



LICKING COUNTY YOUTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT

December 2022



Funded by
United Way of Licking County
and
Buckeye Valley Family YMCA Foundation



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project was launched in response to a lack of easily accessible data related to the holistic needs of youth in Licking County. Funding from the United Way of Licking County and the Buckeye Valley Family YMCA Foundation helped provide resources to form a cross-function task force and a mixed methods countywide youth needs assessment process.

The task force began by defining the scope of our project. Through a common definition of youth development, three developmental areas (social-emotional, cognitive, physical) were measured for needs across children aged 0-18 in the county. Data collection efforts were separated into two phases for gathering and reviewing both quantitative and qualitative data. The first phase involved compiling existing community assessments for the purpose of identifying gaps in data for specific age groups and developmental areas. The second phase of the project sought to utilize in-person group discussions (i.e. focus groups, leadership forums) to confirm or clarify results from the first phase and to establish a more nuanced understanding of the identified needs. More than 350 community members, including 50 different community leaders, and more than 300 youth participated in qualitative feedback sessions.

The findings from these data collection efforts indicate a strong need for more mental health and social-emotional supports for youth of all ages across Licking County. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted opportunities for social-emotional skill development in youth, particularly those aged 8 and younger. Older youth's largest social-emotional need appears to be implementing (not learning) positive coping mechanisms for dealing with stressors.

From a cognitive development perspective, the most pressing needs were determined to be: access to early intervention services for children ages 0-4, improving math proficiency for youth in grades 3-8, and more opportunities for work-based learning for teenagers. Addressing child abuse and neglect and providing access to affordable group activities are the most pressing physical needs for all youth in the county.

A major recommendation from the task force compiling this assessment involves the deepening and expansion of cross-organizational efforts for addressing these identified needs. Expanding the coordination between service providers will make for more navigable and accessible systems of care maximizing the variety of available resources and audience reach.

Youth Needs Assessment – Licking County

Getting Started

In 2021, Licking County welcomed more than a few new non-profit leaders to the community. At least two of these leaders noticed that as they attempted to gather information related to youth needs within the county there did not seem to be current, publicly available information about youth needs. The information they did find was completed amongst a narrow range of ages (e.g. teens), within a specific community (e.g. Heath School District only), or only related to a single topic (e.g. physical health).

Without a comprehensive dataset related to youth needs in Licking County, youth-serving organizations are fending for themselves to collect data related to needs. The lack of information regarding youth needs places non-profits, especially smaller non-profits, in the unfortunate position of having to rely mostly on trial and error methods for providing new programs to deliver to the community to address unmet needs. Furthermore, the lack of understanding and agreement related to youth needs and the solutions for addressing needs makes it more difficult for youth-serving non-profits, the government, and school districts to partner together to address systemic issues impacting local youth.

With all of this in mind, the Buckeye Valley Family YMCA applied for, and received, funding from the United Way of Licking County to conduct a youth needs assessment across the entire county.

Project Phases

This project was led by the Buckeye Valley Family YMCA and launched in December of 2021. Our needs assessment process was separated into 4 major phases:

- Phase 1 – Identify a diverse set of project partners and design a project scope that identifies the assessment framework and key evaluative components.
- Phase 2 – Gather data from existing county-wide needs assessments and identify gaps in the data.
- Phase 3 – Strategize the best methods for collecting information to fill in the missing data and implement those collection efforts
- Phase 4 – Compile the total project findings and develop a set of recommendations for county-wide interventions

The remainder of this document will detail the findings of our assessment and our recommendations for next steps.

Phase 1 – Designing our Assessment Process

Identifying Task Force Members

The following cross-functional group of community leaders were identified to co-lead the assessment process within Licking County. The task force members bring forward a wide range of experiences and domain specific expertise relevant to ensuring the development of an informed and representative community assessment.

Name	Position	Company	Expertise
Adam Shilling	CEO	Buckeye Valley Family YMCA	Physical
Anna Jeffries	Public Information Officer	Licking County Board of Development Disabilities	Social/Emotional
Penny Sitler	Executive Director	Mental Health America of Licking County	Social/Emotional
Phillip Wagner	Superintendent	Johnstown-Monroe School District	Cognitive
Susanne Sacchetti	Executive Director	Licking County Library System	Cognitive
Trevor Thomas	Superintendent	Heath School District	Cognitive

Needs Assessment Framework

The initial meetings of the task force focused on discussing the scope of the assessment and the types of information we sought to collect. Our primary goal to develop a holistic assessment guided our discussion on selecting from the various frameworks for youth needs assessments. Our approach was grounded in our definition of youth development:

Youth Development is the SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL, COGNITIVE, and PHYSICAL process that all youth uniquely experience from birth to career.

