

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Background and Objectives

SRA Research Group, Inc. (SRA) and Performance Evaluation and Improvement (PEI), partnered to assist a task force led by the United Way of St. Lucie County to develop "A Progress Report on the State of the Social, Health, and Public Safety Services in St. Lucie County." The overall objective for the project was to identify the social, health, and public safety needs of St. Lucie County which can be used to assist in delivering effective social, health, and public safety services in the future. Specific project objectives included:

- Describing the existing environment by compiling data relating to social, health, and public safety services.
- Collecting community input from surveys and focus groups concerning needed services.
- Identifying gaps in services and underserved areas.

This needs assessment has an overview of St. Lucie County including:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| ▪ This Executive Summary | Chapter 1 |
| ▪ Methodology | Chapter 2 |
| ▪ Environmental Scan | Chapter 3 |

The environmental scan includes local population trends, the communities within the county, and the general characteristics of the county in terms of education, employment, income, and housing. The remaining chapters of the needs assessment focuses on over 80 indicators. Indicators are data which are available in the public domain that are identified as important at the federal, state, or county level. The indicators are grouped into five major categories as follows:

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| ▪ Family Life (including economic status and family stability) | Chapter 4 |
| ▪ Child Health and Education | Chapter 5 |
| ▪ Adult Health and Functioning | Chapter 6 |
| ▪ Elderly and Disabled Adults | Chapter 7 |
| ▪ Safety and Security | Chapter 8 |

Data for the most recent year available are presented for St. Lucie County and for three peer counties – Lake, Manatee, and Marion. These counties were selected as peers based on population size, proximity to St. Lucie County, and the similarity in population and economic characteristics. More detail showing a comparison of these counties can be found in the Methodology section of this report.

The voices of residents, community and faith-based leaders, as well as service providers were an integral part of the needs assessment process. The Community Response sections of the assessment include findings based on two research projects – a series of six focus groups and a community-wide telephone survey. The focus groups were composed of St. Lucie County:

	<u>Number of Groups</u>
▪ Community leaders	1
▪ Service providers	2
▪ Faith-based leaders	1
▪ Hispanic residents	1
▪ Haitian residents	1

The Hispanic and Haitian groups were included to ensure that the voice of these ethnic minorities was heard in the evaluation. The telephone survey utilized a random sample 400 county residents, and was proportional to the population by zip code.

The telephone survey consisted of 400 telephone interviews among adult residents of St. Lucie County. The survey was representative of residents of St. Lucie County. The questionnaire was designed to complement the indicator data. More detail on how this project was completed is included in Chapter 2 which contains the detailed methodology.

The highlights of the needs assessment are presented in the following pages. This is followed by the subsequent individual chapters which explore the indicators and community response for the environmental scan and each of the five major categories in more detail.

This executive summary consists of the following sections:

- General Overview:
 - Key findings and issues which impact St. Lucie County
- Environmental Scan
 - Geography
 - Population
 - Education
 - Employment
 - Income
 - Housing
 - Haitian
 - Hispanic
- Family Life
 - Overview
 - Economic Status of Families (including Hunger)
 - Family Stability
 - Child Care
 - Public Transportation
 - Challenges Identified
 - Indicator Summary

- Child Health and Education
 - Overview
 - Infant and Child Health
 - Teen Substance Abuse
 - Elementary and Secondary Education
 - Child Welfare and Mental Health
 - Challenges Identified
 - Indicator Summary
- Adult Health and Functioning
 - Overview
 - Access to Health Care
 - Behavioral Risk Factors
 - Death Rates
 - Communicable and Infectious Diseases
 - Chronic Illness
 - Adult Mental Health
 - Challenges Identified
 - Indicator Summary
- Elderly and Disabled Adults
 - Overview
 - Financial Status
 - Living Situation
 - Health Status
 - Disabled Adults
 - Challenges Identified
 - Indicator Summary
- Safety and Security
 - Overview
 - Crime Rates
 - Juvenile Delinquency
 - Safety for Children and Families
 - Challenges Identified
 - Indicator Summary

General Overview

This section provides an overview of some of the key findings and issues affecting St. Lucie County in the needs assessment across all of the areas studied. Additional detail is covered in the specific sections of the executive summary and in the individual chapters of the report, including the environmental scan and the five major categories of:

- Family Life
- Child Health and Education
- Adult Health and Functioning
- Elderly and Disabled Adults
- Safety and Security

St. Lucie County is a close-knit community.

St. Lucie County has seen many changes in the past decade. There has been a change from an agricultural community to a society which is a more suburban metropolis with an economy driven by housing and retail establishments. The county is a community where people are involved and supportive. Government, community organizations, faith-based organizations, and service providers work closely together to make the community a better place for all residents. However, potential reductions in state revenue, based on the proposed tax cuts, will likely put strains on these relationships.

The county has experienced rapid growth in recent years.

In the past several years, St. Lucie County has experienced exponential population growth. Part of this growth has come from residents in Miami-Dade and Broward counties moving north to escape the congestion, crime and higher cost of living in South Florida. This has also brought in an increasing number of younger residents and families with children. Additional growth has come from retirees moving to the area.

Affordable housing is a growing issue, particularly given the employment situation.

To accommodate the increasing population, the number of housing units has risen dramatically. However, so have home prices, which have negatively impacted the affordability of housing. Roughly three in ten residents live in St. Lucie County and work in another county. At the same time, the employment picture suggests that there are not enough high paying jobs. This has led to higher rates of unemployment and lower average wages. St. Lucie County also has more children in poverty. All of this may combine with the aforementioned tax cuts to increase the need for services in St. Lucie County.

St. Lucie County is a bedroom community for surrounding counties.

