

Franklin County Community Assessment Summary & Conclusion



It is with deep gratitude that we thank all those who participated in this project. The dedication of the individuals who attended the monthly focus group meetings and their passion for improving lives in Franklin County is truly commendable. While it is clear that no single individual, organization, company or agency can totally resolve the issues addressed in this report, much needed change is possible when caring individuals work together. It is the hope of all those who collaborated in this project that it will be the catalyst to a brighter future for everyone who lives in Franklin County.

Focus Group Executive Summary & Conclusion

The Franklin County Area United Way (FCAUW) commissioned the United Way of Greater St. Louis, Inc. to conduct a community assessment to identify critical issues, emerging needs and available resources for residents of Franklin County, Missouri. The assessment was designed to help the Franklin County Area United Way identify health and human service trends/gaps, to serve as an informational resource and as a planning tool to address these issues. In addition to the public opinion survey, the assessment included key informant interviews with public officials, business leaders and community leaders. Social, demographic and economic data was also collected. The work of the Community Assessment Team began in January 2012 and was completed in August 2012.

The community assessment provides decision-makers with a clear picture of health and human service needs in Franklin County and what local residents perceive to be the top issues. The assessment also served to identify barriers to accessing services and underserved populations.

The full report, information and methodology can be obtained from the Franklin County Area United Way (FCAUW).

Top Health and Human Services Issues

The following health and human service issues were identified as the perceived top five issue areas in Franklin County in rank order of importance:

- Mental Health & Substance Abuse**
- Housing**
- Employment**
- Transportation**
- Safety**

In March 2013, work was undertaken on behalf of the Franklin County Area United Way (FCAUW) to probe more in-depth on the top five ranking issues identified in the assessment. Separate focus group sessions were conducted for each topic area. This report presents the findings of the focus group sessions.

There was considerable participation in the assessment and the focus group sessions. A cross section of leaders including local government officials, business leaders, and county leaders representing key constituencies, professionals, real estate developers, real estate brokers, real estate lenders, law enforcement, school officials, and social service providers participated in the discussions. The discussions were robust and provided more thoughts and ideas about the topics.

While participants acknowledge that there is no one entity that can resolve these issues, it is their hope that it lays the groundwork for greater collaboration among all who seek to improve the quality of life for all of the residents of the Franklin County area.

The five issue areas are addressed separately in the report; however, common themes emerged that are relevant to all of the issues. These include:

- A general lack of knowledge or information about existing services available to help people;

- A perceived lack of resources and/or capacity to serve those in need;
- A strong desire for continued and expanded cooperative/collaborative relationships among service providers and others that serve similar populations, i.e. drug court, juvenile and parole officers, private and public agencies, to help people.

Mental Health & Substance Abuse

Mental Health & Substance Abuse ranked first among the health and human service categories in Franklin County. Mental illness is defined as an emotional and psychological condition in which an individual is unable to use his or her cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society, and/or meet the ordinary demands of everyday life. Mental health issues include brain injuries, emotional and behavior disorders (including depression), and substance abuse. A number of agencies and organizations in Franklin County are dedicated specifically to treating mental health problems

Comments and Suggestions from the Mental Health & Substance Abuse Focus Group

While there are a number of agencies and organizations in Franklin County dedicated specifically to treating mental health problems, there are significant issues that prevent or hinder citizens from seeking and/or receiving treatment.

