

Beltrami County Health and Human Services

OUTREACH PROJECT



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Section 1:

Executive Summary

In the summer of 2021, Beltrami County Health and Human Services (BCHHS) leadership team was exploring how to gather feedback about the quality of service delivery. While a community-wide survey could have been the simple answer, they were looking for a new approach.

Beltrami Area Resiliency Team had recently completed a community-wide assessment of the strengths and needs of Beltrami County, and the basis of their assessment was 100 one-on-one conversations with community members. That project was called 100 Cups of Coffee. It was not only informative, but innovative in how it engaged people to go deeper in reflecting about their experiences. Interviewees even provided possible solutions to some of the social issues facing Beltrami County. Sitting with a community member built trust. This one-on-one interview method seemed like a promising blueprint to follow. Thus, the Beltrami County Health and Human Services Outreach Project was born.

In the fall of 2021, a dedicated team of BCHHS employees volunteered to work on the Outreach Project Team. They established a foundational question that this project would answer: **“What can BCHHS do to best support the needs of the community and its members?”**

Over the next few months, the Project Team crafted eleven open-ended questions to be asked to individuals from four different groups—service recipients, community members, service providers, and BCHHS employees. They established how the information would be recorded and how interviewees would be selected.

During the summer of 2022, one-on-one interviews were led by Project Team members and a few community volunteers, all of whom were trained by the Beltrami Area Resiliency Team. The questions covered a range of topics—from identifying the most significant issues facing our communities, to topics on race and cultural experiences. Interviewees were asked to reflect on BCHHS programming, services, and impact.

During each interview, detailed notes were taken. When the interviews were completed, the Outreach Project Team reviewed and coded each answer in order to identify themes. Team discussion and reflection on all of the input was thorough, and they found the interview answers to be thought-provoking and enlightening. Themes definitely surfaced and particularly powerful quotes caught their attention. Each question’s findings are shared in the Results section of this report.

Key Takeaways:

The quality of each interaction matters. The biggest takeaway is that every interaction matters. Understandably, clients want to be treated with respect, empathy and understanding. Kindness and a nonjudgmental approach go a long way in creating a positive atmosphere where getting help is not stigmatized.

The reach and impact of Beltrami County HHS is widespread. Almost all people interviewed knew someone who had received services. They shared about the powerful positive impact of programs like WIC, food assistance, mental health case management, housing assistance and many others. This was a reminder of the importance of coordinating these resources well.

Improvements were noted. Members of all four interview groups noted impressive improvements in BCHHS over the past five to ten years. Strong collaboration with community-based agencies was identified as a key factor in that success.

Navigating the social service system is complex and can be frustrating. While County HHS cannot change federal and state mandates and rules, it is critical to support clients who are navigating through the system. Where process simplification can be provided and better support can be offered, action planning will incorporate ideas heard through these interviews.

A theme that emerged in all four interview groups was the importance learning about and honoring Native American history and culture. Staff members expressed a desire to learn about historical trauma, resiliency, racism and other similar topics. Interviewees saw this as an ongoing endeavor, not a “one and done” training.

There was a call to increase outreach and education about BCHHS services and processes. People wanted to know more about what was available for assistance and how to access it. Addressing needs preventatively would avoid the high human and financial cost of crisis situations. Employees wanted more information about services and processes in units other than their own in order to be more helpful to clients.

Most supportive services are concentrated in Bemidji, including BCHHS supports. People living in the outlying rural areas of Beltrami County face a transportation barrier and a disconnect from program awareness and access. More outreach and a satellite location were two suggestions.

Regarding the internal workings of BCHHS, employees reflected on the challenges and stress of their high workload, asking for more flexibility such as a hybrid option that allows for some work from home. They requested a more thorough onboarding process and an opportunity to learn about other BCHHS units so that they can improve their service to clients. Overall, they wanted their ideas for improvement to be heard and seriously considered.

The openness of this project was appreciated. Interviewees found this project to be a good start to the next level of change for BCHHS.

Already, these themes and other ideas expressed through this project have been incorporated into the BCHHS five-year plan. For example, action steps are in process to incorporate training on the topics that were clearly identified.

Looking back, the Project Team would likely approach some parts of this process in a different way; however, overall this was a solid project that created some unexpected outcomes. This is the first known use of this 100 Cups of Coffee tool by a County HHS department, and it was approached using mostly staff effort. Not only did this yield valuable information, but the teamwork displayed was outstanding and the collaborative process enhanced the agency’s goal to create a team-oriented atmosphere.

Section 2:

Project Purpose

Both nationally and locally, society is grappling with complex, sometimes overwhelming challenges. To better address those challenges, this project connects with those at the “heart” of the issues, listening with curiosity and respect to better understand community needs.

The philosophy of this project is that service recipients, employees, community members, and service providers have valuable insights about the complex social and health issues that BCHHS addresses. They also experience firsthand the work of BCHHS. These interviews were an opportunity to gather information and act on what was learned—re-enforcing strengths and improving where possible in the important work of serving Beltrami County. The goal was to answer the question “**What can BCHHS do to best support the needs of the community and its members?**”

Section 3:

Process

This project was modeled after the Beltrami Area Resiliency Team’s 100 Cups of Coffee project, completed in 2021 (<https://www.beltramiarearesiliencyteam.org>). Members of the Resiliency Team assisted with BCHHS interviews and project implementation.

