

GCI: Report to the Community 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Organized in 2003, Geauga Community Impact (GCI) was established as the first ever collaboration of community leaders from local businesses and government, faith groups, safety forces, health and social service organizations in Geauga County. GCI members came together to plan the future of Geauga County's health and human service needs. The planning was guided by a 32-member Steering Committee.

A nationally recognized model, *COMPASS II™, Guide to Community Building*, was utilized to lead GCI through the process. Developed by United Way of America [now United Way Worldwide], the *COMPASS II™* model was chosen because of its emphasis on community building, its credibility, and its ease of use. The premise is that when very complex issues surface, it takes a community to determine and implement workable solutions. The features of the process are:

1. Collaboration whereby numerous county-based groups across public and private sectors join together to make lasting changes to community conditions;
2. Input that is obtained through research and community meetings;
3. Collective approaches to leverage resources to resolve community issues for greatest impact; and
4. Reports of results of collective initiatives to the community.

MCS Consulting Service (MCS), a private consulting firm, was contracted to provide research and to work in collaboration with GCI to develop *GCI: Report to the Community 2004*. The findings from the report guided a Citizen's Convention held in May 2005 to gather input and opinions from county residents. The participants gathered to identify and prioritize needs and to take the first steps in creating a vision for health and human services in Geauga County.

The recommendations from the convention formed the foundation for a comprehensive community agenda, so that long-term solutions to the high priority needs could be identified. See Appendix A

GCI initially focused on two of the three top priorities that were identified on the community agenda, which included Services to Homebound Seniors and Affordable Housing. Both of these issues were addressed by task force groups that created a strategy and resource plan specific to each issue and the community. The results of these groups have been impactful, especially for the populations in need of these services. For example, the Homebound Senior Task Force was able to bring a geriatric assessment program back to Geauga County, which has allowed local seniors with the opportunity to receive services in their local community. In addition, the Affordable Housing Task Force was able to develop a plan that has resulted in over three million dollars being directed into Geauga County to meet the affordable housing needs of our local seniors and individuals with mental health challenges. Work on the third priority issue, Transportation, has been ongoing and solutions are being developed in partnership with a neighboring county and local partners.

In addition to addressing the top priority issues identified, many community organizations developed solutions to the remaining issues identified on the comprehensive community agenda. Some of these include the expansion of healthcare services and outreach programs provided by University Hospitals Geauga Medical Center; development of expanded services and supports provided through Job and Family Services' Workplace Program; enhanced efforts to promote education and prevention services to reduce teen substance abuse through the Geauga Family First Council; and the creation of a new partnership with the Lake County Health Department to expand the drug repository program to serve Geauga County residents.

While GCI initially started as a planned collaborative effort, many groups in the community now appear to be joining together to work on issues and challenges as they arise. This is also evidenced in the survey results within this report.

GCI had been partially funded through a grant received from the Lake-Geauga Fund of The Cleveland Foundation. In addition to this funding, the following health and human service organizations also contributed financially to the project (hereafter referred to as the Partners): Geauga County Board of Mental Health and Recovery Services, Geauga County Department on Aging, Geauga County Job and Family Services, Geauga Family First Council, and United Way Services of Geauga County.

MCS has been asked to replicate the study conducted in 2004 and its findings are reported in *GCI: Report to the Community 2012*.

Demographic Overview

Geauga County is located in the northeastern region of Ohio, which, for the purpose of this report, includes seven other counties (Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Lake, Lorain, Medina, Portage, and Summit). While the region was experiencing a decreasing population (-2 percent between 2000 and 2010), Geauga County grew by 2,494 persons (3 percent). This is consistent with its history of continuous population growth since 1810, when the first recorded population census was conducted. This growth brought the county population to an estimated 93,389 persons, a 15 percent growth rate since 1990 with a 12 percent increase between 1990 and 2000 and only 3 percent over the last decade. The county's population is expected to increase to 99,127 by 2020.

The highest growth between 2000 and 2010 was in Auburn Township (25 percent), Middlefield Village (21 percent), Parkman Township (16 percent), and Hambden Township (16 percent). At the same time, eight of the county's communities lost population.

Today, Geauga County is an aging county, with 22 percent of its population 60+ years of age. This segment of the population is expected to continue to grow as the baby boomers continue to age. Already, the number of those under 34 years decreased over the last decade.

