

*ABRIDGED*



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SEPTEMBER 2019

COMPREHENSIVE  
COMMUNITY NEEDS  
ASSESSMENT

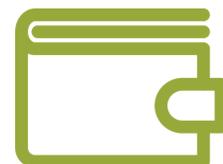
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WASHINGTON & GREENE  
COUNTIES



**blueprints**

break barriers - build futures  
powered by community action



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*TO ACCESS THE FULL REPORT, PLEASE EMAIL REQUEST TO [INFO@MYBLUEPRINTS.ORG](mailto:INFO@MYBLUEPRINTS.ORG)*

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## INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

Blueprints is a private, nonprofit community action agency with the mission *to serve as the catalyst to mobilize the resources of the entire community to enable families and individuals in our service area to attain the skills, knowledge, motivations and opportunities to become self-sufficient*. The strategic planning and operational efforts are focused on the premise that an engaged community, caring leadership and responsible planning can eliminate poverty, create a strong, healthy economy and encourage prosperity for all.

Our name, Blueprints, affirms our organization as a helpful authority, but also positions us as a resource that inspires people to help themselves and their neighbors. Our tagline, “Break Barriers – Build Futures” signifies that we bridge socioeconomic divides and close service gaps. Our secondary tagline, “Powered By Community Action,” is a nod to our proud 54+ year legacy as a community action agency, serving the communities of Washington and Greene Counties with dedication and distinction.

Blueprints provides a myriad of programs that appeal to multiple constituencies and fit into our four service pillars:



- Programs in our **MIND** Pillar strengthen and sharpen the mind and include our Whole Family [2GEN] Approach, Family Literacy, Head Start/Early Head Start, Pre-K Counts, Computer Classes, Getting Ahead, Postsecondary Transitions and Little Free Libraries.
- Programs in our **HOME** Pillar stabilize and secure the home and include Foster Care & Adoption, Child & Family Welfare, Home Ownership Center, Transitional & Independent Living and Resident Opportunities & Self Sufficiency.
- Programs in our **HEALTH** Pillar help preserve and improve well-being and include Care Management for seniors, Home Delivered Meals, Ombudsman, Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), Senior Centers and Women, Infants & Children (WIC).
- Programs in our **WALLET** Pillar help people take charge of their wallet, earn and balance a livable wage, and include A Little *LIFT*, Financial Capabilities Center, Career Development, Matched Savings Account, Work-Based Learning, Work Ready, and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA).

While a triennial comprehensive community needs assessment is a requirement for all community action agencies, it is also a best practice for agencies like ours to effectively identify and quantify local needs specific to those living in poverty. We use the final assessment and the assessment process to ensure that we make maximum use of our time and funding to operate high impact programs that go beyond service provision and are, in fact, a catalyst for change in our community. Our assessment is used for strategic planning, for developing the right program mix and for community collaboration.

## THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The assessment began in April of 2019, and the methodology adopted included both quantitative and qualitative data gathering. Sources of the data collection included:

- The Community Action Association of Pennsylvania Online Community Needs Assessment Tool, which pulls data from state and federal repositories on population, veterans, employment, education, housing, income, poverty, nutrition, healthcare and crime;
- The 2018 Transit Development Plan; Freedom Transit;
- The 2018 Greene County Comprehensive Plan;
- The 2019 Coalition on Human Needs Report;
- The 2018 Community Health Needs Assessment; Washington Health System;
- The 2019 Head Start/Early Head Start Community Assessment;
- The 2019 Washington County Annual Action Plan; Redevelopment Authority of the County of Washington;
- The 2019 State of Child Welfare; PA Partnerships for Children;

In addition to the quantitative data collection from the listed sources, we engaged our constituency, our staff and community members in six focus groups, facilitating conversation on the strengths and needs across Washington and Greene Counties.

Finally, we further engaged our community through an online survey, which prompted respondents to identify both strengths and pressing issues from individual perspectives.

The results of the 2019 Blueprints' Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment are found in the pages that follow. We thank you for your interest and welcome your feedback at: [info@myblueprints.org](mailto:info@myblueprints.org)



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2019 Blueprints' Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment spanned five months and employed 3 major components: a community survey, quantitative data collection and qualitative data collection [focus groups]. The analysis of all data shows many strengths and assets in Washington and Greene Counties, including the cost of living, strong faith based community, low unemployment rates and upward trending graduation rates. Economically, both counties are showing growth. The analysis of all assessment modalities also shows some common and unfortunate recurring needs in our communities. *The full analysis can be found in the full report.*

The five identified community needs in Washington and Greene Counties include:

- **Drug/Opioid Use & associated ramifications [crime/incarceration/CYS involvement]**
- **Transportation [public availability/personally owned vehicles]**
- **Low-Wage Jobs**
- **Activities for Youth**
- **Poverty**

Blueprints is uniquely positioned to address each of these community needs in a broad fashion. Blueprints' real-time strategic planning process provides us the agility to handle changing conditions in our service area, and respond to client and partner needs. We have implemented a 2-generational, or whole family approach to our work in addition to Family Centered Coaching. Families are served in a holistic manner, rather than one-off programming. Our **Mind, Home, Health, Wallet** pillars of service blanket our clientele with goal oriented objectives.

The drug 'epidemic' effects our community as a whole, and while Blueprints is not a drug & alcohol or mental health provider, we are responsive to the needs of our clients. Blueprints' response to the drug problem includes addressing the associated ramifications of drug use, re-entry after incarceration, foster care and housing and career development.

Blueprints is expanding re-entry services to help people put their lives back together following incarceration. We work with incarcerated individuals while in the correctional facility, help develop a plan for re-entry, and provide necessary supports upon release. Blueprints provides housing supports – rent/utility assistance, rapid rehousing, job and career development, and record expungement (when eligible – through partnership with SPLAS).

Transportation has long been a persistent challenge in both Washington and Greene Counties. Reliable mobility affects how far away from home a person can reasonably consider looking for work, how many hours they can realistically work, and if they can be depended upon to make it to work regularly. From a health standpoint, access to transportation affects when and where a person can seek medical treatment and whether family meals come from a grocery store or a

closer convenience store or fast food restaurant, where nutrition is sacrificed and costs are higher. In Greene County, public transportation is largely limited to seniors and those with disabilities. In Washington, public perception of the transportation system is that routes are limited and costs are prohibitive. Blueprints has recently established a partnership with Freedom Transit, the county's public transportation entity. Through this partnership, we have found that routes and options are far more robust than most think, and costs are very reasonable, even for those living on low wages. Freedom Transit has trained all Blueprints' case management staff on routes, options and costs, and even held a free fare day in August 2019 for staff and clients to explore public transportation routes and eliminate the uncertainty of what is available to them.

Vehicle ownership in Washington and Greene Counties is over 92%, fairly consistent with more rural communities. However, lower income households typically own much older models in need of more frequent maintenance and costly service. Vehicle trouble frequently triggers immediate and critical financial hardship, but also puts employment at risk as well. Blueprints is addressing this need in two ways. Grant funding has been secured in Greene County to pay for vehicle repairs for Blueprints' enrolled clients to maintain employment, educational program or to keep families engaged in services. In both counties, partnerships with the Career & Technology Centers have been established to provide vehicle repairs to our clients' vehicles at a low cost.

The data shows that unemployment rates are very low – 4.2% in the report area. The population with no high school diploma is 13.09% in Greene and 7.64% in Washington. Another 46.01% in Greene and 38.62% in Washington only have a high school diploma. This data is indicative of the identified issue in our focus groups of high numbers of workers only eligible for low-waged jobs. Blueprints' internal data indicates that 61% of our clientele draw their income from employment, yet 72% are at or below 125% of the federal poverty level. The conclusion is that while people are working, they are not drawing enough income to rise out of poverty.