About twenty-five employees representing all job types and units within BCHHS volunteered to serve on the Project Outreach Team. They participated at all levels—from writing questions to determining processes for interviewee selection; from conducting interviews to thoughtfully considering all input. Throughout the project, they worked as a team to ensure no one viewpoint could skew the data and eventual findings.

Prior to conducting interviews, Project Outreach Team members attended a training facilitated by Peacemaker Resources and Beltrami Area Service Collaborative. There they discussed the philosophy behind this one-on-one process, heard tips on facilitating interviews and learned how to record data from their conversations. Over a three-month period, Project Team members interviewed individuals from four different groups—service recipients, service providers, community members and BCHHS employees. Each group comprised about 25 percent of the total interviews. Interviews consisted of 11 open-ended questions.

Project Team members determined how representatives of each group would be “recruited” to interview. **Service recipients** were asked to interview as they entered the Community Service Building. **Service providers** were randomly chosen from a comprehensive list of entities that work with BCHHS’s social services, income maintenance, and public health units. **Community members** were approached at public spaces and events. **Employees** were chosen randomly from subgroups to ensure that no one unit or job classification was overrepresented. They were then given the option to participate. Both service recipients and community members were offered \$10 gift cards to honor their time and shared insights. Employees and service providers were interviewed during the work day.

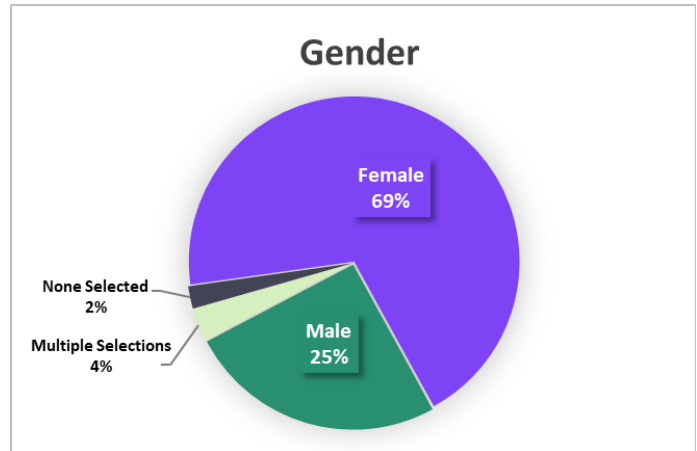
After the interviews, each answer was entered into a data file. The Project Team collaboratively reviewed and coded each recorded response for every question.

Top themes for each question were identified and quotes that exemplified those themes were noted. Especially insightful ideas were highlighted for consideration as well.

Team members were divided into groups to evaluate the themes in preparation for writing this report. Report drafts were reviewed by team members before this final product was published.

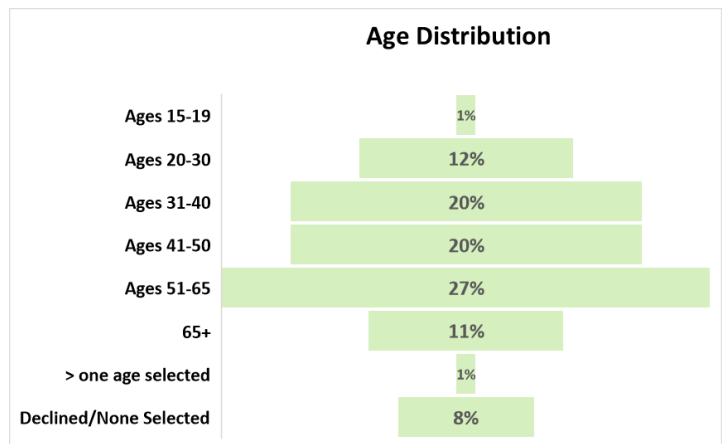
Demographics of Interviewees

Regarding **gender**, females were markedly over-represented in the data (see pie chart to the right). This held true for program recipients as well. Interviewers engaged clients who entered the Community Services Building to ask if they would like to participate. To the best of the interviewers' recollection, men were not declining an interview at a higher rate; rather, more women were entering the building. Another contributing factor was that females are represented at higher rates in the social services field, leading to higher representation in the service provider interview group.