There is little racial diversity in the county although it is slightly more diverse than in 2000 with non-Caucasians growing from 2 percent to 3 percent of the population over the decade. More than eleven hundred persons (1,198, 1 percent) of the population are African Americans with a total of 1,677 persons (2 percent) of other racial backgrounds. There are 836 persons (<1 percent) of Hispanic descent.

Slightly under 3 percent of the county's population is foreign born based on the 2010 Census. The majority (60 percent) of the county's foreign-born population is from Europe followed by 19 percent from Asia.

Geauga County is widely known for its Amish, estimated at about 9 percent of the population. The county's Amish are part of the Geauga Settlement, which also includes families from Ashtabula, Portage, and Trumbull Counties. This farm-based, religious group primarily resides in the rural townships of eastern Geauga County. For the most part, the Amish have their own self-help approaches for providing health and education services. For example, the Amish have their own health insurance plans and they also operate their own schools that go through 8th grade. Their strong work ethic and "take care of our own" mentality seems to permeate and uplift the culture of the entire county.

Foundations of Community

“The successful communities of the 2000s will be those that find ways in which business, government and non profit groups work together with citizens to help a community reach its collective goals and meet its common challenges.”

(Source: Gates, Christian T., *The Community Visioning & Strategic Planning Handbook*, National Civic League Press, 2000)

Creating and sustaining a sense of community across a geographically spread county can be a great challenge. People tend to have a stronger connection with the municipal jurisdiction in which they reside, or with the school district where their children attend school

than they do with the county. Much of a sense of community is perceptual. The 2012 Geauga County Household Survey which replicated the 2004 Geauga County Household Survey and the 2012 Stakeholder Survey captured some of the perceptions that adult residents and stakeholders have about the county.

Adult residents of the county believe even more strongly than in 2004 that county residents help each other out, especially when they have problems and that they help the most vulnerable residents, trust each other, and gather formally and informally in the community nearest their home. On the topic of leadership, there is a strong perception that the county’s leaders address issues, respect each other, and share common goals.

However, the survey indicates that adult residents are mixed regarding their opportunity to affect how things happen in the county. The majority of residents feel that they have little or no opportunity to influence how things happen in the county with only 4 percent feeling they have much opportunity. This response is similar to 2004. In the area of voting, one of the most basic forms of influence, 91 percent of adult residents reported that they vote in most elections; however, the actual numbers reported by the Ohio Department of Development indicate that only 58 percent of registered voters voted in the 2010 election.

Geauga County's rate, however, is higher than the state average and that of its neighboring counties in the region.

Regarding racial and ethnic diversity in the county, the survey findings are also mixed. While 2012 Stakeholder Survey respondents strongly perceive that Geauga County is a community that actively supports and strengthens connections between families and the whole community, only 55 percent of adult residents strongly or somewhat agree that people in the county participate together in community activities with persons who are different from themselves. This proportion was similar in 2004. Fourteen percent of adults in the county perceive racial or ethnic discrimination to be a serious issue in the county; but only 1 percent report discrimination of some form in their household. This is a relatively high percentage given that there is a low percentage of non-Caucasians in the county, approximately 3 percent. Coupling this with the finding that while close to two-thirds of adult residents of the county perceive that the county promotes positive relations and participation in the political process across diverse groups, one-fourth of them strongly or somewhat disagree with that statement suggests an issue to be addressed.

Fortunately, crime in the county is low, which can contribute to trust among residents and thus a sense of community. Between 2006 and 2010, Geauga County averaged only 724 total crimes and the number of crimes has decreased over the five year period at the same time that the population increased. The majority of the crimes are property-related. Relatively few 2012 adult county residents perceive crime to be a serious issue (about one in five); and only 3 percent report that it is an issue in their household. These responses were similar to those in the previous 2004 survey. Only 1 percent (down from 4 percent in 2004) consider threats from gangs to be a problem.

The 2012 Household Survey shows that the majority of the county's adult residents do not volunteer. Of those who do volunteer, most are involved with children/ youth activities or with a religious group.

One of four adults in the county perceives that there are serious environmental issues such as insufficient conservation of green space, water and air quality; fewer consider water or air pollution a serious issue in their household. Eleven percent perceive noise to be an issue in the county and 8 percent in their household.

