

2024 Community Needs Assessment Onondaga County, New York



People's Equal Action and Community Effort, Inc. (PEACE, Inc.)

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22 April 2024

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Acknowledgements

Every three years, *PEACE, Inc.* conducts and releases a Community Needs Assessment (CNA) publicly as required by the Federal Government.

The CNA is organized by members of the agency's Community Engagement Department. Vice President of Operations and Strategy Todd M. Goehle served as the primary researcher, Community Conversation facilitator, and writer. Director of Grants and Planning Maribel Arce also co-led the CNA efforts and contributed research, writing, and analysis throughout all parts of the CNA process.

Internally at *PEACE, Inc.*, a host of stakeholders must be recognized. Members of the agency's Board of Directors and its Planning Committee; the *PEACE, Inc.* Administrative Team; *Head Start/Early Head Start* Policy Council; as well as the Strategic Design, DEI, and *Datasphere* Data-Driven Decisions Committees offered input and inspiration. Thanks also go to the following staff members/interns for their contributions: Allison Griffin, Arielle Kaigler-Hall, Barb Kohberger, Barbara DesChamps, Beth O'Hara, Caitlyn Major, Eddy Luce, Gerri Regan, Jacki Evans, Jenn Gafney, Karen Barry, Kiriminett Lopez, Liessa Rudolph, Michael Willacy, Nancy Turo, Nichole Rivera, Paula Freedman, Sally Ward, Shelly Kasprzak, Stephanie Bingham, and Yesenia Parrilla. Former Grants Coordinator Lucy Totino was an invaluable researcher who laid much of the groundwork for the CNA and who offered critical 11th-hour revisions. *Head Start/Early Head Start* Data Storyteller Irena Felty helped the team navigate dense and complicated data from her program. Particular thanks should go to Executive Director Carolyn D. Brown, who provided the time, space, and support for the Community Engagement team to craft this important document.

Externally, thanks go to the anonymous emerging community leaders and direct service staff who offered thoughts and support in their free time. Paul Ciavarri, Chris Emerling, Theresa Goehle, Gina Iliev, Ocesa B. Keaton LMSW, Tysha Martin, Cynthia O'Connor, Emilija Postolovska, Dr. Frank Ridzi, Joan Royle, Dr. Tony Scott, Alissa Tubbs, Megan Wagner-Flynn, Kara Williams, Qiana Williams, and Jordan Wood made critical suggestions throughout the research process. Additional thanks go to the *Community Foundation of Central New York* for a grant covering the costs of the 2024 Community Conversations. The *Human Services Leadership Council of Central New York* was also generous in letting the agency use unreleased survey data.

Most importantly, the CNA is dedicated to the CNY residents and Human/Social Service Professionals who provided their stories and lived experience as evidence. They drove the findings of this assessment. Thank you to those who provided their time -and often their vulnerability- to provide Onondaga County residents with suggestions for community improvement and empowerment. This is their assessment.

Section I. Introductory Remarks

1.1 Executive Statement/Introduction

“I’m frequently asked ‘what is the biggest issue or need in our community?’ I tell them, ‘Poverty.’ They often respond, ‘no, what is the biggest issue...is it employment, transportation, etc.?’ I again say, ‘it’s Poverty.’” A former PEACE, Inc. employee.

“Poverty is more like a blanket, there are so many things that fall under poverty. To really address poverty, you need to address the trauma that has been inflicted.” An anonymous Central New York (CNY) Direct Service Staff Member.

Welcome to PEACE, Inc.’s 2024 Community Needs Assessment (CNA). The agency is excited that you are reviewing the document and considering its recommendations. The CNA seeks to further ongoing conversations about our community and its advancement for all. The CNA, the data found within it, and the experiences shared in it are all parts of evolving advocacy and planning processes that will develop in the coming years. This is a work in progress. We expect there will be topics addressed in the CNA that you will find eye-opening, controversial, underdeveloped, and/or inspiring. Let’s discuss it!

As the agency has stated in its annual report and elsewhere,¹ Central New York is on the verge of having a “moment.” The arrival of *Micron Technologies, Inc.*, the removal of the I-81 viaduct for a Community Grid option, and the rebuilding of *Syracuse Public Housing* offer **transformative possibilities to deliver social opportunity, economic promise, and inclusionary justice** for those who have often been marginalized. Yet, the promise of the future must wrestle with the legacies of the past and the conditions of the present. In particular,

- The city of Syracuse **has the second highest rate of childhood poverty in the nation**, with 45.8% of city youth under the age of 18 living in poverty according to 2018-2022, 5-year *American Community Survey Estimates* (ACS).
- White Median Household Income (MHI) (\$77,804) was 112% greater than Black MHI (\$36,640) in Onondaga County according to 2018-2022, 5-year ACS. **Onondaga County’s racial income gap has widened** from 97% in 2018, when *The Brookings Institute* found Onondaga County and the city of Syracuse to have the “*seventh worst racial income gap among the nation’s aging industrial cities.*”²
- Between February 2023 to February 2024, the Syracuse Metropolitan area experienced **the greatest one-year, average monthly rent increase in the nation** at 22% (with the average rent of a 1-bedroom apartment being \$1050 a month).
- **Onondaga County is aging.** Its 65 and over population increased by 28.8% from 2011 to 2021. Syracuse’s 65 and over population increased by 42.8% during the same period. The number of older adults living in poverty in the city of Syracuse increased by 110% during the same period.

Embracing the quotes at the top of the page, these realities are interconnected and reinforcing for those who live in and/or face the threat of poverty. To offer insights and potential recommendations about poverty in Onondaga County, the CNA a) will integrate quantitative and qualitative data, b) will embrace research conducted and released publicly by the agency’s community partners, and c) will raise the voices and narratives of diverse community members. From this equitable, justice-informed approach, the CNA will present 5 key claims. First,

- Redlining, Racial Covenants, Urban Renewal, and other discriminatory policies of the past are more than just footnotes of twentieth century history. Nor are they solely a City of Syracuse “problem.” Rather,

¹ PEACE, Inc., “Annual Report 2022-2023.”

² Alan Berube, “To Succeed, Older Industrial Cities Must Overcome Their Stark Color Lines.”

racial inequalities have been systematized over time and have shaped the development of Onondaga County towards its present state. In Onondaga County, community needs must be analyzed and met using a **lens of equity**. It must include the voices and experiences of those who are often overlooked, if not outright ignored. Tied to this claim,

- The barriers faced by low-income Onondaga County residents during the COVID-19 pandemic were not new. This was an argument presented in *PEACE, Inc.*'s "COVID-19 Community Needs Assessment and Chronicle" from June 2020. Rather, **COVID-19 exacerbated and intensified long-standing structural insecurities and inequalities**, a contention becoming all the more apparent in the pandemic's aftermath and around crises about housing, mental health, domestic violence, and more. The CNA also presents evidence that **low-income families are struggling to adjust after unprecedented levels of pandemic-era assistance and in the face of rising inflation that is spiking costs across the board**. In response then,
- A **holistic, layered understanding of poverty** -one that acknowledges multiple histories, barriers, and strengths- is necessary if diverse, low-income households are to reach self-sufficiency. Low-income households face many challenges which are often out of their control. When reading the CNA, note the frequency in which one need can inform, shape, and find meaning alongside other needs. Also, when reading the CNA, note the resiliency and resourcefulness of Onondaga County's low-income residents. Such descriptions are apt ones when explaining the work being pursued by local nonprofit staff. Thus,
- To tackle the complexities of poverty in Onondaga County, **robust and flexible capacity building measures must take place within the Human/Social Services Sector**. Low wages, restrictive funding streams, high turnover, and burnout are hampering the effectiveness of local nonprofits and their community-focused staff to pursue their missions. And last,
- Sustainable **advocacy and power-building campaigns** must continue to be nurtured and promoted to mobilize communities, to overcome lacking senses of belonging, and to push inclusivity as well as community-driven decision-making.

1.2 What is *People's Equal Action and Community Effort, Inc. (PEACE, Inc.)*?

Incorporated in 1968, *PEACE, Inc.* is a federal designated *Community Action Agency* (CAA) with the mission of "*helping people in the community realize their potential for becoming self-sufficient.*" The agency's DEI vision is:

to cultivate a workplace where excellence and social responsibility thrive in an environment that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive. We commit to an organizational culture that creates a sense of belonging, promotes personal and professional growth, and where everyone feels seen, heard, valued, and respected. We will work toward building an organization that is culturally competent and visually reflective of the community it serves.

Community Action began on 20 August 1964 when President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a war on poverty and signed into law the *Economic Opportunities Act*. From its start, community action's guiding principle has been "maximum feasible participation." All CAAs are required to employ a tripartite board system, i.e. one third of the board represents elected public officials, one third community leaders, and one third people living in poverty. This equitable structure ensures a variety of economic experiences and perspectives have a say in agency decision-making, oversight, and design.

Through a network of neighborhood centers and programs in Onondaga and parts of Oswego Counties, *PEACE, Inc.* offers **9 major programs** to equip individuals and families in need with the skills and self-confidence to move forward in their lives. The programs include:

- **Head Start and Early Head Start (HS, EHS):** comprehensive, 2-generation early childhood education,

Kindergarten readiness, and family development serving pregnant women, households, and children from birth to 5 years old. Locations and collaborations are found throughout the City of Syracuse, Baldwinsville, Jordan, Lafayette, and Liverpool. Home-based services are also offered.

- **Family Resource Centers (FRC):** emergency assistance, advocacy, supportive services, food pantries, employment support, youth activities, and family development for low-income individuals. There are 6 FRC locations in total: Baldwinsville, East Syracuse, and Tully, and 3 within the City of Syracuse.
- **Department of Energy and Housing (DEHS):** cost-effective, energy-efficient, and healthy home solutions/weatherization services for Onondaga and Oswego Counties' low to moderate income households.
- **Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS):** 1-to-1 community- and school-based mentoring for school-aged children in Onondaga/southern portion of Oswego Counties.
- **AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent Program:** mentoring opportunities for Onondaga County seniors who wish to share their time and talents with *Head Start* and *Syracuse City School District* youth.
- **Free Tax Preparation Program:** year-round services that help low to moderate income households gain maximum refunds, access eligible tax credits, and receive tax-related, financial education.
- **Senior Nutrition:** locally sourced meals and socialization opportunities for Onondaga County Seniors.
- **Frank DeFrancisco Eastwood Community Center:** opportunities for Eastwood area residents - especially seniors- to socialize, volunteer, learn, and contribute to their society.
- **Senior Support Services:** services for northern Onondaga County seniors who wish to avoid social isolation, age comfortably in place, and live independently.

Within these 9 major programs, there are additional “stand-alone” services based upon community need and previous CNA findings.³ These include,

- **The Early Childhood Career Pathways Project (ECCPP).** A collaboration with *Child Care Solutions of CNY*, ECCPP offers intensive case management, technical support, and start-up funds for clients who are looking to open a licensed Home Family Daycare (HFD), obtain a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential or Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education, or receive career assistance. The project is funded by Onondaga County's *Alliance for Economic Inclusion* and *Micron Technology, Inc.*
- **Family Reentry Program.** The Program offers case management and family supports for justice involved individuals and their families, helping the former gain the confidence, skills, and employment needed to thrive upon their returns to society. The project is funded through the *Mother Cabrini Health Foundation*.
- **The Fatherhood Initiative.** Through a pilot offered by the *New York State Department of State*, Family Services and *Early Head Start/Head Start* staff facilitate cohorts wherein individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence to be effective fathers and supportive family members.
- **Let Me Be Great and HOLA Summer Youth Programs.** Intensive, 6-week summer youth programs that offer Field Trips, Skills Development, and other age-appropriate activities for Middle and bilingual Elementary School Youth respectively.
- **Eastwood Community Center Donation Program.** This volunteer-driven program partners with local

³ CNAs have always been a critical tool for helping the agency respond to community need. For example, “*PEACE, Inc.*’s Covid-19 Community Needs Chronicle and Assessment” provided guidance for allocating one-time, Community Service Block Grant funds made available through the CARES Act. Some of the most novel approaches included a Home Delivered Meals Service, COVID-19 Rental Assistance partnership with *Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County*, and the transition into a year-round Free Tax Preparation and Education Program to help low-income families access expanded Earned Income and Child Tax Credits.

businesses and agencies to collect and distribute food, clothing, and other basic needs supplies throughout the community.

1.3 Who are *PEACE, Inc.*’s Clients?

At more than 50 locations throughout Onondaga and portions of Oswego Counties, *PEACE, Inc.* is one of the few agencies in CNY that reaches rural, suburban, and Syracuse City populations. The populations served by *PEACE, Inc.* are equally diverse, serving families, seniors, and homebound individuals; immigrants, refugees, and New Americans; justice involved individuals; veterans; pregnant and new moms; young children, youth, and teenagers; and more. For the 2023 Funding Year, *PEACE, Inc.* served:⁴

Figure 1: Number of <i>PEACE, Inc.</i> Clients and Households Served	
Clients Served	8895
Households Served	4234

Figure 3: Gender of <i>PEACE, Inc.</i> Clients		
Gender	Number of Individuals	Percentage
Female	5011	56%
Male	3880	44%
Other	4	0%
Total	8895	100%

Figure 4: Age of <i>PEACE, Inc.</i> Clients		
Age	# of Clients	% of Total Clients
0-5	699	7.86%
6-13	1282	14.4%
14-17	641	7.2%
18-24	901	10.13%
25-44	2162	24.31%
45-54	971	10.92%
55-59	555	6.24%
60-64	601	6.76%
65-74	732	8.23%
+75	350	3.93%
Total	8895	100%

Figure 2: Race of <i>PEACE, Inc.</i> Clients		
Identity	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Total Clients
Black/African American	3095	34.8%
White	2154	24.2%
Multiracial	303	3.4%
Asian	150	1.7%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	83	1%
Other	999	11.2%
Undisclosed	2111	23.7%
Total	8895	100%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin	704	7.9%
Not Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin	8190	92.1%
Total	8895	100%

Figure 5: Education Levels for <i>PEACE, Inc.</i> Clients, Ages 25 and Older		
Education Level	Number of Clients	Percentage Total Clients
High School Degree or More	4302	80%
Lacks High School Degree	1069	20%
Total, Ages 25 and Over	5371	100%

⁴ Client data is taken directly from the 2023 *Annual Program Report* (APR). The APR is submitted annually to New York State. Absences of data are reflections of the agency’s different funding streams and their individual requirements.

Figure 6: Housing Status of <i>PEACE, Inc.</i> Clients		
Housing Status	Number of Households	Percentage of Total Households
Rent	3120	73.7%
Own	708	16.7%
Homeless	58	Less than 0.7%
Total	4234	100%

Figure 7: Disability Statistics, <i>PEACE, Inc.</i> Clients		
	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Total Clients
Disclosed Disability	1151	12.9%
Did not Disclose a Disability	7744	87.1%
Total	8895	100%

Some Additional Data Points

- **Income:** Of the 3536 households that reported income, 87% of households were 200% at or below the Federal Poverty Level. 66.7% of households were 150% at or below the Federal Poverty Line. 52.6% of households were 50% at or below the Federal Poverty Level.
- **Health Insurance:** 18.7% of *PEACE, Inc.* clients are Medicaid recipients (1659 total).
- **Geography:** Though it can vary from year to year and according to the program, the agency estimates that roughly 70% of its clients annually are city of Syracuse residents.

1.4 What is a Community Needs Assessment? Why Pursue One?

“I want to see the whole picture - as nearly as I can. I don’t want to put on the blinders of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, and limit my vision...Don’t you see? I want to be able to look at the whole thing.”⁵

According to the *Community Action Partnership* (CAP),⁶ the purpose of a CNA is to “*determine the underlying causes and conditions of poverty within the community...and identify the available resources to address the unmet needs of the community’s most vulnerable residents.*”⁷ Typically, CNAs mix quantitative (statistics, survey results, estimates, and more) and qualitative evidence (interviews, focus group results, expert testimony, and more) **to identify community needs, strengths, and capacity.**

Every 3 years, *Community Action Agencies* (CAA) throughout the United States conduct a CNA. CAAs such as *PEACE, Inc.* are not alone in pursuing a CNA and communicating its findings publicly. For example, many Central New York entities have pursued similar exercises in recent years around housing, health, youth violence, and more. There are also data platforms such as the *Central New York Community Foundation’s* (CNYCF) “Life Needs Assessment.”

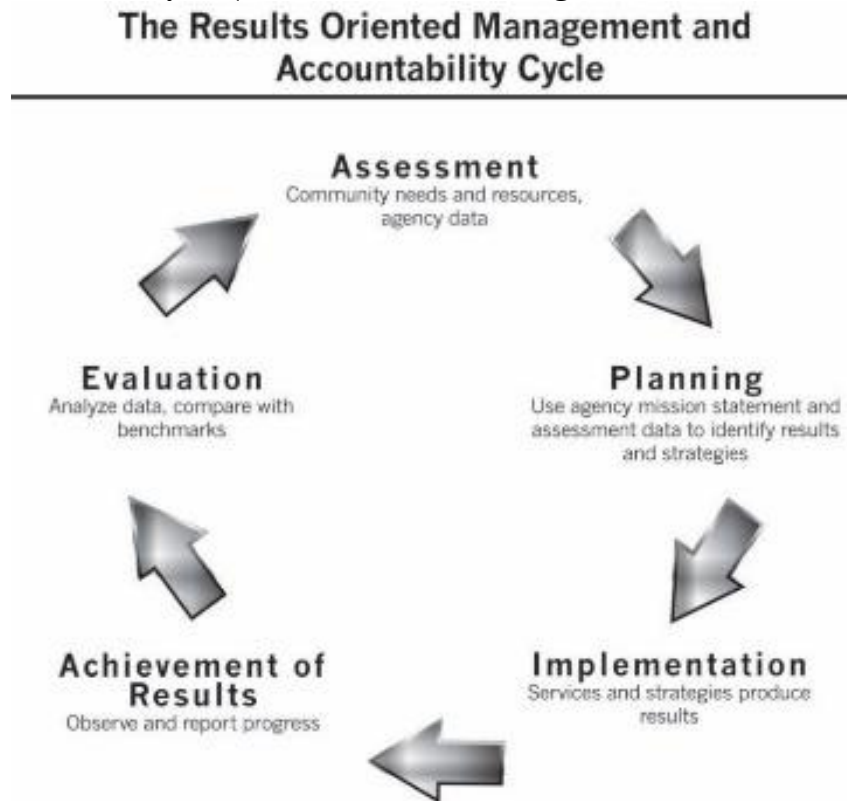
Additionally, CNAs are “first steps” of an evidence-based, performance management approach required of all CAAs. As displayed below, 1) Assessment, 2) Planning, 3) Implementation, 4) Achievement, and 5) Evaluation form ROM4, or the “Results Oriented Management and Accountability” Cycle:

⁵ John Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 113.

⁶ CAP describes itself as a “national, 501(c)3 nonprofit membership organization that provides technical assistance, training, and other resources to Community Action Agencies (CAA), nonprofit and public groups funded by the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), a federal program that allocates funding to states to connect Americans to greater opportunity.” National Community Action Partnership (NCAP), “About Us - National CAP.”

⁷ National Community Action Partnership (NCAP), “Community Needs Assessment Resource Guide.”

Figure 8: The ROMA Cycle (Results Oriented Management and Accountability Cycle)⁸



As a “*performance-based management system*,” ROMA encourages CAAs and their staffs to use CNAs and the data found in it to make programmatic decisions, meet community needs, and pursue community-wide change.⁹ These latter ideals summarize the purpose of a CNA.

1.5 Who is the Community Needs Assessment’s Audience?

More than simply a requirement, *PEACE, Inc.* sees its 2024 CNA as a “living document,” one piece of an ever-evolving public process towards community improvement and empowerment. We believe the following stakeholders will find the CNA useful:

- ***PEACE, Inc.* Direct Service Staff, Administrators, and Board of Director Members** who wish to better align their programs and resources with community need. The CNA can also serve as a reference for determining program purpose and communicating organizational-wide goals to the public.
- **Funders and Policy Makers** who wish to better understand community need and how *PEACE, Inc.* - among other entities- can meet it.
- **Fellow Non-Profits and other Organizations** who wish to target identified needs, build community-wide coalitions, and/or partner with *PEACE, Inc.*
- **Community Members at Large** who wish to learn more about the conditions faced by low-income Onondaga County residents or who may want to use the findings to advance change.

⁸ *New York State Community Action Association*, “ROMA Alliance.”

⁹ *Ibid.*

1.6 What are the Community Needs Assessment's Methods? And What Data is the CNA using?

The previous section outlined how CNAs are important planning, advocacy, and policy tools for different audiences. Just as state and federal regulations require CAAs like *PEACE, Inc.* to pursue CNAs, so too are there are regulations that offer guidance about methods. For New York State CAAs, they are outlined in and monitored through the *Annual Compliance Review of Organizational Standards* (ACROS).

Figure 9: Annual Compliance Review of Organizational Standards (ACROS) ¹⁰	
Standard/Guidance	Description of Standard and Guidance
Standard 3.2	As part of the community assessment, the organization collects and includes current data specific to poverty and its prevalence related to gender, age, and race/ethnicity for their service area(s).
Guidance	-Documentation needed to demonstrate all four categories in order to meet the Standard: gender, age, race, and ethnicity. -Data on poverty available from the U.S. Census Bureau.
Standard 3.3	The organization collects and analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data on its geographic service area(s) in the community assessment.
Guidance	-Documentation is needed to demonstrate that both types of data are collected in order to meet the Standard: -Qualitative: this is opinions, observations, and other descriptive information obtained from the community through surveys, focus groups, interviews, community forums, etc. -Quantitative: this is numeric information, e.g. Census data, program counts, demographic information, and other statistical sources. -Documentation on data analysis is also required in order to meet the Standard.
Standard 3.4	The community assessment includes key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty and the needs of the communities assessed
Guidance	-There is no required way to reflect this information -The organization may choose to include a key findings section in the assessment report and/or executive summary. -Conditions of poverty may include items such as: numbers of homeless, free and reduced school lunch statistics, SNAP participation rates, etc. -Causes of poverty may include items such as: lack of living wage jobs, lack of affordable housing, low education attainment rates, etc.
Standard 3.5	The governing board formally accepts the completed assessment.
Guidance	This would be met through the Board voting on a motion to accept the Assessment at a regular board meeting and documenting this in the minutes.

The above ACROS standards outline basic requirements for data categories (Standard 3.2), data types (Qualitative and Quantitative, Standard 3.3), causality and assessment of poverty (Standard 3.4), and processes of approval by *PEACE, Inc.*'s Board of Directors (Standard 3.5). Detailed suggestions for determining the scope, planning, organization, writing, and release of the CNA are also provided within "A Community Action Guide to Comprehensive Community Needs Assessments," which was released by the

¹⁰ *New York Department of State, "Annual Compliance Review Of Organizational Standards (ACROS). Grantee Self-Assessment Tool for Public Eligible Entities."*

National Association for State Community Services Programs in 2011.¹¹ While these standards can appear limiting, a “CAA’s assessment is unique within its community and state. It offers a focus on local conditions, analyzing the economic opportunities and barriers for all residents who are at risk of remaining or becoming economically insecure.”¹² Flexibility in method and approach also emerges from the rich quantitative data available publicly. Beyond US Census Bureau Data, Surveys, and Estimates, the CNA will rely on other state and national data collections, including but not limited to:

Figure 10: State, National Data Dashboards	
Organization	Platforms
<i>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)</i>	“Places: Local Data for Better Health”
<i>Feeding America</i>	“Map the Meal Gap”
<i>New York State Department of Health</i>	“Onondaga County Prevention Agenda Dashboard”
<i>New York State Department of Education</i>	“NYSED Data Site”
<i>New York State Department of Labor</i>	“Labor Data”

Locally, the CNA will use an abundance of emerging public data collections, including:

Figure 11: Local Data Collections and Dashboards	
Organization	Platforms
<i>Central New York Community Foundation (CNYCF)</i>	“Life Needs Assessment” <i>CNYVitals</i>
<i>City of Syracuse</i>	“Open Data Syracuse”
<i>The Early Childhood Alliance of Onondaga County</i>	“Onondaga County Data Dashboard” “Help Me Grow Onondaga Dashboard”
<i>Onondaga County</i>	“Board of Elections” “COVID-19 Data” “Lead Poisoning Prevention” “Opioid Use”
<i>The United Way of Central New York</i>	“2-1-1 Community Needs in Onondaga County Dashboard”

Additionally, the CNA will integrate *PEACE, Inc.* data previously not released publicly, notably a) intake, nutrition, and family goalsetting data from *Head Start/Early Head Start*; b) demographic and survey data from the *PEACE, Inc.* Free Tax Prep Program; c) food pantry service data; d) data from the career pathway pilot *BOOST*, and more. The CNA will also rely on public research conducted by itself and/or its community partners, including:

¹¹ *National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSPP)*, “A Community Action Guide to Comprehensive Community Needs Assessments.”

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

Figure 12: <i>PEACE, Inc.</i> Public Research	
Author/Entity	Paper
<i>PEACE, Inc.</i>	“COVID-19 Community Needs Chronicle and Assessment.”
Ocesa B. Keaton LMSW and <i>PEACE, Inc.</i> Vice President of Operations and Strategy Todd M. Goehle	“What is Redlining? What is Urban Renewal? Inequality and Resistance in Mid-20th Century Syracuse.” “What is Rent Burden? Housing Instability and Hyper-Segregation in Central New York.”
Alissa Tubbs, Chol Majok, and <i>PEACE, Inc.</i> Community Engagement Department	“Community Conversations: Returning to Work in 2021”
<i>Jobs for the Future</i>	“PARTNERS FOR IMPACT: Community Colleges and Human Services Nonprofits” BOOSTing Family Economic Success Through Organizational Policy and Practice”

1.6.a Towards an Inclusive Data System

Similar to *PEACE, Inc.*, a number of Onondaga County entities have released comprehensive reviews of specific community issues and/or barriers. Given the size of *PEACE, Inc.* and **the breadth of the social determinants of health¹³ addressed by it, the CNA has to practice a similar macro-/systems-level approach**; it cannot match the specificity of these reports. Nor should it. Afterall, the groups noted below are the subject matter experts about their respective topics. Like the strengths-based approach that many of us embrace in human/social services, the CNA will weave the following groups’ research (among others) into larger narratives about poverty and the broader needs of CNY residents. Highlighting their work acknowledges the quality of it and the need to read it!

Figure 13: Reports Produced by CNY Entities	
Entity/Author	Paper/Title
<i>Black Health Project</i>	“Community Needs Survey.”
<i>Central New York Regional Economic Development Council</i>	“The CNY Ascent: Reaching New Heights”
City of Syracuse	“Violent Crime Assessment.” “Syracuse Housing Study.”
<i>CNY Fair Housing</i>	“Analysis to Impediments to Fair Housing: Syracuse and Onondaga County.” “Exclusionary Zoning in Onondaga County.” “Zoning and Segregation in Syracuse, NY.”
<i>Early Childhood Alliance</i>	“The Early Child Care Landscape in Onondaga County: A Supply and Demand Analysis.”
<i>Families for Lead Freedom Now</i> and <i>Legal Services of CNY, Inc.</i>	<i>The People’s Public Hearing on Lead Poisoning, Where do We go from Here?</i>

¹³ The CNA uses a working definition of “Social Determinants of Health” (SDH) that is offered by the *World Health Organization* (WHO), i.e. SDHs “are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies and political systems.” Given a) the feedback received throughout the CNA process and b) the breadth of *PEACE, Inc.*’s services and its expertise, a focus on SDHs seemed prudent for the CNA. Examples of SDHs discussed by the WHO and found within the CNA include, “income and social protection; Education; Unemployment and job insecurity; working life conditions; food insecurity; housing, basic amenities and the environment; early childhood development; social inclusion and non-discrimination; structural conflict; and access to affordable health services of decent quality.” *World Health Organization*, “Social Determinants of Health.”

Michael Kelly	“Syracuse Covenants.”
<i>New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU)</i>	“Building A Better Future: The Structural Racism Built into I-81 and How to Tear it Down.”
<i>Onondaga County Health Department</i>	“Onondaga County Community Health Assessment and Improvement Plan, 2022-2024.”
<i>Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council</i>	“Exploring Tomorrow’s Transit.” “Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan.”
<i>Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance (SOFSA)</i>	“Food Plan CNY”
<i>Urban Jobs Task Force</i>	“Building Equity in the Construction Trades: A Racial Equity Impact Statement.”

Raising the voices of these entities, authors, and their communities show the CNA’s attempts to practice an **inclusive data process or “system.”** Before discussing practice, it’s important to mention theory. What does this idea mean? For the data platform *Community Commons*,¹⁴ “*establishing inclusive data systems is important to build community power and prevent discriminatory use of data and other data misuse.*”¹⁵ Regarding the latter, it’s the acknowledgement that data “*has been used to perpetuate inequalities*” throughout history.¹⁶ That data intersects with and -is a reflection of- systems of power that can discriminate and disenfranchise. Past policies of Redlining and Urban Renewal are just some legacies still affecting the communities of Onondaga County and its social determinants of health today. Even the common, acceptable practice of disaggregating data must be mindful of its ability to “*reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate harmful narratives about specific groups and communities.*”¹⁷ An inclusive data process thus acknowledges historical factors and power dynamics. That there are people behind the data.

For Louise Lief, inclusive data systems include the quest for **data justice**, which “*begins by asking who controls the narrative. Who decides what data is collected and for which purpose? Who interprets what it means for a community? Who governs it?*”¹⁸ For the *Coalition of Communities of Color*, data justice is that *data should: (1) make visible community-driven needs, challenges, and strengths, (2) be representative of community; and (3) treat data in ways that promote community self-determination.*”¹⁹ A common theme throughout all of these explanations is **Narrative**. As discussed above, narrative is more than merely telling a story or the sharing of knowledge and/or experience. Narrative is connected to power, about what details are included and excluded, about whom is included and excluded in forming them, about the effects of narrative that include and exclude communities.²⁰

¹⁴ *Community Commons* is an online platform run by the *Institute for People, Place, and Possibility* that curates resources to “*advance equitable community health and well-being.*” *Community Commons*, “About Community Commons.”

¹⁵ *Community Commons*, “An Introduction to Data Equity.”

¹⁶ *Community Commons* cites the United States Federal Government’s policy of Redlining as an example of such abuse. Redlining both as a Federal policy and as a local practice will be discussed in Section 2 of the CNA.

¹⁷ *Community Commons*, “An Introduction to Data Equity.”

¹⁸ *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, “How Philanthropy Can Help Lead on Data Justice.”

¹⁹ *Coalition of Communities of Color*, “Research & Data Justice.”

²⁰ The research around narrative, power, and equity is vast. Among other sources, the CNA found inspiration from the thoughts of Adam Szymanski, “*The framing of a narrative is an intentional and strategic choice, determining who is in and who is out of the stories we tell and the approaches we propose. It is important for social movements to introduce their own framing — because if we don’t tell our own stories, others will create them for us.*” Szymanski continues, “*At points of intervention, it’s useful to ‘show’ stories rather than tell them, and to use storytelling to disrupt and reframe existing narratives. Dominant narratives can be further broken down in terms of their points of production, points of decision, points of destruction, points of consumption, and points of assumption — and we can use our analysis to shape strategies for optimal effect.*” This CNA attempts to do exactly that by building from the shared experiences of clients and Human/Social Services professionals alike. Adam Szymanski, “How to Build Narrative Power and Co-Create a Just Future.”

These concerns about power, narrative, and inclusivity have been all the more heightened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which **complicated quantitative data collection** due to social distancing and stay-at-home orders. For example, the onset of stay-at-home orders affected the 2020 Decennial Census count, which looked to account for the total United States population as of 1 April 2020. As discussed by the Census Bureau, the count faced “*numerous unforeseen challenges: the enumeration was delayed and data collection methods, such as in-person interviews, were complicated by social distancing and stay-at-home orders.*”²¹ The Census Bureau faced similar delays and challenges when attempting to calculate 1- and 5-year *American Community Surveys* (ACS) in 2020 as well.²² Additionally, conditions shifted quickly during the pandemic in ways that limit available datasets (*Note: this is especially true with food insecurity and the expiration of expanded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, a topic that will be discussed in greater length later in the CNA*). This is not to dismiss quantitative forms of data; indeed, quantitative data informs the CNA. Rather, the more **qualitative approach** embraced within this CNA will help to ensure a more accurate, descriptive, and inclusive data system about community needs. We wanted to hear from and highlight the voices of our community, its residents, and its Human/Social Services servants. It started with a series of **Community Conversations**.

Figure 14: Community Conversations		
Community Conversation Group	Number of Participants	Year
PEACE, Inc. Head Start Parents living in Onondaga County	9	2024
AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent Program, Senior Volunteers ²³	65	2024
High School Students enrolled in William Nottingham High School, Syracuse City School District	13	2024
“Community Conversations to Drive Systems Change:” Direct Service Staff from member agencies of Greater Syracuse Works ²⁴	15	2022
Unemployed, Underemployed Onondaga County Residents (“Community Conversations: Returning to Work in 2021”)	16	2020-2021
Total	118	

The conversations were intentionally inclusive with the participants and groups representing a range of topics (aging, youth and family development, employment and work, education and schools, human/social service supports). Gender, race, ethnicity, age, and location of residency varied among the participants as well. Interpretation/translation services were offered when and if needed. With the exception of the Direct Service Staff Community Conversation, nearly all of the participants were at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line.

The **Design of the Conversations** was also intentional. Food, gift cards, and stipends were provided to show appreciation for each participant’s time and thoughts. Each conversation was structured around 5 broad questions that reduced the “power” of the facilitator, encouraged freedom of expression, and many times led the participants to take control of the conversations themselves. The questions also identified not

²¹ Catherine Doren, Christine Hartley, and Luke Rogers, “COVID-19 Pandemic Leads to Innovative Census Bureau Methods of Estimating U.S. Population.”

²² Matthew C Marlay, Ceci A. Villa Ross, and Hyon B. Shin, “Pandemic Impact on 2020 American Community Survey 1-Year Data.”

²³ AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent Program volunteers were selected because of their ability to speak about both senior-related issues as well as the challenges faced by families and their youth in the *Syracuse City School District* and *PEACE, Inc. Head Start/Early Head Start*. To learn more about this important and effective program, visit <https://www.peace-cao.org/programs/fostergrandparent/>.

²⁴ With over 30 member agencies, *Greater Syracuse Works* (GSW) is a non-profit, workforce development organization that advocates for individuals across Central New York and collaborates to address barriers to employment. For more information about GSW, visit <https://www.greatersyracuseworks.com/>.

only barriers but also assets within the community.²⁵ Though qualitative approaches are intended to “humanize” the subjects of quantitative data and to amplify marginalized voices, the Conversations’ facilitator and recorders were surprised by the degree of the latter. Sharing the CNA findings, continuing dialogues, and developing services with Conversation participants are sound human-centered design principles and will further inclusion by allowing spaces for continued challenge and dialogue. In this respect, the CNA will function as both an assessment and a process for building “community power.”

Complimenting the Community Conversations will be **other forms of qualitative data** to provide the CNA with a more holistic understanding of the community’s needs, including:

- The CNA organizers **surveyed non-C-Suite Administrators and Direct Service Staff** who are connected to the CNY Human/Social Services Ecosystem²⁶ and can speak from experience about CNY’s diverse demographics and social determinants of health. 38 individuals responded who possess more than 500 years of combined work experience within the human/social service sector (for many, their present work is a second career; many described their careers as extending additional years).²⁷ The surveys were conducted in the Winter of 2024.
- **1-on-1 interviews with 14 “subject matter experts”** at *PEACE, Inc.* Each staff member represents a distinct program offering or serves a unique demographic. Topics included a) child care; b) disabilities; c) fatherhood and broader parent development; d) housing; e) justice involved, re-entry/post-incarceration services; f) Latino, Westside Syracuse outreach; g) maternal health and doula services, especially Black maternal health; and h) suburban/rural services. The interviews were conducted in the Winter of 2024.
- **Anonymous Onondaga County Human/Social Service Staff responses** to a “Human Services Career Path Survey.” In the Fall 2023, the *Human Services Leadership Council of Central New York* (HSLC) surveyed the staff of its member agencies to develop Social/Human Services recruitment strategies. Of interest for the CNA were the reasons for why staff went into -and chose to remain within- the Human/Social Services field.²⁸ The HSLC graciously shared the results of the 856 anonymous responses with *PEACE, Inc.* and allowed for the results to be incorporated into this CNA.

²⁵ In each conversation, 5 basic questions were asked. Some were more “positive” or “strengths-based” to identify what is respected and/or works well within one’s community. Others were more “negative” to identify challenges and barriers. Open-ended questions allowed for greater freedom of response. For example, with the Foster Grandparents, the following 5 questions were used to frame the conversation, i.e. 1) What is the best part about living in your neighborhood? 2) What is the most challenging part of your day? 3) What is the biggest problem you, your family, and/or neighbors face in the community? 4) Who are the people or organizations in your neighborhood that are helping people during difficult times? 5) Is there one new service or program that you feel is most needed in your community (something that doesn’t exist right now)? For more about Community Conversation/Focus Group Design, visit Community Toolbox, “Chapter 3. Assessing Community Needs and Resources. Section 6. Conducting Focus Groups.”

²⁶ “C-Suite Administrator” is a common term used to refer to the top-level leadership of an agency, i.e. an Executive Director and Chief Finance, Information, Operations, and Security Officers. The CNA leads were deliberate in attempting to survey individuals who work daily with the community. “Connected to the CNY Human/Social Services Ecosystem” was deliberately broad to include providers, community organizers and activists, policy advocates, researchers, and even individuals within philanthropy.

²⁷ When asked to describe their job responsibilities, a number of descriptions were offered, including but not limited to community engagement, employment support, coordination of social determinants of health outreach, service delivery, program coordination, office management, resource deployment, small business and manufacturing development, funding, HR expertise, parent supervision within the Foster Care system, Senior Companionship and coordination of volunteers, senior services, supervising peer and vocational education, policy analyst, program development and implementation, volunteer recruitment and coordination, adult education, advocating for families, and “advocating for my son.”

²⁸ The *Human Services Leadership Council of CNY* (HSLC) is a coalition of more than 80 CNY human/social services agencies, including *PEACE, Inc.* The mission of the HSLC “is to improve the lives of recipients of human services in Central New York by facilitating growth in the skills, knowledge, capacity and coordinated efforts of the not-for-profit agencies who serve them.” *Human Services Leadership Council of CNY. “HOME.”*

- **Anonymous *PEACE, Inc.* Staff responses** to the question, “*What needs do you see in your community that PEACE, Inc. and its programs could better respond to?*”²⁹ The question was one of 4 broad questions asked as part of the agency’s Strategic Design process. 65 staff members from across *PEACE, Inc.* responded in the Winter of 2023.
- **2022 and 2023 *PEACE, Inc.* Customer Satisfaction Surveys.** 138 clients responded in multiple languages to the survey conducted in Spring 2023.

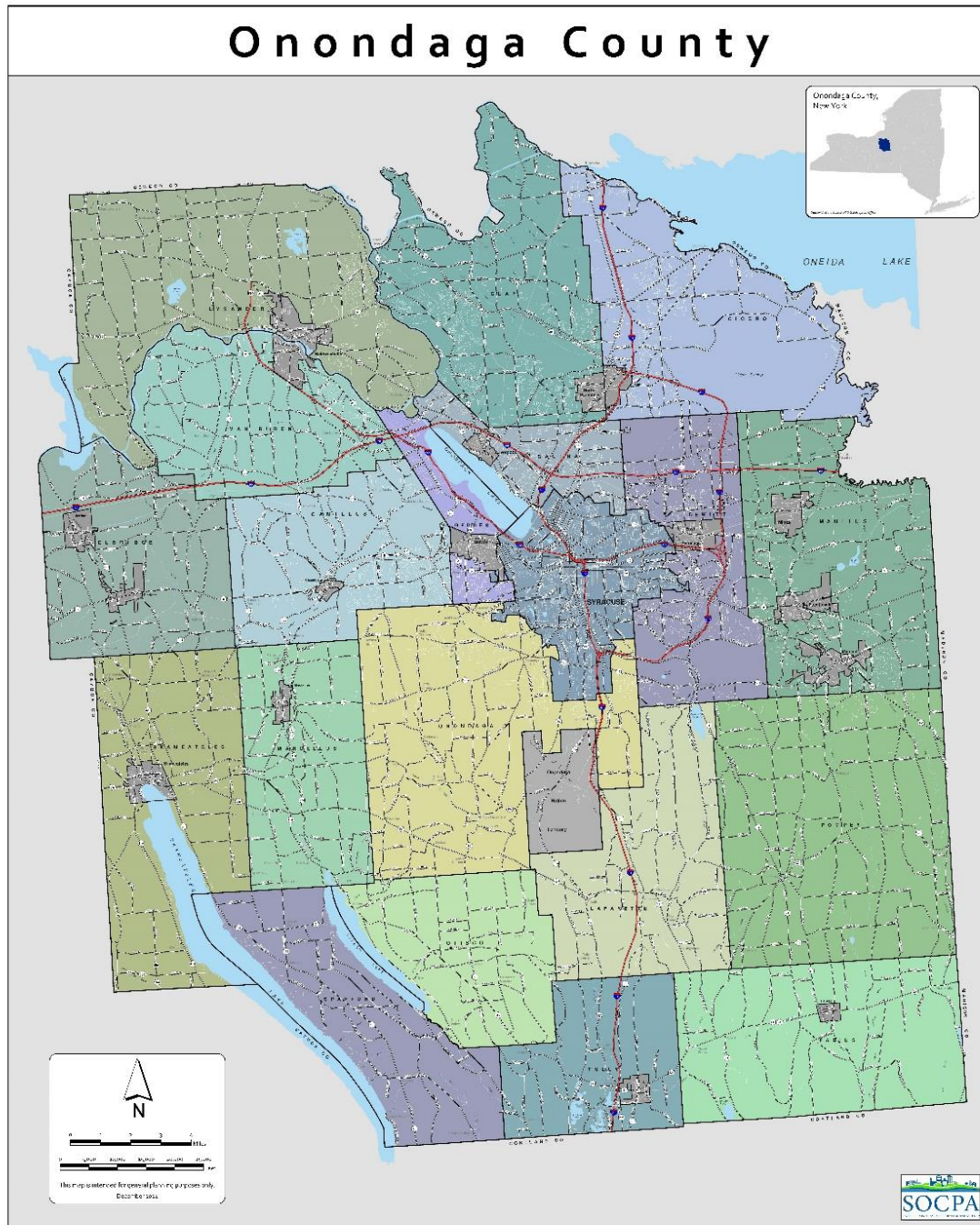
Section II: Basic Information about Onondaga County

2.1. Maps of Onondaga County

Throughout this section, maps frequently either referenced or used throughout the CNA will be highlighted. To better integrate them within the CNA’s evolving narratives, the maps have been placed here rather than in an appendix.

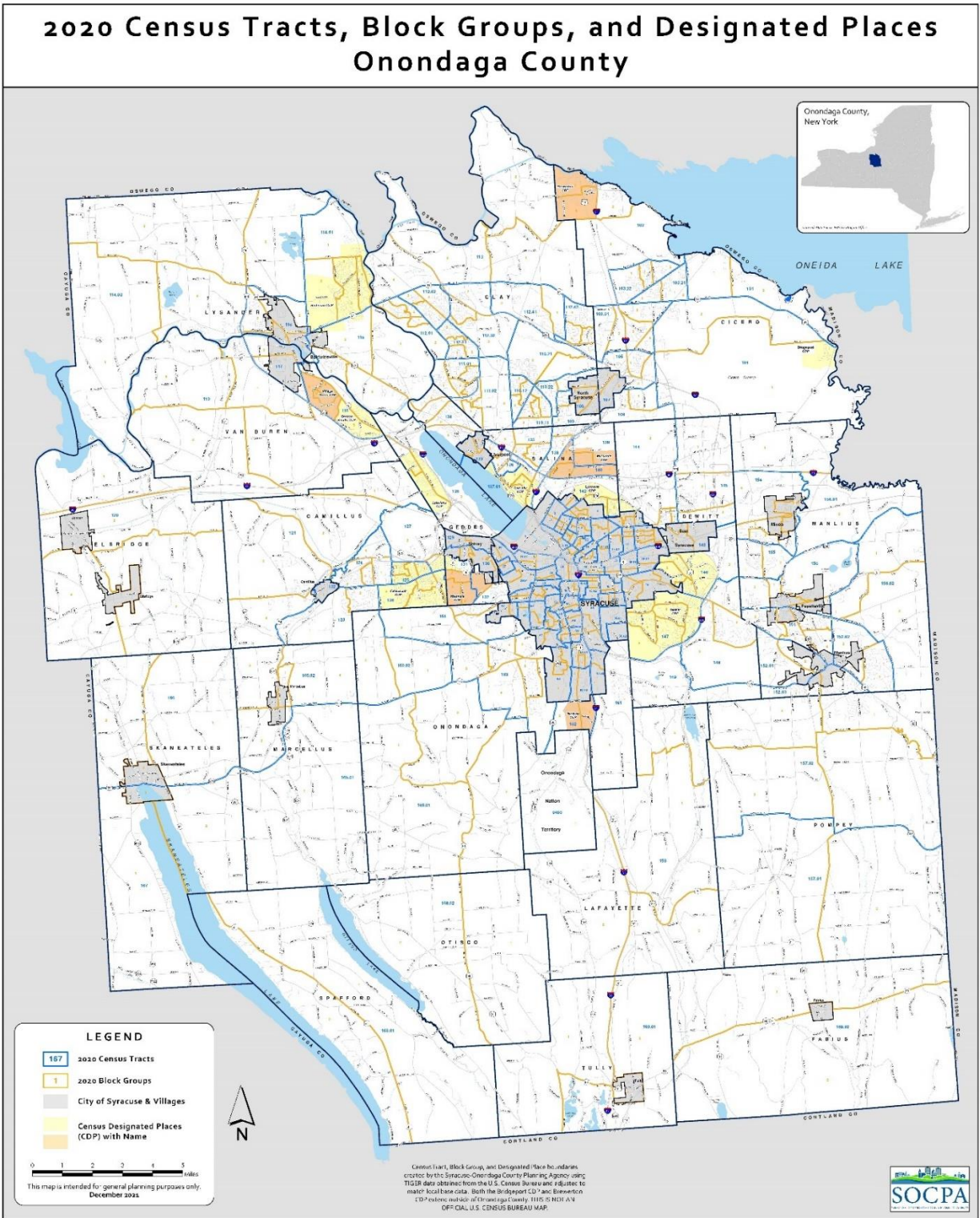
²⁹ The question was one of 4 open-ended ones asked to *PEACE, Inc.* staff while gathering information for the agency’s Strategic Design process in 2023. It was part of the agency’s efforts to integrate community needs information into the Strategic Design process, as suggested within National Community Needs Assessment guidelines. See NASCSP.