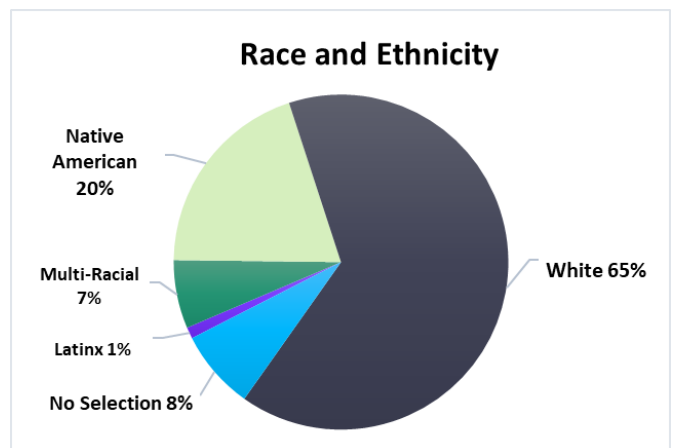


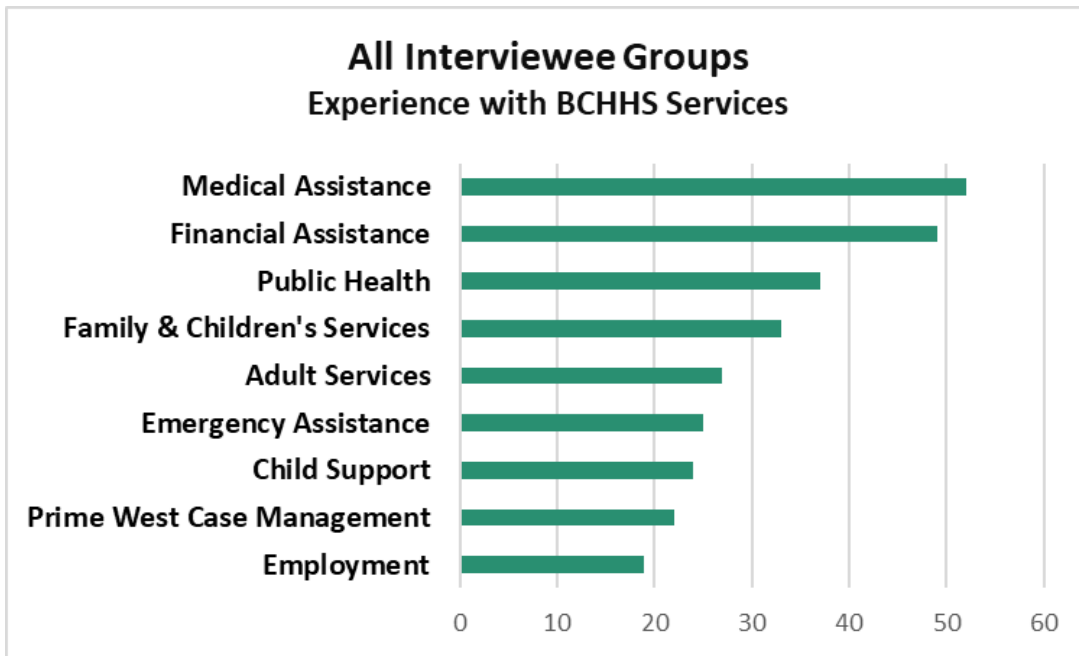
The “multiple selections” category signified service providers who interviewed as a group. The nonbinary population was unrepresented or possibly chose not to share that information.

Age of interviewees was a bit more evenly distributed with ages 51 to 65 claiming the highest percentage of those interviewed. This was, in part, due to the larger range of that age category (15 years) as compared to the other categories (5 to 10 years). Only 12 percent of interviewees were ages 20 to 30. That low representation was even more stark within the service recipient group (10 percent). As compared to other age groups, the younger demographic is likely more comfortable with receiving services using technology rather than visiting the Community Services Building, where interviews took place.

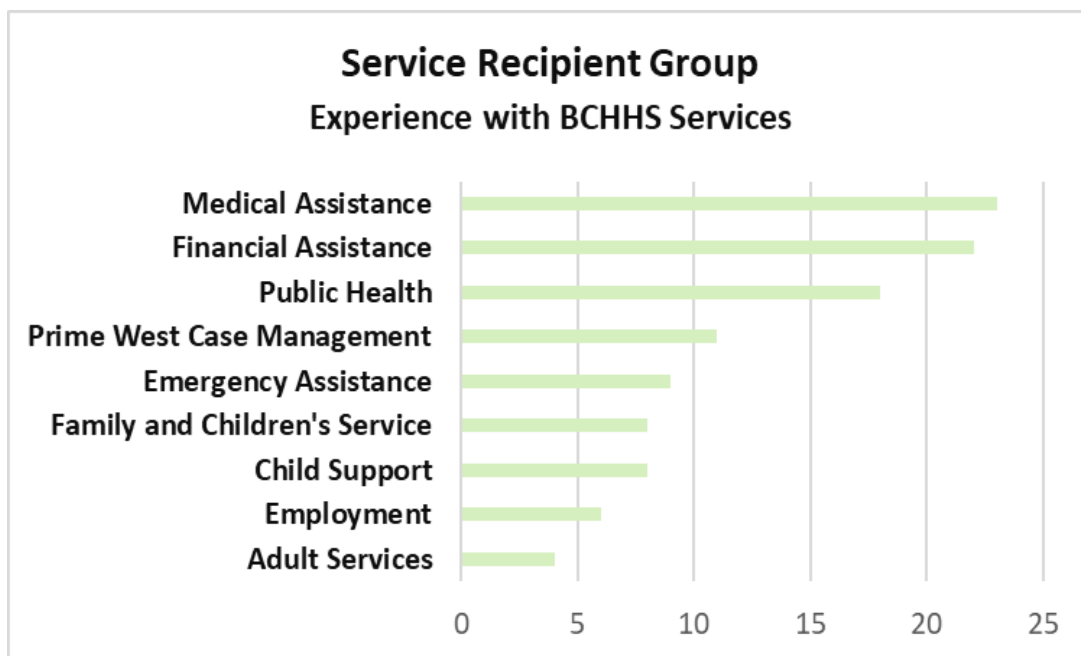


Race and ethnicity information was withheld by 8 percent of interviewees. The representation of Native American interviewees mirrors the demographics of Beltrami County. That said, 41 percent of the **service recipients** interviewed identified as Native American and 52 percent were either Native American or multi-racial.





Finally, interviewees were asked to identify the Beltrami County HHS programs with which they had experience. All but one service area had more than twenty interviewees who could speak to their experience. Medical Assistance, Financial Assistance, Public Health and Family and Children’s Services topped the list (see bar graph above).



Looking specifically at service recipients (see the bar graph above), the top three categories matched those of the entire population interviewed. Proportionately, fewer had experience with Adult Services and more had experience with Prime West Case Management than the full population interviewed.

Section 4: Results

Question 1a: In your opinion, what is the greatest need of people in our area?

The top three needs identified by interviewees were: 1) Housing; 2) Behavioral Health (includes mental health and substance abuse); and 3) Transportation. Service recipients placed food assistance in the top three needs.



Question 1b: What do you think Beltrami County Health and Human Services can do to help address that need?

Housing was overwhelmingly identified as the greatest need in Beltrami County. Interviewees expressed concern about the lack of affordable, safe housing. They noted that having stable housing is foundational to healthy and productive living. As one service provider said, “It’s hard to manage illnesses when you’re on the streets. How can children focus on learning if they don’t know where they will be sleeping?”

To address the housing issue, interviewees said the County should deepen and leverage its partnerships with other agencies. Special populations of focus were mentioned: single adults, veterans, families, elderly and those discharged from treatment or incarceration. In addition to emergency assistance, there was a call for deposit and rental assistance for those who are low income as well as those who do not quite qualify for existing housing programs or financial assistance. Others pointed to a need for homeless shelters and transitional housing with case management support.

Behavioral Health services were identified as a significant need by service providers, community members and employees. This issue primarily centered around long waits for care due to the shortage of mental health professionals. Interviewees suggested that the County could help alleviate some of this strain through better outreach and collaboration with providers to link people to available services. They also suggested “joining forces” with providers working in substance use services to address the backlog of assessments and treatment.

Having access to reliable **transportation** was described as “foundational,” yet lacking in Beltrami County. Many who mentioned the transportation issue called for more involvement from the County, either through creative community partnerships, more in-house coordination, or more direct assistance. The larger goal mentioned was expanding public transportation to a 24-hour service that extends throughout the County. Others pointed out that outlying, rural area residents struggle to access the concentration of services in Bemidji.

Transportation for the elderly and people with disabilities who live in rural areas is very much nonexistent. —*Blackduck community member*

Food insecurity was of particular concern to service recipients, who pegged this as the second highest need after housing. Those who mentioned food insecurity asked for more financial assistance to stabilize this unfulfilled basic need. Access to food was also identified as a concern for individuals living in outlying, rural areas of the county. Interviewees suggested a mobile community food shelf program as a partial solution. One interesting suggestion was that the County could help promote fundraisers for the food shelf or participate in a community garden.

Question 2a: Have you or someone you know needed to access or use County HHS services?

The vast majority of all interviewees answered “yes” to personally accessing or knowing someone who has accessed County HHS services.

Question 2b: What was the experience of accessing services like?

For this question, interviewees heard about a wide variety of interactions with past and present employees. A considerable number of individuals from all four groups described employee interactions as **positive** across the different programs offered through Beltrami County HHS. Several terms were repeatedly used to refer to employees, including “friendly,” “helpful,” “nice,” and “kind.” The services received were referred to as “life-changing” by several individuals and “instrumental in supporting a better life” by one service recipient. That said, there were challenges.

The County has been a great partner to support programs that reach the community. They are actively listening to the issues and working to resolve problems. —*Service Provider*

System navigation was identified as the most significant challenge. All four interview groups reported client issues with understanding complex policies and procedures. Interviewees resoundingly called for more personalized help in navigating requirements that are “confusing, complicated, overwhelming, stressful and lengthy.”

Frustration is a common experience. Clients often don't know who to contact if they need services or get confused by the phone system. —*Service Provider*

People with disabilities and the elderly were identified as having the greatest need for more assistance with understanding forms and processes.

With regard to **communication**, a considerable number of service recipients and service providers were frustrated with the phone system and an inability to reach a case worker in a timely manner.

“Communication” also referred to interactions with staff. Service recipients shared that it is hard to ask for help, and that they need a nonjudgmental, safe space to do so. Experiences with staff communication varied—sometimes within the same interview. “I left feeling like crap, stereotyped and judged,” said one service recipient, who went on to share that she had seen great improvement in her recent interactions with BCHHS.

