

Addison County Speaks

Community Needs Assessment 2007

A report back to the community

In 2007 United Way of Addison County conducted a community wide needs assessment in which Addison County residents were asked five questions:

1. What are the best things about living in Addison County?
2. What kinds of problems or issues are you or community members facing today?
3. What kinds of help and support are available to meet these needs in Addison County today?
4. What kinds of help and support are missing in Addison County today?
5. What do you think will be the key issues you and your community will be facing in five years?

This report shares our community's responses to these important questions.



In 2007 United Way of Addison County conducted a community wide needs assessment in which Addison County residents were asked five questions:

1. **What are the best things about living in Addison County?**
2. **What kinds of problems or issues are you or community members facing today?**
3. **What kinds of help and support are available to meet these needs in Addison County today?**
4. **What kinds of help and support are missing in Addison County today?**
5. **What do you think will be the key issues you and your community will be facing in five years?**

A broad range of Addison County residents participated in the survey either through a Web-based survey, paper survey, interview or focus group. Surveys were handed out across Addison County through all of our partner agencies, the Addison Independent, our newsletter, major employers, community libraries, congregate meal sites, meals on wheels, food shelves, Porter Hospital, and at every town meeting last Spring. The paper surveys included a reference to the same survey that could be taken on-line. We also invited on-line participation via e-mail, our newsletter, our website, and other means. Altogether, over 750 people participated (see sidebar).

The results of this assessment, coupled with national, state and local data will be used to support our strategic planning efforts. We invite other local organizations to use this data to inform, support and prioritize their work as well. This report presents key findings from the web-based and paper surveys, which encouraged people to use their own words in describing what they see as the best things and greatest concerns about living in Addison County.

Who participated:

622 individuals responded on-line and via paper surveys.

79 individuals representing partner agencies, education and the clergy participated in focus group analysis of survey results.

34 individuals as part of community coalitions participated in a discussion of the surveys and answered the questions based on their collective knowledge from the perspective of their coalition.

20 volunteers helped distribute, collect and analyze the surveys over a 5 month period.

Question 1: *What are the best things about living in Addison County?*

The **people** of Addison County received the most recognition as one of the best aspects of our community. Respondents said that they have a strong sense of community and connectedness. Addison County has “a small town feel, where everyone knows everyone,” and “we take care of our own.”

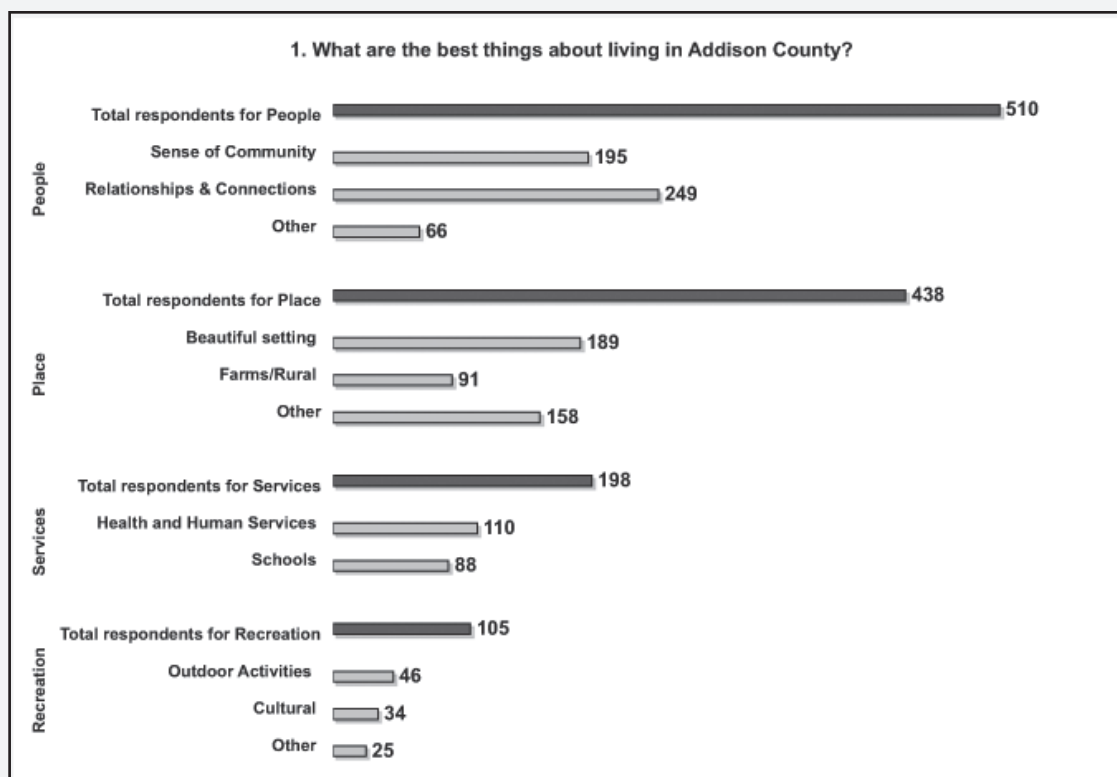
The people of Addison County were described as bright, interesting and open-minded, as well as, friendly, supportive and caring.

The **beauty, agriculture and location** of Addison County are considered our community’s next best assets. That includes our natural setting, dairy farms, orchards and “unspoiled country”.

There is also an appreciation for Addison County’s close proximity to Burlington and Rutland. Addison County is “convenient to both city and country”.

Local services were next on the list of best things about Addison County. This included the social service organizations and health services available to our community. Many of those that responded to the survey also expressed their appreciation of the schools of Addison County.

The diversity and availability of **cultural and recreational opportunities**, both indoor and outdoor is considered a highlight of living in Addison County. Hiking, hunting, fishing, museum-going, dancing, skiing, sculpting and painting are just some of the activities mentioned.



Question 2: *What kinds of problems or issues are you or your community members facing today?*

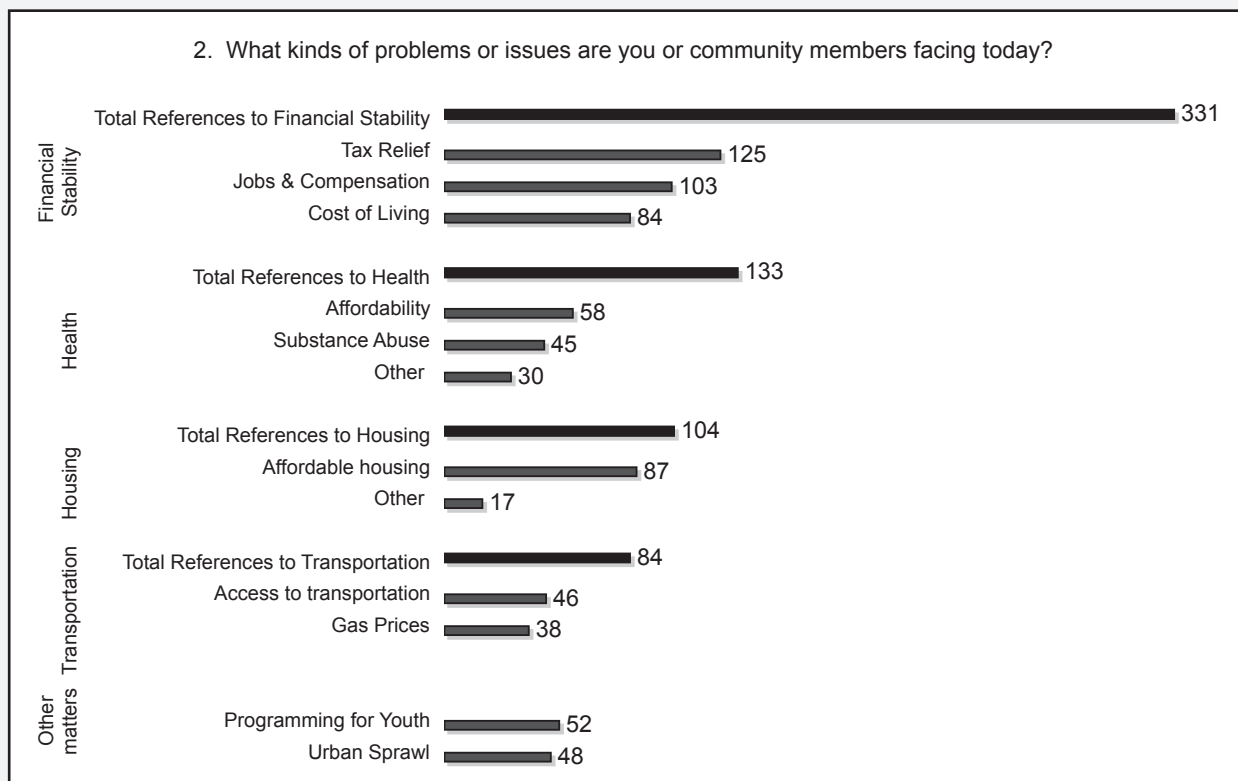
Almost half of those that responded to the survey consider **financial stability** to be the biggest issue facing our community. The need for tax relief, as well as better, higher paying jobs leave many of the residents of Addison County struggling to keep up with the current cost of living.

Various **health** issues are also on the minds of Addison County residents. The lack of access to affordable care was top on the list, while an increase in substance abuse and the need for improved treatment methods were the next most commonly cited issue.

Housing continues to be a concern for Addison County residents with a lack of affordable housing in the forefront of this issue.

Many Addison County residents, particularly those living outside of Middlebury, Bristol and Vergennes, are lacking access to **transportation**. This affects their ability to obtain the services they need or to get and maintain quality employment. Increasing gas prices were also seen as an obstacle to getting around the community.

Other matters that were mentioned were a need for **programs for area youth** and the increase in **urban sprawl**.



Question 3: *What kinds of help and support are available to meet these needs in Addison County today?*

The most common answers to the third survey question were Meals on Wheels (4.3%), ACCAG (3.97%) and Open Door Clinic (3.97%).

It should be noted that these three programs were very active participants in the distribution and collection of surveys. One trend did emerge in that the Health and Human service organizations and the services provided were mentioned in general terms over and over. In addition, over 60 specific and broad ranging organizations or programs were referred to as being available to help. These included government, non-profit and for-profit sectors.



Question 4: *What kinds of help and support are missing in Addison County today?*

When asked about the help and support that is missing, Addison County residents have a long list of creative answers and possible solutions. Over 175 different categories of ideas were presented - although very few of them exceeded a 2.5% threshold of responses. The most oft-mentioned solutions included:

- * Creating and sustaining affordable housing (7.44%)
- * Increasing and enhancing youth programming in the community (7.11%)
- * Increasing access and reach of public transportation (6.4%).

In addition, we saw an emerging theme regarding the working poor or “gap people” – those who earn too much income to qualify for free or subsidized assistance but who are struggling to make ends meet.

Question 5: *What do you think will be the key issues you and your community will be facing in five years?*

Many of the concerns that Addison County residents have for the future mirror their concerns of today; affordable housing, affordable healthcare, access to

transportation, a need for jobs and better compensation, as well as the ability to keep up with the cost of living. These were also key issues that our community was facing when the last needs assessment was conducted in 1990.

Comparison of top concerns in Addison County						
	17 years ago 1990 Survey		Current Concerns 2007 Survey		Five years from now 2007 Survey	
	Rank	% Responses	Rank	% Responses	Rank	% Responses
Substance Abuse	1	70%	9	7%	7	9%
Affordable Housing	2	45%	3	14%	4	13%
Transportation	3	37%	8	8%	9	2%
Affordable Health Care	4	34%	5	10%	1	21%
Affordable Child Care	5	32%		na	11	2%
Affordable Legal Services	6	27%		na		na
Youth Programs	7	27%	6	9%	10	2%
Jobs & Compensation	8	17%	2	17%	3	14%
Tax Relief		na	1	21%	2	20%
Cost of Living		na	4	14%	5	11%
Urban Sprawl		na	7	8%	6	9%
Gas Prices		na	10	6%	8	5%
Responses to question 5 showed increase in concern for seniors: aging population, housing and care specifically as well as for renewable energy and climate change.						

Focus groups comprised of health and human service agencies, education professionals, and members of the local clergy evaluated the information collected in the 2007 survey. They were surprised that that more people did not list substance abuse as an issue our community is facing, especially since it was the greatest concern of the community in 1990. They were also surprised that concerns for personal safety/issues of abuse and a need for foster care reform were merely blips on the survey screen.

The survey showed an increase in concern for the aging population of Addison County, which coincides with the increase in the aging population itself. Gas prices, climate change, a need for renewable energy, and urban sprawl are issues that were identified in the 2007 survey that did not make the list in 1990.

Conclusion

The information included in this report is only part of the process of identifying and addressing the key issues facing Addison County. We look to the community, our partner agencies and to those with whom we collaborate for input as we continue to evaluate, monitor and update the data.

We encourage the use of this information, and thank all of those who have played a part in the 2007 Addison County needs assessment survey.