

**COMMUNITY CARE ALLIANCE**  
**FFY 2016 COMMUNITY SERVICES BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM**  
**NEEDS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY**

The follow is a summary of needs in Woonsocket based on data from the statewide Community Needs Assessment conducted by The Capacity Group LLC on behalf of the Rhode Island Community Action Association released in 2014. Information from the 98 completed surveys distributed by Community Care Alliance (formerly Family Resources Community Action) to clients for this community assessment, along with data from RI Kids Count 2015 Factbook, U.S. Census and other sources served as the basis for this summary.

✓ **Meeting basic needs**

Basic needs services for Woonsocket residents continue to be a priority. Significant numbers of respondents reported very or somewhat serious problems with: affordable food choices (40%), paying for utilities (41%), an affordable place to live (48%) and affordable clothing (45%). The lack of affordable/quality housing was noted by 31% of respondents as one of the top causes of poverty. High unemployment and foreclosures rates have placed additional strain on low income individuals and families, contributing to an increased risk in homelessness. The high level of these problems demonstrates the continued importance of mobilizing both public and private entities to ensure that sufficient affordable housing, basic needs and other community based resources are available. Helping people to address these basic needs is critical in order to stabilize individuals and families and prevent homelessness.

✓ **Unemployment, underemployment and low pay**

Employment remains a concern for many residents, with 67% of respondents reporting that they have an unemployed person in the household. The most significant barriers to employment for unemployed residents reported are a lack of available jobs (44%), health problems or a disability (35%), lack of childcare (22%) and inadequate transportation (18%). A total of 68% of respondents reported that one of the top three causes of poverty was “not enough jobs,” followed by “lack of training/education” (47%). Concern about the limited hours and low pay of jobs was also cited. These reports are not surprising, given the high unemployment rate in Woonsocket, which averaged 9.7% in 2014, the second highest in the state (as compared to 7.7% statewide average).

The economic stability needs of unemployed and underemployed Woonsocket residents can be strengthened by helping link individuals to supports in the community including basic needs, information about accessing state/other benefits, employment and training programs, education supports, income tax preparation assistance and financial literacy education.

✓ **Financial problems**

Financial problems remain a major concern, with 40% of respondents reporting feeling worse off than a year ago with respect to their financial status. Only 14% of respondents reported following a budget in the past year, and 31% have found themselves spending their savings to meet day-to-day expenses. 20% are paying their mortgage or rent late (20%) and 39% are paying their utility bills late. More than half (52%) reported household income of \$15,999 or less; the vast majority (69%) live in single income households. The low income coupled with issues with rent/utility payments places many people at risk for homelessness. The median family income for Woonsocket was less than half of the statewide average (\$31,307 as compared to \$67,904 statewide (U.S. American Community Survey 2009-13); 42.8% of Woonsocket children are living in families below the federal poverty threshold, more than double the state average. Providing basic needs assistance, financial literacy, employment training and access to other supports to address both short and long-term needs is critical to help individuals and families improve their financial condition.

✓ **Children, youth & families**

Affordable child care remains a significant need for Woonsocket residents, with 23% of respondents indicating an issue with the cost of child care. 20% of respondents noted a problem with lack of night or weekend child care, and 12% noted an issue with either distance or lack of transportation to/from child care. 29% of respondents noted a need for full day educational services for their children (birth to 5 years); 7% noted a need for services for children with special needs. The lack of programs and activities for youth and teens was consistently highlighted as a major need in focus groups.

In consideration of Woonsocket's child abuse and neglect rate (at 37.6 per 1,000 children, the second highest in the state and more than double the statewide average), the high teenage pregnancy rate (63.8 per 1,000 girls ages 15-19, the second highest in state), the high rate of children witnessing domestic violence, and the high percentage of children of incarcerated parents, the need to address a multigenerational cycle remains a significant issue to the community of Woonsocket.

✓ **Transportation**

Transportation remains a significant need for Woonsocket's residents. 26% of respondents reported that they do not have access to reliable transportation, and 31% reported a very or somewhat serious problem with transportation. Residents have consistently expressed concerns about the limited routes and schedules of the public transit system in Woonsocket that shuts down in early evening. The need for reliable, flexible, and affordable transportation for Woonsocket residents presents as a barrier to economic self sufficiency and an improved quality of life.

### ✓ **Physical and mental health**

There continues to be a need for support to maintain both physical and mental health. 47% of respondents reported that they delay healthcare because of the cost, and 56% delay seeing the dentist because of the cost. 26% reported a very or somewhat serious problem with affordable medical care for the family. In addition, 13% of respondents reported a very or somewhat serious problem with access to mental health care. Addressing individuals' health/mental health concerns will enhance individual well-being and remove a barrier to employment and economic stability.

### ✓ **Substance Abuse/Addiction**

The high level of trauma experienced by Woonsocket residents has led to a rising concern with substance use and addiction. Within Rhode Island, Woonsocket is disproportionately affected by substance abuse. The city has the second highest rate of drug overdoses in the state. In addition, 20% of parents whose children are enrolled in Head Start have confirmed substance abuse in the family; the true rate is likely higher. Over 29% of respondents noted drug abuse and addiction as a top cause of poverty. The City has the second highest rate of child abuse and neglect in the state; based on data from DCYF, children are placed in foster care approximately 50% of the time due to parental addiction and other mental health concerns. As such, the confluence of poverty and addiction, often accompanied by other traumatic experiences, creates a long term negative impact people's lives. Due to the closing of several substance use treatment programs, accessing treatment and recovery services in Woonsocket continues to be a major concern. There is a growing need for an array of services, both residential and outpatient, for people struggling with addiction so they can get on the road to recovery.

### ✓ **Education**

There continues to be a need to develop and maintain comprehensive educational supports for youth and adults. 24% of respondents reported they do not have a high school degree, and only 17% have a degree beyond high school. 47% of respondents reported that a lack of training/education was one of the top causes of poverty. With the lowest high school graduation rate in the state (58% as compared to 81% statewide), there clearly remains a significant need to address the educational challenges in Woonsocket. Through improved education outreach and programming, the high school dropout rates can be reduced and the ability of residents to maintain long term economic self sufficiency increased.

### ✓ **Information, referral and advocacy services**

Due to the range and scope of reported issues of concern, it is critical that information about available services and resources be made readily available so individuals and families are able to access the programs and supports they need to address economic, health, mental health, substance use, social service and other concerns. These service referral needs can be effectively addressed through comprehensive program development, advocacy efforts and providing individuals with information and links to resources in the community.