Blueprints provides a robust Career Development program that helps our clientele identify a career pathway that will lead them out of poverty. Our Family Literacy program provides the tools necessary to help clients establish educational and vocational goals. We can also utilize barrier elimination funding to help prepare clients for jobs that will pay a living wage.

Appropriate activities for youth in our communities has been identified as a need in Washington and Greene Counties. Drug use among our communities' youth came up in focus group conversations and correlated with a lack of [affordable/educational] activities for youth. Many noted that school sponsored activities either focused on athletics or had costs associated with them that lower-income families could not afford. A lack of life skill [financial] development for youth was also identified as a need. Blueprints provides services in this regard through our After School Program in Washington; appropriate activities and life skill

development are inherent in the program. Blueprints’ Truancy Intervention and Prevention Program [TIPP] addresses issues of truancy in all 14 school districts in Washington County in order to keep kids in school. In the summer, the program ramps up positive activities for youth in the program. The Independent Living program also prepares youth who are aging out of the foster care system in order to prepare them for adulthood.

Poverty remains a key indicator of continued need for Blueprints’ programming in our service area. 14.7% of Greene County’s population are living in poverty; 9.4% in Washington. While both figures are lower now than in 2015, it remains an unacceptable statistic. More troubling, the child poverty rate has actually increased in Greene County since 2015; from 20.16% to 21.7%. In Washington, child poverty decreased since 2015, going from 13.81% to 12.2%.

## 2019 FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES



FAMILY SIZE	100%	125%	130%	150%	185%	200%	250%	300%
1	\$12,490	\$15,613	\$16,237	\$18,735	\$23,107	\$24,980	\$31,225	\$37,470
2	\$16,910	\$21,138	\$21,983	\$25,365	\$31,284	\$33,820	\$42,275	\$50,730
3	\$21,330	\$26,663	\$27,729	\$31,995	\$39,461	\$42,660	\$53,325	\$63,990
4	\$25,750	\$32,188	\$33,475	\$38,625	\$47,638	\$51,500	\$64,375	\$77,250
5	\$30,170	\$37,713	\$39,221	\$45,255	\$55,815	\$60,340	\$75,425	\$90,510
6	\$34,590	\$43,238	\$44,967	\$51,885	\$63,992	\$69,180	\$86,475	\$103,770
7	\$39,010	\$48,763	\$50,713	\$58,515	\$72,169	\$78,020	\$97,525	\$117,030
8	\$43,430	\$54,288	\$56,459	\$65,145	\$80,346	\$86,860	\$108,575	\$130,290

\*additional household members, add \$4420

The Federal Poverty Guidelines are issued at the beginning of each calendar year by the US Department of Health and Human Services. The guidelines were created in the mid 1960’s to quantify the number of people in America who were poor. They were originally based on the cost of a minimum food diet multiplied by three to account for other family expenses. Much has changed in the last 50+ years, but these guidelines largely dictate who may receive services and who may not. Governmental and other funding sources require agencies like Blueprints to use household income to determine eligibility for many programs.

Blueprints is a Community Action Agency and supporting low-income individuals and families is at the heart of its mission. Eligibility for Blueprints' services varies based on program enrollment and is dictated by the funding source.

The guidelines do not tell the whole story, however. While many have studied and written about the usefulness and accuracy of these guidelines, two main points are worth detailing here.

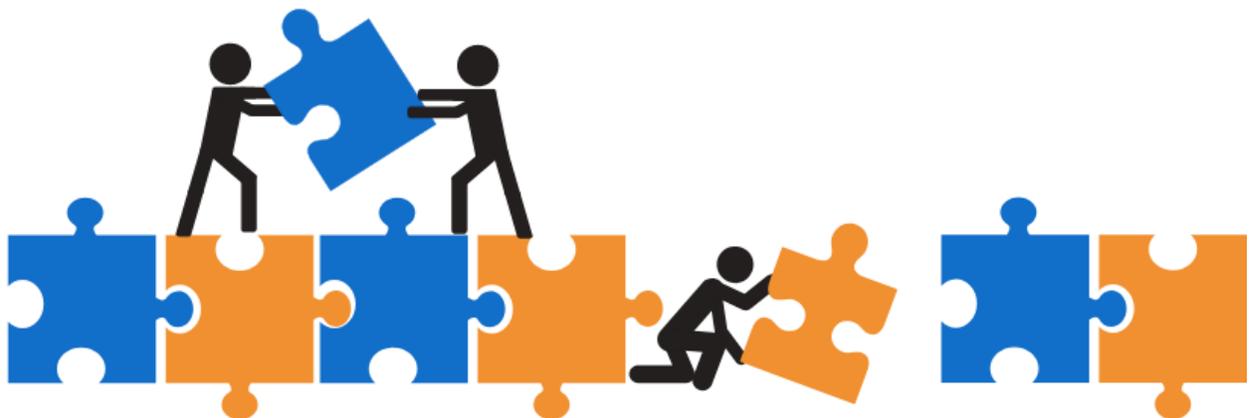
First, the guidelines are an indicator for eligibility, but they do not necessarily identify all who are poor. It would be a mistake to assume that if a family is above the poverty line [+100%], they are not poor. Consider a family whose household income is \$1 above the poverty threshold; they are not considered poor, according to the guidelines. A family whose household income is \$1 below the poverty threshold is considered poor. These two families have the same economic footprint, but one family is eligible for certain benefits and the other is not. People whose household income is 125% or even 150% still struggle to meet even their most basic needs. The Living Wage Calculator, developed by Dr. Amy K. Glasmeier and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is a more accurate measure of what it takes to meet basic needs based on where people live. For example:

<p>4 person household, 2 adults, 2 children, 1 person working full-time:  <b>Minimum wage = \$15,080/year</b></p>	<p>One minimum wage earner [\$7.25/hour], working 40 hours per week is 61% of poverty wage; family cannot live on one person working @ minimum wage.</p>
<p>4 person household, 2 adults, 2 children, 1 person working full-time:  <b>Poverty wage = \$25,750/year</b></p>	<p>One earner at \$12.38 per hour [<i>\$4.88 above minimum wage</i>] would be at 100% of poverty; food and housing for 4 person household would not leave much for transportation, child care, school expenses, etc.</p>
<p>4 person household, 2 adults, 2 children, 1 parent working full-time:  <b>Living Wage = \$46,342/year</b></p>	<p>\$22.28 per hour would meet this family's basic needs. This is 180% of poverty.</p>

The Living Wage for each county in each state can be found at [www.livingwage.mit.edu](http://www.livingwage.mit.edu).

Second, basing the poverty threshold on a 55-year-old formula without taking into account how life in America has changed makes fewer people eligible for benefits to which they would otherwise be entitled. Food, housing and medical costs, among others, have risen to the point to which many families living at the lower end of the income strata must regularly choose to EITHER pay utility bills OR buy food; pay rent OR pay out of pocket medical bills. This cycle keeps people in poverty as these choices create financial hardships. Finding a way out of poverty is nearly impossible.

It is a challenge for people raised in poverty to escape to the middle class. The deck is largely stacked against children who are brought up in poverty. They often lack access to high quality education and instruction; they often do not receive high quality nutrition; they do not have access to future planning [how do you prepare and apply to college if no one in your family has that experience?]; they do not have access to social capital, i.e. family connections for internships, apprenticeships or career centered jobs; and they do not have a safety net that middle and upper class families can provide. While not impossible to break the chains of poverty, it takes opportunity, effort and insight.