While there are no definitive standards which define a bedroom community in terms of the percentage of workers who leave a county to work, over 30% of St. Lucie County workers are employed in other counties. This is slightly fewer than Lake County where many travel to Orlando, but far more than Manatee and Marion counties. This is also an indication of the lack of good employment opportunities in St. Lucie County.

While education is improving, more work needs to be done.

Community leaders and service providers suggest that primary and secondary educational opportunities are strengths in the county, as is the presence of Indian River Community College. However, indicator data, the recently released FCAT scores, and resident input via the telephone survey suggest that more work needs to be done. Without a strong education system and an educated, trainable workforce, it will be difficult for St. Lucie County to attract businesses which will bring in revenue from outside the county, and thus improve the economic climate in the county.

Access to health care is an increasing problem for residents of St. Lucie County.

In St. Lucie County, the indicator data show that one quarter (25%) of residents under age 65 do not have health insurance. Further, the phone survey suggests that many residents are struggling to pay for health insurance, and are having a major problem affording medical and dental services. These issues are greatest for residents with incomes under \$25,000 and those who are less educated in the community. In order to keep emergency departments from becoming overburdened, there is a need to evaluate ways to expand community health clinics to serve the health care needs of residents.

Gangs, drugs, and violence are issues facing St. Lucie County today.

One of the problems which was cited by focus group participants and residents alike is the growth of gangs in the county. Residents and focus group participants agree that gangs are a large problem. While the St. Lucie County Sheriff's Department was able to make some progress with "Operation Unlucky 13", more work remains.

Focus group participants suggest that more constructive activities and outreach are needed for children and youth in St. Lucie County to curb the attraction to gangs. Faith-based respondents mentioned that there are limited opportunities for youth and nowhere they can turn. They see a gap in terms of both recreational and educational/employment opportunities for youth. Those who are too old for camp or child care and too young to work are particularly vulnerable when activities are lacking. Community leaders who participated in the focus groups suggest problems with youth cross socio-economic boundaries and affect all strata, including the poor and affluent. Some believe lack of parental involvement underlies concerns regarding youth. Often gangs replace the family as the child's support unit. The survey of residents indicated that this is an area of concern for many who live in the county. St. Lucie County needs to find ways to engage children in activities to keep them out of gangs.

Teen pregnancy is a problem which needs to be addressed in St. Lucie County.

Two of the key factors negatively impacting birth outcomes are teen pregnancy and poorly educated mothers. While St. Lucie County has made some progress with teens age 15 to 19, this group is still above the state rate, though it is lower than the three peer counties. However, for younger girls ages 10 to 14, birth rates in St. Lucie County are double the state rate and higher than all three peer counties. In order to reduce negative birth outcomes, these issues need to be addressed.

All who are hungry are not being fed in St. Lucie County.

Roughly one in ten households in St. Lucie County may be food insecure. These residents are likely unsure whether they will have food for their next meal and they may go hungry at times. While a portion of these residents are above the poverty line, these individuals are unable to stretch their incomes to meet the costs of basic necessities, including adequate amounts of food for regular meals.

Poverty is a key indicator of hunger and food insecurity. Among the population living in poverty, the data suggest that only about half of the residents who are at-risk of hunger are currently provided food assistance in St. Lucie County by Treasure Coast Food Bank member agencies. Further, federal food and nutrition programs are vastly underused. For example, while St. Lucie County has relatively good participation in the Food Stamp program compared to peer counties, only 54 percent of those eligible for Food Stamps receive them. These data suggest that potentially half of the residents in poverty are food insecure. Ways to feed those who are hungry in St. Lucie County need to be explored.

Too many children and families are homeless in St. Lucie County.

While homelessness is trending down in St. Lucie County, these data indicate that more than 100 children are homeless. This may lead to negative outcomes for these children in terms of health, education, and employment later in life. Increasing foreclosure rates may indicate that the downward trend in homelessness may be reversed. This suggests a need for more help for homeless residents in regard to affordable housing and employment.

Environmental Scan

The environmental scan section of the executive summary covers the following:

- Geography
- Population
- Education
- Employment
- Income
- Housing
- Haitian Issues
- Hispanic Issues

Geography

St. Lucie County, covering an area of 572 square miles, is north of Martin County, south of Indian River County, and east of Okeechobee County. The land mass includes a 20 mile stretch of beachfront on the Atlantic Ocean and waterfront real estate along the north fork of the St. Lucie River, and a stretch of the Indian River which separates Hutchinson Island, a barrier island, from the mainland.

The county has five major communities, including Ft. Pierce, Port St. Lucie, St. Lucie Village, St. Lucie West, and Tradition which is currently being developed. In addition, there is a large unincorporated area of the county west of Interstate 95 to the Okeechobee County line which is largely agricultural and farm land.

Population

In 2007, St. Lucie County has 260,590 residents. This reflects a 70% increase in population from 1970 until the present. In projecting population growth, it is expected that the number of residents will increase to over 400,000 in 2030.

Per the 2000 U.S. census data, the population was 192,695 which included 10,666 infants and toddlers (children under age 5), 32,628 children age 5 to 17, 39,734 elders age 65 to 84 and 3,938 elders age 85 and older.

Education

St. Lucie County has 41 schools, including 18 elementary, 4 middle/junior schools, 6 high schools, and 13 other schools. After receiving a "B" grade in 2006, St. Lucie County earned a "C" district grade for 2007, which is the same grade received in 2005. While there were more "A" schools in 2007, there were also more "D" and "F" schools in 2007. (Note: The school district re-assigned students in the 2006-2007 school year).

