

Evaluation: Determining Priorities

Children, Youth & Families

INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that children experiencing multiple risks are developing less well. According to the research compiled by Child Trends, children in high-risk families are more likely to have been suspended or expelled from school, to have behavior problems, to be in poor health, and to be less engaged in schoolwork than are children in lower risk families. Parents in high-risk families are more likely to experience symptoms of poor mental health, more frequent feelings of aggravation, and more worries about being able to provide the basics, such as food, than are parents in lower risk families. Thus, the level of cumulative risk is related strongly and consistently to children's development. (Source: Cumulative Risks among American Children, 2006 Child Trends)

Herkimer County has used the *Communities That Care* operating system to assess the needs of youth and their families, to identify priorities, and to work collaboratively to address needs and reduce risks. The *Communities That Care* operating system has as its core a research-based approach to assess nineteen risk factors that contribute to the youth problem behaviors of substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, school drop out and violence. The nineteen risk factors measured exist within four Domains: Community, Family, School and Individual/Peer.

In 2000 and 2003, a Herkimer County Risk Assessment Profile was developed, and out of the risk assessment process, five priority risk factors were identified through an evaluation process: Family Management, Family Conflict, Extreme Economic Deprivation, Early and Persistent Antisocial Behavior, and Early Initiation of Problem Behaviors. These priorities have been used to help shape the service delivery system and improve the health and well-being of children, youth and families in Herkimer County.

In 2006, planning groups decided to expand the scale and scope of the risk assessment initiative by using the six Life Areas of the *New York State Touchstones* Document (Community, Citizenship, Physical and Emotional Health, Family, Economic Security and Education). This new structure provided a broader framework for data collection and organization, thereby allowing for a more comprehensive look at all Herkimer County residents. This new format still allowed for the collection of archival data, key informant (expert) information, focus group commentary and survey data to help with the assessment of the needs of children, youth and families. The information below describes the evaluation process, key findings and priorities identified for children, youth and families during the current needs assessment process.

METHODOLOGY

A series of focus groups and stakeholder meetings were held to discuss the needs of children, youth and their families and to help determine priorities. These groups included youth, parents, and key leaders in the areas of county government, health and human services, business, education and law enforcement.

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The IMPACT Program convened eight members of its *Teen Therapeutic Youth Group* on October 26, 2006 to discuss issues and concerns that affect them and to identify service needs. All members were teens between the ages of 14 and 17 who are at-risk and/or diagnosed with a serious emotional disturbance.

The Annual Herkimer County *Youth Summit* was held on November 2, 2006. Approximately 90 youth met in small, topical focus groups around youth-identified priority areas of concern to discuss each issue, its affect on youth, and to determine strategies that would address areas of concern.

The IMPACT Program convened seven members of its *Parent Support Group* on November 7, 2006 to discuss issues that affect their children and families and to identify service needs. All members of this group were parents of a youth below the age of 18 who is at-risk and/or diagnosed with a serious emotional disturbance.

The *Valley United Way* held a Focus Group on November 17, 2006 to discuss the needs of Herkimer County children, youth and families. Seven representatives from local non-profit agencies were in attendance at this meeting to discuss these issues and determine service needs.

The *Human Development Committee*, comprised of 35 representatives of county government, health and human services, business, education and law enforcement, met on January 11, 2007 to review the data presented in the draft 2006 Herkimer County Risk Assessment Profile. The committee was divided into six groups. Each group was responsible for reviewing the data presented in one section (Life Area) of the document. Each group was then asked to generate a list of key issues, concerns and trends (at least three), and from that list identify which issue was a priority. Each small group then reported its findings to the larger group in attendance.

The *Human Resource Planning Team*, the steering committee for Integrated County Planning that includes key leaders from county government, education and health and human service provision, met on March 1, 2007 to review the data presented in the draft 2006 Herkimer County Risk Assessment Profile. Each member was asked to look at each of the six sections (Life Areas) of the document and to identify three key issues, concerns and trends in each section that were most significant. Each person was then asked to select one item in each Life Area as a priority. The results were tabulated and the findings were shared with the group.

FINDINGS

Youth Focus Groups

IMPACT Teen Therapeutic Youth Group -

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Youth participants reported that the main problems that they face have to deal with family issues. Some youth reported that they have been "labeled" because of another family member who may have been in jail or exhibited other negative behaviors. Youth reported that this was very stressful. Family conflict and following home rules were also identified as issues.

