Schuylkill Community Action (SCA)
Executive Summary
2024 Community Needs Assessment

Completed: August 2024
206 N. 2nd St. Pottsville, PA 17901
Telephone: 570.622.1995
Websites: www.schuylkillcommunityaction.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Report

Schuylkill Community Action (SCA), a private non-profit Community Action Agency dedicated to serving low-income individuals, conducted the 2024 Community Needs Assessment (CNA) as part of its strategic planning efforts. The primary goal of this assessment is to identify and report on the most pressing community needs in Schuylkill County. Understanding these needs is crucial for effectively coordinating, planning, and delivering a wide range of social programs and services.

Community Input

A key component of a successful community needs assessment is the inclusion of input from the local community. To gather this valuable input, SCA distributed surveys to local human service providers, agency stakeholders and staff, agency clients, and other residents of Schuylkill County. The aim of this process is to identify the most significant service gaps within the county. The insights gained from this assessment will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of existing SCA programs, make necessary adjustments, and advocate for or develop new programs to address these identified needs.
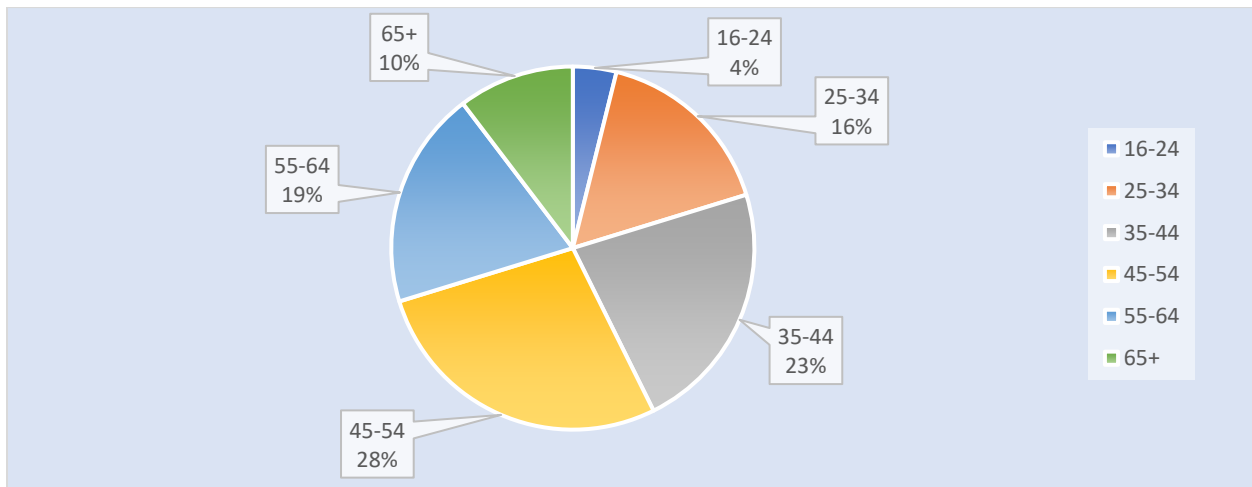
1. Human Service Provider Survey - Human service providers have extensive knowledge about the need for and availability of programs that address the needs of low-income and vulnerable populations. The following targeted groups were included in the survey:
   - **Schuylkill County HIVE** - The Schuylkill County HIVE is a collaborative initiative focused on resource sharing and providing solution-driven responses to improve outcomes for vulnerable residents. Launched in 2024 with partners including Schuylkill United Way, Schuylkill County Vision, Tamaqua Area Community Partnership, and SCA, the HIVE has engaged over 40 human service providers. During the initial meeting in March 2024, SCA's Executive Director introduced the CNA and provided access to the survey. Survey links were subsequently emailed to attendees.
   - **Homeless Liaisons** - Homeless Liaisons and school social workers from each Schuylkill County School District received an email with a link to the survey. The contact list was provided by Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29's McKinney-Vento Outreach Coordinator.
   - **Social Service Agencies** - SCA's Director of Planning compiled a list of social service organizations in Schuylkill County. Providers from this list were emailed a link to the survey and invited to participate online.

- **Churches** - SCA's Director of Planning also compiled a list of churches and councils of churches in Schuylkill County. These churches were emailed the survey link and invited to participate online.
- **Stakeholders/Agency Personnel** - Stakeholders and agency personnel play a critical role in determining project priorities and local funding distribution. Given their experience with low-income populations and support of SCA's mission, both the Board of Directors and agency staff were included in the needs assessment.
  - **SCA Board of Directors** - At the April board meeting, board members were provided with the provider survey, which they could complete either on paper or online. They were also given a list of open-ended questions used in staff focus groups to contribute their insights on community needs and priorities.
  - **SCA Staff** - Agency staff, who work closely with low-income residents of Schuylkill County, participated in several small focus groups. These sessions allowed staff to share their perspectives on community needs and propose ideas for addressing those needs. Staff members were also asked to complete the provider survey, with the option to submit it online or on paper. Their input was crucial in identifying high-priority community needs and informing strategies to help households achieve self-sufficiency.

