

Rural Thurston County Needs Assessment

by **POWER** Parents
Organizing for
Welfare and
Economic
Rights

Prepared for the Thurston County HOME Consortium



June 2014



Executive Summary

We count ourselves fortunate to have had the opportunity to expand POWER's outreach into Rural Thurston County where we met incredibly resourceful individuals and families, powerfully compassionate service providers, and fiercely committed elected officials. We saw organizations that do an amazing amount on a shoestring and were welcomed into intimate communities.

We observed services provided in a welcome and affirming manner and we also saw recipients being treated with suspicion and acrimony. We saw an incredible amount of networking and mutual support and occasionally encountered competition and entrenchment. We have provided examples of other communities working to address similar needs.

Poverty is growing in our nation and affects us all. All who live in community, offer services, or govern must take an unflinching look at the realities of poverty and refuse to believe the rhetoric, stereotypes and misinformation that surround us. There is no shortage of work to be done to combat poverty and working together is much more effective than working at odds.

We also appreciate this opportunity to forward the voice of the real poverty experts, those who are experiencing its devastating effects, and hope that every possible effort will be made to address their barriers and the inequities of urban versus rural funding.

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Introduction

On May 1st, 2014, the Thurston County Home Consortium contracted with POWER, Parents Organizing for Welfare and Economic Rights, to complete a need assessment of the rural Thurston County area including Yelm, Rainier, Tenino, Bucoda, and Rochester by June 30th.

The purpose of this assessment is to pinpoint gaps in service, identify new and future service needs, define best practices for serving rural areas, and make recommendations regarding the needs of low-income, at-risk and homeless individuals and families in the County's rural areas.

POWER is an organization of low-income parents and allies advocating for a strong social safety net while working toward a world where children and care giving are truly valued and the devastation of poverty has been eradicated. POWER, founded in 2007 by members of the Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition (WROC), has provided telephone and email advocacy to thousands of low-income people and social service providers, giving legal information about public benefits law and referrals to appropriate services. We have provided consistent outreach at Community Service Offices, food banks, low-income apartment complexes, and other locations frequented by low-income families.

POWER's office is located in downtown Olympia at 309 5th Avenue SE, Olympia, WA 98501 and can be reached at 360-352-9716 or info@mamapower.org. Our informative website can be viewed at www.mamapower.org. Find us on Facebook.

The Thurston County HOME Consortium is comprised of elected representatives from Thurston County and its cities serving in an advisory capacity to the Thurston County Commissioners regarding funding and policy recommendations of the HOME Investment Partnership Housing Program, the Affordable Housing Program, and Homeless Housing Programs. The 2014 board members are Mike McGowan, Yelm; Dennis McVey, Rainier; Craig Lester, Tenino; Virgil Clarkson, Lacey; Jeannine Row, Olympia; Neil McClanahan, Tumwater; and Karen Valenzuela of Thurston County Commissioners.

The HOME Consortium meets the second Monday monthly from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Thurston County Public Health and Social Services, 412 Lilly Rd. N.E., Olympia. For more information, contact Gary Aden, Program Manager at 360-867-2532. POWER will present their Rural Thurston County Needs Assessment at their next meeting on July 14th.

Methodology

While POWER provides outreach on a regular basis at locations in the Olympia, Tumwater and Lacey area, this project challenged us to enter into rural communities in Thurston County, build relationships around trust and solidarity, and ask people what their communities need. Folks

living rurally with low or no incomes are the experts about the conditions and access to social services, so our main objective was to listen and record their experiences.

POWER advocates are trained in active listening, in providing information and resources without judgment, in anti-oppression, and in effective outreach. We learned early on that that surveys aren't accessible or inviting to everyone. Although we wanted to include as many voices as we could in our research, we discovered that having in-depth conversations, though more time consuming, was more rewarding and effective than asking participants to answer multiple choice questions on paper. We connected in conversation with many people and not all of those people filled out a survey.

Our project leaders and volunteers provided outreach at dozens of locations, including WIC offices, food banks, daycares, grocery stores, community meals and gardens, and more, to conduct interviews with low-income people. Our outreach team was not hands off; we rolled up our sleeves and pulled weeds, prepared meals and whatever else we could do to be helpful. We organized an ice cream social to invite participants to network and share ideas in a fun and relaxed setting. This way we reached a variety of people and perspectives.

We also held interviews with service providers, elected officials, school staff, daycare providers, and faith leaders throughout rural Thurston County as well as in the urban core. We input our data into a management system that allowed for cross-referencing and assessment. We translated our materials and conducted interviews and surveys in both English and Spanish.

We encountered a fair amount of defeat and cynicism amongst service recipients. Many felt that nothing would change if they contributed and that they had already filled out surveys and saw no improvements. We hope this report will inform expansion and improvements to accessing social services in rural Thurston County.

We also took steps to allow the communities we are in contact with to hold us accountable for the work we are doing. We will be sending this report to every service provider we visited, as well as every survey participant that elected to give us their contact information. We in no way mean to imply that our 2 months of intensive outreach in rural Thurston County makes us any sort expert, but we hope that this report provides some useful information, fresh perspectives, and workable recommendations.

We want to sincerely thank everyone who took the time to speak with us.

Rural South Thurston County

Compared to their urban counterparts, rural nonprofits are significantly disadvantaged. With scarce local funding sources and often insufficient local support systems, rural nonprofits find it incredibly difficult to build strong organizations.

-Rachel Swierzewski in the Committee for Responsive Philanthropy's 2007

The data on rural nonprofit funding is stark. Consider the rural funding gap in three important realms (Newstead & Wu, 2009):

- Federal government funding: In each year between 1994 and 2001, rural areas received between \$401 and \$648 less per capita than urban areas for community resources, human resources, and national functions.
- Private foundations: A 2006 "analysis of grant making of the top 1,000 U.S. foundations shows that...grants to rural America accounted for only 6.8 percent of overall annual giving by foundations," even though rural America accounts for 18 percent of the nation's population and 21 percent of those who live in poverty.
- Corporate giving: A 2000 study of giving by 124 Fortune 500 corporations found that rural organizations received only 1.4 percent of the 10,905 grants made.

Thurston County mirrors the national trend. In 2013 through 2014, 18% of the funds for rental assistance went to rural Thurston County residents, though they make up 26% of the population (Citizens Summary Consolidated Plan, 2013).

| Rental Assistance Provided to Individuals in Thurston County | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------|----------|-------|--------|--------|------|--------|-----------------------|-------|---------|-------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| September 1, 2013 - April 30, 2014 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Totals | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Olympia | Tumwater | Lacey | Tenino | Bucoda | Yelm | Ranier | Unincorporated County | Other | Refused | Total Individuals | Total Funding | Per Person Cost |
| Rental Assist | 266 | 107 | 166 | 32 | 2 | 74 | 9 | 23 | 0 | 0 | 679 | \$1,304,445 | \$1,921.13 |
| TBRA | 11 | 5 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 45 | \$205,441 | \$4,565.36 |
| Rapid Re-housing | 171 | 47 | 74 | 3 | 0 | 18 | 0 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 335 | \$354,052 | \$1,056.87 |
| Totals | 448 | 159 | 262 | 35 | 2 | 94 | 9 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 1059 | \$1,863,938 | |
| % by area | 42% | 15% | 25% | 3% | 0% | 9% | 1% | 5% | | | | | |

For example, intercity transit serves Lacey, Olympia and Tumwater with extensive coverage. Because of the high population density of these areas, this transit service adequately covers a large population, fees from which help pay for operation. These centralized systems become complicated and possibly obsolete when the population is spread over four times as much area. Transportation issues must be creatively addressed in a manner which will work for rural county residents.

Public and private agencies across the country have implemented numerous types of programs, including providing cars at no or low cost; arranging or providing loans for car purchase, maintenance, and repairs; and leasing and car ownership programs that secure affordable cars that are then transferred to clients (Working Cars for Working Families, 2014).

Population

The United States Census Bureau estimates that the population of Washington in 2013 was 6,897,012 and that 262,388 live in Thurston County (Census Bureau, 2014). Six percent of those living in Thurston County are under 6 years, 22% are under 18 years, and 14% are 65 and over (Census Bureau, 2014).

Ten percent of Thurston County residents speak a language other than English in the home. Workers spend an average of 25 minutes a day commuting (Census Bureau, 2014).

Eleven percent of Thurston County citizens live below the poverty level, compared to 13% statewide (Census Bureau, 2014) with people:

- Under 18 years – 15%
- 65 years or older – 6%
- Females – 12%
- Males – 10%
- European American – 11%
- African American – 16%
- Native American – 18%
- Latino/Latina – 20%

Thurston County families with children under 18 living below the poverty level – 12% (Census Bureau, 2014), with:

- Married couple families – 4%
- Female-headed single parent households – 33%
- European American – 24%
- Native American – 26%
- African American – 41%
- Latina – 47%

Rural County Population and percent of residents living below the poverty level (Census Bureau, 2014) :

- Rochester – 2,388 and 7%
- Tenino - 1,695 and 15%
- Bucoda - 567 and 15%
- Rainier – 1,794 and 5%
- Yelm – 6,848 and 20%

Poverty Measurements

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, the U.S. poverty level is a narrow income standard that was established in the 1960s. At that time, research indicated that families spent about one-third of their incomes on food; the poverty level was set by multiplying food costs by three (Fass, 2009). Since then, the figures have been updated annually to account for inflation, but have otherwise remained unchanged. Today, food comprises only one-seventh of an average family's expenses, while the costs of housing, child care, health care, and transportation have grown disproportionately. Thus, the poverty level does not reflect the true cost of supporting a family. In addition, the current poverty measure is a national standard that does not adjust for the substantial variation in the cost of living from state to state and between urban and rural areas. More accurate estimates of typical family expenses—and adjustments for local costs—would produce substantially higher dollar amounts (Fass, 2009).

2014 Federal Poverty Guidelines (**Raw Data, 2014**)

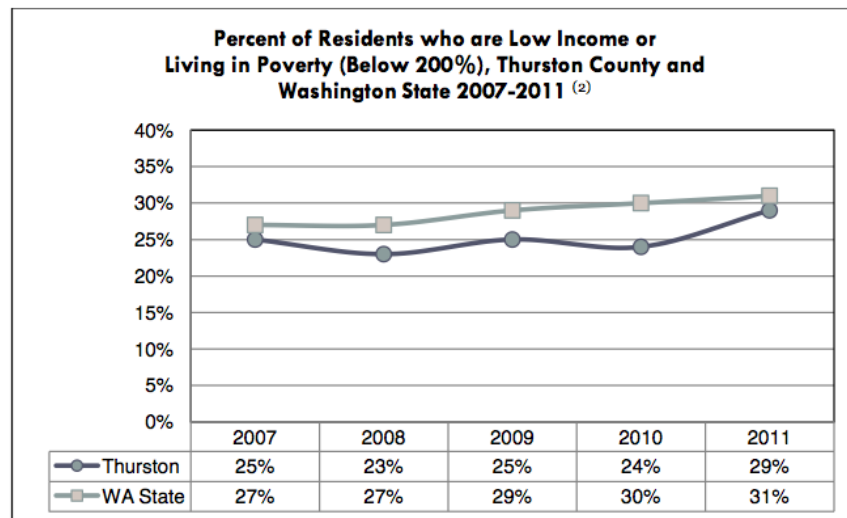
| Household Size | 100% | 133% | 150% | 200% | 250% | 300% | 400% |
|----------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1 | \$11,670 | \$15,521 | \$17,505 | \$23,340 | \$29,175 | \$35,010 | \$46,680 |
| 2 | 15,730 | 20,921 | 23,595 | 31,460 | 39,325 | 47,190 | 62,920 |
| 3 | 19,790 | 26,321 | 29,685 | 39,580 | 49,475 | 59,370 | 79,160 |
| 4 | 23,850 | 31,721 | 35,775 | 47,700 | 59,625 | 71,550 | 95,400 |
| 5 | 27,910 | 37,120 | 41,865 | 55,820 | 69,775 | 83,730 | 111,640 |
| 6 | 31,970 | 42,520 | 47,955 | 63,940 | 79,925 | 95,910 | 127,880 |
| 7 | 36,030 | 47,920 | 54,045 | 72,060 | 90,075 | 108,090 | 144,120 |
| 8 | 40,090 | 53,320 | 60,135 | 80,180 | 100,225 | 120,270 | 160,360 |

A more accurate indicator of poverty is the **Self-Sufficiency Standard**, a scientific measure created by economists Diana Pearce, Director of the Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington School of Social Work (Diana Pearce, 2011). The Self-Sufficiency Standard measures economic security based on the costs of basic needs: housing, child care, food, health care, transportation, and miscellaneous items as well as the cost of taxes and the impact of tax credits. It defines the income needed to realistically support a family or individual, without public or private assistance. For most workers throughout Washington, the Self-Sufficiency Standard shows that earnings well above the official Federal Poverty Level are nevertheless far below what is needed to meet families' basic needs (Diana Pearce, 2011).