2.1.a Figure 15: Map of Onondaga County, Towns, Villages, and City of Syracuse³⁰



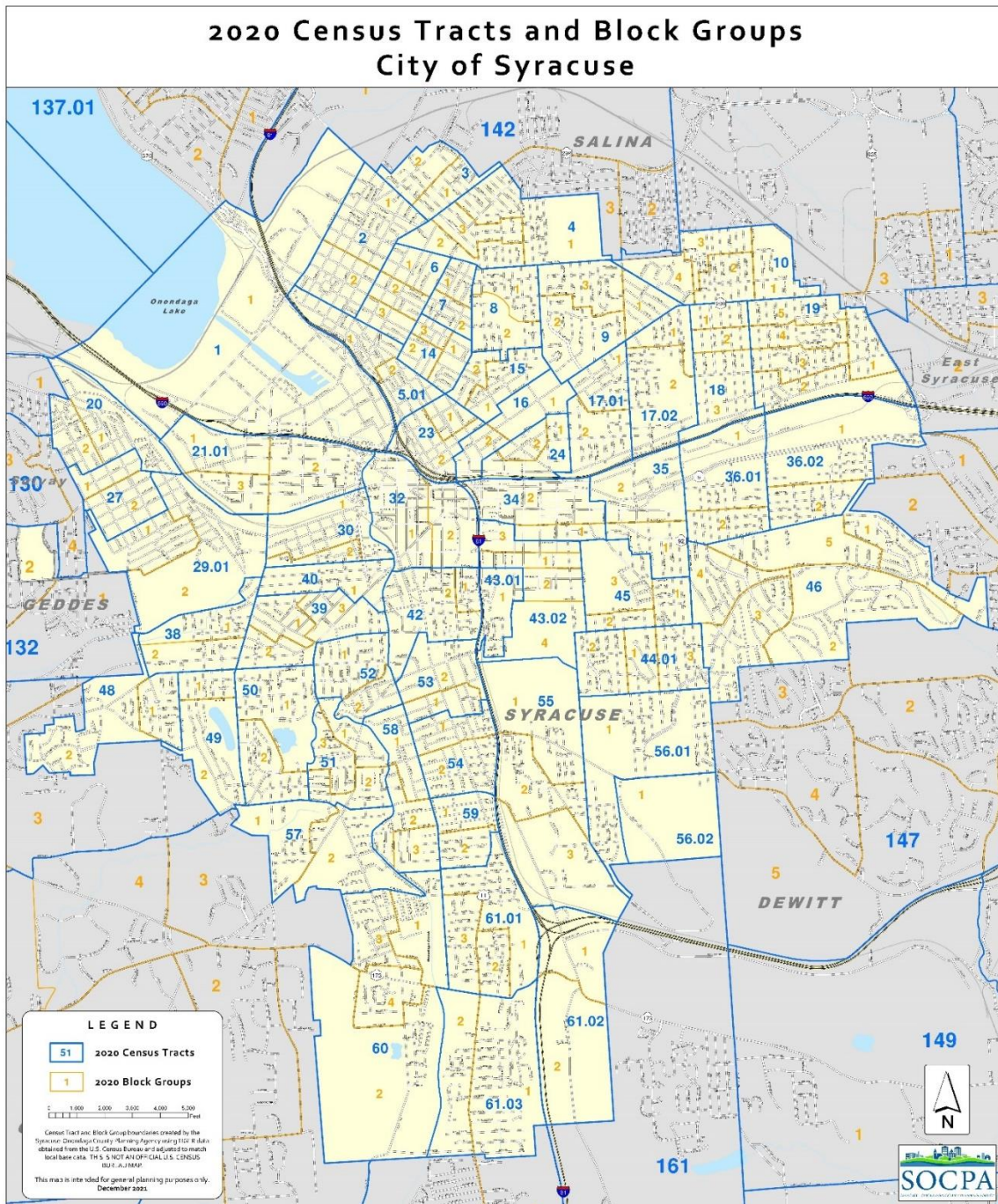
³⁰ The map shows Onondaga County's City, Towns, and Villages. For clarity, a **City** is an incorporated municipality. It has a boarder and local government that provides residents with nearly all of its services. Similar to a city, New York State **Towns** are incorporated municipalities that possess boarders and local governments. The municipal services provided by a town can vary; all towns provide road maintenance, at a bare minimum. All residents who do not live in a city or a Reservation live in a town. Therefore, the city of Syracuse and the Onondaga Nation Reservation are separate municipalities that do not follow the rules and regulations of a town. Within a Town, there can exist **Villages**. Like a town, a village possesses its own border and local government. For a full visualization, visit Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency (SOCPA), "Onondaga County."

2.1.b. Figure 16: 2020 Census Tracts, Block Groups, and Designated Places, Onondaga County³¹



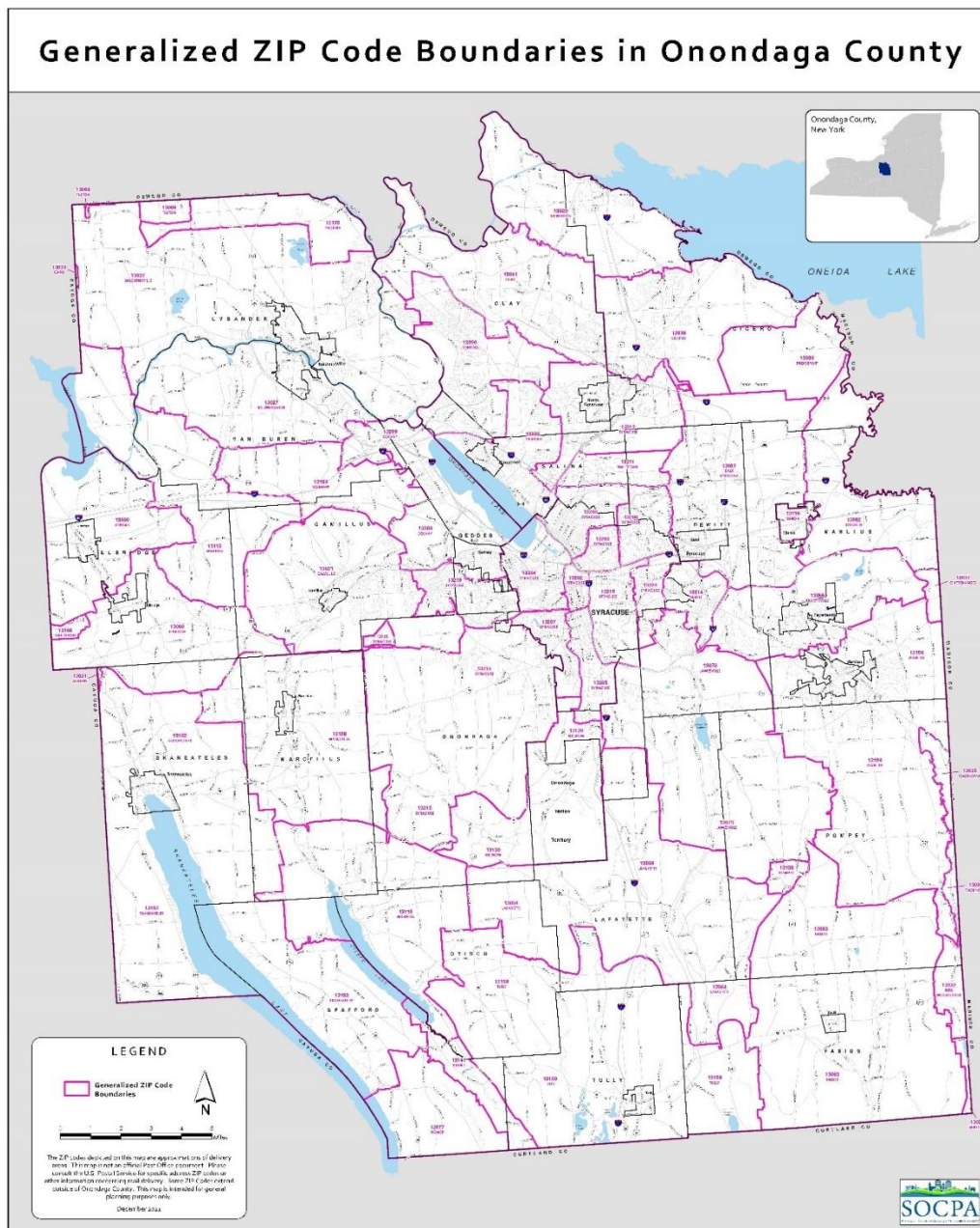
³¹ For a full visualization, visit SOCPA, “2020 Census Tracts, Block Groups, and Designated Places. Onondaga County.”

2.1.c. Figure 17: 2020 Census Tracts and Block Groups, City of Syracuse³²



³² According to the *United States Census Bureau* (USCB), **Census Tracts** are small statistical subdivisions of a county. Each is uniquely numbered with a code. Census Tracts must have a minimum population of 1,200 residents and no more than 8,000. When a Census Tract becomes greater than 8000 residents, the tract is split into 2, and with an extension given to the existing Code. Exemplifying such splitting are Census Tracts 61.01, 61.02, and 61.03 within the city of Syracuse. Splits and/or potential merging of a Census Tract occurs every 10 years alongside the decennial United States Census and through the Participant Statistical Areas Program (PSAP). Census Tract Data is valuable due to its precision. As noted previously, Census Tracts as well as Census Designated Places (CDP) are relatively stable geographic units for at least 10 years. A steady unit of

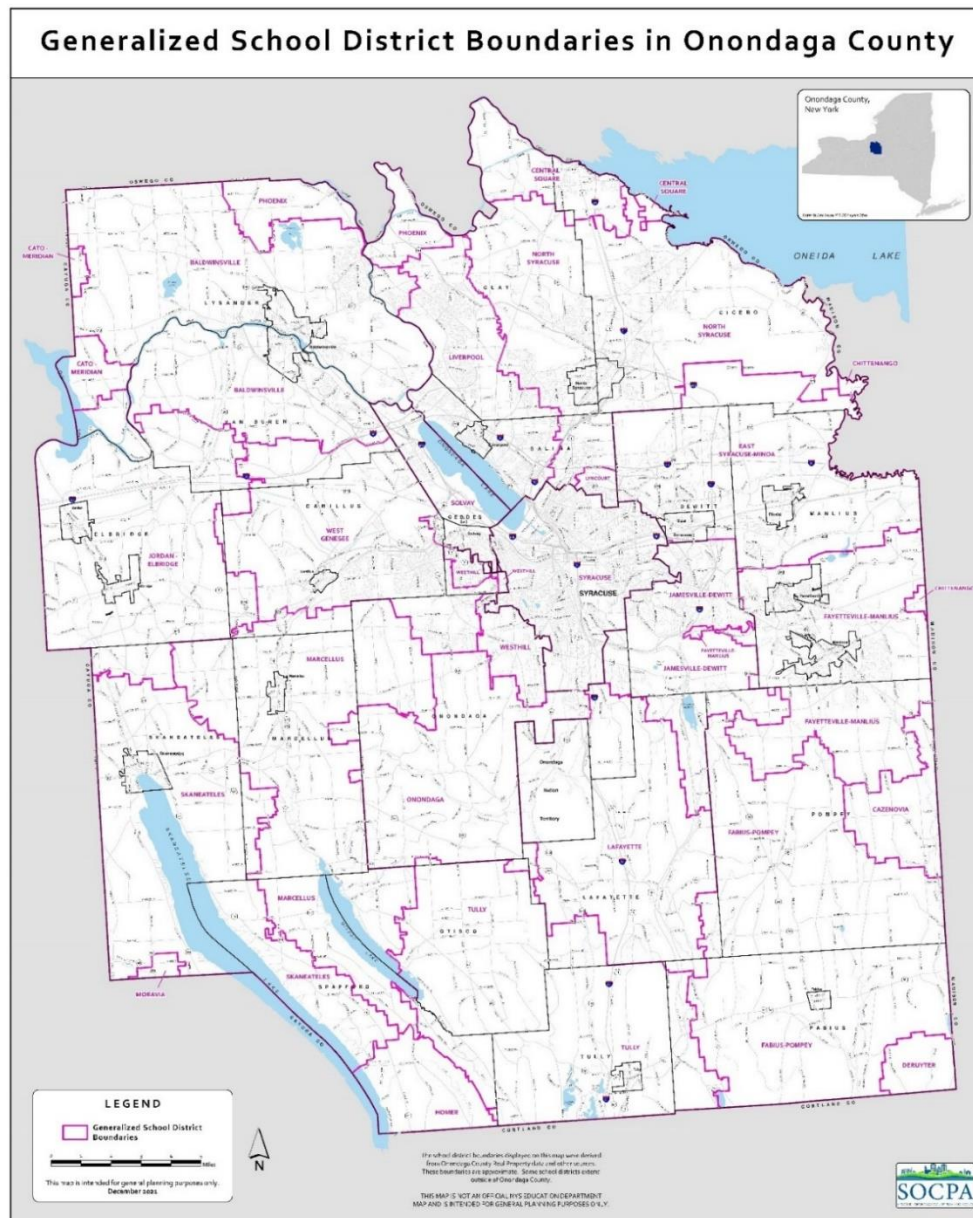
2.1.d. Figure 18: Generalized ZIP Code Boundaries in Onondaga County³³



measurement with a limited scope or number of residents in them, Census Tracts and CDPs are especially useful for identifying at need communities within ZIP Codes and municipal boundaries, better understanding school district populations and their needs, and determining neighborhood-specific needs. For a full visualization, visit SOCPA, “2020 Census Tracts, Block Groups, and Designated Places. Onondaga County.”

³³ Created and governed by the United States Postal Service (USPS), **ZIP Codes** have traditionally served different purposes than Census Tracts. While a ZIP Code can bear out demographic data, its primary goal is to make the distribution and delivery of mail more efficient for the Postal Service. As exemplified in Figure #12, ZIP Codes can transcend town, county, and state boundaries. They can also change rapidly according to the needs of the USPS. These ZIP Code changes “*may make it difficult to determine whether a change in a data value over time is due to actual changes in the population or because lines were redrawn.*” University of Central Florida, “UCF Research Guides: Statistics, Demographics and Census: ZIP Code > Census Tracts.” For a full visualization, visit SOCPA, “Generalized ZIP Code Boundaries in Onondaga County.”

2.1.e. Figure 19: Generalized School District Boundaries in Onondaga County³⁴



³⁴ SOCPA, “Generalized School District Boundaries in Onondaga County.” The formation, expansion, and consolidation of school districts are complicated and contentious topics linked to property, taxation, and -frequently- structural racism, among other issues. **Noteworthy here is that, outside of the city of Syracuse, town and school district lines do not align, as school district boundaries are often dictated by property development and tax revenue.** As noted by former Common Council Member Timothy Rudd, “the town of Onondaga includes parts of seven school districts: West Genesee, Westhill, Onondaga Central, Jamesville-DeWitt, Marcellus, Lafayette, and Tully. Similarly, school districts often span multiple towns. For example, the West Genesee School District covers parts of Camillus, Elbridge, Geddes, Onondaga and Van Buren.” These issues will be discussed in greater detail in Section 3.6, Education. Tim Rudd, “How Suburban Schools Could Help Revive Syracuse.” For a full visual, visit SOCPA, “Generalized School District Boundaries in Onondaga County.”

2.2 General Demographic Information about Onondaga County

This section will present general demographic information about Onondaga County from the 2020 Decennial Census will be presented. To understand the total population of a community, the *United States Census Bureau* recommends individuals use the 2020 Decennial Census, as it accounts for each resident of the country as well as helps determine government representation and appropriation for each respective state. As a result, the CNA will deploy the 2020 Decennial Census as a baseline to understand the population of Onondaga County. Elsewhere, *American Community Survey* (ACS) results will be used, especially when describing Onondaga County populations and or potential changes in population. Again, this follows Census Bureau recommendations, as “*the strength of ACS is in estimating characteristic distributions.*”³⁵

Figure 20: Population Totals for the United States, New York State, Onondaga County, Syracuse City, Towns (2010, 2020 Decennial Census)³⁶

Location	Population 2010	Population 2020	% of Change
Onondaga County (Including Onondaga Nation)	467,026	476,516	2.03%
Syracuse city	145,170	148,620	2.38%
Camillus town	24,167	25,346	4.88%
Cicero town	31,632	31,435	-0.62%
Clay town	58,206	60,527	3.99%
DeWitt town	25,838	26,074	0.91%
Elbridge town	5,922	5,476	-7.53%
Fabius town	1,964	2,006	2.14%
Geddes town	17,118	17,088	-0.18%
LaFayette town	4,952	4,910	-0.85%
Lysander town	21,759	23,074	6.04%
Manlius town	32,370	33,712	4.15%
Marcellus town	6,210	6,066	-2.32%
Onondaga town	23,101	22,937	-0.71%
Otisco town	2,541	2,368	-6.81%
Pompey town	7,080	7,080	0.00%
Salina town	33,710	33,223	-1.44%
Skaneateles town	7,209	7,112	-1.35%
Spafford town	1,686	1,588	-5.81%
Tully town	2,738	2,676	-2.26%
Van Buren town	13,185	14,367	8.96%

Figure 21: Population Totals for Onondaga County Villages, Onondaga Nation (2010, 2020 Decennial Census)³⁷

Location	Population 2010	Population 2020	% of Change
Baldwinsville village	7,378	7,898	7.05%
Camillus village	1,213	1,222	0.74%

³⁵United States Census Bureau, “Comparing ACS Data.”

³⁶ United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census Statistics, 2010, 2020, “Total Population.”

³⁷ Ibid.

East Syracuse village	3,084	3,078	-0.19%
Elbridge village	1,058	921	-12.95%
Fabius village	352	309	-12.22%
Fayetteville village	4,373	4,225	-3.38%
Jordan village	1,368	1,192	-12.87%
Liverpool village	2,347	2,242	-4.47%
Manlius village	4,704	4,662	-0.89%
Marcellus village	1,813	1,745	-3.75%
Minoa village	3,449	3,657	6.03%
North Syracuse village	6,800	6,739	-0.90%
Skaneateles village	2,450	2,533	3.39%
Solvay village	6,584	6,645	0.93%
Tully village	873	904	3.55%
Onondaga Nation Territory	468	831	77.56%

- Both Onondaga County and the City of Syracuse saw more than 2% population increases (2.03%, 2.38%) between the 2010 and 2020 decennial censuses. **For the first time in 70 years and since the 1950 decennial census, the City of Syracuse saw a population increase.** It was also a trend seen among other Upstate New York cities; Rochester (+0.4%) and Buffalo (+6.5%) showed small and large increases respectively.³⁸
- While the City of Syracuse showed a noticeable population increase between 2010 and 2020, many rural Onondaga County towns that are located farther from the City of Syracuse's limits saw a decrease in population. In particular, Elbridge, Otisco, and Spafford experienced noticeable population decreases. Such population decreases parallel the decreases seen throughout Upstate New York's rural counties and the four counties that surround Onondaga County, i.e. Cayuga (-4.7%), Oswego (-3.8%), Madison (-7.4%) and Cortland (-5.1%).³⁹ The majority of Onondaga County villages also saw noticeable population decreases.
- By contrast, many suburban townships with closer proximity to the city of Syracuse saw an increase in population between 2010 and 2020, noticeably Camillus, Clay, Lysander, Manlius, VanBuren.

Interestingly, ACS estimates that are based on the full 2020 decennial census count and that incorporate migration, birth, and death figures **have shown population decreases in Onondaga County since the COVID-19 Pandemic.** According to Census Bureau estimates, Onondaga County lost 2417 residents (a .51% decrease) between July 2020 and 2021⁴⁰ and 3845 residents (a -.81% decrease) between July 2021 and 2022.⁴¹ Migration from Onondaga County to other areas of the Country has been a primary factor.

³⁸ Mark Weiner, "Syracuse Gains Population for First Time in 70 Years, Census Data Shows."

³⁹ Mark Weiner, "Census 2020: While Rural Upstate NY Loses Population, Downstate Fuels New York's Growth."

⁴⁰ Kevin Tampone, "Onondaga County Sees Steepest 1-Year Population Drop since 2010."

⁴¹ Kevin Tampone, "Onondaga County 2022 Population Loss Ranks in NY Bottom Third."

Figure 22: Gender, Onondaga County, City of Syracuse (2010, 2020) ⁴²								
	2010				2020			
	Onondaga County	% of Population	Syracuse	% of Population	Onondaga County	% of Population	Syracuse	% of Population
Male	224,861	48.1%	69,180	47.7%	229,897	48.2%	71,629	48.2%
Female	242,165	51.9%	75,990	52.3%	246,619	51.8%	76,991	51.8%

Regarding **gender**, little change was observed in Onondaga County. Within the city of Syracuse, the male population increased by .5%.

Figure 23: Ages of Residents, Onondaga County, City of Syracuse (2010, 2020) ⁴³								
	Onondaga County				City of Syracuse			
	2010		2020		2010		2020	
Total population	467,026		476,516		145,170		148,620	
	# of population	% of population	# of population	% of population	# of population	% of population	# of population	% of population
Under 5 years	27,378	5.9%	25,612	5.4%	10,217	7.0%	9,136	6.1%
5 to 9 years	28,907	6.2%	27,272	5.7%	8,995	6.2%	8,926	6.0%
10 to 14 years	30,814	6.6%	28,364	6.0%	8,480	5.8%	8,640	5.8%
15 to 19 years	36,411	7.8%	33,647	7.1%	14,207	9.8%	13,830	9.3%
20 to 24 years	35,887	7.7%	36,135	7.6%	19,237	13.7%	18,445	12.4%
25 to 29 years	29,827	6.4%	31,888	6.7%	12,256	8.4%	13,418	9.0%
30 to 34 years	26,105	5.6%	30,927	6.5%	9,289	6.4%	10,890	7.3%
35 to 39 years	26,293	6.3%	28,746	6.0%	7,671	5.3%	8,746	5.9%
40 to 44 years	31,193	6.7%	25,542	5.4%	7,933	5.5%	7,187	4.8%
45 to 49 years	35,830	7.7%	25,586	5.4%	8,760	6.0%	6,650	4.5%
50 to 54 years	35,722	7.6%	30,012	6.3%	8,734	6.0%	7,390	5.0%
55 to 59 years	31,493	6.7%	33,648	7.1%	7,873	5.4%	8,108	5.5%
60 to 64 years	25,588	5.5%	32,962	6.9%	6,175	4.3%	7,942	5.3%
65 to 69 years	18,279	3.9%	27,595	5.8%	4,179	2.9%	6,429	4.3%
70 to 74 years	13,666	2.9%	21,161	4.4%	2,971	2.0%	4,700	3.2%
75 to 79 years	12,205	2.6%	14,449	3.0%	2,671	1.8%	2,865	1.9%
80 to 84 years	10,441	2.2%	9,953	2.1%	2,443	1.7%	2,061	1.4%
85 years and over	10,987	2.4%	13,017	2.7%	3,076	2.1%	3,257	2.2%

- As has been actively discussed by *Interfaith Works* and based on research compiled by AARP and *the Center for an Urban Future*, **Onondaga County and the City of Syracuse's populations are rapidly aging**. In trends similar to other upstate New York cities (Buffalo, Rochester, and Albany in particular), the baby boomer generation and especially those age segments between ages 60 to 75 now account for 17.1% and 12.8% of Onondaga County and the city of Syracuse's total populations respectively. These percentages are steep increases from 2010, when the same age segments accounted for 12.3% and 9.2%

⁴² United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census Statistics, 2010, 2020, "Gender."

⁴³ United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census Statistics, 2010, 2020, "Age of Residents."

of the Onondaga and City of Syracuse population. As will be discussed shortly, accompanying this population growth has also been large spikes in older adult poverty, especially within the City of Syracuse.

- Population growth was also observed in Onondaga County between the ages of 25 and 34 and more steeply in the City of Syracuse between the ages of 25 and 39. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Syracuse was **emerging as an attractive city for millennials** (those roughly born between 1981 and 1996) to settle due to its growing technology and medical field sectors associated with the area's universities.⁴⁴
- Noticeable population decreases were observed among age segments under 24 and between 40 and 54 within both Onondaga County and the city of Syracuse.

Figure 24: Race/Identity in Onondaga County, City of Syracuse (2010, 2020)⁴⁵

Identity	2010					2020			
	Onondaga County	% of Population	Syracuse city	% of Population		Onondaga County	% of Population	Syracuse City	% of Population
White alone	378,885	81.1%	81,319	56.1%		353,232	74.1%	71,175	47.9%
Black or African American alone	51,220	11%	42,770	29.5%		56,947	12.0%	45,588	30.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	3,818	.8%	1,606	1.1%		3,364	0.7%	1,408	0.9%
Asian alone	14,454	3.1%	8,021	5.5%		20,235	4.2%	10,403	7.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	148	0.0%	44	0.0%		138	0.0%	67	0.0%
Some Other Race alone	5,479	1.2%	3,937	2.7%		9,913	2.1%	6,574	4.4%
Two or More Races	13,022	2.8%	7,473	5.1%		32,687	6.9%	13,405	9.0%

Figure 25: Hispanic/Latino Population, Onondaga County, City of Syracuse (2010, 2020)⁴⁶

	2010					2020			
	Onondaga County	% of Population	Syracuse	% of Population		Onondaga County	% of Population	Syracuse	% of Population
Hispanic or Latino	18,829	4%	12,036	8.3%		26,572	5.6%	15,625	10.5%

⁴⁴ Gillian Follett, "Millennials Drive Syracuse Population Growth."

⁴⁵ United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census Statistics, 2010, 2020, "Race and Identity."

⁴⁶ United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census Statistics 2010, 2020, "Hispanic/Latino Populations."

- According to 2010 and 2020 decennial censuses, Onondaga County continues to have an increasingly diverse population. In particular, populations identifying as Asian, “Some Other Race,” “Two or More Races,” and Hispanic or Latino **grew at least 30%** in both Syracuse and Onondaga County from 2010 to 2020. Similar to Buffalo and Rochester, leaders in Syracuse attributed the population growth to expanding New American and Hispanic/Latino populations.⁴⁷
- While also growing over the 2 decennial censuses, 80% of Onondaga County’s Black/African American population still resides within the City of Syracuse according to the 2020 decennial censuses. An improvement from the 83% of the County’s population that resided within Syracuse in 2010, these percentages remain high compared to other racial/ethnic groups and perhaps reflect the structural legacies of racial inequality/the lack of socioeconomic mobility that Onondaga County and the city of Syracuse seek to overcome.

Onondaga County is also home to a diverse New American population according to 5-year, ACS estimates.

Figure 26: Total Foreign-Born Population, excluding Population Born at Sea, Onondaga County, City of Syracuse (2019, 2022)⁴⁸							
Onondaga County				City of Syracuse			
2019		2022		2019		2022	
Total Number of Individuals	% of Total Population	Total Number of Individuals	% of Total Population	Total Number of Individuals	% of Total Population	Total Number of Individuals	% of Total Population
37,224	8.0%	37,354	7.9%	18,777	13.1%	19,002	13.0%

Figure 27: Percentage of Total Foreign-Born Population, excluding Population Born at Sea, Onondaga County, City of Syracuse (2019, 2022)⁴⁹				
Location	Onondaga County		City of Syracuse	
	2019	2022	2019	2022
Europe	22.8%	23.8%	10.5%	10.5%
Asia	41.5%	40.2%	45.6%	43.7%
Africa	13.3%	14.5%	22.6%	24.6%
Oceania	0.3%	0.1%	0%	0.0%
Latin America ⁵⁰	18.6%	17.6%	19.9%	19.9%
Northern America	3.3%	3.8%	1.3%	1.30%

While the total foreign-born population remained relatively steady pre- and post-COVID-19 Pandemic, increases among European and African foreign-born populations are noticeable, while Asian and Latin American foreign-born populations decreased by more than 1%. As evidenced by the 2.0% increase, the majority of African foreign-born populations settled in the city of Syracuse. The percentage of European

⁴⁷ Weiner, “Syracuse Gains Population for First Time in 70 Years, Census Data Shows.”

⁴⁸ *United States Census Bureau*, 5-Year American Census Survey Estimates 2015-2019, 2018-2022, “Selected Social Characteristics,” DP02.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

and Latin American foreign-born populations remained steady within Syracuse but increased and decreased respectively outside the city's limits and throughout the rest of Onondaga County.

2.3 Histories of Onondaga County's Structural Inequalities

As outlined in Section 1.6, one Federal requirement for the CNA is *"to include key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty and the needs of the communities assessed"* (Standard 3.4). Although there is no standardized way for meeting the requirement, all of the examples provided as guidance are all present-day statistics, i.e. SNAP Rates, education/graduation rates, etc. Such data is important and found throughout the CNA. However, to understand a community's current needs and strengths, one must look beyond the present and within the area's histories and structural inequalities.

Doing so ensures the CNA remains justice focused and, as previously outlined in Section 1.6.a, avoids reinforcing stereotypes and/or perpetuating *"harmful narratives about specific groups and communities."*⁵¹ While much has been written about the interconnectedness of Twentieth Century Redlining, Urban Renewal, and Housing Discrimination,⁵² a summary of these issues and their effects on not only Syracuse but the broader County is necessary. Emphasis will also be placed on how local interests played important roles in applying federal policy locally, revealing how **our current community's structural inequalities were not only imposed from above but also in collaboration from below.**

2.3.a What is Redlining?

In sum, **Redlining** was a federal New Deal policy of the *Homeowners' Loan Corporation* (HOLC). Created in 1933, the HOLC *"purchased existing mortgages that were subject to imminent foreclosure"* and reissued them on monthly repayment plans that included the paying of some principal and interest. After 15 years of payments, the homeowner could own the home outright.⁵³ To assess the risk of the property, the HOLC hired local real estate agents to study the conditions of the house, its neighborhood, and the neighboring stock.⁵⁴ From this process, the notorious color-coded maps now associated with Redlining emerged.

The HOLC assigned 4 colors/grades to guide investment within American cities such as Syracuse. Green was rated "Best." Here 100% of residents could access loans. Blue was "Still Desirable" and offered lending to 85% of the residents. Yellow was deemed "Declining" with lending limited to 15% of the residents. Red was "Hazardous" and suggested no lending to residents. These rankings stemmed from the quality of the housing stock and, much more impactfully, the racial demographics of the neighborhood. Red neighborhoods were composed of predominantly Black residents, but also Jews, Catholics, Asians, and non-western Europeans. Below is HOLC map of Syracuse released in 1937.

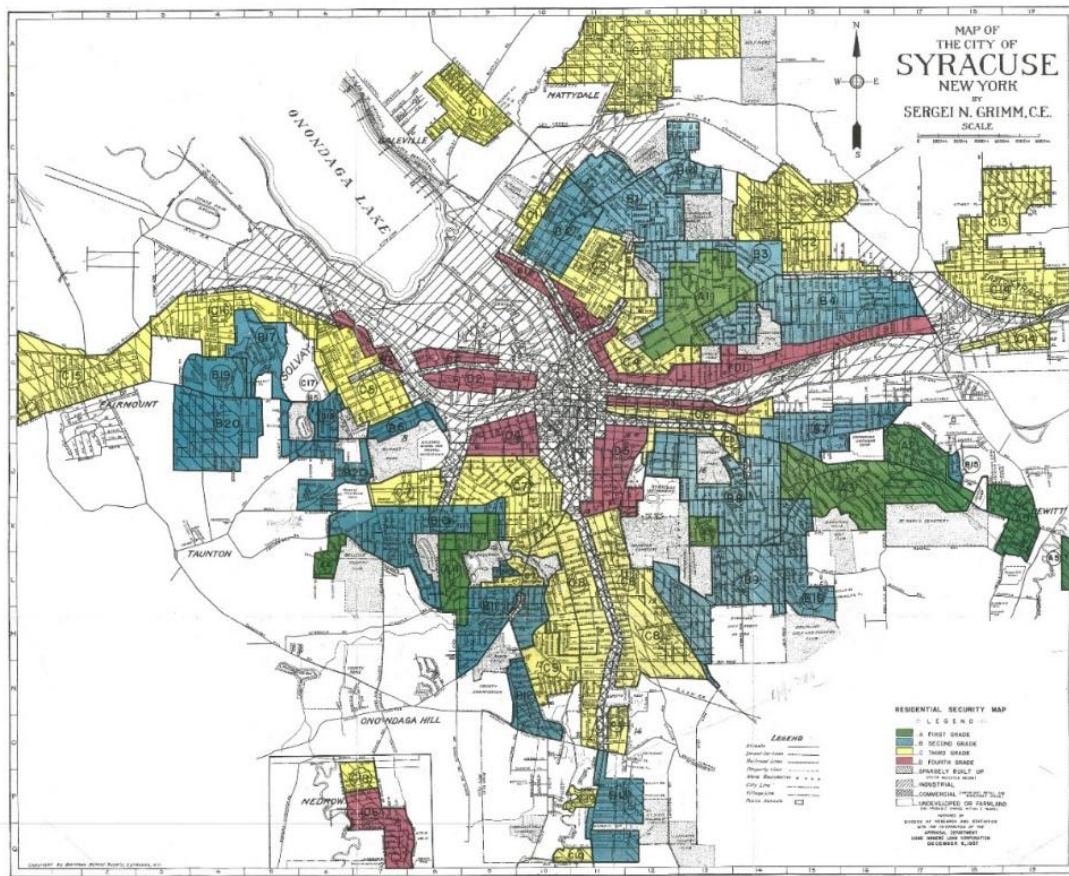
⁵¹ *Community Commons*, "An Introduction to Data Equity."

⁵² Todd Goehle and Ocesa B. Keaton, "What Is Redlining and Urban Renewal? Inequality and Resistance in Mid-Century Syracuse."

⁵³ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of the Law*, 63.

⁵⁴ Rothstein, 64.

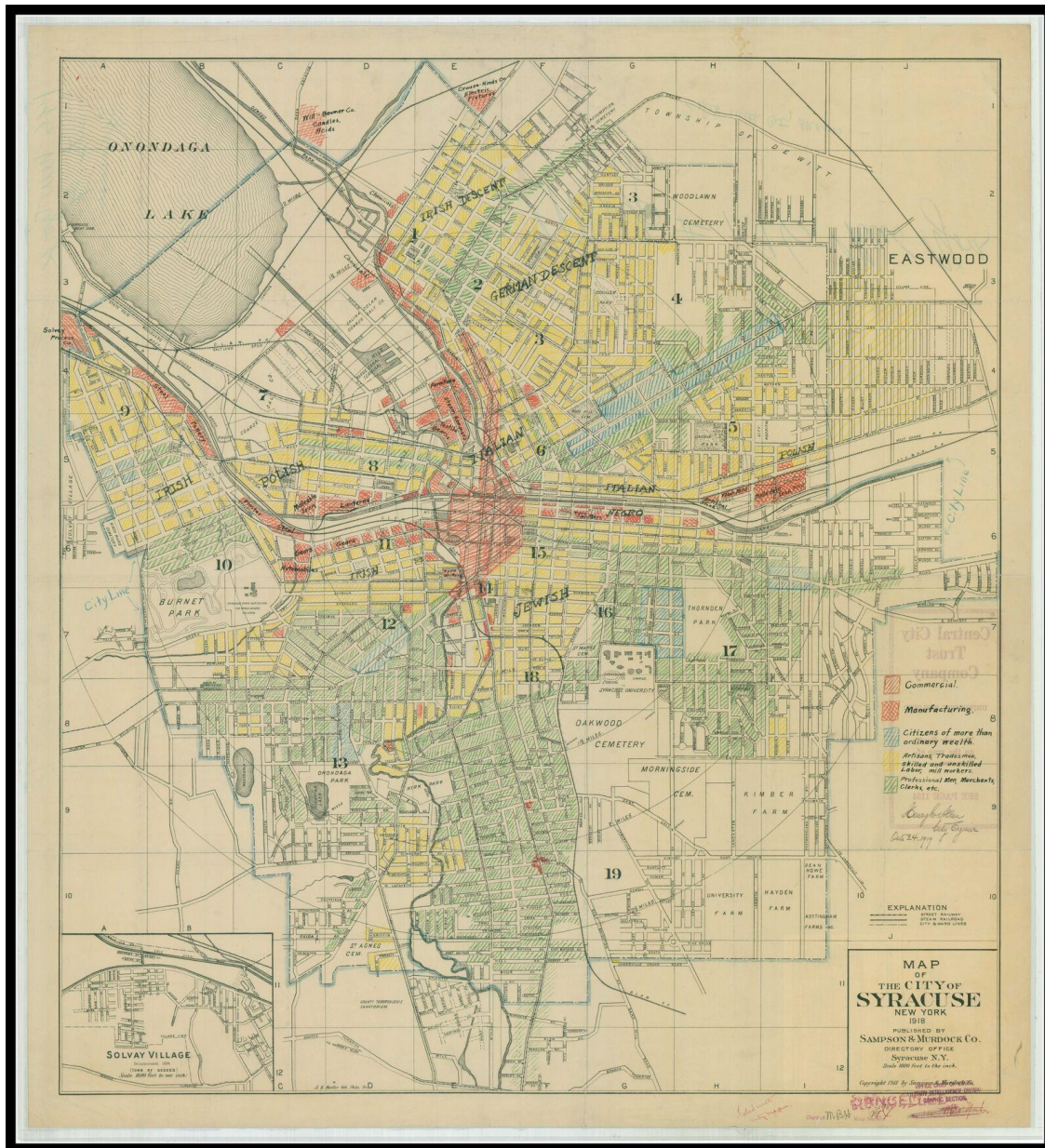
Figure 28: HOLC Redlined Map of Syracuse, New York from 1937⁵⁵



Even before the infamous HOLC maps of the 1930s, **local urban planners connected economics with the racial and/or ethnic demographics of a neighborhood.** In his extensive research, local journalist Matt Mulcahy discovered a color-coded map of Syracuse signed by then City Engineer Henry C. Allen on October 24, 1919. As displayed below, black/African-American populated neighborhoods were identified as “Negro” and in the color “Red.”

⁵⁵ Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, et al., "Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America."

Figure 29: Redlined Map of Syracuse, New York from 1919⁵⁶



Noticeable here is the linking of colors and ethnicities with occupation. “Red” was “manufacturing.” “Yellow” neighborhoods labelled “Jewish,” “Irish,” and more were described as “artisans, tradesmen, skilled and unskilled labor, mill workers.” By contrast, “Green” and “Blue” neighborhoods lacked ethnic/racial labels and were described as “Professional Men, Merchants, Clerks, etc.” and “citizens of more ordinary wealth” respectively. As will be discussed further, the map provides some indication about how notions of “whiteness” were constructed during this period (i.e. through an association with white collar occupations and residential spaces as well as an “Other” associated with blue collar occupations, post-war immigration, and Black citizens).⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Matt Mulcahy, “The Map.”

⁵⁷ Anne Maxwell, “Picture Imperfect, Photography and Eugenics.”

2.3.b White “Respectability” and the Intersection of Race and Class

The intersection of white middle- and upper-class notions of “whiteness” and “respectability,” occupations and work; and race is important to note, as white social anxieties provide additional context for the ways in which local Syracuse authorities responded to -and in the aftermath of- the Globe Malleable Works riots/massacres of 1919. Known as the “Red Summer of 1919,” Syracuse was 1 of 26 cities nationwide that experienced incidents of racial violence. *CNY Fair Housing’s* recent report “Zoning and Segregation in Syracuse, NY” discusses the event extensively. White striking iron workers attacked Black strikebreakers, the coverage of which “melded industrial labor disputes and racial violence.”⁵⁸ Below is one such image originally printed in the *Syracuse Herald Journal* and reprinted in “Zoning and Segregation.”

Figure 30: *Syracuse Herald Journal: Globe Malleable Works Protests*



Herald Artist Vic Lambdin Pictures Scene of Early Morning Fracas When Several Men Were Hurt Near the Globe Malleable Works.

It’s on the heels of this moment when Allen generated his map and began to demarcate white residential neighborhoods from industrial/commercial city spaces wherein the Black population also lived. It’s also within this moment when Syracuse City Hall and the Common Council officially codified this demarcation with the approval of a new Zoning Ordinance in 1922, one that largely remained intact until the recent *Re-Zone* initiative.⁵⁹ According to the *Syracuse Herald Journal*, white affluent neighborhoods were to be “*protected against the objectionable intrusion of business or industry, with attending unsightliness and nuisances.*”⁶⁰ People were of course said to be free to live in these latter locations. But to quote *CNY Fair Housing*, “*Ideas about what makes a place ‘residential’ or ‘industrial’ were tied up with ideas about race.*”⁶¹

2.3.c Housing Discrimination and Racial Covenants

White concerns about upholding “respectable” neighborhoods fueled zoning ordinances and discriminatory lending practices that limited black socioeconomic mobility and segregated the Syracuse community according to notions of “whiteness.” Other discriminatory efforts were based upon the intersection of cultural racism and codification. For example, the same real estate agents that provided the “data” for the HOLC color codes were also sworn to uphold segregated neighborhoods. In 1924, revisions were made to

⁵⁸ CNY Fair Housing, “Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing.”

⁵⁹ City of Syracuse, “Re-Zone Syracuse.”

⁶⁰ CNY Fair Housing, “Zoning and Segregation in Syracuse, NY,” 4-7.

⁶¹ Ibid.

the National “Realtor Code of Ethics” that stated it was the real estate agent’s *“responsibility to keep existing white areas white.”*⁶²

Figure 31: Article 34 of the Realtor Code of Ethics⁶³

ARTICLE 34.

A Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood.

It’s important to note as well that **Article 34** was part of larger efforts to revise the 1924 Realtor Code of Ethics and to professionalize the Real Estate industry based upon “applied” and “pure science.”⁶⁴ Helping Real Estate Agents apply the “scientific-based” Realtor Code were **Restrictive or Racial Covenants**. Traditionally, covenants codify the use of a property in a legally binding agreement such as a deed. Restrictive covenants don’t necessarily need to be sinister; property maintenance requirements are common restrictive covenants written into contemporary homeowner associations’ documents, for example. Historically, upper class property owners had already used written restrictive covenants to influence their property values and neighborhoods.⁶⁵ Yet in a post-World War I moment when the “Great Migration” to northern urban centers from the Jim Crow South was accelerating and -linked to it- eugenic “science” influenced policy was ever-growing (i.e. Syracuse’s 1922 Zoning Ordinance, Article 34), **restrictive covenants proved effective for restricting Black and Brown homebuying and laid the seeds for the later “white flight” into Onondaga County’s suburbs.**⁶⁶

Recently, a Syracuse University Ph.D. candidate and community organizer, Michael Kelly, identified over 1000 local covenants, several of which are displayed and discussed in depth on his outstanding website. Below are “Protective Provisions” for the Lynacres subdivision in Dewitt which Kelly shares on his website. Between seemingly mundane restrictions for the construction of the lot, there is a notice that *“no person of other than the Caucasian race may become the grantee or leasee of the property.”*⁶⁷

⁶² Eli Moore, Nicole Montoyo, and Nicole Mauri, “Roots, Race, and Place: A History of Racially Exclusionary Housing in the San Francisco Bay Area.”

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Jeffrey Hornstein, *A Nation of Realtors*, 109.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 108.

⁶⁶ Goehle and Keaton, “What is Redlining?”

⁶⁷ Michael T. Kelly, “Syracuse Covenants-Mapping Racist Housing Covenants in Syracuse, NY.”

Figure 32: Lynacres Restrictive Covenant, 1926

LYNACRES
PROTECTIVE PROVISIONS

IN THE MATTER OF J.W. CLARK RESTATE CO. INC. "Protective Provisions" June 1, 1926 Respecting the use and enjoyment of "Lynacres" a sub-division of the Town of Dewitt, County of Onondaga and State of New York, and securing the desirable and attractive residential character thereof. Whereas, the J.W. Clark Real Estate Co. Inc., a domestic corporation having its office and principal place of business in the City of Syracuse, N.Y., is the owner of a certain tract of land situate in the Town of Dewitt, County

end of which an additional residence and garage may be erected, but only in accordance with the restrictions which apply generally to the Lynacres Boulevard lots. **SECOND: No person of other than the Caucasian race may become the grantee or lessee of this property.** **THIRD:** No residence on lots fronting on East Genesee Street Turnpike shall be located within 60 feet from the front of said lot line. **ALL** residences shall front on and face Lynacres Boulevard, except on the East Genesee Turnpike lots. The residences on Lynacres Boulevard shall

Connections between race and labor are also displayed in covenants for the Dewitt homes discussed by Kelly. In particular, **non-white domestic laborers could work on a property and add to its value through their labor but not legally have the right to own or occupy it.** The language found in the clause is clear, *"Nothing herein contained shall prevent the lawful owner or occupants of said premises from keeping servants of other than the white race thereon."*⁶⁸

These sorts of restrictive covenants **would eventually be banned** by the United States Supreme Court in *Shelley vs. Kraemer* (1948). The national Code of Ethics was also revised in 1950 and the phrase "members of any race or nationality" was stricken from Article 34. Still, in the estimation of historian Jeffrey Hornstein, *"Article 34 must share culpability for the destruction of perhaps billions of dollars of property values, precipitated by white flight...the ideological and structural conditions that it symbolized linger to this day."*⁶⁹ Locally, SUNY ESF Professor Emanuel Carter echoed similar sentiments in an interview with *CNY Central*. Carter shared that, while racial covenants were no longer legal, the "logic" of them continued to influence lending and investment throughout Onondaga County. For Carter, *"The covenants were a major factor as well... by the late 1950s and 60s the covenants began to flake off ... But, the bank, insurance companies, and the real estate companies still behaved as if those maps were the framework in which business took place."*⁷⁰

2.3.d Urban Renewal, I-81, and the Reconfiguration of a Community

The discriminatory practices pursued throughout Onondaga County came during -and in response to- exponential population growth within the City of Syracuse and among a growing Black Community as a result of the "Great Migration."

Figure 33: Population, City of Syracuse, Decennial Census (1910, 1950, 1960) ⁷¹		
Census Year	Total Number of City Residents	Total Number of Black Residents
1910	137,249	1,124
1950	220,583	5,058
1960	216,038	11,210

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Hornstein, 108.

⁷⁰ Matt Mulcahy, "The Map: Urban Renewal and the 'removal of Blacks' from the Center of Syracuse."

⁷¹ Spurgeon Martin David Stamps and Miriam Burney Stamps, *Salt City and Its Black Community: A Sociological Study of Syracuse*, 38.

As outlined within S. David Stamps and Miriam Burney Stamps' *Salt City and its Black Community: A Sociological Study of Syracuse, NY*, entities such as the *Dunbar Center* emerged to empower migrants from the South with few possessions and limited employment prospects. *Dunbar* and national entities such as the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (NAACP) also fought to ensure Pioneer Homes would be integrated, one of the nation's first public housing initiatives and originally intended for whites only.⁷² Churches such as the *People's AME Zion Church*, the oldest Black Congregation within Syracuse, also played a critical role in furthering the local black community. It should be stressed that these are just some of the ways in which **an emerging black civil society was advancing their rights** and interests in the face of discriminatory policies.

Section 2.2 discussed how the City of Syracuse's population in 2020 had increased for the first time since 1950. And yet **Figure 34** provides greater -and troubling- context for this change; **while the overall population of Syracuse decreased between the 1950 and 1960 decennial censuses, the city's Black/African American population more than doubled.** Indeed, American Counties and Cities were being transformed. Notions of whiteness and respectability once again shaped federal legislation such as the *Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954* by providing moneys and resources for additional public housing complexes, slum clearance, and commercial development within cities. Working in tandem with these *Housing Acts* was the *Federal Highway Act of 1956*. Intending to "interconnect the economies of American cities through 41,000 miles of Interstate," the *Federal Highway Act* provided an additional vehicle for white exodus from the cities into burgeoning suburbs. In this moment then, **Urban Renewal** sought to make downtowns more attractive for economic investment and more accessible for whites who worked within cities but preferred to reside outside of them in growing suburbs. According to Goehle and Keaton, "In the name of economic 'progress,' Urban Renewal cleared blighted properties and relegated African- Americans to declining neighborhoods, leading author James Baldwin and others to describe it as 'Negro Removal.'"⁷³

As this Section has made clear, **Onondaga County was not immune to but rather reflective of national trends and policies.** And as footnotes throughout this chapter indicate, there are extensive histories and firsthand accounts offered by former residents and activists about the 15th Ward.⁷⁴ As part of Syracuse's downtown, the 15th Ward was a predominantly Black/African American neighborhood whose residents sought refuge from the Jim Crow South and the forms of local discrimination discussed above. Statistics bear out the effects of such concentration, and "by 1950, 93% of all black people in Syracuse lived in the Fifteenth Ward where rents were inflated by 20%-40%."⁷⁵

Throughout the 1960s, urban renewal legislation provided reasoning for the destruction of Syracuse's 15th Ward and -in its place- the building of the I-81 viaduct and over time much of the city's current skyline, including *SUNY Upstate Medical Center*, *Everson Museum of Art*, and the *Equitable Towers* (formerly the *MONEY Building* and *AXA Towers*). With I-81's completion in 1968, nearly 900 African-American families were displaced from their homes, affecting more than 80% of Syracuse's Black/African American population of the time.⁷⁶ While the *Fair Housing Act of 1968* and other subsequent legislation made housing discrimination

⁷² Ibid., 38, 49, 56.

⁷³ Goehle and Keaton.

⁷⁴ For more on the 15th Ward of Syracuse and firsthand accounts offered by its former residents and activists, see Bridge Street. "Remembering the 1963 CORE Protests." WSYR Staff, "Remembering the 1963 CORE Protests;" *The Stand*, "No Place Like Home;" Onondaga Historical Association, "The Destruction of Syracuse's 15th Ward;" WSYR Staff. "Hidden History: The End of Syracuse's 15th Ward."

⁷⁵ Jamison Crawford, Andrew M. Croom, Paul Ciavarri, Deka Dancil, Aggie Lane, Athena Last, and Peter King (UJTF), "Building Equity in the Construction Trade: A Racial Equity Impact Statement," 11.

⁷⁶ Aaron Knight, "Urban Renewal, the 15th Ward, the Empire Stateway and the City of Syracuse, New York;" Stamps, 81.

illegal based on race, color, nationality, religion, gender, ability, or familial status, exclusionary zoning practices combined with legal, income-based forms of exclusion have limited poor, black and brown families such as those who previously lived in the 15th Ward from accessing safe and affordable housing within the city of Syracuse and throughout Onondaga County.⁷⁷

2.3.e What are the Legacies of Redlining and Urban Renewal in CNY?

The recent decision to tear down the I-81 viaduct -which at present is crumbling and fails to meet numerous federal highway regulations- for a community grid option seeks to confront legacies of the aforementioned federal, state, and local policies.⁷⁸ Nationally, the *Congress of New Urbanism* identified I-81 as 1 of 15 United States highways prime to be torn down and to be transformed by its local community.⁷⁹ I-81 has also been featured in the speeches of President Joseph R. Biden Jr. and Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg. Each have championed federal infrastructure investments and the rebuilding of American transportation routes as means for racial reconciliation and that union apprenticeships, high-paying jobs, and more can reverse the racial inequalities stemming from urban renewal.⁸⁰ Locally, in its recent report “Building a Better Future: The Structural Racism built into I-81 and How to Tear it Down,” NYCLU vividly captured the stakes over any impending action around I-81, stating that:

*I-81 has remained both a concrete and symbolic representation of false promises and failed policies. The poorest and wealthiest parts of Syracuse are now physically separated by I-81...The I-81 project could be the catalyst for knitting back together what the highway destroyed. By taking a hard look at the harms done to people in the past, there is a real chance to improve housing conditions, health outcomes, and economic and educational opportunity for all people in Syracuse. This will require uncomfortable honesty about systemic racism. But if we ignore this history, city and state officials run the risk of displacing people all over again, further entrenching poverty and segregation.*⁸¹

As evidenced by the quote, NYCLU has long-argued the negative effects of urban renewal and I-81 on vulnerable black and brown city residents. In “Building a Better Future,” NYCLU outlines how I-81 and urban renewal policies precipitated a) the loss of wealth accumulation due to confiscated property and lack of job access; b) greater housing segregation and with it more limited access to quality education, wages, food stuffs, public transportation, and healthcare; and c) higher rates of lead poisoning, respiratory diseases due to automobile exhaust and air pollution, and other health maladies.⁸²

Connections between the legacies of Redlining and its effects on **Public Health** were also in the forefront of NYCLU’s advocacy around the COVID-19 Pandemic. For example, in its “Testimony of the New York Civil Liberties Union before the New York State Senate and the New York State Assembly regarding the Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19 on Minority Communities,” NYCLU found that “*of the 4 ZIP codes with the highest COVID-19 case rates, significant portions of the 3 were characterized as ‘Definitely declining’ or ‘Hazardous’ in the 1937 HOLC ‘redlining’ maps.*”⁸³

⁷⁷ Goehle and Keaton.

⁷⁸ *Poverty and Race Research Action Council (PRRAC)*, “Deconstructing Segregation in Syracuse? Housing/Schools Field Report.”

⁷⁹ *Congress for the New Urbanism*, “Freeways Without Futures 2021.”

⁸⁰ Weaver, Teri. 2021. “Biden Mentions Syracuse’s I-81 Project in \$2T Infrastructure Plan,” Advance Media NY Editorial Board, “Buttigieg Visit Confirms I-81 as Federal Priority (Editorial Board Opinion).”

⁸¹ Simon McCormack, Lanessa Owens-Chaplin and Johanna Miller (NYCLU), “Building a Better Future: The Structural Racism Built Into I-81, and How to Tear it Down,” 4.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 9-14.

⁸³ *The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU)*, “Testimony of the New York Civil Liberties Union before The New York State Senate and The New York State Assembly regarding The Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19 on Minority Communities.”

NYCLU has not been alone in identifying how the policies of the past have created many of the structural inequalities that we will soon observe in the present. Regarding **Hyper-Segregation in Housing**, *CNY Fair Housing* in its “Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing: Syracuse and Onondaga County 2020” reveals how *“the patterns of racial and ethnic segregation that exist in Syracuse and Onondaga County are largely rooted in historical practices that have occurred over the last century. Discriminatory and racist public policies and private market practices have shaped the way the region has developed and continue to impact access to housing opportunities today.”*⁸⁴ Such practices of “exclusionary zoning” will be discussed further in Section 3.4 on Housing.

In one installment of his multimedia series “The Map: Segregated Syracuse,” reporter Matt Mulcahy interviewed *Syracuse University* Education Professor George Theoharis; each identified the legacies of **Hyper-Segregation in Education** and raised the need to desegregate schools so as to better integrate and utilize city and county education resources for local residents.⁸⁵ Many have lauded the planned STEAM School in the former Central High School as doing just that.⁸⁶

Neighborhoods of concentrated poverty stem from **Limited Workforce Equity** as well. In its “2019 Racial Equity Impact Statement” (REIS), the *Urban Jobs Task Force* (UJTF) and *Legal Services of CNY* outlined how, with the movement of financially stable white households furthered by the building of I-81, *“poor whites and black people were left behind and suffered from the eroded tax base”* and limited employment opportunities.⁸⁷ In their estimation, foregrounding federal, state, and local policies of redlining, urban renewal, and the building of I-81 are necessary *“to understand the devastating impact of the initial I-81 highway and to present the upcoming rebuild of the I-81 highway as a new opportunity for good-paying local jobs that could help revive our city economy instead of letting history repeat itself, causing more poverty and segregation.”*⁸⁸

Unsurprisingly as well, these legacies inform many community members’ concerns about any impending I-81 project. In their interviews with local Southside residents, NYCLU found concerns about *“future land use and displacement through gentrification; environmental and health issues; and racial and restorative justice, including equal access to educational, economic and employment opportunities.”*⁸⁹ When combined with expressed concerns about the region’s present housing crisis, fears about **gentrification, land use, and economic development** around the former 15th Ward and the proposed I-81/Community Grid were raised and were met with applause by both sessions of the Foster Grandparent Community Conversations as well. For context, a number of the Foster Grandparents either lived in the 15th Ward or had family members who lived there prior to the construction of I-81. A number of the Foster Grandparents also currently live in Toomey Abbott Towers, a senior housing complex run by *Syracuse Housing Authority* (SHA) which sits between the current I-81 viaduct and the city’s University Neighborhood (specifically *SUNY Upstate Medical* and *Syracuse Universities Crouse Hospital*, and the *Syracuse VA Medical Center*). Additionally, the Community Conversations occurred one week after a controversial plan was made public that proposed replacing 92 SHA housing units with a *SUNY Upstate Optometry School*.⁹⁰ As one Foster Grandparent shared, *“One of the biggest problems is the takeover from SU, Upstate, Crouse and St. Josephs. No matter where you try to move to, you can't do it because if you want a 3-bedroom apartment you have to pay \$2400 a month. You go anywhere in the city, one of these is there.”*

⁸⁴ *CNY Fair Housing*, “Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing.”

⁸⁵ Matt Mulcahy, “The Map: Why Is No One Talking about Desegregating Syracuse Schools?”

⁸⁶ Melissa Newcomb, “Take a Peek inside Syracuse’s Proposed \$75 Million STEAM High School.”

⁸⁷ Crawford et al. (UJTF), 12-13.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸⁹ McCormack et al., 14.

⁹⁰ Michelle Breidenbach, “Plans to Build Optometry School in Place of Syracuse Public Housing on Hold after Public Reacts.”

These concerns were echoed by SCSD Nottingham High School students who also connected the upcoming I-81 project with larger issues about housing, gentrification, and the University Neighborhood's effect on the community. The students agreed feeling *“like they are always building dorms. Rent is super high in Syracuse, and instead of building housing, they are only building dorms...There is also a lot of land being taken up by Upstate and being used for Medical Buildings...I think bringing down I-81 won't lead them to building more housing.* Similar to the seniors as well, the surveyed high school youth were **concerned with how the proposed changes would affect their local community.** One student remarked, *“the buildings are generic, and it loses the personality of the neighborhood...you take away the personality of the historic buildings.”* Another student followed, *I would like to see old architecture and new architecture. There is a lot of history behind those historic buildings.”*

2.3.f. Median Household Income

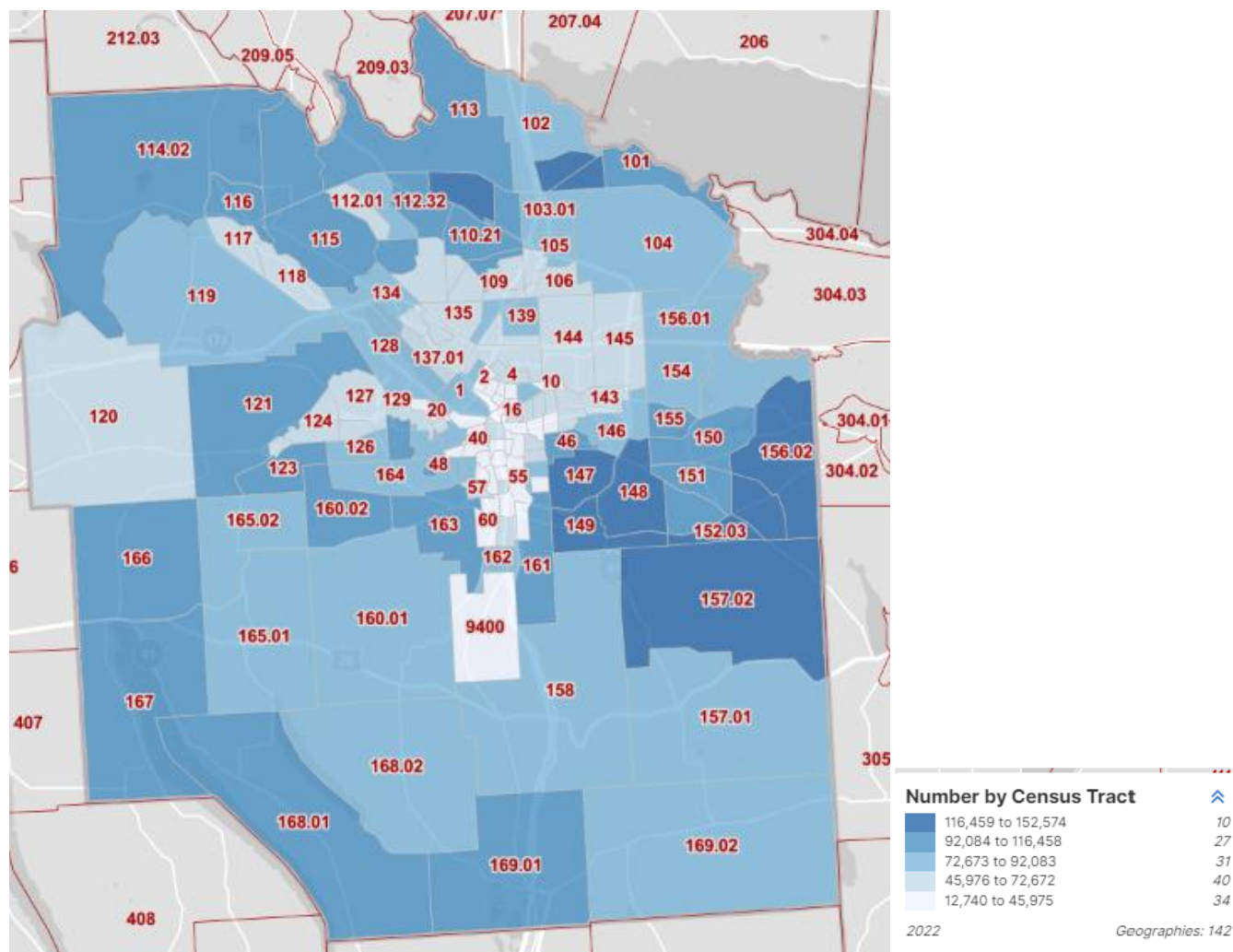
Intentionally or not, these discriminatory legacies of the past continue to shape the socioeconomic inequities of Onondaga County's present, a theme that will be repeated throughout the CNA. **Median Household Income** (MHI) data and maps reinforce this point.⁹¹

Figure 34: Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months for New York State, Onondaga County, and the City of Syracuse (2019, 2022) ⁹²		
Place	2019	2022
New York State	\$68,486	\$81,386
Onondaga County	\$61,359	\$71,479
City of Syracuse	\$38,276	\$43,584

⁹¹ Another indicator of wealth inequality, “Median Household Income (MHI) in the Past 12 months” shows a halfway or “middle” point among Household income in a community. For example, Syracuse has a MHI of \$43,584 according to 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates. This means that half of the city's households are estimated to have earned above \$43,584 and half earned below \$43,584. *United States Census Bureau*, “Median Household Income;” *University of Missouri Center for Health Policy*, “Measures of Income in the Census - MCDC.”

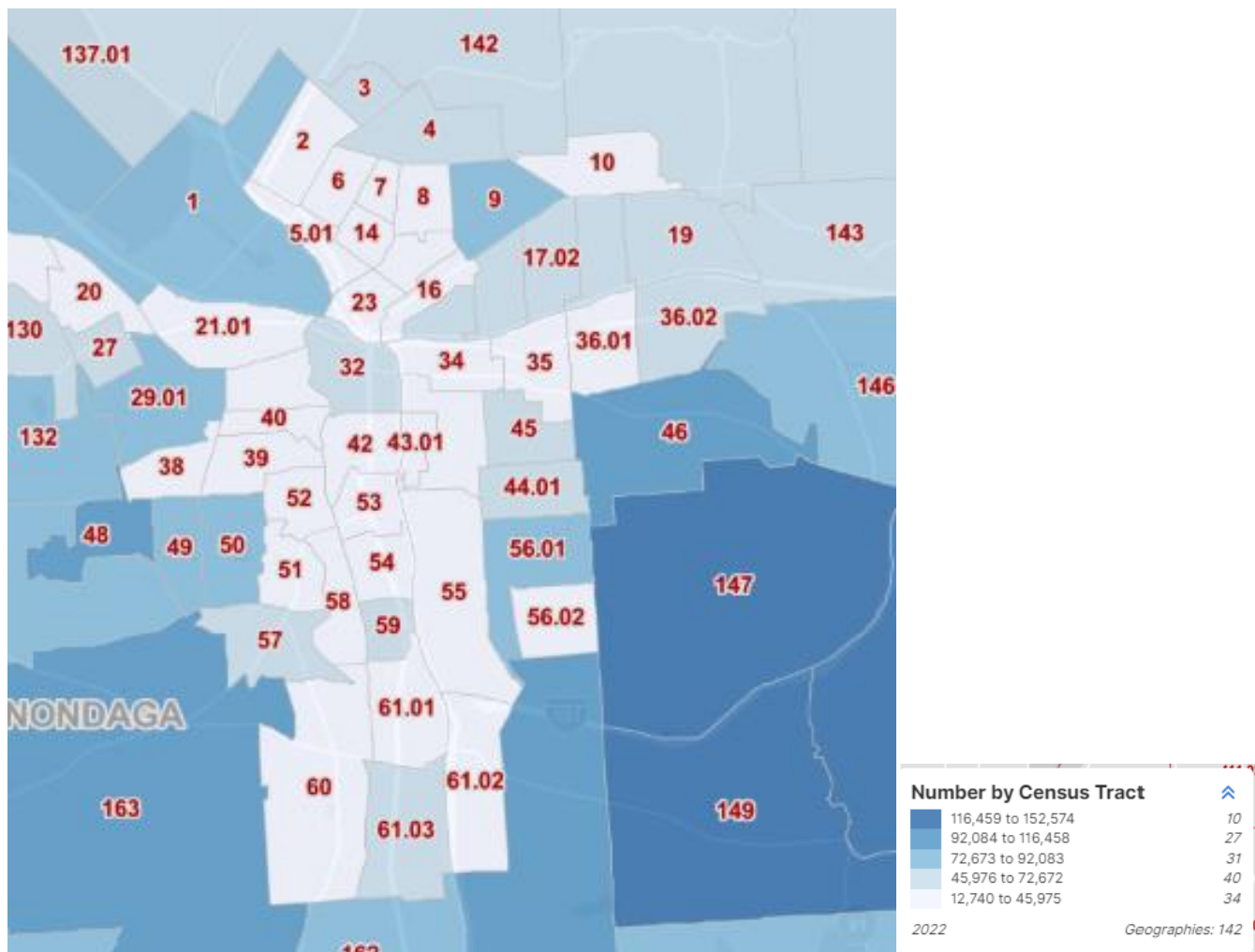
⁹² *United States Census Bureau*, 5-Year American Census Survey Estimates 2015-2019, 2018-2022, “Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months,” S1901.

Figure 35: Map, Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months for Onondaga County (2022)⁹³



⁹³ Ibid.

Figure 36: Map, Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months for the City of Syracuse (2022)⁹⁴



- In lieu of a full table outlining each of Onondaga County’s 142 census tracts, the above maps visualize the MHI of both Onondaga County and the city of Syracuse according to 2019 and 2022 5-year ACS estimates. Eastern townships such as Dewitt, Manlius, and the northern sections of Pompey include Census Tracts wherein MHI is between \$116,459 and \$152,574. The immediate western suburbs bordering the city of Syracuse as well as the western and northern boundaries of Onondaga County (excluding Census Tract 120) also possess Census Tracts wherein MHI is \$92,084 to \$116,458. This is not to say that there is not poverty in these areas and that the CAN does not consider it; certainly, poverty data in the next Section will bear this out. But by contrast, the majority of Syracuse’s Census Tracts (34 out of 55 Census Tracts, or 61.8%) have MHIs from \$12,740 to \$45,975 and feature large concentrations of Black, Latino, New American, and nonwhite poverty. When MHI according to race and ethnicity is factored into the equation, as displayed in the table below, it provides the statistical context for why *The Brookings Institute* found Onondaga County and the city of Syracuse in 2018 possessing the “seventh worst racial income gap among the nation’s aging industrial cities.”⁹⁵ White Median Household Income (MHI) (\$77,804) was 112% greater than Black MHI (\$36,640) in Onondaga County, meaning **Onondaga**

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Berube.

County’s racial income gap has widened from 97% since the release of *The Brookings Institute* report in 2018.

Figure 37: MHI based on race, ethnicity, Onondaga County, Syracuse (2022) ⁹⁶		
	Onondaga 2022	Syracuse 2022
Label	Median Household Income (dollars)	Median Household Income (dollars)
Households	71,479	43,584
One race--		
White	77,804	52,547
Black or African American	36,640	33,549
American Indian and Alaska Native	46,380	-
Asian	68,579	52,257
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	59,698	-
Some other race	47,614	31,044
Two or more races	56,413	27,180
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	51,223	34,437
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	78,261	52,782

Section III. Identifying Community Needs

3.1 Poverty in Onondaga County

We all face adversity and setbacks. Many Americans cannot afford a \$400 unexpected expense. A relatively small expense can snowball if you do not have a safety net creating a poverty trap. People become stuck not because of a lack of effort but because there are systemic inequalities that exacerbate financial emergencies and setbacks.

Outlining the ways in which histories and systems of inequality have informed the region’s development provides a critical context for understanding poverty in Onondaga County and the city of Syracuse. Much has been written about it. For example, in his 2015 report “Architecture of Segregation,” *Rutgers University* Professor Paul Jargowsky found Syracuse to be the worst city in the United States for concentrated poverty among Black and Hispanic residents.⁹⁷ According to a 2021 *CNY Fair Housing* report, conditions in Syracuse have worsened since 2012, identifying a 26% increase in the number of census tracts that have racially and ethnically concentrated poverty.⁹⁸ Despite decreases between 2019 and 2022, **the percentage of City of Syracuse residents living in poverty remains more than double that of New York State and Onondaga County.** These statistics are noted in Figure 40. The immediate Figure 39 represents the current Federal Poverty Level Guidelines (FLP) as determined by size of household and percentage at or above poverty. FLP is especially important for many Human/Social Service providers, as it sets the basis for eligibility with programs such as SNAP, *Women, Infant, and Children* Program (WIC), *Temporary Assistance for*

⁹⁶ Ibid.
⁹⁷Paul Jargowsky, “Architecture of Segregation.”
⁹⁸ *CNY Fair Housing*, “Zoning and Segregation In Syracuse, NY.”

Needy Families Program (TANF), *Medicaid*, and other social safety net/benefit services.

Figure 38: Federal Poverty Level Guidelines (FLP) (2024)⁹⁹					
Household/Family Size	100%	133%	138%	150%	200%
1	\$15,060	\$20,030	\$20,783	\$22,590	\$30,120
2	\$20,440	\$27,185	\$28,207	\$30,660	\$40,880
3	\$25,820	\$34,341	\$35,632	\$38,730	\$51,640
4	\$31,200	\$41,496	\$43,056	\$46,800	\$62,400
5	\$36,580	\$48,651	\$50,480	\$54,870	\$73,160
6	\$41,960	\$55,807	\$57,905	\$62,940	\$83,920
7	\$47,340	\$62,962	\$65,329	\$71,010	\$94,680
8	\$52,720	\$70,118	\$72,754	\$79,080	\$105,440
Each person over 8, add	\$5,380	\$7,155.40	\$7,424.40	\$8,070	\$10,760

Figure 39: Poverty Status in the last 12 Months for New York State, Onondaga County, and the City of Syracuse (2019, 2022)¹⁰⁰					
	2019			2022	
	Below poverty level	% Below Poverty Level		Below Poverty Level	% Below Poverty Level
New York State	2,681,277	14.1%		2,655,662	13.6%
Onondaga County	443,667	14.1%		63,066	13.9%
City of Syracuse	39,983	31.0%		38,798	29.6%

⁹⁹ Office of the Assistant Secretary for Evaluation, “2024 Poverty Guidelines: 48 Contiguous States (all states except Alaska and Hawaii).”

¹⁰⁰ *United States Census Bureau*, 5-Year American Census Survey Estimates 2015-2019, 2018-2022, “Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months,” S1701.

Percent by Census Tract

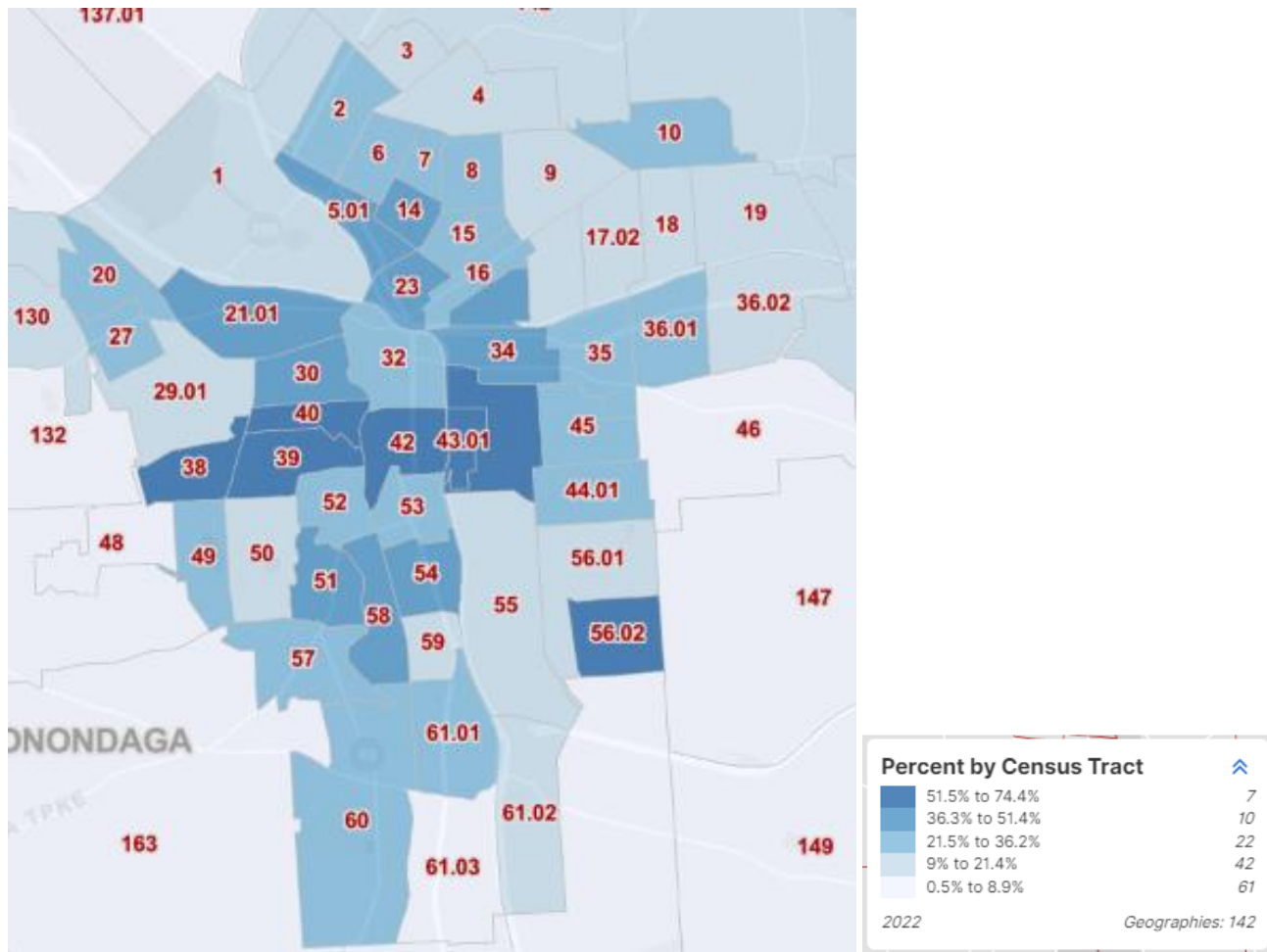
51.5% to 74.4%	7
36.3% to 51.4%	10
21.5% to 36.2%	22
9% to 21.4%	42
0.5% to 8.9%	61

2022

Geographies: 142

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Figure 41: Map, Percentage of Syracuse City Residents Living in Poverty (2022)¹⁰²



Within the City of Syracuse, poverty is far more concentrated, with 17 of the city's 55 Census Tracts (31%) having an estimated poverty rate of more than 36.3%. Of the 10 Census Tracts with poverty rates from 36.3% to 51.4%, many are on the higher end of the scale and located within the Southside (51, 54, 58) and Northside (5.01, 14, 23, 24) neighborhoods of the city, where there is a mix of predominantly Black/African American and Black/African American, New American populations respectively. The 7 Census tracts with poverty rates between 51.5% and 74.4% run east/west across the heart of the city include Syracuse Public Housing (42) as well as the city's Near Westside (38, 39, 40), where there is a mixture of Black/African American and Latino populations.¹⁰³ When comparing Figure 42 with Figure 29 of Redlined Syracuse, note the **parallels between those Census Tracts with the highest rates of Poverty and those formerly Red- and Yellow-lined neighborhoods**. Data related to the number and percent of population below poverty level according to race and ethnicity further reveals these inequalities.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Intermixed in Census Tracts 43.01 and 43.02 are large numbers of Syracuse University students as well as low-income families. Census Tract 56.02 is Syracuse University South Campus and overwhelmingly student based.

Figure 42: Number and Percent of Population Below Poverty Level in the Last 12 Months according to Race and Ethnicity, Onondaga County, City of Syracuse (2019, 2022) ¹⁰⁴								
	Onondaga County				City of Syracuse			
	2019		2022		2019		2022	
	# below poverty level	% below poverty level	# below poverty level	% below poverty level	# below poverty level	% below poverty level	# below poverty level	% below poverty level
White alone	35,902	10.1%	33,939	9.7%	16,900	24.5%	15,074	22.8%
Black or African American alone	17,616	35.1%	17,717	35.3%	16,127	39.3%	15,933	38.9%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	547	22.4%	610	26.8%	430	32.3%	360	36.1%
Asian alone	3,255	21.9%	2,361	14.8%	2,659	36.3%	1,546	20.9%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	8	5.0%	50	27.9%	8	20.0%	10	30.3%
Some other race alone	1,449	31.6%	1,679	25.8%	1,201	40.9%	1,320	34.7%
Two or more races	3,833	24.0%	6,710	23.6%	2,658	37.3%	4,555	38.3%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	6,260	29.5%	7,008	28.9%	4,977	40.7%	5,397	40.4%

Other discrepancies emerge from the above numbers. For example, whereas 44.4% of Onondaga County’s white alone poverty is located within Syracuse, the estimated percentages are far higher for those who are Two or More Races (68%) or Hispanic or Latino (77%). Even more troubling, 90% of the County’s Black/ African American poverty is concentrated within the city of Syracuse.

Childhood poverty is also an issue throughout Onondaga County. For example, whereas the percentage of children under 18 decreased pre- and post-pandemic in New York State, it increased and remained relatively static in Onondaga County and the City of Syracuse respectively.

¹⁰⁴ *United States Census Bureau*, 5-Year American Census Survey Estimates 2015-2019, 2018-2022, “Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months,” S1701.

Figure 43: Number and Percentage of Children under 18 Living in Poverty the Last 12 Months in New York State, Onondaga County, City of Syracuse (2019, 2022) ¹⁰⁵				
	2019		2022	
	# Below poverty level	% Below Poverty Level	# Below Poverty Level	% Below Poverty Level
New York State	791,913	19.6%	734,756	18.1%
Onondaga County	19,903	20.5%	20,544	21.1%
City of Syracuse	13,761	45.8%	13,702	45.8%

In December 2023, the release of new, 5-year 2018-2022 ACS Estimates for Onondaga County once again made local news, finding the city of Syracuse to have the second highest rate of childhood poverty under 18 (45.8%) among American cities with more than 100,000 residents.¹⁰⁶ While an improvement from the previous year's 5-year estimates when Syracuse was number one in the country with a rate of 48.5%, still alarmingly high numbers in Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo have led New York State Governor Kathy Hochul to create a \$50 Million anti-poverty initiative that would target 9 ZIP Codes within the three cities. According to Hochul's plan, Syracuse's 13202 and 13204 ZIP Codes would be targeted, as each have the third and fourth highest child poverty rates in the state at 70% and 63% respectively.¹⁰⁷ Consisting of Syracuse's Downtown and portions of the city's Near Westside and Southside, the ZIP Codes entail the Census Tracts that had high rates of overall poverty and that sit in formerly Red- and Yellow-lined neighborhoods with heavy concentrations of African American, Latino, and New American populations. Additionally, just as residents of Onondaga County are increasing in age, so too are the rates of **Senior Poverty over Age 65**, especially within the City of Syracuse, where the percentage of Seniors over 65 has increased by 24% since 2019. According to the *Center for an Urban Future*, this trend has been ongoing for more than a decade, noting in its research an increase in older adult poverty within the city of Syracuse by 110% from 2011 to 2021.¹⁰⁸

Figure 44: Number and Percentage Seniors over 65 Living in Poverty in the Last 12 Months in New York State, Onondaga County, City of Syracuse (2019, 2022) ¹⁰⁹				
	2019		2022	
	Below poverty level	% Below Poverty Level	Below Poverty Level	% Below Poverty Level
New York State	350,709	11.5%	403,440	12.2%
Onondaga County	6,560	8.8%	7,976	9.7% ¹¹⁰
City of Syracuse	2,560	15.4%	3,445	19.1%

3.1.a. A Note about ALICE (Asset, Limited, Income Constrained, Employed Households)

A last measurement of poverty and income is an initiative of the *United Way* called ALICE, or Asset, Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. ALICE calculations expand beyond Federal Poverty Level (FPL) guidelines and “factor minimum average income that a household needs to afford housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and a smartphone plan, plus taxes.”¹¹⁰ Additionally, ALICE can account for a wider range of households who live paycheck to paycheck and are ineligible for services set by FPL and many of the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Mark Weiner, “Hochul Wants \$50 Million to Fight Child Poverty in Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo.”

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Bowles, Charles Shaviro, and Eli Dvorkin, “Keeping Pace with an Aging Onondaga County.”

¹⁰⁹ *United States Census Bureau*, 5-Year American Census Survey Estimates 2015-2019, 2018-2022, “Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months,” S1701.

¹¹⁰ United for Alice, “Alice in the Crosscurrents: Covid and Financial Hardship in New York State,” 3.

services offered by Human/Social Services providers. Herein is the value of ALICE, i.e. that it can help those providers that use FPL for their service eligibility guidelines to anticipate potential FLP eligible households. For example, the “Below ALICE Threshold,” which combines both poverty-level and ALICE households, was 38% in Onondaga County in 2021, a rate better than the New York State “Below ALICE Threshold” at 44%.¹¹¹ Additionally, while the number of individuals “Below ALICE Threshold” increased by 3%, the number of households increased by 8% from the previous year. Noteworthy as well with the most recent ALICE report, *“with pandemic assistance waning while significant challenges remain, there are warning signs that the economic situation for households below the ALICE Threshold has worsened since 2021, including sustained high levels of food insufficiency, continued difficulty paying bills, medical debt, and feelings of anxiety and depression.”*¹¹² The rest of the CNA presents evidence confirming this cautionary tone, **that low-income households struggled to adjust to and/or navigate the ending of increased COVID-19 era assistance.** Moreover, entities such as *The Center for American Progress* contend solutions for resolving child poverty in cities with high rates such as Syracuse include *“securing the right to basic needs for all families with reforms to food assistance, housing supports and health care programs,”* the curbing of expanded pandemic-era supports seemingly goes against critical policy recommendations that the CNA will show are needed.¹¹³ The contention also supports the CNA’s claim that there are limits to what available quantitative data can tell us in rapidly changing, post-COVID conditions. Rather, descriptive forms of qualitative data can help fill in some of the gaps.

3.1.b. Finances and Increasing Costs

Here it is important to pause and return to the inclusive data approach outlined in **Section 1.6.a.** To think about the systems and structures outlined previously that have produced these numbers. It is also important to once again restate the thoughts of a Human/Social Services provider that began this section,

We all face adversity and setbacks. Many Americans cannot afford a \$400 unexpected expense. A relatively small expense can snowball if you do not have a safety net creating a poverty trap. People become stuck not because of a lack of effort but because there are systemic inequalities that exacerbate financial emergencies and setbacks.

This seems especially true in current conditions when a) families are seemingly struggling with their finances and b) the majority of pandemic-era assistance programs have ended, including Emergency Rental Assistance Programs, more generous SNAP, college loan payment moratoriums, and expanded Earned Income and Child Tax Credits. Using survey data collected from nearly 11,000 Americans in the late fall of 2022, the *Federal Reserve Board* found that, while *“workers continued to experience a strong labor market...higher prices have negatively affected most households.”* Noteworthy are the following data points,

- Self-reported financial well-being was the lowest recorded since 2016.
- *“The share of adults who said they were worse off financially than a year earlier rose to 35%, the highest level since the question was first asked in 2014.”*
- *“When asked for the largest expense they could cover using only savings, rather than how they would pay a small emergency expense, 18 percent said the largest expense they could cover with savings was under \$100 and an additional 14 percent said the largest expense they could cover was between \$100 and \$499.”*¹¹⁴

These conditions have been compounded by **the rise of inflation and of basic needs costs** which has disproportionately hurt and stressed low-income households according to data provided by the *Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas* in early 2023. Here again it is important to note the release date of the report and the

¹¹¹ Ibid., 24.

¹¹² Ibid., 5

¹¹³ Areeba Haider, “The Basic Facts About Children in Poverty.”

¹¹⁴ *The Federal Reserve*, “Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2022 Fact Sheet.”

use of data collected in Fall 2022 (i.e. after the curbing of robust pandemic-era assistance). A number of key conclusions from the report and its use of Fall 2022 *Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey* data found,

- “Households with incomes ranging from \$25,000 to \$35,000 in 2021 were about 19.3 percentage points more likely to be very stressed by inflation than households with incomes in the \$75,000 to \$100,000 range.”¹¹⁵ Additionally, within the report,
- One reason cited for the difference in stress based on household income: low-income households are less likely to have the savings/disposable income to stock up on discounted goods, buy in bulk, and/or delay expenditures if one can save, all of which are often strategies pursued to navigate spikes in food and basic needs costs.
- Additionally, **renters are more greatly affected by inflation than homeowners**, especially with a) renters typically having lower incomes, b) rent increases skyrocketing, and c) rent being a key driver of inflation presently. According to the *Fed* report, “56.5 percent of those paying rent were very stressed by high inflation as opposed to 43.4 percent of homeowners with a mortgage and 39.3 percent of owners without a mortgage.”¹¹⁶

These trends seem to be confirmed locally by the *Community Foundation of Central New York’s* (CNYCF) “Life Needs Assessment” data. When asked if one has “enough money to pay your bills on time,” only 66.35% out of 1171 survey respondents in 2023 marked yes. This was a noticeable decrease from the previous year, when 78.15% of 1565 survey respondents in 2022 said yes. From the same “Life Needs Assessment,” the ability to “save money for future needs” also has seemingly decreased over the past year, with 60.85% of 1124 respondents in 2023 saying yes as opposed to 68.09% of 1567 respondents in 2022.

3.1.c. Debt, Supports, and the Search for Resources

As costs and expenses due to inflation have increased, so too has debt among low- to moderate-income American households, with record total numbers of credit card debt being reported widely in Fall 2023.¹¹⁷ According to fourth quarter 2022 estimates, New York State residents had an average student loan balance of \$37,460; the median student loan balance was \$19,160.¹¹⁸ With the end of the more than 3-year student loan payment pause in June 2023 and the return of student loan payments beginning in October 2023, student loan debt is expected to be an ever-growing burden for many.¹¹⁹ **Medical debt** especially appears to be an emerging issue in Central New York. According to an *Urban Institute* study released in 2023, Syracuse has the second largest “share of consumers with medical debt in collections in New York State.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ *Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas*, “High Inflation Disproportionately Hurts Low-Income Households.”

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Ken Sweet, “Some Americans Have Become Saddled with Credit Card Debt as Rent and Everyday Prices Remain High.”

¹¹⁸ Daniel Mangrum, Joelle Scally, and Crystal Wang, “Three Key Facts from the Center for Microeconomic Data’s 2022 Student Loan Update.”

¹¹⁹ James Kvaal, “A First Look at Student Loan Repayment After the Payment Pause.”

¹²⁰ Jennifer Andre, Michael Karpman, Fredric Blavin, Dulce Gonzalez, and Breno Braga. “Medical Debt in New York State: Estimates for Large Cities and Towns, State Legislative Districts, Congressional Districts, and Other Geographic Areas.”

Figure 45: Cities and Highest Average Percentage of Consumers with Medical Debt in Collections in New York State ¹²¹		
City	Population	Average percent of adults with medical debt
Elmira	27,236	34.50%
Syracuse	142,553	24.10%
Poughkeepsie	30,341	17.00%
Utica	59,984	16.10%
Rome	32,217	16.00%
Niagara Falls	47,978	13.60%
Auburn	26,383	13.00%
Buffalo	255,805	12.80%
Newburgh	28,146	12.30%
Troy	49,253	11.90%

The report also notes that medical debt is also a problem within those formerly Red- and Yellow-lined City of Syracuse neighborhoods with highly concentrated minority populations. Here, approximately 28% of the residents have medical debt, nearly double the next closest region, the Capital District, at 14%. Additionally, the town of Clay was ranked the worst among the state's 25 largest towns with an estimated 11.4% of its residents having medical debt.¹²² Until recently stopped, *SUNY Upstate Medical Center* had aggressively sought lawsuits to recoup medical debt, with more than 1500 lawsuits alone filed last year.¹²³ Still, as an individual who described themselves as working with,

those struggling with debt or facing debt collection lawsuits, the civil legal system is set up in a way that can be very opaque and confusing for non-attorneys. It can be very difficult to find information about what you need to do, or even what your rights are for particular issues such as medical debt or student loan debt.

Women, people of color, and people in poverty often are targeted more by debt collectors and face more severe consequences due to inequities based into the legal system.

Given these varied economic pressures, a Human/Social Service provider in Baldwinsville's commented that ***"access to monetary resources for the families in our community"*** is her biggest challenge. She continued,

I am very limited in what we can do. We would love to repair a car but if it is going to be a money pit it is not worth it unless you can just get it to where it needs to be. Even home repairs, we would love to keep somebody in a home or a trailer but if it is going to be thousands of dollars, is it time to make a change? Seniors are prioritized, but families with children are a vulnerable population as well. If plumbing or the floor are exposed, then children are exposed to lead and mold, they are a very vulnerable population.

For a survey respondent who works with Aging Onondaga County residents, *"we see many of the low-income older adults we serve are facing new hardships-rising costs of food and housing with benefits and subsidies not keeping pace; health care systems that are very difficult to navigate; and services and community spaces that are not safe and welcoming for them."* Concerns about financial supports, the inability for subsidies to meet rising costs, and the difficulty accessing said subsidies also inform the heightened anxieties around what experts describe as ***"benefits cliffs."*** For working households especially that use public assistance benefits such as SNAP or Medicaid, if

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Douglass Dowty, "1 in 4 Syracuse Adults Struggle with Medical Debt, the Most among NY's Big Cities, Study Says."

¹²³ Douglass Dowty, "Upstate Hospital Suspends Filing New Medical Debt Lawsuits as Governor Seeks Partial Ban."

said household's income increases over the program's eligibility limits, a loss of benefits is possible. Fear of such loss leaving households more financially worse off *"can disincentivize people from moving into or up within the workforce."* In a telling example of this found within *Fed Community*, one woman shared *"At that moment, I was thinking that I was stable. I got a job, and I'm doing the things that I want to do... Making \$14 an hour is not enough to keep your family afloat. But I lost my benefits because I was making too much. So, the moment I felt stable, they snatched them out from under me."*¹²⁴ Within Central New York, the innovative pilot 2-Gen Onondaga run by Onondaga County Department of Social Services Economic Security offers a multiple family member approach (i.e. working with single mothers under 25 and their child(ren) that also accounts for benefits cliffs.¹²⁵ For two Human/Social Services providers who work with largely Spanish-speaking clients on Syracuse's Westside, **greater flexibility around "benefits cliffs"** is critical,

Right now, some people don't want to do more. They don't want to fall off the benefits cliff. As soon as you get a job, some of the benefits are gone. I wish they would let them get settled down before they start changing the support people are getting, allow them to save some money and get into a more balanced situation before you take away the support. If they were weaned it would be better than being cut off completely. Some of the services they depend on, they can't get if they are working.

Within their comments as well, the providers note the challenges of communication and planning around benefits. On the one hand, **client awareness and clarity about available services is a chronic and complicated barrier within Central New York's Human/Social Services environment**, a theme that will appear and will be discussed repeatedly throughout the CNA. On the other hand, the intersection of communication and planning are barriers for many low-income residents following the conclusion of pandemic supplements. For the two aforementioned Human/Social Services providers on Syracuse's Westside,

There is a lot of misinformation out there... A lot of clients come here and say 'this and this person told me this...' things don't always work out how the clients want it to be. I tell them, 'Don't wait until last minute, you are going to get this service, but it might not be immediately tomorrow...' For example, I have someone who is getting evicted at any moment and owed \$10,000. It is impossible to solve it this fast. I'll ask them what they are doing, they might not qualify for the appointments, the waitlist is so long... For example the security deposit, they don't have it. They didn't know about the Covid Rent Relief Program. They haven't started looking for an apartment and thinking they will not be kicked out and I am telling them. Yes, yes they can. We see a lot of that.

A debt specialist echoed a need for greater transparency, especially,

Clearer language and sharing of resources to let people know the rights they already have under the law and what they can do to protect these rights. *This includes hospitals following the law to make people aware that they can get financial assistance to pay hospital bills, plain language notices from courts letting people know where they can go for help, and organizations taking steps to educate and empower our communities on issues that affect them.*

Language barriers and limited interpretation services are also issues frequently faced by the providers, who shared that,

We have clients that don't speak Spanish or English. On Tuesdays (the CNY Diaper Bank distributes diapers that day), there is a big diversity of clients and that is our biggest challenge with them, being able to communicate with them. Getting them to understand, it can take 30 minutes just to explain something very simple like the clothing closet. It can be impossible sometimes to ask about resources... Even though some

¹²⁴ Gabriella Chiarenza, "The Benefits Cliff, Explained."

¹²⁵ Onondaga County Department of Social Services, "Economic Security (DSS-ES): 2-Gen."

may speak English, I feel if they call DSS they are unable to explain themselves correctly. You have to know what you are asking for. You don't go with the need and they tell you, you have to ask for the program yourself. If you don't do it from the start, they will have you come again and do the line all over again.

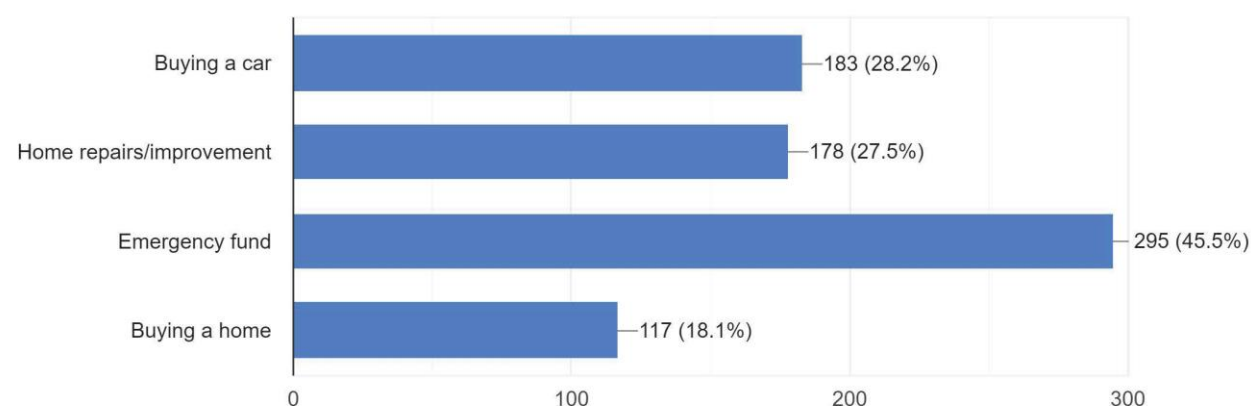
A client's awareness, ability, and sometimes willingness to advocate within complicated bureaucracies such as the Onondaga County Department of Social Services was frequently noted as barriers by those surveyed for the CNA. For one respondent, clients have *"a feeling of powerlessness; navigating the paradox of both TOO MUCH information and NOT ENOUGH information to make meaning of all the things happening to/ around them."* Conversely, even if clarity is provided, Human/Social Services professionals do sometimes become frustrated by a sense that *"Giving families all the information and resources they need and they don't follow through. You can't enable them and do it for them, you need to let them move forward."* Another shared that *"Compassion fatigue is a real thing...sometimes a client will fail to follow up or there will be very tight deadlines that make it hard to coordinate with clients who have a lot of other things going on."*

Despite struggling to find the funds to do so, **many low-income individuals are intentional about creating safety nets for themselves.** *"Almost nobody plans to go into debt,"* shared the aforementioned debt specialist, *"most people find themselves struggling with debt want to find a fair solution to all parties and not get something for 'free.' Most of my clients have been forced to take on debt due to circumstances beyond their control (need for health care, job loss or change in family circumstances, etc.) and are doing what they can to pay back those debts."* The idea ***"that people become stuck not because of a lack of effort"*** is seemingly supported by exit surveys from VITA clients following the completion of their tax return in 2023. Of the 1449 total respondents, 1283 were PEACE, Inc. Free Tax Preparation Program clients (88.7%). On average, filers for the Free Tax Prep Program were 51 years of age and had an average household income of \$25,000. For example, when asked "will you use your refund to save for," almost half (45.5%) responded "an emergency fund."

Figure 46: Free Tax Prep Program/VITA Survey Responses, "Will you use your refund to save for?" (2023)

Will you use your refund to save for:

648 responses

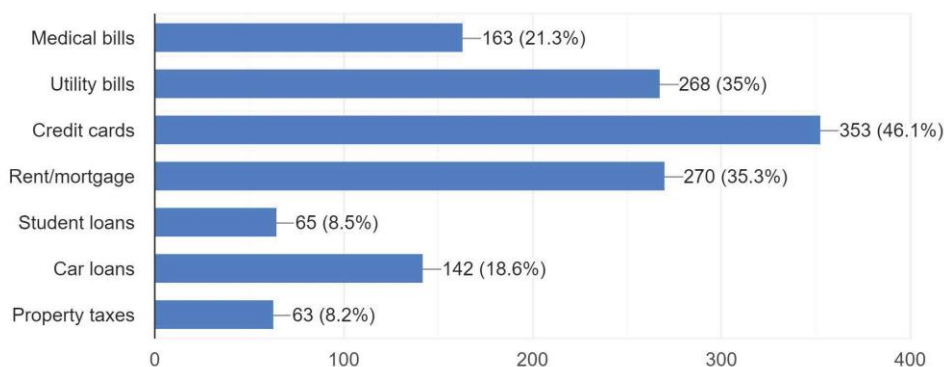


Other responses also indicate the intentions of those who are receiving a tax return. For example, when asked if one "will use your refund to pay down/off," nearly half of the 765 survey respondents stated Credit Card Debt.

Figure 47: Free Tax Prep Program/VITA Survey Responses, “Will you use your refund to pay down/off?” (2023)

Will you use your refund to pay down/off:

765 responses



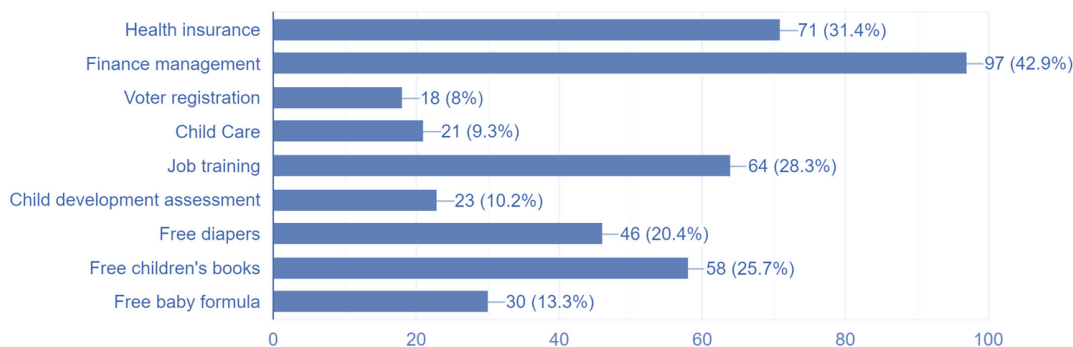
Once again, the surveys indicate a sense of purpose among low income filers around extra, unrestricted funds. The latter survey also shows heightened concerns about paying off one’s Credit Cards, Rent/Mortgage, and Utility Bills. **The desire to relieve Credit Card Debt (46.1%) and pay Utility Bills (35%) were also comparatively higher in 2023** than in the responses offered of by *PEACE, Inc. Free Tax Prep Program* filers in 2019. At that time, more focus was spent on paying down/off one’s rent/mortgage (39.9%) than one’s Credit Cards (30.4%) and Utility Bill (26.84%). Such rises speculatively correspond with the national trends of increased Credit Card Debt/Use as a response to inflation and declining COVID-19 - pandemic-era benefits.

Service requests made by *Free Tax Prep Program* clients also provide some potential insights into the financial priorities of low-income, Onondaga County residents, as they once expressed an interest in financial management first and foremost.

Figure 48: Free Tax Prep Program/VITA Survey Responses, “Services Client Expressed Interest In?” (2023)

Services client expressed interest in:

226 responses



Programs such as *Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program* (VITA) through the *CASH Coalition of Central New York*, the *Syracuse Financial Empowerment Center* (FEC), the *Volunteer Lawyer's Project of CNY's* debt/legal education programs, and the various credit/home financing offerings of *HomeHeadquarters, Inc.* are just a few of the promising wealth-/power-building community resources existing to help low-income residents maximize their financial resources. As one Human/Social Services provider responded, *"financial stability is one of the largest barriers... The understanding of how to manage finances are needed, but advice from financial advisors are not always taken."* Still, in the estimation of a housing specialist, ***"People know what to do with their money already, it's just that they don't have it... They are resilient, they find a way. They are incredibly persistent, sometimes a little too persistent. I look at some of my clients and go, 'How are you living on \$800 a month? How?' But they are."*** Whether or not a client heeds financial advice, the need and demand for additional financial counseling is high among many low-income Onondaga County households and warrants greater investment.

3.2. Low-Income Households in Onondaga County

3.2.a On Trauma

"Poverty is more like a blanket, there are so many things that fall under poverty. To really address poverty, you need to address the trauma that has been inflicted." An anonymous Central New York (CNY) Direct Service Staff Member.

Let's restate the above quote from a CNY Direct Service Staff Member who works in workforce development. The wisdom of it lies in the inclusive tone and its acknowledgement that "many things" should be considered when addressing poverty and trauma's relationship with it. It certainly informs a broad working definition of "trauma" that will be used throughout the CNA, that trauma *"results from exposure to an incident or series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being."*²⁶

"Trauma can happen to any of us," shared a social service provider in rural, southern Onondaga County, *"You can lose a parent, addiction. The most common trait is feeling unworthy of anything."* Research shows that **trauma can lead to increased rates of health-risk behaviors such as substance abuse, unhealthy eating, and more.** It can also precipitate a variety of emotional responses that affect how one interacts with individuals, households and family members, communities, professionals, and more. As a Human/Social Services advocate shared with the CNA team, individuals who have experienced trauma often exhibit resilience but fall into cycles of lacking self-advocacy wherein they could benefit from support. ***"The resilience that they can even get out of bed in the mornings in some of the situations. We deal with families with lots of depression and trauma,"*** shared a case worker. *"That openness that even if I do have pain, it doesn't have to be like that always. They are not always listened to. Many times, they are not treated well in the doctor's office or school. We teach them how to talk when they are advocating for their child in school."*

A nurse who also provides doula services on Syracuse's Southside voiced similar sentiments around **the role of coaching in overcoming trauma,**

*"To empower these women to ask questions is the biggest thing. These are the hurdles we have them jump over. A lot of them won't ask questions, they don't ask why or is there another way about going about this. Just to be able to give these women a voice is where these hurdles came from... **The work we are doing up to now is actually giving these moms a platform.** Mothers have the knowledge, your work as a middle position, you are helping them with tactics to navigate doctors and medical systems."*

¹²⁶ Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center, "What Is Trauma?"

Methods of coaching, goalsetting, and advocacy used to nourish resiliency among low-income households are tried and true methods for challenging the “science” of poverty. Specifically, groups such as *EMPath* and its “Economic Mobility Method” build an approach based on brain science, that **poverty and chronic stress/trauma associated with it affects brain development** and one’s ability to *analyze problems and set goals, and, therefore, how well we can navigate the many challenges involved with getting ahead.*¹²⁷ It’s an issue seen in young children under 3, for example, who can experience poorer early childhood brain development and more debilitating long-term effects due to *Adverse Childhood Experiences* (ACEs) and the stresses emanating from them. As a Foster Grandparent shared, *“When you see somebody shot down and see the violence. Children are like magnets. It impacts their behavior.”* It’s also **intergenerational**. Another Foster Grandparent noted that *“I had a student who was very engaged in learning, but her mother had some personal issues and went through hardship. The student attended school less and her behavior changed when she was there.”* The reverse also happens for parents of course, *“many challenges facing low-income parents – including limited access to education, health, employment, and housing – one area of stress and strain that is common to all parents is managing the often difficult behaviors of young children.”*¹²⁸ So while trauma can happen to anyone, research has again shown that one’s ability to navigate it can become more difficult according to an intersection of socioeconomics, demographics, and environment including but not limited to *“people who identified as black, Hispanic, or multiracial; people with less than a high-school education; people with low-income or who were unemployed or unable to work; and people who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.”*¹²⁹ **Poverty and its connectedness to trauma can thus vary greatly due to not only the sources/aftereffects of trauma but also the individual, age, and their respective environment(s), especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.** For these latter reasons and, when possible, the CNA prefers to use the broader, more inclusive term “households,” which can allow for discussions about families, children, single households, aging adults, and more.¹³⁰ With this said, blending de-identified quantitative data from *PEACE, Inc.’s Head Start/Early Head Start* program and the CNA’s various qualitative forms of data can provide us **some insights about the diverse and intersecting barriers faced -as well as strengths possessed- by some low-income households of Onondaga County.**

3.2.b. *PEACE, Inc. Head Start/Early Head Start* Households at the Intersection of Poverty¹³¹

For context, *Head Start/Early Head Start* is a federally funded, early childhood education program for low-income households that promotes school readiness for children from birth to five. *Early Head Start* tailors its services to households with infants and toddlers, ages two and under. Traditional *Head Start* works with households that have youth ages three to five. Key features of the *Head Start/Early Head Start* model include a) early learning and development, b) health and wellness, c) family well-being, and d) family engagement.¹³² Similar to the *2-Gen Onondaga pilot* noted earlier, *Head Start/Early Head Start* embraces **2-Generation and**

¹²⁷ *EMPath*, “Poverty & Brain Science.”

¹²⁸ Rebecca Bailey, Stephanie M. Jones, and Ann Partee, “How to Target Intergenerational Poverty With a Basic Life Skill.”

¹²⁹ *Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center*.

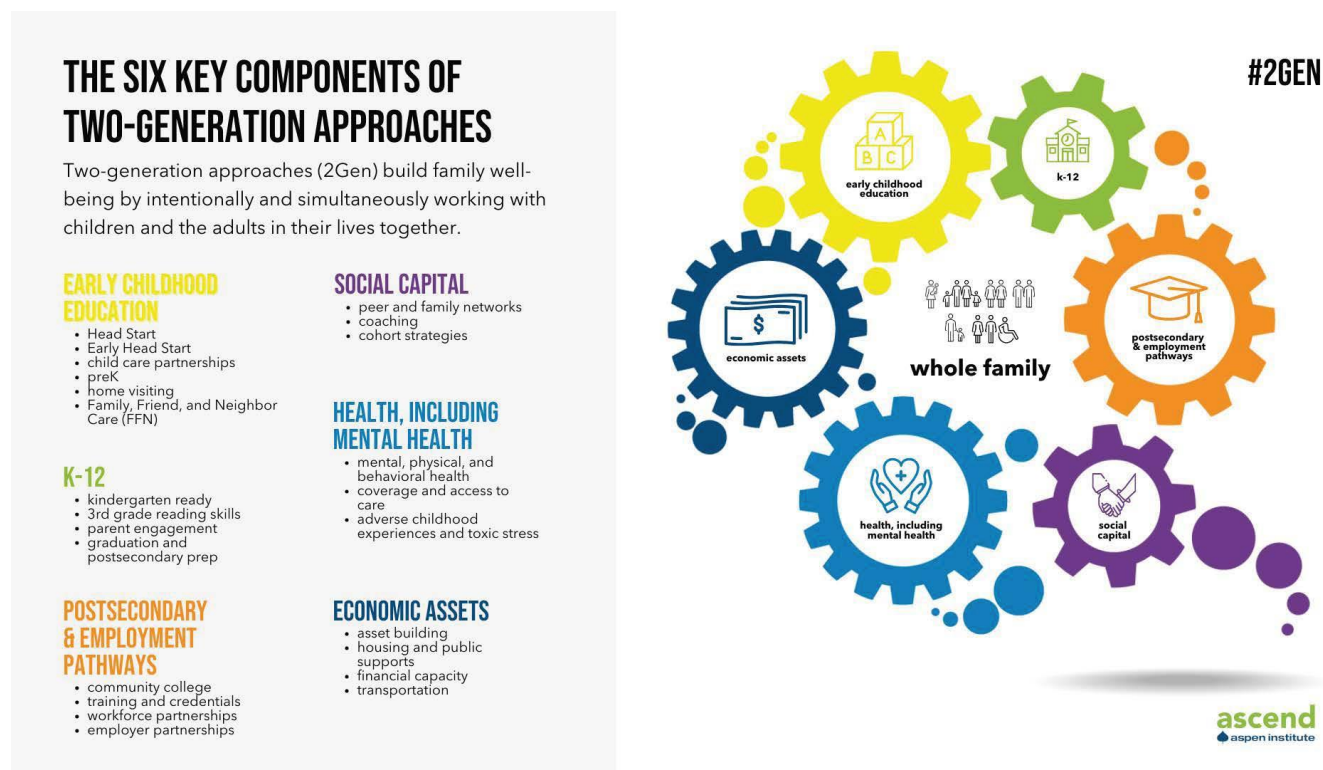
¹³⁰ The move to thinking about households, rather than families, was inspired by the thoughts of a Human/Social Services provider who works with older adults. The respondent shared, *“in addition to funding, we need more awareness about the needs of older adults in our community. Many community-wide issues are spoken about as if they only impact children and working families. Older adults are not typically considered, even when older adults are raising their grandkids. We need more awareness, better data, and strong cross-sector collaboration.”*

¹³¹ In the Community Conversation with Head Start parents, a participant remarked that *“PEACE, Inc. can do better with utilizing the data that they collect and implementing more support with the parents. I had the opportunity to speak with Family Support Workers. I don’t see a high enough level of engagement with the parents, to see if they are healthy enough to get their kids to school. I brought up a suggestion to do a survey to assess the needs of the community. What do we need as parents?”* Inspired by the comment, this section is a first response to answer the individual’s concerns.

¹³² The Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center provides additional explanation of these 4 features as outlined in Head Start – ECLKC, “The Importance of Schedules and Routines. To learn more about *PEACE, Inc.’s* own *Head Start/Early Head Start* center-based, home-based, and partnership programs, visit the *PEACE, Inc.* website at <https://www.peace-caa.org/programs/hs/>.

goalsetting approaches, arguing that a child and adult’s well-beings are both interconnected and interdependent.¹³³ Such logic again stems from science outlined by *EMpath* and others, that the sections of the “*brain in question* are also known to be particularly ‘plastic,’ meaning they can be strengthened and improved well into adulthood.”¹³⁴ As will become clearer shortly, the goalsetting that parents set for themselves throughout a school year embraces the following six key components.

Figure 49: Aspen Institute, Two-Generation Approach, “The Six Key Components of Two-Generation Approaches”¹³⁵



¹³³ *Ascend at the Aspen Institute*, “2Gen Approach.”

¹³⁴ *EMPath*, “Poverty & Brain Science.”

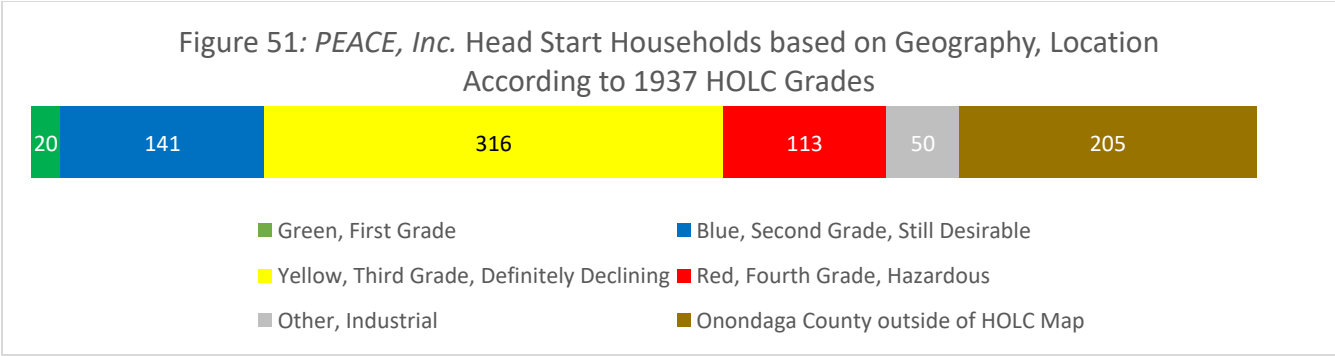
¹³⁵ *Ascend at the Aspen Institute*, “Two-Generation (2Gen) Social Graphics.”

Overall, per eligibility guidelines, nearly all *PEACE, Inc. Head Start/Early Head Start* households are 150% at or below the Federal Poverty Line.¹³⁶ Figure 51 once again restates FPL household income levels.

Figure 50: 2024 Federal Poverty Level Guidelines (FPL)¹³⁷

Household/Family	150%
1	\$22,590
2	\$30,660
3	\$38,730
4	\$46,800
5	\$54,870
6	\$62,940
7	\$71,010
8	\$79,080
Each person over 8, add	\$8,070

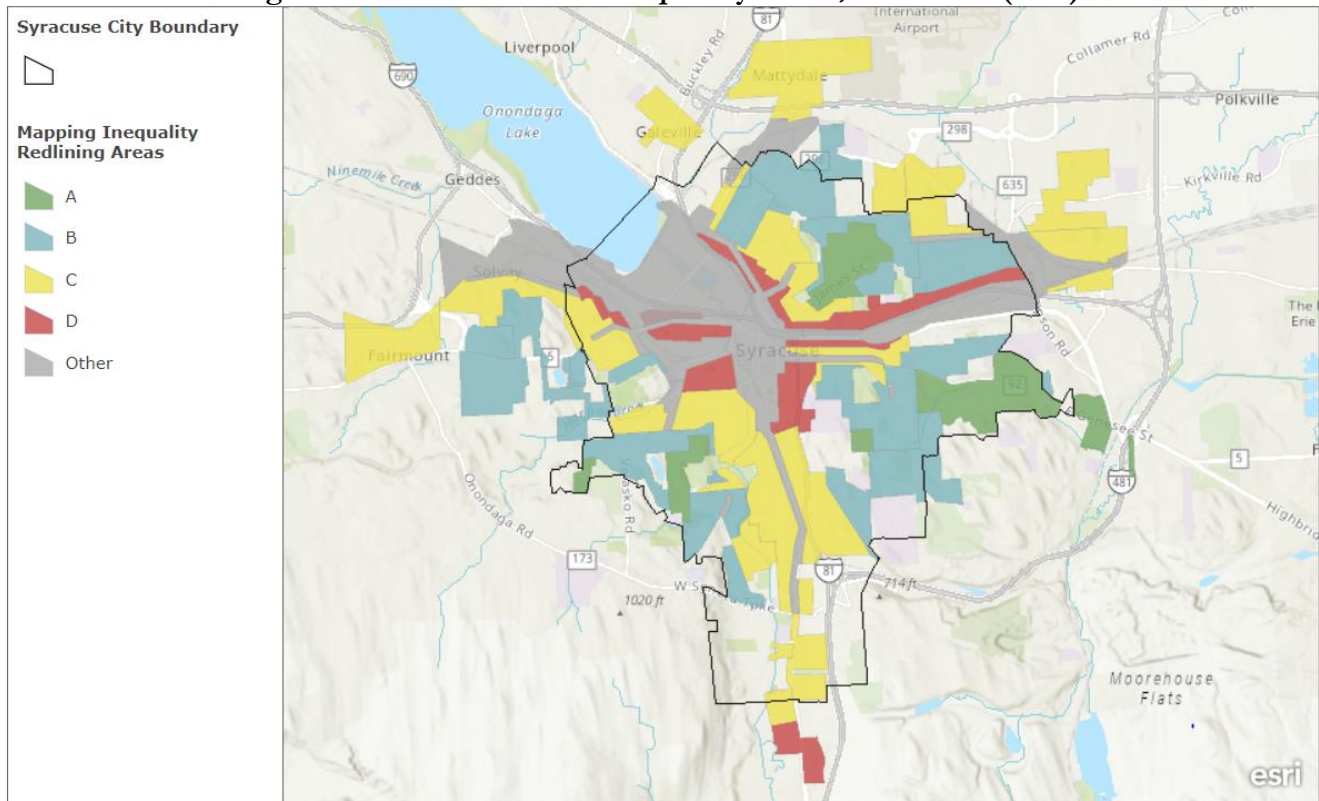
Connecting previous content, **many of *PEACE, Inc.’s Head Start/Early Head Start* clients live in formerly red/yellow-lined neighborhoods**, again revealing the long-term structural inequalities of Onondaga County and revealing those neighborhoods where poverty has largely remained concentrated over time. As displayed below, 429 of the 845 *PEACE, Inc. Head Start/Early Head Start Youth* (50.7% total) live in formally yellow and red identified neighborhoods.



¹³⁶ As a point of comparison, the majority of these families would also be eligible for SNAP, WIC, and -if employed- EITC.

¹³⁷ *Office of the Assistant Secretary for Evaluation*, “2024 Poverty Guidelines: 48 Contiguous States (all states except Alaska and Hawaii).”

Figure 52: HOLC Redlined Map of Syracuse, New York (1937)



That more than half of *PEACE, Inc. Head Start/Early Head Start* families live in historically under-resourced, high poverty city of Syracuse neighborhoods provides additional context for the 2023-2024 *Head Start/Early Head Start* intake data and the 585 youth/families associated with it.¹³⁸ For example, as was discussed in Sections 2.3.f. Median Household Income and 3.1. Poverty, since these same neighborhoods have large concentrations of Black, Latino, and New American poverty, it is thus unsurprising that many of the 585 youth/families **identify with diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds**. It also reflects the outreach needed among these communities related to young families, as findings from the most recent *Onondaga County Health Department's* Community Health and Assessment Plan found “*racial and ethnic disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes including unintended pregnancy, preterm birth, low birth weight, infant mortality, and breastfeeding.*”¹³⁹

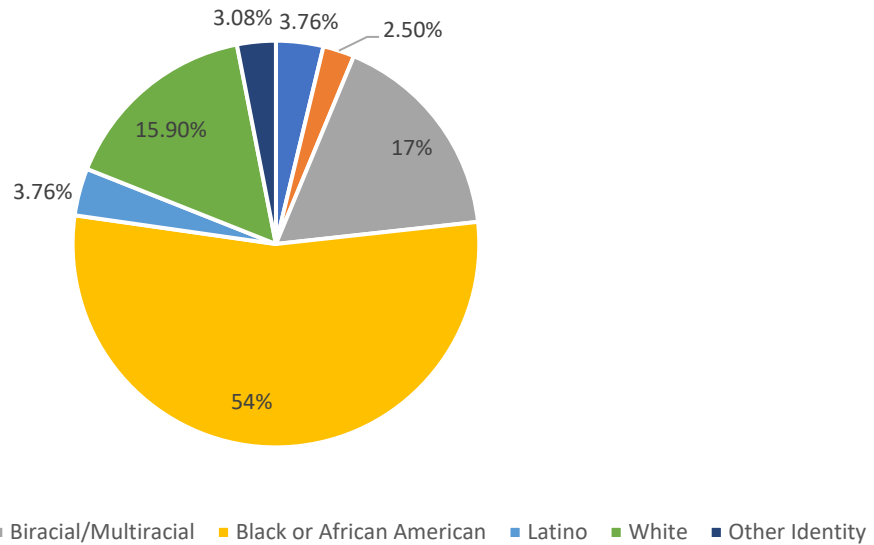
Figure 53: Racial, Ethnic Identity of Head Start/Early Head Start Children, Chart (585 Total)

Identity	Number of Children	Percentage of Total
American Indian or Alaskan Native	22	3.76%
Asian	15	2.5%
Biracial/Multiracial	100	17%
Black or African American	315	54%
Hispanic	22	3.76%
White	93	15.9%
Identified as Other	18	3.08%

¹³⁸ When a parent or caretaker applies to *Head Start/Early Head Start*, they work with an intake staff member to determine the needs of the family. These responses then factor into the admission of a family into the program.

¹³⁹ Bridget K. Volz, Rebecca Shultz, Kathryn Anderson, Cali Armstrong, and Brittany Welch, “Onondaga County Community Health Assessment and Improvement Plan 2022-2024.”

Figure 54: Racial, Ethnic Identity of Head Start/Early Head Start Children, Graphic (585 Total)



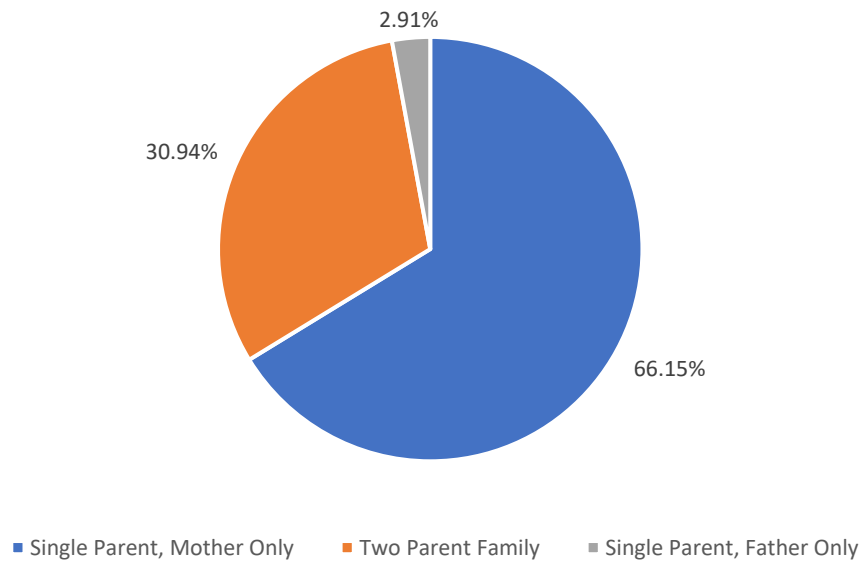
Additionally, with the array of maternal supports provided through the program, **nearly two-thirds of the households are headed by single-mothers.** Targeting single mother households aligns with the socioeconomic and early childhood missions of *Head Start/Early Head Start*, considering that child poverty rates differ greatly depending upon family structure historically.¹⁴⁰

Figure 55: Parent Status of Child/Household, Chart (585 Total)

Household Composition	Number	Percentage of Total Number
Single Parent, Mother Only	387	66.15%
Two Parent Family	181	30.94%
Single Parent, Father Only	17	2.91%

¹⁴⁰ Haider, “Basic Facts.”

Figure 56: Parent Status of Child/Household, Graphic (585 Total)



The large numbers of single-parent, mother-only households reflect *Head Start/Early Head Start's* commitment to serving those communities and populations with the highest need as well as the maternal health priorities championed at present by the *Onondaga County Health Department*. Likewise, the large percentage of the 585 households who face various barriers to self-sufficiency reflect a) the intentionality of *Head Start/Early Head Start* to serve highest need but also b) the effects of concentrated poverty, especially among historically underserved and disenfranchised communities. On the next page is a sampling of the barriers and the total percentages of clients who face them (with definitions for each barrier in the footnotes). Many of the barriers will be discussed in greater detail throughout the rest of the CNA.

Figure 57: PEACE, Inc. Head Start/Early Head Start Intake Statistics for 2023-2024 School Year (585 Households)	
Barriers faced by at least one member of the Household	Percentage of Total Clients
Unemployed Parent or Caretaker	51%
No Personal Vehicle	23%
Homelessness ¹⁴¹	3%
Parent Had at least 1 Child Before 21	58%
Disabled Parent or Caretaker	10%
Child Diagnosed with a Disability, IFSP, IEP	8%
Justice System Involved History ¹⁴²	38%
Cultural Barriers ¹⁴³	8%
Diagnosed Mental Health Condition ¹⁴⁴	38%
Undiagnosed Depression and Anxiety ¹⁴⁵	26%
Domestic Violence History ¹⁴⁶	35%
Recent Exposure to Trauma ¹⁴⁷	24%
Substance Abuse History ¹⁴⁸	21%

To help households overcome these issues, at the beginning of each school year, *Head Start/Early Head Start* caregivers work with case management specialists or “family workers” to establish goals for their households, children, and themselves. A first step is the completion of a “Parent Interest and Needs Survey.” The survey is comprehensive with questions pertaining to child development, nutrition, health and safety, personal development, mental health, parenting and family, and parenting and support groups. The tables below include the results of the first 209 parents to submit the surveys for the 2024 school year; they provide some speculative insights into some of the interests, concerns, and challenges faced by low-income

¹⁴¹ According to *Head Start/Early Head Start Selection Criteria Guidance*, Homelessness is defined as “In a car/on the street - the family is living in their car or sleeping outside at night. In a shelter - the family has been forcibly relocated to a shelter. Living with family/friend - the family has been forcibly relocated to live with family or friends. This can also include residences deemed uninhabitable by housing authorities. The unit has (but is not limited to): Severe safety concerns for those living in the house (broken windows, falling plaster, exposed electrical outlets); Poor to no plumbing, electrical and/or heating problems, pest infestations; High lead exposure.”

¹⁴² According to *Head Start/Early Head Start Selection Criteria Guidance*, Justice System Involved History is defined as “Either parent/caregiver (mother or father) of the child is currently or previously incarcerated.”

¹⁴³ According to *Head Start/Early Head Start Selection Criteria Guidance*, Cultural Barriers are defined as “Family is experiencing difficulties assimilating to American culture that makes it difficult for them to function day to day.”

¹⁴⁴ According to *Head Start/Early Head Start Selection Criteria Guidance*, Diagnosed Mental Health Condition is defined as “Child/parent/caregiver has or had a diagnosed mental health condition, including but not limited to depression, anxiety, Personality Disorder, OCD, Phobia.”

¹⁴⁵ This was criteria created in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and lockdown to consider households with members who felt depressed or anxious but were not diagnosed by a medical professional.

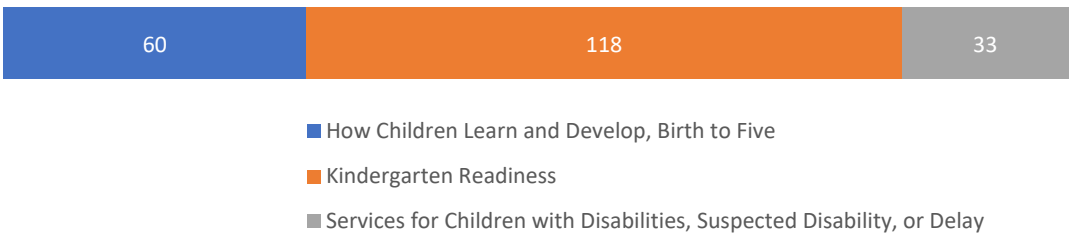
¹⁴⁶ According to *Head Start/Early Head Start Selection Criteria Guidance*, Domestic Violence History is defined as “Any family member in the household has experienced any type of violence, current or past.”

¹⁴⁷ According to *Head Start/Early Head Start Selection Criteria Guidance*, Recent Exposure to Trauma is defined as “One or more household members have experienced a recent or current exposure to trauma. Examples an applicant may disclose include, Life threatening or serious injury, Exposure to crime, General disaster, Sexual or physical assault.”

¹⁴⁸ According to *Head Start/Early Head Start Selection Criteria Guidance*, Substance Abuse History is defined as “Parent/caregiver reports past or current substance use.”

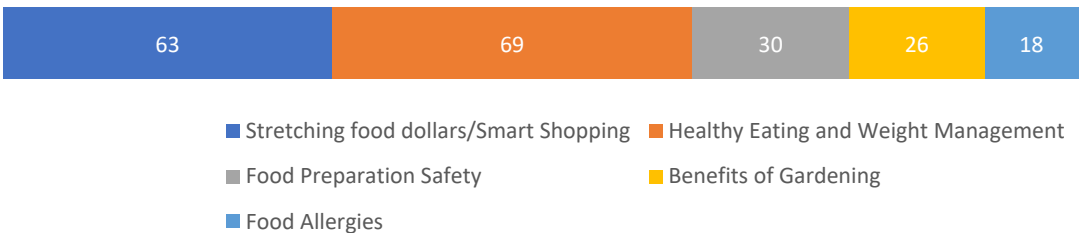
families. Parents could respond to one or more of the options for each of the questions. Analysis for each Figure is included below it.

Figure 58: Number of Parents Interested in Child Development Training



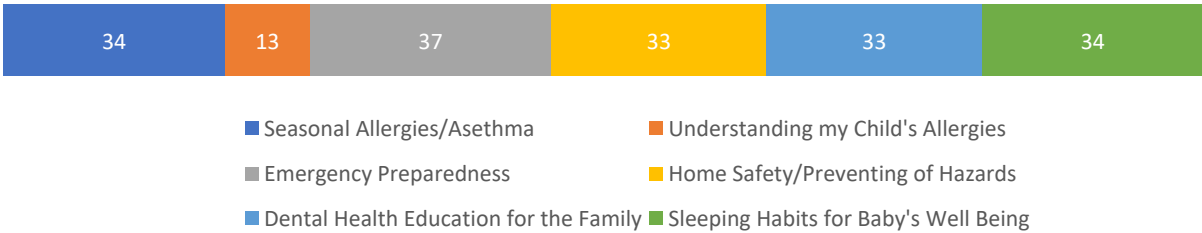
Analysis: The results reflect the importance of a key *Head Start* principle, “Kindergarten Readiness,” for parents who are interested in understanding what is expected of their child when entering kindergarten. *Early Head Start/Head Start* helps children and families achieve their full potential by providing early childhood development, health, and family services that will support them in their preparation and transition to kindergarten. Kindergarten readiness is captured in the school readiness goals defined by *Head Start* Program Performance Standards (HSPPS). Typical activities include but are not limited to hosting transition activities for parents and youth at *Head Start/Early Head Start* sites, virtual and in-school tours, meet and receive school administrator events, and more.

Figure 59: Number of Parents Interested in Nutrition Training



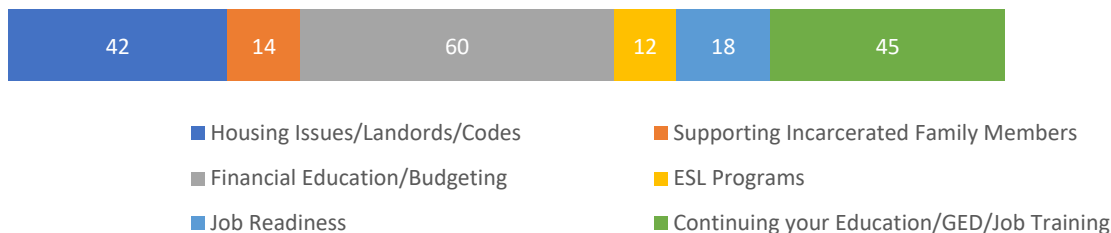
Analysis: **Here parents expressed particular interest in the management of their health and shopping budgets.** Such responses are not surprising given the variety of rising basic needs costs -as well as the desire to navigate them- currently faced by low-income families outlined in Section 3.1.b. Finances.

Figure 60: Number of Parents Interested in Health and Safety Training



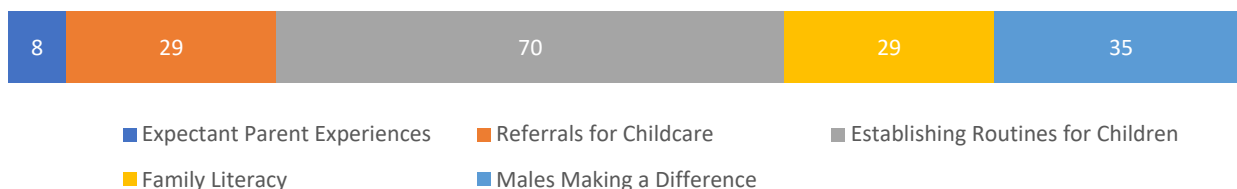
Analysis: Regarding health and safety, **most of the potential topics received nearly equal interest among those parents who initially completed the survey.** The limited number of those parents interested in “Understanding my Child’s Allergies” most likely reflects the number of parents who have children with allergies and who initially completed the survey. Once again, the responses reveal the range of complicated issues that can be faced by low-income households with limited access to and difficult-to-navigate services.

Figure 61: Number of Parents Interested in Personal Development



Analysis: Regarding Personal Development, **Financial Education/Budgeting were clear priorities.** Parents also expressed interest in pursuing education and resolving housing barriers, the latter being unsurprising given CNY’s current housing crisis, which will be discussed in greater detail in Section 3.4. The comparatively low number of parents interested in “Job Readiness” speculatively indicates that some might already be employed, i.e. working poor, a state confirmed by many of *PEACE, Inc.* staff and discussed more fully in Section 3.5 on employment. Each of these topics will be addressed in greater detail throughout the remainder of the CNA.

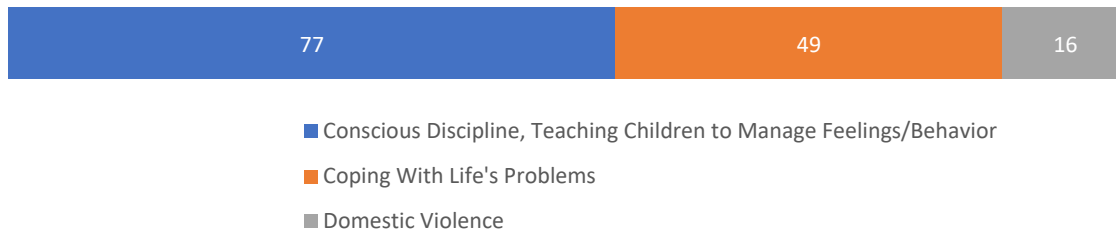
Figure 62: Number of Parents Interested in Parenting and Family Life Training



Analysis: “Establishing Routines for Children” was the most frequently cited response. According to *Head Start/Early Head Start* Guidance, routines in group settings and at home help children feel safe, secure, and engaged.¹⁴⁹

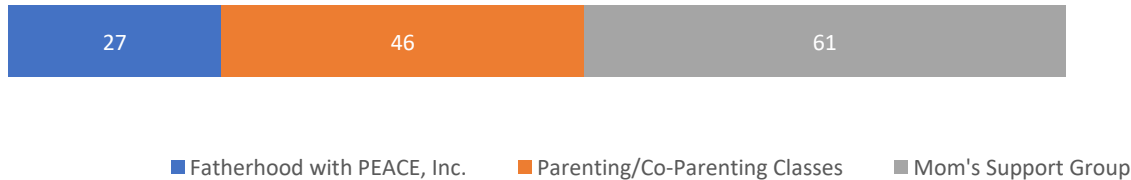
¹⁴⁹ *Head Start*, “The Importance of Schedules and Routines.”

Figure 63: Number of Parents Interested in Mental Health Training



Analysis: Parents were overwhelmingly interested in **Conscious Discipline**, which is an “evidence-based, trauma-informed behavior management system” practiced throughout Head Starts which “promotes social-emotional learning, discipline, and self-regulation.” Rather than traditional responses of punishment and reward, *Conscious Discipline* emphasizes consequences, “connection,” “reflection,” and “personal responsibility” (i.e. rather than focus on what not to do, focus on what to do instead).¹⁵⁰ The objective is that children will develop the skills necessary to foster secure attachments with adults; build peer relationships; regulate emotions and behaviors; and develop an understanding of how to think through problems and apply strategies to solve them.

Figure 64: Number of Parents Interested in Parenting Classes/Support Groups



Analysis: When time permits, which itself is a scarce resource, a large number of parents are interested in cohort learning. As research has borne out, parents often shape their behaviors and beliefs around what they see and what is modelled around them. **Cohort building has been proven to build positive confidence as well as form critical support networks wherein parents can overcome personal and community obstacles (i.e. unsafe neighborhoods, forms of family and domestic violence, trauma, and more) to meet basic needs, to achieve household goals, to emerge as better parents/caretakers for their children.**¹⁵¹ For a facilitator of parenting classes, “the women don’t even realize they are doing it, they are meeting parents and learning from each other. Lightbulbs go on and they think, ‘I can do this.’ They keep in touch after the meeting. On Friday night, if they are in crisis, they can call their peers. When they meet someone from across the table, it’s a stronger bond.” The “Fatherhood with PEACE, Inc.” initiative also reveals fathers/male caretakers can benefit from cohort and support network building as well, as “last year we had 2 parents who were not Head Start parents in the Fatherhood Group. At the second class, one of them came and said I did not think I was going to like this and I thought that I would never run into anybody that ran into the same culture and problems. And I come into this room and there were 3 other

¹⁵⁰ Eastern Oregon University Head Start, “Conscious Discipline – EOU Head Start.”

¹⁵¹ Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Services, and Early Childhood National Centers, “Family Connections to Peers and Community,” 2.

families who were from Africa and had similar family conversations and roots as him.” Herein it’s important to restate that, as the Figures exhibit, parents/caretakers are actively interested in seeking improvements for themselves and their youth to spur empowerment.

3.3 Mental Health and Safety

3.3.a. Mental Health

Among the *Head Start/Early Head Start* households at intake, 38% had at least one member of the household with a diagnosed mental health issue; another 26% believed they were suffering from depression or anxiety but were not diagnosed. Such post-COVID numbers are complicated but unsurprising. As argued in the “PEACE, Inc. COVID-19 Community Needs Chronicle and Assessment for Syracuse and Onondaga County, New York,” *“mental health resources will need to be available in new and diverse ways to deal with the many different stressors/traumas caused by the pandemic, especially its impact on residents of Onondaga County over an extended period of time.”*¹⁵² Within the June 2020 Chronicle/Assessment, findings from an early pandemic *Raising New York* survey were highlighted, including:

- *Around 75% of surveyed parents believe that the coronavirus has “significantly disrupted their home and family lives, increased their levels of stress, and led them to worry about either their own or their family’s mental health.”*
- *“A staggering 1 out of 4 parents of young children (25%) worry about the impact of substance abuse and domestic violence on their family as a result of the coronavirus crisis, with worries about abuse particularly widespread in New York City (35%), among Hispanic parents (36%), and among parents of children with disabilities.”* (Emphasis made by the survey’s author).

Conditions seemingly have not improved. According to the CNYCF’s “Life Needs Assessment” question, “Do you have any Family Members that make you feel unsafe,” 12.88% of respondents (149 out of 1159) stated yes in 2023. This is a sizeable increase from 2022, when only 6.23% of respondents (98 out of 1572) stated yes. More troubling, in a far-reaching February 2023 announcement, the White House declared that the nation ***“is in the midst of an unprecedented mental health crisis among people of all ages.”***

Unpacking this claim, a June 2023 report released by the *New York State Health Foundation* is helpful, “Treading Water: The Ongoing Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on New Yorkers’ Mental Health.”

Comparing more than three years of *United States Census COVID-19 Household Pulse Survey Data*, the report presents a number of notable findings. First and perhaps most importantly, there seems to be **little long-term change among New Yorkers who reported having poor mental health since the beginning of the pandemic**. Specifically, 31.5% of New Yorkers stated having poor mental health in March 2023, a negligible improvement from 32% in May 2021.¹⁵³ Within the first quarter of 2023 as well, it noted a variety of groups more likely to experience depression and/or anxiety within a community. The study’s notes will be quoted fully, due to the connectedness between the groups and the topics identified throughout the CNA. Specifically,

- ***One in two (50.0%) New Yorkers with very low incomes (less than \$25,000 per year) reported anxiety and/or depression, more than twice the rate of those with annual household incomes of \$100,000 or more (22.1%).***¹⁵⁴ Such a statistic provides additional support/context for the high rates of diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health issues found within the previously noted *Head Start/Early Head Start* communities.

¹⁵² PEACE, Inc., “COVID-19 Community Needs Chronicle and Assessment,” 17.

¹⁵³ The report does note fluctuations between these dates, with peaks occurring September 2021 (34.6%) and September 2022 (37.2%), or the beginning of most community’s school years. *New York Health Foundation*, “Ongoing Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on New Yorkers’ Mental Health.”

