

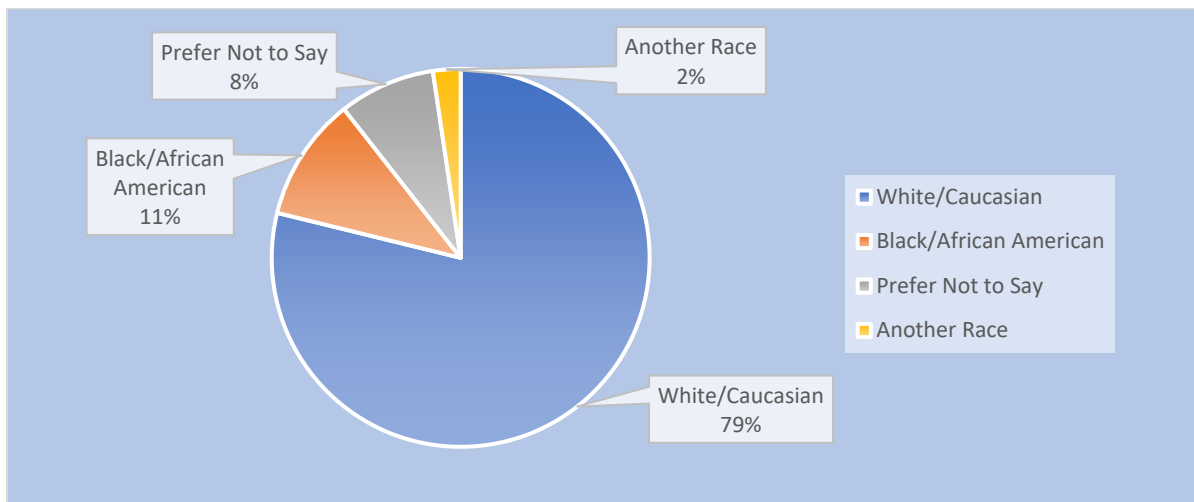
Community Needs Assessment 2024 - Client Responses

Schuylkill Community Action conducted a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment utilizing surveys, focus groups, and public data sources to identify priority needs in the community. Survey information was collected from agency clients, human service providers, and the general public. The following section provides an analysis of the results from clients of Schuylkill Community Action.

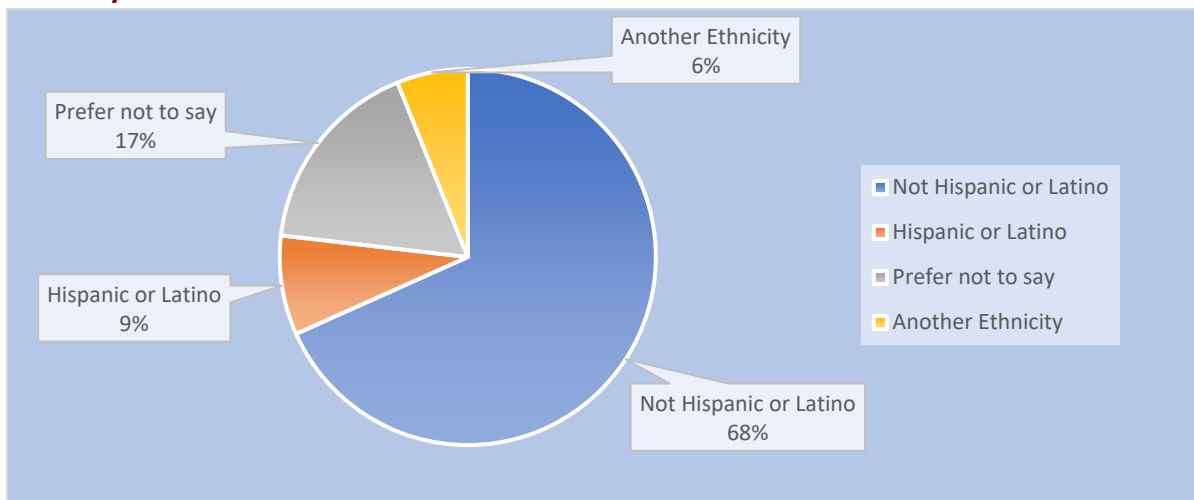
Demographics

Demographic breakdown of Schuylkill Community Action clients that participated in the Community Needs Assessment Survey is listed below. Demographics collected include race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, household income, and household size.