2. <u>SCA Customer/Client Survey</u> - To accurately assess community needs and ensure that our programs and services effectively address the challenges faced by low-income residents, it was crucial to gather direct input from SCA clients. By including clients in the survey process, we gained valuable insights into their experiences, needs, and perspectives, helping us better tailor our efforts to support them.
   - **SCA Office Clients -** Surveys were provided to clients accessing services at our 225 N. Centre St. and Outreach office locations. Printed surveys were available in both English and Spanish, with the option to complete them online.
   - **Schuylkill Food Network -** During the April and May 2024 food distributions, survey information was shared with pantry clients. CNA information cards featuring a QR code and web URL were distributed, offering the option to complete the survey online or request a paper copy. These cards were available in both English and Spanish.
   - **Bridge House Clients -** Residents of our Bridge House Transitional Shelter program were provided with paper surveys to complete.
   - **CTS Clients -** All clients with email addresses saved in CTS were sent an email with a link to the online survey.
   - **Survey Incentive -** Clients who completed the survey were entered into a drawing to win a $25 gift card as an incentive to encourage participation. Ten clients were selected to receive this award.

3. <u>General Public Survey</u> – Including the general public in the needs assessment was essential to ensure that the voices of all community members were heard, not just those who directly access our services. By gathering input from a broader audience, we could identify community-wide concerns and opportunities for improvement. This inclusive approach helped us gain a comprehensive understanding of the needs across Schuylkill County, allowing us to develop programs and initiatives that are more responsive and effective.
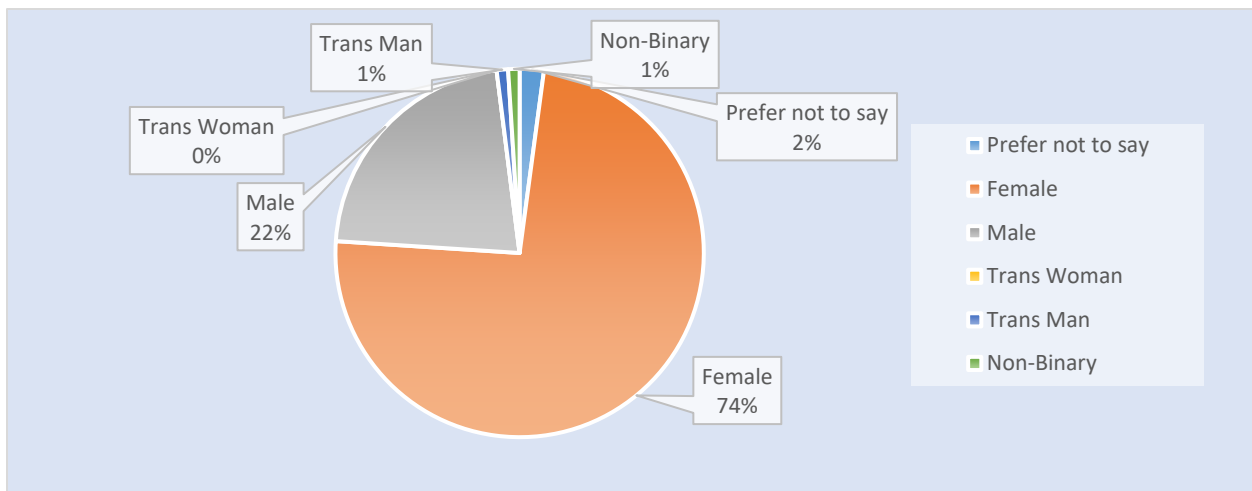
- **Email Outreach -** Emails containing a survey link were sent to individuals on our mailing list, including donors, participants in our golf outing raffle, and elected officials. This allowed us to gather input from a diverse group of people engaged with our organization and the community.
- **Social Media and Website -** The survey was advertised across our social media platforms and website to reach a wider audience. By leveraging these channels, we ensured that the general public had ample opportunity to participate in the needs assessment.
- **Quarterly Newsletter -** Information about the CNA, including a QR code linking to the survey, was published in our quarterly newsletter. This helped engage readers who are regularly informed about our programs and activities, encouraging them to contribute their insights to our needs assessment process.
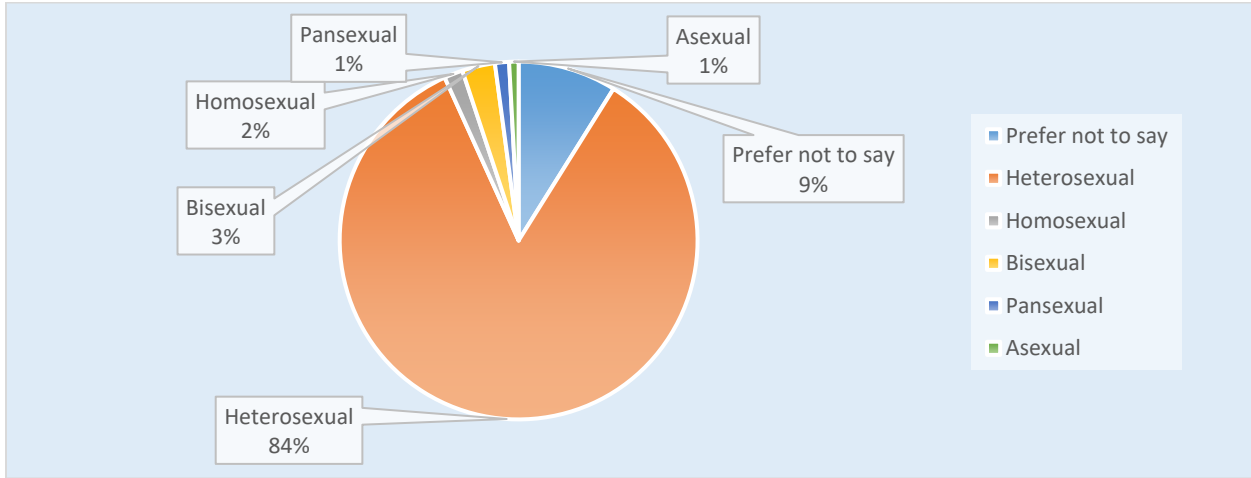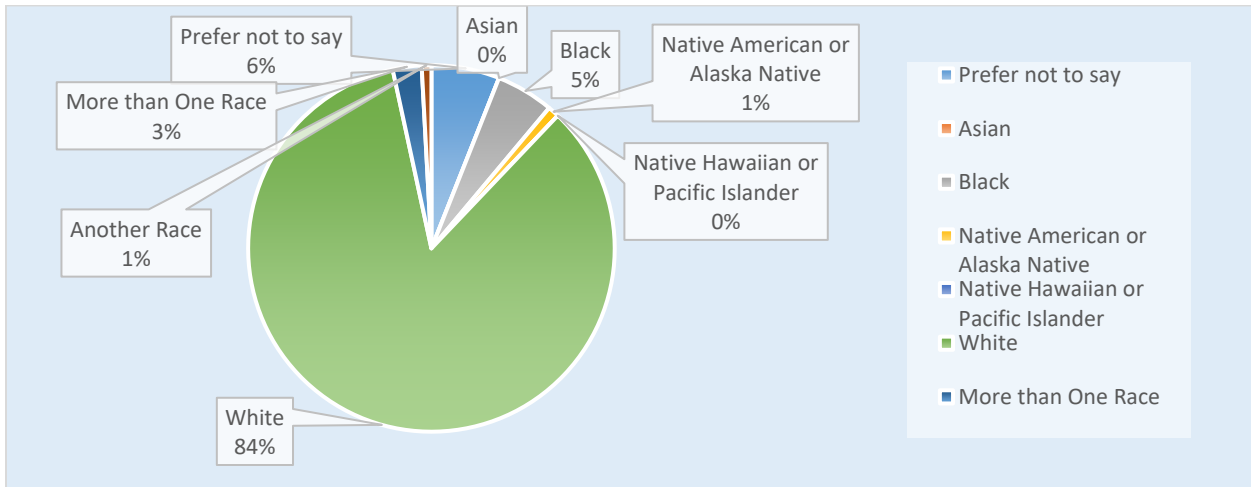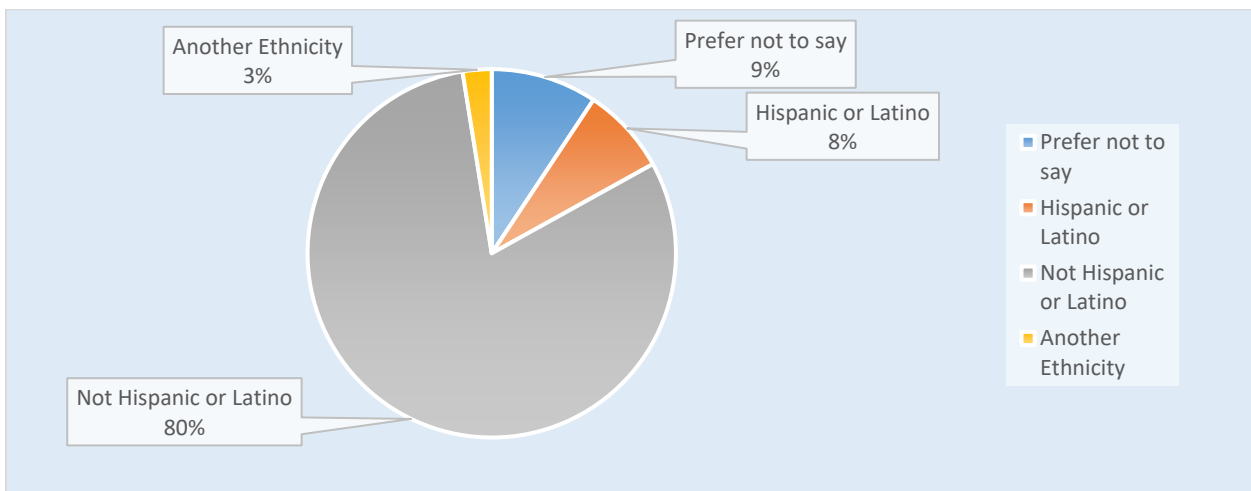
Survey Respondent Demographics

