

Executive Summary (Long Version)
Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority
2018 Community Needs Assessment

Introduction

From March through December 2017, Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority (DCEA) conducted a comprehensive assessment of the needs of low-income residents in its service area and of the overall needs and assets of the communities served. Participants in the survey included community residents, clients, program staff, partners of DCEA, and DCEA's board of directors. The assessment covered all counties in DCEA's service area. Tennessee counties served by DCEA's Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) programs are Cocke, Grainger, Hamblen, Jefferson, Monroe, and Sevier. Non-CSBG counties in Tennessee are Anderson, Blount, Bradley, Campbell, Carter, Claiborne, Greene, Hancock, Hawkins, Knox, Loudon, McMinn, Morgan, Overton, Polk, Putnam, Rhea, Roane, Scott, Sullivan, Unicoi, Union, Washington, and White. Non-CSBG counties in Kentucky are Harlan and Bell. A complete assessment report describing the needs of the communities in detail is available. The following section summarizes the causes and conditions of poverty in DCEA's service area and presents key findings.

An abbreviated Executive Summary is included in the full assessment report.

Key Findings

Summary of the Results of the Community Needs Assessment by Group Surveyed					
Top Needs	Clients	Community Residents	Board	Partners	Staff
Affordable health insurance/health care and/or improved health and nutrition services, including access to food	X	X	X		
Affordable housing for all low-income residents	X	X			X
Affordable housing for seniors		X			
Assistance with housing costs (mortgage, eviction, home energy costs)	X	X			X
Affordable dental care	X				
Transportation (including help in paying for fuel)	X	X	X	X	X
Mental health/substance abuse prevention and/or treatment services		X	X	X	X
Help enrolling in postsecondary education	X		X		X
Preschool education	X				X
Child care (more of, lower cost, targeted to special populations)	X				X
Programs for at –risk youth			X		X
Adult education/English as a Second Language	X				X
Jobs paying better wages with benefits such as paid sick leave	X	X	X		X
Money management programs		X	X		X
Help identifying/accessing needed services		X			X
Crime prevention programs			X		
Parenting skills training			X		X
Child abuse prevention services			X		
Job training programs for youth and/or adults		X			X

Summary of the Results of the Community Needs Assessment by Group Surveyed					
Top Needs	Clients	Community Residents	Board	Partners	Staff
Programs that attract new employers to the counties			X		
Comprehensive services to help criminal offenders transition back to the community and their families				X	X
Strategies, such as motivational interviewing, trauma screening, and activities to build self-regulation and other executive functioning skills, that can help people overcome adverse childhood experiences.					X
Resources to combat bed bugs.					X
Broadband access in many rural areas					X
Homework support for Hispanic and other immigrant children					X
Small business training and assistance					X
Additional services to support veterans (education, employment, housing, mental health, substance abuse, family services)					X
Emergency and transitional housing for young adults without stable, permanent housing					X
Companionship and housekeeping services for elderly and disabled, family involvement in elder care					X
Centralized source of information/referral to comprehensive services				X	X
Soft skills (communication, work ethic, etc.) required for successful employment				X	X
Parenting skills training					X
Training in how to become self-sufficient					X
Food pantries in schools					X

Conditions and Root Causes of Poverty in DCEA's Communities

Conditions of Poverty

Poverty by Age, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity (2015 ACS)

CSBG Counties (Tennessee)

All Age Groups: In DCEA's CSBG counties, the poverty rate for all ages averages 19.9 percent, with Cocke County reporting the highest poverty rate (26.1 percent) and Sevier County the lowest (15.3 percent). With the exception of Sevier (15.3 percent) and Jefferson (16.5 percent), the CSBG counties have overall poverty rates that exceed the state (17.6 percent) and the national rate (15.5 percent).

Childhood Poverty: 27 percent of children (0-17) in the CSBG counties are poor. Hamblen (30.7 percent) and Monroe (30.6 percent) have the highest child poverty rates. Sevier has the lowest (21.5 percent). With the exception of Jefferson (23 percent) and Sevier (21.5 percent), the CSBG counties have childhood poverty rates that are the same as or that exceed the state's rate (25.6 percent). With the exception of Sevier, the CSBG counties have childhood poverty rates that exceed the national rate (21.7 percent). Children 0-4 in the CSBG counties have the highest poverty rates among all children (35 percent). The poverty rate for children 5-17 in the CSBG counties is 26.5 percent.

Youth and Young Adults in Poverty: 24.3 percent of youth and young adults between the ages of 18 and 34 in the CSBG counties are poor, compared to 19.5 percent in the United States and 22 percent in Tennessee. Cocke County has the highest poverty rate for the age group (28.8 percent). Sevier County has the lowest rate (12.1 percent).

Seniors in Poverty: Seniors (age 65 and older) in the CSBG counties have the lowest poverty rates of all age groups (11.5 percent), with Cocke County having the highest poverty rate (16.4 percent) and Sevier the lowest (7.4 percent). In comparison, the poverty rate for seniors in Tennessee is 10 percent. The rate for the U.S. is 9.4 percent.

Gender: 19.9 percent of males and 22 percent of females in the CSBG counties live in poverty. Sevier County has the smallest percent of males (15.3 percent) and the smallest percent

of females (16.9 percent) in poverty. Cocke County reports the largest percent of males (26.1 percent) and the largest percent of females (31.7 percent) in poverty.

Race/Ethnicity: Hispanics/Latinos in the CSBG counties have the highest poverty rates of all races and ethnic groups (38.9 percent). Hispanics/Latinos in Cocke County have the highest poverty rates (46.5 percent). Jefferson County has the lowest rate (33.9 percent). In comparison, 24.3 percent of Hispanics/Latinos in the U.S. and 33.1 percent in Tennessee are poor. Hamblen County has the largest Hispanic population (11 percent).

32.2 percent of Black/African-Americans in the CSBG counties are poor, with Grainger County reporting the highest rate (42.1 percent) and Monroe County the lowest (13.1 percent). In comparison, 28.6 percent of Black/African Americans in Tennessee, and 27 percent in the nation are poor.

19.1 percent of the white population live in poverty, compared to 14.8 percent in Tennessee and 12.7 percent in the nation. Cocke County has the largest percent of the white population in poverty (26.3 percent), and Sevier has the lowest (14.6 percent).

Poverty in Non-CSBG Counties (Tennessee and Kentucky)

All Age Groups: In DCEA's non-CSBG counties, the poverty rate for all ages is 19.04 percent, with Bell County, Kentucky, reporting the highest poverty rate (38 percent) and Blount County, Tennessee, the lowest (14.1 percent). In comparison, Kentucky's poverty rate is 18.9 percent, Tennessee's is 17.6 percent, and the nation's rate is 15.5 percent.

Childhood Poverty: 27 percent of children (0-17) in the non-CSBG counties are poor. Bell County, Kentucky's children are the poorest (51.6 percent). Blount County, Tennessee, reports the lowest childhood poverty rate (19.8 percent). In comparison, Tennessee's rate is 25.6 percent, Kentucky's rate is 26.1 percent, and the national rate is 21.7 percent. In the non-CSBG counties, the poverty rate for children 0-4 is 27.2 percent, and the poverty rate for children 5-17 is 29.6 percent.

Youth and Young Adults in Poverty: 27 percent of youth and young adults between the ages of 18-34 in the non-CSBG counties are poor, compared to 19.5 percent in the United States, 24.9 percent in Kentucky, and 22 percent in Tennessee. Bell County, Kentucky, has the highest poverty rate for the age group (46.8 percent). Blount County in Tennessee has the lowest rate (17.4 percent).

Seniors in Poverty: In the non-CSBG counties, seniors (age 65 and older) have the lowest poverty rates of all age groups (12.9 percent), with Hancock County, Tennessee, having the highest poverty rate (24.4 percent) and Loudon County, Tennessee, the lowest (6.7 percent). In comparison, the poverty rate for seniors in Tennessee is 10.2 percent; Kentucky's rate is 11.6 percent. The rate for the U.S. is 9.4 percent.

