

2003 Sylvan Lake & Summer Villages Community Needs Assessment

Summary

PURPOSE

Sylvan Lake Community & Social Development issues this report to serve three major purposes:

- To provide direction for FCSS program funding priorities, community social service planning & to help public/private/voluntary sector leaders make important decisions about the allocation of resources.
- To gather meaningful data for program providers to use in making effective decisions in order to meet family and community needs of Sylvan Lake & the surrounding Summer Villages residents.
- To give those who are providing services a better sense of the existing and emerging challenges in Sylvan Lake and surrounding area.

METHODS

Two goals drove the selection of methods used in the assessment:

- To gather input from the community members as to their view & perception of community issues/needs, challenges and important services.
- To gather data in which service delivery programs can have confidence and use in effective decision-making to meet family & community needs.

3256 households were mailed surveys, at random 1628 received the Community Needs Assessment and the alternating 1628 households received a Municipal Library Survey.

Sylvan Lake & surrounding Summer Village households responded 461 (28%) times to the mailed Community Needs Assessment surveys. The following population groups by total respondents provided the survey data:

142- Seniors

179- 2-adult families without children: (note: 77 of these respondents are also identified as seniors)

174- 2 adult families with children: (note: 33 of these households are identified as seniors with children)

27- 1 adult families with children: (note: 6 of these households are identified as a senior with children)

28- 1 adult living alone: (note: 6 of these households are identified as one senior)

COMPLEMENTING INFORMATION FOR THE PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITY ARE:

- A seniors issues forum
- 2002-2003 Community & Youth Crime statistics
- Community profile census information
- Service providers & program participants/client statistics

The methodology, and the way the data were combined, resulted in the identification of:

- Five key issues/needs
- Five personal and
- Five system-related barriers to accessing and receiving services in Sylvan Lake
- Five challenge areas

Several additional issues were defined as important by some of the respondents. These additional issues are included in the needs/issues graphs but are not fully analyzed and they are listed as **ADDITIONAL ISSUES DEFINED AS IMPORTANT** following the above four categories.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Major findings of the assessment fall into four broad categories:

Issues/Needs: Major problems and/or unmet needs identified by the household survey respondent group.

Personal Barriers to Service: Individual views and/or characteristics and/or circumstances, identified by the household, that make it more difficult to seek out or receive services.

System-Related Barriers to Service: Broader factors, identified by household respondents, which underlie the service system and present challenges to people seeking needed services.

Challenge Areas: An issue, which was given significant attention by the survey respondents.

THE 5 IDENTIFIED ISSUES/NEEDS in order of combined response rates, are:

Crime and Safety:

Although the rate of reported criminal activity continues to decline, awareness of crime as a significant problem and concern for personal safety and security are growing. There is a growing awareness in the community that we need to find ways of making people feel safer as well as preventing crime before it happens

Accessible and Affordable Child Care:

The lack of affordable, quality childcare presents a tremendous challenge to the economic and social well-being of families in Sylvan Lake. For families with preschool and school age children thinking about going out to work, the cost of childcare is a major consideration. If they are unable to gain access to affordable childcare, then the cost of formal/licensed childcare may provide a work disincentive.

Services for Youth & Youth at Risk:

Young people need healthy places and activities where they can be safe and accepted and engage in positive behaviour so that they can grow as individuals and contributing members of our community. Young people who are susceptible to or experience and exhibit a wide range of behavioural and emotional problems endanger themselves, those around them and the future well being of our community.

Protecting Children from Abuse/Family Violence:

The incidence of family violence — in the form of domestic violence, child abuse— places the lives of those affected in turmoil as well as in a highly vulnerable state. Our increasing knowledge about the needs of children and the effects of their social environment on their growth and development is changing what we view as child abuse.

Alcohol & Substance Abuse Services:

The incidence of both adult and underage alcohol consumption and substance abuse present significant challenge to families and the community, the related crime issues, personal health and well-being. Support & Counselling services promote overall health by increasing the ability individuals have to learn, grow, and manage their lives without relying on alcohol, other drugs, or gambling.

IDENTIFIED BARRIERS TO RECEIVING/ACCESSING SERVICES

The 5 Personal Barriers identified in order of their combined response rates, are:

Long Wait: Excessive waiting time related to scheduling and keeping appointments reduces the effectiveness and availability of needed services.

Resistance to External Aid: The reluctance to seek and accept outside help creates a significant barrier to service delivery in Sylvan Lake.

Inconvenient Hours: Hours of operation can be a pivotal factor in how well services can be accessed.

Unmet Service Expectations: Perceptions concerning the quality of service. Expectations are often related to the value one places on a service.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality is a major issue for many seeking help, particularly those facing the challenge of substance abuse, mental illness or family violence. There is a small-town atmosphere in Sylvan Lake, which further leads people to be concerned about the confidentiality of the services they may receive.

Identified Barriers To Receiving/Accessing Services

The 5 System-Related Barriers identified by the respondent groups in Sylvan Lake, in order of their combined response rates, are:

Cost of Service: When fees are high for low-income households, some people needing services are unable to afford them.

Lack of information: Information is an individual or families greatest resource to access supports and services. Without information, people do not know that a particular service exists and, no matter how good it is, they cannot benefit from it.

Lack of Child Care: For many, having access to childcare, like public transportation, is a pre-condition for being able to access other necessary services or employment.

Lack of Transportation: Very little transportation exists for many people in Sylvan Lake attempting to access needed services, public transportation as it now exists poses barriers for many individuals attempting to access needed services.

Eligibility Criteria: Eligibility criteria can be a confusing or limiting factor, which often prevents people from accessing services.

IDENTIFIED CHALLENGE AREAS:

- **Changing Demographics:** Sylvan Lake’s population has become increasingly diverse socio-economically, as a result of rapid growth experienced in recent years. Both conflict and opportunity increase in the midst of such change.
 - **Lack of Sufficient Public Transportation:** Public transportation is limited. Lack of public transportation limits opportunity to participate fully in the programs, services, and activities, which also imposes barriers to independent living. As a result, many residents, including the elderly, parents of pre-school children, youth and those who lack mobility, are isolated from each other and from necessary supports, programs or services.
 - **Outreach & Support services for Senior’s:** As the senior population in Sylvan Lake continues to increase, the issue of how to care for the special needs of a growing number of elderly people demands increased attention, including homecare, homemaking assistance & transportation.
 - **Family & Parent Support Programs:** Parents are often concerned about everything that involves their child and they require accessible, affordable and accurate information on which to base their parental decisions. On the opposite end of the spectrum we have young families that don't know how to ask basic parenting questions, are without parenting skills, income resources and support networks or easy access to programs and services; therefore, they need the extra supportive programs.
 - **Limited Affordable Recreational Opportunities:** More affordable recreational/leisure programs and activities for families, youth and seniors and will further enhance the lives of individuals of all ages — physically, socially and emotionally. (See “What we heard” comments)
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ADDITIONAL ISSUES DEFINED AS IMPORTANT

Housing and Shelter

- The lack of emergency and short-term shelter, especially for the youth & victims of domestic violence and low income
- The lack of legitimate affordable housing within the town and near accessible public transportation

Loss of Community

- Decreasing participation and involvement in local government, education, civic groups
- Growing sense of isolation among the economically disadvantaged, the uneducated, and the disenfranchised

Emergency Financial Assistance

- Increasing need for short-term emergency funding
- Household financial assistance

Conclusions

More agencies and organizations than ever before are working to serve the needs of the residents of Sylvan Lake. Service providers are working cooperatively in helping people with multiple needs, and have implemented systems of identification and referral through the network of smaller agencies and organizations, which are so critical to the safety net of services available in our community. Many areas identified as assets confirm a broad-based & diverse system of service/support strengths that the Sylvan Lake Town & surrounding village area has long been known for.

- Food and clothing assistance
- Senior services, such as the senior centre, meals-on-wheels programs, home (care) help, assisted living
- Crises services, such as suicide prevention, domestic violence, hotlines.
- Drug and alcohol abuse outreach
- Volunteerism
- Daytime public/program transportation
- Family and parenting support
- Community-based education (life-long, adult)
- Emergency Financial assistance
- Community/public generosity
- Early Childhood Developmental Services
- Teen issues, including drugs, youth crime prevention, suicide awareness, peer pressures
- Interagency coordination and cooperation

However, there is concern for the future of those people who have not made it through the doors of a welcoming agency, or who have been turned away from those doors because of a lack of services or resources.

The population group of children and teens may be the most at-risk population in the community at this time. The Needs Assessment survey makes it clear that affordable, quality child care and before & after school care, is in demand; and teens especially are desperate for safe places and activities.

Recommendations

Our community needs to ensure that anyone seeking assistance is able to get help in reasonable time, with minimum frustration, with maximum results. The community at large needs to know what needs to be accomplished. Leadership from many diverse groups can address many pressing needs and develop process and action plans. Problems such as substance abuse, lack of affordable housing, available transportation, and the increasing plight of the "working poor" can be addressed in this way.

2003 SURVEY RESPONSES

Part 1 & 11 Top 15 Responses Very Serious Need/Issue / Big Problem/Very Important

Highest response 332 to lowest response 223

1. 332 Crime Prevention
 2. 275 Affordable before & after school childcare
 3. 275 Youth Services (leadership training, drop-in activities and volunteering)
 4. 271 Protecting children from abuse or neglect-Household/Family Violence
 5. 265 Alcohol & substance abuse services (counselling and support programs)
 6. 259 Underage alcohol consumption
 7. 243 Services for victims of domestic violence
 8. 240 Parent/Family support programs
 9. 239 Community Crime Prevention
 10. 237 Drug Abuse
 11. 235 Crime
 12. 233 Transportation for people with disabilities
 13. 231 Drug & alcohol treatment counselling for youth
231 Fire/rescue/disaster relief services
231 Juvenile delinquency
 14. 227 Alternate measures/programs for youth
 15. 223 Crisis services (hotline or other)
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2003 SURVEY RESPONSES

Part 1 - Very Serious Need/Issue

Highest response 271 to lowest response 75

1. Protecting children from abuse or neglect.
 2. Services for victims of domestic violence.
 3. Community Crime Prevention.
 4. Fire/rescue/disaster relief services.
Drug & alcohol treat/counselling for youth.
 5. Alternate measures or program for youth crime.
 6. Drug & alcohol abuse prevention education.
 7. Teen pregnancy/prevention-related services
 8. Crisis services (hotline or other) mental health
 9. Childhood immunizations
 10. Sexually transmitted disease prevention-related issues.
 11. Family counselling and support
 12. Supervised physical recreation activities for school-aged children other than organized sports.
 13. Employment training
 14. Transportation to medical appointments
 15. Assisted living facilities
 16. Health/lifestyle education
 17. Information & referral to community programs & services
 18. Leisure recreation for families
 19. Life skills education
 20. Local public transportation
Community resources organizing
 21. Help in finding long-term housing
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2003 SURVEY RESPONSES

Part 11 C- Barriers to Service-Very Serious Top Five

Highest response 191 to lowest response 106

1. Cost of Service
2. Lack of information on services
3. Lack of childcare
4. Wait for service too long
5. Lack of transportation

Part 11 D- Community Issues-Big Problem Top Five

Highest response 259 to lowest response 160

1. Underage alcohol consumption
2. Drug abuse
3. Crime
4. Juvenile delinquency
5. Lack of support for single or low income parents

Part 11 E. Community Services -Very Important-all

Highest response 332 to lowest response 174

1. Crime Prevention
 2. Affordable before & after school care
Youth Services (such as leadership training, drop-in activities & volunteering)
 3. Alcohol & substance abuse services (counselling and support program)
 4. Parent/Family support programs
 5. Transportation services for people with disabilities
 6. Outreach & support services for seniors
 7. Homemaking assistance for seniors
 8. Family/Marital counselling
 9. Job training employment services
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2003 SURVEY RESPONSES

Part 11 A. Priorities:

Top three most serious unmet needs by using the need/issues listed in part 1 of the survey as follows:

Most Serious unmet need

Utility bill assistance,
Youth crime prevention,
Protecting children from abuse/neglect,
Subsidized housing,
Community crime prevention

Second most serious unmet need

Youth crime prevention,
Community crime prevention,
Protecting children from abuse/neglect,
Utility bill assistance,
Assisted living facilities,
Food bank,
Financial assistance for childcare,
Drug & alcohol abuse prevention/education programs.

Third most serious unmet need

Community crime prevention
Protecting children from abuse & neglect,
Subsidized housing,
Utility bill assistance,
Supervised physical recreation for school-aged children/youth other than organized sports,
Youth crime prevention, mediation, alternate measures programs for youth crime,
Drug & alcohol abuse education programs,
Family counseling & support,
Information & referral to local/regional services

B. Groups in Need

Respondents were asked how serious the need to expand/increase services for the population groups. Percentages shown are respondents indicating a very serious need to increase/expand services.

44% - Children/youth
34% - Low income
27% - Disabled & Seniors

2003 SURVEY RESPONSES

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO MOVE TO SYLVAN LAKE?

	58
Smaller Community	5
Size of the community	5
Young Community	9
Friendliness	7
Safety, less crime rate	8
Quiet Community	7
Raise kids here	3
School	12
Lived here once/came here to visit, moved back	29
To be close to family/friends	
	143
Total in this group-----	
	5
Services	18
Lower cost of living	1
Large lots	1
No traffic	1
Taxes	1
Less traffic – cleaner air	
	27
Total in this group-----	
	26
Close/central to major centers/cities	42
Work	22
Easy commute to work	
	90
Total in this group-----	
	14
Aesthetics	25
The lake	8
The lake (recreational use)	1
Recreation	
	48
Total in this group-----	
	1
To retire	2
Tourism/resort	1
Not much low income	
	4
Total in this group-----	

WHAT WE HEARD:

Comments made by community participants are italicized and reflect their beliefs and perceptions of the “Most important problem facing families” in Sylvan Lake:

Basic Needs Services

- *Low Income -Medicare*
- *Middle Income Family support*
- *Financial Strain/Problems*
- *Supports for Seniors*
- *Financial Aid for rising utilities and housing*
- *Utility costs for fixed income people*
- *Lack of Proper Food*

Housing

- *Lack of Affordable housing & support services*
- *Low Income Seniors Housing*

Children & Youth

- *Lack of respect for others by youth*
- *Educational opportunities need to be encouraged with little to no cost, i.e. preschool*
- *Nothing for teens to do in town*
- *Underage Alcohol Consumption*
- *Lack of entertainment that is not recreational*
- *Lack of extra curricular programs for teens*
- *Lack of Facilities for family activities*
- *Not enough for young boys to do*
- *Education parent support groups with child care*
- *Single parent families (families where one parent is away a lot) (parenting skills)*
- *Support programs for single or low-income parents*

Mental Health

- *Marital & family counselling support services*

Lack of Adequate Childcare

- *Subsidized daycare and housing*
 - *Childcare spaces*
 - *Accessible, affordable, reliable child care*
 - *Cost of Childcare*
 - *Subsidized daycare*
 - *Lack of adequate before and after school care*
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WHAT WE HEARD CONT'D

Public Safety

- *Vandalism*
- *Crime (tourist seasons) (theft)*
- *Juvenile Delinquency (lack of punishment)*
- *Youth Gangs*
- *Curfew for youth under 18*
- *Control of teens*
- *Safety of Community*

Family Violence

- *Family Violence/Domestic Violence*
- *Child Abuse*

Health

- *Life skills training (health, lifestyle education)*
- *Sex Education*
- *Substance Abuse*

Recreation

- *Cost (affordable) of activities such as sports and recreation*
- *Access to Recreation – fees to high*
- *Affordable Family Recreation*
- *Lack of Family Activities*
- *Lack of (affordable) recreational opportunities for children and youth (later start times), (times no good), (involved in good things)*

Substance Abuse

- *Alcohol*
- *Alcohol, Drug Abuse (families and teens)*
- *Drug Abuse (high school)*
- *Activities for adults other than drinking*

Lack of Transportation

- *(to city)*
- *(Red Deer)*

Other Problems:

- *Lack of Community Participation*
 - *Readjusting to a new home/area, welcoming newcomers*
 - *Community Activities*
 - *Ways to make community your home – opportunities to be meaningful members of community*
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WHAT WE HEARD CONT'D

Barriers to existing services:

- *Long wait and bureaucracy of/for services*
- *Lack of support programs that guarantee confidentiality in a non-judgmental format*
- *Cost of Services*
- *Reluctance to go outside of family for support*
- *Isolation from services and/or network of friends/family*

System Wide Issues/Barriers

- *Lack of services*
- *Lack of information and resources that are reliable and require assistance based on circumstance vs. categorically established*
- *Lack of information on services*
- *We need a helpful information office that can provide information as needed or point us in the right direction, for any issue we bring up*
- *A lot of provincially funded programs are not available in Sylvan Lake, limiting access to those in need*

For more information, or a copy of the complete needs assessment report, please contact the Town of Sylvan Lake Community and Social Development Department



Town of Sylvan Lake

