

ALABAMA COUNCIL ON HUMAN RELATIONS, INC.
2021 COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT - LEE COUNTY, ALABAMA

MISSION STATEMENT

The Alabama Council on Human Relations, Inc. is a private non-profit organization, funded exclusively for, educational and eleemosynary (charitable) purposes that partners with persons and agencies in the community, on behalf of the low income population. The goal of ACHR is to serve those persons with low incomes and the promotion and implementation of programs that improve economic conditions, education and racial relationships for all people, resulting in increased self-sufficiency and overall improvement in their quality of life.

CONTENTS

ABOUT ALABAMA COUNCIL ON HUMAN RELATIONS, INC.	2
METHODOLOGY - COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT	3
Qualitative Data -- 2021 Survey Tools	4
Focus Groups	5
THE AREAS ACHR SERVES – LEE COUNTY PROFILE	5
Auburn	6
Opelika	8
Impressive Economic Development but . . .	10
FOCUS GROUPS AND SURVEYS, COMINED ONLINE SOURCE DATA	11
Focus Groups	11
Survey Data – Quantitative Data	12
IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF KEY COUNTY NEEDS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN AREA	13
A. Income	14
B. Jobs	18
C. Housing	22
D. Transportation	26
E. Health/Dental/Nutrition-Fitness/Disability-Special Needs	29
1) Health	29
2) Dental	33
3) Nutrition/Fitness and Lifestyle	33
4) Disability-special needs	37
F. Education	38
G. Child Care	40

ABOUT ALABAMA COUNCIL ON HUMAN RELATIONS, INC.

ACHR has been helping families since 1954. In the early years, ACHR's community outreach revolved around the fight for civil rights, with particular focus on voting and housing issues.

In 1965, ACHR was awarded one of the original Project Head Start grants (Lee County). Now ACHR administers Head Start and Early Head Start in both Lee and rural Russell Counties. Some programs, such as the Child Care Food Program, and various housing programs, serve several counties. Other programs, such as the emergency and energy assistance programs, serve only Lee County residents.

Currently, more than 180 employees provide a variety of services to more than 3,000 children and families annually from a central office, three centers serving children and families, and other facilities.

ACHR has served as Alabama's CSBG provider for Lee County since 1981. ACHR staff works diligently to ensure that its programs are in accordance with the current needs of residents of Lee County living low-incomes as shown in the Community Needs Assessment as well as its Strategic Plan and the CSBG Work Plan. ACHR staff reassesses programs and needs at least every three years and based on the information gathered, plans and makes changes as needed.

The agency's two Lee County program centers are located about seven and a half miles apart in the county's largest and most populated cities—Auburn and Opelika. Frankie B. King Center (FBK), named in memory of the late Frankie B. King, ACHR's longtime, beloved Family Services Coordinator. FBK houses administrative offices and eight Head Start classrooms. Because though it is in Auburn, FBK is near the Opelika border, and so houses our various emergency services programs, including energy assistance, housing counseling, and weatherization.

Before COVID was active in our area, the center hosted a variety of forums and events, board and administrative activities, fatherhood meetings, staff training, community conferences, and other functions.

METHODOLOGY - COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Data and information for ACHR's Lee County CNA were generated via a variety of methods and instruments from a variety of sources.

On line resources included information from: The Alabama Department of Labor, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, USA Quick Facts, the U.S. Census Bureau, County Health Rankings & Roadmaps of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, Feeding America, the East Alabama Food Bank, StatisticalAtlas.com, Voices for America's Children/the Alabama Kids Count, Lee County the Cities of Auburn and Opelika, and local and state media.

Additionally, we employed a series of surveys and focus groups, as detailed below. This year, due to COVID, our survey numbers have decreased. Most surveys and all focus groups were done on line (surveys linked through our website, focus groups done using Zoom. We tried to involve most of our clients by doing things like offering tablets to complete surveys at drive through parent orientation for Head Start, Early Head Start. We note that the greatest return on surveys was the Emergency Needs Survey, returned on paper along with signed applications. Even so the data gathered is a useful up-date and is not greatly different from that in previous surveys, so we are confident of our conclusions.

It is difficult to write a Community Needs Assessment this year. Much of that difficulty is due to COVID. It starts with census data, which was impacted by COVID in terms of surveys returned and then delays in getting information out. The Mayor of Auburn was quoted in recent news article as saying (despite its considerable growth) that the number of citizens in Auburn were undercounted. The surveys and focus groups ACHR did were done in March through May of 2021

to give time to analyze and write. Then it looked like COVID in Lee County was lessening to the point that things would be relatively normal when school started. That is not the case. Instead, at this writing several local schools have had to close due to COVID. There have been fights with school boards over masks mandates in our area to the point that some school board members have or are considering resigning. Yet, the results of “let parents/students decide” (one system) compared to mask mandates (two systems) are clear. The one system has had to close multiple schools. The other two have closed classrooms but thus far not schools. Many other areas, as choices business are making are also different. Given all that, would the results of our survey and focus groups be the same if we were to do them this month? What we have is what we have, but we will continue to listen to our families and clients and act accordingly.

Qualitative Data -- 2021 Survey Tools

We designed our survey tools (Community Needs Assessment Surveys, Emergency Services Needs Surveys, Parent Satisfaction Surveys, Staff Satisfaction Surveys, and COVID Surveys) to solicit both qualitative and quantitative data. Variations of the following were employed in conjunction with all of the surveys to generate qualitative data:

1. What are the most serious problems/issues in this community?
2. What services are hardest to find/access in this community?
3. What are your most significant needs and what are the most significant barriers to having those needs met?

Type of Survey:	Number of Responses:	Solicitors:
2021 Community Needs Assessment - Participant Survey	143 Surveys	Solicited responses in a wide range of life-quality categories to gain first-person insight into clients’ status and needs
2021 Parent Satisfaction Survey	24 Surveys	Solicited responses from participants in ACHR Child Development Programs to rate their level of satisfaction with services received

2021 Community Needs Assessment – Groups and Public officials Survey	21 Surveys <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 community based • 7 edu. institution • 1 faith based • 2 private sector • 2 public sector 	Solicited responses from community collaborators and partners on residents with low incomes' needs from the unique intervener-assister perspective
2021 Community Needs Assessment – ACHR Staff Survey	17 Surveys	Solicited responses in a wide range of life-quality categories to gain first-person insight into our staffs status and needs
2021 Emergency Services Needs Survey	360 Surveys	Solicited responses from recipients of ACHR Emergency Services Department services to gain first-person insight into clients' status and needs
2021 Focus Groups	6 Groups	Six focus groups consisting of ACHR clients and community members assembled diverse community residents and service providers to discuss county needs and impact of COVID 19.
COVID 19 Impact and Moving Forward Surveys	222	Solicited responses from participants of ACHR programs in Lee county on how the COVID 19 pandemic has affected their household.
2020-21 ACHR Staff Survey	93 Surveys	Solicited responses from ACHR staff whose duties place them on the front line of client interaction and program services delivery

Focus Groups

ACHR staff held seven focus groups with ACHR clients and community members. The focus groups ranged in size from two to 25 participants. Participants were asked a variety of questions about the needs in the community; additional services that they would like to see in the community; and how COVID impacted them personally and/or financially. The groups met for no longer than 30 minutes each. Discussions about these topics resulted from the questions and the results are reflected in this document.

THE AREA ACHR SERVES - LEE COUNTY PROFILE

ACHR is based in Lee County, Alabama. Lee County is located on the Georgia line in east-central Alabama and measures 607.54 square miles—much of it dominated by the Auburn-Opelika Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Lee County experienced a 15.2% population growth from 2010 to 2017—more than seven times the growth rate of Alabama and almost three times the growth rate of the U.S. over the same period and in March 2018 in an article on *al.com* entitled, was spotlighted as the second fastest growing county in the state. The 2020 census data lists Lee County's population as 174,241 growth of almost 10,000 people in a year; the population density is 288 persons per square mile.



Major Communities in Lee County: Auburn and Opelika

Auburn

Called the “Loveliest Village on the Plains,” Auburn, is a driving force in the growth of Lee County, with a population increase of 43% in ten years to 76,143 people in 2020 (nearly 10,000 in a single year – which was most of the growth in Lee County as a whole. Auburn is home to Auburn University (AU)—an internationally-acclaimed institute of higher learning oft-lauded for its Schools of Engineering, Architecture, and Agriculture.

On the Auburn University campus, the sprawling Donald E. Davis Arboretum has a collection of native plants. The Jonathan Bell Lovelace Museum documents the university's athletics history. The Jule Collins Smith Museum has art from the 18th–21st centuries and south of Auburn is Chewacla State Park with trails and a large lake. The arboretum and the Jule Collins Smith Museum are free and so are good resources for all families. There are fees to visit Chewacla,

but the City of Auburn provides many parks at no charge, including Keisel with wonderful walking trails and Hickory Dickey, which is a “destination” park.

AU’s campus currently has a student enrollment of 30,000 (28,290 in previous CNA) and features dozens of class and office buildings, dormitories, a sports complex, and Jordan Hare; an 87,451-seat stadium (one of the nation’s largest on-campus football stadiums).

