



THE POWER OF CHANGE

Albany County Needs Assessment

December 2015

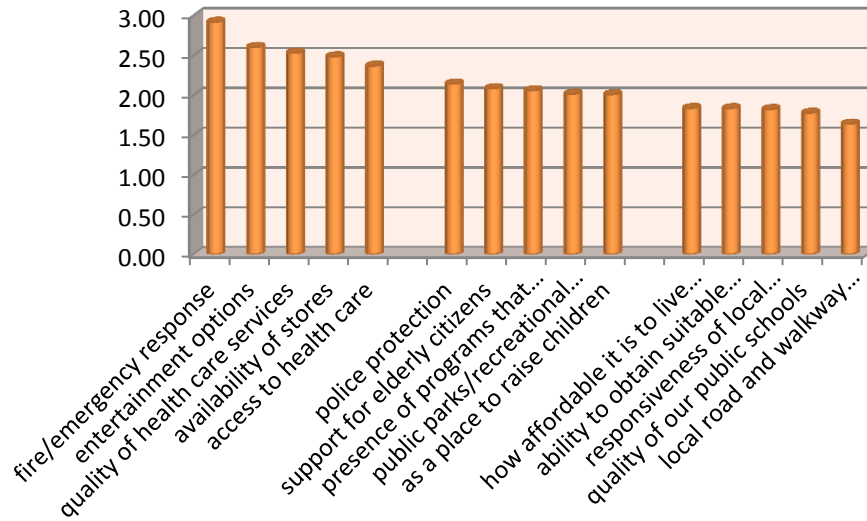
In 2012, Albany Community Action Partnership (ACAP) partnered with Siena Research Institute (SRI) “in order to assess the public perception of the quality of life, a ranking of local services and institutions, current levels of social needs in general and of low income residents specifically, the adequacy of programs, and attitudes towards addressing social problems in the county”, as quoted from the executive summary that accompanied the report of the results from that study. That research encompassed separate surveys administered to residents within Albany County and a survey designed and administered to a cross-section of local area service providers, and accompanying demographic information. In order to assess a relational picture of the situation currently in Albany County, a Community Needs Assessment for Albany County conducted by ACAP in 2015 is a follow up to the one done in 2012. This year’s assessment included surveys administered to over 1,000 area residents, and 150 local area service providers including respondents from educational institutions, the private and public sector, as well as those from community and faith-based organizations. Statistical data was obtained from the United States Census Bureau, New York State Community Action Association (NYSCAA), Capital District Child Care Council (CDCCC), and ACAP.

The overall picture in 2015 is markedly different when assessing the general quality of life in Albany County from 2012 where we had 71 percent of respondents rating as either excellent (12%) or good (59%). Currently only 31% of citizens rate Albany County as either excellent (8%) or good (23%). Just ten percent (one third of the 2012 percentage) believe that life in Albany County is improving while the majority have indicated the situation has remained the same (41%) or gotten worse (32%) over the course of the last three years.

The aspects of life, or local attributes, which were rated above average in 2015, were the same items rated similarly in 2012. In conjunction, the attributes in the average and in need of improvement arenas in 2012 are mostly the same in 2015, with the quality of public schools falling into the bottom third and presence of programs for low income residents moving to an average rating.

Aspects of Life in Albany County

Based on a 4 point scale



Over the past several years there has been a small, but steady, increase of about 1.3% in the population of Albany County. Along with that increase has been an increase in the number of persons living in poverty. There are currently just under 40,000 residents living in poverty, up from over 35,000 three years ago, with over 9,800 of those being children under the age of 18, up from the over 9,000 reported in 2012. However, while the number of persons living in poverty has risen, the percentage of individuals living in poverty has remained constant over the past 3 years at 13.7%. There has only been shuffling of numbers within the 3 groupings of individuals: children under 18 have seen a decrease of 3% to 24.7%, while Adults 25+ (up 2% to 52%) and Seniors 65+ (up 1% to 8.7%) have both risen. Although there has been a slight shifting in the age group percentages of individuals living in poverty, both race and education & poverty statistics have stayed fairly level: 9.9% of persons living in poverty are white, 26.7% are African American, and 26.4% are Hispanic/Latino; and 14.7% of persons who have attained a High School or equivalent level education, 7.8% of those with an Associate degree, and 5.7% of persons with a Bachelor's or higher are living in poverty¹. Of the persons who are age eligible for employment, 38.7% are living in poverty².

