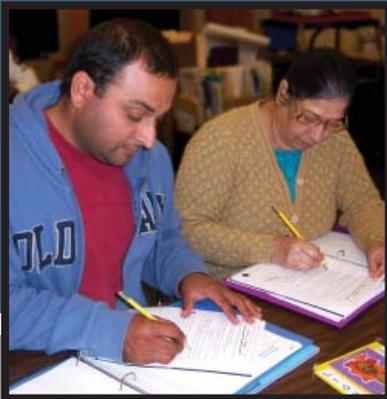


Skagit Prosperity Report

A Community Needs Assessment

2013



A study of needs and resources for low-income people in Skagit County, Washington

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Released February 2014

Commissioned by



Study Design and Reporting by Cornerstone Strategies, Inc.

Funding for this report was made possible by:



Study design and reporting by  **cornerstone**
STRATEGIES

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities and makes Skagit County - and America - a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

www.CommunityActionSkagit.org

Preface

In commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Community Action network, and our own 35th, Community Action of Skagit County is proud of our history of stabilizing lives and equipping people to exit poverty. We are also becoming increasingly aware of our historical responsibility, wherein Community Action was given a “catalytic mission to make the entire community more responsive to the needs and interests of the poor” (1970 Office of Economic Opportunity’s “Instruction 6320-1”).

That’s quite a responsibility.

Another way to put this is that after we equip a family to exit poverty, the community needs to be ready to receive them. If not, our work is likely for naught. Therefore, it’s our job to study local needs – and work with our community to solve them.

We thus ground our collaborative approach to ending poverty on this study, the ***Skagit Prosperity Report: a Community Needs Assessment***.



As we conduct these studies every four years, it is worth noting that our last Needs Assessment was completed in 2009 as our country was in the midst of the worst recession since the Great Depression. This version, though at the end of the Great Recession, is also nestled in a period of stagnating wages, stubborn unemployment, polarized politics, and historically high and growing income inequality.

That said, 2014 marks the exponential growth of communitywide approaches to creating a more prosperous Skagit County for all. You’ll see that we’ve organized this report to roughly correspond to the areas of need and collaborative work identified in Skagit’s “One

Community One Voice” initiative, now sponsored by our friends at United Way.

Why? Solving poverty requires a team approach. It calls for a more common vision. Unifying conversations. And of course guts, determination, hope and more than a dash of crazy optimism.

You may notice that for the first time we’ve included a focus group with the economic sector, for local poverty cannot be solved without local living wage jobs, as well as a Mixtec focus group, an indigenous and marginalized population. Because the Latino and Mixtec populations are growing, it is especially important to listen to their perspectives in understanding the dimensions of poverty in Skagit County.

Please also notice that for the first time we asked low income community members their view on what prosperity would look like in Skagit County.

It seems fitting to begin this report there – not with the problem, but with the vision of what Skagit can become, before looking deeply at the road blocks in our path to getting there.

William B. Henkel

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Executive Director

Acknowledgments

We greatly appreciate the generous support of the organizations that contributed funding to help make this report possible, including United Way of Skagit County, Economic Development Association of Skagit County, Northwest Workforce Council, Skagit County, and the three local hospital districts – Skagit Regional Health, Island Hospital, and United General Hospital. We are also grateful for in-kind support from PeaceHealth - St Joseph Medical Center of their staff-person who skillfully translated the survey tool into Spanish.

We also express gratitude to:

- ❖ The many individuals and families who completed survey questionnaires, as well as the organizations who encouraged families to participate in the survey, and who as well provided updated Recent Developments for their programs,
- ❖ Stakeholders for their valuable insights into vetting and refining the survey tool,
- ❖ The Latina/o Advisory Committee for translating Spanish responses, and to the Migrant Leaders Club youth who helped with child care during focus groups and conducted interviews at food banks,
- ❖ Human Service Providers for their input about gaps and needs in the community service structure and, along with Leadership Skagit alumni, for their thoughtful responses to the new “Prosperity Questions”,
- ❖ Nina Datskiy and Lucia Morales, Community Action staff, and Emily John-Martin, volunteer, for helping organize and recruit families to participate in the Slavic and Mixtec focus groups and for assisting with interpreting, and to Vitaliya Melnik, scribe for the Slavic focus group,
- ❖ Community and business leaders who participated in the Economic Vitality Focus Group, and our Mixtec and Slavic friends who gave up a Saturday morning to share about their joys and struggles in their adopted country,
- ❖ Liz Jennings for training staff and volunteers on coding, and to Harlyn Meyer and Debra Lancaster who coded over 700 “Prosperity” responses,
- ❖ Skagit State Bank & North Coast Credit Union for providing gift cards, and Wells Fargo for providing a gift basket, as survey respondent raffle incentives, and
- ❖ Community Action of Skagit County staff and volunteers, and other community volunteers who helped in a number of ways – encouraged clients to complete surveys, provided outreach in homes, food banks, Project Homeless Connect, and DSHS, data-entered prosperity responses, and provided cover design.

Lastly, this report could not have become a reality were it not for the professional oversight provided by Greg Winter, our Research Consultant of Cornerstone Strategies, Inc.

For online access to this report in Executive Summary or full report format, please visit the Community Action of Skagit County website at www.communityactionskagit.org.

Organizations interested in obtaining specialized reports may be arranged with Cornerstone Strategies at gregwinte@gmail.com.

With Appreciation,
Karen Parnell, Project Director

Executive Summary

Introduction

Community Action of Skagit County, working with the support of other service providers, local government and the private sector, produces a comprehensive community assessment for the following purposes:

- ✓ Explore and illustrate the dimensions of poverty in Skagit County,
- ✓ Provide a strategic planning tool for agencies, organizations and individuals seeking to confront poverty in Skagit County, and
- ✓ Present a locally significant and reliable study for use by local communities and funders and to attract resources necessary to combat poverty in Skagit County.

Who was surveyed?

Overall, 704 households responded to the low-income household survey. These households include a total of 2,233 persons. During a 12-week period in the summer and fall of 2013, this project intensively sampled as many unduplicated households as possible from human and health service sites throughout the county. In addition, we conducted surveys of service provider staff, community leaders, and held focus groups with two ethnic groups under-represented in the survey: members of Mixtec and Slavic communities.

Client perspectives on prosperity

New to the assessment this year, we asked respondents from low-income households to tell us about their barriers to prosperity and also asked for their suggestions for local actions that would improve people’s lives.

The “word cloud” below depicts words used by low-income respondents to describe their barriers to prosperity. Poor financial situations, few employment opportunities, housing expenses, challenging health conditions and education challenges were the most common barriers.



The next “word cloud” depicts the words used by low-income respondents to describe their suggestions for actions our community should take to improve people’s lives.

The most common categories of actions included those that would increase opportunities for affordable housing, living wage employment, education and affordable health care, especially dental care. Respondents also suggested the community should be more respectful of low-income persons, persons of color, and people with disabilities.



What were the surveyed households like?

- ☐ **Residency:** 45% of households live in Mount Vernon. The rest live in small cities or unincorporated Skagit County. 77% have lived in Skagit County for four years or longer.
- ☐ **Family status:** The average household size of the survey sample was 3.4 persons and the median household size was three persons. 59% of households included children, and 37% included children 0-5 years old. 19% of households included at least one senior (60 years or older).
- ☐ **Employment and income:** 60% of client households include wage earners. Spanish speakers are more likely to have income from wages (82%); other common sources of income include Social Security (18%), SSI (15%), TANF (14%), and SSDI (8%).

Half (50%) of client households report less than \$1,000 in total monthly household income; 69% have household incomes that are at or below the Federal Poverty Level.

- ☐ **Race and Ethnicity:** 58% of respondents are white (non-Hispanic), 4% Native American, 2% African-American, <1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, <1% Asian, and 1% represent other racial heritage; 37% of all respondents are of Hispanic ethnicity.
- ☐ **Language:** 30% usually communicate in Spanish; 6% usually speak another non-English language.
- ☐ **Veterans:** 15% of respondent households have at least one veteran member.

Listening to the experiences of diverse communities

Mixtec focus group: In 2008, the Washington State Farmworker Housing Trust Fund estimated that nearly one in four farmworkers (23%) in four Western Washington counties (including Skagit) are indigenous Mexicans (most from the state of Oaxaca) with a distinct culture and history.

Eight persons from seven Mixtec community households participated in a focus group designed to learn more about their experiences as members of the Skagit County community, and their needs and suggestions for improvements in the delivery of social services to members of their community. During these discussions we learned:

- ✓ Overall, members of this community want more respect for their unique needs for culturally appropriate services from health and human service organizations, especially in terms of language and interpreter services.
- ✓ Food: One participant stated proudly, “No one in our community goes hungry.” They rely on food banks a great deal and would like a better selection of the basic foods they use at home to make healthy meals.
- ✓ Child care: some families who work in the fields find it hard to access licensed child care during the hours they need it. They also noted significant challenges working with DSHS to obtain child care assistance.
- ✓ Housing: Two major problems noted were the high cost and low availability of housing suitable for large families, and the discrimination they encounter working with some property management companies.
- ✓ Health: Health care providers do not have staff who can speak Mixtec, which is a barrier to receiving high quality care. People who are Mixtec often have no insurance, making health care very expensive. Some feel that there is low awareness among members of their community about diabetes.

Slavic focus group: Oregon and Washington added more new immigrants born in Russia and Ukraine than in any other part of the country between 1990 and 2005. The more recent Slavic immigrants and refugees from Russia and the countries of Eastern Europe included Jews and Evangelical Christians, as well as a growing number of non-religious immigrants as religious persecution faded with the fall of the Soviet Union. So the Slavic community in Oregon and Washington is rich in diversity and includes many

languages, cultures, countries of origin, and religious backgrounds.

Participants of this focus group included attendees of the Slavic Gospel Church (representing 175 – 200 people), which meets at Bethany Covenant Church in Mount Vernon. Participants included five families. Three families have children ranging from one-year old through young adults. One family has 10 children with one more on the way. Length of time in the U.S. ranged from one to 10 years. All were in the U.S. legally as refugees. Here is what they told us:

- ✓ Refugees often have a difficult transition to life here, especially because they have left professional careers from where they fled and have to start all over here, with the language barrier becoming their biggest challenge. This initial period of struggle has caused some to want to return to their country of origin, but as they persevere, they become more successful and their children do well here.
- ✓ Food: Participants reported that the food stamp assistance they receive is not enough, so they also rely on food banks and WIC. Similar to the comments made by members of the Mixtec community, these participants noted that children at school are not used to eating the “American” food, and may not eat it, and may go home hungry instead of eating. The participants liked the idea of participating in a community garden program.
- ✓ Child care: The women would like to raise their own children the way they want to, and have benefits for large families that would support this practice. One participant mother said that she loves staying at home caring for her children and feels she has done a very good job of raising them -- better than if someone else had cared for them.
- ✓ Housing: When they first come to the U.S., often they stay with family, but sometimes the host family’s landlord tells them that they cannot have that many people living in their apartment, and they are forced to find another place to live while not having the finances for it. Participants felt it would be a good idea to have a place where immigrants can live for at least a little while that is very inexpensive (e.g. \$200 per month) during their initial transition to living in Skagit County.
- ✓ Health: Participants said they can get DSHS medical coupons, but often cannot find a clinic that accepts medical coupons.

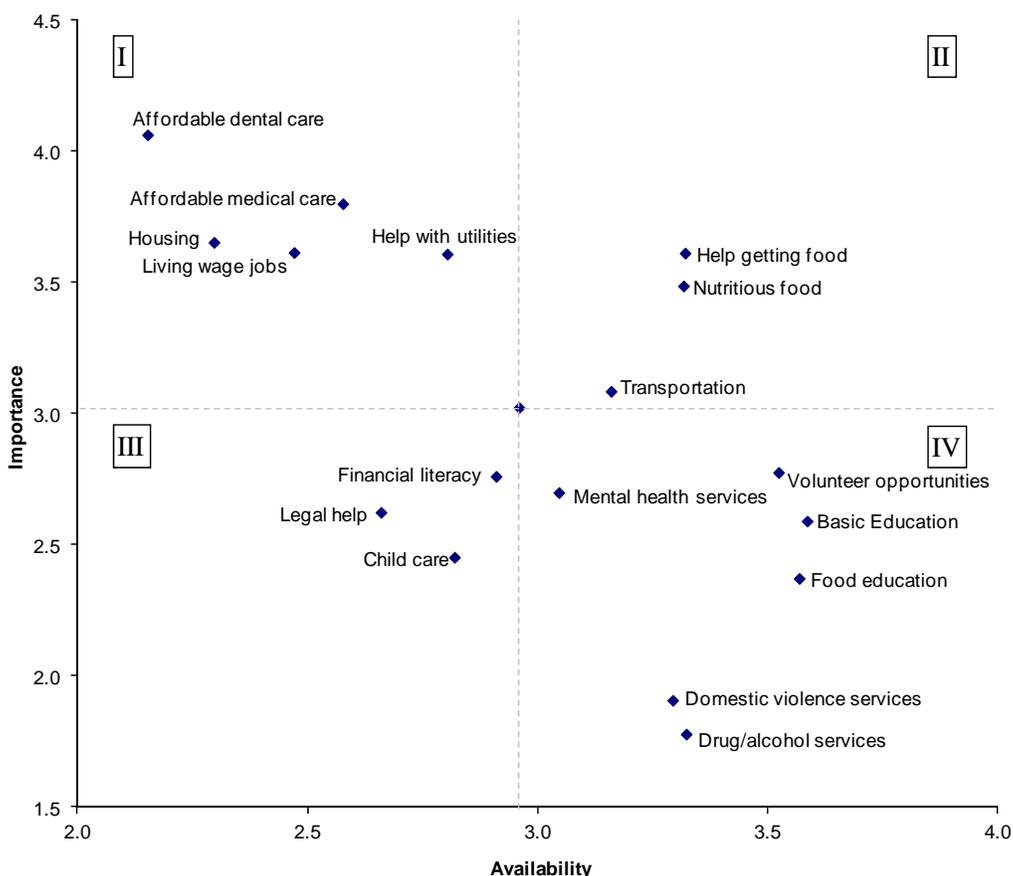
Low-income service gaps. Low-income client survey respondents rated both the *importance* and the *availability* of 17 categories of services for low-income people in Skagit County. Each respondent rated the importance and availability of services to his/her own household.

Gap analysis using importance-availability coordinate system. Because respondents rated each of the 17 services on five-point scales,¹ one way to analyze these data is to calculate the average *importance* and *availability* scores for each service. These data form the basis of an *importance-availability* coordinate rating system (see figure on following page). The average importance and availability ratings were calculated and plotted on a graph. The lines making up the “crosshairs” of each graph represent the average importance score and the average availability score for each group of respondents.

The importance-availability charts are divided into quadrants that rate the services as follows:

- Quadrant I* Services that rank above average in importance, but below average in availability
- Quadrant II* Above average in importance and availability
- Quadrant III* Below average in importance and availability
- Quadrant IV* Below average in importance, but above average in availability

Individuals and organizations planning for future services may want to pay particular attention to the services that appear in the first quadrant (labeled “I”). These are the services that, on average, both groups agree are very important to low-income households and hard to access



¹ Importance scale ranged from 1, for “not important” to 5, for “extremely important”; Availability scale ranged from 1, for “very hard to get” to 5, for “very easy to get”

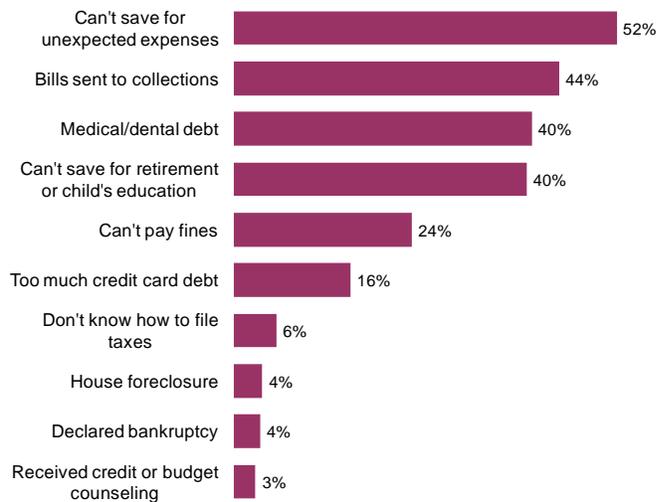
This should not be interpreted to mean that the other services are not worthy of attention. Certainly there are many households in dire need of these services and not enough resources to satisfy that need. However, the services that appear in quadrant I are those for which the gap between need and supply is the largest, based on low-income respondent perceptions.

What were the high priority needs of low-income households?

- High priority needs with lower availability include affordable housing, medical care, dental care, home heating assistance and living wage jobs. These are the same service gaps indicated in the 2005 and 2009 community assessments.
- Compared to other respondents, those who speak Spanish identified the same service gaps. However, they also tend to give adult basic education a higher importance rating.
- Seniors (60 years old and older) also identified the same five service gaps in this survey and in 2009; however, in 2005 they only identified affordable housing and dental care.
- Service providers agree with clients: affordable housing, affordable medical and dental care, and living wage jobs are priority needs with low availability. They would add to that list transportation and mental health treatment services.

What were the findings based on categories of need?

Asset Building and Financial Stability: Choosing from a list of ten types of money problems clients may have experienced in the 12 months prior to the survey, respondents most frequently reported not being able to save for unexpected expenses (52%) or retirement (40%), having bills sent to collections (44%); and having debt from medical or dental care (40%).



By comparison, in 2009, 67% reported having bills sent to collections, 52% had debt from medical or dental services, and 37% were struggling to pay fines.

- 44% of clients needed legal assistance in the past year, and only half of them were able to get the assistance they needed. The most common types of legal assistance needed were related to housing (38%), job issues (34%), family law (34%), consumer debt (31%), public benefits (27%), domestic violence (20%), and immigration (19%).

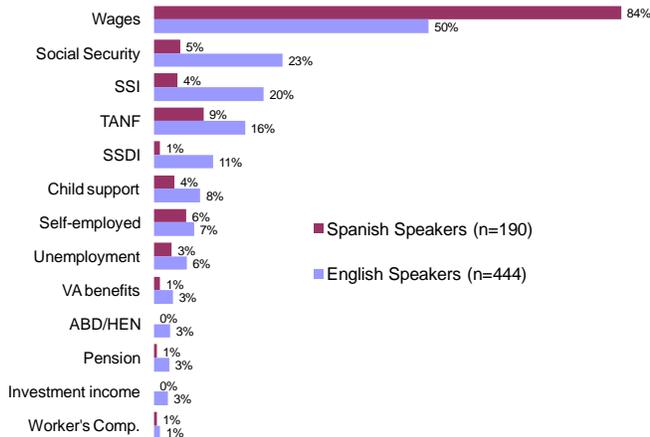
Recent Developments in Asset Building and Financial Stability

- The newly formed Skagit Asset Building Coalition assisted with the launch of Skagit's Bank On North Sound initiative in 2013. Bank On North Sound engages local financial institutions to provide products to assist unbanked and under-banked community members to establish relationships with financial institutions.
- DSHS offered STEPS (Steps to Economic & Personal Success) in 2013, and hopes to offer it in 2014, along with Life Skills classes.
- Catholic Community Service's Family Immigration Program moved to a downtown location in 2013. Spanish and Russian-speaking individuals can access family immigration and citizenship help, including family reunification & petitions, immigrant visa and adjustment of status applications, and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Service to renew Lawful Permanent Resident cards, work permits and other documents is also provided. www.ccsww.org/clis



Employment: More than half of survey respondents (59%) said that getting or keeping a good job had been a problem for their household (compared to 65% in 2009).

- Spanish speaking respondents were much more likely to report earned income and less likely to report all other types of income.

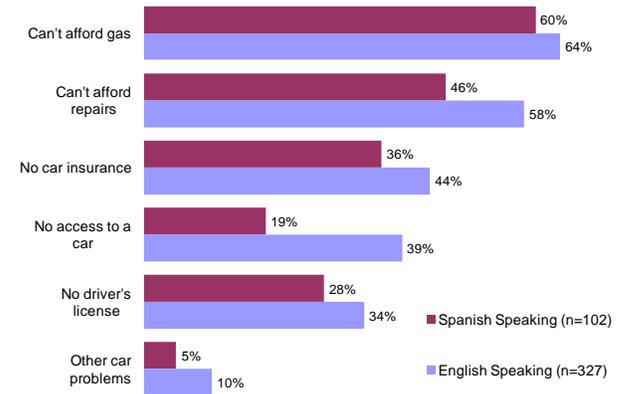


Employment Support – Child Care: Overall, 17% of respondents reported they had problems getting or keeping adequate child care services in the past 12 months. Of those who do find it hard to get or keep child care, more than half (58%) say it is hard to find affordable services. Some also find it difficult to find child care services that fit their needs, such as evening (26%), weekend (26%), and part-time (10%) care. Care for infants (23%) and children with special needs (3%) were hard to find for some survey respondents. It is notable that fewer respondents reported problems accessing these special child care services in 2013 compared to 2009. For example, in 2009, 23% of parents who reported problems getting child care said special needs child care was hard to access; however, this year, only 3% reported that difficulty.

Employment Support – Transportation: About two out of three respondents (64%) reported that transportation had been a problem in the past year. Respondents were asked which of six car problems their household had experienced. Affordability was the main barrier to car transportation, with majorities unable to afford gas (63%) or car repairs (54%). 42% of respondents did not have car insurance, and one in three (32%) said they either don't have a driver's license or it is suspended.

It is notable that the percentage of respondents who had any car trouble was higher in 2013 compared to 2009, and within this group of respondents, the prevalence of every one of these specific car problems was also higher.

- Spanish speaking clients were significantly less likely to report having had a transportation problem in the past year (50% compared to 72% of non-Spanish speakers). When asked about specific types of transportation problems, Spanish speakers were less likely to report all six car problems.



Recent Developments in Employment Services

- Community Action has served TANF clients with WorkFirst's Community Jobs since 2007, adding three new training options since 2009. Enrollment decreases of 42% since 2009 are due to state adherence to a 60-month lifetime TANF limit, program sanctions, and the improving economy.
- Since the 2008-10 recession when Skagit employers lost 9% of its workforce, WorkSource notes an increase in services to businesses seeking to hire employees.
- The Latino Business Retention and Expansion Program at EDASC supports Latino entrepreneurs and business owners with business start-up and expansion. In 2013, it accessed \$255,000 in loans for Latino small businesses, supported 35 business start-ups, and partnered in creating and/or saving 102 jobs.
- In 2012, Community Action's Volunteer Lawyer Program responded to a high number of inquiries to assist the county's undocumented immigrant population access "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals" (DACA allows certain youth limited immigration protection and work authorization). A coalition of partners assisted over 500 people were assisted in applying for DACA.
- The new Friendship House Café will operate Hunger to Hope, a new education and employment program, training residents in basic cooking skills and helping them get jobs. A successful local chef will provide oversight.

Recent Developments in Employment Support Services – Child Care

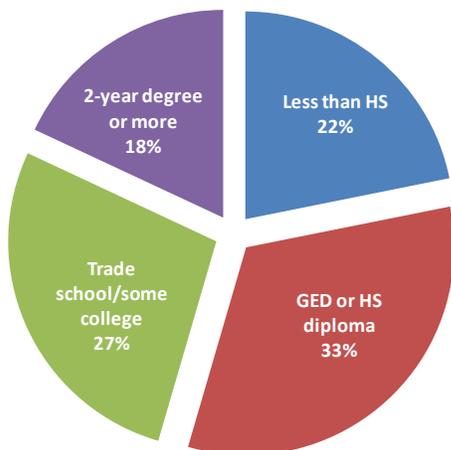
- ❑ 552 families accessed monthly DSHS Working Connections Child Care in 2013 (609 in 2009). Users must now access a state call center to obtain assistance.
- ❑ Skagit’s licensed child care centers totaled 111 in 2013, a 34% drop from 2009. This decrease is due to the recession’s effect on small businesses, a shift to large centers, and families finding less costly child care.
- ❑ Skagit YMCA served 930 children in 2013 through four school districts. SVC’s Early Learning plans to open a campus center in 2015 in partnership with the YMCA.

Recent Developments in Employment Support Services – Transportation

- ❑ Service providers issue limited gas, auto repair, and SKAT vouchers. Rising gas prices contributed to SKAT use, especially by SVC and high school students, Community Action clients, cross-county line commuters, and sales & service industry employees.
- ❑ SKAT services have increased substantially since 2009, going from 13 to 20 fixed routes and from 37 to 49 van pools; fixed route ridership increased 48%. Plus, connections improved between Sedro Woolley and MV, and MV/Everett in 2012. All of this with no fare increase since 2008.

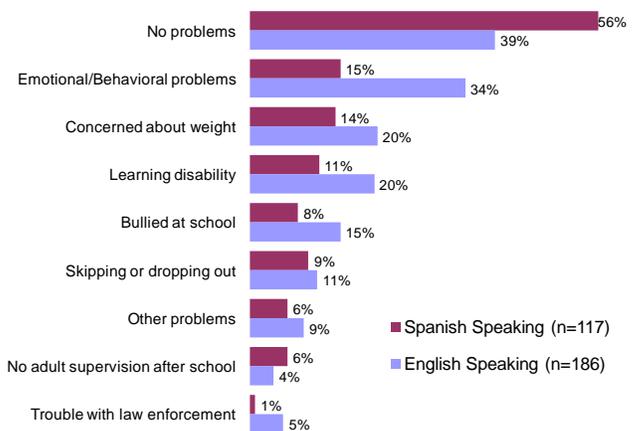


Education and Literacy: Less than half (45%) of respondents over 25 years old have some form of post-secondary education. Some have attended a trade school or some college education (27%), or have a two-year degree or higher (18%). About one in five survey respondents do not have a high school diploma or GED (22%).



- ❑ Respondents were asked which free literacy services they would like to participate in to improve certain skills.
 - ✓ 50% want to improve their computer skills.
 - ✓ 38% would like to improve their finance and budgeting skills.
 - ✓ 36% want to obtain their high school equivalency degree (GED).
 - ✓ 30% want to improve their job search skills.
 - ✓ Spanish speakers were much more likely to say they wanted to improve their English and to learn about citizenship, improve reading and writing, and get a GED. They were less likely to report wanting to learn about budgeting skills.

- ❑ **Youth problems:** Respondents with children were asked what problems they had experienced with their children. About half (46%) of respondents reported that they had no problems with their children (down from 53% in 2009). The most common problems were emotional/behavioral problems at 26%. Learning disabilities are an issue for 16% of respondents. Also, 18% of parents said they worry about their children’s weight or eating habits. The next most common challenges were bullying at school (11%) and skipping or dropping out of school (10%). Spanish speaking respondents compared to English speakers were more likely to report no problems with their children. And they were less likely to report most types of problems.



- ❑ **Communication:** Most respondents (72%) have a cell phone, and only 31% have access to a working landline phone at home (compared to 55% in 2009). About half (51%) have home internet access. 30% say they get a newspaper at home (23% in 2009), and 29% have Public Access TV at home.

Recent Developments in Education and Literacy Services

- ❑ Community Action's Adult Education Program offers professional development to staff and 25 volunteer instructors, with a new focus on integrating technology into its curriculum and increased computer access in classes.
- ❑ Community Action's High School Equivalency Completion Program, staffed by volunteers and an AmeriCorps member, partners with WorkSource. It is addressing changes in the new 2014 GED test by incorporating computer skills and higher order thinking skills into student preparation.
- ❑ In 2013 Skagit Valley College's (SVC) Human Services program added an Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) option, "Introduction to Human Services", and supports students whose first language may not be English.
- ❑ Established in 2010, Northwest Career & Technical Academy partners with Skagit and Whatcom County school districts and SVC. Operating as an extension of high schools, it provides tuition-free job skills training to students ages 16-21. Students attend year-long classes, earning credits and certification.
- ❑ Goodwill Job Training and Education Center moved to a larger site in 2010. Enrollment has since doubled. A variety of free classes are offered, including help in resume preparation, job search assistance and on-line job applications.
- ❑ Skagit Islands Head Start (SIHS): Federal Sequester cuts reduced Early Head Start slots from 101 to 77 in 2013. Other impacts included eliminating 8 positions, closing one site, and reorganizing facilities. The 2014 federal budget restores sequester cuts to its programming.
- ❑ WA Reading Corps/AmeriCorps Program, which served struggling readers in elementary schools and early learning centers, was not funded for 2013-14. Volunteer-based alternatives are being pursued.
- ❑ SVC, in partnership with Dept. of Corrections, Skagit County, the jails, and Community Action, has developed and staffed the "Community Integration Project" with the goal of reducing recidivism by giving ex-offenders a college pathway.



Economic Vitality

If 71% of occupations will not pay enough for a family of four to prosper, how will families make it?
 –Economic Vitality Focus Group participant

Community Action convened a group of local economic development experts to assess the current state of the economy and to hear their suggestions for increasing economic vitality in Skagit County. For the purpose of that convening, "economic vitality" was defined as a robust local economy that provides more living wage jobs.

Economic indicators seem to be heading in the right direction. Locally, the economy has "turned the corner" from job losses to job creation. Still, the recession will have long-lasting impacts, with young people possibly suffering the worst impacts, and wages not keeping pace with rising costs (e.g. housing costs).

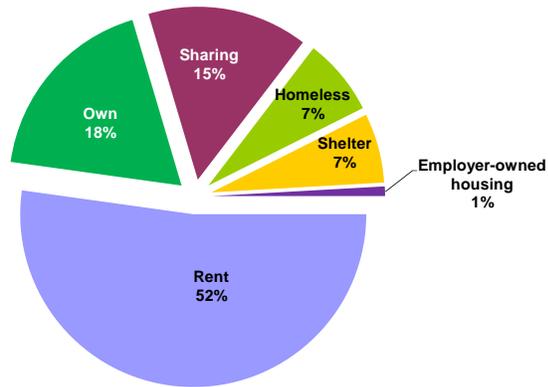
Examples of new initiatives and opportunities to improve economic vitality in Skagit County include:

- ✓ City of Mount Vernon's technology initiatives, including its fiber optic infrastructure.
- ✓ Skagit Valley's new Innovation Partnership Zone designation that will create new business opportunities and jobs by commercializing WSU agriculture research.
- ✓ Skagit Valley College is "ramping up" its employability skills to ensure that curriculum is preparing students with the soft skills required to be successful in the workplace.
- ✓ Skagit Council of Governments is working with many community partners to develop a regional economic development strategy that "will strengthen the region's ability to attract quality businesses and support those that already exist. The development strategy will allow the group to direct resources toward those industries and initiatives with the greatest ability to lift our local economy."

A participant summarized the outlook and hope for creating a better environment for economic vitality:

We need to create a shared vision. Building jobs in our community and valuing the beautiful place we live does not have to be an "either/or" proposition. Creating a shared vision for our community through leadership of EDASC, Skagit Valley College, United Way, Community Action, Chambers of Commerce, and Council of Governments would go a long way toward helping us make decisions and build the kind of community we are after. We can respect our environment, increase clean manufacturing, build our tourism industry, and support new neighborhoods.

Housing: About half of survey respondents (52%) rent their housing. Another 18% are homeowners. The remaining survey respondents currently share housing with another household (15%), live in transitional housing or an emergency shelter (7%), are homeless (7%), or live in employer-provided housing (1%).



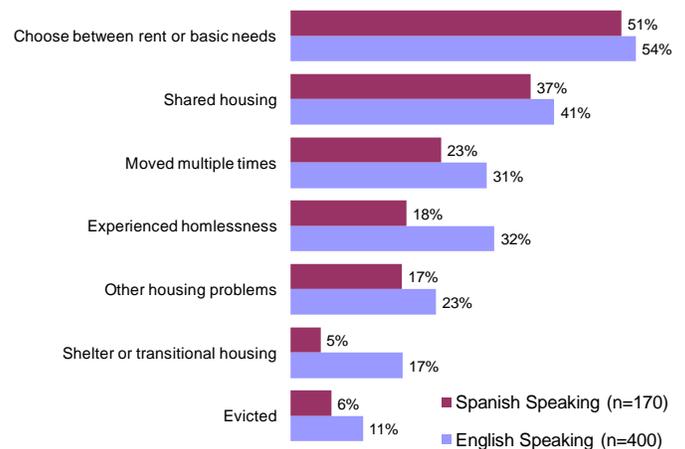
- ❑ Compared to 2009, fewer respondents reported that bad credit makes it hard to find a place to rent (34% this year; 54% in 2009). The affordability of renting or owning a home were also common barriers to stable housing that were less frequently reported this year:
 - ✓ 35% “can’t afford to rent” (48% in 2009)
 - ✓ 27% “can’t afford to buy” (41% in 2009)
- ❑ 65% of renters and 53% of homeowners pay more than 30% of their gross income per month for rent or mortgage. The housing affordability indicators for renting were similar to those in 2009; however, for owning, the affordability indicators were significantly lower, meaning, in this year’s sample, owning was more affordable this year compared to 2009.

Housing costs	Renters	Owners
Mean cost	\$ 553	\$ 708
Median cost	\$ 550	\$ 687
Mean cost burden (% of income spent on rent or mortgage)	46%	37%
Median cost burden	40%	33%
Cost burden >30% of income	65%	53%

- ❑ About half of respondents (53%) said that in the last year they had to choose between paying the rent or mortgage and other basic

needs. 39% have had to share housing to avoid homelessness and many have moved multiple times in the past year (28%). About one in four respondents have experienced homelessness in the past year (27%). These findings are essentially the same as in 2009.

- ❑ Spanish speaking households were less likely to have experienced each of these negative housing situations in the past year. Most significantly, they were less likely to have experienced homelessness, or have stayed in an emergency or transitional shelter.



Recent Developments in Housing Services

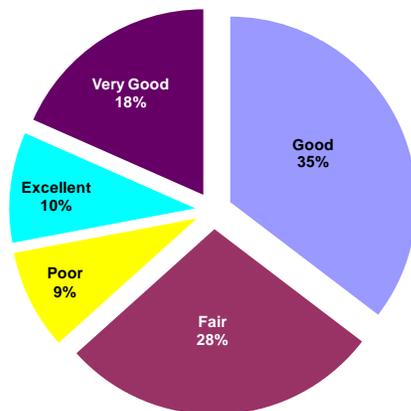
- ❑ County Commissioners appointed a Housing Affordability Committee in 2010, and approved a county-wide Housing Affordability Strategy in 2013.
- ❑ Skagit County updated its 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in 2011. To implement a high priority in that plan, a coordinated entry system opened in 2013. The new Housing Resource Center at Community Action offers central access for homeless housing help.
- ❑ Skagit’s 2012 Point-In-Time Homeless Count included 1,287 persons (48% were children).
- ❑ Using new VASH vouchers, Community Action assisted Skagit’s Housing Authority to place 25 chronically homeless veterans in 2011.
- ❑ Supportive Services for Veterans Families program began operating in a five-county region in 2011 to provide housing services to homeless veterans and their families.
- ❑ Legislative action in 2011 created Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) funding to ensure that single adults, temporarily unable to work and who have no income, maintain safe housing.

- ❑ A Re-entry Program partnership between a landlord, Department of Corrections, Community Action and Skagit County Community Services assists ex-offenders with three months of transitional housing as they exit prison.
- ❑ Home Trust of Skagit (HTS), formed in 2009 by Community Action, achieved independent nonprofit status in 2011. HTS manages housing in La Conner and works with multiple partners to create affordable homeownership in a community land trust model across the county.

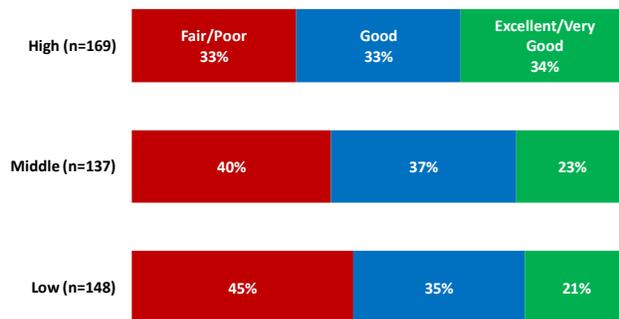


Health: A majority of respondents rate their general health positively, reporting good (35%), very good (18%), or excellent (10%) health status. About a fourth of respondents said their health was fair (28%); nine percent rated their health as poor. The ratings were comparable to 2009 results.

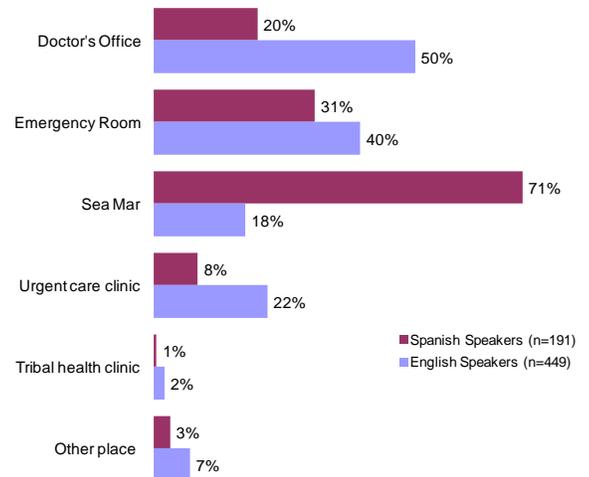
Respondent Health Status



Respondent households were divided into three roughly equal sized groups based on income. Those in the lowest income group (\$0-849/month) were more likely to report only fair or poor health compared to those in the highest income group (\$1,500 and higher).



- ❑ **Uninsured:** Among low-income Skagit County respondents, 34% are uninsured (28% in 2009).
- ❑ **Primary care:** Survey respondents reported that they usually get their medical care from a private doctor's office (41%), the hospital emergency department (37%), a community health clinic such as Sea Mar (34%), or an urgent care clinic (17%). Spanish speaking clients were much more likely to seek medical care at Sea Mar than non-Spanish speakers, though less likely to seek medical care at a doctor's office, the emergency room, or an urgent care clinic. Compared to 2009, Spanish speakers were also more likely to go to a doctor's office for care (20% in 2013, compared to only 7% in 2009).



- ❑ Where survey respondents usually go for medical care is associated with the type of coverage they carry. For example, those with group health insurance, private insurance, or Medicare are much more likely to seek medical care at a doctor's office than respondents with military plans or Medicaid. Those without any health insurance are the least likely to go to a doctor's office (15%), and the most likely to go to the emergency department (46%) or SeaMar (51%) for medical care.

Recent Developments in Health Services

- ❑ Skagit County Alliance for Health Care Access (SCAHA) hired a director in 2010. Affordable Care Act (ACA) and its Apple Health (Medicaid) expansion helped 2,800 Skagit adults gain access to health insurance. SCAHA's role was expanded to develop an operating framework and performance measures to improve health care and health outcomes and to reduce the cost of care.

- ❑ Seven partners organized by SCAHA are certified to enroll adult clientele in WA Apple Health. Individuals may also enroll on-line. In-Person Assisters are enrolling newly eligible individuals and families in health care coverage in addition to renewing medical coverage for clients who received medical coverage through DSHS.
- ❑ Sea Mar's clinic at Skagit Valley Hospital is due to be moved to its main clinic in 2014, and will start offering evening hours. The hospital site will become home to Sea Mar Women's Health Clinic. Sea Mar plans to begin mobile medical clinics at migrant/seasonal farm sites in early 2014.
- ❑ Mount Baker Planned Parenthood, previously located at the MV CSO, moved to a new facility near Skagit Valley Hospital. Bilingual/bi-cultural staff meet client needs in women's health care, and also assist community members register for WA Apple Health.
- ❑ A Veteran's Health Care Center, sited on the SVH campus in 2009, operates as a community based outpatient clinic. It successfully enrolled 5,000 veterans and is adding over 100 new veterans per month.
- ❑ Long-Term Care Ombudsman, operating since 2008 in Skagit and three neighboring counties, supported 2,085 Skagit LTC residents in 2013. LTCO added two new components in 2013: Roads to Community Living, that facilitates residents' return to the community, and an education program, Misuse of Antipsychotics.
- ❑ Community Action's dental services focused on homeless, veteran, and migrant populations in 2010. Now winding down a three-year VISTA-staffed position, the agency is working with SCAHA and local dentists to identify the best way to provide needed care to adults.
- ❑ The new PACT program (Program for Assertive Community Treatment) provides intensive wraparound services to adults with serious mental illness. The Jail Transition Program serves clients with mental illness who are exiting jail to link them with needed services to prevent repeat incarcerations; Skagit Treatment Engagement Program serves homeless individuals with mental illness and/or substance use disorders. Spanish-language mental health services are provided to jail inmates.
- ❑ School mental health treatment services, formerly provided by Catholic Community

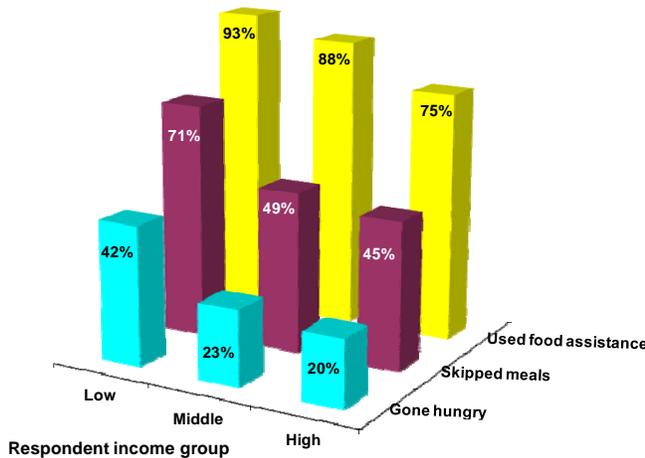
Services, transitioned to the NWESD in 2012. The Community Wellness Plan links individuals without benefits to short term mental health services. The Crisis Center expanded to 15 beds. Services include social detox and mental health stabilization. Pioneer Transitions House provides housing for individuals with mental illness or substance use disorders exiting institutions to help them stabilize. Adult Mental Health Court continues and there are considerations to create a Youth Recovery Court.

- ❑ Sunrise Mental Health began providing services five days per week at the East County Resource Center in 2012. A recent remodel expanded private space at the center, allowing for more counseling hours in confidential space. Growth is attributed to new funding from Skagit County and NSMHA.
- ❑ A Mobile Outreach Team provides mental health support for those aged 13 years and older experiencing pre-crisis distress that, if left unchecked, may result in unnecessary ER visits or hospitalization.
- ❑ The REACH Center opened in 2012 following the Peer Connection Center's closure. The center provides peer support and a meeting place for classes and information sharing for individuals who are looking for an informal setting to seek additional support.



Food and Nutrition: Programs that supplement a household's food supply help 84% of survey respondents. Even so, half (52%) said that someone in their household had skipped meals in the past 12 months because there was not enough money for food. And more than one in four (28%) said that someone at home had gone hungry because they could not get enough food.

These three food security indicators are all associated with household income. When the respondent sample is divided into roughly equal size groups based on income, households in the lowest income group are more likely to use food assistance, experience hunger, and skip meals. For this low-income group, these food security indicators have increased since 2009: used food assistance (84% in 2009 to 93% in 2013); skipped meals (53% to 71%); gone hungry (30% to 42%). For the middle and high income groups, the indicators remain unchanged from 2009 to 2013.



- ❑ Food stamps, food banks, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (popularly known as WIC) are the most frequently mentioned assistance programs used.
- ❑ Over the last nine years there is an upward trend in the proportion of public school children eligible for free and reduced price meals through the National School Lunch program. Mount Vernon and Concrete school districts have the highest enrollment in these programs (70% and 63% respectively). La Conner school district tracks closely the Washington State trend with 46%. Conway and Anacortes schools have the lowest participation (24% and 34% respectively), and Conway's trend appears to show that participation is almost back to pre-Great Recession levels.

Recent Developments in Food and Nutrition Services

- ❑ The Skagit Food Distribution Center, operated by Community Action, distributes over 2 million pounds of food to Skagit's food banks and meal programs, of which over ¼ million lbs in 2013 was locally grown produce. A Field to Family AmeriCorps position expanded relationships with local farmers to access donations and set up volunteer gleans. Grant funding, coupled with Bite of Skagit earnings, will transition this role to a paid position in 2014.
- ❑ Skagit's food banks provided 229 lbs of food per client in 2013 as compared to 205 lbs in 2012 thanks in part to a more coordinated local system. Just over 46,000 individuals were served through the county's 13 food banks in 2013. Heartprints food bank in Mount Vernon closed in mid-year 2013, leaving the

remaining food banks the task of covering the resultant service gap.

- ❑ Skagit households on Basic Food in 2013 increased to 11,928 from 8,675 in 2009, with income guidelines for general eligibility stable at 200% federal poverty level. In mid-2012, the Food Assistance Program, which provides benefits for documented immigrants, reduced services, with families seeing a 50% reduction. Approximately one in four Skagit County households rely on food stamps.
- ❑ Friendship House provides daily meals to residents and the public, serving 42,000 in 2010 and over 50,000 in 2012. Their new FH Café, a free-standing kitchen/cafeteria, opened in December 2013.
- ❑ Skagit County's Meals on Wheels remains an important food source to home-bound seniors, serving over 135,000 meals in 2013, an increase of 4% over past years despite funding cuts. 250 volunteers are crucial in maintaining this important service.
- ❑ The "1095 Skagit" initiative formed following a 2011 Childhood Hunger Summit at which attendees were challenged to "fully nourish children" by Graham Kerr. Efforts in 2012 and 2013 resulted in considerable increases in summer feeding programs in existing and new summer feeding sites.
- ❑ WIC brings nearly \$2.6 million to local markets annually through purchases of nutritious foods by WIC families served at four Skagit clinics. Farmer's Market WIC vouchers, reduced in 2010, still contributed over \$17,000 to markets in 2013, and increased the consumption of fresh locally grown fruits and vegetables by low-income families. A peer counselor breastfeeding program, initiated in 2010 in county WIC programs, utilizes specially trained WIC moms to provide support to other WIC families to encourage successful breastfeeding experiences.
- ❑ \$25,000 netted at the 2013 Bite of Skagit fundraiser organized by North Coast Credit Union will be used to make local produce more available to area food banks.
- ❑ WSU's Community Food Assessment, initiated in 2012, is helping establish a baseline knowledge of Skagit's food network strengths and barriers that families face in accessing fresh and healthy food options. <http://Skagit.wsu.edu>.



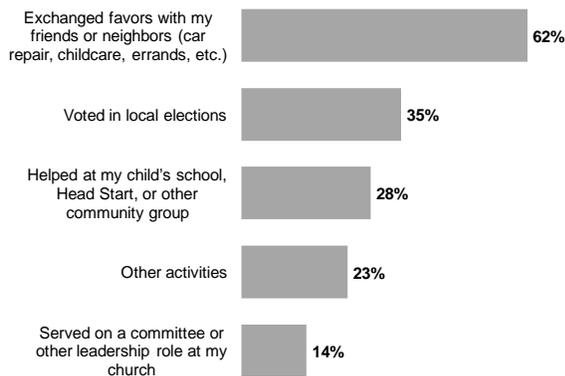
Community Engagement

“We believe in the power of neighbor helping neighbor, and working together to create paths to prosperity.”

– *Community Action’s collective impact statement for Community Engagement.*

We measure community involvement among lower-income Skagit County households because community connectedness is both a measure of family strength, as well as an intervention and barrier-reduction strategy. Research shows being involved in school and community groups, helping neighbors, participation in civic life, and/or being active in communities of faith are indicators of strong community relationships that reduce risk and increase economic opportunity. Volunteerism builds job skills, and being involved in community-based groups develops leadership skills.

- ❑ About one in three low-income respondents (31%) say they have recently served as a volunteer in their community, which is close to the statewide average for adults and higher than the national average of 27% of the adult population. The average number of volunteer hours reported was 9.2 hours per week (the median was 5 hours per week), which is much higher than the Washington State average of about one hour per week per adult volunteer.
- ❑ In addition to volunteering for charities, survey respondents also reported involvement in other types of activities that help build community and strengthen democracy. Nearly two of three respondents (62%) said they had recently exchanged favors with friends or neighbors. About one third of respondents (35%) voted in recent, local elections, and just over one quarter help out at their child’s school or other community group. 14% said they had recently served on a committee or served in a leadership role at their church.



Recent Developments in Community Engagement

- ❑ In 2013, the Skagit Volunteer Center connected over 1,700 potential volunteers to over 130 nonprofit and government agencies throughout Skagit County. Using the “Washington Serves Plan for Volunteerism,” the Volunteer Center is working with other volunteer-mobilizing nonprofits to better coordinate, collaborate and measure collective impact.
- ❑ In 2013, Skagit Project Homeless Connect engaged over 300 community members as volunteers to serve households representing more than 800 homeless and at-risk individuals (half of whom are children). Each year, many PHC guests stand in line for services in the morning, and put on a volunteer T-shirt to help out in the afternoon. People helped in previous years return to volunteer all day at PHC.
- ❑ Partnering with many faith-based, leadership and educational institutions, the Skagit Volunteer Center and Community Action of Skagit County train over 300 community members in better understanding the dynamics of poverty, and how to best serve as allies with lower-income community members.
- ❑ Food banks, school districts and other groups are working hard to improve volunteer management practices to better recruit, train and support volunteers of all backgrounds.
- ❑ At the state and federal level, several movements impact community engagement locally. For example, the state lost the federal Washington Reading Corps program, which resulted in a local loss of 50 AmeriCorps volunteers as full-time tutors and volunteer coordinators in low-income schools, and over 1,000 students who won’t receive that educational support in the 2013-2014 school year.
- ❑ “One Community One Voice,” now housed at United Way, is an overall push for collective impact strategies across all impact areas throughout the county.