AU’s ascension from yesteryear’s “Cow College” moniker to a prestigious university has not been without its regrettable consequences. The once considerable investment of AU faculty time, expertise, and accompanying student volunteers in assisting with the needs of the local low-income community has waned in the more recent time-consuming directives to “publish or perish” and other institution-focused demands. One casualty was ACHR’s 28-year collaboration with AU’s Psychological Services Department to provide screening and mental health services to Head Start. That once mutually beneficial association ended due to the reorientation of the department away from school-based services toward clinical services and the demands of research. Another casualty was ACHR’s relationship with an architecture professor whose students helped plan and implement projects around and in our facilities.

One of Auburn University’s most recent endeavors is a \$94.5 million dollar culinary education center and hotel which will include a boutique hotel and restaurant which should open later this year. It will have a professionally credited hospitality program. This is wonderful for the university and good for a certain segment of our community – but again, Auburn is moving to a level that does not lend itself to helping others.

The university dominates the City of Auburn, although not as much as it once did. Between 1994 and 2016 Auburn’s investment in industrial development resulted in announcements of nearly 6,800 jobs created and approximately \$1.4 billion in capital investment. Auburn has continued, since then, to add industry. As with many communities, Auburn has lost factory jobs

to other countries where labor is less costly. However, the leaders are proactive and so far have managed to replace companies that have failed. Many of the newer companies have high tech jobs and less use for non-skilled labor.

Opelika

Opelika, which abuts Auburn such that one does not notice where each stops or starts has a population estimated at 30,995 in 2020 (a 17% increase in 10 years with about 4,500 additional persons. Though having had a large number of persons with wealth due to factory ownership, it was once mostly a blue-collar town. Opelika now blends a quaintness of yesteryear and a dawning of a new era of growth and modernization.

Opelika—“Alabama’s 1st GIG City”—was the state’s first city to deploy a 100% fiber network that offers up to a gig of internet speed. In addition, since January 2005, Opelika’s economic development efforts have generated industry investment and existing industry expansion that total more than \$1 billion. The area outside Opelika has added several large factories in the past few years, most centered on auto supply and some located a considerable distance. Some are in West Point Georgia 30 miles from Opelika, which is a challenge to persons with low incomes due to transportation cost and family scheduling.

Opelika offers Southern Union State Community College (SUSC), which was birthed in 1993 by the merging of Alabama Community College System Board of Trustees, Southern Union State Junior College and Opelika State Technical College. Today, the college serves more than 5,000 students each semester from its campuses in Wadley, Valley and Opelika. Its three-faceted educational emphasis is on academic classes that transfer and or end with an AA, technical programs for specialized career competencies and health sciences programs for specialized training in the health field. SUSC offers some on line classes, which can be a help people with jobs who want to attend classes if they have connectivity – and if needed classes are offered on line.

Opelika is the home of “Tiger Town”, the largest shopping area in Lee County. Tiger Town, at the intersection of Interstate 85 and highway 280, offers over 1 million square feet of freestanding retail space; housing 92 retail stores, 20 restaurants, 7 health and beauty salons, 6 hotels, a 13 screen movie theater, several banks, two medical care facilities, dental and eyewear offices and two grocery stores.

Opelika also offers a variety of small, local business, including boutiques and pubs, many of which are in Opelika’s revitalized downtown.

Years ago, entrepreneur and philanthropist Jimmy Wright started a small neighborhood grocery in a neighborhood where there were and are many residents living with low income. Gradually, Mr. Wright added square footage in the store as well as services to benefit those in need. He started a free van service to transport customers. He went to Washington on behalf of the SNAP program. He started an online shopping service (before Walmart, Kroger etc. did so) for those who are physically unable or too busy to shop at the store. Thousands of grocery items are available for selection online and for a reasonable cost customers can choose to have their orders delivered to their home or opt for curbside pickup. In addition, according to a July 2018 *oanow.com* article, “Wright’s Market Starts Program for Food-Stamp Recipients,” Wright has initiated a Double Up Food Bucks Program Wednesday, which gives SNAP recipients 50% off of their purchases of fresh fruits and vegetables. Wright’s was one of 10 pilot program stores in the nation testing the use of the online SNAP program. Mr. Wright, a true asset to the community as a whole an especially to those living with low incomes, is beginning to collaborate on various program to improve health and nutrition with nurses and dieticians from East Alabama Medical Center and with ACHR’s registered dietician.

Opelika’s economic and industrial development in recent years is befitting a city with designs on bigger things ahead.

Impressive County Economic Development, But...

The Auburn-Opelika MSA is one of the fastest growing in the nation. It ranked 17th in Milken Institute's 2021 "Best-Performing Small Cities." Milken determines its ranking on the bases of job growth, wage growth, short-term job growth, high-tech GDP growth, high-tech GDP concentration, and number of high-tech industries. Milken is just beginning to rate affordable housing, which the City of Auburn has been and badly needs to work on, as well as access to broad band. These two items are concerns in both Auburn and Opelika.

Milken said that Auburn-Opelika's biggest assets are: 1) a highly educated workforce that supports a more diverse local labor market; and 2) major industries that provide stable employment. Milken added that Auburn-Opelika's biggest liability are its "low wage levels that may deter graduates from staying in the area." Auburn-Opelika also scored ranking in Forbes' 2019 "The Best Small Places for Business and Careers" rating, rating 17 in job growth and 37 in education.

The unemployment rate in Lee County July 2021 was 2.8%. There are help-wanted signs in many locations – including at ACHR. One concern is be matching skill levels and ability to be consistently present to available jobs. Another has become starting salaries – which are both a positive and a negatives. McDonalds is offering \$11 an hour to start, Target and several similar employers in our area are offering \$15 an hour.

COVID continues to play a huge part in uncertainty in this area. Only last week, we read in the local paper that Mrs. Story's Dairy Bar, which has been in business for nearly 70 years and has been handed down through the generations, was closing, possibly for good. Why? They have staff out with COVID and cannot find others to hire. The frustrated owner was quoted as saying, "Nobody wants to work anymore." It is unlikely that Ms. Story's Dairy Bar can pay \$15/hour.

Both the unemployment rate and the salaries businesses are having to offer cause a number of concerns. These salaries entice some people back into the work force after (and currently during) COVID, but they make it a considerable challenge for small businesses and non-profits like ACHR to employ enough quality staff.

There are other concerns. Employers offering that amount expect commensurate, consistent work, and not everyone has the skills, nor the support system to keep those jobs.

Other Communities in Lee County

Lee County has several other incorporated communities; population for each of these currently is estimated. Because of boarder creep, Phenix City (population 36,487), is partly in Lee County, with the majority of in Russell County. This, of course, causes some confusion. Smith's Station, population (population 5,391) is nearby. Both are "bedroom" communities of Columbus Georgia. Residents tend to work in the Columbus Georgia area, but many work in Opelika/Auburn. Other incorporated areas are Loachapoka (191), Notasulga (1,011; partly in Macon County) and Waverly (population 179: partly in Chambers County).

FOCUS GROUPS AND SURVEYS, COMBINED ONLINE SOURCE DATA

Focus Groups

ACHR staff held seven focus groups via Zoom with ACHR clients and community members. Group size ranged from two to 25 participants. Participants were asked about the needs in the community, additional services that they would like to see in the community, and how COVID impacted them personally and/or financially. The groups met for no longer than 30 minutes each. Discussions about these topics resulted from the questions.

The biggest community needs identified during the focus groups were: lack of affordable housing, not enough afterschool activities and inexpensive and safe places for children to play and not enough transportation services. However, many participants (and some who commented in

services) identified and commented on other needs such as lack of good paying jobs with benefits and not enough training programs and problems within the community such as discrimination and lack of trust.

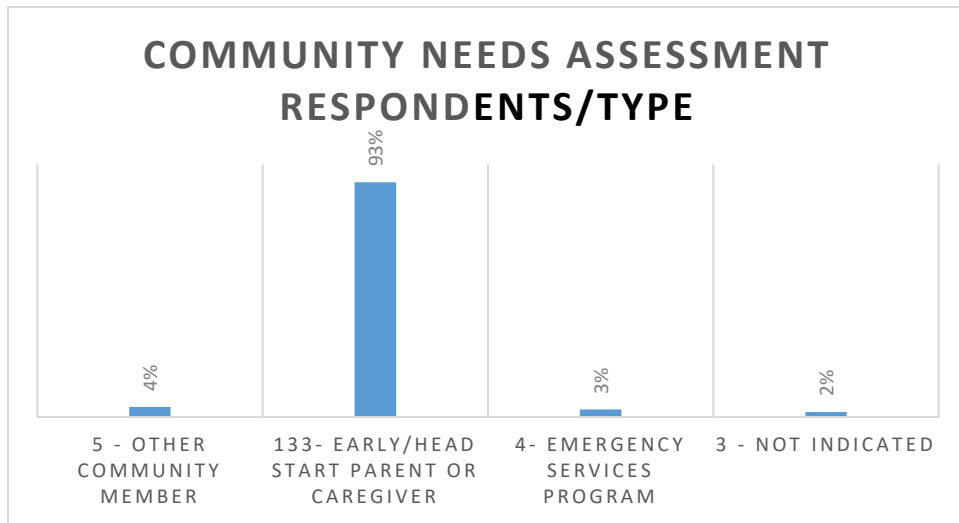
Focus group participants were asked to highlight additional services that they would like to see in the community. A frequent response was the need for more after school programs for young children and adolescents. The discussion surrounding the need for this service included these comments: *“Kids need better mentors and need places to go afterschool to get off the street”*; *“We need free and affordable activities for children and families to do together”*; *“We need a lot more programs to help children stay in school and off the street.”*

As expected, the majority of the participants in the focus groups stated that their household was affected by COVID 19. Many said they were forced to stay home when their children were quarantined from school which made it harder to work and thus affected them financially. Others stated that they could not find a job due to day cares closing and the inability to find child care. A few of the participants commented on family members getting sick and the overall “scared” mentality that effected them and members of their household. Only one participant commented, *“Honestly, COVID did not affect my family. I was still able to work and provide for my daughter.”*

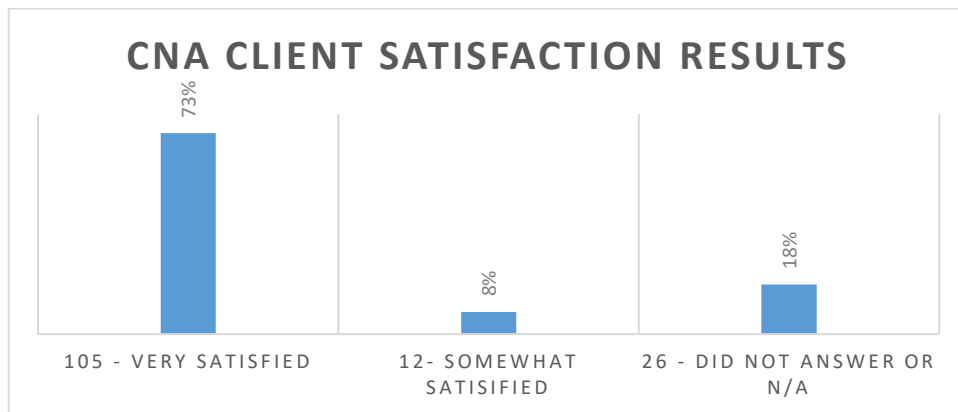
Survey Data -- Quantitative Data

Our 2021 CNA provided opportunities for program clients to weigh through surveys on needs, concerns and the quality of ACHR programs and services. We also surveyed ACHR-CDP parents at the end of the 2020-21 school year.

Following is combined data from those two surveys for client satisfaction with various programs. Given that at the time the survey was done our community had been coping with COVID for more than a year, the results gave our creative in finding solutions to continue services, hard-working, staff a much-needed boost.



- 95% of those using ACHR child services (e.g., Head Start, Early Head Start, Transportation, Child Care, Family Day Care Home, Dental/Hearing/Vision Screening) said they are satisfied (73% very satisfied).
- 97% of those using ACHR adult & family services (e.g., Sunshine Shop, Energy Assistance, LIFE (nutrition counseling & exercise), Fatherhood Program, Home Based Programs, Housing Counseling, Weatherization, Income Tax Assistance, Low Income Housing) said they are satisfied.



IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF KEY COUNTY NEEDS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN SERVICE AREA

ACHR produces a comprehensive directory of programs and services. The focus is on resources in our area available at little or no cost. Our 53-page “Branching Out to the Community” lists and briefly describes services available through dozens of assistance providers and resources

covering a wide range of need categories. The directory has been a handy, go-to tool for our participants in their search for resources and for staff in making targeted, timely client referrals.

In 2019, when our website was updated and made more user-friendly, we created a tab (“Community Resource-Branching Out” under news/information) on our website where a downloadable (PDF) copy can easily be found. We update this as the resource booklet updates. We shared the links to this resource with all Early/Head Start families and with our community partners who used to request paper copies. Representatives from various community agencies have told us they frequently use this resource manual.

In our review of the large amount of data and other information, such as comments made in focus groups gathered in conjunction with our 2021 CNA, the following emerged as priority needs areas:

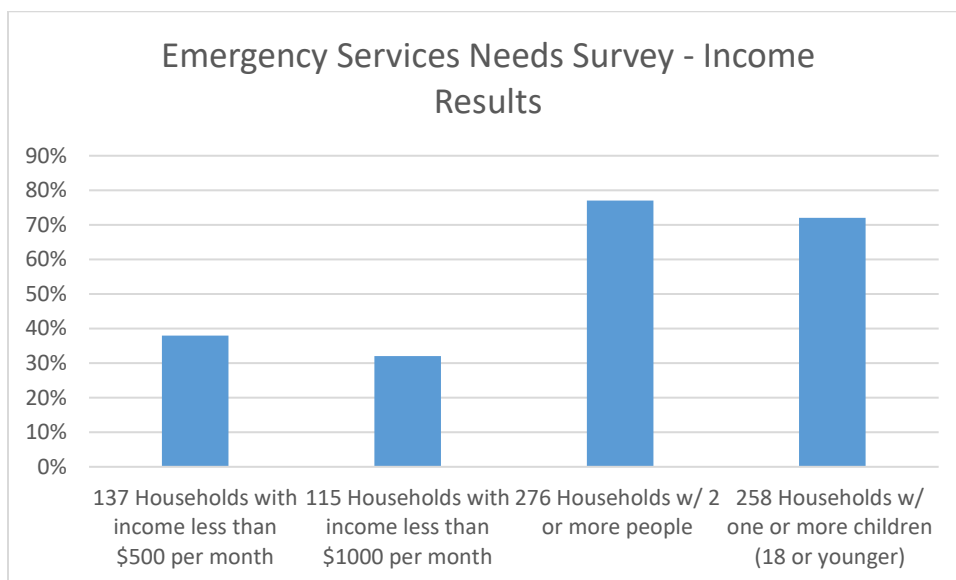
1. Income/Jobs
2. Housing
3. Transportation
4. Health
5. Education/childcare
6. Community concerns such as lack of trust and discrimination follows closely.

A. Income

Although Lee County is known as the second fastest growing county in the state, according to ACHR’s 2018 Client Survey, clients’ number one concern is the lack of income. Lee County’s per capita income is \$ \$27,860 (2019); \$24,951 2018 CNA). Depending on the source, between 15.8% and 19.6% of residents live with an income at or below poverty.

The median annual income for Lee County residents without a high school degree is \$18,075 (\$17,034 in previous CNA). Earnings rise to \$26,828 (\$26,323 in previous CNA) for

high school graduates, to \$32,238 (\$32,095 in previous CNA) for those with some college, to \$42,697 (\$43,665 in previous CNA) for college graduates, and to \$57,766 for those with a graduate or professional degree. (Note: Data from 2018 CNA because complete current data not yet available. We believe the comparisons would be similar.) The connection between income and education is unmistakable. From our August 2021 Head Start Program Information Report, of 266 Head Start families, 99 (35%) reported no one in the family was employed; 69 (25%) reported the highest education in the household was less than a High School diploma or GED.



Making \$1,000 or less per month comes to \$12,000 or less for an entire year, more than \$3,000 less than what someone earning minimum wage makes in a year! Even more disturbing is that 137 households responding to the survey *reported a monthly income of \$500 or less.*

Related comments on the surveys included:

- *“not enough jobs paying for work and too many manufacturers jobs that works you to death for little pay, it is hard living here for the pay and cost of living”*
- *“The largest problem in our community is that everything is over-priced. Its hard trying to live in a community where places to live are now the cost of a car payment or a mortgage.*
- *“everything is overpriced”*

Client Income Results (Results calculated from one or multiple of the following - CNA Participant survey, Emergency Needs Survey, Rental Assistance Survey & COVID Survey)

48% (51% in previous CNA) of household respondents said household bills aren't always paid on time
28% of household respondents said they "need help with things such as food, housing, utility bill, clothing, etc." at least monthly
25% of household respondents said they aren't satisfied with the way their money is managed in their household
18% of household respondents said they need/want more information about money management
16% of household respondents said confusing consumer practices (e.g., payday loans, etc.) is a problem in the county.
10% of household respondents said there isn't enough financial/budget training and information available in the county; 2% said what is available is poor quality; 3% said they can't access what is available.

Participant responses related to COVID and Income

73% of household respondents said that they have received at least one stimulus check.
46% of household respondents said that their monthly income has decreased due to economic shutdown during the COVID 19 pandemic. 21% said that it had decreased by \$300 or more monthly.
24% of household respondents received financial help from an outside agency (government organization, church, non-profit, etc.) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community Provider Respondents -- Income Results (CNA Community Provider Survey):

57% of respondents said confusing consumer practices (e.g., payday loans, etc.) is a problem in the county; 28% said it is a big problem
52% of respondents said there isn't enough financial/budget training and information available in the county
38% of respondents said there isn't enough consumer skills training & information available in county

Staff Respondents -- Income Results (Results Calculated from the CNA Staff Survey):

73% staff respondents said confusing consumer practices (e.g., payday loans, etc.) is a problem in the county; 47% said it is a big problem
12% staff respondents said there isn't enough consumer skill training and information available in the county. 24% said that what is available is not accessible. 18% said that it is poor quality.