¹ 2012 numbers taken from ACAP's 2012 Community Needs Assessment. Remaining statistics in the paragraph have been obtained from the New York State Community Action Association poverty reports --

<http://nyscommunityaction.org/poverty-in-new-york/povertydata/>

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey --

<http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>

While the absolute number of children living in poverty has decreased over the past several years, the number of children under age 18 living in poverty is 17% of the total number of the near 58K children living in Albany County. Of the total number of children in the county, one quarter (25%) are children under the age of 5, with approximately one-third (33%) of that number living within the city limits of Albany. Twenty-two percent (22%) of the overall number of children live in a household that receives some form of Public Assistance from Supplemental Security Income (SSI), cash public assistance income, or SNAP/food stamps, of which over 66% of these families have a single female parent as head of household³. The percentage of children who qualify for free/reduced lunch programs is 42%⁴. The percentage of children with a disability is 4.7%, however, when factoring for age, the only disabilities taken into consideration for children under the age of 5 is hearing and vision impairment, which put this segment's percentage at 1% of the population having a disability⁵.

Our survey posed the question of defining major areas of need on a 4 point scale as to the level of significance to the citizens of Albany County (very significant, somewhat significant, not very significant, and not at all significant). The seven areas addressed were Food and Nutrition—access and affordability, Housing—affordability and quality, Health—access and affordability, Governmental Service—quality of service and representation of elected officials, Young People—education, care, and needs of, Elderly—caring for and meeting needs of, and Economy & Jobs—availability of and ability to get living wage employment. Based on the level of significance, Economy & Jobs rated as the most significant issue faced by the citizens of Albany County at a rating of 3.54 out of 4, followed closely by Housing with a rating of 3.45 out of 4. However, when asked to rank the same seven categories on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the most significant issue faced by the citizens of Albany County, Housing ranked 7 or most significant followed by Economy & Jobs. The same statistical anomaly was found with Young People and Food & Nutrition: young people rated 3.41 out of 4 in significance with Food & Nutrition scoring 3.40 out of 4, while when ranked they flipped in significance and young people

³ Statistics in paragraph to this point from U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey -- <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>

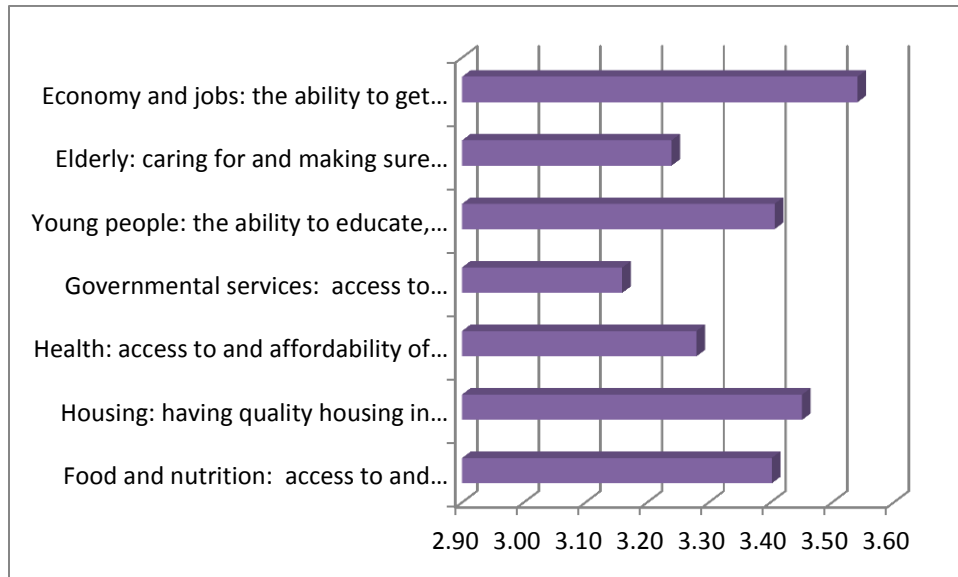
⁴ New York State Community Action Association poverty reports -- <http://nyscommunityaction.org/poverty-in-new-york/povertydata/>