# BLUEPRINTS' COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT: QUALITATIVE DATA – COMMUNITY SURVEY



Blueprints distributed a brief online survey to community members, stakeholders, elected officials, partner agencies, school districts, as well as Blueprints' staff, board and recipients of services.

Respondents were asked to:

- ***Self-identify by category***
- ***Identify residency by county***
- ***Identify strengths & assets of their county***
- ***Identify the most significant problems facing their county***
- ***Identify the most important thing Blueprints can do to help low-income people***

Faith based community/churches and cost of living were identified as the top strengths/assets in Washington/Greene Counties. Transportation challenges and lack of employment opportunities were identified as the top areas of concern.

Full report of responses on the next 7 pages.



Blueprints is conducting a comprehensive community needs assessment and your voice matters!

**DATE:**

Wednesday, June 26, 2019

**TIME:**

9:00 AM - 10:00 AM

**LOCATION:**

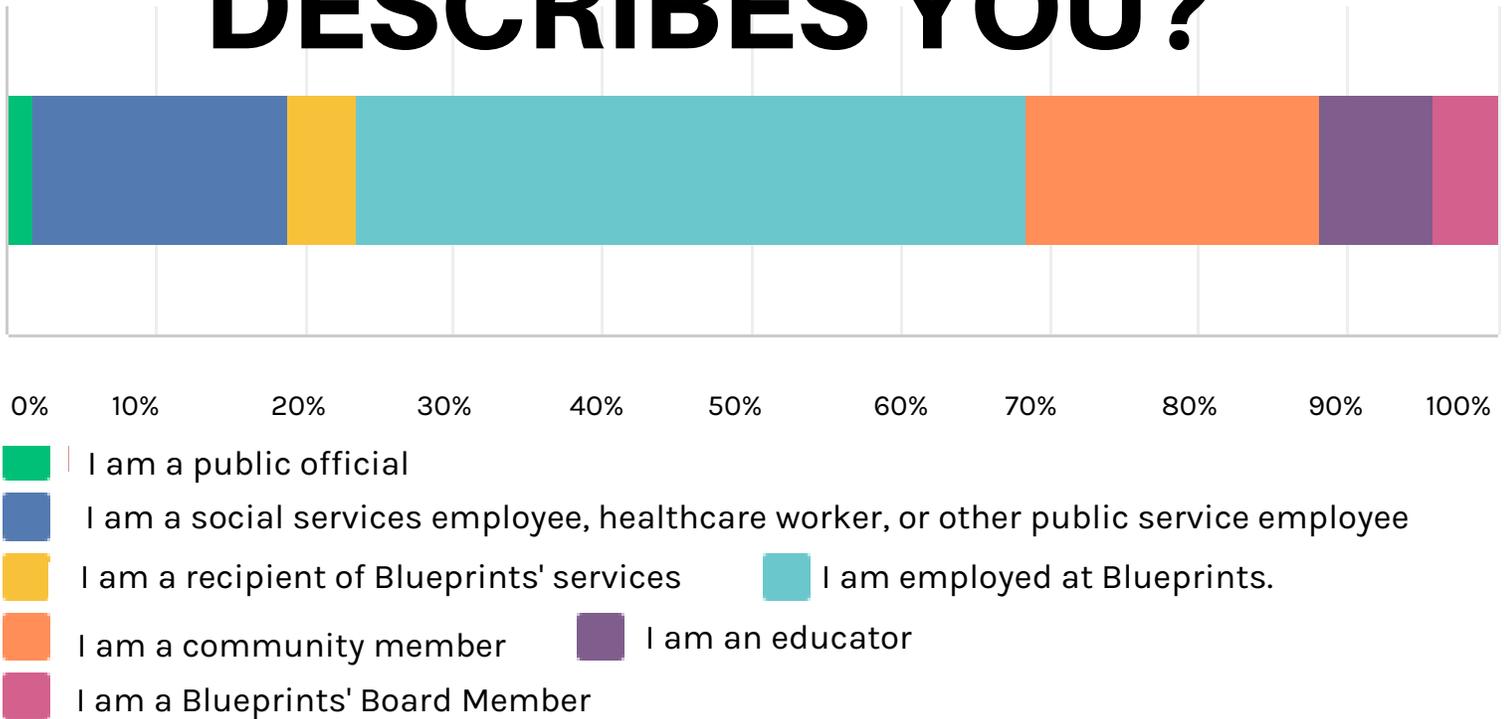
Blueprints  
58 East Greene Street, Waynesburg, PA 15370

**Light refreshments will be served!**

Blueprints structures programs and services to meet the needs of low-income individuals and families in Washington and Greene Counties. Our Comprehensive Needs Assessment process helps us evaluate current programming and consider new programming or service gaps.