Insufficient good paying jobs with good benefits, and the related not enough training programs, also came up during the focus groups. Community providers and ACHR staff see

consumer practices and so forth as a larger problem than do participants, but when 25% of respondents say they are not satisfied with the way their household income is managed, we need to again try to provide financial education.

Income Outcomes:

1. Through ACHR's Emergency Services Program, clients can receive assistance with
 - a. heating bills January through April and with cooling bills during May through September, taking some of the edge off clients' financial strains through utility assistance.

In 2020, during COVID, the Emergency Services LIHEAP Heating Assistance Program assisted 26 additional households compared to pre-COVID 2019. The LIHEAP Heating Program runs from January-April, but due to COVID it was extended to June. Due to this extension, we were able to assist an additional 78 households.

In April of 2020, Lee County had an unemployment rate of 12.4%. Many Lee County residents did not receive their unemployment benefits until July 2020, so our LIHEAP Cooling Program experienced a decrease in households we assisted. We assisted 151 households in 2019 pre-COVID than 2020.

In 2021, the Emergency Services LIHEAP Heating Assistance Program experienced a decrease in assistance of 501 households from 2020. We assisted only 823 households on this program. This decrease can be attributed to various reasons; additional unemployment weekly (\$600) stimulus checks households received due to the 12.4% Lee County unemployment rate in April 2020 (dropped to 2.3% in April 2021); 3 additional stimulus payments households received (\$600, \$1200 and \$1400 with an additional \$1400 per child); an abundance of COVID funds awarded

- throughout the community, and the delay in receiving the LIHEAP grant (usually begins in January but we did not begin the program until March).
- b. Rental assistance during January through September, taking some of the edge off clients' financial strains through utility assistance. During 2020, the Emergency Services Program assisted 159 households with rental assistance through the CSBG COVID Rental Assistance and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program. These households reported due to COVID: 152 lost income, 102 lost employment, 133 experienced additional expenses and 106 contracted COVID.
 - c. Housing counseling during October through September experienced a decrease because group workshops were not offered due to COVID. We did see an increase in homeownership education.
2. Through ACHR's Weatherization Assistance Program, clients receive assistance in weatherizing their homes during October through September to reduce their utility cost and housing expenses. During the past year ACHR's Weatherization Assistance Program assisted 18 households.
 3. ACHR's S.T.E.P.S Program provides information to parents assists high school students in receiving mentoring to encourage them to finish high school and enroll in a degree program. In 2020 3 three students participated in one-one mentoring.

Some of the other area organizations that assist low-income residents with various income-related needs that staff refer participants to include: Salvation Army, United way of Lee County, Auburn United Methodist Church, and Church of the Highlands.

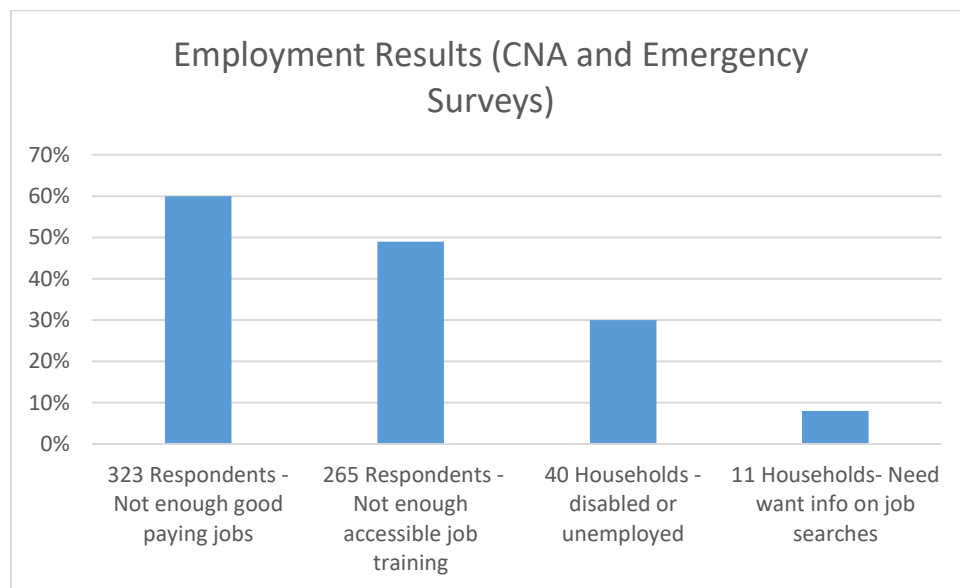
B. Jobs

Lee County's unemployment rate in July 2021 was 2.8% compared to 3.2% in Alabama and 3.0% in Russell County. In fact, with the exception of the COVID period last year (June 2020

was 7.3 in Lee, 7.7 in Alabama and 7.4% in Russell County) Lee County—like most of the rest of the state and nation—has been enjoying a lengthy stretch of low unemployment figures. In fact, the county’s unemployment had not risen above June 2017’s 4.5% until June 2018—partly due to the abrupt closing of Auburn’s Masterbrand Cabinets in June; forcing over 400 employees into unemployment. Currently (August 2021), businesses such as Target and McDonald’s are offering starting wages of \$13-\$15/hour, making it very difficult for us at ACHR to compete for staff.

According to the latest census data, 60.5% of Lee County’s overall 16+ population is in the civilian labor force, compared to the state’s 57.1%.

The labor market poses a unique set of challenges for those who are unskilled and/or under-educated. For this group, too often, the only employment available is minimum wage or part-time jobs that, rather than help raise them out of poverty, might just sink them ever deeper. Not having some college credits, or at least a high school diploma has effectively barred some people from employment. However, the extremely low employment rate is tipping that balance – but will it be for long enough for people to prove themselves as capable workers and retain those positions as persons who currently are out of the job force due to their fears of COVID return?



Client Job Results (Results calculated from one or multiple of the following - CNA Participant survey, Emergency Needs Survey, Rental Assistance Survey, and COVID Survey):

NOTE: Surveys collected between March and May of 2021. Since then, more businesses have reopened, but residents are still able to collect unemployment – which makes it harder for businesses to hire. Things are changing rapidly; it is difficult to accurately assess some needs.

45% (49% in previous CNA) of household respondents said that one or more adult living in the household is employed full time. 14% said one or more adult is employed part time.

42% of household respondents said that there is not enough *job training* available in the county. 16% said what is available is poor quality or not affordable.

20% of household respondents questioned said there *isn't enough employment/good paying jobs* available in the county; 10% said what is available is poor quality or not accessible to them.

8% of household respondents said they *need/want more information about job searching*.

COVID – related question/response

4% of household respondents said one or more adult in the household was laid off during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Community Provider Respondents -- Job Results (from Community Provider Survey):

33% of respondents said there isn't enough job training available in the county. 14% said that what is available is poor quality or not easily accessible.

52% of respondents said there isn't enough employment/ good paying jobs available in the county

Staff Respondents -- Job Results: (Results Staff Survey, and Staff Satisfaction Surveys):

53% of staff respondents said there isn't enough employment/good paying jobs available in the county; quality. 6% said what is available is poor quality.

41% of staff respondents said there isn't enough job training available in the county. 59% said what is available is poor quality, not affordable, or not easily accessible.

Alabama is one of five states that has not adopted a state minimum wage of its own so it adheres to the federal minimum wage of \$7.25. While the minimum wage will almost certainly be raised at some point, it is anyone's guess as to when and how much that will be.

The regrettable bottom line is that a full-time, year-round job at the current \$7.25 minimum wage pays just over \$15,000 a year. Of more concern, 28.3% of the entire Lee County

workforce has been making \$1,250 or less per month. Many of these low-paying county jobs are part-time and without benefits. And, we can't forget about those who are under-employed. It is estimated that upwards of 15% of the entire county workforce is under-employed. (This is 2018 data; was similar earlier this year; now changing.)

Auburn University and East Alabama Medical Center are, as they have been for many years, Lee County's top employers. Auburn University employs 5,326 full-time faculty and staff. East Alabama Medical Center employs over 3500. However, both workforces are majority professional staff, meaning that most positions go to persons with the requisite skills and education necessary to perform them (not usually to our participants living with low-incomes).

Job Outcomes:

1. ACHR offers training opportunities to persons with few skills and little work experience through its Head Start Bus Aide/Intern positions. Persons with a high school diploma or GED are hired/trained to ride the bus with Head Start children. In the process, all Bus Aides learn the importance of punctuality, learn to interface appropriately with children/parents, to do the required paperwork and so forth. In addition, between the morning and afternoon routes some are placed in positions in our centers where they learn additional skills. In most years, several Bus Aides gain enough skills that they are able to leave us for a better job; a plus for them and a minus for us, but staff is glad to do it.

Additionally ACHR offers training and educational support to our staff if they will be working in field. In 2020, twelve persons employed as entering Teacher Assistants obtained CDAs or AAs and therefore received a pay increase and some received promotions. Three additional persons that we know of who received training left the agency for a higher paying position.

2. As we receive referrals, ACHR partners with DHR which offers a JOBS welfare to work training program. The program provides services and works with parents who receive cash assistance and help finding employment. None this year due COVID.
3. ACHR also partners with SCSEP (Senior Community Services Employment Program) which provides community services and job based training for low income seniors. Currently ACHR is helping train three persons participating in this program.
4. ACHR partners with various community partners who provide job fairs to bring job hunters and employers together. For example, GoodWill Industries offers job fairs at least once a month, and ACHR staff circulate information about these and encourage clients to participate. Southern Union and Auburn University both offer job fairs at least once a year, and again, we encourage participation.
5. AlabamaWorks brings together state, educational, business, and service organizations in a unified network whose mission is to recruit, train, and empower a highly-skilled workforce that is driven by business and industry needs.
6. The Career Center, under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) offers clients job search and job training opportunities. Although some opportunities have disappeared, since those jobs are low paying such as support in attaining a Child Development Associate credential, other opportunities are available.

ACHR staff will continue to do everything we can to improve the income status of those we serve. We remain committed to being wise, responsible, dutiful stewards of the funding with which we are entrusted. We remain committed to doing everything we are trained, authorized and able to do to meet clients' immediate financial needs and assist them in their pursuit of longer-range financial goals and objectives on their journey to self-sufficiency.

Some other area organizations that assist low-income residents with various job needs: Achievement Center – Easter Seals, Alabama Dept. of Rehabilitation Services, East Alabama Services for the Elderly, Lee County Literacy Coalition, and the Christian Women’s Job Corps.

C. Housing

Housing costs are a major challenge for residents with low incomes. Approximately 62% (27% in previous CNA) of renters have a monthly rent payment of \$1,000 or more. Lee County renters have a median gross monthly rent of \$856, compared to the state’s \$792 and the nation’s \$1,097 (2019).

Over 71% of mortgagers have a monthly house note of \$1,000 or more and 23.7% have mortgages that eat up 30% or more of their total income.

The median value of owner-occupied housing in Lee County is \$169,300 (\$156,400 in previous CNA), compared to the state’s median value of \$142,700 (\$128,500 in previous CNA) and the nation’s \$329,000.

According to the latest census data, 18-21% of all owner- and renter-occupied housing units are substandard. A substandard housing unit is defined as having at least one of the following conditions: 1) lacking complete plumbing or kitchen facilities (1%); 2) with 1.01 or more occupants per room (3%); or 3) Severe cost burden is defined as monthly housing costs (including utilities) that exceed 50% of monthly income (17%).



Client Housing Results (Results calculated from one or multiple of the following - CNA Participant survey, Emergency Needs Survey, Rental Assistance Survey and COVID Survey):

56% (63% in previous CNA) of household respondents said they rent their current residence
18% (17% in previous CNA) households questioned said they own their current residence
22% of household respondents said they live in public housing
17% of household respondents said they aren't satisfied with their current housing
7% (21% in previous CAN) of household respondents said there isn't enough safe and comfortable housing available in the county. 7% said that what is available is not affordable or not easily accessible.% said what is available is poor quality
4% of household respondents said the county needs housing counseling.

Community Provider Respondents -- Housing Results (Results Community Provider Survey):

33% of respondents (33% in last CNA).said there isn't enough safe and comfortable housing available in the county.
23% of respondents said there isn't enough housing counseling available in the county. 26% said what is available is poor quality.

Staff Respondents -- Housing Results (Results from the CNA Staff Survey):

12% (1% in last CNA) of staff respondents said there isn't enough housing counseling available in the county 6% said what is available is poor quality
42% (27% in last CNA) of staff respondents said there isn't enough safe and comfortable housing available in the county 53% said what is available isn't affordable; 6% said what is available is poor quality

Housing Outcomes:

1. ACHR's Housing Counseling Program offers first-time homebuyer education classes October 1 through September 30. ACHR has partnered with the City of Auburn and the City of Opelika to offer its Down Payment Assistance clients the mandatory first-time homebuyer education class. BB&T and PNC Banks have referred their first-time homebuyer customers to ACHR's Housing Counseling Program. Clients may choose to take the class without a referral.

2. ACHR's Housing Counseling Program offers financial literacy workshops in November and in May. ACHR has various vendors come in twice a year to offer financial information to members of the community.
3. ACHR's Housing Counseling Program offers counseling for rental assistance, homelessness and home maintenance; 22 clients were served October to September.

ACHR is recognized as a HUD Approved Housing Counseling Agency and is listed as having adopted the National Industry Standards. Since of 2018, ACHR has had a NeighborWorks Nationally Certified Homeownership Counselor. ACHR is the only agency in Lee County listed on HUD's website as having a HUD Certified Housing Counselor, nor are there housing counselors in near-by Alabama counties. As a result, the demands on her services have been growing. Feeding that demand is the inclusion of our contact information on a growing number of government and other websites that promote the availability of HUD Housing Counseling services.

In addition, an ever-growing number of financial institutions require clients to complete housing counseling sessions in conjunction with their applications for loans, etc. ACHR's HUD-Approved Housing Counseling Agency has been serving as a sub-grantee of the United Way of Central Alabama—a HUD-Approved Intermediary Housing Counseling Agency—for the past couple of years. We believe that the arrangement has been a mutually beneficial one and we hope to continue it.

Our Housing Counselor assists clients with a wide range of needs, including home purchasing, foreclosure/eviction prevention, mortgage modification, budgeting, homebuyer education, homelessness, etc. In typical years, our Housing Counselor serves 100 clients, but due to COVID19 2020 was not a typical year. in the first three quarters of FY 2020 (October 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020), she served 32 housing counseling clients.

Our Housing Counselor is also ACHR's Emergency Services Coordinator...an incredibly productive tie-in with Housing Counselor. When emergency funding is available, she is able to assist eligible clients with rent payments and other qualifying housing-related expenses.

In addition to housing counseling, ACHR has four affordable housing complexes in Lee County to which it can refer clients in need of housing.

Following are some of the other area organizations that assist residents with ulow-income with various housing needs: Auburn-Opelika Habitat for Humanity, City of Auburn, Auburn Housing Authority, East Alabama Services for the Elderly, City of Opelika, Opelika Housing Authority, HIS Place, and Valley Interfaith Promise.

D. Transportation

The Lee-Russell Public Transit (LRPT) offers Dial-A-Ride—a demand response public transportation service that is provided to all Lee County residents on a first-come, first-served basis (i.e., not always available when needed). The number of Dial-A-Ride trips available each day is based on designated time slots. The service is available Monday through Friday—except on holidays—from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. for Zone 1 (last pick-up is at 5:30 p.m.). However outside Zone 1 (up to a five-mile radius of City hall in Auburn or Opelika), pick-ups begin at 9:00 and return rides begin at 2:30, thus limiting possible work and appointment times.

Dial-A-Ride service must be scheduled at least one business day—and as much as two weeks—in advance. Repetitive trips on a routine and regular basis can be scheduled. Fares are based on designated distance zones and range from \$2 to \$6 per person (one-way). For Zone 1 service, the fare is only \$1 for Senior Citizens (60 and older) with a LRCOG Senior ID Card and free for Auburn University students, staff, and faculty with a valid AU ID. Zone 1 service is free for up to two children under age five each additional child, however, is charged the general fare.

Purchasing a fare card ticket of ten one-way trips gives a 25% discount and resolves the requirement of having exact change to board.

One significant Dial-A-Ride problem for ride users is that the service does not operate on weekends or during early morning and late evening hours during the week—times when residents with low-incomes tend to need affordable transportation the most to get to and from employment. Another issue is that there are not enough ride slots available. We have had clients tell us that they have called days—and even as much two weeks—ahead to schedule and were told that all slots were filled. A third issue is that services in the county (rather than within Auburn/Opelika) is available only two or three days a week, depending on area. Passengers in the county must be at a limited number of designated pick-up points at certain times. Using this service can absorb an entire day. It is possible to get to Phenix City, and to then connect to their transit system.

On the plus side, the services are curb-to-curb, so there is no walk to a bus stop—a significant help to our participants who are elderly as long as they can walk to the curb in front of their home. Drivers are not permitted to go beyond the curb where the bus is parked to assist passengers, but, when necessary, they can help passengers board the bus from the curb.

According to census data, 5.2% of Lee County households have no motor vehicle. That compares to 6.5% of state households without a motor vehicle and 9.0% of U.S. households without one. (This information was from 2018; we cannot find current official data for the county, but know that some of our families (8% of those who responded to the surveys) have no (working) vehicles and so again, this area has surfaced on the CNA as a concern.) ** HERE

Client Transportation Results (Results calculated from one or multiple of the following - CNA Participant survey, and Emergency Needs Survey):

87% of household respondents said they don't use public transportation
83% of household respondents said they never use taxicabs or car services (Lift or /Uber, etc.) for transportation even though cab service is available in their area

31% (21% in last CNA) of household respondents said there isn't enough transportation available in the county. 17% said what is available is not affordable, inaccessible, or poor quality.

10% (9% in previous CNA) of household respondents said they sometimes have to pay someone for a ride somewhere.

