

# MCHENRY COUNTY HEALTHY COMMUNITY STUDY FOCUS GROUPS

March 2006

Prepared for:  
**2006 McHenry County Healthy Community Study**  
**“Working Together for a Healthier McHenry County”**

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Chapter 1  
INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This report presents the results of focus group discussions regarding health and human services needs in McHenry County. The study was completed by Health Systems Research, an applied research unit of the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford, as part of the McHenry County Healthy Community Study. The Healthy Community Study components include focus groups, a key informant study, a household survey, and a demographic analysis.

Focus groups are small groups of individuals formed to discuss a topic of common interest; in this case, their health and human services needs. For this study, fourteen focus groups were formed from target populations in order to gain knowledge about their views of and experiences with health and human services in McHenry County, particularly within the specific population group they represent. Focus groups afford an opportunity to hear the views of certain target groups, especially at-risk individuals, who might not otherwise be heard from in other aspects of the study.

Methodology

Focus groups were organized for target populations identified by the Healthy Community Steering Committee and Health Systems Research, especially groups likely to use or be in need of health and human services. Table 1.1 lists the fourteen focus groups which were convened as well as the number of individuals participating in each session and the meeting site.

Table 1.1  
FOCUS GROUPS WITH NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS AND MEETING SITE

Focus Group	Participants	Meeting Site
At-Risk Youth	14	McHenry East High School
Disabled Individuals	7	Pioneer Center
Elderly	10	Senior Services Center
Farmers	13	McHenry County Farm Bureau
Hispanics	13	Garden Quarter Neighborhood Center
Homeless Men	7	PADS
Homeless Women	7	Home of the Sparrow
Low-Income Individuals	8	McHenry Township
Mentally Ill Individuals	10	Thresholds
Parents of Mentally Ill Children	7	Mental Health Board
Public Aid Recipients	9	McHenry County Health Department
Recent Immigrants	11	Illinois Migrant Council
Unemployed Individuals	11	Illinois Department of Employment Security
Young Adults	7	Youth Services Bureau
<b>TOTAL PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>134</b>	

Area agencies and organizations were asked to help identify individuals who would be willing to participate in the focus groups. Most potential focus group participants were contacted directly for participation by a representative of the convening organization. Although the goal was to have 10-12 participants at each focus group, some difficulty achieving this attendance level was experienced for a few of the groups, while three of the focus groups exceeded the 10-12 person goal. A total of 134 individuals took part in the fourteen groups. The sessions were convened at sites throughout McHenry County.

The format for conducting each focus group was similar. Group participants received a brief review of the purpose and confidential nature of the discussion. Most of the sessions lasted approximately 45 minutes. With the exception of one focus group, a \$20 stipend was given to each participant at the end of the meeting in appreciation for taking part in the session. In lieu of a stipend for the homeless men group, a donation was made to PADS.

During the focus groups, participants were led through discussion of the following questions.

- What do you like about living in McHenry County? Dislike?
- What are the major health and human needs/problems that the community faces today?
- What type of health and human services are most needed by members of your group?
- What important services are missing?
- Have you used any service or contacted any agency in the last year? If so, was the service easy to use? Was the staff helpful and respectful? Did the agency help you?
- Based on your knowledge or experiences, how well do you think the McHenry County health and human services delivery system works?
  - a) What are the strengths?
  - b) What are the weaknesses?
  - c) What gaps in services (other than already discussed) exist?
  - d) Do you see duplication of services?
- What would you say are the major barriers that keep people from using services?
- Is there anything else that you would like to tell us?

For certain focus groups, questions may have been modified to reflect the experiences and views of the particular group.

This report contains an overview of the results for all groups collectively, as well as the minutes for each group, which are found in Appendix 1. For a better understanding of the discussions, the reader is strongly urged to examine the minutes of the individual focus groups.

## Chapter 2 COMMUNITY ASSETS

### Introduction

The first questions asked of focus group participants involved their perception of community assets and positive aspects of living in McHenry County. Groups were asked, “What do you like about living in McHenry County?”

### Small-Town Atmosphere

All of the groups cited the quiet, small-town, easy-going atmosphere found in many of the county’s communities as a positive aspect. Many of the group members appreciate the rolling hills and rural areas of the county. Also, while enjoying the small town living in the area, residents are able to take advantage of services and attractions in Chicago, with a relatively short drive. People are said to be friendly and helpful, especially to newcomers. A few of the elderly and Public Aid recipients mentioned that they grew up in McHenry County and have never lived anywhere else.

### Public Safety and Low Crime

Six of the focus groups cited public safety as an asset in McHenry County, believing that the area enjoys a low crime rate and is relatively “safe.” One mother in the low-income group summarized her feeling of safety as follows: “It is so nice not having to worry about my kids catching a bullet when they’re playing outside.”

### Good Schools

Participants in six of the focus groups, especially parents, reported being very pleased with the local school system, noting that teachers seem to be genuinely concerned about the quality of their children’s education, and are caring and helpful.

### Services for Persons in Need

Public Aid recipients, homeless women, and low-income individuals believe that McHenry County offers an abundance of services for people in need. Several of the low-income group commented that human services are much easier to access in McHenry County than is the case in Chicago.

### Other Community Assets

Focus group members named several other community assets. At-risk youth enjoy the skate parks, school sports, and “hanging out” with their friends.

The farmers feel that the area offers an abundance of shopping establishments and restaurants.

The quality and quantity of mental health services was named as a county asset by the group of mentally ill individuals.

Individuals in two of the groups - homeless women and unemployed - believe that the cost of living is lower in McHenry County than found in Chicago.

## Chapter 3 COMMUNITY PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

### Introduction

In an effort to ascertain community problems and issues, all of the focus groups were questioned about their perceptions regarding negative aspects of living in McHenry County, and the problems and challenges faced by their communities, including health care and human services.

### Rapid Growth and Development in McHenry County

Members of four focus groups are concerned with the rapid growth and development being experienced in McHenry County. An elderly resident of Cary described that community as “busting at its seams!” One of the farmers believes that McHenry is “becoming crowded like Schaumburg,” while an unemployed man said that “in ten years Crystal Lake and McHenry will just be mini-Chicagos.” Along with the rapid growth, concern was voiced about the accompanying overcrowding of local schools. The young adults noted that, because of the rapid growth and development, large companies, such as WalMart, are coming into the area and “battering the small competition.”

Related to the rapid development, several focus group participants feel that the cost of living is rapidly rising in McHenry County, along with gas prices, taxes and utilities. More than one of the senior citizens expressed fears that rising taxes and utilities might force them to sell their family homes and move to an apartment.

### Lack of Public Transportation

Named by all but two of the fourteen focus groups, the lack of a good public transportation system was mentioned as a major problem in McHenry County. PACE is limited and requires calling ahead, which sometimes is not possible. According to members in several of the groups, a good public transportation system is essential for getting to jobs, medical appointments and other errands. PACE runs on weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. only, while many focus group participants would like to see expanded hours for the service, especially evenings and weekends.

Also, more inter-community PACE trips are desired. As one man stated, “If I want to go to Woodstock, I have to go early in the morning and can’t come back until mid-afternoon.” The at-risk youth said that teens do not feel comfortable using PACE, believing that the service is mostly for older people or handicapped individuals. Several of the disabled individuals said that a more coordinated bus system would allow them to be more independent rather than having to rely on group home staff or family members for transportation.

The lack of convenient public transportation can cause major problems for the elderly. Cabs are too expensive for seniors on fixed incomes. Seniors who are unable to drive need access to affordable public transportation all day long, but the senior bus in Cary ends service at 3 p.m., too early for some regular doctors' appointments. One senior suggested that public transport implement a "senior schedule," designating one bus to follow a route convenient to seniors, accessing medical offices, pharmacies, grocery stores, and other senior needs one or two days a week. Seniors could schedule their appointments, meetings and errands on "senior days."

### Lack of Decent Paying Jobs

The lack of decent paying jobs was cited as a problem by four of the focus groups. Most of the available jobs are service sector low-paying positions with no benefits, they said. Several of the homeless men cited instances in which, when a potential employer saw the PADS address on a job application, they wouldn't consider them for a job. Public Aid recipients reported that finding a good paying job is especially hard for single mothers with preschool age children. One woman noted that she had a job that paid \$7.50 an hour, but most of her wages went for child care.

A man in the unemployed group, who is in his 50s, said that finding a decent job at his age is much tougher than is the case for younger people. Two of the young adults believe that, as they progress in their careers, they will have to leave the area for a large city in order to find appropriate work. Hispanics and recent immigrants noted that jobs obtained through temporary agencies are usually low-paying and have no benefits.

### Need for Additional Youth Activities and Programs

Four of the fourteen focus groups said that McHenry County has a need for more activities and programs for youth. The at-risk youth feel that a video arcade, more shopping malls, and additional movie theaters in McHenry would enhance their quality of life. Two women in the low-income group believe that the area needs more activities for school-age children. One suggested opening additional community centers with after-school and evening youth activities.

The young adults reported that the area offers few activities specifically for their age group, feeling that, currently, their options are limited to bowling, eating out, and movies. A few of the unemployed individuals expressed a need for more activities for youth, citing increasing gang presence in Woodstock. As one person commented, "If you don't provide these kids with something to do after school, they're going to be easily recruited by the gangs."

### Lack of Affordable Child Care

Affordable child care is seen as a problem by three of the focus groups. Participants in the Hispanic group stressed that some Hispanic individuals hold down two jobs, and because of income levels, do not qualify for most child care assistance programs. Too high a proportion of their wages must go toward child care. Public Aid recipients and recent immigrants also named child care as a gap, especially during "off hours" and on weekends, although some Public Aid recipients praised 4C for helping to find affordable child care.

### Lack of Affordable Housing

Several of the groups are concerned that affordable housing is lacking in McHenry County. Many focus group participants said that housing in the county is too expensive and the wait time for a Section 8 voucher can be as long as two years, plus not enough landlords in Woodstock accept a Section 8 voucher. As summarized by one of the Public Aid recipients, "My boyfriend and I waited well over two years for a Section 8. When our name finally came up, my boyfriend was working and we made \$500 too much to qualify - so we had to go back on the list." A woman in the low-income focus group suggested the Housing Authority provide more information for potential landlords. She thinks most landlords have an image of Section 8 recipients as deadbeats who are going to cause trouble. The recent immigrants pointed out that a local mobile home park which has primarily Hispanic residents is being demolished, leaving those who live there few options for moving the mobile homes they own.

### Access to Health Care for the Uninsured

Lack of health care services for the uninsured is another area of concern for many of the focus group participants. Seven of the groups believe that few, if any, health care services are available in the county for uninsured individuals. No one in any focus group could name any doctor who would accept patients without insurance or on a sliding fee scale. Some of the individuals in several focus groups had knowledge of the Family Health Partnership (FHP) Clinic in Woodstock and had utilized the clinic's services. The majority of the focus groups agreed that more free or sliding-scale clinics like the Family Health Partnership Clinic are needed in McHenry County. Several persons suggested that, perhaps, the FHP could expand or branch out into other McHenry County communities.

A major concern for farmers is the lack of affordable health care coverage for their group. Farmers reported spending \$10,000-\$15,000 per year on health insurance. Spouses of many of the farmers who participated in the focus group work elsewhere just for the health insurance benefits.

### Health Care Access Issues for Public Aid Recipients

A few members of the focus groups said that finding a primary care doctor who accepts Public Aid is a problem, however, others disagreed with this, saying that the county contains plenty of primary care physicians who take the medical card.

Some focus group participants, such as the Public Aid recipients, noted that not enough specialists in the county accept Medicaid. A few of the homeless individuals believe that obtaining a medical card is difficult, if not impossible, for single, childless individuals, whether male or female.

The Public Aid recipients complained that Medicaid does not cover prescription costs very well and the selection of drugs that are covered is limited. The homeless men expressed a need for help with prescription drugs. For example, one of the homeless men is diabetic and said that he sometimes goes without his medicine because he can't afford the cost.

### Access to Affordable Dental Care

Access to dental care, especially for persons without dental insurance or those receiving Public Aid, is reported to be a problem in McHenry County. Many individuals in the county lack dental coverage and cannot afford care. Many of the focus group participants do not have dental insurance and said that because care is so expensive, they are not getting necessary exams, cleaning, or treatment. For example, one of the unemployed men has put off having a root canal for over two years because he is unable to pay for the procedure. One of the young adults commented that his employer recently eliminated dental benefits, so he is now doing without non-essential dental care because of the cost.

The majority of focus group participants complained about the lack of McHenry County dentists who will accept Public Aid. Only one individual knew of a McHenry County dentist who accepts Public Aid, and she wasn't even sure if this dentist in Richmond is still practicing in the area. Two Hispanic individuals reported that they have to travel to Waukegan to see a dentist who will take their medical card.

### Other Community Problems and Issues

The at-risk youth and Hispanics voiced concerns about local police. The youth asserted that the police treat teenagers harshly, without respect, and frequently "hassle" teens for no reason. Some in the group of Hispanics believe that the local police treat Hispanics as second class citizens and frequently pull them over when driving for no good reason.

The at-risk youth cited a heavy presence of drugs in the area, especially coke and heroin. All of them agreed that drugs are easily available at school. One student told of a meth lab and a crack house discovered in his neighborhood and described how dangerous this is for neighborhood residents.

Both Hispanics and recent immigrants face a language barrier in many situations. For those individuals who speak little or no English, communication with others in the community, such as store clerks and employers, is very difficult.

Hispanics expressed a concern about accessing health care because of the language problem. The lack of bilingual health care staff makes communicating very difficult. This group is not aware of any local physician who employs bilingual staff; therefore, Hispanics with limited English may not be accessing health care.

The group of senior citizens agreed that one major weakness in the McHenry County health care system is seniors' need for better access to health care services such as physical therapy, rehabilitative exercise and fitness/wellness programs. Crystal Lake has no swimming pool or whirlpool for therapy, and rates are high to swim at the Holiday Inn and at a local health club. Seniors are required to join a fitness club before using the pool; one can't participate occasionally without a paid membership. "Cary does great at providing swimming and exercise for kids, but not for seniors," said a Cary resident.

Chapter 4  
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES GAPS AND BARRIERS  
AND EXPERIENCES WITH AGENCIES

Introduction

In an attempt to ascertain gaps in the health and human services systems and barriers to use, focus group participants were asked what types of services are missing for their group, as well as barriers to services and experiences with agencies.

Generally, the focus group participants believe that, aside from issues discussed in this and earlier chapters, the health and human services system in McHenry County is adequate, helpful, and provides many needed services. A few of the groups, such as the young adults and farmers, had little knowledge about human services and, therefore, were unable to voice an informed opinion.

Health and Human Services Gaps

**Affordable Child Care**

Affordable child care is seen as a need by three of the focus groups. Participants in the Hispanic group stressed that some Hispanic individuals hold down two jobs, and because of income levels, do not qualify for most child care assistance programs. Too high a proportion of their wages must go toward child care. Public Aid recipients and recent immigrants also named child care as a gap, especially during “off hours” and on weekends, although some Public Aid recipients praised 4C for helping to find affordable child care.

**Bilingual Agency Staff**

Hispanics and recent immigrants noted the need for bilingual staff at local agencies. Frequently, Spanish-speaking adults must take a bilingual child with them to translate. The group of recent immigrants noted that staff at the Illinois Migrant Council often serves as translators at many agencies throughout the county. The recent immigrants also suggested that, when designing brochures, flyers, and other printed materials which are distributed to the public, not only should they be available in Spanish, but more pictures and graphs should be used to make them easier to understand quickly.

**Services for Mentally Ill Individuals**

The parents of mentally ill children named several gaps in services. Few services exist for those over age 18 with developmental or emotional problems. Shortages include group homes, sheltered workshops, and job training programs with appropriate job coaches. Social workers for these families are in short supply. The parents feel that services for individuals with learning disabilities and ADHD should be expanded to the levels of service for developmentally disabled individuals. Training parents in advocacy was identified as a significant need in the community. Several parents identified the need for more training in dealing with emotional disorders for pediatricians, teachers, social workers and therapists.

**Other Health and Human Services Needs**

The girls in the at-risk youth focus group suggested that the Health Department open a free clinic or branch in McHenry to improve services to teens in the county. Also, the teens would like additional counseling and in-school programs for their group.

Recent immigrants to McHenry County would like to see more places in the community for diabetes and blood pressure checks, such as at a pharmacy or grocery store.

A need expressed by the homeless women is for gasoline assistance. Some local churches occasionally offer help with gas, but not enough. As one woman stated, "\$10 in gas doesn't go very far anymore."

### Experiences With Health and Human Services Agencies

Participants in the various focus groups have used the services of many of McHenry County's human services agencies. Many of the groups contained individuals who have been clients of the Department of Public Aid. Although focus group participants generally did not have problems with the programs at Public Aid, most complained about staff rudeness, what they judged to be incompetence, or being treated disrespectfully. On the opposite side, however, a few of the Hispanics reported that their experiences with Public Aid staff were positive. One member of the Hispanic group said that the way a person is treated at Public Aid depends on "who you get for a case manager."

Some of the individuals who participated in the focus groups have utilized the services of emergency rooms at both the Woodstock and McHenry hospitals. Generally, the medical care received at the hospitals is considered to be good. The main complaint about emergency room services was that time spent in the waiting room to see a doctor is too long. This concern was voiced by every focus group participant who had received emergency room treatment at a local hospital. As one of the Public Aid recipients commented, "I'm just glad I wasn't dying, because I'm sure that wouldn't have made any difference in getting me into a room."

Several of the focus groups contained individuals who had utilized the services of the Family Health Partnership Clinic in Woodstock. Although the medical care at the clinic was deemed to be very good, everyone who had been treated there complained about the long wait times - both to get an appointment and time spent in the waiting room.

Many of the focus group members had used services at the McHenry County Health Department, including WIC, flu shots, immunizations, testing services, and food inspections. Overall, the Health Department received high marks from the community, with staff said to be friendly and helpful. One woman called the WIC program "a lifesaver" while another wished that the WIC program could be extended to include children over the age of five. The girls in the at-risk youth focus group praised the McHenry County Health Department's health services, especially the WIC program and family planning. A few of the farmers reported negative experiences with the Health Department regarding food inspections for various Farm Bureau and other events, believing that Health Department staff is too stringent in applying their rules and sometimes interprets health codes inappropriately.

The disabled individuals praised the services of Pioneer Center, especially their employment component. Along with sheltered workshop employment, Pioneer Center offers training in office maintenance. One person is currently going through this training and is excited about the prospect of having what he called "a real job" when he finishes the maintenance training. Another focus group participant works at McDonald's and credited Pioneer Center with obtaining the job for her.

The elderly focus group participants made a point to express their appreciation for the many special services provided by local firefighters. Several senior citizens said that firemen had helped them put an extra key to their homes in a theft-proof box which was then attached near their door, so firefighters could quickly access those who need help in an emergency. The Cary Fire Department installs smoke alarms and changes batteries for elderly residents. Firefighters were praised by several for "being wonderful in the ambulance" during emergency trips to hospitals. The Cary Fire Department presents fire safety programs at senior centers and hosts two very popular suppers a year for senior citizens.

The homeless women praised the programs at Home of the Sparrow, which include counseling for both children and adults, budgeting help, employment assistance, parenting classes and tutoring for residents and children.

Other agencies with which focus group participants had contact with and, generally, were pleased with the services included Family Services, local churches, Senior Services, PADS, New Horizons, Thresholds, Heart Strings Adoption Support, McHenry County Mental Health Board, LIHEAP, and the Illinois Migrant Council.

## Barriers to Receiving Health and Human Services

### **Lack of Awareness of Available Services**

One of the most common barriers to receiving services, according to focus group participants, appears to be lack of awareness of available services. Many of the focus groups stated that many people are not aware of services or agencies until the time comes when services are needed. One suggestion for improving public awareness included the establishment of a central referral number for information on what services and programs are available. The mentally ill individuals suggested that a list of all available services be compiled in one document, then be distributed to churches, organizations, and agencies which help people in need.

Some of the individuals in the focus groups named word of mouth as the most common method for finding out about services in the community. As one elderly woman said, many seniors are unaware of services “unless they happen to talk about it at bingo.”

The senior citizens believe that, even if their group knew about available services, they might not utilize them. A deep sense of pride exists among the elderly so they are hesitant to request assistance. As one elderly person explained, “Seniors are loaded with pride. They can’t admit that they’re the ones who need the services.” The teens in the at-risk youth group believe that, frequently, teens will not seek services because they are afraid or embarrassed to admit that they need help.

### **Too Many Services Located in Woodstock Only**

Another barrier to receiving needed services cited by several of the groups is that too many of the available services are located in Woodstock only. Several groups asserted that essential human services agencies should be located in all major McHenry County communities. Individuals who do not live in Woodstock sometimes have trouble getting to the agency.

### **Eligibility Requirements**

Several of the focus groups believe that too-strict eligibility requirements keep people from obtaining human services. Low-income individuals specifically mentioned that Public Aid needs to loosen the requirements for food stamps. As one person said, “If I make an effort to work, I’m penalized on my food stamps. How do they expect us to better ourselves without a little help? It’s like being punished for working.” The parents of mentally ill children also cited eligibility requirements as a barrier in that particular diagnoses, age ranges, or geographic areas all limit the availability of services to children with emotional problems. One Public Aid recipient stated, “The system isn’t designed to help you get back on your feet. It encourages you to stay in it by giving you more if you have nothing than if you’re trying to improve yourself.”

### **Lack of Transportation**

Transportation, discussed in Chapter 3, was named as a barrier by several of the focus groups, especially in conjunction with too many services being offered in Woodstock only.

APPENDIX 1  
FOCUS GROUP MINUTES

AT-RISK YOUTH  
November 16, 2005

Karen Lytwyn began the discussion by introducing herself and Barbara Sjostrom. She explained the purpose of the focus group to the five boys and nine girls present, all students at McHenry East High School. The boys and girls met separately; however, the results of both groups are combined in this summary.

When asked what they like about living in McHenry County, the students mentioned the quiet, "laid back" atmosphere of the county's small towns. Both groups said that they feel safe in McHenry, which enjoys a very low crime rate. The boys were enthusiastic about outdoor activities such as the skate park, trails for go-carts, and school sports. The high school girls enjoy hanging out with their friends, many of whom grew up in McHenry and have been their friends almost all of their life.

On the negative side about living in McHenry County, the girls think that everyone knowing each other sometimes causes too much gossip because everyone knows everyone else's business. The girls also complained about nothing for teenagers to do. They feel that a video arcade, a bigger mall, bowling or additional movie theaters would enhance the quality of life in McHenry. Both groups voiced concern that the police treat teenagers harshly, without respect, and frequently "hassle" teens for no reason.

When queried about problems facing McHenry County, several teens cited a heavy presence of drugs, especially coke and heroin. All of them agreed drugs are easily available at school. One student told of a meth lab and a crack house discovered in his neighborhood and how dangerous this was for neighborhood residents.

Another problem named is the lack of a transportation system for people without cars. Teenagers do not feel comfortable using PACE, believing that the service is mostly for older people or handicapped individuals. They all would like to see a public bus service in McHenry. A few students noted that homeless individuals sometimes congregate near the school and in downtown McHenry.

The girls reported using health care services more often than the group of boys. Opening a free or reduced fee clinic or a branch of the Health Department in McHenry was suggested as a way to improve health services. Several students had used the Health Department for STD or HIV testing, as well as WIC, and were satisfied with the services, saying staff was friendly and helpful. However, some of the focus group participants complained that the wait time was often long. Speakers from the Health Department have shared information with students at the high school, which most of the group deemed very useful.

Regarding human services, some students had used or know of services at Public Aid, Youth Services Bureau and Family Services for counseling, and Turning Point for family violence situations. Generally, they are satisfied with the services except for Public Aid where staff seemed rude.

The teens identified the need for more groups during the school day for at-risk youth, providing counseling and life skills, and expanded hours for the Health Department and other health and human services agencies who serve teens, most of whom can only get to these agencies after school.

Barriers which prevent teens from using services include a lack of knowledge about what services are available as well as being afraid or embarrassed to admit that they need help.

Ms. Lytwyn ended the discussion by thanking the students for their help and distributing a \$20 stipend to each participant.

## DISABLED INDIVIDUALS

January 26, 2006

Karen Lytwyn introduced herself and Barbara Sjostrom and explained the purpose of the focus group to the participants. The discussion was held at Pioneer Center in McHenry, with seven disabled individuals taking part, five living in group homes around the county and two who live in the community.

The disabled individuals all enjoy the quiet, rural atmosphere of McHenry County. Those who live in a group home were extremely complimentary about Pioneer Center group home staff.

When asked what they do not like about McHenry County, everyone cited the lack of public bus service as a problem. Several people said that a more coordinated bus system would allow them to be more independent rather than having to rely on group home staff or family members for transportation.

The discussion then turned to local health care. All of the disabled persons in the group have a primary care physician who accepts Public Aid. The staff at the group homes have cultivated a network of physicians who will serve their clients. However, finding dentists who will accept Medicaid is very difficult for this group. Several clients have postponed needed dental work because of this barrier. One of the participants who lives with her parents reported having dental coverage under her parents' insurance. When probed about vision care, three of the participants said that their case manager at Pioneer Center found an optometrist who offers their clients a special discount for eyeglasses.

Most of the disabled individuals in the group, through their Pioneer Center case manager at the group home, are well served by staff who seek out solutions to client human services needs. Therefore, many in the group were not able to convey many experiences with the McHenry County human services network. One person said that he occasionally uses a food pantry or emergency funds through the Direct Assistance Program (DAP) located at several churches.

The group concluded by talking about employment services offered through Pioneer Center. Along with sheltered workshop employment, Pioneer Center offers training in office maintenance. One of the people in the group is currently going through this training and is excited about the prospect of having what he called "a real job" when he finishes the maintenance training. Another focus group participant works at McDonald's and credited Pioneer Center with obtaining the job for her.

Karen expressed her appreciation to the group for taking the time to meet and a \$20 stipend was distributed to all participants.

## ELDERLY INDIVIDUALS

October 17, 2005

Karen Lytwyn opened the morning's discussion by introducing herself and Marti Keeker, and explaining the purpose of the focus group. Ten McHenry County seniors, residents of Crystal Lake and Cary, participated in the discussion. Several lifelong residents said they "were born and raised in McHenry County."

Participants dislike today's "overcrowding," high taxes and rising gas prices in the county. A Crystal Lake woman said she is "most upset about overcrowding" and a resident of nearby Cary echoed, "Cary's busting at it's seams!" More than one expressed fears that rising taxes and utilities might force them to sell their family homes and move to an apartment. One person disagreed: "I don't think they're (taxes) that bad; many places are worse," prompting others to cite their children's difficulties paying even higher tax rates in other states. The group agreed gas prices are too high everywhere and noted that gas gets more expensive as one gets closer to the city of Chicago.

Traffic and lack of convenient public transportation cause major problems for the seniors. Bus transportation must be reserved in advance; which makes an unplanned, but necessary, trip extremely difficult. Cabs are too expensive for those on fixed incomes. Seniors who are unable to drive need access to affordable public transportation all day long, but the senior bus in Cary ends service at 3 p.m., too early for some regular doctors' appointments. One senior suggested public transport implement a "senior schedule," designating one bus to follow a route convenient to seniors, accessing medical offices, pharmacies, grocery stores, and other senior needs one or two days a week. Seniors could schedule their appointments, meetings and errands on "senior days."

The focus group participants agreed that one major weakness in the McHenry County health and human services delivery system is seniors' need for better access to health care services such as physical therapy, rehabilitative exercise and fitness/wellness programs. Crystal Lake has no swimming pool or whirlpool for therapy, and rates are high to swim at the Holiday Inn and at a local health club. Seniors are required to join a fitness club before using the pool; one can't participate occasionally without a paid membership. "Cary does great at providing swimming and exercise for kids, but not for seniors," said a Cary resident.

A "plus" for McHenry County is that, in addition to primary care physicians, a large number and variety of specialists are available to seniors at medical centers and hospitals, both in McHenry County and in nearby counties. Social services, nursing care and home care are all available, but one person complained, "you need to sign up ahead of time to get help later when you discover that you need it."

There is also a strong volunteer system in the county through RSVP, the seniors reported.

Senior Services helps seniors in many areas. One person commented on being "amazed how fast they got it (Senior Services) off the ground and how quickly surveys went out" to seniors. Low cost legal services are also available to seniors. A participant commented on the "excellent legal help" she had received and said that she had referred a friend "and she got help too."

"What are the major barriers to using senior services?" Ms. Lytwyn asked. "Are seniors generally aware of what's available for them in McHenry County?" "Not until they need it," replied several individuals. "Seniors are loaded with pride," explained another, "they can't admit that they're the ones who need the services."

The focus group agreed that some health information isn't getting out to all seniors, and many are unaware of other services that could be available to them "unless they happen to talk about it at bingo" or other gatherings. Information about senior services often "gets tossed," a man said, because seniors just don't want to think about ever having to use the services themselves.

There are no hospitals in Crystal Lake, but area physicians refer local patients to several hospitals located in the surrounding area, including two operated by Centegra, Sherman and St. Joseph hospitals in Elgin, and

Good Shepherd near Barrington. The hospital one uses depends on where one's doctor is on staff. No one in the group had needed to use a hospital in the last year. When asked if they need a hospital in Crystal Lake, they said local residents have been trying to get one for years.

Everyone present was very appreciative of the many special services provided by local firefighters. Several focus group participants said that firemen had helped them put an extra key to their homes in a theft-proof box which was then attached near their door, so firefighters could easily access those who need help quickly in emergencies. The Cary Fire Department also installs smoke alarms and changes batteries for elderly residents. Firefighters were praised by several for "being wonderful in the ambulance" during emergency trips to hospitals. The Cary Fire Department presents fire safety programs at senior centers and hosts two very popular suppers a year for senior citizens.

Following the discussion, Karen thanked the group members for their time and comments, and Marti distributed a \$20 stipend to each participant.

FARMERS  
November 9, 2005

Karen Lytwyn introduced herself and Barbara Sjostrom, explaining the objectives of the McHenry County Healthy Community study. Thirteen McHenry County Farm Bureau board members took part.