The final theme for this question related to **staff education**. Interviewees relayed stories about getting misinformation or contradictory advice from County staff. Employees noted that they would like to learn more about BCHHS programs beyond their direct area of focus so that they can provide clients with better guidance.

Question 3:

Like other organizations, BCHHS has a mission statement to “promote community and family strength and work to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all Beltrami County residents.”

Question 3a:

What have you noticed that the County is doing to reach this goal?

Service recipients named programs such as food assistance, cash assistance, and the various types of case management as examples of the County fulfilling this mission. Helping families remain in their homes and ensuring the safety of vulnerable people were also highlighted. This outreach project—where employees are listening to community—was seen as a shining example of living out the mission.

Several interviewees talked about new technology options added by BCHHS that are helpful. These include text and email notifications and access to an online portal for document submission.

Many **service providers** commented on BCHHS’s collaboration and outreach with other providers and tribal agencies. They appreciated the County’s willingness to engage and promote initiatives such as “Dually Involved Youth” and “Housing Matters.” Service providers mentioned how well the agency responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and how committed BCHHS was to keeping the community safe.

Notably, the majority of **community members** and many service recipients could not answer this question because they were unaware of what the BCHHS does to work toward meeting their mission statement. This raised the question: How could BCHHS become more visible to the community, promote the services offered, and share how they impact wellbeing?

You guys are flourishing and meeting needs where people want and need help. — *Service Recipient*

Recipient

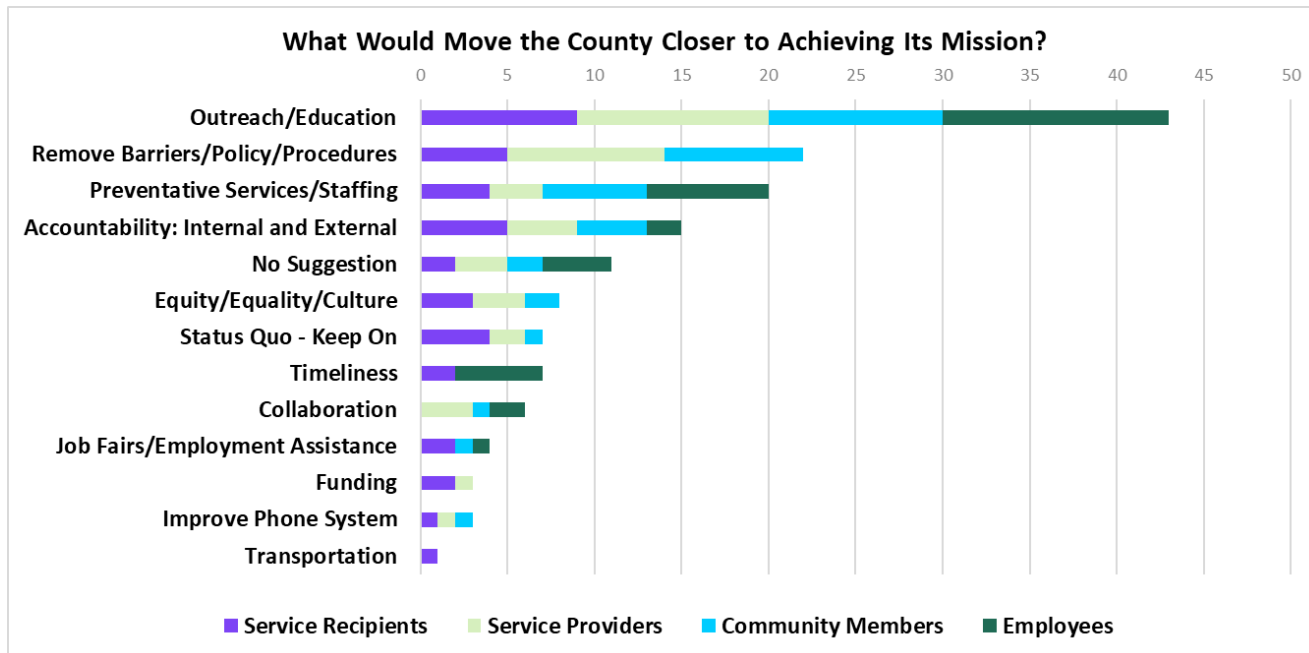
Medical transportation has been a godsend. — *Service Recipient*

Social workers and management are visible and working hard in the community. Employees are working with providers to problem solve and reach mutual goals. — *Service Provider*

Everyone works as a team. 'Is there anything else I can help you with' is something I hear from a lot of workers to clients.

— *Employee*

Question 3b: What is one change that the County could make to move them closer to the mission?



Nearly half of all interviewees felt that **increasing outreach and education** would help fulfill the mission. While BCHHS was recognized for its current outreach efforts, there was a demand for more. Hosting community events, job fairs or an open house were outreach ideas that would increase visibility of the County in the community. A round table discussion with Red Lake Nation was mentioned as a way to improve the relationship between the two entities and to benefit the community as whole.

Another recommendation was to **educate** the community about County services and programs—making that information readily available through various means. Interviewees suggested that BCHHS organize or attend community events to hear concerns and share about programs.