8% (7% in previous CNA) of household respondents said they don't own a car or truck or motorcycle or have access to one

Community Provider Respondent Transportation Results (from Community Provider Survey):

48% of respondents said there isn't enough transportation available in the county. 19% said what is available is not affordable or inaccessible.
--

Staff Respondent Transportation Results (Results calculated from the CNA Staff Survey):

18% of staff respondents said there isn't enough transportation available in the county. 41% said what is available is not affordable or inaccessible.
--

Lee County's Dial-A-Ride service has been around for 13 years as of August 2021. It is not used as frequently by those with low incomes as it could be. The limited schedule, limited slots and cost of rides each are part of the problem. We have offered to pay for fare cards for clients needing transportation to start new employment, but had had no takers.

More recently we are receiving reports of some of our clients trying to use this service, but all slots were booked. For example a Head Start parent tried to book the services to get to and from work and was told there were no rides available. She does have a car, and one of our Family Engagement Advocates arranged with another agency to pay for gas.

Perhaps another concern is potential riders' lack of fully understanding how to make use of the system; there are a lot of details to absorb and we believe that the county's marketing efforts have been both insufficient and ineffective. ACHR staff will continue to help our clients understand and access Dial-A-Ride services as appropriate.

Uber has come to the Auburn-Opelika area, and there are some taxi services. According to a fare finder, the Uber initial fare is \$1.50 and then \$1.60/mile and .20/minute with a minimum fare of \$5.00; with the booking fee, a 6.4 mile, 11 minute trip is \$15.00, again, one-way. Uber charges \$1.00-2.00 extra for each additional person. Tiger Taxi, for two passengers is 1.85 +

2.00/mile +.20 a minute + \$3.00/person over 2, so it is a little more expensive than Uber. Both are pretty much out of the question for our families for anything but occasional use.

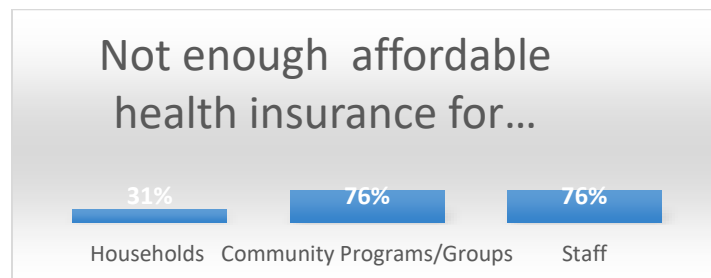
Following are some of the other area organizations that assist low-income residents with various transportation needs: Alabama Medicaid Agency, Disabled Veteran Hospital Shuttle Van. Compared to the number of agencies assisting in other areas, sadly this is slim.

E. Health/Dental/Nutrition-Fitness/Disability-Special Needs

1) Health

Health, dental, and nutrition pose challenges for everyone, but the challenges are greater for those with low incomes. According to the *2021 Alabama Kids County Data Book*, Lee County has an infant mortality rate of 8.9 (7.5 in previous CNA). According to various sites, Lee County has only 1 primary care physician per 1,952 persons (1:1534 in Alabama and 1:1319 in the USA as a whole). However we counted the physicians on the East Alabama Medical center web site listed as General or Family Practitioners as well as some in internal medicine who list general practice giving 45 primary care physicians in our area along with 22 listed as pediatricians or 1:2600 residents. It is not surprising that many local physicians are not taking new patients.

The cost of health insurance for many families we serve is unaffordable; 10.5% of Lee County residents have no health insurance. Fortunately, most children are covered by Medicaid or ALL Kids and those age 65+ by Medicare and/or Medicaid. According to County Health Rankings, 20% of Lee County’s 18+ population say they are in fair or poor general health (up from 17%) Despite the fact that many places in the county are smoke-free, 17% of the residents smoke.



Client Health Results (Results calculated from one or multiple of the following - CNA Participant survey, and COVID Surveys):

89 % (86% in previous CNA) of household respondents said children in their household are on Medicaid/ALL Kids. 9% said they have private insurance. 2% said they have no insurance.
85% of household respondents said one or more adults in their household have insurance (<i>either private insurance or are on Medicaid/Medicare</i>). 15% said they have no insurance.
4% of household respondents said there is not enough health insurance for children available in the county.
9% of household respondents said there is not enough health insurance for adults available in the county; 25% said what is available poor quality, not affordable, or not accessible to them.
97% of household respondents said that children in their household go to their <i>family doctor/Pediatrician</i> when they need medical care.
57% (56% in previous CNA) of household respondents said adults in their household go to the <i>hospital emergency room or any doctor they can find</i> when need medical care. 39% said they go to their <i>family/primary care doctor</i> .
7% (14% in previous CNA) of household respondents said there is not enough healthcare available in the county; 11% said what is available is poor quality, not affordable, or not accessible to them.
6% of household respondents said that someone in their household struggles with ongoing medical issues,
5% of household respondents said that someone in their household struggles with mental health issues.
17% of household respondents said abuse (<i>physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse</i>) is a problem in the county.

COVID ITEM

6% of household respondents said someone in their household tested positive for COVID.
--

Community Provider Respondents -- Health Results (Results calculated from the CNA Community Provider Survey):

67% of respondents said abuse (<i>physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse</i>) is a problem in the county.
24% of respondents said there is not enough health insurance for adults available in the county; 52% said what is available is unaffordable, inaccessible, or poor quality.
14% of respondents said that the health insurance that is available for children in this county is either not affordable or inaccessible.
29% of respondents said there is not enough healthcare in the county; 29% said what is available is unaffordable

Staff Respondents Health Results (Results Calculated from the CNA Staff Survey):

62% of staff respondents said drug addiction is a problem in the county; 29% said it is a big problem
12% of staff respondents said there is not enough health insurance for adults available in the county. 65% said what is available is unaffordable or inaccessible.
12% of respondents said there is not enough healthcare in the county; 41% said what is available is unaffordable

Health Outcomes:

1. ACHR’s Health Staff, with assistance from the Family Engagement staff, work with parents of Early/Head Start children to assure that each child has a medical and dental “home.” In school year 2020-21 almost 98% of our Head Start children had medical & dental homes; 86% of EHS children had medical homes and 60% of EHS children had dental homes (some were too young for dental).

2. ACHR’s Health Staff, with assistance from the Family Engagement staff, work with parents of Early/Head Start children to assure that each child receives needed or required screenings, well-child checks and follow-up care as needed and in the process help the parent begin to learn to navigate the health care system. Both HS & EHS children received developmental, social emotional and various health (height/weight, vision, hearing) screenings; referrals were made to physicians dentists, mental health providers and other resources as appropriate and with parent agreement.

Options for those who need health care and have no insurance are limited. For example, Lee County residents with no insurance can get health care during limited hours four days a week at Mercy Medical Clinic, which provides primary care and assists in finding affordable medications, but often it is difficult to get seen in a timely way. They no longer offer dental care.

Quality of Life Health Care in Tuskegee is open five days (and one evening a week) and provides health and dental care on a sliding fee scale in addition to accepting insurance. Through emergency assistance funds, we have helped, and will continue to help, eligible individuals with low income and high need with their fees when they are unable to pay them (and, therefore, risk the chance of not being seen by a doctor or dentist and a condition getting worse and needing yet more costly treatment).

Normally, the J.W. Wellness Center, in partnership with the School of Nursing, offers screenings (diabetes, blood pressure), and health education and coaching Wednesdays 9:00-12:00 at no cost, but at this writing remains closed due to COVID.

Before COVID, Opelika and the local hospital were working toward having a mobile health clinic for citizens with low incomes. That effort has gone on hold. During the same period, Auburn was working on and has opened a health clinic at Boykin Community Center in Auburn in partnership with schools of health at Auburn University such as the School of Nursing and the School of Pharmacy to serve adults with no source of health care. The clinic is open with limited hours due to COVID. We hope that Opelika will be able to move forward with the planned mobile health clinic once medical personnel are no longer heavily involved in the pandemic. At that point we will do anything we can to assist to assure that initiative is successful. It would be a wonderful resource for Opelika residents.

Following are some of the other area organizations that assist low-income residents with various health needs: Lee County Health Department, Auburn University Speech and Hearing Clinic, Prescription Drug Programs—Low Cost, East Alabama Mental Health Center, Women's Hope Medical Clinic

2) Dental

The Alabama Medicaid Dental Program covers certain routine preventive and restorative services for children (under the age of 21), but, unfortunately, it does not cover any type of dental care for adults. There are currently four dentists in Lee County who accept Medicaid though not all are accepting new patients. All four accommodate special needs.

There are 52 dentists in Lee County who accept All Kids. Most of them accommodate children and youth who have special needs.

There is a lower (we won't say low) cost dental clinic in nearby Tuskegee. Using emergency services funds we have been able to help a few person in pain due to dental problems.

6% of household respondents said that someone in their household struggles with ongoing dental issues,
84% of household respondents said children in their household have access to affordable dental care.
57% of household respondents said one or more adults in their household have access to affordable dental care.

Following are area organizations that assist low-income residents with various dental needs: Auburn City Schools Dental Clinic (children in the Auburn City School system only) and Tuskegee Quality of Life Health Care

3) Nutrition/Fitness and Lifestyle

According to The East Alabama Food Bank, Lee County's overall food insecurity rate is 17.0% (18.% previous CNA) and according to Feeding America 19.7% (21.0% previous CNA) for children. However, estimates indicate that 25 – 50% of those who are food insecure are not eligible for assistance.

An over-abundance of fast food restaurants undoubtedly exacerbates Lee County's nutrition challenges. Entrepreneurs target the students at Auburn University and Southern Union but because it is fast, sometimes inexpensive, and children beg for it many other people rely too

heavily on fast food. Also significant is the county’s comparatively small number of grocery stores. Lee County has 29 stores listed as grocery stores, including 13 specialty stores (Asian, African and Hispanic foods, health food, meat only, farmers market and 4 gas/food locations). That is roughly 6,000 to 11,000 persons per store. No wonder they always are busy. And several are quite large, so for a parent who must take children with her, gathering what is needed in those stores may be a challenge. Thought not counted in the grocery stores, our area has large number of Dollar Stores which sell some food, primarily heavily processed foods.

These things and more (such as habit) lead to an inadequate intake of fresh fruits and vegetables (fewer than five servings) that is the minimum needed for good nutrition/health. It is no surprise that the adult obesity rate in Lee County was 31.9% in 2015 (the last year we have firm data for). Observation indicates it is closer to the state’s 35% now. Changing this is critical to preventing many health problems from heart to diabetes, saving doctor’s visit, medication and even hospitalization. Changing patterns of habits is hard, but staff will continue to work on this.

45% (40% in previous CNA) of household respondents said members of their household doesn’t always eat healthy meals and snacks.
42% (46% in previous CNA) of household respondents said someone in their household receives food/nutrition related assistance (SNAP and/or WIC benefits)
13% (16% in previous CNA) of household respondents said members of their household don’t always have enough to eat.
10% of household respondents said they need/want more information about planning healthy meals and snacks.

Client Fitness and Lifestyle Results (Results CNA Participant survey):

26% of household respondents said drug and/or alcohol addiction is a problem in the county; 15% said it is either a big or crisis problem.
20% (37% in previous CNA) of household respondents one or more members of their household are 30 or more pounds overweight.

Community Provider Respondents - Fitness and Lifestyle Results (Community Provider Survey):

62% of respondents said drug and/or alcohol addiction is a problem in the county; 33% said it is either a big or crisis problem

Staff Respondents Fitness and Lifestyle Results (Results Calculated from the CNA Staff Survey):

71% of staff respondents said drug and/or alcohol addiction is a problem; 41% said it is a big problem
--

Research is clear that for most people nutrition (both having enough to eat and choice of which foods to eat), fitness and life style make a great difference in quality of life, and impact everything from our immune systems to how much we are able to do as we age.

ACHR has begun to work in this area for children, families, clients and our staff. Our registered dietician plays a pivotal role in addressing nutrition, fitness and lifestyle at ACHR through a comprehensive program—Learning Information about Food and Exercise (LIFE)—designed for low-income clients who want assistance in these areas. She offers life-quality guidance on food, diet, weight loss, and exercise. She shares ways to prepare fruits and vegetables in ways that will appeal even to young children. She contributes to written information shared with our participants and staff and works with children and teachers in our classrooms – and outdoors. Clients are invited to contact her to schedule a consultation. She offers light-impact exercise classes. During COVID she has been offering classes via Zoom. While the focus is on clients who living with low incomes, anyone who has a need and is interested is welcome to join the classes. Her enthusiasm, knowledge and ability to provide important, useful guidance and have fun while doing it has made her a big hit—and help—with clients and with ACHR’s staff.

Lifestyle is a big area. It includes personal lifestyle, but personal lifestyle also is quality of life in the community. If I am afraid to let my child go to my fenced in yard to play because of what is happening in my neighborhood that impacts my lifestyle and that of my child. We found hints of concerns in both the survey and the focus groups – not enough to make the top five all by itself, but still – something that needs to be addressed. For example, in the survey we have

26% of participants who completed the survey indicated that drug or alcohol addiction is a big problem in the county; 17% physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse is a problem. 5% said someone in their household struggles with a mental health issues. From focus groups: there are problems “problems within the community such as discrimination and lack of trust.” *“There is a lot of discrimination and bullying in the work place, school, church, assistance places, etc. We need training because a lot of people are so immune to it that they can’t see what wrong or what they are doing.”*

Perhaps we were not asking quite the right questions. Or participants were hesitant to voice the concern. There is data to back up concern. The Lee County Crime rate is half again the national average, with assault, larceny, burglary, property crime and rape leading the types. That makes it a little harder to feel safe.

Still, even if the numbers on surveys and in Focus groups are low compared to concerns like jobs and the cost of housing, these are concerns that also need to be addressed.

Plans for Outcomes

The LIFE Program will continue, despite COVID restrictions, to provide as many people with information and ways to implement it as possible, and to reinvigorate the community garden effort that lost momentum as COVID absorbed staff time and energy.

Staff will review the Early/Head Start Goals and Objectives and find ways to reinvigorate our efforts for staff to learn more about and become more active with parents and in the community in a variety of efforts to reduce trauma and increase resilience.

We already have had one small win, it would seem. Over the summer, the number of times we had to lock down our largest center due do gunshots in the area became alarming. It is our belief that though some of our children may live in neighborhoods where such things happen, our centers should be a safe space where those who are affected have respite and a feeling of

being safe. Staff sent word to the mayor, who worked with the police, and at least for the past month and a half, it has been much better.

Following are some of the other area organizations that assist low-income residents with various nutrition needs: Auburn Senior Center, Community Market, Lakeview Baptist Church, Pine Grove Church, United Way of Lee County, and Area Agency on Aging

Area organizations that assist low-income residents with various fitness/lifestyle needs include: City of Auburn- two Exercise Facilities (free for life after \$25 membership), TOPS (Take off Pounds Sensibly), Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Opelika Addictions Center, HIS Place and East Alabama Mental Health Center.

4) Disability-Special Needs

According to the latest census data, 12.2% (11.63% in previous CNA) of the total Lee County population has a disability of some kind. By comparison, 16.3% in the state have a disability and 12.5% in the nation have a disability.

It is estimated that 916 of the county's under age 18 population have one type of disability and 148 have two or more types of disabilities; 9,386 of the county's age 18-64 population have one disability and 5,289 have two or more; 2,357 of the county's age 65+ population have one disability and 4,243 have two or more.

Furthermore, those in the county's 16+ population who have a disability have annual median earnings of about \$4,000 less than those without a disability. Our surveys indicate:

10% (16% previous CNA) of household respondents said someone in the household has a disability.

2% (5% in previous CNA) of household respondents said they have a child age 4 or younger who requires special care for a disability or serious illness
--

On behalf of our CSBG clients and Child Development Program children and families, we have established strong collaborative, referral relationships with a number of county agencies and institutions that provide services for persons with a disability/special needs.

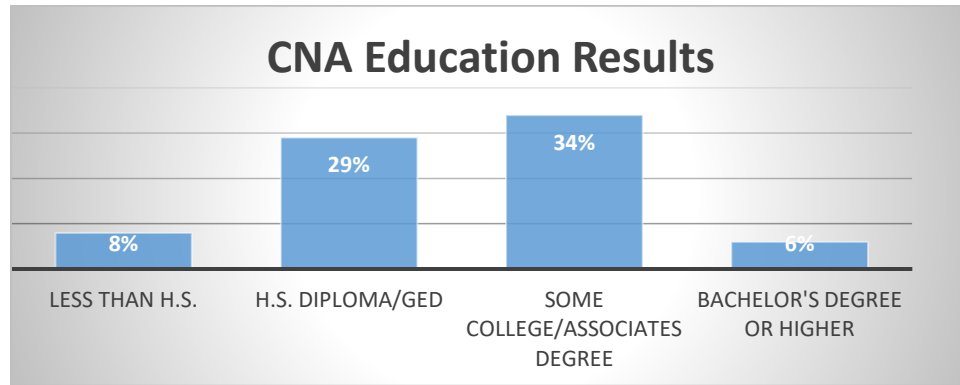
Early/Head Start staff work with our community partners to refer children with suspected disabilities as well as follow up after evaluation. The Lee County Schools, Opelika City Schools and the Auburn City Schools all have mixed classrooms to serve preschool children who have disabilities, particularly those who have moderate to severe disabilities. Therefore after referral and evaluation the Head Start program occasionally “loses” children to a school system if placement in their class is considered the best placement for services needed. This sometimes saddens teachers who have built a relationship, and of course it affects the ACHR-CDP’s disability numbers, but of course we are willing to do whatever is needed to secure the best outcomes for our children. We also have a partnership with East Alabama Mental Health. They provides evaluation and services to children, also sometime outside our center part of the time, and also as needed services to parents and staff. We are very please to have these and other resources.

Following are some of the other area organizations that assist low-income residents with various disability/special needs care needs: our local school systems, Achievement Center—Easter Seals, Alabama Dept. of Rehabilitation Services, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind, AU Speech and Hearing Clinic, AU Psychological Services Clinic, Child Find, Children’s Rehabilitation Services, Goodwill Industries, East Alabama Mental Health Center, Goodwill Industries, Alabama Medicaid Agency, and the Veterans Administration Medical Center.