For 2005-2006, the district reported a graduation rate of 72.7% and a dropout rate of 2.2%. However, there are differences in educational levels across the county. For example, in Ft. Pierce, 30% of the population age 25 and over has not graduated from high school nor received an equivalent degree, compared to only 22% of those in the remainder of the county.

Employment

In 2006, St. Lucie County had 110,140 workers employed and 4,840 workers unemployed. This equates to an unemployment rate of 4.2% which is higher than in 2005 (3.9%), but lower than the level of 5.7% in 2000.

More than half the workers are employed by trade, transportation and utilities (24%), government (17%) or education and health services (12%).

Three in ten residents are employed outside St. Lucie County, which may suggest that the County is a bedroom community for surrounding counties which offer more or better employment opportunities.

Income

St. Lucie County's per capita income in 2005 was \$25,861, which is well below the state level of \$34,001. As a whole, 41% of households in the county are classified as low income. Ft. Pierce has the highest proportion of low income households, at 47%.

Over 25,000 residents (13%) live below the poverty threshold, with poverty being the greatest issue in Ft. Pierce. In addition, a higher proportion of children under age 5 and those age 5 to 17 live in poverty in St. Lucie County.

Housing

In 2005, 78% of county residents were home owners. The median sale price of a single family home was \$234,000, while condominiums sold for \$212,000 on average.

The real estate market has seen a major price increase since 2000. However, during the past year, prices have begun to drop due to a rise in interest rates and a large increase in the inventory of available houses caused by rapid home building and a large number of investors speculating in the real estate market. Further, it's the perception of many in the county that there is a glut in older, lower cost homes.

Despite this, affordable housing is an issue for many residents. Cost burdened households which spend more than 30% of their income for housing account for 24% of St. Lucie County residents. Ft. Pierce has the highest levels of cost burdened households in St. Lucie County.

Haitian Issues

With the focus group conducted among St. Lucie County residents of Haitian decent, one area which is not covered by indicator data is communication. In the Haitian culture, the children speak English, and the parents speak Creole. Haitians feel there is a lack of information in Creole about subjects such as immigration, schools, community, jobs, and transportation. They suggest that a community center, a radio station which would broadcast in Creole, or an information "ATM" would be a good way to share information. Right now the primary place to obtain information for Haitians is church.

Another Haitian issue uncovered in the focus groups is that many feel degraded and that their privacy is invaded when they seek help and services. Additionally, it was mentioned that some married Haitian women, in order to obtain the services they need, feel they need to say they are not married in order to qualify for services.

Hispanic Issues

In the focus group among Hispanic respondents, one of the key issues which is not covered by indicator data is racism. According to respondents in the Hispanic focus group, Hispanics feel the Black residents target them for robberies, particularly in Ft. Pierce. They also suggest that many Hispanics come here with a “farmers” mentality and they are not trained or educated to find anything other than “common” jobs.

Hispanics also stick together to work around the “system”. For example, legal residents will deposit pay checks for illegal residents and give them the cash since the illegal residents cannot obtain a social security card and many do not have a driver’s license, which is needed to open a bank account.

Like Haitians, Hispanics indicate that there are communication issues in terms of not knowing about community events and services which are available to help them improve their lives. They indicate that they do read the Spanish language newspaper, but they also get information from posters and flyers in grocery stores. Hispanics also suggest that there is a need for an interpreter in places like hospitals to help with communication. Like Haitians, the children speak English, and many adults only speak Spanish.

Note to Readers

Many issues outlined herein are covered in subsequent sections of this executive summary. The full text of the environmental scan is located in Chapter 3 of this report.

FAMILY LIFE IN ST. LUCIE COUNTY

The family life section of the executive summary covers the following:

- Overview
- Economic Status of Families
- Family Stability
- Child Care
- Public Transportation
- Challenges Identified
- Indicator Summary

Overview

Based on the indicator data and the telephone survey of residents, there are some family life issues which are impacting St. Lucie County residents. While not in any particular order, some of these issues include lower incomes, higher poverty rates, limited opportunities for higher paying jobs, hunger, lack of affordable housing, and the availability of affordable child care.

Economic Status of Families

St. Lucie County had an average per capita income of \$25,861, which is below the state average of \$34,001 based on 2005 data. Adjusted gross income is similar, with St. Lucie County at \$43,201 and the state rate at \$49,545. While St. Lucie County residents are ranked in a relatively high national percentile for dividend (11) and interest (14) income, the county is in the 60th percentile in terms of wages and salaries. These data confirm that a portion of the predominantly retiree population live on their investments, while most residents live on salary and wages, and many struggle to make ends meet. The telephone survey data support this with two thirds (64%) having difficulty budgeting their money.

Better jobs which pay higher wages are needed in St. Lucie County. Community leaders and service providers in the focus groups stressed the need for more employment opportunities which pay higher wages. This will require attracting business and industry to the county. At the same time, unemployment in St. Lucie County is increasing, with the rate rising to 4.4% for April and May 2007, from 4.2% in March, and up from 3.8% in May, 2006. Further, poverty levels are high, particularly in Ft. Pierce, and hunger is a problem in St. Lucie County as evidenced by more families being classified as food insecure than in peer counties.

Family Stability

In terms of family stability, the divorce rate in St. Lucie County is average. However, the proportion of female-headed households, which can lead to less favorable outcomes for children, is higher than all three peer counties at 11%. Further, 54% of these female-headed households are where children under 5 reside and 40% where children under 18 reside below the poverty level. School moves, which indicate family stability, are slightly higher for St. Lucie County than the three peer counties.

