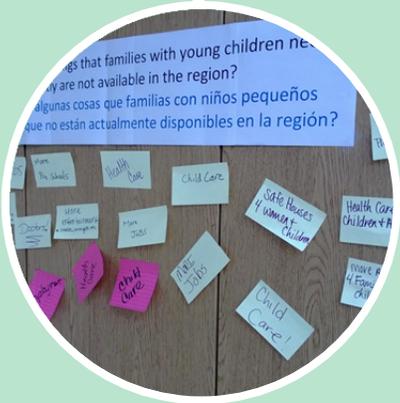




Assessing the Needs and Assets of San Bernardino County Families

Needles

December 2013



Between March and November 2013 Harder+Company Community Research

conducted eight community asset-mapping sessions throughout San Bernardino County with the goal of better understanding the needs, assets, resources, and gaps in services that families with young children in San Bernardino County face. Each session consisted of interactive activities for parents, community residents and local service providers that focused on a broad range of topics, from early education and medical resources to places where children can be active and community sources of pride. This report presents the findings from the Needles Asset Mapping session conducted on April 30, 2013.

The Approach: Asset Mapping

For this project, First 5 San Bernardino and Harder+Company Community Research adopted asset mapping as an approach to understanding community needs. Asset mapping has at least two important advantages over other traditional needs assessment approaches that made it well-suited to meet First 5 San Bernardino’s goals: it is **strengths-based** and **inclusive**.

Asset mapping focuses first on what is available and working in a community. These resources can then be leveraged to help address the needs of that same community – allowing for a strengths-based approach to problem solving. Simply put, being aware of both the resources and needs of a community allows for the development of more strategic solutions that have a higher likelihood of achieving outcomes. Traditional needs assessment focuses primarily on what’s missing from a community.

Second, asset mapping is inclusive – the technique makes it possible for a diverse group of people to work together to describe and understand the community. First 5 San Bernardino was eager to include a strong parent perspective in this project alongside the professional knowledge that service providers and leaders bring. Anyone who lives in a community is well-positioned to participate in asset mapping regardless of education, literacy level, language spoken or prior experience with this type of activity. Asset mapping truly allows a seat at the table for anyone with firsthand knowledge of the community.

Asset mapping sessions resulted in lively discussions and debates about every community we conducted them in. We hope the information in this brief report conveys the passion that community members brought to the session. We are indebted to them for their time and participation in this process.

About this report:

The fold out map to the right provides an overview of the *mappable* assets and needs in Needles. The report that follows provides more detailed information about the community-identified assets and needs.

MAPPING SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY'S NEEDS AND ASSETS



Needles Asset Mapping

This summary map shows community-identified assets and needs in Needles. During the asset mapping workshop a mix of about 30 local parents, residents, and service providers worked together to identify current community strengths and challenges. Participants discussed a broad range of assets including schools, child care, food outlets and health care facilities. Although this is not an exhaustive list, First 5 San Bernardino and key community partners can use this map to identify existing resources that can be built upon to strengthen the foundation of services for children 0-5 and their families.

Key Findings:

- + Duke Watkins Park is a central community hub with a high volume of activities for the community, including children. Although many recognize it as a source of pride, some parents are not able to afford classes provided and find the hours too limited. Many participants voiced concerns about the gang presence around the park, especially since many children attend activities there.
- + There is a significant lack of accessible medical care in Needles. Emergency patients are often air lifted to nearby hospitals, Medi-Cal is not accepted by any of the local doctors, and although there is an OB/GYN coming once a week, participants indicated that they are reluctant to visit him. There is no pediatrician or pediatric dentist in the area.
- + Transportation is difficult in Needles. Though it is a small community, structural barriers make it difficult to do simple things like go to Basha's (where there is no sidewalk or signal for nearby residents) or to the river (because old walking paths are no longer accessible).
- + Needles' weather makes it difficult for families to stay active and healthy. With no indoor activities available and high temperatures many parents report their children resort to TV and video games.

APRIL 2013

What does everyday life look like for parents and community members in Needles?

Needles has a small number of vital community assets: families take advantage of local parks, the library and many sites around the River. Most Needles residents travel to Arizona (and sometimes to Nevada) for everything from medical care and educational opportunities to grocery shopping. The lack of accessible public transportation to Arizona makes this particularly difficult for some families. Additionally, differences in state policies and infrastructure make it difficult for Needles families to receive family support and medical services in Arizona.



Needles residents worked with facilitators to map out where they grocery shop and exercise.



Residents make use of limited grocery and food options in Needles.

According to participants, basic foodstuffs like fruits, vegetables and milk are much more expensive in Needles than in stores across the river in Arizona. The selection at *Basha's* – the only grocery store in Needles – is perceived to be expensive and of low quality. Additionally, participants expressed concerns about families who have to walk there because it is on a busy street and there are no sidewalks or traffic signals to allow parents to cross the road safely with their children. According to one resident, “people have to dangerously walk in and cross the street if they live nearby and don’t drive.” Due to limited selection and high prices, residents often look elsewhere for regular grocery purchases. They may visit *Dollar Tree* and *Rite Aid* locally, but many families travel to cities in Arizona to do their regular

grocery shopping at *Walmart*, *Safeway* or *Smith's* (where WIC is accepted). Participants stressed a need for public transportation that connects Needles with cities in Arizona, so families without adequate transportation can better access these resources.

As can be seen on the map, Needles is home to many fast food establishments that cater to travelers passing through the area. According to Asset Mapping participants, there are very few affordable, healthy options for residents choosing to dine out.



Community programming is a valuable asset in Needles. Outdoor

activities and local parks play multiple and important roles in the desert. *The Colorado River* provides a natural recreation area for families. Some respondents reported that this area is less accessible than in the past because of the addition of a golf course; families and children are less inclined to walk there than they once were. Families also hang out and exercise at *Jack Smith Park* near the river. *Ted Watkins Park* is a community hub that houses the *Recreation Center*, *Aquatic Center*, and *Skate Park*. The Recreation Center houses an after-school program, classes for kids, and organized sporting activities. It is highly utilized by families and a source of pride for the community, but some residents said it could benefit from longer hours and lower prices. Participants noted that gang activity in Needles is concentrated around this park, and that it makes families uneasy because it is so close to their children's activities. Beyond these heavily utilized resources, children are limited to playing at home. Some apartment complexes have playgrounds and climbing gyms however, participants wish there were more places for family recreation in Needles.

Residents also gather at churches throughout the area, and exercise at the



Needles mother uses post-its to identify how Needles is different than the rest of San Bernardino County.

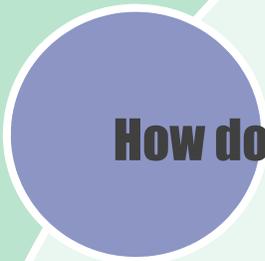
local high school track. Needles location in the desert, with average temperatures of over 100 degrees Fahrenheit from June through September, means that outdoor activities and play is limited to early in the morning or later in the evening after the sun has gone down.

The city and a number of social clubs host community events throughout the year. *The Women's Club of Needles*, for example, puts on an annual Flower Show that brings families from the surrounding areas. *The Chamber of Commerce* also hosts an annual Christmas Parade that families in Needles attend. Participants were also very excited about the *Annual Rodeo* in Needles and see it as a key event that brings the community together.

Community Desires for the Needles Region



The word cloud above illustrates resources participants most desire for Needles and surrounding cities. Participants were asked to name some things they would like to see in their community. Words appearing in larger type appeared more frequently in their responses. Overall community members desire access to **childcare** and **preschool**, **healthcare** and **dental** services, indoor and family-friendly **recreation**.



How do parents care for their families' health?



Families face severely limited medical services in Needles. There are two main medical providers in Needles: the *Department of Public Health* (DPH) and *Colorado River Medical Center*. The Medical Center has the only emergency room in Needles; DPH provides basic services like immunizations and birth control, and offers health check-ups two or three days a month. These providers offer only basic services, so as a result patients are often referred to (or in emergencies, airlifted to) better-equipped hospitals. There are no public clinics in the area, and, according to participants, neither the doctors in Needles nor the hospitals in Arizona accept Medi-Cal.

According to the residents and service providers who participated in the Asset Mapping session, there are no pediatricians, very limited prenatal services and no Labor and Delivery departments in Needles. Participants said there is one Obstetrician/Gynecologist who visits Needles about once a week, but accepts very limited insurance and patients are largely not satisfied with the care they do receive.



“Half of the residents of Needles are on Medi-Cal, but the two doctors don’t accept it. There are very limited medical resources in town.”

~Needles Participant



Ensuring children practice good oral health is a priority for parents, but there is a lack of accessible services and information.

Participants indicated they attempt to instill good oral health habits to their children by brushing their teeth, flossing, using mouthwash daily and regular dental check-ups. However, many parents continue to face challenges in ensuring their children maintain good oral health. Specifically, they cited a lack of dentists (there are very few dentists in the area and many are not currently accepting new patients) and cost of dental care as barriers to ensuring regular oral health care for children.

