

# Shippensburg, PA

## Community Assessment

### 2014

## *Executive Summary*



Prepared By: Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition

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## **About Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition**

The Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition (SCRC) is a collaborative effort to provide quality social services and youth programs that are accessible and safe and that recognize the dignity and worth of each person. Our goal is to help community members reach their full potential.

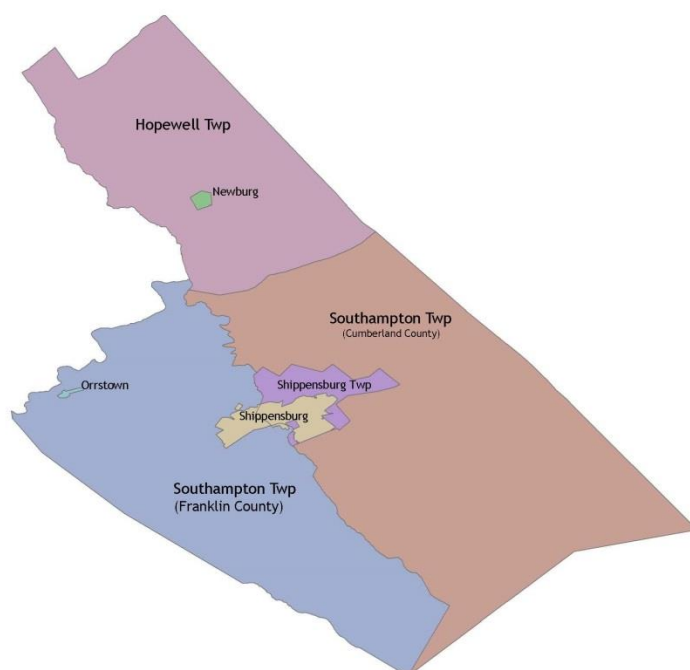
The Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition (SCRC) Committee developed from an ad hoc group of community stakeholders and has grown to a group of over 75 people who are interested in establishing the SCRC. The SCRC Board of Directors began meeting in July 2012 and now operates under the fiscal umbrella of the Shippensburg University Foundation, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

The purpose of the Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition is to provide a central location for access to social services, counseling and youth programming. The coalition could be a resource for a wide variety of community members, whether they are searching for tutoring, recreational activities, food, clothing, counseling or access to the county and private social service programs.

For additional information on the SCRC, visit [shipresources.org](http://shipresources.org). For the full Community Assessment Final Report, please contact the SCRC at [shippensburgcrc@gmail.com](mailto:shippensburgcrc@gmail.com).

## Executive Summary

The Community Assessment was developed as a result of a strategic planning process of the Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition (SCRC) that occurred in 2013. There have been several community assessments in the surrounding areas that included Shippensburg, but were not exclusively focused on Shippensburg. The SCRC Board of Directors recognized the need to conduct an assessment that would help plan programs and secure funding for future endeavors. The SCRC Community Assessment Committee was formed and the planning ensued. Early in the planning process, the community was geographically defined by the lines of the Shippensburg Area School District (SASD). Throughout the report, this area will be identified as the "Shippensburg area." This Executive Summary provides a summarized version of the full report. The full report is available by contacting the SCRC or visiting [www.shipresources.org](http://www.shipresources.org).



The committee decided to collect data in multiple ways in order to understand more about the social service and youth programming needs of Shippensburg. These methods included a survey, focus groups and review of existing data. After developing the survey, which was adapted from the United Way of Carlisle and Cumberland County's Community Needs Assessment, there were several kickoff meetings to ask for assistance with survey distribution and spread awareness about the plans. The review of existing data occurred throughout the project timeframe. The other data was collected and analyzed as follows:

July - October 2013	Surveys distributed via at least 46 organizations.
October-November 2013	Focus groups conducted
February-May 2014	Survey & focus group results analyzed
May-October 2014	Final report written

## **Demographic Information**

Most of the demographic information in this section is from the United States Census Bureau. Data from other sources is noted as such. The total population within the SASD boundaries in 2010 was 27,920 people, which is an increase of just over 4,000 people from 2000. The population of Shippensburg area has a younger median age (29.8 years) than the state median (40.1 years), perhaps because Shippensburg University is located in the town. However, the percentage of youth under the age of 18 is lower (10%) than that of the state (21.3%). It is a predominantly White/Caucasian area, with 93.2% of the population. The Black/African American population is 3.5% and Hispanic/Latino is 2.8%.

The poverty rate for persons and families in the Shippensburg area is 19.75% (2008-2012) which is 7% higher than previous measures (2006-2010) and higher than the state's rate of 13.06%. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the rate of children and teens who qualified for free or reduced lunches has increased every year since 2008-2009. In 2012-2013, 35.4% of students in the district qualified for free or reduced lunch rates. The numbers of individuals who qualify for medical assistance has also increased since 2008. In 2012, 14% of the population qualified for medical assistance. Finally, the median household income is \$47,314 which is lower than the state's median of \$52,267. The unemployment rate of the Shippensburg area, 4.5%, is lower than the state's rate of 8.5%.

The Shippensburg area is slightly less educated than the state with 20.4% of the population attaining a bachelor's degree or higher (27.0% for PA) and more of the population not completing 9th grade (6.4%) than Pennsylvania (3.8%). The school district is facing some of the same challenges as neighboring districts (Chambersburg and Carlisle) in not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress targets for Academic Performance and Graduation.

## **Community Survey**

The survey questions were aimed at learning more about how satisfied residents are with the human services and youth programs that are available in Shippensburg and the importance of providing these programs and services. There were also questions designed to elicit ideas for new programs and services. There were 446 completed surveys. The surveys were available both online and in paper version. The survey results should be applied cautiously to the general population because there were several demographic differences between the survey sample and Census data.

Overall, survey respondents were satisfied with the services and opportunities in Shippensburg. The areas that had the highest levels of satisfaction included community safety, access to quality housing and quality of early childhood education. It was also clear that many residents feel there is a strong sense of community and that the educational institutions and community safety are strengths of the area.

The four items that indicated some level of dissatisfaction included indoor recreational facilities, shelters for people who are homeless, services specific to youth and availability of

supervised after school youth activities. When asked about the biggest problem or issue in Shippensburg, the most common responses were lack of youth activities, human services and drug and alcohol services.

Survey respondents generally felt that it was important that all 24 of the services and programs listed on the survey were available within the Shippensburg area. Those with the highest level of importance included affordable medical services, employment opportunities for adults and quality early childhood education. Those identified as least important (but still identified as important according to respondents) were programs to improve ethnic and racial harmony, support groups, and opportunities for adult education.

In order to understand more about program and service needs in the Shippensburg area, we defined need as a service that is ranked as important, but that people indicate they are not satisfied with. By examining the services that had high importance scores, but lower satisfaction scores, we could more clearly identify needs. These included:

- services for youth, especially after school and recreational activities
- affordable mental and physical health care services
- services to increase employment and reduce poverty, especially among people who are homeless

Survey respondents were able to provide ideas for programs and services in Shippensburg, particularly related to youth programs, support groups and social services. Suggestions for support groups included:

- family support groups
- substance abuse support groups
- mental health support groups
- youth-related support groups
- grief support groups
- domestic violence support groups

When asked about youth-related services and programs, many survey respondents indicated that something needed to be done to help youth have something to do, but did not have specific ideas. There were mixed responses regarding sports-related programs. Some respondents said that they were needed, while others indicated that programs that were not sports-related were needed. Other ideas were offered such as:

- School-based after school programs
- Youth center/indoor recreation
- Training programs
- Summer programs
- Crime prevention programs
- Tutoring programs
- Mentoring programs
- Arts programs

Finally, the most popular suggestions for social service programs were as follows:

- Homeless and poverty-related services

- Services for older adults
- Mental health services

### **Focus Groups**

Nine focus groups were conducted in order to learn more about what people already know about social services and youth programs, what their concerns are and what needs to be done to address these concerns. The focus groups were held in a variety of locations throughout Shippensburg in order to hear from a diverse group of residents and stakeholders.

The human service programs that focus group participants were most familiar with included King's Kettle, Shippensburg Produce and Outreach (SPO), Christ Among Neighbors and the free meals available at churches. The youth programs that participants most frequently identified included library programs, church youth groups and athletic programs. Participants generally seemed aware that there are few social services available and that transportation was necessary to get to most other types of social services in neighboring communities.

At times, there was lack of awareness and/or confusion about social services in terms of eligibility and how to access them. For example, at least one participant thought he had to be homeless to go to one of the free meals based on "word of mouth" information. There was also confusion about how to use the existing transportation, such as the Raider bus, and feedback that service was limited. Some participants identified barriers such as the difficulty of taking children along when waiting in food distribution lines and a sense of pride that prohibits people from asking for help. Overall, one of the clearest barriers to accessing social services is transportation because so many of the programs are located in other towns and the public transportation to the programs in town is limited or confusing.

The participants were asked to identify the most important need to address in Shippensburg. Limited transportation was the most commonly identified need. Transportation is related to employment, health care access, youth activities and participation in existing social service programs. Other needs that were identified included health services, services for senior citizens, services for people with disabilities, the need for community involvement and awareness, basic needs assistance and youth services.

Focus group participants identified several ideas for how to address problems in Shippensburg:

- Partnership efforts with Shippensburg University
- Church activities and opportunities
- Community volunteers
- Clear instructions for public transportation that is available
- Better advertisement of services and community activities

## **Recommendations**

Based on the overall results of the community assessment, the following strengths of the Shippensburg area include:

- Strong sense of a safe community
- A large young adult population
- Existing institutions such as Shippensburg University, Shippensburg Area School District and the churches are viewed as helping to meet community needs and as potential solutions to problems and issues.

The following challenges are identified:

- Increasing poverty rates that are higher than the state average. Also, increasing numbers of children experiencing poverty.
- Limited transportation and lack of awareness about what is available
- Few social service programs available in Shippensburg and limited awareness about the programs that exist.
- No indoor, public recreational facility or community center for youth programs and social services.
- Homelessness is identified as an increasing problem.

The strengths can be helpful in addressing the challenges. For example, the strong sense of community and active participation of the community churches can be leveraged to increase awareness of existing social services and increase the number of youth programs. Shippensburg University, and the students who attend, provide an important partnership opportunity for youth programs and social services. The overall recommendations based on this report include:

- Increase awareness and access to existing social services available in Shippensburg.
- Increase awareness of how to access social services available in Chambersburg and Carlisle.
- Increase community awareness of how to use public transportation and continue working on strategies to help people get to work, appointments, programs, etc.
- Develop programs specifically related to poverty, employment and homelessness that are accessible within the town.
- Increase awareness and access to existing youth programs.
- Develop new youth programs, particularly related to mentoring and after school programs.
- Establish an indoor recreational facility that would be available to the community.
- Increase access to affordable mental and physical health opportunities. This may mean creating new services in town, such as support groups, or increasing access to nearby services.
- Continue to collect information about the need for services for older adults, survivors of domestic violence and drug/alcohol services.