



Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio

Sandusky Community Hub
Outreach Findings

January 2023



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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the following people who contributed to this report: Samantha Flores, Polly Leland and Julie Chase-Morefield (Second Harvest), Anita Kromer (Care & Share of Erie County), Jazmyne Brooks (Emerson National Hunger Fellow), Brant Duda & Erika McLaughlin (Strategy Design Partners), and everyone from the community who took the time to share their thoughts with us. A special thank you to the City of Sandusky for their generous support.

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This report was made possible through a City of Sandusky Community Development Block Grant- CARES Act grant.

Introduction

Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio (Second Harvest) is a regional nonprofit committed to fighting hunger. It has served its community for forty years by distributing over 145 million meals throughout Crawford, Erie, Huron, and Lorain Counties through its network of partner programs and mobile pantry distributions. Second Harvest provides food and resources to fifteen partner programs in Erie County.

Second Harvest’s work has evolved beyond distributing food to include examining the root causes of hunger. Food remains a critical need and will always be at the core of Second Harvest’s work. But, we must concurrently focus on creating long-term food security for families in our region. The root causes of food insecurity are not unlike the roots of a tree, growing sometimes straight but other times gnarled and complex. Addressing these root causes highlights challenges not quickly or easily addressed – stable housing, child care, behavioral and physical health, legal entanglements, employment, education, and transportation. A successful strategy to address the root causes of food insecurity and poverty is to build inclusive and robust collaborative environments where people and organizations can come together to create impact in meaningful and measurable ways. One way to establish such an environment is through a community hub space.

A Community Hub is a public space bringing multiple community agencies, neighborhood groups, and resources together to offer a range of activities, programs, and services to increase long-term food security and family stability over time. As defined by the Canadian Provincial Government of Ontario, “Community Hubs offer a central access point for comprehensive supportive services and can also integrate cultural and recreational spaces to enhance community life. Each Hub is unique, some may be mobile, and others might occupy rural or urban spaces, but they are all defined by local needs, services, and resources.” As part of its mission to serve the community, Second Harvest has embarked on a multi-stage process to determine how best to bring a Community Hub to the region.

Second Harvest began the exploratory process of establishing a Community Hub in 2018 by conducting peer reviews and background research on other hub spaces

across the country. Additionally, Second Harvest conducted a series of interviews and extensive research to determine the appropriate location for the first Community Hub in Erie County. In 2019, Second Harvest met with the Erie County Community Foundation and the City of Sandusky to detail their desire to explore this project further.

The City of Sandusky was chosen for the pilot, in part because of the unmet need in the community documented over multiple years by Second Harvest. To move this idea forward and determine if a Community Hub is viable for the Sandusky community, Second Harvest conducted significant localized outreach through stakeholder and community member interviews and a community-wide survey. Care & Share of Erie County, a long-time partner of Second Harvest, who reopened its doors following the pandemic, was a logical collaborator as an existing downtown food pantry and joined the effort to investigate bringing the concept to fruition.

“Meeting the needs of our residents is a shared responsibility. It requires cooperation from multiple companies, organizations, institutions, and public/private entities. The creation of a Community Hub - where information about programs and services for those seeking assistance is collected and readily available - is exciting and will go a long way in helping all members of the community. The City of Sandusky is grateful for the dedicated work of all the individuals involved with this project.”

– Colleen Gilson, Chief Neighborhood Development Officer,
City of Sandusky



Process & Vision

The Community Hub project has one ambitious long-term goal and some important short-term goals. The long-term goal of the Sandusky Community Hub is food security for individuals and families in the City of Sandusky.



Short-term Goal 1:

Residents of the City of Sandusky have a safe space to ask questions about supportive programming & a direct link to people and organizations administering services.

Short-term Goal 2:

The ability of City residents to have food and other basic needs met immediately.

Short-term Goal 3:

Educational programming schedule created and informed by the needs and voices of the Sandusky community. Increased participation in program events.

Inspired by the **Appreciative Inquiry** approach to social change, **Second Harvest** has been utilizing a multi-part planning process throughout their **Community Hub** work that emphasizes:

- Scanning the area for emerging opportunities and challenges;
- Tailoring programmatic development and community work to build on the strengths and aspirations of residents; and
- Connecting resources to deliver on the community's vision for its future, continuously learning and evolving to maximize impact

The Community Hub planning process is being conducted in two phases: Program Review & Refinement and Prototype & Pilot:

Phase 1 consisted of community outreach and best practice research. This phase included stakeholder interviews with community organizations and leaders to explain the project and determine interest from existing organizations within the Sandusky community

Phase 2 of the process will include building a prototype and piloting a Community Hub space in the community.

Second Harvest will continue to seek and incorporate community and stakeholder feedback into the design of the pilot by conducting additional interviews and group discussions. Conversations with community stakeholders and residents will, over time, help to incorporate the right essential services into the Hub and ensure the space is accessible and welcoming. Second Harvest and community partners must learn from our neighbors facing hunger and other obstacles. A Community Hub thrives on community input and participation—it is a necessary element to long-term sustainability and potential expansion of the model.

Phase I Outreach

Stakeholder & Community Member Interviews

Second Harvest completed thirty-three (33) meetings with forty-seven (47) interviewees to further inform the Sandusky Hub Project. These stakeholders and community members were identified based on their potential connection to the Sandusky Hub, their role in the community, or the organization/company they represent. Interviewees had various backgrounds and sectors, including academics, education, health, justice, public policy, philanthropy, and social services.

As stated above, stakeholders and community members were identified based on their potential connection to the Sandusky Hub, role in the community, or organization they represent and provided critical insight into the potential development of the Sandusky Hub, key services/organizations to be included, and community strengths and assets that the Hub can build from to be successful.

The interviews utilized a standard set of questions for each discussion. In total, five questions were asked of each interviewee. The interviews provided vital information to the planning process, the overall judgment of feasibility, and potential services to consider as part of the project.

The interviews inquired about the following:

Perspectives of the interviewees

General reactions to the Community Hub idea

Strengths of Downtown Sandusky

Existing services & opportunities to enhance project success

Mary Aaron <i>Retired, Erie County Department of Job & Family Services</i>	Molly Carver <i>Sandusky Library</i>	Chris Ruff <i>Sandusky Artisans Recovery Community Center</i>	Jeremy Normington-Slay & Jim Spicer <i>Firelands Regional Medical Center</i>
Brad Kraft, Sarah Kaya, Morgan Brutcher, & Joe Januzzi, <i>Sandusky City Schools</i>	Madeline Davies, Katie Jaegly <i>Erie County Health Dept.</i>	Tom Lucas & Rebecca Owens <i>Catholic Charities</i>	David White <i>Firelands Forward</i>
Ralph Chamberlin & Susan Waldrom <i>Erie County Metropolitan Housing</i>	Beth Maiden <i>Erie County Community Foundation</i>	Alexis Wobser & Pete Rauner <i>Family Health Services</i>	Sue Daughtery <i>Serving Our Seniors</i>
Cindy O'Farrell & Melissa Bayer-Smith <i>Erie County Children & Family First Council</i>	Leslie Murray <i>Attorney Board of Legal-Aid & Boys & Girls Clubs of NEO</i>	Naomi Twine <i>Retired, Ohio Veteran's Home former Sandusky City Commissioner</i>	Gene Kidwell <i>Wightman Weiber Foundation Board of Erie County Community Foundation</i>
Emily Foreman & Stacie Hannon <i>Erie County Public Defenders Office</i>	Denise Zannie & Carl Anderson <i>Legal Aid NWO</i>	Eric Meuhlhauser <i>Mylander Foundation Flynn, Pye & Kruse</i>	Mary Jane Hill <i>Dorn Foundation</i>
Diane Taylor <i>Alcohol, Drug Addiction & Mental Health Board of Erie County</i>	Janice Warner & Tim Brown <i>Erie-Huron-Richland Community Action Agency</i>	Mr. Tory Yarbro <i>Center for Cultural Awareness</i>	Martha Murray <i>Sandusky City Schools</i>
Dr. Tasha Ford <i>BGSU – Firelands</i>	AJ Lill, Amber Jenkins, & Trudy Riddle <i>Erie County Department of Job & Family Services</i>	Ricardo Trevino <i>Community Services of Erie County</i>	Marcus Harris <i>City of Sandusky</i>
	Kendra Faulkner & Christine Boesch <i>OHgo Outreach</i>	Commissioner Steve Shoffner <i>Erie County Commissioners</i>	

Stakeholder Reaction to the Sandusky Hub Idea

Stakeholder and community member interviews started with the interviewer providing background and context in the Sandusky Hub and gauging the interviewee’s reaction to the idea. Below are some of the key takeaways from all of the interviews.

Overall, the participants felt the idea to establish a Community Hub in Sandusky would be beneficial. Many interviewees indicated they “love the idea,” “see the need for this project in the community,” and that a project like this was “long overdue.” Several interviewees indicated a desire to remain involved as part of the process to either serve as a potential referral source to the Sandusky Hub or serve as a provider in the space.

Many interviewees indicated they believed there is a significant benefit of having a “one-stop shop” for residents of Sandusky and that by creating this safe space for people in need no one will need to bounce between organizations to find the services they need. Additional comments regarding the Sandusky Hub are below:

“A project like this is long overdue in Sandusky.”

“It’s helpful that someone wouldn’t have to travel to multiple places to receive help.”

“This is a wonderful idea, a one-stop shop for individuals to be in touch with a caring person and have a warm handoff is a great idea.”

Though the majority of interviewees reported excitement and general positivity toward the idea, there were a few concerns shared. The physical location of the Sandusky Hub was seen as a potential challenge. It was noted that transportation can be a barrier to many in Sandusky and interviewees felt that the physical location should be as central as possible to ensure access to all in Sandusky. Additionally, some acknowledge the potential for turf wars between providers within the community as well as some general concerns about getting a collaborative, significant project like this started and executed properly.

Where does the Sandusky Hub rank on you or your organization’s list of priorities?

Following the introduction to the idea and gauging general reactions, the interviewers attempted to understand where the Sandusky Hub project would fall in each entity’s list of priorities. The majority of the interviewees indicated that this was indeed a top priority for them or aligned closely with the top priorities of their organization.

Additionally, several interviewees were interested in how their organization could potentially fit in the Hub or serve as a referral source. While some interviewees indicated the Hub wasn’t a high priority for them, many of those reported that the project didn’t align with their primary purpose or specific services of their organization.

What do you see as the strengths / assets of Sandusky as a community?

Sense of community / Community pride

The most common strength of Sandusky as reported through the interviews was a strong sense of community. Most reported they believed that Sandusky residents have a strong sense of community pride and want to see the people of Sandusky succeed.

Small town feel & willingness to help one another

Additionally, many noted that the city has a “small town feel” that helps residents feel connected to one another. Many believed that this connection, in addition to Sandusky being a community that cares about its people, creates a sense of willingness to help one another.

Anchor institutions & providers

Interviewees reported that while they see people in need in the city, Sandusky is fortunate to have strong, anchor institutions and providers to support the City. Sandusky is rich with quality service providers, most notably several behavioral health providers, but many other industries as well. The Sandusky School system was noted by many as a strength in the community as well. Many interviewees reported the City (and County) were also fortunate to benefit from significant philanthropic support, particularly for the size of the County.

Organizational collaboration exists

In addition to being rich with services and providers, many interviewees acknowledged that most of the providers in the community have demonstrated a

willingness and/or history of collaborating with each other to best serve the people of Sandusky. Several interviewees reported that philanthropic entities have been collaborating more closely with each other than ever before as well. This history and success with collaboration provide additional enthusiasm that the Sandusky Hub can establish the needed collaborations with partner organizations.

The City Administration

The City Administration was noted as another key strength in Sandusky. Many indicated that the leadership and other staff are strong and leading the City in the right direction. Also, several reported a feeling of overall momentum within the City and felt that this momentum was something the Sandusky Hub could build from.

Diverse population

Interviewees reported that a significant asset of Sandusky was the diversity of the population from multiple perspectives. Many noted that there was a good mix of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds as well as a diverse group of skill sets among the members of the City.

Waterfront/downtown revitalization

The recent revitalization of the downtown was seen as another strength. However, it was important to note, that several interviewees expressed concerns about potential gentrification and a desire that the development of the downtown area be beneficial for all residents of Sandusky.

What do you hope to see in this Sandusky Hub?

Interviewees were asked to illustrate what they would like to see be a part of the Hub. Many focused on the specific services they would like to see, but several reported that the staffing and physical location of the Sandusky Hub will be critically important to its success.

The primary desire was that the Sandusky Hub contained a comprehensive list of services for people. Those services included: **food, employment, housing, basic needs, and mental/physical health**. Several indicated that while the majority of the services within the Sandusky Hub will be reactive or emergency in nature, the Hub should also provide preventative services to people.

It was noted and understood that not all services can be physically contained within the Hub. Interviewees described the importance of a warm handoff to another community agency and that the coordination between the Sandusky Hub and other providers will be critical to ensuring a seamless transition and care for people and that it was imperative that the it lead this collaboration.

In addition to specific services, many indicated the need to have the “right” people be a part of the Sandusky Hub. Interviewees explained that the people staffing the Hub would need to be approachable, open, understand the needs of people in Sandusky, and be able to navigate the current public systems in a seamless manner.

Lastly, interviewees detailed the importance of the environment and the physical location of the Sandusky Hub. They explained that the space must be trauma-informed and welcoming while also being accessible to all people. As noted through the community survey, too often people seeking services have felt judged to the point where they would no longer seek help for this situation. Additionally, many believed that identifying a central location in Sandusky would be ideal to ensure access for people from all areas of the City.

Where do you see opportunities to improve the lives of low-income families in Sandusky?

The final question from the interviews asked interviewees to describe what opportunities they believed the Sandusky Hub would create to improve the lives of low-income families in Sandusky. While some reiterated the impact they believe a project like this could have on the broader community, others discussed streamlining and creating access to services, building trust between the providers and the community, and the overall impact on people’s lives that interviewees hoped to see.



Community Survey

A community-wide survey was developed to assist in the collection of data from the community. The survey was modeled after a Feeding America survey utilizing Qualtrics, a sophisticated data analytics software company. Second Harvest staff worked with partners within the community to tailor specific questions to City of Sandusky residents and covered a variety of topics looking at the root causes of hunger.

The primary objective of the survey was to collect a community-wide perspective and necessary data to inform the Sandusky Hub.

The target audience for the survey was City of Sandusky residents. Through the support of partner organizations, including Sandusky City Schools, nonprofit organizations, The City of Sandusky, county offices, community centers, and food pantries, the survey was distributed broadly to community members. Additionally, Second Harvest distributed flyers to the Sandusky school students. In total, 317 surveys were completed and included in the data collection.

Given the number of responses and the population size of the City of Sandusky, Second Harvest can say with **95% confidence that the results were accurate +/- 5.5%.**

The survey was made available to people through an online link as well as a QR code provided on handouts for people to scan and complete on their mobile devices. Survey results were kept anonymous and the first 200 people in the City of Sandusky who completed the survey were sent \$20 gift cards in the mail as a thank you for participating.

The majority of the survey included multiple-choice questions and ranking questions. However, many questions also provided an open-ended box for additional input from respondents.

