

Health and Human Services: Who Needs Them in Bellevue?

Results of surveys and interviews conducted with providers of human services in 2005 revealed several consistent themes regarding the profile of those seeking help for their human services needs in Bellevue. Of the 43 staff from local human services programs who responded to an on-line survey, 76% (33) indicated that they have seen changes in the types of clients using their services. The top three areas of change were:

- increased numbers of refugees and immigrants needing assistance, ranging from home visiting programs for young parents to those seeking help for domestic violence issues;
- more severity and complexity of problems, including mental illness, more acute dental problems, substance abuse, and criminal history; and
- increasing requests for basic needs such as rental assistance, child care scholarships, food stamps, and housing.

In 2005 there were fewer providers who mentioned that many of their clients have never received assistance from human services agencies before compared to 2001 and 2003. The reason for this change could be due to the improving economy and more people returning to work. However, though job growth is clearly accelerating, many jobs do not pay the wages that workers made in their former jobs. This leaves them with problems making ends meet. And there are still a number of “working poor” households throughout the county, including Bellevue, who have consistently worked at low-wage jobs. Many need to utilize human services even though they work full-time.

Major Themes

Increased numbers of refugees and immigrants needing assistance

The trend toward increased diversity of clients, especially Hispanic/Latino, has been mentioned consistently beginning with the *2001 Needs Update*. In 2005, diversity as an issue has increased, with almost half of the human services agencies completing surveys mentioning this issue. The increased diversity among clients means new challenges for many mainstream agencies that must hire bicultural, bilingual staff; use interpreters; translate materials; and create more welcoming environments for non-English speaking participants.

“Many of our clients are needing assistance with immigration issues, advocacy needs due to language barriers and assistance in understanding how to go through various cultural challenges, such as maneuvering through the court system or legal setting.”

Provider Survey-Catholic Community Services

Still, some people from other cultures prefer to have services provided by those from their native culture, in their native language. This may bring more cultural- and language-specific agencies into the continuum of human services on the Eastside. *(Note: For more information about this topic, see the Refugees and Immigrants section in this report.)*

Severity and complexity of problems

Many providers and key informants who were interviewed commented on the increase of high-need clients, in both acuity and complexity of issues. These include more involved legal issues, dual-diagnosis adults with substance abuse and mental health issues, and seniors with more serious medical or dental issues. This trend

seems to result from a variety of factors, some related to lack of resources for services, some related to an increased number of people needing services.

"We are seeing more harder to serve families with multi-barriers to housing and jobs: evictions, bad credit, undocumented, criminal history, lack of educational, employable skills and ESL."

Provider Survey-Hopelink Kenmore Family Shelter

Increasing requests for basic needs

The utilization of emergency and basic need services is still strong in 2005, according to providers. Many residents seek some form of financial assistance as the cost-of-living in the region, especially on the Eastside, goes up faster than their earnings. The Hopelink foodbank reports that almost half (48%) of their participants work full or part-time. Included in this group seeking supplemental services are those who participate in WorkFirst, the welfare to work program in Washington; undocumented or legal immigrants who are not eligible for many federal or state services; and people on fixed incomes, such as seniors whose main income is Social Security and who have few additional assets.

Phone Survey Results: Prevalence of Human Services Need at the Household Level

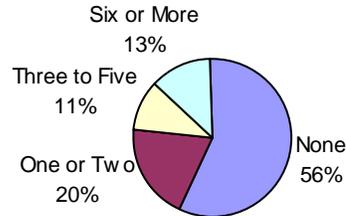
Another way to gauge the need for health and human services in Bellevue is through the phone survey. The survey has a maximum margin of error of $\pm 4.7\%$ at a 95% confidence level so these findings can be generalized to the population at large.

Proportion of Residents Experiencing a Major or Moderate Problem Decreases

Prior to 2005, the percentage of respondents to the phone survey who reported personally experiencing at least one moderate or major problem in their household had been slowly but steadily trending upward: 1997 (40%, 160 people); 1999 (45%, 184 people) 2001 (47%, 198 people), and 2003 (53%, 233 people). The percentage of respondents experiencing a major or moderate problem in their household in 2005, however, decreased (44%, 195 people) and has returned to the levels seen in 1999. In 2005, more than half (56%) reported that

none of the twenty-nine potential household problems were a major or moderate problem compared to 47% in 2003. The remainder of 2005 respondents indicated that one or two areas were a major/moderate problem for their household (20%) or that three or more areas (24%) were a major/moderate problem for their household.