With this definition in mind, we decided to develop an assessment that would help identify the needs of youth within the areas of social-emotional development, cognitive development, and physical development. The group decided evaluating needs across these three distinct areas would provide a holistic understanding of youth in Licking County.

Next, we segmented youth into four age groups based on their stage of life. When combined with our three measurement areas, the following grid was developed. The intent of our needs assessment was to complete as much of the information in each of the individual cells of the grid as possible.

	Social / Emotional Needs	Cognitive Needs	Physical Needs
Ages 0 – 4			
Ages 5 – 11			
Ages 12 – 15			
Ages 16 – 18			

Phase 2 – Collecting Existing Information

As a means towards eliminating duplication of work, the task force gathered recent assessments completed from across the county within the past 3-5 years. The sources, target audiences, and results for the assessments are represented in the following section.

Existing Data Sources Referenced in Our Assessment

- Ohio Healthy Youth Environments Survey (2019/20)
- Licking Memorial Health Systems Community Health Needs Assessment (2019)
- GROW Licking County Workforce Development Assessment (2021)
- United Way Community Blueprint (2016)
- Licking County Board of Developmental Disabilities Early Intervention Data (2019-2021)
- Licking County School District Report Card Data (2017-2021)

OHIO HEALTHY YOUTH ENVIRONMENTS SURVEY

Purpose: The Ohio Healthy Youth Environments Survey (OHYES!) is a collaborative effort of the Ohio Departments of Education, Health and Mental Health & Addiction Services, Ohio National Guard, and representatives from higher education, juvenile courts, foundations, and community service providers.



There are two main purposes of OHYES! First, the OHYES! addresses the need for data on local trends in youth behaviors and risk and protective factors. Second, it helps community-based organizations meet federal grant reporting requirements. Additionally, the OHYES! data may help communities when applying for local grants through foundations such as the United Way. It may also help communities meet the requirements for local health department needs assessments.

Methodology

The OHYES! survey questions cover the following topics: Demographics, Alcohol, Tobacco and Vapor Products, Marijuana, Prescription Misuse and Illicit Drugs, Bullying, Safety and School Climate, Physical Health and Well-being, Mental Health and Suicide, Gambling, Parental Attitudes toward Substance Use, Community, Family and Peer Factors, and School Success. As part of a periodic review process, the instrument was revised for the 2019-2020 school year. Schools may administer the standard OHYES! Survey instrument, which includes 110 questions. In addition, school districts may choose to use an optional version that includes eight sexual behavior questions that could be sensitive to some communities.

The OHYES! is a voluntary, web-based survey available to schools free of charge. The survey is scheduled to be conducted every four years but may be administered more often if a community identifies a need. All students in Ohio schools in grades 7 through 12 (age 12 or older) are eligible to participate. Superintendents and principals are solicited to have their schools complete the survey; they select the grades and percentage of students in those grades to participate. More information about the survey and copies of the survey instrument can be found on the OHYES! website at ohyes.ohio.gov.

Results

When compared to the average response across Ohio, respondents from Licking County experienced more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), reported greater suicidal tendencies, and had a higher propensity to engage in unsafe sexual habits.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events that occur before a child reaches the age of 18. ACEs include all types of abuse and neglect, such as parental substance use, incarceration, and domestic violence. ACEs can also include situations that may cause trauma for a child, such as having a parent with a mental illness or being part of a family going through a divorce.

A landmark study in the 1990s found a significant relationship between the number of ACEs a person experienced and a variety of negative outcomes in adulthood, including poor physical and mental health, substance use, and risky behaviors¹. The more ACEs experienced, the greater the risk for these outcomes. By definition, children in the child welfare system have suffered at least one ACE. Recent studies have shown that compared with the general population, these children are far more likely to have experienced at least four ACEs (42 percent vs. 12.5 percent).²

Limitations

- The assessment did not include children ages 0-12, making the results not applicable to all aged youth in Licking County.
- The reports viewed by steering committee did not include trend analysis, making it impossible to compare areas of improving/worsening across the county.
- The results of this survey are not fully representative of entire county

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). About the CDC-Kaiser ACE study: Major findings. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html>.

² ACEs in young children involved in the child welfare system. Retrieved from <https://www.flcourts.org/content/download/215886/file/ACEsInYoungChildrenInvolvedInTheChildWelfareSystem.pdf>

Licking Memorial Health Community Health Needs Assessment

Purpose

The Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) report is required by the hospital to fulfill a requirement in the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, enacted in March 2010, requiring every 501(c)(3) tax-exempt hospital to conduct a CHNA to identify and prioritize the significant health needs of the community and develop an implementation strategy to address those significant health needs. As part of this process, LMH solicited input from those representing the broad interests of our community.

