

KEY FINDINGS

Rocky Mountain Development Council, Inc. is dedicated to complete a Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment every three years and values being able to do the assessment in order to gauge the communities' needs. The assessment confirms that Rocky's programs and services are needed in the Tri-County area and will even increase in the future.

The process conducted this year shows that transportation is one of the key family needs in our Tri-County area. Lack of transportation can trap people into poverty – people have no means to get to a job without reliable transportation, cannot get their children to childcare or a Head Start program, and often cannot get to medical care. Montana in general is lacking in public transportation between towns. The rural sites have little to no bus service in order to get to Helena, Bozeman, or Butte for medical treatment and/or to pick up prescriptions. People rely on family, friends, and neighbors. The lack of transportation, not only within communities, but also between communities, affects nearly every area covered by this assessment. The lack of transportation leads to isolation; people struggle to get out with friends and family.



The next most critical needs expressed by our communities are lack of affordable housing and homelessness. Helena has an active Continuum of Care Program through the Helena Resource Advocates with the goal of ending homelessness. Rocky receives an Emergency Solutions Grant administered by Good Samaritan Ministries in Helena. In 2017, 35 individuals received support through this grant.

Rocky, in partnership with GL Development, was invited to move forward in applying for tax credits to build a new affordable housing complex in Helena. Red Alder Residences would provide 85 units of workforce and low-income affordable housing. Unfortunately, this will not meet the whole need of our community.



Even with low unemployment numbers, employment stays at the top of the needs in our communities. The survey and forums tells us there is lack of jobs in our area as well as livable wages. The qualitative data tells us that lack of childcare and transportation affect a person being able to hold a job. In a *Time* magazine online article from 2017, long-term unemployment (out of work for six months or longer) and age both create hiring discrimination from employers.

Healthcare and mental healthcare continue to rise to the top of the needs list of our communities. A June 2018 report in the Great Falls Tribune notes that Montana's suicide rate is nearly double the national rate. The rate rose to 15.4 per 100,000 in 2014-2016 from 12.3 per 100,000 in 1999-2001. In April of 2017, Montana's Governor Bullock signed a bill allocating \$1,000,000 for suicide prevention over the next two years.

Quality of health and health-related services is a huge concern in the community. Lack of grocery stores and low food access in rural communities, along with inadequate access to fruits and vegetables, contributes to poor diets/health for community residents. As noted, hunger is often unrecognized, especially in senior populations. Added



KEY FINDINGS CONTINUED

to poor diet is limited physical activity, which is lower in the Tri-County area than the state average. Without a solid health foundation, the limited number of health-care providers and poor transportation to get to and from appointments snowballs into an even greater issue. The lack of medical care in rural communities is troubling.

As of the writing of this document, St. Peter's Health is completing the 2018 Community Health Needs Assessment Report. The project goal is to improve residents' health status, increase their life spans, and elevate their overall quality of life.



The four-year graduation rate is lower than the state average in all three counties examined. A primary concern regarding education is the cost, including not only tuition but also clothes, school supplies, etc. This also ties into the issue of so many jobs not paying a living wage, which makes it difficult for parents to pay for school costs in addition to rent/mortgage, food, medical needs, etc. Poor wages and lack of education were noted as causes of poverty, and these can cycle from one generation to the next.

In the customer satisfaction survey, 42% said they had received and value Area IV services.

Area IV Agency on Aging helps seniors and people with disabilities with information and resources so that they can live with dignity and stay in their homes and communities as long as possible. Area IV Agency on Aging also provides the funding from the Older Americans Act to fund many senior programs in Broadwater, Jefferson, Lewis & Clark,

and in Meagher, Gallatin and Park counties.

Twenty-nine percent of the seniors who participated in the customer satisfaction survey said they have received services from the Senior Companion Program. Senior Companions are volunteers 55 and over who provide assistance and friendship to seniors who have difficulty with daily living tasks, such as shopping or paying bills. The program aims to keep seniors independent longer, and assist family caregivers. A number of those who attended forums mentioned the need to be involved; the Senior Companion Program is a great way to keep agile seniors involved in the community.

When asked about which Rocky programs have been the most beneficial, a number reported senior companions, having someone to talk to, Area IV, and the Stepping On class (offered by Area IV).

