



blueprints

break barriers - build futures
powered by community action

Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment 2021

ABRIDGED VERSION



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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*. Our 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 56 year legacy as a community action agency, serving the communities of Washington and Greene Counties, Allegheny County and the state of West Virginia, with dedication and distinction.

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



- Programs in our **MIND** Pillar strengthen and sharpen the mind and include our Whole Family [2GEN] Approach, 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, MicroLoan 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 organizations 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.

Blueprints' Needs Assessment was last completed in 2019, and we opted to complete a full assessment a year early in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic that ravaged, and continues to ravage, communities across the nation.

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The assessment began in April of 2021, and the methodology adopted included both quantitative and qualitative data gathering. Sources of data collection include:

- 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;
- Waynesburg University's COVID-19 Impact Assessment;
- The 2019 Washington County Annual Action Plan; Redevelopment Authority of the County of Washington;
- The June 2021 Coalition on Human Needs Report;
- The 2021 State of Child Welfare; PA Partnerships for Children-Greene/Washington/PA;
- The 2020 Head Start/Early Head Start Community Assessment;
- The 2020 Greene County Comprehensive Plan

In addition to the quantitative data collection from the listed sources, we engaged our constituency, our staff and community members in five 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 2021 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



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2021 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 confirms the 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 comprehensive data report can be found in the unabridged version of this report.

The five most identified community strengths/assets include:

- **Cost of Living**
- **School and academic institutions**
- **Churches**
- **Access to necessary services**
- **Healthcare**

The five most critical community challenges include:

- **Poverty**
- **Transportation Options**
- **Adequate & Affordable Housing**
- **Substance Abuse and Addiction**
- **Employment Opportunities**

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 2GEN, or Whole Family Approach to our work in addition to Family Centered Coaching, a case management model that places our participants in the driver's seat of service delivery. Families are served in a holistic manner, rather than one-off programming. Our service pillars, **Mind**, **Home**, **Health**, **Wallet**, provide a network of support to help participants set and achieve life goals.

Dedicated to addressing the causes and effects of **poverty** since 1965, Blueprints remains steadfast, striving to inspire individuals and families to alter the trajectory of their lives. The 2GEN, or Whole Family Approach, is our organizational approach to service delivery. We implement our programs, many of which have a singular outcome focus, within the frame of ensuring the entire family's needs are addressed simultaneously. We employ a "warm handoff" style that assures families are connected to all the services that may help them achieve self-reliance.

Since our last assessment report in 2019, the poverty rate in Greene County decreased, while Washington County's rate increased. The child poverty rate decreased in both counties.

Poverty Rate – All Persons	2019	2021	Variance
Greene County	14.7%	14.2%	-0.5%
Washington County	9.4%	9.9%	+0.5%
Pennsylvania	12.5%	12%	-0.5%
United States	13.4%	12.16%	-1.24%

Poverty Rate – Children	2019	2021	Variance
Greene County	21.7%	18.8%	-2.9%
Washington County	12.2%	11.8%	-0.4%
Pennsylvania	16.9%	16.5%	-0.4%
United States	18.4%	16.34%	-2.06%

The downward trend of the poverty rate in PA, Greene County, and the US is encouraging, though there is a concerning uptick in the rate in Washington County.

2021 FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES



FAMILY SIZE	100%	125%	130%	150%	185%	200%	250%	300%
1	\$12,880	\$16,100	\$16,744	\$19,320	\$23,828	\$25,760	\$32,200	\$38,640
2	\$17,420	\$21,775	\$22,646	\$26,130	\$32,227	\$34,840	\$43,550	\$52,260
3	\$21,960	\$27,450	\$28,548	\$32,940	\$40,626	\$43,920	\$54,900	\$65,880
4	\$26,500	\$33,125	\$34,450	\$39,750	\$49,025	\$53,000	\$66,250	\$79,500
5	\$31,040	\$38,800	\$40,352	\$46,560	\$57,424	\$62,080	\$77,600	\$93,120
6	\$35,580	\$44,475	\$46,254	\$53,370	\$65,823	\$71,160	\$88,950	\$106,740
7	\$40,120	\$50,150	\$52,156	\$60,180	\$74,222	\$80,240	\$100,300	\$120,360
8	\$44,660	\$55,825	\$58,058	\$66,990	\$82,621	\$89,320	\$111,650	\$133,980

*additional household members, add \$4540

The Federal Poverty Guidelines are issued at the beginning of each calendar year by the US Department of Health and Human Services. These 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 expense. Much has changed in the last 50+ years, yet these guidelines largely dictate who may receive certain 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 by program, and is dictated by individual funding sources.

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 eligibility indicator for many programs, but they do not necessarily include all who are poor, and those who could benefit from them are routinely considered ineligible. It would be a mistake to assume that, if a family's household income is above the poverty line [+100%] they are not poor. Consider a family whose household income is \$1 or \$100 above the poverty threshold; they are *not* considered poor by the FPGL, and the assumption is they are not in need of assistance or subsidy. A family whose household income is at or below the poverty threshold, conversely, *is* considered poor. These two families have virtually the same economic footprint, yet one family is eligible for certain benefits/subsidies and the other is not. People whose household income is 125% or even 150% still struggle to meet even their most basic needs, made even more critical without benefits or subsidies. 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, in Washington County:

4 person household, 2 adults, 2 children, 1 person working full-time at minimum wage: Minimum wage = \$15,080/year	One minimum wage earner [\$7.25/hour], working 40 hours per week is 57% of poverty wage; families cannot live on one person working @ minimum wage. Two people working at minimum wage is 114% of poverty. Still poor, yet ineligible for some benefits & subsidies.
4 person household, 2 adults, 2 children, 1 person working full-time at a poverty wage: Poverty wage = \$26,500/year	One earner at \$12.74 per hour [<i>\$5.49 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.
4 person household, 2 adults, 2 children, 1 parent working full-time at a living wage: Living Wage = \$59,051/year	\$28.39 per hour would meet this family's basic needs. This is 223% of poverty.

The Living Wage for each county in each state can be found at www.livingwage.mit.edu.

Second, basing the poverty threshold on a near 60-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 on a daily basis for so many. 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 does one responsibly prepare for, apply to, and pay for college if no one in your family has had 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 when difficulties or misjudgments arise. While not impossible to break the chains of poverty, it takes inspiration, opportunity, effort and insight.

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. Through a partnership with Freedom Transit, the county's public transportation authority, we have found that routes and options are far more robust than most people think, and costs are very reasonable, even for those living on low wages.

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. That, in addition to the presence of small "buy here/pay here" used car lots that sell cars for far more than they are worth and charge outrageous interest rates based on low credit scores, compounds the financial problems people experience. Vehicle trouble frequently triggers immediate and critical financial hardship, and can also put employment and housing at risk as well. Blueprints is addressing this need in several 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.

Blueprints' A Little LIFT project is a web-based, community lead barrier elimination initiative that raises funds for participants when they are confronted with financial hardships. For those who find themselves in the difficult position of considering paying for a car repair or rent, utilities, etc., we can raise the funding necessary for vehicle repair, and the family can continue on their journey to self-reliance.

In the last year, we have partnered with Chrome Federal Credit Union and now offer a Micro-Loan program for Blueprints' participants. The max \$1500 loan can be used for car repair or car purchase.

Adequate and Affordable **housing** has been identified as an acute community challenge, made even more so by the COVID-19 pandemic. Housing cost burden, identified as paying 30% or more of household income on housing costs (monthly), crystalizes the challenge to residents of Washington and Greene Counties.

Renters paying more than 30% of income on housing

Greene County	29.05%
Washington County	37.06%
Pennsylvania	44.05%
United States	46%

Homeowners in both counties who are cost burdened is between 11.1%-11.6%, below the state average of 14.7%. Blueprints works with both renters and homeowners to both educate and support those who find themselves in a housing cost burdened situation.

A new and unique housing dynamic across the country, and no different in the southwestern corner of PA, is the eviction moratorium that has been in place since early in the pandemic. The shutdown that disconnected people from their employment directly resulted in people being unable to pay rent and mortgages. Federal and state funding has been put in place to keep people in their homes. Blueprints has been administering those assistance programs in Washington County. Tenant/landlord relations, in some cases, are tense. Blueprints' staff are mediating those relationships in an effort to keep people housed.

As of this writing, the moratorium was extended to October 3, 2021, but the Supreme Court ruled on August 26, 2021 that the CDC did not have the legal authority to extend past July 31, 2021 without congressional action. Blueprints is positioning itself to mitigate the outcome of the potential deluge of evictions that may result.

The **substance abuse** 'epidemic' in recent years affects our community in a myriad of ways – crime - domestic unrest – homelessness - treatment services and availability/access – parenting

& child welfare – housing stability – employability. While Blueprints is not a drug and alcohol or mental health provider, we strive to be responsive to the needs of our community. Blueprints' response to the drug problem includes addressing the associated ramifications of drug use, re-entry after incarceration, foster care, housing and career development.

Blueprints has secured funding to expand 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 Southwestern PA Legal Aid).

Blueprints has also secured funding to implement a career development program specifically for those in opioid recovery. Working closely with the Washington Drug & Alcohol Commission, participants in recovery are connected to jobs and educational opportunities as they work towards stability.

The data shows that unemployment rates have risen since our last report in 2019. The rate for Washington and Greene Counties in 2019 was 4.2%; it is at 6.2% now. Unemployment spiked in May of 2020 to 14.2% due to the pandemic. The employment dynamic at the time of this report (fall 2021), anecdotally, is that employers are having significant difficulty finding willing employees. The additional unemployment compensation that people are receiving has much to do with the lack of ready workers. Businesses across sectors are challenged by workforce the shortage.

The population (25 and above) without a high school diploma is 12.5% in Greene County; down from 13.09% in 2019. In Washington County, those without a high school diploma is at 6.9%, down from 7.64% in 2019.

Another 46.04% in Greene and 37.33% in Washington only have a high school diploma. This data is indicative of an identified issue in one of our focus groups; that high numbers in our workforce are only qualified for low-waged jobs, and struggle financially as a result. Blueprints' internal data indicates that 83% of our clientele draw their income from employment, yet 78% are at or below 150% 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' COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT: QUALITATIVE DATA – COMMUNITY SURVEY

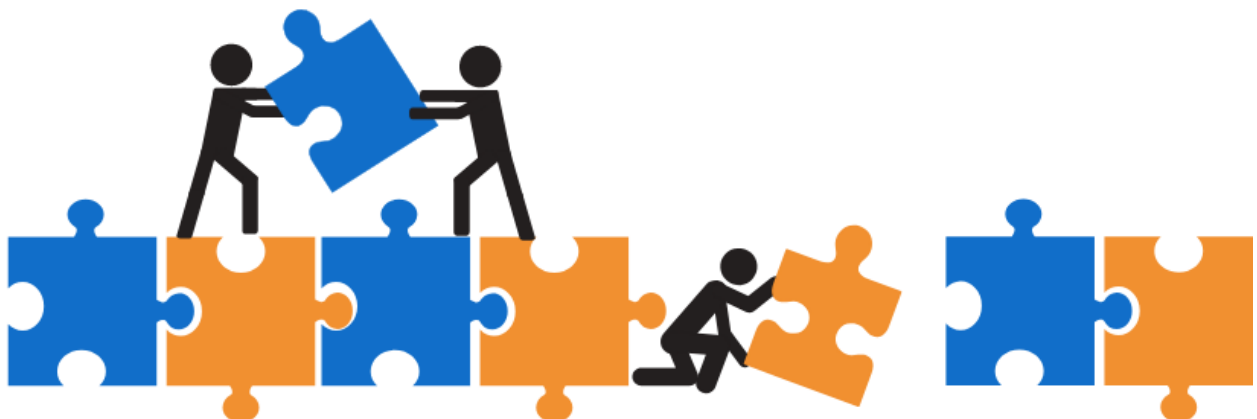


Blueprints distributed a brief online survey to community members, stakeholders, elected officials, partner agencies, school districts, as well as Blueprints' staff, board and recipients of services. We received nearly 300 completed surveys, 46% from Blueprints' staff members.

Respondents were asked to:

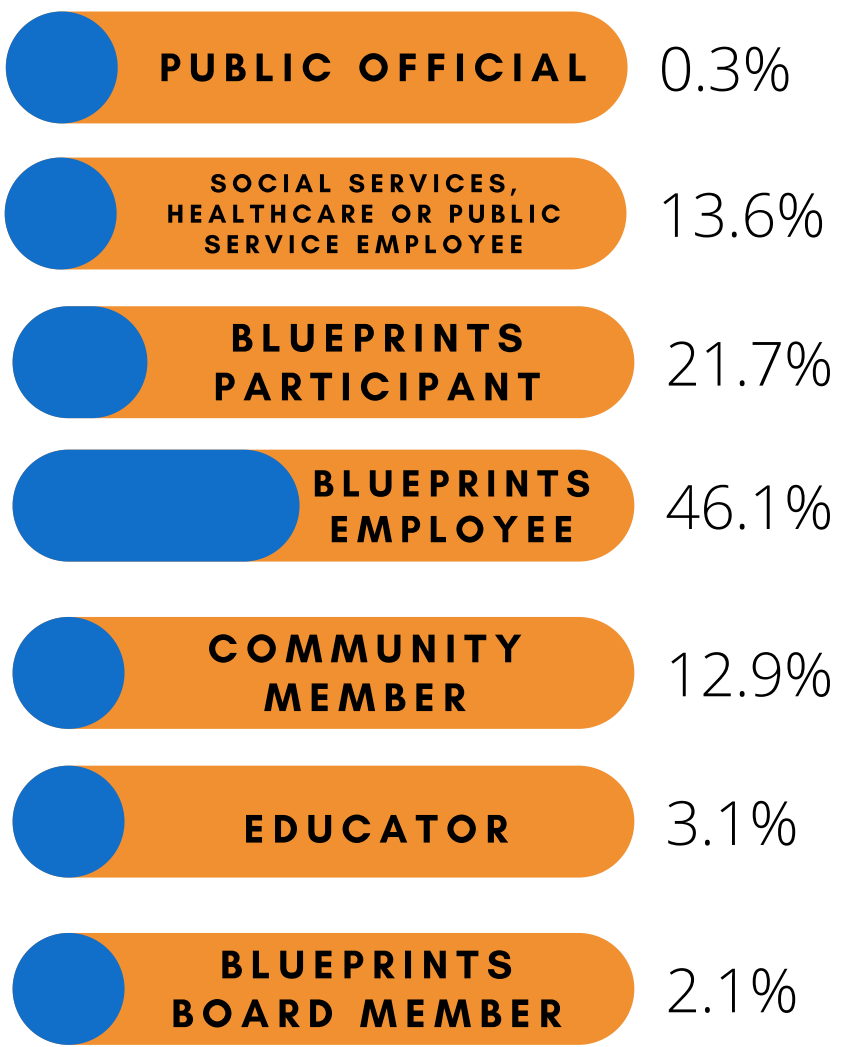
- ***Self-identify by category***
- ***Identify residency by county***
- ***Share if they had adequate internet access during the pandemic***
- ***Identify the most significant community challenges facing their county***
- ***Identify strengths & assets of their county***
- ***Articulate COVID's community impact***
- ***Identify how Blueprints can help***

Full report of survey responses on the next 6 pages.