Methodology

In conducting the 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), the hospital identified primary and secondary community data sources, solicited input from those representing the broad interests of the community, and utilized existing community reports and surveys. The CHNA Committee reviewed this information and identified significant health needs of the Licking County community.

Their next step was to develop an implementation strategy to address these health needs. Through the implementation strategy, LMH works with their community partners to engage in collaboration among health care and social service providers to address these significant health needs.

Results

Reducing the burden of untreated depression, anxiety, and addiction, as well as reducing infant mortality were prioritized needs directly impacting youth in Licking County.

Limitations

A major limiting factor of this assessment is the absence of qualitative data directly from the community. Quantitative data sources were reviewed in abundance for this work, yet little direct feedback from the community was mentioned in this report. Community leaders were engaged in discussions to provide their views on the county and no mention of hosting similar sessions with community members was mentioned.



GROW Licking County Workforce Development Assessment

Purpose

This report is a collection of quantitative and qualitative data collected with the purpose of identifying the needs of the workforce development efforts in Licking County, Ohio. The purpose of this report is to aid community leaders in assessing what is working and what can be improved as Licking County continues to grow and develop its approaches to a competitive and sustainable workforce.

Methodology – This assessment was completed in 3 phases

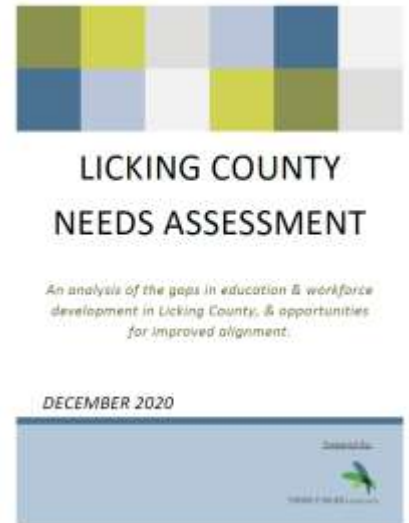
- Phase I of the project involved research on the labor, industry, demographic, and economic conditions of Licking County.
- Phase II of this project focused on collecting survey responses from a variety of area employers, with an emphasis placed on identifying businesses of an array of sizes while also ensuring that the county's largest industries were represented.
- Phase III of the project was designed to collect stakeholder feedback on the labor market and survey data collected during Phases I and II. During these input sessions, stakeholders were invited to participate in an open-ended discussion about their experiences and recommendations for Licking County's workforce development.

Results

The results from this assessment (applicable to youth) indicate that more work-based learning opportunities are needed for students exiting high school. There is also a need for employability skill development, which are sometimes referred to as soft skills. Of note, employers stated that dependability and reliability were two of the most pressing employability/soft skills that youth in Licking County need.

Limitations

The assessment was limited in scope, targeting needs of youth older than 15 years of age and focused entirely on workforce needs, not collegiate readiness.



United Way Community Blueprint

Purpose

In a time of increasing demand for social, health, and economic services, community leaders wanted to identify and assess the priority issues facing residents in the county and to begin developing a coordinated plan to address these needs. In short, Licking County's Community Blueprint Steering Committee needed data and insights that would help them ensure precious resources (of both time and treasure) are aligned with critical community needs.



Methodology

A research team planned and administered a comprehensive needs assessment process that included both primary and secondary data: a survey of a random sample of residents; multiple focus groups held throughout the county with residents; a survey of community stakeholders; and information from county, state, and federal sources.

Results

The results from this assessment pointed towards the need to address child abuse/neglect, mental health care, increasing access to quality childcare/early learning, promoting physical health, and increasing engagement and socialization in community activities.

Limitations

- A limited community response (500) to the circulated survey makes it difficult to segment results to specific regions or age groups. Five hundred survey responses within Licking County is a significant number, however, it is not large enough to segment the results to identify needs for specific sub-sections of the county.
- The data collected for this project was not covered in the final reports accessible online. This makes it difficult to review and establish conclusions on the information different than what is already presented.

School District Report Card Data

Purpose

Our task force identified a major gap in information related to the cognitive needs of youth in all age groups.



Methodology

We gathered report card data for the years 2017 – 2021 from school districts in Licking County, which is publicly available through <https://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/>. We tracked performance across school years for individual graduation cohorts to gauge increases or decreases in student proficiency. In other words, as students move through their educational journey, we tracked whether students gained, lost, or remained the same in their academic proficiency for the subjects of Math and English. To control for factors related to the pandemic, we studied proficiency separately for the years prior to the pandemic and the years during the pandemic.

Results

In general, for Licking County students, when accounting for results both prior to and during the pandemic, there were greater drops in math proficiency than in reading proficiency. Our task force interprets this finding to mean that, regardless of how much 'value' is assigned to report card performance, improving math proficiency is a larger need than improving reading proficiency.

