

# **UNITED WAY OF CHATHAM COUNTY**

## **2009 Community Needs Survey Report**

**4/27/09**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The United Way of Chatham County conducted a Community Needs Survey in early 2009. Over 900 Chatham County residents responded, indicating needs in their own households and giving their views on issues in the county at large. With wide agreement, respondents to this survey identified several issues as major problems in Chatham County. Many of these problems related to necessities of life – lack of good jobs; lack of affordable medical care and money for medications; hunger; and not enough affordable, safe housing. Several issues related to children and adolescents were also of major concern. Survey results will be used to help the United Way focus effectively on the current needs in our county.

### **PURPOSE AND PROCESS**

With the objective of using donated dollars most effectively, the United Way conducts community needs assessments every several years. The survey was intended to include not only donors and community leaders, but also a broad spectrum of county residents. It was limited to Chatham County residents, with one survey per family/household. Wording and formatting made it more accessible to people who do not easily read or respond to surveys. Similarly, considerable attention was given to having paper surveys easily available in familiar settings for residents who do not have ready access to computers. That group likely includes many clients and potential clients of United Way programs. The survey was available in both English and Spanish.

With assistance from several nonprofit agencies, the survey was pretested and suggestions were incorporated. The 2009 United Way Community Needs Survey was widely distributed throughout Chatham County in February and March. Nonprofit and social service agencies, volunteers, civic organizations, churches, two UNC student volunteers and one intern, UW Board members, and community leaders helped to distribute copies of the survey and information about the on-line link. The survey was available both in paper and on-line, linked through the UWCC website.

A few months before the survey began, the U.S. economy worsened. Several major employers in Chatham County closed their businesses or laid off workers. Throughout the world, the

economic recession has had effects. Certainly, this economic downturn influenced survey responses, reflecting its effects in our community.

The survey comprised three sections. Section I had questions about needs in individual households. Section II identified 24 Community Issues and Needs and asked for opinions as to whether each was “not a problem,” “little problem,” or “big problem.” Respondents could also reply “don’t know.” In addition, Section II asked respondents to list the three issues they thought were “most serious.” Section III requested demographic information, but not personal information as it was intended to be anonymous. Copies of the United Way 2009 Community Needs Survey in English and in Spanish are available at [www.nonprofitpages.com/uwcc](http://www.nonprofitpages.com/uwcc).

## SURVEY RESULTS: MAJOR ISSUES AND NEEDS

The Community Needs Survey asked questions about needs in several different ways. Participants were asked about Needs in Your Household and whether they knew where to get help for those needs. Almost one out of three respondents indicated needs in their own household. The most frequently indicated individual household problems were **not enough money to buy food, cannot afford dental care, and nothing for children and teenagers to do after school or in the summer**. Other needs within more than 30% of households of the respondents were **cannot find a good job, not enough money for clothes/shoes, not enough money to buy medicine, hard to find affordable housing, and cannot afford medical care** (Table 1a). Many who indicated needs in their own households did not answer the questions about whether they knew where to get help, so that data was not conclusive.

Survey participants also were asked to give their views on 24 Community Issues and Needs and to indicate which issues they thought were the most serious. In general, the community needs identified as most serious were clustered in these areas: **necessities of life such as jobs, health care, food, and housing; concerns about children and adolescents in our community; substance abuse concerns; public transportation**. Over 91% of respondents saw **lack of good jobs** as a problem, which was by far the most serious need perceived. More than 80% considered the following necessities of life to be problems in our community: **lack of affordable medical and dental care; lack of money for medicines; hunger, and not enough affordable, safe housing** (Table 1b).

Overall, there was a remarkable degree of consensus among participants in this survey. Respondents throughout the county -- across racial and ethnic groups, in towns and rural communities, across age groups, across income and education levels -- identified the same major problems. Whether or not they were directly affected, many people were concerned about the same issues (See Appendix A).

However, on several specific issues, there was notable disparity in the seriousness of perceived need. The differences in perception seemed to vary according to income of the respondents. In general, those with lower incomes perceived issues such as *homelessness, gangs, alcohol and drug abuse* as greater problems. Many of the respondents with higher incomes did not know if these issues were problems in our community. This United Way survey included a larger proportion of lower income residents than other recent community surveys. Those respondents may view some issues differently, or perhaps have more direct knowledge of some problems than higher income respondents.

A relatively large percentage of all respondents said they did not know if some specific issues were problems for the community. About one-fourth of all respondents felt they lacked sufficient information about such issues as *lack of mental health care for adults, child abuse or neglect, violence in homes, and lack of affordable legal help*. For these issues, perhaps there is limited public information available about the extent of the problems in our community. One United Way donor said, “I care, but I just don’t know enough about these issues to know how much of a problem they are.”

### **Issues of Major Concern: Necessities of Life**

Over 90% of Chatham residents responding to this survey believed that **lack of good jobs** is a problem for our county. Almost 50% of the respondents in the United Way Survey listed household income as \$25,000 or less. The majority worked in Chatham County. In 2007, the poverty level for a family of four was defined as income of \$21,203 or less ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)). The issue of lack of good jobs in our county also was identified as a major problem on earlier surveys by the Chatham County Public Health Department and the Chatham County government ([www.chathamnc.org](http://www.chathamnc.org)). It is likely to be an even bigger issue at this time due to the current state of the economy and recent lay-offs and closings of businesses. The unemployment rate in Chatham County for January 2009 increased to 7.6% ([Chatham Record](#), March 26, 2009). However, slightly over 17% of respondents to the United Way Survey listed themselves as unemployed (Table 7).

Most survey respondents believed that **lack of affordable medical, dental, and mental health care** was a problem. Over 37% stated that they could not afford **dental care** in their own household. A similar number indicated they could not afford **medical care** and/or did not have enough money to buy **medications** for themselves or their family. Thus, lack of affordable health care was both a need in many individual households and considered a major problem by most residents who completed surveys. Lack of affordable health care also was found to be a major current issue in the Chatham County Government Survey in 2008-2009 and by the Chatham County Public Health Department in 2006 ([www.chathamnc.org](http://www.chathamnc.org)). The N.C. Institute of Medicine documented that North Carolina had the most rapidly rising percentage of uninsured

residents in the U.S. between 2007 and 2009 ([News & Observer, 2009](#)). The Chatham County Department of Public Health recently identified relationships between the economy and health problems ([Health of Chatham, 2008](#)).

Respondents to this survey were less certain of the problem of **mental health care for adults, children, and teens**. Although 65% thought that lack of mental health care was a problem, almost one fourth did not know if it was a problem or not. Yet in 2008, one of the largest regional newspapers published a series of articles about the declining availability of mental health services for adults and children in North Carolina ([www.newsobserver.com](http://www.newsobserver.com)). One professional who works with children and adolescents in Chatham County described mental health care as having “fragmented services,” and said that “providers are not coordinated” and “the public system is just not available at some levels.”

Over 80% of respondents considered **hunger** as a major problem in Chatham County. “Not enough money to buy food” was listed as the most common individual household need. Local food pantries have many volunteers who distribute food to those in need. Some of those volunteers completed surveys and may know well the increase in the numbers of people served. One food pantry reported an increase of over 48% in the past year in families seeking food (CORA, March, 2009). Of note is that respondents knew where to get help for food more often than for any other need listed for their own households. This may indicate that food pantries are publicizing their services effectively.

Over 80% of respondents at all income levels saw **lack of affordable, safe housing** as a county problem. As might be expected, the issue of affordable, safe housing was seen as a big problem by more people in lower income groups than those in higher income groups. This need was present in the individual households of slightly more than 45% of those in the lowest income group. More respondents from Siler City perceived affordable housing as a need in their own households than respondents from other areas of the county. In this survey, 68% of respondents from Siler City thought that homelessness, in addition to a lack of affordable housing, was a problem for the county. In February 2009, the Board of Commissioners received a report from the Affordable Housing Taskforce that made recommendations to help develop more affordable housing in Chatham County ([www.chatham.mync.com](http://www.chatham.mync.com)).

### **Issue of Major Concern: Problems Related to Children and Adolescents at Risk**

Across differences in income, education, race and ethnicity, and community of residence, 78 % of respondents noted the problem of **not enough activities for children and teenagers**. This was seen as a need in many individual households as well as a problem throughout the county. In the Chatham Government survey, “organized youth programs” were listed as a top priority ([www.chathamnc.org](http://www.chathamnc.org)). In both the County and the United Way surveys, respondents from minority groups considered this a high priority. Over 40% of Latinos who participated in the

survey were parents, which may account for some of their greater concern. However, throughout the county in the United Way survey, more than half of all racial/ethnic groups and all age groups listed the lack of activities for children and teenagers as a problem. Lack of recreational facilities and opportunities also was cited as a concern in the 2006 Public Health Department survey ([www.chathamnc.org/public](http://www.chathamnc.org/public)).

The lack of activities for children and teens may be an underlying cause of other issues that concerned respondents to this survey: *teen pregnancy*, *teenagers dropping out of school*, and *gangs*. Slightly over 70% of all respondents listed **teen pregnancy** as a major issue. Chatham County saw an increase in pregnancies for 15 to 19 year olds, beginning in 2006 (N.C. Center for Health Statistics). Professionals involved locally with teens relate that the number of pregnant teens seems to be increasing, with recent pregnancies of middle school students. Some of these pregnancies are in girls younger than 15 years old. The national birth rate for teens has been rising since 2006, although North Carolina's ninth place rank in teen pregnancies has remained stable ([www.cdc.gov/nchs](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs)). In 2007, the increase in teen pregnancies in our state was mostly among African-American and Latino teens ([www.cdc.gov/nchs](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs)). African-American and Latino respondents to the United Way survey were more likely to view teen pregnancy as a big problem than other respondents did. While a majority of respondents in the United Way survey listed teen pregnancy as a major issue, 23% said they did not know if it was a problem or not. Most of those who stated that they did not know were in higher income groups and were not minority.

*Teenagers dropping out of school* also concerned respondents. Chatham County schools reported an improving graduation rate in 2008. That year the four-year graduation rate in our county was 79.9%, compared to North Carolina's overall graduation rate of 69.9% ([www.dpi.state.nc.us](http://www.dpi.state.nc.us)). All three high schools in Chatham County have improving graduation rates. Yet even the improved rates leave about 20% of students short of graduation.

Two thirds of survey respondents thought that *gangs* were a problem in Chatham County. Gangs were listed as one of the most serious issues by many respondents. Gang activity is reported to center mainly in the schools in Siler City and North Chatham and to involve mostly occasional fighting between students. There is concern that gang interest and participation seem to be filtering down to middle schools. The rate of delinquency in Chatham County is much lower than in North Carolina as a whole ([www.ncdjjdp.org/statistics](http://www.ncdjjdp.org/statistics)). In the United Way survey, over half of respondents from Siler City said that gangs were a big problem. This is in contrast to other areas of the county, where over 30% of respondents said they did not know if gangs were a problem or not.

During adolescence, identity formation is important. Gangs are one way that some adolescents seek an identity. Pregnancy also can be a way for an adolescent to try to establish an identity. Again, the lack of recreational activities for children and teens may lead to troubling activities. One school administrator said, "All these 'ills of young people' are related in that if there are not enough activities, kids will find things to do themselves."

## OTHER AREAS OF CONCERN

**Not enough public transportation** was a major issue for most respondents throughout the county. The only public transportation in Chatham County is provided by Chatham Transit Network, a nonprofit organization. Survey respondents wrote that there is a “lack of transportation for workers . . . to get to and from work,” and that “a person who is unable to drive . . . has no way of getting anywhere.” A parent suggested that the lack of transportation restricted teens and families from taking advantage of activities outside their neighborhoods. The lack of sufficient public transportation also makes health care less accessible for some residents. Thus, limited public transportation impacts many other major issues in Chatham County.

Almost 75% of respondents maintained that **alcohol and drug abuse** is a problem in Chatham County. Over half of these respondents said that it is a major problem. From recent statistics, however, it seems that the incidence of alcohol or drug abuse is not increasing in our county. The number of Chatham County residents served by North Carolina State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Treatment Centers (NC ADATC) dropped from 24 to 16 last year, a 33% decrease. Chatham County residents make up only a quarter of those served by NC ADATC in the Orange-Person-Chatham (OPC) area and only 2% of those served in the North Central region of the state, which includes 18 other counties ([www.ncdhhs.gov/mhddsas/statspublications](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/mhddsas/statspublications)). In the United Way survey, there was an inverse relationship between income and the identification of alcohol and drug abuse as a problem. In other words, as income increased, respondents were less likely to see alcohol and drug abuse as a big problem.

The Orange-Person-Chatham Area Program named *adolescent substance abuse* as a priority issue for Chatham County in its March 2008 Community Needs Assessment ([www.opcareaprogram.com](http://www.opcareaprogram.com)). Trends of alcohol and drug use among adolescents are downward, but the percentages are still troubling. Of the students surveyed in Chatham County Schools in 2008, 37% claimed that they have tried alcohol, 16% have tried marijuana, and 10% have abused prescription drugs. Yet, these numbers represent a decline in substance use in school students over the past 20 years of this survey (Chatham County Schools 2007-2008 Alcohol and Other Drug Survey).

Several other community issues were of concern to most respondents of the United Way Survey but were listed as a problem by fewer people than the issues above. Those surveyed thought the county has problems with *teenagers dropping out of school* and *gangs*, both of which have been discussed above. *Lack of affordable or good day care* also was of concern to most respondents throughout the county, both those with children at home and those without children. One respondent wrote of the need for a “place for children to go and be safe.” Other community issues listed as problems by more than 70% of respondents were *tobacco use by teens*, *not*

*enough help for people who don't read/speak English, people who don't read well, and lack of understanding between groups (racial, ethnic, cultural).*

Declining *tobacco use by teens* may reflect a program of intervention by parents, schools, and community that is achieving some success. In the 2008 survey of county school students, tobacco was seen by the students as more harmful than either marijuana or alcohol. The same survey found that reported tobacco use by students had declined to 20% from a high of 43% in 1989 (Chatham County Schools 2007-2008 Alcohol and Other Drug Survey).

The issue of not enough help for people who don't read or speak English certainly is relevant in a county with a large Latino population. This is somewhat related to the issue of *people who can't read well* (literacy in general), which was seen as a problem by over three-fourths of respondents. Many Latino respondents said that not reading well enough was a problem in their individual households.

The issue of *lack of understanding between groups (racial, ethnic, cultural)* was of concern to the majority of respondents to this survey. Although minority groups saw this as a greater problem, it was seen as an important community issue by over three-fourths of all respondents. Respondents from Siler City viewed lack of understanding between groups as more of a problem than respondents from other parts of the county.

Issues such as "lack of programs for elderly" and "lack of health information" were seen as problems by less than 65% of respondents to this survey. This may indicate that current programs and services are meeting these community needs well.

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

There were 901 completed surveys. Two hundred eighty-eight (288) surveys were completed on-line and 613 were paper copies. Surveys were completed by people throughout our county (Table 2). Approximately 4.5% of county households responded.

There was somewhat higher participation by African Americans and Latinos than their representation in the 2007 population estimate for Chatham County (Table 3). Income distribution among the respondents indicates that the goal of inclusion was met, with slightly larger groups of low income than in the county population figures for 2007 (Table 4). It is not possible to know how much the current economic downturn affected the income of respondents in this survey. Education levels reflected the larger proportion of lower income residents responding (Table 5). The education level of respondents in this survey is notable for the large numbers in the lower education groups and in the highest group. Income and education data together are shown in Table 6.

A majority of survey respondents were employed, either full (39.7%) or part time (15%). Respondents who described themselves as unemployed comprised 17.2%. There were an additional 17.8% who were retired and 5% said they were disabled (Table 7). Most of the employed respondents worked in Chatham County (Table 8). With one survey per household, slightly more than 72% were completed by women.

The age distribution and race/ethnicity of respondents is seen in Table 9. Latino residents comprised a large segment of the younger adults surveyed, while whites comprised a larger segment of the older adults who participated in the survey. Forty-four percent of households with children under 18 were self-identified as Latino.

Household size for survey respondents averaged 3.3 people which is higher than the county average of 2.49 people as reported in the 2000 U.S. Census. Nearly half of all respondents indicated that they have children under 18 living in their home. The average number of children in the household was about 2, with the average age of children around 7 years old. Of the households with children, the majority self-identified as Latino (44%) and between the ages of 31-45 (50.4%). Possibly most notable is the concentration of families in the lower income and education categories (Table 10).

## **CONCLUSION**

The 901 Chatham County residents who participated in the 2009 United Way Community Needs Survey identified vital needs in our county (Appendix A). Necessities of life such as jobs, food, affordable health care, and housing were the essential needs identified. Other major concerns centered on Chatham County children and teens. Not enough activities for children and youth was seen as a major problem. Related concerns were teen pregnancy, gangs, and school dropouts. Many respondents identified the lack of public transportation as a problem. That issue seems related to other needs of high priority. County residents also were concerned about alcohol and drug abuse, and tobacco use by teens. Literacy issues and lack of understanding between groups were cited frequently as problems in our community. The outcome of this survey will serve as one of the tools used to help United Way most effectively meet the needs of Chatham County.

Table 1a

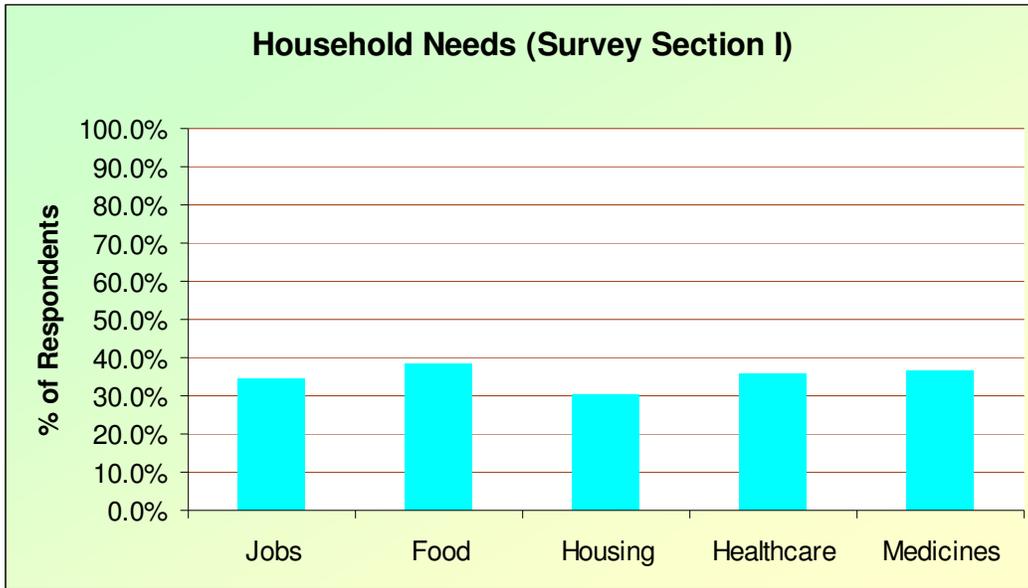


Table 1b

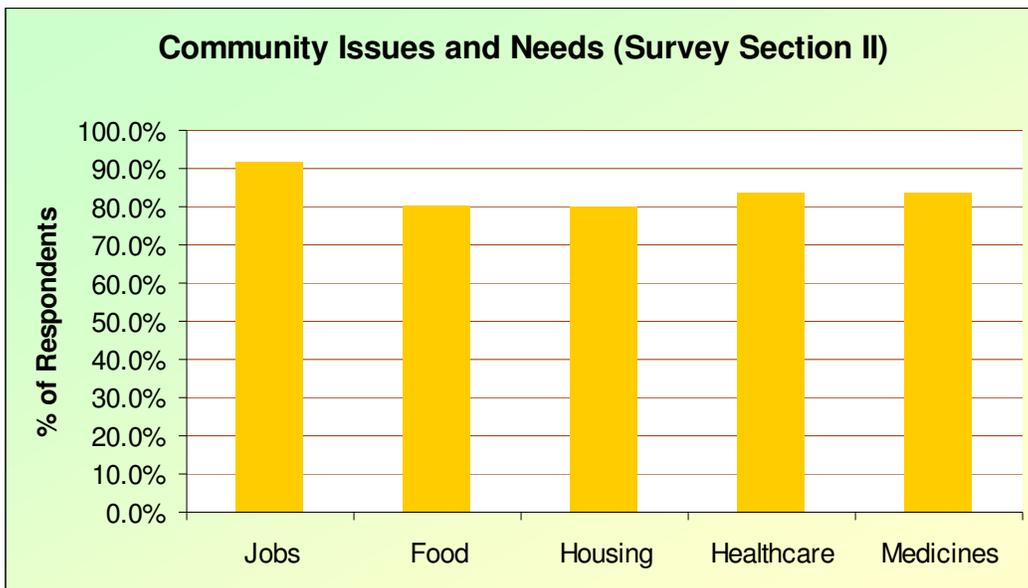


Table 2

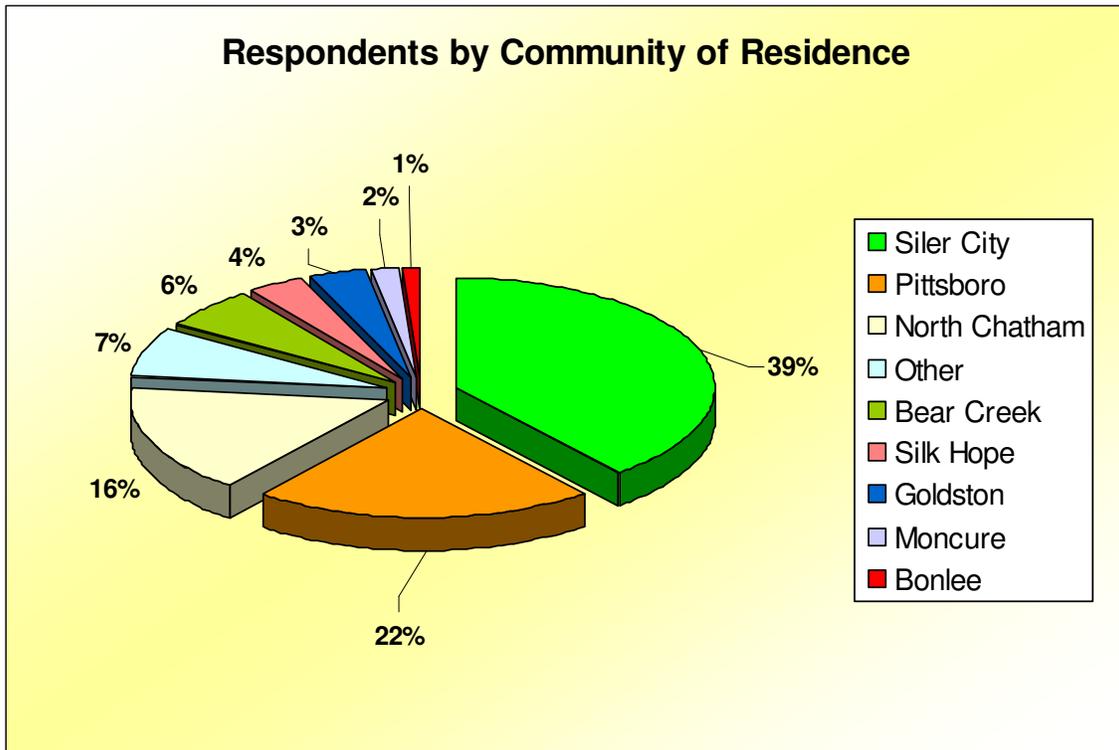


Table 3a

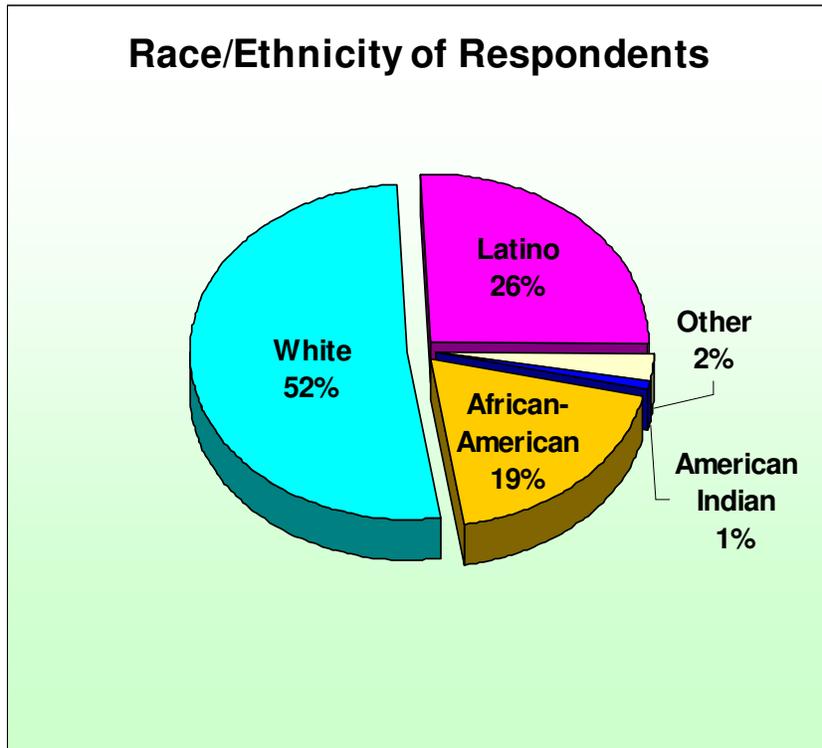