The survey was broken down into the following categories:

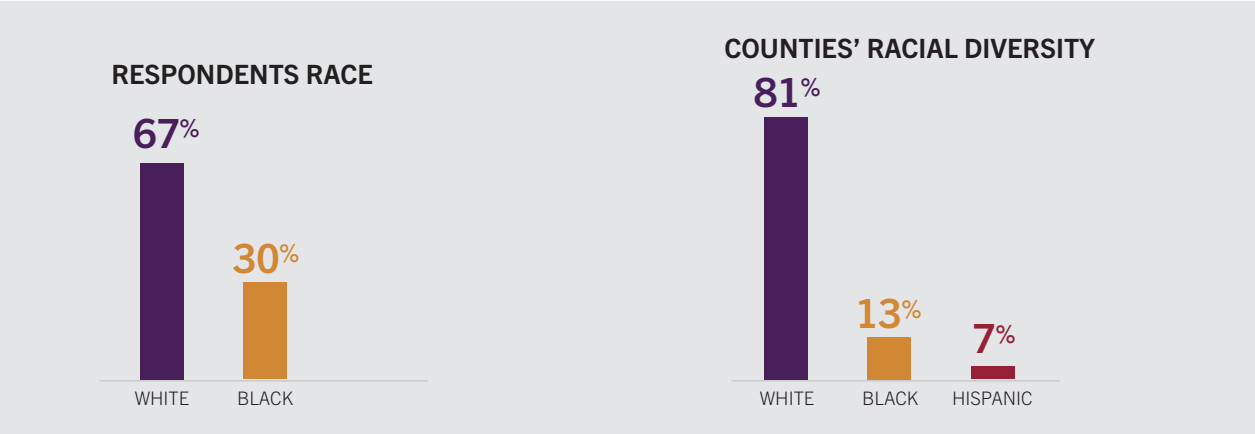
- Informed Consent
- 1 - Respondent Characteristics
- 2 - Household Characteristics
- 3 - Income/Employment
- 4 - Transportation
- 5 - Housing Stability
- 6 - Food Insecurity
- 7 - Economic Trade-offs
- 8 - Mental Health
- 9 - Health Insurance
- 10 - SNAP
- 11 - Barriers to Access
- Closeout

The community survey was critical in ensuring the community had a voice in this process. In total, 317 responses were collected and utilized to inform this process. The data from the US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2021 is referenced throughout this report in order to give context to the community members responses.

Survey respondents were asked a series of demographic questions to gain a better understanding of who responded and to ensure that the outreach was representative of the approximately 24,758 residents living in the City of Sandusky. Overall, the respondent’s demographics aligned closely with the population demographics of Sandusky.

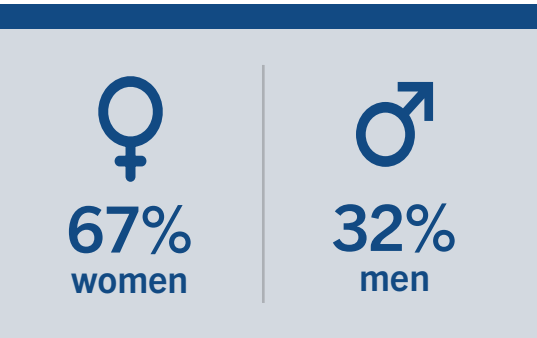
Race & Ethnicity of Respondents

Respondents were asked to indicate their race and were allowed to select all that applied. The majority of the respondents were White (67%) with another 30% reported they were Black or African American. The race and ethnicity of the respondents align closely with the 2021 Census that estimates 67% of the city was White, 24% was Black, and another 7% were of Hispanic or Latino origin. These metrics correlate with the counties’ racial diversity as well, which is only slightly more diverse than the overall state (81% White, 13% Black, and 4% Hispanic or Latino origin).



Gender Identity of Respondents

The percentage of women respondents was slightly higher than the approximate overall percentage of women in the city (52%) with 67% of respondents describing themselves as women and 32% as men.



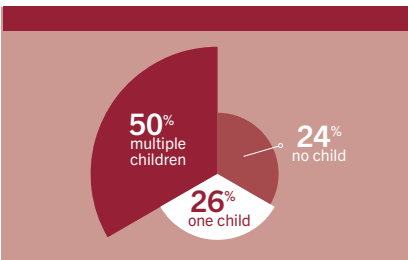
Household Size of Respondents

Of the survey respondents, the most common response indicated their household consisted of four members (24%) with three and two being the next highest at 21% and 17% respectively. These are larger family sizes than are seen on the Healthy Northeast Ohio 2022 Demographics which shows the most common are households of two (33%) with three (16%) and four (12%) being the next highest.



Households with Children

In addition to the total number of people within each household, the survey aimed to gather how many households had children (under the age of 18). Approximately 76% of respondents reported having at least one child living in their household, with 50% of respondents stating they have multiple children in their homes.





Learnings & Opportunities

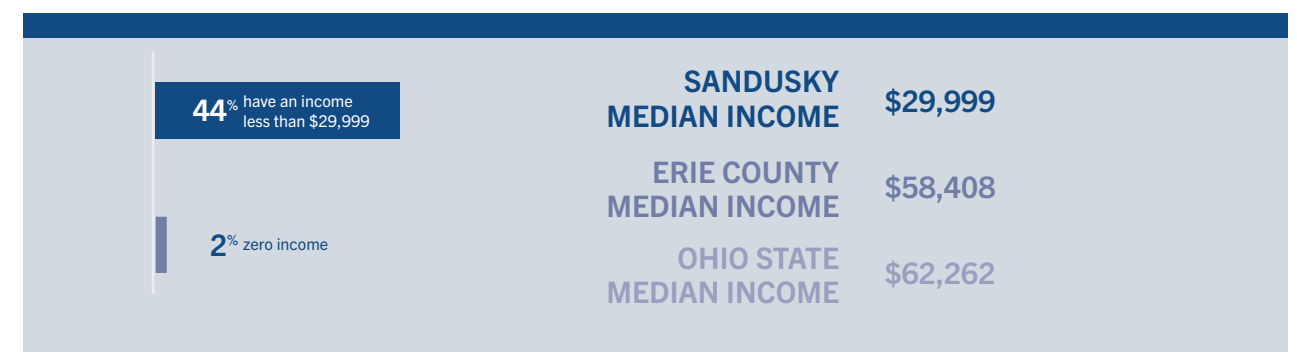
Responses from the community survey helped us to better understand the challenges and opportunities in supporting Sandusky residents to achieve long-term food security through the Sandusky Community Hub. The following sections highlight survey data related to **employment and education, transportation, housing stability, food insecurity, physical and mental health, and overall family stability**. Many of our stakeholders have been working alongside communities to address these issues; however, the community hub model presents an opportunity to achieve more synergy and coordinated efforts to increase impact.

Employment & Education

In an effort to identify opportunities for employment and educational stability survey respondents were asked to identify their income, sources of income, and any barriers to employment.

Total Household Income

In Sandusky, the median household income is \$29,999, significantly less than the Erie County median income of \$58,408 and the Ohio state median income of \$62,262. Survey respondents were asked to report their combined household income (for all of the family members over the age of 15) over the past twelve months. In total, 44% of survey respondents reported a household income at or below \$29,999, with 2% reporting that they had zero income in the past twelve months. Additionally, approximately 76% of respondents reported incomes at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Limit (FPL), which is of note since many assistance programs have eligibility requirements between 100% and 200% of the FPL.

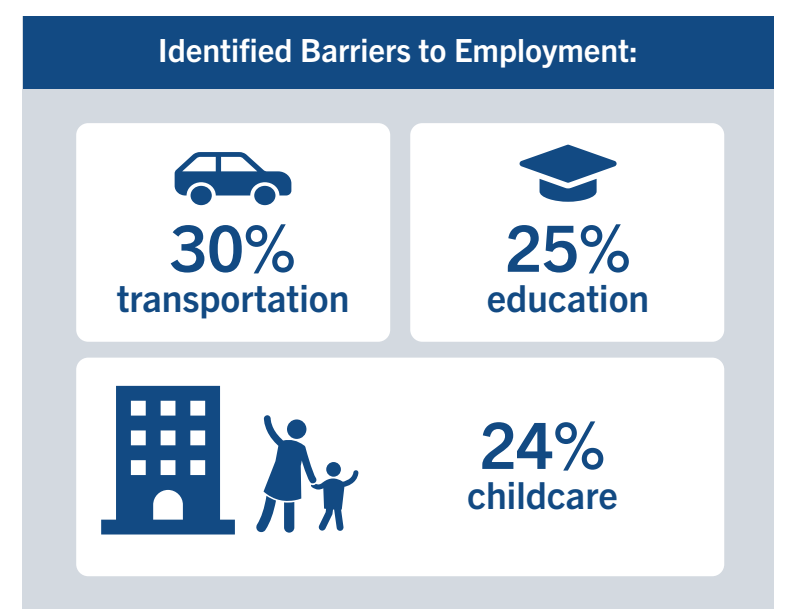


Income Sources

Respondents were asked to select from a list of potential income sources and to select all that applied to their household in the last month. Over half of the respondents (54%) reported that they received income from working for pay full-time (30 hours or more per week), whereas another 23% reported that they earned income from working part-time (less than 30 hours per week). **Of the respondents working for pay full time, approximately 42% are making less than the median income for the city. This data highlights challenges for Sandusky residents who are working but are not working in a job that matches their skills or abilities, leading to earning less than what he or she should or could earn.**

Barriers to Employment

Respondents were asked to identify if they have any current barriers to employment. A barrier to employment was defined as any challenge that may prevent a person from getting or keeping a job or advancing in their career. 30% of respondents reported that a lack of transportation was a barrier to employment for them, another 25% reported credentialing or educational background was a barrier to employment, and another 24% reported childcare was a barrier.





Lack of access to training/education

From the recent “Where are the Workers?” study in Northeast Ohio, “Access to training and education is a significant barrier for a large part of the workforce. Here are some staggering numbers that back up this point:

An estimated
481,559 people
feel they don’t have the necessary
education or training needed to get
ahead in their job or career;

1,167,469 people
are unaware of job-related
training or education programs
in their area;

and
359,707 people
say it’s difficult to pursue
additional training.”

Child Care

Helping Families Escape Poverty

A recent study by Firelands Forward and Child Care Resource Center states that “access to high-quality, reliable child care can be a difference-maker for low-income parents seeking access to the labor market. Unreliable child care can cause parents to miss work and potentially lose their jobs, and for low-income families, this job loss can start a cascade of negative consequences, including the loss of a vehicle or home, which can make it difficult to again access the labor market.”¹

These negative consequences can push a family deep into poverty. By contrast, access to high-quality child care makes it easier for parents to work. It reduces their absenteeism and turnover. It allows them to stay in the labor market for longer continuous periods, increasing their productivity and wages. It can help them move from poverty to the middle class.

Improvements to Economic Development

The region’s unemployment rate has fallen below 4.4 percent (December 2021), and while this seems like a positive, this is a level at which businesses struggle to fill open positions. The lack of readily available workers means that businesses may become reluctant to increase investments in the region. This low unemployment rate, however, masks the fact that the region has many people across the skills spectrum who would work if they could access high-quality, affordable child care. If high-quality child care were easier to access, more parents could enter the workforce, helping to alleviate the talent shortage. In addition, the increased availability of high-quality child care would reduce absenteeism, and thereby increase overall worker productivity.”

¹Where Are the Workers? is a multi-part analysis of Northeast Ohio’s changing talent landscape led by the Fund for Our Economic Future, ConxusNEO, PolicyBridge, the Summit and Medina Workforce Area Council of Governments, and Team NEO. <https://wherearetheworkers.com/>

²The Child Care Resource Center. (2022). (rep.). *Child Care Needs Assessment Report 2022: Erie, Huron and Ottawa Counties*. Retrieved February 2022, from <http://firelandsforward.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Child-Care-Needs-Assessment-Report.pdf>.



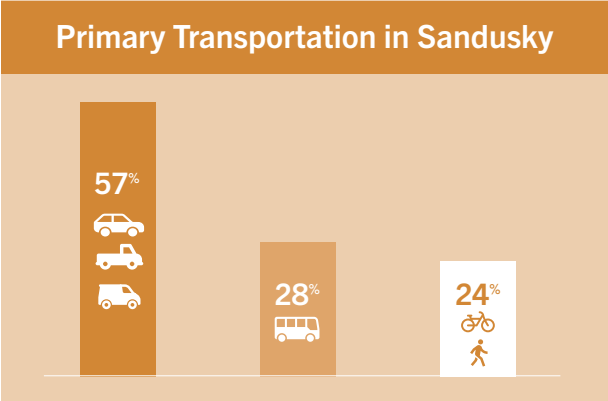
Sandusky Community Hub Employment & Education Opportunities

Research shows that poverty and lack of education put Americans at greater risk of unemployment and underemployment. During times of economic downturn such as the COVID-19 pandemic, those with less educational background are the most negatively impacted. The “Where are the Workers” report outlines the changing employment and talent landscape in Ohio, citing a 5% decline in the number of employed people since the start of the pandemic. While employers are having challenges filling up jobs employees are either leaving the workforce or making different choices “because of dissatisfaction with their current options, health issues, or challenges related to transportation, childcare or other barriers that prevent them from finding or accessing what they need to excel in a job”. Empowering people with training, skills, and educational opportunities can greatly increase earning potentials, career advancement, and options.



Transportation

Survey respondents were asked to report their primary means of transportation for themselves and other members of the household and they could select more than one. They were then asked if a lack of transportation was a barrier for them to access services or employment.



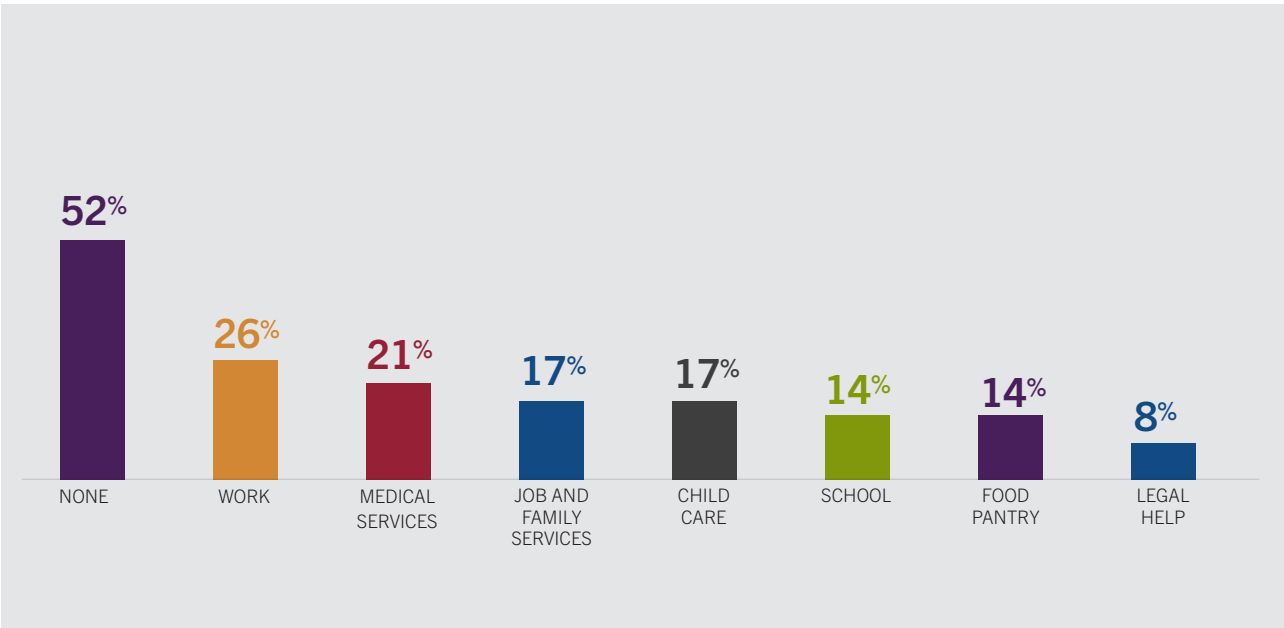
Primary Transportation

Over half (57%) of the respondents reported that they (or another member of the household) own a car, truck, or van. However, over a fourth (28%) reported that they rely on public transportation and another 24% reported that they bike or walk as their primary means of transportation. This data is slightly higher than the approximately 13.21% or more of the population in the city of Sandusky who lived in households with no vehicle available in 2015-2019.

