

Heartland Workers Center 2015 Community Assessment Results

Ward 4, Omaha, Nebraska

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early in 2015, the Heartland Workers Center (HWC) decided to conduct a community assessment. We set out to understand the way that people in South Omaha view their personal circumstances and the conditions of their community by asking questions. We did not want to presume that we understood all of their issues nor possessed all the answers. We wanted quantitative support for the qualitative descriptions that we have received from community members.

The HWC developed a four-pronged approach to further understanding South Omaha, particularly the Latino community, and to engage new leaders to create positive change.

- The initial phase of the operation was an analysis of United States Census data, which was undertaken to develop a broad sense of the demographic and economic characteristics of the community.
- The second phase of the operation was a community assessment, the results of which are described here, and which helped the organization “discover” a first crop of new leaders.
- The next phase of the operation includes leadership training, as well as policy analysis related to the issues and themes that come from the community assessment.
- The final result will be a knowledgeable community with strong leaders that actively engage in civic and political activities at the local, regional, and national level, which will work with interested institutions in improving conditions for the people living in South Omaha.

After months of work, we have completed the initial two phases of our effort. This document focuses on the results of our community assessment. Major findings include:

- Nearly half of respondents say that their household must sacrifice expenses, including utilities and food, in order to cover housing expenses.
- Over one third of respondents say that there are individuals in their household who could be working, but are not working.
- Over one third of respondents stated that they don't have health insurance.
- Many residents have serious concerns about street conditions and crime in their community.

The results of our community assessment reflect both the anecdotal evidence provided by those who participate with the HWC and the analysis of U.S. Census data: families and individuals struggle on a daily basis to make ends meet, provide a safe environment for their children, and obtain healthcare.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT? A community assessment is a survey that is undertaken by an established neighborhood organization, to better understand the way residents in a given neighborhood live their lives: where they work, whether they have health insurance, whether they can make ends meet, and where their children go to school, for example. Organizations often use community assessments to ensure that the work they do is better targeted to the community.

WHY A COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT? The HWC believes that leveraging the power of the community can change the economic and social conditions of South Omaha. The community must understand itself, the daily lives of the people, and the skills that they possess, before acting. Only through this knowledge can the community find the core issues that are important to the people, which impact them daily, and which will dictate any action moving forward.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH. The community assessment was developed after an analysis of United States Census data and thoroughly reviewed by interested stakeholders. The Census data analysis provided a broad sense of the core issues that the community assessment should explore. In addition, the analysis provided information about neighborhoods in particular parts of South Omaha that appeared to be more deeply impacted by issues related to poverty.

CENSUS TRACTS 20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30

Total Households:	10,291
Total Population:	32,362
Total Foreign Born:	10,906
Foreign Born from Latin America	10,261
Population speaking Spanish at home	15,032

Population over 16 that could be in Labor Force	22,325
Foreign born not a US Citizen	8,638
Foreign born Latinos not US Citizens	8,187
Percentage of people living in poverty in census tracts examined	26.4%
Percentage of Latinos living in poverty in census tracts examined	27.1%

Through the analysis, a number of issues were found to be in need of further exploration to better understand how people live in South Omaha:

- Housing
- Employment and Income
- Healthcare
- Education
- Human Services
- Quality of Life and Public Services
- Political Participation

The HWC leadership met with more than a dozen stakeholders to discuss the census data and the proposed focus areas. There was broad agreement among these stakeholders that these core areas should be addressed by the assessment.

The HWC then crafted a draft assessment, which was reviewed by key stakeholders, and adjusted based on their recommendations. HWC staff was trained on implementation and then tested the assessment over several weeks. This test resulted in further refinement of the assessment. The final assessment was a 134-question survey.

The HWC also determined where the implementation should take place based on the percentage of Latino residents and issues of poverty. Ultimately, it was agreed that eight precincts with a high percentage of Latino residents, which coincided with the Fourth City Council District, would be the focus area.

At the beginning of June 2015, staff from HWC began to execute the assessment. It was completed in October 2015. Notable actions during this process included:

- Latino households were identified using the Voter Activation Network (VAN) file. This data includes all registered voters from the county voter file as well as information based on marketing data;
- Staff, leaders, and volunteers went door-to-door during three shifts: 10am-noon; 3-5pm; and 6-8pm;
- Staff, volunteers and leaders also partnered with five churches and organizations working with the Spanish-speaking community in South Omaha;
- Relating this assessment to our GOTV efforts in the last three election cycles to remind community members that we may have spoken with them in the past.
- Knocked on 2,306 houses;
- Identified 246 potential leaders;
- Collected 630 total surveys.

KEY FINDINGS

Housing

- Respondents to the community assessment are overwhelmingly long-time residents and homeowners.
- Almost 46% of respondents stated that their households have five or more members.
- Thirty percent of respondents said that there were no children living in their households.
- Almost half of respondents stated that their household has to sacrifice other expenses in order to pay for their housing.

Do you have to sacrifice other expenses to pay for your housing



Employment and Income

- Ten percent of households stated that no one from the household was employed.
- Fewer than twenty percent of respondents stated that they or someone in their household work at a place where there is a union.
- Only a little over half of those respondents said that they or someone in their home was a member of a union.
- Almost 29% of respondents said that there is someone in the household who was not working but who could be working. Of that group, 37% of respondents state that those individuals have stopped looking for work.

Is anyone in your household unemployed who could be working?



Resident Satisfaction and City Services

- Residents overwhelmingly like where they live (94%).
- Four percent of residents say that the city does an excellent job of meeting neighborhood needs.
- Fifty-eight percent of respondents are dissatisfied with the city's effort at street repair and snow removal.
- There is general satisfaction with police response (64.59%)

Overall, how do you rate the job the city does of meeting neighborhood needs?



Human Services

- Of those who say that they access government-provided services besides monetary assistance, 92% state that they access healthcare.
- In terms of services provided by nonprofit organizations, 25% of respondents say they access basic food services in the community.
- Forty-seven percent say that they access adult education services.

Health Services

- Thirty-five percent of respondents say that they don't have health insurance.

Education

- 83.48% of respondents with children in school say that their child receives free or reduced price lunch.
- 26% of respondents said that they participate in the PTA/PTO
- 29% of respondents said that they, or someone in their household, volunteer in their child's school.
- 80% of respondents are happy with their child's education.

Political Participation

- 78% of respondents say that they are interested in working with their neighbors to improve their community.
- 77% of respondents who do not know how to communicate with elected officials about important issues want to learn how to do so.
- 25 % of respondents say that they know how to communicate with elected officials about important issues
- 17% of respondents know who their elected officials are.

ANALYSIS

While data Census data shows that poverty is prevalent in South Omaha, this community assessment has helped the HWC better understand the daily lives of community residents.

1. Wages are not adequate to cover housing expenses for many respondents. Unemployment and underemployment likely contribute to this poverty. Too many respondents sacrifice expenses in order to pay for their housing. This is terribly important given the condition of the housing stock in South Omaha. An overwhelming number of homes were built before 1939, according to census data (53%). Without proper maintenance and care, the conditions of these houses will deteriorate (and in many instances, they are deteriorating). What are the opportunities that are currently available for both owners and renters to improve these conditions and what can be done to ensure these residents can access these opportunities?
2. Lack of health insurance among respondents is a critical issue. There may be opportunities for individuals to access insurance through the Affordable Care Act. What are the current efforts to reach these households? There are also individuals who may not be eligible for the Affordable Care Act, but still access healthcare services. What can the community do to help these individuals access high-quality health services that are cost effective?
3. The high number of recipients who access the free or reduced price lunch program at school is a clear indication that too many children grow up in impoverished situations. According to Census data, there are general low levels of educational attainment in South Omaha (About 7% of population holds higher than a high school diploma). In general, there is a strong relationship between poverty and educational attainment. There may be opportunities to better incorporate parent involvement in the public schools. The use of schools as centers of community and social life has been enacted in other cities like Philadelphia and Springfield, Massachusetts and could serve as a model for the South Omaha community.
4. Street conditions are a major concern among residents. Forty-one percent of respondents want to work with other residents to improve street conditions. There was ample information, from respondents and HWC staff, of poor conditions, including potholes, broken curbs, and lack of traffic calming. A deeper survey of street conditions should be undertaken with city departments like planning and public works to assess the best method of dealing with these problems.
5. Crime remains an important issue. Residents say that, in general, the police are responsive to community needs. However, that alone may not alter the prevalence of crime in the community. Residents are interested in building relationships with the police and other public service providers. This may be the first step to altering the conditions.

CONCLUSION

There are many hurdles for the South Omaha community. However, there are opportunities for action. The fact that an overwhelming number of respondents are interested in working together to improve their community should provide hope. There are numerous examples throughout the country, including Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston, Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland, Ohio, and Market Creek Plaza in San Diego, which show that residents of poor communities can succeed as leaders in community development and change efforts. Residents of South Omaha want these same opportunities to participate in positive change.

It is with this inspiration that Heartland Workers Center moves forward with its effort to help those residents and their leaders achieve their goals. Yet the Heartland Workers Center also knows that it cannot address these issues alone. By working alongside other institutions and public officials, we can begin to improve social networks and strengthen our South Omaha community.