Limitations

- Tracking graduation cohorts longitudinally does not account for student migration patterns. When using this measurement methodology, it is important to acknowledge that school districts serving highly transient populations possess less reliable datasets than districts with more stable populations.
- Within the past few years, the state of Ohio has made changes to the methodology for student report card grades. These changes make comparing year over year trends within some districts challenging. However, our task force felt that the overall trends (good and bad) could still be identified through our review process.
- Some educators voiced concern during our Community Leaders Forum for over-reliance on report card data for informing needs. Some felt that other proximate measures for the educational and learning needs of youth could be used. As of the time of writing this report, no other measures had been identified.

Licking County Board of Developmental Disabilities (LCBDD) Early Intervention Data

Purpose

Our task force found minimal existing data related to the needs of preschool aged youth within the completed community assessments. Including this dataset was intended to provide insights into recent LCBDD case trends.

Methodology

LCBDD supplied early intervention data from their client visits for the years 2019, 2020, and 2021. The information was de-identified and scrubbed of all confidentiality prior to being shared. Each de-identified client had a listing of development delays that had been detected during visits and tests. Five separate developmental delays are tracked for each client; physical, cognitive, adaptive, social & emotional, and communication.

Results

Between 2019 and 2021, the percentage of clients with physical, cognitive, and communication delays decreased. However, the percentage of clients with adaptive or social & emotional delays either remained the same or increased. Clients receiving early intervention services has decreased significantly from 2019, indicating a need for more early childhood mental health counselors and therapists.

Limitations

There are a large number of youths whose developmental delays are not identified until they enroll in preschool or kindergarten. The number of underrepresented cases is extremely difficult to estimate and the Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated this problem. Given that this type of underreporting is not something our assessment can control for, our task force chose to accept these results in our final report.



Identifying Gaps in Existing Needs Assessments

Cross sectioning our assessment categories and existing data sources resulted in the following chart. Every age range had identified needs for each of our three categories. However, some of the findings are duplicative across all age groups, for example, addressing child abuse/neglect is a need for all ages. The next phase of our assessment was intended to learn more about the areas in which we had limited data and to confirm the results from our review of data sources.

	Social / Emotional	Cognitive	Physical
Ages 0 -4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to child care programs (United Way) - Engaging and socializing in community activities (United Way) - Adaptive and Social & Emotional Development Delays (LCBDD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase access to childcare and early learning programs (United Way) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address child abuse/neglect (United Way) - Reduce infant mortality (LMH CHNA)
Ages 5-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engaging and socializing in community activities (United Way) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase math proficiency (School Report Card) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address child abuse/neglect (United Way)
Ages 12-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prevalence of emotional abuse and household mental illness / substance abuse (OHYES!) - Elevated suicidal tendencies (OHYES!) - Reduce burden created by untreated anxiety, depression, addiction (LMH CHNA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase math proficiency (School Report Card) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address child abuse/neglect (United Way) - Unsafe sexual practices (OHYES!)
Ages 16-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve “soft skills” to increase employability (Workforce Assessment) - Prevalence of emotional abuse and household mental illness / substance abuse (OHYES!) - Elevated suicidal tendencies (OHYES!) - Reduce burden created by untreated anxiety, depression, addiction (LMH CHNA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide more work-based learning opportunities for youth exiting high school (Workforce Assessment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address child abuse/neglect (United Way) - Unsafe sexual practices (OHYES!)

Phase 3 – Filling in Assessment Gaps

The final phase of our data collection process involved gathering qualitative feedback from a variety of sources within Licking County. The following list summarizes the venues in which we gathered feedback and the successive pages of this report detail the findings from each session.

- Community Leaders Forum
- Youth Discussion Groups
- Childcare Providers Forum
- Child and Families First Council Discussion Group

Community Leaders Forum

Our task force hosted a community forum for leaders from youth serving organizations and institutions for two primary reasons. First, we sought to verify that the findings from the existing data sources were correctly interpreted. Second, we began seeking to learn how our assessment process might be more inclusive and representative for future versions of this report.

Forum Participants

A total of 29 individuals representing 21 different organizations in attended the forum, which was hosted on August 2, 2022.

Organizations Participating in Community Discussion

Buckeye Valley Family YMCA	Licking County Library
Boys & Girls Club of Newark	Licking Memorial Health
Central Ohio Technical College	Licking Memorial Pediatrics
T.J. Evans Foundation	Mental Health & Recovery for Licking and Knox Counties
Granville Public Library	Mental Health America
Granville Schools	Newark City Schools
Heath City Schools	Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services
Homer Public Library	Pataskala Public Library
Licking County Board of DD	The Licking County Foundation
Licking County ESC	United Way of Licking County
Licking County Health Department	

Most Pressing Needs

The session opened with introductions and each community leader describing what they felt was the most pressing need related to youth in our county.

- More than 60% of attendees mentioned aspects (or lack thereof) related to mental health support in Licking County as the most pressing need. Some of the most commonly mentioned themes regarding this topic related to a lack of support staff across the county, making it difficult to increase services. There is not enough focus on prevention, identifying signs and symptoms of a mental health crisis, and how to deal with mental health issues.

- Another major need identified by respondents related to overall family engagement. It was mentioned by quite a few participants that there is less parental engagement in their children’s education and activities in 2022 in comparison to years past. Participants felt this is partly to blame for a lack of awareness and access to available community resources. Correspondingly, there was ample discussion on the need for youth to become more autonomous, responsible, and engaged in the community as they progress towards their teen years and exit high school.
- The final topic mentioned by quite a few respondents related to the lack of childcare services across the county. Needs for more 3rd shift childcare services and stability in staffing is needed for both the sake of operators and the youth participating along with more options for care during the summer months, and inclusion of special needs youth.
- Physical health topics (e.g. sedentary behavior, obesity) were mentioned by a small number of participants. Access to healthy foods and an expanded education on preparing healthy meals were the only significantly identified physical needs mentioned during the forum.

Suggestions by the Forum Attendees

The leaders identified the following list of organizations with access to existing community-level data sources that they suggest be included in future iterations of this process; Mental Health & Recovery for Licking-Knox County, Children and Families First Council, Nationwide Children’s Hospital INK project, ALICE Assessment with the United Way, NIAP and Fostering Further. The leaders also identified who to involve in our future assessment processes. This list included involved individuals with access to and knowledge of countywide data and insights in the following areas; HeadStart, Food Insecurity, Childcare, Juvenile Court Systems (school attendance), and Ohio CAN.

In sum the forum attendees confirmed the majority of findings on our initial review of existing data. Both forum attendees and county-wide assessments emphasized the importance of mental health (social/emotional) and de-emphasized the need to prioritize new services to address physical health needs. We received essential information to include in future version of this report.

Youth Feedback Data Collection

Methodology

Our task force discussed at length the right methods and audiences to include in gathering information directly from youth in Licking County about their needs. As a result of the abundance of current and future county-wide surveys and assessments being planned, we chose to gather more qualitative feedback through discussion groups rather than implementing surveys.

The task force also decided to recruit college students to facilitate the discussion groups. This decision was made with the intention of creating a safe, comfortable environment where youth could feel safe opening up to someone more like a peer as opposed to an adult/authority figure. Twenty-one students majoring in Psychology from Dennison University were selected to participate in the process. They were educated on methodology, removing bias from the process, and creating environments for youth to feel safe sharing

their thoughts and feelings. An adult was present for all conversations to provide supervision.

To gather a wide cross-section of community participation feedback gathering sessions were planned in Newark, Heath, Utica, Johnstown, and Pataskala. We used public areas (e.g. libraries, schools, markets) to meet with youth and gather their input. In total, six different sessions were hosted and a total of almost 250 youth (half in Newark/Heath; half in Johnstown/Utica/Pataskala) from ages 10-17 participated. The clear majority of participants were in the 12-15-year-old age range.

Lastly, to ensure full anonymity towards participants at our feedback sessions we will only share the broad and general themes from the discussions, not the results or comments from any single session.

Results

- Pressing Needs
 - As a result of a lack of transportation, youth requested more proximate economic and recreational development to their residences. They desire opportunities for youth recreation and employment. This included restaurants, parks, and many other types of venues that allow for socialization with friends and family.
 - Youth identified finding happiness and joy through sharing food with friends and family and performing in group activities with their peers. No preference was given towards sedentary or physical activities – but a very clear preference was given towards group vs. individual activities.
- Stressors/Coping Mechanisms
 - Grades, parents, and money were the most commonly referenced stressors in the lives of young people. The need for parenting classes was mentioned in an unprompted manner on a few occasions, matching similar feedback received in other forums.
 - Youth identified dealing with stress through negative coping mechanisms with far greater frequency than they did positive coping mechanisms. Negative coping mechanisms included sleeping, over-eating, self-harm, and substance abuse. Positive mechanisms included talking to siblings and healthy activities. Strikingly, not a single participant identified that talking to a friend or adult as a way they handled stress.
- Post High School Graduation
 - Post-secondary education was identified by the clear majority of participants as their desired future after graduating high school. The two most popular majors identified by youth were Undecided and Business.
 - Very few youths responded that they are currently interested in majors related to STEM, Arts & Humanities, or Healthcare.
 - A few handfuls of youth discussed utilizing a gap year to earn money for future college education or pursue service-education opportunities.

Childcare Providers Forum

To continue digging into the needs of children ages 0-5, all licensed childcare providers in Licking County were invited to a childcare forum hosted at the Downtown Newark Library in November. The focus of the forum was to better understand the needs of youth currently enrolled in childcare centers and to learn more about what's needed to improve childcare services in Licking County.

The forum started with a discussion on the most pressing current needs for children and their families. The most referenced need involved a noticeable lack of engagement from parents in their children's lives. The group felt attention should be focused on the sub-section of parents suffering from increased mental health strain resulting from COVID-19 disruptions to services, as improving these parent's situations will have cascading effects towards their children's mental health.

The forum participants also discussed at length the natural socialization restrictions in 2020 and 2021 resulting from COVID-19. The participants felt these restrictions inhibited social learning skills (e.g. cooperation, communication) in youth. Self-regulation skills are also an area for improvement in youth, especially youth below grade 4.

The providers at this forum did not identify a need for third shift childcare opportunities. Sites that currently offer this service have not received inquiries for services. Geographically, the Hebron, Etna, and Johnstown communities were identified as the areas most in need of expanded childcare services in the next five years.

Flexible shifts/schedules are attractive to hire employees, yet detrimental to youth as it creates less consistency in the program. Many openings for child care teachers exist across the county, causing sites to operate at partial capacity in their classrooms and large waiting lists for care, especially for infants.

Within the next five years, childcare providers are hoping to see two main improvements; livable wages within their industry and accessible mental health services for youth. Low salaries offered to teachers acts as a disincentive both for entry into the childcare industry and for retaining current teachers. Participants felt childcare teachers pursuing a bachelor's degree should be provided with more incentives for obtaining this degree.

Currently, mental health services are not provided for infants and toddlers. Funding for these services comes directly from grants or must be paid out-of-pocket by parents or guardians. The majority of childcare centers across the county do not have the staffing capacity to pursue grants, meaning that many youths currently enrolled in childcare programming have no access to mental health services.

Community Voice Meeting

As a follow-up to the Community Leaders Forum, our task force conducted a discussion group with a committee of the Children's and Family First Council, Community Voices. This committee was established via a mandate to include family and youth voices into the Council's proceedings. Parent participants on the Community Voices committee must have a child currently receiving services.

The group identified youth establishing meaningful connections with peers, their family, and non-parental adults as one of the major needs our community is currently experiencing. A lack of positive peer mentors leads to youth being more likely to engage in risky behaviors. Age-specific educational materials were requested (by practitioners and parents alike) to help with substance abuse prevention, social media usage, talking to youth about their identity, and sexual education.

Discussion participants reported that within the next five years they hope that same day mental health services would be available to anyone needing them in the county. "A teen threatening their life is seen on the same day, while a youth questioning their identity is not seen for three months." Early intervention (i.e. preventative vs. reactive) reduces the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors and typically requires fewer governmental resources. Discussion participants also identified "places for youth to go afterschool/on weekends in outlying areas" as something that would greatly help reduce some of the needs we are currently experiencing. Other items mentioned included more school-based programs (e.g. drama club), physical and emotional health services in schools for youth, and programs to help educate youth on how to get involved in the community.

Phase 4: Task Force Recommendations

The following recommendations are being provided by the task force responsible for the development of this report. We have drawn these recommendations from conclusions we made as we collected and digested the information during this process. In other words, these are the subjective opinions of the task force and were developed from the objective facts gathered during this need's assessment process. Our hope is that community organizations and institutions draw inspiration from these recommendations and develop programs or services to help address the unmet needs identified in the report.

Recommendations for Improving Community Assessments

- **Advocate for United Way to include a more holistic and intentional inclusion of self-reported youth needs in future assessments.** The intentional inclusion of young people in the assessment process will help ensure any targeted interventions developed as a result of this report will be closer connected to what youth want.
- **Advocate for community voice in future health needs assessments.** Providing the broad community (including youth) an opportunity to lend their voices to help shape the future of healthcare in our region is essential for ensuring representation.
- **Advocate for all school districts to participate in the OHYES! survey.** More districts in Licking County are needed to ensure the results from this survey can be used by social service organizations to address unmet student needs.
 - The following school districts in Licking County participated in the OHYES! survey during the 2019-2020 school year: Career and Technology Educational Centers, Granville Exempted Village, Heath City, Lakewood Local, Northridge Local, Southwest Licking Local.
 - During the 2020-2021 school year, Career and Technology Educational Centers and Heath City Schools were the only two districts to participate.

Community Assessments Happening in 2023 and Beyond

The following table is a non-exhaustive list of the identified community assessments taking place within Licking County in the coming years. To have an assessment added to this list, please contact the Lindsay Collet via email at Lindsay.collet@bvfymca.org

Assessment Name	Leading Organization	Project Contact	Website to Learn More
Community Health Assessment	Health Department	Chad Brown	lickingcohealth.org
Licking County Youth Needs Assessment	Buckeye Valley Family YMCA	Adam Shilling	Bvfymca.org
Community Health Needs Assessment	Licking Memorial Hospital	Benjamin Broyles	Lmhealth.org
MHR Licking and Knox Counties Comprehensive Community Assessment of Behavioral Health Care Needs	The Mental Health and Recovery Board for Licking and Knox Counties	Kay Spergel	Contact Kay Spergel via email for further information kspergel@mhrk.org

Recommendations for Community Initiatives

Coordinate more partnerships between childcare centers to help educate the community on the need for early intervention services.

Not all childcare centers implement rigorous ages and stages questionnaires or other developmental assessments with their participants. Providing these organizations with more easily accessible resources to teach staff about the importance of early intervention services and then connecting their participants to available resources will reduce negative future health outcomes and strain on government resources. This would address the identified needs of access to early intervention services and addressing childhood neglect.

Workforce development initiatives aimed towards encouraging STEM careers also consider swimming upstream to boost elementary student academic performance.

Large focus and attention is currently being provided from community leaders about the need to prepare local workforce to meet the growing economic development needs of the county, particularly related to STEM careers. Initiatives focused on this need would be well positioned to help raise awareness to, and plan for, supporting the need for increased math proficiency for Licking County students so they can be better prepared academically for pursuing STEM related professions.

Encourage employment at local non-profits to teach “soft skills”.

The roles at most non-profit organizations are naturally suited to teach youth soft skills. Jobs at a non-profit typically require engagement with the public and/or participants, which provides ample opportunities to develop leadership skills. Non-profits also are structured to help their employees feel a sense of belonging to the community as they become a part of a cause larger than just themselves or their families. Establish more systematic, resourced, and consistent employment pipelines to encourage youth employment at non-profits would address multiple needs within this report, including learning employability soft skills, being exposed to non-parental adult role models, and becoming better prepared for post-high school graduation opportunities.

Continue to Raise Awareness about Infant Mortality and ACES

Licking Memorial Health Systems has been extensively working with new and expecting mothers to educate them on this topic. A next step may be to include non-health sector organizations (e.g. Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, Churches) to provide opportunities to engage their constituents in education on this topic.

Several organizations and institutions in Licking County have hosted educational events to help raise awareness for this issue. More educational sessions are needed to ensure our communities are aware and have access to resources to combat the negative impacts of these adverse childhood events.

Increase Opportunities for and Engagement with Parent Education Classes

Triple P, an evidence-based parental skills development program, is offered through various organizations within Licking County. Incentivizing participation within this program and/or offering it at more convenient locations could improve participation. Development of additional types of parenting programs may be necessary to reach all audiences desiring parental education opportunities.

Youth Needs in Licking County – Final Findings

The following table is the completed representation of our task force’s interpretation, after completing this assessment, of the holistic needs for youth within Licking County.

	Social / Emotional	Cognitive	Physical
Ages 0 -4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to child care programs (United Way, Discussion Groups) - Opportunities for engaging and socializing in community activities (United Way) - Increase in adaptive and social & emotional development delays (LCBDD) - Increase access and opportunities for parent education programs (Discussion Groups) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase access to childcare and early learning programs (United Way) - More access to early intervention services, especially for youth not enrolled in government systems (Discussion Groups) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address child abuse/neglect (United Way) - Reduce infant mortality (LMH CHNA)
Ages 5-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engaging and socializing in community activities (United Way) - Increase access and opportunities for parent education programs (Discussion Groups) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase math proficiency for grades 3-8 (School Report Card) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address child abuse/neglect (United Way) - More access to free community areas for group activities (Discussion Groups)
Ages 12-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prevalence of emotional abuse and household mental illness, and substance abuse (OHYES!) - Reduce burden created by untreated anxiety, depression, addiction (LMH CHNA, Discussion Groups) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase math proficiency for grades 3-8 (School Report Card) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unsafe sexual practices (OHYES!) - More access to free community areas for group activities (Discussion Groups)
Ages 16-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve “soft skills” to increase employability (Workforce Assessment) - Prevalence of emotional abuse and household mental illness / substance abuse (OHYES!) - Reduce burden created by untreated anxiety, depression, addiction (LMH CHNA, Discussion Groups) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide more work-based learning opportunities for youth exiting high school (Workforce Assessment) - More understanding of how to get involved in community development activities (Discussion Groups) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unsafe sexual practices (OHYES!) - More access to free community areas for group activities (Discussion Groups)



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Appendix A: Community Leaders Discussion Group Agenda

Notes Taker: Various

Group: Community Leaders - Youth

Date: August 2nd, 2022

of Participants: 29

Tips to Remember	Generic Probing Questions	Managing Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All comments are good comments, write everything down • Try not to bias the conversation by offering your input to the discussion • Pause for answers. Allow time for the group to think by remaining silent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me more about that... • Why do you feel that way? • Can anyone build on that last comment? • Is there anything else we could say about this topic? • Ask what, when, where, which, and how questions • Repeat the question. • Repeat the responses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant agreement - remind the group that there are no right or wrong responses • Domineering participant- move through the group 1-by-1 and ask for input • Irrelevant Discussion – Say “Great comments, but given time constraints lets redirect the conversation”
<p>Discussion Questions:</p> <p>Introduction - Please introduce yourself to the room by stating your name, the organization you represent and your role with that organization, and what you feel is the most pressing need for youth.</p> <p>Question 1 - What additional existing data sources could be added to our assessment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the organization you work with potentially have information on youth needs that is sharable with our group? • Are there secondary data sources that we could consider including? <p>Question 2 - Which at-risk or historically underrepresented communities or groups do we need to consider intentionally including in our efforts?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What methods are best for engaging the community/group? • Is there someone you would suggest we reach out to? 		



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Appendix B: Youth Feedback Discussion Group Notes

Notes Taker: Various

Group: Youth Discussion Groups

Date: Various

of Participants: 300+

Tips to Remember	Generic Probing Questions	Managing Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All comments are good comments, write everything down • Try not to bias the conversation by offering your input to the discussion • Pause for answers. Allow time for the group to think by remaining silent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me more about that... • Why do you feel that way? • Can anyone build on that last comment? • Is there anything else we could say about this topic? • Ask what, when, where, which, and how questions • Repeat the question. • Repeat the responses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant agreement - remind the group that there are no right or wrong responses • Domineering participant- move through the group 1-by-1 and ask for input • Irrelevant Discussion - Say "Great comments, but given time constraints lets redirect the conversation"

Question 1 – What types of interests/events/program/activities do you enjoy participating in with your friends

- How often do you do these activities? With whom? Where?
- Could you please share experiences or programs you'd like to participate in but are unavailable?

Question 2 – When you hear the term "mental health", what are the first things that come to your mind?

- For the past decade, mental health has been identified in local research studies as a major need for teenagers. Quick show of hands, who agrees with that? Why do you agree or disagree?
- What methods have you found are best suited to improve your mental health?
- Who would you feel comfortable turning towards for support for mental health issues?

Question 3 – Adults in this community seem to put a lot of focus towards youth exiting high school ready for college or a career. How do you feel about that?

- What resources or experiences would help you be ready?
- Have you thought about internships or apprenticeships? Why or why not? What's needed to pique your interest?
 - Soft skills, including communication, listening, time management, and more are identified as needs for your generation, especially upon high school graduation. Do you agree?
 - If so, how would you recommend organizations (employers, schools, etc) help you grow in these areas?
 - If not, describe why you feel that is an inaccurate statement.

Question 4 – When you hear the phrase "get active" or "being active", what comes to mind?

- Is "being active" an individual or collective activity for you? Why?
- Where do you go to be active? Are there enough places and/or opportunities in the community for you to be active?
- What's required of a space for you to feel comfortable being active? Public/private, outdoor/indoor, etc

Question 5 - Imagine a place in the community that is your favorite place to be outside of school or your house. It could be a real place or imaginary. Describe the environment.

- Who is there with you?
- When would you go there?
- What would you do once there?

Appendix C: Childcare Providers Discussion Group Notes

Notes Taker: Various

Group: Childcare Forum

Date: 11/8/22

of Participants: 7

Tips to Remember	Generic Probing Questions	Managing Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All comments are good comments, write everything down • Try not to bias the conversation by offering your input to the discussion • Pause for answers. Allow time for the group to think by remaining silent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me more about that... • Why do you feel that way? • Can anyone build on that last comment? • Is there anything else we could say about this topic? • Ask what, when, where, which, and how questions • Repeat the question. • Repeat the responses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant agreement - remind the group that there are no right or wrong responses • Domineering participant- move through the group 1-by-1 and ask for input • Irrelevant Discussion – Say “Great comments, but given time constraints lets redirect the conversation”
<p>Question 1 – What are the top, most pressing needs for youth in Licking Count?</p> <p>Question 2 – What are the biggest needs for your childcare organization/business?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have a waitlist? If so, how many are on the waitlist and how long is someone typically on waitlist? • Are you hearing of demand for 3rd shift service? <p>Question 3 – Describe the impacts (positive and negative) that you have seen Covid-19 have on the development of children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could you describe any developmental milestones that youth are currently struggling to meet? • What resources or experiences would be helpful to boost success? <p>Question 4 – What advice do you have for new providers? ...licensing organizations?</p> <p>Question 5 – What do you hope to see as the most striking difference five years from now regarding childcare services in Licking County?</p>		