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

- **Younger adults had poorer mental health rates than other age groups; two in five (40.0%) New Yorkers between the ages of 18 and 34 reported poor mental health.**¹⁵⁵
- **Poor mental health increased most for Asian New Yorkers and Hispanic New Yorkers; two out of five (41.0%) Hispanic New Yorkers reported anxiety and/or depression.**
- **One in two (50.7%) New Yorkers who lost employment income since the onset of the pandemic reported anxiety and/or depression.**
- **New Yorkers experiencing food insufficiency had worse mental health than their food-sufficient peers.** More than half (57.4%) of food-insufficient New Yorkers had poor mental health—nearly twice the rate of food-sufficient New Yorkers (29.2%).¹⁵⁶

From these findings, the report speculatively offers multiple explanations for continued high rates of depression and anxiety throughout New York. Many of the reasons have already been developed -or will be developed elsewhere- within the CNA, including “ongoing economic uncertainty, stagnant wages, inflation, food insecurity, social isolation, the loss of loved ones during the pandemic, and the effects of Long COVID could all be contributing factors.”¹⁵⁷ Tied to these explanations, it’s also important to restate a theme raised within the aforementioned White House report and one that is now all-too-familiar within the CNA, that “**While the pandemic amplified the effects of an already growing mental health crisis, it is not the only contributing factor.**”¹⁵⁸ Among others noted by the White House,

*the effects of historical and structural inequality and racism; the long-standing stigmatization of mental health issues that may reduce help-seeking; the growth of technology and social media use; the shortage of affordable housing that has led to housing instability for some individuals and families; an increase in gun violence and witnessing or experiencing violence in the home, at school, or in the community; mortality increases due to the overdose crisis and increasingly lethal illicit substances circulating in communities; the effects of increasingly frequent disaster events; and the broader impacts and concerns about climate change.*¹⁵⁹

Length limits a full explanation of the points. Still, given the topics discussed in Section 2.3 Histories of Onondaga County’s Structural Inequalities, **the intersection of mental health issues, historical and structural inequalities, and racism** seems to be supported by data obtained from PLACES. PLACES is a collaboration between the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and CDC Foundation that provides “model based, population-level analysis and community estimates of health measures” based upon existing health surveillance data and ACS data. First, according to the most available CDC estimates from 2021, 16.2% of Onondaga County adults (age 18 and over) reported 14 or more days of poor mental health in the last month.¹⁶⁰ In Onondaga County, this is an increase from 13.6% according to CDC estimates from 2019.¹⁶¹ In lieu of a full table outlining each of Onondaga County’s 142 census tracts, the below maps visualize the 2021 estimates.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

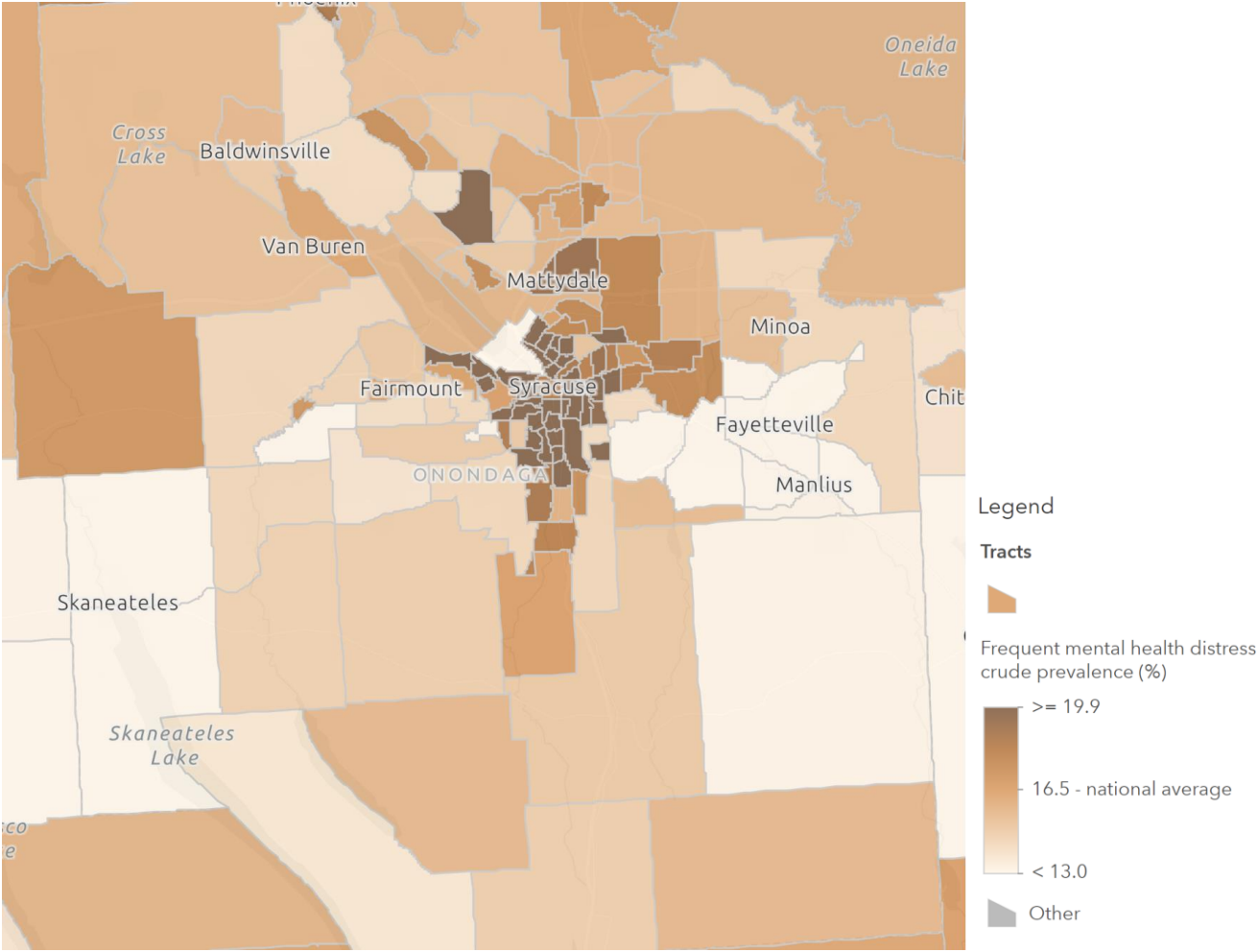
¹⁵⁸ *The White House*, “White House Report on Mental Health Research Priorities,” 7.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶⁰ PLACES, “Adults (age 18 and over) reported 14 or more days of poor mental health in the last month.”

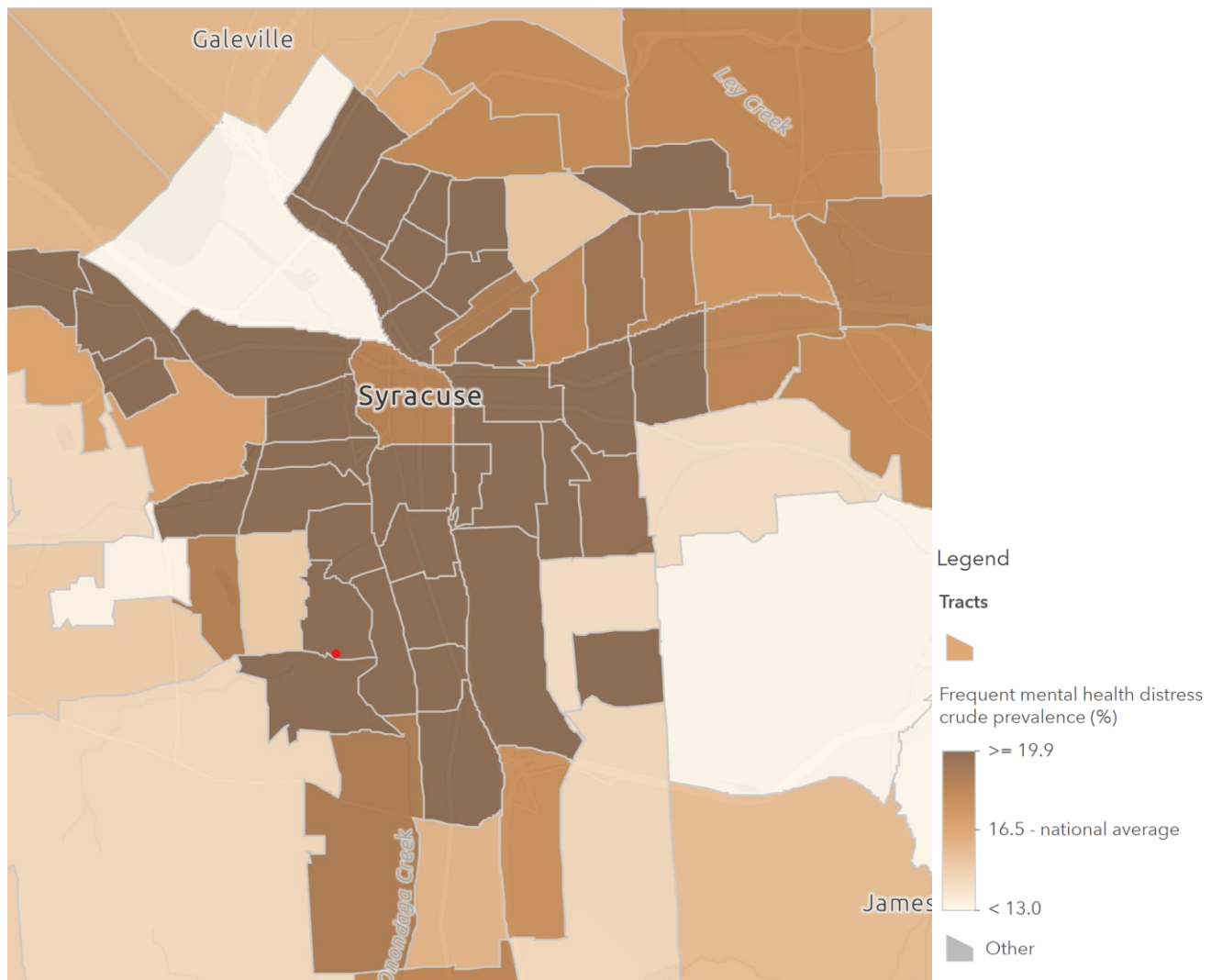
¹⁶¹ Bridget K. Volz, Rebecca Shultz, Kathryn Anderson, Cali Armstrong, and Brittany Welch (*Onondaga County Health Department*), “Onondaga County Community Health Assessment and Improvement Plan 2022-2024.”

Figure 65: Percentage of Onondaga County adults (age 18 and over) reported 14 or more days of poor mental health in the last month (2021)¹⁶²



¹⁶² PLACES, “Adults (age 18 and over) reported 14 or more days of poor mental health in the last month.”

Figure 66: Percentage of Syracuse adults (age 18 and over) reported 14 or more days of poor mental health in the last month (2021)¹⁶³



As outlined in the legend, the darker the shade of brown, the higher the percentage of adults (age 18 and over) within the Census Tract who reported 14 or more days of poor mental health in the last month in 2021. When comparing Figures 65 and 66 with Figures 42 and 43, which visualized the percentages of poverty within Onondaga County and City of Syracuse Census Tracts, there is a great deal of overlap. **The same Census Tracts with high percentages of concentrated ethnic/racial poverty and that are within formerly red- and yellow-lined neighborhoods also have high percentages of poor mental health.** Noteworthy, for example, is Census Tract 42, which occupies a) part of the redlined former 15th Ward, b) has a 74.4% poverty rate according to 5-Year ACS, and c) has an estimated 31.1% of adults (age 18 and over) with 14 or more days of poor mental health in the last month in 2021.

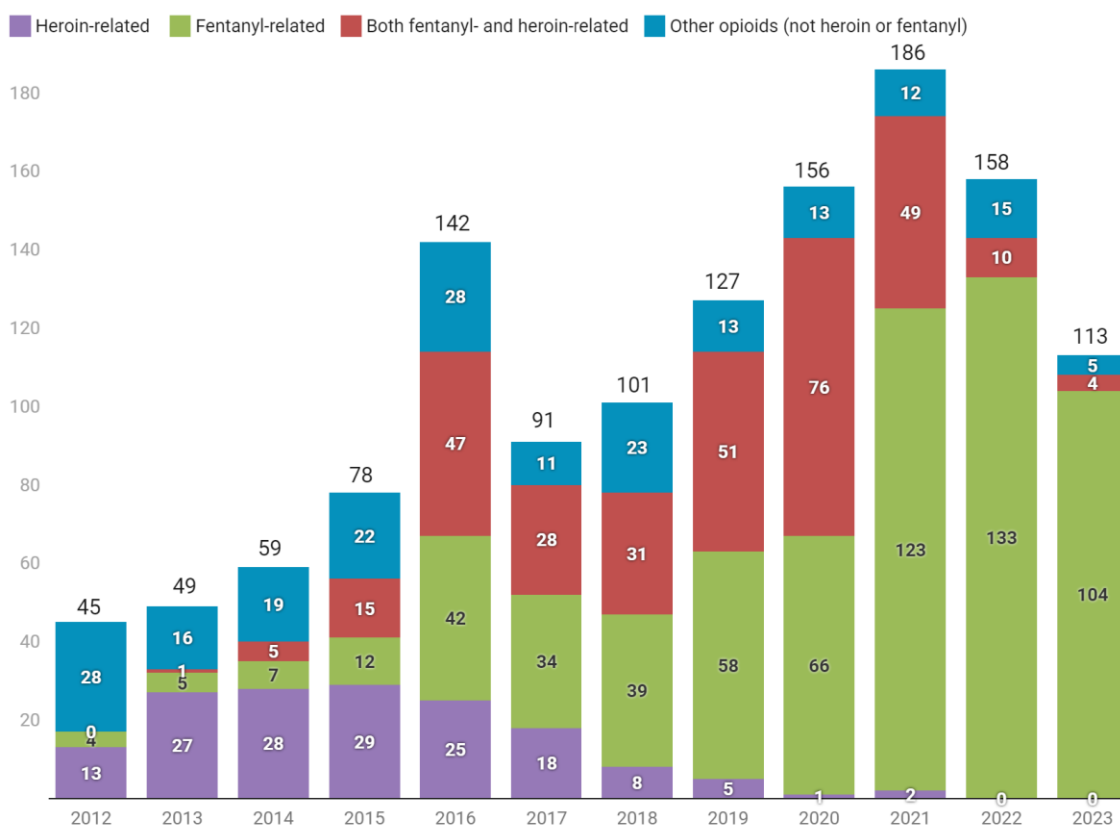
¹⁶³ Ibid.

3.3.b. Opioids, Substance Abuse, and its Effects

The Fall 2023 edition of *PEW's* “Trend Magazine” also outlined 3 distinct, somewhat overlapping crises, a) youth mental health (*Note: to be discussed in the Education Section*), b) serious mental health illnesses “contributing to social problems including homelessness and incarceration,” and c) an ongoing substance use/addiction crisis.¹⁶⁴ Regarding the latter, the opioid crisis is an especially pressing problem. Similar to other locations throughout the United States and New York State, Onondaga County has struggled in recent years to combat what the *United States Department of Health and Human Services* declared as a public health emergency in 2017. As noted previously, *Onondaga County Health Department's* 2022-2024 Community Health and Assessment Plan found opioids and other substance abuse issues negatively affecting maternal health locally. Compounding matters, throughout the initial years of the COVID-19 pandemic, New York State saw **a surge in opioid deaths connected to pandemic-related factors**, including but not limited to social isolation, stress, and limited access to treatment/harm reduction services.¹⁶⁵ As displayed below, Onondaga County experienced similar patterns.

Figure 67: Unintended Opioid Related Deaths Onondaga County (2012-2023)¹⁶⁶

Data through September 30, 2023



Heroin-related: Heroin alone or in combination with other drugs (non fentanyl)

Fentanyl-related: Fentanyl alone or in combination with other drugs (non heroin)

Both fentanyl- and heroin-related: Both fentanyl and heroin alone or in combination with other drugs

Other opioids: Opioids other than heroin or fentanyl

Chart includes fentanyl analogs. Data are reported with a one quarter delay. Data are provisional.

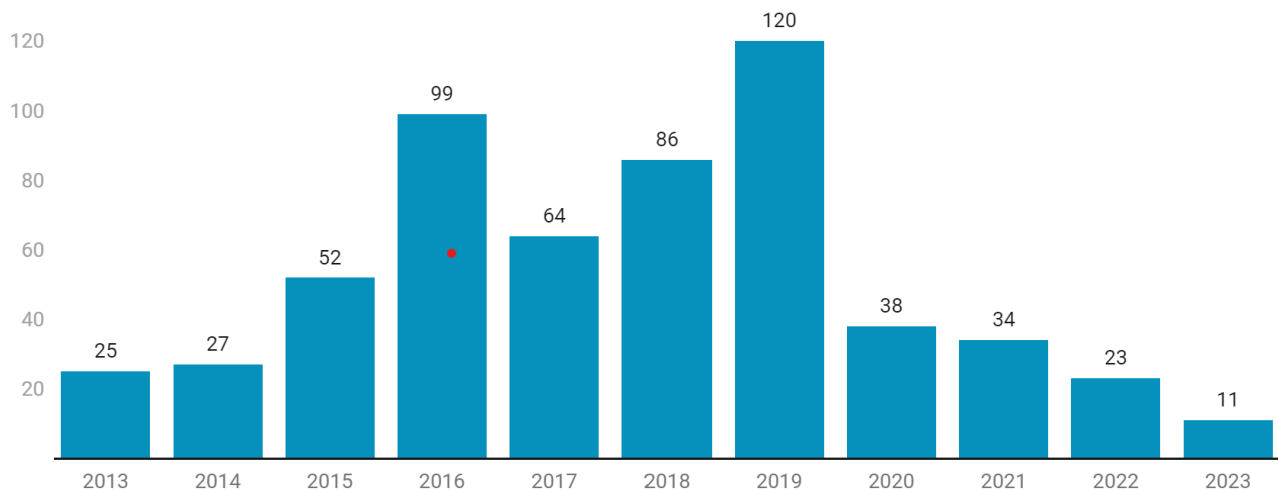
¹⁶⁴ Office of the New York State Comptroller, “Continuing Crisis: Drug Overdose Deaths in New York.”

¹⁶⁵ Office of the New York State Comptroller, “Continuing Crisis: Drug Overdose Deaths in New York.”

¹⁶⁶ Onondaga County Health Department, “Opioid Use: Onondaga County Data Report.”

Figure 68: Unintended Prescription Opioid Related Deaths Onondaga County (2013-2023)¹⁶⁷

Data through September 30, 2023



Deaths in this graph are also included in the graph titled "Unintended Opioid Related Deaths" above. Data are reported with a one quarter delay. Data are provisional. As of January 2020, the Onondaga County Medical Examiner's Office no longer classifies fentanyl deaths as prescription related, unless specifically indicated in the medical death investigation.

There is a great deal to unpack from the 2 Figures. First, regarding the latter Figure 68, **there has been a sharp decrease in unintended prescription opioid related deaths**, dropping from a high of 120 deaths in 2019 to 11 in the first 9 months of 2023. This decrease can be attributed to the decline of prescription opioids and/or addiction stemming from them to treat pain.¹⁶⁸ Rather, as local health officials discussed in a recent edition of *WAER*'s "Syracuse Speaks" series entitled "A Deep Dive in the Evolving Opioid Epidemic in Onondaga County," **experiencing and looking to cope with trauma** are key drivers for Opioid use.¹⁶⁹ As noted previously, these drivers were amplified during the pandemic and provide some context for the more critical numbers of Figure 67, **which shows a steady increase of unintended opioid related deaths with a peak of 186 deaths in 2021**. A second issue from Figure 67 as well: the omnipresence of increasingly more potent forms of fentanyl. Not only is fentanyl the primary driver of opioid-related deaths, but it is also appearing in other drugs unseen due to its relative inexpensiveness for the producer/dealer. As Onondaga County Health Commissioner Dr. Katie Anderson noted, "*someone may think today that they're using heroin, but there's hardly any heroin to be found. It could be fentanyl and xylazine, and who knows what else is to come.*"¹⁷⁰ Moreover, the decline of deaths doesn't necessarily mean fewer people are using opioids. It rather may reflect the wider availability of Narcan, a potentially life-saving medication that can reverse opioid overdoses and might be "*keeping a lot of people from dying,*" stated Dr. Ross Sullivan, who serves as the Medical Director for Helio Health.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Elizabeth Williams and Heather Saunders, "A Look at Changes in Opioid Prescribing Patterns in Medicaid from 2016 to 2019."

¹⁶⁹ Robert Beck, Scott Willis, John Smith, Natasha Senjanovic, and Kat Kollins, "Syracuse Speaks: A Deep Dive into the Evolving Opioid Epidemic in Onondaga County."

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ James T. Mulder, "Onondaga County Opioid Overdose Death Toll Decreases in 2022, but Still Near Record Levels."

The concerns expressed by CNA survey respondents, interviewees, and the three Winter 2024 Community Conversations speculatively show how the public views the interconnectedness of serious mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness as cited by *PEW*. Nottingham High School youth, for example, expressed how they see more homelessness and more homeless individuals seemingly battling with addiction and mental health in the Syracuse Northside and *Centro* Bus terminals. For one student, they “*saw it not as an issue of safety, it’s a poverty issue and people don’t have places to go.*” The Foster Grandparents shared similar concerns about the spread of homelessness within the city, “*You also got a lot of homeless people as well... Their situation is sad. They used to be only on Erie Blvd. Now you are seeing them everywhere.*” The increased presence of struggling homeless individuals led a number of seniors to express heightened anxiety and -for one individual reliant on public transportation- is “*One of my reasons for wanting to move. We have a bus shelter in front of our building. Someone uses it as their apartment (bathroom, bedroom, kitchen), and it took a long time for them to fix it.*” Throughout the conversations as well, the **safety of homeless shelters** was raised. For a Foster Grandparent, “*Homelessness has always been an issue. They are living in the shelter for a reason. The sad part about that is ‘are they homeless,’ a lot of them don’t want to go to the shelter.*” As shared by 2 case management specialists working in the northern suburbs and rural regions of Onondaga County, families who are facing the possibility of eviction and/or homelessness are making difficult choices based upon perceptions of what occurs within the shelters. Homelessness as a result of rising housing costs will be discussed in Section 3.4. Housing. Related to the alleged conditions of shelters, however, the aforementioned case managers shared how their clients,

don’t want to go to the shelter. They would rather sleep outside or in their car. They say it is unsafe, they get robbed and there are assaults of various kinds that are happening. They may be talking about when they have to leave at 7 AM. We don’t know specifically when it happens. We have offered to keep their valuables in the office.

Many of the conversations revealed both **a public anxiety and a push -whether correct or not- to connect increased substance abuse with homelessness, which research has shown is complicated and “bidirectional.”**¹⁷² Like poverty, homelessness is complex, as will be discussed in further detail within Section 3.4 on housing. As noted in the *WAER* podcast, Onondaga County and its partners should continue to pursue robust education and awareness outreach in their prevention campaigns around opioids.

3.3.c. Violent Crime

In the aforementioned *WAER* podcast, City of Syracuse Chief of Police Joseph L. Cecile shared his belief that spikes in opioid usage, neighborhood drug activity, and property crime were connected. As reflected in Figure 69 below, while Onondaga County Sheriff’s Department reports about property crime are down since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, Syracuse City Police Department **reports of property crime have increased** in the City of Syracuse (albeit with a valley in 2021). As of the most recent publicly released data in 2022, total property crime in Syracuse has returned to pre-pandemic levels which itself was elevated (even though greater incidents of burglary occurred, there were fewer incidents of larceny).

¹⁷² Kelly M. Doran, Callan Elswick Fockele, and Marcella Maguire, “Overdose and Homelessness—Why We Need to Talk About Housing.”

Figure 69: Violent and Property Crime Statistics, Syracuse Police Department and Onondaga County Sherriff's Departments (2019-2022)¹⁷³

Agency	Year	Months Reported	Index Crime Total	Violent Total	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Property total	Burglary	Larceny	MV Theft
Onondaga County Sheriff	2019	12	1,709	191	0	49	29	113	1,518	210	1,204	104
	2020	12	1,905	291	1	39	33	146	1,686	212	1,254	220
	2021	12	1,534	181	1	35	27	118	1,353	221	941	191
	2022	12	1,528	198	2	39	33	124	1,330	213	978	139
Syracuse City PD	2019	12	5,593	1,129	19	105	246	759	4,464	850	3,051	563
	2020	12	5,200	1,191	31	96	222	842	4,009	1,032	2,463	514
	2021	12	4,736	1,228	29	58	264	877	3,508	886	2,082	540
	2022	12	5,725	1,295	18	80	287	910	4,430	1,171	2,636	623

Within the City of Syracuse, **incidents of violent crime have steadily increased since 2019**. In a December 2022 report produced by the Syracuse Mayor's office, "City of Syracuse's Violent Crime Assessment," the number one reason cited for the "*city's persistently high violent crime rates were... continuous conflicts between gangs and groups of young men who end up in violent acts.*"¹⁷⁴ The report also shares that gang activity was the number one driver of city homicides in six of ten years between 2012 and 2022. Gang activity also drove the most recent spikes in 2020 and 2021.¹⁷⁵ Subsequently, the 2021 homicide rate of 19.85 per 100,000 city residents was three times larger than that of the United States at 6.52 per 100,000 citizens.¹⁷⁶ Also noteworthy are the locations or "clusters" where homicides take place. As the report bears out, these **homicide clusters overlap with high gun violence clusters as well as neighborhoods of highly concentrated poverty and low educational outcomes**, further contextualizing the complicated "blanket of poverty" discussed throughout the CNA.¹⁷⁷ Displaying this well is Figure 70, which is reproduced below from the report.

¹⁷³ New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, "Gun Involved Violence Elimination (GIVE): Initiative Annual GIVE Shooting Activity Report."

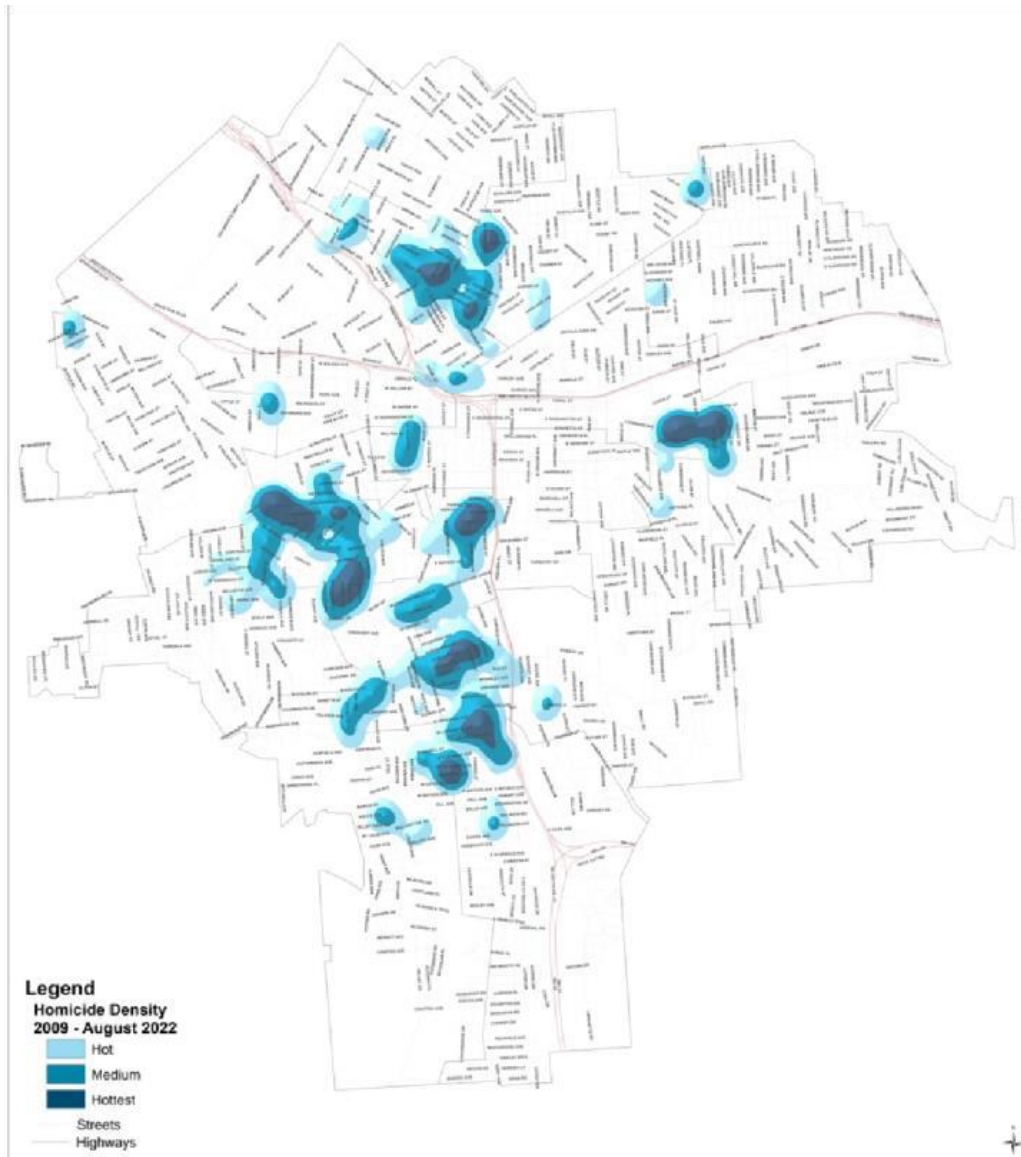
¹⁷⁴ City of Syracuse, "City of Syracuse Violent Crime Assessment," 31.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ City of Syracuse Mayor's Office, "Community Violence Intervention Plan."

¹⁷⁷ City of Syracuse, "City of Syracuse Violent Crime Assessment," 39.

Figure 70: Homicide Density in the City of Syracuse (2009 to 2022)¹⁷⁸



3.3.d. Domestic Violence and Abuse

Nationally, post-pandemic research has begun to explore the interconnectedness of gun violence and another escalating public health crisis, domestic violence, with firearms being used in more than 50% of “Intimate Partner Violence” Homicides.¹⁷⁹ While this potential connectedness is beyond the current scope of the CNA, it does remind the reader to think about domestic violence in wider systems of trauma, violence, and community responsiveness.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 48.

¹⁷⁹ Elizabeth Tobin-Tyler, “Intimate Partner Violence, Firearm Injuries and Homicides: A Health Justice Approach to Two Intersecting Public Health Crises.”

Figure 71: Domestic Violence Victims Reported (2019-2022)¹⁸⁰				
Year	Syracuse City Police Department	Onondaga County Sheriff's Department	All other County Law Enforcement Entities ¹⁸¹	Onondaga County Total
2019	3184	908	726	4818
2020	3282	870	809	4961
2021	2997	820	823	4640
2022	2597	908	746	4251

According to the data, one sees a slight increase in “domestic violence victims reported” to law enforcement entities between 2019 and 2020. Between 2020 and 2022, the steady decrease of reported victims in Onondaga County is largely attributed to a similar steady decrease among victims reported to the Syracuse City Police Department, with fluctuations in the number of victims reported found among non-Syracuse City law enforcement entities.

Still, reported victims are those identified and recorded by law enforcement; **other quantitative and qualitative data indicates a much more complex, ever-growing domestic violence crisis.**

Figure 72: Number of State Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline calls (excluding New York City) (2020-2022)¹⁸²		
Year	Local, Residential	Local, Non-Residential
2020	114,319	24,228
2021	141,272	31,720
2022	145,819	30,988

Further complicating these numbers was an October 2023 report released by State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli which cited a 32% increase in non-New York City, State Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline Calls from 2020 and 2021, a continuation of pre-COVID-19 increases.¹⁸³ While statewide hotline calls increased, the report also found that calls to local, non-state domestic violence hotlines had decreased by 40% in 2020.¹⁸⁴ And while there was an increase in domestic violence shelter admissions between 2015-2019, similar admissions had decreased by 13% between 2019 and 2021.¹⁸⁵

Such trends shed speculative light on potential capacity issues -especially with regards to staffing- faced by local domestic violence entities during COVID-19.¹⁸⁶ Second and more broadly, the data reflects some of

¹⁸⁰ The totals consist of four categories, including aggravated assault, simple assault, sex offense, and Violation of Protection Order. See *NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services*, “Criminal Justice Reports & Statistics.”

¹⁸¹ This includes town and village police departments, Onondaga County State Police, and SUNY Police- Upstate Medical.

¹⁸² *NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence*, “Workbook: NYS 2022 Gender-Based Violence Dashboard.”

¹⁸³ *NYS Office of Budget and Policy Analysis*, “Domestic Violence: Recent Trends in New York State.”

¹⁸⁴ The data point most likely requires greater nuance, as it doesn’t account for increased domestic violence calls in the first month of the COVID-19 pandemic. As noted in *PEACE, Inc.’s* “COVID-19 Community Needs Assessment and Chronicle,” local police, state, and nonprofit entities noted sharp call volume increases in March and April 2020. COVID-19, 17-18.

¹⁸⁵ *NYS Office of Budget and Policy Analysis*, “Domestic Violence: Recent Trends in New York State.”

¹⁸⁶ The then administrators of *Vera House*, a local shelter and advocacy organization for domestic violence and sexual abuse victims, shared their staffing and capacity issues on an early 2022 *Syracuse University* podcast. Xie, “Vera House persists throughout staff shortages, funding deficit.”

the unintended consequences of COVID-19 lockdown protocols and what a 2021 *United Nations* report described as **the “Shadow Pandemic” of Domestic Violence**.¹⁸⁷ This idea was outlined more fully in a 2022 *Harvard Gazette* interview with lecturer on law and clinical instructor at *Harvard University’s* Family and Domestic Violence Law Clinic, Marianna Yang. For Yang,

*A lockdown increases the risk factors for domestic violence in multiple ways: there are more financial stressors because of income loss due to unemployment; there is also the loss of the ability to have breathing spaces for people who are in risky relationships. When people are working outside the home, interactions with their partner are limited to certain hours of the day, and the potential time for conflict is also limited. In a lockdown, not only do you take away those breathing spaces, but you also increase the dynamics where domestic violence can occur. Also, beyond that, during a lockdown, the ability to get help is limited because you don’t have the private space to call somebody; you’re isolated from your support system as a victim/survivor, and you can’t access your family and friends, the people that you rely on.*¹⁸⁸

Historically, domestic violence has been underreported. Within the community conversations, surveys, and interviews, participants not only offered their thoughts about domestic violence and broader forms of abuse within their communities but also additional insights into the functioning of their respective communities. One Near Westside Head Start parent shared that **“sometimes I don’t think people understand, when the police arrive and choose to leave without anything, that has an impact too. You put yourself in a vulnerable position, and who is watching?”** Responding to the comment, a Southside Head Start parent echoed sentiments about domestic violence, distrusting law enforcement, and the presence of the community. She shared how, **“Each neighborhood has a code of law per se, I think it goes on by how we are raised as well. What goes on in the community, stays in the community; police are not embraced. As a community we stick together. I think that goes to domestic violence: We don’t trust the police; the phone hotline is no legal action.”** Similar sentiments have been shared in previous conversations with New Americans and especially refugees, that nonwhite communities monitor and resolve issues collectively, especially when there is distrust of the police. This latter sentiment of distrust corresponds with broader trends following the George Floyd killing in 2020 and reported in “City of Syracuse’s Violent Crime Assessment” from December 2022,

*that the Syracuse Police Department has much lower levels of legitimacy among Black Syracusians than Whites or Latinos. This poses a significant problem because violent crime is concentrated in areas with higher levels of African American population. Therefore, SPD is distrusted more by the communities that need the most help to tackle this issue.*¹⁸⁹

From a Human/Social Services perspective, **understanding community dynamics becomes a critical skill for gaining trust, especially around domestic violence**. A number of respondents shared that this is especially true when pursuing work in rural communities, where it can be *“difficult to gain traction for outreach”* and that *“many times it is hard to see how someone is treated by their families,”* whether it be a potential victim of domestic violence or a senior who might be a victim of abuse or neglect. **Misconceptions about services and concerns about being recognized exist**, *“because we are in a small community, and sometimes people have a stereotypical opinion of our agency...when they have to ask for help for domestic violence and have to leave everything. We talk very positive about a no-judgement zone, we don’t want to minimize their need but we want them to learn how to ask for help, especially if they have children.”* Critical in these quotes as well are other basic needs barriers that might make one more vulnerable to abuse, such as transportation and housing. We’ll turn to the latter now.

¹⁸⁷ Liz Mineo. “‘Shadow Pandemic’ of Domestic Violence.”

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ City of Syracuse, “City of Syracuse Violent Crime Assessment,” 25.

3.4 Housing

Hitting the Brick Wall...a number of people have the same issue (housing shortage), you are not able to assist more than three people and it's all for the same reason." A Social/Human Service Provider, GSW Community Conversation 2022.

A potential indicator of the burgeoning housing crisis within Onondaga County could be the **number of calls about housing to 211**, a free service that connects callers to health and human services throughout Central New York. 211 is run locally by the *United Way of Central New York*, which also operates the *Housing and Homeless Coalition of Central New York*. In 2022, there were 9608 calls about housing in Onondaga County, an increase of 18.44% from the previous year. The majority of these calls originated from Syracuse; 7124 calls came from the city, an increase of 31.6% from the previous year. Data from CNYCF's "Life Needs Assessment" also shows a decrease in the percentage of individuals who have "long-term housing that they can afford," from 85.19% of 1566 surveyed respondents in 2022 to 82.05% out of 1170 survey respondents in 2023.

Certainly, **rising rental and housing costs** throughout Onondaga County are factors. According to a recent article in the *New York Times*, while the national rental rate for 1-bedroom apartments decreased by .7% from February 2023 to February 2024, the Syracuse Metropolitan area experienced **the greatest one-year rent increase in the nation** at 22% (with the average rent of a 1-bedroom apartment being \$1050 a month). As noted in the article, increased rents were common in "low-supplied markets" found in the Midwest and the Northeast.¹⁹⁰

Another calculation, this time from the *Department of Housing and Urban Development* (HUD), shows the Fair Market Rate (FMR) for a 1-, 2-, or 3- bedroom apartment representing the 40th percentile of rent in the Syracuse Metro Area has increased by anywhere from 27% to 33% since 2019. FMR is the estimated amount of income needed to cover one's **rent and utility expenses**, the below rates being 40% of the rental housing units in an area.¹⁹¹

Figure 73: Fair Market Rate (FMR) representing the 40th Percentile of Rent in the Syracuse Metro Area (2019-2024)¹⁹²			
Year	1-Bedroom	2-Bedroom	3-Bedroom
2024	\$916	\$1126	\$1381
2023	\$897	\$1109	\$1367
2022	\$781	\$966	\$1198
2021	\$729	\$901	\$1124
2020	\$723	\$900	\$1127
2019	\$688	\$858	\$1088

The effects of rising rental costs on low-income Onondaga County residents are also evidenced by one's gross rent as a percentage of household income, as estimated through 2018-2022, 5-year ACS. In Onondaga

¹⁹⁰ Michael Kolomatsky, "Rents Are Flat — or Up, or Down, Depending Where You Look."

¹⁹¹ According to the HUD Office of Policy Development and Research, "Fair Market Rents (FMRs) are used to determine payment standard amounts for the Housing Choice Voucher program, initial renewal rents for some expiring project-based Section 8 contracts, initial rents for housing assistance payment (HAP) contracts in the Moderate Rehabilitation Single Room Occupancy program (Mod Rehab), rent ceilings for rental units in both the HOME Investment Partnerships program and the Emergency Solutions Grants program, maximum award amounts for Continuum of Care recipients and the maximum amount of rent a recipient may pay for property leased with Continuum of Care funds, and flat rents in Public Housing units." HUD Office of Policy Development and Research, "Fair Market Rents (40th Percentile Rents)."

¹⁹² HUD Office of Policy Development and Research, "Fair Market Rents (40th Percentile Rents)."

County and the city of Syracuse, residents are spending nearly half or over half of their household income on rent.

Figure 74: Gross Rent as 35% or more of Household Income in New York State, Onondaga County, and the City of Syracuse (2019, 2022)¹⁹³		
Location	2019	2022
New York State	43.1%	42.6%
Onondaga County	39.4%	41.7%
Syracuse	45.7%	47.3%

As both monthly rents and the % of household income spent on rent have increased, *“there is no recourse for families,”* said a local housing expert. *“I field questions from tenants all the time now about the rising rents. In Upstate New York, we have no rent controls, and the landlord can raise the rent as much as they want. Rents have gone up tremendously in the past two years, but the worst was 2022-2023. **There are no resources to help pay the rent.**”* Megan Stuart of the *Housing & Homeless Coalition of Central New York* shared in a recent interview that housing is *“just becoming unaffordable for anyone to live in. What that does is squeeze out the folks with the lowest income out of housing altogether.”¹⁹⁴* The recent January 2024 point-in-time count¹⁹⁵ conducted by the Coalition revealed **an increase of homelessness by 75%** from the previous year. In January 2023, the point-in-time count showed a 30% increase in homelessness across Onondaga County, with Family homelessness up 41%.¹⁹⁶ Even more disturbing were the over 1800 children reported to be homeless within the Syracuse City School District by October 2023, or 1 in every 10 students.¹⁹⁷

Given these conditions, **affordable housing options are at a premium** and, as President and CEO of *Housing Visions* Ben Lockwood outlined in his overview of federal and state programs, multiyear waitlists exist for Section 8 Vouchers and access in Public Housing.¹⁹⁸ Throughout Onondaga County, Human/Social Service professionals shared their experiences working with clients who are struggling to find safe and secure housing presently. In one interview, a Human/Social Service provider who works predominantly with re-entry clients residing in city neighborhoods of color discussed how **the lack of credit scores and quality employment/wages are key deterrents for obtaining stable housing**. He shared how,

Housing is bad, very, very bad. Especially a lot of my clients who are low income. If you are low income you often do not have a credit score. If you are looking at housing that is \$750-800 per month that means you have to be making \$2400 per month, that is \$23 per hour? Some of these clients have low wages, if you are only making \$1500 a month, the landlords are not going to rent to you because it is over 30%. If a property manager sees that the ratio is high, it is under their discretion, they are not giving you the apartment...The thing is most of my clients need housing first. I tell them, you have to get a job, once you have a job you can get housing. Without the paystub you are not getting housing. Once you got the paystubs, I can get you housing, nobody is getting you into an apartment without paystubs.

¹⁹³ 5-Year American Census Survey Estimates 2015-2019, 2018-2022, “Selected Housing Characteristics,” DP04.

¹⁹⁴ Conor Wight, “Homelessness Reaches New Record Level in Central New York, up 75% from 2023 Count.”

¹⁹⁵ Required annually by HUD, The Point-in-Time (PIT) Count *“is a count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January.”* Housing and Urban Development, “Point-in-Time Count and Housing Inventory Count.” US Department of Housing and Urban Development.”

¹⁹⁶ Conor Wight, “Homelessness Reaches New Record Level in Central New York, up 75% from 2023 Count.”

¹⁹⁷ Conor Wight, “1 in 10 Syracuse students are homeless; more will join them without affordable housing.”

¹⁹⁸ Benjamin Lockwood, “Affordable Rental Housing: Who Gets It? What Is It?”

Nor are these issues solely within the city of Syracuse. A Human/Social Service provider in rural, southern Onondaga County outlined many of the challenges that her clients are currently facing. In her estimation, *“Since COVID when no one could be evicted, all rents went from \$800-\$1200. We used to be able to find a good, affordable place for our clients, but it is almost impossible now. Finding houses that are affordable for a single mom with kids. That whole COVID issue caused a huge problem here. We have two homeless families here and we are unable to place them.”*

Complicating the search for affordable housing are two other factors. First, the amount of disposable income needed to move has become onerous and **is affecting more than the lowest income households** in her community. As she shared, *“In order to apply for housing, your income has to be 3x of what you are being charged for rent. So that makes it very frustrating for them to even start looking.”* Second, such burdens have been compounded within her community by the selling of a former government subsidized complex to a private owner who has chosen to rent apartments at full price. These market changes expand the range of potentially impacted households to include ALICE level households. *“There are people paying \$1200 a month and others paying \$100 per month. Housing is the biggest problem we have, for sure.”* The staff member shared that she has been successful in referring clients to East Syracuse, Solway, and *“different places that have apartments,”* but doing so is forcing **households to make difficult choices about basic needs**. With the example of a woman caring for her son who has ADHD, *“the last thing she wants to do is uproot him, but I am not sure if she will find anything here.”* Again, the interconnectedness of social determinants of health are displayed, i.e. a basic need barrier (i.e. housing) can pressure and/or ultimately create other barriers with spiraling effects (education, social networks).

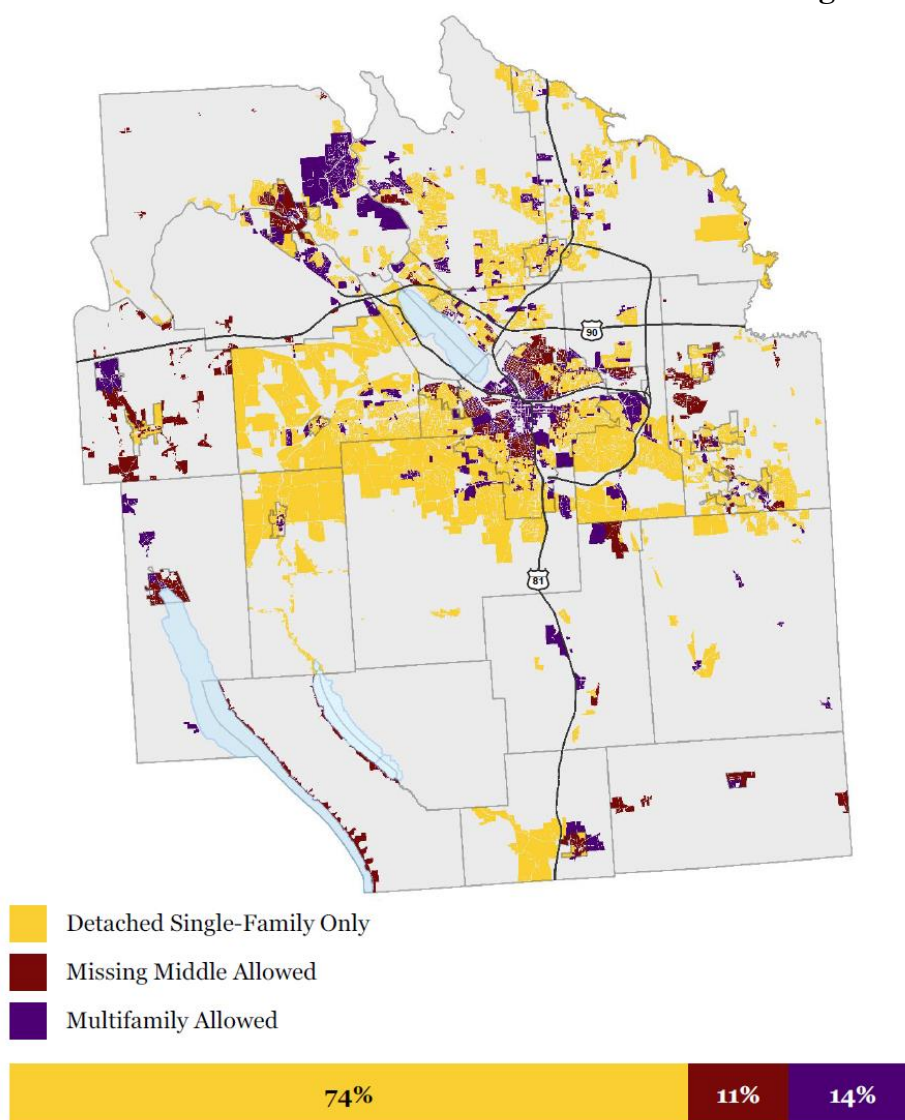
The need to provide additional resources and to expand legal services and knowledge about tenant rights were themes echoed throughout the Community Conversations, staff interviews, and anonymous Human/Social Services surveys. One mother retold her own experience with potential eviction, sharing how her personal knowledge helped resolve the issue, but that at the *“eviction clinic in the courthouse, representatives handle a huge caseload, and it doesn’t always get advertised.”* A Human/Social Services provider mentioned how they are encountering seniors *“getting denied by apartments because of their race or credit score even though their income meets the monthly amount rent due.”* Still another expressed frustration about multiple, non-English speaking clients who either didn’t know about COVID-era rent relief programs or thought they were still in operation, sharing, *“They haven’t even started looking for an apartment and thinking that they will not be kicked out and I am telling them, yes they can. We see a lot of that.”*

Many of these issues have been long-brewing even before the COVID-19 pandemic and are symptoms of larger, structural inequalities. First, for many years, **supply has not kept up with demand**, a condition that will be further exacerbated by economic development in the region and the new residents who will be accompanying it. As *CenterState* CEO President Rob Simpson outlined in a recent editorial, the increase in the region’s housing stock has been minimal over the last decade and only **“347 units of new housing were permitted in Onondaga County” in 2022 when an estimated 2500 housing units annually are required**. Simpson repeats an idea noted earlier, that higher housing costs not only threaten the already vulnerable but also growing numbers of seniors and middle-income households.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ CenterState Corporation for Economic Opportunity, “CenterState CEO President Rob Simpson Emphasizes Need For More Housing Now.”

This leads to a second point referenced a moment ago and studied extensively by *CNYFairHousing*, that **exclusionary zoning**²⁰⁰ practices pursued by Onondaga County townships outside of the city of Syracuse **encourage single-family home construction and discourage multifamily and other forms of housing**. While 74% of Onondaga County is zoned “detached single-family home,” only 14% of the County is zoned as multifamily and around 11% zoned as what’s described as “missing middle,” which allows for duplexes, mobile homes, and small apartment houses. Even here, however, these non-single-family-home locations remain restricted and heavily regulated according to each township, as “*only 3% of total land allows for multifamily housing (i.e. buildings with 10 or more apartments) without special permission from the municipality. Outside the city of Syracuse, that shrinks to 1%.*”²⁰¹

Figure 75: Land Zoned for Urbanized Residential Use in Onondaga County²⁰²



²⁰⁰ CNY Fair Housing defines Exclusionary Zoning as “Residential zoning regulations that privilege detached single-family housing while either banning or making it difficult to construct other diverse housing types such as missing middle and multifamily housing.” CNY Fair Housing, “Exclusionary Zoning in Onondaga County,” 8.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 8.

²⁰² Ibid., 8.

What does this all mean? Not only does a lack of supply and of diverse housing and income options escalate prices,²⁰³ but the mechanisms of these exclusionary zoning practices contribute to residential segregation. Here again, the legacies of discriminatory housing practices remain key. As noted in the *CNYFairHousing* report, “*Compared to white residents of the County, minority residents are twice as likely to rent their homes and almost twice as likely to live in missing middle or multifamily housing. Zoning restrictions that ban the construction of diverse housing types perpetuate the County’s entrenched patterns of segregation.*”²⁰⁴

Onondaga County townships’ exclusionary zoning practices and the potential sprawl stemming from it - especially with considerations to *Micron Technologies* and the influx of people and housing that will come from it - will increase housing costs in rural Central New York and further concentrate low-income residents in aging, deteriorating, low-quality properties within the city of Syracuse. First, according to 5-year, 2018-2022 *ACS* estimates, 87.8% of the homes in the city of Syracuse were built before 1980, a higher percentage than found in Onondaga County as a whole (i.e. 72.3%).²⁰⁵ Second, within Syracuse, the potential health and financial obstacles that accompany both living in and maintaining an older home are amplified by the home’s location. Once again, high concentrations of Syracuse housing properties experiencing moderate to high levels of distress according to 2022 field survey scores are located within 1937 HOLC yellow (Grade C) and redlined (Grade D) locations. In the City of Syracuse’s estimation, ***Areas graded ‘C’ in 1937 were viewed as already in decline. Today, nearly 50% of properties in those areas show signs of physical distress, and 44% are within areas of below average or well below average housing demand- they are blocks that have been stuck in a cycle of decline.***²⁰⁶ Despite blue areas graded “B” and highly desirable in 1937 remaining in demand today, 50% of the current properties in these locations are still “*considered highly vulnerable to decline.*”²⁰⁷ With high concentrations of Black, Latino, and New American populations experiencing poverty within these areas as well, poor housing conditions further social determinant of health disparities according to race and ethnicity.

3.4.a. Lead as Environmental Racism/Injustice

Exemplifying this intersectionality is Onondaga County’s lead/lead poisoning crisis. In a written statement presented at “The People’s Public Hearing on Lead Poisoning: Where we go from Here,” the *Medical Director of the CNY Lead Poisoning Resource Center* -Dr. Travis Hobart- outlined the stakes of lead poisoning at an early age, stating that,

*Lead Exposure in childhood, even at very low levels, causes damage to the brain and nervous system... It increases the likelihood of poor school performance, as well as attention and behavior problems... Some research shows that adolescents previously exposed to lead are more likely to commit crimes and have teen pregnancies... Furthermore, lead can stay in bones for years, leading to inter-generational exposure if a young girl later becomes pregnant.*²⁰⁸

While the *Center for Disease Control* (CDC) advises that 5 micrograms per deciliter is the level of lead in one’s blood that should trigger an environmental and educational intervention, advocates argue that any presence of lead is negative. Additionally, it was not until 1978 when lead-based paints were banned for residential

²⁰³ Ryan Canavan and Alex Horowitz, “More Flexible Zoning Helps Contain Rising Rents.”

²⁰⁴ CNY Fair Housing. 2023. “Exclusionary Zoning in Onondaga County,” 13.

²⁰⁵ 5-Year American Census Survey, Estimates 2015-2019, 2018-2022, “Selected Housing Characteristics,” DP04.

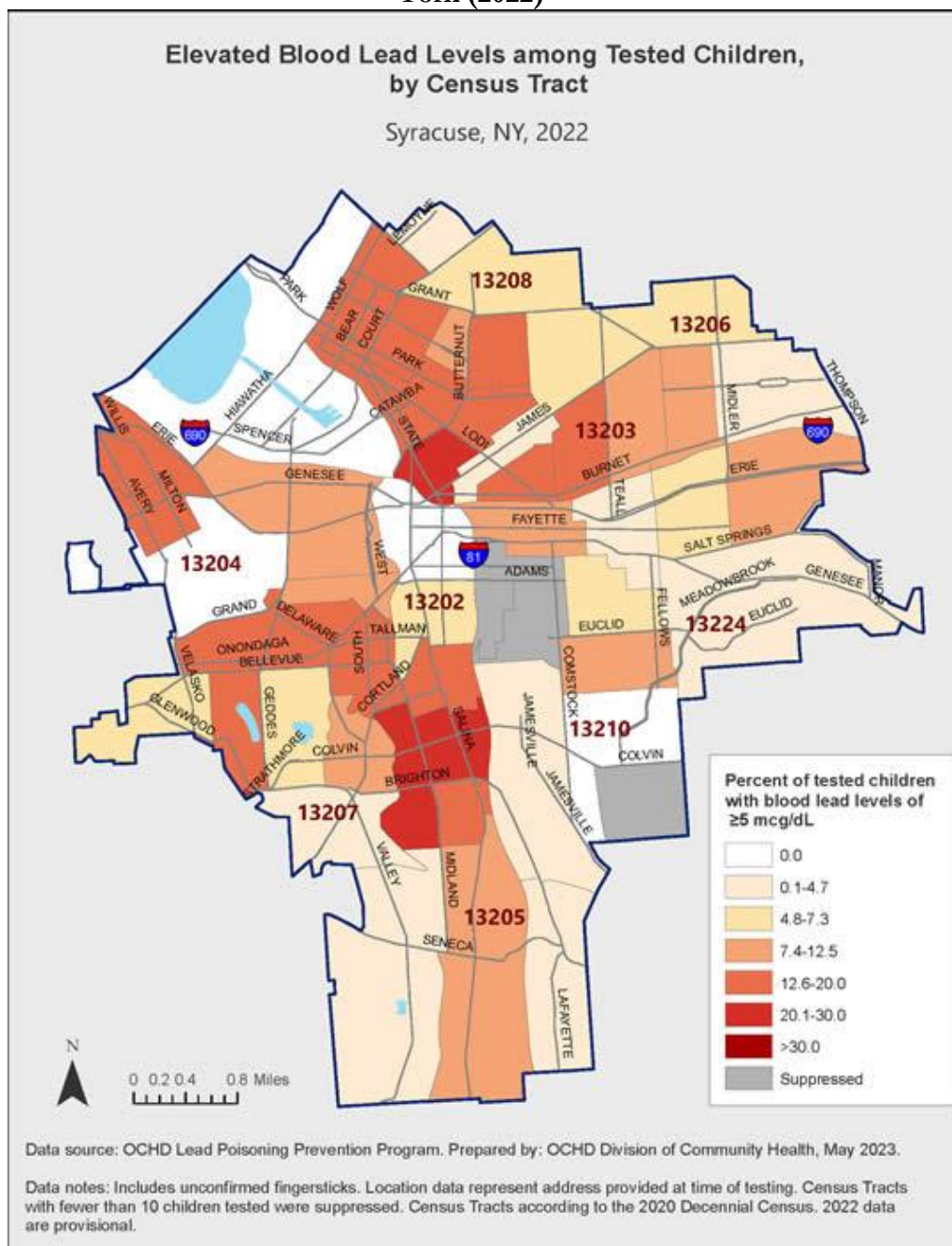
²⁰⁶ CZBLLC. “Syracuse Housing Study,” 23.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 23

²⁰⁸ *Families for Lead Freedom Now!* and *Legal Services of Central New York, Inc.*, “Syracuse Community Report- The People’s Public Hearing on Lead Poisoning: Where do we go from Here?” 55.

use, which means communities with larger, older housing stocks such as Syracuse are especially vulnerable. As displayed in the map below, **those City of Syracuse neighborhoods that have previously been identified in the CNA as a) being formerly yellow- and redlined, b) possessing poor housing stocks, and c) having large concentrations of ethnic and racial poverty are also the neighborhoods with the highest incidents of elevated blood lead levels in children:**

Figure 76: Elevated Blood Lead Levels among Tested Children by Census Tract in Syracuse, New York (2022)²⁰⁹



²⁰⁹ Onondaga County Health Department, "Child Lead Poisoning: Local Data."

Unsurprisingly, NYCLU, *Families for Lead Freedom Now*, and other activists have argued that lead is a reflection of **environmental racism/injustice due to the disproportionate number of non-white, city of Syracuse residents affected by it.**²¹⁰ In 2022, 89.9% of the children found to have elevated blood lead levels in Onondaga County were city of Syracuse residents. The overwhelming majority of them were identified as either “Black” or “Other Race.”

Figure 77: Prevalence of Childhood Lead Poisoning by Race and Geography, 2022 Number of children with Elevated Blood Lead Levels (≥ 5 mcg/dL)²¹¹					
Location	Total	Black	White	Other Race	Unknown Race
Onondaga County	52	10	13	20	9
City of Syracuse	458	193	64	107	94

In response, aforementioned grassroots groups such as *Families for Lead Freedom Now* and leadership there such as Oceanna Fair and Darlene Medley are well-organized and actively advocating for greater systems-level reforms, enforcements, and transparency around lead.²¹² In addition to organizing *LeadSafeCNY*,²¹³ CNYCF facilitated a participatory budgeting initiative wherein local residents offered feedback and selected “*The Sankofa Community-Based Doula Care and Lead Awareness Expansion Project*” to increase testing. The feedback from these convenings also encouraged the Onondaga County Health Department to once again offer a mobile lead testing van which began formal service in Fall 2023.

Lead as environmental racism/injustice is further intensified by other **environmental and safety hazards** - including but not limited to asthma, slips and falls, respiratory illnesses, and more- as well as **the excessive costs** faced by property- and homeowners who are looking to maintain/rehab distressed city properties. As outlined in a 2023 Syracuse city housing study, **construction and rehab costs for many city homes and rentals will far exceed the market value of the properties and/or the willingness of renters/homeowners to pay for the costs.**²¹⁴ Large influxes of capital and/or subsidies are needed; the recent announcement by NYS Governor Kathy Hochul that fifty million dollars are budgeted to fund is a promising start.²¹⁵ While arguing that there is a certain responsibility on the homeowner to maintain one’s home, a housing rehab specialist shared that many homeowners, “*need roofing, siding, they need other things that very few programs in the area cover. Or they can’t afford a loan even if it is low interest.*” Foster Grandparents during their Community Conversations confirmed as much, sharing how “*we need too get houses up to standard and remediate lead. You have to get financing to repair the house. We need assistance with maintenance.*” Even smaller services, such as “*Handyman Services for Seniors, Lawn Services,*” and “*I need someone to paint*” were requested. For the rehab specialist, previous programs such as the *Green and Healthy Homes Initiative* were effective in bringing together a host of interests, including but not limited to the City, County, CNYCF, *Home Headquarters, Inc.*, and

²¹⁰ *Families for Lead Freedom Now!* and *Legal Services of Central New York, Inc.*, “Syracuse Community Report- The People’s Public Hearing on Lead Poisoning: Where do we go from Here?”

²¹¹ *Onondaga County Health Department*, “Child Lead Poisoning: Local Data.”

²¹² <https://www.leadfreedomcny.org/>

²¹³ As described through its website, *LeadSafeCNY* tackles the issue of lead “*through multiple approaches including funding, impact investing and collaboration to support lead-free housing construction, existing home renovations, community outreach and training, workforce development, public policy and more.*” *Central New York Community Foundation*, “Participatory Budgeting: Help Design a Project to Increase Lead Testing in Syracuse.”

²¹⁴ CZB LLC, 24, 25.

²¹⁵ New York State, “Governor Hochul awards \$50 Million to Fund Critical Home Repairs for nearly 1,400 New York Households.”

PEACE, Inc. to braid existing grant opportunities, thus overcoming funding barriers and maximizing impact for a property.²¹⁶ Promising as well are the efforts of *Home Headquarters*, a local nonprofit that is pursuing novel methods for providing mortgages and loans for Minority-homeownership in a county where racial disparities are worse than national averages.²¹⁷

3.4.b. Housing as Proxy to Express Concerns about the Community's Development

When reflecting upon the thoughts of city residents of all ages in the Community Conversations and analyzing the survey responses offered by Human/Social Services professionals, the CNA organizers noticed a consistent theme emerge around the issue of affordable housing. Specifically, **local residents are using the topic of housing as a proxy to express their concerns about gentrification, community development, and the future of CNY.** Some of these concerns were outlined when discussing the impending I-81 project and the development occurring around it in Section 2.3.e. What are the Legacies of Redlining and Urban Renewal in CNY. Additionally,

- Both Seniors and High School students see new housing taking place, but that housing construction is for specific interests and **at the expense of low-income, local residents.** As one high school student shared, *"Instead of houses, I keep seeing of hotels pop up; I don't think we need that many in Syracuse."* A Foster Grandparent remarked, *"They are building all these new homes. In the seniors' apartments, they are not being remodeled. Why are they only dealing with SU taking over all over Genesee St. SU has had these places for almost 10 years and not doing anything with it."* In response, another Senior added, *"I don't understand, they are letting SU build all these homes. What about seniors? The students are transient. There is no place for seniors to get an apartment because SU is buying everything."* References to **the rise of out-of-town landlords at the expense of local interests** were also noted. As a student stated, *"Syracuse landlords that live out of Syracuse, they are not doing anything to upkeep the property. They have to stop letting people that are not from town do that to the property."*
- Multiple times, the expression *"they are letting"* was used. This is a second observation from the qualitative data. Anxieties about housing are proxies to question local politicians and decision-making. For example, a number of respondents **saw the proposed Inner Harbor Aquarium project as misguided and taking resources away from affordable housing.** As one high school student remarked, *"the child in me feels like the aquarium will be super fun but there are more priorities that should be addressed such as child poverty, housing."* Remarked someone in the Human/Social Services field, *"There are misallocation of funds and we are not funding the right priorities (i.e. the fish tank vs. affordable housing)."* Overall concerns about legislation were also voiced, there needs to be **"bigger investment in stable, affordable housing, stronger legislation that prevents injustice to protected classes."** Last,
- The issue of housing was used to express one's concerns about their **neighborhoods and/or changes taking place** within them. A student remarked, *"They have so many boarded up houses, they need to tear them down and build new affordable homes. They are fixing an old church to turn it into a senior home, the Maria Regina complex. I think that's good."* Another shared, *"The new houses are generic and lose the personality of the neighborhood. I would like to see old architecture and new architecture. There is a lot of history behind those historic buildings. If you go downtown all the student housing looks like boxes."* In response to the two students, a third shared, *"They are talking about growth, but some of the changes are a bad option. They are destroying buildings that have history and putting awful looking new stuff."* A Foster Grandparent expressed their discomfort by simply saying, **"As senior citizens, where we used to go, we are practically lost."** Sentiments about avoiding repairs to already standing infrastructure in Syracuse and the positivity connected to the city's architectural past are

²¹⁶ Riley Bunch, "Syracuse Green & Healthy Homes Initiative Launches."

²¹⁷ According to a recent Syracuse.com report, *"only 30% of African Americans in Onondaga County own their homes, compared with 72% of whites. That disparity is even worse than the national average gap of 29 percentage points."* Tim Knauss, "A Syracuse nonprofit steps in to give mortgages to Black homeowners neglected by Banks." Such data once again shows the devastating effects of twentieth century discriminatory housing practices, as outlined in Section 2.3.

also reflected in the popularity of the social media account, *Syracuse History*, which posts videos, photographs, written reflections, and more about the history of the city’s homes, businesses, and peoples. Public forums around the housing crisis have been robust, with politicians, government officials, advocacy groups, and more hosting events and answering constituencies’ questions. Such **forums should continue, allowing for the development of inclusive, community-based solutions that respond to similar concerns about a rapidly changing Central New York.** Further exploration into narratives of memory and nostalgia about the past to understand anxieties about the present are warranted and should be further pursued.

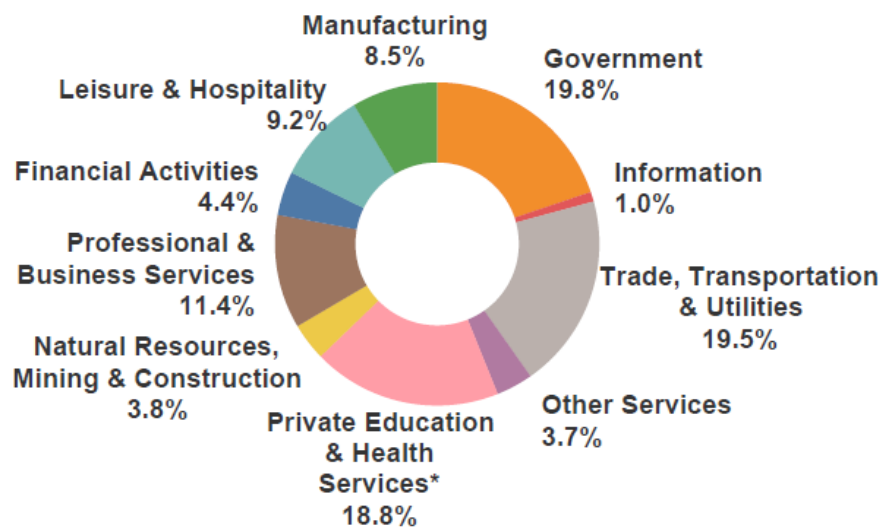
3.5. Employment and Training

3.5.a. Unemployment and the Challenges of Declining Labor Force Participation

*“Lack of resources is difficult...the housing shortage is huge right now. So there are a number of jobs that are open but whether or not a person is open for employment. It’s not that simple...just because there are a number of positions open...there are all of these simmering issues that are barriers for work. The first thing that I provide is **hope**, otherwise we can’t get them to fill out a second application when they close the door on the first.”*

The sentiments offered by a Social/Human Services provider serves as both a) a useful transition from the previous conversation about the pressures associated with housing and b) a continued reminder about the interconnected complexities faced by low-income individuals. This is especially true about employment. Currently, according to a January 2024 *New York State Department of Labor* Market Briefing for the Central New York region (i.e. Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga and Oswego Counties), the area’s most significant industry is “Government” jobs, followed by “Trade, Transportation, & Utilities,” and “Private Education & Health Services.”²¹⁸

Figure 78: Central New York Regional Industry Mix. Total Number of Jobs in Industry (January 2024)²¹⁹



Within the Central New York region as well, the four top industries listed above (Government; Trade, Transportation & utilities; Private Education & Health Services; and Professional & Business Services) make

²¹⁸ *New York State Department of Labor*, “Labor Market Briefing: Central New York.”

²¹⁹ Ibid.

up nearly 70% of the total nonfarm jobs in the region. Additionally, sectors including “Leisure and Hospitality” (2,600 jobs), “Professional & Business Services” (2,100 jobs), and “Government” (1,800 Jobs) saw the greatest job gains in the last year. In 2023, manufacturing saw the greatest job losses (500).²²⁰

At present, the **annual average rate of unemployment** in Onondaga County is lower than in New York State. The rate in Syracuse is higher than in Onondaga County and New York State. As outlined in “PEACE, Inc.’s COVID-19 Community Needs Assessment and Chronicle,” the rates fluctuated greatly in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, far exceeding the annual rate recorded below for 2020.²²¹

Figure 79: Annual Average Unemployment Rate, New York State, Onondaga County, and the City of Syracuse (2019-2023)²²²					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
New York State	3.9	9.9	7.1	4.3	4.1
Onondaga County	3.8	8.0	4.9	3.3	3.3
City of Syracuse	4.1	8.1	5.0	3.4	5.1 ²²³

As noted, unemployment rates have largely returned to pre-pandemic levels. Nationally as well, when combined with job growth beyond pre-pandemic levels, prolonged low rates of unemployment -and in particular low rates of unemployment among Blacks and Latinos- have led *The Center for American Progress* to declare “the labor market recovery from the pandemic to be the fastest and most equitable” compared to other recent recessions.²²⁴ Nonetheless, unemployment rates are just one part of a more complicated employment landscape, as unemployment rates only account for those individuals who have actively looked for work in the last four weeks. They do not account for people who are “Marginally Attached to the Labor Force” (i.e. available for work and searched for a job in the last twelve months but not in the last four weeks) or who have left the labor force altogether.²²⁵

Telling, for example, is how workforce participation in the United States remains below pre-pandemic levels according to the *United States Chamber of Commerce*. In the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, there have been waves of early retirements, parents leaving the workforce due to child care gaps, and individuals looking to establish their own businesses.²²⁶ The five county, Central New York Region has not been immune to such decreases. According to 2023 Labor Statistics, **labor force participation is at a historical low** at 60.5% in the Central New York Region and is lower than the state and national rates of 63.1% and 63.6% respectively.²²⁷ Additionally, in the estimation of the *Central New York Regional Economic Development Council* (CNYREDC), “**over 25% of the labor force is 55+, which means in the next 5 to 10 years, massive retirements are anticipated. Workforce shortages are likely to worsen over time due to stagnant population growth, job growth, mass retirements in the next 5 to 10 years, and historically low unemployment.**”²²⁸

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ PEACE, Inc., “COVID-19,” 22-29.

²²² *United States Bureau of Labor Statistics*, “Unemployment Rate in New York,” “Unemployment Rate in Onondaga County.”

²²³ The Syracuse figure is based on preliminary data from December 2023. *New York State Department of Labor*, “Labor Market Briefing: Central New York.”

²²⁴ Rose Khattar and Lily Roberts, “5 Reasons Why the Labor Market Recovery Was Historic.”

²²⁵ *United States Bureau of Labor Statistics*, “Concepts and Definitions (CPS).”

²²⁶ Stephanie Ferguson, “Understanding America’s Labor Shortage.”

²²⁷ *Central New York Regional Economic Development Council*, “The CNY Ascent: Reaching New Heights. 2023 Strategic Plan,” 9.

²²⁸ Ibid., 9.

These market realities are brought into even sharper focus given the proposed scopes of the I-81 community grid and the construction of a *Micron* semiconductor fabrication factory in Clay. Regarding the latter, plans are in motion to build the “*largest semiconductor fabrication facility in the history of the United States,*” which is “*the largest private investment in New York State history.*”²²⁹ The numbers are massive; \$100 billion investment over the next 20 years, 9000 jobs created with *Micron* alone, and another 40,000 in community jobs.²³⁰ Regarding I-81, the *New York State Department of Transportation* has overcome a spat of legal court challenges and is beginning its work to tear down I-81’s elevated viaducts, a \$2.25 billion project that itself promises to provide thousands of high paying construction jobs.²³¹

On the one hand, even before the *Micron* and I-81 projects break ground, one survey respondent working in manufacturing shared that “***the big barrier is/will be access to the talent they need. If the job numbers for I-81 and Micron are even remotely close, this will be an existential threat to numerous smaller companies in our region.***”²³² According to a November 2022 “Phase II Regional Sector-Based Strategies” Report released by the CNYREDC, the decline in labor force participation has “*negatively impacted incumbent labor pools, and training initiatives alone are not the solution. Special considerations are important to reach the underserved, and to compel those not seeking employment today to return to the workforce.*”²³³ These challenges seemingly set the stage for **potentially transformative and widened, equitable employment** within the community. Regarding I-81, it’s ensuring racially equitable access for quality training and high-wage opportunities around construction as suggested by the *Urban Jobs Task Force*. Within the tech sector, CNYREDC concluded “*Significant work remains in raising awareness of careers in the tradeable sectors. Articulating the potential wages and funded training is important in reaching the most vulnerable populations and will serve to counter misperceptions about technical careers.*”²³⁴ Efforts around both projects have been vigorous. A few notable projects include the creation of *Syracuse Build* to further construction and union pathways for I-81 and other area infrastructure projects; the building of a County-wide *Science, Technology, Arts and Math (STEAM)* high school in downtown Syracuse; and the making of a \$15 million *Micron* Cleanroom simulation Lab at *Onondaga Community College*.²³⁵

3.5.b. Employer/Community-Based Organization (CBO) Collaboration towards Equity

Equitable opportunities are needed beyond I-81 and *Micron* to meet labor demand, however, and it seems as though the time is ripe to engage the region’s many small businesses. For the previously mentioned individual working within the manufacturing sector, “***we need a supply of workers to feed local manufacturers.*** *Local schools are drastically underproducing and I don’t see their enrollments growing anywhere near where they need to be...my clients have many good jobs and careers available that don’t require credentials.*” A workforce survey respondent offered similar thoughts and shared that “*there needs to be more effective communication across the ‘ecosystem’ of organizations that serve disadvantaged small business owners...and there needs more engagement with organizations that serve marginalized communities, so that we can collaborate in connecting business owners/potential business owners in those communities with the programs and services within that ecosystem.*” For a respondent working with recently incarcerated individuals, there are opportunities available, if the client is open to considering it. “*In my opinion, employers are hiring everybody right now, out of prison \$19.50 per hour. It just depends on what you want. A lot*

²²⁹ Ibid., 18.

²³⁰ Ibid., 18.

²³¹ Michelle Breidenbach, “With Lawsuit in Rearview Mirror, NY DOT Is Ready to Design, Build New I-81 in Syracuse.”

²³² According to January 24 DOL data, more than 45% of employees in Central New York working for a company with less than 100 staff members. *New York State Department of Labor*, “Labor Market Briefing: Central New York,” 11.

²³³ Ernst and Young LPP, “Central New York REDC. Phase II Regional Sector-Based Strategies,” 2.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Governor’s Press Office, “Governor Hochul Unveils Plans for \$15 Million *Micron* Cleanroom Simulation Lab at Onondaga Community College.”

of my clients are choosy about the job. I may have a clerk or janitorial job, but if a client worked as a property manager, he can't find a job. That is a problem. You gotta start somewhere and go up."

The paragraph raises two critical questions frequently raised following the pandemic, 1) What are the relationships needed with employers to increase and to improve getting low-income Onondaga County residents into quality jobs? And 2) what are the holistic, multifaceted supports required to empower clients? Regarding the former, social and human services professionals at community-based organizations (CBO) often express the desire to build trusted working relationships with area employers, especially those CBO staff who specialize in helping clients obtain training and work. Useful here is research by *Jobs for the Future* (JFF), a national workforce entity that looks *"to drive transformation of the US education and workforce systems to achieve equitable economic advancement for all"* and its article *"What can CBOs teach us about Achieving Equity in Workforce Development."* JFF notes how *"many practitioners in traditional workforce institutions do not represent the individuals that are actively seeking training and quality improvement"* and *"in a workforce system that rewards outputs, rather than impact, there is little incentive for traditional workplace players to deepen their understanding and cultural competency to better serve populations that experience barriers to employment."*²³⁶ Here is the value -and potentially the misunderstanding by some- about CBOs, ***"that the work and outcomes move at the speed of trust-community-based work requires intentional relationship building that can take months or years to nurture."***²³⁷

These perspectives drove the June 2022 "Community Conversation to Drive Systems Change" hosted by *Greater Syracuse Works* and a later October 2022 Community Event on 2 Generation-based pathways sponsored by *PEACE, Inc.*, *Greater Syracuse Works* (GSW), JFF, and the *Kresge Foundation*. In the June 2022 conversation, participants were asked, **"If you could talk to an employer about your clients, what would you tell them?"** The spirit of **collaboration** informed their responses, with one direct-service staff member sharing that *"I think this same collaboration (i.e. as seen in GSW) needs to be done with employers because I don't think they consider some of the struggles of getting people into jobs. I know some comments I have heard from employers, and I feel like there is this lack of understanding of the community in which you have your business in. It'd be good to try and convene employers to hear what they are saying."*²³⁸ As another individual shared, **stronger understanding of each actor's needs** could benefit both the CBO and the employer, especially after a client is placed, as *"It would be interesting for them to know that people can get support and it doesn't have to fall on the employer. Maybe it might fall on us to help people while on the job."* Still one staff member stated, *"We can be the cheerleaders for employers giving people a second chance."*²³⁹

3.5.c. Broader Barriers towards Employment and Training

Throughout the many Community Conversations, survey responses from Human/Social Services professionals, and low-income Onondaga County residents themselves, employment barriers were frequently discussed. While not exhaustive, the following issues were most frequently noted within these forums.

²³⁶ Jobs for the Future (JFF), "What Can CBOs Teach Us About Achieving Equity in Workforce Development?" 10.

²³⁷ Ibid. 11.

²³⁸ Participants also applied such logic to their own employers and employment, stating that *"We have to look within our own house as well. There is a blindness in employers (including ours)...Once you have this employer, hierarchy structure. There is an inability to listen and see. They go to these leadership seminars, and then you go to the real world and they want to do it the old way. There is a disconnect between the employer and those doing the work."*

²³⁹ Community Conversation participants shared that these barriers between employers and employees are evident among Central New York's nonprofits as well, a topic discussed further in Section 4.

Basic Education Barriers/High School Graduation

A repeated theme among many of the respondents was the need for **additional educational resources** to gain employment or to access additional training opportunities (more on the latter shortly). *“I find so many individuals in our community do not have high school diplomas, and many struggle to really read or write,”* remarked one survey respondent. Another shared that funding issues *“are not broad enough to adjust to community needs and to growing my GED program.”* These comments provide support for the 5-year, 2018-2022 ACS estimates included in Figure 79, which show the percentages of Onondaga County and City of Syracuse residents over the Age of 25 without a High School diploma. Additionally, estimates show that those said residents also have higher percentages of poverty than the broader County and City percentages found in Figure 40.

Figure 80: Educational Obtainment in Onondaga County, City of Syracuse (2022) ²⁴⁰		
Label	Onondaga County	Syracuse
Less than 9th grade	2.80%	5.6%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	5.80%	9.9%
Poverty Rate for The Population 25 Years And Over For Whom Poverty Status Is Determined By Educational Attainment Level		
Less than high school graduate	32.20%	43.5%

While education is admittedly a barrier, a number of conversation participants and survey respondents opined that greater flexibility with hiring and recruitment could yield positive results. As shared by a case manager for New Americans, *“In the refugee community, you have a huge talent pool, but employers require conversational English and don’t see that the level of English is needed for all positions. It is good to be a space that receives refugees, what is the benefit of it if people can’t work until they are conversational in English.”* Another Human/Social Services Professional who works with New American clients seconded these sentiments and added that *“Job training is critical for low-level, English as New Language (ENL) clients.”* From the June 2022 Community Conversation, one participant added that job descriptions and education requirements can deter potential candidates from even applying, sharing that, *“They require a degree for a customer service job. The job doesn’t match with the degree requirement, but because of what employers are asking for in the job description, they don’t even apply.”*

Poverty, Trauma, and Family: Conversations about educational obtainment also spurred broader thoughts about poverty, trauma, and empowerment. For one survey respondent, *“I see an uneducated/ undereducated group of individuals within our city. The dynamics of poverty and how difficult it is for people to find their way, or sometimes to be motivated enough to climb out of it (which is a symptom of poverty) are real barriers.”* For another respondent, *“the resources are there, but the clients don’t want to always take advantage of it, like graduating from high school, obtaining a GED, etc. They may say, “yeah,” but they don’t always follow up with it. You may give recommendations, but there can often be no follow up.”* While the idea of “following through” is an often repeated one among Human/Social Services providers and has been noted throughout the CNA, there is empathy. And for most, there is the desire to help guide the client through trauma-informed practices. For an individual working in workforce, *I have to recondition the person...if a person is homeless for a number of years, **getting them to understand their value is key.** It is difficult when people have been conditioned to not think they are worthy. I have to change my approach, be very delicate, because building trust is going to be more difficult*

²⁴⁰ 5-Year American Census Survey Estimates 2015-2019, 2018-2022, “Educational Obtainment,” S1501.

because of what they experienced in the past. Getting them to understand and helping to build their confidence and to bring their barriers down.

Others in the conversation echoed the difficulty in **building trust**, that *“sometimes building trust with clients is really hard. You can build a trusting relationship. They are always open to giving you something until you lose trust between the person and you. Sometimes it has to do with their family issues and their home life.”* Here again, the pressures of poverty, family, and one’s past can intersect. For one person working in workforce development, ***“I think that sometimes that gets lost in the push for workforce. Trauma. Our clients sometimes become stuck because their families are living these things. I have a client who couldn’t continue because her sister ended up in the hospital from domestic violence and passed away a month later.”*** From previous conversations with unemployed and underemployed Onondaga County residents with children as well, the prioritization of oneself and one’s family can loom large in one’s pursuit of employment. As one single mother lamented, *“These jobs nowadays want you to be on time, but then again, your health is more important. If you’re sick, you can’t take time off. If you have kids that are sick at home, you can’t take some time off of that job. With all of the extra stress, my health is more important to me because if I’m not healthy and strong to provide for myself, how can I provide for my family and my children? I know that I need a job, but...one that’s not going to stress me out at the end of the day.”*²⁴¹ The quote reminds us of a point raised within Section 3.2.b., that chronic stress and trauma can be **intergenerational** and can affect the ways in which anyone works, let alone someone living in poverty.

Here, the supports offered through **trauma-informed coaching and parent cohorts** mentioned in Section 3.2 are critical for building *“the ‘basic’ soft skills to succeed such as knowing that getting to work on time is essential...It’s the cycle of poverty that hampers so many.”* Many respondents thought such trauma-informed, mentorship approaches could be built in partnership with employers. As one workforce case manager shared, *“a mentorship program with us could work in certain environments. We meet with a lot of people, but for some reason we can’t seem to keep them employed. If you know the people you are working with haven’t been working, help them overcome different barriers. Teach them they can’t speak like that, for example. Don’t close the door on them, once they get the job, help them keep the job. Getting a job is easy. Keeping the job is the hard part.”* As will be developed shortly in connection to formal training and education opportunities, continuing growth in self-confidence, reinforcing resiliency, and nurturing soft-skills are potentially the most important ingredients for ensuring empowerment through employment.

The above quotes also reveal **Transportation** and **Child Care** as frequent barriers for employment. Transportation will be developed separately in a later section of the CNA due to the subject’s complexity and relevance to other topics beyond employment, a sentiment best captured by a Community Conversation participant, *“Transportation limits them where they are able to work, live, basic things. There may be a better deal but transportation limits everything; even just getting to medical providers and basic needs covered.”* With regards to child care, certainly, CNYCF “Life Needs Assessment” survey data confirms it as an emerging problem. In 2023, only 72.33% (737) of 1019 respondents stated that they had access to good quality child care. Informative as well is the 2021 report, “The Child Care Landscape in Onondaga County: A Supply & Demand Analysis,” which was released by the *Early Childhood Alliance of Onondaga County* in partnership with *Child Care Solutions of Central New York* and the *Onondaga County Department of Social Services- Economic Security (DSS-ES)*. Similar to other issues discussed throughout this CNA, the child care system largely collapsed during the COVID-19 pandemic, exposing a longstanding fragmented, underfunded system wherein families, employers, and child care providers were all struggling. As the definitive systems-level study for local conditions, the report warrants summary here. Key points include,

²⁴¹ Alissa Tubbs, Chol Majok, and PEACE, Inc. Community Engagement Department, “Community Conversations: Returning to Work in 2021.”

- **Families have a range of needs and demands for their child care provider**, including a) cost, b) location, c) quality, d) hours of operation and the ability to accommodate work schedules (especially second shift/night work care), e) preference of early education arrangement (pre-K, *Early Head Start/Head Start*, center- or family-based child care, etc.), and more. These choices become significantly more limited for families who face transportation barriers, time constraints, and limited incomes. Regarding this latter point,
- **Child care is expensive** and, according to 2021 data, “*The average cost of care for a family with an infant and a toddler is \$24,336 (per year) in Onondaga County.*” Through large federal, state, and county investments, child care subsidies expanded to 300% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) and -in Onondaga County- parent share contributions were “*reduced from 35% to 1% of a family’s income over the poverty line.*”²⁴² Despite these important investments,
- **Only 44% of child care demand can be met** “*by supply of formal and regulated child care for children under the age of 5 in Onondaga County.*”²⁴³ In reality, this figure is likely far lower, as it assumes all providers are operating at maximum capacity. The difficulties faced by child care providers with regards to staffing and wages will be discussed more fully in “Section IV: Human/Social Services Capacity as Community Need.” Advocates for child care reform contend that there **are fundamental misconceptions about child care, its providers, and its importance. Child care is more than simply empowering employment opportunities for parents and child care providers are more than glorified babysitters.** “*I wish we could get parents to perceive their providers as teachers, but they are not seen like that by the general public because child care has been marginalized as a career,*” remarked a child care workforce advocate. Through required credentialing and more, as one survey respondent shared, *child care educators are highly skilled and incredible educators. They provide education and care to children during the time period where the greatest amount of brain development occurs (80% before age 3, 90% before age 5).*²⁴⁴ There are real stakes in early child care education, an idea shared by many parents in their demand for quality child care. Increased investments in *QUALITYstarsNY* and programs such as *PEACE, Inc./Child Care Solutions of CNY’s own Early Childhood Career Pathway Program* are all vehicles for improving education quality within early education sites and among providers.

Lack of IDs: While seemingly minor, another **barrier is the lack of IDs** and other forms of identification that one needs to gain services and/or employment. In Syracuse’s Westside, for example, Human/Social Services providers note the number of clients who lack a) original Birth Certificates and/or Social Security Cards (i.e. critical documents for determining identity and age that are required for obtaining services); b) Drivers’ Permits, Licenses, and IDs; and more. Replacing and/or obtaining new forms of identification can bring additional costs for clients, especially so for those who don’t know that DMV fees can be adjusted with a Proof of Assistance Award from DSS. Such misunderstandings about documentation are frequent. “*Many places won’t accept copies...you need original documents,*” shared a case manager. Also frequent is the flawed belief that Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Cards for SNAP and Cash Assistance can be used in lieu of a Birth Certificate or a Driver’s License. The lack of ID is also a pressing one for a Human/Social Services professional working with re-entry, justice involved clients, who shared how “*New York State is letting people out with an ID; some people are coming out with IDs and some are not.*” For him, “***if they release you from a state prison, they should release you with an ID,***” as the time and resources needed to obtain identification can delay access to employment, housing, and recovery services. These barriers raise even higher levels of concern around Enhanced IDs, which will be required to board a domestic flight or enter federal buildings by May 2025. Not only will the IDs prove expensive for low-income households, but it will also prove

²⁴² *Early Childhood Alliance Onondaga*, “The Child Care Landscape in Onondaga County: A Supply and Demand Analysis,” 7.

²⁴³ *Early Childhood Alliance Onondaga*, “Child Care in Onondaga County: Community Snapshot.”

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

especially taxing for homeless families, as it will require two different forms of state residency.²⁴⁵ Irrespective of the form of ID, questions about security and the safety of uploaded IDs/documents are commonly asked by Free Tax Prep Program and clients. It was an issue raised by Nottingham High School Students as well.

Navigating Digital Divides: Concerns about security also raise questions about digital literacy and accessibility. In “Community Conversations: Returning to Work in 2021,” participants didn’t voice a lack of internet access so much as a desire for greater security and transparency. For one person, *“I don’t like giving jobs online my social security number. Why do you need this for a job application? We can talk about my social security number when I get hired.”* Those who lack confidence and/or the skill to navigate online platforms and technology also expressed their frustrations. Being inundated with *“so many notifications and nothing paying off”* proved disappointing for one participant. For a New American, *“You have to be updated on all technology, software. If you don’t know this you won’t get a job.”* *“I have to learn how to attach something to email and that gets frustrating,”* remarked another. For high school students who are commonly assumed to understand -let alone navigate- the Internet and online platforms, searching for and applying for employment opportunities was equally stressful. *Everything is online,* remarked a student, *“You need to have a social security card, driver’s license. Everything is online.”* A number of students also remarked that *“Minors aren’t even allowed to sign-up for those platforms,”* making the search for employment opportunities limited. From the conversations as well, students expressed **the need and interest for greater employment opportunities within their neighborhoods.** For one student, lacking part-time job opportunities within their neighborhood represented the fragmented nature of the community and a limit of social networks, *“I feel like in the past, you could work in your neighbor’s store. You knew who to talk to and didn’t have to go through all of these difficult online processes...When I was younger, there was a corner store that my family knew well and there was an older man who was very nice. I wanted to work there.”*

Unsurprisingly, for those struggling to overcome “digital divides,” the desire for greater social networks and in-person, supportive employment services are understandably attractive.

Workforce Training and Education: As noted earlier, with the promise of Micron and I-81 as well as an aging workforce, much attention has been directed towards training and education. To return to the late 2022 study by CNYREDC, improvements are critical, as *“There is inconsistency in the supply of educational programming, K-12 to industry pathways, and job placement consortiums that create opportunity and contribute to successful talent acquisition and retention in the targeted sectors.”*²⁴⁶ When compared to other data points, there is a possible disconnect. According to CNYCF “Life Needs Assessment Data,” in response to the question “Do you have the skills that you need to get the job that you want?” 21.7% of respondents (237/855) answered “no” in 2023. The sharp decline in 2022 of 14.33% respondents who answered “no” appears to be an outlier, as 2021 and 2020 saw similar responses to 2023 with 20.21% and 23.3% respectively.

Certainly, many of the aforementioned, multifaceted issues around household stability influence a client’s decision to consider additional training around certificates, credentialing, and/or college education. According to JFF, on average, *“student parents must work more than 50 hours per week just to pay for education and child care costs, even after receiving traditional financial aid.”*²⁴⁷ As discussed around other CNA topics, **Money and Time** are critical barriers and considerations for pursuing additional training. For example, within a workforce/training pathways pilot entitled BOOST which sought to place Head Start and Family Services parents in area workforce/training pathways and programs including BOCES, ERIE21, SUNY EOC, OCC,

²⁴⁵ Jonathan Bosworth, “Which ID Is Right for Me?”

²⁴⁶ Ernst and Young LPP, “Central New York REDC. Phase II Regional Sector-Based Strategies,” 2.

²⁴⁷ Claudia Bonilla and Rachel Pleasants McDonnell, “PARTNERS FOR IMPACT: Community Colleges and Human Services Nonprofits BOOSTing Family Economic Success Through Organizational Policy and Practice.”

Syracuse Build, and more,²⁴⁸ *PEACE, Inc.* parents and staff spoke about the former's reluctance to pay for training or take on debt while their household incomes were already stretched thin. The program's evaluation report bears out instances wherein parents had difficulty affording any additional costs associated with school, which included not only education related costs (tuition, books and supplies, as well as non-tuition related costs such as exam fees and work attire) but also adjustments in household/family obligations, child care, and transportation that could affect a household's broader finances. Regarding the latter, a number of parents expressed the need for greater support when navigating public assistance while seeking one's educational pathway. But more broadly, **adjusting parenting/household responsibilities and multiple work schedules to align with educational pathways and coursework -many of which are scheduled during the day, sometimes every day, and have limited evening and weekend offerings- proved daunting.**

Several examples from the BOOST pilot show how the pressures of money and time play out among households. For a single householder pursuing a health field tract, the need to take a required class forced her to **drop one of three part-time jobs**, causing stress about how to replace the lost income. A single mother with two children was living with her mother and working as a *DoorDash* driver to navigate family obligations. The flexibility of the work also allowed her to pursue a six-week, Phlebotomy certificate and her required "draws" at a local healthcare entity.²⁴⁹ Upon the completion of her class, the student's ability to gain full-time employment was delayed multiple weeks due to health-related issues within her household. For a Human/Social Services professional who facilitates female parenting groups, just the thought of additional education or training -college or otherwise- evokes a range of interconnected stressors and pressures among her cohorts. Her insights are worth highlighting in full, as she shared that,

With the cost of college, sometimes it is not something even on our clients' radars. I asked the 6 women if they thought about going back to school. About nursing and healthcare professions. It can be a very physically demanding job that you can't always do in your 50-60s. They have not thought of it. We gently show them some options, that education and training can offer a better life. It is hard enough to stabilize the families. The pyramid of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, we start on the bottom. That is what is nice about our center, we get to know them long enough to go up the pyramid. Some people never got off the crisis mode. Our tenant was able to get through crises and was able to think of a future career. After working for a year in a warehouse. Once she got to College she didn't think she could learn, but she is on the Dean's list and works full time. She started at OCC and is going to transfer in either St. Joseph's or Upstate or Crouse.

Acknowledging the structural barriers outlined in this section (as well as the rest of the CNA), a client's selected pathway may be longer than they need -or desire- due to the need to stabilize their households first and foremost. Perhaps most noticeably from the example as well, the need for **hope and positive encouragement** -whether through coaching or cohort building- is real. Critical are celebrations with friends and loved ones upon completion, for instance. Throughout any pathway process then, low-income

²⁴⁸ Near the end of BOOST, a similar "Bridge" strategy/program emerged that was led by *CenterState* CEO and included participation from the aforementioned partners (and others).

²⁴⁹ For many, Phlebotomy is an attractive certificate to pursue due to the short time/training commitment and the belief that it can be used as a "springboard" to other potential healthcare opportunities.

In a far-reaching report, *Jobs for the Future* distinguishes static, springboard, and lifetime jobs. A static job is one that seldom leads to a career or potential for job/socioeconomic advancement due to low-pay and high turnover. Lifetime jobs are ones that rarely offer advancement but often offer high pay and job stability. Springboard positions are ones where "workers often advance to different roles with more responsibility and greater pay within the same career area. Business and IT feature many springboard jobs." Carol Gerwin, Sara Lamback, and Dan Restuccia, "When Is a Job Just a Job- and When Can It Launch A Career? The Real Economic Opportunities of Middle-Skill Work," 8.

Onondaga County residents who are looking for careers **require paid training/educational opportunities, time, and trusted, supportive counsel** as they consider not only a job but also the long-term benefit/cost analysis of the opportunity. This latter point of benefit/cost analysis includes clarity about the educational certificate/degree obtained and its value, a repeated concern among a range of “Community Conversations: Returning to Work in 2021” participants. Here again, additional training, stronger communication, and greater synergies/coordination among the multiple actors across Central New York’s workforce ecosystem can ensure that the certificates/degrees being offered are desirable for employers, that the educational pathways are for -or are first steps for- in-demand careers, and that the opportunities can lead towards living wages. Part of this equation as well: **elevating the voices of the clients themselves** and ensuring “*Equitable partnerships must be designed and operated based on the needs and goals that participants and families are communicating to them.*”²⁵⁰ As JFF explained in a position paper about co-designing equitable economic growth and thinking about power and privilege,

*“People who work in low-wage jobs are who are experiencing poverty, people impacted by the justice system, and people facing discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, and disability are often systematically excluded from high-stakes decisions that affect their lives. This unequal representation leads to policies and investments replicating current systemic trends by accruing benefits to those already in positions of power.”*²⁵¹

3.6 Education

The release of “PEACE, Inc.’s COVID-19 Community Needs Assessment and Chronicle” in June 2020 offered both a) an analysis of the pandemic up until that time and b) a snapshot in time of the many burgeoning concerns felt by low-income residents throughout the state and locally. As has been discussed there and throughout this CNA, mandatory lockdown/shelter-in place orders greatly disrupted households and worsened existing inequalities. Arguably, nowhere were these disparities widened than within our education systems and among households with youth. In the first moments of the pandemic, parents/caretakers were already expressing concerns about the limits of remote education, the “falling behind”/long-term education loss of youth, and the socioemotional development/mental health of sheltering-in-place youth. While these issues affected all households with school-age children, this has proven to be especially true for already economically vulnerable ones.²⁵²

Four years later, pandemic-related school and daycare closures have had devastating effects on youth nationwide. For example, a recent report released by *Harvard and Stanford University* education researchers found that “*the average United States public school student grades 3 to 8 **lost the equivalent of a half year of learning in math and quarter of a year in reading.***”²⁵³ Such learning loss was also displayed in national test scores. In their examination of student achievement during the COVID-19 pandemic, the *National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)* found “*Average scores for age 9 students in 2022 declined 5 points in reading and 7 points in mathematics compared to 2020. **It was the largest average score decline in reading since 1990, and the first ever score decline in mathematics.***”²⁵⁴ Regarding mental health, the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)* declared in a recent report that, while students’ mental health was already worsening during the 10 years prior to COVID-19, the pandemic accelerated declines, “***with more than 40% of high school students feeling so sad or hopeless that they could not engage in their regular activities for at least two weeks during the previous year- a possible indication of the experience of depressive symptoms.***”²⁵⁵ In

²⁵⁰ *Jobs for the Future (JFF)*, “Co-Designing a Recovery for All: A Vision for Inclusive Regional Economic Development,” 8.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁵² *PEACE, Inc.*, “COVID-19,” 29-31.

²⁵³ *Harvard Graduate School of Education*, “New Data Show How the Pandemic Affected Learning Across Whole Communities.”

²⁵⁴ *The Nation’s Report Card*, “NAEP Long-Term Trend Assessment Results: Reading and Mathematics.”

²⁵⁵ *CDC*, “Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary and Trends Report: 2011-2021,” 2, 5.

the year 2021, the CDC findings also found across the board increases in suicide planning and attempts, although female students fared far worse than male students along all measures of suicidal thoughts and behaviors as well as “*substance use, experiences of violence, and mental health.*”²⁵⁶ Additionally, “*female students, students of color, LGBTQ+ students, and students who had any same-sex partners*” were the least likely to feel school connectedness, defined in the report “*as feeling close to people at school.*”²⁵⁷ Similar findings were found in the previously mentioned reports, that the pandemic not only negatively affected education at historical levels, but the effects were also felt disproportionately in communities/school districts with high numbers of low-income and minority students.²⁵⁸

These national trends both parallel the data about -and inform the effects of- the pandemic on Onondaga County households and K-12 students, with 4-Year Graduation Rates prior to (2018-2019) and after the pandemic (2021-2022) varying throughout Onondaga County’s school districts.

Figure 81: 4-Year Graduation Rates of Onondaga County School Districts (2019, 2022)²⁵⁹		
School District	School Year 2018-2019	School Year 2021-2022
New York State	83%	87.2%
Onondaga County (All Students)	84% (4606/5503)	85% (4558/5349)
Baldwinsville	89% (408/456)	93.4%(425/455)
East Syracuse-Minoa	89% (234/263)	91.2%(248/282)
Fabius-Pompey	85% (46/54)	94.3% (66/70)
Fayetteville-Manlius	95% (320/336)	98.5% (322/327)
Jamesville-Dewitt	95% (209/221)	96.4% (239/248)
Jordan-Elbridge	91% (106/117)	89.3% (92/103)
LaFayette	94% (58/62)	92.4% (61/66)
Liverpool	89% (486/546)	82.9% (452/545)
Lyncourt	*	*
Marcellus	96% (127/133)	95% (132/139)
North Syracuse	87% (665/764)	86.8% (596/687)
Onondaga School District	93% (66/71)	87.7% (57/65)
Skaneateles	92% (121/132)	93.1% (108/116)
Solvay	89% (135/152)	85% (119/140)
Syracuse City	64% (963/1,505)	71.7% (995/1388)
Tully	90% (74/82)	85.5% (59/69)
West Genesee	95% (389/409)	92.8% (336/362)
Westhill	95% (138/146)	97.3% (144/148)

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 2

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 3-4.

²⁵⁸ Harvard Graduate School of Education, “New Data Show How the Pandemic Affected Learning Across Whole Communities.”

²⁵⁹ New York State Educational Department, “New York State Data.”

Figure 82: Graduation Rates of Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners, and Economically Disadvantaged in Syracuse City School District (2019, 2022)²⁶⁰		
	2018-2019 School Year	2021-22 School Year
All Students	64% (963/1,505)	71.7% (995/1388)
Students with Disabilities	44% (122/277)	53.4% (150/281)
English Language Learners	39% (78/199)	73.7% (205/278)
Economically Disadvantaged	61% (728/1,194)	68.2% (758/1112)

Given the range of issues faced by students and their households during the pandemic, it is unsurprising to see decreases in graduation rates among the majority of Onondaga County school districts, with 4 Onondaga County districts dropping below the state average in particular. **While *Syracuse City School District (SCSD)* continues to have the lowest graduation rates in Onondaga County, the rates nonetheless have increased since pre-pandemic levels, with marked improvements seen among students with Disabilities, English Language Learners, and Economically Disadvantaged Students.** Still, even though an influx of federal funds has helped improve educational offerings and supports, cancellation of *New York State Regents* exams and/or exemptions from *Regents* exam requirements during the pandemic might have influenced graduation rates as well. Future research will hopefully yield greater clarity.

As mentioned previously, English Language Arts (ELA) and Math scores for 9-year-olds declined at record levels nationally, a key indicator of learning loss stemming from the pandemic. With new “Next Generation Learning Standards” and different learning standards measurements, 2022-2023 Grade 3 ELA and Math proficiencies are not comparable with previous years’ results.²⁶¹ Though a comparison with pre-pandemic scores is not recommended, 2022-2023 Grade 3 ELA and Math proficiencies are seen as important first markers for measuring progress in subsequent grades. While initial studies have argue third grade proficiency -or lack thereof- are indicators of high school graduation as well as future academic and career success,²⁶² there is an emerging body of research arguing that ***“socioeconomically-disadvantaged students who show academic prowess early on are not guaranteed to continue on that trajectory, as might be the case with their more affluent peers.”***²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² *The Anne E. Casey Foundation*, “Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters.”

²⁶³ Olivia Pointek, “Predicting Students’ Academic Trajectory from Third Grade Test Scores.”

Figure 83: Onondaga County School Districts English Language Arts (ELA) and Math Third Grade Proficiency Rates, 2022-2023 School Year ²⁶⁴		
School District	English Language Arts (ELA) Percent Proficient	Math Percent Proficient
New York State	45% (71,114/158,413)	54% (86,728/161,252)
Baldwinsville	52% (191/366)	51% (186/366)
East Syracuse-Minoa	36% (83/233)	51% (120/235)
Fabius Pompey	33% (19/57)	31% (18/58)
Fayetteville-Manlius	73% (198/270)	78% (213/273)
Jamesville-Dewitt	64% (103/161)	75% (122/163)
Jordan-Elbridge	37% (32/86)	48% (41/85)
LaFayette	27% (17/64)	33% (21/64)
Liverpool	33% (159/483)	44% (212/484)
Lyncourt	14% (6/44)	23% (10/44)
Marcellus	64% (57/89)	84% (76/90)
North Syracuse	25% (136/545)	37% (200/542)
Onondaga School District	42% (20/48)	57% (28/49)
Skaneateles	54% (46/85)	63% (54/86)
Solvay	33% (23/69)	58% (38/66)
Syracuse City	17% (199/1193)	18% (215/1217)
Tully	53% (25/47)	49% (23/47)
West Genesee	43% (141/329)	45% (147/329)
Westhill	39% (46/119)	51% (60/118)

Notable here are the especially low scores found in the City of Syracuse and Lyncourt, which is within Syracuse municipal boundaries. Beyond simply Grade 3, where ELA and Math Grade 3-8 proficiencies are considered, SCSD ranked 644 out of 661 school districts statewide in ELA and 532 out of 535 districts statewide in Math. In the estimation of SCSD Superintendent Anthony Q. Davis, ***“Although our graduation rate remains over 70%, higher than it has been in decades, our achievement data indicate current and future cohorts of students are missing vital learning in order to maintain and improve that rate of high school completion.”***²⁶⁵

During the Foster Grandparent Community Conversations, participants spoke about third grade testing as an important part of their work and the many challenges around it faced by their SCSD students. *“I teach third grade,”* shared one Foster Grandparent volunteer, *“there is a test and they prepare them to pass the State test. They have to figure out how to multiply. How we teach math today is very different to how they taught math in the past. The teachers teach them how to do it and I am learning how to do it too.”* Tied to the comment, in recent years, curriculums have shifted from a focus on memorizing math facts and procedures to problem solving, from moving away from an emphasis on speed to an understanding that there are multiple ways to reach an answer. In conversations around this shift, a Foster Grandparent shared how *“In my class they are teaching them to do the bigger numbers. Their logic is difficult when the fundamentals are not there. If they don’t even know how to count, how can we teach you? I have a couple of 9-year-olds with a class of 7-year-olds. They don’t know how to count, and they don’t know how to read.”* Herein provides additional context for SCSD’s push for greater reading and math interventions in classrooms, after school hours, and with community partners. The comments also show the

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ *Syracuse City School District*, “Joint Legislative Public Hearing 2023-24 Executive Elementary & Secondary Education Budget.”

need to increase understanding around the “*very strong curriculum*” as described by one Foster Grandparent and to provide additional support for volunteers and parents alike in how to facilitate it with youth.

Tied to curriculum are larger questions about **communication** between school district administrators and support staff, educators, and students/parents. Two consistent themes emerged, the first revolving around **decision-making**. For a *Head Start* and SCSD parent who expressed concerns about transparency in an especially critical post-pandemic moment, *“I think that we need to talk about why things are not working in the SCSD, that particular organization has been strained. COVID ran through it like the fires in Hawaii. They need to rebuild everything from the ground up, and I don’t feel like this is happening with the community. It is happening in an executive session behind closed doors. I think that is wrong.”* A second parent echoed these concerns, feeling as though there isn’t a consistent entity or unified, consolidated voice, *“that is going to the families and saying ‘we need to have a conversation about cell phones in the classroom, for example.’ The systems of support continue to go on no matter what from not having these root conversations.”*

Such sentiments point to a second theme about communication, i.e. **the mediums and methods used to present information**. Parents with children enrolled in Solvay Union, LaFayette, and Weedsport School Districts praised the *Parent Squared* app as a means for achieving “*great communication with parents.*” Speed and ease through a singular system were common refrains. For a father, *“at Weedsport school district, communication is really great. They use the Parent Square App. It can just be a message that they can respond pretty much instantly, and anywhere that I have my phone, I can get my message with my daughter. It doesn’t only have to be a group format. Figuring out how to use it was pretty easy.”* While parents did share that SCSD uses “3 different apps” right now (*School Tool, Talking Points, and Remind* were noted in the conversations), a unified system seemed attractive. Apps were seen as having equitable advantages compared to text-based messaging systems for low-income residents as well, *“Let’s look at reality, how many times are parents changing their phone numbers because we are running out of equal access or time to phone lines. We need systems that don’t lock us out if we change our phone numbers.”* “*An accessible portal or link where we have real access to information about what is going on in the community and where agencies can post in the community so I can know what is going on*” was restated by parents and high school students alike. For the latter group, a sentiment raised earlier in the CNA was shared, that there is too much information and that there are too many modes of information available, making it difficult *“to find out about events going on...I follow so many Syracuse Instagram accounts and I still didn’t know there was a spring event.”* **Similar to parents, social capital and connections were critical for high school youth to access and learn about resources,** *“I am part of a lab at SUNY ESF and any high schooler can take part in it, but nobody knows about it because it is not properly advertised. I learned about it from my teacher.”*

3.6.a. Chronic Absenteeism and its Effects

Lagging math and reading proficiencies have been hardened by the unprecedented levels of chronic absenteeism following the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the United States Department of Education, **“66% of enrolled students attended a school with high or extreme levels of chronic absence” in 2021-2022**, an increase of 25% during the 2019-2020 school year.²⁶⁶ Chronic absenteeism is defined as a student missing at least 10% of the school days during their enrollment, or 18 days/roughly 4 weeks of classroom instruction. According to *Attendance Works*, a national policy advocate that seeks to improve school attendance, there were many reasons for the sharp increase including,

- Trauma and untreated health needs stemming from pandemic-related mental health issues, illnesses, deaths of family members and friends as well as one’s own COVID-19 experiences.

²⁶⁶ *Attendance Works*, “Rising Tide of Chronic Absence Challenges Schools.”

- Isolation and the difficulties faced by schools and students to re-establish “*positive school climates and help students develop the skills to resolve conflicts;*” struggles among students to re-establish and/or forge connections with peers after isolation and/or chronic absenteeism.
- Staffing shortages at school districts that destabilized transportation; hampered school staff, student, and family relationship building; and made curriculum engagement even more difficult.²⁶⁷
- A worsening of the “*root causes of chronic absences,*” including but not limited to the following four issues according to *Attendance Works*, a) barriers associated with poverty (i.e. trauma, family responsibilities, illness, transportation, community violence, housing and food insecurity, etc.), b) aversion (i.e. struggles academically or behaviorally, anxiety and mental health, undiagnosed disabilities or accommodations, etc.), c) disengagement (lack of challenge, lack of connectedness, boredom, etc.), d) and broader misconceptions about the impact of missing school.²⁶⁸

For many of the same reasons, chronic absenteeism rates were notably high for most Onondaga County School Districts emerging from the pandemic. As discussed in *Syracuse.com*, while comparatively low among other districts in the state, the chronic absenteeism rates for Skaneateles Elementary and Middle Schools tripled between 2018-2019 and 2022-2023 school years and “*more than doubled in six other suburban Onondaga County districts: LaFayette, Tully, East Syracuse Minoa, Westhill, West Genesee, and Fabius-Pompey*” during the same periods.²⁶⁹ **For SCSD, the chronic absenteeism rates for its elementary, middle, and high schools all remain among the top ten highest rates statewide.** The 2022-2023 school year rate remained 36% higher for SCSD elementary and middle schools than 2018-2019; in SCSD high schools, the rate was 63% higher across the two periods.²⁷⁰ Still, within the last year, SCSD elementary and middle schools saw the rate decline 10% and SCSD high schools decline 23%,²⁷¹ a product of SCSD’s efforts to curb chronic absenteeism through the appointment of an attendance coordinator, school attendance and “impact” teams, community partners, greater engagement with families, and more.²⁷²

In their Community Conversations, multiple Foster Grandparents vividly spoke about chronic absenteeism and its real effects on the youth in their elementary school classrooms. One shared her frustrations that “*We have kids in our class that are 26, 27 days absent. If they are not there, you can't teach them. If they are not in the classroom they can't learn, and it's not their fault. It's the parents that are not getting them there. They come in at 10 AM and fall asleep in class.*” Another Foster Grandparent lamented how “*There is a little girl in my class, she has probably missed sixty days since September. Last year, I bet it was over 100. She was in the first grade. She really is low. She couldn't even write a letter of the alphabet in September. She could count but didn't know what numbers were. She needs more specialized help, she needs more than a reading and math specialist. They say she is not in school, but I feel it is more than that.*” Whether their beliefs about the causes of absenteeism and poor performance are accurate or not, the Foster Grandparents’ comments reflect the effects of absenteeism and a few of the potential reasons for it (household dynamics, potential inadequacy of school supports, etc.).

3.6.b. School District Funding

It's important here to share a claim from the *Center for American Progress* and one that is supported throughout much of the CNA, “*Children living in poverty don't just experience financial instability that is detrimental to their*

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Marnie Eisenstadt, “Chronic School Absence Exploded Nationally and in CNY, Threatening a Generation of Students.”

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Melissa Newcomb, “Syracuse School Takes Absentee Problem to the Front Lines. ‘Get up, We’re Going to School;’” *Syracuse City School District*, “Joint Legislative.”

development, but they are also more likely to attend under-resourced schools, reside in neighborhoods subjected to chronic disinvestment, experience adverse health outcomes, and become involved in the child welfare and criminal justice systems.”²⁷³ Important too, that these circumstances as well as matters of intergenerational trauma discussed in Section 3.2.a are “*compounding barriers particularly for children of color across the country and severely limiting economic mobility.*” The sentiments are echoed by SCSD Superintendent Anthony Q. Davis when he states how “*Data clearly demonstrates that there is a disproportionate impact on learning loss on economically disadvantaged communities like Syracuse.*”²⁷⁴ Data also shows the large divide existing between SCSD and non-City of Syracuse School Districts. According to a 2020 report by *EdBuild*, an education advocate that offers interactive reports and web tools about school districts and school district funding, **the border between Syracuse City and Westhill School Districts is the seventeenth most segregated school district border in the United States.** The ranking is determined from the differences in percentages between poverty rates of a school district. At the time of the report’s data collection (2017), there was a 33% difference in poverty rates between the City of Syracuse and Westhill High School.

Figure 84: Comparison of SCSD and Westhill School Districts					
Syracuse City School District ²⁷⁵					
District Poverty Rate	District Percent Nonwhite	District Enrollment	District Local Revenue Per Pupil	District State Revenue Per Pupil	District Median Household Income (MHI)
39%	78%	21,015	\$3,596	\$16,217	\$34,716
Westhill School District					
District Poverty Rate	District Percent Nonwhite	District Enrollment	District Local Revenue Per Pupil	District State Revenue Per Pupil	District Median Household Income (MHI)
6%	13%	1,781	\$10,121	\$9,872	\$75,777

While the report needs updated statistics, the underlining structural inequalities represented in Figure 84 are clear. On the surface, each district has nearly equal the combined local tax and state revenue per pupil, around \$20,000 per pupil. **Equal is not equitable however**, with similar revenue amounts going to pupils from drastically different MHI. Additionally, SCSD has a far lesser tax base than Westhill and other area school districts. As SCSD Superintendent Anthony Q. Davis lamented, “*the SCSD has no ability to generate local revenue given of fiscal dependency on the City of Syracuse, where more than 50% of the properties are exempt from property taxes.*”²⁷⁶ As a result, SCSD remains more dependent upon state budgets and funding streams (although increased funding is available for districts with concentrations of students from low-income households).²⁷⁷ This becomes an issue as school funding largely relies upon local property tax receipts, thus wealthier communities can generate more resources for their districts. According to the study, when a school district border “*Outlines an area with high property values, that school system will almost certainly benefit from high local tax receipts. This serves the interests of better-off communities, who have every financial incentive to draw and maintain borders that keep local dollars in.*”²⁷⁸ In the estimation of Tim Rudd, the following mentality is pursued, “*secure the best educational services available to increase the value of your properties. Moving boundaries to accommodate development is part of*

²⁷³ Haider.

²⁷⁴ *Syracuse City School District*, “Joint Legislative.”

²⁷⁵ *EdBuild*, “Fault Lines: America’s Most Segregating School District Borders,” 11.

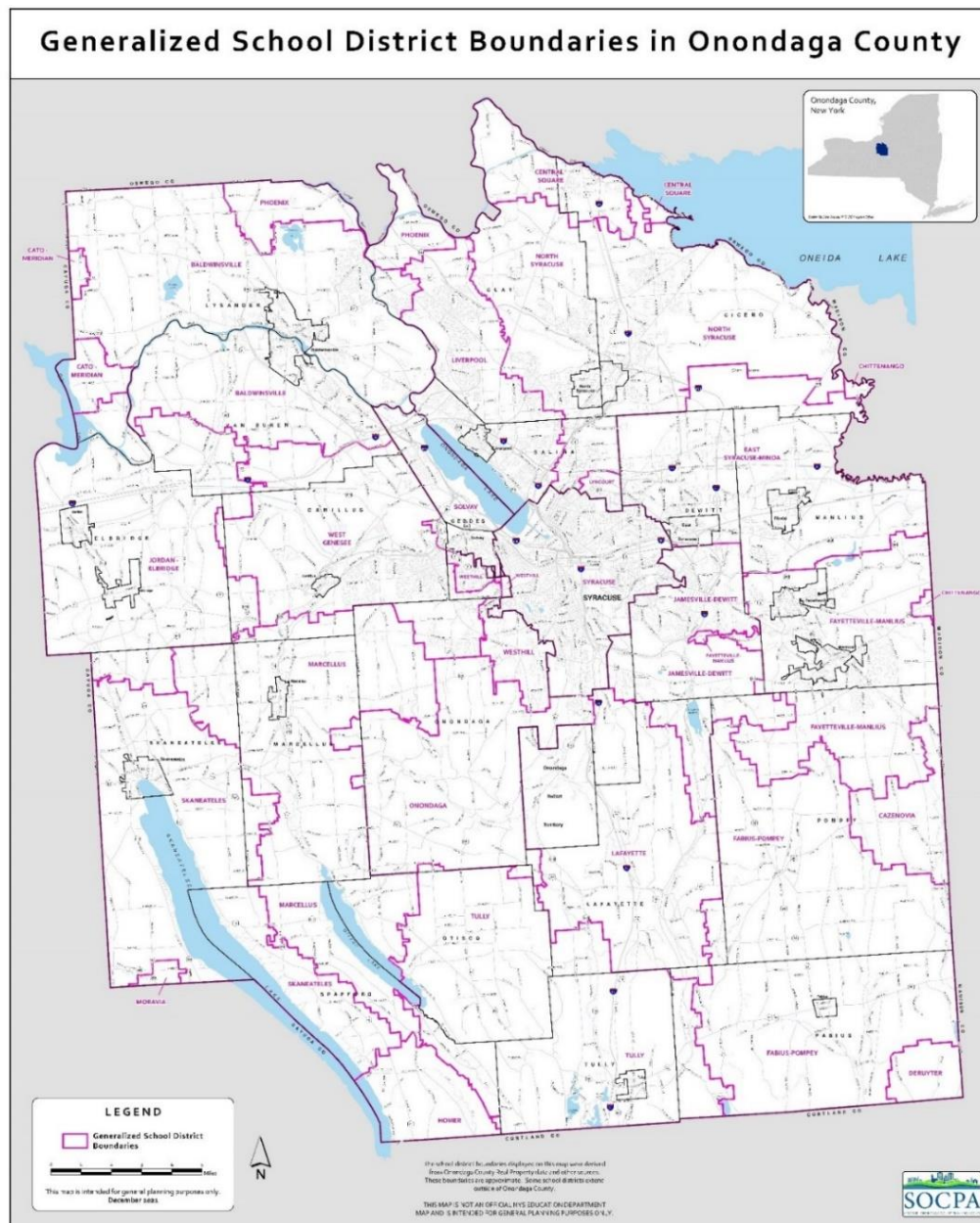
²⁷⁶ *Syracuse City School District*, “Joint Legislative.”

²⁷⁷ *EdBuild*, “Fault Lines: America’s Most Segregating School District Borders,” 11.

²⁷⁸ <https://edbuild.org/content/fault-lines/full-report.pdf>, 11

the reason suburban school district boundaries are so jagged.”²⁷⁹ Within this form of “property gerrymandering” then is another effect of the exclusionary zoning policies that prevent diverse housing throughout much of Onondaga County, i.e. poverty remains ever concentrated in poorer school districts. Here it’s useful to once again share Figure 19, which includes a map of the generalized school district boundaries in Onondaga County (Note: Westhill brushes against the southwest border of the City of Syracuse and SCSD).

Figure 85: Generalized School District Boundaries in Onondaga County²⁸⁰



²⁷⁹ Tim Rudd, “How Suburban Schools Could Help Revive Syracuse.”

²⁸⁰ SOCPA, “Generalized School District Boundaries in Onondaga County.”

3.6.c. Some Final Thoughts about Onondaga County Education Systems

As noted throughout this section, community conversation participants and their feedback reveal the complicated intersection of poverty, academic performance, absenteeism, and trauma/mental health experienced by youth and parents alike. In each Foster Grandparent Community Conversation, participants were insistent that **the pandemic did not create these issues; “They have been going on for years; COVID just made it worse.”** A Foster Grandparent framed the challenges in another way, “My days are fine. Work is a challenge but it is a good challenge. I enjoy being with the children, but some of the things that they go through and we feel like we try to help them but we just don't do enough. Because sometimes you just can't get through to the kids, and it is a challenge. I don't know if it is peer pressure or what but there are things that they go through in their heads.” Certainly, a number of Foster Grandparents voiced how violent crime within their students’ neighborhoods might be influencing behavior as well, “I think what it could be, the children are bringing the street in the classroom. They are imitating the grownups from their neighborhoods.” For another, “When you see somebody shot down and see the violence. Children are like magnets. It impacts their behavior.” A Head Start Community Conversation participant who has children enrolled at SCSD and who volunteers at her son’s school shared the following reflections on the intergenerational stresses encountered currently in low-income households,

*The other thing is the emotional regulation session with parents and children. I do reading sessions with my son's class, and have a conversation with them afterwards, to understand your own emotions, who you are and as a culture we don't have the space to talk about what we feel. When kids act up they are told “Go sit down”, that is not helpful. I am really big that you learn to reflect on your feelings and talk about your emotions. **Some of these kids have heavy loads they carry from home.***

You realize what the kids are missing when they see things are different. I give the kids time to shake off the negativity, they shake their arms and then teach them to hug the positivity. I see that they react positively. A lot of kids do not have time to receive hugs and process stuff. These kids are carrying a lot of weight. I tell my son, this is not your responsibility, it is mommy's. Not a lot of kids have that, they have to be responsible for getting their younger brother to school.

At least for SCSD, there doesn’t seem to be relief in sight. First, learning and socioemotional development losses as a result of sheltering-in-place policies weren’t exclusively issues for enrolled students. Critical stages of early childhood development for youth under five were also strained due to the pandemic, which now places new and unique pressures on education systems both nationally and locally. As SCSD Superintendent Davis wrote, “Far more preschoolers who were unable to access services during the pandemic need special education and related services. The impact of isolation and lack of access to in-person services has resulted in more than one quarter of our preschool students identified as in need of services, and we have expanded program offerings midyear to support them.”²⁸¹

Second, **SCSD and other school districts are struggling to hire a range of qualified instructional and non-instructional staff** for open positions. Here it is best to quote Davis in full to capture the damaging effects of being “plagued by workforce constraints,”

*We are struggling to fill all positions – instructional and non-instructional. The year began with difficulty finding certified staff and now it is nearly impossible to find qualified staff at all levels. For example, we are operating this year with substantially fewer bus drivers and had to change school start and end times to accommodate route consolidation as a result of an inadequate pool of CDL candidates. It has been challenging to provide adequate continuity of instruction due to position vacancies and the intense need of supporting uncertified candidates in both content and service delivery. The need for certified special education and math teachers is particularly concerning, given the academic performance and social-emotional needs of our student population. **Staff are committed, yet overwhelmed, with the complex challenges of our community and needs of our learners.***

²⁸¹ Syracuse City School District, “Joint Legislative.”

These strains were noted by Community Conversation high school students who have struggled to adjust to earlier morning schedules. Staff shortages and the fact that *“they need a lot of teachers at SCSD”* have placed additional stress on Foster Grandparent volunteers as well. In attempting to adjust, *“my challenge is handling my disciplinary frame of mind when working with children in the schools. I have raised my kids differently. I have a learning curve myself.”* Another shared how, *“with schools now, you can't say anything to the kids. I have to be very careful what I say to them.”*

3.7. Transportation and Accessibility

“I didn’t have transportation. Okay, so I have to get up at 4:00 in the morning to get me and my baby ready to catch the bus downtown. Then transfer over get my baby to daycare and then wait like 30-40 minutes, catch the bus going all the way back downtown and then catch and connect the bus to go to school.”²⁸²

Transportation was the second most frequently cited barrier after housing among the surveyed Human/Social Services Field members. The sentiment is seemingly echoed by those Human/Social Service Clients who responded to the CNYCF’s “Life Needs Assessment.” In 2023, 78.87% of respondents (918 of 1146) shared that they had safe and dependable transportation. This was a sharp decrease from the previous year (2022), when nearly 90% of respondents stated that they had safe and dependable transportation.

Overall, according to 2022 5-year ACS estimates, 12.2% of Onondaga County Households lack a vehicle. In the city of Syracuse, 26.4% of households lack one.²⁸³ In the latter, those households lacking a vehicle are typically located in those census tracts where poverty has been concentrated historically (i.e. those formerly red- and yellow-lined areas of the city repeatedly discussed throughout this study).²⁸⁴ In these neighborhoods, the *Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council* (SMTC) found high concentrations of residents with disabilities²⁸⁵ as well, though the report also found a *“few outlying concentrations correlating to the locations of larger elderly community facilities in Onondaga County.”* The presence of these senior living facilities contributes to the *“highest percentages of seniors who are in many of the low density suburban and rural towns.”²⁸⁶*

The diverse populations and locations requiring transportation make it a complicated issue. On this point, when asked about the biggest challenge faced by their constituencies, a survey respondent who works within the transportation sector answered,

*My constituency is really everyone in Onondaga County, so **the biggest challenge is that the wants and needs of the population are diverse, and our challenge is to balance their needs and to help people understand the needs of others in the region so that we can make decisions about spending that equitably distribute benefits.***

Certainly, with high poverty rates in Syracuse in particular and the promise of numerous and/or quality jobs in the northern suburbs of Onondaga County via *Amazon* and *Micron*, transportation and employment are frequently intersecting issues. As one survey respondent shared, *“when people cannot have a stable system in place to get them to and from a job with a consistent way to do so, it hampers their ability to get to work.”* Throughout Onondaga County, the most common mode of transportation for reaching work is the automobile.

²⁸² *Early Childhood Alliance Onondaga*, “The Child Care Landscape in Onondaga County: A Supply and Demand Analysis,” 53.

²⁸³ 5-Year American Census Survey Estimates, 2018-2022, “Selected Economic Characteristics,” DP03.

²⁸⁴ *Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council*, “Coordinated Public Transit - Human Services Transportation Plan.”

²⁸⁵ According to the United States Census, disability is defined as hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care and independent living difficulties.

²⁸⁶ *Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council*, “Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan.”

Figure 86: Ways in which Onondaga County, City of Syracuse residents Commute to Work (2019, 2022) ²⁸⁷				
	Onondaga County		City of Syracuse	
Label	2019	2022	2019	2022
Total number of Workers, 16 years and over	218911	222274	57395	60249
Car, truck, or van -- drove alone	79.9%	74.30%	65.3%	61%
Car, truck, or van – carpooled	7.9%	8.00%	9.3%	9%
Public transportation (excluding taxicab)	2.9%	2.40%	8.9%	7.40%
Walked	3.7%	3.60%	9.9%	9.50%
Other means	1.2%	1.80%	2.3%	3.80%
Worked from home	4.4%	9.90%	4.10%	9.30%

While one can see a decrease in the percentages of both Onondaga County and Syracuse residents that use a car, truck, or van to get to work, said decrease might have more to do with the rise of working from home spurred by the pandemic than selecting alternative transportation options. Public transportation use has also declined. Similar to other metropolitan areas, stay-home-orders and self-quarantining led to a 75% drop in *Centro* ridership in 2020 that led several routes to be temporarily or permanently discontinued.²⁸⁸ With *Centro* also facing staffing and mechanic shortages, long-standing issues of lacking coverage and infrequent, long wait times were amplified.²⁸⁹ As a result of these shortages, direct service staff noted in a June 2022 Community Conversation that “*the bus schedules have changed a lot...transportation limits them where they are able to work, live, basic things. There may be a better deal, but it limits everything.*” Related to work, previous SMTC studies also show the effects of infrequent service hours on low-income Onondaga County residents, that “*Transit service is most likely to be a problem for workers on second and third-shifts, as well as for jobs that involve weekend hours*” and that “*This creates a problem for workers at the bottom end of the region’s pay scale because they are unlikely to own vehicles and are likely to work in retail or hospitality-industry jobs that require night and weekend work.*”²⁹⁰ Such concerns were raised in the Foster Grandparent Community Conversation, for example, with a Senior noting the lack of bus service correlating with working hours at the *FedEx* warehouse. **Infrequency can also be a problem for residents living outside of Syracuse with limited bussing options,**

The presence of Centro is not good out here in Baldwinsville. There are 3 runs a day. Very early morning mid-morning and end of day. Mostly on work schedules and not on weekends at all...The 5pm if you work close by it is fine but if you have to walk you would miss the bus because it is 5:15. And they don’t have bus stops near the subsidized housing. They have to walk a mile just to get it at the corner and if you are disabled that is a barrier. Or if you are toting two toddlers that is a long way to walk to get to a bus stop.

The quote speaks to a theme noted elsewhere -the amount of **time** that low-income residents spend navigating complicated and underfunded public systems, here being transportation. It also shows the practical limits to some of the approaches used to overcome a household’s transportation barriers, such as providing bus passes. In response, plans are being pursued for “**Bus Rapid Transit**” by 2026, or services

²⁸⁷ 5-Year American Census Survey Estimates, 2018-2022, “Selected Economic Characteristics,” DP03.

²⁸⁸ *Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council*, “Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan.”

²⁸⁹ Chris Libonati, “Centro Makes Plans for Bus Rapid Transit System in Syracuse by 2026.”

²⁹⁰ *Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council*, “Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan.”

*“operating at fixed intervals, making routes more accessible and, in some cases, eliminating reliance on complex bus schedules.”*²⁹¹ Through a combination of increased funding and infrastructure/service improvements, “Bus Rapid Transit” advocates see it not only as a way for ensuring ready access to suburban workplaces, Onondaga Community College, and other employment/education sites. In the words of *Uplift Syracuse*, “Bus Rapid Transit” will also ensure *“People will no longer need to plan their entire day around the bus schedule— they will be able to just go to the stop whenever it’s convenient and know a bus will show up soon.”*²⁹² Such Rapid Transit would complement existing *Centro* fixed routes, “Call-A-Bus,” and “Call-A-Ride” services as well as CBO-led transportation programs, notably *Jubilee Homes’* free transportation program for Workers and Seniors and the “Vehicles to Work” collective program between *CenterState CEO*, *Syracuse Financial Empowerment Center*, *Cooperative Federal*, and *the Westcott Community Center*.²⁹³

When speaking with Human/Social Services providers who serve the northern suburbs and rural regions of Onondaga County, **lacking reliable transportation often forces difficult choices**. Before a single mother client could purchase a car, she most likely could not work full time due to the need to walk her children to school and day care, and then walk herself to work, over 1-mile round trip each day. This went on for a year. Frequently, the case managers see low-income clients purchasing automobiles but then lacking the funds to maintain, insure, and/or register the vehicle. In their experience, such **barriers often force households to make difficult choices**, *“to sell the car to pay the rent and then save up to buy another...we have lots of people who would rather save the car at all costs. They say, ‘I would rather save the car than the apartment,’ ‘I can live in my car,’ ‘I can’t move in my apartment’... anyone who lives with trauma or DV, moving is a priority, they need to get away.”*

For some, buses are also **not practical for safety reasons**, especially for justice involved individuals and youth who have to navigate gang violence. According to *PEACE, Inc.’s* reentry case manager, identifying reliable housing and providing rides for work are the primary ways to ensure success and self-sufficiency for a client following incarceration. Volunteer transportation of this sort alleviates potential threats that can occur by taking the bus or walking through a neighborhood that isn’t one’s own. Additionally, the Nottingham students voiced concerns about bus transfers to the *Centro* hub, *that if it is not 6 AM, there is always something happening. I’ve seen drugs. I’ve seen a lady beating her kid. A lot of stuff happens at the Hub.”*

The complexity of the barriers discussed above reinforce the earlier claims that *“the biggest challenge is that the wants and needs of the population are diverse.”* Linked to this are the findings from SMTTC’s recently released 2024 report, “Exploring Tomorrow’s Transit.” In it, transportation planners found that ***Centro* riders used public buses for a variety of different purposes**. While 50% of the 514 respondents use *Centro* to reach work, a variety of reasons ranging from education, shopping, appointments, and recreation were also cited (respondents could answer more than once).²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Chris Libonati, “Centro Makes Plans for Bus Rapid Transit System in Syracuse by 2026.”

²⁹² *Uplift Syracuse*, “Better Bus Service: A Plan to Improve Public Transportation in Syracuse,” 1.

²⁹³ The program “offers barrier removal assistance enabling Pathways to Apprenticeship program participants a conduit to vehicle ownership and the ability to afford reliable transportation that will allow them to obtain and maintain employment.” *Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council*, “Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan,” 32-38.

²⁹⁴ *Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council*, “Public Engagement Effort - Final Report.”

Figure 87: Trip Purpose for Centro Users (2023) ²⁹⁵		
Response	Number of responses	Percent of Respondents
Work	258	50%
School/college	167	32%
Shopping	183	36%
Appointment	176	34%
Recreation	160	31%
Other	34	7%

For a number of the Foster Grandparents, **transportation, its frequency, and its reliability** were key factors in deciding where to live. For one senior, *“The bus service is so-so because they cut a lot of routes. I have bus service 7 days a week. Where I was living before they only had it a couple of days a week. That was a factor for changing my house.”* For another, *“I live in Providence House now. I wanted to do the Bishop because it was more residential and laid back but I couldn’t do it because of the transportation factor. The woman told me to ‘Call-a-Bus.’ I am thankful that I am not in the position to have to call a bus.”* **Family, Social, and Volunteer Networks** are especially critical for those seniors who lack a car living in rural Onondaga County to remain active. For a Human/Social Service provider in Tully, their transportation shopping/medical appointment program for rural Seniors has declined due to a need for more volunteers, *“we used to do 20-25 rides a month. Now we have 5 rides a month. It’s great to live out here...if you have a vehicle and insurance.”*²⁹⁶

Across all of the 2024 community conversations, **the accessibility of one’s neighborhood** was discussed nearly as frequently as access to transportation, reinforcing the claim made by a survey respondent that the planners must *“balance investment in our transportation system across modes so that traveling by bike, walking, or transit is a real choice for people in the community and doesn’t create inequitable burdens on people.”* A number of High School youth, *Head Start* parents, and Foster Grandparents all noted that they liked that there were shops and grocery stores within walking distance of their homes. For city high school students without a car or license, **walkability of one’s neighborhood** was critical for remaining active and pursuing recreation. *“I live in Westcott, and I like how walkable it is,”* shared one student. *“I like how many resources there are like parks.”* A lack of walkability also drove complaints raised by Seniors who -desiring to avoid isolation- asked for better snow removal and more prompt repairs of “tactile paving” at intersections, the latter providing additional traction for Seniors with mobility issues. **Controlling the speeds** in which people drive on streets frequented by pedestrians through speed bumps and other mechanisms were also seen as positives for safety, *“there are children there, it is a narrow two-way road. They put a speed bump on, but it stopped a bit. For the safety of the kids, speed bumps are a good thing.”* For one high school student, **Deteriorating Sidewalk Conditions** within the city proved triggering around the difficulties faced by her mother, *“On the weekends, I go to the Westside and stay with my mom...it is secluded and ragged...my mom doesn’t have a car and when we go to the laundromat, we put things in a shopping cart. It’s tough to navigate the sidewalks. People look at us and I don’t like feeling pitied upon.”*

The transportation needs, barriers, and seeming solutions for Onondaga County are diverse. In the words of the survey respondent who works in transportation, solutions must be inclusive and local, *“It is often cited as a barrier to opportunity. We are not a region that can support NYC-style public transit, but we can support options that are*

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Potential decreases in volunteers, especially aging volunteers in rural locations, is a trend that should be monitored in the coming years. As one survey respondent eloquently shared, *“older adults are the volunteer engines of our community. If you look at most nonprofits, their best and most committed volunteers are older adults. They have a life-time of knowledge and experience that can be harnessed in service to others. Many of them need help themselves, but they want to help, as well.”*

right-sized for our community. It will be creative and multi-modal, and the right option will depend on the land use and physical design of each individual neighborhood.”

3.8. Food Insecurity

As outlined in the “COVID-19 Community Needs Assessment and Chronicle,” the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the immediate lockdown following it caused immediate accessibility challenges, food and nutrition shortages, and supply-chain barriers for a range of populations. Public and private reactions were swift in response and measurable over time. Nationally, *Feeding America* found a “decline in food insecurity in 2021 for both the overall population and for children, with rates reaching the lowest levels on record.”²⁹⁷ *Feeding America* found similar declines in food insecurity²⁹⁸ among the overall population and children of Onondaga County.

Figure 88: Food Insecurity Among Overall Population in Onondaga County²⁹⁹		
Category	2019	2021
Food Insecure Population in Onondaga County	51,580	46,220
Food Insecurity Rate	11.1%	9.7%
Food Insecure People Above SNAP, Other Nutrition Programs Thresholds of 200%	36%	27%
Average Meal Cost	\$3.15	\$3.97

Figure 89: Food Insecurity Among Children under 18 in Onondaga County³⁰⁰		
Category	2019	2021
Food Insecure Children in Onondaga County	17,130	13,840
Food Insecurity Rate	17.3%	13.6%
Food Insecure Children likely Ineligible for Federal Nutrition Programs (Incomes above 185% of Poverty)	30%	15%

While many of the above data points show substantial improvements in the immediate years of the pandemic, they only depict a small portion of the story. First, even though Census estimates show a decrease in the percentage of Households receiving Food Stamps/SNAP in the City of Syracuse pre- and post-COVID, the percentage increased overall in Onondaga County. More troubling are the estimated increases of the total number of Households receiving Food Stamps/SNAP in the City of Syracuse and Onondaga County pre- and post-COVID, as represented below.

²⁹⁷ *Feeding America*, “Map the Meal Gap 2023: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2021,” 5.

²⁹⁸ Food insecurity is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as “the lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life.” Ibid.

²⁹⁹ *Feeding America*, “Overall (All Ages) Hunger & Poverty in the United States.”

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

Figure 90: Total Numbers and Percentages of Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP in Onondaga County, the City of Syracuse (2019, 2022) ³⁰¹				
	2019		2022	
Location	Total Number of Households receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	% of Households receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	Total Number of Households receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	% of Households receiving Food Stamps/SNAP
Onondaga County	25,318	13.7%	27,458	14.2%
City of Syracuse	16,312	29.5%	16,719	28.6%

Second, according to the *Feeding America* data, decreases in Food Insecurity within Onondaga County also occurred alongside **a 26% increase in Average Meal Cost from 2019 to 2021, the latter a reflection of rising inflation and food costs.** Helping combat these pressures were one-time, expanded Child Tax Credits and COVID-19 Emergency Allotments of SNAP, which increased monthly benefits. Still, since the last 2021 dataset, food costs have continued to increase. With SNAP Emergency Allotments also ending in 2023, SNAP households thus saw a return to their normal benefit amount and a decrease of at least \$95 monthly.³⁰² Even before the end of SNAP subsidies, low-income households were seemingly once again emerging as food insecure in New York State, with *The New York State Health Foundation* finding a 30% increase among adults ages 65 and older between 2021 and 2022. Notable as well, “*Food insufficiency increased twice as much in New York State households with children compared to households without children (18.7% increase vs. 9.6% increase) from 2021 to 2022.*”³⁰³ A second *Foundation* report found that the decline of federal and state pandemic supports are amplified by many New York State local municipalities that lack capacity, need more resources, or do not “*identify food insecurity as a top policy priority.*”³⁰⁴

Speculatively, the effects of rising food costs, decreased SNAP subsidies, and lacking municipal interventions could be reflected in the increase of *PEACE, Inc.* food pantry service numbers from 1943 in 2022 to 2619 in 2023. These effects are also found in CNYCF “Life Needs Assessment” Data. In 2022, 94.3% of respondents (1,488 of 1578) shared that they had enough food. In 2023, that percentage dropped to 83.55% (980 out of 1173). The effects of these issues will require continued monitoring and will need to be addressed in future CNAs.

Last and as acknowledged by *Feeding America* in its 2023 report, food insecurity has historically differed across populations and is experienced at higher rates among many of the populations discussed in the CNA (i.e. households with children and disabled members, veterans, and recently incarcerated individuals).³⁰⁵ For example, since 1 January 2023, 16% of *Head Start* households (81/511) declared themselves to be food insecure at intake. *Head Start* households also exemplify the complexity of food insecurity. **In 2023, nearly 1 out of 5 enrolled *Head Start* youth required special diets due to allergies, intolerances, and cultural preference,** a nearly twofold increase from 10 years ago.

³⁰¹ 5-Year American Census Survey Estimates 2015-2019, 2018-2022, “Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),” S2201.

³⁰² *Hunger Solutions New York*, “COVID-19.”

³⁰³ *New York Health Foundation*, “Food Insufficiency During the COVID-19 Pandemic: New York State Trends 2020–2022.”

³⁰⁴ *New York State Health Foundation*, “Healthy Food Systems Planning in New York: A Landscape Analysis of Local Municipalities.”

³⁰⁵ *Feeding America*, “Map the Meal Gap 2023: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2021,” 3.

Food insecurity is also disproportionately experienced by communities of color who suffer from “Food Apartheid,”³⁰⁶ which stems from the structural economic disparities explained earlier, including HOLC Redlining, discriminatory Zoning Ordinances, Urban Renewal, and more. Indeed, while the *Feeding America* data showed a small decrease in food insecurity among the white population in Onondaga County (from 7% in 2019 to 6% in 2021), food insecurity among Black and Latino populations in Onondaga County remained at 25% between 2019 and 2021.

