

Needs Assessment Overview



The United Way of Westmoreland County was formed and continues to grow with the commitment to improve people's lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities. We know the importance of prioritizing our investments based on community needs. But what are they? If we do not know what the critical issues are, how can we work to resolve the problems that we face as individuals, families and a community?

The 2003 Community Needs Assessment was completed with the guidance and support of a variety of community experts, service providers, and funding partners that assisted in validating and analyzing the information gathered through the survey, forums, and demographic profiles. These experts and others then assisted in clarifying and qualifying these needs and suggested strategies that they believe promising in making an impact in our community. The identified needs represent the Westmoreland County area in its entirety, as well as the Alle-Kiski area of Armstrong County and the Connellsville area of Fayette County.

This project was multifaceted, completed with the participation of over 400 community members and based on the analysis of information gathered through:

- Demographic Profiles
- Community and Business Forums
- Community Leader/Key Informant Surveys
- Presentations from Community Experts

This report highlights the needs in our area, but there is good news. In comparing Westmoreland County's demographic information to the state, there are several areas where Westmoreland County is clearly doing better. Many of the needs that have been identified as priority needs fluctuate more by areas of our county – we have many strong and vibrant communities; however, there are also many communities whose demographic data differs greatly from the county average, with heightened need and long-term concerns. The following is a listing of some of our strengths where the overall county picture is stronger than the statewide average:

- Lower poverty rates for children, adults and families
- Higher home ownership rate, greater percentage of occupied housing units and owner-occupied housing units as compared to vacant housing units and renter-occupied.
- Greater population with selected monthly owner costs and/or gross rent less than 15% of household income and decreased populations whose costs exceed 35% of income
- Greater likelihood of long-term connections to community, increased stays in same home, county and state
- Lower percentage of single-parent families.
- Lower percentage of mothers receiving no prenatal care in first trimester
- Lower percentage of births to mothers under 18
- Higher voter turnout
- Larger manufacturing sector**
- Higher percentage of population over 25 with an educational attainment of high-school graduates or higher
- Larger decrease in serious crime and all crime from 1996 -2000*/**

*** Also true for Fayette**

****Also true for Armstrong**

Needs Assessment Overview

The needs in our community are best identified by the following categories:

- Leadership
- Economic Concerns and Poverty
- Health
- Early Care and Education (birth-8)
- Youth 10-17: Bridges to Adulthood
- Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

Children and youth, seniors, low-income and working poor were the populations most often identified as facing especially serious challenges.

We believe this information will be helpful to many others in gaining a clearer understanding of our community: our strengths, most pressing needs, and barriers to individuals in need of the supportive resources provided by community or human service providers.

The Community Needs Assessment was based on a strong motivation for improvement in our service area. It will give the United Way and our partners an opportunity to better understand the critical issues in our region, and then build collaboratives, and leverage resources to address them.

Presented in the following pages are the six identified priority needs in our community, outlined by the following categories:

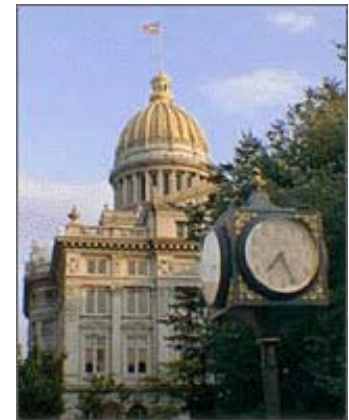
- **Critical Needs** – A summary of the critical needs identified through the community assessment process
- **Census Data** – Demographic compilation of information largely gathered through the 2000 U.S. Census. A completed demographic compilation with sources may be accessed on our website at www.unitedway4u.org
- **Key Informants Tell Us** – Key informants are those individuals who completed the Community Leader Survey and/or participated in the Community and Business Forums.
- **Experts Tell Us** – Experts are those persons who collaborated with us on completing the needs assessment and those persons who were invited to present to the Needs Assessment Committee. A listing of those persons is available in the full report which may be downloaded through our website at www.unitedway4u.org.
- **Strategies to Explore** – These strategies were identified through a participatory process which included approximately 80 community experts and leaders. These persons worked during a full-day retreat to review the “preliminary results” of the needs assessment and identify the most critical strategies to improve the identified need areas.

Critical Need LEADERSHIP



Our leaders are critical to meeting the needs of our community. Although we received many positive statements about our leaders, it is clear that leadership is a concern for many. Our leaders are often long-term residents of our community with generational ties. Critical issues related to leadership are:

- Public awareness of available services
- Increased diversity
- Increased knowledge and professionalism of nonprofits, volunteer and government leaders
- Collaborative planning and sharing of strategies among leaders from all sectors and geographic regions, especially regarding education, health care and development.
- Inclusion of young people: (a) as volunteers, (b) to increase political activism, and (c) to groom for leadership



Census Data

As indicated below, our community has a higher percentage of municipalities with populations less than 2,499. Smaller populations correlate with most limited resources.

	Pennsylvania	Westmoreland	Fayette	Armstrong
# Municipalities, 2000	2,567	65	43	45
Populations 10,000+	13%	19%	7%	0%
Populations 5,000-9,999	16%	17%	14%	2%
Populations 2,500-4,999	29%	12%	26%	20%
Populations 1,000-2,499	20%	23%	28%	33%
Populations 500-999	12%	17%	19%	24%
Populations Less than 500	9%	12%	7%	20%

Percent of Population with Graduate or Professional Degree	Population by Race			
	Pennsylvania	Westmoreland	Fayette	Armstrong
Pennsylvania 8.4%	White 85.4%	White 96.6%	White 95.3%	White 99.5%
Westmoreland 6.6%	African-American 10.0%	African-American 2.0%	African-American 3.5%	African-American 0.8%
Fayette 4.3%	Other 5.1%	Other 1.1%	Other 0.7%	Other 0.6%
Armstrong 3.3%	Senior Population			
	Pennsylvania	Westmoreland	Fayette	Armstrong
	Age 65+ 1,919,165 15.6%	Age 65+ 67,781 18.3%	Age 65+ 26,930 18.1%	Age 65+ 13,053 18.0%
	Age 85+ 237,567 1.9%	Age 85+ 7,637 2.1%	Age 85+ 3,197 2.2%	Age 85+ 1,530 2.1%

Critical Need LEADERSHIP



Key Informants Tell Us...

- We have an aging core of volunteers. Many people appear unengaged and are unlikely to attend community meetings or volunteer.
- The general population is not informed of available resources.
- Diversity is limited. We need to improve tolerance, acceptance and appreciation of diverse populations – cultural and gender groups.
- 50% of survey respondents reported racial or ethnic discrimination as a major or moderate issue. Minority, cultural and gender groups were likewise identified as populations facing especially serious challenges in our community.

Experts Tell Us...

- There is little community knowledge of where to turn for assistance. The human services sector struggles with promoting community awareness.
- Leaders from all sectors of the community do not do enough to share strategies, work together around common goals and build a unified vision, especially in the areas of health, public education and development.
- There is limited cooperation among local governments. Leaders are not consistently coming together from all geographic regions to address mutual concerns.
- There is a lack of active promotion of positive relations among people from all races, genders, and cultures.
- Cities of high diversity have been recognized as economically strong and most attractive to young people.

Strategies to Explore



- Comprehensive, regional 24/7 information and referral system
- Develop systems to promote the diversity and inclusion of young people in leadership – in volunteering, political activism, and grooming for leadership.
- Government and nonprofits must seek out “new blood” for board membership
- Encourage civic engagement and discourage isolation
- Need coordination and planning of services in county, increased collaboration among providers and funders
- Increase the volunteer base



Critical Need

ECONOMIC CONCERNS & POVERTY



The Needs Assessment identified poverty and economic concerns as major issues more than any other needs or problems. Community and human services are directly influenced by the economic conditions of our region. When there are more financial strains on families, there is not only an increased community need for supportive services but also a decreased amount of resources available to support these critical services. Major issues related to poverty and economic concerns are:



- Leadership commitment and collaboration to create viable strategies in helping historically poor populations and communities gain self-sufficiency
- The right kind of growth to prevent overdevelopment in sales and retail
- Decrease barriers to community and human services (transportation, cost, child care)
- Skills and knowledge of workforce

Census Data

Our community, when compared to the state, has a higher percentage of persons in the lower income ranges.

Income by Type				
	Pennsylvania	Westmoreland	Fayette	Armstrong
Median Household	\$40,106	\$37,106	\$27,451	\$31,557
Median Family	\$49,184	\$45,996	\$34,881	\$38,271
Mean Retirement	\$14,663	\$13,655	\$12,487	\$10,854

Percent of Employment by Sector				
	Pennsylvania	Westmoreland	Fayette	Armstrong
Manufacturing	16%	19%	13%	19%
Wholesale and Retail Trade	18%	22%	23%	22%
Mining, Construction, Utilities, Transportation and Warehousing	9%	13%	11%	14%
Information, Finance/Insurance, Real Estate and Rental Leasing	9%	5%	6%	6%
Education Service and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	10%	5%	3%	4%

Critical Need

ECONOMIC CONCERNS & POVERTY



Key Informants Tell Us...

- Approximately half of the survey respondents recognized unemployment/underemployment (49%) and the lack of jobs (51%) as major issues for our community.
- 76% of the survey respondents cited poverty as a major (32%) or moderate (44%) issue.
- A significant number of survey respondents identified poor road and/or traffic conditions (59%) and inadequate public transportation (43%) as major issues.

Experts Tell Us...

- Welfare reform has decreased the population eligible for welfare so child care and transportation barriers prevent this population from obtaining self-sustaining jobs.
- The waiting time for disability determinations is lengthy.
- There is an increased need for assistance with food.
- Requests for financial guidance/assistance are increasing. More persons are reporting higher debt.

Strategies to Explore

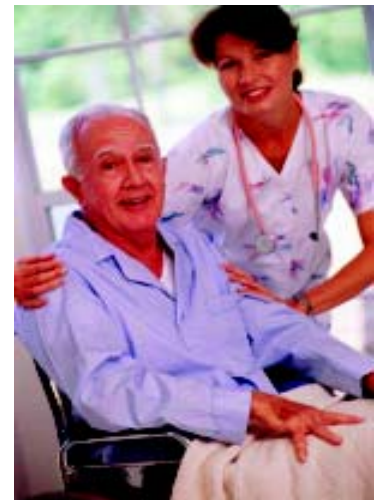


- Health and human services need to be integrated in efforts to revitalize communities.
- Continue to concentrate on job growth with local and county leaders working toward common goals, addressing regional development.
- Leaders collaborate to identify clear strategies to attract people to our area and retain our younger populations
- Promote after-school programs for youth through the teen years, recognizing child care as a barrier to many parents seeking self-sufficient employment. Ideal traits identified for such programs include: in-school, flexible hours, quality programs, more than babysitting
- Develop strategies that are both county-wide and targeted toward needy communities

Critical Need HEALTH



The Assessment identified several priority needs related to health and our community. Despite the growing knowledge of preventive measures and behaviors that can improve our health, we are a community with a growing crude death rate (number of deaths per 1,000 population). Health access is a growing barrier for many in our community. Prescribed medications are not affordable to many in need. Health insurance costs are rising. Transportation barriers continue to be a struggle heightened by centralized and limited health care providers. Critical issues related to health concerns are:



- Accessibility – Reducing barriers of transportation, stigma, insurance, and cost
- Health Literacy – Having a clear understanding of the terminology and explanations of the symptoms, preventable measures, medications, and treatment
- Prevention of use of alcohol, tobacco, and drug abuse
- Integrated and accessible behavioral health treatment options
- Prevention and promotion of healthy lifestyles such as diet and exercise, regular exams, screenings, and tests
- Additional services and treatment options for persons with physical disabilities
- Supports for the aging population attempting to care for family members with disabilities

Census Data

Cancer is the leading cause of death in Westmoreland County for those aged 25-64 and the second cause of death for those aged 65+.

Accidents are the leading cause of death for people aged 5-24. This represents a higher percentage in our community than in the state.

Diseases of the heart are the primary cause of death for persons aged 65+ in our community as well as in the state.

	Suicide Rate			
	2000 Percent Difference Compared to State		12 Year Percent Difference Compared to State	
	Age 5-24	Age 25-44	Age 5-24	Age 25-44
Pennsylvania as % of total deaths	N/A	N/A	-11%	-9%
Westmoreland	+9%	+57%	-25%	+71%
Fayette	+68%	-100%	+19%	+40%
Armstrong	+39%	+171%	-100%	+222%

Crude Death Rate (Total Deaths/Total Population) x 1000		
Area	Crude Death Rate	Ten Year Difference
Pennsylvania	10.6	2% increase
Westmoreland	11.5	15% increase
Fayette	12.2	5.2% increase
Armstrong	12	7.2% increase

Critical Need HEALTH



Key Informants Tell Us...

- 71% of respondents identified lack of affordable medical care as a major or moderate need in our community.
- Tobacco use and alcohol abuse were both identified by approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents as a major or moderate issue locally.
- Persons with physical and/or mental disabilities were identified as facing especially serious challenges in our community, with support, treatment services and programs being identified as a major or moderate issue by approximately half of the survey respondents.

Experts Tell Us...

- Our community hospitals and service providers are facing increased financial struggles.
- The current public mental health system is overloaded with customers and has a limited number of available practicing psychiatrists. Appointments for individual therapy are also limited.
- Providing services in nontraditional settings, such as the schools and primary health care centers, was noted to have an increased accessibility to community members.
- Primary barriers to accessibility for persons in need of health related supports are health literacy and community knowledge/awareness.
- Early diagnosis and treatment are critical to positive outcomes; yet barriers to early diagnosis and treatment are heightened for our vulnerable populations (children, elderly, disabled, and poor).
- A recent survey completed by Latrobe Area Hospital found that isolation (and feelings of) is a symptom, major barrier and increased risk factor for both middle age and older adults.

Strategies to Explore

- Promote and enhance coordination and planning of services in county, increased collaboration among providers and funders
- Providing services in nontraditional settings such as the schools and primary health care centers
- Promote health literacy and community knowledge, and awareness
- Collaborate to create strategies to promote early diagnosis and treatment
- Improve affordability and access to doctors, medical care, complementary, and alternative services
- Adopt community philosophy that values health and wellness

Critical Need

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION



Parenting is one of the most rewarding experiences of a lifetime. However, it is time-consuming; children require nurturing, guidance, structure and safety. In today's society, many parents struggle as they work to support their families and seek the best care options available for their children. Research indicates that the ages between birth and age three are the most critical for learning and development. Educational experts identify children coming to kindergarten ready and able to learn as a strong factor in the child's future academic success. With this in mind, the critical issues related to early care and education are:



- Preparing children to enter school
- Only three of the 17 school districts in Westmoreland County offer full-day kindergarten programs.
- Yale study identified that 75% of child care is “poor” and can interfere with children’s emotional and intellectual development.
- Increasing need of programs and services to address flexibility of hours, sick care, and care for children with special needs
- Recruitment, retention and training of child care staff

Census Data

- The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has established academic standards for grades three, five, eight and eleven, that clearly indicate what learners should know and be able to do by the time they complete each of those grade levels...The education of early childhood learners is part of life-long learning that is significantly influenced by preschool and early childhood experiences. -- Pennsylvania Department of Education
- Today, more than 13 million children in the U.S. under age six - including children whose mothers do not work outside the home - are cared for by someone other than their parents.
-- Early Care & Education Partnerships: State Actions and Local Lessons - 2003
- By age three, 85% of all the connections that the brain will make throughout life are formed.

School Enrollments				
	Pennsylvania	Westmoreland	Fayette	Armstrong
% of Population Under Age 5	5.9%	5.2%	5.7%	5.4%
School Enrollment Population Age 3+	3,135,934	84,043	32,185	15,812
Nursery School/Preschool	6.5%	7.2%	5.3%	6.2%
Kindergarten	5.1%	5.2%	5.5%	5.8%
Elementary School	44%	45.8%	49.2%	48.1%

Critical Need

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION



Key Informants Tell Us...

- Over half (57%) of survey respondents identified lack of quality and affordable care for children as a major or moderate issue for our community.
- 44% of the survey respondents identified literacy as a major or moderate issue.
- 46% of the survey respondents recognized the shortage of programs and services to address special needs as a major or moderate issue.

Experts Tell Us...

- Families with both parents working full time at minimum wage earn \$22,000 per year and child care consumes over 25% of their income.
- State reimbursement is \$4,200 per year yet quality child care is noted to cost \$8,500 per year.
- There is a shortage of programs and services to address special needs: flexibility of hours, sick care, and care for children with special needs.
- Quality hinges on the knowledge and abilities of child care staff. However, recruitment and retention is difficult because of low child care wages and lack of benefits. Staff turnover rates at many child care facilities are as high as 50% per year.
- A national study reported that when children enter kindergarten, low-income children have been read to an average of 35 hours while middle-income children have been read to between 1,000 - 1,700 hours. Middle-income first graders are noted to have a 3,000-word vocabulary compared to the 2,000-word vocabulary of the low-income children. By the 11th grade, there is a 20,000-word difference in the vocabulary of these two groups.

Strategies to Explore



- Promote early literacy
- Enhance affordable quality child care while promoting community and parent value and understanding of quality early care and learning
- Promote standards and accreditation in early child care agencies
- Increase opportunities for full-day kindergarten
- Educate parents and preschools as to what skills and knowledge children should have as a foundation for entering kindergarten
- Advocate for adequate resources to include: staff, funding, environment, transportation, etc.

Critical Need

YOUTH 10-17



In each facet of the Needs Assessment, youth was identified as a priority population and one that faces especially serious challenges. The youth, our future, is a clear concern for nearly everyone in our community. For some, the teenage years are times of personal growth that seem to come naturally; but for many, the added responsibilities and freedoms influenced by increased peer pressures lead to taking risks and other dangerous behaviors. Critical issues related to youth 10 - 17 include:



- Retain youth in area
- Increase prevention and treatment programs, with more programs based on best practices addressing root causes
- Build youth connectedness to community
- Increase opportunities for supervised activities geared toward youth that are too old for child care, yet too young to be left alone
- School safety, decrease bullying in schools

Census Data

	Pennsylvania	Westmoreland	Fayette	Armstrong
Percent of population Age 17 and under	23.8%	22.0%	22.7%	22.9%
Percent change in # of students, 1981-1991	-12%	-20%	-19%	-15%
Percent change in # of students, 1991-2001	9%	2%	-6%	-10%
Percent of population Age 5-20 with a disability	7.5%	6.8%	9.0%	6.7%

Critical Need

YOUTH 10-17



Key Informants Tell Us...

- 86% of survey respondents identified youth involvement with drugs and alcohol as a major or moderate need. This was also a major concern identified at every community forum.
- 58% of those surveyed identified family violence as a major or moderate issue, noted by experts as having generational effects and consequences.
- Over half of survey respondents (55%) identified lack of quality before- and after-school programs as a major or moderate problem.
- 60% of survey respondents recognized the shortage of programs and services to address special needs as a major or moderate issue.

Experts Tell Us...

- There is increased youth involvement with drugs and alcohol, often including middle-class and upper-class youth not typically suspected of involvement.
- Sexual activity among youth is on the rise. Youth in many schools reported oral-sex clubs and do not consider health risks carried with forms of sex other than intercourse.
- Childhood obesity is increasing in our community.
- There is a need for more after-school programs, for youth too old for child care and too young to be left alone.
- Family violence is a barrier to a child's healthy development.
- Children with special needs require specialized socialization opportunities as other peer groups do not readily accept them.
- The No Child Left Behind Program focuses too much on testing; schools are reacting by eliminating nonacademic time.
- Bullying is occurring more frequently. All youth need assistance with learning positive relationship building, problem solving and coping skills.
- Mental health treatment needs to be more accessible to youth. School-based treatment has demonstrated positive outcomes.

Strategies to Explore

- Develop programs and activities that promote youth involvement in community service and civic activities and discourage youth isolation.
- Develop programs and service opportunities that enhance positive adult-teen relationships.
- Increase opportunities for wellness and recreational activities that promote social and positive self image.

Critical Need

SENIORS & PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



The needs of our aging and disabled population continue to grow, while resources appear to be shrinking. Our elderly population is one of the highest in the country. The needs of the elderly and disabled are similar in that barriers are more pronounced, community resources are less accessible, and both populations are identified as having increased risks for isolation and deteriorating health. The elderly and disabled, along with their families and caretakers, often find themselves searching for resources that do not exist. Specific issues relating to the senior and disabled population are:



- Services to address elderly isolation
- Programs and services to assist the growing percentage of grandparents as guardians of young children
- Assuring accessibility and affordability for health care
- Supports for elderly caring for adult children with special needs
- Alternative day programming and housing support services for young disabled adults transitioning out of public school system
- Increased expertise and services for dually diagnosed (individuals with two disabilities such as mental health and mental retardation)

Census Data

Senior Population

	Pennsylvania	Westmoreland	Fayette	Armstrong
Percentage of grandparents living with grandchildren who are their primary caretakers	39.2%	44.3%	44.8%	40.2%
Percentage of Population Age 65+ in Poverty	9.1%	8.0%* * Higher areas of poverty in some areas - up to 23.1%	13.5%	7.9%
Percentage of Population Age 65+ with a disability	39.4%	39%* * Higher than county avg. in several areas - up to 50.6%	45.9%	39.4%
Total Licensed Approved Nursing Home Beds for 65+ per 1,000	49.5	37.2	26.5	32.1

Disabled Populations

Although Westmoreland County has a lower population of people age 21-64 with a disability, when compared to the state, the percentage of this population segment that is employed is lower. Additionally, several areas of the county have an increase in disabled populations.

	Pennsylvania	Westmoreland	Fayette	Armstrong
% of Population Age 21-64 with a disability	17.5%	15.8% (to 28.4%)	25%	19.1%
% of Population Age 21-64 with a disability and employed	54.8%	51.2%	42.9%	43.4%



Key Informants Tell Us...

- 56% of survey respondents identified inadequate support services for older adults as a major or moderate issue.
- Senior citizens were the second population group identified as facing especially serious challenges.
- 45% of those surveyed recognized inadequate services and programs for persons with physical disabilities as a major or moderate issue; however, a significant amount of those surveyed did not feel comfortable answering this question.
- Inadequate support service and treatment options for persons with mental illness were identified by 56% of the survey respondents as a major or moderate issue. Challenges identified by experts include limited outpatient treatment shortages of psychiatrists.

Experts Tell Us...

- The senior and disabled populations are especially vulnerable to inadequate general knowledge of where to turn for assistance.
- A population that presents unique challenges in servicing are individuals with mental health and substance abuse needs.
- Elderly people are at heightened risk of undiagnosed substance abuse and medication misuse related to increased prescribed medications and over-the-counter medication, decreased tolerance to alcohol, and increased isolation.
- Barriers are pronounced for the elderly and the disabled. Identified barriers include:
 - Limited community knowledge and awareness - A comprehensive information and referral system is expected to be especially beneficial to these population groups.
 - Stigma, pride, strong sense of self-reliance
 - Limited community awareness, no centralized information and referral system
 - Transportation - Needs include attendants and escorts that are not available through public transportation system.
 - Cost of services is prohibitive for many.
 - Concerns for red tape

Strategies to Explore

- Comprehensive, regional 24/7 Information and Referral System, awareness is increased barrier for aging and disabled
- Promote variety of supportive housing, living arrangements and services to promote independent living, consider urban community developments such as “walking communities”
- Behavioral health services and supports integrated in natural places of help, to include primary care physician offices
- Enhance supportive services such as transportation with escorts

The United Way of Westmoreland County would like to acknowledge and thank the following members of our Needs Assessment Committee, community partners whose time and talents were critical to the completion and value of this project:

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