

Review of Other Assessments/Surveys

In addition to the 2013 Couleecap Needs Assessment, data was collected via other assessments that were completed within the recent past in the Couleecap four-county service area. This information provides additional perspectives for identifying the needs of low-income households and planning programs and services to meet those needs. This data also provides comparison data to the Low-income Household Survey responses.

Data from the following assessments are reviewed here:

- **2012 Compass Now – Assessment of needs in the Great Rivers Region including La Crosse County, Monroe County, and Vernon County (which are all part of the region served by Couleecap, Inc.)**
- **Food Security Survey Project in La Crosse County**
- **Community Food Security Assessment for Monroe and Vernon Counties**
- **2013 Couleecap Board and Staff Survey of Needs in the Coulee Region**

Great Rivers Region – 2012 Compass Now

The following “Highlights” were reported:

1. Health

- Key Health issues: Alcohol Use, Health Care Access and Cost, Mental Health, Obesity
- Emerging Issues in the region: Dental Care Access and Cost, Illegal Drug Use
- Other:
 - More than ½ of survey respondents rated the affordability of dental care in their community as fair or poor.
 - 2/3 of survey respondents expressed high concern for illegal drug use.
 - Rising health care costs, especially high deductibles and reduced health benefits result in people avoiding health care.

2. Income

- Key Income issues: Limited Economic Development, Low Living Wages, Unemployment
- Emerging Issues in the region: Having Enough Food, Food Insecurity
- Other:
 - 1/3 of survey respondents indicated their inability to meet their basic needs of food, housing, and clothing
 - ¾ of survey respondents rated the availability of jobs with wages that offer a good standard of living as either fair or poor.
 - Local data suggests that homelessness is on the rise.
 - More children are living in poverty than 5 year ago.

3. Education

- Key Education issues: School Readiness, Job Skills Training
- Emerging Issues in the region: Risks to Youth, Higher Education Costs
- Other:
 - More than 4 out of 5 respondents rated their K-12 schools either good or excellent.
 - Employers are requiring a more educated workforce.
 - Schooling after high school is much lower in rural areas.

4. Community

- Key Community issues: Transportation, Food Availability, Childcare
- Emerging Issues in the region: Senior Housing
- Other:
 - 9 out of 10 survey respondents rated their community as a good or excellent place to live.
 - Childcare is a costly expense for working families.
 - Reports point to a need for public transportation.
 - Monroe and Vernon counties have large areas of their counties that are considered “food deserts” – areas where at least one-third of the population has limited access to healthy food.

Food Security Survey Project in La Crosse County

Background

In the spring of 2012, Couleecap and students in a Global Citizenship class at Globe University partnered together to conduct a food security survey project in La Crosse County.

- Food security is defined as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum: 1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and 2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (e.g., without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies).”
- Food insecurity is defined as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”
- Hunger is defined as “the uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food. The recurrent and involuntary lack of access to food. Hunger may produce malnutrition over time. Hunger is a potential consequence of food insecurity.”

Surveys were distributed on May 3, 2012 to low-income households, through five sites in La Crosse County (WAFER, The Salvation Army, St. Clare Health Mission, Globe University, and the Onalaska Library), to gather information on their food needs. The survey was developed by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). 70 surveys were completed. 42 of the survey respondents were from households with children and 28 were from households without children.

Per their responses to the survey, households were determined to be at one of four different food insecurity levels. The four levels included:

- **High** - households show no or minimal evidence of food insecurity.
- **Marginal** - food insecurity is evident in household members’ concerns about adequacy of the household food supply and in adjustments to household food management, including reduced quality of food and increased unusual coping patterns. Little or no reduction in members’ food intake is reported.
- **Low** – food intake for adults in the household has been reduced to an extent that implies that adults have repeatedly experienced the physical sensation of hunger. In most (but not all) food-insecure households with children, such reductions are not observed at this stage for children.
- **Very Low** – at this level, all households with children have reduced the children’s intake to an extent indicating that the children have experienced hunger. For some other households with children, this already has occurred at an earlier stage of severity. Adults in households with and without children have repeatedly experienced more extensive reductions in food intake.

Findings

For the 70 households completing a survey, results for food security status showed that:

- 21 (30%) households had very low food security status
- 35 (50%) households had low food security status
- 7 (10%) households had marginal food security status
- 7 (10%) households had high food security status

For the 42 households with children, survey results showed that:

- 37 (88%) households had low or very low food security status

For the 28 households without children, survey results showed that:

- 19 (68%) households had low or very low food security status

Households were also asked to choose one of four statements that best describes the food eaten in their household in the last 12 months. Survey results showed that:

- 35 (50%) households chose “often not enough to eat”
- 21 (30%) households chose “sometimes not enough to eat”
- 11 (16%) households chose “enough but not always the kinds we want”
- 3 (4%) households chose “enough of the kinds we want”

For the 42 households with children, survey results showed that:

- 34 (81%) households chose “often or sometimes not enough to eat”

For the 28 households without children, survey results showed that:

- 22 (79%) households chose “often or sometimes not enough to eat”

Community Food Security Assessment for Monroe and Vernon Counties

Monroe and Vernon counties are located in the picturesque, southwestern portion of Wisconsin noted for its bluffs, hills, and streams. The two counties are largely rural with a combined population of slightly over 74,000 (Monroe: 44,673; Vernon: 29,773).¹ As with other areas of the state and country, residents here were met with the challenges of lay-offs, reduced-hours, rising food prices, and unsettled economy that resulted during our recent “Great Recession.”

In response to these uncertain economic times, Couleecap collaborated with J. Whitty and L. Gibbs, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse graduate interns working with a Wisconsin Center for Public Health Education and Training (WiCPHET) field placement to conduct a community food security assessment. Food security can be defined as the ability of a household to obtain sufficient quantities of healthy food to support a healthy, active lifestyle. Couleecap is an agency within the two county area that receives and then distributes commodity foods from the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) to local food pantries. **Food pantries in the region have recorded increasing numbers of households seeking food aid in recent years. This assessment was conducted to gain a more in-depth look at the potential food security issues that low-income residents may be dealing with in these two counties.**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) created a *Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit*² for use by local agencies, organizations, and governments. This toolkit provides interested entities with a wide variety of data gathering tools to choose from to create a community assessment that caters to the needs of the particular organization and the community. The toolkit was used by J. Whitty and L. Gibbs to assess the food security needs of low-income households in Monroe and Vernon counties. After reviewing the toolkit, it was determined that the assessment used would contain three primary components.

