



2023 Community Assessment

MONROE COUNTY

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Prepared by

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Executive Summary

Every three years, Action for a Better Community, Inc. (ABC) conducts a comprehensive analysis of the state of our community and a special analysis for its Early Childhood Services Division (as required by Head Start Performance Standards as well as Community Services Block Grant legislation). The purpose of this analysis is to provide Action for a Better Community, Inc. (ABC) and its community stakeholders with information to most effectively target agency resources, programs, and services in ways that most effectively fulfill the agency's mission. In the intervening years, a community assessment update is completed primarily consisting of new data highlighting significant changes that have occurred since completing the most recent comprehensive assessment. This report is the 2023 (comprehensive) community assessment. Key findings about Monroe County are highlighted below.

- Monroe County shows fairly stable population characteristics – there have only been very slight changes in its demographic profile since the most recent comprehensive community assessment.
- The majority of residents in the county, city, state and the nation only speak English – 70% or more. Among the non-English languages spoken, Spanish rose to the top locally. The 2017-2021 American Community Survey (ACS) found that less than 10% of non-English speakers spoke English “less than very well”. Shelter, security, and stability (e.g., employment) were among the challenges facing refugees seeking to make a life in this community and are the reasons many leave as soon as they arrive. Helping refugees/immigrants access resources and navigate systems continues to be needed.
- According to the 2017-2021 ACS, the percentage of individuals in poverty in the city of Rochester (29.3%) is 2x the rate for Monroe County, Rochester Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), New York State (NYS), and the U.S. (all of which have rates around 13%). Towns outside the city with poverty rates in the double digits included: Sweden (18.1%), Wheatland (13.8%), Greece (10.3%), and Clarkson (10.2%).
- Whites are less likely to live in poverty than most non-whites. The 2017-2021 ACS notes that 9.0% of whites were in poverty compared to 15%-35% of nonwhites in Monroe County. Slightly more women than men reside in poverty.
- According to the 2017-2021 ACS, the poverty rate for families residing in the city of Rochester (at 24.9%) was at least 3x the rate of all other areas in Monroe County. The rate for county, Rochester MSA, NYS, and the nation was about 9.0%.
- Among the various family types, the poverty rate continues to be highest amongst female-headed households (single mothers), according to the 2017-2021 ACS. The rate was 3.1% for married-couple families, 27.4% for female-headed families (single mothers), and 10.0% for male-headed families (single fathers) in Monroe County. For the city of Rochester, the breakdown was: 8.2%, 41.0%, and 9.1%, respectively.
- Families with children are more likely to be in poverty than the general population. The 2017-2021 ACS reported that 46.0% of families with children under age 18 residing in the city of Rochester were in poverty. The rates for the county, Rochester MSA, NYS, and the nation were about 20%.

Towns outside the city with the highest poverty rates included: Wheatland (27.8%), Greece (17.9%), and Sweden (17.5%). Families with children under age 5 had poverty rates of 44.4% for the city and about 20% for the county, Rochester MSA, NYS, and the nation.

- According to the 2017-2021 ACS, the percentage of individuals below 100 percent of poverty with a disability stood at 19.6% nationally, 23.0% for NYS, 22.2% for Rochester MSA, 24.0% for Monroe County, and 25.1% for the city of Rochester. For those at 100-149 percent of poverty, the percent with a disability was around 12.0%.
- A sizable number of county children with developmental delays/disabilities – 435 – are on a wait list (30 days or more) to receive early intervention services due to a shortage of providers. Many providers have stopped providing these services because of low reimbursement rates --- caused by reimbursement cuts and new non-billable mandates -- which has been a community issue for over 5 years. This issue can hinder a child's own development and his/her ability to be on par with their nondisabled peers. Local advocates and the County are advocating for legislation to increase reimbursement rates (by 11%). The County Executive has committed resources to address needs in the meantime.
- Seniors (65 and over) in poverty make up 19% of the city's population, which is at least double the percentage for the county (and all towns within the county), Rochester MSA and nation, and nearly double the state's rate. Each year, the community assessments note a significant number of grandparents responsible for (raising) their grandchildren for 6 months or more live in poverty. According to the 2017-2021 ACS, current specific percentages are: 37.3% for the city, 24.8% for the county, 21.3% for Rochester MSA, 19.5% for the state, and 17.7% for the nation. In the latter part of 2018, a local coalition, the Aging Alliance led by the United Way of Greater Rochester, was formed to address issues of importance to older adults and their well-being, including implementing a plan to create an age-friendly community.
- Unemployment and poverty decrease as educational attainment increases. The 2017-2021 ACS noted that 49.8% of county residents and 32.0% of city residents had an Associate's degree or higher. When comparing unemployment rates, the unemployment rate was 18.5% for city residents with less than a high school diploma and was 3.9% for residents with a Bachelor's degree or higher. Similarly, the poverty rate for city residents with less than a high school diploma and for residents with a Bachelor's degree was 35.1% and 8.3%, respectively.
- Many people living below the poverty level work --- less than 5.0% work full-time, according to 2017-2021 ACS. Data on the working poor indicate that education and a full-time job are important to reducing a person's likelihood of becoming poor.
- 2017-2021 ACS reports that 3.9% of county and 8.2% of city residents received public assistance (i.e., general assistance [Safety Net Assistance] or cash assistance [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families]).
- According to the 2017-2021 ACS, the city's per capita, median household and family income lag behind incomes for the county, Rochester MSA, NYS, and the nation. For example, the median household income for the city was \$41,980 while the income for all other areas was over \$65,000. Incomes for whites were higher than most non-whites.

