



2022

# Community Perspectives

Focus Group and Interview Findings on Housing, Poverty, and  
Behavioral Health in Adams County, Illinois

A 2021-2022 Adams County Community Assessment and Plan Report

# PARTNERS

The 2021-2022 Adams County Community Needs Assessment and 2022 Community Perspectives Report is made possible through the partnership and leadership of the following community partners:



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# INTRODUCTION

In 2021, the United Way of Adams County along with its partners, Blessing Health System and the Adams County Health Department oversaw the development of the 2021 Adams County Community Needs Assessment thanks in part to receiving an R3 – Restore. Reinvest. Renew. Assessment and Planning Grant from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

The 2021 Adams County Community Assessment includes a combination of primary and secondary data and highlights and isolates areas that need immediate attention and further study. The 85-page Assessment includes more than 90 different data sets in the areas of financial stability, education, and health. It allows the community to look at health and social issues on a broad scale and in a larger context and includes trends and indicators on local, state, and national levels.

Upon delivery of the Assessment, a group of 40 community leaders and frontline workers in the areas of education, social services, and health convened for an all-day planning session on October 21, 2021. The purpose of the session was to develop focus areas, shared goals, and community wide initiatives that support the health and well-being of all Adams County residents.

Three focus areas emerged because of the planning session and Assessment data: 1) housing instability/homelessness, 2) poverty/financial instability, and 3) behavioral health including mental health and substance abuse. One key takeaway from the planning session was the need for additional perspectives from community members personally experiencing issues around these three focus areas.

In February 2022, Maggie Strong of Strong Consulting conducted focus groups and one-on-one interviews around housing, poverty, and behavioral health, gathering community perspectives to inform the 2022 Adams County Community Plan. The findings presented here are intended to be used by the United Way of Adams County, its partners, and the Adams County community to improve access to programs and services, to shape programs that are tailored to the needs of the community, and to help improve the health and well-being of all Adams County residents.

# METHODS

Findings presented in this report are based on data from 5 focus groups and 9 one-on-one interviews that addressed the topics of housing instability, poverty, and behavioral health. The focus groups and interviews were conducted between February 7, 2022, and March 4, 2022.

<b>Organization</b>	<b># of Participants</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>
Bella Ease	7	2/7/2022	Teen Reach
Cheerful Home - Parents	2	2/15/2022	Cheerful Home
Cheerful Home - Staff	3	2/16/2022	Zoom
QUANADA	3	2/16/2022	QUANADA Shelter
Horizons	3	2/16/2022	Horizons Soup Kitchen
Blessing Health System BEST Self Center	1	2/18/2022	BEST Self Center
Quincy Young Life	10	2/21/2022	Young Life
Early Childhood and Family Center	6	2/24/2022	Zoom
Bella Ease Family Focus	8	3/4/2022	Grandview Church
<b>Total Participants</b>	<b>43</b>		

Focus Groups were facilitated by Maggie Strong of Strong Consulting and lasted for approximately 90 minutes. A semi-structured guide was used, which covered topics including participant experiences with and perspectives on housing, poverty, and behavioral health, and the programs and services provided in Adams County in these focus areas. Participants were asked to complete a brief questionnaire at the start of the focus group to gather basic sociodemographic information (see appendix for questionnaire documents).

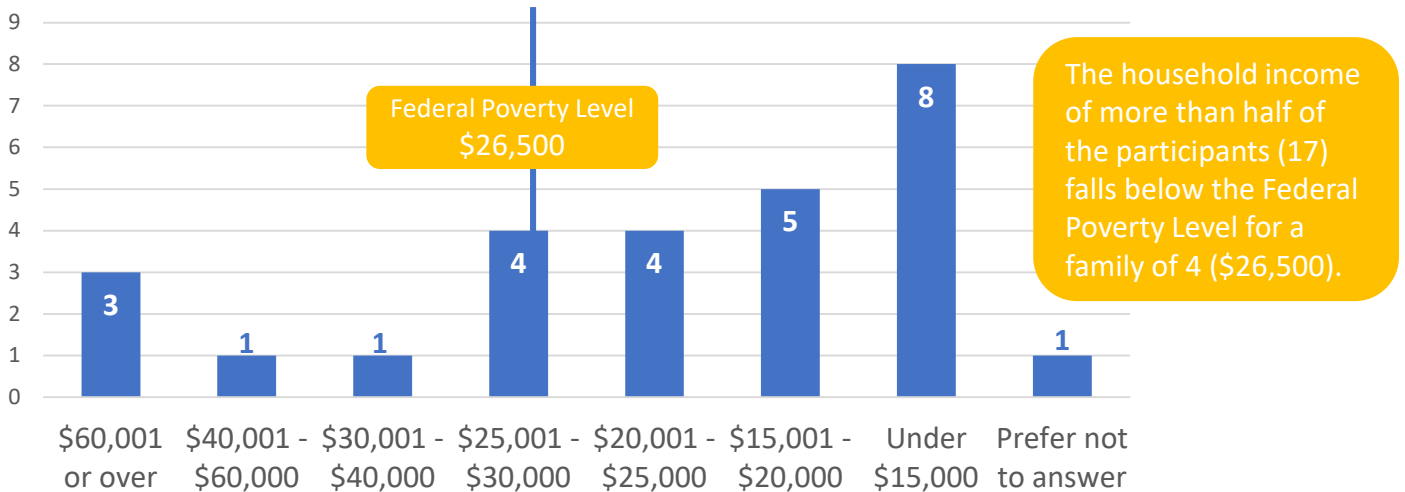
Focus Groups were recorded by a member of the Strong Consulting team and one-on-one interviews were recorded by Maggie Strong. In some cases, organization staff and counselors were present and participated in a limited manner in the focus groups and interviews. In-person focus group participants received a \$10 gift card to McDonalds in appreciation for their time.

# CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

43 individuals participated in the focus groups and interviews. Of the total number of participants, 10 participants were students under the age of 18 who participated in a focus group through Quincy Young Life. The student sociodemographic profiles have been removed from this section. Their comments and feedback are included in the Findings section of this report. The sociodemographic data presented below represents the responses of 27 participants who completed the demographic questionnaire.

The median age of participants was 35. The majority of participants (22) used she/her pronouns, with 4 participants using he/him pronouns and 1 participant using they/them pronouns (identifying as non-binary). 22 participants described their race/ethnicity as white or Caucasian, 7 described their race/ethnicity as black or African American, and 2 described their race/ethnicity as both white or Caucasian and black or African American.

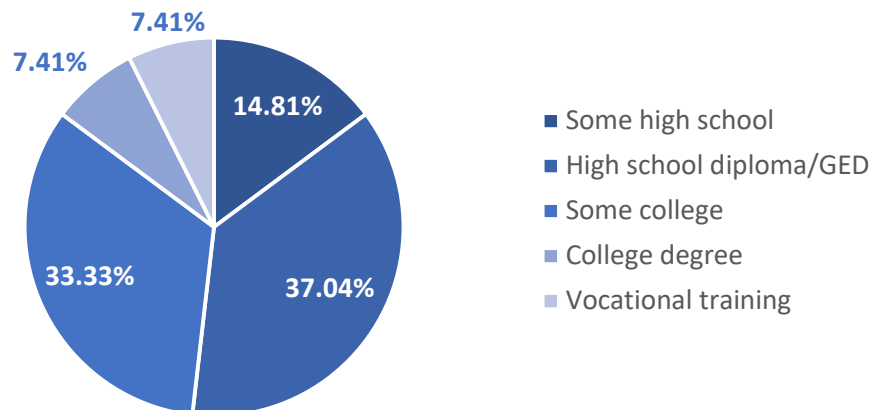
## Participant Household Income



“The more money you have, the more money they take. You can never get ahead or save to do something more. You feel trapped.”

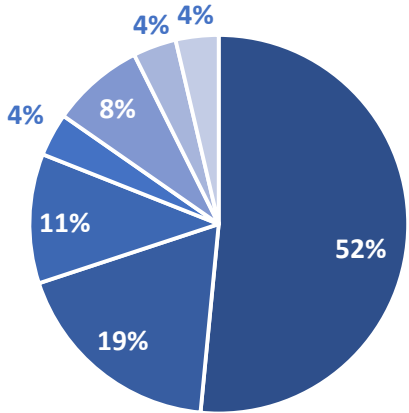
## Participant Education Level

85% of participants have less than a college education.



# CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

## Participant Employment Status



- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Unemployed – looking for work
- Unemployed – not looking for work
- Not able to work
- Freelance/Self-employed/Gig work
- Prefer not to answer

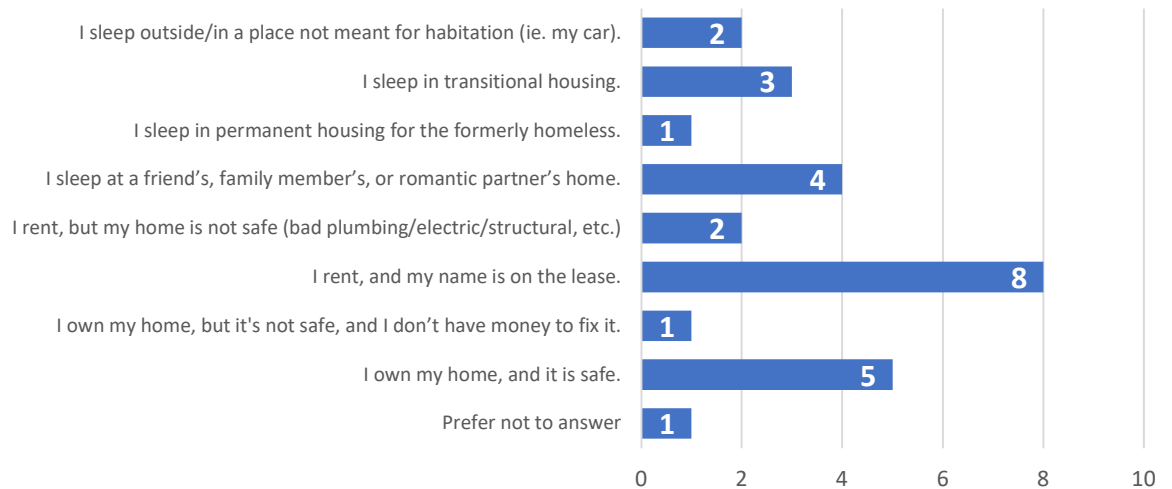
More than 50% of participants are employed full-time. While 11% of participants are unemployed and actively looking for work.