The first component conducted was the gathering of existing data. US Census data were reviewed to identify pertinent demographic and socioeconomic data. Additionally, food assistance programs that county residents might turn to for food assistance, which included FoodShare (SNAP in WI), the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Free and Reduced School Lunch Programs, Senior Meal Sites, and local food pantries were contacted to investigate participation trends.

The second component of the assessment was the distribution of the Household Food Security Module.³ This is an 18-item validated survey instrument that has been widely used to assess household food security status. Depending on the responses of the participants, a household can be determined to be food secure or food insecure. Food secure households are further broken down into the categories of high food security and moderate food security. Food insecure households are also broken down further into low food security and very low food security. In December 2011, the Household Food Security Module was distributed widely across the two counties to agencies and organizations that low-income households may turn to for help. A complete listing of these organizations can be found in Table 1.

The final component of the community food security assessment was conducting a focus group. It was determined after looking through the options provided in the toolkit, that the focus group held for this assessment would have three main focus areas. The three main areas explored during the focus group were: individual household experience with food security, food shopping patterns to investigate ease of access, and food program participation to include potential barriers to participation.

Table 1. Organizations that Distributed the Household Food Security Module

- Cashton Cupboard & Closet
- Sparta Food Pantry
- Neighbor for Neighbor Food Pantry
- Living Faith Food Pantry
- Vernon County WHEAP (Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program)
- Scenic Bluffs Community Health Centers

Results of the Community Food Security Assessment:

Demographic, Socioeconomic, and Program Participation Data

When looking at the demographic and socioeconomic data for Monroe and Vernon counties it was clear that poverty, especially for children, continues to be a problem as it is throughout the state and nation. Over 1 in 5 children in both counties live below the federal poverty line (see Figure 1). For a family of four, this means that the monthly household income would fall below \$1,921. Food insecurity and poverty are often associated making the number of youth living in poverty even more troubling.

In Vernon County, single-headed households with a female as the primary provider appeared to be living in poverty at a startling rate. In 2011, it was estimated that 81.3% of female single-head of household families in Vernon County were living at or below federal poverty level. As the surveyed population for this data was small, there is a margin of error of +/-22.4%. However, even with this margin of error taken into account, Vernon County's rate is significantly higher than Wisconsin's (48.3%) and the United States' (46.1%).

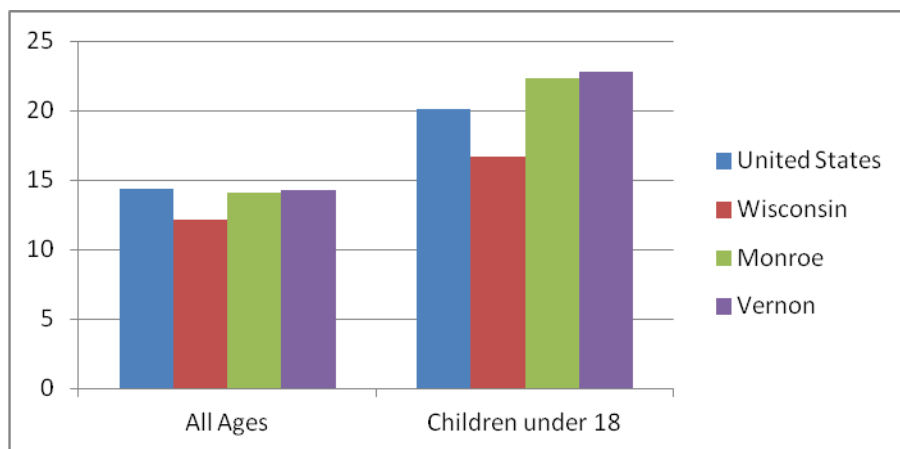


Figure 1: Poverty by percentage⁴

Monroe County and Vernon County food pantries that were contacted reported many similarities. Increased numbers of households seeking assistance and an increase in

the number of households seeking emergency food assistance for the first time were common themes. **Along with an increase in food pantry clientele, more households are also utilizing help from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) known as FoodShare in Wisconsin. Both Monroe and Vernon counties have seen a dramatic increase in the number of individuals utilizing FoodShare** since the “Great Recession” began (see Figure 2).

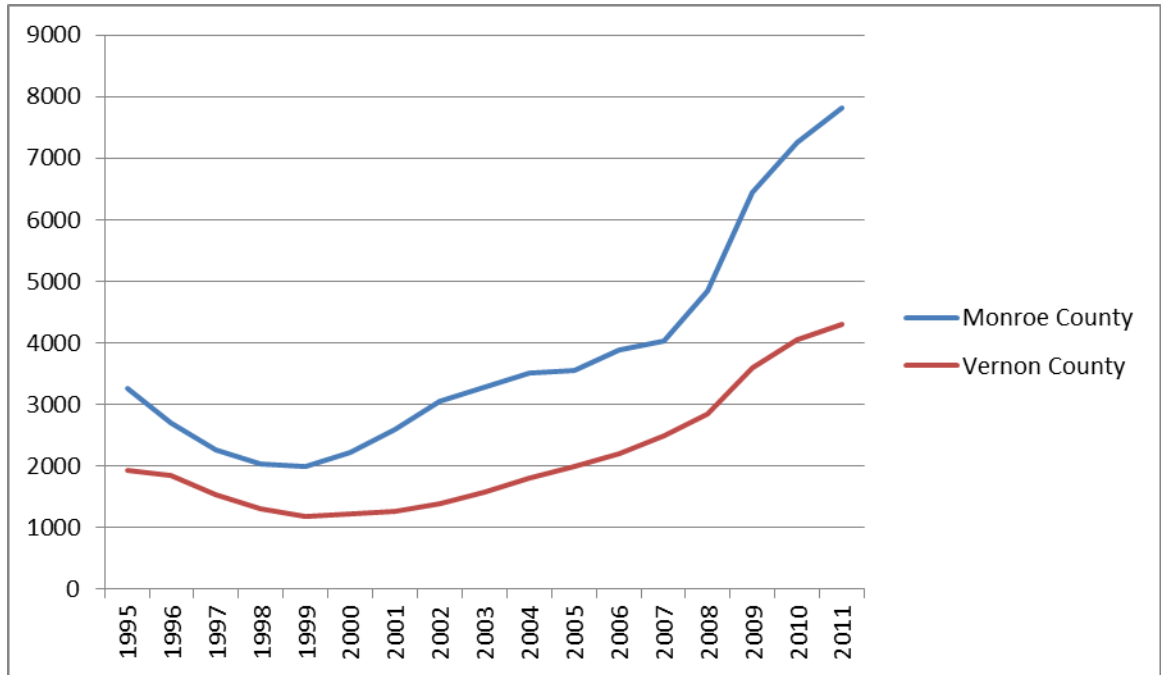


Figure 2: FoodShare/SNAP participation by county⁵

Although FoodShare increases the resources households have to purchase food, many households in the two counties have to deal with additional barriers in acquiring food. The two counties only have a handful of full service supermarkets and grocery stores each. These grocery stores are located primarily in the larger towns of the counties. For households that do not live in the larger towns with full service grocery stores, local options generally consist of gas stations and convenience stores. Individuals and families often will use their FoodShare benefits at the gas stations and convenience stores due to the barriers that time, distance, and transportation impose. The higher cost and lower nutritional value of the food that is readily available at these locations result in a lower overall quality of nutrition that these households receive.

Food Security Survey

The purpose of the Household Food Security Module distribution was to assess the extent that food insecurity was affecting low-income households within the two counties. Of the surveys distributed, 192 were returned from six locations in the two counties. Of the respondents, 79.7% of the households were found to be food insecure. Food insecurity can be further broken down into low food security and very low food security. In households experiencing very low food security, one or more individuals in the household experience the more dramatic effects of food insecurity where decreased food intake, skipped meals, and weight loss due to a lack of food resources can occur.

Among the respondents, 31.3% were experiencing low food security and 48.4% were experiencing the more distressing effects of very low food security (see Table 2).

Table 2. Household Food Security Survey Results				
Survey Locations	Food Security Status			
	Very Low	Low	Marginal	High
Cashton Cupboard & Closet (n=12)	33.3%	33.3%	25%	8.3%
Sparta Food Pantry (n=32)	59.4%	34.4%	3.1%	3.1%
Neighbor for Neighbor Food Pantry (n=38)	55.3%	34.2%	7.9%	2.6%
Living Faith Food Pantry (n=43)	37.2%	32.6%	16.3%	14%
Vernon County WHEAP (n=43)	46.5%	34.9%	14%	4.7%
Scenic Bluffs Community Health Centers (n=19)	57.9%	-	10.5%	31.6%
Others (unidentified location) (n=5)	40%	60%	-	-
Total (N=192)	48.4%	31.3%	11.5%	8.9%

Households with children appear to be affected by food insecurity at a comparable rate to the overall pool of survey participants (see Table 3). Some of the survey locations had strikingly high food insecurity rates among households with children (e.g. Sparta Food Pantry 92.3%, Neighbor for Neighbor Food Pantry 90.4%, Vernon County WHEAP 88.5%). The higher levels of food insecurity at these locations among households with children appear to be reflective of the food security status of the general population that utilizes the services of these organizations (when compared to the results listed in Table 2).

Table 3. Food Security Status for Households with Children				
Survey Locations	Food Security Status			
	Very Low	Low	Marginal	High
Cashton Cupboard & Closet (n=8)	12.5%	50%	37.5%	-
Sparta Food Pantry (n=13)	53.8%	38.5%	7.7%	-
Neighbor for Neighbor Food Pantry (n=21)	57.1%	33.3%	4.8%	4.8%
Living Faith Food Pantry (n=23)	21.7%	39.1%	21.7%	17.4%
Vernon County WHEAP (n=26)	46.2%	42.3%	11.5%	-
Scenic Bluffs Community Health Centers (n=14)	57.1%	-	7.1%	35.7%
Others (unidentified location) (n=3)	-	100%	-	-
Total (N=108)	41.7%	36.1%	13.0%	9.3%

Additionally, individuals who completed the Household Food Security Module answered an additional question that looked into the respondents' perception of the amount and kinds of food available in the household. This question is not included in the food security calculations, but does provide some insight regarding respondents' perception of the quality of food available to the household as well as their perception of their household's food security. The question was presented as: "Which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household in the last 12 months, that is, since last December?" The possible choices and the accompanying responses by survey participants are as follows:

- "Enough of the kinds of food we want to eat" 17.7%
- "Enough but not always the kinds of food we want" 36.5%
- "Sometimes not enough to eat" 27.1%
- "Often not enough to eat" 9.9%
- "Don't know; prefer not to answer" 1.6%
- No Response 7.3%

Over one third (37%) of respondents reported sometimes or often not having enough food to eat. Almost an equal amount (36.5%) indicated that they didn't always have the kinds of food preferred, possibly indicating the use of cheaper, less nutritional, filler foods (e.g., potatoes, boxed macaroni meals) to fill stomachs.

Focus Group

The focus group that was conducted was helpful in gaining the personal experiences of community members in the region and also for brainstorming ideas for improving regional food security. Focus group participants consisted of individuals who had received services from the Sparta food pantry and/or worked at the pantry. The three main areas explored during the focus group were: individual household experience with food security, food shopping patterns to investigate ease of access, and food program participation to include potential barriers to participation.