Employees also expressed a need to learn more about services provided across the entire BCHHS system rather than just their particular unit. They also asked for more training and knowledge of community-based resources to better help the individuals they serve.

All interview groups wanted more focus on **removing barriers** to care. This included addressing transportation gaps and assistance with obtaining vital documents, as well as providing guidance with complex policies and procedures. Several mentioned the importance of having a “live person” to answer questions and the confusion caused by the phone system.

Do more outreach. I got connected with services because I was lucky a family member helped me sign up. I don't think everyone else knows what resources are available to them. — Service recipient

Departments get pocketed and forget about resources outside of our agency—and in it as well. — Employee

Clients get sent here and there, have to talk to one worker for one thing, another for something else. They get different messages from different workers. One person should be their main contact person who helps pull everything together. — Employee

Community members and employees focused on a need for more **preventative services** and **increased BCHHS staffing**. Preventative services were identified as a strategy to avoid out-of-home placements. Interviewees recognized that additional staff might be required to provide more effective, individualized, face-to-face assistance. In their request to add staff, employees described the stress of high caseloads and how that impacts the quality of services and staff retention.

Provide a care coordinator to advocate for people who don't know where to go and who to talk to.

—Employee

Question 4a:
What would be/is important to you when you interact with Health & Human Services employees?



Respect was identified as the most important factor when interacting with Beltrami County for the service recipients, community members and employees. Respect was described as attentive listening and seeking to understand what people are going through. Employees who are respectful to clients were described as friendly, kind, compassionate, nonjudgmental, and empathetic.

For service providers, **communication** was the most important factor. Specifically this meant open, honest, and timely communication to both the clients and providers. They expressed the importance of BCHHS staff taking the time to explain processes and the “why” behind decisions that are made.

I need to be able to talk to the appropriate person and get accurate information.

—Service Recipient

Regarding job knowledge and navigating the system, service recipients emphasized the importance of staff knowing where to refer them for their unique situation—which program or other staff member would be helpful? Their accounts varied on whether or not this need was met.

Question 4b:

If you have interacted with BCHHS, what went well and what needs improvement? *EMPLOYEE question—When you consider how BCHHS employees interact with the public, what is going well and what needs improvement?*

Service recipients and service providers felt that **communication** was a strength when they have interacted with BCHHS. They appreciated the friendly greetings of front desk employees and the new option for staff to communicate with clients using text messaging.

On the other hand, service recipients and providers felt that **service accessibility** needed improvement. They wanted employees to be more informed of what other units and departments do so they can better assist clients with accessing those other services. In addition, they want the application processes to be more streamlined. Frequent comments were made about the phone system needing improvement and wanting more face-to-face contact and more assistance from Beltrami County employees.

Some employees thought that service accessibility, in general, had improved. The reorganization to provide a centralized intake area was recognized as helpful in greeting clients and connecting them with the correct person or unit. Other employees identified service accessibility as an area that needed improvement. They indicated that caseloads were too high and that a lack of community-based service providers put clients at higher risk. One suggestion was to have BCHHS offer services such as diagnostic assessments, psychiatric care and parenting groups onsite.

The majority of the community interviewees either had no suggestions on this question or they felt that things are generally going well with regard to interactions with the public.

Smile; be open. Have conversations. I want to feel welcome here.

— *Service Recipient*

Sometimes people are surprised and pleased to have things work out that seemed impossible.

— *Employee*

Good staff interactions but I need more help than I'm getting and I'm not sure what to do. I'm homeless, starving, and they set an appointment for me to come back in tomorrow. I have no transportation and it was hard enough to get here today.

— *Service Recipient*

Listen more to our stories and understand where we are coming from. — *Service Recipient*

Question 5:

Thinking about yourself or someone you know who has received County services, what impact did that experience have on their situation?

Interviewees gave overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding the impact of County services. Negative responses were mostly in regard to understanding and navigating processes.

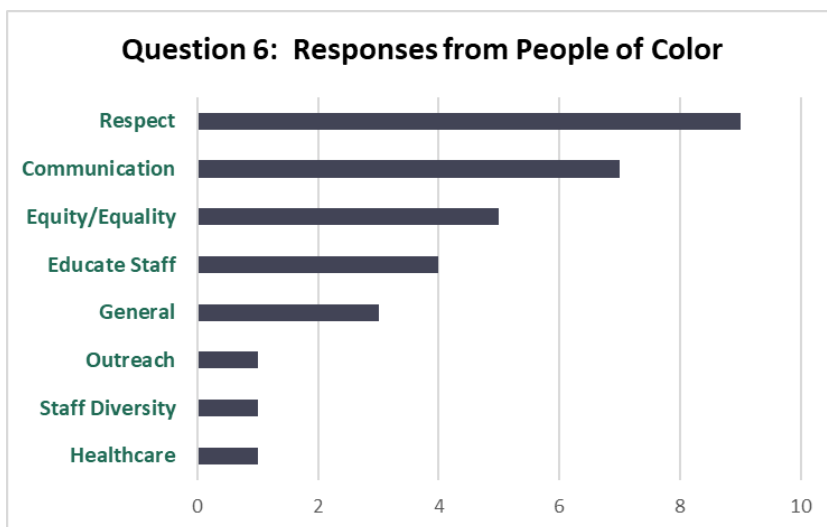
Service recipients, employees, and the community reported that **food, medical, and housing assistance** had the most notable impact. The impact of medical assistance stood out to service providers.

