

Community Assessment

In 2004 our United Way commissioned The Joint Center for Policy Research of the Public Services Institute at Lorain County Community College to provide research assistance. The purpose of the study was to identify social service needs, to prioritize needs from a community perspective, and to establish a score card from which to continuously monitor community progress so that United Way could better serve and impact the community.

The research approach was community based and thorough in seeking to identify the greatest social service needs from multiple perspectives while also prioritizing those needs.

The multiple perspectives were obtained by:

- Scanning secondary data sources to identify needs when Lorain County is compared to state and national averages
- Engaging a large number of community leaders in the issue identification process
- Assessing needs from input received from Lorain County residents

Including all pertinent data and opinions in the assessment helped assure that the service course that United Way would follow targeted real world, Lorain County issues. Both one to one in depth interviews and small focus groups were employed with independent facilitators gathering the input. The 8 focus groups were particularly important in that they included all the county's geographic areas and multiple populations. The discussions explored issues' root causes, ideas, participant desires and motivations along with identified needs. This combination of personal interviews and group discussion was a dynamic process that both provided detailed information from which we could formulate a service strategy as well as a picture that revealed attitudes, values, and hopes of the community which we serve.

In addition to identifying needs, those who were interviewed and participated in focus groups were asked to prioritize needs. Both the needs and the prioritization were then presented to a 15 person community volunteer task force to review and cast in the form of a recommendation to the United Way Board for adoption. The task force phase of the assessment was equally as vigorous and in depth as the preceding ones with the final step being a full United Way Board of Directors analysis and acceptance of the report and task force recommendation. Once accepted, The Executive Director was charged with framing the results into a report to the community along with a service action plan. That report and action plan, titled the *2005 Impact Report*, was approved in May 2005 by the Board.

The *Report* mirrors the assessment results. It calls for United Way to achieve impact in the following priority need areas through programs that evidence collaboration, individual client and community goals, and the maintenance of the highest standards of performance. Those priority areas are:

- Caring for basic needs. This includes people in crisis and people with greatest needs
- Nurturing children and youth
- Strengthening families

The *2005 Impact Report* is outcome based, promising the consumer and donor alike, caring services, the use of best practices, accountability and transparency. Those were the characteristics which the assessment identified as service imperatives. They were also the qualities which the assessment reported were already United Way of Greater Lorain County trademarks.

The full Impact Report can be found on the United Way website: www.LorainCountyUnitedWay.org