“Looking for a job is almost impossible when you’re homeless.”

“My daughters rent, and a lot of their landlords have been terrible. Is there someplace that makes them accountable?”

## Participant Current Housing Situation

48% of participants rent or own their own home, while 44% of participants are in unstable housing situations - and are either homeless, in transitional housing, or sleeping at a friend’s or family member’s home.



“Homeless women need to be protected. They are scared. There are so many things you can’t control.”

# CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

Participants have gone to the following housing agencies to seek assistance.

Have you ever asked for assistance from any of these housing agencies? (Check all that apply.)

<b>Organization</b>	
Salvation Army	14
QUANADA	12
Two Rivers Regional Council	10
Quincy Housing Authority	9
General Assistance	6
I have not asked for housing assistance.	5
United Way	5
YWCA Quincy	4
Unmet Needs	3
Well House	3
Prefer not to answer	3
Fisher of Men	0
New Start Rescue Mission	0



# FINDINGS

In the following sections we describe participants' perceptions of and experiences with programs and services in Adams County in the focus areas of housing, poverty, and behavioral health. We describe findings related to general challenges and barriers to accessing assistance, as well as challenges specific to each focus area. Finally, we present participant recommendations regarding approaches and factors, both at the individual and community level, that promote stability and improve the lives of Adams County residents.

## Challenges and Barriers

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### General Challenges and Barriers

- Having all the documentation agencies require is a challenge.
- Setting up meetings with resource organizations required me to take more time off from my job.
- Hard to know how to reach out to the resources or find them. It's not easy to find the organization that can help you.
- Agencies want to see 30 days of your finance history to see what you have been able to save. They want you to apply for public aid first, but to apply for public aid, you must not have a job.
- Re-entry resources after incarceration is lacking.
- Men in need have it worse than most women do because there isn't support or programs for them. There are more hoops for men, and they have the hardest time getting help.
- If you have a felony, there aren't options for you – emergency or otherwise.
- I have a list of services I can share with families, but because I'm new in my role I don't have a lot of connections
- Families lack the knowledge of what services are available to them.
- Some parents avoid getting their children assessed because of the extra work it might require dealing with the potential extra needs and support.
- Lack of education and difficult schedules prevent families from accessing a lot of the help they need.
- Some families have been offered help, but they are afraid to accept it because they don't want to get in trouble.
- Stability is not normal for a lot of our families.
- Some of these places, "help who they want to help".
- You get used to being turned down and so you don't fight for an appeal.
- I just don't have a support system. It's just me. My kids' dad follows me everywhere I go and he is my abuser.
- I'm scared to shop local as a nonbinary person. There's an 80% chance that they won't accept me. My biggest barrier to getting help is being LGBT.
- If you aren't from here and are new the area, you don't know where to go for help.
- The teenage population is vulnerable and the least served. We push our kids out unprepared and there aren't many services for this age group. The young adults are not ready. They are not adults.
- It makes it hard for you to ask for help when you think you're going to get shot down.
- Agencies want a lot of requirements for their help.
- You basically have to look yourself for where to go for assistance. There's not a person that can guide you through it. You're on your own trying to find help.
- You see children removed from their homes/parents because the parents don't have enough support. But then you give the foster parents support. You are paying foster care to take care of my children instead of me.
- Childcare is issue number one.
- My kids get kicked off the bus and I have no way to get them to school and then they are truant. The schools should be helping, but they aren't.

# FINDINGS

## Challenges and Barriers



### Housing Challenges and Barriers

- The hours I work are the same hours you need to contact landlords.
- It's difficult to find places to rent when you have a lot of children and need more space. The larger spaces are more expensive, but you don't have more income.
- How do you come up with money for a deposit if you aren't even breaking even?
- I have a (criminal) background and it's hard for me to find someone to rent to me.
- I'm saving for a down payment on a house so when I'm done with the YWCA program, I can buy, not rent. I have more problems trying to rent from people than buy.
- The rental process was hard. We kept getting denied. We'd be honest with people about our background, and they'd say they still must do a background check. Then they wouldn't consider us anyway.
- I fell through steps and broke my back because of a non-safe landlord situation.
- Talking to landlords wasn't a great experience. I tried getting housing on my own before I got into transitional housing. Just by the sound of my voice on the phone, they didn't give me a chance. Probably because I was black. And poor. And a woman with three kids.
- To get help from some places, you must be able to document your homelessness. It's not enough to tell them you're living in your car. A social worker, police officer, or park ranger needs to see you being homeless.
- It's easier to get housing in counties outside of Quincy and Adams County
- The safest place for someone without a home could be a drug house.
- I can't access services because I have a dog that I'm not willing to give up.
- There is a stigma surrounding housing and where you live in town.
- I can't afford to move because I can't find a decent house for less than \$700 or more.
- I was alarmed by the amount of racism there was when looking for a place to rent. My babysitter, who is black, would call and go look at a place and be told it wasn't available. I would call and they would give me an application. We both had similar incomes and backgrounds, so race was the only difference.
- Young adults are subject to landlords that take advantage of them.
- I don't have a home and trying to get my kids back, getting a home is a big step in doing that.
- I have been upfront about my felony background with landlords. I still have to pay \$50 for a nonrefundable background check to be considered for a rental. They take my \$50 and don't call me back. I don't know that they are actually running a background check. I've spent \$1000 in background checks and still don't have a place to live.
- Landlords are doing things under the table.
- It's difficult to have both the first month's rent and a deposit
- I feel like most people would rather be homeless than have to deal with the assistance providers.
- I don't understand why we have Section 8 if no landlords will take it. There's a two-year waitlist to even get assistance with housing.
- My credit score is the big challenge. I want to put a down payment on house, but no bank will even give me a chance. I can't even get a car loan.
- Two of my kids have lead poisoning from the place we rent. Landlords won't fix things. I talked to the Health Department, but then COVID happened, and they aren't holding the landlord accountable. And DCFS will count it against me.
- Every place requires history of employment for a year. They want to see stability for a year, and you have to have references. If you're a single parent, that is impossible. We can get to stability if we don't have housing.
- QUANADA can't help you if you have too many kids.
- Housing and then DCFS are huge problems. I would almost rather be homeless with my kids and not have to deal with them.

# FINDINGS

## Challenges and Barriers



### Poverty/Financial Instability Challenges and Barriers

- Childcare is a whole paycheck.
- On your days off, you must take care of your grandchildren so your kids can work.
- Without a side hustle or second or third job, you can't make it financially.
- I started working a 3<sup>rd</sup> shift manufacturing job. I started making more money and I was going to lose my child's social security. And I was going to lose my SNAP benefits because I was making more money. I was also going to lose daycare assistance from West Central Childcare and would have to pay out of pocket for overnight daycare. So, I decided to quit my 3<sup>rd</sup> shift manufacturing job and make less money at a fast-food restaurant with better hours. I would be able to keep these benefits for my kids and spend more time with them instead of having to sleep when they were home and send them to someone else's house at night for daycare. It's been better for us since I'm back to working days.
- At some places, you can't work anything but third shift for years before you get a chance to move to first shift. Second shift doesn't really work for people because you can't make other appointments. As a person in recovery, you need to be able to make it to meetings.
- It's more expensive to take care of your kids than ever before.
- Electric and gas bills just went up like crazy.
- Families struggle with everyday life – filling out applications, managing money, keeping their kids clean and in clean clothing in appropriate sizes
- Some families lack education on proper hygiene and bathing.
- Many of our families have jobs, but they are not managing their money wisely.
- I have kids at three different schools, I have a broken-down car, and I am late every day to my job.
- I'm on a leave of absence from work because of mental health issues.
- Looking for a job is almost impossible (when you're homeless).
- It's hard to find childcare.
- People's hands seem to be tied. Certain agencies when you go to them, they need you to have a job, but you need help because you can't get a job.
- I struggle to find daycare.
- I can't find a job right now because of DCFS. Having a case against you restricts you from getting a job and getting to a place where you can get your kids back.
- Getting to jobs on time and getting transportation is difficult.
- The people that are looking for help will work. We'll prove that we will do what we need to do to work. But they just don't give us enough time sometimes.

"A lot of people think that poverty is a choice. It absolutely is not. It's mind-blowing how many people think their privilege has nothing to do with how they "made it". People are not choosing to be in poverty."

"I'm one of the few that has overcome poverty. It was not easy, and I took advantage of all the help. You cannot do it alone."

# FINDINGS

## Challenges and Barriers



### Behavioral Health Challenges and Barriers

- There is still a stigma when it comes to therapy.
- It's difficult when you're an addict because a lot of addicts are seeking medication and they're self-medicating with drugs because they don't get the actual help and medication they need.
- There is a fear of being judged and not accepted.
- There is some serious lack of resources when it comes to behavioral health.
- I have young kids telling me they want to die, and they can't be seen by a professional for months.
- I don't know where to tell people to go for help. I feel helpless, and I don't want to cause more stress.
- Kids are struggling at a younger age.
- When I changed jobs, I couldn't go to therapy because I couldn't afford to pay out of pocket. I can't afford to get my kids into therapy because of the cost. It shouldn't be about your ability to pay if you need help.
- At one point, I had to go to the ER and commit myself to keep myself safe from self-harm. I was in crisis, and I felt like it was the only option.
- Poverty should not be an impediment to accessing health care and mental health care.
- I have been treated differently and negatively when I didn't have insurance versus when I did.
- My husband suffers from schizophrenia, bipolar, PTSD, paranoia. Domestic violence is a part of our relationship. Everyone only sees the DV, not the mental health side. They (Blessing In-Patient Psychiatric Unit) kept my husband in the hospital for 3-5 days and let him out and told him to take his medicine. He gets out looking crazy still and he's not going to take his medicine. They say they can't force him to stay, but I want to petition to keep him longer.
- My options to seek mental health services or therapy are limited because I'm on Medicaid.
- A lot of what is happening to people is because of trauma and it's not their fault.
- I wish I would have seen a therapist sooner. I didn't reach out sooner because I was scared about not being accepted as LGBT. My biggest barrier to getting help is being LGBT.
- Something that worries me is that other people in the in-patient psychiatric unit don't have insurance and were worried about the financial aspect of getting help. They would worry about getting out in time to get to their next work shift, or not being able to pay for food or rent because they were missing work.
- Working minimum wage, or even above minimum wage – people still couldn't afford their mental health care and meet their basic needs.
- If they don't get help, high schoolers will turn to things that make them feel better – like drugs.

"I have personally struggled with anxiety and depression. These are serious problems and there is still a stigma. I have lost my brother and uncle to suicide."

"I wish I would have seen a therapist sooner. I didn't reach out sooner because I was scared about not being accepted as LGBT. My biggest barrier to getting help is being LGBT."

# FINDINGS

## Recommendations and Needs

### General Recommendations and Needs

- Be more compassionate. Don't judge. We need empathy, not sympathy.
- Respect us. Basic respect.
- Offer encouragement.
- Offer regular listening sessions throughout the community so people understand the challenges we face directly from us.
- It would be helpful if we could provide assistance filling out paperwork and applications with families.
- It would be helpful for all community service providers/workers/social service providers to have the opportunity to learn about different services available so we could know where to go to get help for our families. It would be great if there was a required workshop or class for every new employee in the social service profession.
- We need to continue to offer services to our parents – more help – and we need to stay on top of them.
- We need to walk alongside our parents.
- Give me black and white rules so I can wind through it and figure it out. I've never seen so much red tape.
- There needs to be clearer paths forward.
- If people would just look me in the eye and say hello when they pass me on the street, that would be a good step.
- You need to treat people the way you want to be treated.
- You don't need to fix people who are struggling. You need to fix the community and teach them how to give basic respect.
- Programs for parents are important. You need to help empower parents.
- Get the word out about what services and support are available. That's the first step.
- Understand that people are proud. Help keep things confidential so that people feel like their privacy is respected.
- We need more services for the high school age group. If we start younger, we can better prepare them.
- We need people in the community that will help us find assistance.
- We need agencies that care and want to help.

"If people would just look me in the eye and say hello when they pass me on the street, that would be a good step."

"You don't need to fix people who are struggling. You need to fix the community and teach them how to give basic respect."

"Getting denied is the hardest part. They put you through the ringer and then you get denied."

# FINDINGS

## Recommendations and Needs



### Housing Recommendations and Needs

- We need more income-based housing or subsidized rent to give people more wiggle room to budget.
- We need more opportunities for people with criminal backgrounds to get subsidized housing.
- We need housing for people who have criminal convictions.
- We need landlord education and rental inspection ordinances or rental standards, habitability standards.
- There needs to be a safe place for people to sleep with no or little rules about drugs and alcohol.
- We need a place for people to go with no barriers to cut down on the homeless; places with no rent or utilities you must pay.
- We need to have accountability for landlords regarding racism and bias.
- If money goes toward housing assistance, there should be inspections to make sure the housing is livable. The money could go toward inspections.
- We need to make landlords sign up and be inspected. There should be an approval process for landlords before they can rent a property.
- Pre-rental inspection that doesn't cost the landlords money.
- There needs to be accountability for the landlords. You have to have a safe place to rent. There needs to be standards to keep places up to par. But don't make it to where it is unaffordable. You can't blame the cost of fixing up the place to be livable on the person renting.
- Offer incentives for landlords – a property tax deduction if they were to fix up a property – something that would encourage them to be better landlords.
- Landlords need to meet the person they are potentially renting to. They shouldn't just go off the application.
- We need landlords who will work with Section 8.

"I sleep in my car currently. Salvation Army doesn't have availability. QUANADA isn't accessible because there isn't domestic violence. You can't get back into the YWCA program if you aren't in a shelter. I connected with Quincy Housing Authority and am approved for a four-bedroom, but that could be months of waiting."

"My parents moved out of their house to rent a smaller house so my brother and his wife could live in their house. They had tried for a year to find something to rent that was big enough and that they could afford. My parents were lucky that they could afford to pay rent for another place."

# FINDINGS

## Recommendations and Needs



### Poverty/Financial Instability Recommendations and Needs

- Budgeting classes
- How to rebalance when you have major changes to your income
- How to increase your education level so you can increase your income
- Need first-time homebuyer's classes about the true costs of housing (insurance, utilities, taxes, etc.)
- Teach finances and budgeting
- Teach classes in grade school and high school that actually prepare you for life.
- Financial classes would be helpful for a lot of our families
- We need to help kids understand how to manage money, how to go to college without acquiring debt. We need to teach them how to overcome things when they are at such a disadvantage.
- Food pantries should be available more often than once a month. We need more clothing and food pantries.
- We need financial assistance and budgeting help.
- We need childcare assistance.

"We need to help kids understand how to manage money, how to go to college without acquiring debt. We need to teach them how to overcome things when they are at such a disadvantage."

### Behavioral Health Recommendations and Needs



- It is important to connect with kids as much as possible, one-on-one.
- Mental health resources and early intervention specifically are so important.
- It would help to talk about emotions earlier and keep talking about them – early intervention.
- We should have a response team member or mental health provider in each childcare classroom.
- The BEST Self program should be better communicated to more people coming in for mental health help.
- We need more adults who we can trust and who will listen to us. When you share and open up, you let someone else help carry the weight.
- We need schools to teach more about mental health and to help us understand why we're feeling what we're feeling and that it's okay.
- Break the stigma. Everybody needs help sometimes.
- We need a better place that provides addiction services like Gateway in Springfield. They hold people more accountable and get them to come to terms with the disease that is addiction.
- Understand what the underlying issue of substance abuse is and accept that it is a disease and not as much of a choice.
- The court needs to help with the issue and not focus on the punishment. People with addiction issues don't need to pay more fines and be locked up, they need help.
- People in recovery need to be part of the conversation when it comes to talking to young people. People teaching DARE don't have the same experience. It's a joke.
- Need to teach kids about the reality of drugs. Sometimes they make you feel good – we need to recognize and acknowledge it and then explain that it is a slippery slope.
- We need to teach kids about emotions and how to handle their emotions without using substances and continue to teach them when they are in grade school and high school.
- We need to teach people that mental health and substance abuse go hand-in-hand.
- Don't treat people in poverty differently when it comes to their care. It leads to being misdiagnosed and self-medication.

"Kids need love and connection the most."

# FINDINGS

## Agency/Organization Experiences

### Positive Agency/Organization Experiences

- [Org A] – help with a place to go after you get out of jail, help finding an apartment and help paying the first month's rent
- [Org A] - helped me the most, they paid the first month's rent and deposit for my apartment after I graduated from their program and helped me furnish the apartment.
- [Org B] – they truly help sometimes, but it's a 50-50 chance that they have funds available
- [Org C] – help finding a job
- [Org B] – I was homeless and able to stay in the shelter
- [ORG D] – the transitional housing program has been the most helpful. I don't pay rent, only utilities and it's allowed me to save money. If you follow the rules, you're good to go.
- [Org C] – helped me get an application filled out. They helped advocate for me with my DCFS case and walked along with me during that process. They helped get me clothes for work. We still attend some of their groups.
- [Org A] – I graduated from drug court and got off probation early. I was looking at paying fines for a couple of years, but [Org A donor] surprised me and paid them all. I'm just free from all of that and I can move forward and not have that always on my back.
- [ORG E] – [Org E employee] has been helpful in providing a list of service providers so that I can find help for families with specific needs
- [Org C] – I take parenting classes with [Org C]. They help me with DCFS. They are easy to work with and they are all on the same page as me.
- [Org F] – It's awesome. I get help to pay for my kids' daycare.
- [Org G] – they're awesome.
- [Org H] – they are fabulous. The conversations back and forth were great. They helped get me a washer and dryer.
- [Org I] Program – This program is phenomenal. I've benefited from it a lot. I wish I would have heard about it when I came into the ER. My wife found out about it from her therapist. I wish it could reach more people.
- [Org I] – I'm nonbinary. They have been great about their effort to use my correct pronouns. If they get it wrong, they reach out and apologize.
- [Org J] – Really helpful. I've never gone there without them accommodating me if they had the funds. They are always truthful and honest.
- [Org K] – Helped me and treated me like an actual person.
- [Org L] – They are a great tool to get the word out. They have a list of all the programs and places that can help and share it during home visits.
- [Org C] – They care. They give you references. They help you find a job. They have your back. They give you mental health and physical support. They've been through it themselves. [Org C] is the only one that has helped me.
- [Org J] – They go above and beyond. I've never had issues with Two Rivers.
- [Org B] – I stayed in the shelter, and they helped me get through. But you can't have any record.

"They are really helpful. I've never gone there without them accommodating me if they had the funds. They are always truthful and honest."

"They helped me and treated me like and actual person."



# FINDINGS

## Agency/Organization Experiences

### Negative Agency/Organization Experiences

- Gatekeepers lack respect and empathy and they cut you off and cut you down before you even get in the door.
- [Org K] – they are the most difficult to work with. They make you do a whole lot of extra stuff and when you're homeless and you don't have a vehicle, doing their 25 things before you can get help with rent or the water bill or whatever it may be, it's complicated. There is so much paperwork and you must show proof of everything. If you're struggling, you're not thinking about saving receipts.
- [Org I] – I will drive to Hannibal if I need mental health services because I will get treated better there.
- [ORG M] – They say you're doing so good. Keep doing what you are doing. You're so organized. You're so motivated. But I don't feel like I have any control over my kids and what happens to them. They say you're so close. Close to what? You can't give me a date. You technically don't have any control because it's in the court system. So, what am I close to?
- [Org K] – I was trying to help a homeless person and they rudely said, "have you heard of friends or family?" Thank you for kicking me when I'm already down.
- [Org K] – You have to be prepared for how awful people are going to make you feel.
- [Org B] – I was denied help and told I needed to do this and that and get a better job. I was a proud person and didn't want to ask for help. When you get shot down from the [Org B], it really breaks you. They acted like they were so much better than me and couldn't think about helping me. They only show up when they can get in the news and get credit.
- [Org I] – They were extremely dismissive to her (fiancé's 18-year-old sister).
- As a service provider, one of the most difficult things for us is when we refer a client to another agency, and they come back to us and they've been humiliated. One woman at another agency was so offended by a client I sent her that she called me and shamed me for sending the client to them. So, I can only imagine how my client felt.
- They don't treat you like a human being.
- [Org B] and [Org K] are not good.
- [ORG M] – They are notorious for telling me that if I do xyz that it will be a certain way, and then it's not.