With respect to the amenities and services that contribute to community life, the following issues are perceived to be the most serious in the county and in households in order of priority:

- Between 30 and 39 percent of adult residents consider the lack of cultural events, shortage of recreational facilities, and inadequate public transportation to be serious issues in the county with about half as many reporting the issue in their households. Note that in 2004, the range was 40 to 49 percent of adults considering these serious issues in the county. Geauga County has a large percentage of residents who drive to work, an average of 81 percent between 2006 and 2010.
- Seventeen percent of adult residents consider insufficient activities for seniors to be serious issues in the county and 23 percent report that insufficient transportation for seniors and persons with disabilities is a serious issue. This compares to 21 percent and 19 percent, respectively in 2004.
- Few adult residents (7 percent or less) consider insufficient police, fire, and EMS, slow police, fire, and EMS response rates to be serious issues in the county compared to 10 percent or less in 2004.

SUGGESTED ISSUES TO ADDRESS – COMMUNITY LIVING:

1. Communication about how to influence policies in the county
2. Diversity
3. Lack of cultural events
4. Shortage of recreational facilities
5. Inadequate public transportation

Basic & Emergency Needs

Geauga County is perceived by many to be an affluent bedroom community. And many of the facts support this perception. For the majority, incomes are above regional averages and life in the county offers many amenities. County officials and residents can take pride that Geauga County compares positively to the state and other counties in the Northeast Ohio region on multiple variables of distress. For example, the county's percent of population below 200 percent of the poverty level at 21 percent compares favorably to the Northeast Ohio region's rate of 30 percent in 2010. For the same period, only 7.3 percent of the county's population had incomes below the federal poverty level compared to the regional average of 13.5 percent. Geauga County has the highest rate of married couples with children below poverty, but the lowest percent of female headed families below poverty in the region.

However, the realities of the national and global economies have also impacted Geauga County. The county's percentage and number of persons in financial distress has increased over the decade. An average 21 percent of the county's population (19,952 persons) between 2006 and 2010 had incomes below 200 percent of poverty compared to 16 percent (14,547 persons) in 2000. This amounted to \$44,628 for a family of four in 2010 (\$35,206 in 2000).

Almost two-thirds of them (12,893 persons) had incomes below the poverty threshold \$22,314 in 2010 (\$17,603 in 2000).

Furthermore, an estimated average 22.6 percent of those below poverty between 2006 and 2010 were in serious poverty (2,916 persons) with income below 50 percent of the federal poverty rate. These figures may be slightly biased because of the large numbers of Amish residents, whose incomes may be in the category of what is now called near poverty, i.e., between 100 and 200 percent of poverty.

In effect, poverty and near poverty in Geauga County increased over the past decade, i.e., the number and percent of persons below 100 percent of the federal poverty level and the number and percent near poverty (between 100 and 200 percent of the federal poverty level). Thus, it must be noted that many county residents live with marginal incomes; that increases in poverty over the past decade places more demands on the county's health and human service delivery system; and that any further negative changes in the economy could easily cause more people to slip into poverty.

In an affluent community like Geauga County, residents with limited financial, social, psychological, or health resources can become a hidden, forgotten, invisible population because they represent small numbers. These are the low-income residents, the homeless, children and youth in custody of the county, educationally challenged students, uninsured and under-insured persons/families, and persons with health problems.

However, the impact of the recession within the past decade make it less likely that these individuals remain invisible as both the numbers and percent of the county's population have increased.

Perceptually, 51 percent of the 2012 Stakeholder Survey respondents consider that poverty has been an issue in the county over the past twelve months. Thirty-five percent of adult residents consider poverty a serious issue in the county and 8 percent in their household. Note however, that, reflective of the changed economy, poverty is perceived to be a more serious issue in the county than in 2004 when only

23 percent of adult residents considered it a serious issue in the county and 3 percent in their household.

The proportion of the population that has difficulty meeting their basic needs is the primary indicator of the level of need in a community. When looking at areas of basic needs that are least affordable in the county, overwhelmingly affording prescription drugs, health insurance, and medical care rise to the top of the list for both adult residents and 2012 Stakeholder Survey respondents. This was also the perception in 2004. Typically stakeholders perceive the issues to be more serious than adult residents who perceive the issues to be more serious for the county than for their own household.

There are many other serious basic needs issues in the county with about one-third of adult residents considering the following unaffordable: housing, child care, mental health services, legal help, food, clothing and shoes, and recreational and entertainment activities.

There are a number of resources available to assist persons with insufficient means to meet their basic needs. However, there are tremendous pressures on government at all levels, federal, state, and local, to limit the amount of public funds for the community's safety net. Private resources are also in short supply to meet growing demand.

Two-thirds of 2-1-1 First Call for Help Information and Referral service requests were specifically for basic need services for the two-year period 2010 and 2011. Food pantries headed the list at 28.3 percent of the top 20 requests for the period.

SUGGESTED ISSUES TO ADDRESS – BASIC & EMERGENCY NEEDS:

1. Affordability of prescription drugs, health insurance, and medical care
2. Assisting those below or near poverty to meet basic needs for housing, child care, mental health services, legal help, food, clothing and shoes, and recreational and entertainment activities

Education

Education is an issue in Geauga County where perception and objective reality meet and clearly present a consistent picture. Geauga County is a very educated community with the highest percent of persons with bachelor's degrees or higher in the region. In addition, the performance data from the seven public school districts in the county support the perceptions of a strong school system. The county school districts are equal to or above state standards in attendance, high school graduation, and third and tenth grade reading and math proficiencies. Five of seven of the county's school districts were rated "excellent" and the other two "effective" for the 2011 academic year.

However, the schools have also been impacted by the economic conditions of the country. One of five students was economically disadvantaged in the 2010/2011 school year compared to one of ten students in 2004. In the 2004 Geauga Community Impact report, we considered these students among the county's *invisible population*; however, now that the numbers are double, they can hardly be considered invisible. The good news is that there is some economic integration in the county's relatively affluent school districts, meaning that the majority of low income students are not clustered in one or two districts. While the data indicates that economically disadvantaged students have high attendance and relatively high graduation rates, it also demonstrates that many have under-performed on the reading and math proficiency tests when compared to the average for all students in the respective districts.

Students with disabilities are another group that was previously considered part of the county's *invisible population*. However, these numbers have also increased with 13 percent of the students in Geauga County's public schools with disabilities in 2010/2011 compared to 10 percent in 2004. The performance of these students is weak as they have substantially lower performance rates for reading and math, substantially lower graduation rates (in 5 districts for which data were available) when compared to all students. However, they generally have similar attendance rates.

Racial and ethnic minority students remain part of the *invisible population* of Geauga County with only 4.6 percent of non-white students in the district. There was not sufficient data on performance indicators for analysis for this group of students.

The educational issues that were considered most serious by adult residents in the 2012 Geauga Household Survey were over-crowded classrooms and unsafe school environments. Note that the surveys reflecting this viewpoint were completed after the tragedy at Chardon High School on February 27, 2012.

Child care

Education and child care are related much like a foundation is to a house. What happens through child care services contributes to the foundation that will subsequently influence learning. The educational system then provides the environment, tools and skills for learning that will help a student become self-sufficient later in life. Child care can also be considered a social service that supports working families. Affordable, quality child care while parents work is the foundation of a child's future education. Close to one-third of adult residents and more than half of stakeholder survey respondents indicated that affording child care is a serious issue in Geauga County. However, only 5 percent of adult residents and 22 percent of stakeholder survey respondents believe that insufficient quality child care is an issue in the county. Neither affordability or quality of child care is perceived to be serious in households.

Supply and demand data suggests that there is adequate child care for all ages countywide, based on the number of vacancies. However, when examining the data more specifically, it was found that eight communities in the county have no licensed, certified, or registered child care providers. There are also insufficient numbers of regulated or certified family child care providers across the county. Some families may use out-of-county child care services near their employment. Nannies and out-of-county child care are not included in the supply and demand data.

The quality of child care is typically measured by external certification or accreditation. As of June 2012, one preschool in the county was accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and seven child care and preschool programs met Ohio's Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) standards. Thus, out of 40 child care centers and preschools in the county, only 17.5 percent of eligible programs are accredited or meet SUTQ standards.

SUGGESTED ISSUES TO ADDRESS – EDUCATION:

1. Reading and math performance of economically disadvantaged students and those with disabilities
2. Over-crowded classrooms
3. Unsafe school environment
4. Affordable child care
5. Accredited or Ohio Step Up to Quality child care

Employment and Income

Compared to other counties in the region, Geauga County's economic picture is stronger on multiple indicators. Its median household and per capita income rates are among the highest in the region. The county's unemployment rate has been lower than that of other counties in the region and lower than the state's average each year between 2007 and 2011. And it has the most educated population in the region as measured by percentages with a bachelor's degree or higher.