Housing prices increased dramatically in St. Lucie County, preceding the slump in real estate sales in 2005-2006. Home ownership in 2005 was 78% which is below two of the peer counties, while the median sale price at \$234,000 is above two peer counties. In addition, the housing cost burden, which represents the proportion of income spent on housing above the desired 30% level, is 24%, placing St. Lucie above two peer counties. Further, homelessness is higher than two of three peer counties. All of this suggests that affordable housing is an issue for St. Lucie County.

The telephone survey indicates that residents agree, with more than one-third (36%) reporting that finding affordable housing is a major issue for them. The community leader and service provider focus group participants also mentioned that more affordable housing is needed. However, they suggest that it is a problem because developers do not want to build affordable housing and residents don't want it in their backyard.

Child Care and Youth Programs

In regard to child care, focus group participants feel that the Children's Services Council, faith-based organizations, and the educational system serve children well in the county. However, the indicator data suggest that while the population of St. Lucie County is increasing, the number of child care slots has declined and child care is less affordable for many residents. Respondents in the telephone survey agree. According to telephone survey respondents, only 11% agree that there is enough quality day care in the county, while a majority agree (54%) there is a need for more subsidized child care. Further, 45% of parents surveyed have had an issue finding affordable, quality child care in the past 12 months.

In addition to child care, focus group participants and the telephone survey responses suggest a need for more youth programs. They suggest that after school programs are needed for the youth and teen population to curb the appeal of gangs. Over one-third of the telephone survey participants agree that gangs hurt the quality of life in their neighborhood (39%) and a similar number of parents (35%) have had issues with teen criminal activity in their household during the past 12 months.

Public Transportation

While progress has been made with public transportation according to several focus group participants, the Haitian and Hispanic focus group attendees suggest there is a need for better public transportation. In the telephone survey, two-thirds (65%) agree that public transportation is important. In addition, residents with incomes under \$25,000 and those who are Black are more likely to have a major issue finding transportation to work, according to the telephone survey.

Respondents in the Haitian focus group also suggest that more public transportation is needed.

Challenges Identified

Some of the challenges identified in the family life section include:

- More jobs and higher paying jobs
- Affordable housing
- Homelessness
- Hunger
- Available and affordable child care
- Youth programs
- Public transportation

Indicator Summary

For families to thrive, basic economic and family stability are necessary. Inadequate financial resources often result in poor nutrition and poor health care which can lead to diminished productivity and undermine general well-being. The impact of poverty is particularly great on children. Family stresses caused by economic concerns and other issues are reflected in divorce and more frequent household moves. For adults on welfare with dependent children, participation in the workforce helps combat the negative outcomes of poverty and decreases the amount of time that cash assistance is needed for basic subsistence.

In addition to these factors, home ownership and the affordability of housing impact family well-being. Along with housing, available and affordable child care affects many families. Family Life Chapter 4 presents indicator data relating to the economic status of families and family stability. The community response to issues of family life is presented at the end of the chapter.

Following is a summary of the family life indicator data:

	Good	Neutral	Needs attention	
	St. Lucie County compared to peer counties			St. Lucie County better (+), the same (=), or worse (-) than the state
ECONOMIC STATUS OF FAMILIES				
Per capita income				-
Adjusted gross income				-
Average income from dividends and interest				N/A
Average wages and salaries				N/A
Reported income				N/A
Unemployment rate				-
Median household income levels				-
Poverty rates				+
Children in poverty				-
Households potentially food insecure				+
Participate in federal nutrition programs				N/A
Free or reduced school lunch – Elementary school				=
Free or reduced school lunch – Middle school				-
Adults receiving diversion payment/service that remain off cash assistance for 12 months *				-
Work able food stamp customers participating in work or work related activities *				-
TANF customers participating in work or work related activities				-

* District 15

	Good	Neutral	Needs attention	
	St. Lucie County compared to peer counties			St. Lucie County better (+), the same (=), or worse (-) than the state
FAMILY STABILITY				
Dissolution of marriage				+
Female-headed households				+
Poverty rates in female-headed households				-
Student population stability (elementary)				N/A
Home ownership rate				N/A
Median single family home sales price				N/A
Median gross rent				N/A
Household cost burden: Percentage of income spent on housing				N/A
Homeless count				N/A

CHILD CARE				
Infant and toddler care				N/A
Gold seal accredited centers and homes				N/A
Child care affordability				+

CHILD HEALTH AND EDUCATION

The child health and education section of the executive summary covers the following:

- Overview
- Infant and Child Health
- Teen Substance Abuse
- Elementary and Secondary Education
- Child Welfare and Mental Health
- Challenges Identified
- Indicator Summary

Overview

In reviewing the indicator data, as well as input from the telephone survey and the focus groups, several issues exist in terms of child health and education. While not in rank order, these include, but are not limited to, lack of prenatal care, teen pregnancy, disease and death rates among children, substance abuse, and lack of appropriate education proficiency. In addition, there is room for improvement on child welfare and mental health issues.

Infant and Child Health

Prenatal care is critically important to healthy birth outcomes, which impact successful functioning later in life. While most women in St. Lucie County receive prenatal care, the proportion of women who receive inadequate prenatal care is higher than the state rate and two of three peer counties. These data suggest a need for appropriate health and sex education for all age groups, starting around the age of 10.

It should also be noted that many women in the Haitian focus groups are not familiar with the concept of prenatal care, which suggests that this needs to be stressed to the Haitian community in Creole.

Another area for concern is the relatively high rate of under-educated mothers, which also impacts functioning of children in later life. St. Lucie County exceeds the state level and that of two of the three peer counties on this measure. This indicates a need for parenting education which is echoed by both the focus groups and the telephone survey. Community leaders, service providers, and residents all believe that St. Lucie County needs to improve parenting education programs in the county.

Two other problems are a higher rate of gastrointestinal illness for children under age 6 than the state and peer counties, as well as a much higher death rate for children ages 1 to 19. These issues all require attention.

St. Lucie County has made progress on improving low birth weight outcomes and in terms of reducing infant mortality rates. In addition, St. Lucie County compares favorably to the state and peer counties in terms of Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) participation, i.e., rates are

higher in St. Lucie County than in the state as a whole and higher than in the peer counties. Most Kindergarten students are up-to-date on immunizations, though this rate is still slightly below peer counties. More progress is still needed in these areas.

Teen Substance Abuse

The health and functioning of adolescents is negatively impacted by substance abuse. Substance abuse was identified by community leaders and service providers in the focus groups as an issue which is intertwined with other problems including gangs, crime, and HIV/AIDS. In St. Lucie County, both younger teens (middle school students) and older teens (high school students) have substance abuse problems. Younger teens are above the state rate and two peer counties for both tobacco and alcohol use. Both the younger and older groups are also higher than the state rate and peer counties (three for younger – two for older) in terms of marijuana use.

Parents in the telephone survey concur, with 30% saying they have had an issue with alcohol or drug abuse in their household during the past 12 months. This suggests a need for substance abuse education at or before the age of 10 for children in St. Lucie County.

Elementary and Secondary Education

In order to succeed in school, students must attend school regularly. While elementary school attendance is on par with the state rate and peer counties, absences for middle and high school students exceed both the state and peer county rates. Attendance needs to be improved in St. Lucie County.

The lack of attendance is reflected in reading and math proficiency. Specifically, St. Lucie County third and tenth graders are rated lower than both the state and peer counties in terms of both math and reading proficiency.

Parents in the telephone survey echo these findings, with only 17% saying they agree that St. Lucie County public school students are well prepared for college. However, community leaders and service providers in the focus groups were more positive about the public schools and feel that great strides have been made in terms of education in St. Lucie County. Continued improvement is needed in the St. Lucie County schools.

Child Welfare and Mental Health

Child abuse, neglect and emotional disturbances can all negatively impact outcomes for children. Child abuse rates in St. Lucie County have increased slightly, but are on par with the state rate and equal to one peer district, while well below another.

Of all children who were removed from their homes in Department of Children and Families District 15 (including St. Lucie County), almost 70% were reunited with their families within 12 months. Where higher rates indicate a positive outcome, District 15 compares negatively to the state rate. District 15 compares negatively to one district and compares positively to another.

While it has been improving, seriously emotionally disturbed children (SED) in St. Lucie County spent 344 days in the community (as opposed to being institutionalized), which is lower than the state, but equal to two peer districts. SED school attendance is improving and is now slightly higher than the state level, above one peer district and equal to another. This suggests that some progress is being made with SED children.

In the telephone survey among residents, just under one in five (17%) parents say children with behavioral and emotional problems has been a major issue in their household during the past 12 months.

Haitian parents find that the U.S. culture makes it very difficult for them to parent as they would in their native land. Specifically, they say their children have too much power over their parents due to our laws. This makes controlling children difficult and can lead to behavioral problems.

Challenges Identified


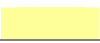



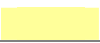






Some of the challenges identified in the child health and education section include:

- High rate of births to teen mothers, particularly ages 10 to 14
- Births to mothers with less than a high school education
- High rate of substance abuse, particularly among middle school teens (except for illicit drugs other than marijuana)
- High rate of absenteeism for middle and high school students
- Lower rates of math and reading proficiency for 3rd and 10th grade students
- Parental concerns about the quality of education
- Child abuse rates which are increasing
- Lower rate of children being reunited with their families when removed
- Outcomes are improving for seriously emotionally disturbed children, though parents still indicate major problems in this area

Indicator Summary

Children are the heart of each community and the status of child health and education are indicative of the well-being of the entire community. A healthy birth and healthy development, free from disease and injury, help to ensure that children grow to be productive, independent adults. Conversely, problems at birth and in early development such as very low birth weight, poor nutrition, limited intellectual and sensory stimulation, illness affecting development, or other health problems may follow a child into adulthood, manifesting as learning problems, social maladjustment, chronic health problems, or other issues. Monitoring the indicators of child health is arguably the most critical piece of a community needs assessment. Chapter 5 presents data on indicators relating to child health and education.

Following is a summary of the child health and education indicator data:

	Good	Neutral	Needs attention	
	St. Lucie County compared to peer counties			St. Lucie County better (+), the same (=), or worse (-) than the state
INFANT AND CHILD HEALTH				
Births with late or no prenatal care				-
Births with inadequate prenatal care				-
Births to mothers participating in WIC program				+
Births to teen mothers ages 10 to 14				-
Births to teen mothers ages 15 to 19				-
Births to mothers with less than high school education				-
Low birth weight births				+
Infant mortality				+
WIC participation				+
Up-to-date immunization for Kindergarten students				-
Enteric disease among children under 6				-
Child deaths (all causes)				-

	Good	Neutral	Needs attention	
	St. Lucie County compared to peer counties			St. Lucie County better (+), the same (=), or worse (-) than the state
TEEN SUBSTANCE ABUSE				
Tobacco use within last 30 days by middle school students				-
Tobacco use within last 30 days by high school students				+
Use of alcohol within past 30 days by middle school students				-
Use of alcohol within past 30 days by high school students				+
Use of marijuana within past 30 days by middle school students				-
Use of marijuana within past 30 days by high school students				-
Illicit drug use other than marijuana within past 30 days by middle school students				+
Illicit drug use other than marijuana within past 30 days by high school students				+

