

UNITED WAY OF BLAIR COUNTY

IMPACT FUNDING:

A COMMUNITY PLAN

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## EVOLUTION OF OUR PLAN

One simple phrase, "Nothing has changed", started United Way of Blair County's Board of Directors looking at the possibility of change. It was time for us to research another way to invest our donors' contributions. We began by visiting other United Ways that had begun Impact Funding, researched the process of change and interviewed United Ways about their processes. Then we looked inward. Was United Way of Blair County ready for a change? Could the staff and the Board of Directors commit the time to drastically change the way we have done business? After all our research, it was decided that United Way of Blair County would move forward. United Way of York County Maine had the same characteristics as Blair County, the same size metro and similar community; and their process fit our community. We decided to follow their lead. In 2002, our journey to Impact Funding began.

There were multiple reasons for us to move toward Impact Funding. Channeling money from workplace campaigns to agencies had not sufficiently addressed our communities' problems. As mentioned in the previous paragraph the problems of Blair County had remained the same for years. Services were being provided but there had been no impact on the issues. The changing economic environment had increased social needs. Over the past several years, Blair County has lost major industrial jobs. United Way of Blair County was seen as a funder of agencies. We needed to become a community convener to bring together a variety of resources to address our community's needs. In light of our relationship with our volunteers, businesses and other human service organizations we were in a position to bring people and organizations together to address critical needs. With all this said, the primary reason for change was our donors were asking us to change. They want to see their contributions making a difference. They want their contributions directed to "Results That Matter."

As we began to develop our plan, we met with our member agencies during the summer of 2002. We let them know that United Way of Blair County would be moving to Impact Funding and would be developing Requests for Proposals (RFP) for future dollars. We talked about what Impact Funding meant and why we decided to change. We held two meetings to listen to their concerns and list their questions, so that as we proceeded, we could respond to them.

Change brings with it many questions. To begin answering these questions and mapping out our future, the Board of Directors met with Dr. Chuck Kormanski of Kormanski Consulting and Dr. Bill Engelbret of Penn State Altoona for a retreat Saturday, April 12, 2003 at the Sheetz Conference Center. From this retreat ten, (10) concerns were identified:

- It will be a challenge educating the community about our new direction.
- We will need to educate ourselves internally so that we can make the process work.
- We will need to develop strategies for raising funds.
- We will need to distribute our dollars for greater impact.
- We will need to ensure that United Way can measure the impact.
- It will be a challenge to create a new image.
- We will need to determine the needs of the community (not just the monetary needs).
- We will need more commitment from business leaders.
- We will need to obtain more media coverage.
- It will be a challenge to create and sustain a culture of change.

From this point, a New Direction Committee was formed to begin our strategic plan for Impact Funding. The first decision to be made was how to determine the community needs. A list of Community Connectors was developed and these people were contacted and invited to several nominal group interviews. At these meetings they were asked to list what they thought the community issues were. The list was prioritized and ranked. A survey was developed based on the information collected at all of the nominal group interviews. This survey was a part of our 2003 campaign. After the original survey, a committee, with the help of Dr. Kormanski, revised the information.

March 31, 2004 was the deadline for collecting data from the survey. Dr. Bill Engelbret of Penn State Altoona compiled the data and presented it to the newly named and reorganized Community Building Committee (formerly the New Direction Committee). From information gathered, four Focus Areas were identified:

- Job Related Issues
- Meeting Emergency Needs
- Nurturing Children and Youth
- Strengthening Families

Each Focus Area was led by Community Leaders skilled in that area with a team of 15 -20 experts that had experience and knowledge of the area. The task of each team was to define and analyze information and data within these focus areas, to identify and to prioritize issues and to develop a plan of work.

After 2 long years, our mission and direction had changed. That beginning marked a long-term process that would grow and develop as we did. We expected to address the identified issues for the next 3 -5 years knowing that change doesn't happen overnight. To have a sustained change we knew it would take time.

#### OUR PLAN PRESENTS VISION AND FOCUS

Historically, United Way of Blair County has used the funded agencies as our filter to let us know how they would provide services for the community. Impact Funding redirects our focus to deal with specific areas of community concerns. We listened to our community and found that families, children and youth, jobs and emergency needs were critical to them.

United Way of Blair County's Community Plan provides a foundation of information and ideas on which to build future action for addressing community issues. We fully expect these ideas to grow and further develop. The issues addressed in our plan are complex and will require long-term attention. We expect to continue working on the strategies outlined here for at least the next three years. The results of our efforts will not be easily or quickly measured; but we are committed to tracking them, continually sharing our progress with the community and constantly re-evaluating our work.

## **THE COMMUNITY PLAN CONTINUES TO EVOLVE (2007 – present)**

Beginning in early 2007, The Blair County Human Services Office and the United Way of Blair County invited other key community leaders to once again join and support an effort to conduct a countywide needs assessment. It was once again time to identify community assets, identify targeted needs, and develop an action plan to fill those needs with the ultimate goal of improving the lives of all people in Blair County. The results of that assessment were released to the public in January of 2009, and work groups met to develop a Community Plan based on the results of that updated needs assessment.

