

Report of Findings

Isabella County Community Survey



Prepared for the
Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation
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BACKGROUND

In Fall 2017, the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation contracted with the Center for Applied Research and Rural Studies (CARRS) of Central Michigan University to conduct a needs assessment survey of Isabella County residents. The purpose of the survey was to learn more about residents' views concerning human and social service needs in the community, as well as to document the extent to which households experience social and economic challenges. Additional analyses were designed to determine the extent to which subgroups of the population (for example, people in low income households) have opinions and experiences that differ from those of other community residents.

The Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation's mission is explicit in stating its commitment to improving the community. In particular,

The Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation seeks to enhance the quality of life for all citizens of Isabella County, now and for generations to come, by attracting and holding permanent endowed funds from a wide range of donors, addressing needs through grant making, and providing leadership on key community issues.

The hope is that survey responses will both inform the Foundation about unmet needs in the community and engage residents in efforts to address pressing needs (including through assisting with future fundraising efforts).

The Center for Applied Research and Rural Studies was created through a Michigan Research Excellence Fund grant in 1995. Its primary focus is addressing issues of interest to central and northern Michigan. The function of CARRS is to utilize the resources and academic expertise of Central Michigan University to assist governmental units, social agencies, and non-profit organizations in addressing social, economic, environmental, and community development

concerns. Hence, there is an excellent fit between the needs of the Community Foundation for data on community needs and the goals of CARRS.

The survey instrument for this project was developed by CARRS in consultation with Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation staff and an advisory committee established by the Foundation to provide input and feedback on survey drafts. A list of advisory committee members, along with member of the Foundation's Board of Trustees and Grant Review Committee, is found in Appendix A.¹ Some of the survey items are replications of a survey of Isabella County conducted by CARRS in 2006. The complete text of the survey (in print format) is found in Appendix B.

SAMPLE DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

In order to maximize both the overall response rate and to increase the representativeness of the survey sample, the 2018 survey was administered through a multi-modal design. That is, survey data were collected both through telephone interviews and through print surveys distributed through U.S. mail.

The U.S. Bureau of the Census estimates that there were 28,604 housing units in Isabella County in 2012-16. While telephone interviews from a Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing system were often the survey method of choice in the past for representing this kind of population (and were used by CARRS for the 2006 needs assessment project), the increasing number of cell phone only households makes this methodology problematic, even if one uses a random-digit dial method for generating samples. It is virtually impossible without large budgets to find—through screening—cell phone only households when the focus is on relatively small

¹ Some questions are modifications of those suggested by the national United Way of America in its COMPASS II project and of those used by the United Way of Saginaw County in an earlier needs assessment project.

geographic areas such as Isabella County. Cell phones, unlike landline phones, are not place based, and residents of Isabella County may have cell phone numbers from out-of-county or even out-of-state areas.

Marketing Systems Group (M-S-G) of Horsham, Pennsylvania maintains an address-based list of households in the United States. They estimate that their list provides coverage of 98 percent of American households and that they can secure telephone numbers for approximately 60 percent of these households. We purchased a random sample of household addresses in Isabella County from M-S-G and called these households with landline telephones or cell phones numerous times to find an adult at home at a time convenient for the interview. Households without phone numbers (or with out-of-service phone numbers) were subsequently mailed a print questionnaire.

The Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation provided publicity about the survey project on its website and through social media. Such publicity is one way to legitimate the project, thereby helping to increase response rates. Further, as an incentive, respondents were told that a random drawing would take place among those who completed the survey instrument for a \$50 gift certificate to a local store.

CARRS gratefully acknowledges the cooperation and assistance of the residents who spent time on the telephone with our interviewers or who completed the print version of the survey instrument.

Telephone Survey of Residents

Interviews for this project were completed in the Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) laboratory associated with CARRS. CATI systems augment and extend the benefits of telephone interviewing as a data gathering technique. With a paperless CATI system, interviewers sit at a computer workstation, the interview schedule appears on the computer

screen, and the interviewer inputs data from respondents directly into a computer file. The computer continuously monitors the sample and interviewing process and automatically dials the pre-loaded sample telephone numbers for the interviewers.

The CATI system's generation of periodic reports during the fielding phase of a study allows for continuous quality monitoring. The CATI supervisor is constantly aware of the numbers of completed interviews, refusals, out-of-service telephone numbers, and is able to use the system to schedule call-back appointments and the redialing of busy telephone numbers.

Finally, the CATI system promotes data quality. The computer prompts the interviewer for only those questions that are appropriate for a specific respondent, and the computer is programmed to be “unwilling” to accept responses that are other than those designed for the question at hand. Interviews become more interesting to the respondents because the interview is tailored to their specific circumstance.

Interviewers were Central Michigan University students—either paid CARRS staff who work part-time as telephone interviewers (after training in survey design, telephone interviewing, and research ethics) or students enrolled in a social research methodologies class (SOC 350 or SWK 350), who were similarly introduced to survey research, telephone interviewing, and ethics through their coursework. The pretests of the interview schedule took place on Monday, February 12, 2018 and Wednesday, February 14, and modifications to the interview schedule were made after the pretest session. Actual interviewing began, as scheduled, on Thursday, February 15 and concluded on Monday, February 26, 2018.

Households in the sample received a postcard informing them of the upcoming telephone survey a few days before interviewing began. The text of the postcard is found in Appendix C. The

postcard helps to establish the legitimacy of the project for the potential respondent and provides assurances of confidentiality.

In the end, interviewers placed calls to 2,011 different telephone numbers from the sample available from M-S-G.² Interviewers began the interview by confirming that the phone number was associated with a residence in Isabella County. In fact, this initial screening by interviewers resulted in 60 numbers that were not associated with residences in Isabella County. In addition, interviewers worked to ensure that they were speaking with someone 18 years of age or older who was willing to complete the interview schedule.

M-S-G pre-screens numbers to increase the likelihood that the numbers randomly sampled are associated with working telephones. This process cannot be perfect, however, and 798 numbers dialed were linked to wrong numbers, fax machines, or out-of-service telephones. An additional 26 calls were made to households where the relevant individual was incapable of speaking on a telephone or was not available until after the end of the study period.

Computer modems were programmed to call each telephone number multiple times over a number of different days. In fact, the average telephone number in the sample was called 3.3 times, and 535 numbers were dialed five or more times. For 448 telephone numbers, the final call resulted in the failure to pick up the phone (e.g., an answering machine), and for seven numbers the final call resulted in a conversation with a household member who told interviewers that the relevant household member was not at home or with a household member who was not willing to talk during the time period when calls were made.

Quota cells were established to help ensure that the sample of completed interviews appropriately represented the geographic diversity of Isabella County. That is, telephone numbers

² In fact, we purchased a larger sample from M-S-G to ensure a large enough list of numbers to call. The 2,011 numbers actually called represent a random sample (of replicates) from the larger random sample purchased.

were coded as being in the City of Mount Pleasant, in rural areas with the Mount Pleasant zip code of 48858, or in other areas of the county (with zip codes other than 48858).

Completed telephone interviews were obtained from 222 residents of Isabella County. Some 450 household members who spoke with interviewers refused to take part in the study. Hence, the percentage of completed interviews out of the total number of calls made to eligible respondents who *actually spoke* to our interviewers was 33 percent.

The average interview lasted for between 20 and 21 minutes (mean interview length is 20.4 minutes). Slightly less than one quarter (23%) of interviews lasted for 15 or fewer minutes, while 16 percent continued for more than 25 minutes.

Mail Survey of Residents

For the households for which we are not able to secure telephone numbers, we administered a mail survey, with questions that are comparable to those from the telephone interview. We also sent print questionnaires to those households with telephone numbers coded as “out of service.” The mail questionnaire helps to ensure that the households for which we do not have phone numbers (largely cell phone only households or those with unlisted/unknown phone numbers) are represented in the final sample. Only very slight changes in wording or format were made when changing the survey instrument from telephone to print format.

The Total Design Method was used to help ensure quality control over the mailing process. The questionnaire was formatted into a six-page booklet, which is both graphically appealing and helps ensure that pages are not lost and re-ordered. An initial mailing of questionnaire and a postage-paid return envelope (to CARRS) was sent to 2,405 respondents during the first full week of March, 2018. (Note that 655 had been called by CATI interviewers who learned that the telephone number we had secured was out of service.) Questionnaires were

numbered to keep track of in-coming and out-going mail. The first page of the questionnaire booklet included a cover letter that explains the survey project, guaranteed respondent confidentiality, and provided contact information if respondents had questions or concerns.

Approximately one week after the initial mailing of the survey package, a postcard was mailed to the entire print sample. The text of the postcard is found in Appendix C; the text both thanks respondents who have already completed the questionnaire and serves as a reminder for those who have not. Then, approximately two weeks later, a second mailing of the questionnaire and return envelope was posted to those respondents who had not yet returned the completed questionnaire.

Usable print questionnaires were returned from 309 survey respondents out of about 2,400 mailings.³ Approximately 550 survey packages or postcards were returned to CARRS as undeliverable. We continue to receive such undeliverable mail from the post office even in late July.

The responses from these 309 print questionnaires are combined with those from the 222 telephone interviews into a single dataset. Hence, this report is based on a total of 531 completed surveys (recognizing that some survey respondents chose not to answer particular questions). These 531 surveys represent 14 percent of the 3,761 households initially contacted (before learning about non-working phone numbers and undeliverable mail).

Readers should remember that all random samples have associated with them a margin of error. Given the number of households in Isabella County, a sample of 500 yields a margin of error of about plus or minus four percentage points, at the 95 percent confidence level. That is, a reader can be 95 percent confident that the population of Isabella County falls within four percentage

³ Honors student Michaela Nyquist was extremely helpful throughout this project. Among other tasks, she entered most of the print questionnaires into the electronic dataset.

points of the sample statistics presented in this report or elsewhere. Consequently, small differences between subgroups in the sample or between the results from one question and another should be discounted.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

Respondents were asked a number of questions about their own background and about the characteristics of their household. These questions were placed near the end of the telephone interview (or print questionnaire) because they are not necessarily engaging questions for respondents and because they may seem—to some respondents—to focus on private or personal matters. (Respondents were assured that their confidentiality would be maintained and that this information would be used—as here—for summary purposes only.) Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic data gathered from respondents.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample:
Percentage Distributions for Isabella County Residents**

Characteristic	Percent
LOCATION OF RESIDENCE	
City of Mount Pleasant	36.1
Outside of the City	63.9
GENDER	
Male	38.4
Female	61.6

	Percent
ETHNICITY	
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.7
African American/Black	0.8
Hispanic/Latino	1.5
Native American/American Indian	3.5
White	91.3
Other	1.2
HOUSEHOLD INCOME⁴	
Less than \$10,000	8.2
\$10,000 up to \$25,000	16.0
\$25,000 up to \$50,000	24.3
\$50,000 up to \$75,000	18.6
\$75,000 up to \$100,000	15.7
\$100,000 or more	17.2
RECEIVE PUBLIC ASSISTANCE	
Yes	12.9
No	87.1
HOME OWNERSHIP STATUS	
Own	77.8
Rent/Lease	22.2
YEARS IN THE COUNTY	
0-5 years	13.7
6-15 years	14.4
16-25 years	15.8
26-35 years	13.1
36-45 years	14.9
46-55 years	12.1
56 or more years	16.0
NUMBER OF ADULTS IN HOUSEHOLD	
1 adult	25.4
2 adults	58.3
3 adults	11.0
4 or more adults	5.2

⁴ Forty-two respondents (7.9% of the sample) refused to answer the income question, which was at the very end of the interview. The percentages reported here are based on the respondents who did provide household income information.

	Percent
NUMBER OF EMPLOYED ADULTS IN HOUSEHOLD	
None	35.2
1 adults	29.9
2 adults	29.9
3 adults	3.9
4 adults	1.0
ADULT LOOKING FOR WORK	
Yes	17.4
No	82.6
YOUNG CHILDREN UNDER 5 IN HOUSEHOLD	
Yes	7.0
No	93.0
YOUTH BETWEEN 5 AND 17 IN HOUSEHOLD	
Yes	19.1
No	80.9
NUMBER OF SENIOR CITIZENS IN HOUSEHOLD	
None	61.4
One senior	22.2
Two seniors	16.0
Three or more seniors	0.4
MEMBER OF HOUSEHOLD IS COLLEGE GRADUATE	
Yes	63.4
No	36.6
COLLEGE STUDENT STATUS	
Yes, full-time student	7.9
Yes, part-time college student	1.5
Not a college student	90.6

Census estimates for the 2012-16 period suggest that we were very successful in capturing the geographic diversity of Isabella County. The Census estimates that 36.7 percent of the county's population lives within the City of Mount Pleasant, and, in fact, 36 percent of respondents in the sample report living in the City of Mount Pleasant as opposed to elsewhere in the county.

While the interviewers assured that the respondents were adults living in Isabella County before beginning the telephone interviews, no effort was made to select respondents randomly within households. Given this, it is not surprising that the respondents in the sample are disproportionately female, with 38 percent male and 62 percent female. About 90 percent of respondents in the sample report that they are white, with the largest ethnic minority group being Native American. The Census Bureau asks respondents both to indicate their race and their Hispanic status, making direct comparisons to responses from our single survey question problematic. Nonetheless, Census Bureau estimates from 2012-16 show that 86.1 percent of county residents are white, non-Hispanics (only), and 3.7 percent are Hispanics.

Twenty four percent of respondents report household incomes less than \$25,000, and 33 percent report annual incomes in their household of \$75,000 or more. The Census estimates that 33.3 percent of households are in the lower income bracket, and that 24.6 percent are in the higher one. About 13 percent of the sample reported that someone in their household received public assistance (for example, Bridge Card, WIC, or Supplemental Security Income). The Census does not report comparable data, but does show that 12.6 percent of Isabella County families were below the poverty level in 2012-16. Hence, the sample slightly under-represents low income households and over-represents higher income households. Nonetheless, breakdowns by income are certainly possible given the sample size and the fact that about one quarter of respondents live in households with incomes below \$25,000 per year.

The 2012-16 Census reported a home ownership rate in the county of 61 percent of occupied housing units, which presumably reflects the high percentage of CMU students living in the county during the academic year when Census data are reported. By contrast, more than three quarters of respondents in the sample indicate that they own rather than rent their residence.

Respondents also report a relatively long tenure in the county, with half of the sample indicating that they have lived in the county for 30 years or more. Fourteen percent of respondents are relatively recent additions to the county population, having lived in Isabella County for five or fewer years.

The most common number of adults living in a household in the sample is two, although 25 percent of respondents live in single-adult households and 16 percent live in a household with three or more adults 18 years of age or older. About 65 percent of respondents in the sample report one or more employed adult in the household, and 17 percent of respondents report that an adult in the household is looking for work. While the latter percent seems high, respondents are answering the question with focus not on themselves but on any individual in the household. In addition, comments added to the margins of the questionnaire indicate that these respondents include those who are unemployed along with those who are looking for better jobs or for full-time rather than part-time employment.

Less than 10 percent of households report that young children under 5 years of age live in the household, while almost 20 percent report that youth between 5 and 17 years of age are household members. Thirty nine percent of respondents indicate that one or more senior citizen, 65 years or older, lives in the household.

Very few respondents—only eight percent—report that they are currently full-time college students, with another two percent being part-time college students. However, 63 percent of respondents report that there is at least one college graduate living in their household. Again, the focus here is on any one member of the household, not necessarily the respondent

FINDINGS

Key findings from the community survey are organized into eight main sections. We begin with a discussion of residents' perception of community needs, followed by an analysis of problems experienced in the household in the last 12 months. We then explore whether respondents with household needs use the community services available to help them. The report goes on to discuss respondents' involvement in the community and their general views about living in Isabella County. The next section of the report focuses on respondents' opinions about the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation, followed by an analysis of the ways in which members of the sample secure information about the community. An important concluding section explores the impact of household income on the experiences and opinions of respondents. At several points in the report, we hear the voices of individual respondents, for a series of open-ended questions were interspersed throughout the survey, allowing respondents to comment in their own words.

Perceptions of Community Needs

An important feature of the community survey was the series of questions asking residents the extent to which they believed each of a number of issues needs to be given attention. These questions were introduced in the print version of the survey as follows:

*Communities sometimes experience challenges and problems that need to be addressed. For each issue below, indicate the extent to which you believe it is a need for people in your community. Please focus on the **community as a whole** rather than on your specific household.*

Respondents were asked to indicate their response using one of four response options—"major need," "moderate need," "minor need," or "not a need." Figure 1 is a graph that provides the percentage of respondents reporting the perception that the issue in question is a "major need" for people in the community. Table 2 provides the complete percentage distribution for each of

the 16 issues. The figure and table are organized so that the issue with the highest percentage of “major need” responses appears on the left of the figure or at the top of the table.

Figure 1: Perceptions of Community Needs: Percent Saying "Major Need" for Isabella County Residents

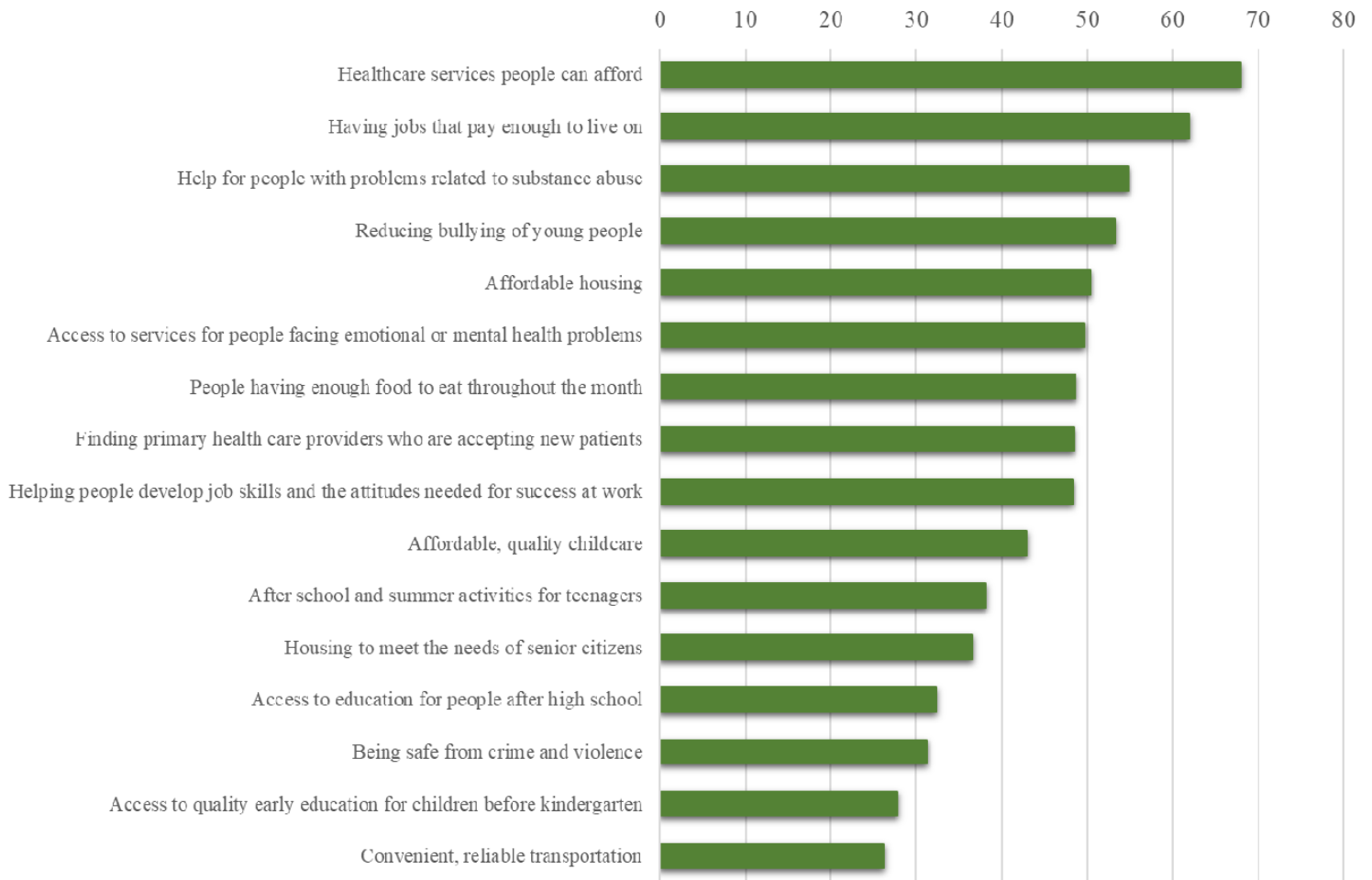


Table 2: Perceptions of Community Needs: Percentage Distributions for Isabella County Residents

	Major Need	Moderate Need	Minor Need	Not a Need
Healthcare services people can afford	68.0	25.0	4.7	2.3
Having jobs that pay enough to live on	62.0	28.0	8.2	1.8
Help for people with problems related to substance abuse	54.8	33.9	7.7	3.6
Reducing bullying of young people	53.3	30.8	11.5	4.4
Affordable housing	50.4	33.5	12.7	3.4
Access to services for people facing emotional or mental health problems	49.7	36.5	11.2	2.6
People having enough food to eat throughout the month	48.6	39.2	10.8	1.4
Finding primary health care providers who are accepting new patients	48.4	36.0	11.6	4.1
Helping people develop job skills and the attitudes needed for success at work	48.3	38.9	11.2	1.6
Affordable, quality childcare	42.9	40.4	12.0	4.7
After school and summer activities for teenagers	38.2	41.7	15.4	4.8
Housing to meet the needs of senior citizens	36.6	40.0	19.2	4.2
Access to education for people after high school	32.4	38.4	20.5	8.7
Being safe from crime and violence	31.2	38.3	25.9	4.5
Access to quality early education for children before kindergarten	27.8	37.9	25.9	8.4
Convenient, reliable transportation	26.2	38.6	25.6	9.6

A number of conclusions are apparent from the figure and table.

- The percentages of residents reporting that an issue is a “major need” varies considerably from a high of 68 percent to a low of 26 percent. That is, at least one quarter of the respondents in the sample view each of the 16 issues presented to them as being a “major need” for people in the community. This range of responses suggests both that the items selected for inclusion in the survey are ones of importance to Isabella County residents and that the respondents thought seriously about the questions presented to them, rather than answering with a response set (the mechanical overuse of one of the response options).
- The two areas with the highest percentage of respondents—more than 60 percent—reporting “major need” are “health care services that people can afford” and “having jobs that pay enough for people to live on.”
- None of the issues under consideration here is viewed as “not a need” by more than 10 percent of residents, although six issues are seen as being a “minor need” or “not a need” by at least 20 percent of respondents.
- Each of the remaining eight issues is viewed as a “major need” by between about 40 and 55 percent of respondents.

An alternative way of gauging perceptions of community problems is to ask respondents to discuss community needs in an open-ended fashion. With this in mind, after answering the closed-ended questions summarized in Table 2, respondents were asked: “Now, just in your own words. What do you think is the biggest problem facing residents of Isabella County today?”

CARRS staff coded these qualitative comments into a series of discrete categories.⁵ The code

⁵ CMU Honors student Michael Ignat helped with the coding of these data, and we appreciate his assistance and care in executing the coding.

categories developed by CARRS, and the numbers and percentages of respondents in each category are found in Table 3. The table is organized so that similar types of responses are grouped together.

Recognize that any one comment may have been coded into more than one category; consequently, the percentages will not equal 100. The grouping of categories in Table 3 is intended to highlight key themes, although readers may find other ways of organizing the categories themselves.

Table 3: Biggest Problem Facing Residents of Isabella County: Code Categories, Frequency and Percentage Distributions for Isabella County Residents

Category	Number	Percent⁶
Employment/Jobs	79	14.9
Healthcare (Total)	137	25.8
Healthcare/Affordability	27	5.1
Healthcare/Mental health	26	4.9
Healthcare/Access	25	4.7
Healthcare/General	10	1.9
Healthcare/Substance abuse or drugs	49	9.2
Basic needs (Total)	87	16.4
Poverty	20	3.8
Housing	48	9.0
Basic needs/Food	13	2.4
Basic needs/Community costs	6	1.1
Community culture, attitudes, and environment	44	8.3
Education (for all ages)	25	4.7
Local Government, including taxes	18	3.4
Safety and crime	16	3.0
Bullying	10	1.9
Casino problems	8	1.5
Community and Services/General	6	1.1

⁶ Percentages based on N = 531

Category	Number	Percent
Transportation/Roads	41	7.7
Transportation, other than roads	19	3.6
Other	25	4.7
Don't know	14	2.6
Nothing	11	2.1

The main patterns found in Table 2 are replicated here with the open-ended, qualitative responses provided by respondents. When asked to respond in their own words, 15 percent of Isabella County residents report that the biggest problem in the county is related to employment and jobs. Comments that capture well these residents' views about the biggest county problem are the following:

Finding jobs that pay well.

Opportunities for jobs that pay a livable wage.

Not enough jobs here.

The ability to earn enough money to buy a home and support yourself with healthcare.

Concerns about healthcare are also prominent, with about one quarter of respondents mentioning some aspect of healthcare as the major problem facing residents in the county. Some residents in responding to the question simply said “*healthcare*,” while others focused more explicitly on access or affordability. Health care access comments included these:

Lack of medical care.

Access to healthcare providers and specialists.

Healthcare providers accepting new patients.

Some respondents highlighted health care affordability by simply saying “*affordable healthcare*,” while others expanded as follows:

Healthcare services that people can afford.

Health care issues, mental and physical. It's too expensive.

Paying too much for healthcare insurance.

Mental health was singled out by some respondents as the biggest problem facing residents in the county. In addition to simply saying “*mental health*,” some respondents elaborated on this particular kind of health issue that is problematic in the county.

Having resources for mental health that are affordable.

Mental health helps.

Dealing with mental illness. Figuring out what do with people who have mental problems.

Problems related to substance abuse or drugs are also mentioned by about 10 percent of respondents as the biggest problem in the county. Included in this category are the following comments:

The opioid epidemic.

Very bad drug problems.

Help for people with problems related to substance abuse - including alcohol, opiates, and other drugs.

Substance abuse is a major problem. There are good programs, but there isn't enough education in the population. The medical field needs to be better at educating.

About one respondent in six focused on some type of “basic needs” as the largest county problem. Housing was singled out as a particular problem by almost 10 percent of residents, while others mentioned issues related to food, the cost of living, or poverty, generally. Comments that mention housing issues, in particular, include the following:

There should be no one out there homeless.

Safe, affordable housing.

High incidence of people that need services like home restoration and soup kitchen.

I have lived for the last 9 months with no gas for heat. No one would help.

More than 40 respondents saw as problematic what we are calling community culture, attitudes, and environment. While diverse, these comments express concern about the values exhibited by community members and the nature of the interactions of community members with one another. Examples of comments in this category are the following:

Indifference to what's going on around us. Not getting actively involved in social and/or civic actions to impact county residents.

Strong prejudice.

Drunken and noisy college students.

Kids are lazy and have no morals.

More than 40 respondents see issues related to roads as the biggest problem facing residents in the county. These comments tended to be straight-forward and include the following:

The roads are terrible.

We need better roads.

Busy, rough roads/traffic hazards.

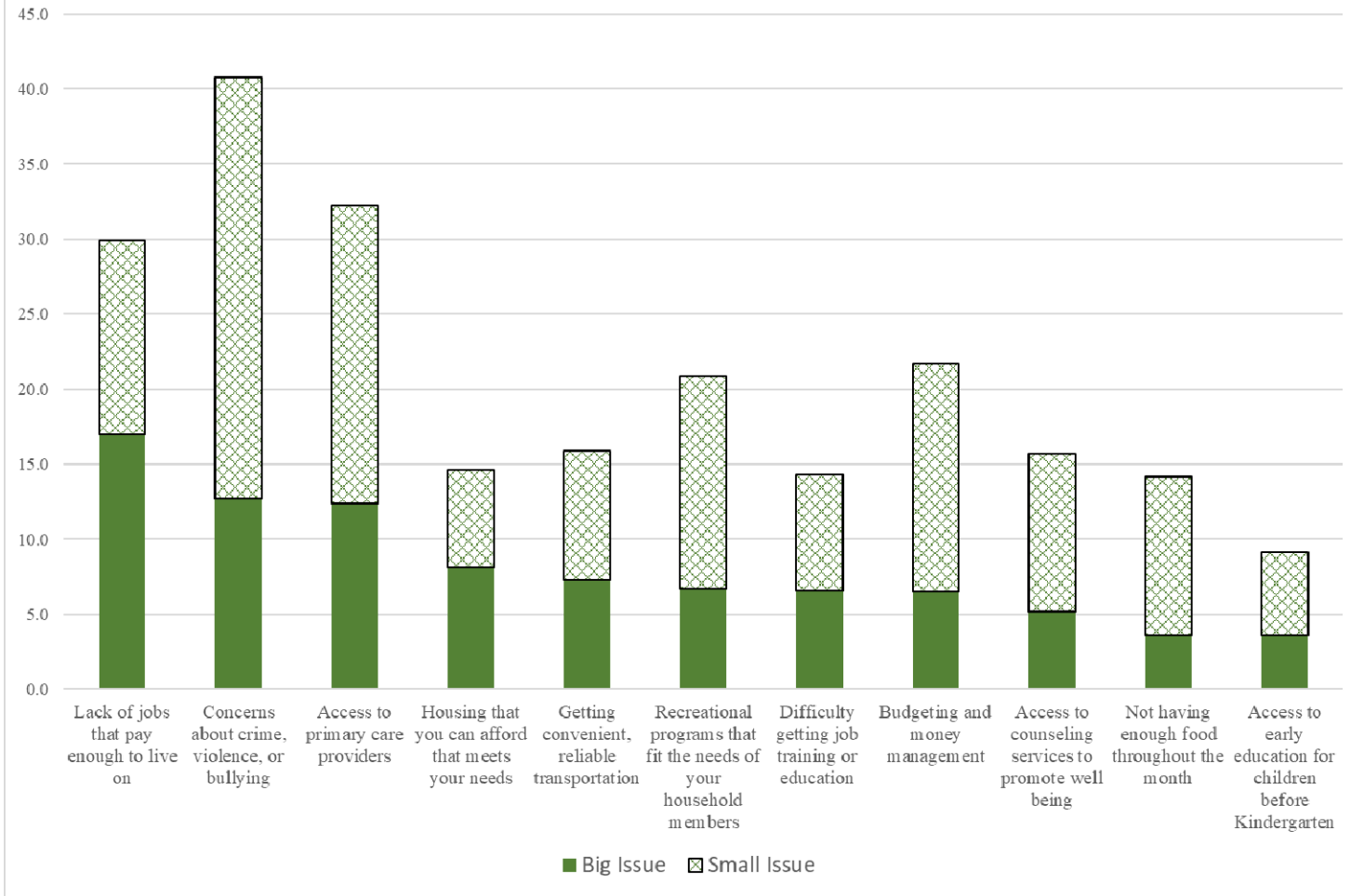
No other specific code category contains more than 10 percent of respondents.

Problems Experienced in the Household

In another section of the interview schedule and print questionnaire, the focus shifts from the respondents' perceptions of community needs to a discussion of the actual problems that respondents or their household members have experienced in the recent past. In particular, respondents were asked the extent to which each of 11 issues "have affected you and members of your household in the last 12 months." Respondents were asked to indicate whether each issue

has been “a big issue,” “a small issue,” or “not an issue.” Figure 2 graphs the percentages of respondents reporting that a problem was a “big issue” or a “small issue” for the household in the past year. The solid bars chart the percentage of respondents indicating that an issue has been a “big” one for their household, while the hatched bars provide the percentage reporting that the issue has been a “small” one in the last 12 months. Together the height of the bars indicates the extent to which the household has experienced the issue in question at least to some degree. Table 4 provides the complete percentage distributions summarizing responses to these 11 questions. The figure and table present the issues in descending order, with the one receiving the highest percentage of “big issue” responses appearing first on the left in the figure and at the top of the table. While differences in experience by household income are highlighted in a separate section of the report, we will discuss here the ways in which household composition—namely, the presence of one or more senior citizen, toddler under five years of age, and child between 5 and 17 years of age—affects the likelihood of a respondent reporting that an issue has affected the household. In addition, we will compare the responses of individuals with shorter and longer tenure in the county.

Figure 2: Experience of Problems in the Household in the Last 12 Months: Percentages Reporting "Big Issue" or "Small Issue" for Isabella County Residents



Percentage Distributions for Isabella County Residents

	Big Issue	Small Issue	Not an Issue
Lack of jobs that pay enough to live on	17.0	12.9	70.1
Concerns about crime, violence, or bullying	12.7	28.1	59.2
Access to primary care providers	12.4	19.8	67.8
Housing that you can afford that meets your needs	8.1	6.5	85.4
Getting convenient, reliable transportation	7.3	8.6	84.1
Recreational programs that fit the needs of your household members	6.7	14.2	79.1
Difficulty getting job training or education	6.6	7.7	85.7
Budgeting and money management	6.5	15.2	78.3
Access to counseling services to promote well being	5.2	10.5	84.3
Not having enough food throughout the month	3.6	10.6	85.8
Access to early education for children before Kindergarten	3.6	5.5	90.9

There are several key conclusions from Figure 2 and Table 4.

- Fortunately, most residents report that each of the issues we asked about has not been an issue for members of their household in the last year. That is, the percentage of respondents reporting that the issue is “not an issue” exceeds 50 percent in each case.
- Nonetheless, at least nine percent of respondents report that each of the 11 issues has been an issue at least to some degree for their household members. That is, the percentage of “not an issue” responses is never 90 percent or less.

- Seventeen percent of respondents report that “lack of jobs that pay enough to live on” has been a “big issue” for their household in the last year, with more than 10 percent of respondents indicating that “concerns about crime, violence, or bullying” or “access to primary care providers” has been a “big” challenge for their household.
- These three issues also stand out as being “big” or “small” issues for sizeable numbers of Isabella County households. That is, at least 30 percent of households report that “concerns about crime, violence, or bullying,” “access to primary care providers,” and “lack of jobs that pay enough to live on” has been an issue—whether “big” or “small”—for members of their household in the last 12 months. Given the tragic shooting on the CMU campus on March 2, we explored whether respondents who completed the survey in print (after March 2) were more likely than those who completed the survey over the telephone (before March 2) to see concerns about “crime, violence, and bullying” as an issue. This was not the case.
- At least 20 percent of respondents report that “recreational programs that fit the needs of your household members” and “budgeting and money management” has been a big or small issue for members of their household.
- Additional analysis finds that respondents in households with senior citizens are not more likely than other respondents to experience any of the issues discussed here.
- Respondents with young children under five in the household are more likely than others to face particular challenges. In particular, respondents in households with children under five are more likely than those without toddlers to report that access

to early education has been an issue (40.5% versus 6.6%, respectively), that lack of jobs that pay enough to live on has been an issue (47.2% versus 28.6%), that job training or education has been an issue (29.7% versus 13.2%), and that concerns about crime, violence, or bullying has been an issue (59.5% versus 39.3%) in their household in the last 12 months.

- Respondents in households with older children—those 5 to 17 years of age—are more likely than others to report that recreational programs that meet the needs of household members has been an issue (28.3% versus 19.1%). They are also more likely than those who do not have children in that age range to indicate that access to quality early education has been an issue (15.3% versus 7.6%).
- Respondents who have lived in the county for 15 years or less differ from those with longer tenure in the county in some significant ways. In particular, those with fewer years in the county are more likely than those who have lived in the county longer to report that lack of jobs to pay enough to live on has been an issue for their household in the last 12 months, with 38.7 percent of those living in the county for fewer years reporting this compared to 26.0 percent of those who have been in the county longer. Given this, it is not surprising that not having enough food throughout the month is more likely to be an issue for those who have been in the county for a shorter period of time compared to those with longer tenure (21.0% versus 11.0%, respectively). Those with fewer years in the county are also more likely to indicate that housing that you can afford that meets your needs has been an issue at least to some degree in the last year (27.5% versus 9.9%) and that

access to counseling services to promote well being has been an issue (23.1% versus 13.2%)

Respondents were also asked whether their household had experienced “any other major challenge or problem in the last 12 months.” Twenty percent of the sample or 106 respondents answered “yes.” They were then asked: “What kind of problem was that?” CARRS staff coded these open-ended responses into a number of discrete categories. The code categories, along with the frequencies and percentages, are found in Table 5. The percentages are based on the number of respondents indicating an “other” problem existed, not on the number of respondents in the total sample.

**Table 5: “Other” Problems Experienced in the Last 12 Months:
Code Categories, Frequency and Percentage Distributions for Isabella County Residents**

Code Category	Frequency	Percent based on N=106
Personal health or health of another	28	26.4
Healthcare	12	11.3
Transportation	12	11.3
Flooding	11	10.4
Housing	11	10.4
Government and legal issues	10	9.4
Work	9	8.5
Safety	6	5.7
Other	13	12.3

The largest number of respondents who reported that their household had experienced other types of challenges mentioned ones related to health and healthcare. Some of these comments focused on challenges related to the respondent’s personal health or the health of another loved one. Illustrative of these comments are the following:

I had a major surgery—still recovering.

Dealing with family deaths and counseling.

Some health-related comments, however, repeated themes discussed above focusing on healthcare access and affordability. Comments included in this category include the following:

Being referred to specialists and struggling to pay the bills, not sure who can help.

Finding a doctor.

Some respondents also mentioned challenges they were facing related to transportation.

The following comments are included in this category:

Transport out of town to other major towns, cities.

Busy, over-developed roadways are causing traffic hazards.

Water damage and issues of flooding were also mentioned as household challenges in the last year. The following comments illustrate this theme:

The flood over the summer.

Flooding; recent water main break in neighborhood causing major flooding in the streets.

Issues related to housing appeared again when respondents were asked about “other” household issues. Comments in this category are diverse, with the following included in this category:

No gas for heat. Not enough money.

Needed reroofing and new eaves troughs/downspouts (church helped)

Losing house. (Used services in the community: They haven’t helped me. 1st I made too much money, now I don’t make enough.).

While the experience of any of these problems can be devastating for household members, the compounding of problems is especially difficult. Table 6 reports the total number

of different types of problems experienced by Isabella County residents. The first panel of the table provides a percentage distribution of the number of issues listed as “big” by respondents, while the second panel gives the percentage distribution of the number of issues of any size (“big” or “small”) reported by respondents.

**Table 6: Number of Problems Experienced by Households in the Last 12 Months:
Percentage Distributions for Isabella County Residents**

	Percent
Number of “Big” Problems	
No “big” problem	61.2
One “big” problem	19.6
Two “big” problems	7.5
Three “big” problems	5.3
Four “big” problems	1.9
Five “big” problems	1.1
Six “big” problems	1.3
Seven “big” problems	1.3
Eight or more “big” problems	0.8
Number of “Big” or “Small” Problems	
No problem	24.3
One problem (“big” or “small”)	24.9
Two problems (“big” or “small”)	18.6
Three problems (“big” or “small”)	9.2
Four problems (“big” or “small”)	6.6
Five problems (“big” or “small”)	6.2
Six problems (“big” or “small”)	3.2
Seven problems (“big” or “small”)	2.8
Eight or more problems (“big” or “small”)	4.2

Again, the table shows that most residents—slightly more than 60 percent—report that their household has not experienced any of the 11 issues addressed in the survey as a “big issue” in the last 12 months. However, most respondents—fully three quarters of them—tell interviewers or indicate on the print questionnaire—that their household has experienced one or more of these issues at least to some degree. That is, only 24 percent of respondents report experiencing none of the 11 issues in the last 12 months. As many as 12 percent of respondents report that their household has experienced three or more “big” problems in the last year, and 32

percent of respondents list at least three issues as being either “big” or “small” for household members in the last year.

Use of Services by Residents in Need

Of course households with problems and challenges are in a better position if they are able to make use of community services designed to assist them. Their needs are greater if services to help are unavailable or if household members have not made use of them. To explore this issue, respondents who reported that their household had experienced a problem to some degree in the last 12 months were asked whether they have used community services to help with the problem.⁷ Table 7 provides the number of people reporting the existence of a problem (who appropriately answered the question about service use), the number of people with a problem reporting that they have used a community service to address it, and the resulting percentage of people with problem reporting service use. The numbers are provided in the table because they vary considerably depending on the problem in question and are, at times, quite small. The table is organized with the issue experienced by the largest number of respondents listed first and the one with the fewest number of respondents listed last.

⁷ The CATI system was programmed to skip questions about service use for those respondents who indicated that they were not experiencing a problem in their household. In the print version of the questionnaire, respondents were instructed to answer questions about service use only if an issue had been a “big” or “small” one for members of their household in the last year. Some respondents, however, answered the question about service use anyway (perhaps having used a service in previous years), and these responses have been removed from the analysis presented here. In addition, some respondents who reported that an issue was a “big” one or a “small” one for their household in the last year chose not to answer the question about service use.

Table 7: Number Experiencing Problem, Number Using Service, and Percentage with Problem Using Service for Isabella County Residents

	Number Experiencing Problem to Some Degree	Number Who Used Service	Percent Experiencing Problem Who Used Service
Concerns about crime, violence, or bullying	194	55	28.4
Access to primary care providers	157	60	38.2
Lack of jobs that pay enough to live on	140	42	30.0
Budgeting and money management	104	17	16.3
Recreational programs that fit the needs of your household members	101	56	55.4
Getting convenient, reliable transportation	80	33	41.3
Access to counseling services to promote well being	79	44	55.7
Housing that you can afford that meets your needs	69	22	31.9
Not having enough food throughout the month	69	37	53.6
Difficulty getting job training or education	65	26	40.0
Access to early education for children before Kindergarten	45	18	40.0

Two conclusions are apparent from Table 7.

- There is considerable variation in the percentage of respondents with household challenges who report using community services to help. For example, only 16 percent of the respondents who experience issues with budgeting and money management use community services to help with this issue. The highest percentage of respondents with an “issue” who report using a community service to help is only 56 percent. In fact, in

only three cases do 50 percent or more of “needy” respondents report using a service to help address the need in question—namely, “recreational programs that fit the needs of your household members,” “access to counseling services to promote well being”, and “not having enough food throughout the month.”

- The three areas of greatest need—“lack of jobs that pay enough to live on;” “access to primary care providers,” and “concerns about crime, violence, or bullying”—are also areas of relatively low service use. In none of these problem areas do more than 38 percent of needy respondents report use of a service to provide help with it.

It is also worthwhile to explore the overall number of people who have taken advantage of the services available in the community to assist those with needs. Table 8 provides the percentage distribution of an index measuring the total number of services used by the 402 respondents who do face at least one “big” or “small” issue in their household.

**Table 8: Number of Services Used:
Percentage Distribution for Isabella County Residents
with at Least One Household Issue**

	Percent Based on N=402
No service used	51.2
One service used	27.1
Two services used	9.0
Three services used	4.5
Four services used	3.5
Five or more services used	4.7

We see that about one half of the sample experiencing at least one household challenge has used no community service. In fact, less than five percent of the sample has used five or more of these services. These summary data suggest both that there are unmet needs in the

community and that the view that some people “overuse” or “hoard” community services is not substantiated empirically.

Involvement in the Community

The needs assessment survey focused for the most part on perceptions of community and household needs and on the services available to assist people with those needs. Certainly, communities with many unmet needs are less desirable than ones where needs are met. Nonetheless, a community’s strength also depends on the extent to which residents are involved in community life. A series of questions at the beginning of the survey was designed to explore the extent of involvement of Isabella County residents in their community. These questions were introduced to respondents by the interviewers as follows: *“The first questions ask about your involvement in the community.”* Respondents were asked simply to respond with “yes” or “no.” Table 9 provides the percentage distributions that summarize responses to these questions. Note that the focus of the questions is on someone in the household rather than the individual respondent.

**Table 9: Community Involvement:
Percentage Distributions for Isabella County Residents**

Someone in household ...	Yes	No
Votes regularly in local elections	69.6	30.4
Reads the local newspaper regularly, whether online or print	61.7	38.3
Volunteered time or expertise in the last year to a community, religious, or political group	53.6	46.2 ⁸

Table 9 suggests that large numbers of Isabella County residents report living in households with at least one member who is involved in the community. More than one half of

respondents report that at least someone in the household votes regularly in local elections, reads the local newspaper regularly, and volunteered time to a community, religious, or political group.⁹

Opinions about the Community

The Community Foundation was also interested in learning directly about residents' views of the community. Do residents view their community positively, as a good place to live and work? If so, residents can themselves be positive public relations advocates for the county. If not, the issue is to learn where residents see weaknesses and problems, so that perhaps they can be addressed. Respondents were presented a series of nine declarative statements. Then for each, they were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with it, using the standard response options of "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." Table 10 provides the percentage distributions that summarize responses. The table is organized with items with similar focus grouped together.

⁸ 0.2% "don't know"

⁹ These numbers are possibly inflated by social desirability bias. It is easier for respondents to answer "yes" to such questions than "no." On the other hand, the focus on household involvement rather than individual involvement will necessarily yield higher percentages of "yes" responses. If one household member in four regularly reads the local newspaper, for example, the respondent is quite accurate in providing an affirmative response to the question.

**Table 10: Opinions about Isabella County:
Percentage Distributions for Isabella County Residents**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Isabella County is a good place to raise children.	34.2	61.9	3.3	0.6
Isabella County is a desirable place for seniors to live.	15.8	70.5	11.9	1.8
Isabella is a desirable place for young professionals to live.	10.1	58.1	28.3	3.6
Relationships between CMU and the community are good.	17.8	67.1	13.0	2.2
Race relations in Isabella County are positive.	11.3	67.1	18.3	3.3
Poverty is a major problem in Isabella County.	19.7	47.2	29.4	3.7
Enough is being done in the county to help people get out of poverty.	3.2	28.7	53.8	14.3
The quality of life in Isabella County is good for people like me.	19.0	70.9	8.2	1.9
It is easy to find out what is going on in the community.	14.8	61.5	21.2	2.5

Residents' perceptions of life in the county are a combination of the positive and the negative.

- Respondents are more likely to view Isabella County as a positive place to raise a family than as a desirable place for seniors or young professionals to live. In fact, while less than five percent of respondents *disagree* (to some extent) that the county is a good place for raising children, more than 30 percent of respondents “disagree” or “strongly disagree” that the county is a desirable place for young professional to live.

- While the vast majority of respondents (more than three out of four) report that relationships between CMU and the community are good and that race relations in the county are positive, the percentage of respondents who “strongly agree” is less than 20 percent. In fact, more than 20 percent of respondents “disagree” or “strongly disagree” that race relations are positive in Isabella County.
- Meanwhile, two thirds of respondents report that poverty is a major problem in Isabella County, with 20 percent strongly agreeing with this statement. Slightly less than one third of respondents indicate that enough is being done in the county to help people get out of poverty—meaning that more than two thirds of members of the sample “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with this statement.
- By way of contrast, fully 90 percent of respondents “agree” or “strongly agree” that the quality of life in Isabella County is good for people like themselves, with almost one respondent out of five strongly agreeing with the statement. However, while a sizeable majority of respondents agrees that it is easy to find out what is going on in the community, almost one quarter of respondents “disagree” or “strongly disagree” that it is easy to find out what is going on.

Opinions about the Community Foundation

The Community Foundation was also interested in respondents’ perceptions of its own work, given that fundraising efforts are more likely to be successful if community members are both aware of the Foundation’s activities and think positively about them. Respondents were, first, asked how much knowledge they have about the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation. They were asked to respond with one of four choices—“a great deal,” “some,” “a little,” or “none.” Respondents who indicated that they had at least a little knowledge about the

Foundation were then asked to rate the services provided by the Foundation on a scale ranging from “excellent” to “poor” and also to indicate whether each of three initiatives found in the Foundation’s Strategic Plan should be a “high priority,” a “medium priority,” or a “low priority” in the future. A “don’t know” option was also provided. Table 11 provides the percentage of respondents choosing each of the response options, recognizing that some of the questions were asked only to respondents who were knowledgeable about the Community Foundation.

Table 11: Knowledge and Opinions about the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation: Percentage Distributions for Isabella County Residents

	Percent
EXTENT OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION	
A great deal	8.0
Some	21.0
A little	19.5
None	51.4
RATING OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE FOUNDATION, for knowledgeable respondents (N=254)	
Excellent	22.8
Good	41.7
Fair	11.4
Poor	3.5
Don’t know	20.5

	Percent
PRIORITIES FOR THE FOUNDATION, for knowledgeable respondents (N=254)	
Fundraising and the maintenance of endowments to use in the future	
High priority	49.0
Medium priority	37.5
Low priority	6.7
Don't know	6.7
Providing grants to organizations in the community	
High priority	62.2
Medium priority	28.7
Low priority	3.9
Don't know	5.1
Bringing groups together to solve community problems	
High priority	56.3
Medium priority	31.9
Low priority	7.5
Don't know	4.3

A number of conclusions are apparent from a review of the data in the table.

- A majority of respondents indicate that they have no knowledge about the Community Foundation, and less than 10 percent of the sample reports “a great deal” of knowledge.
- Meanwhile, respondents with knowledge of the Foundation’s work give it reasonably high ratings, with almost two thirds reporting that its services are “excellent” or “good.” The two lowest ratings of “fair” or “poor” are chosen by only 15 percent of respondents. Note, however, that 20 percent of respondents indicate that they “don’t know” how to rate the Foundation’s work, even among the 254 respondents who report at least “a little” knowledge about the Foundation.
- All three Strategic Plan initiatives are seen as “high priority” ones by majorities or near majorities of the “knowledgeable” sample. Respondents are slightly less likely to rate highly the priority of “fundraising and the maintenance of endowments to use in the

future” compared to the other two strategic initiatives. In fact, 62 percent of respondents say that “providing grants to organizations in the community” is a “high priority,” and 56 percent of respondents give this high rating to “bringing groups together to solve community problems.” Few respondents are opposed to each of these initiatives, with less than 10 percent indicating that each should be a “low priority” for the Foundation in the future.

Sources of Information about the Community

We have seen from Table 10 that a significant number of residents—about one quarter—indicate that it is not easy to find out what is going on in the community. The Community Foundation, of course, is interested in learning the best ways of communicating about the programs it supports and for involving residents, more generally, in community activities. To explore the issue of how county residents secure information on community issues, respondents were asked about Internet availability at their residence, recognizing that some parts of the county are not served by Internet providers and that Internet service, when available, is costly for some. Respondents were also asked how they get information on local issues—that is, whether each of six sources of information is a “major way,” a “minor way,” or “not a way” that they secure information. They were also queried about whether they were aware of the 2-1-1 telephone system “that connects people in need with helpful resources?” Table 12 provides the percentage distributions that summarize responses to these questions.

**Table 12: Internet Access and Sources of Information about Local Issues and Resources:
Percentage Distributions for Isabella County Residents.**

	Percent
ARE INTERNET PROVIDERS AVAILABLE TO PROVIDE SERVICE?	
Yes	91.3
No	8.7
DO YOU HAVE AN INTERNET CONNECTION AT YOUR RESIDENCE THAT MEETS YOUR NEEDS?	
Yes	77.5
No	22.5
SOURCES OF LOCAL INFORMATION	
Television	
Major way	44.2
Minor way	32.8
Not a way	23.0
Morning Sun (online or print)	
Major way	39.4
Minor way	40.2
Not a way	20.4
Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram	
Major way	38.3
Minor way	34.3
Not a way	27.4
Word of mouth and meetings	
Major way	38.2
Minor way	48.2
Not a way	13.6
The radio	
Major way	29.6
Minor way	42.2
Not a way	28.2

	Percent
Email and e-newsletters	
Major way	19.4
Minor way	42.7
Not a way	37.9
AWARE OF 2-1-1 TELEPHONE REFERRAL SERVICE	
Yes	35.5
No	64.5

A series of conclusions are apparent when reviewing the data summarized in Table 12.

- The table shows that, while more than 90 percent of respondents indicate that Internet providers are available to provide service to their residence, only slightly more than three quarters of residents report that they have an Internet connection at their residence “that meets their needs.” Of course some of the respondents who say “no” to the latter question may have Internet access at their home, but their view is that the connection does not meet their needs.
- Table 12 also makes clear that respondents secure local information today from a combination of “legacy” and electronic media. That is, about 40 percent of respondents indicate that television, the Morning Sun (either online or in print), social media, and word of mouth and meetings are a “major way” of getting local information. Radio is a major way of securing information on local issues for 30 percent of respondents, while email and e-newsletters are relied on a major source of local information for slightly less than 20 percent of respondents.
- It is also worth noting that each local information source—other than word of mouth and meetings—is “not a way” of getting local information for at least 20 percent of respondents. This suggests the importance of using multiple information channels to “get

the word out” on any issue of importance to the Community Foundation or other local groups.

- Finally, in this series, we note that only slightly more than one third of residents are aware of the 2-1-1 telephone referral system. This finding highlights both the difficulty of communicating to residents across the county and the need to publicize this helpful public resource more widely.

Comments

The telephone interview and questionnaire concluded with an open-ended question that simply asked respondents: “Is there anything you would like to add about life in Isabella County or the issues we have discussed?” About 35 percent of the sample (N = 187) took the opportunity to provide additional comments. Table 13 provides those categories, along with the numbers and percentages of respondents in each. Here the percentages are based on the total sample size of 531. The numbers of comments in specific subcategories are provided along with their aggregation into a total for the more general category.

Table 13: Additional comments: Code Categories, Frequency and Percentage Distributions for Isabella County Residents

Categories	Number	Percent¹⁰
Positive perceptions	47	8.9
Negative perceptions	10	1.9
Environment (Total)	51	9.6
Environment/Physical	7	1.3
Environment/Social & Recreational	29	5.5
Environment/Social/Diversity	9	1.7
Environment/Social/Food	6	1.1
Transportation	31	5.8
Housing	21	4.0
Healthcare (Total)	18	3.4
Healthcare	6	1.1
Healthcare/Drugs	8	1.5
Healthcare/Mental Health	4	0.8
Government	17	3.2
Employment	16	3.0
Other	15	2.8
Law enforcement/Crime	11	2.1
Town-Gown Relations—Bad	11	2.1
Town-Gown Relations—Good	10	1.9
Education	7	1.3

A number of final comments simply focused on some positive aspect of life in the county (and positive comments outnumber negative ones). The following comments illustrate the type of comments included in this category:

It's a great place to live.

I think the Community Foundation does great work.

I really enjoy all the city parks and the farmer's market!

Proud of community. Lots of good support organizations.

¹⁰ Percentages based on N = 531

About 10 percent of the sample concluded the survey by adding a comment about the physical or social environment in the county. These comments were diverse and include the following:

We need pollution control addressed even though it has moved outside of the city limits.

There should be more things to do besides the casino and bars.

Need more recreational opportunities for young and old.

Not a lot of diversity.

Transportation issues were mentioned by 31 respondents who chose to add a final comment. Most, although not all, of these comments focused on problems with traffic and the roads. Comments included in this category are the following:

Mission Road is too dangerous.

Isabella County roads are in very, very bad condition.

Our roads and large trucks. Speeding issues.

No transportation outside the city.

Twenty one respondents made a final comment about housing issues. These following comments provide illustrations of those included in this category:

I own my home and can't get help fixing things or help getting things for home.

More affordable housing options for adults who are not students or low income. Apartments seem to be the only option, or houses for 1000+ a month.

Get affordable houses.

I believe we have enough student housing and would like to see more single family dwellings in the old neighborhoods.

No other specific type of comment was added by more than 10 percent of those choosing to add a final remark or by more than five percent of the total sample.

DIFFERENCES IN EXPERIENCES AND OPINIONS BY INCOME

A key goal of the Community Foundation in undertaking this survey project is to ensure that the opinions and experiences of less advantaged county residents are taken into consideration in planning for future grant making and services. The economic diversity of households represented in the sample makes it possible to compare the experiences of households with yearly incomes of less than \$25,000 to those with yearly incomes of \$75,000 or more. What follows is a discussion of those instances where income distinctions are both statistically significant (at $p \leq .05$) and substantively important to the work and decision-making of the Foundation.¹¹

Table 14 provides the percentages of respondents from lower income households (less than \$25,000) and the percentages of respondents from higher income households (\$75,000 or more) for those questions that yield significant and important income differences. Only one response option is provided for each question—the one that most markedly shows the income difference. The table is organized by the main topics in the preceding report.

¹¹ Some recoding of variables was necessary in order to secure a large enough case base to perform this analysis. For instance, the response options “minor need” and “not a need” were combined.

Table 14: The Opinions and Experiences of Respondents from Lower and Higher Income Households: Percentages for Isabella County Residents

	Household income less than \$25,000	Household income \$75,000 or more
PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY NEEDS		
Affordable housing—Major need	59.5	38.4
Convenient, reliable transportation—Major need	42.0	19.7
Access to education for people completing high school—Major need	40.4	22.6
Affordable, quality childcare—Minor need or Not a need	23.8	13.3
PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED IN THE HOUSEHOLD		
Lack of jobs that pay enough to live on—Big issue	30.4	8.2
Concerns about crime, violence, or bullying—Big issue	19.3	6.3
Access to primary care providers—Big issue	19.8	6.3
Housing that you can afford that meets your needs—Big issue	20.9	3.1
Getting convenient, reliable transportation—Big issue	17.2	3.8
Difficulty getting job training or education—Big issue	14.0	1.3
Budgeting and money management—Big issue	10.4	1.3
Access to counseling services to promote well being—Big issue	9.6	3.2
Not having enough food throughout the month—Big issue	10.4	0.0

	Household income less than \$25,000	Household income \$75,000 or more
OPINIONS ABOUT THE COMMUNITY		
Isabella County is a good place to raise children—Strongly agree	25.4	45.3
Poverty is a major problem in Isabella County—Strongly agree	32.1	17.0
Enough is being done in the county to help people get out of poverty—Disagree and Strongly disagree	78.1	70.9
The quality of life in Isabella County is good for people like me—Strongly agree	12.9	28.7
INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY		
Votes regularly in local elections—Yes	43.9	82.6
Reads the local newspaper regularly, whether online or print—Yes	41.7	69.6
Volunteered time or expertise in the last year to a community, religious, or political group—Yes	33.9	67.7
OPINIONS ABOUT THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION		
Knowledge about the Community Foundation--None	64.3	34.0
SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMMUNITY		
Has Internet connection at residence that meets needs--Yes	65.5	87.4
Morning Sun—Major way	26.5	45.0
Social media—Not a way	28.7	17.5
E-mail and e-newsletters—Not a way	48.7	28.0

There are important differences in the opinions and experiences of respondents from lower and higher income households, along with similarities that are also worth noting.

- Respondents' views about community needs do vary by household income, but in only a few instances. In particular, respondents from lower income households are more likely than those from higher income households to view affordable housing, convenient, reliable transportation, and access to education for people completing high school as a "major need" in the community. By contrast, a higher percentage of respondents from lower income households report that affordable, quality childcare is a "minor need" or "not a need" in the community, while more than 40 percent of all respondents see affordable, quality childcare as a "major need."
- However, there are marked differences by income in the extent to which respondents report that their household has experienced challenges in the last 12 months. In nine out of the 11 cases under analysis here, respondents from lower income households are more likely than those from higher income households to report that their household has faced this as a "big" issue. In a number of cases, these income differences are large. For example, while no respondent from a higher income household reports "not having enough food throughout the month" as a "big issue," 10 percent of respondents from lower income households indicate this. Similarly, 30 percent of respondents from lower income households indicate that "lack of jobs that pay enough to live" on is a "big" issue for their household, as opposed to only eight percent of respondents from higher income households, and 21 percent of respondents from lower income households as opposed to only three percent of those from higher income households state that "housing that you can afford that meets your needs" has been a "big issue" for them in the last year.

- As might be expected given the data above, respondents from lower and higher income households have different views about aspects of the quality of life in Isabella County. Residents from higher income households are more than twice as likely as those from lower income households to report that the quality of life in the county “is good for people like me” (29% versus 13%); only two percent of respondents from higher income households disagree or strongly disagree that the quality of life is good compared to 27 percent of people from lower income households. Similarly, respondents from higher as opposed to lower income households are more likely to “strongly agree” that the county is “a good place to raise children” (45% versus 25%). Almost one third of respondents from lower income households “strongly agree” that poverty is a major problem in the county, while fewer than one fifth of respondents from higher income households have this point of view, and, while most respondents express some level of disagreement with the view that “enough is being done” to help poor people get out of poverty, lower income respondents are somewhat more likely than higher income ones to think this (78% versus 71%).
- Respondents in lower income households are less likely than those in higher income households to report reading the local newspaper regularly, voting in local elections, and volunteering time and expertise to community groups. In each case, the difference between respondents from higher income households and those from lower income households is more than 25 percentage points.
- Respondents from lower income households are much less likely than those from higher income households to have no knowledge about the Community Foundation, 64 percent versus 34 percent, respectively.

- Respondents from higher and lower income households also receive local information in somewhat different ways. Higher income respondents are more likely than lower income respondents to have an Internet connection at their residence that meets their needs (87% versus 65%, respectively). It is not surprising, then, that higher percentages of lower income residents compared to higher income residents report that social media and e-mail/e-newsletters are “not a way” that they secure local information. Respondents from higher income households are also more likely to get information about the local community in a “major way” from *The Morning Sun*, whether online or in print format—a difference between the two income groups of close to 20 percentage points.

CONCLUSIONS

This report summarizes the opinions and experiences of 531 residents of Isabella County who were interviewed by telephone or who completed print surveys sent through U.S. mail in Winter and Spring 2018. Key findings are found below.

- Respondents were asked whether each of 16 issues was a “major need,” a “moderate need,” a “minor need,” or “not a need” for people in their community. The percentages of residents reporting that an issue is a “major need” varies considerably from a high of 68 percent to a low of 26 percent. The two areas with the highest percentage of respondents—more than 60 percent—reporting “major need” are “health care services that people can afford” and “having jobs that pay enough for people to live on.” None of the 16 issues under consideration here is viewed as “not a need” by more than 10 percent of residents.
- Responses to an open-ended, qualitative question about the biggest problem facing Isabella County residents corroborate the quantitative data. Aspects of healthcare—access, affordability, mental health issues, and substance abuse—are noted by about one quarter of respondents. Employment issues—especially the lack of jobs that pay a livable wage—are mentioned by about 15 percent of the sample.
- Respondents were also asked whether each of 11 issues had been a “big issue,” “small issue,” or “not an issue” affecting them or members of their household in the last year. The three issues that were most likely to be experienced by Isabella County households were “lack of jobs that pay enough to live on,” “access to primary care providers,” and “concerns about crime, violence, or bullying.” At least 30 percent of respondents report each of these issues has been a “big” one or a “small” one for their household in the last

12 months. Fortunately, the percentage of respondents reporting that each issue is “not an issue” for members of their household exceeds 50 percent in each case.

- Large percentages of respondents who report that their household has experienced a problem in the last year also tell interviewers that they have NOT used community services available to help with that problem. The three areas of greatest need are also areas where relatively low numbers of people connect with community services; in none of these areas do more than 38 percent of respondents with a need report the use of services.
- Majorities of respondents report living in households where one or more member is involved in the community—through voting in local elections, reading the local newspaper, or volunteering time or expertise to local groups.
- Respondents are divided in their views about the community. More than 90 percent of respondents agree that the county is a good place to raise children, while almost one third disagree that it is a desirable place for young professionals to live. About two thirds of respondents think that poverty is a major problem in the county, while less than one third report that enough is being done to help people get out of poverty. Fully 90 percent of this sample of respondents agree that the quality of life in Isabella County is good “for people like me,” although more than 20 percent of respondents disagree when asked whether race relations in the county are positive.
- A majority of respondents indicate that they have no knowledge about the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation. Those with at least “a little” knowledge have favorable views about the Foundation’s services provided to the community, with only 15 percent indicating a view that services are only “fair” or “poor.” Knowledgeable respondents

also view each of three strategic Foundation initiatives of as being a “high priority,” with less than 10 percent indicating that each should be a “low” priority going forward.

- Respondents secure information about local issues in a variety of ways, using a mix of traditional and electronic media. About 40 percent of respondents indicate that television, the Morning Sun (either online or in print), social media, and word of mouth or meetings are a “major way” of getting local information. By contrast, at least 20 percent of respondents report that each of these most heavily used sources of information is “not a way” they get local information.
- Only about 35 percent of respondents are aware of the 2-1-1 telephone service available to link people with needs to available community services.
- Respondents from lower income households differ in important ways from those living in higher income households. In particular, residents from lower income households are more likely to experience a variety of challenges in their household (nine out of the 11 under analysis here), and they report a lower quality of life.

**APPENDIX A: Board of Trustees, Grant Review Committee, and Advisory
Committee Members**

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APPENDIX B: Interview Schedule (print format)

THE VIEWS AND NEEDS OF ISABELLA COUNTY RESIDENTS

Dear Isabella County Resident:

Three weeks have gone by since we mailed you a survey designed to learn your views about community needs. We are concerned that we have not yet received your completed questionnaire.

Central Michigan University's Center for Applied Research and Rural Studies (CARRS) is working with the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation to conduct this scientific survey to learn the views of county residents. While your involvement in this research is, of course, **voluntary**, we hope we can count on your participation! Please have a resident 18 years or older in your household complete the survey, which should take about 10-15 minutes. If you have **no opinion** on a specific issue, just **leave that question blank**. Please return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed **postage-paid return envelope**.

All survey responses are **confidential**. Surveys are returned to CARRS, and CARRS will write a summary report that will be available to the community. No information that could identify individuals or households will be included. The number on the back page of the survey is used to keep track of in-coming and out-going mail only. We will randomly draw the number of a completed survey, and the household will receive a \$50 gift certificate to a local store.

Please call CARRS at 989-774-2572 if you have any questions about this important community research project. Thank you very much for your help!

Mary S. Senter, Director
CARRS

Amanda A. Schafer, Executive Director
Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation

The first questions ask about your involvement in the community.

How many years have you lived in Isabella County? YEARS
(If one year or less, enter 1)

Does someone in your household...	YES	NO
Read the local newspaper regularly, whether online or in print?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteer time or expertise to a community, religious, or political group in Isabella County in the last year?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vote regularly in local elections— for example, elections for City Commission, School Board, or County Board of Commissioners?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Communities sometimes experience challenges and problems that need to be addressed. For each issue below, indicate the extent to which you believe it is a need for people in your community. Please focus on the **community as a whole** rather than on your specific household. Leave blank if don't know or unsure. *(check one response for each row)*

Indicate the extent of need in your community...	MAJOR NEED	MODERATE NEED	MINOR NEED	NOT A NEED
Healthcare services that people can afford	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People having enough food to eat throughout the month	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helping people develop job skills and the attitudes needed for success at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Affordable housing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Available primary health care providers who are accepting new patients	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing to meet the needs of senior citizens	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help for people with problems related to substance abuse— including alcohol, opiates, and other drugs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having jobs that pay enough to live on	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People being safe from crime and violence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to quality early education for children before they enter kindergarten	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing after school and summer activities for teenagers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Convenient, reliable transportation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to services for people facing emotional or mental health problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Affordable, quality childcare	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reducing bullying of young people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to education for people after completing high school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In your own words, what do you think is the biggest problem facing residents of Isabella County today?

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about Isabella County. *(check one response for each row)*

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Isabella County is a good place to raise children.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is easy to find out what is going on in the community. That is, there is enough information available about community activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Isabella County is a desirable place for young professionals to live.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relationships between CMU and the community are good.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Race relations in Isabella County are positive. That is, people from diverse groups get along well.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Isabella County is a desirable place for senior citizens to live.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poverty is a major problem in Isabella County.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enough is being done in Isabella County to help people get out of poverty.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The quality of life in Isabella County is good for people like me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	YES	NO
Are Internet providers available to provide service to your residence?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have an Internet connection at your residence that meets your needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you aware of the 2-1-1 telephone system that connects people in need with helpful resources?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

These next questions focus on issues related specifically **TO YOU AND YOUR HOUSEHOLD**.

On the **LEFT**, please indicate the extent to which each has been an issue for members of your household in the last 12 months. *(check one response for each row on the left)*

On the **RIGHT**, for those issues that have been BIG or SMALL for your household, indicate whether household members used a service.

Indicate the extent to which each has been an issue for your household ...				If a BIG or SMALL issue, have you used community services to help?	
BIG ISSUE	SMALL ISSUE	NOT AN ISSUE		YES	NO
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Getting convenient, reliable transportation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	NOT having enough food throughout the month	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of affordable housing that meets your needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accessing to primary health care providers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accessing counseling services to promote well-being	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accessing early education for children before they enter Kindergarten	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accessing recreational programs that fit the needs of your household members	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of jobs that pay enough to live on	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty getting the job training or education needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Budgeting and money management training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Concerns about crime, violence, or bullying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Have you or members of your household experienced any OTHER major challenge or problem in the last 12 months?

☐ NO OTHER PROBLEM

☐ YES → What kind of problem was that?

Have you used services in the community to help with this problem?

YES ☐ **NO** ☐

People get information on local issues in many different ways. For each information source below, indicate if it is a major way, a minor way, or not a way you get information on community issues. *(check one response for each row)*

Sources of information ...	MAJOR WAY	MINOR WAY	NOT A WAY
Morning Sun (online or print version)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Radio	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Television	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Email and e-newsletters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Word of mouth and meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation serves Isabella County. Please indicate your views about the Foundation on the questions below. *(check one response)*

How much knowledge do you have about the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation?

- ☐ A GREAT DEAL
- ☐ SOME
- ☐ A LITTLE
- ☐ NONE —————> IF NONE, SKIP TO BACK PAGE

How would you rate the services provided to the community by the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation?

- ☐ EXCELLENT
- ☐ GOOD
- ☐ FAIR
- ☐ POOR
- ☐ DON'T KNOW

Community Foundations can play many roles in their communities, but they cannot do everything. For each option, tell me if you think it should be a high priority, a medium priority, or a low priority for the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation. *(check one response for each row)*

PRIORITIES of Community Foundation ...	HIGH PRIORITY	MEDIUM PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY	Don't know
Fundraising and the maintenance of endowments to use in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing grants to organizations in the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bringing groups together to solve community problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please Turn to LAST PAGE —————>

These last questions focus on your background. This information is used for summary purposes only. Your responses will remain confidential.

	NUMBER including ZERO
How many adults (18 years and over)—INCLUDING yourself—live in your household?	<input type="text"/>
How many of these adults are employed at least 20 hours per week for pay?	<input type="text"/>
How many seniors 65 years and over—INCLUDING yourself—live in your household?	<input type="text"/>

	YES	NO
Are there young children under 5 years of age living in your household?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there children ages 5 through 17 years living in your household?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you own your present residence?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is any member of your household a college graduate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does anyone in your household receive public assistance such as a Bridge Card, SNAP, WIC, Supplemental Security Income, or TANF?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you live within the city limits of Mount Pleasant?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is anyone in your household currently looking for work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Which describes you?

☐ NOT A COLLEGE STUDENT

☐ PART-TIME COLLEGE STUDENT

☐ FULL-TIME COLLEGE STUDENT

Which describes you? ☐ FEMALE ☐ MALE

Which of the following best describes you? (check AS MANY AS APPLY)

☐ NATIVE AMERICAN (American Indian) ☐ HISPANIC

☐ ASIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER ☐ WHITE

☐ BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN ☐ OTHER: _____

Please check the category that best describes your yearly household income.
(check one response)

☐ LESS THAN \$10,000

☐ \$10,000 UP TO \$25,000

☐ \$25,000 UP TO \$50,000

☐ \$50,000 UP TO \$75,000

☐ \$75,000 UP TO \$100,000

☐ \$100,000 OR MORE

Is there anything you would like to add about life in Isabella County or the issues in the community?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME! RETURN IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED.

APPENDIX C: Post Cards—Telephone and Print Surveys

Postcard sent in advance of telephone interview

Dear Isabella County Resident:

The Mount Pleasant Area Community Foundation has asked CMU's Center for Applied Research and Rural Studies (CARRS) to conduct a survey of community needs. During the next few weeks, CARRS will be calling you in order to conduct a short, scientific survey with a member of your household.

Your household was selected randomly, and the call will be used only for the purposes of learning about your experiences and views about the community. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and the interview will not take long to complete. If we call at a bad time, tell us and we will call back when it is convenient for you.

We need your help and hope we can count on your participation! Findings from this project will be shared with the community and will be used for planning for the future. Please call me at 774-2336 if you have any questions about this research project. Thank you.

Mary S. Senter

Mary S. Senter, Director
Center for Applied Research and Rural Studies, CMU



Postcard sent one week after print survey packet

Dear Isabella County Resident:

Last week we mailed you a questionnaire to learn your views about the needs of Isabella County residents. If you have already returned the completed questionnaire, please accept our thanks and appreciation.

If you have not yet returned the confidential survey, please take a few minutes to do so. It is important that we have a large and representative sample of Isabella County residents to understand all viewpoints and experiences. If you would like us to send you another copy of the questionnaire, please call us at 989-774-2572 or email us at carrs@cmich.edu.

We need your help and hope we can count on your participation! Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions about this research project.

Mary S. Senter, Director
CARRS, CMU



Amanda A. Schafer, Executive Director
Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation