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey -- <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>

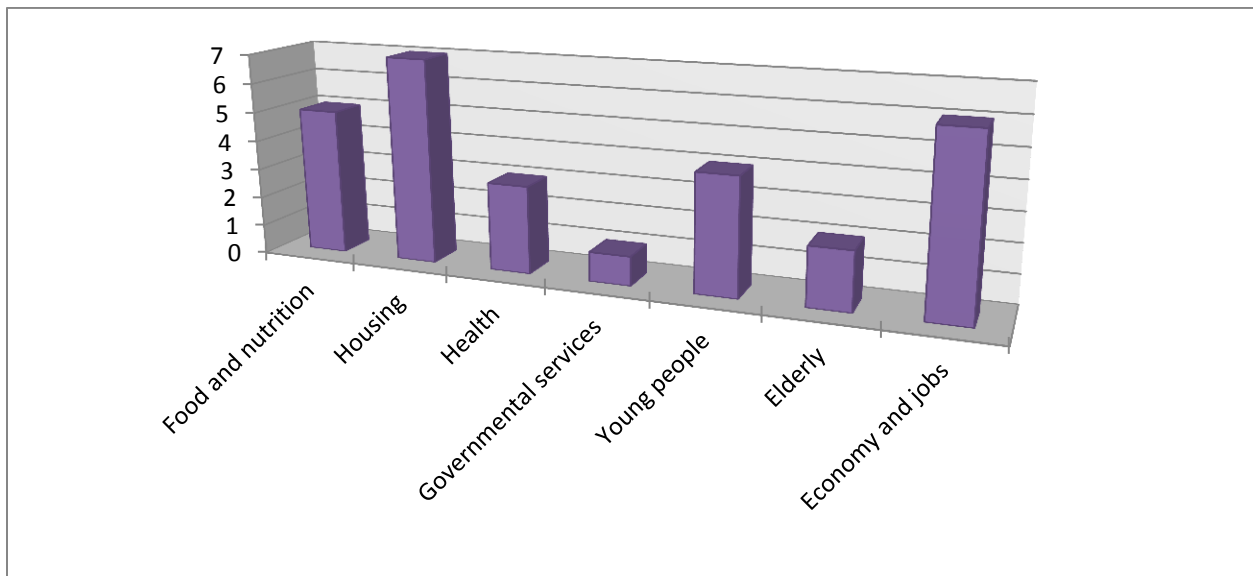
ranked 4 with food & nutrition ranking 5. As can be seen in the chart though, all areas do rate highly in their level of significance for the citizens of Albany County.

Major Areas of Need

Based on level of significance



Based on ranking



While 3 years ago most all were in agreement that “in this economy, more and more people than ever before now require help in meeting their basic survival needs”, this statement is still

true and obtained 86% agreement, however it was edged out ever so slightly by both “everyone must do as much as they can or our community will deteriorate” (87% agreement) and “it seems as though many social needs are getting greater and greater” (88% agreement). What has changed is the level of agreement by service providers with the statement “a lot of the needs that people have are actually caused by their own choices.”—only slightly more than one-third of service providers do, down from the 50 percent rating in the previous assessment.