# WHICH CATEGORY BEST DESCRIBES YOU?

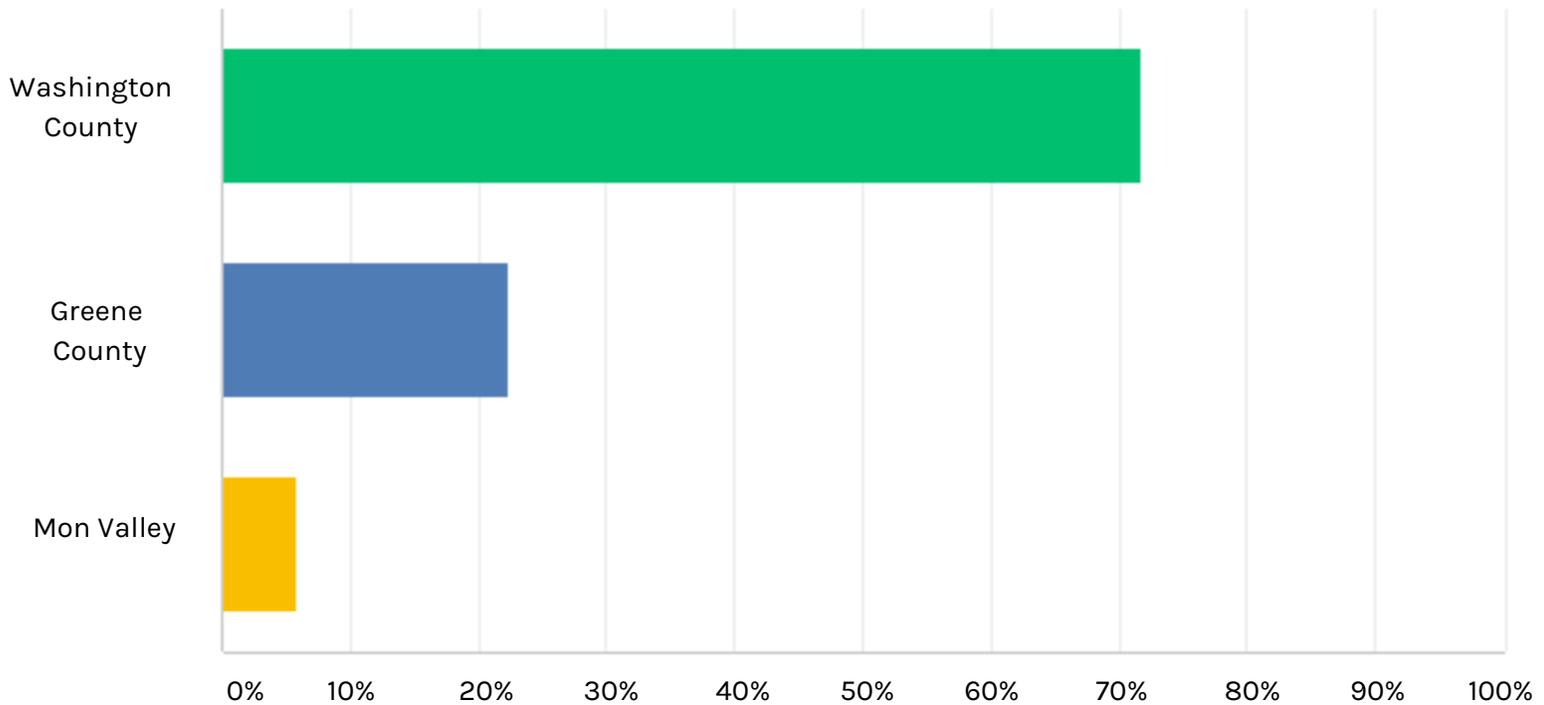


**45%** OF RESPONDENTS WERE BLUEPRINTS' EMPLOYEES.



**20%** OF RESPONDENTS WERE COMMUNITY MEMBERS

# WHERE DO YOU RESIDE?



**72%**

**WASHINGTON COUNTY**

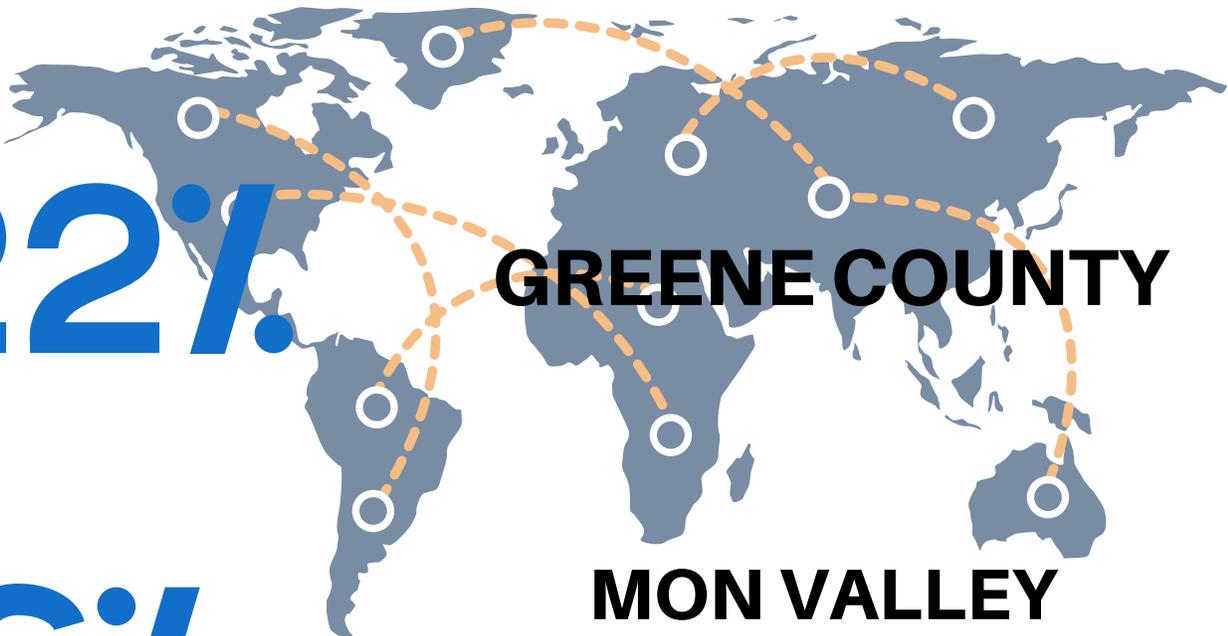
**22%**

**GREENE COUNTY**

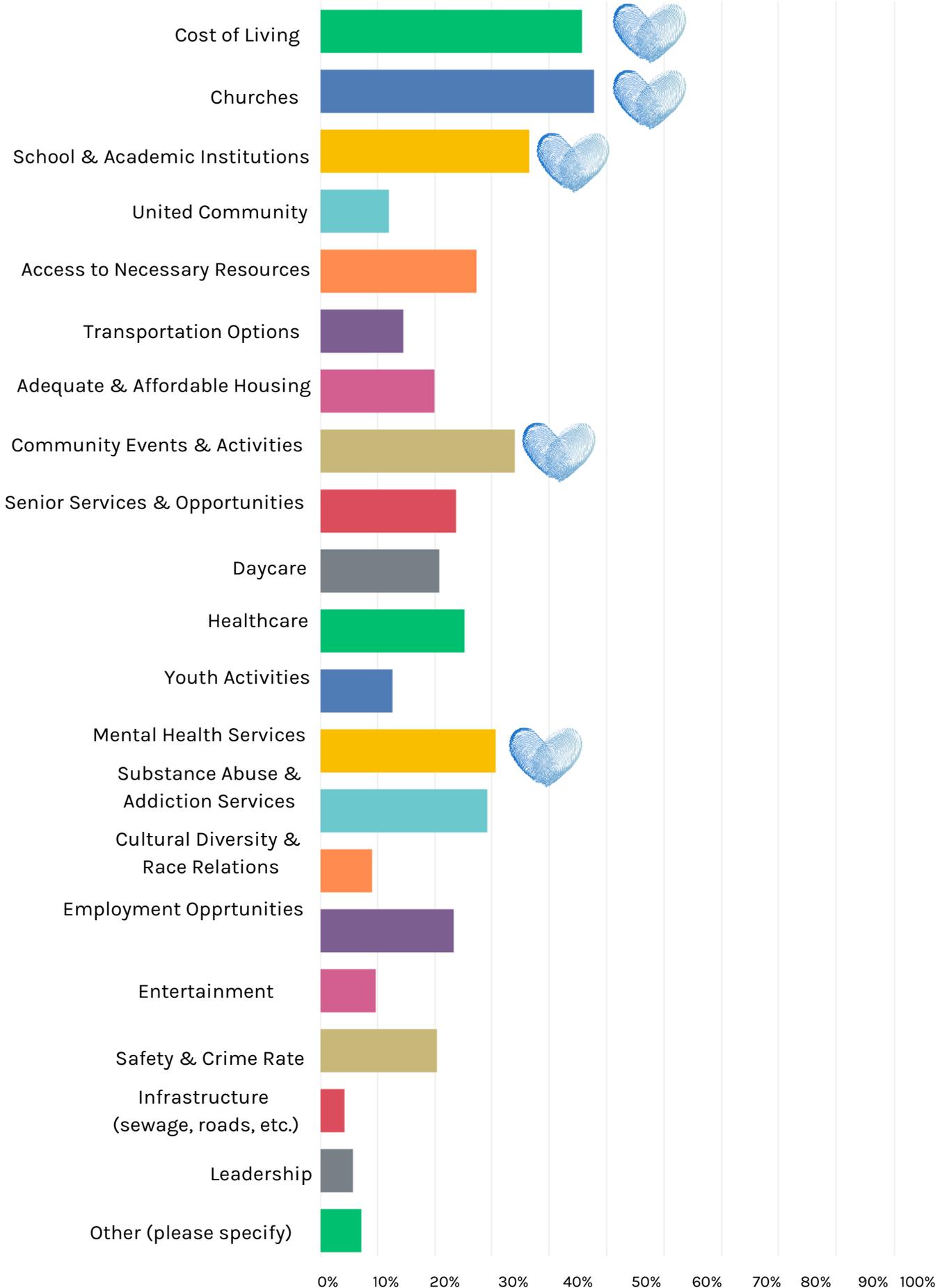
**6%**

**MON VALLEY**

**(A DISTINCT GEOGRAPHIC AREA OF WASHINGTON COUNTY)**



# IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS & ASSETS OF THE COUNTY YOU LIVE IN?



# TOP STRENGTHS OF WASHINGTON/GREENE COUNTIES



1 48% of respondents listed **CHURCHES** as a strength.



2 46% of respondents listed **COST OF LIVING** as a strength.



3 37% of respondents listed **SCHOOL AND ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS** as a strength.

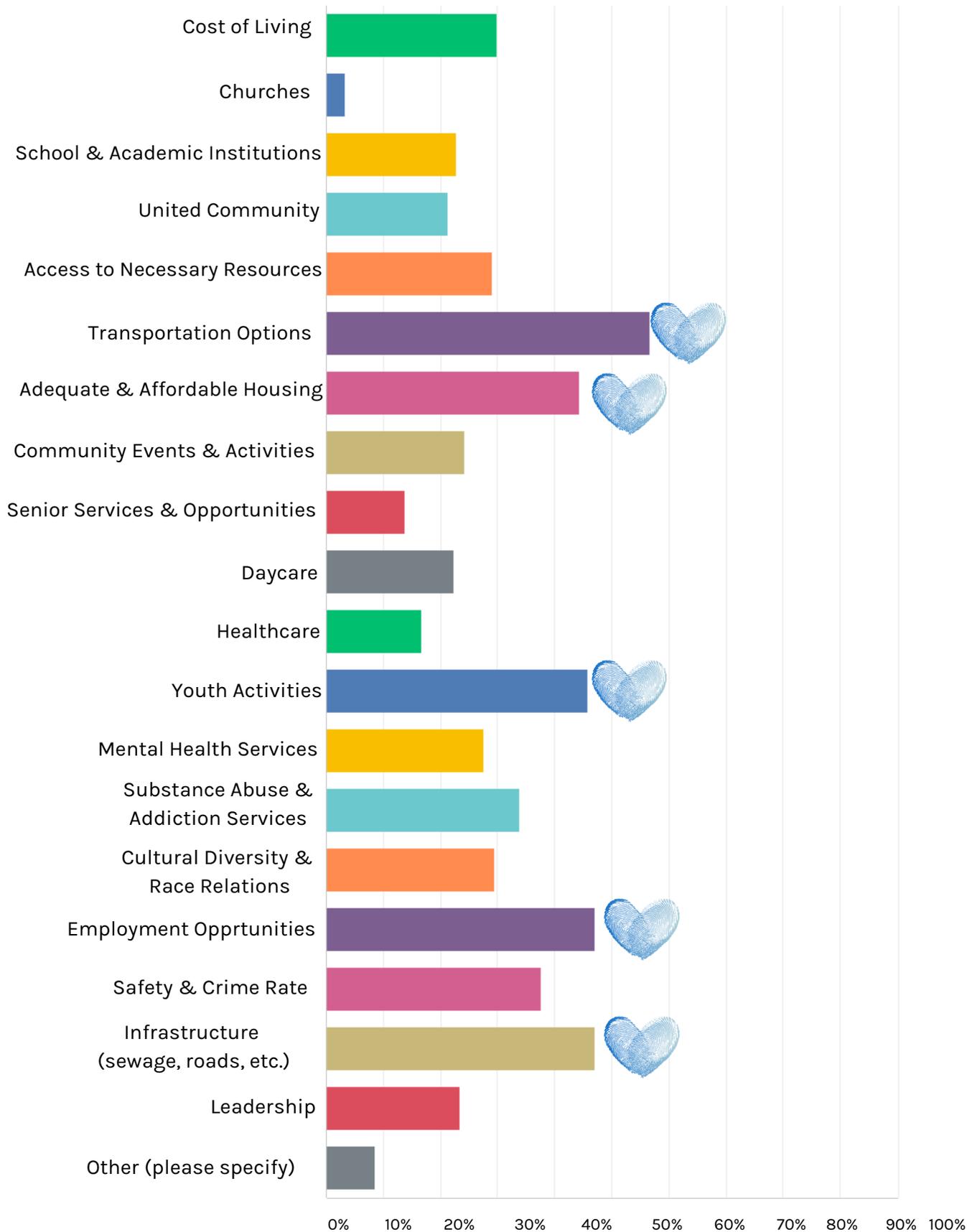


4 34% of respondents listed **COMMUNITY EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES** as a strength.



5 31% of respondents listed **MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES** as a strength.

# IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS AND UNDER SERVED AREAS OF THE COUNTY YOU LIVE IN?



# TOP PROBLEMS & UNDER SERVED AREAS OF WASHINGTON/GREENE COUNTIES

1

**57%** of respondents listed **TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS** as an issue.



2

**47%** of respondents listed **EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES** as an issue.



3

**47%** of respondents listed **INFRASTRUCTURE** as an issue.



4

**46%** of respondents listed **YOUTH ACTIVITIES** as an issue.



5

**44%** of respondents listed **ADEQUATE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING** as an issue.



# WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING BLUEPRINTS CAN DO TO HELP LOW-INCOME PEOPLE?

- **Community outreach for youth.**
- **Help with transportation issues.**
- **Connect them to adequate resources to support attaining self-sufficiency.**
- **There is a lack of temporary housing solutions.**
- **Help with daycare.**
- **Do more to advocate statewide to eliminate the poverty cliff effect and expand services for individuals with substance use disorder and a criminal record.**
- **Expand access to mental health services and addiction treatment.**
- **Educate in the areas of day to day living such as cooking and cleaning.**
- **Free community events for children.**
- **Simplify application processes.**
- **Get the word out more about who you are and what you offer and advertise more.**
- **Provide more resources to individuals who are not low-income and advertise more in Greene County.**
- **Get involved in other organizations to do events and streamline services better.**
- **Teach community leaders how to write grants and add a WIC office to the unemployment office in Donora.**
- **Hold company/community food drives to benefit the individuals we serve.**
- **Move some of Blueprints' services to WV outside of foster care.**
- **Engage middle level youth or young adults. Many clients have kids of varying ages being under served or not served at all.**



**break barriers - build futures**  
powered by community action

# BLUEPRINTS' COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT: QUALITATIVE DATA – FOCUS GROUPS



Focus groups are an integral part of our needs assessment process. We assembled a diverse group of stakeholders at five different locations and engaged them in a spirited sharing of ideas and concerns. All focus groups were unique in the way thoughts and ideas were shared, but all had similarities despite the diversity of each group and within each group.

Focus groups conducted:

1. **4/30/2019** – With 11 participants of Blueprints' Getting Ahead Program in Washington County
2. **5/8/2019** – With 29 participants of the Jefferson Senior Center in Greene County
3. **5/16/2019** – With 16 members of the Head Start/Early Head Start Policy Council
4. **6/13/2019** – With 14 community members and partner agency personnel, including: representatives from Dress For Success, Domestic Violence Services, Cornerstone Care, United Way, Blueprints, Southwest PA Legal Aid Society, Blueprints' staff and Blueprints' clients
5. **6/26/2019** – with 17 community members and partner agency personnel, including: representatives from Red Cross, Domestic Violence Services, United Way, First Presbyterian Church, Community Foundation, Catholic Charities, the Food Bank, SNAP, Chamber of Commerce, a local financial planning company and community volunteers

In order to frame the conversation, each group was given key data points to consider:

- Poverty rates
  - Greene Co. = 14.7%; Washington Co. = 10.2%; PA = 12.5%
- Poverty rates for children 4 and under
  - Greene Co. = 25%; Washington Co. = 14.7%; PA = 21%
- Unemployment
  - Greene Co. = 4.9%; Washington Co. = 4.1%; PA = 4%
- Graduation Rates
  - Greene Co. = 93.4%; Washington Co. = 92.6%; PA = 88.6%
- Adults 25+ with no high school diploma
  - Greene Co. = 13.25%; Washington Co. = 7.74%; PA = 10.12%
- 40.07% of students in Washington & Greene Counties are eligible for free & reduced lunch program
- Cost burdened renters [paying 30% or more household income on housing]
  - Greene Co. = 28.95%; Washington Co. = 37.37%; PA = 44.83%

Once each group had a chance to consider the data points shared, the facilitator posed the following questions to each group:

- What comes to mind when asked to identify the most significant problems facing our community?
- Why do you say that?
- What can be done?
- What should be done?

***Summary and highpoints of each group dialogue:***

April 2019 Focus Group – Getting Ahead Class; 11 participants - most participants have previously or are currently accessing multiple services from Blueprints.

**Significant problems/Community needs identified:**

1. Addiction
2. Mental health stigma
3. Transportation
  - a. Current public transportation system not reliable for employment needs
4. Low-wage jobs/poverty
5. Lack of education
6. Community activities for youth
7. Halfway houses, ¾ houses spread throughout Washington County – the Mon Valley in particular
  - a. Most of these resources are in Pittsburgh or Washington [city], but not in outlying areas

**Further clarification on problems/needs:**

- These hinder quality of life; prevent individual success
- Without reliable transportation [vehicle or public transport that works], you're stuck

**Group Dialogue**

- If the community helped one another, more ideas would be generated for more programs to help those in need;
- Addiction
  - More outreach and better education; knowing signs of addiction; can't help if you don't know
  - More programs/events for people to get together and do "normal" stuff – support groups; new friendships
  - Drug counseling at home on a more personal level – jumping right into rehab is scary
- Mental Health Stigma
  - Dual diagnosis treatment – someone who can treat mental health issues along with substance abuse issues

- Resources for people who are just “down” – not necessarily depressed or diagnosed with a mental illness, but those who could possibly be heading down that road
- Transportation
  - Only one individual in the group currently uses public transportation
  - All agreed that public transportation in Washington County does not have enough bus lines
  - All agreed that public transportation is not very reliable
  - Using public transportation for getting kids where they need to be and getting to and from work is confusing, falls short of ideal
  - Bus schedules are hard to figure out
- Low-wage jobs/poverty
  - Need opportunities for individuals with shaky backgrounds – most jobs available to people with troubled pasts are low-paying, escaping poverty is unlikely
  - Blueprints can facilitate Job/Resource fairs with employers willing to give our clients opportunities
  - More resources for people who are just over eligibility thresholds for benefits
  - Past due bills, significant amounts in some cases, put people in an inescapable hole. Whether through addiction related issues or other financial hardships, even decent paying jobs do not allay the weight of insurmountable debt. Perhaps debt forgiveness or deferment after a positive trend-setting period of on-time payments for utilities or other bills.
- Youth activities
  - [Blueprints] partner with community centers to offer sports/recreation to clients and their children
  - STEM classes – robotics, engineering
  - If kids are busy, may help the drug epidemic, build positive social relationships

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May 2019 Focus Group – Jefferson Senior Center [Greene County] – 29 participants
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**Significant problems/Community needs identified:**

1. Addiction
2. Not enough income – low-wage jobs
3. Graduation rates
  - a. Nobody going into the trades
4. Youth Activities
  - a. Leadership - Vision

**Further clarification on problems/needs:**

- Churches and other community entities should offer more resources to those in need
- New leadership necessary – Greene County has had different leadership, but the same vision and no progress has been made
  - Everyone needs to be a “leader;” get involved in the issues – If you don’t like what’s going, on then step up and do something about it
- Communicate needs to the community – speak at churches and local businesses about the issues and how they can be a part of fixing our problems
- The state needs to raise the minimum wage to better sustain quality of life
- Second chances to people with [criminal] backgrounds
- Vocational schools need to encourage students to go into the trades
- We need manufacturing back in the area
- Task force that could work on future growth for the area.
- Crime & Safety – form a neighborhood watch
- Mental Illness – more institutions and resources to help those facing mental illness get help

**Group Dialogue**

- Blueprints can inform the public of needs and resources – go to senior centers, churches and other community gatherings to raise awareness and identify how they can help
- Blueprints can speak at schools – connect at the middle and high school levels
- Create a task force that could raise awareness and identify how to address community needs

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May 2019 Focus Group – Head Start/Early Head Start Policy Council – 16 participants; parents and community representatives in attendance

**Significant problems/Community needs identified:**

1. Addiction
2. Transportation
3. Low-wage jobs/Poverty
4. Activities for youth
5. Disconnect between resources and people who need them
6. Childcare options during the summer

**Further clarification on problems/needs:**

- Addiction
  - Underlying issue is the economic ability for families to have an adequate income, so they turn to drugs for consumption or income
  - Take time to focus on the root issues; economics and the ability to train individuals for higher paying jobs so drugs are not a viable option

- Transportation
  - Buses are on a specific schedule; if a person's needs do not align with the schedule, he/she is stuck
  - Greene County does not have public transportation and no taxi services available
  - Address transportation issues through A Little LIFT [Blueprints' crowdfunding initiative], to assure client vehicles are legal and save; establish an on-demand taxi service
  - Provide bus passes for clients based on need
  - Secure different location for Early Learning classrooms in Donora/Monongahela/New Eagle
- Low-wage jobs/Poverty
  - More opportunities for individuals with criminal backgrounds – jobs available to these people are low-paying and will not raise them out of poverty
  - Take time for training
  - One person acknowledged a report that stated the minimum income for a household of four to meet basic needs is \$25/hour
  - People without skills or training cannot take advantage of available opportunities
- Activities for youth
  - Activities for kids should be educational or technology based instead of sports
  - The cost for youth activities [sports], registration fees/equipment is prohibitive

### **Group Dialogue**

- Disconnect between resources and people who need them
  - Word of mouth is the biggest asset for the agency
  - Put a publication in the mail to all Washington and Greene County residents about Blueprints' programs and events. Monthly non-profit publication – include other non-profits such as Community Foundation of Greene County
  - Provide daily information to Head Start parents
    - Focus on one program per month so parents are not overloaded with information on programs
  - Ask Valley View Terrace [and other housing units] Leasing managers to send Blueprints' information to residents about available services
  - Celebrate and share the successes of your clients. People are attracted to those successes
    - Success stories on Facebook can attract new clients as well as donors
    - Have an updated section of success stories on your website/Facebook
    - On A Little LIFT website, there are the updates on the families – send those out to the people who donated to that LIFT with a link of new LIFTS.
    - More Blueprints' presence at community events.
    - Use many different modes of communication – some in our target audience cannot read
    - Text messaging system alerts
      - Not everyone pays for a texting plan

- Numbers change frequently with our clientele
- Share video of success at the first parenting meeting each year
  - Have someone come speak on your list of programs at the first parent meeting

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June 2019 Focus Group – Washington – 14 participants; representation from Dress for Success, Domestic Violence Services, Cornerstone Care, United Way, Blueprints, Consumer/Family Satisfaction Team, 3 clients, Southwestern PA Legal Aid Society