The effort of identifying local needs and bringing people together to develop a plan will be an on-going community effort. All three local hospitals joined the needs assessment effort, and the partners formalized themselves as the Healthy Blair County Coalition. A new assessment was conducted in 2013. Groups were formed to develop plans to address the identified needs. United Way of Blair County worked with those workgroups and our Community Building Committee made slight modifications to our Community Plan in light of initial findings.

In July 2015, the Healthy Blair County Coalition (of which United Way of Blair County continues to be a part) began the process of gathering data once again for an updated assessment. Data was collected through a variety of methods including a random household survey, key informant survey, community economic needs assessment survey, service provider survey, associations survey, faith-based survey, healthcare provider interviews, and secondary indicator data. Data was collected through December 2015 and analyzed by the Healthy Blair County Coalition Data Analysis Sub-Committee. Based on the data collected, the updated Community Health Needs Assessment was finalized and published in June 2016. Primary need areas remain consistent with the needs identified in 2013.

In 2018, the Community Health Needs Assessment was updated again following the same process as in years' past. Data was collected during the second half of the year in 2018, and the Community Health Needs Assessment was finalized in June 2019. Obesity, alcohol and other drugs, and poverty/lack of adequate income were identified as the primary need areas in our community.

The Grant Review Committee (formerly the Community Building Committee) of the United Way of Blair County considered its current plan, the focus areas of United Way Worldwide and the findings of the most recent needs assessment and other secondary data and refined the plan to focus on the following vision/focus areas:

### **ECONOMIC MOBILITY:**

"We envision a Blair County where individuals and families have access to lasting solutions that allow them to achieve financial stability and improve their socio-economic status."

### **MEETING EMERGENCY NEEDS:**

"We envision a Blair County where there is a safety net for those experiencing emergencies."

### **EDUCATION:**

"We envision a Blair County where community members of all ages will have access to educational opportunities and experiences."

### **ACCESS TO HEALTH:**

"We envision a Blair County where community members of all ages have access to lasting solutions that promote physical, mental, and emotional health."

# ECONOMIC MOBILITY

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## VISION

*"We envision a Blair County where individuals and families have access to lasting solutions that allow them to achieve financial stability and improve their socio-economic status."*

### ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #1 FINANCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES

**ISSUE:** Lack of education and training on basic budgeting practices for children and adults

#### *Current Key Findings:*

- According to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, 72% of households feel poverty/lack of adequate income is a significant community challenge in Blair County. Moreover, 89.8% of key informants and 100% of service providers recognize poverty/lack of adequate income is a primary issue in Blair County.
- According to the United States Census Bureau, July 2018 population estimates indicate that 14.5% of the Blair County population is living in poverty which is higher than the state rate of 12.2%.
- As of October 2019, the per capita personal income in Blair County is \$43,793 as compared to the state per capita income of \$53,300. The median household income in Blair County is \$45,664 compared to Pennsylvania's median household income of \$56,951 (Center for Workforce Information & Analysis).
- According to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, 3.7% of Blair County households receive general assistance and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). 44.9% of households with children under the age of 18 participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and 50% of Blair County students are enrolled in free/reduced school lunch programs compared to the state rate of 46%.
- 44.4% of Blair County children under the age of 18 are living in low-income families (2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment).
- According to ALICE in Pennsylvania: A Financial Hardship Study (2019 Pennsylvania Report), the 2017 Point-In-Time data indicates that 39% of the Blair County population is considered to be living at or below the ALICE level, with 16% of that population living in poverty. ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed – formerly referred to as the “working poor”) refers to households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but less than the basic cost of living for the county.
- According to 211 data, from January 1, 2019 through December 10, 2019, 930 calls were received from individuals seeking some type of financial assistance. Calls were broken down as follows: 586 seeking utility assistance, 226 seeking rent/mortgage payment assistance, and 118 seeking general financial assistance. These financial assistance calls made up 32% of the total calls placed to 211 during that time period.

*Desired Objective:* All children and adults in Blair County are provided with basic budgeting courses.

#### *Initial Strategies:*

- A. Identify who provides basic budgeting and publicize the programs.
- B. Develop a universal curriculum for youth and adults.
- C. Provide incentives for attending training.
- D. Be inclusive of rural areas.
- E. Identify those in need of budget counseling.
- F. Develop a plan with sustainable solutions for those in severe need.
- G. Develop a comprehensive plan linking clients with agencies and agencies with other agencies.

**ISSUE:** Lack of access to and availability of meal programs, food pantries, and affordable healthy food choices.

*Current Key Findings:*

- According to 211 data, between January 1, 2019 and December 10, 2019, 89 calls were received from individuals seeking food pantries or food programs in Blair County.
- Transportation is a barrier for many in accessing food programs, especially in the more rural parts of the county.
- Food pantries and programs may operate on limited schedules, often making it difficult for individuals to access the programs especially when a lack of transportation exists.
- Senior citizens can use Meals on Wheels.
- School districts offer weekend food programs (backpack programs) throughout the school year, but many communities do not have programs during the summer months. During the 2018-2019 school year, the Mountain Lion Backpack Program provided weekend meals for an average of 958 elementary students weekly in the Altoona Area School District. 110 students in the Spring Cove School District benefitted from the weekend meals program (Scarlet Dragon Packs) during that same time period.
- According to the PA Department of Human Services as reported in the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, 3.7% of Blair County households receive general assistance and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). 44.9% of households with children under the age of 18 participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education as reported in the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, 50% of Blair County students are enrolled in the free/reduced school lunch program compared to the Pennsylvania rate of 46%.
- According to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, more than 8% of Blair County residents who are considered low-income do not live close to a grocery store. 13% of the Blair County population experienced food insecurity at some point during the year.

*Desired Objective:* All residents of Blair County will have access to affordable, nutritious meals every day.

*Initial Strategies:*

- A. Identify those agencies that provide meals and inform the community through various media and other modalities.
- B. Research other available resources.
- C. Expand the current services to meet the need.
- D. Develop better linkages with the religious community.
- E. Increase the outreach to the homebound/disabled with transportation to centers that provide meals.
- F. Identify and develop creative ways to meet all family nutrition needs.
- G. Increase the availability of healthy, affordable food choices in neighborhoods, especially in rural communities where transportation is an issue.

**ISSUE:** Lack of access to and availability of affordable, quality childcare.

*Current Key Findings:*

- 83% of children eligible for Child Care Works (subsidized childcare) are going unserved (KIDS COUNT: Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, April 2019). This is higher than the unserved rate in Pennsylvania, which is at 73%.
- In Blair County, only 54% of child care capacity meets high-quality standards. (KIDS COUNT: Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, April 2019).
- 47% of children in Blair County who are eligible for high-quality, publicly funded Pre-K programs do not have access to such programs (KIDS COUNT: Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, February 2019). According to KIDS COUNT: Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (February 2019), of the 2,015 eligible children ages 3-4 years in Blair County, 957 children do not have access to high-quality, publicly funded Pre-K programs.

According to the same report, of the 35 Pre-K locations in Blair County that are eligible to participate, only 28 providers do so. To ensure all eligible children have access to high-quality, publicly funded Pre-K programs, 48 additional classrooms are needed.

- Unsubsidized childcare is expensive, often costing between \$600-\$700 per month for one child.
- There is limited affordable, quality childcare available after the traditional business-day hours. 24/7 care is limited or not available at all.

*Desired Objective:* All families will have access to affordable, quality childcare.

*Initial Strategies:*

- A. Increase availability of services during non-traditional hours.
- B. Identify affordable, quality providers and research and develop ways to increase capacity in existing programs.
- C. Research and develop ways to increase the number of affordable, quality providers.
- D. Collaborate with businesses for partnerships in providing childcare to their employees.
- E. Identify affordable, quality childcare facilities and inform community members about resources available to help them access the facilities and programs.
- F. Identify and develop creative ways to meet childcare needs including access and affordability.

## **ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #2 JOB READINESS, EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

**ISSUE:** Job Readiness

*Current Key Findings:*

- As of October 2019, the unemployment rate in Blair County is 4.5% which is comparable to the state rate of 4.2% (Center for Workforce Information & Analysis).
- Manufacturing, skilled trade, transportation, customer service, etc. jobs are available in Blair County, but employers are having difficulty finding individuals qualified for the positions. Roadblocks for hiring include lack of education or skills for the job, inability to pass a drug screening, transportation, and lack of access to affordable child care (Altoona Blair County Development Corporation).
- Access to affordable child care is a significant issue. 47% of eligible Blair County children do not have access to high-quality, publicly funded Pre-K programs (KIDS COUNT: Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, February 2019). Additionally, 83% of children eligible for Child Care Works (subsidized childcare) are going unserved (KIDS COUNT: Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, April 2019). This is higher than the unserved rate in Pennsylvania, which is at 73%.
- Affordability of post-secondary education or job skills training programs can be a barrier. According to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, 45.8% of key informants felt that lack of affordable post high school opportunities was a significant community challenge.

*Desired Objectives:* All youth and adults have the necessary education and skills to obtain and retain good jobs with the potential for advancement.

*Initial Strategies:*

- A. Collaborate with businesses and organizations to offer workforce development, education, and training programs tailored to employer needs and to match the economic vision with current and future job trends of the county.
- B. Remove barriers to participation in basic education and job readiness programs by promoting flexible class hours, use of digital or alternative curricula, and providing childcare and transportation support.
- C. Create financial assistance programs for job readiness programs and assist individuals with applications to such programs.
- D. Increase access to and opportunity for apprenticeships and internships.
- E. Provide career counseling programs for youth to align them with post-secondary education/training programs

and plans.

- F. Establish locally funded Individual Growth Account programs that allow savings to be used to purchase professional trade tools.
- G. Expand job placement activities that link those completing education/training with family-sustaining jobs.
- H. Conduct outreach and education to increase awareness of and enrollment in education, training, and development programs.

**ISSUE:** Lack of access to transportation

*Current Key Findings:*

- Public transportation is not available in the more rural parts of the county. According to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, 36.4% of household survey respondents, 57.6% of key informants, and 69.1% of service providers felt that inadequate public transportation is a significant community challenge and issue.
- There is no longer a taxi service within the county.
- Ride share services such as Uber and Lyft are not cost-effective options for those living at or below the poverty level.
- According to Altoona Blair County Development Corporation, lack of access to transportation is one of the barriers to gaining and maintaining employment that residents face.

*Desired Objectives:* Ensure all community members have access to affordable means of transportation to employment or school/education/training.

*Initial Strategies:*

- A. Collaborate with financial institutions and non-profit organizations to develop and provide a revolving car loan program.
- B. Provide vouchers for public transportation or ride sharing for transportation to employment or education/training programs.
- C. Research, develop, and provide demand-response transit programs to support access to employment or education/training programs.
- D. Research, develop, and provide volunteer transportation programs to support access to employment or education/training programs.

# MEETING EMERGENCY NEEDS

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## VISION

*“We envision a Blair County where there is a safety net for those experiencing emergencies.”*

### ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #1 BASIC NEEDS/SAFE SHELTER

**ISSUE:** Lack of 24/7 emergency shelters/Safe Shelter/Temporary Emergency Housing

#### *Current Key Findings:*

- According to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, homelessness and affordable housing are a significant issue in the county. 975 consumers received emergency assistance from Blair Senior Services in 2017-18 in the form of rental assistance, motel stays, and utility payments. Blair County Community Action provided assistance to 162 households who were homeless or in danger of becoming homeless during that same time period (2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment).
- According to 211 data, between January 1, 2019 and December 10, 2019, 1,255 calls were received from those who were homeless or seeking emergency shelter or some type of housing assistance and another 101 calls were received from those seeking general housing or rehousing information.
- During the 2018-19 fiscal year, Family Services Inc. Family Shelter served 156 individuals, providing 5124 days of shelter. However, 788 eligible individuals were turned away due to the shelter being full.
- During fiscal year 2018-19, Family Services Inc.’s Teen Center & Shelter provided 49 youth with safe shelter. An additional 975 youth were provided with non-residential services.
- Shelter programs are based on 30-day stays but stays can be extended in the absence of affordable housing provided that the resident continues to follow shelter rules and is actively working toward housing and employment goals.
- The youth shelter is based on a 21-day stay per federal funding guidelines.
- Service is often segmented by gender.
- Reasons for youth seeking shelter were family/child conflict, issues with step-parents, parents refusing housing, runaway (youth leaving home without parent permission), and homelessness. 5.2% of Blair County students (grades 6, 8, 10, and 12) reported that they had lived away from their parents/guardians because they had been kicked out, ran away or were abandoned (PAYS 2017).
- There is limited accessibility for people with disabilities.
- There is limited access based on client's history, i.e. criminal background.

#### *Desired Objectives:*

- A. Blair County will have a sufficient number of "accessible" emergency shelter beds 24/7 for men, women, and children.
- B. Assure that runaway and/or homeless youth or youth and adults at risk due to family conflict have access to the services and support they need.

#### *Initial Strategies:*

- A. Educate and promote to the community and agencies what is available.
- B. Secure funding for new shelters or to expand existing shelters.
- C. Ensure that all shelters are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) approved and accessible.
- D. Ensure that there is accessible emergency/crisis transportation.
- E. Provide a network for gaining access to basic necessities following an emergency.
- F. Provide programs that provide conflict resolution skills to youth and adults at risk and their families.
- G. Provide programs that support runaway and/or homeless youth or youth/adults at risk due to family conflict.
- H. Provide programs that provide alternative emergency housing in the absence of available shelter vacancies.

## **ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #2**

**ACCESS TO SERVICES:** Information & Referral, Affordability/Access, 24/7 Response, Physical Access/Barriers

**ISSUE:** Lack of education and communication on how to access financial hardship and human service programs, with special focus on which agency should be called first.

### *Current Key Findings:*

- From January 1, 2019 through December 10, 2019, 2,878 calls were made to 211 in Blair County. 1,255 of those calls were from individuals inquiring about emergency shelter and homelessness. 586 calls were from individuals looking for assistance with their utility bills, and another 226 calls were seeking rent/mortgage payment assistance. 118 individuals sought general financial assistance while 101 individuals inquired about general housing or rehousing issues. 89 calls were from those seeking food pantries or food programs (PA 211 database data, December 2019)
- In some situations, a person must have termination notices or eviction notices before they can receive help.
- Clients have to be "at the bottom" before they can find help.
- Confidentiality can be a hindrance when agencies try to help.
- Clients call multiple agencies, getting frustrated trying to find the "right fit."
- Agencies themselves don't know what services other agencies provide.

*Desired Objective:* The one-call information database service (PA 211) will provide and maintain an updated website/database that Blair County residents can use to find help so that providers/agencies can coordinate and refer services accurately and in a timely manner.

### *Initial Strategies:*

- A. Coordinate and keep up-to-date service data from "help agencies" and advocate for dollars to fund the technology for coordination (211 system).
- B. Continue to educate the public and agencies about the information system.

## **ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #3 DISASTER/EMERGENCY SERVICES**

**ISSUE:** Disaster and Household Emergency Response

### *Current Key Findings:*

- From July 2017 through June 2019, the American Red Cross assisted 324 individuals/families following a disaster or other unforeseen emergency.
- In times of disaster, collaboration among agencies is important to meeting the needs of those impacted.
- Volunteers are often needed in the face of a natural disaster or other unforeseen emergency.
- From January 1, 2019 through December 10, 2019, 930 calls were made to 211 in Blair County from those seeking financial assistance of some type including general financial assistance, rent/mortgage payment assistance, or utility assistance.

*Desired Objective:* All people will have access to food, shelter, clothing and/or financial support in times of disaster or household emergencies.

### *Initial Strategies:*

- A. Provide programs beyond government that provide food, shelter, clothing and/or financial support to those experiencing disasters.

B. Provide programs beyond government that provide food, shelter, clothing, and/or financial support to those experiencing financial crisis or hardships.

# EDUCATION

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## VISION

*“We envision a Blair County where community members of all ages will have access to educational opportunities and experiences.”*

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

We seek to make this vision a reality through these essential elements for residents of all ages:

- Children and youth have an ongoing relationship with a caring adult/older youth that promotes healthy beliefs and clear standards
- Safe places and activities where people of all ages can learn and grow
- Appropriate life-skills and job training opportunities

We have initially identified key aspects to assure access to educational opportunities and experiences for all individuals in Blair County. They are:

- Mentoring
- After-school activities
- Safe neighborhoods
- Affordable, quality early childhood education/Pre-K
- Appropriate life skills

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #1

### **CHILDREN AND YOUTH HAVE AN ONGOING RELATIONSHIP WITH A CARING ADULT/OLDER YOUTH THAT PROMOTES HEALTHY BELIEFS AND STANDARDS.**

#### **ISSUE:** Mentoring

Mentoring is the purposeful creation of a caring relationship between an individual (other than a parent) and a child or youth that promotes healthy beliefs and standards by sharing new or mutual interests, taking part in activities together and/or providing ongoing support.

#### *Current Key Findings:*

- Behavioral Health Rehabilitative Services (BHRS) including Therapeutic Staff Support, Mobile Therapy, and Behavioral Specialist Consulting (offered by several providers in Blair County) served 776 youth in 2018 while 2,222 youth received outpatient mental health services and 157 youth received inpatient mental health services (data provided by Blair Health Choices).
- According to the results of the 2017 Pennsylvania Youth Survey, 31.3% of Blair County students (grades 6, 8, 10, and 12) reported being bullied at some point during the year as compared to 28.2% of students at the state level.
- According to the results of the 2017 Pennsylvania Youth Survey, 5.1% of Blair County students (grades 6, 8, 10, and 12) reported engaging in binge drinking.
- According to the results of the 2017 Pennsylvania Youth Survey, “depression is the number one risk factor for suicide by teens, a risk amplified in teens self-medicating” with alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. (p. 59). In Blair County, 37.8% of students reported feeling sad or depressed on most days and 15.8% of students reported that they had seriously considered suicide (Pennsylvania Youth Survey, 2017).
- Youth involved in Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program are less likely to be involved with drugs.

#### *Desired Objectives:*

- A. Increase the number of children and youth who are matched with an appropriate mentor.

- B. Create and/or expand mentoring opportunities throughout Blair County.

*Initial Strategies:*

- A. Fund mentoring programs with special attention given to programs that:
- i. Extend existing programs to geographic areas within Blair County where need is identified, and/or
  - ii. Create a new mentoring program. or
  - iii. Fund programs which incorporate opportunities for children and youth to make a contribution to their community.
- B. Increase knowledge of and interest in mentoring for the purpose of recruiting mentors and identifying "mentees".

**ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #2**

**SAFE PLACES AND ACTIVITIES WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE CAN LEARN AND GROW.**

**ISSUE:** After-school activities (Elementary to High School)

After-school activities are critical for the positive emotional, social, mental and physical development of children and youth. These activities are especially important for children who may be left home alone without adult supervision. After-school activities may be school or community-based and sponsored by individual schools, districts or community organizations. After-school includes activities that occur following a school day, during school vacation periods, including weekends or during the summer months.

*Current Key Findings:*

- According to the October 8, 2018 PsychCentral article, *Children Who are Home Alone*, of the 38 million children in the United States, 7 million are left home alone regularly. Reasons cited for leaving children home alone include an increase in single-parent households, the need for both parents to work in two-parent households, and lack of availability of affordable childcare.
- According to a 2019 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps report, 32% of Blair County children are living in single-parent households.
- Juvenile crime peaks right after school lets out, from approximately 3:00 pm - 6:00 pm.
- Research shows that due to transportation issues and the availability of facilities centrally located, schools should be increasingly utilized for after-school programs.
- According to youth.gov, “afterschool programs can boost academic performance, reduce risky behaviors, promote physical health, and provide a safe, structured environment” for children (*Benefits for Youth, Families, & Communities, paragraph 1*).
- According to the 2017 Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS), only 39.7% of Blair County students in grades 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> viewed their schoolwork as meaningful and important. Only 42.4% of students reported that they enjoyed being in school during the past year. 80% of students report that they feel safe at their school.
- According to the results of the 2017 Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS), 31.3% of Blair County students (grades 6, 8, 10, and 12) reported being bullied at some point during the year as compared to 28.2% of students at the state level. According to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, 59.5% of household survey respondents identified bullying/harassment/cyberbullying as a significant community challenge.
- According to the results of the 2017 Pennsylvania Youth Survey, 5.1% of Blair County students (grades 6, 8, 10, and 12) reported engaging in binge drinking.
- According to the 2017 PAYS, the most commonly used substance by Blair County students (grades 6,8,10, and 12) was alcohol with 36% reporting that they had tried it at least once. The next most frequently used substance was cigarettes with 15.2% of students (grades 6, 8, 10, and 12) reporting that they had used them at least once.

- According to the 2017 PAYS, 33.3% of Blair County students (grades 6, 8, 10, and 12) report having participated in some form of gambling at least once.
- According to the 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment and the PAYS 2017, Blair County continues to see a decline in the percentage of youth engaging in alcohol, inhalants, cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, hallucinogens, methamphetamines, ecstasy and prescription drugs for lifetime use but marijuana use continues to increase.
- The number of after-school activities varies widely in communities across the county. According to the PAYS 2017, 60.8% of Blair County students in grades 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> report participating in school-sponsored activities. 45.4% of students report participating in family-sponsored activities or hobbies, and 29.4% report participating in faith-based activities.

*Desired Objective:* Increase the number and variety of after-school programs and/or increase participation in after-school programs throughout Blair County.

*Initial Strategy:*

- A. Fund proposals that
  - i. Expand current after-school programming, or
  - ii. Implement new after-school programs.

**ISSUE:** Lack of access to affordable, quality early childhood education programs.

*Current Key Findings:*

- 47% of children in Blair County who are eligible for high-quality, publicly funded Pre-K programs do not have access to such programs (KIDS COUNT: Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, February 2019). According to KIDS COUNT: Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (February 2019), of the 2,015 eligible children ages 3-4 years in Blair County, 957 children do not have access to high-quality, publicly funded Pre-K programs. According to the same report, of the 35 Pre-K locations in Blair County that are eligible to participate, only 28 providers do so. To ensure all eligible children have access to high-quality, publicly funded Pre-K programs, 48 additional classrooms are needed.
- According to the Blair County Community Needs and Opportunities Assessment (April 2018) completed by the Pennsylvania Early Learning Investment Commission (ELIC), there are 56 certified Early Care and Education (ECE) providers in Blair County. This provides capacity to serve only 40% of children under the age of five. More than half of the 56 providers are at or below a STAR 2 rating (with STAR 4 being the highest that can be achieved).
- The Blair County Community Needs and Opportunities Assessment (PA ELIC, April 2018) also reports that “High-quality ECE is an essential support to the workforce and provides children with the social, emotional, and cognitive skills for a strong start toward success in school and life.” (p. 3)
- According to the First Five Years Fund (2018), research tells us that IQ scores for children in disadvantaged situations can be increased by up to 10 points when provided with high-quality early learning. Furthermore, the likelihood of children repeating a grade in school is reduced by 15% when the children have had access to early education and special education placement is reduced by 10%. Additionally, participation in quality early learning increases high school graduation rates by 14%. Finally, children who enter kindergarten ready for school have an 82% chance of mastering basic skills by age 11 versus a 45% chance of master by age 11 for children who were not ready school ready at kindergarten.

*Desired Objectives:*

- A. Increase the number of high-quality early childhood education slots and facilities throughout Blair County.
- B. Ensure all eligible Blair County children have access to affordable, high-quality early childhood education.

*Initial Strategy:*

- A. Provide expanded or new high-quality Pre-K programs.

- B. Provide funding programs for low and moderate-income families to allow access to non-publicly funded, high-quality Pre-K program slots in the absence of availability of publicly funded slots.

**ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #3  
APPROPRIATE LIFE SKILLS**

**ISSUE:** Family Engagement

Programs and services should be offered to assist parents in learning the skills necessary to support their family members and increase engagement with their children and their academic teams in order to reduce risk factors and promote healthy behaviors, choices, and academic success.

*Current Key Findings:*

- According to the Pennsylvania Department of Health as reported by the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, “the percent of teen births for Blair County is 5.5% which is higher than for Pennsylvania at 4.3% (ages 15-19). There were 67 teen births (ages 19 and under) in Blair County in 2017. 39% were on Medicaid.” (p. 84)
- According to the 2016-2017 Reach and Risk Report, “Research shows that children in families earning up to 300 percent FPL (federal poverty level) are at risk of academic failure and do not have the financial resources to access quality early childhood services.” (p. 7). Furthermore, children in Blair County are at a moderate-high risk of low academic performance based on risk factors such as living in economically stressed families, parents with low educational levels, etc.
- 19.2% of youth (according to the PAYS 2017) report a willingness to use alcohol (“would like to try or use it” or “would use it any chance I got”).
- According to the PAYS 2017, 12.8% of Blair County students surveyed (6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades) reported changing homes once or twice within 12 months, and 4.5% reported changing homes three or more times in the past three years.
- According to the PAYS 2017, 12.3% of Blair County students surveyed (6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades) reported being worried they would run out of food at home due to money issues and 5.9% reported they had skipped meals because their family did not have enough money for food. 5.2% of Blair County students (grades 6, 8, 10 and 12) reported that they had lived away from their parents/guardians because they had been kicked out, ran away or were abandoned (PAYS 2017).

*Desired Objectives:*

- A. Increase measurable parenting skills through offering "best practice" parenting programs.
- B. Decrease the risk factors and increase the protective factors as described in the Pennsylvania Youth Survey – Blair County [https://www.pccd.pa.gov/Juvenile-Justice/PAYS/Blair%20County%20Profile%20Report\\_2017.pdf](https://www.pccd.pa.gov/Juvenile-Justice/PAYS/Blair%20County%20Profile%20Report_2017.pdf).
- C. Provide affordable or low-cost programs that enhance the family's ability to support, engage with, and nurture their members.

*Initial Strategies:*

- A. Offer mentoring and parenting programs in easily accessible areas.
- B. Include life skills training where there are already opportunities for parent communication.
- C. Provide "best practice" and research-based programs that develop parenting and relationship skills.

# ACCESS TO HEALTH

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## VISION

*“We envision a Blair County where community members of all ages have access to lasting solutions that promote physical, mental, and emotional health.”*

### ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #1

#### SAFE, SUPPORTIVE, STABLE, NURTURING ENVIRONMENT

##### **ISSUE:** Violence and Abuse

Programs should address the prevention of family violence by and between adults as well as the support of programs, services and initiatives which assist victims and their families.

##### *Current Key Findings:*

- According to the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services as reported in the 2018 Annual Child Protective Services Report, the latest child abuse statistics (2018) indicate 545 reports of child abuse in Blair County with 58 being substantiated (11%). The total substantiated reports per 1,000 children is at 2.2% which is higher than the state percent at 1.9%.”
- 3.73% of the Blair County population (data found in 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment) reports being married with the spouse absent and 11% report being divorced. The divorce rate is higher than the state percentage of 9.59%.
- According to the State of Child Welfare 2018 report from PA Partnerships for Children (July 2018), there were 185 unduplicated children served in the foster care system in Blair County in 2017.
- 56.7% of households responding to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment reported that family violence, abuse of children, adults, and elderly is a concern in Blair County.
- According to 211 data, between January 1, 2019 and December 10, 2019, 47 calls were received in Blair County from individuals seeking assistance for a domestic violence or legal aid issue. Family Services, Inc., assisted 20 victims/survivors in removing themselves from abusive situations during the 2018-2019 fiscal year

##### *Desired Objectives:*

- A. Reduce the number of families in Blair County who are affected by violence and abuse.

##### *Initial Strategies:*

- A. Fund programs and initiatives that reduce the rate of violence and abuse in Blair County that are substantiated by community indicators.
- B. Support public education programs and forums around the objectives of the community organizations who are addressing this issue.

### ESSENTIAL ELEMENT #2

#### Physical, mental, and emotional health

##### **ISSUE:** Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is a serious problem in Blair County requiring prevention, intervention and treatment programs to address all forms of substance use disorders among adults and youth in our community and to support those with addictions and their families.

##### *Current Key Findings:*

- Substance abuse is considered the number one community challenge in Blair County according to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, with 79.1% of respondents indicating that this is an issue.

- According to the statistics reported in the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, drugs of choice in Blair County include opioids, alcohol, methamphetamines, and marijuana with opioid use disorder remaining the primary diagnosis in Blair County. “In fiscal year 2017-2018, Medicaid data showed 2,886 distinct members admitted for substance use disorders and 1819 admissions (63%) had an opioid use disorder” (2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, p. 23).
- As of the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment report, Blair Drug and Alcohol Partnerships has reported a 300% increase in the report of methamphetamine use than in previous years.
- During fiscal year 2017-2018, 117 substance abuse referrals from local hospitals were made to Blair Drug and Alcohol Partnerships, of which 27 were overdose survivors (2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment). There were 52 overdose deaths in 2017, an average of one per week.
- Individuals 44 years of age and older represent an underserved population and less likely to receive an intervention – a concern because of the rate at which they are prescribed pain medication and overdose rates according to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment. Specifically, “from January 2016-August 2017, prescription drug data identified the population ages 44-70 as receiving the highest volume of two specific pain medications. In conjunction, the overdose data for Blair County shows 24% of fatal overdoses are for persons over the age of 50” (2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment).
- Blair Health Choices reports (according to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment) that of the 9,464 members they serve, 2,200 received outpatient drug and alcohol treatment and an additional 552 received drug and alcohol rehabilitation services.
- In 2017, the following was reported in Blair County: 450 driving under the influence arrests, 156 liquor law violation arrests, 172 public drunkenness arrests, and 778 drug arrests (2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment).

*Desired Objectives:*

- A. Reduce the incident rate of substance abuse in Blair County.

*Initial Strategies:*

- A. Provide programs and initiatives that reduce the rate of substance use disorder in adults and youth in Blair County that are substantiated by community indicators.
- B. Provide public education programs and forums around the need for a continuum of care of treatment for substance use disorders.
- C. Develop new or expand existing programs that respond to the needs identified in Blair County.

**ISSUE:** Lack of available and affordable physical, mental health, and dental care. Initiatives, programs and services which increase the availability, affordability and accessibility of physical, mental health and dental care treatment to those who cannot afford to provide it for themselves and for whom no other assistance is available.

*Current Key Findings:*

- According to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, in the 2017-2018 fiscal year, over 9,464 Blair County residents received mental health services through the Medical Assistance Behavioral Health Managed Care provider, an increase of 2,000 from two years ago. Moreover, care was received by an additional 4,056 uninsured individuals through Department of Human Services funding.
- Medicare and Medicaid eligible persons in Blair County have limited access to medical and dental care.
- Blair County is designated as a Health Professional Shortage area for dental care. The ratio of population to dentists is 1,670:1 in Blair County according to the 2019 County Health Rankings Report as reported by the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment. This is compared to the overall state rate of 1,460:1.
- According to a 2015 Pennsylvania Department of Health report (as documented in the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment), only 34% of Blair County dentists accept Medicaid, 26% accept Medicare, and 88% accept private insurance.
- According to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, 760 patients were seen in the emergency departments with dental issues.

- “Data taken from the 2019 County Health Rankings Report indicate 6% of people ages 18-64 in Blair County are without health insurance which is comparable to Pennsylvania. Without health insurance, people do not have the means to pay for office visits, diagnostic tests, or prescription medications” (as reported in the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment).

*Desired Objectives:*

- A. Ensure all Blair County residents (insured or uninsured) have access to affordable physical and mental healthcare and dental care services.

*Initial Strategies:*

- A. Increase the capacity of the free dental clinics to provide services to persons of low income who are under or uninsured.
- B. Increase the capacity of the free health clinics to offer health services to persons of low income who are under or uninsured.
- C. Increase the availability of pharmaceuticals for persons who are unable to afford the prescriptions necessary to treat health problems.

**ISSUE:** Healthy Lifestyles

*Current Key Findings:*

- Obesity continues to be one of the top community challenges in Blair County. According to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, 78% of household survey respondents, 83% of key informants, 88% of service providers, and 100% of faith community respondents felt that obesity was a significant community challenge.
- The 2019 County Health Rankings report for Blair County (as reported in the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment) states that 30% of the Blair County adult population is obese.
- 73% of Blair County residents live in close proximity to a park or other recreational facility (2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment).
- “According to the Center for Disease Control, obesity rates in Blair County increased from 25.3% to 33.1% from 2004 – 2013. Reports of physical inactivity increased from 26.9% to 27.2% while reported diagnoses of diabetes rose from 9.3% to 11.3%. In Blair County, 33.5% of K-6 students and 37.6% of students in grades 7-12 are considered overweight or obese.” (2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, p. 22).
- According to the 2019 Blair County Community Health Needs Assessment, more than 8% of Blair County residents who are considered low-income do not live close to a grocery store. 13% of the Blair County population experienced food insecurity at some point during the year. Poor nutrition and lack of access to affordable healthy food options contributes to obesity.
- Obesity increases the risk of other health issues such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, stroke, etc.

*Desired Objectives:*

- A. Children, adults, and families increase healthy behaviors and reduce the prevalence of chronic diseases.
- B. The rate of obesity and related health issues is decreased county-wide.

*Initial Strategies:*

- A. Provide new or expand existing healthy lifestyle programs; i.e., exercise, recreation, etc.
- B. Provide nutrition education programs.
- C. Provide after-school nutritional, recreational, or exercise programs for youth.