- Lack of knowledge and accessibility of services and resources by general public is the primary hindrance.
 - There is a need for a distribution of mental health resources and action plans to assist the community in dealing with mental health issues. One suggested resource is a complete and easily accessible directory of services or catalog that consolidates available services and resources.
 - This directory could be condensed into a briefer, brochure-type document to be distributed to social service agencies, schools, churches, and the community at large.
 - This directory could also be put on a CD or flash drive for distribution to service providers.
 - United Way of Greater St. Louis has a “2-1-1” number that provides resources for a variety of issues, including mental health. Access to this resource is available to everyone and covers the bi-state area. It can be utilized in conjunction with other community directories.
 - A speakers’ bureau could be formed to provide speakers at various civic clubs, churches, etc. to increase citizen awareness of available resources.
 - The Franklin County Service Providers is a networking organization that provides an excellent venue for sharing and distributing information.
 - A marketing program could be developed to promote public awareness of mental health services and resources that are available in the county, including the 2-1-1 number, the S.E.L.F. program, and local resources provided through churches, schools, civic organizations, and municipalities.
- Lack of transportation prevents many people from seeking help.
- Lack of treatment for all types of mental health in Franklin County.
 - There is no hospitalization except on a limited basis and, when released, adult patients find it difficult to obtain outpatient care.
 - There are few outpatient care facilities serving Franklin County: Meramec Recovery, Bridgeway, Centerpointe, and New Vision.
 - Agencies that provide treatment run at or near capacity and are constantly working with limited financial support.
 - There is a severe shortage of psychiatrists with waiting periods for appointments as long as one to six months.
- Fear is a primary deterrent from reaching out for help for many people:

- Fear of losing one’s children to social services
- Fear of the stigma of mental illness affecting future job security
- Fear of being publicly ostracized

In addition to being the cause of 75% of all crime in Franklin County, drug abuse is often linked to mental health issues. The following issues are contributing factors in the growing drug abuse epidemic in Franklin County:

- Self-manufactured meth and alcohol are the drugs of choice among the “older” generations (30+).
- Prescription drugs (gotten illegally) and heroin are the younger generation’s drugs of choice.
- Pill mills are on the rise in Missouri. Pill mills are clinics that prescribe painkillers without a valid medical purpose to anyone who can pay with cash or a credit card.
- Missouri is the only state that does not have a prescription drug monitoring system.
- There is major lack of both immediate and long-term treatment resources.

The Mental Health Focus Group recommended that Franklin County begin to develop community “help” facilities where people can find support to return to or continue living in mentally/emotionally healthy situations. The benefit of these community assistance facilities would be to reduce the occurrence of relapse by making long-term recovery a priority.

People who would benefit most from having these mental health “models of assistance” established in their communities include:

- Those with on-going mental health issues who need continued treatment to prevent inpatient psychiatric admission
- Those who have completed a substance abuse program and need support to prevent relapse
- Those at risk of becoming homeless or who lack basic support for food, shelter and income
- Those at risk of incarceration or who have been or will be released from a detention center, prison or rehabilitation center
- Those not linked with mental health services
- Those unable to consistently keep their appointments for therapy and/or psychiatric support

United Way provided funding to Foundations for Franklin County for a Drug and Alcohol Abuse summit for Franklin County which included presentations from law enforcement, the court system, doctors, and people in recovery. Several models of assistance were discussed.

- Drug Courts

Drug Court is a program that has grown out of the realization that sending people to jail is not the solution for ending drug abuse. Drug courts are an effective and cost efficient way to help non-violent drug offenders commit to a rigorous drug treatment program in lieu of prison. Drug courts represent the combined efforts of justice and treatment professionals to actively intervene and break the cycle of substance abuse, addiction, crime, delinquency, and child maltreatment. These special dockets are given the responsibility to handle cases involving addicted citizens under the adult, juvenile, family, and tribal justice systems. In this blending of justice, treatment, and social service systems, the drug court participant undergoes an intensive regimen of substance abuse treatment, case management, drug testing, supervision and monitoring, and immediate sanctions and incentives while reporting to regularly scheduled status hearings before a judge with expertise in the drug court model. In addition, drug courts increase the probability of participants’ success by providing ancillary services such as mental health

treatment, trauma and family therapy, and job skills training. (Missouri Association of Drug Court Professionals, <http://modrugcourt.org>)

- Community Recovery Centers

Community Recovery Centers are places for people in recovery run by people who have been in successful recovery from substance abuse for a long time. A documentary aired on PBS called *Anonymous People* presents a model for long-term recovery and support. The film presents how community recovery centers are able to provide a more comprehensive approach to maintaining long-term recovery from addiction than Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-Step Programs. While these programs have done a good job of helping addicts maintain sobriety, they have also, unfortunately, created a culture of anonymity that perpetuates false perceptions and social stigmas surrounding those who struggle with addictions.