The stories shared for this question were a window into the importance of providing this aid. Service recipients used terms such as “**life changing**” and “**lifesaving**.” One person relayed how assistance gave her peace of mind to know that she would be fed, while another interviewee noted that without BCHHS help they would be living outside. Daycare assistance allowed one interviewee to continue working, and one person noted how getting help had “a ripple effect for family.” County case managers who had been particularly helpful were called out by name with appreciation.

**Question 6:
What do you think the County can do to better support community members who are Indigenous, Black, Latino or People of Color when they are accessing and receiving services?**

As with interview question 4, **respect** stood out in responses to this question. People of Color who were interviewed talked about the importance of how they are spoken to. They wanted to engage with staff who were open, unthreatening, nonjudgmental and informed about cultural ways. There was a call for staff education on historical trauma, poverty, bias, and cultural customs; similar training topics were also requested by employees.

Communication referred to several subjects, including a request for the County to provide printed materials in other languages. This would prevent unnecessary delays in receiving services and, in turn, lead to better outcomes. Communication also centered around staff asking clients about their cultural preferences. County workers who are well informed about culturally rooted services in the community could then share about those options and refer clients.

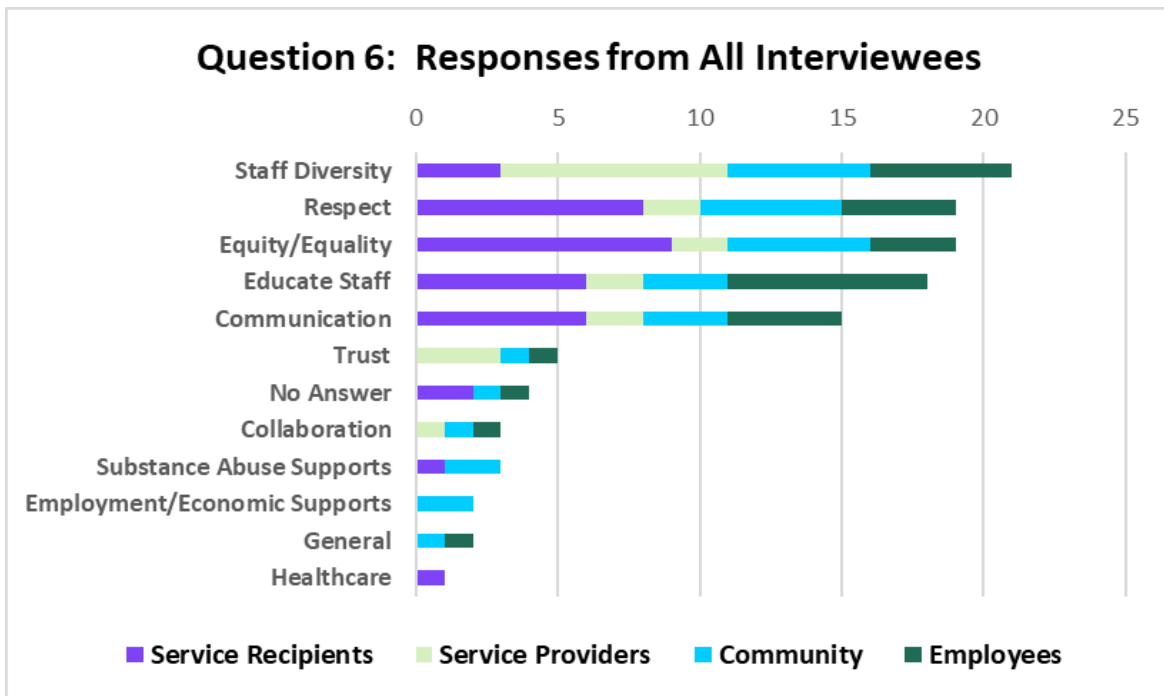


Equity and equality were mentioned in terms of avoiding stereotypes, respecting individual stories and understanding historical and ongoing trauma in this region. Interviewees also proposed that the County honor culture and create a more inclusive environment through art and signage in the Community Service Center.

Increasing **staff diversity** was identified as a top priority by the service providers, community members, and employees. Beyond hiring more diverse staff, they wanted the County to assess whether members of diverse groups felt supported in the current system—and then respond to any needs that arise.

Historical trauma is real and its effects are real. It is generational.
—Native American Service Provider

Service providers stressed the need to develop **trust** across races and cultures. One respondent emphasized the vulnerability of those who ask for help. Advice on how to achieve trust was centered around showing **respect** through a nonjudgmental, friendly, welcoming, and nonintimidating approach.



Question 7: What would be helpful for all Beltrami County staff to understand about Indigenous (Native American) culture, values, or experiences in this area?

Multiple Native American interviewees stressed the importance of **respect**, as opposed to stereotyping or looking down upon Native American community members. They expressed a need for **staff training** to understand their history and rich culture. Listening, being open to learn, and creating an inviting space for Native American service recipients were steps they identified to build trust.

Interviewees who were *not* Native American expressed an interest in more education about cultural practices, belief systems and history of the Native American community members. They specified that these trainings should be ongoing rather than a one-time event. Some staff members shared specifically what they have learned about the culture and want other staff to know.

Several interviewees suggested that County staff members attend cultural gatherings to learn and build trust through relationships. Others emphasized the importance of learning about the harsh history that led to **generational trauma** that continues to impact lives.

Interact with Indigenous partners. Learn what is going well with Indigenous people. —Native American Service Provider

Our culture and values are very important to us. Don't question it. Acknowledge differences and respect them. A lot of bad experiences happen in this area. You don't want to add to those bad experiences. —Native American Community Member

To understand the culture is to understand the person. — Native American Service Recipient

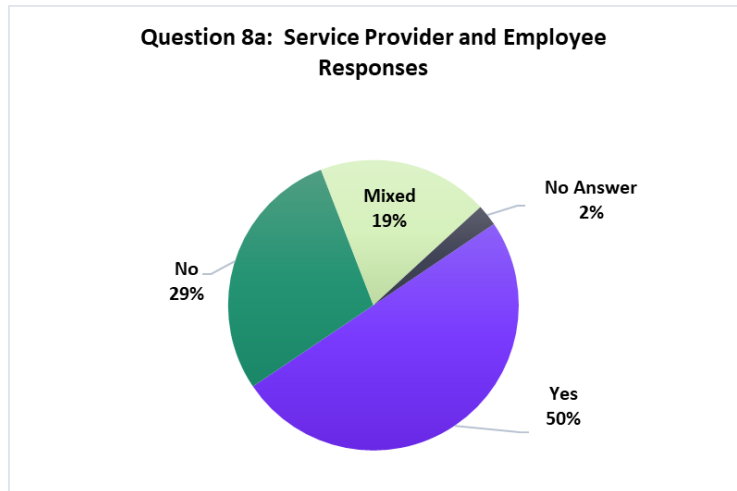
It can be difficult for us to trust any authority, anyone who comes from the government. There is lots of work to be done. —Native American Service Recipient

Seek to learn but don't rely on everyone to educate you. You need to do the work to learn. —Employee

**Question 8a:
Do you feel that partnerships between the County and community services providers are strong enough to address the needs of our area?**

Nearly a third of interviewees did not answer this question, many stating that they had no direct knowledge. Those who chose not to answer were primarily from the community and service recipient groups.

Thus, the pie chart to the right represents only **service providers** and **employee responses**. More than half (51 percent) believe that partnerships are strong enough to address the area’s needs.



**Question 8b:
What has worked well with these partnerships and what could be improved?**

Communication, coordination, and collaboration were the top three topics of discussion on this question. One interviewee shared, “There has been big improvement in the last 10 years with County partnerships. It’s less adversarial than it used to be.” Another noted that BCHHS leadership is at the table, trying to solve problems alongside community providers. Many of those interviewed made similar statements, but there was a call for even more County partnership.

One theme was the importance of communication between the County and various service providers about resource availability and program criteria. This happens through relationship building and participation in collaborative meetings. With high nonprofit staff turnover, communication can be especially challenging, but it was noted as critical, as it impacts whether clients have accurate information and whether helpful referrals can be made between systems.

Another theme was that the County should take the lead in coordinating partnerships and encouraging collaborative efforts. One interviewee suggested that the County initiate meetings with open dialogue and data on education, mental health, homelessness, chronic disease and other issues with an eye on collaboratively addressing them.

**Question 9:
What is something you know, that you wish the County understood and paid more attention to?**

The most common theme for service recipients was the importance of **empathy**. They wanted staff to understand more about the day-to-day struggle of poverty. Comments were shared about the shame of asking for assistance. Being met with kindness, understanding, and a nonjudgmental approach was appreciated. Employees and service providers agreed and pointed out the need for empathy.

Given the significant poverty of this area and skyrocketing cost of living, a concern about limited **resource availability** was a frequent topic for all four interview groups. Community members talked about the need for assistance funding to increase as the cost of living increases. Without that adjustment, daily life becomes a series of insurmountable barriers just to meet basic needs.

All groups agreed that the lengthy, difficult **process** of applying for and receiving benefits was a concern. One interviewee said that it is so difficult to navigate that people with extreme needs give up. The income maintenance unit case banking process where no single employee is assigned to a case was criticized as “not working for the clients.”

Employees wished that others understood the amount of **stress** that comes with the job. One staff member shared, “Some cases are tough and high need. This makes it hard to meet the workload.” Employees asked for more flexibility regarding work hours and the ability to do some work from home, believing that it was shown during the pandemic that this could be done. Some employees expressed that they wanted to feel more appreciated and heard by management.

A call for more programs and supports for **substance use disorder and mental health issues** was heard from all four interview groups. Interviewees also pointed out the high impact of prevention programming.

Another common theme from three of the groups was the need for **staff development** to help employees better understand and serve clients. