

CLARK COUNTY NEEDS ASSESSMENT



MAY 2009



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CLARK COUNTY
WASHINGTON

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CLARK COUNTY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A. Introduction

This needs assessment identifies opportunities and challenges for government agencies, and community organizations to improve the quality of life in Clark County. It is our hope that the report will be used to help guide the efforts of the many excellent and effective programs and services currently provided in our community. It may additionally support new work in areas of high need.

Since 1970, Washington's Clark County has been the second fastest growing county in the state. It covers 628 square miles in southwestern Washington and has a population of 431,200¹, a third of who are employed in the Portland metro area. Almost half (48%) of the county's residents live in unincorporated areas.

In 2007, 9.3% of individuals in Clark County were living in poverty. Approximately 6.6% of all families in Clark County had incomes below the poverty level and 9.5% of families with children under the age of 18 lived in poverty. Among female heads of household with children under the age of five, 53.5% earned incomes below the poverty level in 2007. (Census Bureau's American Community Survey).

Department of Health & Human Services Poverty Guidelines: 2009

	Number of People in Household							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Annual Income	10,830	\$14,570	\$18,370	\$22,050	\$25,790	\$29,530	\$33,270	\$37,010

Note: For each additional person after 8 persons, add \$3,740.

Source: Federal Register, Vol. 74, No. 14, January 23, 2009, p. 4199

Cities Ranked & Rated ranks the Portland-Vancouver area as #3 on its 2007 list of best places to live in America. Cities are ranked on the basis of information from the U.S. Census Bureau and other resources, considering population density, the economy and jobs, cost of living, climate, local culture, crime statistics, transportation, health care, and additional data.² The *Columbian* (May 9, 2007) relates that Clark County gave the area a boost in ranking because it offers a variety of alternative lifestyle, housing, educational, and other options compared to those in Portland, including a different tax structure.

Local government, nonprofit, and faith-based organizations have worked diligently to attempt to meet the needs accompanying such rapid growth, impossible though it has been to keep pace. Community systems intended to assist residents (old and new) who lose their jobs or confront a financial crisis brought on by illness, disability, or other crisis, are deeply challenged by the current recession.

¹ Clark County Washington. Census 2000 Quick Facts, <http://gis.clark.wa.gov/gishome/publications/?pid=quickfacts>

² *Cities Ranked & Rated* Bert Sperling and Peter Sander

Because the county's growth is primarily due to in-migration, the county has proportionately more young people (below the age of 15) and fewer older residents (60 and older) than the state or nation.³

Many community priorities, including access to healthy food, and dental care can have devastating life-long consequences for children and youth if left unattended. At the same time, aging baby boomers are one of our fastest growing populations. The now diminished financial capacity of many boomers will stress community resources in the years ahead. Could we add some specific information on projected baby boomers?

This report for the Clark County Community Action Advisory Board brings together data helpful in understanding community needs to plan a community response.

B. The Community Action Program

The Community Action Program coordinates the planning and administration of a variety of funds and programs including: the Community Services Block Grant, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Weatherization and Rehab, Deed Recording Funds, 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness and Emergency Shelter and Prevention Program (ESPP).

These funds and programs provide essential services and help to support the self-sufficiency of low-income people such as: emergency shelter, energy assistance, homelessness prevention through rent/mortgage assistance and case management, child care, health and dental care, access to services, and family services. Fund allocation is determined by the Community Action Advisory Board and involves input from local service providers.

The Community Action Program allocates over a million dollars per year to community agencies to provide services to homeless and low-income people in Clark County. However, the demand for services far exceeds the available funding.

- The energy assistance program serves only 18% of the people needing assistance.
- Fifty percent of people seeking emergency shelter are turned away.
- The Salvation Army reports a 40% increase in clients needing food assistance, with 25% new clients.

The Community Action Program continually works with the community to help prioritize and alleviate these problems.

³ Washington State Employment Security Department. Clark County Profile January 2008, *Workforce Explorer Washington*, January 10, 2008. Scott Bailey, Regional Labor Economist.
<http://www.workforceexplorer.com/article.asp?PAGEID=94&SUBID=&ARTICLEID=8672&SEGMENTID=0>

C. Purpose

The Community Needs Assessment is done to fulfill the following purposes:

- a. To assist Community Action Advisory Board and key stakeholders in assessing and quantifying the needs and priorities for basic services in the community;
- b. To act as a tool in planning activities, and in obtaining support for implementing those plans;
- c. To make available to the public, information on local poverty conditions as well as available resources to serve those living in poverty;
- d. To provide information to Washington State agencies and the federal government that reflects not only the data of national statistics, but the complexity and challenges of life as experienced in American communities; and
- e. This report complies with state and federal regulations intended to demonstrate responsible use of tax funds to the American public.

D. Data Collection

Two distinct research methods were integrated to produce this report, including secondary data collection and a primary research activity in the form of a consumer survey.

Secondary collection of existing data about Clark County involved consolidation of numerous studies, needs assessments and published reports developed for Clark County in recent years. This phase also involved collection of vital statistics and unpublished or raw data from community organizations. Together, these sources yielded information on health and human services, demographic, and quality of life.

See Appendices for a list of resources consulted for this report.

The second research method was a survey of people receiving a variety of human services in December 2008. This survey was created by the Department of Community Services staff and distributed to local consumers by local service providers including area food banks, shelters, and nonprofit community service providers. The survey provides one snapshot that anecdotally reflects the priorities of local residents.

Survey respondents numbered 167 individuals speaking on behalf of themselves and their families. The survey results are available online at <http://www.clark.wa.gov/community-action/documents.html>

E. Issues for the Community

The following areas were determined to be priority issues from data collected, both through surveys and secondary research.

1. Dental care, as well as health care and prescription assistance
2. Employment
3. Food and other emergency assistance

4. Housing /rental assistance / mortgage counseling / utilities assistance / emergency shelter
5. Money management / budgeting
6. Transportation
7. Information and Referral

The priority issues are also reflected in the calls to 211 info from Clark County.

**Top 10 Requests for Clark County Referrals
Calls to 211 info**

	Issue	2007	2008
1	Rent assistance	709	914
2	Holiday Assistance	176	522
3	Electric Bill	402	518
4	Food Pantries/Food Stamps	395	494
5	Emergency Shelter	423	404
6	Tax Prep	529	386
7	Low Cost Housing	338	372
8	Legal Advocacy	182	211
9	Transportation		176
10	Dental Care	167	172

Additional information is also included about specific populations including:

- a. Seniors
- b. Children and youth

Community partners are currently addressing most of the priority issue areas to varying degrees. We have listed some of that work under *Local Response – an example* in the descriptions below. This is not to recommend additional funding for these programs over others also doing worthy work in the area, but to provide some concrete examples of how we are moving forward.

DENTAL CARE (AS WELL AS HEALTH CARE AND PRESCRIPTION ASSISTANCE)

“Former Surgeon General David Satcher's report, *Oral Health in America*, documents the higher burden of oral diseases and conditions borne by those with relatively low social standing at each stage of life.”⁴

“Poor oral health can be the source of life-threatening and expensive medical problems contributing to an overloaded health-care system. Even those who qualify for government assistance have limited access to care. A majority of the 3,800 active dentists in Washington won't accept Medicaid, saying it doesn't pay enough and is a morass of paperwork. Oral

⁴ Treadwell, Henrie M., Northridge, Mary E. (2007). *Oral Health is the Measure of a Just Society*, Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, Volume 18, Number 1, February 2007, pp. 12-20

infections can lead to health problems as serious as heart attacks and strokes. Having missing teeth interferes with chewing and contributes to a poor diet or malnutrition. And it affects a person's speech and appearance, which makes it harder to find a good job.”⁵

“Nationally, a third of Americans have no dental insurance, and about half of all dental procedures are paid for out-of-pocket, according to the federal government's 2004 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey.”⁶

Local Response – An example

“The Southwest Washington Oral Health Coalition was formed in 1996 to improve the oral health of residents in Clark County. The Coalition's main priorities are prevention of oral diseases and access to care. In 1998, the Southwest Washington Oral Coalition was successful in opening the SWIFT Community Dental Clinic, which later became the Sea Mar Dental Clinic. Currently, the coalition is working to develop a new dental clinic to meet the need for dental care in our community, especially for low-income residents who lack access to dental care.”

Clark County website <http://www.clark.wa.gov/public-health/about/advisory.html>

The need for such a clinic is reflected in the requests for services received by the following dental care providers:

- The Free Clinic of Southwest Washington Dental Program sees 3-5 patients with dental related issues per medical clinic, (four 2.5-hour clinics per week). They receive an average of 50 calls per day seeking dental care.
- Sea Mar Community Health Center provides emergency dental care to 10 patients per day.
- The Oral Health Program of Clark County Public Health receives 2-5 calls per day from people needing dental care.

Basic Health, a state-subsidized health insurance program for the working poor, does not include dental coverage. The program currently covers almost 100,000 Washington residents, with enrollees paying a portion of the monthly premium based on their income. When those rates increase January 2010, the average enrollee will pay \$61.60 per month. The \$150 annual deductible will also increase to \$250 on January 1, 2010; prescription costs will increase as well. These rate increases are being implemented in response to a 43% state budget cut that could have cut tens of thousands working poor out of healthcare coverage. Holding the system steady however, does not take into account that the current recession will likely cause many more people to lose existing insurance and apply to the state for Basic Health coverage.

More information about general healthcare, as well as information about mental healthcare, alcohol and drug treatment, and programs for people with disabilities are available in individual

⁵ Kyung M. Song (2007). *Lack of Dental Care Leaves Poor In Agony*, □Seattle Times Tue, 30 Jan 2007

⁶ Song.

reports or through contacts on the Clark County Washington website, <http://www.clark.wa.gov/>

EMPLOYMENT/EDUCATION

“Sixteen months into the current national recession, joblessness is still headed up with no leveling off in sight. As business and consumer spending have collapsed, more and more people continue to find themselves without work. Between December 2007 and March 2009, Washington State’s seasonally adjusted unemployment rate doubled, going from 4.6 to 9.2 percent. Furthermore, the absolute count of unemployed individuals behind this statistic more than doubled in the same period, climbing from 157,500 (seasonally adjusted) in December 2007 to 327,400 in March 2009. And the economic hardship of joblessness won’t stop at these 327,400 people because most households contain more than one person; and the effects of job loss will in a sense multiply throughout the entire household.”⁷

Clark County's unemployment rate has more than doubled in the past year, for two reasons. First, the county has lost jobs. Preliminary estimates for May 2009 put the loss at 4,600 jobs over the past year, with construction, manufacturing, business services, and finance especially hard hit. All sectors except for health care and government are in the red, and government will likely get there over the next few months as budget cuts come into play beginning in July.

Second, a third of Clark County workers are employed in Portland, and job losses are even larger percentage-wise across the river.

Construction has been an important industry in Clark County, due to rapid population growth in the past. Construction is down 2,400 jobs (20 percent) over the year, due to the collapse of the housing market. Through April, 162 housing permits have been issued in the county, well below last year's pace. For the 1997-2006 period, the average was 1,000 units by this time of year. At this rate, the total for 2009 will be less than 400 units, below even the 1982 recession. Commercial construction is also on the decline, due to lower retail sales (fourth quarter 2008 was 15% below fourth quarter 2007) and the general downturn in economic activity.

The labor market is expected to be weak throughout this year and well into next year and perhaps longer. The two factors that typically drive economic recovery--consumer spending and homebuilding--are hobbled, the first by high debt levels and job losses; the second by the huge inventory of both homes and rentals.⁸ (June 2009)

Only two months later, by August 2009, Clark County unemployment was the highest of Washington’s 39 counties. The statewide rate was 9.2% for that same period. Approximately 8,300 county residents lost jobs between August 2008 and August 2009, bringing the estimated number of unemployed residents to 30,800. Jobs lost included:

⁷ Washington Labor Market Quarterly Review Vol. 33, Number 1 2009

⁸ Scott Bailey, Regional Economist, Washington Employment Security Department. Email response to questions June 2009.

construction down 2,800 jobs; manufacturing shed 1,500 jobs, service sector down 2,100. Education and healthcare both added some positions, but only modest increases that in no way offset the dramatic employment losses. Clark County's job loss is in part a reflection of the Oregon economy where over 235,000 are on unemployment rolls statewide. Oregon's economy, historically very influential in Clark County, lacks the stabilizing effect of many giant employers within the state. Although both have suffered losses, Microsoft and Boeing in King County for instance, have an overall positive effect on Washington's statewide numbers.

A traditional response to layoffs is to seek retraining/education, often in a new field.

The Columbian reports, "Enrollment at the Vancouver college is soaring to unmatched levels, driven by Clark County's unemployment rate and high school students eager to rack up cheap college credits. Through last Friday (*June 19*) summer enrollment is up nearly 37 percent from one year ago.

And early fall enrollment, calculated daily, is 57 percent to 58 percent above the June 2008 pace. That owes entirely to continuing students — new registrations for autumn term don't start until August."⁹

A record 15,000 students began classes in September for the fall term. This number was up 23% from fall 2008. More than \$4.3 million in federal Pell grants had been processed by Clark College at the terms opening day. The college also helped to disburse \$1.2 million in Washington state need grants and provided an additional \$353,000 in scholarships.¹⁰

Many people will need help navigating completing an educational track, others will benefit from assistance in becoming ready to work, including supports such as rent assistance and childcare while first gaining employment, or reemployment.

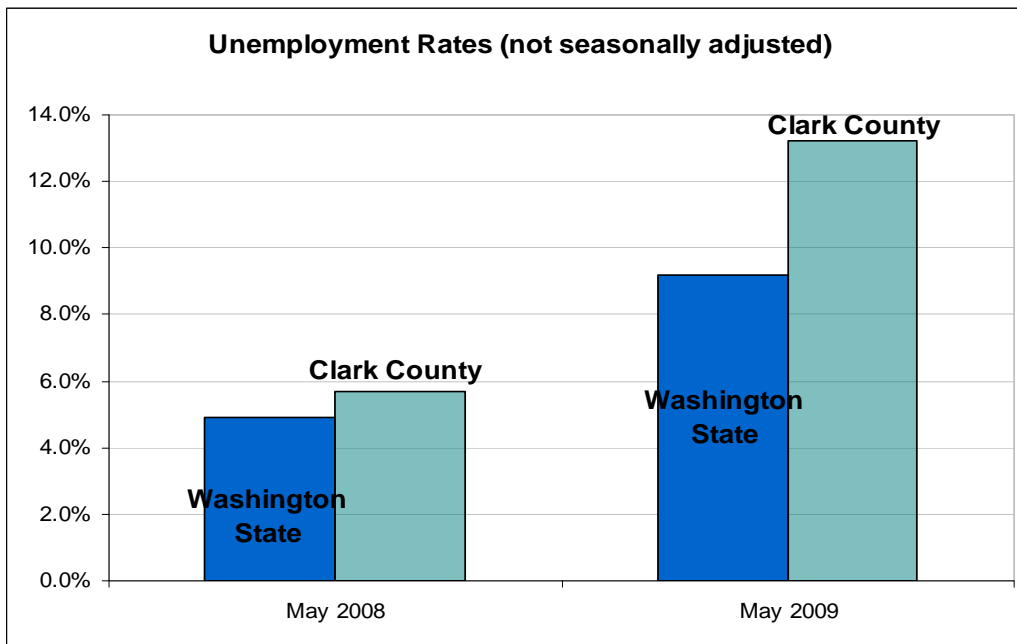
Local Response - An example

- Columbia River Mental Health Homeless Employment Navigator provides comprehensive supported employment services for chronically homeless individuals.
- Partners in Careers/Salvation Army Moving Forward Together provides employment services with a compliment of supports to aid in housing and employment.

Unemployment is a forceful hammer that can destroy the security of housing, healthcare, knowing where your next meal is coming from. Now in the double digits, employment supports that help to insulate vulnerable populations and allow them to move forward are even more critically needed.

⁹ Howard Buck, Enrollment swells at Clark College June 23, 2009 columbian.com

¹⁰ Howard Buck, First, Clark students crack checkbooks The Columbian Sept. 22, 2009



Client comment from survey

“I am currently monitoring my money and working on a budget. I am currently enrolled in Clark College and receive financial aid. I am currently employed with The Columbian as a delivery driver. (I could use some winter sweatshirts for work.)”

FOOD ASSISTANCE

Requests for food assistance through Clark County calls to 211info, the numbers of boxes distributed at local food banks, free and reduced lunch numbers and participation in the Share backpack program tell us that hunger is a significant issue. Our community is stepping up with state and private funds to establish a new, better-equipped food bank. The new food bank - like shelter kitchens, school food backpacks, and preschoolers tummies – will need to be continually refilled.

“While some sites have seen as much as a 40% increase in requests this year over the same period last year, the overall average demand is up 18% for emergency food services throughout the County. It is clear that the loss of income among families is taking its toll on food budgets. People who have never visited an emergency food pantry are coming in for help. Independent nonprofits continue doing what they can with community donations to extend a helping hand to their neighbors in need.” Steven L. Rusk, Business Administrator, The Salvation Army - Clark County Coordination

Food Assistance	Annual	Monthly Grants	% of Population
2007	\$40,133,406	35,711	8.61

WA Department of Social and Health Services

Free & Reduced Lunches	Applications for free/reduced lunch	% Student Population
Clark County		
2007-2008	25,820	35.7%
2008-2009	26,652	36.6%

Share served more than 105,000 hot meals in 2008 through its Hot Meals Program¹¹
 Oregon Food Bank, in association with area food pantries, distributed 101,651 food boxes in Clark County in 2008.¹²

The cost of food, particularly healthy food, is rising at the same time that people have fewer funds to purchase it, and when gas to reach the store is also close to \$3 per gallon.

“The Consumer Price Index (CPI) for all food increased 5.5 percent in 2008, the highest annual increase since 1990, and is forecast to increase 3.0 to 4.0 percent in 2009.

The CPI measures the average change over time in the prices paid by urban consumers for a representative market basket of consumer goods and services. While the all-items CPI measures the price changes for all consumer goods and services, including food, the CPI for food measures the changes in the retail prices of food items only.”¹³

According to the USDA’s Economic Research Service in one-third of low-income households with very low food security, at least one adult in the family worked full time. Households where a job has been lost may tumble from being secure to marginally secure, or marginally secure to low. Over the past decade, the prevalence rate of food insecurity has generally tracked the poverty rate.

Research from Children’s HealthWatch (formerly C-SNAP) and others shows that children and families in marginally food-secure households are at greater risk for health problems, developmental delay, and impaired school performance than children in food-secure households.¹⁴ Three out of five single women with children had trouble putting adequate food on the table in 2007.

¹¹ Council for the Homeless website

¹² Council for the Homeless website

¹³ *United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service*

¹⁴ *Food Insecurity Rates Rise Steeply with Recession, Children’s HealthWatch 2009*
http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/upload/resource/Rise_FI_Brief.pdf

Local Response - An example

- The Fresh Alliance Program retrieves fresh and frozen food items from area groceries for distribution at Clark County Food Banks.
- Share's Backpack program provides a weekend's supply of food to an average of 300 children at 14 schools each week during the school year.

EMERGENCY SHELTER AND HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

Homelessness & Housing in Clark County Fact Check

1. "In a January 30, 2009 one-day "point in time" count, there were 1,159 people who were homeless, 54% of people who are homeless are in families with children.
2. The Council's Emergency Shelter Clearinghouse receives over 1,300 calls per month from people seeking shelter. There were 16,617 total calls received in 2008.
3. In 2008, the Clearinghouse received emergency shelter requests from 4,032 people. Of those needing shelter, 73% were individuals in families, and of the total number, 35% were children.
4. A minimum wage earner in 2009 (earning \$8.55 per hour) could afford monthly rent of no more than \$444.60.
5. An SSI recipient (receiving \$674 per month) could afford monthly rent of no more than \$202.00 in 2009.
6. Fair Market Rent in 2009 is \$623 for a studio, \$713 for a 1-bedroom, and \$874 for a 2-bedroom apartment.
7. The estimated wait for a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher is 5 years."¹⁵
8. Energy Assistance dollars assist only 18% of the eligible population.¹⁶
9. Clark County ranked the highest of any Washington county on foreclosure rates for the first quarter 2009 and continues into 2009 as one of the highest foreclosure property counties in the state.
 - a. "Clark County foreclosures totaled 1,301 in the three months ending in March, compared with 737 foreclosure filings during the first quarter of 2008. That meant one in every 269 homes was in some stage of foreclosure, according to RealtyTrack, a California service that tracks real estate data."¹⁷
 - b. Clark County has a high foreclosure rate. Foreclosures nationally and locally are at a high level and will likely stay high for some time to come as the labor market continues to be weak and a number of mortgages reset to higher monthly payments over the next two years.¹⁸

¹⁵ Points 1-7: Council for the Homeless website

¹⁶ Tif Rock, Clark County Department of Community Services

¹⁷ Troubled homeowners: Get help, The Columbian Friday, May 1, 2009 Cami Joner

¹⁸ Baily email

Local Response - An example

- The Janus Youth Assistance Creating Options for Residential Needs (ACORN) Program assists young people transitioning out of foster care or being released from juvenile facilities to prevent youth homelessness.

The recent Council for the Homeless publication, *Opening Our Community's Doors: Clark County 10-Year Homeless Plan, 2008 Report Card* is a complete report on the concerns of area homelessness. The following table, from that report, compiles information from the community database maintained by Council for the Homeless. Eleven community agencies providing services to those who are homeless or at-risk-of-homelessness participate in this collective system. Tracking access and requests for services helps to clarify the picture of need.

SHELTER COUNT 2008				
# Singles not in Families	# Adults in Families	# Children in Families	# of Families	% Families with Children
1,118	254	343	198	15.0%
TURNAWAYS				
# of Turnaways		# Children in Families	# of Families	% Families with Children
4,974		684	1,132	18.5%

Clark County has a history of collaboration to work on community concerns. The Coalition of Service Providers for the Homeless (The Coalition) is a group of nearly 50 nonprofits, faith-based groups and government agencies that provide services for people without homes. It is one of the largest and most visible examples of a community that comes together to make needed changes.

Client comment from survey

"I waited for Share Shelter space with my little girl for months. We were sleeping in a closet. I have (now) accomplished so many things here, with the Big help of staff."

Money Management

As of August 2009, Clark County lead the state in foreclosures for seven consecutive months. Community Housing Resource Center reports that demand had doubled for "Credit Smart" classes and credit repair services over a year ago. Referrals from former clients, nonprofit and public agency partners as well as lenders and realtors, have created a waiting period of up to three weeks to receive a counseling appointment. The Center no longer does 'marketing' or outreach efforts as they are pressed to capacity to keep up with referrals.

Demand for mortgage default services has quadrupled. Stimulus funds have been used to hire a second financial counselor who will assist the Center by providing credit repair and mortgage default prevention counseling services.

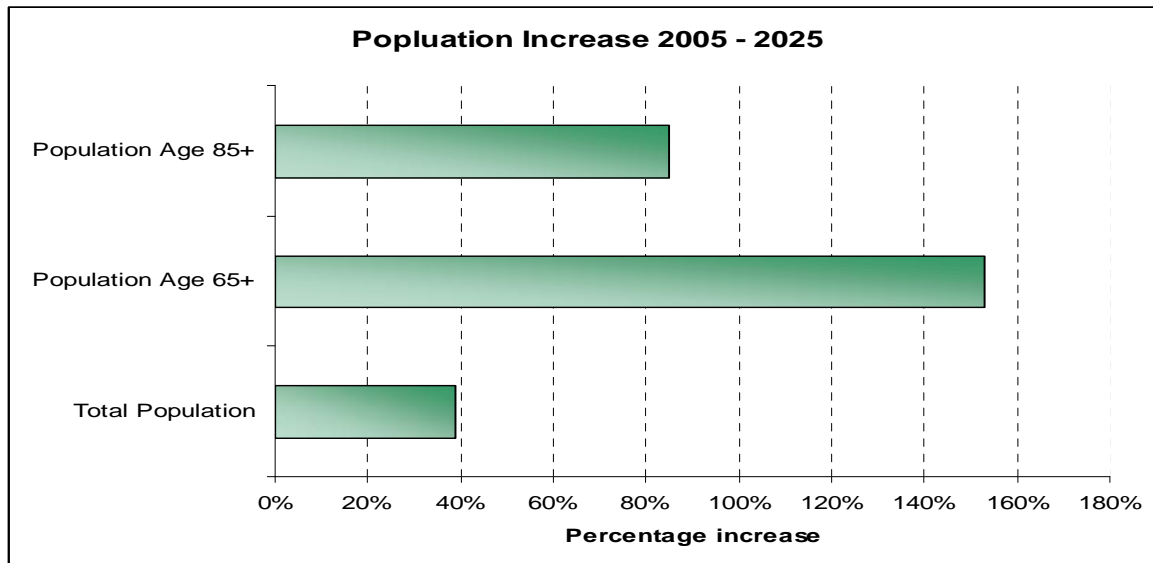
A weekly mortgage default prevention workshops is attended by 30 or more people each week. Consumers are required to attend this workshop first and counseling appointments are not scheduled until all required documents are gathered and copied. It usually takes two weeks before clients can be seen for a one-on-one counseling appointment.¹⁹

Populations

Seniors

The aging of the baby boomers will put increasing and unrelenting pressure on a wide variety of services. Many people whose employment now places them above the poverty line are unprepared to maintain that status upon retirement or in the case of disability or health situation that does not allow them to continue working.

According to the 2000 US Census the median age in Clark County was 34.2 years.



Children and Youth

The poverty rate for America's elderly (people over 65) did increase significantly in 2007, to 9.7 percent, or roughly one out of every ten seniors. But the poverty rate for minors (aged 17 and under) is 18 percent, or more than one out of every six children in America.²⁰

¹⁹ Email message from Community Housing Resource Center Sept. 2009

²⁰ Source: *Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2007*. U.S. Census Bureau

E. Summary of Results

For the majority of Clark County residents, our community is a wonderful place to live, work, and lead a healthy life. However, this report shows not only are there are an increasing number of our fellow residents experiencing a significantly different life here – but that a very many of us are much closer to the edge than we suspected.

We hope that from this needs assessment the community can build on its strengths and focus its ongoing efforts on the key concerns experienced by people living here.

Client comment from survey

“Overall I have found the services, volunteers and programs very helpful and I’m thankful. I will try to give back when I can.”