

Moving Toward a Stronger Knox County

2004-2005 Community Assessment Key Findings



Community Quotes

"I came from the bigger city, and living here in Mount Vernon... I think it's a wonderful place to raise kids. That was one of the reasons why I chose to move here."

"... everybody in town knows your kids and if they're gettin' into something you're gonna get a phone call ... 'he's out here playing in the crik again!'"
—Low-income parent focus group participants

Purpose of the assessment

This report is the result of a community building process called *COMPASS II*. Developed by United Way of America, *COMPASS II* is designed to bring together diverse stakeholders to assess and document local strengths and needs, mobilize community resources, and select priority issues on which to focus efforts to improve the lives of Knox County residents.

In late 2003, United Way started bringing together a broad partnership of community stakeholders to identify the kinds of information that were most needed from a needs assessment. These stakeholders called for specific information about unmet needs, access to resources, and satisfaction with existing social services, as well as a process for prioritizing community issues. The 2004-2005 Community Assessment was designed to be used for several purposes, including United Way's fund distribution process, grant writing and strategic planning by social service providers, and other planning, fundraising, and advocacy activities.

Research methods

The assessment involved several different surveys and focus groups, and was designed to include a wide variety of voices from all parts of Knox County.

Figure 1: Research methods and sample sources

General public

442 Household Surveys

- Random mail sample (210)
- Convenience sample at fairs and festivals (133)
- Purposive sample of emergency assistance consumers (99)



Community leaders and experts

- 124 Key Informant Surveys
- 56 Social Service Provider Surveys
- 34 Business and Association Surveys

Special groups and social service consumers

- Focus groups with:
 - Low-income parents of young children (three groups)
 - Youth (four groups)
 - Senior citizens (four groups)
- 174 Agency Awareness and Satisfaction Surveys
- Strong representation from low-income adults in Household Survey (99 surveys with emergency assistance consumers)

Data interpretation

Overall, those who participated in a survey or focus group for this assessment were very similar to the Knox County population in terms of area of residence (geographic distribution), age, race/ethnicity, and whether they had children living with them. Research participants, however, were more likely to be female and from low-income households.

This assessment involved a variety of sampling strategies and both qualitative and quantitative methods, all of which have strengths and limitations. Results of any one method should be viewed in context with results from other methods. The assessment drew heavily upon purposive and convenience sampling strategies. These strategies are cost-effective and were employed to obtain participation from specific groups, but are not as strong as random selection in terms of producing results that can be directly generalized to the overall population of Knox County. The results of this assessment are particularly helpful for describing perceptions, opinions, priorities, strengths, assets, and barriers. These results are not as helpful for describing the incidence or prevalence of specific problems, such as unemployment, obesity, or teen pregnancy. Secondary data and statistics collected by government agencies and others are therefore presented in the assessment report to provide more accurate information about the prevalence of specific economic, social, and health problems.

Strengths and assets

Knox County's many strengths are rooted in our "small town" environment

This Community Assessment identified many strengths and assets in Knox County. Often citing the benefits of living in a small town, focus group participants listed the following things that make Knox County a good place to live:

- Safety and low crime rate compared to bigger cities
- Friendly people, people looking out for each other, and more relaxed lifestyle
- Green space, parks, trails, and many outdoor places for children to play
- Good schools and a good community for young children
- Central location and access to other cities for goods and services (Columbus, Mansfield, Newark, Coshocton)
- Some high-quality services and programs available for families and senior citizens
- Significant assets and infrastructure, such as Knox Community Hospital, Knox County Health Department, New Hope Early Education Center, YMCA of Mount Vernon, Mount Vernon Nazarene University, Kenyon College, public schools, and, retail businesses on Coshocton Avenue in Mount Vernon

Survey results identified the following community strengths:

- Strong sense of community togetherness: most feel that people in their town or area come together to help each other, gather together formally and informally, and work together on common goals
- Collaborative leadership: most key informants agreed that Knox County leaders come together to work productively on community issues and respect each other
- Volunteerism: half of the *Household Survey* respondents (52%) said they regularly do volunteer work, compared to 29% nationwide¹
- Satisfaction with the status quo regarding safety and crime, green space and the environment, and schools



Figure 2: Demographic profile of Knox County²

	Knox County	Ohio
Population, 2004 estimate	57,785	11,459,011
Population, percent change April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2004	6.0%	0.9%
Median annual household income	\$38,877	\$40,956
Percent white	98%	85%
High school graduate or higher*	82%	83%
Bachelors degree or higher	17%	21%
Persons per square mile	103.4	277.3
*percent of persons age 25+		

Community Quotes

"It's a great place to live, like, in your younger years. I have always talked about getting out of Mount Vernon, but I think it is a good place to raise kids. It's safe."

—Youth focus group participant

"We have great collaboration between social service agencies in our community."

—Dennis Murray, Health Commissioner, Knox County Health Department

High-priority issues and unmet needs

Broad consensus points to four top-priority issues

Overall, there was a great deal of overlap between the results of different research methods, and Knox County residents seemed to agree upon the following set of issues that emerged as significant unmet needs in the community:

- Health care affordability, insurance, access, and quality
- Jobs, economic issues, and support for self-sufficiency (wages, benefits, unemployment, poverty, and lack of money for basic needs)
- Recreational and entertainment activities, especially affordable activities for children, families, and teens
- Mental health, stress, emotional issues, and substance abuse

Household Survey results: Issues experienced in "your own household over the past 12 months"

Figure 3: Top five ranked issues experienced by households³

(rank based on average rating for each item, n=428)

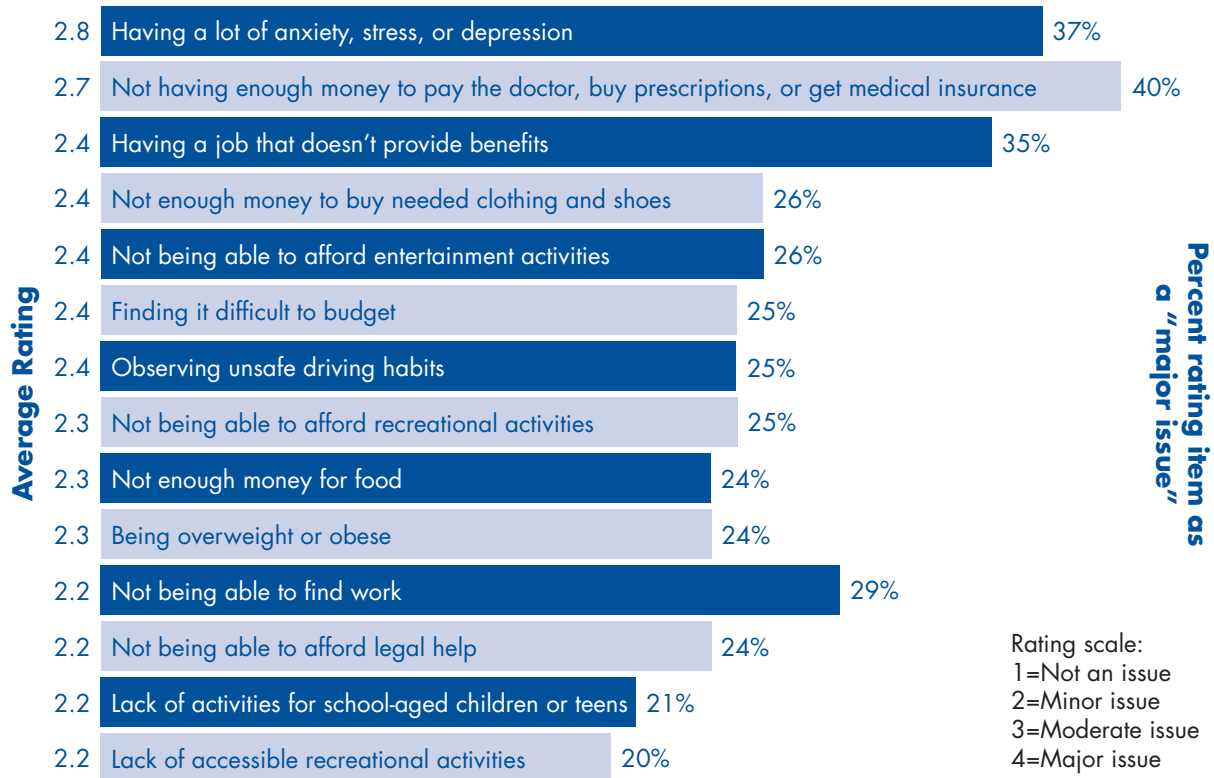


Figure 5: Unemployment rate, 1997-2004⁵

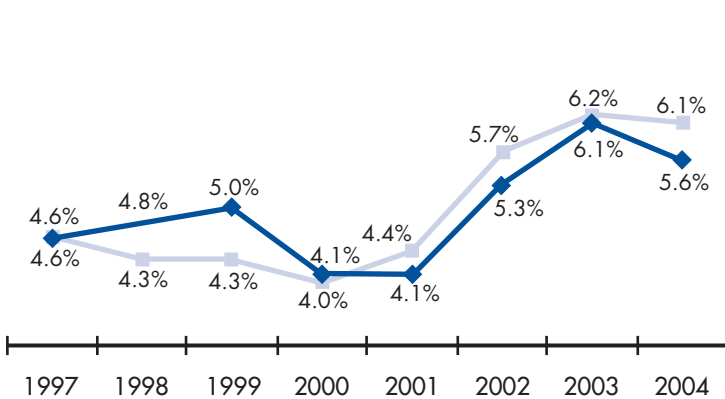
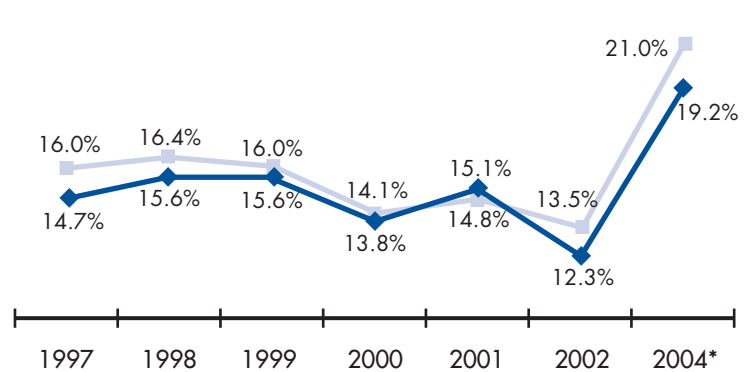


Figure 6: Percent of children (under age 18) in poverty, 1997-2004 (100% Federal Poverty Line)⁶



*1997-2002 data and 2004 data are from different sources.



Additional issues and unmet needs

Several other issues also emerged from two or more research methods as important unmet needs:

- Obesity
- Teen pregnancy
- Unsafe driving habits
- Poor access to transportation for seniors and youth
- Lack of affordable housing and substandard housing
- Family violence and abuse of children or adults
- Child care affordability, quality, and safety

Key Informant Survey results: Perceived issues in Knox County

Figure 4: Top five ranked community issues⁴

(rank based on average rating for each item, n=124)