Gender: 19.9 percent of males and 23.3 percent of females in the non-CSBG counties live in poverty. Bell County, Kentucky, has the largest percent of males (34.4 percent) and females (41.2 percent) in poverty. Blount County, Tennessee, has the smallest percent of males (12.4 percent) in poverty. Loudon County, Tennessee, has the smallest percent of females in poverty (14.5 percent).

Race/Ethnicity: Hispanics/Latinos have the highest poverty rates of all races and ethnic groups (41 percent) in the non-CSBG counties. Hispanics/Latinos in Unicoi County, Tennessee, have the highest poverty rates (75 percent), Hancock County, Tennessee, the lowest (0 percent). In comparison, 24.3 percent of Hispanics/Latinos in the U.S., 33.1 percent in Tennessee, and 31.8 percent in Kentucky are poor. 36.2 percent of Black/African-Americans in the non-CSBG counties are poor, with Hancock County reporting the highest rate (100 percent) and Campbell County, Tennessee, the lowest (0 percent). In comparison, 28.6 percent of Black/African-Americans in Tennessee, 31.5 percent in Kentucky, and 27 percent in the nation are poor. Loudon County, Tennessee, has the smallest percent of Hispanics/Latinos (8 percent) in the non-CSBG counties.

21.2 percent of the white population live in poverty, compared to 14.8 percent in Tennessee, 17.4 percent in Kentucky, and 12.7 percent in the U.S. Bell County, Kentucky, has

the largest percent of the white population in poverty (37.5 percent), and Knox County, Tennessee, has the smallest (13.4 percent).

Hispanic/Latino Population in CSBG and Non-CSBG Counties

The Hispanic/Latino population is growing in all counties. 16,855 persons of Hispanic/Latino origin live in the CSBG counties (2015). The two counties with the largest Hispanic/Latino population are Hamblen (6,948) and Sevier (5,041). In the non-CSBG counties, the Hispanic/Latino population totals 54,143. Knox County has the largest Hispanic population (16,857) in the CSBG and non-CSBG counties. 7,335 Hispanic/Latino children under age 18 live in the CSBG counties. The largest number reside in Hamblen County (3,159). 22,183 Hispanic/Latino children under age 18 live in the non-CSBG counties. The largest number live in Knox County (6,876).

Population Growth and Loss

The population of the CSBG counties is 312,456. All CSBG counties are projected to experience positive population growth from 2010 to 2020. In comparison to the 1 percent growth projected for both Tennessee and the nation, Grainger will have a 1.5 percent growth rate, Jefferson, a 1.9 percent growth rate, Monroe, a 2.2 percent growth rate, and Sevier, a 2.5 percent growth rate. Hamblen (0.5 percent) and Cocke (0.9 percent) will grow by less than 1 percent. The population of the non-CSBG counties is 1,754,267. Counties with projected growth rates over 1 percent are: Knox (1.2 percent), Union (1.1 percent), Loudon (2.4 percent), and Blount (2.1 percent). Two non-CSBG counties in Tennessee will experience a loss of population: Hancock (-0.2 percent), Sullivan (-0.2 percent). The two Kentucky counties will experience the greatest loss in population. Bell County's population is projected to decline by 3 percent from 27,337 in 2015 to 26,394 in 2020. Harlan County's population is expected to decline by 5 percent from 27,703 in 2015 to 26,368 in 2020. Population loss stems from a decline in major employers, such as the mining industry in Kentucky. **Sources:** Kentucky and Tennessee State Data Centers, 2017.

Race and Ethnicity and Poverty

Hispanics/Latinos and Black/African-Americans have higher poverty rates than the white population in our communities. In addition to the barriers confronting low-income individuals, racial/ethnic groups in white rural communities often face discrimination in employment and social situations. Many Hispanics who are illegal residents live in fear of deportation. Lack of English proficiency hinders assimilation and access to good jobs and/or postsecondary education or training.

Employment and Wages

Among all DCEA counties in Tennessee, only Blount, Bradley, Knox, and Loudon counties have unemployment rates that are equal to or less than the state (4.8 percent) and national unemployment rates (4.9 percent). In Kentucky, Bell (9 percent) and Harlan (12.1 percent) counties have much higher unemployment rates than the Kentucky rate (5 percent) and national rate (4.9 percent). (Note: employment rates are from the Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016 annual data, the most recent annual data available in April, 2017, the time of data retrieval). For the most part, wages in the service counties are lower than the state average for the same industry. The counties that make up Local Workforce Development Area 2 in Tennessee (Claiborne, Cocke, Grainger, Greene, Hamblen, Hancock, Hawkins, Jefferson, Sevier, and Union) have the lowest average annual wages among all Tennessee workforce areas served by DCEA (1, 3, 4, 5, and 7). Bell County, Kentucky, has the lowest average annual wage of both the Tennessee and Kentucky counties.

Education

In the future, nearly 52 percent of job openings in the CSBG and non-CSBG counties will require at least some postsecondary education. A two or four-year college degree has the potential to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Currently 20.8 percent of adults in DCEA's CSBG counties have an associate's degree or higher, compared to 31.5 percent in Tennessee and 37.8 percent in the U.S. 29.6 percent of adults in the non-CSBG counties have an associate's degree, compared to 31.5 percent in Tennessee, 37.8 percent in the U.S., and 29.7 percent in Kentucky. Increasingly, certificate or apprenticeship programs requiring less than two years of postsecondary training are viewed as pathways out of poverty provided that the training

is directly connected to placement in a high demand occupation in the local area. Statistical information from the states' educational agencies reveal that the majority of low-income high school graduates are inadequately prepared for college. 15.6 percent of adults in the non-CSBG counties and 19 percent of adults in the CSBG counties do not have a high school diploma or equivalent credential. In comparison, 14.5 percent of Tennessee adults and 15.8 percent of Kentucky adults lack a high school credential. In the U.S., 13.3 percent of adults have not completed high school or earned an equivalent credential.

Ramifications of Low Incomes

DCEA clients who work earn the minimum wage (\$7.25/hour) or little more than the minimum wage. Family-supporting wages are the hourly wages families need to be able to pay for basic food, child care, medical and dental care, housing, transportation, and other household expenses without receiving public benefits. The required hourly wage for a family with two adults (one adult is presumed to be working) and one child in CSBG and non-CSBG counties averages \$22 an hour. Seniors living only on Social Security or Supplemental Security Income need safe, affordable housing that is kept in good repair and convenient transportation to medical and community services. Assessments reveal that many low-income children and seniors are food insecure. Poor seniors need improved access to food assistance programs, including home-delivered meals or congregate meal programs. Children can benefit from increased family access to SNAP benefits, free and reduced price school lunches and breakfasts, the Child and Adult Care Food program, Summer Food programs, and nonprofit and faith-based nutrition education and food resources. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, rental housing (at fair market rates) in DCEA's service area is not affordable to people with low incomes. The Tennessee Housing Development Agency reports a severe shortage of public and other government-assisted rental housing in all of DCEA's service counties in Tennessee. Affordable, convenient, safe, and reliable public transportation is a high need in all counties. Without it, low-income residents and seniors or those with disabilities confront severe barriers to getting to work, school, and needed services of all kinds.

Personal Barriers to Self-Sufficiency

DCEA's assessments of program staff, partners, clients, community members, and board members identified various personal barriers to employment and self-sufficiency, including substance abuse, mental health challenges, disability, absence of a strong work ethic, deficient interpersonal skills required for success at work, inability to manage emotions and carry through on tasks required to reach goals, lack of affordable child care, teen pregnancy, poor life and/or parenting skills, lack of transportation, and ex-offender status. Some personal barriers may stem from the experience of childhood poverty.

Early Poverty

Assessment results confirm that early poverty is often a predictor for life-long economic disadvantage. Early poverty is a severe problem in DCEA's service area, with 27 percent of children in both the non-CSBG and the CSBG counties living in poverty. In the U.S., the childhood poverty rate is 21.7 percent. Early poverty is also associated with other adverse circumstances, such as exposure to violence, parental substance abuse and mental illness, and child abuse, which can lead to high levels of toxic stress in children and subsequent lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and mental and physical health. Childhood poverty is strongly associated with teen parenthood and unemployment. The longer children live in poverty, the worse their adult outcomes are. For young adults, living in poverty makes it more difficult for them to access quality education and training programs. When they do enroll, low-income young adults are more likely to have to work full time while in school, thus prolonging the time it takes them to earn a degree and putting them at risk for non-completion.

Disability

About 30 percent of clients served by DCEA report having a disability. People with disabilities have much lower work participation rates and much higher poverty rates than people without disabilities. In the non-CSBG counties, 20 percent of the age group 18-64 have one or more disabilities. This rate is almost twice the national rate of 10.3 percent. In the CSBG counties, 18 percent of those 18-64 have a disability. In the six CSBG counties, an estimated 4,649 individuals between the ages of 18 and 34 have one or more disabilities. In the non-CSBG counties, 27,359 persons age 18 to 34 report at least one disability. Because having a disability

frequently results in a lack of employment and poverty, children of parents with a disability face multiple obstacles to their own self-sufficiency as they grow up.

Distressed Counties

The Appalachian Regional Commission designates one CSBG county as economically distressed (Cocke). Six non-CSBG counties are classified as economically distressed (Campbell, Hancock, Morgan, Scott, Bell, and Harlan). To be designated as distressed, counties must have median family income no greater than 67% of the U.S. average and a poverty rate that is 150% or greater of the U.S. average.

Root Causes of Poverty in Our Communities

Root causes of poverty in the communities served were identified as **employment-related** (lack of employment, less than full-time year-round employment, mismatch of residents' skills with skills required by employers); **education-related** (low educational attainment levels and poor literacy or numeracy skills regardless of educational level attained, lack of knowledge about educational opportunities and financial aid, lack of social/emotional skills required for success in college, inability to juggle work and school, inadequate academic preparation for college); **income-related** (lack of jobs paying enough to support a family, lack of income from any source that is sufficient to meet the basic needs of life, inability to manage money wisely); and **personal barriers to self-sufficiency** (substance abuse, mental health challenges, disability, poor attitudes toward work, lack of workplace and life skills, teen pregnancy, lack of child care and transportation, poor parenting skills, ex-offender status, poverty in childhood).

Partners in the Communities

The assessment identified key service providers for low-income residents working toward self-sufficiency. DCEA partners with a comprehensive range of service providers in all counties, including employment and job training providers (Workforce Investment Act Career Centers); transportation providers (the Human Resource Agencies); educational institutions (K-12, community colleges, four-year colleges, postsecondary vocational/technical educational institutions, and adult education); medical, social services, and other providers in the Aging Network; basic needs providers (agencies and organizations delivering welfare to work services,

food assistance, children's services, mental health/substance abuse treatment, services for those with special needs, medical and dental health prevention and treatment services, and public and assisted housing); faith-based organizations; economic development agencies; and employers.

Community Assets

A major asset is people -- hard-working, compassionate people who are eager to help members of their communities who are in need. Other assets are services provided by social services and youth development programs and educational agencies (including DCEA's programs) and churches. Some board members identified assets specific to their counties. Grainger County's assets include tourism, wineries, Clayton Homes, good roads, and free movies in the park. Among Hamblen County's assets are well-managed government services, a better than average school system, HC Excel, a strong job base (manufacturing, health care, and retail), and DCEA's Head Start. Cocke County's assets are programs operated by the East Tennessee Human Resource Agency, the ConAgra Foods Foundation, and DCEA programs. Jefferson County's assets include Family Resource Centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, churches, Appalachian Outreach, and DCEA's Head Start and Neighborhood Service Centers.