Transportation as a Barrier

The majority of respondents (52%) reported that transportation did not keep them from services or employment. However, one-fourth of respondents (26%) did report lack of transportation was keeping them from work. Medical services, Job and Family Services, and child care were the top three services that were identified by participants as being difficult to access due to a lack of transportation.

Does a lack of transportation keep you from accessing any of the following?



Sandusky Community Hub Transportation Opportunities

According to the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 1 in 13 Ohio residents does not have access to a vehicle. A transportation barrier can also serve as a barrier to nutritious food, healthcare, employment, and community connection. The American Hospital Association reports that each year, 3.6 million people in the United States do not obtain medical care due to transportation issues. Lack of transportation may lead to poorer management of chronic illness and, thus, poorer health outcomes through delayed and missed appointments, delayed care, or missed medication.² These barriers also perpetuate disparities as they disproportionately impact older people, people with disabilities, people with lower incomes, and people of color. There is a critical need to connect communities to high-quality, reliable, and safe transportation to reach resources, jobs, and connections.

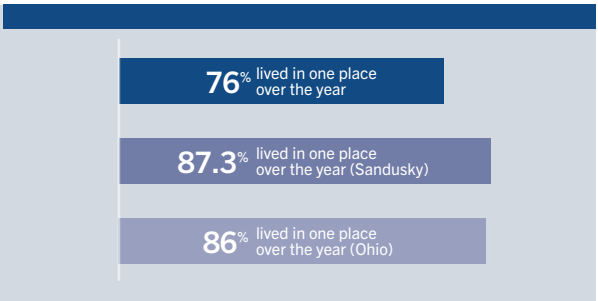
²Syed ST, Gerber BS, Sharp LK. Traveling towards disease: transportation barriers to health care access. J Community Health. 2013 Oct;38(5):976-93. doi: 10.1007/s10900-013-9681-1. PMID: 23543372; PMCID: PMC4265215.

Housing Stability

Respondents were asked several questions to get a better sense of their current housing situation, including how many places they have lived during the past year and if they (or another member of their household has experienced (or expects to) foreclosure or eviction in the past year.

Number of Places Lived

76% of respondents reported that they only lived in one place over the past year. This number is slightly lower than the data found in the US Census regarding the percent of individuals who are still living in the same houses they lived in a year ago in the City of Sandusky (87.3%) and Ohio (86%). The lower percentage might be a sign of housing instability within the community.



Experience with Foreclosures or Evictions

While 73% reported that they, or any member of their household, had not experienced foreclosure or eviction, 21% reported that they did. This data matches that from the US Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey which shows during the week of October 5-17, 2022, 23.5% of Ohio residents felt it was very likely or somewhat likely to experience an eviction or foreclosure in the next two months. **Based on the total number of respondents to the survey, at least 66 households experienced or expected to deal with foreclosure or eviction in the past or coming year.**



Sandusky Community Hub Housing Stability Opportunities

Across Ohio, individuals face many challenges when seeking to obtain and maintain safe and affordable housing. These challenges include rising housing costs, lack of affordable options, and the potential to lose their homes due to loss of employment, eviction/foreclosure, or other life circumstances. Households already experiencing high levels of economic burden are more likely to make trade-offs between other necessities such as food, healthcare, medicine, or rent. The 2019 Ohio Medicaid Assessment Survey Report highlights that housing insecurity is associated with a number of negative social and health impacts including higher rates of mortality and chronic disease, job loss, stress, and declines in mental health status, as well as greater utilization of emergency room services³. Connecting families with resources to secure safe and affordable housing is an integral component in being able to achieve overall long-term stability.

³Spence, D., Sahr, T., Price-Spratlen, T., Nau, M., Schmidt, S., Reda, C., Farmer, A., Das, P., Ranbom, L., Hayes, W., Canfield-Simbro, B., & Ruhil, A. (2021). (rep.). *Housing Insecurity in Ohio: 2019 Update*. Ohio Colleges of Medicine Government Resource Center. Retrieved from <https://grc.osu.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/2019%20OMAS%20Housing%20Insecurity%20Chartbook.pdf>.

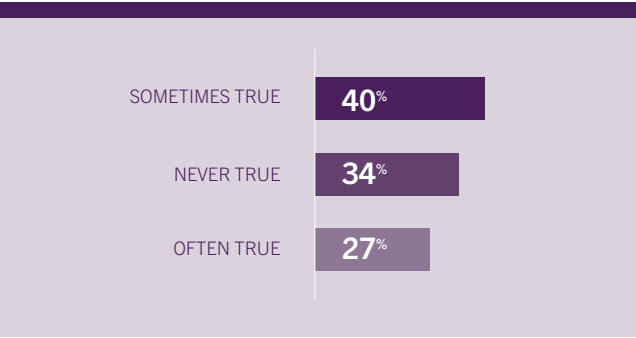
Food Insecurity

According to Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap research, about 12% of Erie County residents overall and 18% of children live in food-insecure households, meaning they do not have reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. Survey respondents were asked a series of six questions to determine if their households were food insecure. Results were calculated using Feeding America’s Food Security Calculator. Based on the survey results, 54% of survey respondents were food insecure. The following are statements that people have made about their food situation. Respondents were asked to report if the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for their household in the last 12 months.

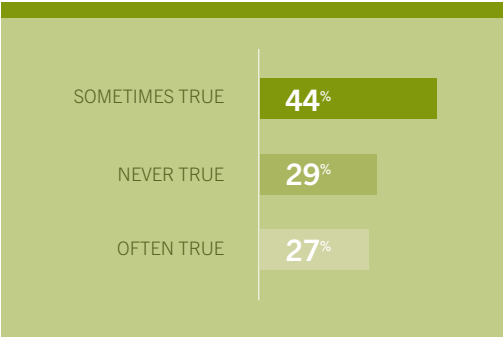
These results were calculated using the following six questions from the Food Insecurity Module:

1. The food that we bought just didn’t last, and we didn’t have money to get more.	2. We couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.	3. In the last 12 months, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food?
4. How often did this happen? Question asked based on their response to the previous question.	5. In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn’t enough money for food?	6. In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn’t eat because there wasn’t enough money for food?

Food Bought Didn’t Last and Didn’t Have Money to get More

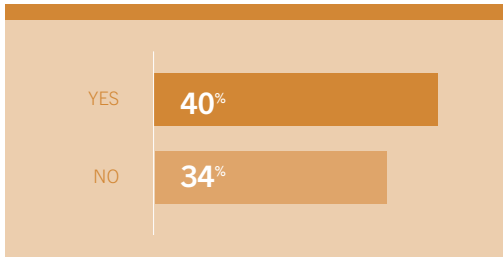


I/We Couldn’t Afford to Eat Balanced Meals



Cut or Skipped Meals Due to Money

Respondents were asked if their household ever cut the size of their meals or skip meals completely because there wasn’t enough money for food. As shown below, over half (55%) of the respondents reported that they did indeed skip or cut meals as a result of not having enough money. These results indicate that 173 households had an adult skip or cut a meal completely.



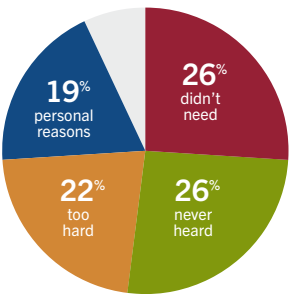
Of those 173 households who skipped or cut meals, nearly half (49%) reported that they did this almost every month of the year. With an additional 39% reporting that it happens at least some months. Meaning more than 150 households are skipping or cutting meals on a regular basis.