Started by recovering addicts, community recovery centers host self-help meetings, recovery education and discussion meetings, career planning and resource training sessions along with recreational and social activities. The role of the centers' staff is to recruit, train, encourage and assist the participants to plan, initiate and maintain recovery support meetings and activities. Centers function as "one-stop shops" that are available for recovering participants to select the information, training, education and other support activities or services available that are most appropriate for their individual needs. (Sober Living Network, www.sober.com)

- TCM

Another successful method of encouraging long-term mental health and recovery from substance abuse is a program called wrap-around targeted case management (TCM). In this program, a case manager works with the participant to identify and prioritize their needs and addresses barriers they may encounter. Based on the participant's unique strengths and needs, the case manager will connect the individual to appropriate community resources and coordinate their care to support their ability to live independently in the community.

- A group of clergy in Franklin County is training church members to assist people with mental health and substance abuse issues.

Housing

Housing ranked second among the health and human service categories in Franklin County. Housing includes homelessness, affordable housing and housing for disabled persons.

Comments and Suggestions from the Housing Focus Group

- Homelessness is a major concern in Franklin County.
 - There is only one homeless shelter in the county.
 - There is a lack of transitional housing for those completing drug/alcohol rehabilitation, those being released from prison, those in the foster care system who are turning 18, and others who are at risk of becoming homeless.
 - There is a shortage of social service resources providing both financial help and alternative housing. There is also a lack of financial assistance for the social service agencies and programs who offer help to the homeless.

- There is a lack of information available to low income people who are seeking help with their housing needs. The challenge is in getting information distributed through United Way agencies as well as to the community as a whole. The assistance providers in each community need to have access to information on all housing issues from utility assistance to low- and moderate-income housing alternatives.

- Getting and maintaining basic family housing needs is a challenge.
 - Many people lack basic skills required to maintain a home, including budgeting and financial management. United Way's S.E.L.F. (Strengthening, Empowering, & Lifting Families) program addresses this challenge by teaching basic life skills such as budgeting, cooking on a budget, résumé preparation, interviewing skills, and how to achieve a more stable family lifestyle. This program has been provided throughout the county.
 - Much of what is "affordable" is substandard.
 - There are minimal energy assistance programs available. Missouri Asset Development offers some energy assistance for disabled and elderly, but is limited to only 35 air conditioners to the elderly.
 - There are few programs available to help families purchase homes and they have restrictions or limited availability.
 - Missouri Asset Development is a program offered through USBank. The bank will match \$2,000 savings for housing for a family who is employed but living at 125% poverty level. This program is limited to five families.
 - The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the most popular mortgage loan for people who wish to buy workforce housing.
 - ◆ Families only have to provide 3% down; the remaining 97% is financed by the USDA.
 - ◆ Closing costs can be included in the loan to further reduce out-of-pocket expenses.
 - ◆ This loan is available only to people with low- to moderate-income; the income of a three-person family can't exceed \$50,650.

- There is lack of affordable housing for rental units as well as home ownership. The initial outlay of money for housing down payments or rental deposits, along with utility deposits, etc. are significant barriers to low income families finding and maintaining affordable housing.

