

GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER. LIVE UNITED



2015 COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

United Way of Pinal County, Inc.

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LIVE UNITED™

United Way
of Pinal County



October 15, 2015

Dear Pinal County Community Member:

This report culminates a 10- month effort to learn what households and community leaders believe are the important, perhaps urgent health and human service needs facing Pinal County residents. I greatly appreciate the efforts of the Steering Committee to organize this research project. Their judgment and leadership produced a report that will enable public and private sector leaders to not only understand our area's most pressing social needs but also to act on them in collaborative, collective ways.

The 2015 study is the third such research project conducted by United Way of Pinal County in the last 16 years. The study summarizes the findings during the 1999 and 2005 studies, combining them with the results of 2015. The Executive Summary or the full document will be available to anyone who wants to use the information to improve Pinal County.

United Way of Pinal County believes solutions to identified issues will require collaboration, resource sharing and innovation among organization who wish to maximize limited resources for the improvement of Pinal County. It is our hope that this report does that.

United Way of Pinal County's top priorities have been directed to supporting education, health and income needs of our residents. **The Board will ask the Community Needs Assessment Steering Committee or a special committee to help develop strategies over the next year that address the top three issues identified.** It is possible that other groups or persons will lead or advocate for solutions to other problems identified, and we welcome that grass-root support. This report should lay the groundwork for dialogue, planning and action.

In closing, I want to thank our VISTA member, Manuela Bowler, for her work and dedication to this study, our partners who supported this project, and the many volunteers and professionals who dedicate their spare time or livelihoods to improving the quality of life in Pinal County communities, bringing hope and help to those In need.

Sincerely,

Keith McGlaughlin, President
United Way of Pinal County Board of Directors

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2015 Community Needs Assessment Executive Summary

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Introduction

To better understand the challenges currently facing Pinal County communities, the United Way of Pinal County (UWPC) initiated a community needs assessment in late 2014. The primary objectives for the study included: Identifying and assessing perceived current human service needs, comparing the current data to UWPC past studies, and providing the data to the UWPC board for their use in determining whether there is needed change in its granting priorities with partner agencies. Ever mindful of the UWPC mission, “to match generosity with community needs to create lasting improvement in people’s lives” this study will be a tool to assist in meeting that mission.

Drawing on past research as well as the work of other United Ways across the country, UWPC has focused its investments on the areas of Education, Income and Health as the core building blocks that contribute to a better quality of life.

The study was conducted by a VISTA member, Manuela Bowler, who was provided through the Arizona Alliance of Non Profits, and with the assistance of a local steering committee that determined the study questions and methods of data collection to obtain reliable and unbiased data on Pinal County demographics.

Data were collected through on line surveys, distribution of those same surveys through businesses and events, key informant surveys, and 9 focus group sessions in many Pinal County communities where we met with local residents, service providers, and program participants.

A comparison of needs reported during each of the 4 studies conducted by UWPC shows the top needs identified in 1999, 2005, 2008 and 2015.

This Executive Summary provides a brief overview of the key findings from the full Community Needs assessment. The summary includes population information, discussions of Education, Income and Health issues, and concludes with health and human service concerns. The full report is available for download at www.unitedwayofpc.org

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

The sample size is 1939 surveys initiated through the Survey Monkey portal. Approximately 30% of surveys were unique customers and the remaining 70% were manual entries of paper survey responses.

The importance of having a large sample size cannot be understated. The response size was large enough to give a decent representation of community sentiments. The survey has a 5% margin of error.

A breakdown of the sample:

- 22% Male
- 78% Female

- 88% White
- 42% Hispanic Origin

- 85% Aged 18-64
- 14% Aged 65+

- 30% of survey respondents made between \$5,001-\$17,000

- 55% of survey respondents lived in homes whose total household income was between \$15,001 and \$30,000 per year.

During the ten year time period since the last countywide assessment Pinal County has experienced a 44% growth rate as our population mushroomed from 245,000 in 2005 to the current 401,918 (2014) and that's not the end of our growth. The projections are that we will continue this incredible growth for the next 10 years with population projections placing us at about 561, 844 people. The Town of Maricopa and the unincorporated area of Pinal County known as San Tan Valley will continue to lead the pack. The area known as the "Copper Corridor" struggles to compete with the urban setting and the opportunities offered to younger generations.

The needs assessment also identified that for the next 20 years the generation known as the "baby boomers" will continue to increase the demand on senior services as this population ages out of the workforce and into retirement. Although Elder Abuse seemed to be a ranked relatively low in the survey, we know that the baby boomer generation will continue to age out of the social service system. According to the US Census the population reaching 65 years of age in 2010 numbered approximately 40 million and

that number is expected to increase to approximately 90 million by 2050. This continued increase in the senior population will increase demand for social services for this demographic. Additionally, the 2015 Pinal County First Things First Needs Assessment identified that 20% of seniors qualify as primary caretakers for grandchildren. Even with limited resources grandparents are taking on the task or raising a second family.

Another vulnerable population is the Veterans. According to Diann Lesueur, Executive Director of Open Hands Outreach Program (OHOP) states that the biggest unmet support services are for homelessness and addiction. "Veterans unable to work waiting for their disability to begin, leaving them and their families homeless or at eminent risk of becoming homeless and no funding available to carry them through this gap. All sources of assistance are maxed out as the need continues to grow. The numbers of veterans in need among those recently returning from war increased. Twenty-two veterans a day commit suicide. Addiction among veterans is much higher than the general population." Addiction among veterans is serious.

When Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is combined with addiction, the results can be devastating to the veterans, their family and the community. Veteran Homelessness continues and funding available through other resources is limited. OHOP deals with up to 5 individuals per month that are unable to find resources to meet their housing needs. The following account is a perfect example of what happens to some Veterans. OHOP recently learned of a husband and wife team who lived out of their van for a month. OHOP was able to provide food, a tent and personal hygiene kit for them during this time. No transitional housing for a couple exists in Pinal County. The man found employment, rented a house but was unable to pay the deposits to have the electric and water turned on, which left them living in the van for the month. There were no resources available to them.

Poverty is a growing class in Pinal County with roughly 30% of the population living in a chronic state of insufficient funds where it is hard to afford basic essentials of life such as housing, utilities and food. Melissa St. Aude, a reporter with the Casa Grande Dispatch wrote an article on February 19, 2015 wherein she told of the meeting with an Apache Junction mother with a family of four as she struggles to make ends meet with the \$618 in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) assistance she receives. "Rising food prices are a concern for her as SNAP does not adjust for inflation... What's missing from the program, said the Apache Junction mom are classes on how to eat healthy on a limited budget or tips for stretching limited food dollars. She tried couponing, user lower-cost alternatives and studying grocery store ads to find the best prices but she says she can't stretch enough to avoid running out of money by the

end of the month. Free lunches or dinner from churches and emergency food boxes provided by a food bank help the family get by, but the mom worries about her children's health if they don't eat fresh fruits and vegetables every day."

Organizations like CAHRA are overburdened and underfunded to meet the constant demand. In the 2015 Resource and Referral Hotline (2-1-1) Annual Report on which agencies were most referred to, it is clear to see the human services need. There were a total of 10,997 searches for resource referrals combined with the telephone, voice activated search and web searches of the database. Of those, 3,934 were operator assisted. The top 10 Referral Agencies in Pinal County are: CAHRA, Salvation Army—Apache Junction, East Valley Partners in Caring, Socialserve.com for affordable housing, Open Hands Outreach, Apache Junction Food Bank, AZ Unemployment Insurance, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Nutrition Assistance Program and the Genesis Housing Services.

Education

The community cast 1269 opinions on gaps. Of the four survey categories this one ranked the lowest. In the sub categories listed within this section, the gaps of Socialization and Knowledge of Resources were the clearly identified community needs.

Socialization refers to Senior Centers, afterschool programs and places/events for people to engage in inexpensive, wholesome activities. It is interesting to note that this was considered a gap not just in the more rural parts of Pinal County but throughout the county. Even such large communities as Maricopa, Casa Grande and Apache Junction had residents place this as the biggest gap.

The Knowledge of Resources category refers to the ability to find resources that are needed to solve the gap. With budget cuts at nonprofits and government agencies the position of social worker /patient advocate that can provide navigation support is often found less necessary, leaving system users to self-navigate a decentralized and disjointed system. Community members stated that finding resources is a real "hit and miss" and hinges a lot on how informed the person giving the referral is. There are many resource meetings conducted in the county and yet there doesn't appear to be much cohesiveness among the groups nor collective approach to systemic issues. There are individual groups that meet on various topics that do amazing work but really work in a silo.

According to the Arizona Department of Education graduation rates in Pinal County average about 70%, which leaves 30% with lesser earning capacity as they enter adulthood. A high school dropout will make approximately \$19,000/year while a high school graduate earns approximately \$28,000 and a bachelor's degree widens the gap

even further with earnings of around \$50,000 per year. This wage disparity spread out over a lifetime impacts retirement and social benefits such as social security and Medicare/Medicaid. Additionally, there's a direct correlation between education attainment and the need for social assistance. An increase in income also shows correlation in civic involvement. According to the overall survey results GED Assistance ranked fairly low partly because other issues may be easier to admit as being the problem.

Income

Even though unemployment across the county has dropped since the late 2000's, people do not feel like they earn enough to support their families. Thirty percent of survey responses came from families earning less than \$30,000/year. This yearly earning equates to \$15 per hour. Livable wage is a minimum of \$16.00/ and some sources even place that as high as \$21 per hour. In Pinal county minimum wage equals \$7.65/hr. Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a 2BR apt. is \$870/month. To afford this level of rent and utilities, without paying more than 30% of income on housing, a household must earn \$2,900/month or \$34,800/yr. Assuming a 40 hour work week, and no overtime, this translates into a housing wage of \$16.73/hr. The estimated average wage for a renter is \$11.16/hr. To afford the FMR, a renter must work 60 hrs/week for 52 wks/yr or a household must include 1.5 workers earning this mean wage to make the FMR affordable.

This need for the additional worker means that child and afterschool care become an additional line item in the strained family budget. Affordable afterschool care evoked more responses than any other sub category in the entire survey. The 649 responses represent a 33% response rate of the entire survey and 66% among the Family survey responders. This creates the dependency on grandparents, or friends and neighbors, to provide child and afterschool care. The Boys and Girls Clubs, and other programs like this, become a viable alternative for afterschool care, if the parent/guardian works traditional working hours. First Things First estimates that 20% of the senior population provides some, or most of, the care for children under the age of 6, especially if the senior person lives with the young family.

The United Way of Pinal County VITA program estimates that approximately 30% of Pinal County population qualifies for tax credits and if they filed a tax return they could possibly reap those credits. The National Conference of Mayors Dollar Wise Report states that "The General Accounting Office and the IRS estimate that 15 to 25 percent of the families who are entitled to the EITC do not claim their credit."

The credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit

(CTC) can provide a much needed increase in income, especially to people hovering at the poverty line. These credits help struggling Pinal County residents cover their basic needs including food, housing, child care, transportation and healthcare. Filing for taxes can be expensive as the national average for tax filing is estimated at \$250. The VITA program eliminates the financial burden of the tax filing fee. Last year alone the Pinal County VITA program completed 2355 Federal/ 1370 State Tax Returns. The United Way of Pinal County with its six VITA sites including the Gila Indian River Community site saved families \$588,750 in tax preparation fees and recouped \$3.2 mil in refunds.

Health

The survey results indicated that inflation, and especially an increase in food prices, has made it more difficult for government food assistance recipients to make ends meet. Food pantries and banks struggle to keep up with the demand. In order to prolong shelf life of products the food banks offer preserved foods like canned or boxed items. For both Food Deserts and Food Swamps, profitable delivery of fresh fruits & vegetables does not fit the grocer's business model; therefore processed (longer shelf-life) foods are developed/offered. This problem spans the entire society with the USDA estimating that 20% of all children under the age of 18 live in homes with insufficient nutrition. The increasing senior population experiences similar issues. During the past year, PGCSC provided 136,971 home delivered meals to 1,204 individuals in Pinal and Gila counties. Over the past three years, PGCSC has experienced a waiting list that has fluctuated up to 150 individuals.

Survey results indicated that 255 respondents stated that their concern is access to affordable healthcare. In conversation with countywide focus groups it became apparent that rural parts of Pinal County are at significant disadvantages to systemic medical care, particularly specialized care which requires trips to either Tucson or Phoenix. Access to affordable prescriptions is also an issue. Sun Life provides lower cost medical services across the county, including the more rural parts of the county. Transportation for medical appointments was in issue discussed in the rural parts of the county as well; medical providers have regular hours but if people need to find rides from working people then they can't make the appointments during the day. In addition, people may now have insurance but can scarcely afford the copays and deductibles and are using the system as a catastrophe plan and not preventative.

It is also known that government health insurance does not usually cover dental services for adults. It is not considered to be a part of a healthy life. According to Ira Lamster, Dean Emeritus of Columbia University Dental Medicine says "It's an issue that is particularly important that is not always talked about, People in the United States are retaining their teeth, and as a result, teeth that have been in use for 50 or 60 or 70 years

will have problems. Neither Medicare nor the Affordable Care Act includes adult dental coverage, although some pediatric dental care is covered. Even the Medigap insurance that adults buy to expand their plans' benefits still won't cover dental procedures. Less than 1% of dental services are covered by Medicare. Neglected dental health can turn into even bigger medical issues." "For instance, if you have diabetes and you have gum disease, your metabolic control will be worse," Lamster said. "There is a lot of data showing that periodontal disease can increase your risk for heart attacks and strokes. There are so many ways this can impact your overall health. That is why regular access to care is so important." (CNN)

Concerns:

The community at large struggles with an *inability to find resources* to address the gaps left by the deficiency in income and living expenses. It is human nature to fight for life and 30% of the population struggles with everyday life. They live in a constant state of financial deficiency and struggle to keep a roof over their head, lights on and mouths fed. The remaining 70% aren't sure how to help or direct people to the right places or know where to go for additional resources themselves.

Access to affordable afterschool care is a great concern for families. This was coupled with not having enough places to socialize that are nominally priced and available to all age groups. The concern is that the age group most often left unattended after school is also the group that is most at risk of experimenting with activities that can profoundly impact their ability to succeed in life. Shana Malone with the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission reported to the Pinal County Substance Abuse Coalition on November 25, 2014 that the youth is starting substance abuse at earlier ages and this is an alarming trend. This coupled with the brain development that happens from the mid-teens to the mid-twenties creates a stronger possibility of developing life-long addictive behaviors and creating other long term brain development issues that may not be seen for years. The goal she stated was to have the prevention efforts focus on earlier ages.

The studies clearly show that fewer older teens become first time drug experimenters. The goal therefore should be to build social infrastructure that helps kids stay busy and engaged in meaningful positive life choices so that their brain has more time to develop into the "adult" brain.

Un/Underemployment and inability to support a household's main living expenses was the other large gap identified by the community. This lead to the subcategory concerns of affordable housing, utilities, rent, lack of affordable health insurance and food. In addition, the communities are concerned about the impact of the GED Assistance gap, which generally aims to reach the 16-21 year old high school dropouts, but for those older than that, they find the process nearly insurmountable and keeping them trapped

in the social service system. High School Graduation rates countywide are mostly in the 70% range. The communities also expressed that the public seemed to need more moral education and that youth doesn't appear to have many good role models with whom to pattern their lives.

Comparisons

The Strategic Goals of the United Ways across the country, including United Way of Pinal County are:

Education – cut number of high school dropouts in half by 2018.

Strategy: Focus on early childhood education and creating strong families and focusing on birth to 21.

Income – cut number of lower-income families by half.

Strategy: UWW strategy was on increasing personal savings ability for families so they can better provide for their families.

Health – Increase by 1/3 the number of youth and adults who are healthy and avoid risky behaviors.

Strategy: Increase awareness of risky behaviors and health issues and understand the impact of those issues starting before birth; and assure affordable health care.

In order to ensure that community investments are applied to the right programming, and are creating collective impact, the organization conducts periodic needs assessments. The first assessment on record is a limited assessment conducted in 1999, which is in the pre-First Things First era.

In 2005 the United Way of Pinal County conducted the last community needs assessment where there were surveys were distributed through partner agencies and community 12 focus group meetings were held around the county to gather additional insight.

The Great Recession of 2008 warranted a special assessment of the landscape with the heavy financial toll the housing bust and climbing unemployment raged upon Pinal County residents. The United Way of Pinal County spearheaded a social service discussion on how they are impacted by the economic trends at the time and how best to shore up the strained system. Participants in this discussion were:

- Salvation Army
- Coolidge Family Resource Center
- DES Family Assistance

- DES Employment Services
- DES Child Care Administration
- Adelante Juntos Coalition
- CAHRA
- In 2015 the survey tool from 2005 was evaluated for its relevancy with today's needs; it was slightly adapted and essentially the same format was followed in gaining information for this report.

Community Needs Assessment

Side-by-side comparison

1999 Limited Scope	2005	2008	2015
Health and Education of Infants/Preschool.	Economic Development/Better Jobs	Food	After School Programming/Socialization
Developmental Activities to Help Preschool that help them become productive adults	Transportation	Shelter/Housing	Un/Underemployment
Strengthening Families and Communities	Domestic Violence	Transportation	Knowledge of Resources
Caring for the Elderly	Services for the Elderly	Employment	Shelter/utilities/food
Emergency Food, Shelter, Helping the working poor	Adult Literacy	Healthcare	Access to Local Services
	Drug and Alcohol Abuse	Utilities	Public Safety
		Cash	How to use food boxes
			Home Repairs
			Lack of Good Role Models
			Moral Education
			All above had more than 300 votes. The ones listed below were under 300
			297- Strengthening Marriages
			289 – GED Assistance
			286 – Parent Support Network
			282 – Teen Risky Behavior
			272 –Family Abuse, Domestic Violence
			271- Mental Health

In the 16 years since the initial assessment, it appears that the thread issues haven't changed significantly. The main issues of un/underemployment, ability to support family life (including rent, utilities, food, childcare, dental/healthcare) and create a healthy life for the family and community have not changed. This leads to the question "are we creating the collective impact that we know is needed to move the needle?"

The focus group meetings conducted with the 2015 Needs Assessment identified two main common denominators that wove themselves through these gaps: an underdeveloped countywide coordination of addressing social issues, and creating impact, in a collective way and secondly centralization of resources. This seems to be supported by this nearly 20 year retrospect of United Way community assessments.

For information about this survey, or for a copy of the full report, contact manuela.bowler@unitedwayofpc.org