

Goal #2: Supportive Relationships within Families, Neighborhoods, and Communities

Why is this Goal Area Important?

Social support helps to give people the emotional and practical resources they need to feel cared for, valued and secure. Especially in hard economic times, these human connections often are looked to when formal support agencies cannot assist. Studies have shown that social support is one of the important factors in predicting health, including mental health and wellbeing, from young children to older adults. Service areas in this support network include social support for individuals, families and adults raising children, legal assistance, and information and referral.

What's Working?

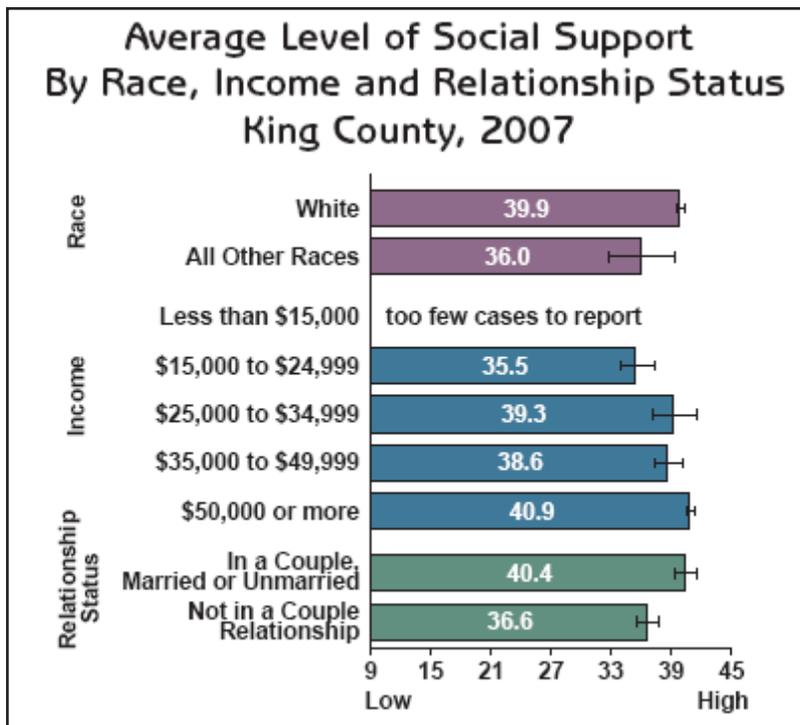
- The Wrap-Around Services Pilot Project, a collaboration between the Bellevue School District, the City of Bellevue, and United Way of King County, began in Spring 2005 at Lake Hills Elementary School. The project's objectives are being met with great success: bolstering academic achievement and family involvement in the school and enhancing neighborhood vitality through community celebrations and collaborations with local businesses. As of the 2009 City budget cycle the project was elevated to program status and expanded to Odle Middle School. A Wrap-Around Coordinator was assigned to lead the Wrap-Around Service Program there. The Coordinator completed program research on families, students, faculty and the Odle community to establish criteria for the Odle Middle School Wrap-Around Service Program launched in 2009-2010.
- In Spring 2009, the City of Bellevue Neighborhood Outreach Program launched Neighbor Link, a partnership between neighborhoods and the City to promote

neighborhood involvement and community building. Projects include a "End Summer Hunger" food drive, sponsoring a child for summer camp, or adopting a community plot at the Crossroads Pea Patch. In August 2009, it added outreach to downtown residents, to help those living in the many new condos and apartments.

- Eastside Legal Assistance Program (ELAP) provided 124 Bellevue residents legal information in their self-help clinics during the first two quarters of 2009. Of those completing evaluations, 96% said they were comfortable with the legal system upon receiving ELAP's legal advice services.

