%	68	3.01%	15
Housing purchase/payment programs	29.00%	145	57.40%	287	10.80%	54	2.80%	14

The next segment of resources that may need improvement were legal, safety, and employment supports, with over 20% of respondents indicating that these are not available at all or only somewhat available (50%+ of respondents). Nearly 25% indicated that employment support is moderately available, which may indicate less need in this area.

Legal/Safety/Employment Support	Not Available at All		Somewhat Available		Moderately Available		Adequately Available	
Legal support and representation	25.20%	123	55.33%	270	15.78%	77	3.69%	18
Physical safety education/support	24.29%	119	52.04%	255	19.39%	95	4.29%	21
Employment support, skills and training	20.61%	102	49.90%	247	24.44%	121	5.05%	25

Financial, education, transportation and healthcare resources were selected as somewhat available by over 52% of respondents. Of these areas, the greatest potential need was identified as financial support/assistance (18% Not available; 55% Somewhat available) Other areas of the survey indicated stronger needs in the transportation area than indicated in this response. This may have been due to how people defined "assistance." This may present an opportunity for improvement of future surveys.

Finance, Education, Transportation, Healthcare	Not Available at All		Somewhat Available		Moderately Available		Adequately Available	
Financial support/assistance (education, insurance, b	18.29%	92	54.67%	275	20.68%	104	6.36%	32
Education support, skills and training	18.09%	87	53.22%	256	23.91%	115	4.78%	23
Transportation assistance	16.97%	85	52.10%	261	23.15%	116	7.78%	39
Healthcare education and assistance	16.00%	80	54.40%	272	22.80%	114	6.80%	34

Senior Care Support is an area of potential need as well but may require further study. Nearly 12% of respondents indicated these resources are not available at all, yet it ranked in the bottom three by respondent numbers. Over 56% indicated they were only somewhat available and only about 5% indicated they were adequately available.

Senior care support	Not available at all		Somewhat available		Moderately available		Adequately available	
Senior care support	11.75%	57	56.49%	274	26.80%	130	4.95%	24

Food and Nutrition Programs ranked toward the top for availability**,** with 20% of respondents indicating that these are adequately available and nearly 75% indicating that they are somewhat to moderately available. The next categories ranked with highest availability were Child Development Programs, with 80% indicating these programs are somewhat (47%) or moderately (34%) available.

Food/Child/Senior Care	Not available at all		Somewhat available		Moderately available		Adequately available	
Food and nutrition programs	5.38%	28	36.15%	188	38.08%	198	20.38%	106
Child development programs	8.10%	40	46.96%	232	34.21%	169	10.73%	53

INCREASED AWARENESS OF SERVICES/RESOURCES

It was noted several times in gathering community insights that UCAP may be able to help more families through increased awareness of available services and resources. For example, survey respondents ranked budgeting assistance as a need, yet this is a service currently provided by UCAP.

The largest majority of respondents prefer **social media (68%)** as the medium for learning about services, following by **websites (53%)** and **community newsletters (42%)**. This may be tied to the age groupings of respondents, with 67% of respondents being in the 25-54 age group. Newspaper and radio were identified by an average of 27%, which interestingly closely aligns with the respondents in the 55+ age group (24%). Further analysis would need to be undertaken to see if age does, in fact, influence communication preferences. Several other mediums were noted including: email, word of mouth, and person-to-person contact.

How do you prefer to learn about services in your area? (Check all that apply.)

Answer Choices	Response%	Response#
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)	67.97%	365
Websites	53.45%	287
Community newsletters	41.53%	223
Newspaper	29.24%	157
Radio	24.02%	129
Fairs/community events	23.28%	125
Phone book	5.96%	32
Other (please specify)	3.72%	20
	Answered	**537**

STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The UCAP service area has many strengths including the people and organizations who work together to support each other and those in need. UCAP was noted as one of the greatest strengths along with several other supportive organizations or programs such as schools, faith-based organizations, and other agencies. As UCAP considers gaps in services and how to address them, below are a few insights regarding potential opportunities:

Housing

Several counties in the UCAP service area are actively working to study and discern best approaches to address housing needs. Reaching out to these partners to learn and provide valuable insight directly from families will be key in developing strategies. Potential housing opportunities lifted up by stakeholders included: greater understanding/awareness of available housing stock in the UCAP service area; increased awareness of housing assistance services/programs; and financial support programs for home and rental repairs/improvements or damage/security deposits.

Child Care

This is another area of need to which partnerships are essential. Building on past and current efforts, UCAP can play a critical role in ensuring that the voices of parents and providers are heard and understood. Two potential child care opportunities lifted up during this process included exploring innovative ways to assist with after school care programs and Head Start transportation.

Transportation

In light of identified needs, the greatest opportunities appear to be associated with financial assistance with gas and vehicle operation/repair costs. In addition, working to improve weekend and extended hours for community transit (potential through added volunteers) could be extremely helpful.

Healthcare

Key concerns for health care will require focused conversations with area health care providers to explore and develop innovative solutions to the noted challenges of limited number of providers and/or the forms of payment they accept.

Employment/Wages

It was surprising to some focus group members that the need for higher wages ranked high among survey respondents. This along with higher-than-average unemployment numbers in the service area, may present an opportunity for UCAP work with others to explore the barriers to employment and develop pathways to prosperity. The unemployment numbers indicated by survey respondents are particularly interesting. Current unemployment rates in the region are among the lowest in the state (<2% according to DEED) and a range of 16,000 to 20,000 job vacancies existed at the end of 2021. Partnering with other agencies/organizations to explore the barriers to employment and whether or not some of the other identified needs are impeding the pathway to employment and prosperity for those you serve, may present a significant opportunity to help those in need. UCAP may consider working with area workforce development agencies and higher education institutions to gain further insight as to the types of jobs that are low-paying and determine potential pathways for helping individuals acquire the skills and training needed to advance their employment opportunities.

Increased Awareness of Services/Resources

Insights gathered suggest opportunities to increase awareness of the services and resources provided by UCAP and its partners. Expanding your social media presence through Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter presents the greatest opportunity in light of 68% of respondents indicating that social media is their preferred method of communication. By better distributing information and resources those in need will gain greater access and improved connections.

IDENTIFYING STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

UCAP is presented with numerous opportunities to continue to be a leader in helping those in need. Assessing the best possible opportunities by looking at the information within this report and existing UCAP assets, combined with the ease of implementation and the level of anticipated impact, will help ensure your collective capacity and focus can produce the greatest impact now and into the future.

Further insights on enhancing services are noted in the executive summary. By building on existing as well as developing new services in collaboration with other agencies and organizations, UCAP can truly fulfill its mission to eliminate poverty by empowering individuals and strengthening communities.