- A person must make \$14.07 an hour to afford a two-bedroom apartment at the fair market rent cost of \$732 per month according to the State of Missouri Department of Housing Development. The minimum wage is \$7.50 per hour.
- The generally accepted standard for “affordable rent” is spending no more than 30% of gross income on gross housing costs.
- Along with the increased costs of living, it was noted that most occupants of rental properties make \$10 or less per hour.
- The increase in demand for rental properties due to the significant number of foreclosures in recent years has caused the cost of rental properties to rise.
- There is very little assistance available for renters.
 - The HUD program (Section 8 Housing) has a two-year waiting list.
 - The Missouri Housing Development Corporation (MHDC) has a program designed to help renters become homeowners. Renters pay rent for 24 months and it applies toward home ownership. This housing is always in an area where the developer must prequalify the properties to sell. The MHDC program offers an incentive to developers who are seeking funds for construction of homes for low- to moderate-income families. This incentive is based on a Federal Tax Credit that can be used as equity in the project thus making the developers’ cash investments 30-40% less than a conventional project.
- Joey Graves, Economic Development Director of Union, reported on a variety of issues as they relate to affordable housing both county-wide and on a state level.
 - Rentals should not exceed 25% of housing in a community. Communities in excess of 25% tend to represent a less stable, nomadic population which translates into increased employee turnover. Rental percentages per community are as follows:
 - Washington – 31.9%
 - Union – 34.3%
 - Pacific – 35.2%
 - St. Clair – 46.4%
 - Union is now experiencing growth and development of affordable housing. In Union there are more than a sufficient number of rental properties available.
 - The cost of home ownership is higher in Washington than Union and other parts of the county because Washington is more of a white collar community with higher income levels. However, the City of Washington is taking steps to make construction of workforce/affordable housing more appealing to developers. Strict housing codes were preventing development of economical housing. New codes allowing slightly smaller lots reduce builder investment and encourage the building of homes in the \$150,000 range.
- It is difficult to find housing that is handicapped-accessible as well as housing for those with developmental disabilities.
 - Emmaus Homes announced that they would like to build or buy and renovate homes to house people with developmental disabilities. Their goal is to build ten homes over the next 18 months. Each home would house four residents plus one care professional on site at all times.

Employment

Employment ranked third among the health and human service categories in Franklin County. Employment includes available resources for the unemployed and under-employed, career training and job opportunities, barriers to gainful employment, and recommended suggestions.

Comments and Suggestions from the Employment Focus Group

There are many resources available to the unemployed or under-employed in Franklin County.

- The Missouri Department of Economic Development, Division of Workforce Development provides resources for veterans such job fairs and career development. It is disconcerting to note that only 65% of those eligible use these resources, according to Steve Weingart, Workforce Development-Local Veterans Employment Representative.
- The Missouri Career Center (formerly the Unemployment Office) located in Washington, sees close to 2,000 people per month, and offers career paths testing, training in résumé and application completion, and a variety of other employment related services, including job fairs. The center recently hosted a job fair, but only 200 people attended.
- Four Rivers Career Center is a public education institution that offers specialized and diverse educational opportunities to secondary and post-secondary students of east central Missouri. The Four Rivers Career Center student's program is customized throughout their school career.
 - Starting in second grade, public school students are encouraged to begin thinking about what they want to be when they grow up. Throughout the remainder of their elementary school years they are given many opportunities to learn about the possible career paths they could choose.
 - In eighth grade, students formulate a four-year plan for their secondary school years. They customize their studies by choosing a career path from one of sixteen career clusters.
 - In their junior year, students establish a six-year plan that covers the last two years of high school and the next four years of college/training. They are given a test called Work Keys which helps predict a student's likelihood of career success.
- Most of the county's Chambers of Commerce now post job openings for member companies on their websites.
- East Central College offers several programs for those seeking employment or training.
 - The GED program (now called HSE) is provided throughout Franklin County. The flexible hours and variety of locations make this program accessible to anyone seeking to complete their high school education.
 - Career assessments and résumé preparation, as well as career counseling, are offered free of charge.
 - The Transitions Program is an excellent resource available to the unemployed or under-employed at ECC. Some of the programs offered through the Transitions Program include:
 - Intro to College – a class that teaches study skills, time management, and career exploration
 - Boot Camp – an intensive 2- or 3-day class for older unemployed or under-employed adults going back to school
 - MoHealthWINs - The \$20 million MoHealthWINs program will train more than 3,200 Missourians for careers in growing healthcare occupations, while developing innovative solutions to current

and future workforce needs in the health services/sciences industry. Administered through the Missouri Community College Association, this program is made possible by a federal grant from the United States Department of Labor, plus vital support from employer partners and college/workforce partners.

