

United Way of Southwestern Indiana Social Service Provider Collaboration Assessment

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**United Way of Southwestern Indiana
(Vanderburgh, Warrick and Spencer Counties)**

**In partnership with the United Ways of
Gibson and Posey Counties**



**Sponsored by
Alcoa, Bussing-Koch Foundation, Deaconess Hospital,
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& Welborn Baptist Foundation**

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Executive Summary

The United Way of Southwestern Indiana partnered with United Ways in Posey County and Gibson County to conduct a Comprehensive Community Assessment within five counties in southwestern Indiana: Gibson, Posey, Spencer, Vanderburgh, and Warrick. The purpose was to identify community needs and strengths, as well as the level of collaboration and potential areas of duplication among social service providers. Study sponsors included: Alcoa, Bussing-Koch Foundation, Deaconess Hospital, St. Mary's Healthcare Services, Vectren, and the Welborn Baptist Foundation.

A community assessment model derived from best practice literature was used to examine the study questions, which involved two distinct phases. This report serves as a companion document to the main community assessment report, which detailed the needs and strengths identified by members of the community and secondary data sources that relate to the issues addressed through the community survey process. This document addresses the second study question, *"To what degree are priority needs being met by community organizations in the region, as indicated by existing gaps, collaboration, and potential service duplication?"* Specifically, three study questions associated with phase two were addressed:

1. To what degree are social service providers responding to the needs identified through the community needs assessment?
2. To what degree are social service organizations working collaboratively to address community issues?
3. What potential areas of duplication exist among social service providers?

Needs assessment committees were formed to guide model development and implementation. A Planning Team was created to establish goals for the study and oversee key aspects of the process. Members of the team included: leaders from the United Way of Southwestern Indiana; consultants from Diehl Consulting; representatives from local higher educational institutions, including University of Evansville, University of Southern Indiana, Ivy Tech Community College, and Oakland City University; a representative of social service agencies; and a local researcher. Additionally, an Advisory Committee was formed to generate ideas and provide feedback on selected needs assessment methods. Members of the Advisory Committee were selected from a wide array of community, school, government, and private organizations, and represented a diverse cross-section of demographics. Key findings related to the above questions are summarized below.

1. To what degree are social service providers responding to the needs identified through the community needs assessment survey?

A document review of completed community organization Provider Profiles and information related to other social service organizations gleaned from public information (e.g., websites, annual reports) was conducted to address this question. Specifically, the number of organizations and the types of services provided were matched with the 56 issues from the community needs assessment survey. Additionally, the ten highest priority needs as identified in the 2008 comprehensive community assessment were specifically examined to identify the number of organizations addressing these issues.

It is evident that community organizations in the five-county area are responding to a diversity of issues that impact their community. However, at least three of the highest priority needs identified within the community assessment survey (understanding the cycle of poverty, child and adult obesity, and affordable dental care) may warrant additional focus by community organizations. Key findings included:

- Of those that completed the full provider profile, organizations have provided services in the community from 5 to 150 years, with an average of 38 years and median of 30 years per organization. Organizations serve a total of 755,335 clients across all organizations annually.
- The 188 social service organizations within the five-county area that were examined within this study are addressing 87.5% (49/56) of the issues contained within the community needs assessment.
- The issue with the largest number of organizations targeting it with services and programs is low- to moderate-income individuals not having funds for basic needs (e.g., adequate clothing, food, housing, and legal services). Given that this issue is broad and encompasses a large number of concerns, ones that focus on basic needs for survival, it would be expected that many social service agencies would target this issue.
- Seven issues were identified as not being directly addressed by any of the social service organizations. Of those, the lack of child support payments ranked highest within the priority needs. Three other issues not being directly addressed, yet identified as community strengths, included school violence, violent crime, and race relations.
- Of the 10 highest priority needs identified within the community assessment, two or fewer organizations are directly addressing the following issues: understanding the cycle of poverty that occurs in successive generations, child and adult obesity, affordable dental care for low- to moderate-income individuals, and availability of weekend/evening hours for human services. However, while availability of hours is indicated as not being directly addressed, a review of responses to the Provider Profiles suggests otherwise. For instance, a total of 32 out of 68 (47.1%) organizations specified that they offer services on the weekends, and 48 out of 68 (70.6%) organizations specified that they offer services in the evening.