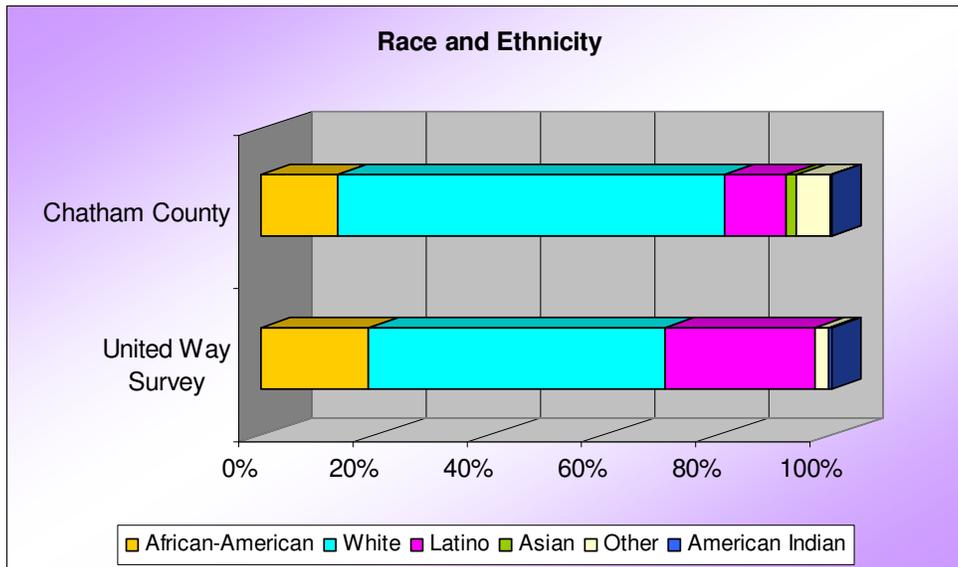
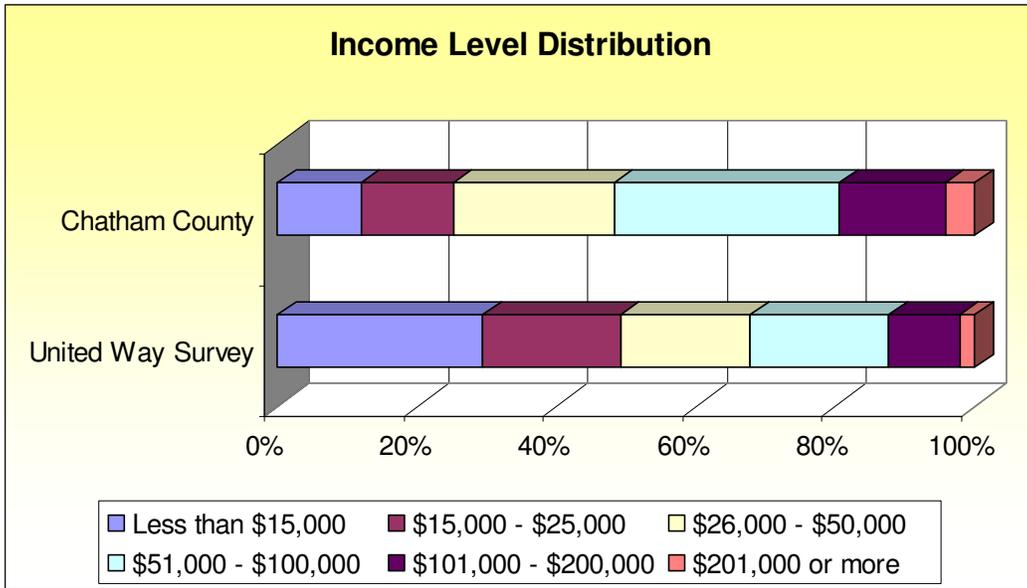


Table 3b



Note: <sup>a</sup> Chatham County population estimates are based on American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates (2005-2007).

Table 4



Note: <sup>a</sup> Chatham County income data are based on American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates (2005-2007).

Table 5

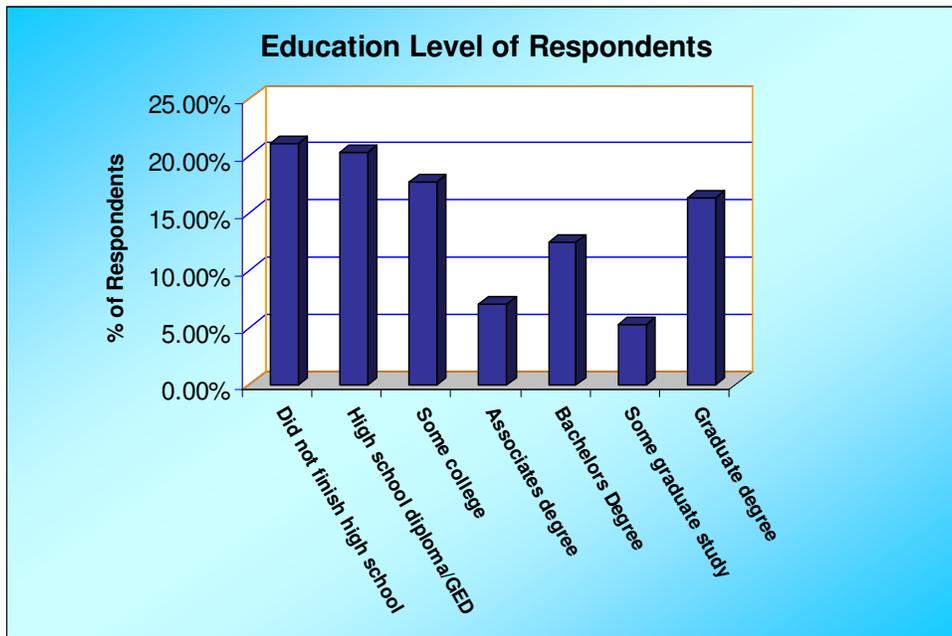
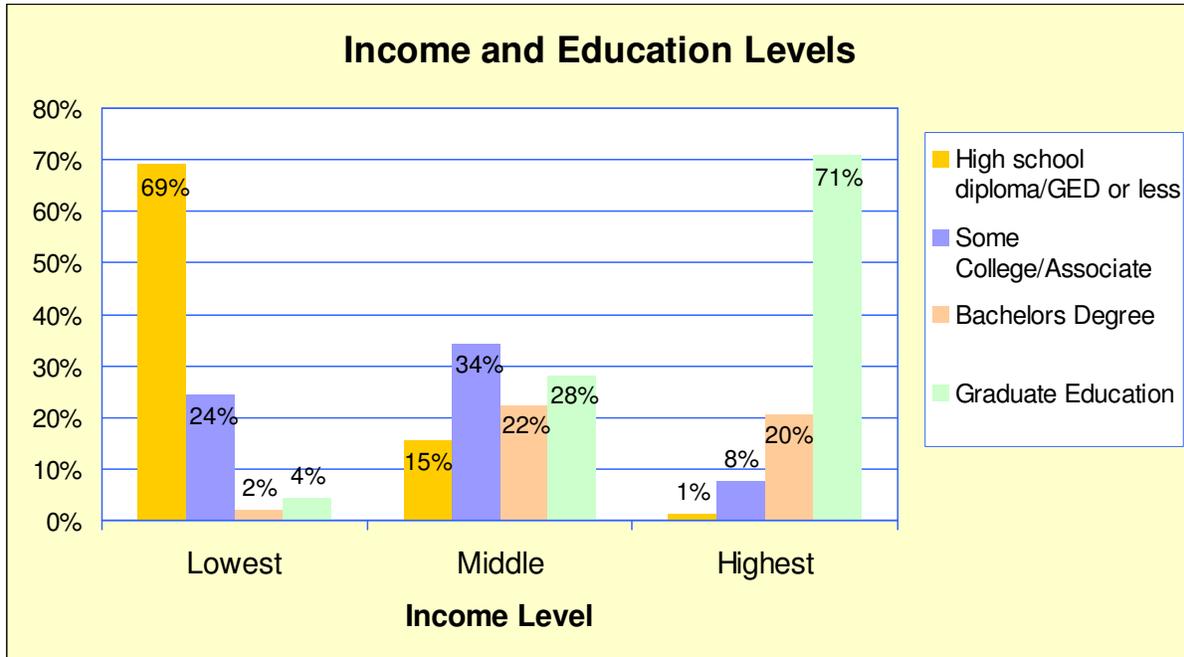


Table 6



Note: <sup>a</sup> Lowest= \$25,000 or less; Middle= \$25,000-\$100,000; Highest= \$100,000 or more.

Table 7

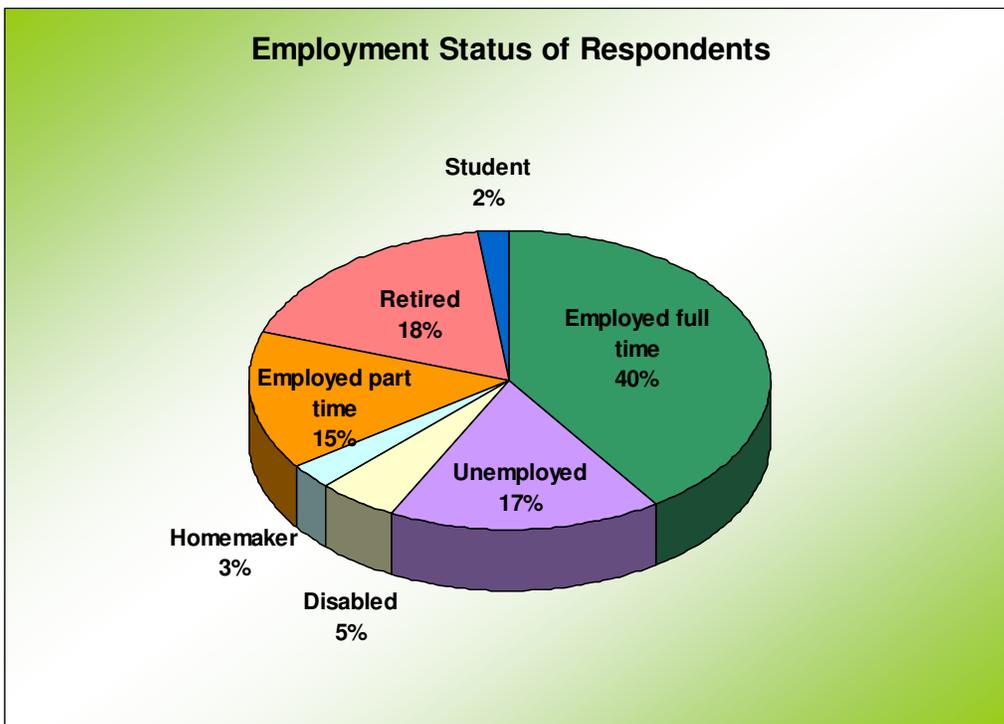


Table 8

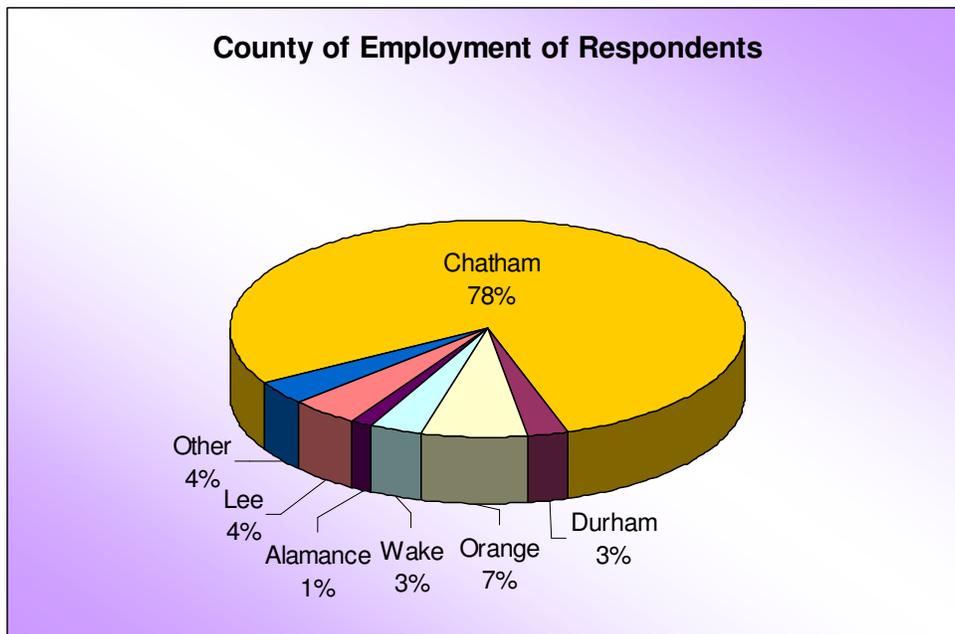


Table 9

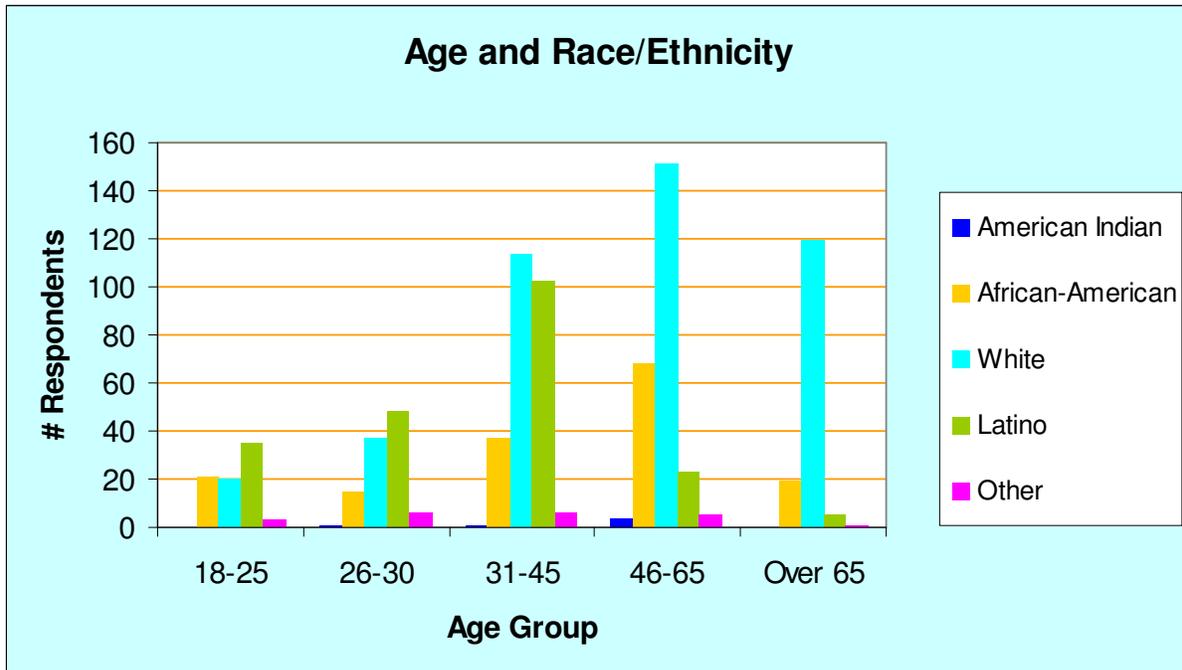
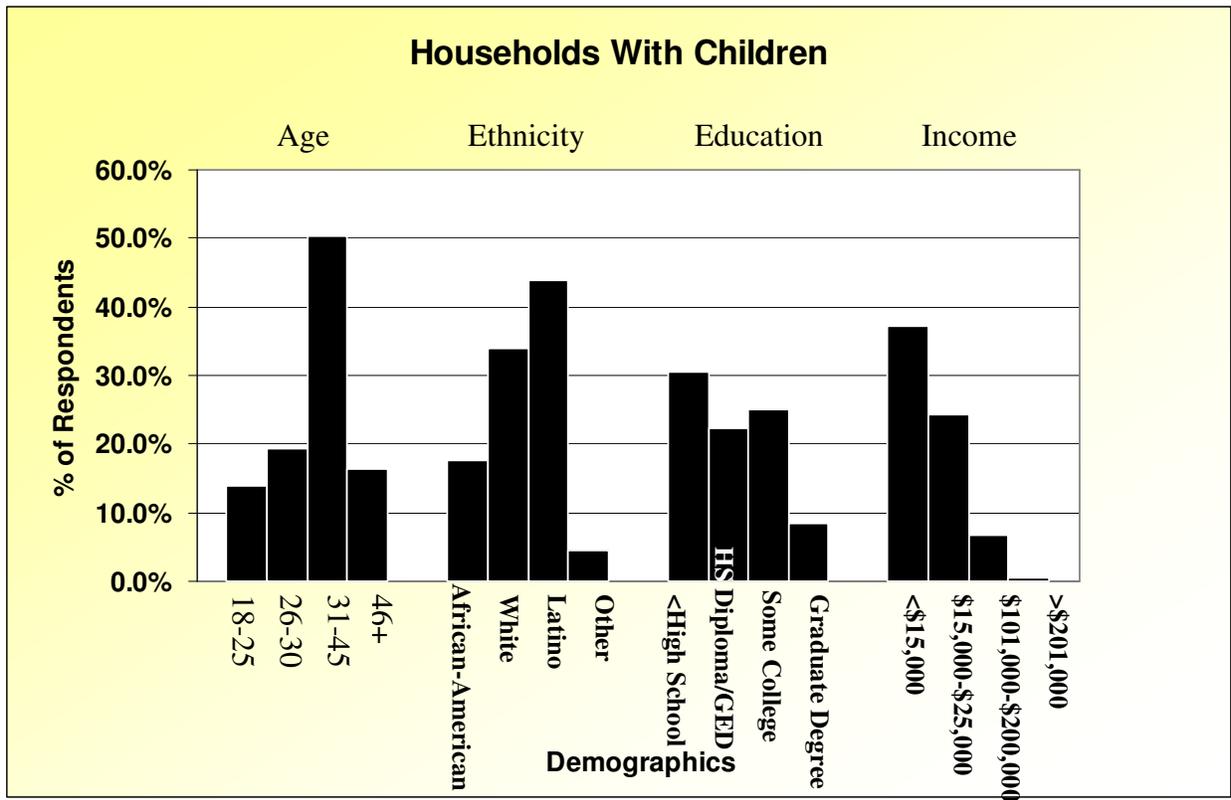


Table 10



## Appendix A

### ISSUES IDENTIFIED AS MOST SERIOUS\*\*\*

Lack of good jobs  
Drug or alcohol abuse  
Not enough public transportation  
Lack of affordable medical care  
Not enough activities for children and teenagers  
Teen pregnancy  
Hunger  
Not enough affordable, safe housing  
Teenagers dropping out of school  
Lack of affordable or good day care  
Lack of money for medicines  
Tobacco use by teens  
Gangs  
Not enough help for people who don't read /speak English

\*\*\*Respondents asked to list 3 issues they considered most serious from list of 24 Community Issues and Needs. List includes issues identified most often.

## **NEEDS IN INDIVIDUAL HOUSEHOLDS\***

Not enough money to buy food  
Cannot afford dental care  
Nothing for children and teenagers to do after school or in summer  
Not enough money to buy medicine  
Cannot afford medical care  
Cannot find a good job  
Not enough money for needed clothes/shoes  
Hard to find housing that I can afford

## **COMMUNITY ISSUES AND NEEDS \*\***

Lack of good jobs  
Lack of affordable medical care  
Lack of money for medicines  
Hunger  
Not enough affordable, safe housing  
Not enough activities for children and teenagers  
Not enough public transportation  
Lack of understanding between groups (racial, ethnic, cultural)  
People who can't read well  
Drug or alcohol abuse  
Tobacco use by teens  
Teens dropping out of school  
Teen pregnancy

\* "Problems in household in past 12 months", identified by slightly more than 30% of survey respondents. Listed in order of frequency of response.

\*\* Issues and Needs in our county, identified as "little problem" or "big problem" by survey respondents. List is in order of frequency of responses. All issues in list were identified as a problem by more than 70% of total of survey respondents.

## Appendix B

### SOURCES USED

- Annual Dropout Reports*. Retrieved from the North Carolina Public Schools Web site:  
<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/research/dropout/reports/>
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<http://www.ncdhhs.gov/mhddsas/statspublications/reports/index.htm#statisticalreports>
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[www.ncdjjdp.org/statistics](http://www.ncdjjdp.org/statistics)  
[www.chathamnc.org/publichealth](http://www.chathamnc.org/publichealth)  
[www.thechathamnews.com](http://www.thechathamnews.com)