- MoManufacturingWINs – a statewide training network that is creating opportunities for Missourians to obtain the training they need to work in modern manufacturing shops. A nine-member consortium of public two-year colleges, to which East Central College belongs, is collaborating to implement a rigorous certification training model endorsed by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). The program enables students to earn industry-recognized credentials that validate students’ mastery of skills in specific areas of manufacturing.
- The S.E.L.F. (Strengthening, Empowering & Lifting Families) program, developed by the Franklin County Area United Way in conjunction with other county service providers, is a 6-week program that provides tools and resources to help people improve their lives and reduce their dependence on food pantries and agencies that provide assistance with utility bills, etc. One of the weekly classes concentrates solely on successful job readiness, including preparing a stellar, eye-catching résumé, acing the job interview, dressing for success, and developing personal qualities that will help candidates keep a job once they get it.

There are numerous excellent resources to help the unemployed and under-employed of Franklin County find and maintain gainful employment. However, the Employment Focus Group found that there are several factors that hinder job seekers. These factors include:

- A lack of positive, personal character traits and ethics among job seekers.
 - Many lack a strong work ethic. They are frequently late, call in sick, and often lack respect for their employers.
 - Many job seekers present a poor appearance, dress inappropriately and lack proper personal hygiene habits.
 - Some lack social skills such as good manners, a positive attitude and respect for themselves and others.
 - Others lack basic skills such as how to accurately and completely fill out an application, use a calculator, and properly answer the telephone. Many job seekers have poor grammar and poor writing and spelling skills.
- Limited training opportunities and/or lack of information about available training opportunities, especially in basic skills such as math, reading, writing, and simple technology.
- Lack of trained, qualified workers. According to Darren Lamb, Director of Economic Development for the City of Washington, Franklin County lacks qualified workers to fill jobs in the biotech and financial fields where 25% of jobs are available.
- Difficulty of matching employee skills to employer needs. It was suggested that employers could get the trained employees they need by providing customized career training.
- Finding and keeping funding for programs. Many current programs are funded through public schools and government organizations, but additional sources of funding may be required to expand and/or enhance programs.
- Lack of awareness among job-seekers of available jobs, career opportunities, and training opportunities.

The following points became evident to the Employment Focus Group during the course of the meetings.

- It is clear that increased publicity throughout Franklin County is crucial – publicity of job opportunities, training programs, industry expansion, and other resources available to the unemployed and under-employed.
 - A greater variety of publicity using different mediums might help increase public attendance at job fairs.
 - Also, presentations or distribution of information to civic clubs, churches, fairs, etc. can increase the availability of all employment services.
- There is a need for coordination of programs and communication among program providers to eliminate duplication of services and help job-seekers find the best solution for their need, whether it is career counseling, additional training, or a job.
- Local industries must be committed to hiring participants in the various training programs upon their successful completion of the program. One suggestion is to have companies sponsor individuals, provide the necessary training they need to do a specific job, and then hire them when they are qualified.
- Furthermore, local industries must be willing to supplement funding for the various training programs if these programs are to be successful long-term.

Transportation

Transportation ranked fourth among the health and human service categories in Franklin County. The Transportation Focus Group discussed the public transportation services that are currently available in Franklin County, their benefits and limitations, and made several recommendations for providing additional public transportation services.

Comments and Suggestions from the Transportation Focus Group

The need for additional public transportation services in Franklin County is great.

- People need transportation for a variety of reasons:
 - To get to work
 - To get to medical appointments. McAuley Clinic reported that approximately 20% of medical appointments are missed due to a lack of transportation.
 - To get seniors who are unable to drive to senior centers for hot meals and take them shopping for groceries and other items
 - To take disabled persons shopping or to their jobs
- The cost of public transportation is prohibitive due to the amount of territory Franklin County covers. Franklin County is the third largest county in Missouri geographically and ranks fourteenth in population.
- The only “free” transportation services in Franklin County are provided by OATS and Franklin County Transportation Council.
 - There are small charges for these services for those who can afford to pay them.
 - It costs \$38 per 8-hour day for OATS to provide their current schedules throughout Franklin County.
- There are taxi services available in Franklin County, but their cost makes them unaffordable for low-income and elderly/disabled persons who lived on fixed incomes.
- Developmental Services provides limited transportation for its clients, but lacks funding to increase those services throughout the county.

The Transportation Focus Group came to the conclusion that increasing public transportation in Franklin County is possible with the right funding and leadership.