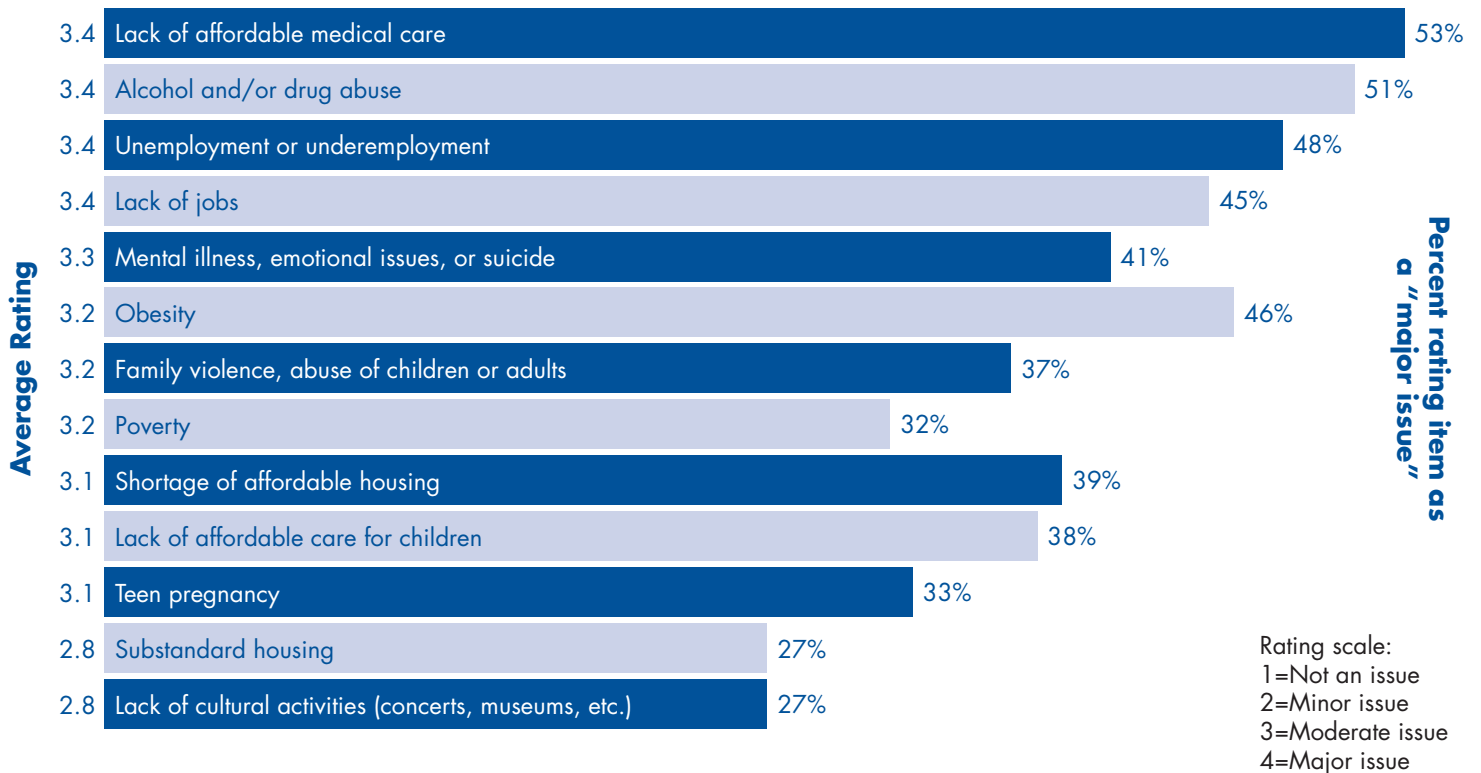


Figure 7: Child poverty in 2004, 100% and 200% Federal Poverty Line (FPL)⁷

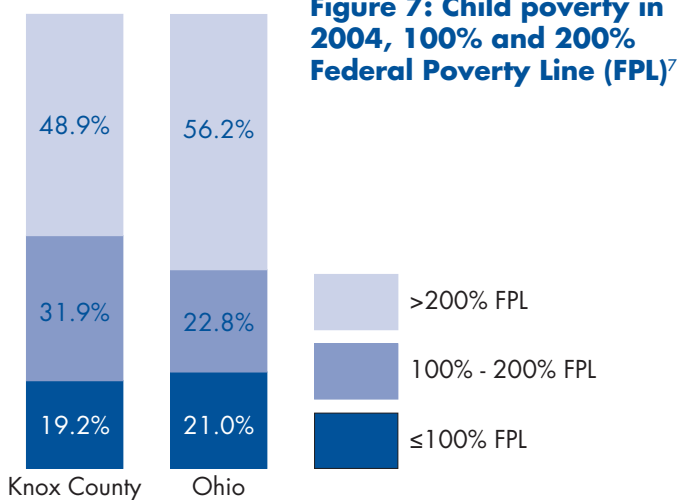
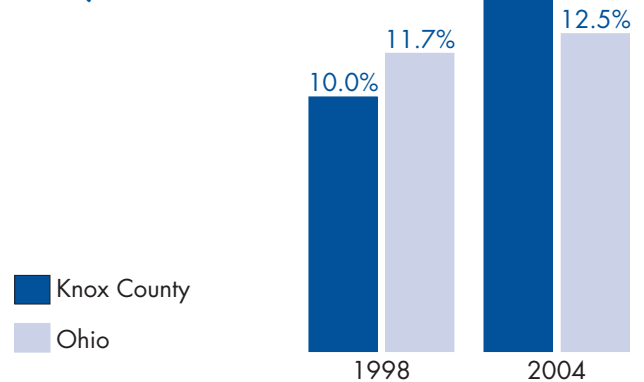


Figure 8: Percent of adults without health insurance (age 18 and older), 1998 and 2004⁸



Community Quotes

“I’m working, I’m functioning and surviving, but I’m not going anywhere.”

–Low-income parent focus group participant

“We provide services regardless of anyone’s ability to pay, so we won’t ever turn anyone away. This gets harder to do as we have more and more uninsured people in our county who need care.”

–Kevin Rogols, Chief Executive Officer, Knox Community Hospital

Overlaps and gaps in services

No unnecessary duplications of service were identified

This Community Assessment did not specifically identify any unnecessary overlaps or duplications of social services in Knox County. The *Social Service Provider Survey* and focus groups revealed that there are several emergency assistance providers, youth programs, and senior services in the county. Focus group participants indicated that it was desirable and necessary to have a variety of service providers in these areas. In the parent focus groups, for example, participants argued that limited resources and rigid eligibility criteria for emergency assistance programs leave gaps in the safety net instead of actual duplications of service. Similarly, seniors argued that they wanted more local senior programs. Residents of Fredericktown, Centerburg, and Danville called for services in their own towns, instead of having to rely upon programs in Mount Vernon.

Not enough providers of mental health and substance abuse treatment

Given that mental health, substance abuse, jobs, and economic issues have been identified as high-priority needs, it appears that there are relatively few resources available for these problems. For most low-income residents, there is really only one major mental health provider (Moundbuilders Guidance Center) and one substance abuse treatment provider (Alcohol and Drug FREEDOM CENTER). In the parent focus groups, participants expressed their frustration with the lack of choice in mental health services.



Not enough resources for preventing poverty and promoting self-sufficiency

On the *Social Service Provider Survey*, only four organizations reported that they provide “job training or employment opportunities for low-income people” and only two reported working on “economic development.” Comparing this to the 17 organizations providing emergency or financial assistance (utilities, material needs, etc.) and nine organizations providing food assistance, it appears that there are more resources for addressing the symptoms of poverty than resources for preventing poverty and promoting self-sufficiency.

Awareness of existing resources

Overall, many Knox County residents seem to be aware of existing social services:

- Most United Way member agencies enjoy high visibility
- Low-income parents seem aware of government programs and emergency assistance providers, but need more information about eligibility criteria, family activities, and educational opportunities
- Teens are aware of many – but not all – youth programs and services
- Computer use and Internet access are fairly common among parents and youth, but not senior citizens

Consumer satisfaction with existing services

Most consumers seem satisfied with most United Way member agencies

The majority of respondents to the United Way *Agency Satisfaction Survey* reported that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with most of the agencies they had used, indicating an overall level of satisfaction with these programs among Knox County residents.

Lower satisfaction with mental health, substance abuse, and employment services

Survey and focus group results revealed that many Knox Countians feel frustrated by the lack of choice in mental health and substance abuse treatment providers. Agencies providing these services, and employment services, received lower satisfaction ratings compared to other types of agencies.

Barriers to getting help

Focus group findings reveal the following barriers:

- Cost, stigma, lack of transportation, rigid eligibility criteria, and disrespectful service providers are barriers for some low-income parents
- Cost, lack of transportation, and busy parents may deter some youth from getting help
- Isolation and lack of transportation are barriers for senior citizens

Many social service agencies have experienced funding, staff, and program cuts

Overall, more than half of the social service organizations surveyed experienced budget cuts during 2003 and 2004, and decreases in funding were more common than funding increases:

- 68% of organizations said they experienced some kind of reduction or elimination in funding during 2003, rising to 74% in 2004
- 35% of the agencies reported some kind of elimination or reduction of programs or services in 2003, falling slightly to 29% in 2004
- 28% said they had to turn clients away or start a waiting list in 2003, falling slightly to 23% in 2004
- 47% said they reduced or consolidated staff in 2003, dropping to 43% in 2004



Data sources:

1. Volunteerism: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004-2005.
2. Figure 2: US Census Bureau, State and County QuickFacts from 2000 Census.
3. Figure 3: COMPASS Household Survey, 2004-2005, all samples.
4. Figure 4: COMPASS Key Informant Survey, 2004.
5. Figure 5: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) data, 2005.
6. Figure 6: 1997-2002 data are from the US Census Bureau; 2004 data are from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) Ohio Family Health Survey, Health Policy Institute of Ohio Health Data Brief, May 25, 2005.
7. Figure 7: ODJFS Ohio Family Health Survey, Health Policy Institute of Ohio Health Data Brief, May 25, 2005.
8. Figure 8: ODJFS Ohio Family Health Survey, 1999 and 2005.

Community Quotes

“Like all employers, we’re dealing with rising health insurance costs. We want to provide the best benefits possible for our employees, but we also have to keep an eye on the bottom line. I think this squeeze is one of the biggest issues affecting employers in the county.”

–Kathy Blackburn, Vice President of Human Resources, First-Knox National Bank

“The kids are just rumbling around doing absolutely nothing. They are home or whatever. Parents are at work working 8-to-5 jobs. It’s not like there is any sort of supervision.”

–Youth focus group participant

Moving toward a community vision

Throughout 2006, United Way of Knox County will bring various stakeholder groups together to review the results of the Community Assessment, identify priorities, and begin to develop a community impact plan. The results of this Community Assessment present exciting opportunities for improving the quality of life in Knox County. The broad consensus in identifying top-priority issues lays the framework for bringing the community together to solve problems. Knox County's identity as a safe, cohesive, and friendly community, in a beautiful rural location, provides an excellent foundation for building a stronger community.

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