Age

Gender

2024 SCA Community Needs Assessment- Executive Summary

Sexual Orientation

Pansexual 1%
Asexual 1%
Homosexual 2%
Prefer not to say 9%
Bisexual 3%
Heterosexual 84%

Legend:
- Prefer not to say
- Heterosexual
- Homosexual
- Bisexual
- Pansexual
- Asexual

Race

Prefer not to say 6%
Asian 0%
Black 5%
Native American or Alaska Native 1%
More than One Race 3%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander 0%
Another Race 1%
White 84%

Legend:
- Prefer not to say
- Asian
- Black
- Native American or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- More than One Race

Ethnicity

Another Ethnicity 3%
Prefer not to say 9%
Hispanic or Latino 8%
Not Hispanic or Latino 80%

Legend:
- Prefer not to say
- Hispanic or Latino
- Not Hispanic or Latino
- Another Ethnicity

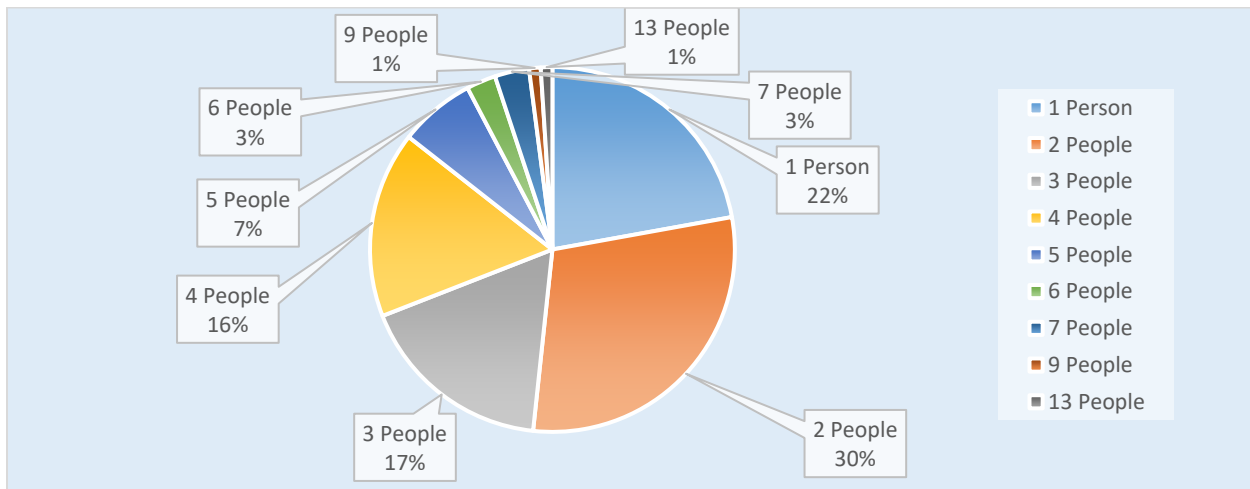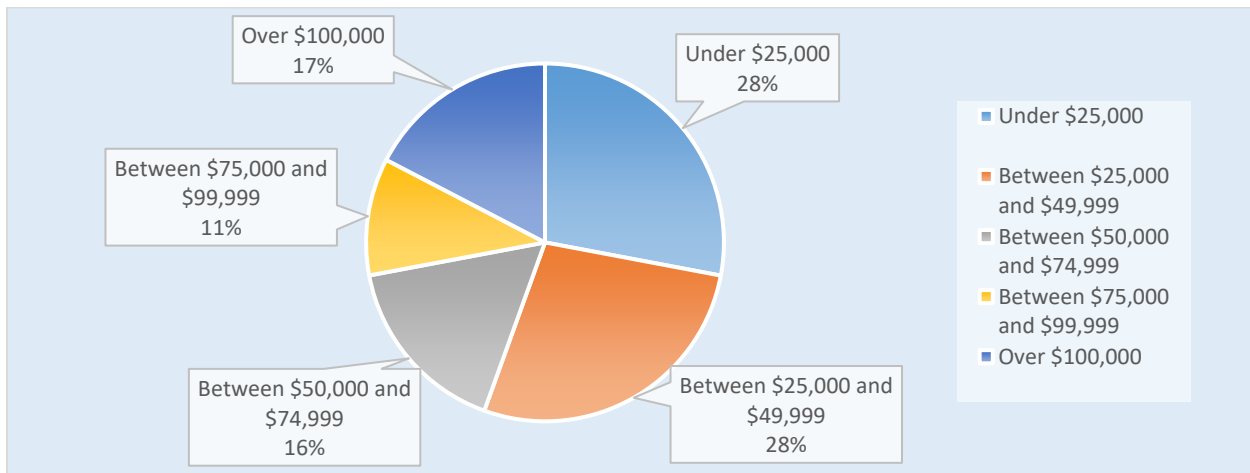2024 SCA Community Needs Assessment- Executive Summary
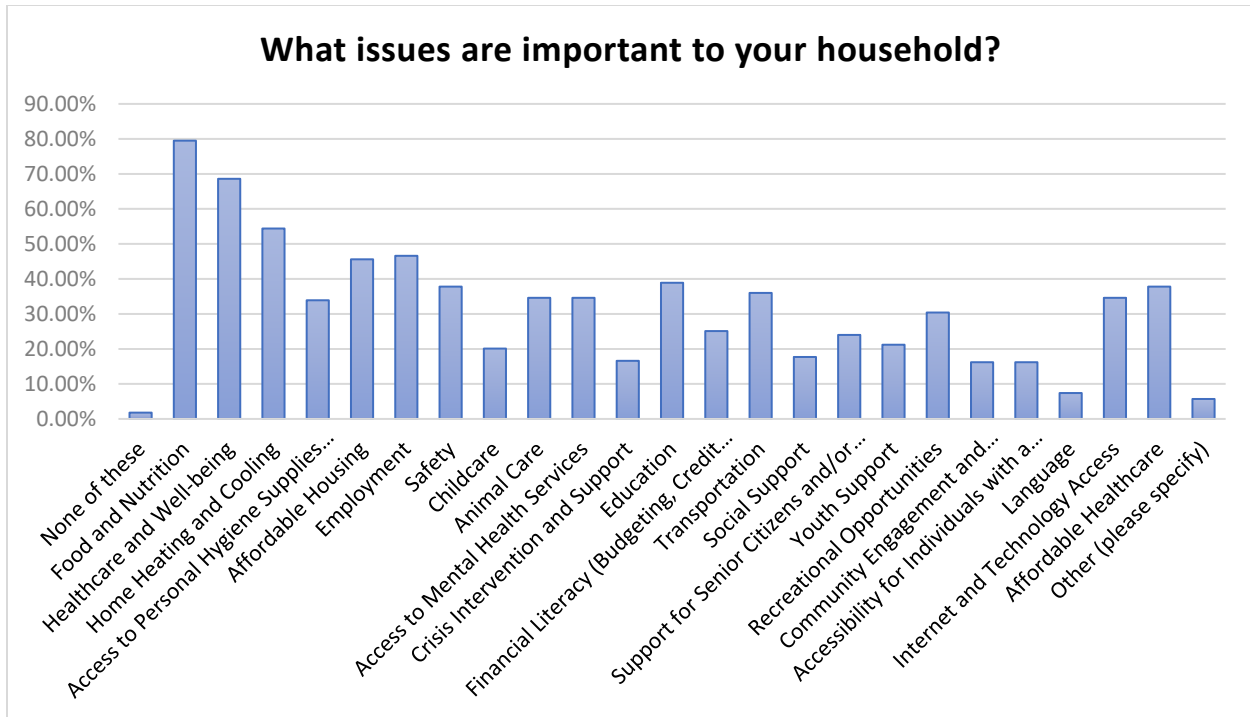
Household Size

Household Income

Community Needs Assessment Survey Results

Survey responses were received from 283 local individuals comprised of agency clients, human service providers, and the general public. Survey respondents were asked to identify issues that were important to their household. Participants were provided a robust list of issues and had the ability to identify other issues that were not listed. Over 79% of households felt food and nutrition were important to their household. This was followed closely by Healthcare and Well-Being (69%) and Home Heating and Cooling (54%). A complete breakdown of issues important to the survey respondents is reflected below.

What issues are important to your household?

Survey participants were asked to identify and rank their top four issues important to their household. Responses were scored on a priority ranking scale: 4 points for the top issue, 3 points for the second, 2 points for the third, and 1 point for the fourth. The total points for each issue were summed, and the top five issues with the highest total scores were ranked. The analysis identified the following as the top five most important issues for the surveyed households:

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

Employment

Participants were then asked questions regarding their employment status. Over 71% of households reported they were currently employed, while 19% disclosed they were not employed and 10% reported being retired.

The survey also explored factors that could prevent individuals from seeking or accepting job offers. Nearly 30% of survey participants reported no barriers. The top-five reported factors were:

1. **Does Not Pay Well Enough**
2. **Location of the Job**
3. **Shift Hours**
4. **Disability**
5. **No Public Transportation to Job Location**

2024 SCA Community Needs Assessment- Executive Summary

Housing

Survey participants were asked about their housing situation, safety, and affordability of housing-related expenses. Over 54% reported being homeowners, 33.4% were renters, 6.8% lived with family members, and 5.6% were homeless and residing in temporary emergency or transitional housing shelters.

While 94% of participants feel safe in their current living situation, 6% feel unsafe. Those feeling unsafe cited economic and housing stability as key concerns, including the need for lower rent, more rental stock, and the availability and viability of Section 8 vouchers. Physical safety enhancements like security cameras and increased police presence were also important. Respondents emphasized the need for regular check-ins and assistance with maintenance, indicating a desire for supportive community services. Environmental factors such as the presence of a larger criminal element and the need for community beautification were mentioned, alongside personal space preferences like the need for more living space or single-level homes. Additionally, specific issues like fragrance sensitivities, domestic violence, and the need for safe parking areas were identified, reflecting a nuanced spectrum of safety and security concerns.

Participants were also asked to identify the three most difficult needs to afford in their household. Responses were scored on a priority ranking scale with their top issue receiving 3 points, second receiving 2 points, and third ranked receiving 1 point. The total points for each need were summed, and the top five with the highest total scores were ranked. This analysis ranked the top five needs as follows:

1. **Utilities**
2. **Rent**
3. **Home Repairs**
4. **Home Heating and/or Cooling**
5. **Property Taxes**

These findings underscore the critical need for affordable housing solutions, enhanced safety measures, and supportive community services to improve the overall housing situation and well-being of residents.

Food and Nutrition

The Community Needs Assessment included several questions regarding food and nutrition, focusing on how households make decisions about where to shop, access to food, and the utilization of food services.

When asked how their household decides where to shop, the top three responses were cost (84%), location (57%), and acceptance of SNAP benefits (24%). These priorities reflect a strong emphasis on affordability and convenience, as well as the need for government assistance programs among a significant portion of the population.

Regarding food accessibility, 89% of respondents indicated they can access enough food to feed their entire household, while 11% reported they cannot. Similarly, 89% of companion animal owners stated they can access enough food for their pets, with 11% indicating they face difficulties in this area.

The survey also explored the food services utilized by households. The top three services cited were SNAP (39.5%), food pantries/food banks (35.3%), and the free or reduced school lunch program (13.6%).

These findings highlight the reliance on public assistance programs and community resources to meet nutritional needs.

In summary, while a majority of households can access sufficient food, a notable percentage still face challenges. Cost, location, and SNAP acceptance are key factors in shopping decisions, underscoring the importance of affordable and accessible food options. The significant use of SNAP, food pantries, and school lunch programs demonstrates the crucial role these services play in supporting food security within the community.

Transportation

The Community Needs Assessment gathered data on transportation types used by households, the adequacy of public transportation, and specific transportation challenges faced by the community.

When asked about the types of transportation used to get to work, school, or handle important tasks, the top three responses were personal vehicles (79%), walking (32%), and STS public transit (12.5%). This indicates a strong reliance on personal vehicles, with walking and public transit serving as secondary options for a smaller segment of the population.

Regarding the adequacy of public transportation, 61.5% of respondents stated they do not need or utilize public transit. Among those who do use public transit, 43% reported that it meets their needs, while 57% indicated it does not. The open-ended responses from those dissatisfied with public transit revealed several key issues:

- **Route Availability:** Four respondents mentioned that route times are not available throughout the day.
- **Cost Concerns:** Four respondents cited price concerns.
- **Location of Routes:** Fifteen respondents indicated issues with the location of routes.
- **Preferred Employment Areas:** Five respondents mentioned a lack of routes to preferred employment areas.
- **Accessibility:** One respondent noted that they are unable to use public transit because they are wheelchair-bound.
- **Service Frequency and Availability:** Respondents recommended more buses, more frequent routes, and the inclusion of weekend routes.
- **Information and Technology:** Suggestions included clearer understanding of bus schedules, the development of an app showing real-time bus locations, and better information dissemination.
- **Expanded Services:** One respondent recommended incorporating a train station to major cities.

In summary, while personal vehicles are the primary mode of transportation for most households, there is a significant need for improved public transit options. Issues such as route availability, cost, location, and accessibility highlight the areas where public transit falls short. Enhancements in service frequency, technological integration, and expanded route options could better meet the needs of the community and reduce transportation barriers.

Adult Education

The Community Needs Assessment explored the importance of various types of adult education for respondents and their households, revealing key areas of interest and perceived need.

Among the survey participants, 31.3% indicated that they have no need for adult education. However, the majority highlighted several critical areas of interest. The top five topics of importance were:

1. **First Aid (22.7%):** A significant portion of respondents expressed a need for first aid training, indicating a strong desire to be prepared for medical emergencies and to provide immediate care when necessary.
2. **Emergency Preparedness (21.9%):** Close to one-fifth of respondents emphasized the importance of being prepared for emergencies, reflecting a broader concern for safety and readiness in the face of potential disasters or crises.
3. **Financial Education (20.3%):** Financial literacy was identified as a key area of interest, with respondents seeking knowledge and skills to better manage their finances, budget effectively, and plan for the future.
4. **Mental Health First Aid (19.9%):** Mental health awareness and support were highlighted by many respondents, underscoring the community's recognition of mental health issues and the need for skills to assist those experiencing mental health crises.
5. **Computer/Digital Literacy (18.8%):** With the increasing importance of technology in daily life, nearly one-fifth of respondents identified a need for education in computer and digital literacy, aiming to enhance their skills in navigating the digital world.

In summary, while a notable portion of the population feels no need for adult education, there is a significant demand for training in first aid, emergency preparedness, financial education, mental health first aid, and computer/digital literacy. These findings highlight the community's priorities in acquiring practical skills that enhance personal safety, financial stability, mental health support, and technological competence. Addressing these educational needs can greatly contribute to the overall well-being and resilience of the community.

Thoughts and Experiences

The Community Needs Assessment explored participants' feelings of safety, inclusion, and experiences with discrimination within their community, as well as, their perceptions of various community services and resources.

Experiences of Discrimination

When asked if they had ever felt unsafe, unwelcome, or experienced hostility or discrimination in their community or public spaces, 55.8% of respondents reported that they had not. However, a significant proportion of participants did report experiencing hostility or discrimination based on various factors, including:

1. **Race:** 14.5%
2. **Body Size/Appearance:** 12.4%
3. **Gender:** 12.0%
4. **Age:** 12.0%

2024 SCA Community Needs Assessment- Executive Summary

5. **Socioeconomic Status:** 11.6%

These findings underscore key areas where discrimination and hostility are present within the community, particularly concerning race, body size/appearance, gender, age, and socioeconomic status.

Perceptions of Safety and Community Services

Participants rated various community issues on a scale of 1-5, with 5 indicating strong agreement and scores under 3 showing disagreement. Higher scores reflect perceived adequacy of opportunities, services, or actions, while lower scores highlight areas needing improvement. The top five strengths and areas for improvement, based on weighted averages of responses, are outlined below:

Areas of Strength:

1. **Awareness of Crisis Support and Domestic Violence Services** (Weighted Average 4.04)
2. **Areas of the Community That Feel Safer** (Weighted Average 3.95)
3. **Likeliness to Report Acts of Harassment or Discrimination to the Police** (Weighted Average 3.77)
4. **Adequate Support from Family, Friends, and Community Members** (Weighted Average 3.76)
5. **Feelings of Safety Walking Alone Day or Night** (Weighted Average 3.68)

Opportunities for Improvement:

1. **Affordable Housing Options** (Weighted Average 2.53)
2. **Adequate Support Services for Those Facing Homelessness** (Weighted Average 2.58)
3. **Sufficient Support Services for the Reentry Population** (Weighted Average 2.78)
4. **Cultural Diversity Celebrated and Valued in the Community** (Weighted Average 2.84)
5. **Sufficient Job Opportunities in the Community** (Weighted Average 2.86)

The survey results reveal a mixed perception of safety and community services. While a majority feel safe in their community and are aware of crisis support and domestic violence services, there are significant areas where improvement is needed. The high levels of awareness of crisis support and the sense of safety in the community are strengths to build upon. However, cultural diversity, job opportunities, affordable housing, and support services for the homeless and reentry populations received notably lower scores, indicating dissatisfaction and highlighting critical areas for community development. These insights are vital for guiding efforts to create a more inclusive, supportive, and well-served community.

Additional Thoughts

The responses to the Schuylkill Community Action Community Needs Assessment 2024 highlight a range of additional thoughts and concerns regarding the future needs and priorities of the community. Key themes that emerged include:

1. Housing and Homelessness
   - **More Housing for Seniors and Affordable Housing**: The community expressed a need for increased housing options for seniors and more affordable housing for all income levels.

- **Homeless Shelters and Support:** There is a call for more homeless shelters, especially those adopting a "housing first" approach, and for sober living environments for people in recovery from substance use disorders.

2. Employment and Training
   - **Job Assistance for Individuals with Criminal Backgrounds**: More support is needed to help individuals with criminal records find employment.
   - **Youth and Adult Education and Training:** The community needs more vocational training programs, especially for youth and young adults, as well as GED and ESL classes with better screening processes.

3. Inclusivity and Community Services
   - **Inclusive Community Initiatives:** There is a strong desire for a more inclusive and welcoming community, with education and exposure to diversity and various cultures.
   - **Support Services:** Expanded services and support are needed for people with mental health issues, disabilities, and those in recovery. This includes more accessible mental health and substance use disorder services, inpatient facilities, and support groups.

4. Public Safety and Community Environment
   - **Effective Policing and Safety:** Concerns were raised about the effectiveness of the police and the need for a safer community environment.
   - **Community Cleanliness and Beautification:** Residents want cleaner streets, better-maintained properties, and more green spaces and parks.

5. Economic and Social Support
   - **Affordable Living and Cost of Living:** The community is struggling with the rising cost of living, including housing, childcare, healthcare, and basic commodities. There is also a need for tax cuts for the middle class.
   - **Food Access and Affordability:** Access to fresh and healthy food is a concern, with calls for more food pantries and affordable food options.

6. Transportation and Accessibility
   - **Improved Public Transportation:** There is a need for better public transportation options, especially in rural areas, to ensure access to employment, healthcare, education, and other essential services.
   - **Building Accessibility:** Enhancing building accessibility for people with disabilities remains a priority.

7. Community Programs and Engagement
   - **Youth and Teen Programs:** The community would benefit from more after-school, weekend, and summer programs for youth, including the establishment of a teen center.
   - **Community Events and Social Groups:** More community events without alcohol and opportunities for adults to connect through clubs, social groups, and sports leagues are desired.

8. Addressing Discrimination and Inequities
   - **Equitable Distribution of Services:** Concerns were raised about discriminatory practices at food pantries and the need for equitable distribution of social resources across different areas, particularly smaller towns like Shenandoah.
   - **Fair Housing Practices:** Issues with rent control, landlord practices, and the need for regulation to prevent exploitation were highlighted.

2024 SCA Community Needs Assessment- Executive Summary

These additional thoughts underscore the community's need for comprehensive, inclusive, and equitable services and support systems to address the diverse and evolving needs of Schuylkill County 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 (61%), social media (49%), conversations with human service providers (36%), and websites of organizations (36%). These insights highlight the importance of maintaining strong community connections, an active social media presence, and user-friendly websites to effectively share information and ensure that essential resources are accessible to those in need.

Action Steps

Survey participants rated the importance of various potential action steps for community and human service providers using a scale: "very important" (3 points), "somewhat important" (2 points), and "not important" (1 point). Responses marked "don't know" were excluded from scoring. The top five priority action steps, based on the weighted average of responses, are as follows:

1. **Provide housing for homeless individuals and families** (Weighted Average: 2.75)
2. **Increase housing options for seniors** (Weighted Average: 2.60)
3. **Make the community safer, more inclusive, and welcoming for all residents** (Weighted Average: 2.54)
4. **Expand access to dental services for adults** (Weighted Average: 2.53)
5. **Enhance building accessibility for people with disabilities** (Weighted Average: 2.53)

Survey participants were asked to identify their top 3 action steps. Each action step was scored as follows: 3 points for the top priority, 2 points for the second priority, and 1 point for the third. The total points for each action step were summed, and the steps with the highest total scores were ranked. Below are the top 5 ranked action steps, along with recommendations for addressing these needs:

1. Provide Housing for Homeless Individuals and Families
   - **Develop a Comprehensive Housing Strategy:** Create a plan that includes short-term emergency shelters, transitional housing, and long-term affordable housing options.
   - **Collaborate with Local Government and Organizations:** Partner with local government, nonprofits, and private sector stakeholders to pool resources and expertise.
   - **Increase Funding and Resources:** Seek federal, state, and local funding, as well as private donations, to build or renovate housing units.
   - **Supportive Services:** Offer wraparound services such as case management, job training, mental health counseling, and substance abuse treatment to help individuals maintain stable housing.
2. Expand Access to Dental Services for Adults
   - **Increase Dental Clinics:** Establish more low-cost or free dental clinics in underserved areas.
   - **Mobile Dental Units:** Deploy mobile dental units to reach residents in rural or remote areas.
   - **Dental Health Education:** Implement community education programs to raise awareness about the importance of dental health and available resources.

- **Partnerships with Dental Schools:** Collaborate with dental schools to provide services through student clinics under the supervision of licensed professionals.
3. <u>Renovate or rehabilitate older or abandoned homes.</u>
    - **Expand existing Housing Rehabilitation Programs:** Establish Countywide housing rehab program to pair with existing municipal funded programs and the Whole-Home Repair Program.
    - **Public-Private Partnerships:** Engage with private developers, local businesses, and nonprofits to invest in the rehabilitation of blighted properties.
    - **Community Revitalization:** Focus on revitalizing entire neighborhoods through coordinated efforts in housing rehabilitation, infrastructure improvements, and community engagement.
4. <u>Make the Community Safer, More Inclusive, and More Welcoming for All Residents</u>
    - **Community Policing Initiatives:** Foster trust between law enforcement and community members through community policing strategies, including regular neighborhood patrols and community engagement events.
    - **Anti-Discrimination Policies:** Enforce and promote policies that prevent discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other factors.
    - **Inclusive Community Programs:** Develop programs and events that celebrate diversity and bring residents together, such as cultural festivals and community dialogues.
    - **Safety Audits and Improvements:** Conduct safety audits in neighborhoods to identify and address safety concerns, such as poor lighting, hazardous areas, and lack of safe pedestrian pathways.
5. <u>Improve public transportation to reach rural areas.</u>
    - **Expand Transit Routes:** Work with local transit authorities to expand bus routes and schedules to cover rural areas, ensuring that residents have access to essential services.
    - **Transportation Vouchers:** Provide transportation vouchers or subsidies for low-income residents to use on public transit or rideshare services.
    - **Community Transportation Programs:** Develop community-based transportation programs that utilize volunteer drivers to assist residents in reaching medical appointments, grocery stores, and other necessary destinations.

By focusing on these priority areas, human service providers in Schuylkill County can address critical needs and improve the quality of life for residents.

Focus Group Summary

As part of the Schuylkill Community Action (SCA) 2024 Community Needs Assessment (CNA), we conducted a series of focus groups to gain insights into the community's perspectives on poverty and identify effective strategies for empowerment. This summary outlines the key questions posed to participants and highlights their insightful responses.

1. <u>Vision of a Community without Poverty</u> **-** Participants envisioned a thriving, interconnected community marked by:
    - **Economic Prosperity**: Flourishing businesses, job opportunities, financial stability, and focus on education.

- **Community Well-being**: Clean streets, public recreational spaces, reduced crime, and vibrant downtown areas.
- **Social Equality and Inclusivity**: Celebrated diversity, eradicated racism, accessible mental health care, and reduced substance abuse.
- **Accessibility and Transportation**: Reliable transportation and inclusivity in prosperity.

2. Factors Perpetuating Poverty - Participants identified various factors, including:
- **Structural and Systemic Issues**: Government policies, racism, inequality, and lack of access to education, healthcare, and transportation.
- **Economic Challenges**: Low wages, high costs, inflation, and debt.
- **Behavioral and Personal Factors**: Substance use, lack of motivation, and entitlement.
- **Generational and Familial Dynamics**: Generational poverty and home environment.
- **Health and Well-being**: Mental illness, addiction, and limited access to services.
- **Employment Issues**: Lack of job opportunities and underemployment.
- **Other Barriers**: Language barriers, violence, and technology literacy.

3. Greatest Needs to Reduce Poverty and Aid Self-Sufficiency - Key areas of focus identified were:
- **Economic Stability and Employment**: Affordable housing, living wages, and better public transportation.
- **Social Services and Support**: Shelters, resource awareness, transitional housing, and education.
- **Support for Specific Populations**: Veterans, seniors, substance use disorder individuals, and those needing mental health services.

4. Agency Needs to Empower Residents - Participants highlighted the following needs for SCA:
- **Top Priority**: Increased funding.
- **High Priority**: More outreach opportunities, long-term programming, and public awareness.
- **Medium Priority**: Employment training, rental assistance, access to nutritional food, and increased staffing.

5. Steps for Reducing Poverty - Prioritized steps for SCA included:
- **Long-term Solutions and Self-sufficiency Programming**: Ongoing support, self-sufficiency classes, and financial education.
- **Increased Funding and Capacity**: Secure more funding and hire additional staff.
- **Enhanced Client Engagement and Accountability**: Provide holistic care and ensure client accountability.
- **Expanded Access and Service Delivery**: Open satellite locations and enhance resource sharing.
- **Support Employment and Business Development**: Sponsor job fairs and support small businesses.
- **Community and Client Resources**: Expand housing rehab and increase assistance for basic needs.
- **Advocacy and Awareness**: Engage with lawmakers and raise public awareness.
- **Innovation and Adaptation**: Embrace innovative service delivery and community collaboration.

By implementing these strategies, SCA aims to significantly reduce poverty and empower Schuylkill County residents towards self-sufficiency.

Conclusion Summary

The 2024 Community Needs Assessment conducted by Schuylkill Community Action (SCA) highlights critical needs within Schuylkill County, driven by the voices and experiences of local residents and stakeholders. Through extensive surveys and focus groups, the assessment identified food and nutrition, healthcare and well-being, affordable housing, employment opportunities, and home heating and cooling as the top priorities for the community.

The assessment revealed that while a majority of respondents can access sufficient food, challenges remain, particularly concerning affordability and location. Similarly, housing affordability and safety emerged as pressing concerns, with many residents seeking enhanced support services for those experiencing homelessness and increased availability of affordable housing options. Employment barriers, such as low wages and lack of transportation, further exacerbate these issues, indicating a need for targeted job assistance and training programs.

Additionally, the assessment uncovered significant disparities in community experiences, particularly related to discrimination and access to resources. This calls for initiatives to promote inclusivity and cultural diversity while addressing the specific needs of vulnerable populations, including seniors, individuals with disabilities, and those reentering the community after incarceration.

To effectively address these identified needs, the assessment outlines actionable recommendations focused on housing solutions, increased access to essential services, community safety improvements, and enhanced support for education and employment training. By fostering collaboration among human service providers, local government, and community stakeholders, SCA aims to develop comprehensive strategies that empower residents, enhance quality of life, and create a more equitable community.

In conclusion, the insights gathered from the 2024 Community Needs Assessment provide a roadmap for SCA and its partners to address the pressing challenges faced by Schuylkill County residents, ensuring a coordinated approach towards building a resilient, inclusive, and thriving community for all.

2024 SCA Community Needs Assessment- Executive Summary