Prevalence Social Support

- In a survey conducted countywide in 2007 for *Communities Count: Social and Health Indicators Across King County*, social support was measured by asking people nine questions about specific types of social support they believed they could rely on. The answers were used to create a social support scale with a possible score between 9 (low) and 45 (high). In King County as a whole, the average score was 39.1. East King County was about the same, at 40.3. There were no statistically significant differences in average social support levels by region in the county, and no significant changes between 2001, 2004 and 2007. When looking at race, income and relationship status in King County as a whole, people with incomes of \$50,000 or more reported higher levels of support than people with lower incomes, as did people who were White, and those who lived as a married or unmarried couple rather than as a single person.¹



Source: Communities Count 2008

Service Trends

Support for Individuals, Families, and Adults Raising Children

- Support for older adults (people 65 and older) is critical as more of the population ages, and more families live long distances apart. Many older adults will be “aging in place” and will require in-home care, most likely from family, friends and neighbors, in addition to paid providers. Programs that keep older adults active in the community, such as acting as a “Bus Buddy” helping someone learn how to ride the bus or being tutors and mentors in elementary schools, are important opportunities for decreasing isolation.
- In the King County Community Health Survey conducted in 2007, adults were asked about the challenges of parenting, and how often they had help and support in raising their children. In East King County, 63% of respondents with children ages 0-5 and 64% with children 6-14 report coping very well. This compares closely with King County as a whole, which reported 64% and 58%, respectively.²
- In the 2009 Bellevue phone survey, only

6% of respondents rated the need for individual or community support as a parent or caregiver to children as a significant household need, but feedback from providers and parents strongly suggests that this support is very much needed. Some parents who are newcomers to the U.S., including refugees and immigrants from China, Korea, Africa, the Middle East, Mexico and other Latin countries, would like help to learn more about the customs and systems in schools and other settings in which they interact with their children. These families face challenges such as not having translated materials to help them keep up with what is happening at school, and lack of understanding of academic expectations in this

country. A number of organizations, such as Youth Eastside Services, Asia Pacific Language School, Kindering Center, Hopelink, and Chinese Information and Service Center, provide parenting classes and support groups for multi-cultural parents to help them bridge the cultural gaps, but more are needed.

“Many moms and dads are both home during our home visits now because they have lost their jobs. The primary care givers need early childhood supports.”

Community Conversation, Healthy Start Staff

- Jubilee REACH Center, a family support center sponsored by the First Presbyterian Church of Bellevue in the Lake Hills neighborhood, provides numerous programs that support individuals and families. These include before and after-school programs, mentoring, youth activities such as community service projects, and English-as-a-Second-Language classes with childcare. This Center also provides community meal programs, some with an international

focus, and a dental van for low-income children. In fall, 2009 Jubilee REACH opened the Heart and Home Value Centers providing employment opportunities for the community.³

- Human Services Specialists at the Family Connections Centers, located in five elementary schools in the Bellevue School District, facilitate improved access to human services between home, school, and community. Staff make referrals to local agencies for clothing and food, as well as counseling, housing, employment, emergency financial assistance and health care. Some of the schools have a large number of families who are refugees and immigrants, and many who are eligible for the free and reduced price lunch program. Staff report that as a result of the recession, they are seeing more formerly middle class families who have lost their jobs and are now needing support. Affordable housing is the number one need. Funding for more sites and longer hours of service, including during school vacations, are critical.⁴
- Single parents may have more needs for support. Whether mothers or fathers, they often have special needs because they may be the sole providers of their children's needs. Between 2006-2008 approximately five percent of all households in Bellevue were composed of single-parent households. Families with a female householder, no husband present and related children age 5-17 had the highest family poverty rates of 30%.⁵

Support for Early Learning and Early Childhood Development

- In 2003, more than 120 agencies, organizations and individuals from across King County helped to develop *An Early Childhood and School Readiness Action Agenda*. Its aim is to improve school readiness in King County for children birth to five years. The research evidence is strong that children begin learning

from birth, and the earlier a child has opportunities to develop socially, cognitively, and emotionally, the better she will do in school and in life. Towards that end, four subregional networking teams (called Families and Children Early Support - FACES), began implementing strategies to meet their common goals around school readiness. FACES on the Eastside has sponsored a number of projects, including parenting groups in English, Spanish and Cantonese/Mandarin, free developmental screenings for children birth to three, and legislative forums on early childhood issues to raise visibility with East King County legislators.

- In 2004/2005 and in 2008, kindergarten students in the Bellevue, Highline and Shoreline School Districts were assessed for their school readiness in five areas using the Early Development Instrument (EDI). The purpose of the project, jointly sponsored by Public Health-Seattle & King County and United Way, is to use what was learned about the strengths and needs of the children to help people in the community create responses that support the needs of children and families. Findings from the study in Bellevue in 2008 show that district-wide, 29.6% of the kindergarten students scored not ready for school in at least one domain of readiness and 14.1% had problems in at least two. These percentages were slightly higher than in 2004. The study found that children who had attended preschool scored significantly higher than those who did not in all five areas, and that children who were English Language Learners scored significantly lower in all areas except physical health and well-being.⁶
- Healthy Start, using the evidence-based Parents as Teachers “Born to Learn” curriculum, is a voluntary home visiting program that supports healthy child development, enhances parenting skills, improves the quality of parent-child interactions and promotes school readiness

activities for at-risk families. In addition to information about activities to promote this positive development, parents are assisted in developing social support networks and peer relationships to help them to succeed in becoming independent, and also have the option to work with a volunteer Mentor one-on-one. This program results in increased parenting skills, high rates of children and parents receiving routine medical care, and parents meeting goals of being more independent, by going to work or school. Healthy Start serves a high number of non-Caucasians and non-English speakers. In 2008, of the 180 Bellevue families served, 80% were non-Caucasian. Due in part to the large number of Spanish-speaking case managers in the program, over half (59%) of the participants are of Hispanic-Latino origin.⁷

- Eastside Baby Corner (EBC) supplies agencies such as food banks and schools with infant and child basic needs such as formula, cribs, diapers, and clothing. In 2008, they provided supplies to about 3,869 Bellevue low-income residents, an increase of 35% over 2006. Due to the volume of requests, which continues to increase especially due to the poor economy and high unemployment rates, staff report that each week there are orders they are unable to fill, such as for big items like cribs and car seats. Staff now need to limit the number of items it gives each agency weekly, and has 27 agencies on the wait list to begin receiving items. Another major issue is the rising cost of infant formula which makes it difficult for EBC to keep it in stock.⁸
- Family, friends and neighbors (FFNs) provide care for an estimated 60,000 children in King County. For 28,000 of those children, FFNs are the primary source of care when parents are working or attending school. Child Care Resources sponsors the Family, Friend and Neighbor Project, whose goal is to provide a comprehensive, community-based network of supports and resources for family, friend and neighbor

caregivers and the children in their care. One activity is an informal play group for children birth to five and caregivers, called Play and Learn. There are eight such groups in East King County, four in Bellevue, three of which are in languages other than English.⁹

Increased Resources for School-Aged Kids

- Research supports the fact that positive after-school and “out of school time” programs are critical for school-aged children and youth to build developmental assets and avoid at-risk behaviors. In 2005, *SOAR, helping kids reach for the sky* convened a countywide workgroup that developed a King County Youth Action Agenda, similar to the one for birth to five-year olds. Completed in December 2006, this plan’s implementation is being overseen by the School Age Implementation Team (SAIT), a group of professionals who are working on a number of efforts to address collaboration, professional development, training, and leadership for this age group. (Note: See the *School Aged Children and Youth* section of this report for more information.)

“Kids need more financial support for sports activities. And more access to after-school activities; many are too expensive.”
Community Conversation, King County Housing Authority, Spiritwood Residents

Work/Family Supports

- Work and family issues in the United States are increasing as more families work longer hours, and have more responsibilities for caring for their children, as well as frail, older family members; these caregivers are commonly called the “sandwich generation.” Another trend is that more fathers are taking the primary role in parenting which seems to be at least in part due to the poor economy. The most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that unemployment

rates have increased more rapidly for men than women over the past year or more, as men are more likely to be employed in industries like construction that have seen the most severe job cuts. And many men are also working more reduced hours and part-time jobs.¹⁰ These trends support the need for more family-friendly policies and programs to help families not just cope, but thrive.