- One suggestion is whether it would be possible for Developmental Services to partner with Franklin County Transportation Council to expand their services and make them accessible to low-income and elderly people who are not DSFC clients.
- Another suggestion is a public/private partnership to develop a transportation program. This was idea was implemented in Moberly and funded by the City of Moberly. It was successful until the city could no longer fund it. The City of Owensville has a public transportation service that serves the southern part of Gasconade County. This program is funded by grants. Additionally, small fees are charged to those who can afford it.

- The Focus Group discussed formulating a model of a program that would prove, when implemented, that expanded public transportation could work in Franklin County. The Mobility Management Plan produced by the Franklin County Transit Committee is an excellent model of expanded transportation services.
 - Funding for this program would come from several paths:
 - Franklin County and various cities in the county would work together to coordinate and provide funding.
 - Additional funding would be provided by the destination businesses and medical facilities.
 - A minimal fee would be charged to those who could afford it.
 - It might be possible to partner with OATS and FCTC to expand their services and routes.
 - One suggestion is that riders could provide in-kind service through United Way agencies in lieu of payment.
 - Other possible sources of funding, other than rider contribution and local governments, could come from state and federal grants and grants from private foundations.
 - Initially a pilot program would be offered to seniors and those who need transportation to medical facilities.

Safety

Safety ranked fifth among the health and human service categories in Franklin County. Safety includes delinquency prevention, alternative sentencing for offenders, halfway houses, legal aid/representation, child abuse, family violence, gang violence, and assistance for victims.

Comments and Suggestions from the Safety Focus Group

There are a number of issues that affect the overall safety of Franklin County residents. These include a lack of knowledge of accessible resources among the general public, increased drug usage, and a lack of homeless shelters.

- Lack of knowledge of accessible resources among the general public
 - There is a need for a distribution of safety resources and action plans to assist the community in dealing with safety issues. One suggested resource is a complete and easily accessible directory of services for front line, direct providers with contact names, phone numbers and email addresses. This directory could be condensed into a briefer, brochure-type document to be distributed to social service agencies, schools, churches, and the community at large.
 - United Way of Greater St. Louis has a “2-1-1” number that provides resources for a variety of issues, including safety. Access to this resource is available to everyone and covers the bi-state area. It can be utilized in conjunction with other community directories.
- Increased drug usage
 - Research shows that there is a correlation of increased drug usage in the schools and in the community as a whole.
 - Drug users and distributors have increased their network of communication through social media which contributes to increased drug usage.
 - Great strides have been made in controlling the production and usage of meth; however, there is an increase in abuse and trafficking of both heroin and prescription drugs.
 - The increase in drug usage needs to be addressed with additional resources aimed at reducing drug usage. Reducing or eliminating the number of crimes associated with drug trafficking (i.e. robbery and violence) would make our communities safer and more secure.
 - Missouri is the only state that does not have a prescription tracking system. The state is being pressed to implement a system; however, there has been little action or progress made.
 - Doctors from other states may write excessive prescriptions that are filled in Missouri.
 - A considerable number of doctors over-prescribe controlled substances which are then sold on the street.
 - These drug issues result in an increase in crime which further reduces safety in Franklin County.
 - Reactive programs, such as Preferred Family Healthcare and Crider Health Center, are in place, but are often at capacity.
 - Preventative programs are being expanded or developed with local service providers.
 - United Way is working with Washington Public Schools regarding a pilot program on mentoring. This mentoring program encourages parents to take more active roles in working with schools and students. Studies have shown that when parents are active participants in school activities such as tutoring, performance and positive focus improves and delinquency and safety issues decrease.

- Youth safety programs are being developed and expanded through The Crux and Team 314.
 - The prosecuting attorney's office provides a victim advocate to assist those that encounter domestic violence and sexual abuse.
- Lack of homeless shelters
 - There are no long-term facilities to house the homeless in Franklin County. Homelessness often leads to desperation resulting in the commission of crimes; this is what makes homelessness a safety issue.
 - The reasons for the lack of homeless shelters include a lack of resources and the lack of public support. In fact, much of the general population in Franklin County is openly opposed to the establishment of homeless shelters in its communities. There is a stigma surrounding homeless shelters. Many people feel they attract an undesirable type of person and are breeding grounds for crimes such as robbery, violence, drug trafficking, etc.
 - A challenge is to develop a "safety net" of services to assist individuals in finding long-term solutions to permanent housing.
 - Due to the connection between mental health and safety issues, there needs to be an effort to identify assistance and/or services for those with mental health issues that have led to homelessness.

Conclusion

In response to the Community Needs Assessment that was conducted for Franklin County in 2012, focus groups were formed to discuss the top five issues and make recommendations that would lead to long-term solutions. The top five issues in Franklin County at the time of this study are:

1. Mental Health & Substance Abuse
2. Housing
3. Employment
4. Transportation
5. Safety

While each issue has individual characteristics and problems unique to its population, there are overlapping themes common to all five areas. The greatest common theme discussed in all five focus groups was the communities' lack of knowledge and/or information about existing services available to help people. Neither the agencies and organizations that provide the services, nor the clients who utilize them, fully realize what is available. It became clear through the focus groups that while there is much duplication of services in Franklin County, especially in the area of mental health, often those providing the services do not know about the others. Additionally, all of the areas struggle financially to deliver their services, and those they serve struggle financially to pay for the services. In the areas of transportation and housing, there is a deficit of options for low income families. But again, what is available is largely unknown. It seems practical to conclude that collaboration among similar organizations would benefit everyone. While it is clear that no single individual, organization, company or agency can resolve the issues in Franklin County, nor is there a simple solution for any of them, by working together, sharing resources and information, those who seek to improve the quality of life in Franklin County have the power to do so.

There are several general recommendations from the Focus Group meetings that pertain to all five issues. To alleviate the information gap, a county-wide publicity campaign would be beneficial for sharing knowledge of existing services and available resources and tools, and connecting consumers with providers. "Getting the word out" was a primary desire of all five focus groups. United Way has already created an excellent answer to filling the information gap – 2-1-1. Rather than recreating the wheel and spending valuable man hours creating a resource guide unique to Franklin County, existing agencies and organizations could make their contact information available through 2-1-1 and use 2-1-1 themselves to learn what's available and where.

Free, confidential and available 24 hours a day year round, 2-1-1 is an excellent tool that connects consumers to the resources they need with just a simple phone call. 2-1-1 is a resource database that can be accessed by dialing 2-1-1 or 800-427-4626 any time of the day or night. Some of the resources that are available through 2-1-1 include

- **Basic Needs** such as food pantries, shelters and where to get utility assistance;
- **Physical and Mental Health Resources** such as answers to insurance questions, Medicare, Medicaid, prenatal care; children's health insurance programs, prenatal care, crisis intervention, support groups, counseling and drug and alcohol rehabilitation;
- **Jobs Programs** such as educational and vocational training, job training, financial and transportation assistance, English as a second language classes, and HSE (formerly GED) preparation;
- **Support for Seniors and Those with Disabilities** such as centers for independent living, meals at home, home health care, transportation and recreation;

- **Support for Children, Youth and Families** such as after-school programs, tutoring, mentorship programs, early childhood learning programs, counseling, and child care referral centers;
- **Disaster and Weather** such as the locations of heating and cooling shelters and tornado, flooding and other natural disaster resources and information
- **Volunteer Opportunities** such as volunteer centers, mentorship opportunities, locations to donate food, clothing, furniture, computers and other items, and one-time, long-term, permanent, part-time or group volunteering opportunities.

The Franklin County Service Providers provides another great avenue for agencies and organizations to collaborate and network. The Service Providers meets on the first Tuesday of each month at noon in the Public Safety Building in Washington. Every agency representative is given the opportunity to share information about their organization at each meeting. The Franklin County Service Providers is an open meeting with no rules for membership except that the agencies and organizations must serve people in Franklin County. It used to be strictly for non-profit organizations, but has expanded to include many for-profit agencies as the need for networking and collaboration has increased.

The Franklin County Area United Way is willing to coordinate bi-yearly meetings with any focus groups that wish to continue collaborating in an effort to improve lives in Franklin County.