

# **WINNEBAGO AND BOONE COUNTIES 2010 HEALTHY COMMUNITY STUDY KEY INFORMANT STUDY**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes information obtained from in person interviews with 61 key informants regarding health and human services in Winnebago and Boone Counties. Key informant interviews obtain information and perceptions from individuals who are considered to be experts in their field based on professional experience, knowledge of the local health and human services system, or who are in a position of influence within the community

Topics of discussion were focused on a set of questions which included the best aspects of living in Winnebago and Boone Counties, target populations in need of services, the health and human services system as a whole, and challenges for the future in the counties.

When asked what they consider to be the best aspects of living in Winnebago and Boone Counties, the leading community assets include availability of activities; access to other communities such as Madison, Chicago, and Milwaukee; strong sense of community; the park system; living affordability; size of the area, and people.

Key informants were asked to identify those groups needing increased community attention. Informants were then asked to identify the groups' needs, barriers to services, services available, and improvements required to serve them better. Children and youth were mentioned most by key informants, followed by minorities, including Hispanics and African-Americans. Low-income individuals and those in poverty were also named by several key informants, as were the elderly and mentally ill individuals.

Almost every person who mentioned Children and Youth as a group in greater need of attention specifically identified those children of school age from K-12 with an emphasis on those children coming from low-income families. With a high level of children living in poverty attending the public schools, the basic needs of food, shelter and clothes need to be met. In addition to basic needs, better education attainment is needed by this group, along with more mental health services and positive healthy activities. Many children are in need of good role models and positive mentors. Barriers for children include the economic vulnerability of the families they come from, as well as reduced funding for the classroom and for other youth services. This group needs a comprehensive plan that utilizes the school as a center for children and their families to educate themselves about services and options available in the area that can help them improve their lives. The community needs to begin communicating to families the value of education for all children.

In all mentions of minority groups, there are common themes that arise especially as it relates to education, economic stability and health. Most mentioned needs for minorities were basic services of shelter, food and clothing. The second most mentioned need is for better education as it relates to literacy, job skills and available health and human services. A need for more ESL services exists, as well as reducing teen births within the African-American and Hispanic community.

The two most mentioned barriers to services for the minority population are lack of knowledge about services available and mistrust of the current system. Some felt the human service system is too bureaucratic and services are not linked like they should be. The most frequently named area of improvement that could help this group was to obtain funding resources for programs that provide basic services of shelter, food and clothing. Equally mentioned was the need to educate this group in a manner that allows them to compete for jobs in the new economy.

Regarding needs and services for low-income and poor, the community needs to be better prepared to assist those who are faced with dramatic transitions that result from increased costs of living and/or loss of employment. As times get tough, more people

are accessing the social service safety net for the first time, and many are also showing up in the criminal justice system. Several key informants noted the need for retraining for this group. Retraining needs to be quick enough to prepare individuals for new jobs that will be available when the economy recovers. In addition to increased emphasis on education and development of skills that will prepare them for future disruptions in the workforce, access to affordable healthcare, day care and transportation were also mentioned as needs for this group. Lack of knowledge of available services was the most mentioned barrier for this group. In addition, mistrust of the system and intimidation of the bureaucratic maze also were mentioned as barriers. For the poorest individuals, the current transportation system was seen as a barrier. Outside of fully funding the basic social service safety net programs and development of job retraining programs, another improvement mentioned was a need to increase funding for mental health services in the community. Some mentioned the need for a 708 Board that is responsible for distributing taxpayer money to available services.

For the elderly, the needs mentioned most by the key informants were those that allow senior citizens the opportunity to be independent, active and stay involved culturally and economically in the community. Access to transportation, jobs and information about opportunities to contribute were most frequently mentioned. Knowledge of services and available transportation were the most mentioned barriers for this group. With some mentioning fear, pride and a sense of helplessness as additional barriers to accessing services and being more involved in the community. Suggestions for improving the lives of this group include increased funding for transportation systems for the elderly, more funding for basic safety net services, creation of a senior center that links elderly and youth and more home delivered meals.

Regarding mentally ill individuals, increased inpatient treatment and services for children with mental health issues was seen as needed. In addition, many key informants mentioned the need for increased funding for counseling programs and aftercare services. Three barriers to services for mentally ill persons include decreased funding, lack of knowledge of services available and no coordinated system that can diagnose a comprehensive care plan for individuals facing mental health issues. The most important improvement is to increase funding to the many programs and services that already exist like Janet Wattles and Rosecrance. Three of the key informants expressed the need for a 708 board to help allocate funds to services that help this population.