- According to surveys conducted in Washington State in 2008, fewer employers offered paid leave to employees compared to 2006. Those that offered some paid vacation dropped from 73% to 63%, while only 38% offered paid sick leave, down from

“There is fear that if you ask for time to go to the doctor, or ask to change your schedule, they will cut your hours or fire you. There is a lot of pressure right now.”
Community Conversation, Cirulo di Mamas, Kindering Center

44%. Without sick leave, many workers must make the choice of going to work when they or their children are ill, using vacation days when available, or risking loss of pay or a job.¹¹ Washington State passed a family leave program in May 2007 designed to provide up to \$250 per week for up to five weeks beginning October 1, 2009. The implementation of this law,

however, is temporarily suspended, due to the budget shortfall in state government. These benefits are critical to help employees balance work-life responsibilities, but in the current economic climate these benefits are decreasing.

Need for Low-Cost Legal Assistance

- Nationally, experts estimate that 80% of low-income Americans who need help in civil legal cases don’t receive it. This includes people who are turned away but also those who don’t try because it’s so hopeless.¹²
- The Washington State Office of Civil Legal Aid 2007-2009 Biennial Report indicates that access to legal aid for low-income state residents has gone from very difficult to worse due to the poor economy. The difference between available resources and the need for services-called the “Justice Gap”- is larger than ever. The Northwest Justice Project, which maintains the statewide legal hotline and offices throughout the state, saw client demand jump 30% in 2008 compared to the same period in 2005. The top issues for which people received help statewide were family safety (e.g. domestic violence), housing (e.g. foreclosure), and income maintenance (e.g. eligibility for disability benefits).¹³
- In keeping with the statewide trends, Eastside Legal Assistance Program (ELAP) has seen a large increase in requests for

| Percent of Firms Offering Paid Leave by Size of Firm | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 2008 | Paid Leave | | | | | | | |
| | Full-time Employees | | | | Part-time Employees | | | |
| Firm Size (number of employees) | Undesignated | Sick | Vacation | Holiday | Undesignated | Sick | Vacation | Holiday |
| 2 to 9 | 16.6% | 34.1% | 57.8% | 54.9% | 5.8% | 11.0% | 17.8% | 20.2% |
| 10 to 24 | 19.4% | 40.5% | 71.0% | 66.3% | 7.0% | 13.2% | 21.1% | 24.7% |
| 25 to 49 | 23.5% | 46.0% | 76.6% | 72.4% | 8.6% | 13.9% | 23.3% | 25.9% |
| 50 to 99 | 29.3% | 55.0% | 82.8% | 83.3% | 13.3% | 20.2% | 25.8% | 32.4% |
| 100 to 499 | 37.0% | 62.9% | 82.1% | 85.5% | 19.0% | 28.5% | 34.9% | 41.0% |
| 500 + | 45.3% | 64.5% | 78.0% | 81.7% | 28.3% | 38.6% | 44.9% | 52.0% |
| Total | 18.8% | 37.8% | 63.3% | 60.2% | 6.9% | 12.5% | 19.7% | 22.6% |

Source: Washington State Employee Benefits Survey Report, March 2009

legal services. As a result of the economic downturn, more people are seeking help with evictions, domestic violence, credit card and debt issues. Beginning in 2008, calls for legal assistance to 2-1-1 at the Crisis Clinic are screened and directed to ELAP, which has improved access to Eastside clients. In the first two quarters of 2009, ELAP logged almost twice as many calls requesting legal aid compared to mid-year of 2008. There are waiting lists for clients needing help from the Domestic Violence Legal Fund Project and for the family law/Domestic Violence clinic in which there is an extremely high need. Between January 2008 and January 2009, domestic violence cases doubled. There is a shortage of attorneys to help beyond a half-hour free consultation with clients because taking cases often involves months of intensive legal work.¹⁴

- ELAP has two specialized clinics for immigrants and refugees: an immigration clinic which deals with immigration law issues twice a month and a multilingual clinic which provides assistance on any civil legal issue with bilingual interpreters in Spanish, Ukrainian, and Russian. The multilingual clinic also has a separate phone number with the capacity to take voicemails in these languages so that all screening and appointments are also handled in the client's native language. Both of these clinics operate similarly to their other advice clinics—a free half-hour with a volunteer attorney for advice and consultation. They also will provide interpreters for those needing help in other languages and bilingual informational cards that can be used by other social services agencies to let them know about their services. ELAP works with Hopelink to assist with citizenship applications.¹⁵

Finding Help: Information and Referral

- Staff at the City of Bellevue's Mini-City Hall at Crossroads Shopping Center reported that in 2008, they received 24,087 contacts from

consumers asking for information about a variety of resources, with about 45.5% related to human services needs. This was about a three percent increase compared to 2007. However, with the onset of the recession, staff began to see a steady increase in late 2008 and the first six months of 2009. Between January and May, 2009, they served 10,583 consumers, with over 50% human services related. They are seeing more requests for financial assistance of all kinds including rent assistance, health insurance, foreclosure help and sliding-fee scale counseling, which is different than previous years. Volunteer interpreters offer help in Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Russian, Tagalog, Hindi, Bengali and Urdu.¹⁶ Written materials about city activities and services in languages other than English have been developed in all departments, with a number of them still in process. City staff have access to Teleinterpreter services which provides an over-the phone interpreter. The city also has Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese web translations on its website. *(Note: See Refugees and Immigrants section in this report for more information.)*

- During the 2003 Washington State legislative session, lawmakers passed a bill making the three digit dialing code “2-1-1” the official state number for information about health and human services, including access after a natural or other disaster. Washington Information Network (WIN 2-1-1) is a one-stop approach that prevents people from having to call numerous agencies that may or may not be able to help them. In 2008, statewide, WIN 2-1-1's call centers received 361,859 calls, averaging 30,155 calls/month. This is an increase of 24% compared to 2007. The top gaps identified, where requests exceeded availability, included rent and mortgage assistance, utilities and transportation.¹⁷ In 2009, during the State Legislative Session, WIN 2-1-1 received \$2 million from a very tight biennium budget, acknowledgement by lawmakers that this service fills a critical need.

- Crisis Clinic is the designated agency in King County for 2-1-1. It provides services five days/week during business hours, and half day on Saturdays. Staff noted in the provider survey that as a result of the recession, callers have multiple needs for assistance, not just a single need. More are recently “laid off” and have not ever used a social service and have no idea where to find help, even if any assistance is available.¹⁸ In 2008, 1,610 Bellevue callers to the 2-1-1 CIL who would disclose their incomes lived below the poverty level; among the Bellevue callers to the Crisis Line, the line for emergency crisis assistance, 739, about 81%, lived below the poverty level.¹⁹
- As the chart below shows, the total number of calls to 2-1-1 CIL by Bellevue residents has varied over the past dozen years, with an increasing trend beginning in 2001; the percentage of total calls that pertain to basic needs is growing, as well. The largest percentage increase, however, was between 2006 and 2008 with over 70% more calls in this category.²⁰

| Requests from Bellevue Residents for Basic Needs Resources from the Community Information Line | | | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Year | Number of Calls Received for Basic Needs | Total Calls Received for All Services | Percentage of Total Calls for Basic Needs | Number of Requests for Emergency Shelter |
| 1996 | 642 | 2390 | 26.8% | 274 |
| 1997 | 613 | 2333 | 26.2% | 285 |
| 1998 | 629 | 1998 | 31.4% | 298 |
| 1999 | 581 | 2018 | 29.4% | 250 |
| 2000 | 414 | 1899 | 24.04% | 168 |
| 2001 | 308 | 2265 | 13.6% | 103 |
| 2002 | 394 | 2119 | 18% | 122 |
| 2003 | 511 | 2102 | 30% | 159 |
| 2004 | 555 | 2587 | 21% | 158 |
| 2005 | 543 | 2428 | 23% | 161 |
| 2006 | 552 | 3156 | 18% | 191 |
| 2007 | 956 | 3306 | 29% | 359 |
| 2008 | 954 | 3390 | 28% | 388 |

Source: Crisis Clinic, Community Information Line 2-1-1, July 2009

Community Perceptions

Social Support

- Twenty-seven percent of the respondents to the 2009 phone survey identified a *lack of parenting skills* as a major or moderate community problem, slightly more than in 2005 and 2007. Since 1995, this issue has been a decreasing trend as a community problem. In the same survey, another question was asked about whether the respondent had received enough individual or community support as a parent or caregiver to children. Only about six percent of respondents rated this as a major or moderate household problem, similar to 2007, remaining in the second tier of problems.
- In well over half of the Community Conversations held in Bellevue, participants representing a number of ages, cultures and special interests, one of the strong themes was the need for support for parents and family caregivers.
- In the 2009 phone survey, respondents who found help were then asked from which organizations or persons did they receive assistance. Among the 43 respondents, the help was most often attributed to a health care provider (56%) or to a family, friend or neighbor (49%).
- For the first time in the phone survey, a question was asked regarding the level to which the community supports the needs of specific populations. Nearly a third of respondents (29%) report that the community completely supports young children under six years old, followed by older adults (26%), youth between the ages of six and eleven (25%), individuals of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds (23%) and individuals with disabilities (21%).

Information and Referral

- Difficulty finding resources for human services was frequently mentioned in virtually all Community Conversations involving a wide variety of stakeholders, from older

adults to youth, providers and consumers, and especially people who are English Language Learners (ELL).

- In the 2009 phone survey, ten percent of respondents said that people in Bellevue do not have enough access to human services similar to previous years; of those, 16% said that there was lack of general information regarding services. In the same survey, a related question asked why people who sought help could not get it. Of the 33 people who said they didn't find help for their problems, 36% said they didn't know where to look for help.

Legal Services

- In the 2009 phone survey, *lack of affordable legal services* was rated as a major or moderate household problem by almost 10% of respondents, similar to the rating given in 2005. This problem peaked in rating in the 2003 survey, when over 12% of respondents rated it a major or moderate problem. Respondents in the lower income bracket (\$20,000 or less) were more likely to rate it as such. Almost a quarter of respondents rated it as a major or moderate community problem, similar to 2007.
- In the 2009 consumer survey, over half of respondents (56.4%) rated *being able to pay for legal help* as a major or moderate problem.

Implications for Action

- Especially now during the economic downturn, Bellevue families will need social support for raising their children or caring for aging and or disabled loved ones, or a combination of the three. Family, friends and neighbors will be even more important components in the caregiving plan because

"Decreases in state and local funding for basic survival services, including health care, will make providing referrals even harder. More competition for scarce resources."

Provider Survey, Crisis Clinic

funding has been cut for many formal services, such as chore services and adult day health centers.

- The need for information presented in languages other than English continues to grow as the excellent quality of life and beautiful environment attracts more and more refugees and immigrants to the Puget Sound Region and East King County. Human service providers, local government and the business community will need to work together to meet this need in the community.
- Many residents still do not have easy access to computers and rely on the phone. Multi-modal forms of getting information out to the community is needed. The Crisis Clinic's 2-1-1 Community Information Line is one way to help fill this critical information gap. However, state funding for its operation must be continued. Another way is partnering with non-profit agencies, cities and faith communities to include information about resources through printed media, public TV access, and neighbors sharing information with neighbors.
- Low-cost or free civil legal services are a growing need for many residents especially during the economic downturn. A major gap for services exists for direct representation, especially for survivors of domestic violence, immigration issues, foreclosure and credit counseling.

Endnotes

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