

Quality of Life Assessment – Executive Summary

Jackson County, Indiana

4community Partnership
Jackson County United Way
June 2005



Partnership

4community Partnership

The following list of organizations and individuals partnered with Jackson County United Way in this improvement campaign. The Jackson County United Way wishes to recognize and express gratitude for their efforts on behalf of this initiative.

Community Foundation of Jackson County

Represented by
Bud Walther,
President & CEO of the
Community Foundation of
Jackson County

Greater Seymour Chamber of Commerce

Represented by
Bill Bailey,
President of the
Greater Seymour Chamber
of Commerce

Jackson County Drug Free Council

Represented by
Lin Montgomery,
Coalition Director of the
Jackson County Drug Free
Council
and
Brenda Turner,
Member of the Jackson
County Drug Free Council

Jackson County Industrial Development Corporation

Represented by
Jim Plump,
Executive Director of the
Jackson County Industrial
Development Corporation

Jackson County United Way

Represented by
Trina Tracy,
Financial Planner at Vision
Financial Group
and
Ruth Ann Rebber,
Executive Director of the
Jackson County
United Way

Schneck Medical Center Foundation

Represented by
Joseph M. Joiner
Executive Director of
Schneck Medical Center
Foundation

Seymour Community Schools Corporation

Represented by
Barb Bergdoll,
Principal at Seymour
Middle School

YMCA Organizing Committee

Represented by
Jay Fischer,
VP of Seymour Operations
at SIHO Insurance Group
and
Rob Millman,
Realtor at Coldwell Banker
South Central Realty, Inc.

Executive Summary

Background

In May 2004, the Jackson County United Way assembled a group of community leaders to collaborate on strategies for community improvement. The goal of the initiative was to bring county residents together to improve the quality of life of Jackson County. Rather than focus on one area of need, the community partnership sought to create a comprehensive needs assessment for the county, across all quality of life indicators, which could be used to inform strategic planning, decision making and resource investments for many years to come.

An exhaustive data collection effort followed, to determine the “baseline” or current state of several key indicators of quality of life in the county:

- Education
- Justice and Public Safety
- Leisure and Recreation
- County Infrastructure
- Economy and Financial Well-Being
- Health and Human Services

For each indicator, all available data were collected and reported as findings, highlighting both strengths of the Jackson County community and areas in need of improvement. The report also includes recommendations to address the greatest needs identified. It is hoped that these baseline measures of quality of life indicators will be used to benchmark progress of community investments, whether they be in the fields of education, public safety, recreation, infrastructure, economy, or human services.

Findings

The assessment identified many areas of strength, as well as critical needs that must be addressed to improve the quality of life of Jackson County residents. The “Top 10” needs are highlighted below:

- *K-12 education.* Many of the Jackson County schools are struggling with low assessment rates and high drop out rates.
- *Higher education attainment.* Jackson County residents do not seek higher education at rates commensurate with surrounding counties or the state.
- *Low levels of adult literacy.* More than half the adults in Jackson County have significant problems with reading.
- *Increased methamphetamine use and production.* The number of meth labs seized in Jackson County leads the region, while meth arrests are increasing faster than any other type of drug- or alcohol-related arrest.
- *Rapid growth of the Hispanic community.* The rapid growth of non-English speaking residents creates challenges for schools, employers, service providers and government officials.
- *Teen birth rate.* The teen birth rate in Jackson County has been on the rise for more than ten years, leading to more low birth weight babies and a lack of education attainment for female youth.
- *Limited quality early childhood care and education opportunities.* There are no licensed child care centers in Jackson County, outside of Head Start programs, and the need for child care greatly exceeds current capacity.
- *Limited resources to support the needs of adults ages 65 and older.* The availability of services for older adults does not meet the current need, and the population of seniors will increase dramatically in the near future.
- *Lack of public transportation.* There is a great unmet need for public transportation in Jackson County, which is a significant barrier for rural residents, especially those with limited mobility, the elderly and low-income families.
- *Significant caseload backlog for the Circuit Court.* The caseload of the Jackson County Circuit Court is one of the highest in the state, almost doubling in less than two years.

Continued on next page

Recommendations The recommendations associated with the “Top 10” needs are summarized below:

- *K-12 education.* Encourage access to current information technology tools and collaboration among school corporations; and engage school improvement specialists to improve performance related to No Child Left Behind standards.
- *Higher education attainment.* Align learning with future employment opportunities, and establish a program responsible for coordination of learning opportunities for adults in Jackson and neighboring counties.
- *Low levels of adult literacy.* Expand current resources focused on literacy; create family learning opportunities; and hold adult education providers accountable for results.
- *Increased methamphetamine use and production.* Evaluate efforts around the state and the region aimed at reducing meth use and production, and implement selected strategies through a collaboration of human services and public safety agencies.
- *Rapid growth of the Hispanic community.* Increase English language learning opportunities for Hispanic students; identify and develop leaders and advocates among the Hispanic community; collaborate with nonprofit organizations to develop the Hispanic workforce; and recruit Spanish speaking medical personnel.
- *Teen birth rate.* Find quality programs that work to reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancy.
- *Limited quality early childhood care and education opportunities.* Increase financial support for early childhood education; develop and publish a county wide referral system of childcare providers; and develop and maintain licensed day care centers at strategic locations in the county.
- *Limited resources to support the needs of adults ages 65 and older.* Expand the capacity of the county senior citizen centers for service; expand public transportation available to seniors and others in rural areas; and plan and develop affordable, safe and quality housing for seniors.
- *Lack of public transportation.* Establish a county-wide, freestanding entity to operate a public transportation system that best fits the needs of the county.
- *Significant caseload backlog for the Circuit Court.* Work with state officials to gain the recommended addition to the Circuit Court system in Jackson County.

Continued on next page

Next Steps

Recommendations for each quality of life indicator have been developed to guide the future activities of Jackson County community leaders. It is the hope of the community partnership that produced this report that many of these recommendations will be adapted into the planning efforts of Jackson County government, private and non-profit organizations, and that the indicator measurements presented will be used to benchmark the progress of these efforts.