

Riley County Community Needs Assessment

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS



In an effort to gain insights from the community for the purposes of planning and community improvement, Wichita State University's Center for Community Support and Research (CCSR) was contracted to conduct a community-wide needs assessment for Riley County, which included the compilation of selected secondary data, administration of a community survey, key informant interviews, and focus groups with persons who were underrepresented in the survey. Secondary data, which is publicly available data such as that from the Census survey, Kansas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), and others, was compiled for the most recent years available. Additionally, a community survey was conducted via the internet, mail, phone, and through administration at public locations or meetings to gather input from residents regarding their perceptions of community strengths and needs in 11 different topic areas (Quality of Life, Health, Mental Health, Social Issues, Children and Youth, Education, Aging, Housing, Transportation, Infrastructure, and Economics and Personal Finance).

A total of 1,126 surveys were completed. In order to gain additional insight on the issues addressed in the survey as well as any other topics of concern, key informant interviews were conducted with 25 community members representing a wide range of interests and professions (e.g., ecumenical, business, healthcare, social service, education). Additionally, a focus group was held for each of the three populations that were underrepresented in the survey - young adults (18-24 years old), persons with low income, and Hispanics/Latinos. The primary strengths and needs that were identified for Riley County were remarkably consistent regardless of method of data collection.

THE OVERARCHING THEME OF ALL OF THE DATA COLLECTED IS THAT RILEY COUNTY IS A COMMUNITY THAT IS DIVIDED BETWEEN A HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, PROSPERITY, AND GROWTH ON ONE HAND, AND DWINDLING RESOURCES FOR AND LACK OF ATTENTION TO THOSE WHO ARE MOST IN NEED ON THE OTHER.

For the full report, go to: www.rileycountycommunityneedsassessment.org

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HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE

Riley County generally offers a high quality of life due to such factors as good schools, safety, a clean environment, and a strong sense of community.



LACK OF ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Respondents to the community survey rated access to and affordability of mental health services in the community as their top concern related to mental health. This need was echoed frequently in key informant interviews and focus groups. Mental health services appear to be particularly difficult to access and afford for persons with low income and those who do not speak English.



SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY AND COLLABORATION

While the needs may be great for many in Riley County, service providers and others in the community are oriented toward working together to leverage resources and bridge gaps for those most in need. The work of the Riley County Council of Social Service Agencies (RCCSSA) was highlighted as a key catalyst for cooperation and collaboration. Kansas State University and other organizations and businesses are also seen as constructive partners in efforts to address needs and better the community.



LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Affordable housing is a major issue across the community for students, low income, and even middle class persons. Secondary data show that the average value of an owner-occupied house in Riley County is much greater than for the state of Kansas (\$174,900 versus \$129,500). There is a sense of an inflated value being placed on housing, including rentals, by those who are selling and leasing properties.



GROWTH

Riley County is experiencing a “boom” of sorts with the likely addition of the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility as well as other business development efforts. While this is seen as a positive by many, others are concerned that the “bottom will fall out” as one participant noted and that the community does not have the infrastructure to support such rapid growth.



“INVISIBLE” POPULATION WITH SIGNIFICANT NEEDS

As Riley County grows and prospers, those who have fewer resources or who are outside the mainstream (e.g., non-English speakers, those with disabilities or mental illness, persons with low income) have a sense of being forgotten or pushed aside.

This population was described by one participant as “invisible” because they are easy to overlook in the midst of general prosperity; however, they have significant issues with housing, transportation, and access to necessary health and mental health services that are surpassing the decreasing funding for such necessities. Persons in the military and students are affected by this issue as well given that they are often lower income but not thought of as being in need of assistance. The effect is an expanding divide between those who have resources and those who do not.



LACK OF ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

According to the Department for Children and Families (2013), the funding for child care assistance in Riley County has decreased over the past few years as has the number of children receiving this benefit. This is another area that appears to be of particular concern for those who have low incomes; however, over half of the survey respondents, who tend to have higher incomes than average, report having lost or quit a job due to child care issues. Over 40% also indicate that child care is not affordable.