Youth reported that they felt they are treated differently at school, and that the rules are not enforced fairly. Some youth in attendance reported that they have been labeled as a "troublemaker", and as a result do not get treated the same as others.

Most youth in attendance reported having academic difficulties that required additional assistance. All youth in attendance reported that they wanted to go on to college and eventually leave the area.

Youth reported that violence at school is an ordinary occurrence. Youth reported that boyfriend/girlfriend relationship issues were a major cause of fights. Drug and alcohol use and sexual promiscuity were reported to be prevalent and interrelated, both to one another and to violence.

All youth in attendance either knew someone, or have at one time themselves, been severely depressed and considered suicide. These youth reported that they would tell their friends first if there was a problem, and would tell family or another caring adult if they trusted them.

Youth Summit -

Youth leaders identified the following topics as priority areas based on their effect on youth at school, home and in the community: Alcohol/Drug Abuse and Drunk Driving; Acceptance, Depression and Suicide; Relationship Issues; and Quality of Life - Community Involvement and Jobs. Youth also identified two overarching issues, *Morality and Conscience* and *Crisis Management*, and believed that these themes had great impact on the issues listed above. Developing a "do the right thing" attitude, and involving and educating youth in crisis management and planning was thought to be an effective strategy to improve the problems facing youth today.

IMPACT Parent Focus Group

Parents reported that the quality of services available in Herkimer County has improved over the past few years, especially for at-risk youth. Parents reported that intensive home-based prevention services are very helpful to their children and their families. Mentoring, youth groups, and positive activities for youth were also seen as very helpful. Parents also informed that the availability of respite services has allowed time for both youth and parent to "calm down" and problem solve. If a child is placed, the opportunity for the family to still receive services would be helpful to resolve issues and bring the child home successfully.

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Parents expressed the need to provide love, stability, structure and support in their families. They reported that they sometimes need concrete help to set limits, solve problems and address needs, and programs such as "Common Sense Parenting" are very helpful. Also, having a forum to vent and discuss strategies was also cited as being very important.

Financial pressures are many, and can impact the stress in a family. Participants reported that there is a continued need for quality low cost child care services so parents can work.

Most parents reported a history of domestic violence in their family, and reported that the services and interventions provided in Herkimer County have been very helpful. Having more services geared toward men as victims was suggested as an area of need.

Parents reported their children have been bullied by their peers in the past, and felt that not having the "right" clothing, having a different family structure, looking different, having emotional or learning difficulties, or just not "fitting in" may have been reasons for these occurrences. Parents reported that at times their children will fight back, and will face consequences as a result. One parent reported that his school district just started a new character-building program, and when he reported that his child was being bullied by peers to a school administrator, the school intervened and the behavior ceased.

Parents stressed the importance of being treated respectfully when accessing services, and reported that this has improved greatly in Herkimer County. Also, being included in the treatment planning process for their children was seen as very important.

United Way Stakeholders

Focus group participants identified *family issues* as a priority area of concern. Families appear to be struggling more and have a hard time providing adequate structure and support for their children. There has been a breakdown of the traditional family structure and a noted lack of parenting skills. The need for additional parenting programs has increased as a result of this trend. Providing free counseling, one stop services for families, increased child care availability, character-building youth services and church-based services and supports were all identified as possible strategies to address these issues. Education and support services for youth (and families) in the areas of obesity prevention and healthy lifestyle choices were also identified as a need.

Both the *elderly and disabled populations* appear to be increasing. Both populations will require a large number of services to remain independent in the community.

Homelessness was identified as a growing problem for individuals and families alike. Energy costs, the impact of disasters, unemployment, stricter eligibility and regulatory requirements, substandard housing, more stringent codes enforcement and the lack of credit were cited as reasons for this trend.

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Youth services need to be redesigned. Services tend to be driven by program parameters and are usually facility-based. Services need to be more individualized. There is also a lack of recreational facilities that provide services to youth in towns and villages. This is primarily due to a lack of funding.

The *viability of non-profit agencies* was also discussed. Non-profit service providers stated that funding is sometimes inconsistent and very often does not provide enough resources to adequately meet the needs of the population that they are trying to serve. Agency directors reported that a large portion of time is spent on trying to secure funding to maintain the services currently being provided. Participants also noted that the increasing cost of retaining existing staff and services, and the effect of a program's loss on those individuals that need services, is often overlooked.

Human Development Committee Data Review

The Human Development Committee identified the following key issues, concerns and trends during the data review process. An *asterisk next to an item indicates that the item was identified as a priority.

Life Area: Community

- Population of the county is getting older
- Lack of transportation
- *Loss of jobs, particularly in manufacturing
- Need for daycare
- Out of wedlock births and Medicaid births are above Upstate New York average rates

Life Area: Citizenship

- Low voter rates
- * Escalating violence in youth under 16 (arrests)
- * Higher percentage of youth reported on the TAP Survey that they have been "bullied"
- Increase in the number of young women that have been incarcerated
- PINS placements have been reduced significantly (seen as a positive trend)

Life Area: Physical and Emotional Health

- *Obesity/tobacco use (lack of evidence of individual effort to change)
- *Teen birth rate is growing (but teen pregnancy rate is stable)
- *High depression and suicide rates

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Life Area: Family

- *Increase in female-headed and step -parent families with children (stress)
- *Aging population, more adults in the "sandwich generation" (simultaneously caring for aging parents and children/grandchildren)
- *Need for better parent communication about high-risk behaviors and more enforcement of rules in the home
- *Family violence increased
- *Need to promote family meals

Life Area: Economic Security

- * Low incomes and wages - Herkimer County is below both NYS and the US in median household income
- Health care and insurance costs (inc. lack of employers that offer health insurance)
- Rise in HEAP caseloads
- High percentage of youth getting free and reduced lunches
- Young families with children less than 5 years old in poverty
- 25% of all single headed families living in poverty
- Large number using Food Banks
- Number of elderly in poverty (10% of elderly, 38% are below 200% poverty)

Life Area: Education

- *The availability of quality head start programs and daycare (affordable) and its impact on academic preparedness
- School violence and bullying
- Increased drop-out rates
- Lack of GED programs

Human Resource Planning Team Data Review

The Human Resource Planning Team identified the following key issues, concerns and trends during the data review process. The findings were collated and are presented here. The top three priorities in each area are listed in bold.

Life Area: Community

- **Loss of jobs, especially in manufacturing (11 votes)**
- **Loss of young adults from our community (6 votes)**
- **Need for regulated Daycare/Childcare (5 votes)**
- **Population of the County is getting older, especially the very old (age 85+) (5 votes)**

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- High number of out of wedlock births & Medicaid births (4 votes)
- Limited availability of (public) transportation (4 votes)
- Village populations in decline, town populations are increasing
- 12.5% living below the poverty line
- Promote community and cater more to youth by developing "hubs of activity" and community centers.
- Promote a healthy community by developing walking and biking trails.

Life Area: Citizenship

- High youth arrests, especially with shift to younger youth (<16 years) for burglary, larceny, mischief & other sex offenses (9 votes)
- Increase in the number of female incarcerations (6 votes)
- High DWI rates among both adults and youth 16 - 20 (3 votes)
- Increased Juvenile Delinquent intakes and placements (3 votes)
- Low voter turnout (3 votes)
- PINS Diversion has reduced placements significantly *positive trend (3 votes)
- Survey indicating large number of people who believe drinking and driving is a problem (2 votes)
- Increased use of Alternatives to Incarceration Programs which has had an impact on the incarceration rate (2 votes)
- High percentage of alcohol related fatalities
- High percentage of TAP survey respondents feeling constantly teased, threatened or harassed by other youth (20%)

Life Area: Physical and Emotional Health

- High rates of depression and suicide (13 votes)
- Obesity/Overweight - lack of physical activity (7 votes)
- Teen birth rate is increasing and consistently exceeds upstate rates (5 votes)
- High numbers of youth using alcohol and drugs (4 votes)
- Younger and younger age at which illicit drugs or alcohol are tried for the first time (3 votes)
- Negative health, family, and economic results from alcohol and drug abuse (2 votes)
- The numbers of teens who report their parents or friend's parents are buying alcohol for them (2 votes)
- Almost 22% of all HC residents lack health insurance
- Fluoridate the water

Life Area: Family

- Increase in single parent families, decline in the number of two parent families (7 votes)
- Need for better parent/child communication and positive family interaction (6 votes)