When investigating household experience with food insecurity, focus group participants reported that food security issues tend to peak around the holidays. However, the participants felt that just about all the individuals utilizing the food pantry worry about running out of food on a monthly basis. Methods that community members use to stretch the available food resources were discussed. Participants stated that they stretch food resources by small scale gardening, and by making soups and casseroles to freeze. Along with stretching food resources available within the Sparta community, participants reported that community members from Sparta are traveling to utilize the Second Harvest mobile food pantries in Cashton and Norwalk.

Focus group participants also discussed their personal, as well as observed, experiences with shopping for food in the community. The participants stated that it is difficult to get to grocery stores. Transportation was the major barrier that was discussed, as community members without their own vehicle would have to arrange their own transportation or pay cab fare. Another issue that was raised and discussed was that of the lack of taxi services in the majority of the small towns and villages in the

counties. Transportation was seen as being an even larger barrier in those communities.

Participants reported widespread use of food assistance programs (e.g., WIC, FoodShare, Free/Reduced School Lunches). Participants perceived the programs as being very helpful, even necessary for many families: “I don’t know what I would have done without them.” Participants did see a need for increased outreach, including increased screening and referral for food assistance programs, aid with completing applications, expanded service hours, and increased availability of interpreters to assist the Hispanic population.

Conclusion

The results of the community food security needs assessment indicate that food insecurity is a prevalent problem among low-income households in the region. With 79.7% of survey households determined to be food insecure, the results indicate a strong need for increased work in the area of food security within the two counties.

Monroe and Vernon counties are facing many of the food security issues that a lot of rural counties in the United States are currently dealing with. **Poverty continues to be a major issue** in the region with a large proportion of the children living in poor households. Since the downturn of the economy, **increased numbers of households seeking FoodShare assistance and emergency food resources at the food pantries** have been noted. **Food access continues to be a large issue** with many residents not being within close proximity to a full service grocery store/supermarket and transportation being a barrier to access healthy foods.

This region already has many programs and good people working to assist food insecure households. However, with a renewed focus on food insecurity and hunger, there is potential for increased food security in the two counties.

In 2013, Couleecap, Inc. conducted a needs assessment to gather information regarding the needs of low-income individuals/families in Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties. Board and staff surveys were distributed to 83 Board and staff members; 49 (59%) surveys were returned.

Outcomes

The table below reports the areas of need for low-income households, rank ordered by Board and Staff from most to least important, and the top two concerns within each area:

Areas of Need	Significant Concerns
Employment	Finding a job with higher wages Finding a full-time job
Health	Paying for health care Paying for health insurance/prescription drugs
Housing	Paying for rent/security deposit Paying for home repairs
Transportation	Paying for gasoline Paying for car service/repairs
Education	Learning money management skills Paying for school
Emergency Assistance	Getting help with utility bills Getting help with rent payments
Child & Family Development (child care)	Finding child care when child is sick Finding affordable, quality child care
Child & Family Development (parenting)	Correcting/disciplining their child Dealing with alcohol and drug use by youth
Business Development	Developing a business plan Getting business start-up loans

**Results of Low-Income Household Needs Assessment Survey for Board and Staff
(Number of Surveys Returned = 49)**

DEMOGRAPHICS.

1. I'm a: 36.7% Board Member 63.3% Staff Member

2. Gender: 65.3% Female 34.7% Male

3. Age: 0.0% 18-24 24.5% 25-34 20.4% 35-44
 18.4% 45–54 36.7% 55 or older

4. Residence or Service Area (check ALL that apply):
 26.5% Crawford County 46.9% La Crosse County
 28.6% Monroe County 57.1% Vernon County

RATE THE FOLLOWING NEEDS FOR LOW-INCOME PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

Survey respondents were asked to rate the following areas of need and how much of a need each issue is for low-income people in their community. The areas of need included: transportation, education, employment, housing, health, child and family development, emergency assistance, and business development.

Transportation: How much of a **NEED** is **TRANSPORTATION** for low-income people?

	Not at All/Slight	Moderate	High/Very High
Getting a reliable car	4.4%	22.2%	68.9%
Buying a car	17.8%	28.9%	48.9%
Paying for car service/repairs*	4.4%	20.0%	75.6%
Paying for car insurance	4.7%	18.6%	72.1%
Paying for gasoline*	4.4%	13.4%	80.0%
Finding a ride	26.7%	24.4%	40.0%
Finding public transportation	23.3%	23.3%	41.9%

* Indicates highest needs

Other needs/comments:

1. With the SMRT bus running, it should allow some folks to work in either Prairie or La Crosse. It is a cost effective means of transportation.
2. People that are underwater on their vehicles, meaning they owe more than the vehicle is worth. They may have a car payment that is much more than their current budget can afford, however they can't sell the car because they would still owe money and be without a vehicle.

Please describe changes that could be made, if any, to improve the quality of services provided for transportation-related issues in our area:

1. More public transportation, more frequent stops, greater area of coverage, vouchers, passes, etc.
2. Perhaps additional shuttles in more rural areas to bring people to medical appointments, grocery shopping, and other appointments.
3. More public transportation.
4. Funding for used car loans, gas, or other transportation related expenses.
5. I think that the SMRT bus has been a huge asset to the rural Vernon Co and Crawford Co communities in our area. Maybe more efforts like this to reach additional Monroe Co communities, such as the Tomah/Sparta area.
6. Some of the La Crosse Mayoral candidates have seized on transportation issues and out-lined their suggestions in answers to questions posed by the La Crosse Tribune. You might research this. Complaints expressed include zigzag routes, lack of express routes, lack of enough east/west routes within the City of La Crosse.
7. Later running public transportation in Onalaska. Have clients that work until 8 pm on weekends and have to use public transportation.
8. It's okay.
9. With the SMRT bus now operating, hopefully people will have public transportation to work and school but at \$3 one way, it takes an hour of work at minimum wage to pay for the transportation to and from a job. Then again at \$3.54 a gallon of gas, it may be cheaper to pay the SMRT bus.
10. We need more options for transportation, especially in rural areas.
11. Transportation issues are challenging because they are often "unplanned." People think everything is fine but then their car breaks down and they have an immediate issue. It takes a long time to apply for help for car repairs, etc. Meanwhile, they are left with no transportation.
12. Expand public transportation options into the rural areas.
13. Coordinating multi-county volunteer drivers. I find there are individuals and organizations (such as churches, civic organizations, schools) that are willing to offer their time and vehicles to help people with transportation issues get to-from grocery shopping, medical/dental/vision appointments, but there is no one place/one call to request/arrange this type of assistance. It is not only the elderly, disabled, or those with minor children who have need of transportation assistance, and finding this help is difficult. Some transportation organizations (such as LogistiCare for persons on Medicaid/BadgerCare) will not allow other family members to be taken if that member does not have the qualifying appointment. (If a single mom has a dental/medical appointment for one of her children and utilizes LogistiCare for transportation, the only other family member allowed would be mom - and mom has to arrange for child care for her other children or arrange for other transportation if she cannot find/afford child care).