	Good	Neutral	Needs attention	
	St. Lucie County compared to peer counties			St. Lucie County better (+), the same (=), or worse (-) than the state
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION				
Students absent 21 or more days – Elementary school				=
Students absent 21 or more days – Middle school				-
Students absent 21 or more days – High school				-
Kindergarten readiness				-
Students scoring proficient FCAT reading				-
Students scoring proficient FCAT mathematics				-
Public high school graduation rates				+
Drop-out rates				+

CHILD WELFARE AND MENTAL HEALTH				
Child abuse rates *				=
Children reunified within 12 months *				-
Annual days SED children spend in the community *				-
School days SED children attend *				+

* District 15

ADULT HEALTH AND FUNCTIONING

The adult health and functioning section of the executive summary covers the following:

- Overview
- Access to Health Care
- Behavioral Risk Factors
- Death Rates
- Communicable and Infectious Diseases
- Chronic Illness
- Adult Mental Health
- Challenges Identified
- Indicator Summary

Overview

Adults represent 75 percent of the population in St. Lucie County. There are an estimated:

- 12,949 young adults (ages 20 to 24)
- 55,345 adults ages 25 to 44
- 62,508 adults ages 45 to 64.

Indicators of adult health include access to and availability of health care, behaviors which can lead to poor health and quality of life outcomes, death and disease rates, and mental health issues. All of these impact the individual's quality of life, as well as having a negative impact on the community as a whole.

Access to Health Care

An important indicator of overall health in a community is the ability of residents to access health care. One-quarter (25%) of St. Lucie County residents under the age of 65 are without health insurance. This is higher than the state as a whole and the three peer counties.

According to the telephone survey, affording health insurance is a major issue for almost half (45%) of St. Lucie County residents. This has the greatest impact on households with children and families who earn under \$50,000 per year. As a service provider in the focus groups pointed out, this problem has the greatest impact on the working poor, while the very poor may be impacted less since they receive help with their medical costs.

Affording medical services is also a major issue for many (41%) based on the telephone survey of residents. The survey showed that this was a particular problem for Hispanic households (61%). In addition, participants in the focus group among Haitians stated that they feel that the health care system does not help them since they cannot afford the services.

If these lower income residents and working poor do not have access to health care, they are likely to delay care, which can lead to more serious illness. Further, these residents may rely on the emergency department at local hospitals for care which may overburden these facilities.

The telephone survey also indicates that the cost of dental care is a major issue for many residents (44%). As with health care, this problem has the greatest impact on households with children and lower incomes. A lack of dental care has been shown to lead to many more serious health issues, including heart disease.

Behavioral Risk Factors

Risk factors for adults include health status, as well as lifestyle behavioral choices which can impact health.

About one in five St. Lucie County adults report they are in poor health (20.7%) or are obese (21.9%). These problems are even more acute for less educated, lower income, and elder adults. In addition, obesity is a far greater issue among Blacks (43%). These data match the resident telephone survey, where 23% indicated a major problem with adult obesity in their household during the past 12 months.

Among the lifestyle factors, most adults (73.8%) consume less than five fruits and vegetables a day, while over half (55.4%) have no regular moderate physical activity. Further, over one in four St. Lucie County residents smoke (28.1%) and 12.4% engage in heavy or binge drinking. The telephone survey data indicate that 10% of households have a major issue with substance abuse. However, service providers in the focus groups suggest this may be much higher and report that this behavior has a negative impact on many young children in the county.

Death Rates

The death rate for adults in St. Lucie County has decreased over the last five years. Heart disease and cancer are the leading causes of death among adults in St. Lucie County.

Communicable and Infectious Diseases

While vaccine preventable illnesses and sexually transmitted disease rates are relatively low, St. Lucie County has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS in the state, as well as a higher rate of tuberculosis cases. Both measures are above both the state rate and the rates for all three peer counties.

Chronic Illness

Residents in St. Lucie County die from the four classic categories of chronic disease including:

- Heart disease
- Cancer
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- Stroke

In terms of the behavioral risk factors which are associated with morbidity and mortality, St. Lucie County compares unfavorably to the state for high blood pressure cases and no regular vigorous physical activity. Compared to peer counties, St. Lucie County has the least number of high cholesterol cases, and a higher percent of residents that do not have regular leisure time physical activity. These diseases are an indication that poor diet and lack of exercise are contributing factors to health issues for residents.

The county compares poorly to the state on death rates for diabetes, lung cancer, and skin cancer. While St. Lucie County is improving, rates for heart disease and stroke also compare unfavorably to the state.

Adult Mental Health

The treatment of adult mental illness has a direct impact on the ability of adults to support themselves financially.

Compared to the state and peer counties, adults with mental illness in District 15, which includes St. Lucie County, are slightly less successful in completing treatment. However, adults who complete treatment are somewhat more likely to find work, though the average days worked is declining. Adults with mental illness are more likely than residents of peer counties to avoid being institutionalized.

In the telephone survey of residents, just over one in five adults (23%) report a major problem with feelings of anxiety, stress, and depression. This is more of an issue for residents who are not employed, parents with children, and residents with incomes under \$25,000 per year.

Both community leaders and service providers in the focus groups indicated that St. Lucie County lacks sufficient beds for mental health patients. In 2005, the Savannas, a mental health facility, experienced hurricane damage and closed. However, the facility reopened in 2007 under new ownership under the name Port St. Lucie Hospital. As of August 2007, the facility had 60 beds with plans of opening 15 more beds in the future.

In addition, among the homeless population in the county, mentally ill adults have one of the greatest needs for housing.

All of this suggests that mental illness may be preventing some residents from finding and keeping jobs, which indicates the need for additional services and treatment for adults with mental illness.