**Significant problems/Community needs identified:**

1. Awareness of resources
  - a. Lack of caseworker awareness about other agencies and available resources
2. Transportation
3. Employment for people with criminal backgrounds
4. Low-wage jobs/poverty
5. Drug epidemic
6. Childcare options
7. Services for older adults
8. Youth activities

**Further clarification on problems/needs; Group Dialogue:**

- Awareness of resources
  - Educating people on Blueprints’ services and expressing value in the resources offered
  - Helping organizations should come together more often for shared events – agency partners to raise awareness of available resources
  - One-stop-shop for clients to meet all their needs at once
  - Event/Venue to bring service organizations together with consumers to share success stories to spread awareness and show the impact of services
  - Health & Welfare Council for service organizations to get together and relay events and missions to one another to keep agencies informed
  - Non-Profit Newsletter collaboration
  - Quarterly staff meetings to inform internally between departments about programs
- Transportation
  - Mobile Units to reach people where they are
  - Allegheny County is piloting a program through which people can receive one free Uber/Lyft ride to and from the hospital
- Employment for people with criminal backgrounds
  - More opportunities for individuals with backgrounds
  - Reduce stigma through education

- When people cannot find a job, they steal for their families; retail theft on their record and then nobody will hire them
- PA Clean Slate Law – misdemeanors and minor violations can be wiped clean; then individuals can legally answer “no” to the “do you have a record” question on job applications – to be fully implemented by the end of 2021
- Legal Aid offers help to clients with criminal backgrounds
- Low-wage jobs/poverty
  - The more you make, the more you spend; it is a matter of educating individuals on financial literacy
  - Teach children and teens financial literacy to educate them at an early age; create healthy financial habits for later in life
  - Give children piggy banks and have them save until the end of the school year to teach them about saving money
  - Second Chance banking opportunities – make monitored accounts available; budgeting class completion requirement
- Drug Epidemic
  - As soon as they are able, get them working.
  - More support systems and groups to provide mentoring
  - Sober housing. When they leave ¾ houses they have nowhere to go
  - More halfway houses and ¾ houses in the Mon Valley
- Childcare
  - More evening and weekend childcare options are necessary
- Services for older adults
  - Blueprints’ Aging Well department in Washington County
- Youth activities
  - More free activities
  - More promotion of activities throughout each county

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June 2019 Focus Group – Waynesburg – 17 participants; representation from Red Cross, Domestic Violence Services, United Way, Volunteer, First Presbyterian Church, Community Foundation of Greene County, 2 Blueprints’ clients, Catholic Charities, a local financial planning company, Food Bank, SNAP & the Greene County Chamber of Commerce

**Significant problems/Community needs identified:**

1. Transportation
2. Financial resources for service agencies
3. Accountability of people in need
4. Lack of community
5. Affordable housing
6. Lack of basic skills of the younger generation
7. Lack of insurance

### **Further clarification on problems/needs;**

- Transportation
  - Transportation system is too limited for people who are not disabled or a senior. People without a vehicle of their own have limited mobility for emergency or even routine transportation needs
  - Lyft and Uber are non-existent in Washington/Greene County
  - Many people have older cars; cannot afford to buy new one and cannot afford to maintain them
  - No show rates for programs across the county are high due to lack of transportation
- Financial resources for service agencies
  - No funding available to achieve large scale improvements, such as vehicle repair
  - All funding comes with strings attached; not good or bad, just reality. Mitigates effectiveness as funders are buying outcomes, not necessarily significant and comprehensive community improvements
- Accountability of people in need
  - Service agencies have high no-show rates; clients are not held accountable for missing appointments; for example, some families chronically miss picking up food boxes; when they come in unscheduled, they are given food; some in the groups advocate for not providing the food, “that will teach them.”
  - People are conditioned to behave a certain way because that’s how they were raised
- Lack of community
  - Finding people in the community who want to make a difference is a barrier
- Affordable housing
  - Very limited funds to help with people in need of housing/security deposit/rent
  - Incomes are so limited for people drawing Social Security; cost burdened
  - No transient housing in Greene County– people have need of short-term lodging
    - Mission House in Greene County is a short-term facility; is minimally used as a result of drug screen requirement
    - People transitioning back into the community from incarceration struggle to find housing
- Lack of basic skills of the younger generation
  - Kids coming out of high school lack the necessary [financial] skills and resources to survive and succeed
  - There is a lack of parenting skills and lack of basic living skills
  - Parenting programs available tend to focus solely on younger children, not middle and high school aged children
- Lack of insurance
  - People experiencing a disaster are usually people that are already economically distressed – bad wiring, old houses, lack of insurance [renter’s insurance]

### Group Dialogue:

- Network and communication to find those people in the private sector willing to donate to see changes for community improvement
- With regard to client accountability;
  - Create a program that follows consumers of services over time to see how they fulfill their obligations and track dependency
  - Create a program that provides mentors for clientele to become accountable for their actions
  - Hold clients accountable; if you want <the service> you need to do <this>
    - This perspective was not held by all in attendance
- With regard to a lack of community;
  - Build a community connection
  - Need to remove the bias/stigma about consumers of public benefits
    - Encourage clients to pursue a more independent future
    - Engage more volunteers to help mentor consumers of services
  - There needs to be a systems change; build a model that could spark inspiration
- With regard to housing;
  - More transient [temporary] housing in Greene County
  - More subsidized housing in Greene County
- With regard to basic skills for younger generation
  - Parenting programs that are specific to ages of children [elementary, middle and high school aged kids]
  - Whole family approaches to service delivery
- With regard to lack of [renter's] insurance
  - Landlords charge higher rent if tenant does not get insurance
    - Use public service ads to convey the benefits of renter's insurance

While each focus group's composition was diverse, several common themes surfaced at each. Addiction/drug use was a hot topic of conversation in all of the focus groups. Washington and Greene Counties are no different from many communities across the country, drug use affects the community in many ways; crime, public safety, parenting, property values, etc. In three of the focus groups, the conversation progressed to the impact drug use has on one's ability to find employment and housing after incarceration; the effect on children who are thrown into the foster care system as a result. It disrupts lives and impacts communities.

Transportation is always near the top of the list when community needs are discussed. Our focus groups all addressed transportation, labeling it a chronic issue. Community mobility is important, as how mobile a person is dictates where they can look for work, how long they can reasonably work and how reliable they can be to their employer. It impacts where they can do their grocery shopping and where they can seek medical treatment. For those without a vehicle and for those which public transportation is not an option, they are stuck in place. One of the focus groups suggested a ride share/on demand transportation service, which Blueprints is currently researching.

Low-wage jobs and poverty were a common theme in all focus groups as well. The groups pointed out that low-wage jobs do not represent a pathway out of poverty, and that organizations, like Blueprints, are essential to creating those pathways. In two of the groups, dialogue focused on employment opportunities, or lack of opportunity, for people transitioning back into the community after incarceration. A criminal record is a tremendous obstacle to employment for these people as they attempt to sustain themselves in the community. There are opportunities for expungement through the legal process, which will help many people in that situation.

Appropriate activities for the youth in Washington and Greene Counties was also a central theme in four of the five focus groups. One aligned the dearth of positive youth activities with the drug problem; positive activities will fill the void that drugs apparently are filling for many kids in our communities. Sports and other school related activities represent a financial burden for many families, unfortunately. While many pointed out that there are positive activities in both counties for young people, many are free of charge, organizations can do a more persistent and universal job at promoting them.



# BLUEPRINTS' COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT: ANALYSIS & KEY DATA POINTS



According to the 2017 American Community Survey, the service area has a total population of 244,999 persons, with Greene County at 37,388 persons and Washington County at 207,661. Greene County has declined in population over the last ten years, while Washington County continues to experience slow growth; the two-county area, as a whole, is up .59% in the last five years.