Finally, respondents were asked if they ever felt like they ate less than they should or went hungry but didn’t eat because there wasn’t enough money. **For both questions, over half of respondents reported that yes, they did eat less (55%) or went hungry (53%) as a result of money.**

SNAP & Public Benefits Participation

A related section of the survey asked respondents a series of questions about SNAP (and other public benefits). Current participation in SNAP among survey participants was at 44%, which is notably higher than that of Sandusky (22%) and Ohio (13%).

Subsequently, respondents were asked if they, or anyone in their household, has ever applied for SNAP. This resulted in an increase from 44% who are currently receiving these services or benefits to 67% who have applied for these services or benefits. Twenty-nine percent reported that they have never applied for these benefits.



Those who reported they have not applied for SNAP, food stamps, food benefits card, or Ohio direct card (61 people), were asked to identify why they haven’t. Only 26% reported they hadn’t applied because they didn’t need the service. Whereas another 26% reported they had never heard of food stamps. About one-fourth (22%) reported it was too hard to apply for these benefits and another 19% cited personal reasons as why they have not applied.

Respondents were also asked if they or any member of their household ever had their food stamps, SNAP, food stamp benefit card, or Ohio Direct card stopped. 40% reported that they did have their benefits stopped at some point.

Additionally, respondents who had their benefits stopped were asked the primary reason why their benefits were stopped. Almost half (48%) of respondents who reported they did have their benefits stopped reported that the main reason was that their income was too high. **However, another 19% reported the primary reason was that time ran out or they missed a recertification deadline. Lastly, 15% reported they lost their benefits because they did not meet the work requirements.**

It is worth noting that it is unknown how many of the 48% who did have their benefits stopped did so as a result of the “benefits cliff.” The benefits cliff happens when a small increase in earnings means a family can no longer receive public benefits. There is significant research to show that these cliffs can be so severe that people would be better off not taking better-paying jobs to remain eligible for public assistance. Theoretically, these households that have been cut off from public benefits due to their income being too high could be the most food insecure.⁴

⁴Campbell, E. (2022, February 18). *Policy change can reduce benefit cliffs and incentivize work.* The Center for Community Solutions - Research. Retrieved November 11, 2022, from <https://www.communitysolutions.com/research/policy-change-can-reduce-benefit-cliffs-incentivize-work/#:~:text=Benefit%20cliffs%20occur%20when%20a,or%20otherwise%20balance%20their%20budget>



Sandusky Community Hub Food Security Opportunities

While the survey addressed food insecurity it was not able to capture the nutrition security, or lack thereof, among Sandusky residents. Nutrition security is different than food security as it looks not only at having consistent, equitable access to food but the food must be healthy and safe as well as affordable. Research shows that poor nutrition increases the risk of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease which are illnesses that result in half a million deaths per year. Poor health is not the only burden families have to bare, but higher health care costs and decreased productivity/ability to work can have major impacts. It is essential to not only provide food for the Sandusky community, but that it helps support optimal health and well-being.⁵

Additionally, SNAP reduces poverty by helping households meet their food needs allowing them to spend more of their budget on the rest of their basic needs. This federal program has also been linked to improved health outcomes as research shows that adults receiving SNAP view their health status as more positive, miss fewer days of work due to illness, have fewer doctor visits, and are less likely to demonstrate psychological distress. Although, SNAP is a beneficial program it still has several barriers to access. Eligible individuals often face challenges applying or staying connected to the program. These barriers often lead to “churn”, which occurs when benefits are stopped due to administrative hurdles, even though the household is still eligible, and the family reapplies shortly after. With these barriers to access being reflected in the survey, it is evident the Sandusky community would benefit from benefit access case management and application assistance.⁶

⁵US Department of Agriculture. (2022, September). *Food and Nutrition Security*. USDA. Retrieved November 11, 2022, from <https://www.usda.gov/nutrition-security#:~:text=Nutrition%20security%20is%20consistent%20access,Tribal%20communities%20and%20Insular%20areas>

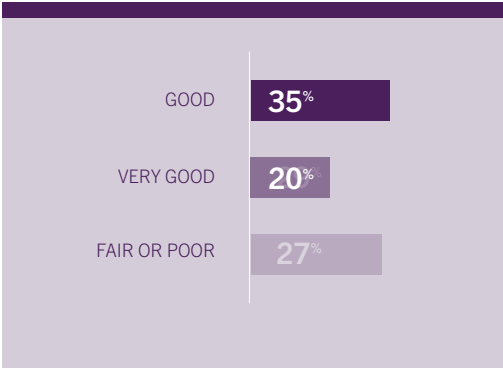
⁶Keith-Jennings B, Llobrera J, Dean S. *Links of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program With Food Insecurity, Poverty, and Health: Evidence and Potential*. *Am J Public Health*. 2019 Dec;109(12):1636-1640. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2019.305325. PMID: 31693420; PMCID: PMC6836787.

Physical Health & Healthcare

Respondents were asked several questions to get a better sense of their physical health and their current healthcare situation.

Physical Health

As shown below, 35% of respondents self-attested that their overall health was good, with another 20% reporting that it was very good. 33% percent of respondents indicated that their health was fair or poor. This is a slightly higher percentage than that seen by the County Health Rankings published by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute in 2019, which shows that for quality of life 20% of Sandusky residents experience poor or fair health. In the state, approximately 18% of residents experience poor or fair health.



Health Insurance Coverage

Additionally, respondents were asked to report if anyone in their household did not have health insurance. It is important to state, the percentage of the population not covered by private or public health insurance in Ohio and nationally is 6.6% and 9.2% respectively.⁷ Even though 65% of survey respondents reported that no one in their household was without insurance, **the survey captured 30% of respondents with people in their households who did not have health insurance.**



⁷America's Health Rankings analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, United Health Foundation, AmericasHealthRankings.org, accessed 2022.



Sandusky Community Hub Physical Health & Healthcare Opportunities

Poor health can limit one’s economic opportunities, ability to work, educational attainment, and overall quality of life. There is a growing scholarship and consensus that realizes addressing poor health outcomes requires transforming systems to address the social determinants of health or the nonclinical factors—education, employment, race, ethnicity, and geography— that influence health outcomes. Having health insurance is associated with improved access to care and better health outcomes. Yet, over 28 million Americans lack coverage. According to the American Hospital Association, most uninsured people cite the high cost of insurance as the main reason for their lack of coverage. Access to affordable and secure health coverage can be life-changing for individuals, especially those who are cost-burdened and making trade-offs between healthcare, medicine, and other daily necessities. Research also demonstrates that uninsured people are less likely to receive preventative services for major health conditions and chronic diseases. Improving one’s access to quality and affordable healthcare is imperative to creating the conditions for families and communities to grow and thrive.

Mental Health

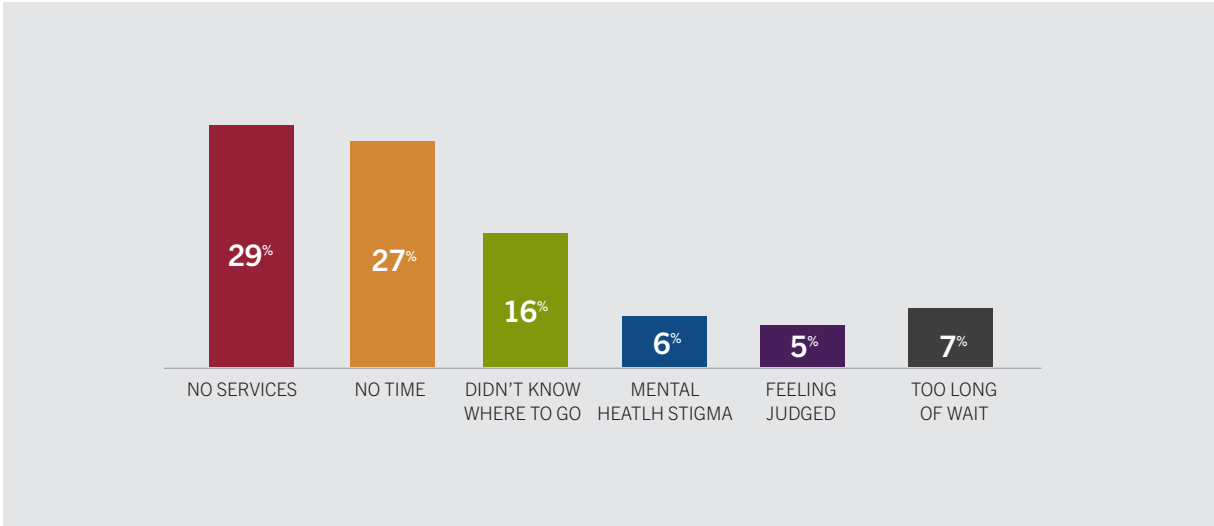
The survey analyzed the mental health of respondents by looking at the number of days, in the past 30 days, that respondents had poor mental health and if they were able to receive counseling.

Poor Mental Health

Respondents were asked to report how many days over the past 30 that their mental health was “not good.” 77% of respondents provided a response greater than zero days. **The percentage of respondents who reported frequent mental distress -- mental health that was not good 14 or more days in the past 30 days -- was 21.6%, which is higher than the state (15.3%).⁸**

Current Counseling Services

Respondents were asked to report if they have tried to receive mental health or counseling services in the past 30 days. Of the 269 responses, 29% reported they did receive services in the past month and 27% reported no for various reasons spanning, not having the time (16%), didn’t know where to go (6%), or because of the stigma surrounding mental health (5%). 7% of respondents reported going for an appointment and not going back as a result of feeling judged and 5% reported trying to contact a provider for services but the wait was too long and they gave up.



⁸America's Health Rankings analysis of CDC, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, United Health Foundation, AmericasHealthRankings.org, accessed 2022



Sandusky Community Hub Mental Health Opportunities

A 2021 study conducted by the Institute for Hunger Research & Solutions at Connecticut Foodshare, in collaboration with the National Food Access and Research Team, found that anxiety and depression were closely linked to high rates of food insecurity and a reduced inclination to seek food assistance. As such, mental health, specifically anxiety and depression “were both a consequence and driver of food insecurity.” Therefore, addressing mental health in the community works hand-in-hand to address food insecurity.



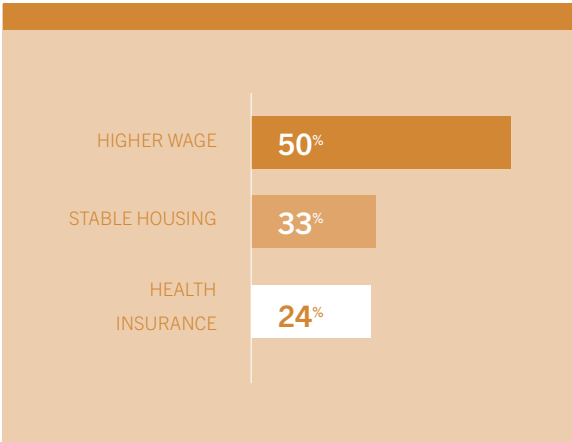
Overall Family Stability

The survey looked to identify economic trade-offs respondents are making in order to have their basic needs met and achieve long-term family stability. Two questions helped address family stability by asking respondents to choose how often they made different economic trade-offs and what factors would help them attain long-term family stability.

Economic Trade-offs

Respondents were asked to respond to a series of statements with the question, “how often during the past 12 months did you or members of your household have to choose between...” As shown in the chart below, no less than 13% of respondents had to choose between paying for food or another need or necessity every month. Nearly one-fourth (24%) had to choose between food or paying for transportation. Additionally, at least 14% and up to 26%, had to choose between food or another need at least some months of the year.

	EVERY MONTH	SOME MONTHS DURING THE YEAR	1 OR 2 TIMES A YEAR	NEVER	DON'T KNOW
Paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care?	15%	20%	16%	42%	5%
Paying for food and paying for utilities?	21%	26%	18%	30%	2%
Paying for food and paying for rent or mortgage?	20%	22%	17%	37%	2%
Paying for food and paying for transportation or gas for a car?	24%	20%	19%	32%	3%
Paying for food and paying for school loans, tuition, or other education expenses?	12%	17%	17%	49%	3%
Paying for food and paying for childcare/babysitting?	13%	14%	13%	54%	3%



Long-Term Family Stability

Respondents were asked to report what they would need to increase long-term family stability and have all their food needs met. Half of the respondents (50%) reported that higher-wage employment was needed for their stability while another third (33%) reported that stable housing was needed. Another 24% of respondents reported that health insurance was needed to increase the stability of their household.

Sandusky Hub Family Stability Opportunities

The trade-offs mentioned in this section are only some examples of trade-offs. There are three main categories: hunger-coping trade-offs (choosing between paying for food and paying for other household needs), financial hunger-coping strategies (e.g., borrowing money, skipping bills, selling property), and rationing hunger-coping strategies (e.g., eating after children, eating less food). Previous research has shown that households facing food insecurity are twice as likely to make these trade-offs. Additionally, they are more likely to make tradeoffs between food and paying medical bills as they are more likely to experience negative life events (e.g., major change in financial status, death of a spouse, losing a job and homelessness) which can result in health challenges and a greater need for medical services.⁹ By learning whether the Sandusky community is making these trade-offs, what is being sacrificed, and maybe optimized, formal and informal supports can be put in place with the underlying goal of reducing food insecurity.

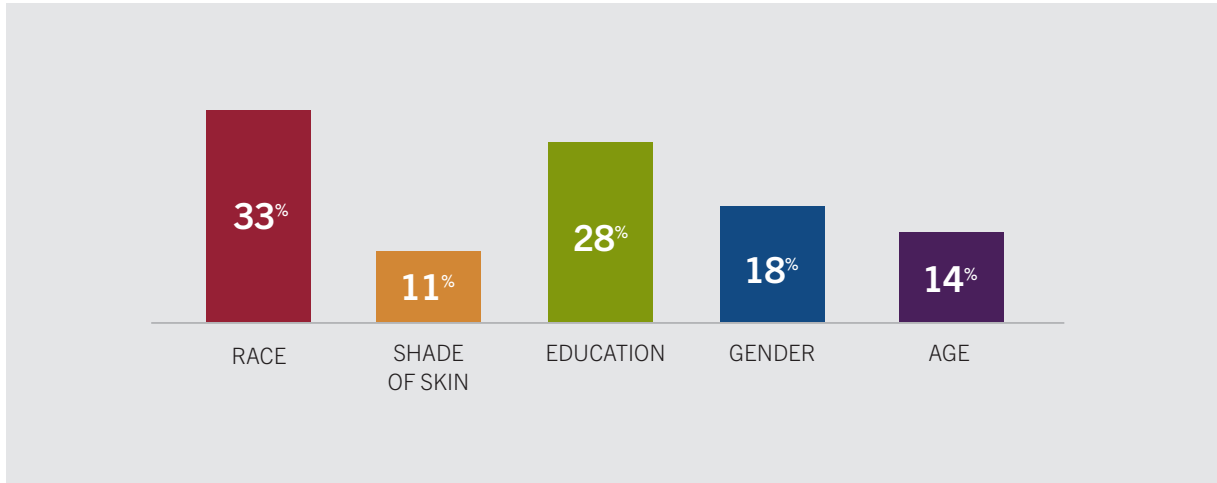
Furthermore, making trade-offs, coping strategies, and accessing resources can all be an integral part of community building. It is important to note that these strategies require strong community bonding, sharing of knowledge and social capital. Providing pathways to mitigate trade-offs and coping strategies can help deepen community ties and connections to others, increase knowledge and resource sharing within the community, and help in strategy building at both the household and neighborhood levels.¹⁰

