

2010 Couleecap Needs Assessment

2010

*prepared by
Starfish Consulting, Inc.*

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2010 Couleecap, Inc. Needs Assessment

Introduction

A. Background

Couleecap, Inc. serves people and communities in the Coulee Region of Wisconsin that includes Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties. **Couleecap, Inc.** is a private, nonprofit agency established in 1966 during the War on Poverty, when hundreds of Community Action Agencies were established throughout the United States. **Couleecap, Inc.** is one of these locally-based, nonprofit agencies founded by a caring group of local citizens dedicated to *continuing* the fight to end poverty in the Coulee Region.

Each year, **Couleecap, Inc.** helps more than 16,000 families, including 40,000 people, in the four-county region to achieve self-sufficiency by providing: the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing; the tools for living healthy, safe, independent lives; and the foundation for building a future.

Couleecap, Inc. Mission

To fight poverty and promote self-sufficiency for people in the Coulee Region.

Drawing on the strengths of its diverse programs, the main purpose of **Couleecap, Inc.** is to provide the tools and resources that empower low-income people to meet their needs, develop self-confidence, and reach self-sufficiency. **Couleecap, Inc.** strengthens communities by identifying resources, developing opportunities, and advocating for local adults, youth, and families. **Couleecap, Inc.** continues to educate and advocate for local adults, youth, and families.

The basic principle of a community action agency is to work at a grassroots level and build upon local leadership, local planning, and local operations. **Couleecap, Inc.** was created to make a difference in the lives of local people – individual by individual, family by family, and community by community.

The 2010 Couleecap Needs Assessment summarizes the needs and concerns in the Coulee Region as experienced and described by low-income individuals and families. Every three years, **Couleecap, Inc.** conducts a needs assessment of their four-county service area as part of a Community Services Block Grant (CSBG). This assessment gathers relevant information to help the agency design programs that address the issues of poverty and promote self-sufficiency for low-income families in the Coulee Region.

Couleecap, Inc. Vision

To make a difference in the lives of people in the Coulee Region by:

- *Empowering people to achieve their full potential;*
- *Promoting social and economic justice;*
- *Serving as a catalyst for change;*
- *Strengthening families and communities.*

B. Purpose

The purpose of the 2010 Couleecap Needs Assessment was to determine the needs of low-income individuals and families in Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties. Specific areas of need include: transportation, education and training, employment and job training, housing, health-related issues, child and family development / parenting, emergency assistance, and business development. Information was gathered from a diverse cross-section of low-income individuals and families.

The information gathered via the 2010 Needs Assessment will be valuable for Couleecap, Inc. to:

- Identify community needs and concerns
- Set multi-year goals and identify appropriate strategies that may include:
 - Services
 - Coordination of services and/or case management
 - Advocacy
 - System change
 - Coalition building
 - Resource mobilization
 - Community development

C. Guiding Questions

Low-Income Household Survey. Low-income household survey respondents were asked to report the “need” for their household on a variety of issues. Respondents rated responses on a scale from one to five. The question was “*How much of a NEED is this issue for your household?*” Possible responses were: 1 – not at all; 2 – slight; 3 – moderate; 4 – high; and 5 – very high. In addition, survey respondents could indicate if each specific issue “did not apply” to their household. A space was provided for survey respondents to list “other issues” that their household could use help with right now.

Focus Group. Three focus groups were conducted as part of the 2010 Couleecap Needs Assessment. One group consisted of representatives from key agencies that serve low-income families; and two groups consisted of low-income families (Hispanic and African American) that have or would be eligible to use services from Couleecap, Inc. Through each focus group, participants discussed:

- *the needs of low-income families*
- *how well current services address the needs of low-income families*
- *ways that services can be improved / changed for low-income families*
- *homelessness*
- *services that Couleecap, Inc. provides*

D. Limitations

The 2010 Needs Assessment collected data via one specific survey instrument and three focus groups. All responses reflect the status of the respondents at the time the information was collected. This 2010 “snapshot” will be used to document current needs of low-income individuals and families, as well as for comparison with other assessments when applicable. (Copies of the Survey and Focus Group Protocol are included in Section VI of this report.)

2010 Couleecap, Inc. Needs Assessment

Methodology

A. Theoretical Framework

The 2010 Needs Assessment was developed to assess the needs and concerns of low-income individuals and families. Information was gathered from three primary sources: (1) low-income households (via household survey); (2) low-income households (via focus groups); and (3) key agency staff that serve low-income families (via focus group). Other local needs assessments were reviewed and included for comparison.

To identify the needs of low-income individuals and families in the Coulee Region, the 2010 Needs Assessment focused on the following issues for low-income households:

- Transportation
- Education and Training
- Employment and Job Training
- Housing
- Health-Related Issues
- Child and Family Development / Parenting
- Emergency Assistance
- Business Development

B. Type of Design

The 2010 Needs Assessment was similar to previous assessments (1998, 2001, 2004, and 2007). Self-report surveys were utilized to gather data. In 2007, format changes were made to provide consistency between survey instruments. The 2010 survey instrument adhered to the previously established survey format. The major areas of concern / need for low-income individuals and families continues to be the emphasis for all data collection.

C. Selection and Description of Survey Respondents

The 2010 Needs Assessment Survey was distributed to 1,700 low-income households through the following agencies and Couleecap, Inc. programs: The Salvation Army; Options Clinic; Scenic Bluffs Health Care Center; St. Clare Health Mission; WAFER; New Horizons; Legal Action; Head Start in Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties; Families First Resource Center in Viroqua; Catholic Charities in Prairie du Chien; La Crosse Area Hmong Mutual Assistance Association; food pantries in Gays Mills, Prairie du Chien, Sparta, Tomah, Viroqua, Westby, Hillsboro, and De Soto; Monroe County WHEAP (Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program); Vernon County WHEAP; Couleecap Homeless Programs; Youth Employment & Training Programs in Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties; Bargain Boutique in Prairie du Chien; First Time Homebuyer Program; Couleecap Home Rehabilitation Program; Foreclosure Assistance Program; Emergency Assistance Program; Work-N-Wheels Program; Skills Enhancement Program; Job & Business Development Program; and Weatherization Program. Every effort was made to guarantee the confidentiality of all respondents.

D. Data Collection Strategies / Description of the Sample

Information was gathered from three primary sources: (1) low-income households (via household survey); (2) ESL / Hispanic low-income households and African-American households (via focus groups); and (3) key agency staff that serve low-income families (via focus group).

To guarantee a representative cross-section of the low-income population, surveys were distributed through a variety of agencies and programs throughout the four-county Coulee Region. A list of the specific agencies and programs are listed in Section C on the previous page.

E. Data Analysis Strategy

Primary data reported in the 2010 Couleecap Needs Assessment were gathered via the low-income household survey described previously. All survey data was entered into an SPSS database. Prior to analysis, all data was cleaned to guarantee a clean data-set. The data was compiled to produce the four-county Coulee Region report and disaggregated to produce the individual county data reports.

Additional data were gathered via focus groups for: (1) ESL / Hispanic low-income households and African-American households and (2) key agency staff that serve low-income families. Focus group discussion data were transcribed and key themes identified.

F. Interpretation of 2010 Couleecap, Inc. Needs Assessment Results

The 2010 Couleecap Needs Assessment survey and focus group data provide a “snapshot” of the household needs for low-income individuals and families in the four-county Coulee Region. Survey answers and focus group responses are dependent on how accurate survey respondents and focus group participants reply. Survey and focus group questions were interpreted by individual respondents and based on his/her definition and / or interpretation. Some survey respondents and focus group participants chose not to answer specific questions. This meant that all individuals are not represented in every answer. However, this occurred very infrequently, leaving a sample size that is a representative sample of the population surveyed.

G. Dissemination of Survey Results

All 2010 needs assessment results were compiled into this comprehensive research document entitled “2010 Couleecap Needs Assessment”. The initial findings were presented at Couleecap’s Annual Meeting on April 8, 2010. Results will be posted on Couleecap’s website (www.couleecap.org) and on Couleecap’s Facebook page in September, 2010. All Couleecap Board Members and Couleecap Staff will receive a copy of the 2010 Executive Summary and have access to the full report on Couleecap’s website in September, 2010. Results will be distributed to area service providers and to others as it is requested. Information from the 2010 Couleecap Needs Assessment will also be presented as part of Couleecap’s Annual Report on the Face of Poverty in the Coulee Region in September, 2010. Ads focusing on the results will be done on Wisconsin Public Radio and in the Kickapoo Free Press. News releases sharing the results will be submitted to all local newspapers as well.