Challenges Identified






Some of the challenges identified in the adult health and functioning section include:










- Lack of health insurance
- Access to affordable health care
- Access to affordable dental care
- Poor health status
- Obesity
- Substance abuse treatment resources
- Tuberculosis cases
- HIV/AIDS
- Lack of mental health beds







Indicator Summary

The St. Lucie County community needs assessment included the needs of the general adult population. Chapter 6 addresses the indicator data relating to health care access, behavioral risk factors, death rates, and communicable diseases using data from the Florida Department of Health. Adult mental health data was obtained from the Department of Children and Families. The community response to issues of adult health and functioning is presented at the end of Chapter 6.

Following is a summary of the adult health and functioning indicator data:

	Good	Neutral	Needs attention	
	St. Lucie County compared to peer counties			St. Lucie County better (+), the same (=), or worse (-) than the state
HEALTH CARE ACCESS				
Uninsured rates: no reported health care insurance				-
COMMUNICABLE AND INFECTIOUS DISEASE				
Vaccine preventable disease				+
Sexually transmitted diseases				+
AIDS cases				-
Tuberculosis cases				-

	Good	Neutral	Needs attention	
	St. Lucie County compared to peer counties			St. Lucie County better (+), the same (=), or worse (-) than the state
BEHAVIORAL RISK FACTORS				
Have been told by a doctor or other health professional that their blood pressure is high				-
Have been told by a doctor or other health professional that their blood cholesterol is high				+
Have had their cholesterol checked in last two years (of those ever measured)				+
NO regular vigorous physical activity				-
NO moderate vigorous physical activity				=
Engages in no leisure time physical activity				-
Consumes < 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day				=
Are overweight (BMI >25)				=
Are obese (BMI >=30)				=

CHRONIC DISEASES				
Coronary heart disease hospitalizations				N/A
Coronary heart disease deaths				N/A
Heart failure hospitalizations				N/A
Heart failure deaths				N/A
Stroke hospitalizations				N/A
Stroke deaths				N/A

	Good	Neutral	Needs attention	
	St. Lucie County compared to peer counties			St. Lucie County better (+), the same (=), or worse (-) than the state
DEATH RATES				
Cervical cancer deaths				N/A
Breast cancer deaths				N/A
Lung cancer deaths				N/A
Prostate cancer deaths				N/A
Colorectal cancer deaths				N/A
Skin cancer deaths				N/A
Diabetes deaths				N/A
CLRD deaths				N/A

ADULT MENTAL HEALTH				
Adults who complete treatment *				+
Annual days worked for pay for adults with severe and persistent mental illness *				+
Average annual earnings for adults with severe and persistent mental illness *				+
Annual days in the community for adults with severe and persistent mental illness *				+

* District 15

ELDERLY AND DISABLED ADULTS

The elderly and disabled adults section of the executive summary covers the following:

- Overview
- Financial Status
- Living Situations
- Health Status
- Disabled Adults

Overview

The approximately 53,540 elders (65+) in St. Lucie County represent 22.3 percent of the population, including:

- 19.7 percent aged 65 to 84
- 2.6 percent over 84 years of age

The population age 60 and over is 71,776 in 2007 and is expected to double to 145,760 by 2030. This suggests that providers of services to elders, who are already straining to meet demand, will find their situation even more difficult in the coming years.

An ideal environment for the elderly is one that provides choices, promotes independence, and enables older Floridians to remain in their communities for a lifetime. This is the mission of the Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA). The department works to create a long-term care system that is streamlined, cost-effective, and consumer-friendly; effective support networks for elders, families, and caregivers; and an elder-friendly environment that values the contributions and needs of elders. The St. Lucie County Council on Aging, Inc. is the local agency to coordinate and advocate for services for the elderly.

Financial Status

While fewer elders live in poverty compared to the state rate, St. Lucie County is below two of three peer counties on this measure.

Service providers in the focus groups reported that many seniors are living on very tight budgets and are not able to pay for the services they need.

Living Situation

Older people who are living alone without a spouse or caregiver are more likely to require placement in a nursing home as they age and become more frail. In St. Lucie County, one in five elders (age 60+) live alone, which is slightly below the state rate and similar to two of three peer counties.

Loneliness is also an issue for many elders, according to residents who participated in the telephone survey. According to these residents, half (49%) of elders age 60 and over feel many seniors in St. Lucie County suffer from loneliness. Despite most (59%) of the elders in the telephone survey indicating that they know how to get information about services, this may indicate a need to do more to communicate the activities which are available to seniors.

Other concerns about living situations were highlighted by the results of the resident telephone survey. Specifically, 44% worry they will not be able to remain in their home if they become sick and need care. In addition, 42% worry that they will not be able to find transportation, and over two-thirds of the elders believe the county needs to have an adequate transportation system.

Finally, 30% indicate they have an issue with making their home handicap accessible.

Health Status

In order to maintain good health, it is critical to have access to medical care. One-fourth of the elders in St. Lucie County are medically underserved, which is above the state level, but below two of three peer counties.

Elders who have more than two disabilities are considered significantly disabled. In St. Lucie County, fewer elders are considered significantly disabled than in peer counties or the state as a whole.

The findings are similar for Alzheimer's cases, with St. Lucie County below the state rate and the three peer counties.

The DOEA has developed a series of indicators that provide a picture of the adequacy with which the needs of the elderly are met in local communities, including an index measure. The Elder Needs Index shows that residents age 60 and older with the greatest needs are located in Ft. Pierce zip codes 34950 and 34947.

Based on findings from the telephone survey, those over age 60 are twice as likely to have issues with alcohol abuse than younger residents. This may be due in part to the loneliness many elders in St. Lucie County experience. Elders are similar to their younger counterparts in terms of weight problems.

Disabled Adults

For disabled adults, avoidance of nursing home placement is a key indicator. If the level of community services is adequate, disabled adults may be able to stay in their own homes. In St. Lucie, none of the adults with disabilities who received services through Elder Affairs were placed in a nursing home.

While Elder Affairs is very successful in keeping disabled adults out of nursing homes, 16% of the residents in the telephone survey have a major issue finding affordable adult day care. In addition, service providers in the focus groups pointed out that adults who act as caregivers tend to suffer most from a lack of affordable adult day care.

Challenges Identified

Some of the challenges identified for Elderly and Disabled Adults include:

- Elders living in poverty
- Elders who are lonely
- Communication to elders about services and activities
- Elders who have multiple needs in Ft. Pierce

Indicator Summary

Given Florida's high population of elderly residents, a needs assessment would be incomplete without a focus on the needs of the elderly. Disabled adults of any age have similar needs and issues. Chapter 7 of this report presents indicator data relating to the needs of elderly and disabled adults using data from the Florida Department of Elder Affairs. The community response to the issues of the elderly and disabled adults is presented at the end of the chapter.

Following is a summary of the elderly and disabled adults indicator data:

	Good	Neutral	Needs attention	
	St. Lucie County compared to peer counties			St. Lucie County better (+), the same (=), or worse (-) than the state
ELDERLY				
Population 65+ living below poverty level				+
Population 60+ living alone				+
People 65+ medically underserved				-
Population 65+ with two or more types of disabilities				+
Probable Alzheimer's as percent of population 65+				+
DISABLED ADULTS				
Adults with disabilities not placed in nursing home				+

SAFETY AND SECURITY

The safety and security section of the executive summary includes the following:

- Overview
- Crime Rates
- Juvenile Delinquency
- Safety for Children and Families
- Challenges Identified
- Indicator Summary

Overview

Living in a safe and secure environment is an important factor in the success of adults and has a critical impact on the growth and development of children. Factors such as a low crime rate and lack of juvenile delinquency are important to all. Domestic violence, child abuse, and parental neglect can have a permanent impact on a child's healthy development. Some of the challenges for St. Lucie County, in no particular order, are index crimes, gangs, domestic violence, and crime in schools.

Crime Rates

St. Lucie County has a crime rate of 3,743 per 100,000 population for index crimes, including murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. This is lower than the state rate, fairly close to two peer counties and well below the third. The county has seen a 7.2% decrease in crime rates from 2004 to 2005. Further, jail populations are much higher than state rates and those for peer counties. According to the telephone survey, two-thirds of residents (65%) feel safe in their neighborhoods.

All of this suggests that law enforcement efforts are being effective. However, the index crime rate for Ft. Pierce is 2.5 times higher than the county as a whole and twice the state rate.

Juvenile Delinquency

The juvenile crime indicators are above state levels and are trending up.

Simply put, the problem is gangs. Given the comments from community leaders, service providers and faith-based participants in the focus groups, this comes as no surprise. Focus group participants, along with the residents in the telephone survey, indicated that gangs are a major problem. The gang activity is responsible for many of the index crimes and drug related problems in Ft. Pierce and throughout the county. This may indicate a need for expanding or establishing community watch groups in areas which have more gang related criminal activity.

Many, including the law enforcement officers who participated in the focus groups, suggest that gangs are part of the larger problems of families living in poverty, a less educated population,

poor job prospects, and lack of strong parenting and male role models. Focus group participants suggest these issues must be addressed to reduce gang problems.

Safety for Children and Families

Death rates due to unintentional injuries are the same as the state rate and lower than all three peer counties.

Violence in the home and community has a strong impact on outcomes for children as well as their families. In St. Lucie County, domestic violence was much higher than the state rate and higher than all three peer counties. However, child abuse, neglect or threatened harm was similar to the state levels and lower than the two peer districts (District 15 and Suncoast Region). At the same time, crime and violence in high schools was above both the state rate and all three peer counties.

The results of the telephone survey among residents showed that only half of the parents agree that their children feel safe in school. This finding, combined with the indicator data, suggest the need for more school resource officers.

Challenges Identified

Some of the challenges identified in the safety and security section include:

- Index crime rate in Ft. Pierce
- Gang activity
- Domestic violence
- Crime and violence in high schools

Indicator Summary

For the community at large, safety and security are generally defined in terms of a low crime rate, particularly for the crimes defined as index crimes, i.e., murder, rate, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. Lower rates relative to the statewide rate or rates for peer counties encourage a feeling of safety. For children, the safety and security of their environment significantly impacts their growth and development. Violence experienced by children may include domestic violence and child abuse or threatened harm, as well as crime and violence in school. Parental neglect also undermines a child's security and healthy development. Chapter 8 presents data relating to indicators of safety and security for the general public, for children and families, and related to juvenile delinquency.

Following is a summary of the safety and security indicator data:

	Good	Neutral	Needs attention	
	St. Lucie County compared to peer counties			St. Lucie County better (+), the same (=), or worse (-) than the state
CRIME RATES				
Index crime rates				+
Non-violent crime rates				+
Violent crime rates				+
Jail incarceration rate				+
Average daily jail population				N/A

JUVENILE CRIME				
Rate of youth referred for delinquency offenses				N/A
Youth committed for delinquency offenses				N/A
Youth transferred to adult court for delinquency offenses				N/A

SAFETY FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES				
Deaths from unintentional injuries				-
Domestic violence rates				-
Child abuse rates *				-
Crime and violence incidents in high school				-

* District 15