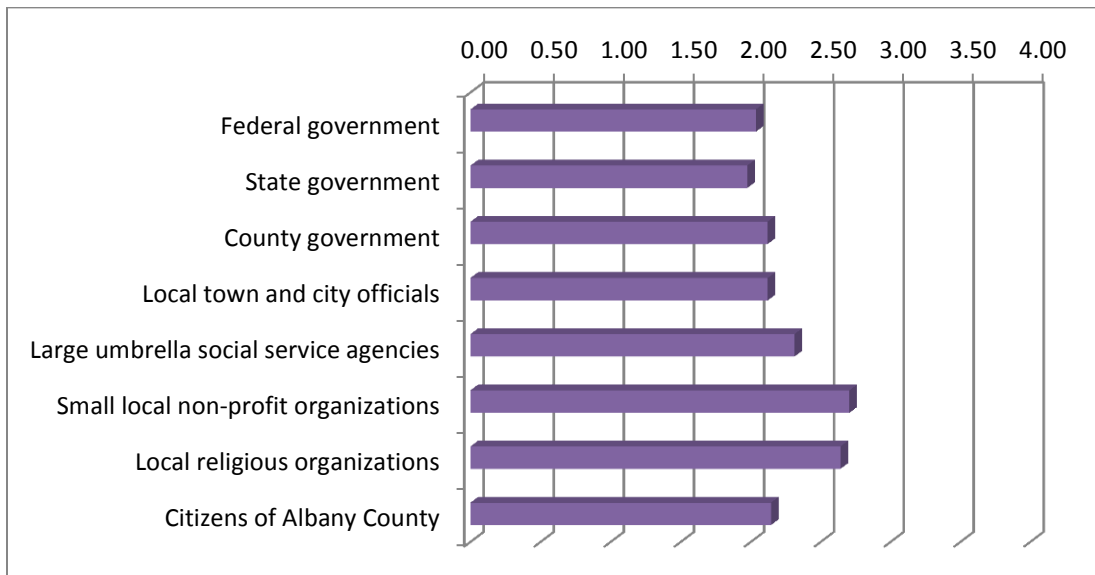
All respondents stated the need to have additional programs to address the needs of the community in most arenas with the exceptions determined to be that there are enough programs for both alcohol/substance abuse recovery and HIV/Aids support. The areas deemed in greatest need of additional programs are the same as 2012 with one exception: elder care, while still deemed to need additional programs, fell in the ranking. Parenting and family needs, affordable housing, mental health, housing improvements, youth services, caregiver support, emergency needs, and careers were deemed the areas in which are the most in need of additional programs.

Agencies are still encouraged, and believe they do a good job of responding to emergency needs but want to recognize that emergencies do not always happen on a 9-5 schedule and that there is not enough being done to recognize, or have programs conduct business in, non-traditional time slots or “after hours”. Many respondents indicate that standard operating hours for business don’t meet with the requirements of their needs. This is especially recognizable in the child care arena where out of 215 licensed child care providers in Albany County, there are no center based care facilities that provide non-traditional service hours, and only a small portion of family and group family facilities that offer evening, overnight, and weekend care⁶ in an era when we are heavily focused on the growing health care industry and the need for both 2nd and 3rd shift workers. Many respondents indicated a need to have service providers develop opportunities for service in the evenings, nights, and weekends; recognizing that the needs of today’s society is different than it once had been. Respondents also indicated a need for quality affordable child care, of which according to the CDCCCC report cited in this assessment, there is a shortage of spaces for children in the 0-2 age bracket, with only 14% currently in center-based care, and while there appears to be a surplus of spaces for children in the 3-4 year group, the number seeking is only representative of 39% of children in center-based facilities.

⁶ 2014 Picture of Child Care in the Capital Region – Capital District Child Care Council – www.cdcccc.org

Similar to the 2012 assessment results, when it comes to addressing the needs of the residents of Albany County, local social service agencies and religious organizations were given highest overall satisfaction rating (based on a 4 point scale: 4-excellent, 3-good, 2-fair, and 1-poor), but are not yet up to the level of “good” as the overall averages are 2.71 and 2.64 respectively. The lowest rating received was for state government which received an overall average of 1.97.

Service Institution Effectiveness



Agencies do admit (59%--same as in 2012) that there are some providers which are inefficiently managed, who do not realize the outcomes equal to their spending. And a resounding 91% believe that the safety net would be stronger if there was better communication and cooperation among service providers and urge that we build collaboration and coordination of services between agencies with less focus on competing with each other. Also, agencies continue to believe there is not enough being done to move low income people away from dependency towards self-sufficiency.

Overwhelmingly, across the board it was noted that respondents believe that the issues faced by low-income residents in Albany County will not decrease but will only remain the same or increase, especially in the areas of mental health, housing, affordable quality child care employment, job training, and public safety.

Key Findings

Of particular interest to note from this assessment are the findings in the areas of housing, employment, child care, and cooperation/coordination of services. Across the board, respondents have indicated the very significant need for quality, affordable housing and child care. Over-priced and/or substandard housing/child care can be a drain on much needed and limited resources which could be more aptly put toward fulfilling other basic necessities such as food, utilities, and clothing. Additionally in the area of child care there is a need for an increase in the number of opportunities for care, especially with small children in the 0-2 age group. As the census bureau is reporting 38.7% of employed persons living in poverty, the need for living wage employment key. Job training (as both credentialing and employability skill sets) in growth industry fields is necessary for individuals to obtain the skills necessary to fill the positions that are in high demand in today's job market. Also of note is the recognition that the lack of opportunities for services in non-traditional or 'after hours' is potentially a key factor in hindering persons living in poverty from obtaining and/or retaining living wage opportunities as current job responsibilities may make it impossible to attend a program designed to provide the skill set to build a career, or may be holding someone back from accepting higher paying employment due to lack of child care options with the non-traditional schedules of some employment. This could also be an issue with obtaining other services designed to offer assistance to the low-income populous to aid in working toward self-sufficiency—if work or other obligations conflicts with the work/office hours of an agency providing assistance then the individual/family will not be able to obtain the needed service or assistance.

Moving Forward

As in 2012, this community needs assessment notes the commitment of all respondents to work toward improving the quality of life for all residents in Albany County, in particularly for low-income residents, while recognizing that this is an arduous journey that doesn't lend itself to quick and easy solutions. Service providers have again expressed the importance of working collaboratively and efficiently, with a coordination of efforts, to assist residents on their path toward self-sufficiency. Over the past 3 years ACAP has made a concerted effort to build intentional partnerships with other service providers through the region in all sectors and would benefit themselves and the residents of Albany County to continue on this path by building opportunities to share information to aid low-income residents, whom the agency is assisting, on

their path toward self-sufficiency. This has the potential to reduce some of the time that spent by customers on paperwork supplying the same basic information at multiple agencies throughout the region while gaining the ability for the individual to achieve more in the same span of time. ACAP and other agencies would also benefit from looking into having opportunities for services in the evening either on a daily basis or 1-2 evenings per week and potentially weekends to allow customers more flexible options to partake of services offerings that may not be otherwise available to them due to scheduling conflicts.

While both residents and service providers alike noted the need for additional programming in most all arenas, it would be more beneficial for agencies to work together in a focused, collaborative and cooperative manner on developing the programs that would be most advantageous to the low-income residents and the locations where these additional programs would be most sought after; and not just create programs for the sake of creating programs that may not be necessary in a particular area, or would be more useful in an altogether different part of the county.

When looking at the areas of greatest need in Albany County in relation to programs that are offered by ACAP, most of the programs focus on those areas which were rated as greatest need. As these areas were also determined to be the areas of greatest need in the 2012 assessment, and look to remain as such, it would be beneficial to remain on the same course of focusing resources and expanding offerings as similarly noted by the Siena research team in their recommendations.

Area of Need	ACAP Program	Recommendations
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career Services • Dress for Success Albany 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to expand partnerships with local businesses to offer wider variety of career options • Training opportunities in the evening or weekend • Partner with AFI program for education and small business start-up/expansion
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Home • Weatherization Assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build partnerships with area providers to leverage opportunities to increase

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EmPower • Restore 	efficiencies and improve quality of housing
Food & Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Pantry • Nutrition workshop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional locations throughout the county • Expand upon partnership with Capital Roots and Veggie Mobile • Nutrition and healthy choices workshops for all customers, not just pantry
Child Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Court Children's Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand hours of service
Early Childhood Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Start • Head Start • Universal Pre-K • Extended day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the Early Start opportunities to allow for greater enrollment to cover gap in availability • Provide opportunities non-traditional care hours such as evenings and weekends • Increase opportunities for before and after care for Head Start and UPK • Develop more workshops and parenting programs and parent participation opportunities
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tax Assistance • Assets for Independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offer the AFI program in the areas of small business startup loans and mortgage assistance, aiding employment and housing opportunities • financial management workshops