- A household with one adult and one infant in Monroe County needs a minimum annual income of \$49,201 to meet its basic needs, according to the NYS Self-Sufficiency Standard for 2021, a tool created by the Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington. This amount is more than 2x the official poverty measure, which is \$19,720 for a household of two at 100% Federal Poverty Level (amount would be \$39,440 at 200% FPL).
- Since 2021, unemployment rates have taken a downward turn, returning to pre-COVID levels. In 2022, NYS Department of Labor reported that the unemployment rate stood at 3.6% nationally, 4.3% for New York State, 3.4% for Rochester MSA and Monroe County, and 5.1% for the city of Rochester. In general, the unemployment rates for the city of Rochester are higher than all other geographic areas. Staffing shortages exist for various industries.
- In a 2022 Job Seeker Survey, produced by the Business Council and NYS Department of Labor, job seekers noted the following top 5 employment barriers: discrimination due to a person's age (34.0%), limited job experience (31.0%), limited or no degree, certificate, or credential (30.0%), limited professional network (29.0%) and limited modern/digital skills (23.0%).
- In a 2022 Business Workforce Survey (The Business Council and NYS Department of Labor), the top 5 positions employers, statewide, say are the hardest to fill were: laborers, administrative, direct support professional, registered nurse, and maintenance. The Finger Lakes regional employers noted that childcare, transportation, and equity issues were reasons they were unable to attract and retain workers.
- According to the NYS Department of Labor's 2018-2028 long-term job growth projections, industries expecting to experience the most long-term job growth are: healthcare and social assistance, transportation/ warehousing, educational services, and professional/business services.
- NYS Education Department reports that at 71.0%, the RCSD graduation rate in 2021-2022 was substantially lower than rates for the county (and all towns within the county), Rochester MSA, and nation, which were at 78.0% or higher. It should be noted that RSCD graduation rate was higher than past years.
- There is a child care crisis: (1) Child care is unaffordable. For example, Child Care Aware of America reports that the average cost of center-based infant care in NYS in 2020 was \$16,588 per year. Child care subsidies help make child care costs more affordable. In August 2022, eligibility for child care subsidies expanded to be up to 300% FPL, enabling more families to get help in meeting their childcare expenses. (2) There is staff turnover due in part to low pay for child care staff (about \$30K), with some receiving governmental benefits to make ends meet, noted by The Childrens Agenda. (3) There have been layoffs and program closures, further limiting access to quality child care. These persistent issues were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. To help parents and providers meet costs, as of July 2022, the County decreased the parent co-pay fee for subsidized childcare to 1% and covers up to 80 child absences as a way to stabilize revenue for child care providers. As a result of the pandemic, eligible providers received funding to help stabilize programs.
- Food insecurity continues to be a concern. Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap reports food insecurity rate was 11.8% (U.S.), 9.6% (NYS), and 11.6% (Monroe County) in 2020. The same year,

rates for children were 16.4% (U.S.), 14.6% (NYS), and 18.9% (Monroe County). Foodlink enhanced efforts to address the matter with activities as establishing a Food Policy Council, “Find Food” locator and a recently launched mobile WIC market at two sites (Cameron Community Ministries and School #33/Ryan-R/Sully library).

