



# MUHLENBERG COUNTY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

November 2008

*Commissioned by*

FELIX E. MARTIN JR.  
FOUNDATION

# THE MUHLENBERG COUNTY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

*Who understands the opportunities and needs of a community more than the men and women who live there?*

The answer is obvious, so in the spring of 2008 the Board of the Felix E. Martin, Jr. Foundation, in conjunction with The Community Foundation of Louisville, retained the services of Horizon InForm – a nationally-known public opinion research firm. Their job: to listen to the residents of Muhlenberg County and report on the opportunities and needs as outlined by the men and women of the community.

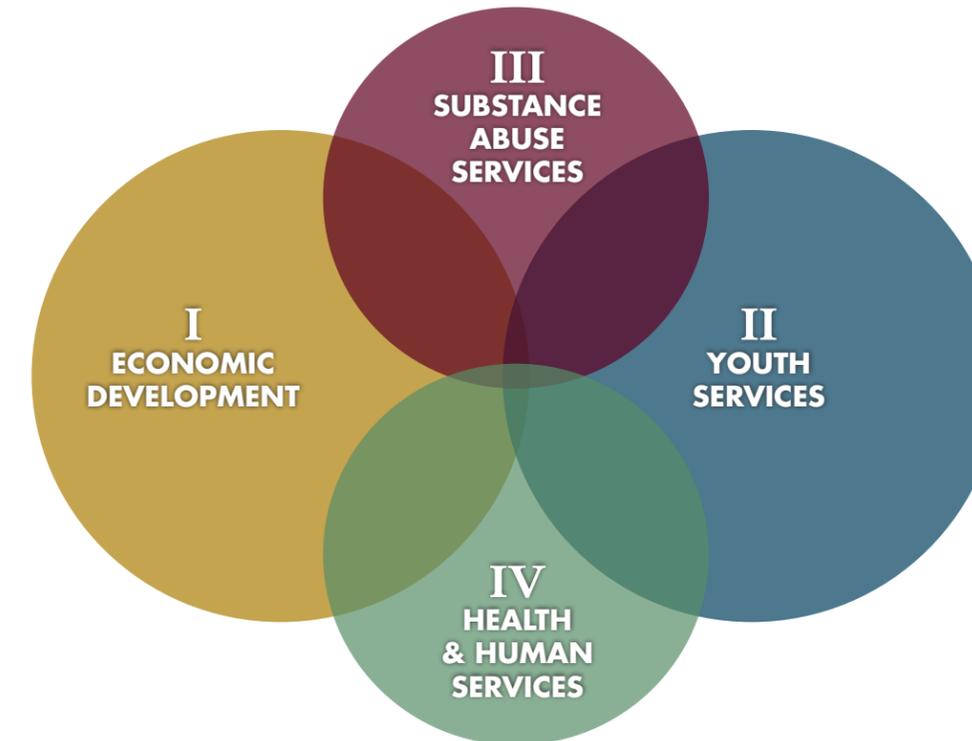
1000+ KEY INFORMANTS

In the process, over 1,000 residents were contacted in person, through group meetings, over the internet or by telephone. They were asked to reflect on their community, and the challenges it faces now and would likely face in the years ahead.

# MUHLENBERG COUNTY: A MOSAIC OF NEED AND OPPORTUNITY

The residents seemed to respond in one voice about four signature needs of the County – Economic Development, Youth Services, Substance Abuse Services and Health and Human Services. While each topic is unique, in most cases they correlate and connect with others.

For example, cultural arts can assist in Economic Development by making the community more attractive to new employers. It would also enhance Youth Services through a more well-rounded education curriculum, while providing young people new opportunities to participate in theatre, music and visual arts activities.



## I - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The people in the County felt that Economic Development would require unique and significant efforts to build and attract new and diverse businesses to the community. Even as the coal industry seems to be making a comeback, attracting other companies that employ a variety of local residents and increase the tax base of the cities and County is paramount to the future of the community.

However, if companies are to be attracted to Muhlenberg County, they must be confident in the strength of the work force available. That means:

- A variety of educational opportunities that improve job readiness and personal development must be available to students, both in high school and continuing with community and technical college training.
- Opportunities are needed for adults who want to improve their skills by enrolling as “non-traditional students” in various training programs, but need help with finances, day care or transportation.
- Enhanced training programs are needed to help local residents learn the specific skills that will be required by the jobs brought by new businesses.

Beyond that, however, community leaders and residents alike told the research team that the *community itself* had to develop in ways that would be attractive to new business leaders and the employees who would relocate to Muhlenberg County.



## I - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

For the community to be attractive to new businesses, change is needed in several areas.

Infrastructure improvements are needed, such as:

- Downtown development and beautification for the two urban areas, as well as a more attractive presentation of the entire County
- Improvement of water and sewer systems in selected areas
- Expanded health care facilities and services

Leisure opportunities are needed to enhance the quality of life, especially:

- Advanced arts and cultural opportunities
- Expanded recreational opportunities for all ages
- Improved parks and recreation sites

If this complex mosaic of economic and community development could be accomplished, residents believe the County’s future would be bright and so different from the challenging years of the past.



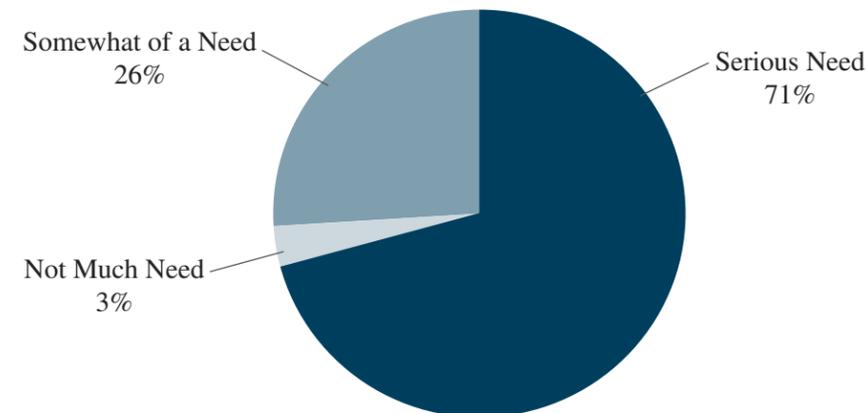
## II - YOUTH SERVICES

Civic leaders and local residents alike said the young people of Muhlenberg County are the “treasure” of the present and the “hope” for the future. However, virtually everyone was concerned that the interests of the County’s youth and the resources of the community were out of synch. There are not sufficient constructive activities for young people to do or enough places “for them to hang out”—to just have fun in wholesome environments.

The local churches offer wonderful youth facilities and activities, but most said there needs to be a significant variety of other alternatives as well.

The Muhlenberg County Schools are thought to provide significant academic and extra-curricular programming, and the vast majority of residents (80% of phone survey) are “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with public school education in their community. However, the phone survey showed that 97% of residents feel that there is “somewhat of a need” or a “serious need” for programs for young people.

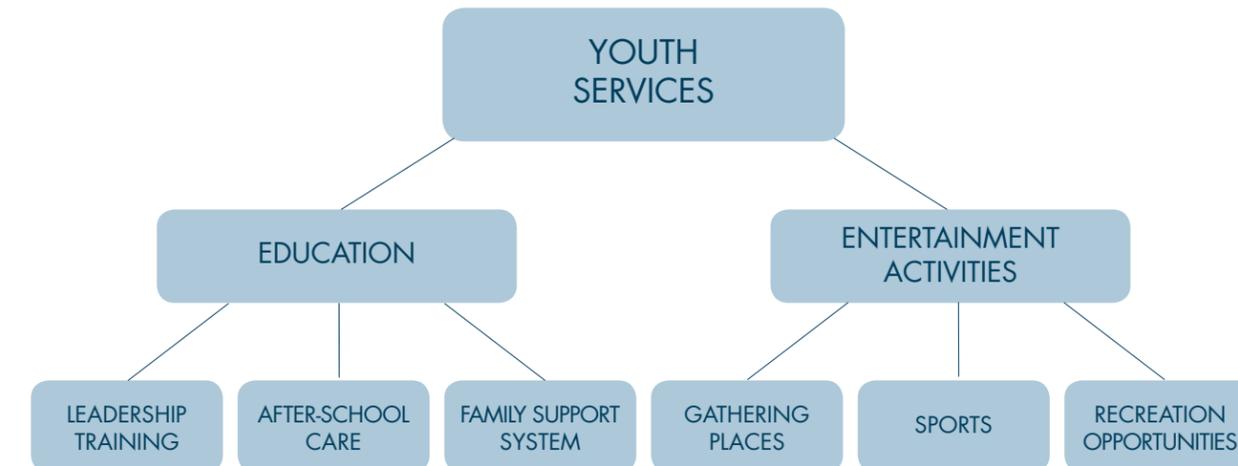
**PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**  
*Level of Need*



## II - YOUTH SERVICES

Residents worry about young people “hanging out,” or skate boarding in dangerous and unsupervised areas. They regret that favorite recreational sites have closed and new possibilities have been difficult to attract or implement. Consequently, most of the “fun” is located elsewhere. For lack of these opportunities, Owensboro is often the “place to go,” and a pattern of leaving Muhlenberg County to meet personal needs begins early and could become set for life.

To meet the needs of young people, the community wants to commit its resources to the youth of Muhlenberg County – not only for leisure and recreation, but for personal development as well. Where possible, young people should have leadership training opportunities, after-school alternatives, and ways their families can receive the resources they need to help their children. Respondents felt strongly that Youth Services need to be equally available to families in all areas of the County, from all income levels.



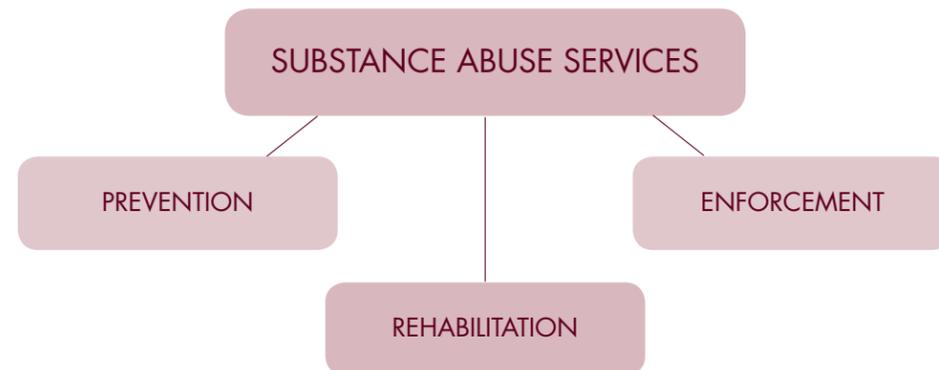
### III - SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

Most people in the County recognize the significant challenges of substance abuse in the community, especially methamphetamine. Over 70% of those responding to the phone survey said the problem was “very bad.”

The faith-based community has tried valiantly to help those families ravaged by substance abuse. Pastors speak eloquently about the hurt caused by meth throughout the community, and the need to reduce meth use by giving people hope for better and more meaningful lives, with better job opportunities for adults and more constructive activities for youth.

Groups such as STAND (Students Teaching About Narcotics Dangers), and other organizations with similar objectives, encourage young people and others to stay off drugs. Public authorities investigate and prosecute those making and using the drugs. In both prevention and enforcement, the majority of County residents were satisfied with the efforts being made and felt strongly these efforts must continue.

However, they said what is significantly lacking are rehabilitation programs and treatment facilities to assist those who want to free themselves from addiction. There are few affordable opportunities for rehabilitation in the region.

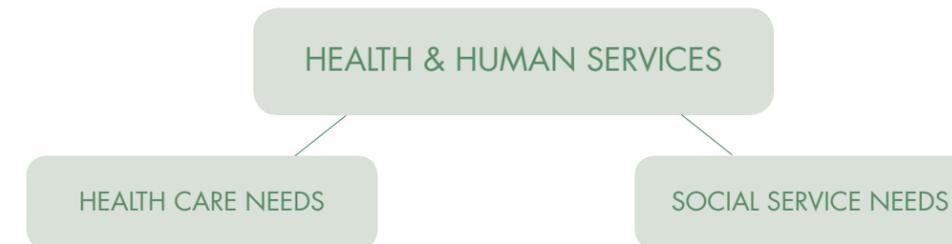


### IV - HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Given the current economic and employment challenges in Muhlenberg County, the need for social support is significant. The close-knit and caring communities, of which the residents are rightly proud, respond to that need as best they can on a personal level and through the support offered by churches and other faith-based organizations.

The churches are sometimes overwhelmed by the need, but continue to do what they can with food pantries, disaster relief efforts, and funds to help with emergency utility and rent payments. All these efforts respond to the need, but so much more is needed for younger families, at-risk mothers, and older or disabled adults.

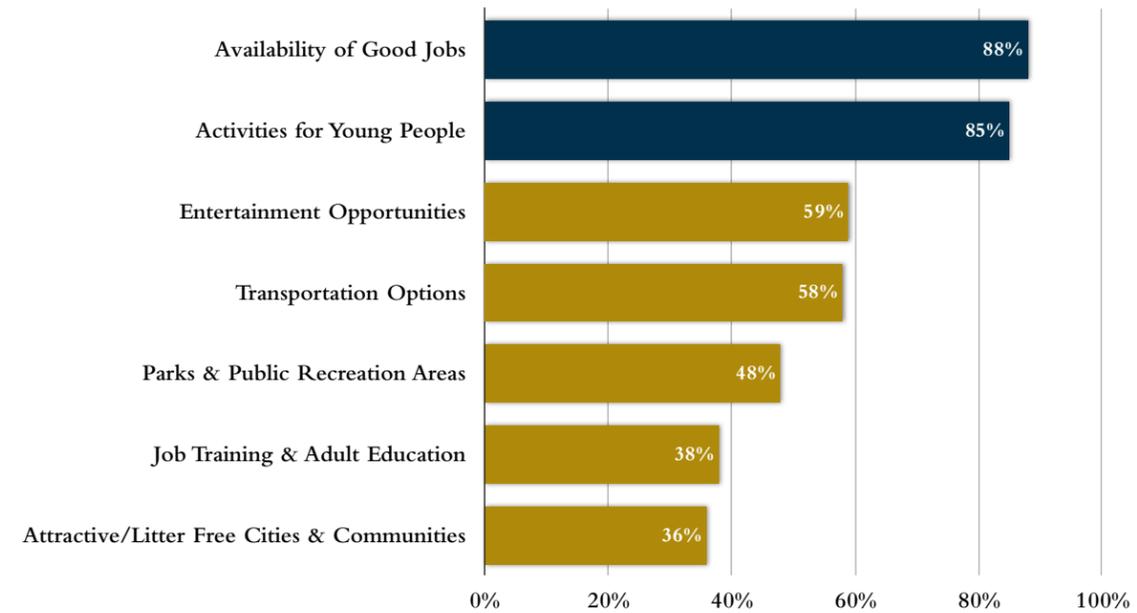
Statistically, the health status in the County is poor in comparison to most of Kentucky. Yet health care services often receive high marks for the quality of physicians and health care professionals in the community. Innovative programs of the past have attracted primary care physicians back to the County. The new clinic offers state-of-the-art outpatient services. However, retaining specialists and updating or replacing the facilities of the Community Hospital were identified as important needs.



## SUMMARY OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT

So many issues facing the County are interwoven in their cause and effect. The specific items identified as areas of dissatisfaction or important needs often relate to more than one of the key areas: Economic Development, Youth Services, Substance Abuse Services and Health and Human Services.

### TOP AREAS OF COMMUNITY DISSATISFACTION (PHONE SURVEY)\*

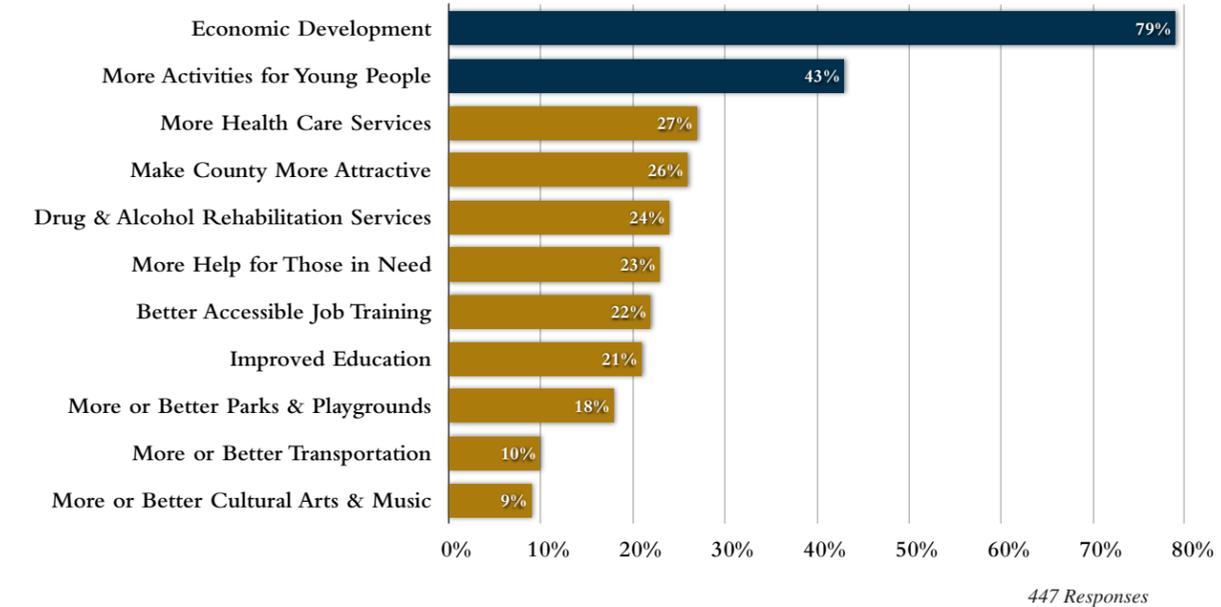


\* Among those with an opinion.

## SUMMARY OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The County overwhelmingly identifies the issues surrounding Economic Development and Youth Services as the two most important strategic goals for the years ahead. If these primary issues can be successfully addressed at a strategic level, many residents think that the burden on Substance Abuse Services and Health and Human Services can be alleviated as a result.

### SURVEY OF MOST IMPORTANT NEEDS (INTERNET SURVEY)



The people of Muhlenberg County are clearly proud of their community and proud of the people who share their lives as family, friends and fellow church members. There are obstacles to overcome, but many opportunities to enhance the quality of life in Muhlenberg County.

# FELIX E. MARTIN JR. FOUNDATION

The Felix E. Martin, Jr. Foundation seeks to enrich the lives of the citizens of Muhlenberg County, Kentucky by providing support to qualified organizations to meet educational, civic and cultural needs of the County - both today and for generations to come.

The Foundation was established by a Trust created by Felix E. Martin, Jr., a native and long-time resident of Muhlenberg County, Kentucky.

The Felix E. Martin, Jr. Foundation is chaired by Roderick J. Tompkins, Sr., Felix's long-time friend and financial advisor, and is administered by The Community Foundation of Louisville.



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