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- **Increase in domestic/family violence and its impact on children (4 votes)**
- **Herkimer County has the 3rd highest parent support ratio in the state (the number of people 50-64 , the "sandwich generation", who provide care for parents 80 +) (4 votes)**
- Youth concerned about their parents not getting along (2 votes)
- Significant rise on TAP survey of children reporting that they have been hurt by an adult in the home (2 votes)
- Decrease in family meal time (2 votes)
- High numbers of child abuse and neglect reports
- Parenting skills needed
- Lack of affordable, quality child care.
- Lack of local transitional housing for older youth.
- Large percentage of families with children under 18yrs. who have all parents in the workforce
- Grandchildren being raised by grandparents

Life Area: Economic Security

- **Low average annual wages and income (11 votes)**
- **High number of families in poverty (8 votes)**
- **Prohibitive health care and insurance costs (5 votes)**
- High number of elderly living in poverty (3 votes)
- High number of Medicaid cases (2 votes)
- Need for health care (2 votes)
- Need for decent paying jobs
- Promote the Food Stamp program.
- More financial support for the Emergency Assistance Program, as the program of last resort
- Improve the public transportation system

Life Area: Education

- **School violence and bullying (10 votes)**
- **Lack of funding for GED programs for young adults, age 19-21 (5 votes)**
- **Availability of Head Start, Pre-K, and quality daycare programs/impact on academic preparedness (5 votes)**
- Drop out rates (3 votes)
- Students' perception that rules are not enforced fairly - increases as youth get into higher grades (2 votes)
- Increased need for monitoring attendance & drop out prevention measures
- Decreased numbers of adults enrolled in continuing education programs

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PRIORITIES

Human Development Committee

The loss of jobs, particularly in manufacturing, escalating violence in youth below the age of 16, an increase in the percentage of youth that reported on the TAP Survey that they have been "bullied", low incomes and wages, and the lack of availability of quality head start programs and affordable daycare were all identified by the Human Development Committee as priority concerns. The issues identified in the *Family* and *Physical and Emotional Health* Sections of the Profile were all considered to be of priority (see list).

Human Development Committee members agreed that the priority Risk Factors of Family Management, Family Conflict, Extreme Economic Deprivation, Early and Persistent Antisocial Behavior, and Early Initiation of Problem Behaviors identified during the Communities That Care risk and resource assessment process in both 2000 and 2003 remain a problem for youth and families today and should continue to be addressed.

Human Resource Planning Team

High rates of depression and suicide (13 votes), the loss of jobs, especially in manufacturing (11 votes), low average annual wages and income (11 votes), school violence and bullying (10 votes), High youth arrests, especially with shift to younger youth (<16 years) for burglary, larceny, mischief & other sex offenses (9 votes), the high number of families in poverty (8 votes), and the increase in single parent families/decline in the number of two parent families (7 votes) were identified as priorities in each life area.

The Human Resource Planning Team will continue to discuss the priorities identified during the evaluation process and will identify strategies that reduce those risks and improve outcomes for children, youth and their families.

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Community

INTRODUCTION

Some of the characteristics or attributes that many successful communities have in common include local pride and support, welcoming and inclusive cultures, broad citizen participation, and a balance between strong traditional institutions and new opportunities. In 2004 a grass roots effort by individuals to empower a breakthrough that transforms the future of the Central New York region to one of success was begun with a conversation. This effort quickly became a broad based initiative of diverse individuals and groups sharing the beliefs that various levels of resignation are keeping us from realizing what's possible and that our community conversations have the potential to empower our future and allow us to find and use the resources we have to fulfill our visions. With the belief that the key-missing ingredient in this process is the community wide conversation, a series of community conventions for the future began. This initiative is known as Breakthrough Central New York.

METHODOLOGY

As part of the BreakthroughCNY initiative, seven community meetings were held in Herkimer County (Old Forge, Herkimer, Poland, Dolgeville). Citizens were notified and invited to attend through traditional media outlets and word of mouth. Two of these events were dedicated to specific target audiences, one being the Conference of Village Mayors and the other the Youth Summit. A total of 435 residents, including a range of people from high school age through senior citizen age, chose to attend one of these events. An additional 22 teens participated in the Youth Summit.

A worldwide expert consultant on community and economic revitalization (Australian born David Beurle) lead these meetings. Participants were asked to rate their community on ten common attributes of successful communities. They were given four red dots (weakness) and four green dots (strength) and told that they could use them in any combination to reflect their beliefs regarding the ten attributes. Some people chose to use one dot for one attribute and some may have chosen to use all four dots on the one attribute they felt the strongest about making it possible to exceed 100% agreement. The results were reviewed and discussed and then participants created a shared vision statement for the community.

FINDINGS

Among the mixed age group meetings, responses were consistent from one meeting to the other.

The two attributes identified as weaknesses by the most people the most often were "A participatory approach to community decision making" and "The deliberate transition of power to new leaders." These attributes are among those that are future oriented and also require change.

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The two attributes identified most frequently as community strengths were "A strong belief and support for education" and "A strong presence of traditional institutions, as integral to community life." These attributes are among those oriented in the past and in maintaining the status quo. Two areas where responses were more evenly split were "Evidence of strong community pride and inclusive culture" and "Support for local business". Participants voiced their

Table 98

Breakthrough CNY				Attributes	Youth Summit			
All age respondents					Teen respondents			
Weakness		Strength			Weakness		Strength	
#	%	#	%		#	%	#	%
137	33	168	40	Evidence of a strong community pride and inclusive culture	22	100	2	9
134	32	39	9	Invest in the future-Built to Last	18	82	5	23
208	50	22	5	Participatory approach to community decision making	8	36	1	4
153	37	42	10	Creatively build new economic opportunities	10	45	5	23
118	28	99	24	Support local business	6	27	16	73
215	52	8	2	Deliberate transition of power to new leaders	6	27	2	9
51	12	288	70	Strong belief in and support for education	2	9	25	114
18	4	268	65	Strong presence of traditional institutions, integral to community life			22	100
61	15	108	26	Willingness to seek help from the outside	20	91	3	14
128	31	44	11	Communities and regions are self-reliant	4	18	15	68

Data Sources: 2006 Breakthrough CNY Community Conventions & 2006 Youth Summit

beliefs that while they felt pride in their communities they did not believe

their communities were necessarily welcoming or inclusive to newcomers or people of differing ethnic or cultural backgrounds. By a show of hands, when asked at least half of the participants identified themselves "as transplants" to their Valley community.

Among the responses of the high school-only group attending the Youth Summit the identified weaknesses differed from the whole group responses. However the two groups shared some key beliefs regarding the strengths of the Valley communities.

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By majority response, the teens identified three areas they perceived to be weak, "Evidence of strong community pride and inclusive culture", "Willingness to seek help from the outside" and "Investment in the future". By comment, these students discussed social limitations such as "can't escape the drama", "everybody knows your business", "school is the only game in town, once you go home, there's nothing to do", and "it is difficult to find part-time employment if you don't/can't drive". They also expressed both a desire to have places in the community of their own and involvement in "establishment" activity and decision-making, even suggesting a joint Student Council/Town Board meeting.

Also by majority, the strengths identified included "Strong belief and support for education", "Strong presence of traditional institutions" and "Support for local businesses".

PRIORITIES

Several common themes were articulated as priorities in the four Community Vision statements as well as supported by discussion. Participants expressed a desire to be connected to one another and from community to community. Comments included, "we are more alike than different", "only the lines on a map divide us", "we need community centers", "community meetings" and "hubs of activity". Participants discussed the value of resources that we already have in our communities and the desire not to lose them when seeking new opportunities. These resources included our natural wilderness, open spaces, rural charm and history. Participants discussed the need for a culture that welcomes and supports new opportunities especially as it pertains to organic agriculture, sustainable energy and the development of a variety of small business. Participants discussed the need to promote, in order to maximize, opportunities for recreation, tourism and experience that already exist. Finally, participants expressed a desire that all residents be included and considered in the planning and implementation process.

If the key-missing ingredient is a community wide conversation including a broad range of citizens, next steps must include sharing the Vision statements with as many citizens as possible and engaging more of them in "the conversation." Towards this end some smaller conversations regarding specific actions such as establishing a welcome wagon and a community bulletin board in the Kuyahoorra area, green energy, a youth center and affordable North Country housing have begun. Plans are also in the works for a Breakthrough CNY enrollment campaign and an on-line newsletter.

Herkimer County Vision Statements

The Valley Communities Vision Statement

We, the Valley Communities, are a close knit, welcoming collection of interconnected communities that develop our future in a planned and holistic way. We are a fun and exciting place to live and visit where people support local businesses and each other.

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Together the Valley Communities are a vibrant tourism destination that connects people to our authentic small town atmosphere. We promote our rich history while utilizing our abundant and unique natural resources and architectural heritage. Our vibrant economy is based on smart growth, sustainable energy production and high value organic and natural agriculture.

The Kuyahoorra Valley Community Vision Statement

We, the Kuyahoorra Valley communities are an all inclusive multi-generational community where all members are involved. Our community provides a supportive and nurturing environment that calls for the participation of all. We focus on the positive and are known for our youth focus and our unique sense of connected community.

We are known as the "Norman Rockwell" community of upstate New York. We have an economy that builds on and celebrates our rural charm and natural resources, within a thriving network of local businesses. Our diverse and self-sufficient economy is sustained by recreation, agriculture, tourism, cottage industries and alternative energy production.

The Central Adirondack Communities Vision Statement

We, the Central Adirondack region, are a welcoming, multi-generational community where people are nurtured, motivated, and responsible for our own destiny. Our hamlets are thriving centers that work together to connect seasonal and year-round residents into an extraordinary community.

We have a vibrant economic tourism base that allows a diverse cross-section of our population to thrive year round. We are a unique destination for arts, culture and recreation and a world-renowned center for the studies of the natural wilderness environment.

The Dolgeville Area Community Vision Statement

The Dolgeville area is a warm, friendly, welcoming community that attracts locals and visitors alike to enjoy the natural and unique beauty of our community and environment. We have strong connections with surrounding communities to form a powerful regional voice.

Our area's economy is a business and entrepreneurial friendly hot spot! We are a unique tourism destination that weaves together recreation, rich heritage, agricultural assets, natural resources and the creative arts. We have a bustling downtown atmosphere that is attractive and alive. Our economy draws new people into the region to be a part of a network of small vibrant businesses within a powerful regional identity.

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Aging Population/Elderly

INTRODUCTION

Senior citizens are a vital part of our community. They are our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, part of our individual and community family. Seniors deserve our attention as many of them are as vulnerable as our youth. The senior population is diverse, ranging in age from age 60 to over 100 years, at least 2 generations. Many seniors suffer from serious health issues that restrict their ability to perform activities of daily living such as driving, housekeeping, and even their own personal care. Many live alone due to the death of their spouse. This usually results in a loss of income, sometimes a dramatic loss that can result in a myriad of aftereffects. Although there are programs available to assist seniors, a number of factors limit their ability to access these services or the services are not adequate enough to meet their needs.

METHODOLOGY

A focus group was invited to discuss the needs of seniors. A small group was the goal in order to take advantage of group dynamics and informal discussion. Those invited included:

- Members of the Herkimer County Office for the Aging Advisory Council
- Presidents of all of the senior citizen clubs in Herkimer County numerous service providers
- Service Providers & Related Nonprofits

The focus group was held on Wednesday, November 15, 2006 at 1:00 pm at the Herkimer County Office Building, Room 301, 109 Mary Street, Herkimer, NY. In attendance were 3 OFA Advisory Council members and 8 service providers.

FINDINGS

Transportation: "It's tough to get around", especially when you live in the country. Medical transportation was also brought up as an issue. There are limitations to the number of people & distance traveled by the OFA van. There is a shortage of RSVP volunteers providing transportation, especially with the increased gasoline prices. Many RSVP volunteers will not transport in the winter due to the weather. Another related issue was the insurance risk and potential legal ramifications involved with providing transportation to someone; the fear of getting sued, and the possibility of financial problems if someone gets hurt while you are transporting them. The possibility of providing public transportation has been explored by both the County and by HARC, but the system would be prohibitively expensive and so has not been pursued to fruition. Another issue with establishing a public transportation system is that people tend to want a service when they want it, do not want to wait, and do not want to pay for the actual cost of the services. When people have been independent and able to just get in their own car and take care of what they need to do, it is a very difficult adjustment to have to make

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prior arrangements in order to get a ride. For example, when you have your own car and you decide you want to go get groceries, you just get in the car and go. When you no longer drive, it is difficult to have to make arrangements with someone and then wait until they are available. *[The senior's comment that, "it's tough to get around" was reinforced with the results of the recent Herkimer County Office for the Aging's client satisfaction survey of seniors who use their transportation services. Eighty-one (81) of the 92 survey respondents answered the question, "What would your life be like without this service?" Their comments were quite revealing and reinforced that their lives would be much more difficult without this service.]*

Medical: It is important for seniors to bring someone with them when they visit the doctor because the information can be confusing and overwhelming. This is very difficult for seniors who do not have adult children or someone they can trust to accompany them. It is also an issue for seniors living in an adult care home. The facility often needs to send an aide with the senior.

Fuel Costs: The increased price for gasoline and heating their homes has become a problem for many seniors.

General Finances: Just not enough money to meet expenses. How important it is to save some money for retirement. Sometimes people have a hard time adjusting to a lower income and continue to spend as if they still had their pre-retirement income. Credit is too easy to get. Advice for younger people: save money for retirement and get insurance, especially health insurance.

Insurance: The importance of having insurance was raised; health insurance especially; without adequate insurance, the financial burden can be too much. Unless a senior has an adult child or someone to assist them with health insurance claims and issues, it can be overwhelming with the decisions that need to be made. This relates not only to medical insurance claims, but to decisions related to Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage.

Medical: There is a lack of physicians who specialize in geriatrics. It can be difficult, if even possible, to find a geriatrician who will accept new patients.

Socialization: The importance of socialization was raised. Too much isolation can cause many problems.

Home Repairs: This issue is related to general finances; that is, there is not enough household income to make necessary repairs to the home. Also, there are some weatherization and related services available, but there is a 3-year wait list for weatherization, very few funds available to assist with roof replacements, and although there are some low-interest loans available, many seniors refuse to take a loan for their home repairs.

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General: Sometimes people have a hard time seeing the 'big picture', that is, they see themselves with a problem with their heat bill for example, and want assistance with that one thing. However, sometimes there are other areas where they could save money.

Service delivery is often viewed as needing to be free; a reluctance/refusal to contribute or pay for services; wanting things for no cost. Not all seniors have low incomes. Personal responsibility.

It is hard to move/leave your home and live somewhere else. Not only going through the process of physically moving all of your belongings, selling things, deciding what to take, etc. But when you get to your new residence, everything is different, and you have much to learn. Not an easy process.

Lack of Awareness of Services: Many seniors do not know what services are available to them. Many do know, but chose not to use them due to a variety of reasons such as pride, reluctance to have a government agency involved in their lives, reluctance to reveal their personal finances, difficulty navigating the paperwork. People do not pay attention to newspaper articles, brochures, and other mediums explaining about services until they actually need them. Need to have a constant 'stream' of public education so info is available when people need it.

PRIORITIES

Public Education:

Work to reduce the lack of awareness of services trying to reach as many households as possible.

- Explore the possibility of putting information about services in school district newsletters
- Also, church bulletins, brochures in physician offices,
- Free weekly newspapers (Valley Home News & Pennysaver) and other newspapers. Explore the possibility of having an insert in the newspapers.
- WKTV's Mug Club.
- Web site for info, especially for targeting the adult children. Advertise the web address.

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Health

INTRODUCTION

According to Healthy People 2010, determining health priorities helps direct resources to the areas that matter most to community partners and that will have the greatest impact on community health status. Healthy People 2010 builds on initiatives pursued over the past two decades. The 1979 Surgeon General's Report, Healthy People, and Healthy People 2000: National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives both established national health objectives and served as the basis for the development of State and community plans. The Physical and Emotional Health Sections were arranged in line with the Healthy People 2010 Goals, and where possible those Goals were inserted near the related Local, State and National Data.

METHODOLOGY

Herkimer County HealthNet (HCHN) Staff, arranged data collected from a variety of sources, including but not limited to:

- Local Health and Human Service Agencies
- State Departmental Databases
- Local Government
- Census Data

The data was then arranged according to Healthy People 2010 goals. Commentary was solicited from relevant local experts and inserted into the section. If commentary was not available, HCHN staff reported what each dataset illustrated.

A draft of the document was then distributed to the HCHN Board of Directors. The Board consists of forty health and human service agencies and consumer members, who can be considered experts and primary stake holders. The group was provided with a form that they used to comment on each of the sub-sections in the Physical and Emotional Health Sections, and were asked to rank their top three Priorities. These forms were returned to HCHN, and the comments were integrated into the document and the Priorities ranked.

FINDINGS

Mental Health: Mental Healthcare Services are of concern in Herkimer County. Some factors are beyond the scope of the County to deal with, including parity of Mental Health benefits with other Health Benefits, the limitations being rigid and much less than for other specialties and number of Mental Health Professionals in the area.

Obesity/Physical Activity: The Obesity Rate in Herkimer County is above the National and State rates. This has an impact on the overall health of the county and cost to society in general. Of particular

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concern was the rate of obesity in children and not only its immediate effects but its effect on them as they enter adulthood. The Focus Group felt that Herkimer County residents are aware that a change in their behavior is needed, but do little to alter it.

Oral Health: The chief concern cited by the data and focus group were the number of Dental Providers in Herkimer County accepting Medicaid, especially for pediatric patients. Also of concern was the lack of fluoridated water systems in Herkimer County.

Injury & Violence: Herkimer County has a high suicide rate when compared to State and National Statistics. It was difficult for HCHN Staff to obtain exact numbers of Suicide attempts and deaths in Herkimer County, especially for those under 18 and over 65 years of age. The data collected also shows a high number of DWI arrests, this could be due to good enforcement, higher prevalence or stricter standards; it can't be determined from the data. Herkimer County has a very high rate of Hip Fractures compared to other Central New York Counties and above the Healthy People 2010 Goal, but below the National Rate.

Tobacco Use: A Survey by Smoke-Free Mohawk Valley released June 2006 found that smoking rates in Herkimer County are "not significantly different from the rates found in other Central New York counties recently surveyed." It also found that, "Use of other tobacco products (those other than cigarettes) among Herkimer County residents is much lower than use of cigarettes."

Health Status & Risk: Approximately 65% of men in Herkimer County indicate they have ever had a sigmoidoscopy/colonoscopy. For the male population this exceeds the HP 2010 goal of 50%. HCHN was not able to locate data on the rate for women. Less than half of Herkimer County adults have had a blood stool test in the past two years.

Overall Findings: A common thread in the six areas just addressed is human behavior. Individual choices and societal norms can positively or negatively impact each of these areas. To be effective in addressing health issues, health and human service providers in Herkimer County need to collaborate and learn how to identify areas of concern and improve and strengthen their work to improve the public's health. Utilizing behavior change theory we can work together to identify strategies at all levels to drive and sustain behavioral changes that result in a healthier population.

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PRIORITIES

The federal Centers for Disease Control have found that half of all deaths are linked to unhealthy behavior and unsafe environments, including smoking, alcohol abuse, poor diet, physical inactivity and exposure to toxic substances such as lead, pesticides and air pollution. The global cost of these conditions, in human as well as in financial terms, is enormous.

Most chronic diseases are associated with or caused by a combination of social, cultural, environmental, and behavioral factors. While it is important to promote healthy behaviors in our Herkimer County residents; it is equally important to improve access to health care. Access can be broken down to mean; individuals have health insurance coverage, and appropriate health services are locally available. Without health insurance coverage many individuals will forego health care until they are in crisis. If services are unavailable locally individuals are also less likely to obtain care until they are in crisis.

The top Priorities determined by the Focus Group were:

- **Nutrition/Physical Activity:** Reduction of Herkimer County's Obesity Rate & Increasing the amount of Physical Activity Herkimer County Residents engage in.
- **Oral Health:** Increase Access to Oral Health Providers for Medicaid Eligible Herkimer County Residents & Increase Utilization of existing Medicaid Providers by Herkimer County Residents. Promote use of fluoride to reduce the incidence of tooth decay, especially in children.
- **Mental Health:** Increased/Better Screening, Increase Care Opportunities & Increased Opportunities for adults and youth to utilize the Mental Health System.
- **Injury & Violence:** Reducing Violence and Bullying among Herkimer County Youth; especially, but not limited to, what takes place in school. Increasing the opportunities for prevention of suicide, particular groups of interest are: youth and elderly. Expand on/Refine existing prevention resources.
- **0-5 Age Group:** This has been identified as a gap in data collection across every sub-section of the Health Section. Virtually no data is collected on children's health and well-being from after birth, until they start kindergarten. We need to gather data and address areas of concern identified as a result of better data collection.
- **Wellness/Preventive Services:** The more citizens utilize existing preventive healthcare services, the earlier chronic diseases are diagnosed. Increased utilization of preventative services will help to prevent hip fractures in the elderly, colorectal cancer, lung cancer, cardiovascular disease, and stroke; all of which are areas of concern among Herkimer County residents. Increased focus on wellness services would have a positive effect on every other priority identified in this Profile.
- **Access to Health Insurance:** Increase awareness and utilization of assistance programs providing health insurance coverage. Increasing use of Pharmaceutical Companies Coupons and Discount programs, local nonprofit & government programs.