F. Education

According to Kids Count, the graduation rate for youth not in poverty is 96%; for those in poverty it is 84%, which would explain the 69 Head Start families this past year whose person with the highest education in the family unit had neither a High School diploma nor GED. Although ACHR no longer offers adult education, we do refer and encourage. We have put aside a small amount of funding to help folks, especially those who want credentials related to early

childhood education, attain needed college credits if that is the best path for them and if they are not eligible for other assistance. We are proud to say that twelve education staff attained credentials last year. We will continue to assist clients in every way possible to receive the education they need to advance their employability status and earning potential.



Client Education Results (Results calculated from CNA Participant Survey):

8% of household respondents said they haven't graduated from high school or received their GED.
8% of household respondents said there isn't enough adult education available in the county. 8% said what is available is not affordable, inaccessible, or poor quality.
11% of household respondents said they need/want more information about adult education.
3% (7% in previous CNA) of household respondents said they can't read, write, or do math well enough to perform basic tasks.

Community Provider Respondent Education Results (Results or CNA Community Provider Survey):

14% of respondents said there isn't enough adult available in the county. 5% said what is available is inaccessible.
--

Staff Respondent Education Results (Calculated from CNA Participant Survey)

24% of staff respondents said there isn't enough adult education available in the county. 17% of staff respondents said what is available is not affordable or inaccessible.
--

Some of our participants express a desire to further their education. But, of course, the “want to” will only go so far. Often the path to a high school diploma or GED—and all other educational objectives—is lined with financial obstacles. That is particularly true for low-income single mothers with young children. It is a challenge to find and afford childcare, have reliable,

affordable transportation, be able to attend school -- and continue employment (which means fitting the school schedule with the work schedule and child care schedule).

We are committed to providing parents with as much support and assistance as we can. In the area of child development/care, we have Head Start and Early Head Start. One center in Lee County and one in Russell offer wraparound care (before and after school hours and during the summer). If the parent has not already applied for vouchers to help with child care the costs, one of our staff members assists.

Staff is committed to encouraging participants to further their education/training and guiding them when they are ready to work toward access the education and training they need to secure employment that best suits their needs and that of their families. Staff regularly participates in a variety of community job fair-type events, in addition to referring participants to these events as well as directly to employers.

Following are some of the other area organizations that assist low-income residents with various education needs: Achievement Center—Easter Seals, Adult Basic Education Programs, Lee County Literacy Coalition, Southern Union State Community College, and Chattahoochee Valley Community College.

G. Child Care

Child Care continues to be a need. Of those surveyed for the 2021 CAN, 34% (56% in previous CNA) of respondents said their household includes two or more children age 5 and under; 69% (70% in previous CNA) of household respondents said they would get a job or work more hours outside the home if additional, more affordable hours of child care were available; 47% (60% in previous CNA) of household respondents who have a child in Head Start or EHS

said additional, more affordable hours of child care are needed and 14% said what is available is unaffordable, inaccessible, or poor quality.

There is no question in our minds about any of that. Having a safe, affordable place for children to be while parents are at work or training is a pathway to being able to attend training or get a good-paying job. Our child care slots are always full and we would like to find the funding for more. Because of COVID, this past year has been especially challenging for parents because COVID cases and exposures have caused child care centers, including ours to have to close too many times.

Although the some of the 2020 census data now is available, all we have available for Lee County is the over-all population for Lee County as a whole as well as for Auburn, and Opelika. The population in our area has undeniably grown rapidly and a tremendous amount of that growth is in Auburn. Why? Auburn University has grown, bringing with it more college professional and of course students. East Alabama Medical Center is expanding (most recently a new cancer center) and is bringing in more physicians and support staff. In addition, Auburn has become something of a bedroom community for Montgomery because the schools in Auburn have a better reputation than do those in Montgomery. We do not believe the number of persons living below the poverty level has increased in line with the increase in population, and we have watched the percentage decrease. It is possible that this population has decreased. Apartment complexes for students or homes costing \$250,000 and more have been built in some areas where persons living with low incomes once lived causing moves out into the county – or out of Lee County, often to join family elsewhere. Therefore the data below is based on 2019.

In 2019, there were approximately 1480 children living in poverty, 296 in each age group, who are eligible for Early/Head Start Services. In Lee County, ACHR has 2016 slots for

children who are Head Start Age and 80 classroom and 68 home based slots for infants and toddlers.

Other options for 3-5 year olds with low incomes include: Twelve Pre K classrooms in Lee County, another ten in Auburn and three in Opelika. Together, those classes serve approximately another 216 children, not all of whom are below the poverty line. Other sources of low cost care are Joyland Day Care Center and Auburn Day Care Center.

There are also about 45 licensed daycare centers and 22 day care homes in the area that serve some of this population. Parents who receive vouchers from the state can place their child in any childcare facility that will accept the vouchers, which at this point is the majority of child care facility. One thing that has changed is that because the funding for vouchers has increased, Family Guidance Center, that takes/reviews/issues the vouchers, no longer has what previously was sometimes a 4-5 year wait-list for vouchers; instead the wait period sometimes is only days. Many day care centers have ceased to offer part-day care, so if a parent needs care before or after the Head Start day and/or year, they often accept a slot in a day care center. In 2018 we estimated that there were as many as 158 children living in poverty who did not have a source of care, though some of those children of parents who prefer to keep their child at home, or with a relative. Given the increase in the number of day care centers in the past few years, we estimate that the majority of families living with low incomes who need care for their 4-5 year old children can find a source of care.

The situation for parents living with low income who have infants and toddlers is different. Currently ACHR's Early Head Start program has room for 40 infants and toddlers at Darden Center in Opelika; in January 2022 we will open five additional classrooms for a total of 80. Auburn Daycare and Joyland Daycare also serve Infants and toddlers as do some other child care centers that accept vouchers.

In addition, ACHR's Early Head Start program provides services for another 68 infants and toddlers in Lee County through the home based program which provides parents (mostly mothers) with assistance in understanding and supporting their child's development as well as encouragement and assistance in getting the child to regular health care appointments, obtaining services such as WIC, setting and then working toward goals for the family unit and so forth.

East Alabama Mental Health's Special Deliveries program also has a home visiting program that serves ages 0-5; they can serve families who are not income eligible for EHS. ACHR home based staff and the Special Deliveries staff have a good relationship and work together to see that as many families as possible who want this service receive it.

Many of the aforementioned day care homes accept infants and toddlers, and of course vouchers. Even so, given the estimated 888 Early Head Start-eligible children age 0-3, we estimate that are more than 400 children living below the poverty line whose parents have a challenge finding care in a center nor home based support for the parent and child because there are not enough openings. Again, some parents do not want or need that care and/or support, but for those who do, finding that care is a challenge.

Our surveys indicate that:

Client Education Results (Results calculated from one or multiple of the following - CNA Participant survey, and COVID Surveys):

69% (70% in previous CNA) of household respondents said they would get a job or work more hours outside the home if additional, more affordable hours of child care were available.
64% (74% in previous CNA) of household respondents said they work either full time or part time outside the home
47% (60% in previous CNA) of household respondents who have a child in Head Start or EHS said additional, more affordable hours of child care are needed.
34% (56% in previous CNA) of household respondents said their household includes two or more children age 5 and under
27% of household respondents said they need/want more information about child care
15% of household respondents said there isn't enough wraparound child care available in the county; 14% said what is available is unaffordable, inaccessible, or poor quality.

9% of household respondents said there isn't enough full-time, all-day daycare available in the county; 21% said what is available is unaffordable, inaccessible, or poor quality.
9% of household respondents said there isn't enough parenting skills training and information available in the county. 3% said what is available is unaffordable, inaccessible, or poor quality.

COVID ITEMS

38% of household respondents said someone in their household has had to stay at home and care for the children instead of going to work due to the COVID pandemic.
38% of household respondents said someone in their household has had to stay at home and care for the children instead of going to work due to the COVID pandemic
17% of household respondents said they do not have access to internet while at home during the COVID pandemic.

Community Provider Respondents Education Results (Results from Community Provider Survey):

67% of respondents said there isn't enough wraparound child care available in the county.
43% of respondents said there isn't enough full-time, all-day daycare available in the county.
47% of respondents said there isn't enough parenting skills training and information available in the county.

Staff Respondents Education Results (Results calculated from the CNA Staff Provider Survey):

41% of staff respondents said there isn't enough wraparound child care available in the county; 24% said what is available is unaffordable or poor quality.
18% of staff respondents said there isn't enough full-time, all-day daycare available in the county; 47% said what is available is unaffordable.
18% of staff respondents said there isn't enough parenting skills training and information available in the county.

Our task in this area is as simple as it is difficult: serve as many eligible children from families living with low-income as we can and, if we cannot, assist in any way we can to get them placed somewhere else. Mindful that that more than 85% our Head Start/Early Head Start parents/guardians are their children's sole caregivers and also need to work, we offer wraparound child care (before and after school and during the summer) for some of our Head Start and Early Head Start children and siblings at Darden Center in Opelika, and partner with Joyland Child Development Center and Auburn Day Care Centers in Auburn for wrap care.