⁹Luo Y, Mobley C, Hossfeld L, Koob C, Hossfeld C, Baxter SLK, Griffin SF. *The Association between Food Insecurity and Making Hunger-Coping Trade-Offs during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Role of Sources of Food and Easiness in Food Access*. *Nutrients*. 2022; 14(21):4616. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu14214616>

¹⁰Luo Y, Mobley C, Hossfeld L, Koob C, Hossfeld C, Baxter SLK, Griffin SF. *The Association between Food Insecurity and Making Hunger-Coping Trade-Offs during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Role of Sources of Food and Easiness in Food Access*. *Nutrients*. 2022; 14(21):4616. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu14214616>

Discrimination & Trauma-Informed Care

In order to identify additional barriers to access, respondents were asked about feelings of judgement when receiving services. They were asked to consider their experiences in the last month accessing services such as public benefits access, medical services, legal assistance, housing assistance, etc., and identify if they felt someone at a service site judged them because of their personal circumstances or any other reason. 42% reported strong yes or yes while another 49% reported no or strong no. Additionally, those approximately 132 households who reported yes or strong yes, were asked to describe what they believed was the main reason for these experiences. Respondents were provided with a series of options and were allowed to select more than one reason. Their race was the most common reason people believed they were judged at 33%. However, an additional 11% reported that they felt the shade or color of their skin was a factor in them being judged. The other most common reasons included their education or income (28%), gender (18%), and age (14%).



The link between food insecurity and discrimination in housing, public assistance, and healthcare services is evident in research. Housing discrimination has been associated with serious and lasting population health outcomes as well as racial and ethnic disparities in child health. Healthcare-related discrimination has been shown to result in negative mental and physical health outcomes. Lastly, public assistance discrimination hinders the motivation to be present in public assistance offices, attend appointments, and trust that cases are being processed fairly. These acts of noncompliance lead to sanctions, which are federally mandated reductions in benefits, further exacerbating inequities. A food insecurity and discrimination report from Children’s Healthwatch, recommends eliminating practices of discrimination in systems, institutions, and policies as an actionable step to reduce food insecurity.

⁹Evans, S., Chilton, M., Solomon, R., Mouzon, S., Grimaldi, G., & Ettinger de Cuba, S. (2018, November). DISCRIMINATION & FOOD INSECURITY IN PHILADELPHIA: HOUSING, PUBLIC ASSISTANCE, AND HEALTHCARE.



Sandusky Community Hub Anti-Discrimination Opportunity

Utilizing trauma-informed care practices has been identified as a key solution to addressing discrimination. Trauma-informed care aims to recognize, understand, and empathize with the impact of trauma on an individual and those around them. It also seeks to avoid any re-traumatization. Rather than treating each person like a number or a case, it aims to understand each individual as a whole. Trauma or re-traumatization can cost a person their comfort, confidence, and willingness to seek any type of assistance in the future.

By using a trauma-informed approach, the Hub can be a safe and welcoming space designed with community input. Partnering with the community to create a physically, culturally, and socially accessible space is essential to making sure the trauma-informed principles are applied. These principles utilize a racial equity lens to center inclusivity, accessibility, and transparency and will be integral in the project design.



Conclusion

With a thorough understanding of Sandusky’s needs, strengths, and specific opportunities for the Sandusky Hub, Second Harvest is positioned to share this information with the community and leverage the findings to support its strategic decision-making. The research and outreach conducted in phase one have provided critical insight into the Sandusky Hub’s formation, location, services, and eventual pilot. The need, the desire for a safe, trauma-informed space, and the challenges with the current public serving system all demonstrated throughout this report show clearly why a Sandusky Hub is necessary.

Based on our interviews and community survey, the Sandusky Community Hub will incorporate the following elements:

Accessible services embedded in the community

A commitment to providing culturally appropriate services, strategically offered within target communities to build trust and connect with potential community members.

Central access point

Many described how the Sandusky Hub would create a single door or central access point for people who are seeking services. They also indicated that having a central point would increase overall access to services within the community and streamline people’s ability to get services.

Efficient referral system

Through a holistic assessment framework, and using a web-based network, all community members accessing services will be screened and referred to a comprehensive set of resources that support financial well-being, health, educational attainment and social connection — such as employment services, healthcare, childcare, and financial services.

Community-based educational environment

The use of guest speakers and class discussions has become increasingly popular, with examples of programming in the community through local libraries. We will rely on community feedback and focus sessions to inform educational content decisions.

Trust building

The Sandusky Hub could begin to build a trusting relationship between the community and its providers. Many described the mistrust that people have in providers, for real or perceived reasons, but the Sandusky Hub could bridge that gap and empower people to seek the services they need. Some also reported that successful implementation of the Hub would increase collaboration between providers who don’t currently work together.

Address trauma and healing

Interviewees indicated that the best way to get community members out of the service line is by addressing and healing the trauma they’ve experienced. If the Sandusky Hub is successful in connecting people to the appropriate support and services, interviewees believe it can help to heal the generational trauma that so many Sandusky residents have faced.

Path Forward: Phase 2

Armed with this information, Second Harvest will share these findings with key partners, including The City of Sandusky, and begin holding meetings with additional stakeholders and community members to review and discuss the findings contained within this report. Below are some common hub development stages that help to dig deeper into what building a pilot model looks like and will also be used to continue to guide this project. It is important to note, some of the stages will happen concurrently while others will occur in succession. These stages are meant to help build a framework, rather than being prescriptive.

Stage 1: Acquiring the Hub (Building or Improving the Hub)

The hub project has already involved many conversations about geographic location and physical space requirements. Many steps will need to be taken to improve existing spaces. These steps will include consulting with architects and contractors and reimagining the current layout of the space. Many considerations will be taken into account, including the thoughts and perspectives of the building owners.

Stage 2: Understand Local Needs and Demand

This stage focuses on understanding the strengths, resources, and the needs within the community. The Stakeholder Interviews as well as the Sandusky Community Survey previously mentioned have helped to provide a better understanding of the community. Throughout this report the strengths, resources, and needs of the community have been highlighted. Even though we have already learned so much, continual community input will be essential throughout this project.

Stage 3: Establish a Clear Mission/Vision with the Community

Creating an intentional process for engaging community members is especially important in a hub as it provides opportunities to build relationships, build trust, and showcase long-term commitment. Community hubs are uniquely positioned to elevate those with lived experience as they’re built on the principles of collaborative community governance. With that in mind, it is critical to approach the community from a position of learning and humility. Some possible actions are to conduct a community visioning meeting, develop a community outreach and engagement plan focusing on BIPOC and those with lived experience, and create processes for codesign with built-in compensation. These actions would help to include the community in the decision making process rather than have the communities role be strictly as consultants.

Stage 4: Develop Partnership and Build Relationships

This stage looks to identify three main components of the Hub: the space capacity, the partners, and the partnership plans. To figure out the space capacity, it is important to think through the physical space available and decide how many tenant organization spaces — organizations that could participate on a frequent schedule and have their own designated space — would be available compared to rotating organization spaces — organizations who are able to offer their support by coming onsite on a less frequent basis and would share a space. With many stakeholder organizations showing a lot of interest and excitement around the prospect of being involved, it will be critical to discern who has the staffing capacity, resources, and invested interest to sustain a staff member at the Hub. In order to identify the partners, the space available, their available capacity, and the communities priorities will all be taken into account. Finally, creating partnership plans involves developing a group structure once the partnerships have been established. This includes, but is not limited to, developing partnership agreements, MOUs, project work plans, and conflict resolution agreements.

Stage 5: Operating and Sustaining the Hub

The final stage looks at the necessary policies and procedures to establish in order to determine the structure. Some considerations include how policies and procedures will be determined and created, staffing volume, staff and volunteer training, and recruitment and management of volunteers. Policies and procedures for sustainability will also need to be established. Preliminary testing of the design can be done by hosting a pop-up/mobile event.