Access to services for rural low-income persons often requires getting to larger cities even outside the county of residence - and without their own reliable transportation, this access is limited.

14. Potential users should find out about SMRT which would enable rural folks to get to higher density work areas for employment. SMRT/Running Inc. is a superb means of transportation for those who cannot afford a car, repairs, insurance and gas. SMRT is a real deal!
15. Not sure of any changes that could be made to help with the transportation issue. We need better public transportation for the outlying areas.
16. We have new bus service at present.
17. Travel from small town is expensive. Rates are up but the economy is in trouble.

Employment: How much of a **NEED** is **EMPLOYMENT** for low-income people?

	Not at All/Slight	Moderate	High/Very High
Finding a job	2.3%	21.0%	76.7%
Finding a full-time job*	0.0%	14.0%	86.0%
Finding a job with higher wages*	2.3%	9.3%	88.4%
Finding a permanent job	0.0%	14.0%	83.7%
Keeping a job	0.0%	25.6%	67.4%
Getting training for a better job	0.0%	25.6%	67.4%
Getting health benefits with job	0.0%	9.3%	86.0%
Finding child care during work hours	0.0%	33.4%	54.8%
Finding affordable child care during work hours	4.7%	18.6%	65.1%
Transportation to get to work	4.7%	23.3%	65.1%

* Indicates highest needs

Other needs/comments:

1. People need to participate in a "rehearsal" for job interviews. Dress and body language need to be emphasized.

Please describe changes that could be made, if any, to improve the quality of services provided for employment-related issues in our area:

1. More jobs training programs, support in getting started, finding community resources like child care, transportation, etc. Help getting over the initial actual and psychological hurdles of enrollment in jobs training programs. Link benefit eligibility to meaningful efforts to receive jobs training and seek employment.
2. More training to bring up job level skills which could help lower income folks to receive a higher livable wage.
3. Set up affordable daycares.
4. Expand programs that offer job training for both employed and unemployed workers. They can improve their skill sets in order obtain employment or better

employment.

5. More funding for education and job training.
6. Promotion of ride-share opportunities - to help rural residents get to/from employment outside of their neighborhoods. Encourage economic development to bring more jobs to rural areas - support for those businesses that have built/employed in rural areas. Foster training/educational opportunities starting in high school - expose rural school children to business and entrepreneurial opportunities in their home towns/counties to encourage long-term growth – give young people a reason to stay or return to their hometowns after college/training. Encourage buying local - offer local venue for area small businesses, producers to bring their products and services to the public - more than a "Farmers' Market" - offer marketing assistance to get the word out about services one can find locally. Create community volunteer work groups - encourage small businesses/entrepreneurs/individuals to donate time, skills to improve community in exchange for advertising, rental space, business-management assistance (such as researching grants, accounting assistance, strategic plan development). The local community center needs improvements/repairs or improved community landscaping, window cleaning, painting, mowing, etc. – if people put in the elbow grease to accomplish these projects that benefit the community - they can earn discounts on rental of empty store fronts; included in advertising the community chips in on in-area media; work with others in the community who have knowledge/experience in business skills.
7. Out of work people need to brush up resumes, find appropriate interview clothes, and practice interviews - all would enhance their desirability in regard to jobs. Also, a hand up is appropriate but finite. I LOVE helping those who want help and are willing to work for it to sustain their efforts for a better life but also allowing them the dignity of gainful employment. Affordable childcare is always a challenge for low income women/families. And, expansion of Medicaid by the State would allow people to retain their meager earnings instead of going into bankruptcy due to medical bills.
8. Child care for second and third shift working men and women.

Education: How much of a **NEED** is **EDUCATION** for low-income people?

	Not at All/Slight	Moderate	High/Very High
Getting a diploma/GED/HSED	11.6%	51.2%	27.9%
Paying for school*	0.0%	25.6%	70.0%
Transportation to get to school	11.6%	34.9%	44.2%
Getting training for a better job	2.3%	30.2%	62.8%
Finding child care during school hours	0.0%	51.2%	37.2%
Finding affordable child care during school hours	0.0%	32.6%	55.8%
Learning money management skills*	0.0%	18.6%	79.1%

* Indicates highest needs

Other needs/comments:

1. Nutritional counseling is also essential. Cooking with locally grown, seasonal foods would benefit their diets as well as the local community.

Please describe changes that could be made/if any, to improve the quality of services provided for education-related issues in our area:

1. Provide incentives/requirements to enroll in classes to become more employable.
2. Many people do not have a high level of financial management skills. More education could help them make wiser choices and plan for needed expenditures. Also there are many who "live on the edge" living from paycheck to paycheck, so they don't have an emergency fund or savings let alone investing any dollars for down the road retirement.
3. Offer money management classes.
4. Need more accessible training that will place them in the workforce.
5. One of the challenges for education and employment is learning to set goals and manage resources effectively. It's hard to think long term when an individual has short term needs. I'm not sure what the answer is, but sometimes it appears that we are able to often "patch-up help" for specific needs but somehow the bigger picture gets lost. Perhaps more coordinated help?
6. Student loans are not the solution to paying for higher education as they have to be repaid. We need to encourage and support bright students with grants and scholarships without long term debt that could deter some students from getting a better/higher education. I also see that not only do many low income folks need money management education but they also need good food counseling -no sugars or high carbs, drop corn syrup, eat more fresh fruit and veggies, etc. stop eating garbage foods and soft drinks. A healthier body leads to a healthier mind, and more energy to undertake endeavors that are challenging such as education.
7. Some people don't know how to manage their budget.

Housing: How much of a **NEED** is **HOUSING** for low-income people?

	Not at All/Slight	Moderate	High/Very High
Paying for rent/security deposit*	2.4%	9.5%	85.7%
Making house payments (mortgage)	4.9%	34.1%	56.1%
Paying for home repairs*	2.4%	14.3%	78.6%
Paying for utility bills	0.0%	22.0%	75.6%
Getting insulation/weatherization	2.4%	19.0%	73.8%
Finding safe, affordable housing	4.9%	19.5%	70.7%
Paying property taxes	11.9%	35.7%	40.5%
Buying a house	4.9%	41.5%	41.5%

* Indicates highest needs

Please describe changes that could be made, if any, to improve the quality of services provided for housing-related issues in our area:

1. More innovative programs to help low income people become home owners. More Habitat houses, more land contract houses, more sweat equity building programs. We are already doing a lot of great things; we just need to do more of them.
2. We have many that don't make a "livable" wage, so are struggling with rent, utilities, etc. Since our area has a high number of lower paying jobs, perhaps one solution would be additional "income-based" housing.
3. Monroe County has a strong Coalition that has been dealing with many of these issues.
4. Have funds to provide to La Crosse County residents for motel vouchers, rent and security deposit. When people call it seems that we have very few housing services to provide in La Crosse County (housing for homeless and buying a house is all). Our only option is to refer them to several different places that may or may not be able to help.
5. Affordable, quality rental property is hard to come by throughout the counties I serve - especially for low-income and rural residents. Assistance for individuals who are not elderly, disabled and do not have dependent children is nonexistent. All people need quality and affordable housing - just because a person is single does not mean they can afford to pay high rent just to find decent housing in smaller villages/rural areas. Single people also add to communities, and overall economic growth to communities. I'd like to see continued improvement in offering assistance to landlords to improve the energy efficiency of their property and overall affordability of housing especially in rural areas.
6. It is better for low income people to live in subsidized housing than to buy a home that they cannot afford even at low interest rates. I think Couleecap is "spot on" with first time homeowner education.
7. We need some type of training for low-income people to help teach money management.
8. Some people don't make enough money that hold 3 jobs – have hard time.

Health: How much of a **NEED** is **HEALTH** for low-income people?

	Not at All/Slight	Moderate	High/Very High
Getting health care (physical)	4.9%	19.5%	73.2%
Getting mental health care	2.4%	17.1%	78.1%
Getting dental care	2.4%	12.2%	82.9%
Getting eye care	5.0%	22.5%	62.5%
Paying for health care*	4.9%	4.9%	87.8%
Paying for mental health care	4.9%	7.3%	83.0%
Paying for dental care	2.4%	9.8%	85.4%
Paying for eye care	5.0%	12.5%	72.5%
Paying for health insurance*	2.4%	4.9%	87.8%

	Not at All/Slight	Moderate	High/Very High
Paying for prescription drugs*	2.4%	4.9%	87.8%
Getting treatment for drug or alcohol abuse	2.4%	26.8%	61.0%
Getting treatment for gambling addiction	22.0%	24.4%	26.8%
Getting treatment for health condition	4.9%	17.1%	71.0%
Getting treatment for mental illness/depression	2.4%	19.5%	73.2%
Getting treatment for a disability	12.5%	20.0%	50.0%
Having adequate health insurance	2.4%	12.2%	80.5%
Dealing with increased levels of stress	14.6%	19.5%	56.1%
Getting help for physical abuse	12.5%	20.0%	50.0%
Getting help for emotional/verbal abuse	12.2%	24.4%	48.8%
Getting help for sexual abuse	12.5%	25.0%	40.0%
Learning about good nutrition	9.8%	19.5%	58.5%

* Indicates highest needs

Other needs/comments:

1. Wellness in general; preventative not intervention.

Please describe changes that could be made, if any, to improve the quality of services provided for health-related issues in our area:

1. Getting the governor to accept Medicaid expansion monies, full implementation of the Affordable Healthcare Act, improved state funding for mental and physical health services, protection of Medicare and Medicaid funding.
2. Any family that is not eligible for BadgerCare has difficulties paying for services.
3. Knowing that there are clinics/hospitals/community health centers throughout the three counties I serve and being able to get transportation or afford to pay for care are two different things. Access to mental health care, especially affordable care is limited all over my service area. I am hopeful once the full effect of the Affordable Care Act comes into being in 2014, being able to afford the needed care will become a smaller barrier - since things such as physicals, preventative screenings, mental health coverage become "essential health benefits" - many of which can no longer be limited by a person's ability to pay (no co-pays or deductibles - and plans must offer mental health coverage). Even for many who currently have health insurance, and pay monthly premiums, do not get basic, preventative screenings or annual physicals because of high deductibles or co-pays. Transportation will still be an issue. And adequate mental health professionals/access for rural areas is as well. Sponsoring rural outreach clinics with travelling mental health counselors/psychiatrists - finding grant dollars, corporate sponsors willing to help cover the expense.
4. Scott Walker and his Republican legislature need to take the Federal monies offered to expand Medicaid. Newtown, CT is a tragedy but has brought mental health treatment to the forefront of people's minds. Mental health and dental are two areas not sufficiently supported for the low income population. Teeth are the

very first impression a person gives to a potential employer and if they are in poor condition, it is an indication of potential poor health, slovenliness, and other negative connotations. Good dental hygiene is essential to good overall health. Mental health has been stigmatized and underfunded for so long that we are experiencing a shadow epidemic. 20% of the population at any given time is suffering from some sort of mental health issue. Unemployment and underemployment add to depression and could lead to more extreme manifestations.

5. Better dental care and health insurance costs.
6. Because young can't afford it and seniors can't afford it.

Child & Family Development: How much of a **NEED** is **CHILD & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT (child care)** for low-income people?

	Not at All/Slight	Moderate	High/Very High
Availability of child care	2.4%	46.3%	36.6%
Affordable, quality child care*	0.0%	31.7%	53.7%
Child care for infant	2.4%	26.8%	51.2%
Child care for school age child(ren)	7.5%	42.5%	30.0%
Child care on nights and weekends	2.4%	29.3%	53.7%
Child care when child is sick*	4.9%	17.1%	63.4%
Child care for child with special needs	2.5%	20.0%	52.5%

* Indicates highest needs

How much of a **NEED** is **CHILD & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT (parenting)** for low-income people?

	Not at All/Slight	Moderate	High/Very High
Developing appropriate parenting skills	2.4%	24.4%	41.5%
Dealing with teenager(s)	2.4%	29.3%	56.1%
Correcting/disciplining their child*	4.9%	26.8%	61.0%
Dealing with alcohol and drug use by youth*	2.4%	29.3%	58.5%
Dealing with increased levels of Stress	5.0%	30.0%	50.0%

* Indicates highest needs

Other needs/comments:

1. Managing family finances; couple communication and relationship skills.

Please describe changes that could be made, if any, to improve the quality of services provided for child and family development-related issues in our area:

1. We need an Options Clinic in Vernon County. There's no excuse for unwanted pregnancies with proper education and contraceptive information.

2. I believe there are some great organizations and initiatives already available - even in the rural areas. There is always need for help with children and families - and I would hope communities will continue to build on the strides made – but I'd like to see some of that same energy put into economic development and overall community development in rural areas, transportation, health/mental health care.
3. Families are put under stress in this situation. Too much bullying going on in school from teachers, students, principals, and more.

Emergency Assistance: How much of a **NEED** is **EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE** for low-income people?

	Not at All/Slight	Moderate	High/Very High
Food assistance	4.9%	31.7%	58.5%
Clothing assistance	19.5%	41.5%	31.7%
Shelter assistance	7.3%	17.1%	70.7%
Getting help with utility bills*	4.9%	14.6%	75.6%
Getting help with rent payment*	4.9%	14.6%	75.6%
Getting help with mortgage payment	7.5%	29.3%	55.0%
Eviction prevention	7.3%	29.3%	58.5%
Emergency health care	4.9%	22.0%	61.0%
Finding affordable legal help	14.6%	26.8%	51.2%
Transportation	9.8%	19.5%	68.3%
Dealing with depression	4.9%	24.4%	63.4%

* Indicates highest needs

Please describe changes that could be made, if any, to improve the quality of services provided for emergency assistance-related issues in our area:

1. More money for staff to better serve the clients' needs.
2. Legal services to provide to people. Many times we refer to Legal Action; however, the wait for their services is often a lot longer than the person is able to wait. Emergency funds for rent payments and mortgage payments. There is more help for rental assistance than mortgage payment assistance.
3. Monroe and Vernon counties need emergency shelter opportunities - and all rural areas need emergency shelter opportunities.

Business Development: How much of a **NEED** is **BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT** for low-income people?

	Not at All/Slight	Moderate	High/Very High
Getting business start-up help	19.5%	41.5%	19.5%
Developing a business plan*	19.5%	34.1%	26.8%
Getting business start-up loans*	19.5%	34.1%	26.8%

* Indicates highest needs

Please describe changes that could be made, if any, to improve the quality of services provided for business development-related issues in our area:

1. Business incubator services specifically targeted to low-income entrepreneurs, seeking grants for supporting fledgling low-income businesses.
2. There is money available both at the county and through Couleecap for small business. I think it needs to be publicized and someone needs to assist low/middle income individuals in starting a viable business.
3. Business/economic development can be a catalyst to making overall improvements to communities and peoples' lives - I'm all for putting energy and resources into business development - so long as it also encourages and even expects giving back in time, talents and resources to the community.
4. Banks don't like to take risk at this time because of economy.

COULEECAP

What do you consider to be the greatest **STRENGTH of Couleecap?**

1. Well-established organizational infrastructure; knowledgeable, committed staff; strong leadership, visionary department leaders who make it their mission to be innovative and progressive.
2. I believe the greatest strength of Couleecap to be our compassion. We care about the needs of others. We want to help people in any way that we can. We strive to find out what the community needs so that we can help more people become self-sufficient.
3. The committed Board and dedicated staff.
4. Housing programs.
5. Assisting those in need for food, clothing and shelter.
6. Terrific leadership, excellent staff and a "can do" attitude.
7. Home insulation services and clothing stores; being a vocal advocate for the needy and the low income.
8. I think the weatherization is because they save people money.
9. Collaboration and working relationships.
10. The greatest strength of Couleecap is the variety of talented and capable staff/volunteers. Many staff are always looking for creative solutions to problems that our low income populations face as well as additional funds to put those ideas into action. Most of the staff members are an asset to the organization.
11. Couleecap works to get to the actual needs of those in poverty in its mission to help those in poverty work their way up. It does more than "throw money at problems" by looking to the full array of daily challenges.
12. That as a staff unit we do whatever it takes to help our clients succeed.
13. Couleecap's commitment to helping people in poverty.
14. I think that the staff Couleecap has had have been its greatest strength.
15. The ability to steer a client from one program to the other.
16. The employees.
17. Breadth of services provided by high quality staff.
18. Two strengths: Actually getting people the help they need; and advocacy role in helping communities understand the needs of low-income people.

19. The way that staff work with the clients to help them become more self sufficient.
Most staff work together to get the assistance to the clients.
20. Talent - established and trusted/respected organization.
21. Internal and external collaboration efforts.
22. Couleecap follows its mission. The diversity of programs.
23. Couleecap is a tremendous organization and a particularly good business model for non-profits. Grace Jones is a superlative leader and the hierarchy of Couleecap is highly effective, personable, and competent.
24. Couleecap's greatest strength is how we are able to help low income people in so many ways.
25. Ability to keep the agency growing in the face of financial cuts, etc.
26. Building affordable housing and trying to help people help themselves.
27. Ability to help people in need without prejudice.

In the last couple of years, tell us about a time when you were proud to work for Couleecap.

1. I'm always proud to be associated with Couleecap!
2. I am always proud to work for Couleecap. When I read Grace's report and the department directors' reports and see all that we are doing and trying to do for our communities I am proud. When I am able to help someone I am proud. When I see other staff members able to help someone I am proud. It's basically an everyday kind of feeling!
3. When John Young was selected for the Jefferson Award.
4. When a person graduates from the housing program as a success story.
5. Seeing success stories of those receiving assistance to reach a goal or be successful.
6. I asked a woman what was her favorite program(s) on the radio and she told me learning about Couleecap! People listen and learn about the tremendous organization Couleecap is and are proud that we have such an effective group headquartered in Vernon County.
7. Every time I learned or heard about someone we had helped or anytime I saw or heard Grace speaking/writing about our organization.
8. There are many days at Couleecap that make me proud to work here. All the clients are very nice and love the work that is being done.
9. Often, when we hear of successful clients.
10. I can't think of any specific instances. However, I am proud to work for Couleecap most of the time when I get to describe my work and the organization to people. I find that a lot of people do not know about Couleecap and what we do. I like being able to explain it to them and most will say, "that seems like a great place," or "an asset to the community, or "I had no idea people could get help with all those things."
11. When I have had the opportunity to directly interact with clients to learn their life stories and the conditions whereby they may make positive changes in their lives.

12. I feel proud whenever I help somebody get caught up on their rent so they are not evicted. I can see the joy and relief on their face and that lets me know that I am doing a good job.
13. Every time a person without housing gets into their own apartment. Giving people the opportunity to make their own success stories.
14. I am proud of Couleecap for being in the spotlight nationally on things because of staff that are willing to take the step forward to blend programs together which ultimately benefits the clients as they can receive twice the help with keeping costs in check for the programs as well.
15. I'm always proud of Couleecap and I let everyone know it.
16. Every day. It's such a wonderful feeling to be able to help people as part of my job.
17. I had a client frustrated with some work done on her house through Couleecap. I relayed that message and Grace responded immediately and compassionately. The client was so happy to be listened to and treated with such respect.
18. While the downsizing since the end of ARRA has been very challenging, most staff have stepped up and done more work in the day to get all the work done that needs to be done with less staffing.
19. Seeing the Land Trust come to life - love this - and only with/through Couleecap did this have a chance in our area - hope to see this model more and more in more and more areas of Couleecap's service counties. Watching the effort on neighborhood revitalizations/creating communities with community spaces - fostering education and experience for young people - utilizing VISTA members - bringing youth energy to the organization.
20. When we received the DFC grant for Monroe County and seeing the great things that program is doing.
21. Every day when I am able to help people. Literally, every day. But when I go out in the community and people tell me what a wonderful agency we have, it makes me feel great!
22. I particularly like the housing and weatherization programs.
23. I am proud to work for Couleecap every time I hear "thank you for all your help" or I see a smile on the clients face because we just relieved a little bit of their worry.
24. While attending People Helping People Awards night.
25. Help homeless man get job and home for them and their child and get education for them to get better jobs.
26. Lady approached me and thanked me for Couleecap's weatherization of her house.

In five years, what would you like to be able to say about Couleecap in terms of things that it has done?

1. That it continues to be true to its mission, use its funding resources wisely to do the greatest possible good, continue to find innovative ways to meet the needs of all low-income people in the Coulee Region, make steady inroads in the fight to eliminate poverty in the Couleecap region, continue to be the champion of the underdog!

2. In five years I would like to see that we have grown in terms of the programs we are able to offer, the number of people we are able to help, and the needs we are able to meet. We have a great variety of programs already, but there are many other needs in our communities. It would be awesome to see us provide mental health counseling for example.
3. We helped 20,000 families improve their quality of life.
4. More success stories.
5. Increasing the competency level of low-income people to make informed decisions, be better skilled in financial management, and striving to better for their and their children's lives in being housing and food secure.
6. Couleecap helped develop low cost housing in Soldiers Grove and Gays Mills. It develops new housing stock at affordable prices and is helping the redevelopment of neighborhoods. The winterization program is superlative. It stays on message - helping those who need it the most by providing the tools for a better life.
7. Couleecap was there when no one else was for the needy workers and needy elderly and unemployed.
8. Taken the lead in the COC activities.
9. We have at least maintained our programming if not expanded many programs to serve more people.
10. I would like to be able to say that Couleecap has continued to keep abreast of changing challenges and needs of those in poverty, and has proven to be flexible and creative with its limited resources.
11. I would really like to show how much we partner with other agencies. I love that we work with other agencies and I want us to continue doing that and I think it helps clients know more about the resources that are in the area they live in.
12. I would like to say in five years that Couleecap will be known as the leading agency in the nation when it comes to innovation of blending funding together to maximize what we can do for the people that are less fortunate.
13. Continue what it has been doing.
14. I would like to be able to say that communities themselves began to think of the needs of low-income households and to plan accordingly because of the advocacy work done by Couleecap. I hope the compassion of this agency is contagious.
15. Been the driving force in rural and community development – revitalizing neighborhoods - that encourage continued community involvement.
16. Created more affordable housing in our area.
17. That, through the services and programs at Couleecap, we have been able to reduce the amount of hunger, homelessness, and poverty in our communities.
18. Grace Jones still lives!
19. That we are still a great agency.
20. Couleecap does the best they can with the funds they get to help improve houses, education, and single parents that need jobs.

Additional Comments:

1. Couleecap is a stellar organization lead by a star in the Community Action Programs and the administration and staff are fabulous!
2. As a Board Member, I feel I should be bringing to Couleecap a stronger base of knowledge about some of the needs of our clients, to give better direction through this needs assessment.
3. Great leadership team.
4. I am proud to be a member of this board. It also has been very helpful in my job as it has made me much more aware of the resources available for people in need.
5. Couleecap and Legal Services can only do what they can with the funds they have. It would be so helpful if our government would understand the need to have these programs to help people with some problems.