Located in the southwest corner of the state, the two contiguous counties are bounded by West Virginia on the west and south (of Greene County); by the Monongahela River on the east; and Allegheny & Beaver Counties to the north of Washington County. The area covers 576 square miles in Greene County and 857 square miles in Washington County. Greene County is primarily rural (69%) with a population of 71 persons per square mile, and is the most rural area in southwestern Pennsylvania. Washington County is primarily urban/suburban with an area of 857 square miles and 237 persons per square mile. Blueprints has a presence throughout each county, and services reach those in need regardless of where in the county they reside.

Transportation remains a persistent challenge in both counties, with Greene County's Public Transit service limited to seniors and those with disabilities. Washington County's Freedom Transit, though often criticized for not serving to the more rural parts of the county, is in fact more robust than many give it credit for being. In recent years, it has expanded its service delivery to include connections to the Mon Valley, the City of Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh International Airport. According to the 2018 Washington County Transportation Authority's Transit Development Plan, more than 7.5% of Washington County residents do not have access to a personal vehicle. We know, anecdotally, that a large contingent of Blueprints' clientele do own a personal vehicle, but many of those vehicles are 10+ years old, and it is a struggle to maintain them safely and affordably. This means Freedom Transit's fixed route service, shared ride and on demand services can be a viable option for many in the county. Blueprints is currently promoting the use of public transportation to our constituency. Staff have been educated on routes, schedules and costs and are in the process of de-mystifying the system for our clients. On August 19, 2019, Freedom Transit provided a free-ride day for all of Washington County to engage more riders. That day resulted in a 9%-16% increase in ridership for two of the most popular routes. For many, public transportation can get them to work, to appointments, to school and back home again.

Blueprints' largest program, Head Start, does not provide transportation to children; however, centers are located within the neediest communities and case management and home based services reach those families who require assistance regardless of proximity to the office and classroom locations. The distribution of population has long been a defining issue in the selection and delivery of human service programs to residents. Frequently, the cost of service

delivery increases in proportion to decreasing population density. The need for those services, however, does not decrease and in some low-density areas, the need for assistance is even greater.

Drug use is an unfortunate, yet defining issue throughout the country and has acutely manifested itself in our service area. The heroin epidemic dominates the news in both counties; task forces and community forums have been mobilized to address the issue. Drug arrests and overdose deaths are routinely reported in the newspapers. In 2017, there were 97 deaths attributed to drugs in Washington County (Washington County Coroner, S. Timothy Warco). Greene County is 10<sup>th</sup> in the state in per capita drug deaths (Greene County Messenger, June 2016). While less newsworthy, alcohol abuse is prevalent, contributing to family dysfunction. According to the 2019 Head Start Community Assessment, nearly 21% of those surveyed indicated that drug/alcohol use has impacted their family unit and 54% say it's affecting their community.

Based on the US Census Bureau, 2017 Small Area Income & Poverty Estimates, poverty remains a key indicator of continued need for Blueprints' programming in our service area. Persons below poverty represent 14.7% of the Greene County population; higher than the PA rate of 12.5%, and slightly higher than Greene County's 2015 rate of 14.54%. In Washington County, 9.4% of the population is below poverty, down from 10.52% in 2015.

A disturbing statistic is the child poverty rate (0-17), which has increased since 2015. The child poverty rate in Greene County is 21.7% and in Washington it is 13.81%. Child poverty in the Commonwealth is 16.9%. Despite the high percentages of poverty and child poverty, fewer households are now eligible for TANF benefits – less than 1% (.0063%) of households in Greene and less than 1% (.0019%) of households in Washington [.0086% in PA]. These percentages are disproportionately low considering the numbers of persons in poverty. In one year's time, 300 households in Washington and 100 households in Greene have been removed from the TANF roles. Although, ongoing public opinion holds that people in poverty receive large amounts of cash in general assistance or "welfare" benefits, only 40 households in Greene and 140 households in Washington receive actual cash assistance. These amounts are capped at \$216 per month (PA Dept. of Human Services).

Unemployment in Washington and Greene Counties is only slightly higher than state and national averages as of June 2019. The job market is good for those seeking employment. Blueprints has a very active career development services and focuses on clients securing employment, advancing to postsecondary education programs and career selection.

Washington and Greene County school districts graduate approximately 2700 students each year. The graduation rates in Washington County is 92.6%; in Greene County, it is 93.4%. About 70% of graduates plan to attend a trade school or college (PA Dept. of Education); which is higher than the state average of 66.15%.

Educational achievement of those individuals over the age of 25:

Area	No HS Diploma	High School Only	Some College	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate or Professional
Greene	13.25%	45.99%	15.39%	7.37%	11.5%	6.49%
Washington	7.74%	38.51%	15.06%	9.67%	19.16%	9.87%
Pennsylvania	10.12%	35.58%	16.06%	8.15%	18.25%	11.83%
National	12.69%	27.32%	20.78%	8.28%	19.13%	11.8%

*[American Community Survey, December 2013-2017]*

Housing is identified as an area of need. Housing-cost burden on renters is of significant concern. In Washington and Greene Counties combined, 36.05% of renters are considered to be cost burdened, meaning more than a third of renters are paying more than 30% of their household income in rent (utilities not included). This dynamic is a significant barrier to escaping poverty.

Washington County's 2019 Annual Draft Action Plan, prepared by the Redevelopment Authority of the County of Washington (RACW), is intended to identify and address the County's housing, community development and economic development needs over the next 5 years. The objectives in the plan include:

- Providing decent affordable housing
- Creating suitable living environments
- Creating economic opportunities
- Improving availability/accessibility
- Improve affordability
- Improve sustainability

The goals are consistent with Blueprints' strategic planning and programmatic initiatives. Blueprints works directly with the RACW for our Home Ownership Center, through which we provide rapid-rehousing, rent & utility assistance, pre and post purchase counseling, and foreclosure mitigation.

With regard to Health Care, Washington Health System completed a Community Health Needs Assessment in 2018, and presented the results in April of 2019. Community health scores were calculated in five domains, mortality, behavior, clinical, social/economic and physical environment. Thirty-four aspects of a healthy community showed improvement on the community health needs assessment from 2015 to 2018. Twenty-two aspects of a healthy community showed worsening scores.



Summary health measures:

<p><b>Improving Health Trends:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fewer deaths attributed to coronary heart disease</li><li>• Fewer deaths attributed to breast cancer</li><li>• More adults at a healthy weight</li><li>• Lower rate of youth smoking</li><li>• Lower unemployment rate</li><li>• More people getting influenza and pneumonia vaccines</li></ul>	<p><b>Worsening Health Trends:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Higher rate of accidental drug overdoses</li><li>• Higher rate of suicide</li><li>• Higher rate of youth obesity</li><li>• Fewer dental visits</li><li>• More single parent households</li><li>• More violent crime</li><li>• More fast food intake</li></ul>
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Significant to Blueprints' scope of interest, the community health needs assessment includes the positive correlation between significant health concerns/premature death/chronic illnesses with social problems like poverty, smoking, mental illness, drug use, unemployment, inactivity, drop-out rates and under-education. Behavior, social and economic factors play a role in overall community health.



**Referenced Document List:**

- 2018 Transit Development Plan; Washington County Transportation Authority*
- 2018 Community Health Needs Assessment; Washington Health System*
- 2019 Head Start/Early Head Start Community Assessment*
- 2019 Washington County Annual DRAFT Action Plan; Redevelopment Authority of the County of Washington*