Oral health information for families and children is available at *Headstart, First 5 San Bernardino*, schools, community events and the dentist.

Identifying parent's practice and knowledge:

Community members utilized "placemats", like the one pictured here, and worked in teams to identify dental health practices, challenges, and gaps in services.

Supporting healthy & thriving FAMILIES!

Tells us about yourselves:

Age: _____ How many children live with you? _____ How many are under 17? _____
Are you a: _____ Parent _____ Grandparent _____ Service Provider
_____ Foster Parent _____ Other: _____

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Are you a: _____ Parent _____ Grandparent _____ Service Provider
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What kinds of dental health activities does your family practice regularly?
Ex. Brushing teeth daily, flossing, etc.:

What are some of the difficulties to maintaining good dental health?

To keep my family healthy, the three most important things are:

Where do you get information about your child's dental health? Ex. Community events, mobile clinics, dentist, family, etc.

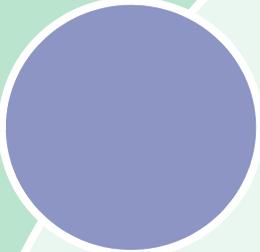
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What learning opportunities are available for young children and their families?



Parents value education for their children and opportunities to learn together. Participants engage in educational activities with their children regularly;

this includes reading to them, educational games, outdoor activities and field trips to the library. *Needles Library* is a valuable resource for families in the area. It provides computer access, a summer reading program and story time for children. *Sunday School* at families' place of worship is also an important educational resource for children. Some residents take their children to Arizona for elementary school because of the smaller class sizes and reportedly higher standards. There is only one *Headstart* in the area, and it has a long waiting list for families. Many parents desired more preschool options, *Mommy and Me* classes, and activities for young children. Families in Needles often rely on family members, friends and neighbors to provide care for their children when needed.



Parents also take advantage of educational resources available to them in the area. *Palo Verde College* offers GED classes. Other organizations like *MHS Needles Center or Change* and *WestCareArizona* provide parenting classes.

Summary of community-identified needs in Needles

- Parents cite issues with public transportation and neighborhood walkability as barriers to accessing basic services for families and recreation activities for their children.
- There is a lack of gainful employment in the area. It is common for parents who are employed to work as far away as Barstow (a two hour commute) or across the river in Arizona.
- Emergency medical services are limited; patients are often air lifted to nearby hospitals for more serious cases.
- Regular and prenatal medical care is difficult to access in Needles for poor families who utilize Medi-Cal, which is reportedly not accepted by any of the local doctors. There is an Obstetrician/Gynecologist that comes to town about once a week that does see Medi-Cal patients. There is also no Pediatrician in the area.
- Gang activity concentrated around community parks is a concern for residents and families in Needles.
- Participants are concerned about the homeless and transient populations found within Needles and especially at *Santa Fe Park*, near the Amtrak Station.

Summary of needs in the Needles and Desert Region*

*Community members were asked to name some things that families with young children need that currently are not available in the region. The “word cloud” above illustrates their responses. Words appearing in larger type appeared more frequently in their responses. The key items include **employment** opportunities and services, access to **childcare**, **medical care** for families and children, **classes** for parents, and **recreation** activities for families.



Summary and conclusions

The community of Needles cares deeply about the well-being of young children and their families.

While residents in many regions of the county face challenges in raising young children, these challenges are more pronounced in Needles than in other cities. Needles is geographically isolated which means that families have to travel long distances, including going to Arizona, to access affordable, healthy food and other services that are not available locally, including health care. The extremely hot temperatures (in excess of 100 degrees for four months out of the year) make walking and outside activity inadvisable during the day and present further barriers to families with young children to accessing services and supports they need to thrive. Needles residents have a strong sense of community that can be leveraged to build upon the existing services and infrastructure in Needles to improve life for families with children zero to five.

THANK YOU!

Many thanks to the community residents who attended this event and worked diligently to identify their community’s needs and assets. We also want to thank local non-profits and churches that helped recruit community members and provided their knowledge and support every step of the way.



First 5 San Bernardino was created in December, 1998 in order to realize the benefits of Proposition 10 (California Children and Families Act) for the County's youngest residents and their families. The act created a program for the purpose of promoting, supporting, and improving the early development of children from the prenatal stage to five years of age.

Vision – All children in San Bernardino County are healthy, safe, nurtured, eager to learn and ready to succeed.

Mission – Promote, support and enhance the health and early development of children prenatal through age five and their families and communities.



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