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture updated how Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP (formerly Food Stamps) is calculated for the Thrifty Food Plan, resulting in an increase in the SNAP benefit amount.
- The county and city housing stock are fairly old, which can often mean there will be a need for costly repairs and maintenance. For example, the 2017-2021 American Community Survey notes that less than 15% of county housing stock and less than 5% of city stock was built in 2000 or later.
- Rochester residents (63.0%) are more likely to rent while residents in the county, Rochester MSA state, and nation are more likely to be homeowners (54.0%-67.0%). Affordable housing continues to be a concern – the HUD guideline is that rent should not consume more than 30% of one’s household income. Housing affordability in the county: 28% (White), 40% (African American/Black), 23% (Asian), and 37% (Hispanic/Latino) of household income was spent towards rent cost. For homeownership, a ratio of less than 2 or 3 is considered affordable: 2.1 (White), 2.7 (African American/Black), and 2.7 (Asian and Hispanic/Latino). Data obtained from ACT Rochester.
- A small percentage of adults (3.2%) and children under age 19 (1.6%) in the county are without health insurance, according to the 2017-2021 ACS. For the city of Rochester, the rates were 4.4% (adults) and 2.5% (children).
- The infant mortality rate in 2017-2019 stood at 13.0% for the city and 7.4% for the county, according to the NYS Department of Health. African Americans/Blacks had an infant mortality rate 3x the rate of whites.
- Teen pregnancy is continuing a downward trend overall. Chlamydia and Gonorrhea continue to be present at alarming levels. The number of HIV/AIDS related deaths are small in comparison to the number of people living with HIV or AIDS, which implies that people are living longer --- in 2021, 162 people (per 100,000) were living with AIDS and 140 people (per 100,000) living with HIV in the county. Data obtained from ACT Rochester.
- Since 2000, children with elevated blood lead levels have been declining overall, though there have been spikes in a few of those years.
- The number of indicated cases and rate of child abuse and neglect shows an upward trend, according to ACT Rochester.
- Mental health services need attention. According to the 2022 County Health Ranking, 14.0% of county adults reported 14 or more days of poor mental health per month. The 2021-2022 Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicated that 45% of RCSD girls and 23% of RCSD boys felt sad/hopeless for 2 or more weeks in the past year. For the county, 42.0% of girls and 20.0% of boys had these feelings. There has been improvement: rates of adults and children/youth receiving mental

health services have slowly risen since 2005. In 2021, 33,311 adults and 10,201 children/youth received mental health services. Most services were provided in an outpatient setting, according to the 2022 Mental Health Summary Report, Monroe County Office of Mental Health.

- There is an opioid crisis. The Monroe County Office of the Medical Examiner's 2020 Annual Report on deaths related to overdose attributable to heroin/morphine and/or fentanyl reported 238 deaths in the county, a 31% rise from 2019, and an 8% increase from 220 deaths in 2017. In 2020, there was an average number of 20 deaths per month related to these substances. Overdose prevention drugs and Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) are some of the efforts to address the issue.
- Domestic and community violence continue to be a concern. According to Willow, in 2020, county rates of domestic violence were 1.6x the statewide rate, and city rates were 3.6x the statewide rate. While violent crimes in the county and city varied over time, serious crimes show a downward trend overall, well below its 2000 level: 28 in 2000 and 31 in 2021 (county); 74 in 2000, and 84 in 2021 (city). However, shootings in the city are on an upward trend. There were 303 shootings in 2022, up from 168 in 2013.
- While most households have technology in the home, a digital divide exists. Seniors, those with less than a high school diploma, and those not in the labor force are most likely to be without technology. Among racial and ethnic groups, Asians were the most likely group to have a device. Agency programs and local libraries have helped improve access, while federal programs help make phone service and broadband affordable. Data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau and Pew Research Center.
- Despite the impact of the pandemic, Americans found ways to help each other and their communities. In New York State, 6.5 million residents helped their neighbors at the height of the pandemic. There is a possible new trend: formal volunteering declined while informal volunteering rose between 2019 and 2021. For example, in New York State: 21.7% residents formally volunteered while 45.1% informally volunteered by exchanging favors with their neighbors. A good volunteer management program is imperative to attracting and retaining volunteers. Data obtained from Volunteering and Civic Life in America report (January 2023).

Stakeholder Feedback Key Points

Feedback was obtained from stakeholders through surveys and one focus group with customers. The following highlights some of the feedback provided by stakeholders who represent customers/residents, staff, Board members and community experts/partners.

- The current state of the community varied. Some of the community's successes shared include: array of community resources, neighborhood building/caring/collaboration and the renovation or development of downtown Rochester, including housing. For youth, relationships they have with those closest to them were most commonly mentioned as positive things about the community.
- Challenges facing the community were expressed in some way across *all* of the stakeholders, which were: crime and violence, including domestic violence, and housing related issues

such as affordable housing and homelessness. Other issues mentioned among *several* stakeholder groupings were:

- poverty
 - affordable child care
 - transportation (affordability, accessibility and availability)
 - mental health/health care
 - employment
 - job training (e.g., trades)
 - education, specifically improving the quality of education and educational outcomes
 - need for parenting classes and programs for fathers
 - financial advisement, including credit repair
 - food insecurity
 - racism
- The top challenges identified across the spectrum of stakeholders that ABC should set as a priority over the next three years are listed immediately above.

As the community continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, identifying emerging needs, forming new or expanding partnerships, and continuing to be in position to pivot where needed will be necessary as the agency continues to fulfill its mission.