Percent of Respondents Rating Household Problems As "Moderate" or "Major"



It is also important to note that in all of the survey years, some segments of the population who experience household problems are likely under-represented. Some of these segments include: people who do not have telephones, who live in temporary shelters, who speak languages other than English and are not comfortable speaking to an interpreter on the phone, or those that have certain disabilities that make it difficult for them to speak on the phone. An underrepresentation of such persons would likely mean that the survey results somewhat underestimate the number of residents who experience major or moderate problems related to human services needs.

There are nine areas considered to be among the First Tier of most frequent problem areas. These nine areas received a combined "major/moderate problem" from at least 10% of respondents. Interestingly, the problems ranked in the First Tier of

"State funding for child care has decreased. Lower payments to child care providers for DSHS (state) subsidized children has meant that families have more limited access to child care. Those families who are now over-income for state child care subsidies are requesting the Bellevue scholarship."

Provider Survey-Child Care Resources

household problems in 2005 were also reported within the First Tier in 2003.

- Not being able to get or pay for medical insurance (17%)
- Not being able to pay for the doctor, prescriptions or dental bills (15%)
- Not being able to find work that supports yourself or family (15%)
- Having a lot of anxiety, stress or depression that interferes with your daily life (15%)
- Finding it difficult to budget the money that's available (12%)
- Not being able to afford recreational activities (11%)
- Inadequate public transportation (11%)
- Not having enough money to pay for housing (10%)
- Not being able to afford legal help (10%)

The percentage of major/moderate ratings given to *not being able to get or pay for medical insurance* decreased slightly from 19% in 2003 to 17% in 2005. Its ranking, however, increased from second in 2003 to first in 2005. Similarly, there is no change to the areas ranked in the First Tier of household problems compared to 2003, but it is notable that the combined percentage of major and moderate ratings given to almost all of these First Tier areas declined compared to 2003 (the exception being *not having enough money to pay for housing*, which received equal major/moderate ratings in both 2003 and 2005).

Having a lot of anxiety, stress or depression that interferes with your daily life was ranked first in 2003 (with 20% major/moderate ratings), but is ranked fourth in 2005 with significantly fewer respondents (15%) assigning major/moderate ratings to this problem area.

Not being able to pay for the doctor, prescriptions or dental bills was ranked fourth among the First Tier problems in 2003 but is ranked second among the First Tier problems in 2005 (even though 15% of respondents reported this as a major/moderate problem in both survey years).

Caveats for Interpreting Ratings of Household Problem Areas

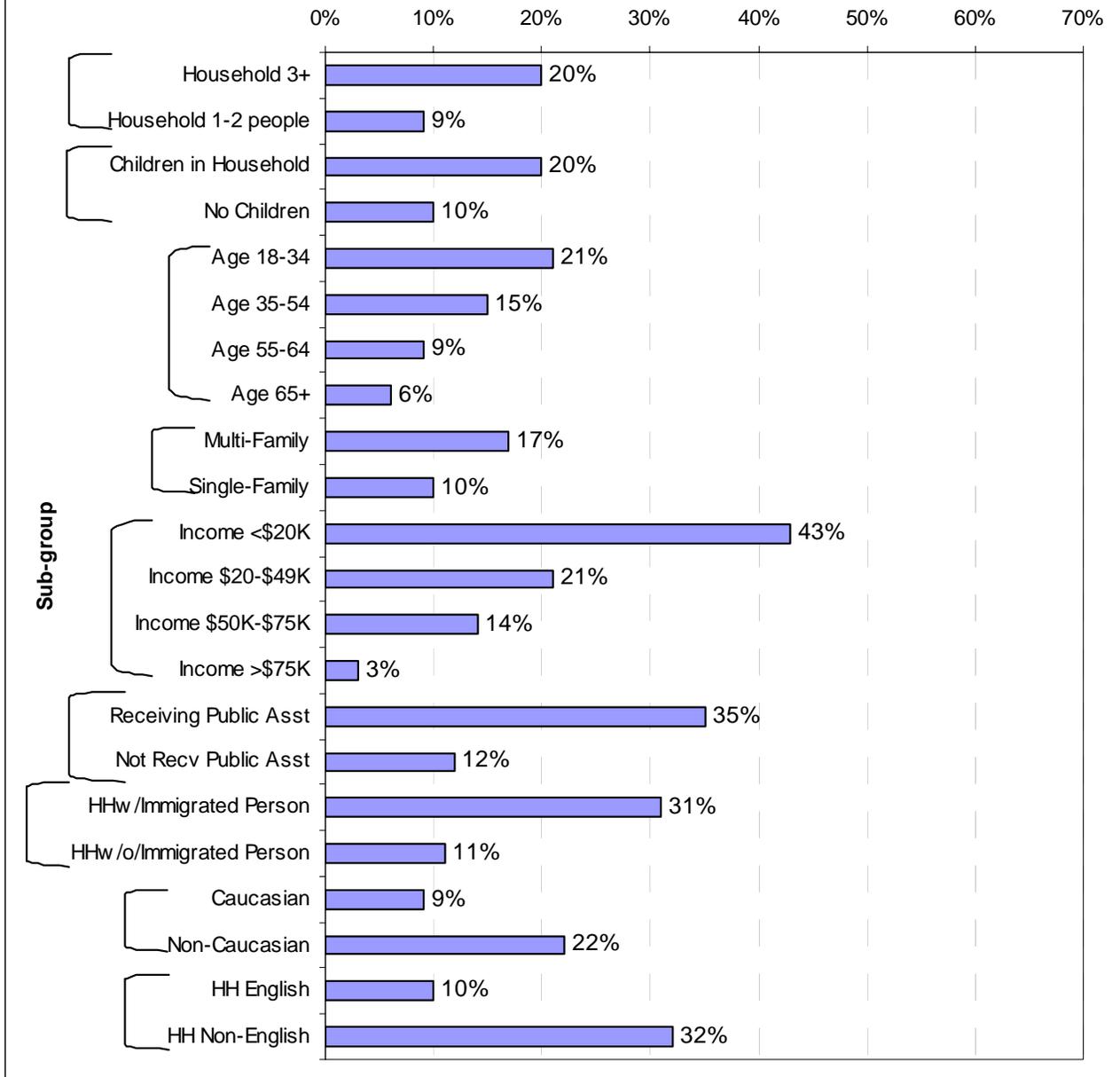
It is wise to be cautious when using the ratings of household problems to determine what may take a higher priority in terms of funding or planning. Household problems have varying degrees of social impact. For example, not being able to obtain basic needs like housing or food, may be more critical at a moderate level than not being able to afford recreational activities experienced at a major level. Also, underrepresented segments of the population are likely those who are experiencing some of the problems asked about in the survey, such as those who are disabled or living in temporary shelters. A wide range of such underrepresented groups are contacted through other means, e.g. focus groups and consumer surveys, to help account for this factor.

Differences in Household Demographics that Affect Incidence of Household Problems

In the 2005 phone survey, similar to other years, some segments of the population were more likely to experience a greater number of household problems than others. The chart on the next page shows the percentage of respondents rating six or more household problems as major or moderate among subgroups with significant differences in the number of problems experienced.

- Although the sample subset is small (just 20 respondents in 2005 indicate receiving public assistance), since 1997, survey findings suggest that households receiving public assistance are more likely than households who are not to experience more moderate and major household issues (35% vs. 12%, respectively). Though caution should be exercised in interpreting these data, the consistency among survey results indicates that these findings are at least somewhat representative of this segment of the population in Bellevue.
- In response to the increasing diversity in the City, a new demographic question was added in 2001 asking if the respondent had immigrated to this country in the past ten years. Those who had more recently immigrated were found to more frequently have rated six or more house-

Respondents Rating 6 or More Household Problem Areas as Major or Moderate



hold problem areas as major or moderate than those who had not. In the 2005 survey, this was also true. Three in ten respondents (33%) indicated someone immigrated to this county in the past ten years and rated six or more household issues as being major or moderate compared to 10% who had not. This may be because new immigrants encounter tremendous stresses when settling in a new culture.

- Respondents living in a household that earns an income of less than \$20,000 is the subgroup with the highest percentage rating six or more household problem areas as major or moderate (43%), compared to just 3% whose incomes are \$75,000 or greater.

Did Respondents Needing Help Look for and Find Help?

For many, the next step after realizing there is a problem is looking for help. Forty-six percent (89 people) of those responding to the phone survey in 2005 who experienced at least one major or moderate household problem reported that they sought assistance for that problem. As the pie chart shows below, those who sought help, 10% (nine people) indicated that they found the help they needed for some of the problem areas, and 66% (59 people) indicated they had found the help they needed for all problem areas. Twenty-four percent (27 people) did not find the help they needed.

In the 2001 and 2003 surveys, a slightly lower percentage (40% in both years), reported that they sought assistance for a major or moderate problem. Interestingly, in 2003, the percentage of people who sought help and found it for all of their problems was less (57%, 54 people) than in 2005. This might indicate that in 2005, community agencies are getting better at advertising their services, or that people are becoming more educated about where to look for help. In 2005, less than a quarter (24%) of those who looked for help didn't find it. This is lower than in 2001 and 2003 when 28% and 29%, respectively, did not find help for any of their problems. No comparable data is available from surveys prior to 2001, as previous surveys' responses were coded differently.

Various subgroups were more likely to report seeking help for problematic issues. These

include: women, respondents who experienced six or more problems at a moderate or major level, those who live with three or more other people, and public assistance recipients. Of note, but not surprisingly, single-parent households report looking for help significantly more often than did single-adult households. However, sample sizes are very small for both of these groups and caution should be used when making inferences about the population these groups represent.

Issues for Which Assistance Seekers Found Help

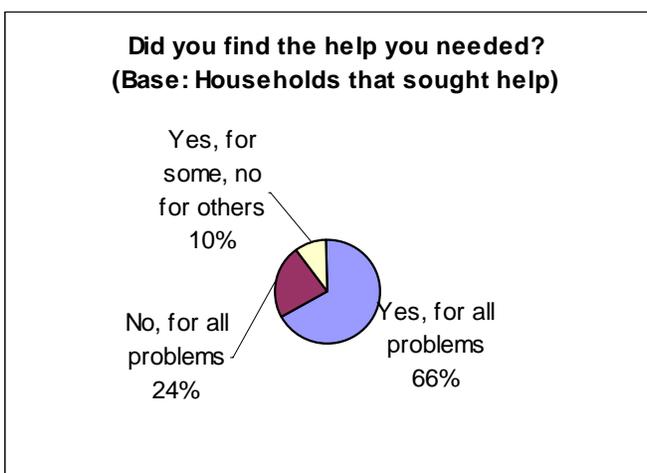
Respondents who indicated that they found help for some or all of their problems were asked to identify the issue or issues for which they found help. Of the 68 respondents who found help for their problems, most indicated they received help for mental health counseling or other issues (37%), or help with medical issues, insurance or bills (19%). The table on the next page shows the other issues for which help was found.

Where Did Bellevue Residents Look for Help with Household Problems?

Bellevue residents were asked in the phone survey where they had found help with some or all of their problems. Of the 68 respondents who answered this question, almost half (49%) reported health care providers as their first choice, closely followed by family members, friends, or neighbors (44%). Others listed were mental health counselors or therapists, human services agencies, schools, human services and faith community organizations. These responses were similar to those in 2003, though at that time more people mentioned family members more often than health care providers.

Role of Faith-based Organizations in Providing Help

In 2005, almost a quarter of the respondents to the phone survey stated that they received help from a church, synagogue or temple. In a survey completed by a dozen representatives of faith communities on the Eastside, overwhelmingly, the top services provided were food, rental assistance, and payments for utilities and emergency assistance, including gas and car repairs. The top services requested were similar, as most of their



Issue for which Assistance Seekers Found Help <i>Note: May total more than 100% due to allowance of multiple responses</i>	% of Respondents (n=68)
- Mental Health Counseling Or Other Issues	37%
- Medical Issues / Bills or Medical Insurance Coverage	19%
- Financial Assistance	12%
- Elderly Assistance	10%
- Family Health - domestic violence, divorce, parenting, etc.	9%
- Drug / Alcohol Problems / Addiction	7%
- Employment Assistance	7%
- Housing	6%
- Education or School Issues	4%
- Dental Issues (bills or dental insurance coverage)	3%
- Childcare	3%
- Transportation	3%
- Assistance for Disabled People	3%
- Legal Assistance	1%
- Assistance for non-English Speaking Residents	1%
- Other	3%

programs were developed after hearing about community needs. In addition, many of the surveys indicated that faith communities supported a number of existing human services agencies in the community, such as Jewish Family Service, or Congregations for the Homeless, with volunteers and donations. This indicates that, as expected, the faith-based communities contribute an enormous amount of basic services to assist those in need. Many of these services are rarely inventoried and counted as part of the safety net in the community.

"Often people will come to Hopelink when they do not know where else to go. They seek financial assistance for car repair, rental assistance, food, and other emergency situations."
Provider Survey-Hopelink Family Development Program

For What Problems Could They Not Find Help?

In the 2005 phone survey, 30 of the respondents who reported one or more household problems stated that they could not find help for some or all of their problems, compared to 40 respondents in 2003. As the table on the next page shows, in 2005 the three most frequently mentioned issues for which respondents could not find help were medi-

cal bills or medical insurance coverage, employment assistance and mental health counseling or other issues. Interestingly, these issues are related to several of the top tier problems rated in the survey as major or moderate household problems. Also of note is that respondents reported finding help for mental health and medical issues while for some respondents, this was the issue cited as being the most difficult.

Findings from the provider and consumer surveys and key informant interviews about gaps in services were consistent with the phone surveys. Transportation, financial assistance, and help with medical bills or insurance were among the top household problems listed by those sources. In addition, some providers mentioned that consumers had trouble finding affordable housing, affordable childcare, English-as-a-Second-Language classes, and legal assistance.

Level of Satisfaction with Assistance Received

Respondents who found help were also asked how satisfied they were with the assistance they received. Eighty-eight percent of respondents rating this question were either very satisfied (57%) or somewhat satisfied (31%). In 2003, slightly more respondents were very satisfied (60%) and slightly fewer were somewhat satisfied (27%).

Issue for Which Assistance Seekers Could Not Find Help <i>Note: May total more than 100% due to allowance of multiple responses</i>	% of Respondents (n=30)
- Medical Issues / Bills or Medical Insurance Coverage	27%
- Employment Assistance	27%
- Mental Health Counseling or Other Issues	17%
- Childcare	13%
- Financial Assistance (Paying for Bills)	13%
- Family Health (domestic violence, divorce, parenting, etc.)	10%
- Dental Issues (bills or dental insurance coverage)	7%
- Assistance for Disabled People	7%
- Housing	7%
- Transportation	7%
- Legal Assistance	7%
- Elderly Assistance	3%
- Assistance for non-English Speaking Residents	3%
- Drug / Alcohol Problems / Addiction	3%
- Education or School Issues	3%
- Other	3%

Barriers to Accessing Help

What prevents people in Bellevue from accessing human services when they need help? In 2005, the main barriers identified by focus groups, consumer and phone survey respondents, provider surveys, and key informant interviews all have some common themes and are very similar to those listed in past years of the *Needs Update*.

Cost and Ineligibility for Services

As shown in the table below, cost and ineligibility barriers were mentioned frequently in all surveys and interviews. In the phone survey, inability to access services due to cost was the barrier with the greatest

number of mentions in 1997 (25%), 1999 (32%), 2001 (28%), and 2003 (23%). In 2005, cost as a barrier was mentioned in two ways:

being unable to pay (20%) and, specifically, cost of or lack of health insurance coverage (10%). In the consumer survey, over 50% of respondents said that being unable to pay for services was the top barrier.

Both providers and consumers offered examples of those who are barely making ends meet yet are above the threshold to be eligible for childcare subsidies, mental health services, after-school care, prescription or other healthcare coverage. Some federal or state subsidies have decreased or been eliminated, so people on the "bubble" can't get help. Many agencies cannot serve additional

Top Five Barriers Mentioned in 2005					
	Focus Groups	Phone Surveys	Consumer Surveys	Provider Surveys	Key Informant Interviews
Transportation			x	x	x
Cost	x	x	x	x	x
Language	x			x	x
Not eligible		x	x		
Don't know where to find help	x	x			

"Cost is becoming a factor. When a family qualifies for services at the lowest income levels, many resources still require a fee."
Provider Survey-Bellevue School District, Family Connections Centers

clients, or may serve them with fewer resources due to these funding issues.

Lack of Information About Resources

In 2005, one-third of those phone survey respondents who could not find help for some or all of their problems reported that it was because they didn't know where to find help. This is somewhat less than the 45% in 2003 who reported this barrier. It is difficult to speculate why there was such a difference between the two survey years, but anecdotal information obtained from focus groups, providers, and interviews indicates that this area is increasingly more challenging despite efforts to simplify ways to get information out to those who need it. Of the 43 providers that completed a survey about trends and barriers, almost half reported that not knowing where to look for help was a problem for their clients. In the consumer survey, this was the third highest rated barrier. Some of the reasons given for the lack of information access include:

- Not enough information: Sometimes human services programs have limited funds for marketing to get the word out, or, due to program cuts, limited staff at their sites available to answer questions. Some consumers have trouble finding out how to access public funding for which they may be eligible.
- Sometimes information is available, but consumers need more support from an advocate to "walk them through" the process or make the contacts for them.
- Lack of time to obtain services was also listed as a barrier. As one provider succinctly described some of her ESL students: "Too many hours of work required to make a living wage and no time to receive services."¹

Language Barriers

Bellevue is becoming much more diverse. For example, in the 2005 consumer survey, *not being*

able to speak, read or write in the English language was a major or moderate problem for almost half of respondents. Over 60% of respondents completed the survey in a language other than English. Similarly, the number of people who completed the phone survey in languages other than English increased from 21 in 2003 to 31 in 2005. But what happens when materials about services are not available in someone's native language? The result for many is less access to both basic needs and activities that help them feel more a part of the community.

"We are seeing more clients who are indigent or working poor and need food stamps, housing, vocational training, assistance in their efforts to apply for work, or medical attention. Because we cannot meet these needs we do provide a lot more case management by seeing that our clients are referred to appropriate human service providers in the area."

Provider Survey-Therapeutic Health Services

In 2005 surveys, very similar to 2003, providers consistently reported that more of their clients have limited English proficiency and therefore are not able to succeed in a variety of critical areas — employment, finding healthcare, housing, being able to interact with their children's teachers at school, complying with court-ordered treatment. Many comment that they believe there are insufficient English-as-a-Second-Language classes to meet the need for those needing to learn English at all levels. There is a tremendous need to have signage in other languages, translated materials available, and staff who speak other languages available at all points in the service delivery system, to provide cultural and linguistically competent services.

Transportation

Comments about inadequate transportation being a barrier to accessing services were universal. In the 2005 provider survey, transportation was the highest rated barrier for accessing human services, more frequently mentioned than cost, similar to 2003

findings. Almost 70% of the providers who responded mentioned lack of transportation as a barrier for access to virtually every service area, from childcare to services for frail elderly. In the consumer survey, lack of transportation was the second highest mention.

Lack of transportation or lack of convenient bus routes figure heavily in not being able to find and retain a job, especially if there are young children in the family who also need to be transported to childcare or school. Focus groups, in particular those with seniors and youth, talked about the challenges of taking public transportation.

For those who have jobs with off-hours shifts or in more rural areas with fewer services, cars are their only source of transportation. For low-income people, finding money for gas and car repairs adds to the burden of their cost-of-living.

"Many of my students cannot use the buses because of the lack of maps and signage in Spanish. They do not know where the routes go. Many have two jobs and cannot wait for the buses to get to their jobs on time. So they buy cars that break down and cost money to repair."

Key Informant Interview-Poder Mas, Robinswood High School

Footnote

1. Ferrier, Alice. (2005, May). Hopelink Eastside Literacy Program. Personal Correspondence.