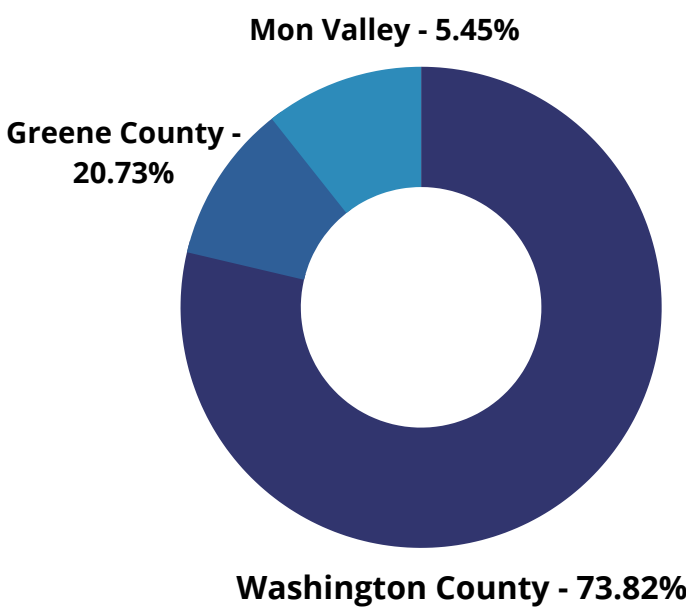




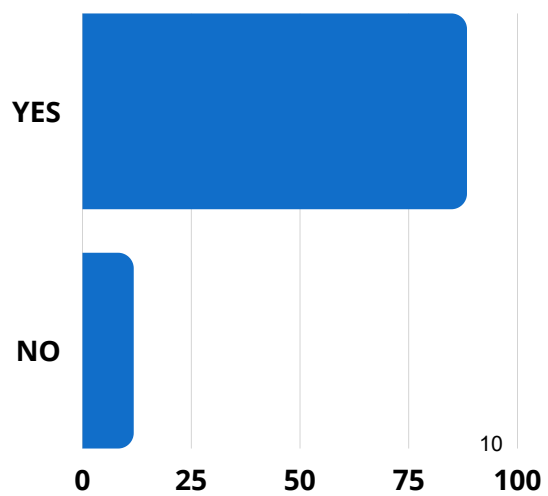
WHICH CATEGORY BEST DESCRIBES YOU?



WHERE DO YOU RESIDE?



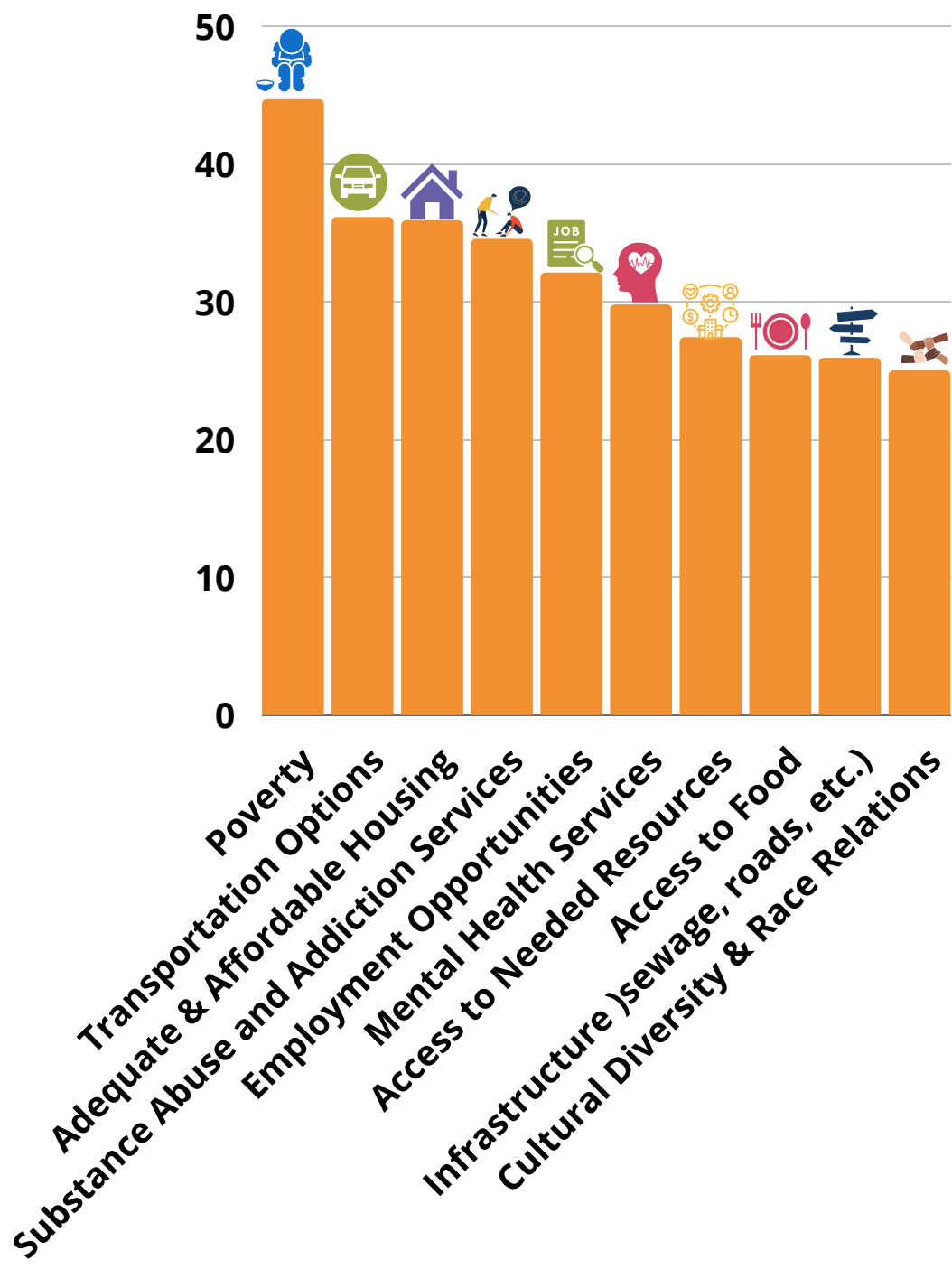
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, HAVE YOU HAD SUFFICIENT ACCESS TO INTERNET SERVICES?





WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL COMMUNITY CHALLENGES IN WASHINGTON & GREENE COUNTIES?

THESE WERE RATED ON A SCALE FROM 1-10 WITH 1 BEING MOST CRITICAL AND 10 BEING LEAST CRITICAL



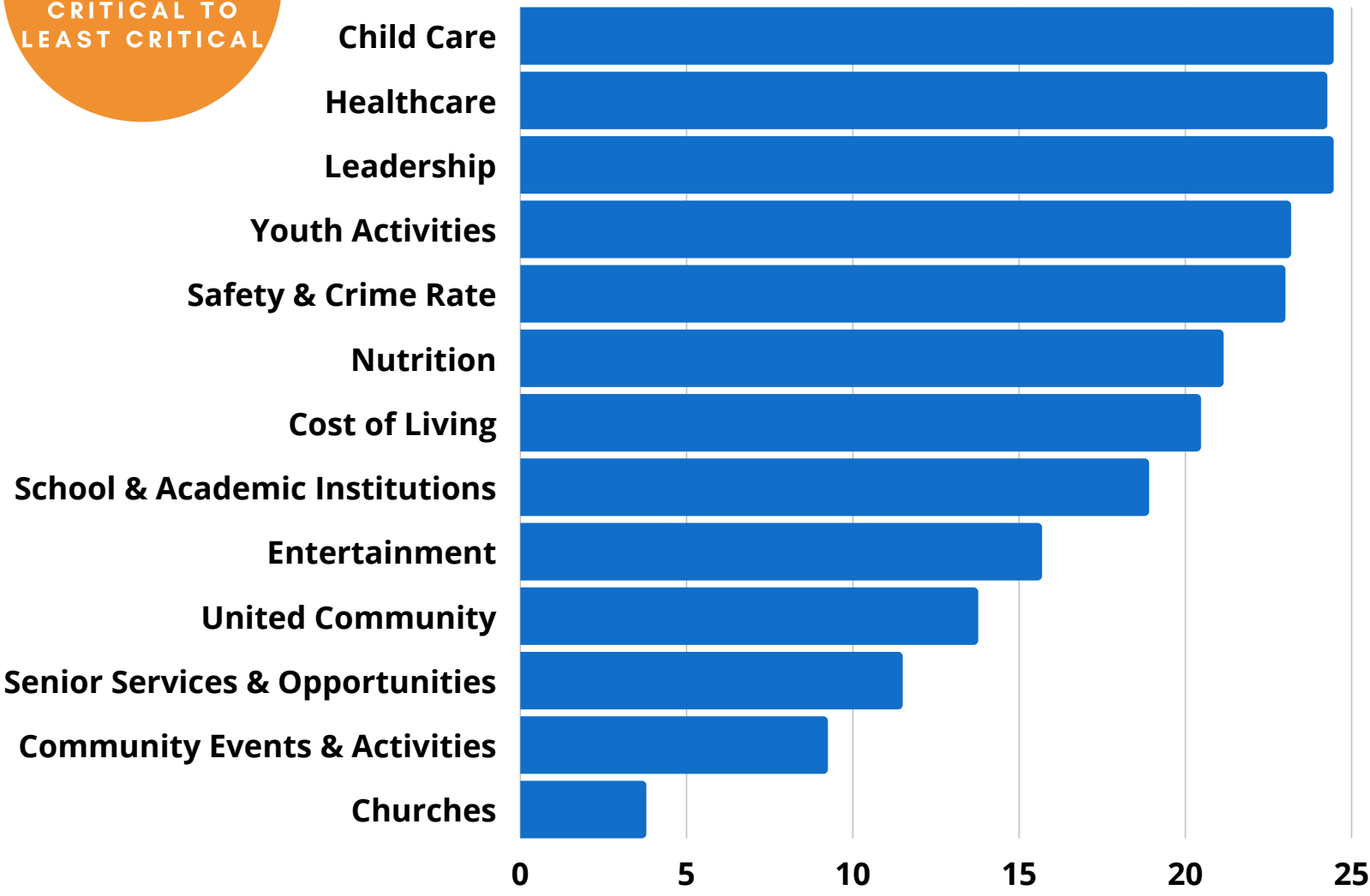
**TOP 10 MOST
CRITICAL
CHALLENGES**



WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL COMMUNITY CHALLENGES IN WASHINGTON & GREENE COUNTIES?

THESE WERE RATED ON A SCALE FROM 1-10 WITH 1 BEING MOST CRITICAL AND 10 BEING LEAST CRITICAL

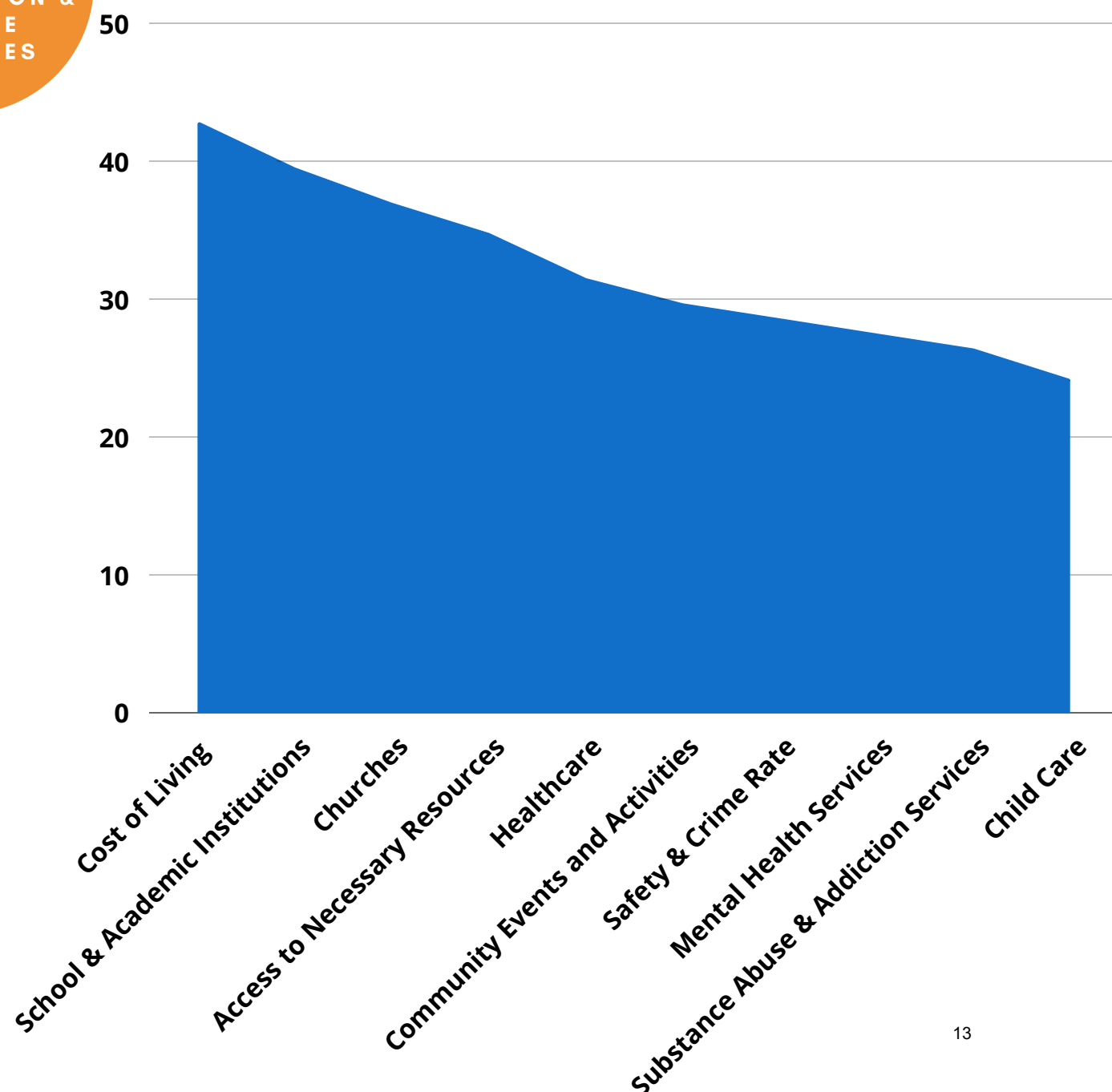
REMAINING 13
CHALLENGES
FROM MOST
CRITICAL TO
LEAST CRITICAL





WHAT ARE THE GREATEST STRENGTHS OR ASSETS OF WASHINGTON & GREENE COUNTIES?

TOP 10
STRENGTHS OR
ASSETS OF
WASHINGTON &
GREENE
COUNTIES





HOW HAS COVID MOST SIGNIFICANTLY
AFFECTED YOUR COMMUNITY?

**DIFFICULTY HIRING
EMPLOYEES**

isolation

BUSINESSES CLOSING

**DIVIDED
COMMUNITY**

**LOSS OF
EMPLOYMENT**

*Impact on schools and
daycares*

*Financial
Stress*

MENTAL HEALTH

**BASIC SOCIAL
INTERACTION**

**access to
services**



HOW DO YOU THINK BLUEPRINTS CAN HELP?

1

TRANSPORTATION FOR PEOPLE TO ACCESS RESOURCES.

2

MORE PROGRAMS GEARED TOWARDS TEENS/SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN.

3

BE MORE VISUAL IN SOME OF THE MORE RURAL COMMUNITIES.

4

PROVIDE SENIOR PROGRAMS IN WASHINGTON COUNTY.

5

GATHER WITH OTHER COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, GOVERNMENTS, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO ADDRESS THESE NEEDS.

6

PLAN AND HOST MORE COMMUNITY EVENTS.

7

RESOURCE GUIDE AND MAP OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES. MAKING SURE PEOPLE KNOW OF ALL THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO THEM.

8

MOBILE BLUEPRINTS UNITS.

9

COVID-19 VACCINE EDUCATION.

10

BE FLEXIBLE IN OFFERING SERVICES AS FAR AS VIRTUAL, IN-PERSON AND EVENING HOURS AS NEEDED.⁵

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. **5/11/2021** –Blueprints' Getting Ahead Program graduates in Washington County
2. **6/2/2021** – Waynesburg Senior Center in Greene County
3. **6/16/2021** – Stakeholders, funders, Blueprints' Board Members & donors in Washington
4. **6/30/2021** – Stakeholders, Blueprints' participants, other human service providers in Greene County
5. **7/22/2021** – Head Start/Early Head Start Policy Council

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

- Poverty rates
 - Greene Co. = 14.2%; Washington Co. = 9.9%; PA = 12%
- Unemployment
 - Greene Co. = 6.7%; Washington Co. = 6.1%; PA = 5.8%
- Graduation Rates
 - Greene Co. = 85.5%; Washington Co. = 93.5%; PA = 88.3%
- Adults 25+ with no high school diploma
 - Greene Co. = 12.49%; Washington Co. = 6.86%; PA = 9.48%
- 40.08% of students in Washington & Greene Counties are eligible for free & reduced lunch program
- Cost burdened renters *[paying 30% or more of household income on housing]*
 - Greene Co. = 29.05%; Washington Co. = 37.06%; PA = 44.05%

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? And why?
- What can be done?
- What should be done?
- What services should be provided that are not?
- Can/should Blueprints do that?

Summary and highpoints group dialogues:

May 11, 2021 Focus Group – Getting Ahead Class Graduates (Washington County); all participants have previously or are currently accessing multiple services from Blueprints.

Participants articulated the ‘Cliff Effect,’ whereby even minimal increases to household income negates eligibility for various types of assistance. There is an inherent disincentive to earning money, or earning more money, “because you lose food stamps [SNAP], childcare subsidy or health insurance.”

“I feel good about getting a job, but then I lose my food stamps [SNAP] and childcare. The money I thought I had, I have to spend on childcare, transportation and groceries. I’m no further ahead.”

Participants also expressed the challenges with transportation for those who live in small, rural communities. Those who are fortunate enough to have a car, have an older car that breaks down a lot and repairs are costly. Public transportation is not convenient for grocery shopping for a large family; it is hard to take groceries on a bus.

Some in the group have been incarcerated, or know someone who has been. They talked about the challenges of re-entry – housing, jobs and the stigma associated with a criminal record.

Deep conversation about the challenges of recovery and how difficult it is to not only put the past behind them and remain clean and sober, but climbing out of the hole they have dug for themselves. Fines, criminal records, poor credit scores are major hurdles to clear to achieve stability and self-reliance.

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June 2, 2021 Focus Group – Waynesburg Senior Center [Greene County]

Participants discussed the most significant challenges facing residents of Greene County. While seniors have the benefit of affordable access to public transportation, others in the community struggle:

- getting to employment opportunities
- simply getting to and from the grocery store
- setting to and from necessary medical appointments

Participants discussed and debated the lack of life skills young people have in order to successfully transition to independent living. The 83% graduation rate in Greene County was identified as contributing to the problem.

The conversation culminated with dialog about the economic status of the county. The declining population – young people leaving the county for jobs elsewhere, lack of new businesses in the county, and of course, COVID-19.

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June 16, 2021 Focus Group – Stakeholders, Funders, Blueprints’ Board Members & Donors in Washington

This group engaged in a rich discussion about the challenges facing the Washington County community, and how Blueprints, other providers and local government are addressing those challenges. Topics included housing and home ownership, substance abuse, crime, the economy, education, support for our youth, advocacy, mentorship and partnerships.

The definition of poverty was shared as the frame for part of the conversation. The working definition, from Dr. Ruby Payne, is ‘the extent to which an individual does without resources.’

For people living on limited financial resources, overcoming life’s challenges is daunting at best. As people fall on hard times, the lack of financial and other resources to bounce back after an eviction or foreclosure is just short of impossible. How does one set up a new place to live after an eviction or foreclosure? Without help, our neighbors and friends continue to struggle.

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June 30, 2021 Focus Group – Stakeholders, Blueprints’ participants, other human service providers in Greene County

This eclectic group of focus group participants was passionate and emphatic about the challenges facing Greene County.

Adults with no high school diploma

- Greene County has double the rate of renters who are cost burdened as Washington County with a third of the population;
- COVID has/will make that number grow; has impacted educational attainment for youth
- Starting to stress the importance of graduation & postsecondary education in high school is too late; need to start in elementary school;
- The GED exam is hard; keep kids in school until graduation to avoid as a young adult when starting families;
- Cannot get a “decent” job without GED or diploma.

Why are people dropping out of high school?

- Economic stress
- Home stress
- Poor attendance
- Substance abuse
- Transportation issues
- Kids ask, “is school worth it?”
 - We need to answer them **YES**

Job opportunities are limited in Greene County; kids are leaving for jobs in Washington or Allegheny Counties; some leave the state.

Transportation to get to work was offered as a significant challenge.

More grandparents are raising grandchildren; CYS involvement; custody changes creating a lack of home stability was discussed at length.

Career & Technology Center is a great community resource; end the stigma attached to vocational training in high school. Certificate programs can lead to household sustaining wages, right here in Greene County.

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July 22, 2021 Focus Group – Head Start/Early Head Start Policy Council (Both Counties)

Our Policy Council is comprised of Head Start/Early Head Start parents and community representatives.

Cost burdened renters:

- 30% or more in housing related costs is significant, and does not allow any room for error
- We need to educate people about the benefits of buying rather than renting
- The Cliff Effect – increase in wages leads to disproportionate reduction in benefits
- The mindset of living paycheck to paycheck is stressful

Financial Literacy Education – the group identified this as an effective way to educate and prepare people for successful independent living. The Mon Valley is in need of this service; Blueprints should consider alternate locations beyond the Washington Headquarters. Consider co-locating with partner agencies throughout the county. Offer remote training resources – record financial literacy and housing counseling information and make available online.

It was suggested that the valuable services that Blueprints provides should be made available after hours for people who have difficulty accessing during business hours.



BLUEPRINTS' COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT: ANALYSIS & KEY DATA POINTS



According to the 2019 American Community Survey, Greene & Washington Counties have a total population of 244,082 persons, with Greene County at 36,388 persons and Washington County at 207,661.

Both Greene and Washington Counties experienced a slight decline in population in the last two years, 482 and 449 people respectively.

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.

Poverty and its effect and impact on our community permeates all other needs identified in both the qualitative and quantitative data. The COVID-19 pandemic presented and continues to present a unique challenge to everyone, and makes the need for Blueprints' and the nonprofit community's services all the more critical. The latest Census poverty statistics show a downward trend in the overall poverty rate in Pennsylvania, which is encouraging, but the ravaging impact of COVID likely remains to be determined. The child poverty rate decreased as well, down to 12.45% from 13.61%. Despite the relatively flat level of poverty and child poverty rates, fewer households are eligible for TANF and other benefits. We reported in 2019 that less than 1% of households in both counties were receiving TANF benefits. Another 272 households have been removed from the TANF roles since that time as more families are no longer eligible.

According to Waynesburg University's COVID-19 Impact Assessment, 60% of Washington and Greene County nonprofit organizations have decreased services because of the pandemic's impact. Unfortunately, cuts to services when the community is experiencing acute need is devastating. The assessment also indicates that, during the pandemic, organizations have reported losing revenue from private and corporate donations, event revenue and investments. As a result of the reduction in revenue, nonprofit organizations have been forced to reduce staff, staff hours, services provided, and were unable to acquire operational supplies.

The governmental response to the pandemic has been to allocate funds to keep people in their homes, to subsidize unemployment and to halt the decline into poverty for those struggling to get by. Blueprints has seen a significant uptick in new participants in programming because of the pandemic.



Referenced Document List:

2021 Waynesburg University COVID-19 Impact Assessment

2020 Greene County Comprehensive Plan

*2019 Washington County Annual Action Plan; Redevelopment Authority of the County of
Washington*

2020 Head Start/Early Head Start Community Assessment