The focus group began with a discussion about positive aspects of living in McHenry County. The group appreciates the open space, fresh air, and lack of noise in western McHenry County. Several members praised the good hospitals and excellent shopping options nearby. A few individuals like being close enough to Chicago to visit the city when they want, yet live in the more rural McHenry County.

Named as negative aspects of residing in the county were the unmanaged growth and development that the participants believe is occurring in McHenry County. One man summarized this sentiment by stating, "McHenry is becoming crowded like Schaumburg". Slow response time by the McHenry County Sheriff's Department, which is spread too thin, was also noted by two of the farmers.

When asked about health care, the consensus of the group was that local primary health care and dental services are of good quality and in adequate supply. No one in the focus group could name any missing health services. Those who had used the various hospitals were satisfied with the care they had received, aside from saying that the time spent in the Woodstock hospital waiting room was too long.

Of concern to many in the focus group is the high cost of health insurance for self-employed farmers. Members reported spending \$10,000-\$15,000 per year on health insurance. Spouses of many of the farmers in the group work elsewhere just for the health insurance benefits.

None of the farmers had ever used any local human services. A few of the men reported negative experiences with the Health Department regarding food inspections for various Farm Bureau and other events, believing that Health Department staff is too stringent in their rules and sometimes interprets health codes inappropriately. Flu vaccination clinics with long lines were also criticized as poorly organized, although the low cost flu shot is appreciated by the group.

Ms. Lytwyn thanked the farmers for their participation and a \$20 stipend was given to each focus group member.

HISPANICS  
December 15,2005

After introductions and an explanation of the focus group's purpose, Karen Lytwyn ascertained that all present lived in McHenry. Thirteen Hispanic individuals took part in the focus group discussion. An interpreter was present to translate for the participants who do not speak English.

Many reasons were given for liking McHenry as a place to live. All of the group reported that they feel very safe in McHenry, which has little gang activity and low crime. Several participants who had moved to McHenry from Chicago enjoy being able to leave their home in the evening without worrying about being assaulted. Many of the Hispanic individuals like the easygoing pace of living in McHenry; the "laid back" atmosphere of a small town. The schools are good and their children receive help in school when needed.

The group then talked about the negative aspects of living in McHenry County. The cost of living is high, and living in the county is fairly expensive. Residents sometimes must go to other counties for low cost health care. No public transportation is available, especially between cities. Frequently a person may be able to find a job in another city, but has no way to get to the job. Many of the Hispanics in the group do not own a vehicle or do not drive.

Some of the group believe that the local police treat Hispanics as second class citizens and frequently pull them over when driving for no good reason. A language barrier exists for those participants who speak little or no English, finding it hard to communicate with others in the community, such as store clerks.

When asked about the adequacy of local health care, many of the individuals showed concern that sometimes they have a problem receiving primary health care. For those receiving Public Aid, finding a doctor who takes the card can be difficult, especially if the patient does not speak English. No one in the group knew of any local doctor who is bilingual or has bilingual staff. Also, some Hispanics in the group do not qualify for Public Aid. A few have utilized the Family Health Partnership Clinic in Woodstock, reporting the medical care to be good, but wait times excessive.

Several participants reported that, frequently, Hispanics will not go to a doctor or emergency room because of their immigration status and the fear of being deported.

Dental care is a major issue for this group. No dentist in McHenry County takes Public Aid or will work for a reduced fee, they say. Two of the participants go to a dentist in Waukegan, who takes the medical card.

A major problem for the focus group participants in both the health care and human services areas is lack of bilingual staff at health care facilities and agencies. Frequently, a Hispanic adult must take a bilingual child with them to translate.

The women in the group stressed the huge need for affordable child care, especially during "off" hours, such as evenings and weekends. Some hold down two jobs, and because of income levels, do not qualify for most child care assistance programs. The Hispanic women believe that eligibility requirements should be loosened.

Affordable housing is also a problem for many participants in the focus group. Several group members have applied for public housing, but do not qualify for benefits. Plus, even if a person does qualify, the waiting list for Section 8 housing is very long, sometimes up to two years. In the meantime, some larger Hispanic families are forced to live in one or two bedroom apartments, since that is all that they can afford.

Many of the Hispanic individuals have had contact with the local Public Aid office. While a few members of the group said Public Aid staff is very helpful, others find the staff to be rude and patronizing. As one woman stated, "It all depends on who you get for a case manager."

When asked about employment opportunities in the county, the majority of the group laughed and said, "There are no good jobs here." Some of the participants complained about a staff person at a major temporary employment agency used by many Hispanics. One man summarized, "The woman at the agency favors her friends. If she doesn't know you or doesn't like you, she's rude and won't send you out on good jobs or any job at all."

Karen thanked the participants for their contribution to the discussion and distributed a \$20 stipend.

HOMELESS MEN  
November 23, 2005

Barb Sjoström began the discussion by introducing herself and Karen Lytwyn and explaining the purpose of the McHenry County Health Community study. A total of seven homeless men participated in the focus group.

The group discussed the positive aspects of living in McHenry County. Many of the men enjoy the “easy going” lifestyle in Woodstock and the small-town atmosphere. Two men are impressed by the rolling hills and the presence of farmland. Several in the focus group reported the people in McHenry County to be very friendly and willing to help others in need.

When asked what they dislike about living in the county the men named the lack of local public transportation. Being homeless, many of the men cannot afford even the PACE bus. PADS contracts with an outside company to take its clients places, but depending on how many places the van has to stop, sometimes many hours is spent in the van.

Some members of the focus group complained that well-paying industrial jobs are missing in McHenry County. Most of the available jobs are low-paying service jobs. Several of the group cited instances in which a potential employer sees the PADS address on a job application and won't consider the PADS resident for a job.

The discussion turned to health care, with almost all of the group commenting that a medical card is almost impossible for a single man to obtain. One man blamed this, partly, on the perception that white males don't need help. None of the men have any type of health insurance and, unless an emergency arises, they do without health care. Two of the group members had used the Family Health Partnership Clinic and complained that they had to wait a month or more for an appointment.

The group expressed a need for help with prescription drugs. One man is diabetic and said that he sometimes goes without his medicine because he can't afford the cost. PADS has helped him a few times with the cost of the drugs. Dental care for individuals without insurance is said to be lacking in McHenry County. Several of the men in the group need some type of dental care, but are unable to receive needed treatment. As far as they knew, no agency or group assisted with dental expenses.

When asked about human services in the county, all of the focus group members have used at least one service. The group participants were all pleased with the service they received at PADS, except for the transportation problem. PADS assists with finding a job, helps with resume writing, provides access to a phone and computer, and offers GED classes. Family Services counseling services are said to be beneficial, and the agency helps with psychotropic drugs.

The group noted that several local churches provided clothes and food for homeless individuals. One man said that New Horizons in Hebron had been very helpful to him in finding food, and referred him to PADS. Another knew of someone who had received a donated car from Willow Creek Church.

Regarding housing, many of the men in the group are on the Section 8 waiting list, which is said to be too long - up to two years. Not enough landlords in McHenry County accept a Section 8 voucher, and those with a voucher are sometimes stereotyped as being bad tenants.

Most of the focus group participants believe that all essential human services agencies should be located in one place - with offices in all McHenry County places. Too many of the agencies and their services are available only in Woodstock.

The meeting ended with thanks to the men for their participation in the focus group. In lieu of a \$20 stipend, a donation was made to PADS.

HOMELESS WOMEN  
February 13, 2006

Karen Lytwyn introduced staff and explained the purpose of the focus group. Seven female residents from Home of the Sparrow participated in the discussion.

When asked what they like about living in McHenry County, most participants compared the difference between their previous lifestyle in Cook or Lake Counties with their current McHenry County residence. They all believe that the cost of living in McHenry County is much less expensive. The group also appreciates the local school system, lighter traffic in the area, friendly people and the country atmosphere. Several feel that health and human services are more accessible, available and efficient in McHenry County than in Chicago.

Next the group was asked what they think are the negative aspects of living in McHenry County. Lack of a public transportation system, with a regular schedule between communities, was named as a major problem by all of the women. Though PACE and Dial-a-ride is available, prescheduling is required, with long waiting times for pick-up, plus direct point-to-point travel to your destination is not available. Those who have relocated to McHenry from Chicago and its suburbs said that the lack of public transportation prevents them from visiting their friends and family "back home."

When asked about health care, the group agreed that finding a primary care physician willing to take patients receiving financial assistance is not difficult, unless you are single and childless. Members all agreed that qualifying for assistance is very difficult, if not impossible, for a single childless woman. The two childless women in the group must pay all expenses themselves, or go without any medical attention.

Home of the Sparrow offers some health care services pro bono, such as paying for a doctor if a resident or her child is sick and has no insurance.

Some of the focus group members had used the emergency room at Northern Illinois Medical Center and noted that, while the medical care was satisfactory, the time spent waiting to see a doctor was "ridiculously" long.

One of the women has utilized the Family Partnership Clinic in Woodstock and described the clinic as "terrible to get in and not very accommodating in scheduling appointments."

The discussion then turned to local human services. The group praised Home of the Sparrow, saying that the agency is unique in that mothers are allowed to bring their sons twelve and older; most homeless facilities do not allow this. Home of the Sparrow offers counseling for both children and adults, budgeting help, employment assistance, parenting classes and tutoring for residents and children.

One of the women in the group complimented the WIC program at the McHenry County Health Department, and wished WIC could continue for children over age five.

A suggestion for a needed human service was gasoline assistance. Some local churches occasionally offer help with gas but not enough. As one woman stated, "\$10 in gas doesn't go very far anymore."

The group believes that most people are not aware of the array of human services available to them. When asked how they found out about Home of the Sparrow, most said by word of mouth, or from a clergy member at a Chicago emergency shelter.

The discussion ended with the distribution of a \$20 stipend and a thank you for the women's participation in the focus group.

LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS  
November 21, 2005

Barb Sjostrom began the discussion by introducing herself and Karen Lytwyn and explaining the purpose of the study. A total of eight low-income individuals took part in the focus group discussion.

The group shared what they perceive as the positive aspects of living in McHenry County. Several said that the McHenry schools are good, with very caring, involved teachers. Most enjoy the "country living" of McHenry and like the small-town atmosphere and the slower pace of living compared to Chicago. The low level of crime in McHenry County was named as a benefit of living in the county, with one mother saying "It is so nice not having to worry about my kids catching a bullet when they're playing outside." Human services are much easier to access in McHenry County than in Chicago, and the people are very helpful and friendly to newcomers.

When asked what they dislike about living in the county and the major problems facing McHenry County, the group unanimously named the lack of local public transportation. PACE is limited and requires calling ahead; sometimes this is not possible. Also, PACE does not travel between McHenry County places enough. For instance, one group member said, "If I want to go to Woodstock, I have to go early in the morning and can't come back until mid-afternoon." According to this group, not everyone drives, and a good bus system is essential for getting to jobs, medical appointments and other errands.

Some members of the focus group complained that well-paying jobs with benefits are lacking in McHenry County. Most of the available jobs are low-paying assembly line positions or in the service sector.

Two women in the group believe that the area needs more activities for school-age children. One suggested opening additional community centers with after-school and evening youth activities. Finally, one person said that traffic congestion is beginning to be a problem in McHenry.

The wait time for a Section 8 voucher is too long, sometimes up to two years. Not enough landlords in McHenry accept Section 8, and one woman suggested the Housing Authority provide more information for potential landlords. She thinks most landlords have an image of Section 8 recipients as deadbeats.

Regarding health care, all but two individuals in the group has insurance through Public Aid. They generally agreed that finding a primary care doctor who accepts the medical card is not a problem. However, very few specialists will take Public Aid. One of the men with no insurance reported that the medical care at the Family Health Partnership clinic is very good, but the wait time for both an appointment and in the waiting room is too long. He feels that the clinic needs to expand and open branches in other McHenry County cities.

The lack of McHenry County dentists who accept Public Aid, especially for adults, was cited as a major health care problem by this group. No one could name a McHenry County dentist who accepted the medical card for adults and only one person knew of a dentist in McHenry County who would accept Public Aid for children. She took her child to him for a cleaning and said she waited five months for an appointment.

A few of the low-income individuals have used emergency room services at the McHenry hospital and agreed that while the medical care received was good, the time spent waiting to be treated was very long. One person feels that the hospital needs more ER beds, reporting that he was treated in the hallway at one visit.

When queried about local human services needs, all of the focus group members have used various services in the past. The WIC program at the Health Department was said to be very helpful. However, one person did not know that McHenry County had a Health Department and was very curious as to the services provided. The group cited several area churches for providing valuable services to the community, such as help with utilities, clothes, and food. One woman cited Home of the Sparrow as

providing good housing for homeless women, but believes that the facility places too much emphasis on finding a job as quickly as possible.

Almost all of those who receive Public Aid feel that staff at the local office is rude and looks down on their clients. Also, Public Aid needs to loosen the requirements for food stamps. As one person said, "If I make an effort to work, I'm penalized on my food stamps. How do they expect us to better ourselves without a little help? It's like being punished for working."

Most of the focus group participants cited the lack of centralized human services as a barrier to receiving help. Too many of the agencies are located only in Woodstock and should expand to other areas of the county. Also, many people have no idea where to go for services until they need them, then have to "scramble" to find out where help is available.

The meeting closed with distribution of a \$20 stipend and thanks to the participants for helping with the Health Community study.

MENTALLY ILL INDIVIDUALS  
December 19, 2005

Karen Lytwyn began the focus group by introducing staff and explaining the purpose of the Healthy Community study. Ten clients participated in the focus group, all residents of Woodstock area group homes. The focus group was organized by staff at Thresholds.

When asked what they like about living in McHenry County, the group immediately cited the quality and quantity of mental health resources. Compared to other places in which they have resided, the group members are very satisfied with the mental health services offered in the county. Family Services in McHenry, Thresholds and their group homes were all praised for having helpful staff and effective programs. Several participants like the rural setting of Woodstock, and said that the people are very friendly.

On the negative side of living in McHenry County, group members noted the lack of a public transportation system with a regular schedule between communities. PACE is difficult to use because you must call ahead for a ride which sometimes is not possible. Most of the mentally ill individuals do not like the fact that they must leave their group home every day from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m., reportedly even if they are not feeling well. Two of the participants, however, do not find this requirement to be a problem, saying that they come to Thresholds every day for programs anyway.

Regarding health care, most group members are satisfied with the treatment they receive at local medical clinics and emergency rooms, although two persons believe that the Woodstock hospital ER should find a way to shorten the wait time to see a doctor. One member reported that he had to wait three hours once at the ER to see a doctor. Most of the mentally ill persons have used the medical services at the Family Health Partnership Clinic. Although medical care and staff at the clinic were reported to be excellent, participants complained about the long wait time to get an appointment. The group identified a need for more dentists and vision care professionals who accept Public Aid. No one knew of any McHenry County dentist or eye doctor who accepts the medical card.

Group members noted that many human services are available in the county. Local churches were specifically mentioned as a good place to get food and clothing. Several food banks and pantries are also available to those in need. Mental health services, especially Thresholds, were again praised.

A lack of knowledge was suggested as the main reason individuals don't use available human services. The group suggested compiling a list of services and making it available to those in need or to churches and other organizations which help people.

Karen thanked the participants for their contribution and Ms. Sjostrom distributed a \$20 stipend to all of the discussants.

PARENTS OF MENTALLY ILL CHILDREN  
October 25, 2005

Barbara Sjoström explained the purpose of the McHenry County Health Community Study and the several components. Seven parents of children with learning disabilities, or emotional or behavioral problems were present. Each parent had a child or children with different combinations of disabilities.

Plenty of open space and greenery, as well as being scenic, defined what the individuals in the focus group like about living in McHenry County. Several members said that people are friendly, and the lifestyle in McHenry County is more easygoing than in Chicago. The Northern Illinois Special Recreation District and Wrap Around Services from the Mental Health Board were praised as quality services.

Much of the focus group discussion centered on difficulties encountered in obtaining needed services for children and young adults with emotional and developmental disorders such as Bipolar Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), Behavior Disorders (BD) or Developmental Disabilities (DD). Few services exist for those over age 18 with developmental or emotional problems. Shortages for this group include group homes, sheltered workshops, and job training programs with appropriate job coaches. Social workers for these families are in short supply. Services for individuals with learning disabilities and ADHD should be expanded to the levels of service for developmentally disabled individuals.

All participants agreed that without their advocacy efforts, their children would not receive the required services from schools and other agencies. Children who don't have parent advocates may drift through the special education system without having their needs met. Training parents in advocacy was identified as a significant need in the community.

The group discussed the Special Education system in depth with general agreement that the dissolution of services by the Special Education District of McHenry County (SEDOM) had a negative impact on children. All school districts in the county sent their special education students to SEDOM where highly trained teachers and structured programs existed. Due to financial considerations, SEDOM was recently dissolved and the children returned to their home school districts which have varying levels of expertise in dealing with these children. Many children were assigned to regular classrooms as part of the inclusion model, with variable results depending on the child.

Participants feel that the schools are quick to label students as Behavior Disorder (BD) or Emotionally Disturbed (ED), negative labels affecting their future. These labels made it easy to "dump" the students into special classes where adequate supervision and safety may not exist. One mother commented that her child became worse after going to the BD classes.

Parents described their experiences at specific agencies. One mother reported a positive experience with Metropolitan Family Services where a therapist helped her son considerably. Another parent reported that Family Services was not helpful to her bipolar son with its socialization class. Youth Services Bureau was criticized for having too much therapist turnover. Heart Strings Adoption Support was praised for winning a national award, though DCFS recently cut their funding. Three parents endorsed Wrap Around Services of the Mental Health Board for their facilitators who help families. One parent even became a facilitator in order to obtain services for her son.

Several parents identified the need for more training in emotional disorders for pediatricians, teachers, social workers and therapists. The parents do not think they should have to educate the professionals about these disorders.

The greatest strength of the mental health and educational systems listed by the parents was encountering some excellent teachers, social workers, and therapists who really made a difference in controlling the behavior of the troubled children.

Rigid eligibility criteria for various programs are a weakness of the health and human services system. Particular diagnoses, age ranges, or geographic areas all limit the availability of services to children with emotional problems. A lack of coordination among agencies and "turf issues" were also mentioned as weaknesses.

No duplication of services has been observed by the parents in this group. Rather, parents think more individualized services should be developed for troubled children and older youth, particularly young adults needing more group homes and employment programs. One parent proposed that another agency should be created to serve these individuals, though funding is always an issue.

More respite care services, parent support groups, and summer activities for their children were mentioned as gaps in services. Greater community awareness of emotional and behavioral problems is necessary to change stereotypes, perhaps by using a media campaign. One parent suggested including discussion of these conditions in the high school health curriculum.

The parents believe the stigma and shame of having troubled children and sometimes being told that they are bad parents who can't control their children are major barriers to seeking help. A lack of information about what services are available may also be a factor. Perhaps the biggest barrier to seeking help is a lack of assertiveness among parents or the lack of persistence in advocacy efforts to obtain the appropriate services for their children.

Barbara thanked the group for their participation and gave each \$20 for their assistance.

## PUBLIC AID RECIPIENTS

December 7, 2005

Barb Sjostrom began the discussion by introducing herself and Karen Lytwyn and explaining the purpose of the study. A total of nine Public Aid recipients took part in the focus group discussion.

The group shared what they believe are the positive aspects of living in McHenry County. Most like the small-town, quiet atmosphere. One woman enjoys the warm summers. Health care and human services are plentiful, and much easier to access than in Chicago. Several mothers in the group think that the Woodstock school system is very good, especially with programs for special needs children. Some individuals in the group grew up in McHenry County and have no desire to live anywhere else.

When asked what they dislike about living in the county and the major problems facing McHenry County, all participants named the lack of public transportation as a negative aspect. PACE is not reliable and has limited availability. The group members do not like the fact that you have to call ahead to arrange PACE transportation which frequently is not possible.

Several women in the focus group stated that good jobs are hard to find in McHenry County, especially if you are a single mother with preschool age children. One cited as an example that she had a job that paid \$7.50 an hour, but most of her wages went for child care.

Housing in the county is too expensive and the wait time for a Section 8 voucher can be as long as two years, plus not enough landlords in Woodstock accept a Section 8 voucher. Eligibility for public housing is said to be too strict. As summarized by one participant, "My boyfriend and I waited well over two years for a Section 8. When our name finally came up, my boyfriend was working and we made \$500 too much to quality - so we had to go back on the list."

Regarding health care, everyone in the group has medical coverage through Public Aid. They generally agreed that finding a primary care doctor who accepts the medical card is not a problem. However, very few specialists will take Public Aid.

Of major concern to this group is the lack of dentists who will accept Public Aid and, in fact, only one person knew of any dentist in McHenry County who would work with Public Aid. He is located in Richmond and she wasn't even sure if he is still practicing. The group also complained about prescription coverage under Medicaid, saying that the list of covered drugs is too limited.

A few of the Public Aid recipients have used emergency room services at the Woodstock hospital and agreed that while the medical care received at the ER was very good, the time spent waiting to be treated was extremely long. As one person commented, "I'm just glad I wasn't dying, because I'm sure that wouldn't have made any difference in getting me into a room."

When asked about local human services needs, all participants had used services. These included the Health Department for WIC, LIHEAP, Pioneer Center, and local churches. The group praised the Health Department as providing great services, especially WIC which is a very helpful program. LIHEAP provides utility assistance which one woman reported was very helpful for her. Almost all of the Public Aid recipients found staff at the local Public Aid office to be a bit rude on occasion. Several of the group members have sometimes gone to local churches for food. They praised the churches for providing this needed service. The churches in Woodstock are said to be very generous with food and clothing.

One woman feels that many people can't afford services, but also can't qualify for some helping programs because their income is just above the eligibility threshold which can discourage people from trying to help themselves. As stated by one woman, "The system isn't designed to help you get back on your feet. It encourages you to stay in it by giving you more if you have nothing than if you're trying to improve yourself."

Transportation was again mentioned as a barrier to receiving services. A shortage of good, affordable child care facilities, especially on off-shifts and on the weekend, is also said to be a problem, although some participants praised 4C for helping to find child care. Also, many people are not aware of where to go for services until they need them - then they don't know where to turn.

The meeting closed with distribution of a \$20 stipend and an expression of thanks to the participants.

RECENT IMMIGRANTS TO MCHENRY COUNTY  
November 9, 2005

Karen Lytwyn introduced staff and explained the purpose of the focus group. Eleven English as a Second Language (ESL) students and a translator participated in the discussion held at the Illinois Migrant Council office in Harvard. The participants are recent immigrants, mostly from Mexico, who have some legal status such as a work permit or citizenship.

When asked what they like about living in McHenry County, the group mentioned the small town atmosphere with nice people and little traffic in the western portion of the county. The schools were praised, especially the lack of gangs in the schools. Several of the discussants reported that they feel their children are very safe in Harvard schools. Most of the group believes that Harvard enjoys a very low crime rate.

The negative aspects of living in McHenry County centered around the cost of living with high taxes, expensive housing and high prices for food. The lack of a good public transportation system was mentioned, with several people saying that Harvard needs a bus system. Although the city is not large, some places are too far apart to walk. One person read that recently Harvard has experienced extensive vandalism to buildings and cars. She hopes that this does not mean that crime is on the rise.

Participants shared their experiences with health care facilities in the county. Despite long waiting times for appointments or in the emergency rooms, the participants are generally satisfied with the health care they receive. Due to the large demand from uninsured patients, the wait for an appointment at Family Health Partnership Clinic in Woodstock is almost a month. A similar clinic is needed in Harvard, since traveling to Woodstock is sometimes not possible unless able to drive. Several women in the group have used McHenry County Health Department services, including WIC, prenatal care, immunizations and school physicals for their children.

When asked what additional health services would be helpful, the participants desire more places for diabetes and blood pressure checks, such as at a pharmacy or grocery store.

Some of the individuals in the group are familiar with human services. One participant had a good experience with receiving disability payments from Social Security. Local food pantries, especially at churches, have been helpful to other members of the group. The Illinois Migrant Council was praised for their high quality ESL classes and assistance with referrals to other services. Several individuals appreciated the fact that the Public Aid office in Woodstock has bilingual staff.

Suggestions were made for improving services to the growing Spanish-speaking population. The number of agencies who employ bilingual staff is increasing, but more staff who speak Spanish are needed. The Illinois Migrant Council Director often serves as an advocate and translator with many agencies throughout the county. When designing brochures, flyers, and other printed materials which are distributed to the public, not only should these materials be available in Spanish, but more pictures and graphs should be used.

A lack of child care and information about what services are available were identified as gaps in services. Affordable housing is in short supply throughout the county. Currently, a mobile home park which has primarily Hispanic residents is being demolished, leaving those who live there few options for moving the mobile homes they own.

Employment is limited because many of the temporary agencies who employ recent immigrants to the area do not provide any benefits such as insurance. Also, with no buses between towns in the county, getting to a job is often difficult.

Ms. Lytwyn thanked everyone for participating in the focus group and distributed a \$20 stipend.

UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS  
November 17, 2005

Barb Sjostrom began the discussion by introducing staff and explaining the purpose of the Health Communities study. Eleven unemployed individuals were present at the focus group.

The group was asked about the good aspects of living in McHenry County. The first thing mentioned was that McHenry County is a safe place to raise a family, with little crime in the county. Several individuals said that they like the small town environment of cities in McHenry County. If people want additional forms of entertainment and shopping, Chicago is within easy driving distance. One woman praised the Woodstock School District, saying that her children get a quality education. One person reported the cost of living to be less in McHenry County, although several others in the group disagreed.

There are several problems facing the county. Several people believe taxes of all kinds are becoming too high and the cost of living is rising rapidly. Some individuals in the group complained about the growth and development in the county, with one person saying "In ten years Crystal Lake and McHenry will just be mini-Chicagos." Along with the rapid growth comes overcrowded schools, especially in the eastern parts of the county.

Public transportation is seen as a problem by this group. PACE only operates on weekdays from 9 to 5, and is inconvenient. A person must call ahead to arrange for PACE and frequently, this is not feasible. Longer hours and expanded routes should be available, with more than one trip per day between cities.

A few of the unemployed individuals see a need for more activities for youth, citing increasing gang presence in Woodstock. As one person commented, "If you don't provide these kids with something to do after school, they're going to be easily recruited by the gangs." One man noted that a "head shop" opened on the Woodstock square and he sees this as a threat to the well-being of youth.

All of the group cited the lack of jobs as a problem in the county. One man in this group who is in his 50s, said that finding a job for someone his age is even tougher than for the younger age groups. Most of the available jobs are low-paying service jobs with no benefits.

None of the focus group participants currently have medical insurance, except for one woman who is receiving Public Aid. All of the unemployed stressed the need for free or sliding-scale medical care in the county. Some of the group had used the Family Health Partnership Clinic and stated that, although the medical care was excellent, the wait to get an appointment was too long.

Low-cost dental care was seen as lacking by this focus group. One man said he's put off a root canal for over two years because he can't afford the procedure. The cost of prescription medicine is outrageous when a person has to pay himself. One man noted that when he was staying at PADS, the local homeless facility, help with medicine was provided.

Regarding human services needs, this group believes that services are plentiful in McHenry County, although not centralized. All participants had used the services of agencies during the past year. At the McHenry County Health Department, group members who utilized MCHD services found the staff to be helpful and friendly. One woman called the WIC program "a lifesaver." Local churches are very generous with food and clothing. LIHEAP provides help with utilities.

When asked about barriers to receiving services, the members of this group unanimously named lack of transportation as the major barrier. Other than PACE, which requires arranging ahead of time, no public transportation is available. Related to the transportation problem is that human services in McHenry County are mostly located in Woodstock. The group believes that agencies should have branch offices in other cities. Additionally, many people are not aware of services which are available and a better centralized information and referral service is needed in the county. When asked how they had learned of

available human services, most indicated word of mouth as the source. One person said that a Department of Employment Security staff person told him about a food pantry at a local church.

The session ended with the distribution of a \$20 stipend and a thanks to all for their participation.

YOUNG ADULTS  
November 2, 2005

Karen Lytwyn introduced herself and Barbara Lambert and explained the purpose of the focus group. Seven young adults (three men, four women) attended the discussion, which was held at Youth Services Bureau. Five of the individuals live in Woodstock, with one each from McHenry and Crystal Lake. All have full-time jobs, while one also is a part-time student at McHenry Community College.

Positive aspects of living in McHenry County are considered to be the open spaces and the small-town atmosphere of the county's towns, while still being near enough to Chicago to quickly get into the city when needed. Several of the participants enjoy the downtown square in Woodstock, with one saying the square is "quaint" with lots of good restaurants. The group said they feel safe living in the county, with the low incidence of crime.

On the downside, the group mentioned the necessity of having a car since the public transportation is not adequate. Jobs are not plentiful in the area. Two of the young people believe that, as they progress in their careers, they will have to leave the area for a large city in order to find appropriate work.

This group of young adults thinks that McHenry County is facing many challenges because of explosive growth. Small businesses are closing as large companies like WalMart are coming into the area and "battering the small competition."

The cost of housing is an important issue for the group who feel that the high cost of buying a home in the area is prohibitive for many people their age. Various parts of the county have different rental costs, ranging from very expensive in the southeastern area around Cary to cheaper and more affordable in the northwestern zone near Harvard. Crystal Lake has mostly new construction, while Woodstock has older housing options. Finding an affordable apartment can take a great deal of effort.

More recreational activities are needed for teens and young adults in their 20s. Options in the area now are limited to restaurants, bowling alleys, and movie theaters.

Everyone in the group now has health insurance, although one man recently had been uninsured for three years and reported health care to be difficult to find without insurance. He said most local doctors won't even make an initial appointment with you unless you have some type of insurance. Concern was expressed about the many young adults between college and careers who have no health insurance. Some must rely on parents to cover medical bills, but coverage under parents frequently ends a few months after college graduation. One participant's employer recently eliminated dental insurance so he is now foregoing any nonessential dental work, such as routine cleanings.

As far as human services needed by young adults, no one in the group could identify any nor have they used any human services. Agencies they were aware of include United Way, Youth Services Bureau for counseling, Pioneer Center which assists people with disabilities, and the Health Department for family planning services.

Karen thanked the young adults for participating and a \$20 stipend was given to each individual.