Key informants were asked a series of questions about the health and human services system in Winnebago and Boone Counties. These questions probed their views about the system's strengths and weaknesses, as well as any gaps, examples of duplication, or barriers to services. Changes in the system in the past five years and trends or challenges for the future were identified, as well as perspectives on the most important actions that are needed to improve health and human services.

The large number of quality health and human services available throughout the area was cited as the greatest strength of the human service system. Health and human service providers in the area are genuinely open to collaboration and have a high level of communication with one another.

The most commonly mentioned weakness of the system is that health care and human services is often fragmented, with no centralized system in place that can ensure comprehensive approaches to helping those individuals who are dealing with a blanket of issues. Another weakness is that knowledge of the many services available is not readily known or available throughout the community.

Although no consensus was identified when it came to gaps in service, the following items were mentioned: Wellness programs in school; inpatient treatment for the mentally ill and substance abusers; lack of school nurses and county health educators; too much reliance on government funding; planning to help individuals get off of

assistance; a local VA hospital and children's hospital; 708 Board; and services for the elderly.

Key informants noted that the large number of human services and medical providers in the area causes duplication of services. Resources are spread out among the many programs and services and decrease the capacity of these organizations to provide services. The system could be more efficient if services were more aligned with each other and if providers could find a way to share administrative costs. It was also mentioned that City, County and Township governments need to come together to reduce redundancies in government services.

The most common barrier individuals face when accessing the human services system is lack of knowledge regarding available services, followed by lack of transportation. Current funding streams are also seen as a barrier, as well as lack of trust in the system, language barriers, and the system's complicated fragmentation.

The recent economic downturn dominated the discussion about recent and future changes that have affected the local health and human service system. Reduced funding sources have had an impact on what and how services are provided. With more unemployed entering the community's social safety net system, agencies are being asked to provide more services with fewer resources available.

Most key informants expect to see more of the same trends. The next five years will be a time for the human service system to become more efficient and be creative with resources. Services will be forced to be more coordinated in order to share resources. Some services and organizations will have to merge while others will disappear. Informants voiced the opinion that the face of the community will change. Older established businesses will continue to leave or close up shop while new businesses and industries will call the area its home. A few noted that the Hispanic population will continue to grow and have more of an impact on the development of the area both culturally and economically.

Some mentioned that the health care system locally will be forced to undergo some major changes. A population growing older and poorer will force changes to how services are paid for. A number of key informants see an increased need for mental health service funding and an increase in drug abuse programs in the near future.

Leading needed actions to improve the community include collaboration and coordination of services, an improved transportation system, centralized information and referral system, regional strategic planning, and health education.

Key informants were asked to identify the three biggest challenges facing Winnebago and Boone Counties. Economic Issues, educational issues and transportation issues were mentioned most often as challenges, followed by high crime.

When discussing economic issues, respondents focused on three main areas of concern; lack of jobs, the business community environment and the lack of an overall strategic plan to attract business to the area. Three themes regarding the challenges facing the community's educational system emerged: quality of education, the perception and culture of the community regarding the educational system, and poor education attainment levels. Transportation issues raised were separated by both internal and external transportation concerns. Although some believe the internal system is adequate most made comments about the need to improve the system. Particularly it was desired that the system has to be more accessible for those who do not have access to a vehicle. Developing transportation systems that link the region to Chicago and the World was also mentioned.

Several key informants voiced concern about the perceived increase in violent crime rates and the need to confront gang and drug related crime. One key informant involved in the criminal justice system noted some improvements in this area, stating that the court system is speeding up, an increase in rehabilitation services is being offered in the jail, the jail is a safer environment for inmates and officers and a Resource Center has been opened up to promote linkage and alignment of services for individuals in the criminal justice system.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This report is one component of the 2010 Healthy Community Study. In addition to the key informant study, the Healthy Community Study components include focus groups, a household survey, and a demographic analysis.

This report summarizes information obtained from in person interviews with 61 key informants regarding health and human services in Winnebago and Boone Counties. Key informant interviews obtain information and perceptions from individuals who are considered to be experts in their field based on professional experience, knowledge of the local health and human services system, or who are in a position of influence within the community.

### Methodology

Key informants, local experts in education, government, human services, or business, were selected by Rockford Health Council. A listing of key informants and their affiliations is shown in Appendix I. Questions were developed (shown in Figure 1.1) to guide the discussions with the key informants.

The 61 key informants have expertise in these areas: business/employment (6), children/youth (2), churches (2), civic organizations (1), criminal justice (5), education (4), government (15), health care (9), housing (1), leisure and recreation (2), media (1), mental health (1), senior services (1), and social services (11).

Topics of discussion were focused in a set of questions which included the best aspects of living in Winnebago and Boone Counties, target populations in need of services, the health and human services system as a whole, and challenges for the future in the counties.

Figure 1.1  
KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1.) What are the major population groups that your organization serves and what services do you provide?
- 2.) What would you say are the best aspects of living in Winnebago and Boone Counties?
- 3.) Overall, in Winnebago and Boone Counties, which population groups would you say are in greatest need of increased community attention? (for each population group named)
  - a) What are the major needs of this group?
  - b) What evidence do you see of their needs?
  - c) What are the barriers to services for this group?
  - d) What services are currently provided and what services need expansion or improvement in the way they are delivered?
- 4.) How well does the Winnebago and/or Boone County health and human services delivery system work?
  - a) What are the strengths?
  - b) What are the weaknesses?
  - c) What gaps in services (other than those already discussed) exist?
  - d) What examples of duplication exist or ways that efficiency might be improved?
  - e) What would you say are the major barriers that keep people from using services already available?
  - f) How have health and human services changed over the past five years?
  - g) What changes or challenges do you feel will emerge over the next five or ten years?
  - h) If not discussed already, what are the most important actions that are needed to improve health and human services?
- 5.) Aside from the topics that you have already discussed, what would you say are the three biggest challenges that Winnebago and/or Boone County is facing?

CHAPTER 2  
BEST ASPECTS OF LIVING IN WINNEBAGO AND BOONE COUNTIES

Key informants were asked what they consider to be the best aspects of living in Winnebago and Boone Counties. Listed in the table below are the items that were listed by three or more individuals.

Table 2.1  
BEST ASPECTS OF LIVING IN WINNEBAGO AND BOONE COUNTIES  
(Three or more mentions)

Activities	21
Access to other communities	20
Community	19
Park System	17
Affordability	14
Size	12
People	12
Nature	9
River	5
Educational – choices	5
Health Care System – Access	4
Ease of getting around by car and foot	4
Human Services	3
Faith based organizations availability	3

The number one response given by individuals is the **availability of activities** in the immediate and surrounding areas. Those interviewed listed arts, cultural and recreational as the types of activities they view as most accessible in the community. Some also mentioned the availability of sporting activities, both participatory and spectator, as a positive.

The second most mentioned best aspect of living in the community is the **access to other communities**. Almost all the individuals who mentioned this aspect named as a trio the urban communities of Madison, Milwaukee and Chicago.

The next most common thing mentioned as a positive for living in the Winnebago and Boone Counties is the **strong sense of community**. Informants feel the caring, concerned and welcoming nature of the community’s leaders and residents create a sense of belonging, inclusiveness and purpose. In addition, the respondents mentioned the friendliness of the people of the community, as well as the family friendly emphasis as positive aspects.

The **Park System** was the most mentioned physical asset in the community. Informants also feel that the natural beauty of the surrounding area and the available outdoor spaces are seen as a positive attributes. The **river** was mentioned as a physical asset that adds to the enjoyment of living in the area. The availability of **quality health care services** provided by three major hospitals and Crusader Clinic is also seen as a major positive.

Educational choices were mentioned by five participants. The specific choices identified were the growing higher education opportunities available in the area and the number of private K-12 schools. It was mentioned that the area has three public school systems (Rockford, Harlem, and Belvidere) available in close proximity.

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CHAPTER 3  
TARGET GROUPS AND SERVICES NEEDED

Introduction

Key informants were asked to identify those groups needing increased community attention. Informants were then asked to identify the groups' needs, barriers to services, services available, and improvements required to serve them better. Table 3.1 reveals those target groups mentioned by four or more individuals. Children and youth were mentioned most by informants with minorities mentioned second most. Hispanics were the most mentioned minority group at nine times with African-Americans mentioned six times. The remaining five individuals who mentioned minorities did not specify one group over another. The needs of each of these groups are discussed below in detail.

Table 3.1  
LEADING TARGET GROUPS MENTIONED  
BY KEY INFORMANTS  
(four or more mentions)

Target Groups	Mentions
Children & Youth	27
Minorities	20
Low-Income Individuals	12
Poor	11
Elderly	10
Mentally Ill	8
Unemployed	8
Disabled	4

Children & Youth

Almost every person who mentioned Children and Youth as a group in greater need of attention specifically identified those children of school age from K-12 with an emphasis on those children coming from low-income families. Statistics were given identifying the number of children living in poverty in Winnebago and Boone Counties at 34%. In the Rockford Public Schools, the number is 66% with 78% of students receiving subsidized lunches. The number of homeless children attending the public schools has risen. More youth are involved in gang and criminal activity, and truancy rates and drop out rates have risen as well. Some mentioned that teen pregnancy is an issue. One informant stated that 1,100 teens with pregnancy issues visit Crusader Clinic each year.

With a high level of children living in poverty attending the public schools, most of the participants commented that the basic needs of food, shelter and clothes need to be met. In addition to basic needs, most people agreed that better educational attainment is desperately needed by this group. This group is also in need of more mental health services, and there is a need for more positive, healthy activities for children. It was mentioned that many of these children are in need of good role models and positive mentors. It was also stated that children need an education system that focuses on graduating every child and providing multi-educational track opportunities like vocational education.

As mentioned earlier, the greatest barriers to these children are the economic vulnerability of the families they come from. Almost all the informants mentioned reduced funding for the classroom and for other youth services as another barrier for children. A theme that was most mentioned as a barrier for all groups mentioned in these interviews is the lack of knowledge of services that are available in the area.

The informants were asked to name some ways to meet the needs of children. The most common strategy mentioned was to develop a comprehensive plan that utilizes the school as a center for children and their families to educate themselves about services and options available in the area that can help them improve their lives. The community needs to begin communicating to families the value of education for all children. Many focused on a community-wide solution to our educational issues that allows for participation from the business community, faith-based organizations, government and other non-profit agencies.

### Minorities

The second most mentioned group in need of more attention are minorities. In some cases people either specified African-American or Hispanic, but most often mentioned both. One participant mentioned that there are a growing number of "hidden populations" that we have not identified in assessments who are in need. As an example of a hidden population, they mentioned the growing Asian community that have not been included in community assessments. In all mentions of minority groups, there are common themes that arise especially as it relates to education, economic stability and health. Many individuals of these groups are the low-income and poorest residents of the community.

Because of the current socio-economic status of these individuals, the needs mentioned most were basic services of shelter, food and clothing. The second most mentioned need is for better education as it relates to literacy, job skills and health and human services available to them. It was also mentioned by a number of informants that there is a need for more ESL services. The need to reduce the large numbers of teen pregnancies within the African-American and Hispanic community was also mentioned. The two most mentioned barriers of all subgroups in this population are the lack of knowledge about services available and mistrust of the current system. Some felt the human service system is too bureaucratic and services are not linked like they should be.

When asked to identify areas of improvement that could help this group, the most mentioned solution was to obtain funding resources for programs that provide basic services of shelter, food and clothing. Equally mentioned is the need to educate this group in a manner that allows them to compete for jobs in the new economy. Another area for improvement is expansion of services that help identify those with mental health needs in the minority populations. More ESL classes and other services need to go where this population lives, works and worships.

### Low Income, Unemployed & Chronically Poor

It appears that the recent downturn in our economy has highlighted the need to help those individuals who are the most economically vulnerable. With unemployment rates reaching historic levels it is becoming apparent among the individuals interviewed that the community needs to be better prepared to assist those who are faced with dramatic transitions that result from increased costs of living and/or loss of employment. As times get tough, more people are accessing the social service safety net for the first time, and many are also showing up in the criminal justice system.

In addition to the need to assist these individuals during the uncomfortable transition many of them face during a downturn in the economy, it was mentioned that there is a need to retrain these individuals. Retraining needs to be quick enough to prepare individuals for new jobs that will be available when the economy recovers. In addition to increased emphasis on education and development of skills that will prepare them for future disruptions in the workforce, access to affordable healthcare, to affordable day care and affordable transportation were also mentioned as needs for this group.

Lack of knowledge of available services was the most mentioned barrier for this group. In addition, mistrust of the system and intimidation of the bureaucratic maze also were mentioned as barriers. For the poorest individuals, the current transportation system was seen as a barrier.

Outside of fully funding the basic human service safety net programs and development of job retraining programs, another improvement mentioned was a need to increase funding for mental health services in the community. Some mentioned the need for a 708 Board that is responsible for distributing taxpayer money to available services. Lastly, it was mentioned by many informants that it is necessary to develop a centralized source for disseminating information about available human services in the community.

### Elderly

The community is becoming older and it is not surprising that ten key informants mentioned the elderly as a target population in need of more attention. The needs mentioned most by the key informants were those needs that allow senior citizens the opportunity to be active and stay involved culturally and economically in the community. The emphasis is a need to allow older individuals to live as independently as possible and the ability to continue to contribute their talents to the community. Access to transportation, jobs and information about opportunities to contribute were the most mentioned needs that were mentioned.

Knowledge of services and available transportation were the most mentioned barriers for this group, with some mentioning fear, pride and a sense of helplessness as additional barriers to accessing services and being more involved in the community.

Suggestions for improving the lives of this group include increased funding for transportation systems for the elderly, more funding for basic safety net services, and creation of a senior center that links elderly and youth. More home delivered meals are also needed.

### Mentally III

Eight key informants labeled individuals with mental illness as a group that needs more attention in the community. Four hundred visits per month to Swedish American Health System's emergency room are related to behavioral/mental health issues. The issue of inpatient treatment was an issue with three of these informants. There was an emphasis on the limited inpatient treatment and services for children who have mental health issues. In addition, to inpatient issues, all mentioned the need for more funding for counseling programs and aftercare services.

Three barriers were mentioned by nearly all those who identified this group as one who needs more attention. They include: decreased funding, lack of knowledge of services available and no coordinated system that can diagnose a comprehensive care plan for individuals facing mental health issues.

The most mentioned improvement is to increase funding to the many programs and services that already exist such as Janet Wattles and Rosecrance. Three of the key informants expressed the need for a 708 board to help allocate funds to services that help this population.

## CHAPTER 4 HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DELIVERY SYSTEM: CHARACTERISTICS AND AREAS NEEDING ENHANCEMENT

### Introduction

Key informants were asked a series of questions about the health and human services system in Winnebago and Boone Counties. These questions probed their views about the system's strengths and weaknesses, as well as any gaps, examples of duplication, or barriers to services. Changes in the system in the past five years and trends or challenges for the future were identified. The interviews closed with the informant's perspectives on the most important actions that are needed to improve health and human services. Some aspects of the interview results have been integrated in the discussion presented in this chapter.

Chapter 3 focused on target populations; this chapter addresses the services system. However, some recurring themes may be seen in the discussions in both sections.

### Strengths and Weaknesses of the System

The large number of quality health and human services available throughout the area was mentioned by nineteen key informants as the greatest strength of the human service system. Nine individuals also mentioned that the health and human service providers in the area are genuinely open to collaboration and have a high level of communication with one another. One informant gave, as an example of this collaboration, the partnership between the courts, Janet Wattles, Rosecrance and Remedies (formerly PHASE/WAVE). Seven mentioned that the leaders and the residents of the community who are behind these services are highly professional, caring and cooperative.

Despite the strength in numbers of services available and their willingness to collaborate, the most common mentioned weakness of the system is that care for individuals is often fragmented and there is no centralized system in place that can ensure comprehensive approaches to helping those individuals who are dealing with a blanket of issues. The second most mentioned weakness of the health and human service system is that knowledge of the many services available is lacking throughout the community.

This feeling that services are fragmented also extends to the health care providers located in the region. Despite the quality and availability of health care with the three large hospitals and Crusader Clinic, a few informants mentioned that specializations at these institutions might better serve the community and reduce the competition among a limited population.

Although no consensus was identified when it came to gaps in service, the following items were mentioned in no particular order:

- 1.) Wellness programs in school
- 2.) Inpatient treatment for the mentally ill and substance abusers
- 3.) Not enough school nurses and county health educators
- 4.) Too much reliance on Government Funding
- 5.) Planning to help individuals get off of assistance
- 6.) VA Hospital
- 7.) Children's Hospital
- 8.) 708 Board
- 9.) Elderly Services

When it came to the issue of duplications and efficiencies the common theme that emerged from the interviews is that the large number of human services and medical providers in the area causes duplication of services. Resources are spread out among the many programs and services and decrease the capacity of these organizations to provide services. The system could be more efficient if services were more aligned with each other and if providers could find ways to share administrative costs. It was also mentioned that City, County and Township governments need to come together to reduce redundancies in government services.

The discussion regarding barriers people face when trying to access the human service system presented more consensus among the interviewees. The most common barrier mentioned by 19 participants was the lack of knowledge regarding services available. The second most mentioned barrier at ten was the lack of transportation. Nine key informants mentioned that the current funding streams are also barriers. Eight mentioned that some people lack trust in the system's ability to help them and five mentioned culture and language barriers. Four mentioned that the vastness of the system and its complicated fragmentation also serve as barriers.

### Recent and Future Changes in Health and Human Services

The recent economic downturn dominated the discussion about recent and future changes that have affected the local health and human service system. Nearly everyone interviewed mentioned that reduced funding sources have had an impact on what and how services are provided. With more unemployed entering the community's social safety net system, organizations were asked to provide more services with fewer resources available.

The condition of the local economy was not able to keep younger professional individuals in the community, causing the population to grow older and poorer. In addition, there has been an increase in new immigrants to the community and an increase in minority populations. Also noted was the fact that groups of poor from other communities have moved to the area to access the services that are being provided here.

All of these changes put additional strain on an already resource-strapped system. One informant mentioned that a food pantry had to go out of business and two others mentioned that services and programs hit especially hard are those dealing with mental health issues and substance abuse.

When asked what changes they see coming over the next five years, most mentioned that they expect to see more of the same trends mentioned above. Some said they see the next five years as a time for the community's human service system to become more efficient and be creative with resources. Some think services will be forced to be more coordinated in order to share resources. Some services and organizations will have to merge while others will disappear. Some said that the transportation system will have to improve and others mentioned that the relationship between government and the citizenry will have to change.

Informants voiced the opinion that the face of the community will change. Older established businesses will continue to leave or close up shop while new businesses and industries will call the area home. A few noted that the Hispanic population will continue to grow and have more of an impact on the development of the area, both culturally and economically. Some commented that there will be an increased need for housing and services for the elderly.

Some mentioned that the health care system locally will be forced to undergo some major changes. A population growing older and poorer will force changes to how services are paid for. A number of key informants see an increased need for mental health service funding and an increase in drug abuse programs in the near future.

Most Important Actions to Be Taken

Listed in the table below by the number of times they were mentioned are the suggestions by the Key Informants of actions that need to be taken to improve the community.

Table 4.1  
 MOST IMPORTANT ACTIONS NEEDED MENTIONED  
 BY KEY INFORMANTS  
 (four or more mentions)

Actions To Be Taken	Mentions
Collaboration & Coordination of Services	19
Transportation System	17
Information & Referral System	10
Regional Strategic Community Planning	10
Health Education & Coordination	7
Education Expansion & Coordination	6
Funding/Building Capacity	5
Mental Health Services	5
Economic Development	4
708 Board	4

Health and Human Service System Capacity Building

The most mentioned action item is the feeling that providers of health and human services need to enhance their already good working and collaborative relationships. Informants feel it is necessary for more services and programs to be aligned with one another to ensure individuals receive the most comprehensive care they can get. Collaboration and coordination is a possible strategy for cash strapped organizations to share resources and funding sources. Many shared the opinion that some organizations in the health and human service system, as well as government entities, should look at opportunities to merge programs and services. Some went as far as to suggest that organizations should look to merge with organizations who serve similar populations. These mergers would save administrative costs and cut down on competition for funding.

One common suggestion for a community-wide collaboration of the entire system is the need for a centralized entry point and database regarding the health and human services in our community. This entry point would serve as a clearinghouse to direct individuals to the appropriate services or programs that can most effectively assist them. A centralized “triage” system would allow for follow-up with individual to make sure they are getting the comprehensive care they may need. This “triage” system could also help to assist in developing the other area of concern mentioned numerous times by

informants: the need for a centralized Information and Referral System. Some mentioned the need to develop a 211 information hotline as a solution to how residents can easily receive information regarding services available in the community.

### Transportation Development

Transportation improvement was mentioned by a vast number of key informants. The need to improve the local transportation system was something mentioned in many key informant discussions regarding access barriers to the health and human services of our community. There are isolated pockets in the community that do not have sufficient access to public transportation. Many feel that the system is not accessible enough or expansive enough to adequately serve the poor, the disabled or the elderly.

Just as important to key informants was the need to improve the transportation systems that tie this community to the rest of the world. The two most mentioned methods to do this is developing high speed passenger rail service and expanding the Chicago/Rockford International Airport. It was mentioned by a number of individuals that rail service needs to be developed beyond Chicago, to include service to Madison and Milwaukee.

### Community-wide Strategic Planning

Key Informants voiced the opinion that a community-wide strategic plan should be developed. This plan should focus on a regional approach to growth. Some think Rockford and the surrounding area has lost its identity and needs to develop a new identity upon which a strategic plan for improvement developed.

### Education Improvements and Enhancements

Other areas that Key Informants focused on were the need to improve and support the education of the citizenry. In addition to finding solutions to improve our public and private K-12 institutions, it was also mentioned that the community needs to investigate and develop ways to expand access to higher education for more of the residents.

### Other Actions

Also mentioned as areas for action are the need to help organizations find funding for services and help with capacity-building. It was mentioned by a few that building capacity and funding for Mental Health and Substance Abuse services is of particular importance. A number of people voiced the need to create a 708 Board to help focus funding needs.

CHAPTER 5  
CHALLENGES FACING WINNEBAGO AND BOONE COUNTY

Introduction

Key informants were asked to identify the three biggest challenges facing Winnebago and Boone Counties. Of those issues listed by four or more informants, Economic Issues, Educational issues and Transportation issues were mentioned most often as shown in Table 5.1. A more detailed breakdown of the many facets of these three issues is provided in the narrative found below.

TABLE 5.1  
CHALLENGES FACING WINNEBAGO AND BOONE COUNTIES

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number of Mentions</b>
Education	37
Jobs	34
Transportation System	16
Crime	15
Strategic Planning	14
Business	13
Human Services	13
Economy	11
Poverty	7
Health/Health of Individuals	5
Health/Healthcare access	4

Economic

When discussing economic issues, respondents focused on three main areas of concern: lack of jobs, the business community environment and the lack of an overall strategic plan to attract business to the area.

With unemployment in the region once again reaching historic levels, it is not surprising that the largest concern mentioned by 34 respondents was regarding the availability of jobs in the area. Although many see the unemployment rate improving as the recession ends, they feel that many of the jobs that have been lost have been lost for good. Many see the region in a transitional state as the region's historic manufacturing base disappears. They are also concerned that new industries or new technologies have not been identified or courted to replace the outgoing quality jobs that have left the area.

Some claim that the loss of industry and businesses has caused a decrease in corporate commitments, a loss of leadership and a "brain drain" in the community. The community has also seen a depletion of wealth as people and businesses relocate, leaving a less

skilled and less educated labor force that is in need of not only more technological jobs but job retraining as well.

Some voiced concern that the current political and cultural environment is hostile to the business community. This hostile environment is a barrier that needs to be addressed if the community hopes to attract new businesses and industries to the area.

### Educational

Making a correlation between attracting new businesses and having a viable and attractive educated labor force, 37 respondents listed issues related to education as a major challenge confronting the community. Three themes regarding the challenges facing the community's educational system emerged. Those themes were the quality of education, the perception and culture of the community regarding the educational system, and poor educational attainment levels.

The most common link between the respondents was the need for the community to do something about the poor educational attainment levels. Most feel a need to increase both the high school graduation rates and the number of people in the community who have four year degrees as well.

Some feel that a major barrier to improving the public educational system is the perceived self image of the education system and the community. This poor self-image, specifically the public K-12 school system, prevents the community from supporting efforts to improve the schools.

### Transportation

Sixteen respondents mentioned transportation as a major challenge facing this community. The issues raised were separated by both internal and external transportation concerns. Although some believe the internal system is adequate, most made comments about the need to improve the system. Particularly it was desired that the system has to be more accessible for those who do not have access to travel by car.

It was also suggested that there needs to be an improved system that links the city from the West side to Downtown to the East side. In addition it was mentioned that transportation issues need to be thought out regionally, and that a public transportation system should be developed to link Rockford with Belvidere.

Developing transportation systems that link the region to Chicago and the World was equally discussed by this same group of respondents. It was the general consensus that a rail system should link the area with Chicago and that the Rockford Airport should be expanded to include more business and passenger travel.

### Crime

This issue was named by 15 informants as a major challenge. One key informant involved in the criminal justice system did mention some improvements in this area. They stated that the court system is speeding up, an increase in rehabilitation services is being offered in the jail, the jail is a safer environment for inmates and officers and a Resource Center has been opened up to promote linkage and alignment of services for individuals in the criminal justice system. There is concern with the increase in violent crime rates and the need to confront gang and drug related crime.

### Strategic Planning

Among 14 respondents there was a concern that the area does not have a regional plan for development. Without a widespread inclusive plan the region can not address many of the issues mentioned here that confront the community. Comments suggested that the area needs a defined identity and a plan for growth, highlighting specific strategies like how to develop land use.

### Human Services

Thirteen informants expressed concern that the current recession and political culture has made it difficult for the human service system to maintain its past levels of service. The capacity of the system will be diminished as the tax base continues to decrease. More people will be unable to donate their time and money due to the effects of the recession and a possible perceived value backlash against organizations providing human services.

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APPENDIX I  
LISTING OF WINNEBAGO/BOONE COUNTY KEY INFORMANTS

J. Maichle Bacon, MPH  
*Public Health Administrator*  
*Winnebago County Health Department*

George Davis  
*Executive Director*  
*City of Rockford Human Services Dept.*

Dr. Jack Becherer  
*President*  
*Rock Valley College*

Tim Dimke  
*Executive Director*  
*Rockford Park District*

Steve Bois  
*CEO*  
*Rockford Area Association of Realtors*

Philip Eaton  
*President and CEO*  
*Rosecrance Health Network*

Paul Brand  
*Executive Director*  
*Employers' Coalition on Health*

Gordon Eggers  
*President and CEO*  
*Crusader Community Health*

The Honorable Fred Brereton  
*Mayor*  
*City of Belvidere*

Chet Epperson  
*Chief of Police*  
*City of Rockford Police Department*

Joe Bruscato  
*State's Attorney*  
*Winnebago County State's Attorney's Office*

Janyce Fadden  
*President*  
*Rockford Area Economic Development Council*

Darcy Bucholz  
*Executive Director*  
*Workforce Investment Board*

Dr. Richard Fairgrievies  
*Superintendent*  
*Regional Office of Education*

Vint Buckwalter  
*Director of Finance, Electric Systems*  
*Hamilton Sundstrand*

Einar Forsman  
*President and CEO*  
*Rockford Chamber of Commerce*

Teri Carter  
*Executive Director*  
*United Way of Boone County*

Karen Gill  
*Vice President of Operations and Fund Development*  
*Remedies*

Bob Cleveland  
*Director of Services*  
*Northwest Illinois Area Agency on Aging*

Patricia Gomez  
*Executive Director*  
*La Voz Latina*

Mary Ellen Commare  
*Executive Director*  
*Youth Services Network, Inc.*

Lisa Gonzalez  
*Co-Public Health Administrator*  
*Boone County Health Department*

Rev. K. Edward Copeland  
*Pastor*  
*New Zion Missionary Baptist Church*

Bill Gorski, MD  
*President and CEO*  
*SwedishAmerican Health System*

John W. Cressman  
*Executive Director*  
*Rockford Housing Authority*

Carol Green  
*Executive Director*  
*Lifescape Community Services*

Linda Grist Cunningham  
*Executive Editor*  
*Rockford Register Star*

John Groh  
*President and CEO*  
*Rockford Area Convention and Visitor's*  
*Bureau*

Major Randy Hellstrom  
*Winnebago County Coordinator*  
*Salvation Army - Rockford Temple Corps*

The Honorable Janet R. Holmgren  
*Chief Justice*  
*Seventeenth Judicial Circuit of the State*  
*of Illinois*

Michael Houselog  
*Superintendent*  
*Belvidere Community Unit School District*  
*100*

David Howard  
*Vice President of Nursing Home Operations*  
*Provena Life Connections*

Wray Howard  
*President and CEO*  
*YMCA of Rock River Valley*

Mark Hunter  
*Black Male Health Coordinator*  
*Winnebago County Health Department*

Charles E. Jefferson  
*State Representative, 67th District*  
*Illinois General Assembly*

Norma Joseph  
*President*  
*Rockford NAACP*

Gary Kaatz  
*President and CEO*  
*Rockford Health System*

Tom Kalousek  
*Executive Director*  
*Winnebago County Forest Preserve District*

Kris Kieper  
*CEO*  
*YWCA of Rockford*

Karen Lemmon  
*Director, Community Development*  
*Department*  
*Village of Machesney Park*

The Honorable Darryl F. Lindberg  
*Mayor*  
*City of Loves Park*

Martin Lipsky, MD  
*Regional Dean*  
*University of Illinois Rockford*

Paul Logli  
*President and CEO*  
*United Way of Rock River Valley*

Gerald Lott  
*Executive Director*  
*Rockford Youth Initiative*

Gloria Lundin  
*President*  
*Community Foundation of Northern Illinois*

Richard Meyers  
*Sherriff*  
*Winnebago County Sheriff's Department*

The Honorable Lawrence Morrissey  
*Mayor*  
*City of Rockford*

Frank Novak  
*Executive Director*  
*Rockford Public Library*

Dean Olson  
*Chairman*  
*Rockford Acromatic Products*

Julia Pesavento, DMD  
*President*  
*Winnebago County Dental Society*

Jim Peterson  
*Executive Director*  
*Northwest Community Center*

Pam Clark Reidenbach  
*Director*  
*Northern Illinois Center for Nonprofit*  
*Excellence*

David A. Schertz  
*President and CEO*  
*OSF St. Anthony Medical Center*

Samuel J. Schmitz  
*President*  
*Goodwill Industries of Northern Illinois*

Gary Schwerin  
*Executive Director*  
*Bridge Ministries*

Dr. LaVonne Sheffield  
*Superintendent*  
*Rockford Public School District 205*

Dave Syverson  
*State Senator, 34th District*  
*Illinois State Senate*

Ken Terrinoni  
*County Administrator*  
*Boone County Board*

Frank Ware  
*Executive Director*  
*Janet Wattles Center*

Shawn Way  
*CEO*  
*Milestone, Inc.*

Linda Zuba  
*Attorney at Law*  
*Zuba and Associates*