From the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Thurston County (The Self-Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State, 2014):

- Monthly wages at \$9.49/hr for a single adult working 40 hours per week - \$1,671
Annual Self-Sufficiency Wage - \$20,050
- Monthly wages at \$18.35/hr for an adult with one preschooler working 40 hours per week - \$3,230 Annual Self-Sufficiency Wage - \$38,755.43

Therefore, the finding from the report *Income & Health: Low Income or Living in Poverty*, Thurston County's Public Health & Social Services Department's Community Health Assessment Data Series 2012, shows a more realistic view of poverty in Thurston County (O'Garro, 2012):

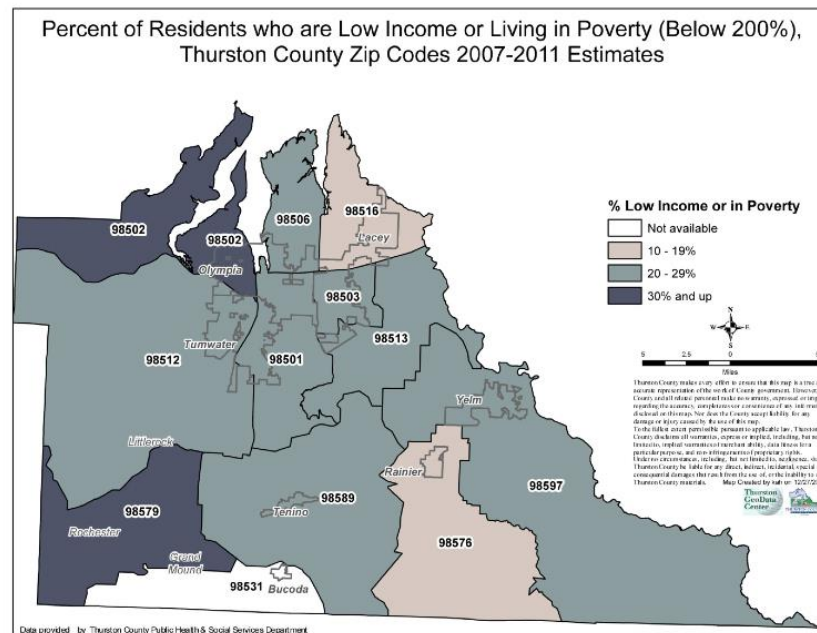


**Percent of Residents who are Low Income or Living in Poverty (Below 200%),
Thurston County Zip Codes 2007-2011 Combined ⁽²⁾**

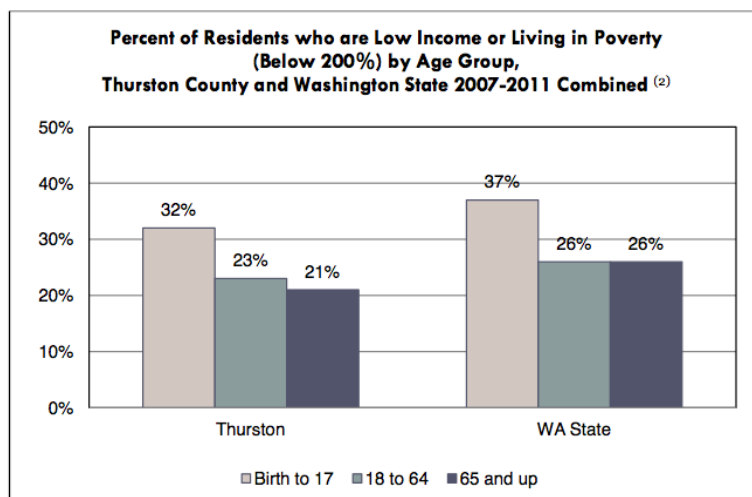
| Zip Code | Percent | | Zip Code | Percent |
|----------|---------|--|----------|---------|
| 98501 | 22% | | 98530 | (NA) |
| 98502 | 31% | | 98531 | (NA) |
| 98503 | 26% | | 98576 | 19% |
| 98506 | 28% | | 98579 | 32% |
| 98512 | 22% | | 98589 | 28% |
| 98513 | 21% | | 98597 | 27% |
| 98516 | 19% | | | |

The following map from Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Community Health Assessment Data Series 2012 illustrates further the breakdown of poverty by zip code within Thurston County. The areas hit hardest by poverty are Olympia and Rochester, or unincorporated Thurston County.

- Areas throughout Thurston County have a sizable proportion of residents who are low income or living in poverty. ⁽²⁾



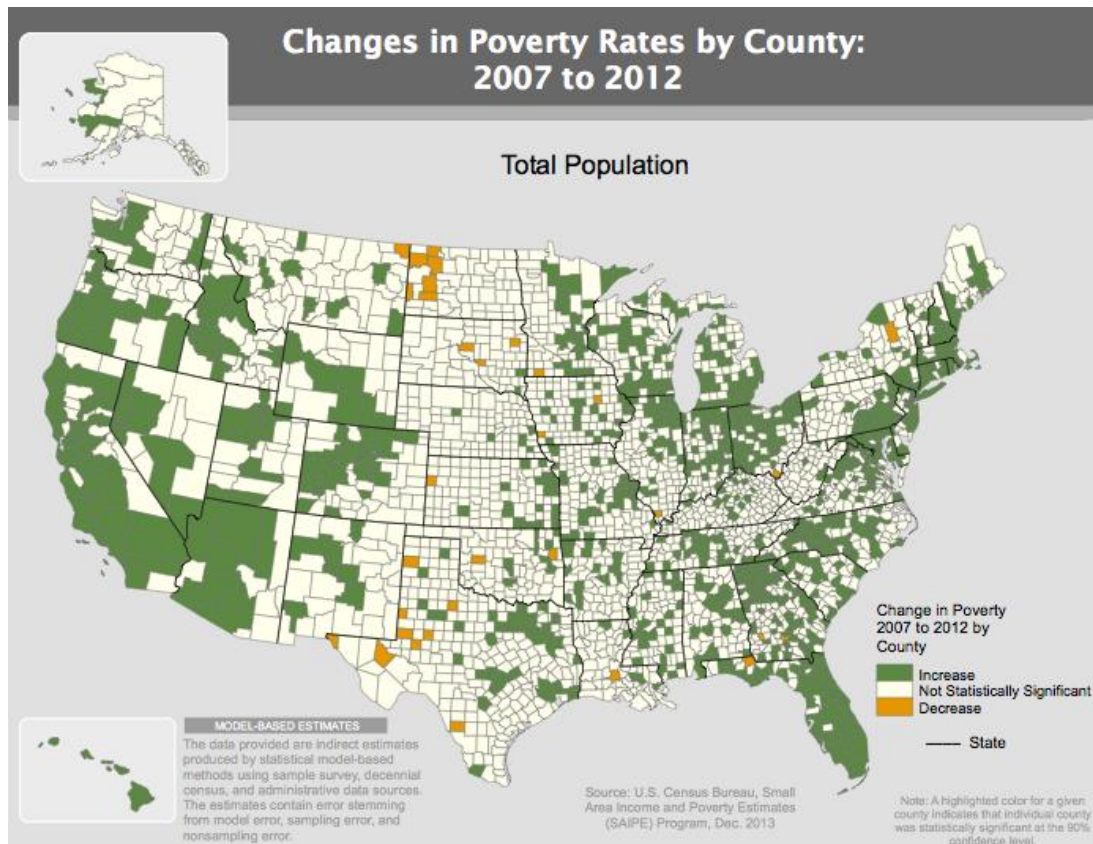
Another insidious fact illustrated by the following table from the Community Health Assessment Data Series 2012, is that children are more likely to be low income or living in poverty than adults (O'Garro, 2012).



Children are more likely to be low income or living in poverty than adults

State and Federal Policies

Charitable and non-governmental spending is dwarfed by government funds. As a result, cuts in governmental health and human services funding cannot easily be filled in by local sources or foundations. This map shows sweeping increases in poverty across the country from 2007 to 2012 (Census Bureau, 2014).



State and federal policies which decrease access to public benefits devolve the problems associated with poverty to the county, municipal and community level. Thurston County has had a statistically significant increase in poverty between 2007 and 2011; however, the numbers of people accessing poverty relief programs have not kept pace (O'Garro, 2012).

Basic Food benefits have increased as poverty increases, thanks to increased accessibility through online applications and a federally funded marketing program. As with most public benefit programs though, Basic Food benefits are not sufficient on their own, providing roughly \$4 a day per recipient. The need for supplemental food programs like free meals and food banks are important. Federal food stamp cuts have increased reliance on local food programs.

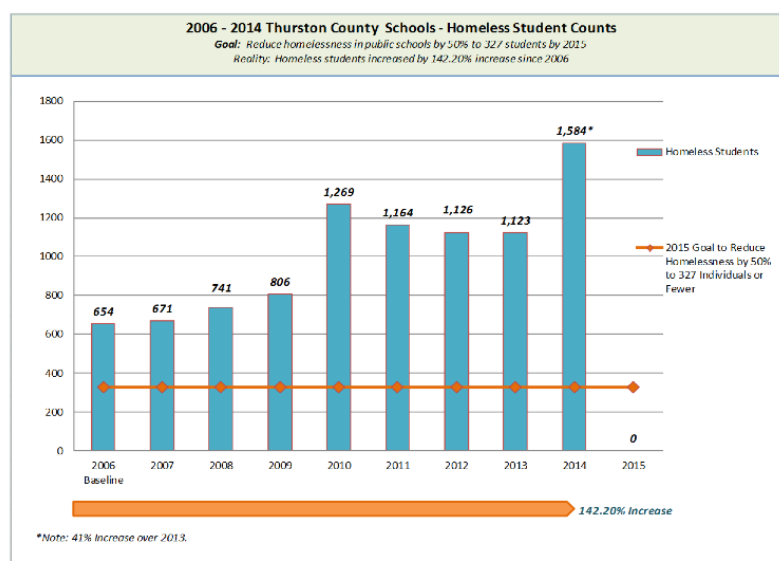
Basic Food benefits are not sufficient on their own, providing roughly \$4 a day per recipient.

Cash assistance programs, which increase personal incomes and support local economies, have decreased as poverty has increased, due to restrictions and restructuring of programs that support children and people with disabilities.

TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), need-based cash benefits to families with minor children, has steadily decreased in value – in

1960 an AFDC grant was 100% of poverty level, today's monthly TANF grant for a parent with one child is \$385, 29% of the federal poverty. In 2011, Washington legislators introduced a retroactive 5-year time limit on TANF that decreased the rolls dramatically, leaving thousands of Thurston County families with Basic Food and Medicaid as their only income. Between 2011 and 2012, families who received TANF decreased from 9,341 to 8,762. Not surprisingly, homeless students in Thurston County schools have increased dramatically. The table below from the 2014 Thurston County Homeless Census Report shows homeless student counts from 2006-2014 (Thurston County Homeless Census, 2014).

Between 2011 and 2012, families who received TANF decreased from 9,341 to 8,762. Not surprisingly, homeless students in Thurston County have increased dramatically.



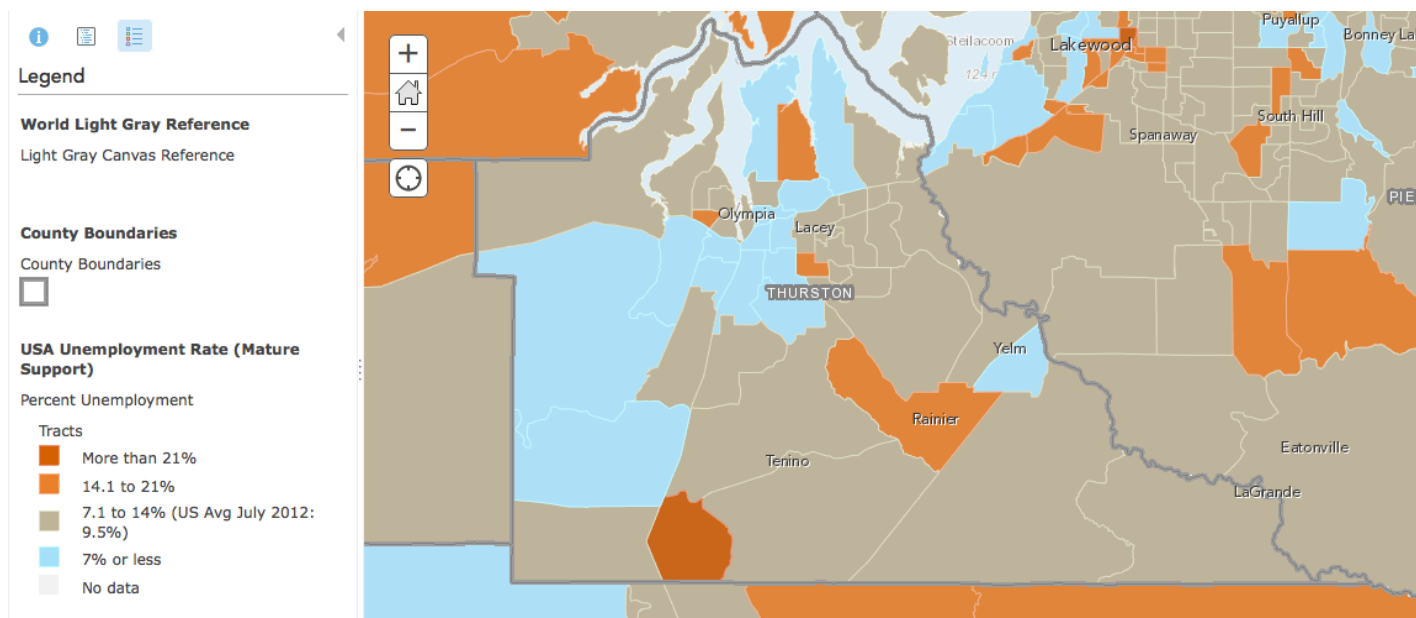
State disability benefits also took a nosedive at this time. In 2011, state legislators eliminated Disability Lifeline, a cash assistance program that served 2,260 Thurston County residents with disabilities that prevented them from working. They created Aged Blind and Disabled, a program restricted to people with permanent disabilities, that served only 1,191 Thurston County residents in 2012 (Client Data Report Viewer, 2014)

Work

2% of married couple households with a working member lived below the poverty level, 1% with a full-time, year-round worker. However, 19% of female-headed, single-parent

households with a working householder and 6% with a full-time, year-round worker still lived below the poverty level (Census Bureau, 2014).

In early 2009, Washington State's unemployment rate was nearly 10%. The following map shows unemployment rates throughout Thurston County (ArcGIS).



Personal income estimates are the best available local level indicator of general purchasing power, and are therefore central to tracking and comparing county patterns of economic growth and change in our local economies. ***The three major components are earned income, property income, and public benefits.*** Paralleling a nationwide trend, public benefits and property income have increased in Thurston County, while labor-related earned income declined in relative share.

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Earned income decreases can be linked to reduction of industries like mining, wood products and durable goods manufacturing (including air and motor vehicle equipment). Agriculture-dependent regions are influenced by weather, international swing in commodity prices, changes in government programs, as well as general cyclical conditions and trends. Our economy has been shifting from goods-producing to services-producing activities.

Social security and disability payments make up the largest general category of public benefits. Medicare and Medicaid payments have driven much of the rapid growth. Public benefits are spent locally in stores, in payments to landlords, health care professionals, and more. Budget cuts that decrease public benefits negatively impact our local economies.

Education

According to census.gov, the following statistical data speaks to the intersections of education and poverty.

Of the adult population (25 years or older) living below the poverty level:

- 22% are not high school graduates
- 9% have high school diplomas or equivalency
- 8% have a college associates degree
- 4% hold bachelor's degrees or higher

Of married-couple families living below the poverty level:

- 14% are not high school graduates
- 5% have high school diplomas or equivalency
- 3% have a college associates degree
- 1% hold bachelor's degrees or higher

Of female-headed single parent households living below the poverty level:

- 48% are not high school graduates
- 23% have high school diplomas or equivalency
- 28% have a college associates degree
- 13% hold bachelor's degrees or higher

Of female-headed single parent households living below the poverty level, 48% are not high school graduates, 23% have high school diplomas or equivalency, 28% have a college associates degree, 13% hold bachelor's degrees or higher.

Health

More than \$300 million in budget cuts to health care programs were in the Washington State's 2009-2011 budget (Rural Healthcare: A Strategic Plan for Washington State, 2009). South Carolina Rural Health Research Center's Report, Health Disparities: A Rural-Urban Chartbook found:

- Residents in any rural county were more likely to report fair to poor health status than were residents of urban counties (19.5% versus 15.6%).
- Rural residents were more likely to be uninsured than urban residents (17.8% versus 15.3%). Hispanic adults were most likely to lack insurance, with uninsured rates ranging from 40.8% in rural micropolitan counties to 56.1% in small remote rural counties.
- Rural adults were more likely than urban adults to report having deferred care because of cost (15.1% versus 13.1%).
- Proportionately fewer rural women receive recommended preventive screening services for breast and cervical cancer.
- Prenatal care initiation in the first trimester was lower for mothers in more rural areas compared with suburban areas.
- Receipt of reproductive health services by sexually active women, aged 15–44 years, within the past year, was less likely for women living in nonmetropolitan areas.

Less than one half of rural women live within a 30-minute drive to the nearest hospital offering perinatal services.

Rural residents travel longer distances to receive care or to access a range of medical, dental, and mental health specialty services. Less than one half of rural women live within a 30-minute drive to the nearest hospital offering perinatal services. During 2008–2010, rural women aged 18–64 years reported the highest rates of delayed care or no medical care due to cost (18.6%) and no health insurance coverage (23.1%), both rates increased since

2002–2004. Obstetric and gynecologic health services, including family planning, are limited in many nonmetropolitan areas.

Eighty-seven percent of U.S. counties, in which 35% of reproductive-aged women lived, had no abortion provider in 2008. Obstetrician–gynecologists with rural mailing addresses were significantly less likely to perform abortions (6.5%) than their urban counterparts (17%). Rural women seeking abortions in 2008 traveled substantially greater distances: 31% traveled more than 100 miles and an additional 42.9% traveled between 50 miles and 100 miles, compared with 3.8% and 7%, respectively, for nonrural women.

Working toward Solutions

As reported in the article *Health Disparities in Rural Women*, The University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston’s Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology developed its Regional Maternal & Child Health Program to serve geographically underserved women in multiple off-site clinics. The program addresses culturally relevant services and transportation needs, and uses electronic medical records to facilitate continuity of care. It also provides housing in its Regional Perinatal Residence for high-risk women (and family members) who live in distant locations to facilitate their access to regional center care when hospitalization is not necessary.

The clinic provides housing in its Regional Perinatal Residence for high-risk women (and family members) who live in distant locations to facilitate their access

Oregon enacted legislation to offer financial incentives, such as a state income tax credit for

Twenty-four family medicine residency programs have incorporated a rural training track. Graduates of these programs are two to three times more likely to practice in rural areas

rural practitioners and assistance with medical liability insurance, for obstetricians practicing in rural areas.

Twenty-four family medicine residency programs have incorporated a rural training track. Graduates of these programs are two to three times more likely to practice in rural areas than graduates of family medicine residencies overall. The majority of those physicians initially selecting rural sites remained in rural locations 2 years after graduation (Health Disparities:

A Rural-Urban Chartbook, 2008).

Housing

In 2010, the Census reports that there were 108,182 housing units in Thurston County; 93% were occupied, 7% (7,532) units were vacant (Census Bureau, 2014). Of occupied housing units, 67% owner-occupied and 33% were renter-occupied. The Tacoma News Tribune reports that Pierce and Thurston counties are the top 2 counties in the state for rates of homes in foreclosure (Cooper, 2014). One in every 642 homes in Pierce County, 1 in every 983 homes in Thurston County and 1 in every 1,199 homes nationally were in some state of foreclosure as of May 2014. Many of the low-income families and individuals we met in rural Thurston County who were stably housed were fortunate to have access to support in the form of Section 8 vouchers, USDA Rural Home Loans, or other subsidized housing. **Long-term affordable housing is the answer to homelessness.**

Temporary housing assistance standing alone will not end family homelessness. While such assistance, appropriately administered, can perhaps be valuable tool in the efforts to address homelessness, the myriad problems caused by temporary subsidies must be acknowledged and addressed with urgency...unless and until necessary investments in long-term housing infrastructures are made and temporary assistance becomes a "bridge to permanent housing," homelessness among children and their families will continue at high levels and a substantial emergency shelter safety net will continue to be needed to keep our children safe.

-A Bridge to Where?, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, 2010

Social Services

The following section includes analysis of the social service providers of rural Thurston County. We learned about the following providers through outreach, research, and talking with social service recipients and providers. We apologize if we have missed anyone or there are any inaccuracies.

When interviewing providers, we sought to learn what services they provide, a description of the service, data for how many clients they serve, the needs of the provider, the needs of the community from the provider's perspective, and how far clients travel to receive services.

When doing outreach and talking with recipients, we also wanted to learn what the community knows about receiving the service.

We appreciate the providers who took the time to speak with us and contribute to this report. They are all very busy doing important work to serve their community, and we appreciate their efforts in helping folks meet their needs in various ways.

Rainier Service Providers

Rainier Emergency Food Center (REFC)

Services Provided

The Rainier Emergency Food Center is a satellite location of the Thurston County Food Bank, which provides low-income clients a week's worth of groceries per visit.



Description of Service

According to this Thurston County Food Bank (TCFB) satellite's website, "Our emergency food center organization serves the rural Thurston County area as a satellite of the Thurston County Food Bank. We are currently the second largest center serving the many families and individuals affected by the current downturn in the local economy... open Wednesdays and Saturdays 9:30-12:00" (Satellite Locations, 2014) They also provide after-hours service for those in need, and delivery to those who have no other way of receiving services.

Our Observations and Notes

Our experience with this food bank was certainly friendly. There was music playing inside and most people were chatting and hanging out until it was their turn in line. The welcoming atmosphere makes this service provider more approachable for recipients. Many people were eager to voice their experience in our surveys. We collected 11 surveys and had multiple friendly conversations with both recipients and volunteers. We were impressed with the size of their facility and the 23 dedicated volunteers that allow this agency to operate. The volunteers gather for a potluck at the end of every shift.

Clients Served

According to an interview with Nancy Decker, REFC serves 600 people a month. In 2012, the satellite had 3,200 visits, 42% of recipients from Yelm, 40% of recipients live in Rainier (2012 numbers). In 2013 43% of recipients were from Yelm, while only 37% of recipients live in Rainier. This food bank is the only satellite that has a shopping model, resembling the service provided in Olympia.

Needs of the Provider

Beyond the support REFC receives from Thurston County Food Bank, Executive Director Nancy Decker reported they operate exclusively on grants and donations. They need more funding support, a grant writer, more freezer space and refrigeration to store more food, as well as a new vehicle. Their current van is old and runs 7 days a week. At this pace it will not last much longer, and without a vehicle their operation is at risk. A refrigerator truck is on their wish list but at this point any vehicle will do. All of their staff are volunteers and are giving a lot of time to keep this operation going.

Sugar and Spice

Services Provided

We interviewed staff at Sugar and Spice. They reported that they accept DSHS and military child care vouchers for daycare. They provide transportation for special needs children to the Yelm School District for childcare. They have offered a 14 session, 7 week Strengthening Families Workshop funded by the Healthy Action Team.

Our Observations and Notes

Sugar and Spice is a place for parents and families to hang out. Even parents whose children no longer attend the day care stop in occasionally. The director of the facility is a member of Rainier Community Care's Healthy Action Team.

Sugar and Spice belongs to the Early Achiever's preschool program, through the Child Care Action Council. This membership provides Sugar and Spice with funding to cover material costs, train staff, as well as maintain their facilities.

Clients Served

Sugar and Spice care for a maximum of 37 kids at any given time, and are often at capacity. Their clients travel from as far as Rochester, Yelm, and Lacey.

Needs of the Community from Providers Perspective

Sugar and Spice director, Tali, believes strongly that youth and teen services and activities are needed in Rainier to keep kids occupied and out of trouble. She sees parks and public spaces as necessary to build community. Gas vouchers and public transportation are a big need, and help with seeking out employment opportunities would benefit the parents and youth of Rainier.

Rainier Community Garden

Services Provided

Rainier Community Gardens grows fresh fruits and vegetables in 39 garden beds and shares them with volunteers and the Rainier Emergency Food Center. They also provide volunteer opportunities and seek to educate the community about sustainable agriculture (Rainier Community Garden, 2014).

POWER Joins Thurston County HOME Consortium to Assess Needs

Access to social services is spotty in rural areas making it difficult for people in need to get help. The idea of poverty is rife with stereotypes and misinformation the group Parents Organizing for Welfare and Economic Rights is working to overcome. POWER is conducting an assessment of services and needs in the South Thurston County area. POWER was awarded the bid to conduct the survey in the rural area by the HOME Consortium. All information must be prepared by June 30. They are seeking resident input in regards to needs, access, and changes in the social services for south Thurston County.

Sierra Brown and Jen Witherspoon visited the Rainier Community Garden last week to understand the garden's role in meeting the hunger needs of local residents. When they showed up, Angie Karnes, Rainier High School FFA Advisor, teacher, mom, and garden coordinator put them to work. Witherspoon, a farmer herself, was prepared and already dressed in her work clothes. The two young women spent time planting potatoes before chatting with Karnes about the garden and who benefits.

The community garden is a resource of which residents may not be aware and a project which could also benefit from additional funding.

Anyone can provide input before the final report is published by calling POWER at 360-352-9716 or toll free at 866-343-9716 or by email info@mamapower.org.

**Posted June 19, 2014 in
Nisqually Valley News**

Description of Service

The Rainier Community Gardens purpose is to, “bring the Rainier community and surrounding areas together and provide educational gardening opportunities for everyone while growing fresh food and impacting local hunger issues. Open since 2011, the Garden was developed by Rainier High School Agriculture Educator Angie Karnes and her Environmental Science students. Over 150 community volunteers, 220 students and 33 donors have helped this project grow” (Rainier Community Garden, 2014).

Clients Served

In 2013, the Rainier Community Garden produced over 2914 pounds of vegetables and donated over 2247 pounds to the Rainier Food Bank (Rainier Community Garden, 2014).

In 2013, the Rainier Community Garden produced over 2,914 pounds of vegetables and donated over 2,247 pounds to the Rainier Food Bank.

Needs of the Provider

The Rainier Community Garden is in constant need of volunteers and funding.

Needs of the Community from Providers Perspective

According to our interview with Angie Karnes, Agriculture Educator there is a great need for more community activities to support youth engagement and improvements to public transportation infrastructure in rural Thurston.

Rainier Senior Center

Services Provided

According to our interview with Senior Center Staff, the Rainier Senior Center provides the community with low cost meals twice a week and low cost acupuncture once a month.

Clients Served

They serve an average of 40 people per meal.

Needs of the Provider

This provider is in great need of donations and volunteer support.

Tenino Service Providers

Tenino Food Bank Plus

Services Provided

In an interview with director Robin Rudy, the Tenino Food Bank provides the following:

- Medical referrals
- Assistance to veterans
- Senior citizen services
- Disaster preparedness
- Christmas House

- THS scholarship fund
- Salvation Army Extension
- Tenino Community Thanksgiving Day Dinner
- Assistance for local students
- Boy & Girl Scouts of America
- Salvation Army summer camp
- WinterFest in Tenino

Tenino Food Bank Plus director Robin Rudy says she can also send clients over to get free hot breakfast at Scotty B's Diner and to the doctor next door for free medical services.

Description of Service

The Tenino Food Bank Plus “provides food to a growing number of families throughout the Tenino-Bucoda area. The Food Bank hours are 8:30am to 10:30am on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 297 Sussex East in Tenino. The Food Bank offers extended hours before the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays ...The Tenino Resource Connection is designed to provide additional resources beyond food to area residents and helps to raise awareness that additional help is available for those in need.

Our Observations and Notes

The line to get in was not too long, and people trickled in over the course of two hours. Robin has been working at the food bank for 30 years and is a proud service provider who offers a wide variety of social services for low-income folks and people experiencing homelessness. She does not believe anyone is falling through the cracks in her town and Tenino residents should be turned away from other food banks outside of Tenino, even though 58% of participants from Tenino stated more food banks are needed.

Chris Bauermeister, Satellite Program Director of the Thurston County Food Bank, told us that the Thurston County Home Consortium funded the construction of a huge warehouse in Tenino for food bank use. It has walk in refrigerators and if utilized could be a major distribution center for all satellite food banks in south county. We asked Robin Rudy about the warehouse and she said she had worked on the plans with the City of Tenino. She said she had the blueprints in her office but wouldn't show them to us. She claimed that the contractor didn't build it to spec and she can't use the building the way it is. It now sits empty. She told us if anyone else uses that building for a food bank she will take down the whole city government.

Thurston County Home Consortium funded the construction of a huge warehouse in Tenino for food bank use. It has walk in refrigerators, and if utilized could be a major distribution center for all satellite food banks in south county...It now sits empty.

What the Community Knows About Receiving the Service

Tenino City Councilmember Sirena Painter shared concerns with us about the inaccessibility of the Tenino Food Bank, based on hours of operation. If people are working there isn't any way for them to access the service.

One client we talked to said she comes to this food bank when she can, but finds it difficult to work it into her busy schedule. Her main mode of transportation is borrowing vehicles from her friends. When she does not have a vehicle during the Tenino Food Bank Plus hours, she makes her way into Olympia to access the Thurston County Food Bank. Her mother has an address in Olympia, and she said she would get turned away from TCFB if she gave them her Tenino address. Hours of operation and transportation are barriers to accessing the Tenino Food Bank.

Clients Served

We asked Robin for some figures for our report, and she said that the food bank served 700 people in the month of August last year. When we asked for a more extensive report, she said the information is all on a spreadsheet but would not show us.

Heritage Baptist Food Bank

Services Provided

This satellite of the Thurston County Food Bank offers free groceries to low-income Tenino and Bucoda residents.

Description of Service

The Heritage Baptist Food Bank operates between 2pm and 5pm every Saturday. Recipients can take as much perishable food as they can eat and receive a prepackaged bag of non-perishable goods.

Clients Served

In the months of April and May 2014 this agency served 163 families and 563 individuals. About 35 families were served per week.

Needs of the Provider

This satellite operates out of the Heritage Baptist Church. They do not currently have their own facility or vehicle, which that limits their operation. Satellite Director and City Council Member Craig Lester wants to open a homeless shelter and clothing bank in Tenino. One barrier to expanding his current operations is that the church is not a 501 c 3 non-profit, and they don't want to become one. Currently there are construction plans underway to build a facility for the satellite.

Needs of the Community from Providers Perspective

Craig Lester feels there is a need for a permanent homeless shelter as well as a clothing bank in Tenino.



Rochester Service Providers

Rochester Organization of Families (ROOF)



Services Provided

ROOF provides referrals to a wide range of services in Thurston County, including clothing, housing, counseling, health care, and other emergency services, as well as:

- Community Referrals
- Parenting Classes and Resources
- Income Tax Preparation
- Energy and Rental Assistance
- Well water sample drop off for testing
- After school and summer care for kindergarten-fifth grade
- Operation Santa holiday gifts for youth and families
- Back to school supplies drive
- A community garden

Description of Service

ROOF's mission is to, "address community needs by providing resources and services to families to achieve a healthy and positive community in the Rochester area. We continue to grow and change in response to the emerging needs of the Rochester Area" (ROOF Community Services, 2014).

Clients Served

Gabrielle Davis shared that ROOF receives 550 household visits per month at the food bank and estimates 30,000 total visits per year, both including repeated visits. In 2013 their back to school drive served 275 kids and Operation Santa served 500 kids.

Needs of the Provider

ROOF needs a lot of support. Gabrielle Davis, the Kid's Place Program Director, told us that they have had to consolidate their services because of lack of funding and/or staff and volunteer help. Often they run out of funds and have to turn people away who are seeking financial assistance. They used to offer parenting classes, but don't have enough resources to continue that program. ROOF receives no county funding for the work they do. They cover costs through grants and donations. According to a report provided to us by the Thurston County

HOME Consortium, only 5% of the individuals reached by county funded grants to service providers are in unincorporated Thurston County, which includes Rochester.

Needs of the Community from Providers Perspective

When interviewing Gabrielle Davis, she expressed the needs of the community through identifying the most significant struggles of ROOF's clientele. Energy and utility assistance are two of the biggest needs people coming to ROOF have. A comprehensive list of low-income housing, including which landlords take Section 8 vouchers, would also be greatly beneficial. Shelters for people experiencing homelessness are necessary, as is a free medical clinic for low-income folks and more affordable access to prescriptions. There is also a substantial lack of employment opportunities in Rochester. A satellite DSHS office or better access to DSHS would benefit the community. Furthermore, transportation access is severely lacking in Rochester.

Gabrielle says there is a lack of community involvement in the area, and there are few to no community gathering spaces. This makes it harder for ROOF to advertise services and spread the word about events.

Rochester United Methodist Church



Services Provided

The Rochester United Methodist Church operates a clothing closet, food bank, and soup kitchen. The clothing bank serves clients of all ages. They have a shoe and coat drive in the fall. Their 'back-to-school' outfit program provides at least one complete outfit - including shoes. In an interview with Susie, the clothing bank's director, new clothes are available for children with designated need during the school year. Additionally, they help folks with emergency services and gas vouchers, and also refer folks to ROOF for further resources.

It is also worth noting that the church and clothing bank director have plans to open an emergency shelter. PSE gave them a generator, the Red Cross gave them cots and beds, and one of their staff is putting together to-go backpacks, emergency kits, and sleeping bags.

Description of Service

The Clothing Closet is open Mondays, 4-6 pm; Wednesdays 3-5 pm; and Fridays 10 am –Noon; and they are closed on holidays. Clients can receive 10 items per month per family member and can visit as many times as they like until their item limit has been reached.

What the Community Knows About Receiving the Service

Carol is a cancer survivor from Rochester. When she was battling sickness, she began volunteering with the Rochester Community Clothing Closet. This got her out of the house a few days a week, re-built her self-esteem, and helped her transition off of her medications. She

is now a big asset at the clothing bank, assisting Susie the Director. Carol has also begun collecting sleeping bags, tents, and putting together emergency supply backpacks to distribute to people experiencing homelessness. This project also has flooding and other natural disaster preparation in mind for use.

Another volunteer with whom we spoke is Connie, who was formerly homeless. Her son was being bullied in middle school, but now, thanks to the clothing bank, is one of the best dressed students in high school and on the honor roll.

Clients Served

We learned from the agencies website that “the clothing bank served 533 people in April, with 3,023 items given away. 30,000 items were given away in 2013. During the past year 4,307 individuals from 1,332 families (including repeat visits) were served... Thanks in large part to a donation from TransAlta, we were able to provide approximately 230 students with a new pair of pants and a top, underwear, shoes and socks, plus 10 backpacks to the ROOF Center prior to the start of the 2011-2012 school year” (Clothing Closet).

According to their website the Rochester United Methodist Church Food Bank collected and delivered 2,135 pounds of non-perishable food products to the Rochester low-income community during 2010 (Clothing Closet).

Needs of the Provider

The clothing bank operates out of two trailers in the back of the Methodist Church. Susie, the director, informed us about their struggle to maintain the mission in the face of inadequate funding and zoning laws. The county planning department has told them the trailers are unfit for public use and the church must build a new building within two years or they will be shut down. They have not been offered any funding support to construct a new building. The estimated costs are \$150,000, but if they want to build an emergency shelter they will also have to replace the septic system, which would double the project cost.

The county planning department has told them the trailers are unfit for public use and the church must build a new building within two years or they will be shut down...the estimated costs are \$150,000

In addition to this threat, the church and clothing bank are struggling to pay their existing bills, because they have no real income or funding. This service provider needs county funds to continue providing services to low income people.

The biggest clothing donation need is shoes for children and adults.

Needs of the Community from Providers Perspective

Services needed in Rochester are permanent and emergency shelters, subsidized housing, utility assistance, mental health services, a greater alliance between providers as well as other faith based communities.

Boys and Girls Club of Rochester

Services Provided

The Boys and Girls Club of Rochester engages K-12 students with an after school program, summer program, and one family night per month (Rochester Club, 2014).

Description of Service

The Boys and Girls Club's mission is to provide a safe place to learn and grow, as well as ongoing relationships with caring adult professionals, life enhancing programs, character development experiences, and hope and opportunity (Rochester Club, 2014).

Clients Served

According to our interview with Ashlee Fitch, Branch Director, the Rochester Boys and Girls Club serves 100 children each day and mainly serves Rochester, although 11 of their clients live in Tenino.

Needs of the Provider

The provider would like to increase enrollment by offering transportation for kids outside of Rochester.

Needs of the Community from Providers Perspective

Ashlee identified transportation as the greatest need of families in the Rochester area, followed by community involvement, as well as more park services, clean up, and maintenance.

Yelm Service Providers

Yelm Community Services (YCS)

Services Provided

- Food Bank and USDA Commodities
- Clothing Bank and Thrift Shop
- Youth Activities (after school programs, late night teen activities, Summer Day Camp)
- Salvation Army Assistance/Warm Neighbor Program
- Emergency Rent and Utilities Assistance
- Maternity Support Services
- Emergency Homeless Shelter
- Krislen Apartments, for Seniors and people with developmental disabilities

Description of Service

The agency began in 1971, and has continuously provided many services to Yelm and Rainier, the Nisqually Tribe, and the surrounding rural Thurston County community. Yelm Community Services is proud to be the first and oldest food bank in Thurston County (Yelm Community Services, 2014).

Our Observations and Notes

The phone number that is listed on the YCS website has no voicemail options and at least 6 times when we tried to call, the line went dead after ringing a few times, though we were

calling during business hours. When someone finally answered, she seemed anxious to quickly end the call. As a result of this, we were unable to connect with Cindy Marchand-Cecil, the Executive Director of Yelm Community Services. We were also unable to interview Monserrat, who runs the food bank, because she was too busy during food bank hours and scheduling conflicts prevented setting up a future appointment. Signage around the food bank was threatening and unwelcoming. We performed one day of outreach at the food bank and collected 22 surveys from YCS recipients.

Theresa Slusher, Thurston County Homeless Coordinator, spoke at length about her concerns regarding the 3 foreclosed homes that Thurston County Housing Authority purchased with federal funds after the housing market crash. The City of Yelm has the title, and YCS has the property management responsibilities. She told us these houses were supposed to be used specifically for low income housing or as a transitional or permanent shelter for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Theresa did not know the current status of the houses, or if they were being occupied by low income families.

As of June 24, the three houses were listed as available for rent on the YCS website. We called to get more information and were told that 2 are rented, and the 3rd house is available for \$1200 a month.

We found that YCS has a 6 bed shelter that is currently occupied and there are two families on the waiting list. Getting on the waitlist requires filling out an application in person. Our understanding of this shelter is that because of limited space only multiple people of one gender or one family can stay at any given time, even if it means empty beds.

When we spoke with Devon McColley-Hopkins, the Yelm School District Homeless Liaison, she mentioned the one bedroom shelter at YCS. She didn't seem to know about the 3 large houses that the City of Yelm has allowed YCS to rent and manage for the purpose of providing transitional or permanent housing to residents in need.

When we spoke with Devon McColley-Hopkins, the Yelm School District Homeless Liaison, she mentioned the one bedroom shelter at YCS. She didn't seem to know about the 3 large houses that the City of Yelm has allowed YCS to rent and manage for the purpose of providing transitional or permanent housing to residents in need.

What the Community Knows About Receiving the Service

During outreach at the Crossroads Church Lord's Table dinner on Saturday 6/21/14 we surveyed folks and shared conversations over dinner with members of the Yelm community. Two gentlemen, who spoke with us but did not wish to fill out surveys, told us the homeless shelter situation in Yelm is "inadequate and pathetic." One man was proud of the access to food in Yelm and said no one should go hungry in this town, but was dissatisfied with access to shelter and wanted to see some major improvements in homeless housing services. The second man specified that Cindy of Yelm Community Services needs to let people in to her shelter instead of leaving them empty. He knows the shelter is there but wants to increase access to it so that the shelter can more effectively serve folks in need.

Kristina Caron spoke with Nisqually Valley News about her family's experience staying at the YCS shelter:

"It was a total blessing," she said. "I can't say that enough, because if it weren't for them, I honestly have no idea what I would be doing." Even so, the situation isn't ideal, she said. There's a lot of rules – she has to leave my 8 a.m. and be home by 4:30 p.m. If she misses that cut-off, the doors are locked. Luckily, she's always been back on time, she said. Visitors need to fill out multiple pages of paperwork to visit them inside the shelter. The shelter gives them a roof over their heads, but it's not a home."

They do not turn them away for food, but cannot legally give out commodities without risking federal investigation or loss of funding

According to Chris Bauermeister at TCFB: Yelm has two food banks: The Yelm Prairie Christian Food Bank and the Yelm Community Services Food Bank. YCS receives TEFAP (federal commodities) from the TCFB but does not share information or collaborate in other ways. This means that when Yelm folks visit the Rainier Emergency Food Center, the satellite volunteers have no way of knowing if these

households have received commodities from the other food banks. They do not turn them away for food, but cannot legally give out commodities without risking federal investigation or loss of funding.

Yelm Prairie Christian Faith Harvest

We called to speak with someone about our project and asked if we could do outreach at the food bank. The first person we spoke with couldn't make the decision, but said she would pass on our information. When we didn't hear back, we called and were told that there was no way we could do outreach during their food bank ours, nor could they participate in a phone interview. She said they were in a lawsuit with the City and were not taking any chances. In an article from October 30, 2013, the Nisqually Valley News reports:

The city is charging YPCC God's Portion, a Yelm-based regional food bank formerly known as Faith Harvest Helpers, fines of \$250 per day for building and zoning code violations. The food bank says they're in compliance with city codes and argues the city doesn't have jurisdiction because they're a 501(c)3 nonprofit.

According to Tim Kraus, a spokesman for the food bank, YPCC God's Portion collects more than one million pounds of food each month and distributes it to more than 55 food banks and food pantry ministries around the Puget Sound region, providing food for about 110,000 people so far this year. The food bank has also provided food to a little more than 17,000 walk-up clients in the Yelm area as of the end of September, he said. To date, the number of people served by the ministry this year exceeds 125,000, he said. The organization was named 2011 Non-Profit Organization of the Year by the Thurston County Economic Development Council.

City Charging Food Bank \$250 a Day, Steve Wyble

Emanuel Lutheran Church

Services Provided

The Emanuel Lutheran Church offers a free meal each Tuesday evening between 6pm and 7pm, emergency shelter for one family or person, and a temporary emergency shelter in the case of local disasters.

According to our conversation with Pastor Jerry, the church “unofficially” takes in folks for an overnight shelter. Officially, he has storage space for houseless folks to safely stow their belongings during the day to prevent theft. He has let people park their RV’s on church property, and law enforcement does not give him a problem unless there are complaints from the neighbors.

Jerry offers community service opportunities through the Friendship Diversion program for people who are required to perform community service. He also hosts a weekly dinner open to the community.

Our Observations and Notes

The “Dinner with Pastor Jerry” began as an idea expressed by a youth after church one Sunday. She thought there should be a dinner where everyone was invited to sit and break bread together with Pastor Jerry. And so was born the Tuesday night dinner. Scott, the food ministry leader, who also volunteers with other local food banks, including Yelm Prairie Christian and Crossroads, gathers all the food for the dinner.

Scott said that what they experience is a “rural setting with urban issues.” Without resources that come with being an urban hub, times are tough.

Sometimes, the church can barely pay their electricity bill. The community has responded well to the work the church prioritizes in the community. After 3 years of free dinners and other services—the church acts as an unofficial shelter—they’ve only experienced theft or physical violence for the first time this year. With only 6 beds in Yelm available and stringent eligibility standards, this unofficial shelter has saved lives.

The church acts as an unofficial shelter...with only 6 beds in Yelm available and stringent eligibility standards, this unofficial shelter has saved lives.

What the Community Knows About Receiving the Service

People find out about the dinner through word of mouth, fliers around town that map the location and time of all free meals and food banks, or if they attend the church. The recipients of these meals we spoke with were very pleased with the service provided and the atmosphere created to break bread, build community, and go home full of good food. The volunteers made plates full of leftovers for everyone to take home to share with family or eat for lunch the next day. This meal is a safe place for low income folks and provides no cost social space that fosters friendships in an otherwise isolated and stigmatized lifestyle.

The farthest clients are from Spanaway, Rainier, and one woman walks from McKenna.

Clients Served

Sometimes up to 70 people come to free dinner; it slows in the summer time. Some people cannot come because they do not have a ride. The farthest

clients are from Spanaway, Rainier, and one woman walks from McKenna. The service primarily serves Yelm.

Needs of the Provider

Permits are required to expand the property to include the shelter. Pastor Jerry would like funding to bring in volunteers and sow the seeds of a community garden. Steady and consistent funding for the free dinner would ensure money to purchase meat and other supplies that are rarely donated.

Needs of the Community from Providers Perspective

Pastor Jerry is currently operating a small-time shelter in the childcare room of the Lutheran Church. There needs to be more shelter and easier access to shelter for people experiencing homelessness.

Jerry sees a big need for a pet foster care place where people experiencing homelessness can leave their pets until they get rehoused. Almost no shelters will accommodate pets, a significant barrier to accessing shelter.

Pastor Jerry has been in conversation with the Mayor of Yelm about zoning codes being irrelevant during a state of emergency. In our opinion, homelessness and hunger are a state of emergency.

Transportation and gas help, mental health and substance abuse counseling, food banks need more meat, clothing banks are needed, utility assistance, and free laundry service.

Crossroads Church

Services Provided

The Crossroads Church operates a food bank, open once per week, hosts a free weekly dinner, and operates the “Young Life Program”.

Yelm Lions Club

Services Provided

- Vision assistance
 - \$1,500 towards vision exams and glasses
 - \$1,500 toward vision therapy
 - collecting and recycling used glasses
- Hearing aids
- Thursday night dinner – up to 70 people some weeks
- Santa shop with pancake breakfast – by donation, allows kids of all income levels to come in and pick out gifts for their parents. About 300 kids each year.
- Holiday gift baskets through the Yelm Community Services Food Bank
- Adopt a family at Christmas
- Build wheelchair ramps
- Donate and volunteer to help the Homeless Backpack Project

- Collect funds for the Salvation Army with a request that the \$\$ they gather go to fund heating assistance fund with the power company that serves Yelm.
- Highway cleanup, partnering with the Dept. of Transportation.
- Dictionary project – a free dictionary to every kid in the Yelm public school district
- Free firewood – they collect, dry, split and donate
- Camp Leo – a summer camp for kids with diabetes – Lions donate to the scholarship fund and volunteer at the camp.
- Project New Hope – serves military families, Lions donate and volunteer, Christy teaches an anger management class

Needs of the community from the provider's perspective

Christy Garcia and Pedro agreed that they need a Community Center, in the true sense of the word. Not a recreational center where people can hold meetings, but a true center where the community can gather. They said they agree with Sarah Cooper from Young Life that the homeless youth population in Yelm is increasing; youth need no-cost activities that can give them a positive focus and help shape their lives.

We need a community center...not a recreational center where people can hold meetings, but a true center where the community can gather.

School Homeless Liaisons

Description of Service and Our Observations and Notes

We left voicemails with all 6 of the homeless liaisons in rural Thurston County. We only had a response from Devon McColley-Hopkins in Yelm. Devon is the only homeless liaison we interviewed about accessing social services in Yelm and supporting families experiencing homelessness. Devon works at the district office and does not actually interact with any homeless families. The school counselors are the ones that provide direct support, and Devon is there to counsel them on how to engage with youth experiencing homelessness and how to support them in their education. Devon makes all of her referrals from the Thurston County Crisis Clinic Resource List. The school can provide food and transportation for their students, but not for the parents or family. Transportation assistance is provided by either bussing the children to and from school, or giving gas mileage reimbursement to parents who drive their children to school.

Teachers and counselors are trained annually on how to identify youth experiencing homelessness. In addition to interpersonal identification methods, the school district registration form added 2 questions in order to identify families at risk or currently experiencing homelessness. These two questions have to do with economic hardship and displacement.

Countywide Service Providers

We are aware that this list is much longer and that many agencies in Olympia, Tumwater and Lacey serve clients from rural Thurston County. The few organizations listed below are those we interviewed and worked with during our time-limited outreach project.

Community Youth Services

Services Provided

- Rosie's Place drop-in center for youth ages 12-24
- Provides showers, laundry, hygiene supplies, food, clothing and more
- Outreach in rural Thurston County

SafePlace

Among the many services provided, SafePlace hosts a bilingual legal clinic at ROOF once a month and are a referral for emergency services for abused women and children. We were excited to work with them but we didn't have time to fully interview the staff at SafePlace, although Jessica and Luci helped with our project by surveying their participants at outreach events.

Thurston County Food Bank Satellite Program (TCFB)

Services Provided

The Thurston County Food Bank provides visitors with fresh produce, frozen meat, bread, pastries, dairy products and some frozen foods. Non-perishable foods are offered by choice, organized by food groups and scaled up by family size. Clients are allowed 15 full visits per year, 10 partial visits (which provide produce, protein, dairy, bread, and pastries), and unlimited supplemental visits (produce, bread, and pastries only). Additional selections are offered to those with special needs including dietary restrictions. Visits are limited to one per week.

Description of Service

The mission of the Thurston County Food Bank is to eliminate hunger within our community. To reduce access barriers, the Thurston County Food Bank, in collaboration with community partners, operates fifteen satellite food banks (Thurston County Food Bank, 2014).

To reduce barriers, the Thurston County Food Bank, in collaboration with community partners, operates fifteen satellite food banks.

Thurston County Food Bank works with the rural food banks in Rochester, Tenino and Yelm. Collaborations include acting as the lead agency for the Emergency Food Assistance Program, accessing food through Food Lifeline and Northwest Harvest, as well as providing food and technical support to some smaller rural operations (Thurston County Food Bank, 2014).

TCFB delivers commodities, meats, dairy and pre-packed bags of non-perishables, to two rural satellites. The fruits and vegetables along with other perishable goods are items the satellites need to gather themselves through local donations (Satellite Locations, 2014).

Our Observations and Notes

According to Chris Bauermeister, though TCFB almost exclusively provides food resources, they ideally would like to provide more. In addition to food services, TCFB has an in-person assistor to help people who are trying to sign up for the Affordable Health Care Act at their

main location. They also provide information about signing up for food stamps to supplement their food bank visits.

When recipients have reached their 15 visits in a calendar year, they call them in for an appointment to talk about the needs of the household, and do their best to connect them with resources that will help them access other services.

When recipients have reached their 15 visits in a calendar year, they call them in for an appointment to talk about the needs of the household and do their best to connect them with resources that will help

The Mobile Food Bank Program is a program for seniors living in low income housing. With only one paid staff member, they make regular visits to 9 Olympia locations, 2 Lacey locations, 4 Tumwater locations, and 1 Yelm Location (Mobile Food Banks, 2014). Yelm Adult Community Center is the only rural location the Mobile Food Bank Program serves. The Mobiles Program is something that needs fewer resources to expand relative to constructing a new facility or warehouse distribution center. This program is operated by staff and centralized volunteers in the urban core, so volunteer recruitment in rural communities would not be needed to continue operation.

Chris said TCFB wants to eliminate competition for funding and increase coordination between the food banks by incorporating other food banks into the TCFB network. They believe this would allow both the TCFB and its newly incorporated partners to serve more people, operate efficiently and maximize providing services with the funding they have. Being a part of this network would mean the total population served would increase, and along with that would come increased funding. In addition to eliminating competition, incorporating all food banks in the county would mean little to no duplication of services.

Chris described the generational difference between food bank operators. The old food bank model is pretty informal, accepting donations and distributing them without much record keeping. This has been effective in the past, but because of federal government cracking down on tax deductible donations, a paper trail of transactions and records is essential to the resilience and operation of a food bank today. This is an adaptive challenge.

Clients Served

3,950 households are served by the program—14,450 visits in the program. 1,000 bags packaged per month.

Needs of the Provider

The Thurston County Food Bank used to have more than one primarily Spanish-speaking satellite in the area. The first was Centro De Vida Y Esperanza Crossroads church in Lacey, the second was CIELO, the Integral Latino Educational Center of Olympia. The reason why these satellites no longer operate is because the funding could not be maintained to rent out the space for the food bank. This has been a devastating blow that significantly limits food bank access for our Spanish speaking population.

Needs of the Community from Providers Perspective

The Thurston County Food Bank believes coordinating with all existing food banks, providing them with more support, and adding their numbers served to TCFB, will create more leverage power for funding. This will make sure that the resources are focused where they need to be and little-to-no duplication exists.

Funding has been drying up over the last few years, so having service providers compete for funding creates barriers to effectively providing services and inevitably, and people in poverty suffer. More funding distributed among service providers will facilitate more paid staff that can support and recruit more volunteers.

Building alliances with faith-based communities in order to find more locations to operate a mobile or physical food bank in rural areas will expand the Mobiles program with more locations and contribute to reducing transportation barriers. This is a reinforcing cycle of expansion, since all of these things will increase the ability to secure grants and contracts that will increase funding that will increase capacity, and so on.

Community Action Council

Services Provided

Community Action Council is the primary agency in Thurston County for providing low-income clients with rental and utility assistance. The Community Action Council administers assistance to Thurston County residents through two government programs, Housing and Essential Needs (HEN), and The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) (Energy Assistance Program, 2014).

Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) is a statewide program that may provide non-cash housing and other assistance for recipients of DSHS Medical Care Services (DSHS, 2014).

Grant funds can only be used to support HEN eligible clients that qualify as homeless or at-risk of homelessness. Allowable financial assistance for housing may include monthly rent, overdue rent, security deposit, and service animal deposits. Utilities assistance is limited to electricity, natural gas, sewer, water, garbage and utility deposits. Essential Needs assistance includes help with obtaining personal health and hygiene items (such as toothpaste, shampoo, toilet paper), cleaning supplies (such as laundry and dish soap), and bus passes. Assistance cannot be provided through gift cards, vouchers, or certificates.

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a federally funded program that provides assistance to help low-income families and individuals pay heating bills during the winter (Energy Assistance Program, 2014). Assistance is paid directly to the utility or energy provider on the client's behalf. Homeowners may also qualify for limited heating system repairs. Assistance is limited to eligible households, one time per year. Additional energy assistance may also be available from specific private utility Fuel Funds. Eligibility is

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), a federally funded program that provides assistance to help low-income families and individuals pay heating bills during the winter.

based on household income. The gross income received by all members of the household must be at or below 125 percent of the Federal poverty level. Funding is provided on a first come, first serve basis (Energy Assistance Program, 2014).

They also operate a number of supplemental programs to meet other needs, such as water assistance and services to low-income women with children. Additional rental and utility assistance is available when the agency has funding for it (Affordable Housing Program, 2014).

Community Action Council's services are available to all Thurston County residents. Their Olympia office hours are Monday-Thursday, from 7am to 5:30pm.

Description of Service

Community Action Council's mission is to, "focus on meeting the needs of low-income individuals and families through a variety of programs designed to help them become independent and more self-sufficient. The Council continues working collaboratively to develop strategies that address poverty in our communities" (Community Action Council of Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties, 2014)

What the Community Knows About Receiving the Service

A Crossroads church Lord's Table recipient spoke with us about energy assistance availability: "Receiving the assistance wasn't the hard part, but it was difficult to get an appointment with them in time before the funds ran out."

Salvation Army

A few of the rural service providers such as ROOF, Emanuel Lutheran Church, Yelm Community Services, and Tenino Food Bank Plus are Salvation Army extensions. We do not know what this partnership looks like and could not find more information about the kinds of support Salvation Army offers to rural service providers.

Garden Raised Bounty (GRuB)

Description of Service

"The Kitchen Garden Project (KGP) partners with organizations and low-income people to create backyard and neighborhood food solutions. We connect people with the sustainable food movement by providing access to the knowledge and resources needed to grow fresh, healthy and culturally appropriate foods." (Kitchen Garden Project, 2014)

Clients Served

Kitchen Garden Project Rural Recipients

2014 - 8 gardeners in Yelm, Tenino, Rainier, and Rochester.

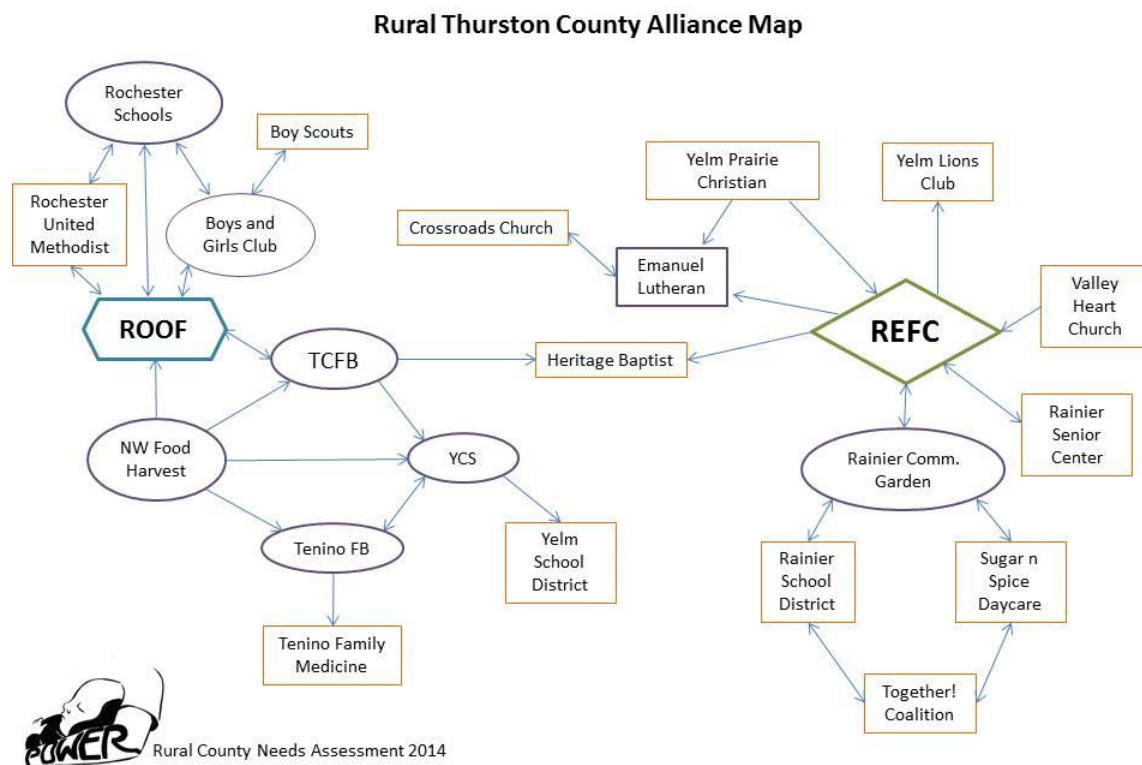
2013 - 10 gardeners in Yelm, Tenino, Rainier, Rochester, and Centralia

2012 - 6 gardeners in Yelm, Rochester, and Bucoda

2011 - 14 gardeners in Yelm, Tenino, Rochester, Littlerock, and Centralia

Service Provider Alliances and Partnerships

An important question we asked each service provider was, “Do you have any alliances with other organizations?” We see the communication and networking of service providers as crucial in providing services, reducing duplication, and preventing gaps in services. Theresa Slusher’s promotion and implementation of coordinated entry in homeless shelters speaks to this. In the diagram below, ROOF and the Rainier Emergency Food Center (REFC), are the providers with the most partnerships with other services, one out of necessity and one out of abundance. The Rural Thurston County Alliance Map below, provides a visual representation of alliances and partnerships currently in practice.



The REFC is a large distribution facility, which serves clients first and providers second. They receive support from TCFB, Yelm Prairie Christian, and the Rainier Community Garden. They also work together with TCFB to support the smaller rural satellite, Heritage Food Bank. The Valley Heart Church has allowed the REFC to build a facility and operate on their property. REFC distributes food to all three free dinner providers in Yelm, as well as Crazy Faith Ministries, which serves free meals twice per week in Olympia.

The Yelm free dinner providers work together and share food to make sure no excess is wasted and that everyone has ingredients to cook a meal each week. They are aware of their need to communicate, because they serve the same group of people for the most part. They coordinate serving days because they want folks to have access to a free meal throughout the week.

The Thurston County Food Bank provides TEFAP commodities to Rochester Organization of Families (ROOF), Yelm Community Services (YCS), and the two satellite food banks Rainier Emergency Food Center and Heritage Baptist Food bank. They deliver to Heritage Baptist Food bank prepackaged bags of non-perishables as well as dairy and meat products.

The Rochester service providers work closely together because they are geographically isolated from other providers. Rochester providers are under supported, receiving no Tenant Based Rental Assistance funding from Community Action Council in 2012. ROOF and the Rochester Community Clothing Closet run almost entirely off of donations.

Tenino is a small town with two food banks. These food banks operate at different times at different locations, and do not work with each other. Craig Lester, the director of the Heritage Baptist Food Bank and a Tenino City Councilperson, told us he has tried to share resources like extra bread with Robin Rudy of Tenino Food Bank Plus, but she has refused his support.

When Tenino Food Bank Plus and Yelm Community Services do not collaborate or share information with the Thurston County Food Bank, it creates competition for funding and duplication of services. Many Yelm residents travel to the Rainier Emergency Food Center for services. These folks aren't turned away by REFC, but legally they cannot distribute TEFAP commodities to Yelm residents because they do not know if the recipients have already received commodities from YCS.

Conclusion

Multiple service providers are struggling to sustain their operation based on lack of funding or county/city building code and zoning violations. Yelm Prairie Christian has been battling the city of Yelm in court and refused to comment to us about the situation. Rochester United Methodist Church does not receive any funding from the county or state, but will be forced to shut down in two years if they do not construct a new building for their clothing bank operations. Pastor Jerry at Emanuel Lutheran Church has been told he must improve the church's sidewalks and parking lot before he can build or expand his building. This does not take into account the condition of the pavement and sidewalks in the immediate vicinity of the church, which is no better than the private property he has been told he must improve. With funding issues in mind, these three ideas rise to the surface of our service provider research:

1. Service providers who do not cooperate are having a harder time making services accessible for recipients. Likewise, service providers with strong community alliances and partnerships serve their populations, with or without funding.
2. Service providers can only use the funding they receive effectively if they have the full support of their elected officials, funders and their communities.
3. More outreach and coordination among rural service providers, governing bodies and funding bodies is needed. We see the communication and networking of service providers as crucial in providing services, reducing duplication, and preventing gaps in services.

Finally, the way we perceive people experiencing poverty contributes to the ways we provide service. When recipients are treated like assumed thieves and liars, it requires them to internalize oppression and trade their dignity for the services they need as opposed to when recipients are treated like friends and community members.

Survey Results and Analysis

Although we set out to collect at least 250 surveys, our practice changed as we encountered antipathy towards surveys. Folks felt surveys were ineffective because they had filled out surveys and had seen nothing change. They are also not as inclusive a tool as simple conversation. Folks with literacy issues are usually not willing to expose their difficulties with reading and writing, but typically say no thank you and walk away. The concept of surveys can be very strange and foreign to someone who was not raised in the U.S. These were not voices we were willing to overlook.

We surveyed as many people as were willing, but engaged on a more individual basis those who were eager to share their knowledge and experience of accessing services in rural county. We collected 126 surveys—and continue to receive them—as well as documented in more depth the details from people experiencing poverty in our rural communities.

Rural Needs Assessment participants identified major gaps in accessing social services in rural Thurston County. Although many of them agreed services were readily available, especially food banks and free meals, accessing these services presents one of the major challenges of people living in poverty in rural county. The following concerns were the most prevalent throughout our interviews and surveys:

- Food assistance programs are still a large need in rural communities
- Medical services such as dental care and eye care are severely lacking.
- Even though services exist throughout rural Thurston County, access is limited. Transportation is the number one reason why our participants have trouble accessing services.
- Rental and utility assistance programs are needed with a focus on rural Thurston County that takes a more comprehensive, low-barrier approach and has a wider reach
- 14% of survey participants reported being currently homeless.
- More clothing banks
- Access to hygiene supplies
- Job search help/professional training

Limitations

The questions we asked were largely open-ended. Many people appreciated having options to get their thinking going, and weren't sure if certain benefits qualified as "services." We adapted the survey to help elucidate what the questions were asking. In doing this, we recognize that

although this format facilitated more responses, it may have limited the participants' thinking outside the box. We surveyed service recipients with the purpose of understanding social service systems as they impact rural communities through the lens of the recipient. We walked the fine line between helping inspire participants to share their own unique ideas while giving enough of a prompt so that they answered the question rather than skip it all together.

The Questions

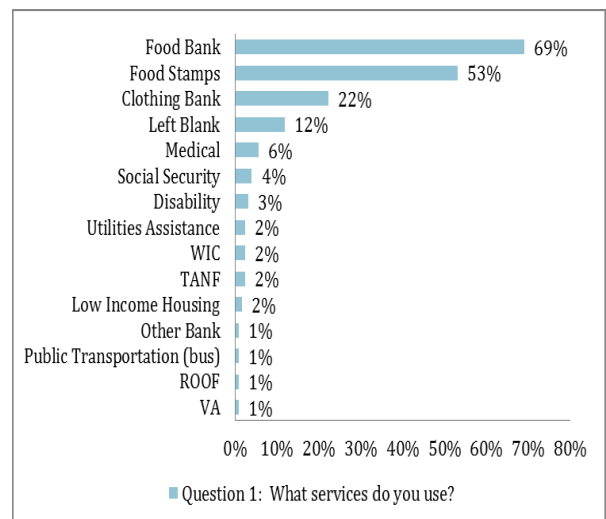
The following section will provide survey data analysis for the 7 questions we asked, including questions pertaining to accessing social services, missing services and experiencing homelessness. We will also use anecdotal evidence from interviews with service recipients.

Question 1: What services do you use?

We asked this question as a starting point to help determine what services people currently utilized. This question alone implies gaps in the services that people have access to in rural communities. The top three services used were:

1. Food Banks, at 69% of respondents
2. Food Stamps at 53% of respondents
3. Clothing Banks at 22% of respondents

From the response breakdown shown here, it would seem that food banks are plentiful with 69% affirmative responses; however, 73% of the survey participants were interviewed at food banks. These statistics become more complex as we look at responses broken down by where they were collected. For example, at the Yelm Emanuel Lutheran free dinner, 100% of our respondents also used the food banks. One woman would use food stamps, but she doesn't qualify because of her



"I don't know what I'm going to do when the car goes. Mine broke down and we can't afford the repairs and my husband's is on its last leg."

social security income.

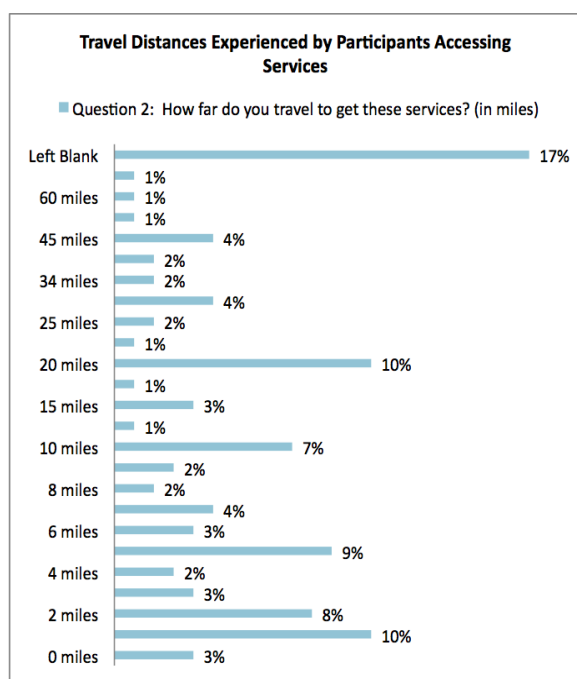
Many people at the food banks arrived in carpools, not technically a social service, but a more organic way to subsist without transportation or money for gas, which relates directly with the fact that **only 1% of our respondents use public transportation.**

Another woman whom we saw at multiple outreach events expressed concern at what feels like the complete absence of public transportation: "I don't know what I'm going to do when the car goes. Mine broke down and we can't afford the repairs and my husband's is on its last leg." This was a common issue among our participants: how will they get to the food bank if they don't have transportation?

In a focus group we held at Emanuel Lutheran Church on June 9th, one participant mentioned the idea of decentralizing services. This would enhance access to more services as they are distributed throughout remote/rural areas rather than concentrate services in the urban hub.

Another noteworthy figure from our data analysis is that ***only 2% of our responders utilize rental and utilities assistance when 14% are currently homeless***. Is this due to issues of availability, promotion or access?

At an outreach event at ROOF, we met a family with young children who had been “camping” for 3 weeks. They found a rental unit they could afford, but were having trouble coming up with the money for the deposit. After contacting every organization they could think of, including the Family Housing Center and various churches throughout Olympia, they were \$150 short. We heard countless testimonies from participants about utility bill crises and trouble finding sources for assistance.



Question 2: How far do you travel to get to these services?

We asked participants about distance traveled to access services. The answers could represent distance traveled to visit food banks, attend free meals, or apply for basic food, depending on how the participant considered the question. The top two responses were tied, with 10% traveling 20 miles and 10% traveling 1 mile. Most of the respondents who traveled more than 10 miles answered this question based on travel distance to apply for services in the urban hub: Olympia, Lacey or Tumwater. Although the DSHS mobile CSO visits rural communities, the visits are few and far between and poorly promoted. We held an outreach event at Bailey’s IGA in Rochester during a mobile CSO visit and only two people entered the unit during the 3 hours we were there. Even though

there seems to be an effort to reach people in rural communities who have limited resources and transportation, travel to services remains one of the largest barriers to accessing them.

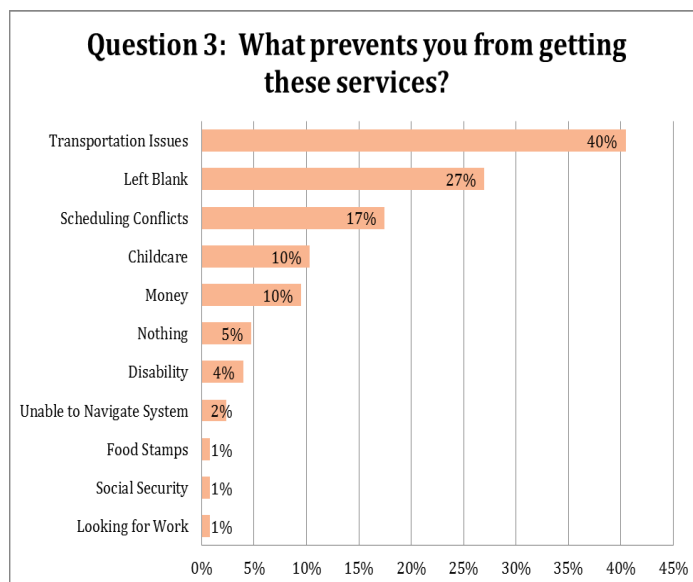
Question 3: What prevents you from getting these services?

We posed this question to gain insight on barriers to accessing social services. Though it seems to have been an unclear question—27% of participants declined to answer—40% of participants selected transportation issues as the reason why they are prevented from accessing services. With nearly non-existent public transit, outrageous gas prices and no

40% of participants selected transportation issues as the reason why they are prevented from accessing services

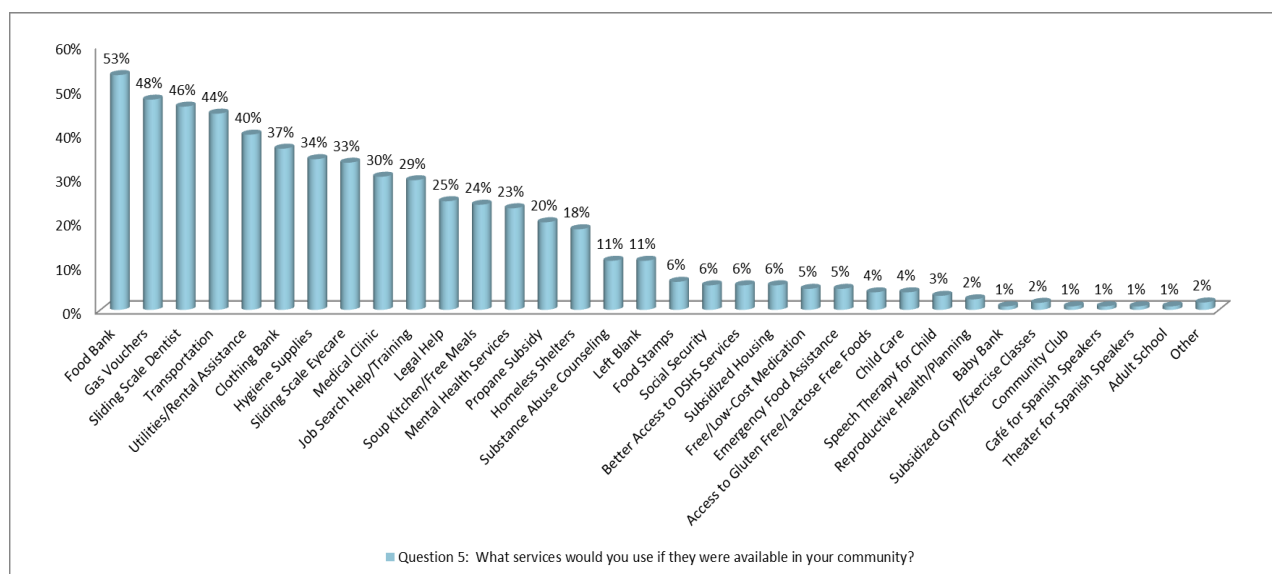
affordable/subsidized auto mechanics, getting around is illustrated as, once again, the most challenging aspect of accessing services in rural county.

The Yelm Senior Center has two buses to help members to and from the facility, but they struggle to maintain the funding to pay drivers. Many of the faith-based service providers have gas vouchers to give people in emergency situations, but even then, it's only one or two vouchers a year and just enough gas to get to the urban hub, Olympia, to find services. Other than that, the Rural/Tribal Transportation Service as described elsewhere in this report, is difficult to navigate and has minimal presence in these communities. Alternatively, people seem to rely quite a bit on carpooling to various service providers. At our ice cream social focus group, we held in Yelm, carpools were already forming to visit the clothing bank at the Rochester United Methodist Church.



Additionally, caring for children or a relative presents multiple challenges to accessing services, with 10% juggling accessing services and caregiving. Participants expressed the difficulties of waiting in line for an hour at the food bank—or a few hours at the Community Service Office—with children or a sick relative. For many, these obstacles are just too great.

Question 4: What services are missing in your community?



53% of our participants believe more food banks are necessary in the rural communities.

In Yelm, between 60% and 70% of respondents would like to see more food banks in the community. Considering 42% of the participants at the Rainier Emergency Food Service listed Yelm addresses versus 35% who listed Rainier addresses, there seems to be a disconnect in food assistance services in Yelm. Our experience at the Yelm Community Services Food Bank was alarming. Here is an excerpt from the journal we kept of outreach events (What's New, 2014):

Signage around the food bank warned to the effect of: "Taking anything left outside is theft and criminals will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law," "no loitering" and "you will be prosecuted with illegal dumping if you leave donations after hours." Meanwhile, an hour before the food bank opened, emergency food assistance recipients lined up on the far side of the parking lot with assigned numbers—Yelm Community Services staffers keep a tight ship. Numbers were called and the people rushed over to fill their shopping carts. One woman, who used to live on my street, hung back and spoke with us. She worried that the director would realize she'd already been to the food bank this month (apparently, it's only one visit per month). The place was busy for the better part of the 3 hours. People talked to us about other service gaps. Once again, even in Yelm, adequate transportation is lacking, along with other services such as mental health, substance abuse counseling and dental.

46% of our participants named the need for subsidized, sliding-scale or otherwise affordable dental care. 33% for affordable eye care.

46% of our participants named the need for subsidized, sliding-scale or otherwise affordable dental care. One interviewee recounted his last trip to the dentist where the only treatment available to him was tooth extraction. Dental care is an important aspect of any person's healthcare plan and is too often dismissed as unnecessary. With the only

free dental clinic all the way in Olympia, it's no wonder so many stated the need for more dental care options that are accessible for people in rural county who need this basic care.

Eye care was not far behind; 33% claimed affordable eye care as a need in their communities and 30% stated medical clinics were lacking. Health care is essential to one's well-being, and there are few to no medical services available, and significant barriers to accessing the ones that do exist. For example, SeaMar just opened a location in Yelm, reportedly far from the main parts of town where bus services exist.

As expected, 44% expressed the need for transportation or gas vouchers. 92% of Rochester participants who answered this question would use transportation if it was available in the community. Though disabled persons can schedule a door-to-door bus service, this must be done weeks in advance and still

More than 9 out of 10 of our participants in Rochester would use public transportation if it was available in the community.

leaves countless people stranded. Gabrielle from ROOF noted in our interview with her that many people move to rural areas because the cost of living seems to be cheaper, but don't account for how they will access services they need.

We interviewed a POWER member who recently moved from Olympia to Tenino. She is a single mother raising 2 children, one of whom is autistic. She said, "If my car stopped working, I don't know what I would do for transportation. Buses don't come close to picking people up where they live."

Her autistic child has speech and communication therapy needs, which were addressed in the Olympia School District. The Tenino School District is unable to provide this therapy for her child.

What a dilemma: either live in Olympia where rent is grossly unaffordable, but services such as transportation and proximity to service providers exist; or, move to the country where rent might be affordable, but you'll be stranded if you need to get to the mobile CSO to sign-up for food stamps or the soup kitchen on Tuesdays or even the food bank.

Rochester continues to be a relatively isolated community in rural Thurston County. Less than 1/3 of the raised garden beds are utilized at the Rochester Community Garden, a stark contrast to the abundant and well-maintained Rainier Community Garden. The director of the Boys and Girls Club in Rochester said that the number one community need in Rochester is community involvement, but how can the community be involved if they have no way of getting themselves to these spaces.

40% of our participants stated the need for rental and utility assistance. Many of the people with whom we spoke were discouraged by the lack of rental and utility assistance. Contrasted with the number of people currently receiving rental/utility assistance—2%—clearly, many people are left behind. The lack of affordable housing in rural communities is ever-present. With seemingly no county rental assistance funding funneling down to Rochester, the prospects are grim. Homelessness—with a very different face in the rural communities—is not in the foreground. Woods and farms hide the homeless and the homeless become increasingly disillusioned with the systems to which they have access.

Homelessness—with a very different face in rural communities—is not in the foreground. Woods and farms hide the homeless...

Almost 1 in 3 people reported needing job search help and professional or vocational training in their communities. With most of the GED prep classes and adult schools located in the urban hub and Centralia, people in the rural community once again face the barriers of accessibility, including transportation, scheduling, childcare needs, and money to do all of these things. Worksource provides job search assistance, computers with internet access, copiers, phones and faxes, workshops and training resources, but their only office in Thurston County is in Tumwater.

Interestingly, **only 18% claimed homeless shelters were needed in the community.** According to Thurston County HOME Consortium's 2012 Annual Report, only a small percent of

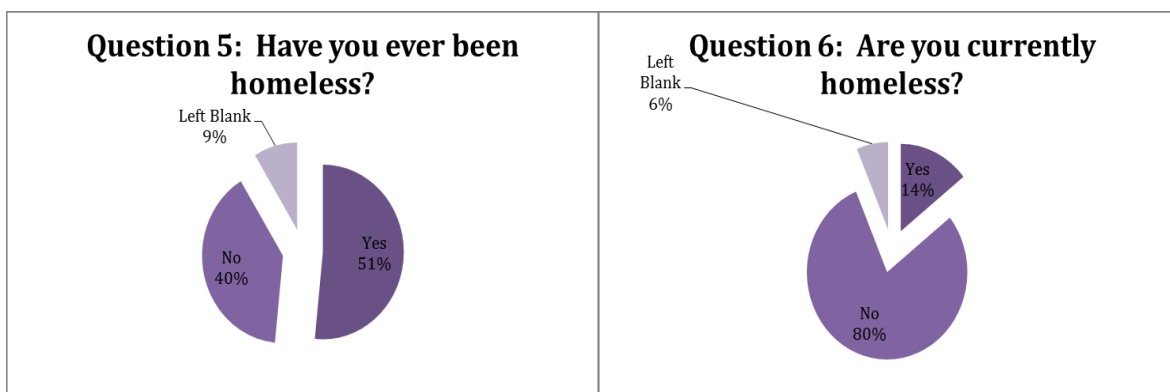
people leaving emergency shelters are stably re-housed (2012 Annual Report). These programs are geared toward people who are recently homeless and those who have been homeless for a long time seem to be overlooked. A holistic approach would include programs to help folks who have experienced homelessness or substandard housing for extended periods of time.

What we discovered is that there are key people in each community who can bridge the gap between the homeless and services that might help them

What we discovered is that there are key people in each community who can bridge the gap between the homeless and services that might help them. Building relationships with these people is imperative if homelessness is to be truly addressed. Connie Todd, homeless advocate and volunteer at Rochester United Methodist Church, who has experienced homelessness throughout her life, has connections in the homeless community in

Rochester. The director of the clothing bank at the church said that a lot of the homeless are mistrusting toward service providers, but Connie bridges that gap. After these key figures in each community are identified, service providers must work with them to locate the chronically homeless, who, again, are largely invisible, identify what their specific needs are and what assistance would be helpful and empowering. Individualized, personal care is best practice in serving anyone, but especially the homeless in rural communities.

Questions 5 and 6: Have you ever been homeless? Are you currently homeless?



Stunningly, **over half of our participants had experienced homelessness at some point in their lives.** 76% of people interviewed in Rochester had experienced homelessness before. Again, with little-to-no funding trickling through to Rochester, there's very little to help these people.

40% of the people interviewed at the free dinner at Crossroads Christian Community and 50% of the people we interviewed at Rochester's IGA reported experiencing homelessness currently. A lot of this is attributed to the substandard housing conditions in which people live in rural communities. Without stringent city code enforcers, people who have no money for home repairs can continue living in dangerous conditions. One service provider said if a person has a roof over their head, they're not homeless—that is, we believe, until the roof caves

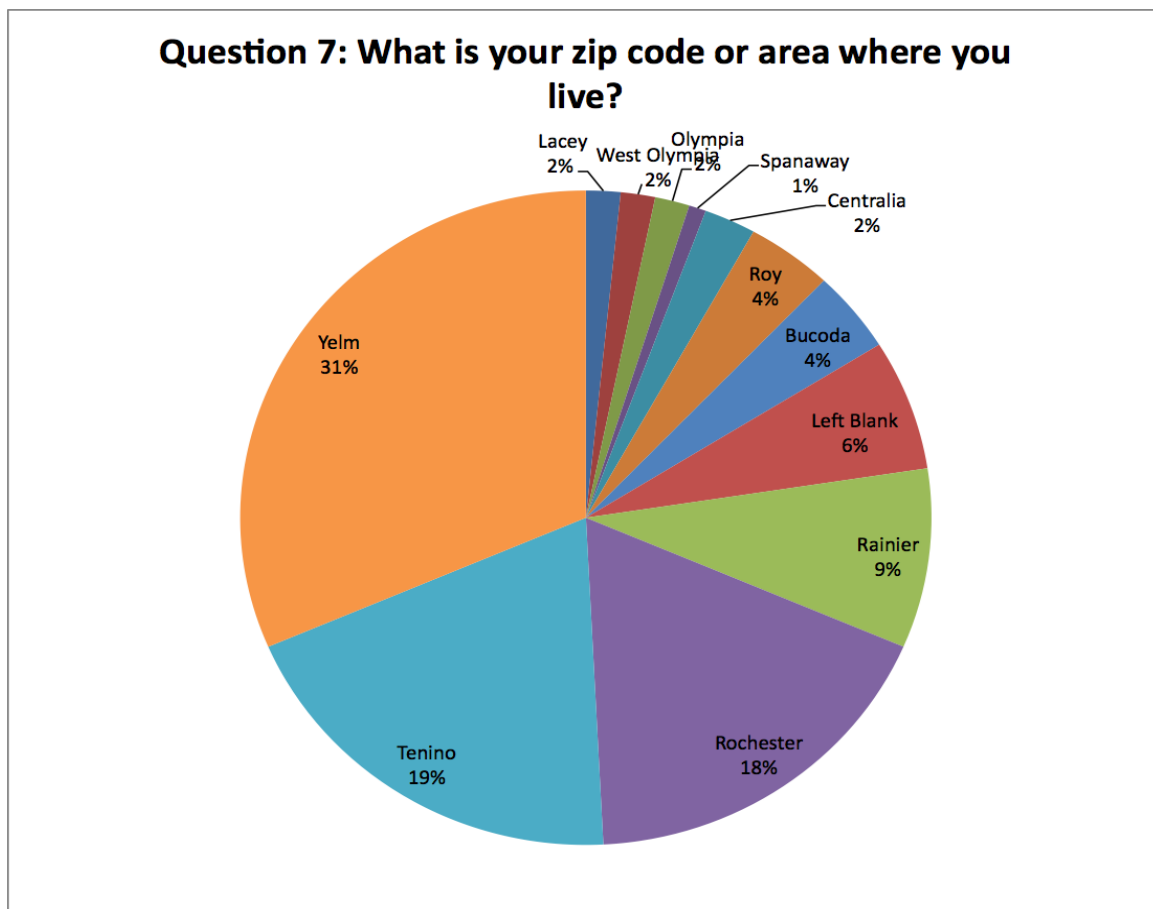
The front steps to her house are gone; after rotting and crumbling away, the front door opens to a sheer, 4 foot drop.

in and kills them. One participant in our ice cream social focus group in Yelm mentioned that the front steps to her house are gone; after rotting and crumbling away, the front door opens to a sheer, 4 foot drop. She asked about home repairs programs, and one person mentioned a program called chore help with Catholic Community

Services. Along with Rebuilding Together, these programs help low-income people with home repairs and maintenance. Catholic Community Services serves low-income seniors and disabled adults (Catholic Community Services, 2014). Rebuilding Together serves low-income families, seniors and disabled adults and has 100-200 projects in Thurston County (Homeowners in Need, 2014). Additionally, one person mentioned a program through the USDA Rural Development program called mutual self-help loans, which “is used primarily to help very low- and low-income households construct their own homes” (Single Family Housing Loans and Grants, 2014). Since only two people in our interactions with people knew of these programs, it doesn’t seem to have much of an impact in our rural communities. More time would have allowed us to look into these types of services and their accessibility in rural Thurston County.

Question 7: What is your zip code or area where you live?

The chart below shows the zip codes/areas our participants reported in their surveys. Despite having only 3 outreach events in Rochester, Rochester citizens make up a relatively large chunk of our participants. Additionally, it was surprising to see the representation from Lewis County and Pierce County.



Transportation

Transportation was the most cited gap in services to rural Thurston County by survey participants. Currently, a significant amount of rural county residents have trouble or cannot access public assistance and other services because of a lack of reliable transportation. Though there are transit programs targeted towards rural county, they are too limited in capacity and consistency to meet the transportation demands of our county residents and many are left stranded.

Intercity Transit

Intercity Transit offers regular routes to Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater, and Yelm. Besides Yelm, Intercity Transit does not serve rural Thurston County and refers service to Rural and Tribal Transit. An old Intercity Transit route map shows that there used to be regular routes in different areas of rural Thurston County. Due to budget cuts in the early 2000s, many rural routes were eliminated to concentrate services in the more populated areas of Olympia, Tumwater, and Lacey.

Funding for Intercity Transit comes from local sales tax revenue and in the last twelve years, sales tax increased twice to expand Intercity Transit hours and frequency. Despite receiving several national awards for ridership participation and quality of service and several sales tax increases, Intercity Transit continues to prioritize urbanized Thurston County and leaves most areas of Thurston County without service.

Village Vans

Village Vans is a program through Intercity Transit that provides transportation for low-income people in Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater during their job-seeking process. Rides are made by appointment-only through a 24-hour call line and are offered weekdays only. Village Vans is not a public transportation service in the sense that Intercity Transit is; it offers a specific-service geared toward those seeking employment with barriers to transportation.

Village Vans also offers free job training for drivers and other job skills to people seeking employment. This program offers low-income people greater accessibility to the workforce in a dynamic, multi-faceted way.

Para Transit

Sirena Painter, Tenino City Councilperson:

Para Transit is a regional service that transports people to medical appointments. You have to call multiple days in advance to schedule a pick-up. Since the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, Para Transit has been absolutely overwhelmed with callers. Sirena's mom scheduled a pick-up, but when her doctor rescheduled the appointment, she had a very hard time trying to get ahold of Para Transit to cancel her ride. Something most Para Transit riders don't know, says Sirena, is that Para Transit will give out gas vouchers or transportation reimbursement for people who can get a ride with a friend or wouldn't otherwise have money for gas to travel to their appointment. This is a helpful service for people who have access to a working vehicle.

Rural and Tribal Transit (R/T)

Sirena Painter, Tenino City Councilperson:

Rural and Tribal (R/T) Transit program service the areas of Bucoda, Rainier, Rochester, Tenino, Yelm, the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, and the Nisqually Tribe. It was developed by the Thurston regional Planning council, TOGETHER! and the Thurston County Human Services Transportation Forum (The Profile).

Currently, the R/T serves the area sporadically, offers appointment-only service scheduling and has no consistent bus stops.

Currently the R/T serves the area sporadically, offers appointment-only service scheduling and has no consistent bus stops. These appointments are offered from 6am to 6 pm weekdays, leaving night and weekend transportation unavailable to residents in areas not serviced by Intercity Transit.

One of our project leaders lives in Rochester and found employment in Centralia last summer. She's low income and her family shares one car, so she called R/T to see about transportation options to and from work. They could pick her up 2 hours after her shift ended and drop her off 45 minutes later at the corner of Highway 12 and Albany, leaving a 4 mile gap which she had to either walk or bike. With so much waiting and travel time, it was not a helpful option.

Car Repairs for TANF recipients

DSHS has a list of support services available to WorkFirst participants, which include transportation supports such as gas vouchers, bus passes, car repairs, and licensing, fees, and insurance costs. These supports are unevenly distributed and often DSHS clients are unaware of them or told they don't qualify when they do. Support with navigating DSHS can help families access this important resource.

Mobile CSO

We performed outreach twice during mobile CSO visits to our rural county.

The first outreach was at the Rochester IGA grocery store on May 12th. Only two people utilized this service, and they came into town after their grandpa told them he saw the CSO parked in town. We asked the four case workers inside the vehicle how much promotion they did to make the community aware of their presence that day. They told us they email fliers to local service providers and businesses in hopes that they will print them off and distribute them around town, and/or tell their clients about it. It did not seem to work as we saw no fliers posted in Rochester.

The second outreach was at the Rainier Emergency Food Center on May 28th. We are unsure how many folks utilized their services that day, but were glad to see the mobile CSO parking in a location that low income folks frequent while using the food bank's services. They did the same amount of promotion that they always do,

Of the people we talked to who went to the mobile CSO, none of them knew it would be in town that day

which we feel is inadequate. Of the people we talked to who went to the mobile CSO, none of them knew it would be in town that day, and happened upon it while visiting the food bank.

The mobile CSO is a good idea that is not being delivered effectively. It does not travel in a sequential order, and does not promote its location or make sure the community it is attempting to serve knows when or where they can receive its services. Both locations we observed have no public transportation to or from them. Even if people knew they would be in town, if they do not have a car or cannot ask a neighbor for a ride, they cannot access this service no matter how much promotion is offered.

Conclusion

The survey and interview data we collected is invaluable in many ways. Changing our goals and tactics for collecting the information we sought ensured the data we gathered is well-rounded and complete. We faced numerous barriers including disillusionment, mistrust and sentiments of defeat that all stem from the internalized oppression of poverty. Our participants provided tremendous insight regarding living in poverty and accessing social services through all the barriers, gaps and politics.

In spite of these struggles in navigating the system, many people were creative with their responses. Subsidized gyms, free exercise classes, cafés for Spanish speakers, and baby banks were among some of the more interesting suggestions. Anyone who wants health and lifestyle activities should have access to those things. Although some very basic are not being met, thinking about people's needs from a well-rounded perspective will help to understand not just the condition of people in poverty, but the human condition. It doesn't matter how much money people have, everyone wants to live a healthy, happy and fulfilling life.

Recommendations

We have taken a look at national trends in rural poverty as well as a close look at rural Thurston County. We have heard from recipients, providers, religious leaders, elected officials and other community members. Our recommendations are based on what statistics teach us about anti-poverty work and from the information shared with us by people living in rural Thurston County.

Address transportation gaps. In rural Thurston County, the most immediate need is transportation. Even if services were plentiful, without the means to access them, they are useless. Better public transit, community vans, support for drivers, organized carpools, car sharing, bicycle paths, well promoted mobile services, affordable car repairs and car buying programs are some options that might begin to alleviate this need. Village Vans is a successful model. We would like to see it, or a similar program expand to rural Thurston County.

Continue rural outreach. Outreach is important; the exchange of ideas, referrals to resources and the connections made amongst recipients, providers and their community is invaluable

and cannot be replicated through hands off methods. People need contact—spaces in which they can share their knowledge and voice their needs—and people in isolated communities are often left out of those spaces. Maintaining ongoing outreach efforts in remote areas is also necessary to keep afloat of the issues rural communities face. As changes or crises occur, outreach staff can provide ongoing reports to service providers, elected officials and faith community leaders so they can make appropriate moves to ameliorate the constant ebb and flow of economic turmoil.

Identify Rural Homeless Liaisons. The issue of homelessness in rural communities differs from the issue of homelessness in urban hubs not only because services are few and far between, but because people are more spread out as well. Hidden between farm and forest, the homeless can exist for years in the rural community without anyone taking notice. In talking with rural service provider staff members, volunteers and service recipients, we found that key people in each community serve as unofficial liaisons between homeless people and services. Only one official homeless shelter exists in all of rural Thurston County; at least one in each town (including Rochester) would be a sufficient start. However, a more comprehensive plan is necessary, which begins with identifying our “rural homeless liaisons” and learning from these figures and the homeless populations they serve what additional steps could address the unique circumstances they face.

Incentivize healthcare programs in rural areas that increase access to medical services. Like the Regional Maternal & Child Health Program implemented by the University of Texas, programs that facilitate necessary care and increase the overall health of rural populations should be supported and encouraged. We would like to see financial incentives offered to rural practitioners either through the state or local governments.

Create community gathering spaces. Service providers expressed concern for the lack of involvement and gathering spaces within their communities. Funding for community spaces, including parks and recreation centers, should not only include the construction or rehabilitation of these spaces, but also the maintenance of them. Within these spaces, information kiosks and bulletin boards can provide a platform for the promotion of services, events, and activities. More community spaces will increase community involvement and pride and facilitate the exchange of—and access to—social services.

Implement countywide fast track or work-around for emergency facilities construction and operation. When service providers are forced to maintain rigid city code and zoning standards, it is the people in poverty who inevitably suffer. There are ways to keep the public safe while preserving the functions of providers. Such interference can be crippling to an organization who can barely keep the lights on. Can Thurston County implement standards that allow providers to continue operations without entering legal battles or having to spend exorbitant amounts of money on new construction or sidewalk improvements?

Expand effective anti-poverty programs that increase people’s access to tangible and long-lasting benefits. We need emergency assistance programs like food banks, homeless shelters, and more because they save lives, decrease suffering and provide for basic daily needs. These programs need to be funded. However, programs that help people purchase their own home, create permanent low-rent adequate housing options, stay in their homes and communities,

and increase personal incomes will decrease homelessness and suffering on a more permanent basis. These programs improve communities.

Support programs that increase personal incomes. Statistics show that access to *higher education* is a clear pathway to decreasing poverty. Creating and supporting programs increase education or build people's *entrepreneurial skills and opportunities* create more permanent pathways out of poverty and diversify local economies. There will always be a portion of any population who are unable to work, because of disabilities, because they are needed at home to care for children or a family member, or because they cannot find work as hard as they try. Ensuring *access to an adequate public safety net* will not only decrease suffering, but will benefit the local economy.

No one wants to see their neighbors suffer, however our language around poverty often puts the blame on those experiencing poverty. We must all challenge misinformation to create a clear path for policy makers and communities to support programs and politics that effectively challenge poverty. Our focus group included service providers as well as those who rely on services. It was not surprising that the suggestions from service providers tended toward improvements to services within the community, while the suggestions from low-income folks tended toward sweeping economic change. No one wants to envision a life of constant struggle to patch together, sometimes without success, what is needed for daily survival.

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Appendix A



Parents Organizing for Welfare and Economic Rights

309 5th Avenue SE, Olympia, Washington 98501

360-352-9716 toll-free 866-343-9716

info@mamapower.org

www.mamapower.org

Find us on Facebook.

Social Services Survey

What services do you use? (For example, food stamps, food banks, TANF, clothing bank, etc.)

How far do you have to travel to get these services?

What prevents you from getting services? (For example, distance, transportation issues, time, your schedule, caring for a child or relative, etc.)

What services would you use if they were in your community? Circle as many as apply to the needs of your community:

Mental health services

Medical clinic

Dental care

Eye care

Food bank

Clothing bank

Hygiene supplies

Homeless shelter

Transportation - buses

Gas vouchers

Propane subsidy

soup kitchen/free meals

job search help

substance use counseling

legal help

rental/utility assistance

OTHER:

We define homelessness as not having stable housing. (For example, staying with family or friends, temporary shelter, couch surfing, no running water, heat, camping, etc.)

Have you ever been homeless?

Are you currently homeless?

What is your zip code or area where you live?

POWER is an organization of low-income parents and allies advocating for a strong social safety net while working toward a world where children and care giving are truly valued, and the devastation of poverty has been eradicated.

Appendix B

Encuesta de Servicios Sociales

¿Qué tipo de servicios usa usted? (Por ejemplo, cupones de alimentos, banco de alimentos, TANF, banco de ropa, etc.)

¿Hasta cuántas millas tiene que viajar para obtener estos servicios?

¿Qué le impide a usted que no pueda obtener estos servicios? (Por ejemplo: distancia, problemas de transportación, tiempo, horario, cuidado de niños o parientes, etc.)

¿Qué servicios le faltan?

¿Qué servicios usaría si estuvieran disponibles en su comunidad?

Definimos el estar sin hogar como no tener vivienda segura. (Por ejemplo, quedarse con familia o amigos, refugio para personas sin hogar, no agua corriente o calefacción, camping, etc.)

¿Alguna vez ha estado sin hogar?

¿Está usted sin hogar en este momento?

¿Cuál es su código postal o área donde vive usted?

Appendix C



Parents Organizing for Welfare and Economic Rights

309 5th Avenue SE, Olympia, Washington 98501

360-352-9716 toll-free 866-343-9716

info@mamapower.org www.mamapower.org Find us on Facebook.

Social Service Provider Survey

What services do you provide?

How many people do you serve?

How far do your clients travel to get your services?

What services do you feel are missing from your community?

What kind(s) of support does your organization need to continue providing or better provide for the needs of your community?

Do you have any alliances with other organizations?

POWER is an organization of low-income parents and allies advocating for a strong social safety net while working toward a world where children and care giving are truly valued, and the devastation of poverty has been eradicated.

Appendix D-Outreach Calendar

| | |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8-May | Mobile CSO @ Rochester IGA |
| 12-May | ROOF Food Bank |
| 12-May | Interview with Gabrielle @ ROOF |
| 15-May | Yelm Community Services Food Bank |
| 16-May | Interview-Anna Schlect |
| 20-May | Interview Devon McColly Hopkins @ Yelm School District |
| 21-May | Olympia CSO |
| 22-May | Interview Chris Bauermeister @ TCFB |
| 23-May | Interview with Ashley @ CYS |
| 27-May | Emanuel Lutheran Free Dinner |
| 27-May | Interview with Scott @ Emanuel Lutheran |
| 27-May | Interview with Pastor Jerry @ Emanuel Lutheran |
| 28-May | Mobile CSO @ REFS |
| 28-May | Rochester United Methodist Clothing Bank |
| 28-May | Interview Carol @ United Methodist Clothing Bank |
| 28-May | Interview Suzy @ United Methodist Clothing Bank |
| 2-Jun | Interview with Sirena Painter, Tenino City Council |
| 2-Jun | Interview with Liz |
| 2-Jun | Interview with Mike McGowan, Yelm City Council, Thurston County HOME Consortium Member |
| 4-Jun | Interview with Penny, POWER Member |
| 5-Jun | Tenino Food Bank |
| 5-Jun | Interview with Robin Rudy @ Tenino Food Bank |
| 5-Jun | Interview with Tali @ Sugar n Spice Daycare |
| 5-Jun | Yelm Lions Club Free Dinner |
| 9-Jun | Interview with Ashlee @ Rochester Boys and Girls Club |
| 9-Jun | POWER Outage Event in Yelm |
| 11-Jun | REFC |
| 11-Jun | Rainier Senior Center |
| 11-Jun | Interview with Rosemary @ Rainier Senior Center |
| 12-Jun | CSO Outreach |
| 14-Jun | Rainier Community Garden |
| 16-Jun | Interview Theresa Slusher @ Homeless Coordinator for Thurston County |
| 21-Jun | Heritage Baptist Food Bank |
| 21-Jun | Crossroads Free Dinner |
| 23-Jun | CIELO GED Class |
| 25-Jun | CIELO GED Class |
| 26-Jun | Interview Karen Valenzuela, Thurston County Commissioner |
| 30-Jun | Interview Christy and Pedro Garcia, Lions Club |