However, on other indicators, the picture is mixed and varies by industrial sector. Over the past decade (2000 to 2010), there was a net loss of jobs (-1,946, -7.2 percent), with significant loss occurring since 2006, the last statewide employment peak (-3,703, -12.8 percent). There were substantial increases in health care/social assistance and retail trade jobs and a major decrease in the manufacturing. Construction and arts/education/recreation also lost significant proportions of their jobs over the decade.

Over the past five years, Geauga County's civilian workforce decreased by slightly under 3 percent among residents 16 years and older. However, for those who were working, average annual wages increased across most industrial sectors between 2000 and 2010. And the county increased the number of employment establishments with the largest expansion in health care/social assistance establishments.

The county's unemployment rate has been inching up, from an average 3.0 percent (1,400 persons) in 2000 as reported in the 2004 Geauga Community Impact report to 6.5 percent (3,300) in 2011, with a peak of 7.4 percent in 2010. This upward trend reflects the status of the national, state and regional economies.

Seventy percent of 2012 Stakeholder Survey respondents saw unemployment as a serious issue in the county and 64 percent, under-employment. Forty-eight percent of adult residents perceived unemployment as a serious problem and 42 percent, under-employment. However, reflective of the downward turn of the economy since the last Geauga Community Impact report, the 2004 household survey reported that only 30 percent of adult residents considered unemployment a problem and 32 percent, under-employment.

While challenged as part of a region undergoing a major transformation from a manufacturing economy to a service economy and more recently from the National/global economic slow down, Geauga County has the natural resources as well as a strong, educated, hard-working labor force that can contribute to the recovery of the region's economy.

SUGGESTED ISSUES TO ADDRESS – EMPLOYMENT & INCOME:

1. Job growth
2. Support for those who are unemployed and under-employed

Health

The findings on health in Geauga County are mixed. On some indicators, residents of the county are far healthier than their counterparts in neighboring counties. On other indicators, county residents fall short. The entire region under-performs the state in prevention.

While slightly under two-thirds of the adult residents of the county reported that they are satisfied with their ability to access the health care system, affordability of health care, prescription drugs, and health insurance are perceived to be major issues for county residents by adult residents, but even more strongly by respondents to the 2012 Stakeholder Survey. This is exacerbated for the 10,395 persons of all ages (11.3 percent of population) who are uninsured. Note that Geauga County has more uninsured persons as a percent of the population than most other counties in the region. However this is likely influenced by the presence of the Amish in the county who are typically self-insured.

In 2011, 6,586 individuals were on Medicaid in Geauga County. There is no current number of individuals eligible and not receiving Medicaid although some of the uninsured likely fall in this category. Furthermore, there will be changes as public policies such as the Affordable Care Act roll out that could influence this number.

On the physical health indicators, Geauga County is superior when compared to other counties in the region and typically when compared to state averages. However, there are challenges.

Heart disease and cancer are the two leading causes of death in the county even though, when compared to the state, the northeast Ohio region is estimated to have the lowest death rates from heart disease, cancer, lung cancer, chronic lower respiratory disease (CLRD), stroke, and Alzheimer's Disease. It also had the lowest rate of premature mortality.

With respect to predictors of more serious health issues, the county's rates are lower than Ohio's except for arthritis. These include diagnosed diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, and high blood cholesterol plus obesity and a history of heart attacks and stroke. A small number of persons in the county were diagnosed with HIV infections, Chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis with the incidences of gonorrhea and chlamydia upward in the county.

The county's percent of women with adequate prenatal care during the first trimester was lowest in the region and the percent is decreasing. The county is lowest in the region with pregnant mothers who smoked during pregnancy, percent of low birth weight and premature babies, and unwed mothers.

The Northeast Ohio region, excluding Cuyahoga County, has not done too well in the areas of prevention. The region was found to under-perform the State of Ohio in residents getting regular physical activity and consuming the recommended levels of fruits and vegetables plus the numbers of overweight adults, women 18+ having a PapSmear within the past three years, adults 65+ having Pneumoccal Vaccine, and adults 50+ having a Sigmoidoscopy within the past five years.

There is a strong perception that mental and behavioral health are serious issues in the county according to two-thirds of respondents to the 2012 Stakeholder Survey and one-third of adult residents. This includes anxiety, stress and depression, alcohol/drug abuse for both adults and teens, and children and youth with emotional and behavioral issues. It is difficult to fully identify the number of those with mental health or substance abuse problems.

In Ohio, it is estimated that 46 million residents ages 6 and older had a moderate to serious mental disorder between 2007 and 2009 with about one-third of them with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Recent research has shown that most adults in Geauga County had only moderate or low stress levels and were basically satisfied with their lives. Approximately 3 percent of adults 18+ reported experiencing major depression. However, the county has the third highest suicide rate in the region with about 2 percent of adults having considered or attempted suicide. In addition, 9 percent of youth reported seriously considering suicide. Seventy-eight persons with developmental disabilities in Geauga County also have a mental health diagnosis. And the county is among the counties in the region with the highest rates of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use.

Service to those who do experience mental or behavioral disorders, especially those with lower incomes who depend on public supports, has been limited by serious cuts to budgets. According to the Center for Community Solutions (July 2011), approximately three hundred thirty thousand consumers were served by county behavioral health boards in the state. This represents only 18.9 percent of all persons with mental disorders and 63.1 percent of those under 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Between 2007 and 2009, with a rate of 53 percent, Geauga County ranked eighth in the region with percent of persons with mental health needs served by its county board. The regional average was 69.2 percent.

In conclusion, Geauga County is a very healthy county in many respects; but steps could be taken to ensure that all citizens have opportunities for health treatment. Promoting health through preventative measures is an area that can always use greater attention.

SUGGESTED ISSUES TO ADDRESS – HEALTH:

1. Access to affordable health care
2. Addressing health issues – heart disease; cancer; arthritis
3. Ensuring adequate prenatal care during first trimester of pregnancy
4. Ensuring preventative health practices – physical activity; eating fruits and vegetables; preventative tests
5. Addressing use of alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs
6. Funding for mental and behavioral health care, especially for those under 200 percent of federal poverty level

Housing

In addition to strong schools, housing is what attracts people to a given community. Geauga County, a once rural county, has undergone tremendous growth and development over the past several decades. It has attracted newcomers from outside the county to move in, thus increasing its population. For the most part, the in-movers are attracted to the higher priced housing that comes with communities zoned for large lots. The result is a county with increases in new housing units, although growth in owner-occupied housing has slowed in the last decade. At the same time, there was an explosion of development of rental units that quadrupled the number in 2000. In both owner- and renter-occupied housing, there are few vacancies, the signs of a strong housing market, although the number and percent of vacancies almost doubled over the past decade. Within the region, Geauga County has: the lowest rental vacancy rates; the largest proportion of owner-occupied units; and the lowest proportion of renter occupied units. The county also has the most stable population in the region with 93.4 percent of residents in the same house as in the previous decade.

Growth in the number of households outpaced population growth in the county over the past decade because of the increase in single person owners and even more with single person renters.

Geauga County is a community of expensive homes with an average median housing value of \$230,900, the highest in the region, between 2006 and 2010. Slightly more than 7 percent of units are valued under \$100,000, and 31.5 percent between \$100,000 and \$199,000. In total, the county has the fewest owner-occupied units valued under \$200,000 in the region. At 38.7 percent, this is far lower than the second lowest county in the region (Medina County) at 58.1 percent.

“While increased housing values are often beneficial to the tax base, they may result in the out-migration of younger families and other moderate income populations.” (Source: *Social Indicators 2003, Housing*) It can also mean that persons who raised their families in the county and would like to “age in place” may no longer afford to remain in the county if their financial resources decrease with age. “It is assumed that an efficient housing market has the ability to deliver affordable housing to as many income levels as possible. An inefficient housing market increases community instability by forcing one or more income levels of potential homeowners to look elsewhere to buy or rent.” (Source: *Social Indicators 2003, Housing*)

Geauga County ranks sixth in the region for affordability of owner-occupied housing with the median monthly cost to owners of \$1,405 representing only 22.3 percent of household income [approximately \$6,300 monthly or \$75,605 annually]. The county’s median rent of \$751 ranks lowest in the region as a percent of household income at 27.7 percent [approximately \$2,711 monthly or \$32,534 annually].

The Geauga Metropolitan Housing Authority (GMHA) has a limited supply of subsidized public housing and Section 8, a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development program that provides vouchers to subsidize market rate housing for low-income persons. The waiting list for public housing is 712 and for Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, 294 as of August, 2012. While the public housing waiting list always remains open, the Section 8 HCV waiting list only opens every few years for a limited time period.

Approximately one-third of adults in the county and one-half of 2012 Stakeholder Survey respondents perceived that a shortage of affordable housing for families and for seniors are serious issues in the county. In 2004, slightly under half of adult residents considered this a serious issue in the county. A 2011 study by the Geauga County Auditor's Office replicated a 2003 study of housing for older adults in the county.

While the number of housing units for this population increased, because of the increase in the number of persons 60+ in the county, the number of units available per person 60+ actually decreased. With the aging of the county's population, it can also be anticipated that the county will need more market-rate and subsidized housing for older adults at various levels of independence.

Research indicates that small groups of persons with developmental disabilities living together in individual housing units afford a better living environment than larger group homes. To address this housing need, the Geauga County Board of Developmental Disabilities (DD) manages an inventory of a condominium and 18 single houses. Several of these houses were purchased since the 2004 GCI Report which reported the need for additional affordable housing for persons with developmental disabilities. The DD Board typically purchases single story ranch houses which they can more easily renovate for accommodations such as wheel chair accessibility.

With the aging of the county's population, it can also be anticipated that the county will need more market-rate and subsidized housing for older adults.

While homelessness is not as visible in Geauga County as in the larger urban counties, it is still present. Homelessness is defined as those who are living with other friends or family members so they can remain in their community. Based on this definition, it is estimated that approximately 33 individuals (20 adults and 13 children) are homeless. Eighteen reside in shelters and 15 are unsheltered.

SUGGESTED ISSUES TO ADDRESS – HOUSING:

1. Access to affordable housing
2. More housing for older adults of all income levels and various levels of independence.
3. Need for permanent, independent housing for single households and households with families and for emergency shelter

There is an unmet need for housing single households and for households with families. The need is primarily for permanent, independent housing and for emergency shelter as well. (Source: Geauga County Board of Mental Health and Recovery Services)

Special Populations

Geauga County is a community of stable families with the largest proportion of husband-wife families in the region, half with children. When comparing the county to the region, it has the largest average family size, the lowest rate of births to unmarried persons, the second lowest rate of families below poverty, the lowest percent of divorced/separated persons, as well as the lowest percent of grandparents raising grandchildren. A small percentage of the county's families have incomes below poverty.

The county's stable family structure is further demonstrated by the fact that there are few children in custody of Geauga Job and Family Services, with a lower percent of them in custody than in other counties in the region. The dominant profile is children 12 years and older, white, removed for multiple safety issues.

Most are in licensed foster homes and remain in custody up to two years. However, the county has the highest percentage of children in permanent custody compared to other counties in the region, but the third lowest percent of children in permanent custody for four or more years. The longer a child remains in permanent custody, the less likely s/he is to find a permanent or "forever" home.

Children in permanent custody live in foster homes until they are adopted or age out at 18 years. The county also has and the lowest rate of teen pregnancy in the region, a rate that is declining.

Children and Youth

In 2010, there were 26,380 children ages 19 or under in Geauga County, 28.2 percent of the total population and the highest percentage in the region. This age cohort is expected to decrease to 22.9 percent by 2030. The county has the second lowest poverty rate in the region for children 17 years and under at 10.8 percent.

Academically, socially and emotionally, youth in the county are functioning well. At the same time, there are some issues to be addressed. Twenty-nine percent of adult residents believe that teenage alcohol and substance abuse are major issues in the county and about one-third of them also believe that emotional and behavioral problems among adolescents are serious issues. Three times as many 2012 Stakeholder Survey respondents believe that these are serious issues.

Various surveys of Geauga County students substantiated some of those perceptions. Slightly more than one-fourth of students in grades 6 through 12 (27.0 percent) tried a combination of alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana followed by 23.5 percent trying alcohol alone. More students perceived tobacco to have greater risk and greater parental disapproval than either alcohol or marijuana.

Fifteen percent reported being current smokers, one-third, current drinkers, while 12-15 percent used marijuana at least once, and 6 percent, inhalants. About 11 percent reported seriously considering suicide in the past years.

Older Adults

Today, Geauga County is a young county with 77.9 percent of the population under the age of 60 and 22.1 percent over 60 (20,683 persons). However, this ratio will be changing rapidly as the Baby Boomers age.

By 2030, it is projected that 36.0 percent of the county's population will be 60+ and only 64 percent under 60. Of the current 60+ population, more than two-thirds are between 60 and 74 years, thus a "young old" population; 21.7 percent, 75-84 years; and 9.5 percent, 85+ years. As the population ages, greater proportions will be in the 75+ and 85+ age cohorts, and thus require more of the community's health and social services.

With respect to health, the goal is for persons to age in good health, avoid premature death by practicing preventive health, have strong social networks, and have enough economic resources to sustain them through the final years of their lives. For the majority, Geauga County's older adults are aging successfully. In 2009, the average life expectancy was 79.7 years, the highest in the region. Geauga County's seniors also have the third lowest rate of disability in the region. In addition, the county has the second highest rate of persons 65+ married in the region, and only an average of 8.1 percent of persons 65+ living alone, the third lowest rate in the region.

Economically, the county’s older adult population is relatively secure compared to other counties in the region. For those who are age 65+, Geauga County has the largest percent employed, the highest median income, and the third lowest percent below poverty in the region.

Relatively small proportions of adult residents and respondents to the 2012 Stakeholder Survey believe that there are:

- Insufficient activities for seniors in the county: 17 percent of adult residents compared to 21 percent in 2004 and about the same percentage of 2012 Stakeholder Survey respondents;
- Insufficient support for caregivers of older adults, e.g., spouse or adult child: 14 percent of adult residents compared to 22 percent in 2004; and
- Lack of homemaker and personal care services for homebound seniors [thus placing greater burden on the caregiver]: 14 percent of adult residents compared to 18 percent in 2004 and one-third of 2012 Stakeholder Survey respondents.

SUGGESTED ISSUES TO ADDRESS – SPECIAL POPULATIONS:

1. Prevention of use of addictive substances by children/youth
2. Preparation for aging of population

Conclusion

In 2004, seven issues on the Household Survey had responses of 40 percent or more; while in 2012, only four items fell into that category:

2004 Household Survey

1. Affordable Health Insurance – 49.2%
2. Affordable Prescription Drugs – 49.1%
3. Affordable Medical Care - 47.0%
4. Lack of Cultural Activities – 46.2%
5. Shortage Recreational Facilities – 45.2%
6. Shortage Affordable Housing for Families – 44.2%
7. Inadequate Public Transit – 40.3%

2012 Household Survey

1. Unemployment – 48.0%
2. Affordable Health Insurance – 46.7%
3. Affordable Prescription Drugs – 43.5%
4. Under-employment – 42.2%

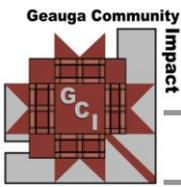
Only affordability of health insurance and prescription drugs rose to the top of the lists in both 2004 and 2012.

Not surprisingly, given the country's economic status, unemployment and under-employment only rose to the top in 2012. This suggests that addressing the economic and social service needs of those in the county who are unemployed or under-employed should rise to the top of priorities addressed by Geauga Community Impact in addition to the more specific items that are addressed in the previous sections.

In an affluent community like Geauga County, residents with limited financial, social, psychological, or health resources can become a hidden, forgotten group because they represent small numbers. In the 2004 Geauga Community Impact Report, we labeled this population as the "*invisible population*." They are the low-income residents, the homeless, children and youth in custody of the county, educationally challenged students, the uninsured and under-insured persons/families, and persons with health problems.

However, the impact of the recession within the past decade made it less likely that these individuals remain invisible as both their numbers and often their percentage of the county's population have increased.

It cannot be denied that Geauga County has many educational, economic, health, and residential strengths that make it a highly desirable place to live, to raise a child, and to grow old. However, there still are many persons in the county with multi-dimensional, complex needs that range from limited incomes to physical and mental health issues. And their needs have been exacerbated by the economic condition of the country since publication of the last GCI Report to the Community. The willingness of the community to come together and address their needs is the true test of community. "*If communities are to effectively address local problems, all sectors of the community need to be involved, to work together in concert towards common ends*". (Gates, Christopher T., *The Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Handbook*, National Civic League Press 2000)



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