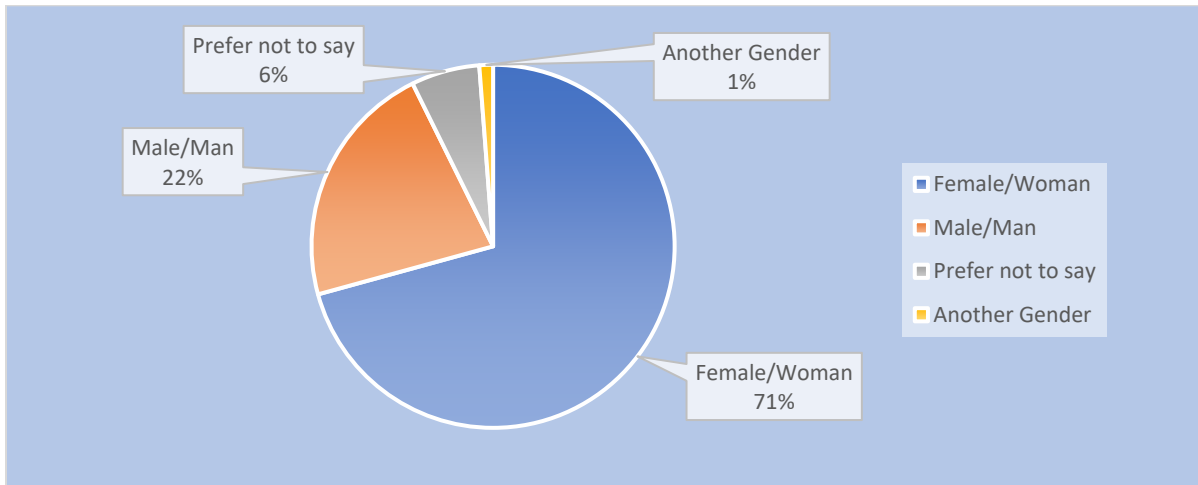
Race



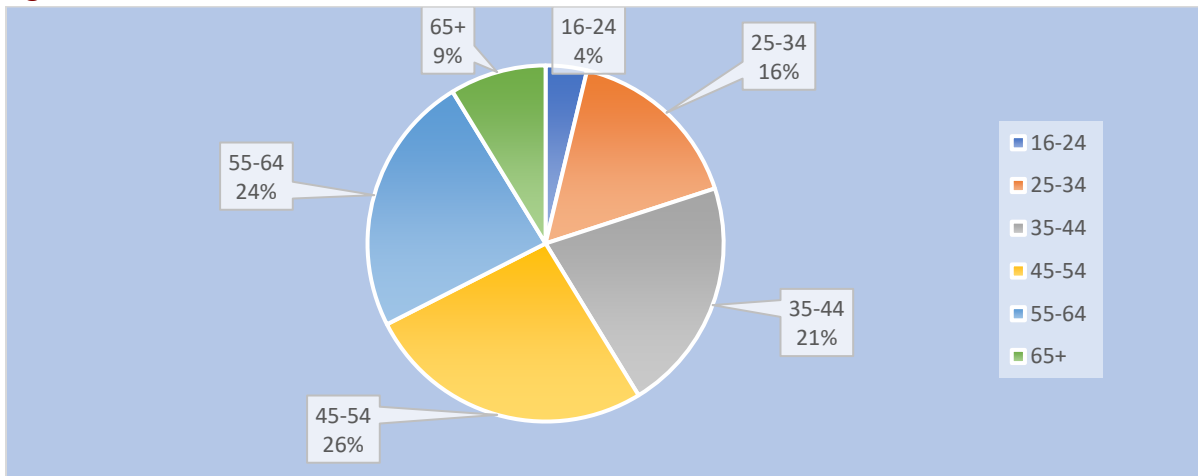
Ethnicity



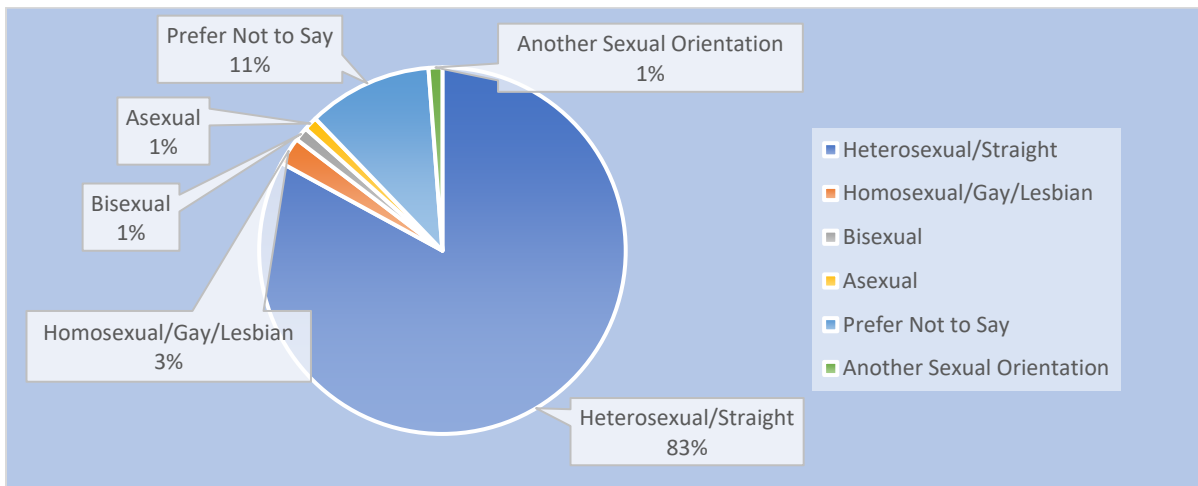
Gender



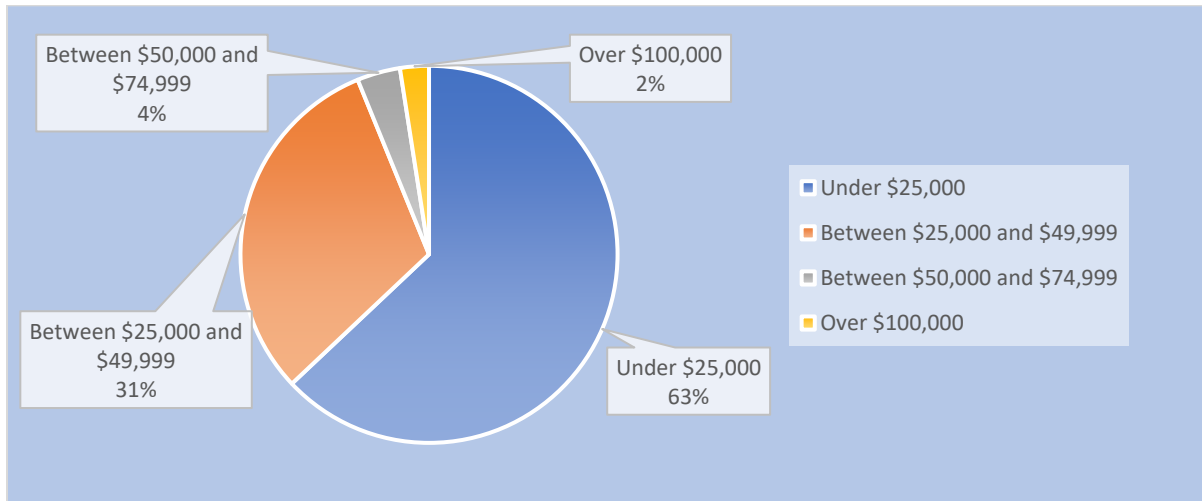
Age



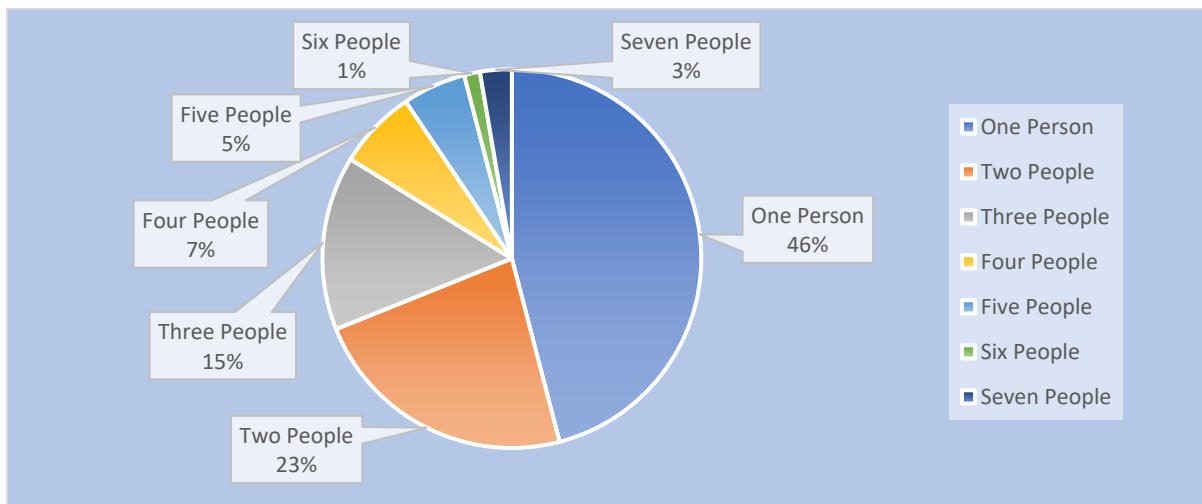
Sexual Orientation



Household Income

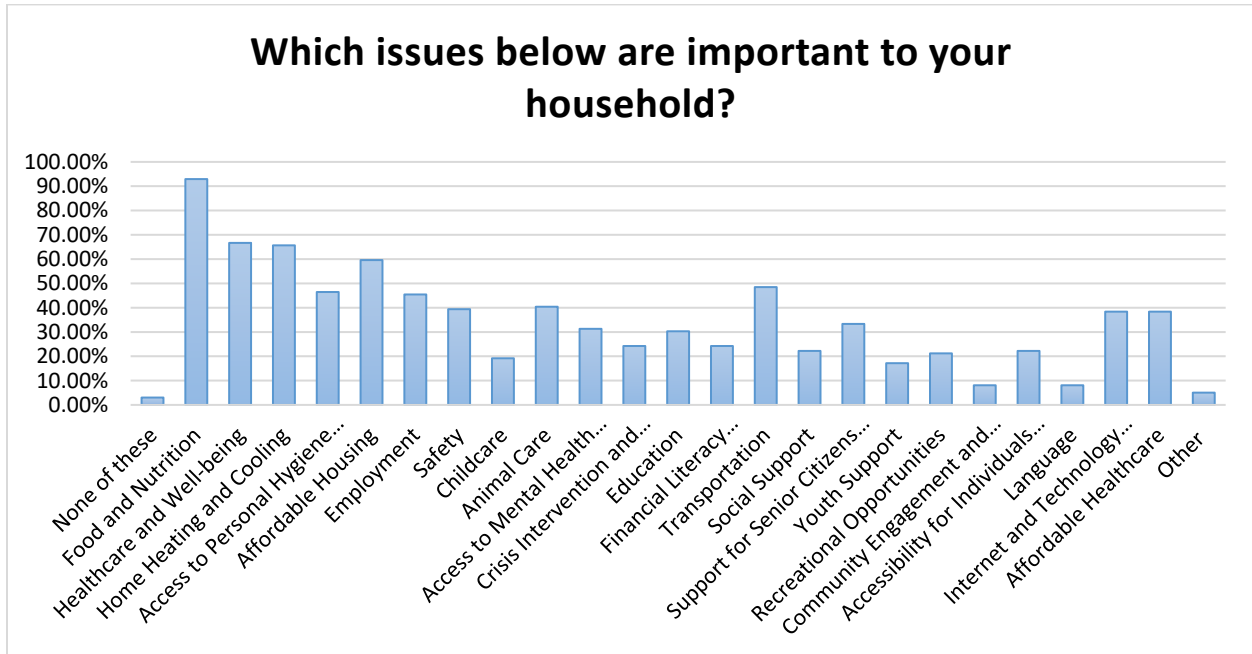


Household Size



Community Needs Assessment Survey Results

The survey received responses from 99 participants, highlighting a range of concerns and needs. Nearly 93% of participants cited Food and Nutrition as an issue of importance to their household. This was followed closely by Healthcare and Well-being (67%) and Home Heating and Cooling (66%). A full breakdown of important issues is highlighted in the graph below:



Survey participants were then asked to identify the top four issues that were important to their household. Responses were scored on a priority ranking scale, where the top issue received 4 points, the second received 3 points, the third received 2 points, and the fourth received 1 point. This analysis identified the following as the top five most important issues for the households:

1. **Food and Nutrition**
2. **Affordable Housing**
3. **Healthcare and Well-being**
4. **Home Heating and Cooling**
5. **Employment**

Employment

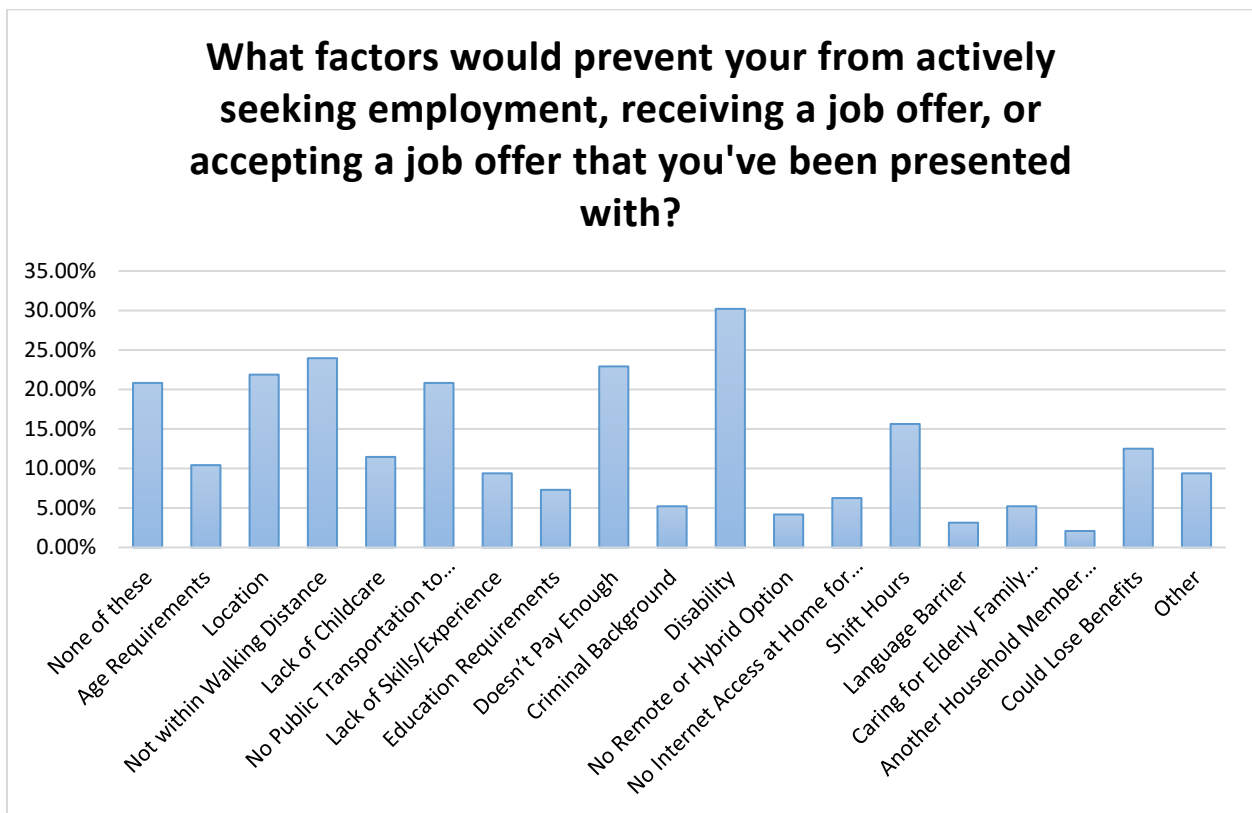
The next section of the 2024 Community Needs Assessment focused on employment. Nearly 40% of participants reported being employed, while the same percentage indicated they are unemployed. Additionally, 21% of participants said they are retired.

The survey also explored factors that could prevent individuals from seeking or accepting job offers. The most significant barriers identified were:

1. **Disability:** 30% of participants cited disability as a primary reason for not pursuing or accepting employment opportunities.

2. **Not Within Walking Distance:** 24% of participants indicated that job location not being within walking distance was a significant obstacle, making it difficult to accept employment.
 3. **Doesn't Pay Enough:** 23% of participants cited inadequate pay as a primary reason for not pursuing or accepting employment opportunities.
 4. **Location:** 22% of participants indicated that job location was a significant obstacle, making it difficult to accept employment.
 5. **No Public Transportation to Location:** 21% of participants reported that a lack of public transportation to employer locations would make it difficult to accept employment. (tied)
- None of These:** 21% of participants answered that none of the options provided would prevent them from pursuing or accepting employment suggesting there may be other obstacles not mentioned in the survey. (tied)

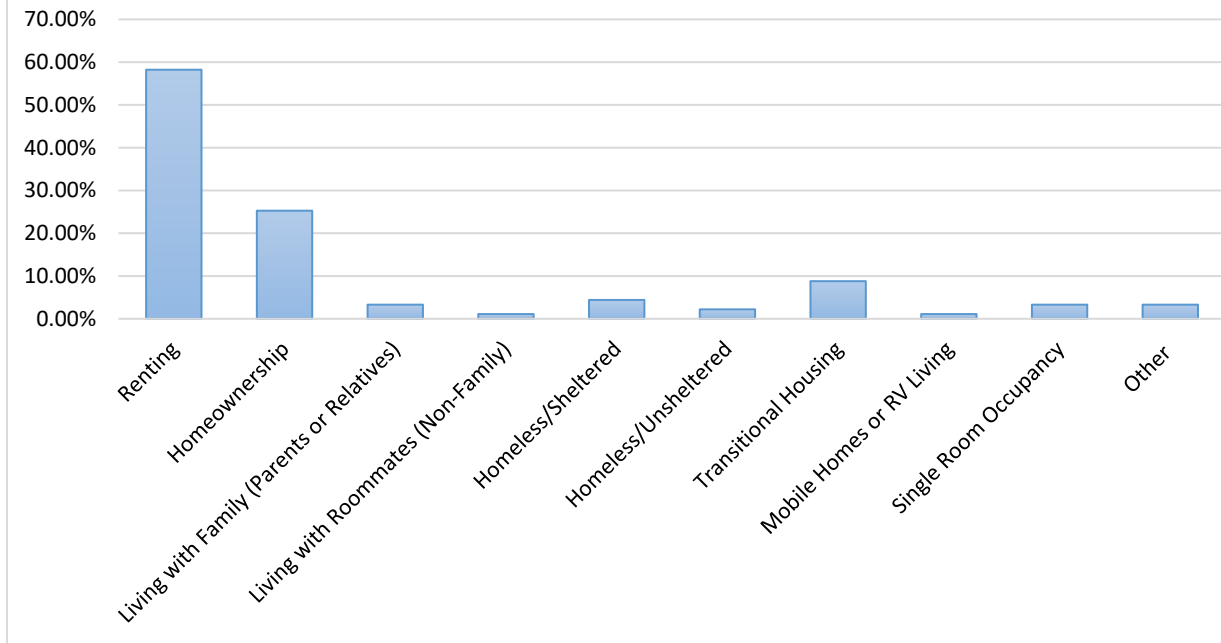
The table below represents the different barriers to employment identified by survey participants:



Housing

Survey participants were asked questions regarding housing. The first question asked participants about their current living arrangements. Over 58% of participants identified they are currently living in rental properties. 25% of participants identified homeownership as their current living situation. Nearly 9% identified they are currently living in transitional housing. A breakdown of their responses is below:

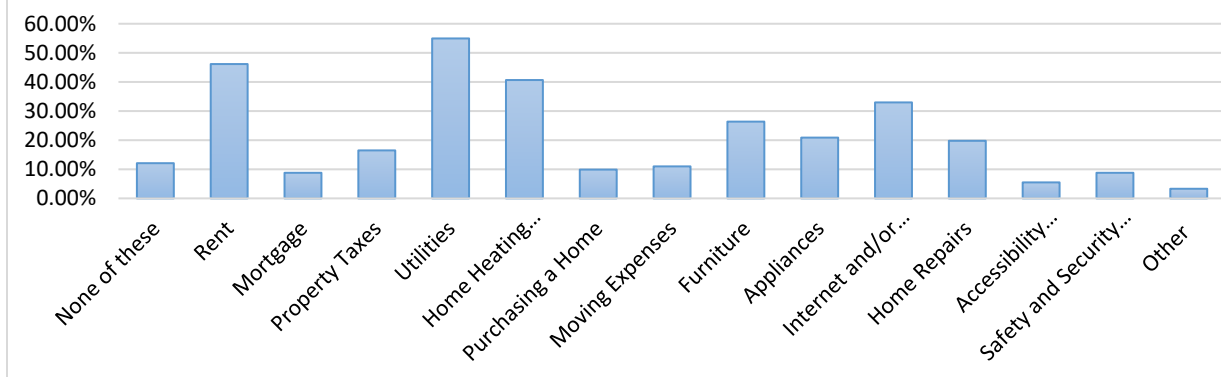
What is your current living situation?



91% of participants surveyed responded that they felt safe in their current living situation with the remaining 9% stating they felt unsafe. Those that felt unsafe used open-ended responses to highlight some actions that would make them feel safer. Actions mentioned include ensuring affordable rent, increasing availability of affordable homes, more living space, living in single apartments or single-level homes with minimal neighbors, continued rental assistance, securing doors with deadbolts and installing security cameras, maintaining smoke-free and fragrance-free environments, reducing rent for solo living, addressing domestic violence, and providing safe parking.

Survey participants were then questioned about housing needs that their households have struggled to afford financially. The majority faced some sort of financial burden, with nearly 56% struggling with utilities, over 46% with rent, and 41% with home heating and/or cooling.

Which of the following housing needs has your household faced and struggled to afford financially?



Survey participants were then asked to identify the top three needs that are most difficult to afford for their household. Responses were scored on a priority ranking scale, where the top need received 3 points, the second received 2 points, and the third received 1 point. The top five challenges are ranked below:

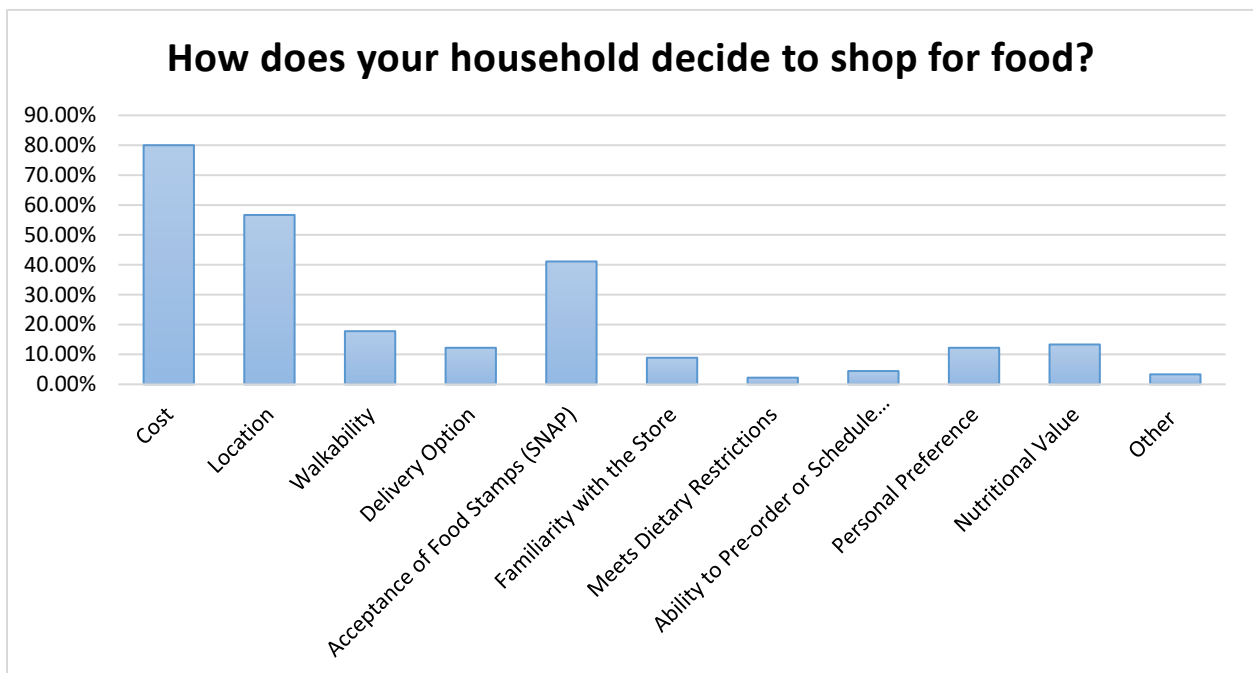
1. **Rent**
2. **Utilities**
3. **Home Heating and/or Cooling**
4. **Furniture**
5. **Internet and/or Phone**

To close out the housing section of the survey, participants were asked about reliable internet access in their homes. 68% reported having reliable internet access. Over 16% reported they do not have internet, with a little over 15% having internet access that is unreliable. These findings underscore that while a majority enjoy consistent connectivity, a notable minority experience intermittent or no access to the internet, highlighting potential disparities in digital infrastructure and access across surveyed households.

Food and Nutrition

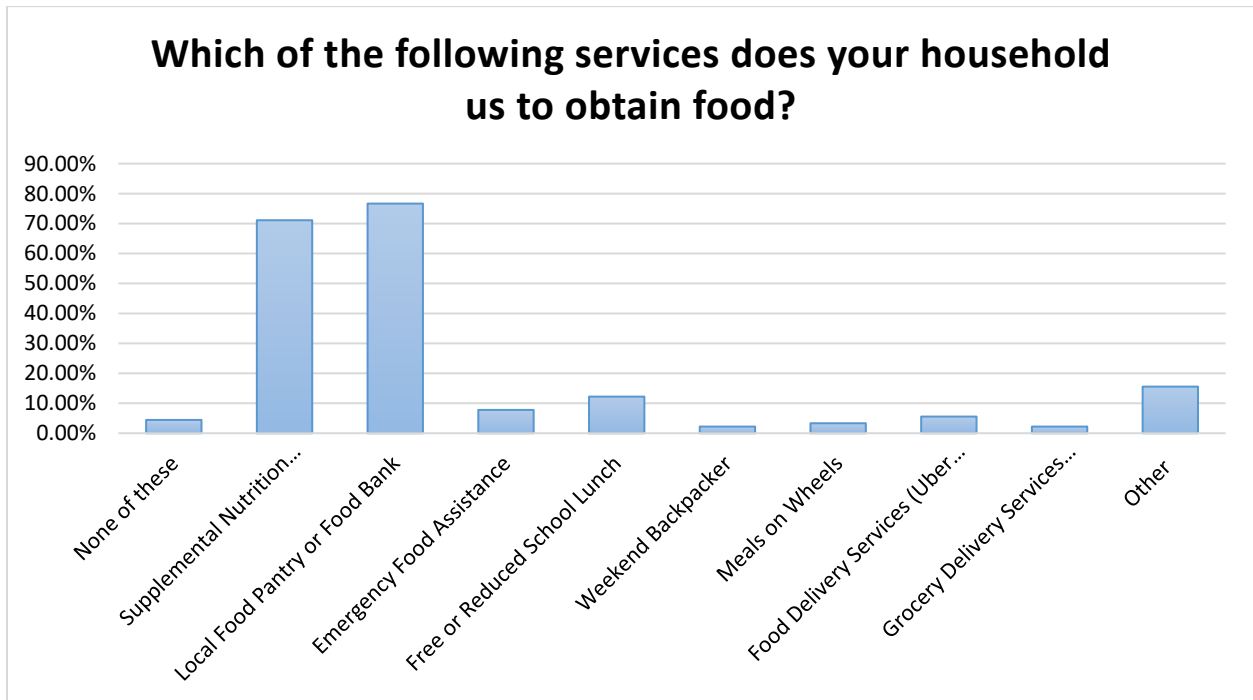
The next section of the survey asked questions around food and nutrition. 81% of participants surveyed reported having enough food to feed their entire household on a daily basis. 19% responded that they did not have enough food. Food insecurity can cause detrimental effects to an individual and families health and well-being.

Participants were surveyed on how their household decides where to shop for food. Response information showed that cost (80%), location (57%), and acceptance of food stamps (SNAP) (41%) were the top three reasons. A complete breakdown of the responses is summarized in the below graph:



The next question posed regarding food was in reference to companion animals. Nearly 47% of participants felt they had enough food to provide to their animals on a daily basis, while 17% of participants stated they do not have enough food to provide. The remaining 36% of participants responded they did not have a companion animal in their home.

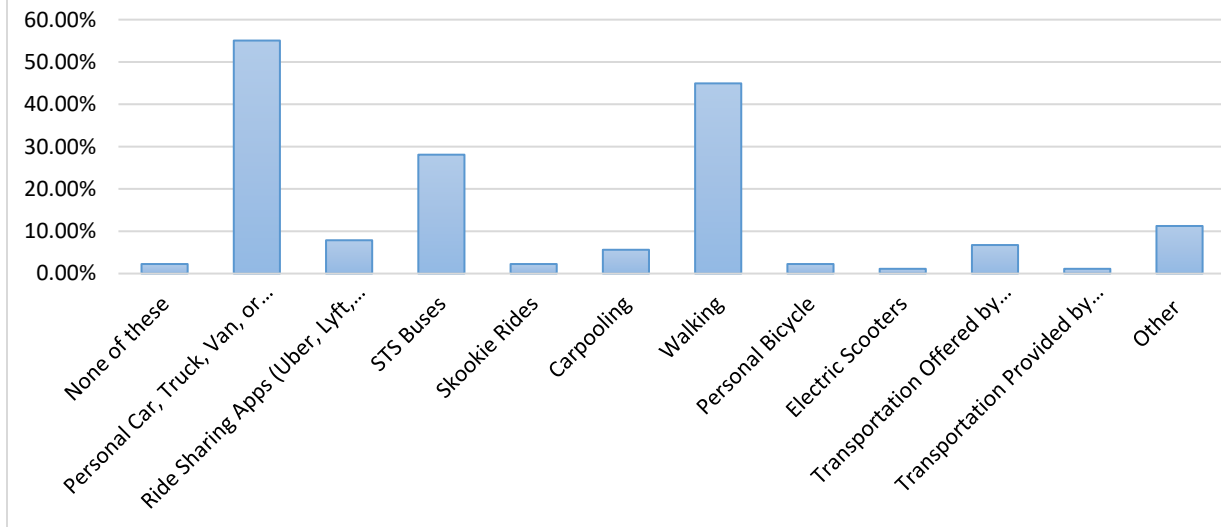
The final question inquired about food services that participant households use to obtain food. Nearly 77% reported using local food pantries or food banks and 71% reported participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).



Transportation

Survey participants were questioned about the different types of transportation utilized to get to work, school, or take care of important tasks. A slight majority of participants, 55%, utilize their own personal vehicle to meet their transportation needs. Walking was cited as the second most popular mode of transportation at 45% followed by STS Buses at 28%.

Please CHECK ALL of the transportation types listed below that members of your household currently use to get to work, school, or take care of important tasks.



Participants were asked about their household's experience with public transportation. While 39% did not need or actively use public transportation, the majority (61%) reported some level of reliance. Among those who considered using public transportation, 54% felt it was inadequate for their household's needs.

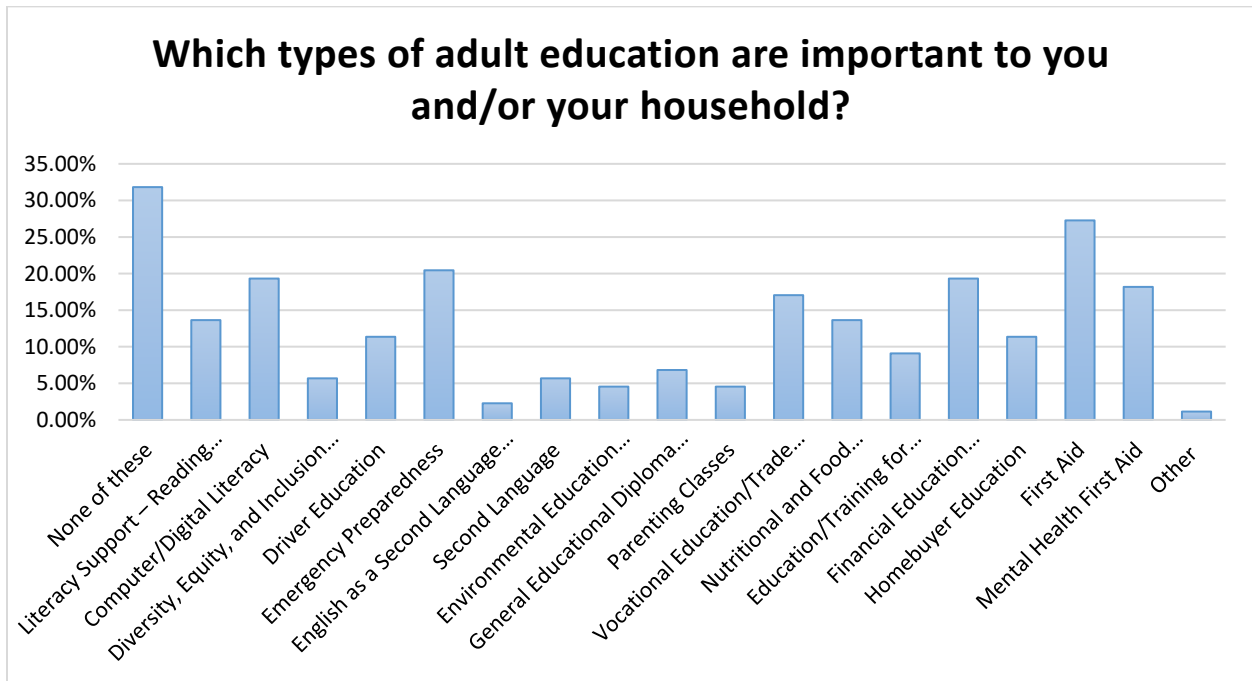
Survey participants highlighted several aspects of public transportation that do not meet their needs through open-ended responses. Key issues included:

1. **Limited Operating Hours:** Some participants noted that public transportation does not run all day, particularly impacting those with overnight jobs.
2. **Financial Accessibility:** Concerns were raised about the affordability of fares, with participants mentioning they couldn't afford transportation costs and relied on friends or family for rides.
3. **Geographical Coverage:** Criticisms centered around gaps in service, especially in areas like Tremont and other locations without bus routes to reach employment centers.
4. **Service Availability:** Participants mentioned that buses do not cover all of Schuylkill County, limiting access to necessary locations and services.
5. **Information and Accessibility:** Challenges included unclear bus schedules, difficulty finding routes or schedules, and a lack of awareness about the transportation options available.
6. **Wheelchair Accessibility:** Concerns were expressed about accessibility for individuals using wheelchairs or scooters, with some reporting issues or denial of service from STS (Shared Transportation Services).
7. **Weekend Service:** Participants noted a lack of weekend service, which limits mobility options during off-peak hours.

These insights highlight the need for improvements in operating hours, financial accessibility, geographical coverage, service availability, information and accessibility, wheelchair accessibility, and weekend service to better meet the needs of the community.

Education

Participants were asked to identify the types of adult education that are important to themselves and their households. A breakdown of adult education needs is summarized in the graph below:



Nearly 32% of participants stated they did not have a need for any of the types of education. Others identified a variety of adult education topics that are important to them. The top three priority adult education topics are:

1. **First Aid**
2. **Emergency Preparedness**
3. **Computer/Digital Literacy**

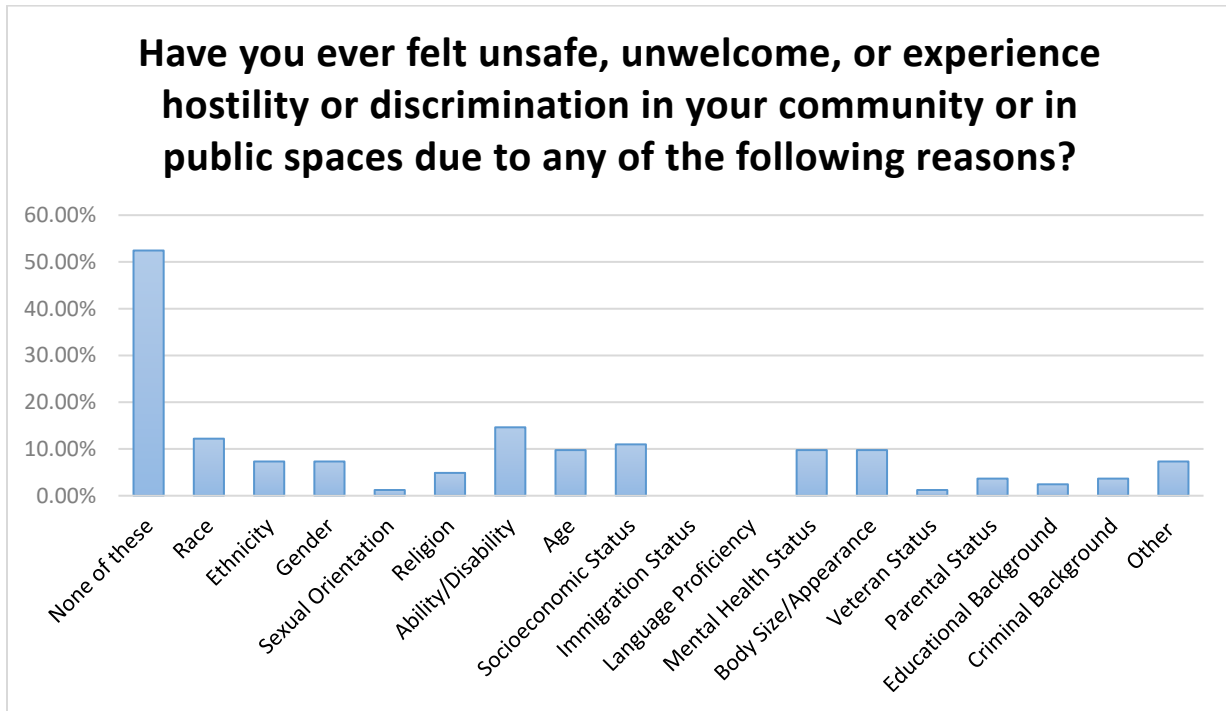
Thoughts and Experiences

Participants were questioned on whether they felt unsafe, unwelcomed or experienced hostility or discrimination in their community. A significant portion of participants (52%) reported that they have never felt unsafe, unwelcome, or experienced hostility or discrimination in their community or public spaces due to any of the factors listed. This indicates a slight majority perception of overall safety and acceptance within the community.

Among those who reported feeling unsafe or experiencing discrimination, the most commonly cited factors include ability/disability (15%), race (12%), socioeconomic status (11%), age (10%), mental health status (10%), and body size/appearance (10%). Other notable responses include ethnicity (7%) and gender (7%). These findings highlight various dimensions of diversity and identity that can impact

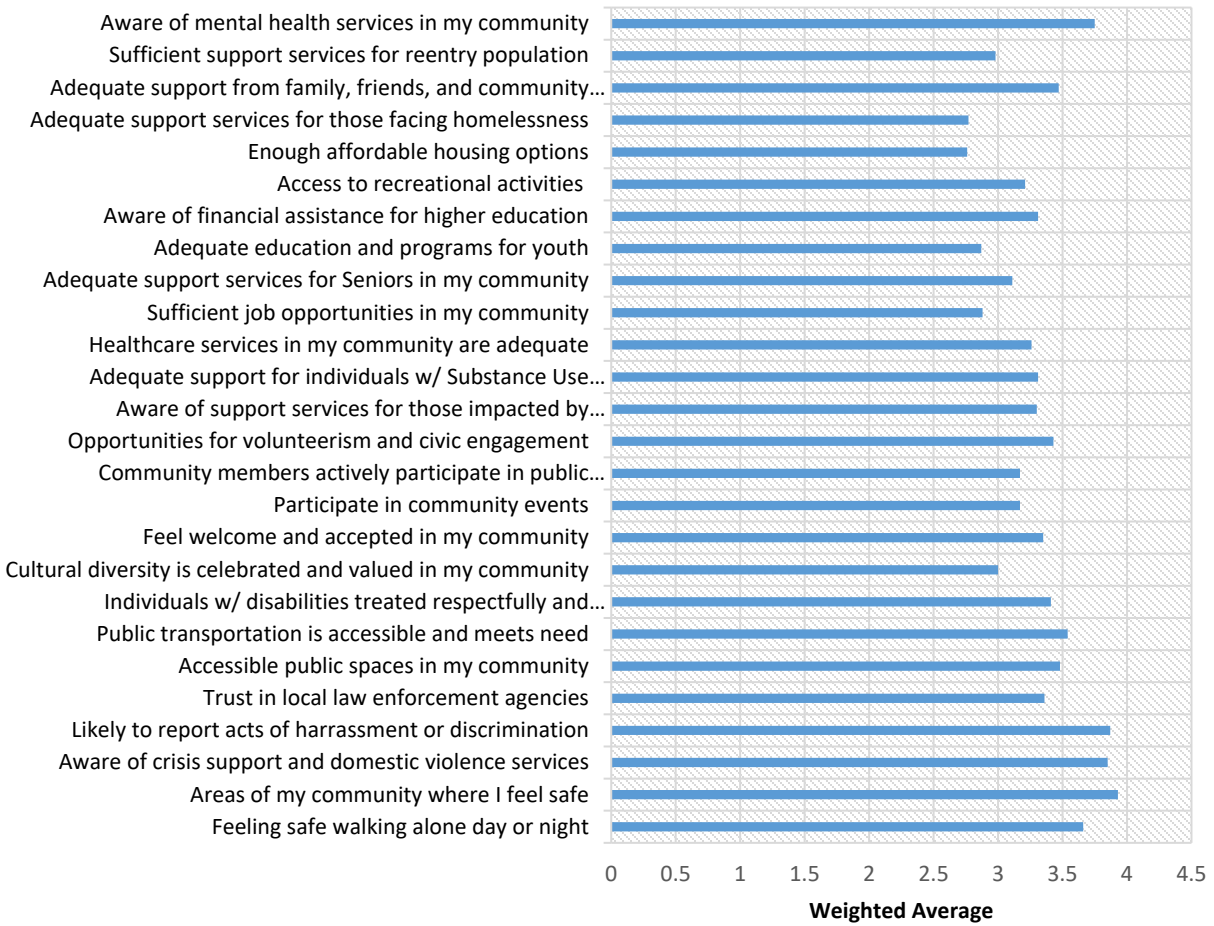
individuals' experiences within the community, underscoring the need for expanded Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) education in our community.

A breakdown of the responses is below:



Participants were then asked to share their thoughts and experiences regarding a variety of issues in their community. Participants replied on a scale of 1-5 with a score of 5 indicating strong agreement. Any score under 3 demonstrates a disagreement to the statement. Their responses are highlighted in the following chart:

Please rate each of the following statements based on your level of agreement or disagreement. Choose the option that best reflects your thoughts and experiences.



The higher the score, the more agreement that the opportunities, services, or actions are adequate in our community. Below are the top five areas of strength in our community according to surveyed clients of Schuylkill Community Action:

1. **There are areas in the community where people feel safer or more welcome than others**
2. **Individuals who experience or witness harassment or discrimination in the community are likely to report it to authorities or organizations**
3. **Awareness of crisis support services for victims of crime, domestic violence, sexual assault, etc., in the community**
4. **Awareness of mental health services available in the community**
5. **Feeling safe walking alone in their neighborhood during the day and night**

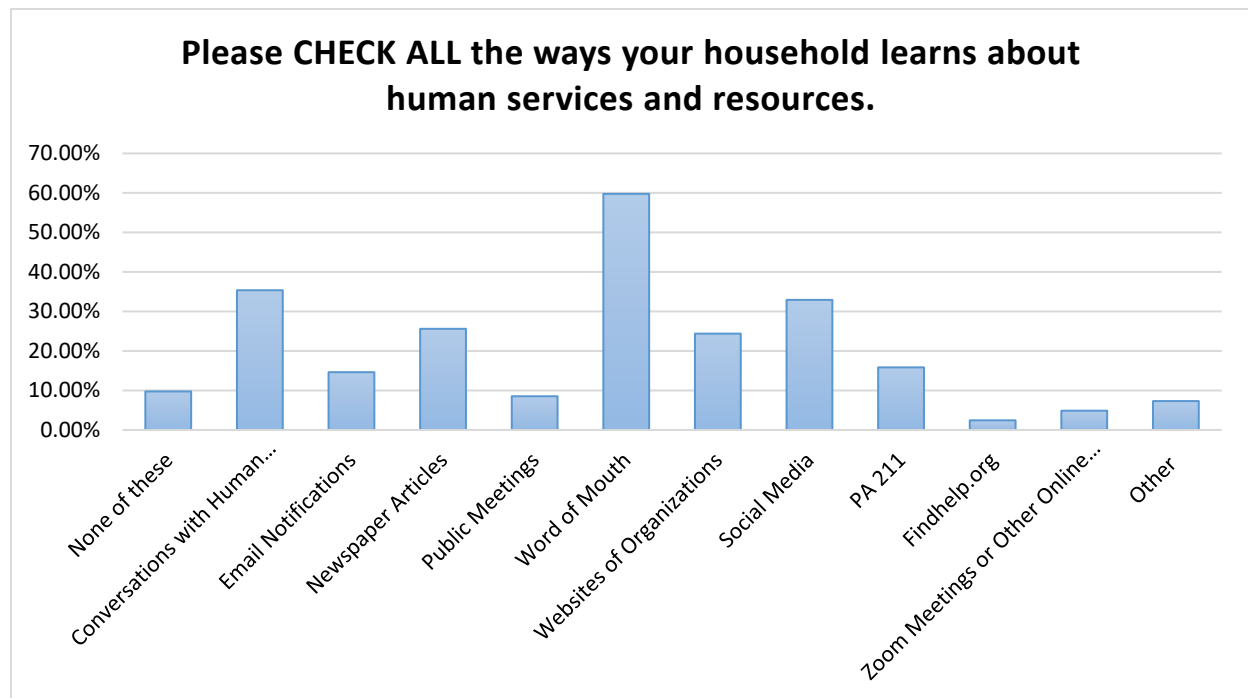
Conversely, the topics scoring the lowest represent areas of opportunity for improvement in the community. Below are the top five opportunities for improvement according to surveyed clients of Schuylkill Community Action:

1. **Feeling that there are enough affordable housing options in the community**
2. **Adequate support services for individuals facing homelessness and other emergency situations**
3. **Adequate educational resources and programs for youth in the community**
4. **Sufficient job opportunities available in the community**
5. **Sufficient support services available for individuals reintegrating into the community after being incarcerated**

The survey results emphasize the importance of addressing various factors that contribute to feelings of insecurity and discrimination in our community. While there are notable strengths in areas such as awareness of crisis support services and feelings of safety, there are significant opportunities for improvement, particularly in affordable housing, support for the homeless, educational programs for youth, job opportunities, and reintegration services. Addressing these areas will require a concerted effort to enhance DEI education and implement targeted support services to foster a more inclusive and supportive community for all residents.

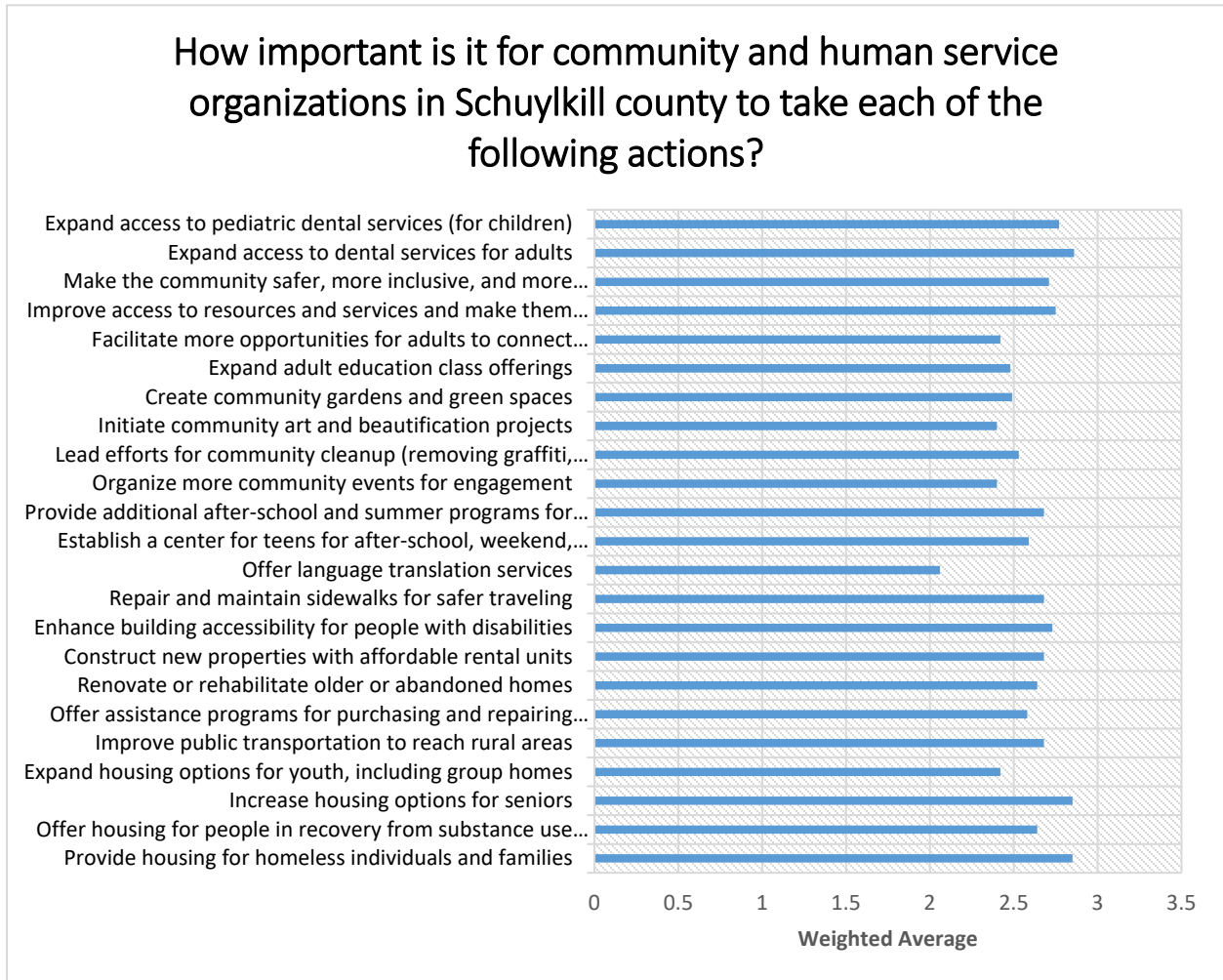
Awareness of Human Services

Participants were asked to indicate how their households learn about human services and resources. The top three methods identified were word of mouth (58%), conversations with human service staff (35%), and social media (33%). These insights highlight the importance of leveraging various communication channels to effectively reach and inform community members about available human services and resources. A complete breakdown of the responses is summarized in the below graph:



Action Steps

Surveyed participants were then questioned on how important it is for community and human service organizations to take specific actions. Each of the identified action steps received a weighted score above 2.0, indicating that they were all considered at least "somewhat important." Providing housing for homeless, expanding access to pediatric dental services, offering housing in sober living environments for people in recovery, improving public transportation, and renovating older or abandoned homes had the highest weighted averages noting their priority of importance.



Participants were then asked to identify their top three priority action steps to be taken from the aforementioned actions. Responses were scored on a priority ranking scale, where the top action received 3 points, the second received 2 points, and the third received 1 point. The following are the top five priority action steps to be addressed, ranked in order of priority:

- 1. Provide housing for homeless individuals and families (tied)**
Offer assistance programs for purchasing and repairing vehicles (tied)
- 2. Increase housing options for seniors**
- 3. Improve public transportation to reach rural areas**
- 4. Construct new properties with affordable rental units**

5. Renovate or rehabilitate older or abandoned homes

The prioritization of these action steps underscores a strong commitment to addressing critical housing needs and enhancing community safety and inclusivity. By focusing on these top priorities—such as providing housing for homeless individuals and families, offering assistance programs for purchasing and repairing vehicles, expanding housing options for seniors, and improving transportation to rural areas—the agency aims to significantly improve community well-being. These efforts are crucial steps toward creating a more supportive, welcoming, and well-served community for all residents.

Additional Thoughts

Participants were asked to provide open-ended responses on any additional thoughts or concerns they have about the future needs or priorities of their community. A summary of those responses is outlined below:

1. Employment and Job Support:

- Need for more assistance in finding jobs, especially for individuals with criminal backgrounds
- Need for more vocational training programs and opportunities for youth and young adults

2. Housing:

- Concerns about the lack of affordable housing options, particularly for seniors and disabled individuals
- Need for more housing availability and better maintenance of existing properties.

3. Community Services and Resources:

- Issues with limited community services and resources, particularly in smaller areas
- Demand for more social and community resources outside of larger towns like Pottsville and Tamaqua
- Requests for English as a Second Language (ESL) and General Educational Development (GED) classes to be more accessible and better managed

4. Safety and Law Enforcement:

- Expressed dissatisfaction with police responsiveness and perceived gaps in service delivery

5. Social Equity and Inclusion:

- Concerns about discrimination at local food pantries and inequitable distribution of resources
- Emphasis on the importance of creating a more inclusive community that supports all residents, regardless of background or ethnicity

6. Environmental and Community Beautification:

- Issues related to environmental concerns, such as trash accumulation and lack of maintenance in buildings
- Suggestions to repurpose empty buildings for efficiency apartments or childcare facilities

7. Cultural and Community Events:

- Calls for more community events that cater to diverse populations and fewer events focused solely on alcohol-related activities

8. Educational Opportunities:

- Advocacy for increased access to educational resources and programs, including support for youth education and skill development

9. Rent Control and Housing Affordability:

- Concerns about the high cost of rent and a lack of rent control policies, particularly in areas benefiting from government assistance programs like Section 8

These responses from the Community Needs Assessment reveal significant needs and priorities for Schuylkill County's future. Key concerns include enhancing employment support and vocational training, improving affordable housing options, expanding community services in smaller areas, addressing safety issues, promoting social equity and inclusion, tackling environmental challenges, diversifying cultural events, enhancing educational opportunities, and implementing rent control policies. These findings underscore the community's call for comprehensive actions to create a more equitable, supportive, and vibrant environment.

Conclusion

The Community Needs Assessment conducted by Schuylkill Community Action reveals a comprehensive overview of the current state of human services within Schuylkill County. The insights gained from the survey responses of 99 clients of Schuylkill Community Action offer a critical perspective on the community's strengths, challenges, and priority needs.

Key Findings

- **Top Community Concerns:**
 - Food and Nutrition
 - Affordable Housing
 - Healthcare and Well-being
 - Home Heating and Cooling
 - Employment
- **Employment Barriers:**
 - Disability
 - Reliance on walking
 - Inadequate pay
 - Job location
 - Insufficient public transportation
- **Housing Challenges:**
 - Rent
 - Utilities
 - Home Heating and/or Cooling
 - Furniture
 - Internet and/or Phone
- **Food Security:**
 - The majority have sufficient food daily, but a notable minority experience food insecurity.

- Cost, location, and acceptance of food stamps (SNAP) are the primary factors in choosing where to shop for food.
- **Transportation Issues:**
 - High reliance on walking as a primary mode of transportation, given the rural nature of Schuylkill County.
 - Significant concerns about the adequacy of public transportation, including limited operating hours and geographical coverage.
- **Educational Needs:**
 - First Aid
 - Emergency Preparedness
 - Computer/Digital Literacy
- **Community Safety and Inclusivity:**
 - Many feel safe and supported, yet concerns remain about discrimination, particularly based on ability/disability, race, and socioeconomic status.
 - Areas of opportunity include improving affordable housing, support for the homeless, educational programs for youth, job opportunities, and reintegration services.

Priority Action Steps

The community has identified the following top priorities for action:

1. Provide housing for homeless individuals and families (tied)
Offer assistance programs for purchasing and repairing vehicles (tied)
2. Increase housing options for seniors
3. Improve public transportation to reach rural areas
4. Construct new properties with affordable rental units
5. Renovate or rehabilitate older or abandoned homes

The findings from the Community Needs Assessment conducted by Schuylkill Community Action highlight essential areas of concern that must be addressed to enhance the well-being of Schuylkill County residents. By prioritizing housing, safety, inclusivity, and access to essential services, Schuylkill Community Action can make significant strides in meeting the needs of its residents.

Focusing on these priorities and fostering collaboration among stakeholders will allow Schuylkill Community Action to effectively respond to the identified needs. This approach requires targeted resource allocation and a commitment to advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives throughout the community. Addressing these challenges will not only improve the quality of life but also create a more supportive, engaged, and well-served community for all residents of Schuylkill County.

By concentrating on these key areas and implementing the identified action steps, Schuylkill Community Action can ensure a more robust and inclusive response to the community's needs, fostering a healthier and more resilient Schuylkill County.