

United Way serving Crawford, Franklin, Logan and Sebastian counties in Arkansas and LeFlore and Sequoyah counties in Oklahoma

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY



Alcohol

Drug

Poverty

Illiteracy

Childcare

2003 Community Assessment



Medical

Cultural



The **Community Needs Assessment** is a snapshot of the most pressing needs of our area as determined by local citizens and community leaders. It has been ten years since the United Way of Fort Smith Area completed a community needs assessment known as the **Compass Project**. Again, United Way has identified key issues to assist our organization and the community by conducting a **Compass II Project** in Sebastian and Crawford counties.

Compass II is intended to provide United Way and agencies indications of perceived needs and how those needs may be acted on. The findings are based on the broadest range of opinions—key informants, household members and focus groups. This survey is not an in-depth statistical analysis.

Overall community findings concluded:

- There is a need for increased coordination among service-delivery providers.
- A consolidated, one-stop approach to various social service programs would be more effective and comprehensive.
- The issues identified in this assessment are interrelated and are often found in combination with one another, whether in a city, neighborhood or family.
- There is an increased need for social service casework and mentoring programs that assist individuals to become independent and self-sufficient.
- Problems perceived by key informants are not necessarily those perceived by household members.
- It is our hope that funders, as well as service providers, will use this information to inform and inspire their own decision-making. In addition, this project can be used to enhance and support issue-specific assessments already conducted by other organizations.

The Compass II Project was conducted by United Way staff during a nine-month period using several techniques.

Regional household survey: An extensive set of questions was posted to more than 4,300 area residents with a 40 percent return

rate. Residents were contacted through the public and private school systems, area childcare provider centers and area senior citizens centers.

Regional key informant survey: More than 600 area community leaders were asked to complete an extensive set of questions regarding the strengths and concerns of their community. A total of 325 surveys were returned and analyzed separately from the household survey.

Human service provider survey: Area health and human service agencies were asked to complete the community issues portion of the household survey. A total of 40 questionnaires were returned and analyzed separately from the household respondents.

Analysis of data developed by others: Statistics collected from many sources were studied to help document local trends.

Focus groups: Five focus group sessions were held in Fort Smith on what was determined to be the most pressing issues of the area—**illiteracy and poverty, access to quality childcare, access to affordable medical care, prevention and recovery from alcohol and drug use and access to cultural opportunities**. Focus group participants were leaders and individuals who are experts in their field of work.

The purpose of this document is to bring to the community's attention to the most pressing issues facing our citizens. The United Way Board and local focus groups guided the assessment process from its inception. This process could not have taken place without the full support of our community leaders, area civic organizations, area health and human service providers, United Way member agencies, and the Fort Smith, Van Buren, Greenwood and Alma school districts.

Hugh Maurras, *United Way Board Member
and Compass II Project Chairman*

Ann Filyaw, *Compass II Project Coordinator*

Angela Tilley, *United Way Executive Director*

Fort Smith

Survey Results

Major issues in order of importance

Key Informant Survey

1. Poverty
2. Alcohol and/or drug abuse
3. Illiteracy
4. Unemployment/underemployment
5. Lack of affordable medical care
6. Family violence
7. Lack of affordable childcare
8. Lack of jobs

Household Survey

1. Crime
2. Lack of cultural activities
3. Lack of affordable childcare
4. Shortage of recreational facilities
5. Overcrowded housing
6. Teen pregnancy
7. Lack of affordable medical care
8. Alcohol and/or drug abuse
9. Gangs
10. Lack of jobs

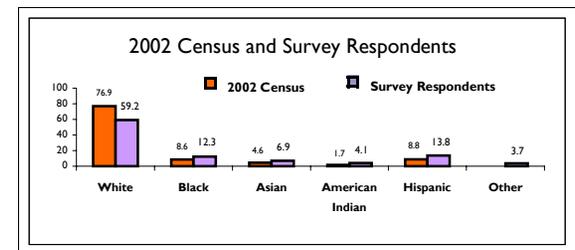
KEY INFORMANT FINDINGS

Surveys were distributed in Fort Smith to 454 key informants with 45% returned. Key informants included leaders of our community, key United Way donors, members of local civic clubs and active community volunteers. More than 60% of the key informant surveys were from individuals in the executive, administrative, managerial and professional fields.

The key informants strongly agreed that people and organizations from all regions come together to address mutual concerns. However, 39% of the respondents said that associations from various parts of the community do not share strategies, while 40% agreed that associations share strategies.

Respondents identified the following community strengths:

- There is a large base of volunteers to help meet community needs.
- Fort Smith has a strong education system and good parks, libraries and fine arts opportunities.
- The University of Arkansas–Fort Smith will be an important cornerstone for future area growth.



The Survey Respondents closely paralleled the 2002 Fort Smith Census.

Fort Smith key informants did not consider of major concern the issues of water or air pollution, overcrowded classrooms, poor road and/or traffic conditions, gangs, access to food and clothing, substandard housing and overcrowded housing.

MAJOR CONCERNS

When asked to list the top three major concerns for the Fort Smith area, key informants responded:

1. Alcohol and/or drug abuse
2. Lack of jobs
3. Unemployment and underemployment

Fort Smith 2003 Issues

By zip code and in order of importance

Since Fort Smith has a diverse population, the household survey data was segmented by zip code to give a better understanding of geographical needs.

72901 (Downtown)

1. Lack of affordable childcare
2. Crime
3. Lack of cultural activities
4. Shortage of recreational facilities
5. Lack of affordable medical care
6. Alcohol and/or drug abuse
7. Teenage pregnancy
8. Lack of jobs

72903 (Central, East)

1. Lack of cultural activities
2. Crime
3. Teenage pregnancy
4. Shortage of recreational facilities
5. Lack of affordable childcare
6. Lack of affordable medical care
7. Alcohol and/or drug abuse
8. Lack of jobs

72904 (North)

1. Crime
2. Teenage pregnancy
3. Lack of affordable childcare
4. Lack of cultural activities
5. Lack of affordable medical care
6. Alcohol and/or drug abuse
7. Shortage of recreational facilities
8. Lack of jobs

72908 (South)

1. Lack of cultural activities
2. Shortage of recreational facilities
3. Crime
4. Lack of affordable childcare
5. Teenage pregnancy
6. Lack of affordable medical care
7. Alcohol and/or drug abuse
8. Lack of jobs

72923 (Barling)

1. Lack of affordable childcare
2. Shortage of recreational facilities
3. Lack of affordable medical care
4. Crime
5. Lack of cultural activities
6. Lack of jobs
7. Alcohol and/or drug abuse
8. Teenage pregnancy

HOUSEHOLD FINDINGS

Surveys were distributed to 2,385 Fort Smith households with 30% returned. The census data from the survey respondents closely mirrored the actual Fort Smith population census. Of those surveyed, 27% receive public assistance. Less than 49 percent vote in most elections.

The assessment identified several area strengths. As a community, the data revealed that Fort Smith households believe people help each other when they have a problem, that people trust each other and that people who are different from one another participate in activities together.

The data collected revealed the following issues not to be of concern for the Fort Smith household respondents— poverty, unsafe school environment, mental illness or emotional issues, not having enough money for food or clothing, not being able to find work, not being able to afford recreational or entertainment activities, substandard housing and overcrowded housing and inadequate public transportation.

CONCLUSION

After reviewing the household and key informant data, five areas of concern were identified as key issues for further study.

1. **Alcohol and/or drug abuse (which tends to be the root of criminal problems in our area)**
2. **Lack of affordable medical care**
3. **Lack of affordable childcare**
4. **Illiteracy and poverty**
5. **Lack of cultural activities**

Fort Smith focus group sessions were held to provide a better understanding of the services, opportunities and challenges facing organizations that work within these five areas. Focus group findings and recommendations for each of the five areas are listed on the following pages.

Fort Smith

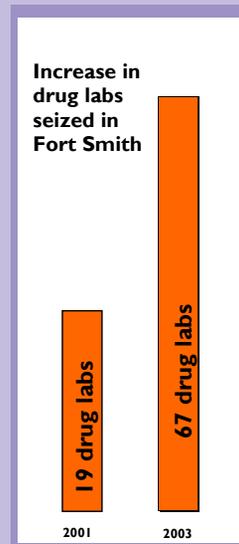
Alcohol and Drug Abuse

“The continuing growth in the manufacturing and use of methamphetamine is directly impacting the increase in many of our property-type crimes. The money from these criminal acts is being used to purchase more illegal drugs. While we must continue strict enforcement, we must also strive to reduce the demand for these substances.”

Randy Reed, Fort Smith Chief of Police

Compass II results identified alcohol and/or drug abuse as the number one issue facing the Fort Smith area.

In Sebastian County, 40 percent of the criminal cases involve violation of the Controlled Substance Act. An additional 30-40% of the criminal cases (theft, robbery) are indirectly related to drug abuse .



FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The following comments and concerns were raised by focus group participants.

Although the overall crime rate in Fort Smith has remained steady over the last few years, certain property crimes related to drug and alcohol abuse have increased.

- Increased resources are needed for alcohol and drug abuse treatment facilities, public awareness on the long-term effects associated with use, the number of prevention classes available and resources for case workers.
- There should be an increased emphasis on youth participating in after-school and summer programs. Such programs help deter criminal activity during high-crime youth hours and help educate youth on the impact of drug/alcohol use.
- A central Information and Referral Center would make it easier for caseworkers and families to obtain services.
- Parents need increased intervention and education on the topics of drug and alcohol use.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE NEEDS

- Reconnect the family with programs such as Parents As Teachers (PAT) through the Fort Smith Public Schools. PAT helps to instill the value that parents are the first and most important teacher and model in a child's life. This program is an important part of drug and alcohol abuse rehabilitation as well as family literacy (which helps combat poverty).
- Provide a collaborative "One Stop Shop" for information, referral and social services case work.
- Increase the number of caseworkers in the community who can assist individuals and families for all areas of concern, not just drug and alcohol issues.
- Expand and support area's drug courts.

“I believe the best tool to combating this problem is the concept of a Drug Court. Through intense counseling and court supervision in the structured environment of a Drug Court, I believe we can break the cycle of addiction. If we can, we will be able to take these non-violent offenders and turn them into law-abiding, tax-paying, responsible citizens.”

James R. Marschewski, Circuit Judge, Division VI, Sebastian County

Poverty

- **Fifty-two percent of Fort Smith elementary children live below the poverty level.**
- **Sixty-five percent of Fort Smith elementary students are eligible for free and reduced lunch programs.**

POVERTY IS IDENTIFIED AS THE SECOND MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FROM THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT WHEN THE HOUSEHOLD AND KEY INFORMANT RESULTS ARE COMBINED

Aspects of poverty

- Economic deprivation
- Unemployment and underemployment
- Lack of access to medical care
- Inability to break family history of illiteracy
- Psychological devastation
- Increased rates of illiteracy and criminal activity

For a family of four in the U. S. with two children, the federal poverty threshold is an annual income in 2003 of less than \$18,660.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The following comments and concerns were raised by focus group participants.

- There has been an increased need for food pantry services and it is believed that one in five children in Fort Smith goes to bed hungry.
- Sources of poverty in Fort Smith include:
 - Levels of unemployment
 - Low wages
 - Cuts in job benefits
 - Inadequately educated workforce
- Although not stated by the household respondents, there is a need for stable and adequate housing for low-income individuals, according to social service agencies.
- The community believes wage levels are inadequate.
- There is a great need for increased financial education for at-risk families.
- Many grandparents are now the primary caregiver for their grandchildren. This increases the financial strain on families which often have fixed incomes.
- Several organizations are working to combat poverty and help families in need. Agencies include the Adult Education Center, literacy council, local health and human service agencies, food pantries and many faith-based organizations. But how well these agencies are or should be coordinating these efforts are unclear.

“A consistent trend which appears to be present in all issues is the increase in family poverty among our residents. This condition has a detrimental effect upon children and makes the services which public and private agencies provide of great importance to the future success of our young people.”

*Dr. Benny Gooden
Superintendent,
Fort Smith Public Schools*

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE NEEDS

The following recommendations were made by focus group participants.

- Increase the opportunities for stable and adequate housing.
- Create higher wage jobs, opportunities.
- Increase early mentoring opportunities.
- Coordinate services for families in need.
- Increase financial education opportunities and generation education opportunities.
- Encourage increased involvement from faith-based organizations.

Illiteracy

The relationship between poverty and illiteracy:

- 43% of those lacking literacy skills live in poverty.
- 70% of those lacking literacy skills are unemployed.

THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT DETERMINED THAT ILLITERACY IS A KEY ISSUE OF CONCERN FOR OUR COMMUNITY.

Arkansas literacy issues



1. In Sebastian County, 26% of the population (20,800) have less than a high school education.
2. Children whose parents read to them are better prepared for school and perform better academically.
3. Illiteracy is an intergenerational problem — the children of illiterate parents perform less well in and are more likely to drop out of school.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The following comments were made by focus group participants.

- The influx of multi-generational families is a contributing factor to illiteracy in Fort Smith.
- More than 50% of the children entering kindergarten in Fort Smith perform two to three years behind their developmental norm.
- Substandard nutrition is contributing to substandard school performance.
- Several organizations play a positive role with the literacy issue—Adult Education Center, the Literacy Council, the Multicultural Center, faith-based organizations, civic clubs and various social-service caseworkers.
- Additional social-service caseworkers are needed to assist the entire family unit and not just specific-issue cases.
- The community needs to encourage family and individual literacy.
- The growing population of teenage mothers and non-English speaking families pose a literacy challenge.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE NEEDS

The following recommendations were made by focus group participants.

- A coordinated marketing effort, information and referral center, and additional caseworkers to help promote the improvement of literacy.
- Better access for adults to skills development opportunities.
- Investments in early mentoring programs to encourage family literacy and skills development.
- Businesses encouraged more to support employee's basic educational skills.
- Special efforts to reach the teenage mother and non-English speaking families.

“Literacy is the foundation for success. Improvement for basic skills opens doors, restores confidence and renews hope. Although all parents want their children to be successful, not all parents have the skills to help their children find success.”

Sharon Ellis, Adult Education Supervisor, Fort Smith Public Schools

Fort Smith

Access to Affordable Medical Care

FIFTY PERCENT OF THE FORT SMITH RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THAT HEALTH CARE IS A MAJOR CONCERN IN THE AREA.

Barriers to health care access

(Healthy People 2010, Leading health indicators)

Financial

- Not having health insurance
- Not having enough to cover needed services
- Not having the financial capacity to cover services outside a health plan or insurance program

Structural

- Lack of primary care providers, medical specialists, other health care professionals to meet special needs
- Lack of health care facilities

Personal

- Cultural or spiritual differences
- Language barriers
- Not knowing what to do or when to seek care



FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The following comments and concerns were raised by focus group participants.

- Of our aging population, one in four has mental health problems.
- Parents age 17-25 years old show high signs of depression.
- The majority of individuals seen through social service agencies do not have money for prescriptions.
- There is a lack of available prescription drugs and doctors to service the at-risk families.
- Mentoring at-risk families could provide prevention resources for medical issues.
- There is a gap of services for at-risk children needing accessible medical and dental care.
- There is an increased need in the community for additional caseworkers, especially bilingual caseworkers.
- Although the community has available weekday elderly care with transportation, there is a need to extend services to the weekend.

Fort Smith Facts

There are connections between poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and the availability of health care in the community.

It is estimated that approximately 30-35% of individuals in Fort Smith are underinsured or uninsured.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE NEEDS

The focus group members concluded that it would benefit the community to have:

- Increased mental health services.
- Mentoring programs for at-risk families to include medical issues.
- Additional social-service caseworkers to meet all the family's needs in a seamless manner.
- Availability and access to prescription drugs and prescription drug programs.
- Access to preventive care opportunities through community events and educational programs.

"The greatest stimulus for health insurance for citizens in our community is good economic development that would bring adequate numbers of good paying jobs to our community. Anything other than that is going to require government resources. Those resources are already inadequate, and competition for these resources is so great that people who are unemployed or illiterate, unfortunately, are of the highest priority for health care benefits."

Dr. Jerry Stewart, CEO of Cooper Clinic, Fort Smith

Childcare

An investment of one dollar in early childhood education saves nine dollars in societal costs, such as welfare and the expense of the justice system, and remedial education .

THE LACK OF AVAILABLE OR QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRESCHOOL CARE IN FORT SMITH IS A MAJOR ISSUE FAMILIAR TO ALL SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS.