"You have to be prepared for how awful people are going to make you feel."

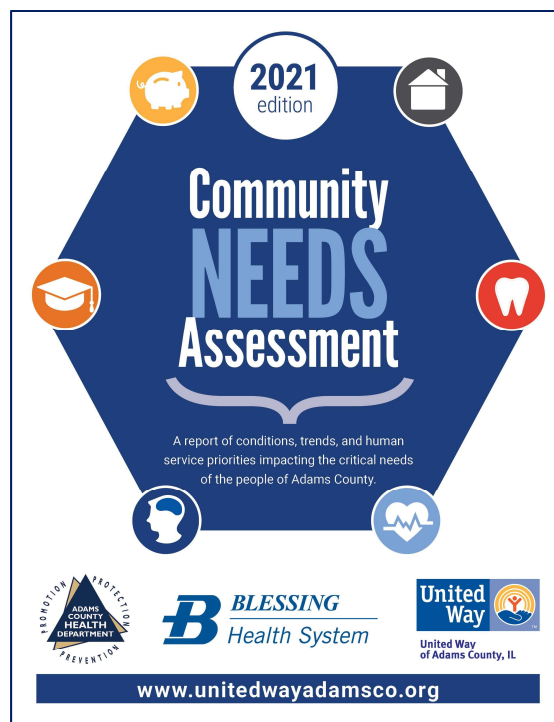
"They don't treat you like a human being."

# CONCLUSION

The research presented in this report was conducted to facilitate incorporation of community voices into the development and implementation of programs, services, and initiatives that promote the health and well-being of Adams County residents, specifically around the focus area of housing, poverty, and behavioral health. Findings include community members' perceptions of factors underlying housing, poverty, and behavioral health challenges, existing barriers to programs and services, and recommendations regarding how best to address those barriers.

Participants provided a wealth of information related to both the prevalence and perceived causes of these challenges in their community. They described common barriers to overcoming housing and financial instability and indicated that trauma and challenges related to living under difficult social and economic conditions can contribute to substance abuse and poor mental health.

The information in this report, as well as the data presented in the 2021 Adams County Community Assessment (<https://www.unitedwayadamsco.org/communitydata>), will be used to inform the 2022 Community Action Plan. For information about how to get involved, contact the United Way of Adams County at 217.222.5020.



# APPENDIX

## Focus Group and Interview Question Guide

### **Focus Group Introduction:**

Thank you for being a part of today's/tonight's discussion. I'm so glad each of you made time to join us here. My name is Maggie Strong and I'm working with the United Way of Adams County, along with its partners on a Community Needs Assessment and Plan. We spent much of last year looking at secondary data around the areas of health, financial stability, education, housing, and behavioral health.

Through this process, the data told us that we need to focus in on issues related to housing and financial instability as well as mental health and substance use services and access. And we knew that we needed to talk to community members to learn more about how your lives, and the lives of your friends, family, and neighbors, are impacted by these issues.

Many of us are proud of our community, but we know it has challenges, too. We cannot improve services and systems around housing, poverty, and behavioral health in Quincy and Adams County without hearing directly from community members like yourselves.

Please know that everything you say today will only be shared generally and not identify any specific person. And if at any time you'd prefer not to answer a question, just let me know.

# APPENDIX

## **Focus Group Questions:**

I'd like to ask you questions about some important areas of all our lives – our homes, or where we sleep at night, our ability to afford basic necessities and provide for ourselves and our families, and how mental health and substance use affect these and other parts of our lives.

Some of these questions or topics may not apply to you, but you may know someone who deals with these issues. Without naming names, any information you are able and willing to share will be helpful – from your own perspective and that as a friend, neighbor, or family member of someone experiencing these issues.

## **HOUSING**

1. What kind of housing assistance would be most useful to you, your family, or families like yours?
2. If you were in charge of providing housing assistance in Quincy/Adams County, what improvements would you make?
3. What has helped the most when it comes to finding or improving your housing situation (or that of your family's or friends' housing situations)?
4. What doesn't help, or even hurts, when it comes to finding or improving your housing situation (or that of your family's or friends' housing situations)?

## **FINANCIAL INSECURITY/POVERTY**

1. If you could change one thing about the process of getting financial assistance or help in Quincy/Adams County, what would it be?
2. If you or someone you know are currently unemployed or underemployed (meaning you'd like a better job, better pay, or more hours), what's keeping you (or them) from finding a job or better job?
3. What is your (or families like yours) biggest struggle when it comes to money, paying bills, or buying the things you need for your family?

## **BEHAVIORAL HEALTH (MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE USE)**

1. If you could change one thing about the process of getting mental health/substance use treatment or help in Quincy/Adams County, what would it be?
2. If you were in charge of providing mental health or substance use services in Quincy/Adams County, what improvements would you make?
3. What keeps you or your family and friends from getting help when it comes to your/their mental health or substance use?

## **GENERAL**

1. Is there anything else you would like to share?
2. Is there anything that we didn't touch on that you feel is important?

Thank you for your time. These can be difficult topics and we appreciate your honest perspectives. The information you shared today will help us improve the services and programs that are intended to support community members in their times of need.

# APPENDIX

## Participant Demographic Questionnaire

### Adams County Community Needs Assessment Focus Group/Interview Participant Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this focus group/interview. We cannot improve services and systems in Quincy and Adams County without you. Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability. The information you provide in this questionnaire and during our focus group/interview will help us understand how we can provide better services with less barriers.

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Prefer not to answer
2. What is your gender?  
 Female (she/her)  
 Male (he/him)  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Prefer not to answer
3. How do you describe your race? (Check all that apply.)  
 Native American Indigenous Person or Alaska Native  
 Asian  
 Black or African American  
 White or Caucasian  
 Hispanic or Latinx or Spanish origin of any race  
 Unknown  
 Other/Prefer to self-describe: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Prefer not to answer
4. What is your marital status?  
 Single  
 Married  
 Divorced  
 Widowed  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Prefer not to answer
5. What is your household income?  
 Under \$15,000  
 \$15,001 - \$20,000  
 \$20,001 - \$25,000  
 \$25,001 - \$30,000  
 \$30,001 - \$40,000  
 \$40,001 - \$60,000  
 \$60,001 or over  
 Prefer not to answer
6. Including yourself, how many people live in your household?  
 1  
 2  
 3  
 4  
 5  
 6  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Prefer not to answer
7. What is your highest level of education?  
 No formal education  
 Some high school  
 High school diploma/GED  
 Some college  
 College degree  
 Vocational training  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Prefer not to answer
8. Have you ever been enlisted in the military?  
 Yes  
 No  
 Prefer not to answer
9. What is your current employment status?  
 Employed full-time  
 Employed part-time  
 Unemployed – looking for work  
 Unemployed – not looking for work  
 Student  
 Military  
 Not able to work  
 Retired  
 Freelance/Self-employed/Gig work  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Prefer not to answer
10. What is your current housing situation?  
 I sleep outside/in a place not meant for habitation (for example, my car).  
 I sleep in an emergency shelter or domestic violence shelter.  
 I sleep in transitional housing.  
 I sleep in permanent housing for the formerly homeless.  
 I sleep in a hotel/motel.  
 I sleep in a foster care home or group home.  
 I sleep in subsidized housing.  
 I sleep at a friend's, family member's, or romantic partner's home.  
 I rent, but my home is not safe (bad plumbing/electrical, structural issues, etc.)  
 I rent, but do not have a written lease.  
 I rent, and my name is on the lease.  
 I own my home, but it is not safe, and I don't have the money to fix it.  
 I own my home, and it is safe.  
 Prefer not to answer
11. Did you have a safe, stable home when you were under age 18?  
 Yes  
 No  
 Some of the time, but we were homeless for part of my childhood.  
 Prefer not to answer
12. Have you ever asked for assistance from any of these housing agencies? (Check all that apply.)  
 I have not asked for housing assistance.  
 Fisher of Men  
 General Assistance  
 New Start Rescue Mission  
 QUANADA  
 Quincy Housing Authority  
 Salvation Army  
 Two Rivers Regional Council  
 United Way  
 Unmet Needs  
 Well House  
 YWCA Quincy  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Prefer not to answer

# APPENDIX

## Participant Waiver

### 2021-2022 Adams County Community Assessment & Plan Focus Group/Interview Participant Consent Form

#### **Purpose**

You have been invited to participate in a focus group/one-on-one interview sponsored by United Way of Adams County under the direction of Maggie Strong of Strong Consulting. The purpose of this focus group/interview is to better understand your experiences and opinions related to housing, financial instability, and behavioral health (mental health and substance use) issues in Quincy and Adams County. The information learned in this focus group/interview will be used to help improve services and systems in Quincy and Adams County related to these areas.

#### **Procedure**

As part of this process, you will be a part of a group of 6-12 individuals (or part of a one-on-one interview). A moderator will ask you several questions while facilitating the discussion. The focus group may be audio-recorded, and a note-taker may be present. However, your responses will remain confidential, and no names will be included in the final report.

You can choose whether or not to participate in the focus group/interview, and you may stop at any time during the course of the process.

Please note that there are no right or wrong answers to focus group/interview questions. The United Way and their partner organizations want to hear the many varying viewpoints and would like for everyone to contribute their thoughts. Out of respect, please try not to interrupt others. However, feel free to be honest even when your responses differ those of other group members.

#### **Benefits and Risks**

Your participation may benefit you and other community members by helping us improve housing, financial assistance, and behavioral health services and programs in Quincy and Adams County. However, no risks are anticipated beyond those experienced during an average conversation.

#### **Confidentiality**

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to respect the privacy of other focus group members by not disclosing any content discussed during the process. United Way of Adams County and Strong Consulting will analyze the data, but – as stated above – your responses will remain confidential, and no names will be included in any reports.

#### **Contact**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this process, please contact:

Maggie Strong  
Strong Consulting  
mestrong@gmail.com  
217.257.0721

*I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above.*

Sign name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_