2. To what degree are social service organizations working collaboratively to address community issues?

This study defined collaboration as “An ongoing process in which individuals willing to embrace change come together to develop trusting relationships among all relevant stakeholders to achieve common goals and desired outcomes for the betterment of the community. This is accomplished by sharing responsibility, resources, accountability, and authority.” A technique called Social Network Analysis was used to examine the degree to which social service organizations are working collaboratively to address community issues. This approach describes the pattern of relationships among organizations within a network. Three aspects were described: (a) a description of the characteristics of the overall network; (b) a description of individual organizations within the network; and (c) a description of sub-groups within the network.

Overall Network Characteristics

The network of social service organizations in the five-county study area is very connected, with very few organizations completely cut off from the overall network. As a result, it should be relatively easy for organizations to communicate and collaborate with one another since they are separated by so few organizations. While the network is quite connected, the number of actual direct connections is quite small, which may be a result of the large size of the network. Key findings include:

- The overall social service network is defined as 188 providers within the five-county study area. There is a high degree of connection within the network. Only 3 (1.5%) of all organizations are completely isolated from the others.
- There are six organizations that serve as cutpoints for the network. If any of these six organizations were removed, a number of other organizations would become isolated from the network. A low number of cutpoints suggests greater stability in the connections in the network.
- To further demonstrate the network’s connectedness, each organization is connected to every other organization by fewer than 2.5 organizations. In other words, if one organization needs to communicate or collaborate with another organization, it would be relatively easy to reach that organization given the small number of organizations that separate them.
- Overall, the network of organizations is not very densely connected. Density is a measure of direct connections between organizations. On average, agencies are only connected to 5% of the organizations with which they could be connected. The low measure of density may be a result of the large number of organizations that comprise the network. The larger the network, the smaller the density.

Individual Organizations Characteristics

Considerable variance exists in the number and strength of collaborative partnerships among community organizations. Although there was a high degree of collaboration among individual organizations, a small amount of these collaborations were actually reciprocated. Further, nine organizations that were determined to provide essential services (e.g., food, clothing, mental health, healthcare, and emergency shelter) were given high collaborative ratings by other organizations, which suggest that the functions served by these organizations are high in importance to the overall network. Key findings include:

- The number of collaborative partnerships in the entire network ranged from 0 to 111, with a mean of 16.29 organizations. In other words, organizations collaborate with an average of just over 16 other organizations. Given that organizations rated the degree of collaborations on a 7-point scale, the overall strength of collaborations may be measured. On average, the strength of collaboration was 3.95, where 1 represents no collaboration and 7 represents high levels of collaboration.
- On average, the largest number of organizations indicated they collaborate with organizations in Domain 7: Violence & Crime. The domains that have the highest average number of collaborations were Domain 2: Alcohol & Drugs and Domain 6: Education & the Workforce. Domain 6 also had the highest strength of collaboration.
- Another aspect of the measurement of collaboration is the reciprocation of collaboration. Although responders reported a fairly high number of collaborative partnerships, 15.9% of these incoming and outgoing collaborations were actually reciprocated (e.g., provider X reports collaborating with provider Y and Y reciprocates the collaboration). When the value of these collaborations was examined (e.g., provider X rates collaboration with provider Y as a 6 and provider Y rates its collaboration with provider X as a 6) only 3.54% were reciprocated. Domain 5: Family Life and Domain 7: Violence and Crime appeared to have the highest reciprocated value of collaborations, and Domain 2: Alcohol and Drugs and Domain 6: Education and the Workforce had the highest reciprocated collaborations.
- Based on collaboration ratings provided by participating organizations, some agencies are more central to the network. A large number of other organizations indicated that they collaborate with these organizations. Nine organizations fell into this category. When each of these nine organizations was examined, it appeared that all provided essential services to clients, such as food, clothing, mental health, healthcare, and emergency shelter. Further, the organizations also have programs and services focusing on individuals in crisis, poverty or limited financial means. The purpose of these organizations appears to be critical with regards to the overall functioning of the network. These functions also provide insight into the issues faced by organizations.

Sub-groups within the Network

To further examine the degree of collaboration among social service organizations, connections among sub-groups, or sub-networks, were examined. Overall, 18 sub-networks were identified based on how they grouped together on collaboration ratings. However, the strength of connections among these sub-groups varied, which indicated that some sub-groups work together more cohesively compared to other sub-groups. A similar finding was identified for within-domain collaboration. Specifically, organizations that fell within the Alcohol & Drugs and Violence & Crime domain had higher degrees of connection compared to the other domains. However, this finding may be influenced by the variance in the number of organizations that fell within the different domains (i.e., domains with few organizations have a greater likelihood of higher connections). Finally, a high degree of cross-domain collaboration emerged within the network. This finding suggests that social service organizations may depend on the functions of other social service organizations, which reinforces the overall importance of interagency collaboration. Key findings include:

- A total of 18 sub-networks were identified based on how they grouped together on collaboration ratings. Two sub-networks were shown to be more cohesive than the others.
 - The first of these highly connected sub-networks had 31 members and was directly connected to 45% of the agencies with which they could possibly be connected within this sub-network. On average, the organizations within this sub-network are connected either directly or indirectly to 64% of the possible organizations with which they could be connected. Despite this high degree of connection, a review of the specific organizations in the sub-network uncovered no common themes among the services they provide or the issues they address. This finding suggests that the issues being faced by social service organizations within this sub-network are diverse, which would reinforce the importance of diverse collaborations.
 - The second of these highly connected sub-networks had 11 members and was directly connected to 36% of the agencies with which they could possibly be connected within this sub-network. On average, the organizations within this sub-network are connected either directly or indirectly to 59% of the possible organizations with which they could be connected. Unlike the sub-network described above, the members of this sub-network may be said to have common interests: most of these organizations deal with youth services in some manner.
- In addition to the analysis that allowed organizations to be grouped solely based on their collaboration ratings, the analysis also assessed the degree of collaboration among organizations within each primary domain. Results of this analysis indicated that Domain 2: Alcohol & Drugs and Domain 7: Violence & Crime are the most densely connected. In other words, these domains have a greater degree of direct connections within their network than do other domains. As mentioned above, this finding may be influenced by

the variance in the number of organizations that fell within the different domains (i.e., domains with few organizations have a greater likelihood of higher connections).

- A large degree of cross-domain collaboration was found within the network. This means that while organizations may be collaborating within their specific domain, a high degree of collaboration also occurs with organizations outside of their primary domain. The largest between-domain connections are from Domain 2: Alcohol & Drugs and Domain 7: Violence & Crime (19% of the total possible connections), and from Domain 7: Violence & Crime to Domain 6: Education & the Workforce (17.5% of the total possible connections).

3. What potential areas of duplication exist among social service providers?

Several approaches were utilized to examine potential areas of duplication. The first approach provided a description of the number of organizations that are addressing specific issues. Next, using the collaborative rating scale completed by social service organizations, a second approach examined the level of collaboration occurring among similar service providers. Finally, a third approach examined the strength of collaboration within organizations by domain classifications. These approaches and key findings are summarized below.

The first approach examined the community issues identified within the needs assessment. Specifically, social service organizations were matched with each of the issues from the needs assessment, and the issues that were being addressed by at least five organizations were examined. The issue with the largest number of organizations targeting it with services and programs was low- to moderate-income individuals not having funds for basic needs (e.g., adequate clothing, food, housing, and legal services). Given that this issue is broad and encompasses a large number of concerns, ones that focus on basic needs for survival, it would be expected that many social service agencies would target this issue.

A second approach defined potential duplication as those organizations that reported collaborating with less than 50% of other organizations that they identified as providing similar services. While the level of collaboration may vary among similar service providers, one could argue that without basic levels of collaboration, the likelihood of duplicating services would increase.

- Using the collaborative rating scale, organizations identified other organizations that provide similar services as them. Out of the 112 organizations completing the collaborative rating scale, a total of 74 organizations identified at least one organization that provided similar services. The average number of organizations providing similar services was 6.14.
- Of the 74 organizations that indicated providing similar services as them, a total of 63.5% (47/74) of organizations reported collaborating with at least 50% of these organizations. While the remaining 27 organizations reported collaborating with less

than half of similar service providers, only 13 (17.57%) of these organizations actually had five or more similar service providers.

- The 27 organizations identified as collaborating with less than 50% of similar service providers were subjected to content analysis to identify common themes. However, no themes emerged. Typically, these organizations included a diversity of small to large-scale agencies and were spread throughout each of the domains. Collectively, this finding suggests that potential duplication of services may be contained within individual organizations versus clustered within broad service areas.

A final approach to examining potential duplication involved identifying groups of agencies that “hang together” in providing similar services. The analysis identified 5 groups and a group of isolates (i.e., a group of agencies indicating no one else provides similar services – note that some of these may have been non-responders). To get a sense of the amount of collaboration within each of these groups, density values for the collaboration ratings were calculated within each similarity group. As described earlier, density represents the degree of direct connections between organizations. Overall, a high degree of collaboration within some of the groups was evident. However, there were no clear patterns with regards to the group structure. This again reinforced the notion that potential duplication of services is likely not contained within broad social service domains, rather it appears to be more community agency specific. Another key finding related to this analysis was the lack of collaboration within other sub-groups. While this does not provide direct evidence specific to duplication, it does highlight the lack of awareness of some organizations in the services provided by other community organizations.

Key Findings and Considerations

1. Social service organizations in the five-county area are responding to a diversity of issues that impact their community. Findings highlight the existence of a mature and critical support network being provided for citizens within the region. Of those that completed the full provider profile, organizations have provided services in the 5-county study area from 5 to 150 years, with an average of 38 years and median of 30 years per organization. Organizations serve a total of 755,335 clients across all organizations each year. Given that these data are limited to only those organizations responding to the full-provider profile, we would expect these numbers to be significantly higher if they included those from the other organizations that did not respond.
2. In Phase One of the Community Assessment, the highest percentage of participants across all stakeholder groups falling in the high in importance and high in being-addressed-well quadrant (represents strengths) was noted for “*Cooperation of community organizations in effectively addressing needs.*” This means that the highest percentage of participants agreed or strongly agreed that this issue is important to the community, and also agreed or strongly agreed that the issue is being addressed well within the community. Phase Two identified a high degree of connection for the overall network, as well as individual sub-networks. In addition, findings suggested that a large degree of cross-domain collaboration exists within the network. Collectively, these findings suggest that social service organizations are collaborating throughout the network,

which serves to validate stakeholders' perception of the level of collaboration within the region.

3. Although a high level of connection was noted among social service organizations, there was a small degree of reciprocation related to collaborative ratings. This may highlight the different perceptions that social service organizations have related to collaborative partnerships or the level of value placed by social service organizations with regards to these partnerships. Alternatively, it is also possible that individuals within organizations may not fully understand the level of collaboration occurring with other agencies. Given the many explanations for this finding, consideration should be given to initiating a dialogue among social service organizations with regards to the nature of collaboration. Given the significant role played by social service organizations, a discourse of this nature would appear to be beneficial in strengthening the connections between organizations and deepening providers' understanding of collaboration.
4. At least three of the highest priority needs identified within the community assessment survey (understanding the cycle of poverty, child and adult obesity, and affordable dental care) may warrant additional focus by community organizations. While it is likely that organizations are addressing these issues indirectly, the high priority related to these issues suggests a need to focus more intentionally in these service areas. In doing so, a review of secondary data sources contained within the first phase of the 2008 Comprehensive Study is encouraged. From this perspective, decisions for determining the extent to which community organizations are adequately addressing these issues should be guided by the overall prevalence of the issue within the community. When making these decisions, consider formulating committees and placing issues within the context of prevalence.
5. While some of the social service organizations in the overall network had few collaborative partnerships with similar service providers, the majority appeared to be working together with most of these providers. Therefore, potential duplication of services may be contained within individual organizations versus clustered within broad service areas. Specifically, while there were organizations in the service network that did not collaborate with other organizations, the impact of this potential service duplication appears minimal. However, further study in relation to duplication is warranted. In doing so, consider focusing on the issues that were identified as being addressed by more than 5 community organizations. This approach should further examine aspects of service provision (e.g., operational hours, client population) and prevalence of the issues being addressed within the region.
6. Thirty-eight social service organizations indicated that no other organization provides a similar service. Further, when similar service providers were examined, the strength of the collaboration varied by sub-networks. These findings may suggest a need for more awareness with regards to the types of services provided by other organizations within the broader service system. This approach would also serve to identify new opportunities for collaboration.