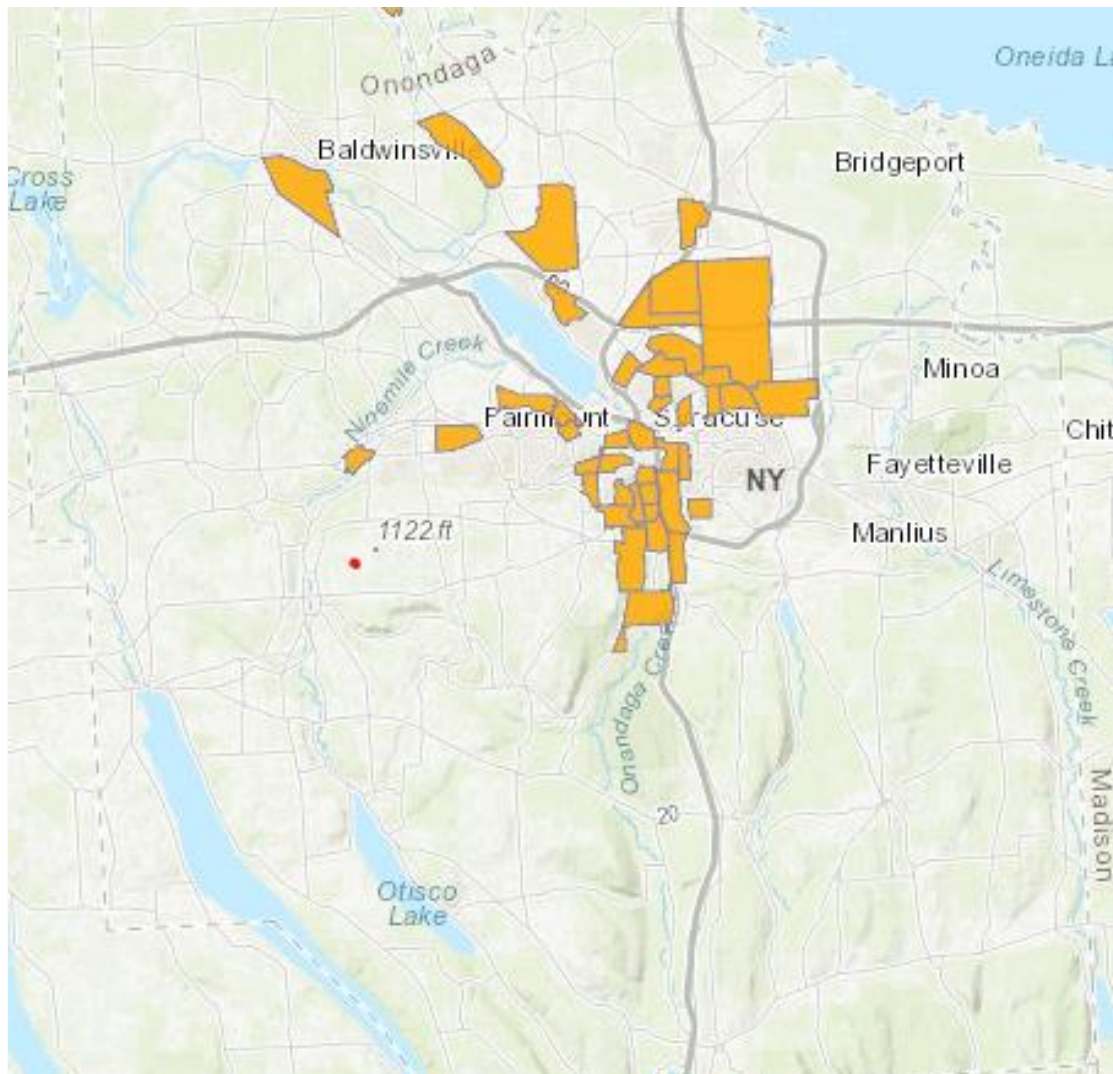
While using 2019 data, the *United States Department of Agriculture* (USDA) and its “Food Access Research Atlas” visualizes those Onondaga County census tracts -many of which are City of Syracuse neighborhoods with concentrated racial and ethnic poverty- where there is low access to supermarkets. The first map includes -in orange- those low-income census tracts “*where a significant number or share of residents is more than 1/2 mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket.*”³⁰⁷ The second map includes -in yellow- those low-income census tracts “*where more than 100 housing units do not have a vehicle and are more than 1/2 mile from the nearest supermarket, or a significant number or share of residents are more than 20 miles from the nearest supermarket.*”³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ In an interview, SUNY ESF Professor Matthew Potteiger uses an increasingly popular term, “food apartheid,” to describe “*how a lack of access to healthy food disproportionately impacts Black communities.*” In contrast to the term food desert which seemingly naturalizes food insecurity, Potteiger and others use food apartheid to stress food insecurity as a human-created system. Isabelle Tavares, “Fighting Food Insecurity.”

³⁰⁷ *United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service*, “Food Access Research Atlas.”

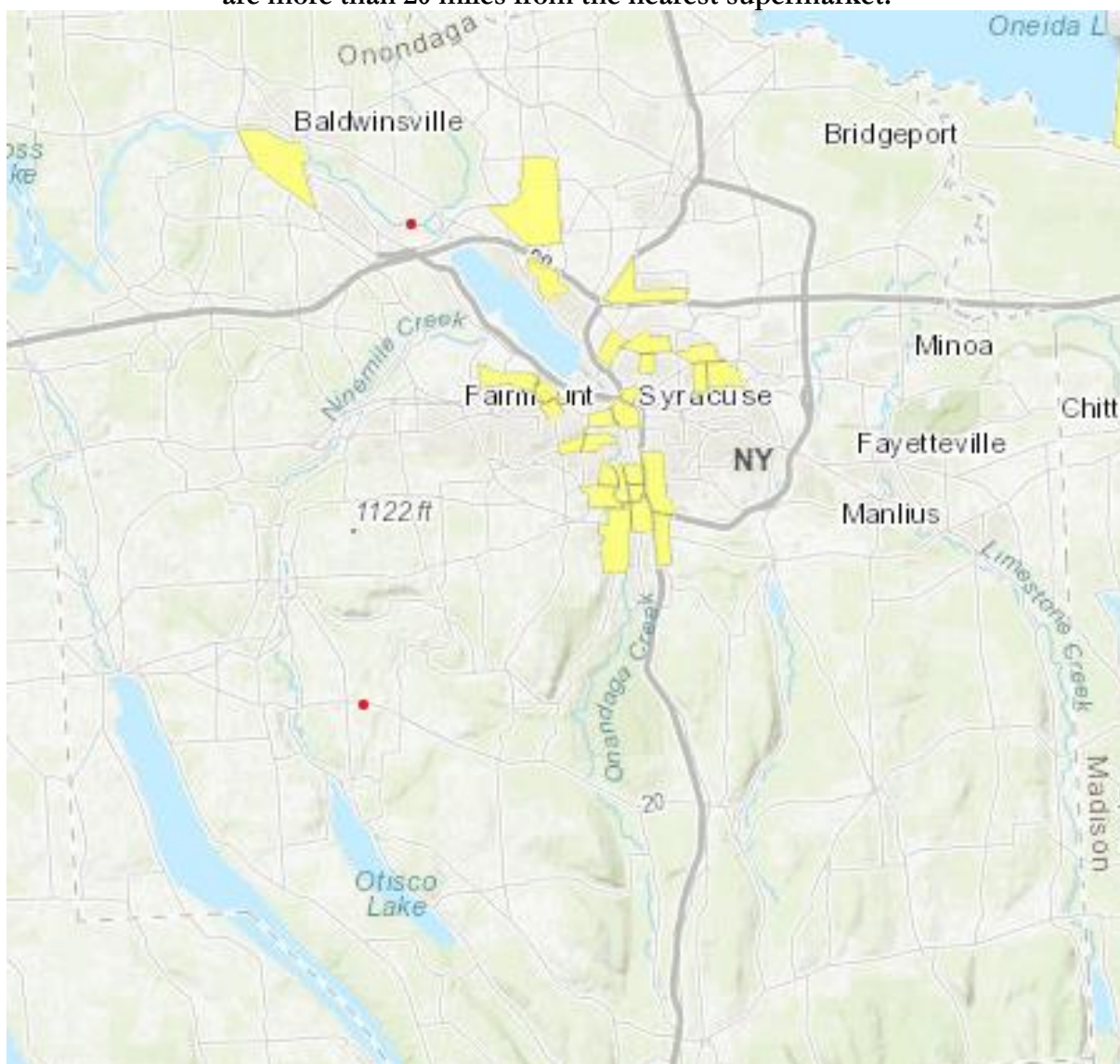
³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Figure 91: Low-income census tracts where a significant number or share of residents is more than ½ mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket.³⁰⁹



³⁰⁹ Ibid.

Figure 92: Low-income census tracts where more than 100 housing units do not have a vehicle and are more than ½ mile from the nearest supermarket, or a significant number or share of residents are more than 20 miles from the nearest supermarket.³¹⁰



With reference to the second map, Community Conversation participants brought into sharper focus the interconnectedness between food insecurity, a lack of transportation, and other barriers noted throughout the CNA. For example, seniors living at Brighton Towers in Syracuse’s southside (one of the highlighted regions above), noted how “there are no grocery stores in the area. They have to pay someone to take them out to Walmart or Green Hills. All these corner stores popping up, what about grocery stores?” Here, concerns about **fresh food access and transportation intersected with concerns about a neighborhood’s development**. Seniors also expressed the need for free **delivery services**, as “there are a lot of seniors who do not drive and they do not have delivery. If you are a senior and you do not have transportation, you are out of luck.” They also appreciated how “the Food Bank truck comes to our church and delivers fresh food. They put it in your car.” In rural southern Onondaga County, a network of volunteers connected to local churches, food pantries, and social service entities

³¹⁰ Ibid.

provide rides and deliver food stuffs for seniors especially. Other seniors noted the presence of **grocery bus services** at their residencies, though time could be limited in the stores visited (Wegmans, Tops were noted). Within the city of Syracuse, the 2017 opening of the *PriceRite* Supermarket on South Avenue and the 2021 opening of *Brady Market* in Syracuse's New Westside have increased access to groceries, fruits, and vegetables. *Brady Farm*, *Jubilee Southwest Community Learning Farm* and *Urban Delights*, and *Syracuse Refugee Agriculture Program* are all mission-driven programs offering residents with education opportunities, fresh produce, and community revitalization efforts. Community Conversation participants noted senior living communities, *The Food Bank of Central New York* and their *Food Sense* Program, an array of nonprofits (*PEACE, Inc.*, *Syracuse Northeast Community Center*, *Westcott Community Center*, *Syracuse Housing Authority Christopher Community* in Liverpool, *LaFayette Outreach Food Pantry* were mentioned), and religious organizations (*Missionary Bellevue Church*, *Southern Baptist Church*, *the Vineyard Church* on Butternut Street, *Plymouth Congregational Church*, *St. Paul's Catholic Church*, *St. Joseph's Catholic Church* in Camillus were mentioned) that offered food pantries. Noteworthy as well is the systems-level advocacy being pursued by the *Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance*, which also organized an annual "Food Justice Gathering" at *Plymouth Congregational Church* in October 2023. As quoted in a story for *WAER* 88.3, *Plymouth Congregational Church's* Reverend Eric Jackson explicitly connected **food insecurity with broader community injustices**,

*"When I say healthy...we're not just talking about putting a few tomatoes in your system, but having access to food that's going to help your body get what it needs," said Jackson. "When your body doesn't get what it needs, it affects your health and, ultimately, your capacity to even be able to economically thrive. So food is very much at the heart of so much injustice and we don't even realize it."*³¹¹

Section IV. Human/Social Services Capacity as Community Need

"We are an Invisible Army." A Human/Social Services Professional from the June 2022, GSW Community Conversation.

Human/Social Services agencies and staff are often seen as critical drivers for meeting community needs. Uniquely positioned through their proximity to their clients, Human/Social Services professionals have helped provide additional context and drive multiple narratives throughout this CNA. As many who responded to the *Human Services Leadership Council's* "Human Services Career Path Survey," they overwhelmingly seek to help others,

Figure 93: Human Services Career Path Survey Question, Why did you take a Job in Human Services?	
Response	Percentage of Respondents
Passion for Helping Others	48.83%
Educational or Professional Path	11.61%
Career Change	8.08%
Previous Experience	16.9%
Personal Connection	8.89%
Community Focus	8.71%
Work Alignment with Values	5.55%
Interest in Working with People	4.44%
Hours and Benefits	0.85%
Uncategorized Responses	0.95%

³¹¹ Avery Gingerich and Natasha Senjanovic, "Food Justice Gathering aims to Increase Food Security in Syracuse."

As one direct service staff member responded, *“I like helping, I call myself a custodian of helping. I like showing my face and providing community support.”* Tied to the latter point, the desire to help individuals and -as a result- one’s community can motivate,

I go home and still continue to help people. This past Saturday, I had a contractor working at my house but I couldn’t stay because I had to help someone. I ran to a church food pantry, grabbed 5 boxes and delivered it all because this family had nothing. I am using my time, my gas money, but I bring my kids along and show them that we help people. To me that is satisfying because it is how I grew up. They weren’t clients.

When Human/Social Services providers spoke about community needs, they themselves also reflected upon their own needs in the workplace. Listening to Human/Social Services Providers describe their work proved informative. From their thoughts, it became clear **that capacity building within the Human/Social Services Field itself was a community need** and required its own section within the CNA.

Such claims are not new. For example, *PEACE, Inc.*’s “COVID-19 Community Needs Assessment and Chronicle” outlined the challenging work conditions and stresses faced by essential workers in the early moments of the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, claims of low salaries, difficulties paying for basic household expenses let alone potential medical expenses, and disproportionate numbers of Black and Hispanic essential workers compared to non-essential workers reflected longer-term structural inequities within the Human/Social Services field that existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic.³¹²

Similar to other fields within CNY, **staff recruitment and retainment have remained constant concerns**, especially in response to community need. A number of local nonprofit coalitions have advanced these concerns publicly, and many of their findings are found in this section. In June 2022, *Greater Syracuse Works* (GSW) -a coalition of more than 30 nonprofit CNY entities- hosted a direct service staff “Community Conversation to Drive Systems Change.” Feedback from the conversation guided GSW’s monthly direct service staff meetings and a larger public advocacy event co-sponsored by GSW, the *Kresge Foundation*, *Jobs for the Future*, and *PEACE, Inc.* More recently, the *Human Services Leadership Council of Central New York* (HSLC) surveyed its more than 80 member agencies and staff to develop recruitment strategies for the Human/Social Services field. Interested survey participants are being reconvened and a Spring 2024 summit is currently being organized to develop further approaches.

4.1. What are the Wage, Funding, and Resource Challenges?

We need more money to be more effective in our work. STAFF in capital letters, that is the first thing we need. We are just two of us, we have other agencies, and volunteers but it’s not the same...Right now to go to social security with an appointment you can be there the whole morning, you could be there easily 3-4 hours at DSS.

As will become clearer, initial responses about recruiting and retaining nonprofit staff parallel national trends. For example, in *The National Council of Nonprofits*’ report, “2023 Nonprofit Workforce Survey Results: Communities Suffer as the Nonprofit Workforce Shortage Crisis Continues,” surveys of nearly 1600 Human/Social Services providers bore out the following barriers.

³¹² *PEACE, Inc.*, “COVID-19.”

Figure 94: Barriers towards Recruiting and Retaining Nonprofit Staff ³¹³	
Reason Given	Percentage of Respondents
Salary Competition	72.2%
Budget Constraints/Insufficient Funds	66.3%
Stress and Burnout	50.2%
Challenges caused by Government Grants and Contracts	20.6%

Local Human/Social Services professionals expressed similar concerns about **Wages** within the HSLC “Human Services Career Path Survey.” When asked “What do you find most difficult about your job,” the most frequent response was **Low Compensation** (24.7%). Such a response is unsurprising given average wages of “Community and Social Service Occupations” according to first quarter 2023 data provided by the New York State *Department of Labor* and its “Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics Program” (OEWS).

Figure 95: Hourly and Annual Entry, Median, and Experienced Wages for All Occupations, Community and Social Service Occupations in New York State and Central New York According to NYS DOL (2023)						
All Occupations ³¹⁴						
Location	Hourly Entry Wage	Annual Entry Wage	Hourly Median Wage	Annual Median Wage	Hourly Experienced Wage	Annual Experienced Wage
New York State	\$16.76	\$34,849	\$26.10	\$54,276	\$47.48	\$98,743
Central New York	\$15.63	\$32,511	\$23.63	\$49,143	\$36.88	\$76,711
Community and Social Service Occupations ³¹⁵						
New York State	\$19.03	\$39,593	\$31.22	\$59,906	\$37.30	\$77,588
Central New York	\$16.92	\$35,180	\$24.34	\$50,630	\$31.54	\$65,602

Low entry wages among “Community and Social Service Occupations” -let alone experienced wage compared to all other occupations both locally and state-wide- supports many of the responses to the HSLC survey, in particular *“The pay is hard to accept for the amount of work we do;” “salary is challenging to stay in this field;”* and *“trying to pay my bills earning only \$16 an hour.”* A PEACE, Inc. survey respondent connected low pay to ever growing work expectations and an underappreciation of one’s work, stating *“more is always put on our plate to add to the workload by people that don’t realize how much time and effort we are already putting into the workday. I feel the pay has never reflected the importance of the work we do.”* Another PEACE, Inc. employee saw matters of wages as simply beyond the capacity of a singular non-profit agency. Rather, the employee connected matters of wages to larger, system-wide issues placed upon the Human/Social Service Sector, *watching capitalism, politicians, and racism create community problems then point to human service agencies to fix these problems and then underpay us and underfund us. It’s insane. I’m tired of some agencies and some politicians that place blame on poor people and immigrants and single mothers. While billionaires get rich and don’t pay taxes. Again, it’s hideous.*

³¹³ National Council of Nonprofits, “Nonprofit Workforce Survey Results: Communities Suffer as the Nonprofit Workforce Shortage Crisis Continues.”

³¹⁴ Higher wages in New York State than Central New York is largely a product of higher wages (as a reflection of higher living costs) in New York City.

³¹⁵ Similar to other DOL Occupational Groups, “Community and Social Service Occupations” is a broad designation and doesn’t fully capture the range of occupational titles and educational requirements found within many of CNY’s Human/Social Services agencies. Still “Community and Social Service Occupations” does include various counselors, therapists, social workers, health education specialists, social and human service assistants, etc. and more, making it an appropriate group for conversation. *New York State Department of Labor*, “Occupational Wages.”

When one combines “Low Compensation” (24.7%) with other responses including “Resource Scarcity” (13.8%) and “Funding and Resource Chasing” (4.2%), nearly half (42.7%) of the HSLC survey responses cited funding/resource related issues. Participants within the “Community Conversations to Drive Systems Change” in June 2022 and the non-C-Suite Human/Social Services survey in Winter 2024 spoke about:

The Lack of long-term, sustainable funding; the restrictiveness of the funding that is available.

- *“I work in the field of aging - there is a serious lack of awareness and resources to address the needs of this rapidly expanding population. We may be successful at getting funds and resources for a new initiative, but it is very difficult to sustain interest over the long-term.”*
- *“The unfortunate reality that much of this kind of work is beholden to temporary funding sources; exploring diversified funding streams for sustainability.”*
- *“Funding is such an issue. Funders want to fund what is shiny and new and we have valuable programs that serve a large need in our community that have data to show their impact. There is a strong need in our community right now for food subsidies, housing, child care, and skills training.*

Connectedness between the lack of sustainable funding, staffing and wages, and program effectiveness.

- *“We need funders to understand the importance of the work we do and not feel threatened all the time with cuts in funding. We need to be able to offer better pay to our own workers to have less turnover and more consistency in the work we do. We need better transportation in our city so workers can have more opportunity for the many jobs available outside of our city limits.”*
- *“We need more staff which means more multiyear funding opportunities to meet the needs of City of Syracuse residents. We need additional funding for our basic needs pantry immediately. Additionally, it would be very helpful if funders could pay us within a reasonable timeframe.”*
- *“In aging services, there is a significant lack of funding to support programs for a growing population of older adults. Generally speaking, our programming and activities are challenged by unexamined biases and inequities around aging.”*

4.2. The Quest for Work/Life Balance

What’s the Most Challenging Part of my work? Empathetically navigating the emotional terrain of a much-traumatized community.”

As the above quotes illustrate, wages, ever-evolving work expectations, staff shortages, and limited funding a) strain Human/Social Services employees and b) add to the challenges that they face meeting the needs of their clients. The emotional effects of these pressures are real. One individual summarized the loneliness and alienation that comes from their work, sharing,

The knowledge that most of the systems I work within are outside of local control (State and Federal funding and policies) means that we must always take a very long-range view- this can be disheartening. This work can be lonely and isolating- there are not a ton of people in this community who think about the work in the same way as I do. I also spend a lot of time absorbing frustration and pain from others in my network that can be heavy to hold.

Difficulties processing the day-to-day experiences of one’s clients, let alone finding a way to distance and recharge oneself from it, were common refrains as well. For another Human/Social Service employee,

We have had a lot of clients going through personal trauma like domestic violence and family issues. We seem to have been going through quite a bit of it lately. For me, the hardest part is going home and leaving it behind. Sometimes I take the work home with me. When you hear something bad is happening to somebody, your brain just needs to process that. Sometimes it can be scary. Sometimes you worry about your own health. Right now, we are working with somebody with Stage 4 cancer, another is a victim of domestic violence. It can give you some anxiety. Sometimes you remember things when it is quiet at night. I worry about my clients.

Empathy and concern for one's clients also challenges the ability to maintain work/life balance for Human/Social Services employees,

Work/life balance is hard. Sometimes I need rest...Another thing is probably disconnecting, because I see people in the community all the time and give my card out, but sometimes it bleeds into my life. I meet clients during my lunch break and bring them into the center. Sometimes clients need to know this person really supports me. I do a lot of mentoring. I talk to them as a mentor as well, and I want to make sure they know they have the support. A lot of my clients come from families that don't support them. Their circumstances are sometimes because they don't have support from their families and are not connected to community resources. I make sure they are connected...Even when I am on vacation, depending on the severity of what is going on, I may have to stop by when a client needs help. Thankfully, I haven't had to do this very often, but it has happened.

4.3. Case Study: The Early Childhood Education Workforce Crisis.

"I find that many people don't understand how important early education is."

Within the Human/Social Services Field, Early Childhood Education occupations provide an especially vivid case study of these matters of low wages; of restrictive funding and overregulation that affects service delivery; and of lacking work/life balance. As noted by the *Early Childhood Alliance Onondaga*, 90% of all brain development happens before the age of five.³¹⁶ Preschool, pre-Kindergarten, *Head Start/Early Head Start*, and other early education programs provide critical interventions for not only the child but often times the whole family. And yet, in a Summer 2023 briefing released by the *National Head Start Association*,

- 20% of *Head Start* and *Early Head Start* classrooms were reported to be closed nationally.
- 81% of respondents cited "staff vacancies" as the primary reason for closing classrooms.
- 65% of respondents cited "compensation" as the primary reason for higher-than-normal staff vacancies.³¹⁷

"With an estimated 137,000 to 275,000 children on *Head Start* or *Early Head Start* waiting lists," the effects of classroom closures and staff vacancies are measurable.³¹⁸ The lack of capacity to meet demand and need has its roots in the conditions explored throughout this section. First and most glaring are wages. First quarter 2023 wage data provided by the *New York State Department of Labor* puts the wage gap between preschool and elementary school teachers into sharper focus.

³¹⁶ *Early Childhood Alliance Onondaga*, "Child Care in Onondaga County: Community Snapshot."

³¹⁷ *National Head Start Association*, "An Update on Head Start's Ongoing Workforce Crisis."

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Figure 96: Hourly and Annual Entry, Median, and Experienced Wages for Elementary School Teachers (Except Special Education), Preschool Teachers (Except Special Education) in New York State, Central New York According to NYS DOL (2023)						
Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education ³¹⁹						
Location	Hourly Entry Wage	Annual Entry Wage	Hourly Median Wage	Annual Median Wage	Hourly Experienced Wage	Annual Experienced Wage
New York State		\$55,646		\$83,534		\$111,719
Central New York		\$55,818		\$79,401		\$88,278
Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education ³²⁰						
New York State	\$15.66	\$32,528	\$18.64	\$38,778	\$26.94	\$56,023
Central New York	\$14.48	\$30,107	\$16.43	\$34,171	\$21.57	\$44,861

As noted by the *National Head Start Association* and also referenced in an *Early Childhood Alliance Onondaga* (ECA) briefing, there is “a large, growing pay gap between the early learning and public education sectors as states and localities adjust salaries and expand hiring flexibilities to attract staff for school district positions.”³²¹ While compensation remains the primary reason cited for lacking staff retainment, short staffing and the aforementioned needs of families creates additional workplace stresses. This intersection was best summarized by a *PEACE, Inc.* *Head Start/Early Head Start* staff member, “Burnout is real. Many staff are overworked and underpaid for important contributions to our economy and society. These are very demanding jobs that don’t get the recognition they deserve.”

Conditions are similarly dire in other early education settings, in particular more traditional center-based and home-family child care sites. As noted previously when discussing child care as community need, there are only enough licensed care providers to meet 44% of the estimated demand in Onondaga County. Here again, wages are an important starting position, especially when one also factors the credentialing and necessary state-mandated onboarding and background check processes that can delay a candidate’s hiring and start date.³²² NYS DOL data is again revealing.

Figure 97: Hourly and Annual Entry, Median, and Experienced Wages for Child Care Workers in New York State, Central New York According to NYS DOL (2023) ³²³						
Location	Hourly Entry Wage	Annual Entry Wage	Hourly Median Wage	Annual Median Wage	Hourly Experienced Wage	Annual Experienced Wage
New York State	\$14.87	\$30,928	\$17.68	\$35,573	\$19.09	\$39,699
Central New York	\$14.20	\$29,536	\$15.06	\$31,337	\$16.80	\$34,932

The effects of these wages can often leave Early Childhood professionals facing similar pressures as those of their clients. For example, a 2016 statewide study found that “nearly 60% of child care providers in NYS were

³¹⁹ “Preschool Teachers, except for special education” is a close, yet limited representation of early education occupations. The Occupational Title is found under the Occupational Group, “Educational Instruction and Library Occupations.” *New York State Department of Labor*, “Occupational Wages.”

³²⁰ “Preschool Teachers, except for special education” is a close, yet limited representation of early education occupations. The Occupational Title is found under the Occupational Group, “Educational Instruction and Library Occupations.” Ibid.

³²¹ *Early Childhood Alliance Onondaga*, “Child Care in Onondaga County: Community Snapshot.” Strict yet necessary federal mandates requiring *Head Start/Early Head Start* teachers to possess Bachelor’s Degrees makes it even more difficult to retain staff against better paying and more flexible public school opportunities.

³²² *Early Childhood Alliance Onondaga*, “The Child Care Landscape in Onondaga County: A Supply and Demand Analysis,” 14.

³²³ The Child Care Occupational Title is found under the Occupational Group, “Personal Care and Service Occupations.” Ibid.

receiving public assistance such as SNAP, TANF, or the EITC.”³²⁴ For the workforce coordinator of the *Early Childhood Career Pathways Program* (ECCPP),³²⁵ grants and start-up funds are critical to the success of her program and her clients entering Early Childhood professions, a point argued elsewhere in the CNA. She shared that:

The average wage of someone starting our program is under 16 per hour. It pays for standard family daycare, CDA training and fees. If the start-up money was not there, we would not have the completion rate that we have...I think without all the starting grants they would not be here, they would not be able to pay for the CPR fees, etc. It is a lot of money for someone who has a couple of kids and trying to feed them first.

That Human/Social Services staff can struggle to support not only their clients but also themselves was a point not lost on an Early Childhood specialist of more than 20 years,

I wish that this field paid a lot more, I am not going to say better because I recognize that we are not making bad money but I wish that we were recognized more in our paycheck. The work we do with children and our families is so important. It pains me that our staff have the same struggles as the families we serve. When you have struggles due to lack of financial resources to address things at our own personal level it is difficult to be present for the kids. Wish we could feel very financially secure and wonder, if I miss a week of work, am I going to be ok?

4.4. A Larger Issue Beyond the Human/Social Service Field: The Need for Advocacy

The last point brings into sharp focus that many of the employment barriers faced by low-income Onondaga County residents are the same faced by those asked to empower them. Unsurprisingly then, irrespective of the respondent’s human/social services responsibilities, greater **Advocacy** emerged as a consistent theme among survey respondents. First, when respondents referenced advocacy, their thoughts revolved around **greater community engagement, awareness, and organizing around specific issues** that were of interest to them and their primary constituencies. The push for greater improvements around Aging, Housing, Basic Needs, Wages, and more are topics that have been raised throughout the CNA and in this section about the Human/Social Services Sector. Such policy-driven advocacy around a specific topic have taken place and proven successful; one example is the grassroots efforts of the *Urban Jobs Task Force*, its “Racial Equity Impact Statement,” and the creation of a community “Big Table” of key stakeholders to ensure workforce and contracting equity for Syracuse residents and minority business owners respectively on I-81.

A number of respondents moved beyond speaking about certain topics and raised greater, **systems-level concerns about empowerment and disenfranchisement** within the community. Some felt as though such advocacy work is developing throughout the community, “*that our partners are lobbying, advocating, and gathering the voices of the disinvested, showing them that they have power, being resourceful and building partnerships in new*

³²⁴ In its December 2023 “Community Snapshot,” *ECA Onondaga* outlines the complicated ways in which child care and child care providers are funded. The *ECA Onondaga*’s explanation is reprinted below in full. According to *ECA Onondaga*, “*Child care is funded via two payment mechanisms: parents (self-pay) and federal funding of NYS’ Child Care Assistance Program, which uses the artificially low market rate. This is in contrast to the K-12 public school system, where tax dollars are used to pay into a system that creates a universally accessible public good for all families.*” The artificially low market is equally problematic, “*basing reimbursement on the amount providers charge, which neither represents the true cost of care nor the cost of highest quality care. Additionally, the market rate survey uses three-year-old data. The reimbursement rate for providers is then set at the 80th percentile of the market rate.*” *Early Childhood Alliance Onondaga*, “Child Care in Onondaga County: Community Snapshot.” *ECA Onondaga* Executive Director Bethany Creaser also outlined the state’s complicated child care funding system in an editorial published in *Syracuse.com*, “One Solution to complex child care crisis is to fund it properly.” Bethany Creaser, “One Solution to Complex Child Care Crisis Is to Fund It Properly.”

³²⁵ *Early Childhood Career Pathways Program* is a partnership between *PEACE, Inc.* and *Child Care Solutions of CNY* that helps interested clients open home family daycare sites, pursue CDAs and Associate’s Degrees in Early Childhood Education, and obtain resume/work placement supports. See <https://www.peace-caa.org/programs/frc/eccpp/>.

ways.” The need for greater, continued advocacy work was similarly echoed by a surveyed policy specialist, *“our community would deeply benefit from a robust community organizing and power building arm. Much of my work would be eased and strengthened with additional community participation.”* Education around the tactics needed to navigate, reform, and overcome dense governmental bureaucracies was a repeated theme as well. For an empathetic respondent, there is a *“lack of knowledge and skill in developing, presenting, and pressing for needed governmental and non-governmental investments in their communities. The structure of government is so opaque to most as to be invisible and the language of advocacy is inadequate to the task of accessing the detailed research frequently required to develop a grassroots, community-driven development agenda.”*

Greater experience -as well as outright change- could emerge through the *“expansion of opportunity to directly influence, and participate in, the practice of power-sharing, power-holding, and policymaking,”* shared still another respondent. Within the Human/Social Services Space, such opportunities could occur through additional mentorship and professional development, spaces for information and best practice exchange, and direct access/contact with key powerholding constituencies such as employers, economic development planners, public and elected officials, and more. When these recommendations were presented publicly in 2022, then Director of Strategic Initiatives for the *Syracuse Community Center Collaborative* (and current *PEACE, Inc.* Director of Grants and Planning) Maribel Arce added, *“I think we need to have these difficult conversations about race about equity, about barriers, and what are the barriers in place that need to be lifted. And what are the best channels to do it? And we also need to talk about what are the supports that are needed that currently don't exist.”*³²⁶

As has been noted throughout the CNA around matters of gentrification, housing, education, and more, Community Conversations participants readily expressed interest in *“more forums to talk to elected officials and to ask about programs that are being funded.”* Many already actively participate in a variety of grassroots, civic, and governmental entities. All of the *Head Start* parents that participated in the February 28 Community Conversation are members of *PEACE, Inc. Head Start/Early Head Start Policy Council*, who have governing rights and help make decisions for the program. A number of Forster Grandparents shared that they were members of the *Syracuse Tenants Union*, which *“shows you how you can organize, put money aside, and advocate.”* Still another noted her involvement with a city transportation group, sharing that

One of the problems to get traffic under control is the red tape to get it under control... in order to get a light, or sign, you have to prove that your neighborhood is unsafe. They have been out in various neighborhoods, but they haven't found anything that they feel needs to change. The only way they do that is if someone gets injured or killed, then the neighborhood has to get together to advocate.

Of course, critical to advocacy is the need to ***“hold our elected officials accountable”*** and to vote. Below are statistics related to total registered voters and actual turnout in yearly elections since 2012.

³²⁶ Katie Zilcosky, “CNY Workforce Needs a Boost before Micron Opportunities Can Be Accessible to All.”

Figure 98: Historical Voter Turnout Comparison in Onondaga County, City of Syracuse (2012-2023)³²⁷

		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
County-Wide	Total Voters	281800	281132	275982	273840	285756	285037	287980	292832	308402	303384	304495	306077
	Turnout	206435	76638	137298	74623	212864	106032	180330	107550	237531	94306	171212	90721
	Percentage	73.26%	27.26%	49.75%	27.25%	74.49%	37.20%	62.62%	36.73%	77.02%	31.08%	56.23%	29.64%
City	Total Voters	71210	71014	68100	67001	68730	68287	67700	70315	73377	70491	70859	71691
	Turnout	48024	17324	26971	17558	45325	25555	36466	20638	48068	20174	29272	16438
	Percentage	67.44%	24.40%	39.60%	26.21%	65.95%	37.42%	53.86%	29.35%	65.51%	28.62%	41.31%	22.93%

Nationally, presidential elections occur every 4 years and historically/typically lead to the highest voter turnout (2012, 2016, and 2020 on the Table). In Onondaga County, County Executive elections take place every 4 years (2015, 2019, and 2023 on the Table). In the city of Syracuse, mayoral elections take place every 4 years (2013, 2017, and 2021 on the Table). According to Pew, nearly 2/3 of eligible voters did so for the 2020 presidential election, *“the highest rate for any national election since 1900.”* The 2018 election (49% turnout) *“also had the highest rate for a midterm since 1914.”*

Locally, 2020 marked an overall voter record with 77.02% turnout according to election data.³²⁸ Still, within the city of Syracuse, the percentage of total voter turnout decreased in each of the presidential elections since 2012 (though the number of total voters did increase from 2016 to 2020). While the elections were not perceived to be competitive by many, the percentage of voter turnout for the Syracuse Mayoral election in 2021 and the Onondaga County Executive election in 2023 were both below 30% in the city and county respectively. Greater research towards **“get-out-the-vote” campaigns in areas of lower voter registration and turnout** within the City of Syracuse might prove critical for developing robust advocacy campaigns around community need as well.

Section V: Conclusions and Final Recommendations

To best understand community need, this CNA attempted to humanize quantitative data and the experiences represented by it. We have sought to solicit, integrate, and champion the voices of low-income Onondaga County residents and those who work most closely with them. Ultimately, we have embraced human-centered design principles and we have tried our best to advance an inclusive, equitable, and justice-informed approach for understanding community needs in Onondaga County. To conclude the CNA, we now offer a **“Persona,”** which can describe the complex needs that have been explored throughout this document as well as introduce several recommendations for *PEACE, Inc.* and the community at large.

A common practice within the human-centered design field, a persona is a fictional composite character that is created from research observations and conversations with target constituencies. Human-centered design originated in the 1960s and initially within the business sector to better understand a constituent, their use of a product or service, their needs and behaviors, as well as their aspirations and life situations.³²⁹ Taught and championed by the *Stanford University Design School* and other entities, such methods have increasingly been adapted among nonprofits as a means to better integrate constituencies into decision-making, to explore the effectiveness of programs and services through them, and then to develop strategies for improvement and

³²⁷ Onondaga County, “Onondaga County Board of Elections, Statistics.”

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Rikke Friis Dam, and Teo Yu Siang, “The History of Design Thinking.”

advocacy that are grounded in empathy and a shared understanding of one's entire experience.³³⁰ For Fiona Kanagasingam, "In a sector caught up with measurement and metrics, we can forget who we aim to serve and who we are accountable to."³³¹ We agree. As a product of collective insight and research, the following fictional persona, "Amanda," can remind one about not only the issues that were discussed in this CNA but also the resilient individuals who we as a community must ultimately better serve.

Amanda

Meet Amanda, a mother of two in her early 30s, living in a low-income neighborhood in Syracuse. Amanda's daily morning routine is a testament to her resilience and determination. Each morning, she wakes up at dawn to get breakfast for her high school-age son, James, who takes the bus at 6:00 am. Often in challenging weather conditions, she walks her younger children over a mile to daycare and elementary school before heading to her part-time job at a fast-food restaurant.

As she is walking to work, Amanda dreams of saving to buy a car. She would be able to work more hours, get a better paying job, she could go to college. But then she remembers the income cap and worries if she will fall off the cliff and end up worse off. "Don't hit that income cap" - she tells herself - "otherwise there are no services." She doesn't know how she would afford insurance and child care without public assistance.

Amanda's situation reflects the reality of many families facing inter-generational poverty where support systems and resources are scarce. Also struggling to make ends meet, her family can't help with child care or financial assistance. Amanda relies on her own resilience to navigate life's challenges.

Amanda moved to the city when she escaped Domestic Violence during the pandemic. Initially she had been reluctant to call the police, as her boyfriend's addiction got worse during lockdown. When asked why she didn't leave him she says "People don't understand that things have to be drastic to get real help. When the police arrive, issue an order of protection and leave, it has an impact too. It makes you more vulnerable." Amanda was down, feeling guilty of her own choices by the time her boyfriend threatened her with a gun.

It took Amanda a lot of effort to get where she is at right now. Amanda is thankful to have a job that keeps her mind off her problems for a few hours. She just wishes it would pay a living wage and offer benefits. If for any reason she misses work, she does not get paid. The stress of making impossible decisions constantly weighs on her mind. Should she forgo a day of work to make it to the food pantry or is it better to go to the Department of Social Services to apply for additional support instead?

Amanda feels like she constantly has to advocate for herself and her family. Support systems exist, but you must ask specifically for the program you want and be sure you are eligible for it before you apply. Months may go by before you get help, there are waitlists for rental support, the food pantry application must be submitted a month before, etc. Ensuring stability for her family while dealing with her trauma and the financial strain feel like an overwhelming burden.

By the time she gets home after picking up her daughters, James has been out of school for a long while and cooked dinner with the little food they could get from the church pantry. James would like to play basketball but there are no buses to bring him home after games and Amanda does not want him to walk home at night

³³⁰ Fiona Kanagasingam, "Using Human-Centered Design to Advance Civic Engagement in Nonprofits."

³³¹ Ibid.

alone. Not only is there gun violence in her neighborhood, but she is afraid someone might call the police on her son just for walking outside on the street.

After helping with homework and putting her kids to sleep, Amanda is exhausted. Her heart beats fast as she opens the mail. Her landlord has increased her rent to \$1000. More than she can afford with her annual income of \$20,000 a year. She might have to move again if she gets an eviction notice, but she knows that it will be difficult to find somewhere cheaper. Landlords will not rent to you unless your income is three times the rent and this was the cheapest place she could find. Having to uproot her children, especially her oldest son who is already struggling with the adjustment to a new school, weighs heavily on Amanda.

Amanda wipes her tears and opens her book to start studying for her High School Equivalency Diploma, a first step to starting a new career. She will study until she falls asleep, she can't stop taking these small steps to create a better life for her family. "Her resilience and determination despite the systemic barriers and experienced trauma that she faces are truly remarkable."

The persona explicitly references the data, the experiences, and -at times- the emotions that have provided this CNA's foundation. Like the persona, the CNA attempts to be comprehensive. While we believe the CNA has accomplished this, lacking space did prevent the development of many topics beyond a macro-level analysis. We believe these shortcomings are also fine, as **the CNA was conceived as an evolving process for conversation, advocacy, and empowerment**. Also like the persona, the CNA looked to explore the connectedness of critical needs that are faced by the majority of low-income Onondaga County residents, acknowledging that barriers and strengths might look different according to race and ethnicity, age, location, accessibility, history, and more. Rarely working in isolation, the barriers addressed included income; finances; debt; housing; transportation; education; employment; trauma, chronic stress, and mental health; violence and abuse; drugs; neighborhoods; networks and/or the lack of them; food; Human/Social Services capacity; racism and discrimination; and more. Perhaps the most important barrier that seemingly lurks behind the scenes but is omnipresent? **Time**. Our systems ask a lot of our low-income constituencies and the staff who serve them. Time is a privilege.

In conclusion then, the CNA contends that we as a community must:

1) Pursue a **holistic, layered response against poverty** that acknowledges multiple histories, barriers, and strengths if diverse, low-income households are to reach self-sufficiency. A Senior moving due to a lack of transportation and access to food. A domestic violence victim lacking funds who feels forced to choose between a car and an apartment. A woman overcoming personal trauma and creating common goals with others to enroll in higher education. These were just some of the examples found in the CNA that display the intersecting challenges faced -as well as strengths and resilience displayed- by low-income households.

2) Realize that the barriers faced by low-income Onondaga County residents during the COVID-19 pandemic were/are not new. Rather, **COVID-19 exacerbated and intensified long-standing structural insecurities and inequalities**. Senior isolation, housing, food insecurity, child care, opioids, domestic violence, racism, and more were all developing issues even before the pandemic. The CNA also argues that the ending of expanded, pandemic-related social-net reliefs were disruptive in their own ways and most likely needed to be continued, especially as low-income households disproportionately face rising inflation and basic needs costs even today. COVID-era supports such as expanded EITC/CTC, SNAP, and rent reliefs were successful -if not outright empowering- because they put money into people's pockets who needed it most. Important as well, the CNA presents evidence that many know how to save and to use their money when they have it. **Access to unrestricted capital and greater opportunities for use with it** (i.e. car purchases, homeownership and especially minority homeownership, and more) will be critical in the

coming years.

3) **Invest in the Human/Social Services Sector through robust, flexible, and multiyear capacity building measures.** Low-wages, limited and short-term funding, and burnout not only affect staffing but program effectiveness. As shown repeatedly throughout the CNA, it takes time for Human/Social Services Staff to navigate a client's needs and strengths. It also takes time to build trust, confidence, and networks among clients, staff, and agencies to execute programs and to adjust them for maximum effectiveness. In this respect, program development is similar to that of our clients and, in the words the founder of Montessori education Dr. Maria Montessori, *"there is not a regular linear development, but development manifests itself in jerks."*³³² The realities faced by current nonprofits are best summarized by one surveyed respondent,

"Annual grant renewal cycles present several challenges. Annual reapplication takes enormous capacity especially when funders ask the program to be new each year. Annual renewal creates job-insecurity for staff. Funders sometimes announce non-renewals too late to develop new funding to continue effective programs, leading to staff layoffs. Multi-year funding with cost-of-living increases provides stability for program participants, room to grow staff experience, and capacity to develop programs and ancillary services. Annual grant renewal cycles slow progress. Worse, one-year grants with strict policies against 'going to the well again' for renewed funding can do more harm than good as they make a bad faith promise to participants, staff, organizations, and the community."

4) **Build sustained advocacy and power-building campaigns** to raise greater awareness of the issues faced by Onondaga County's low-income households and to push for inclusive, transparent, and community-driven solutions. Throughout the CNA, clients and Human/Social Service staff offered critical, innovative suggestions both large and small for improving our community. It's also clear that there is great anxiety across ages and demographics about the transformational changes that will take place across Central New York over the next decades. For reasons discussed throughout the CNA, those who have lacked equitable access to opportunity historically are understandably skeptical. To promote and ensure inclusive communication and decision-making so that all can benefit from the promise of socioeconomic revival, we as a community must continue:

5) **To acknowledge and work to overcome the legacies of discriminatory policies such as Redlining and Racial Covenants that have been systematized over time and continue to shape Onondaga County as a whole.** Exclusionary zoning, school district boundaries and quality of education dictated in part by property values, and food insecurity are just some of the most vivid examples of such inequities that have been presented within the CNA. Simply put, *"The Playing Field is not Equal."*³³³ More on this in a minute.

In response, the experiences found within the CNA will drive change and encourage greater program responsiveness at *PEACE, Inc.* The CNA reflects and will inspire the three strategies of the agency's recently approved 3- to 5-year Strategic Design. First, the agency looks to **Develop Current and Future Leadership** within the agency and the community through coordination, mobility, and skills development. Second, building on the intentional work pursued for more than a year now (including the creation of the DEI Vision Statement found in Section 1.2), the agency will **Further a Culture that Champions Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging**. The agency will strive to embrace and reflect the diversity of the communities that it serves as well as the workforce that it employs. And third, the agency will **Modernize Technology Platforms to Securely Meet the Needs of our Staff and Community**. It will

³³² Maria Montessori, "The Absorbent Mind," 83.

³³³ *Confronting Poverty*, "Most Americans Will Experience Poverty."

analyze, create, and update technology systems that better secure, measure, and respond to emerging agency and community needs.

Finally, it might be useful to reference a number of claims raised by “Confronting Poverty,” a website administered by Mark R. Rank, the Herbert S. Hadley Professor of Social Welfare at Washington University in St. Louis. Throughout the expansive website, there is an attempt to counter research that depicts *“the poor as alien and out of step with the rest of America...that words poverty and welfare often conjure up images of people on the fringes of society-unwed mothers with a multitude of children, inner-city unemployed black men, high school dropouts on drugs, the mentally disturbed homeless, and so on.”*³³⁴ According to research by Rank and Hirschl, ***“between the ages of 20 and 75, nearly 60 percent of Americans will experience at least one year below the official poverty line, while three quarters of Americans will encounter poverty or near poverty (150% below the official poverty line).”*** Poverty can and will affect most of us at some point in our lives. Indeed, within the CNA, topics such as ALICE, inflation and basic needs costs, debt, mental health, housing, and more have been presented as issues that impact more than just those living in poverty at this moment of time. And yet, here’s the point. While these issues can impact any of us, they do not do so equitably, ***“the playing field in America is not level...the process begins with the financial resources of parents and the neighborhood a child is raised in. This then affects the quality of schooling a child receives, which then influences the type of job and career that they acquire and work at. All of these, in turn, can affect the quality of health an individual experiences, along with how well one is prepared for the retirement years.”***³³⁵ The CNA hopes that many of the causes for this unlevel playing field have been developed adequately here. We hope that the work can spur further research and dialogue into how we all can advance equity and empowerment within Onondaga County.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid.

VI. Citations

6.1 Unpublished Sources and Research

Community Conversation Focus Groups

- AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent Program*, Senior Volunteers (2024)
- “-Community Conversations to Drive Systems Change:” Direct Service Staff from member agencies of *Greater Syracuse Works* (2022)
- High School Students enrolled in William Nottingham High School, *Syracuse City School District* (2024)
- PEACE, Inc. Head Start* Parents living in Onondaga County (2024)
- Unemployed, Underemployed Onondaga County Residents (2020)

Human Services Leadership Council

- Human Services Career Path Survey”

Interviews with *PEACE, Inc.* staff specializing in

- Child Care
- Disabilities
- Fatherhood and broader parent development
- housing
- Justice involved, re-entry/post-incarceration services
- Latino, Westside Syracuse outreach
- Maternal health and doula services, especially Black maternal health
- Suburban/rural services

PEACE, Inc. Internal Research

- Customer Satisfaction Surveys (2022, 2023)
- Evaluation Data from the Career Pathway Pilot *BOOST*
- Family Services Program*: Food Pantry Service Data
- Free Tax Preparation Program*: Demographic and Survey Data
- Head Start/Early Head Start Program*: Intake, Nutrition, and Family Goalsetting Data
- Strategic Design Staff Responses

Survey Responses from non-C Suite, Direct Service Staff involved in Human/Social Services

6.2 Data Collections

Central New York Community Foundation: “Life Needs Assessment Survey”

United States Census Bureau Documents

- Decennial Census Statistics, “Age of Residents.”
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