Demand for early child development exceeds the supply

(Arkansas Department of Human Services, Children and Childcare Issues 2001)

- Poverty is the major risk factor for lack of access to proper preschool care. Other factors include lack of education in parents and language barriers.
- The failure of childcare facilities to provide an appropriate curriculum with regard to age and language is an impediment.
- Sebastian County has 109 childcare facilities that operate with full or part-time programs.
- A child's experiences between birth and age five are critical to future educational development.



FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The following comments and concerns were raised by focus group participants.

- More needs to be done to educate the business community on the benefits of on-site or cooperative childcare resources for employees.
- Finding quality childcare for working parents is a challenge. The challenge is with the hours offered, the quality of care or the cost of care.
- Since more than half of the children in Fort Smith enter kindergarten 2-3 years behind their developmental norms, it is important that parents and childcare providers work to ensure a child's success.
- Arkansas does not offer a childcare rating system or marketing program. This type of a program could help educate parents and childcare providers on the importance of offering quality care with appropriate curriculum.
- There are major issues facing early childcare providers. Issues include:
 - Training and retention of employees. Childcare workers have low wages and inadequate benefits, and there is a lack of incentives for personal development and further training.
 - The increasing need for childcare voucher and scholarship programs.
 - Funding problems that affect the quality of childcare programs.

“High quality early childcare programs help level the playing field for low income children who are at risk. Such programs enable these children to enter school ready to succeed.

Jo Harper, Arkansas Early Childhood Commission

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE NEEDS

The following recommendations were made by focus group participants.

- An effort needs to be made to train and inform the business community to provide childcare programs as a benefit for employees.
- Restart a collaborative effort to support the Early Childhood Providers Professional Association increasing awareness for quality programs, offering training, informing professionals of state initiatives, and being a networking avenue for staff and directors.
- Promote and support community and state measures in updating and enacting legislation regarding the licensing and accreditation of worthy childcare facilities.

Fort Smith

Lack of Cultural Activities

THE HOUSEHOLD SURVEY REVEALED THAT THE LACK OF CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN FORT SMITH WAS ONE OF FIVE MAJOR ISSUES. WHEN BROKEN DOWN BY ZIP CODE, TWO OF FIVE ZIP CODE AREAS (72903 AND 72908) STATED IT WAS THE NUMBER ONE ISSUE FACING YOUTH AND ADULTS. AVAILABILITY OF CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES WAS FOLLOWED CLOSELY BY A CONCERN FOR AFFORDABILITY OF CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES.

Youth and cultural activities

- Cultural opportunities are important for at-risk children. There is a direct correlation between a lack of healthy cultural opportunities and youthful criminality.
- More community service organizations such as Boys & Girls Clubs, libraries, and parks and recreation sites are adapting arts programs to achieve results such as:
 - Diverting youth from gangs, drugs and criminal activity.
 - Reducing truancy and improving academic performance.
 - Building self discipline, communication and job skills.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The following comments and concerns were raised by focus group participants.

- Funding for cultural opportunities remains an issue.
- A collaboration is needed between the media and arts groups to increase the awareness of area opportunities.
- There are numerous free and affordable cultural opportunities and events in Fort Smith, but better awareness is needed for these events.
- A media/marketing seminar is needed for area non-profit agency that could educate groups on how to better publicize their events.
- The area needs to increase cultural programs targeted to the Hispanic community.
- Programs need to be developed or better publicized that are intended to reach at-risk youth.
- There is an opportunity for better cooperation and collaboration to establish appropriate programs among the art groups and non-profit agencies.

"I've asked hundreds of students 'What is Art?' The best answer was from a kindergartener who said, 'Art is from the Heart.'" Michael Richardson, Program Director, Fort Smith Art Center

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE NEEDS

The group concluded that it would benefit the community to:

- Organize a non-profit marketing seminar.
- Encourage health and human service agencies to incorporate more cultural opportunities into their programming.
- Develop a Fine Arts Council (independent of government control) that will serve as a "think tank."

"Music is one of life's essential ingredients. For children, it is often the substance of their playful exploration of and experimentation in the world around them, the core of their socialization and expressive communication with one another, and the refuge where they find peace, joy and fulfillment away from the worries of their young lives."

Charles L. Booker, Jr., Director of Bands, University of Arkansas, Fort Smith ("Music in Childhood" 2002)

Greenwood

Survey results

Major issues in order of importance

Key Informant Survey

1. Shortage of recreational facilities
2. Lack of cultural activities
3. Lack of jobs
4. Water and/or air pollution
5. Lack of affordable medical care
6. Poor road and/or traffic conditions
7. Shortage of affordable housing
8. Alcohol and/or drug abuse

Household Survey

1. Lack of cultural activities
2. Shortage of recreational facilities
3. Lack of affordable medical care
4. Water and/or air pollution
5. Poor road and/or traffic conditions
6. Teenage pregnancy
7. Lack of affordable childcare

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY FINDINGS

Surveys were distributed to 510 Greenwood households with 197 returned. Thirty-three percent of the households surveyed volunteer six or more days a month for their church, children's activities, sports groups and school. Of the respondents, 77% vote in most elections.

Respondents believed the community actively supports and strengthens connections between people. The household assessment showed Greenwood to be a strong community with the following issues not being of major concern to the households: unemployment or underemployment, poverty, illiteracy, substandard housing, gangs, racial or ethnic discrimination, not having enough money for food or clothing and experiencing alcohol and/or drug issues.

KEY INFORMANT FINDINGS

The key informant respondents represented community leaders from the professional, sales and managerial occupations. Surveys responses mirrored those of the household respondents. Survey participants identified few major concerns for the community. Key informant respondents unanimously agreed that a shortage of recreational facilities and a lack of cultural activities topped the lists of concerns.

MAJOR CONCERNS

When asked to list the major concerns for Greenwood, key informants listed:

1. **Shortage of recreational facilities** (Only existing facility is the Boys & Girls Club. Plans are underway to develop a city-wide park and recreational facility.)
2. **Water and/or air pollution** (Greenwood plans in 2004 to address the issues of water supply shortage and water quality.)
3. **Poor roads and/or traffic conditions** (A majority of all road have been resurfaced in the last five years with \$300,000 spent annually on roads. Traffic conditions are an issue with only one way in and one way out, but recent studies have not found a solution.)

Alma

Survey Results

Major issues in order of importance

Key Informant Survey

1. Poverty
2. Alcohol and/or drug abuse
3. Lack of affordable medical care
4. Teenage pregnancy
5. Family violence
6. Inadequate public transportation
7. Lack of affordable child care
8. Lack of jobs
9. Poor roads and traffic conditions
10. Illiteracy

Household Survey

1. Lack of affordable medical care
2. Teenage pregnancy
3. Poor roads and/or traffic conditions
4. Alcohol and/or drug abuse
5. No money for doctors, prescriptions or medical insurance
7. Crime
8. Inadequate public transportation
9. Alcohol and/or drug abuse
10. Unemployment and underemployment
11. Lack of jobs
12. Lack of affordable childcare

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY FINDINGS

Surveys were distributed to 600 Alma households with 26% returned. Of those surveyed, 80% of the household contained two or more adults with at least one child and 20% contained one adult with at least one child. Fifty-one percent were between the ages of 35 and 54. Fifteen percent received public assistance.

The assessment identified several strengths of the Alma area. As a community, the data revealed that Alma households believe people come together to work on common goals, that people help each other when they have a problem and that people trust each other. Only 35% of the respondents regularly do volunteer work in their neighborhood. The majority volunteer for religious groups, sports groups, the school and children's activities three to five days per month. Fifty-eight percent of the household respondents vote in most elections.

The data collected revealed the following issues not to be of concern for the Alma respondents—unsafe school environment, not having enough money for food or clothing, illiteracy, experiencing household crime, gangs, not being able to find work, difficulty in reading well enough to get along, experiencing noise, air or water pollution and experiencing drug and/or alcohol issues

KEY INFORMANT FINDINGS

The key informants strongly agreed that there is mutual respect among leaders from all sectors of the community and that leaders share common goals and vision for the community.

They responded that an unsafe school environment, lack of cultural activities, water or air pollution, gangs, and HIV/AIDS were not major issues for the Alma area.

MAJOR CONCERNS

When asked to list the three top major concerns for the Alma area, the key informants listed:

1. **Alcohol and/or drug abuse**
2. **Family violence**
3. **And various responses included lack of jobs, teenage pregnancy and lack of affordable medical care.**

Van Buren

Survey Results Major issues in order of importance

Key Informant Survey

1. Illiteracy
2. Poverty
3. Lack of affordable medical care
4. Teenage pregnancy
5. Lack of cultural activities
6. Alcohol and/or drug abuse
7. Shortage of recreational facilities
8. Inadequate public transportation
9. Poor roads and/or traffic conditions

Household Survey

1. Lack of affordable medical care
2. Lack of cultural activities
3. Poor roads and/or traffic conditions
4. No money for doctors, prescriptions or medical insurance
5. Poverty
6. Alcohol and/or drug abuse
7. Lack of jobs
8. Teenage pregnancy
9. Lack of affordable child care
10. Inadequate public transportation

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY FINDINGS

Surveys were distributed to 840 households with 20% returned. Of those surveyed, 77% of the household contained two or more adults with at least one child. Sixty-two percent were between the ages of 35 and 54 years of age. Sixteen percent received public assistance.

The assessment identified several strengths of the Van Buren area. As a community, the data revealed that Van Buren households believe people help each other out when they have a problem, that people trust each other and that people consider the same things important.

The data collected revealed the following issues not to be of concern for the Van Buren respondents—unsafe school environment, noise and pollution, having enough money to buy food, experiencing household crime, overcrowded housing, not being able to find work and experiencing alcohol and/or drug issues.

KEY INFORMANT FINDINGS

The key informants strongly agreed that people and organization from all regions come together to address mutual concerns and there is a mutual respect among leaders from all sectors of the community. Forty-six percent of the respondents believe the community actively promotes participation in the political process. Forty percent of the respondents believe religious groups come together to address pressing social concerns, but 33% strongly disagree with the statement.

The key informants responded that an unsafe school environment, having enough money to purchase food, not being able to find work, experiencing alcohol water or air pollution, substandard housing, overcrowded classrooms, poor road and/or traffic conditions and gangs, access to food and clothing and overcrowded housing were not an issue for our area.

MAJOR CONCERNS

When asked to list the top three major concerns for the Van Buren area, the key informants listed:

1. **Lack of affordable medical care**
2. **Alcohol and/or drug abuse**
3. **Illiteracy**

S

Sebastian and Crawford Counties

Household, Key Informant and Service Provider surveys were distributed in Barling, Fort Smith and Greenwood in Sebastian County and Alma and Van Buren in Crawford County.

Generally speaking, the following issues were consistent concerns in Crawford and Sebastian counties. However, it is clear not all communities have the same issues.

- **Illiteracy**
- **Lack of cultural activities**
- **Lack of affordable medical care**
- **Shortage of recreational activities**
- **Lack of affordable child care**
- **Teen pregnancy**
- **Poor road and/or traffic conditions**
- **Crime**

The Compass II Project gives an overview of the general opinions from area households and community leaders regarding the issues facing the Crawford and Sebastian county areas. Every effort was made to gain a cross-section of responses that best represent the current census of our communities. Returned data weighed heavily on the female opinion from the household respondents whose age range is between 35 and 54. The majority of key informant responses in Fort Smith and Van Buren were from males in the professional or executive fields and Greenwood and Alma from females in the professional field.

It is the hope of United Way that non-profit agencies and service clubs will use the assessment while developing grant proposals, strategic plans and setting priorities for annual projects. The United Way Board of Directors is committed to addressing the concerns identified in this

A detailed report of the survey questions and responses is available by contacting the United Way of Fort Smith Area, 479-782-1311 or emailing unitedway@mynewroads.com

SOURCES

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The Free/Reduced Lunch Count & Census of Students by Ethnicity, FSPS

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ARTS USA: Arts programs for at-risk youth

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Bureau of Vital Statistics

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

National Center for Health Statistics

National Health Interview Survey

National Center for Health Statistics

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Fort Smith Regional Chamber of Commerce
Fort Smith City Officials
Fort Smith Downtown Rotary
Fort Smith Manufacturers Executive Association
Fort Smith Public Schools

Fort Smith Southside Rotary
Gator Golf
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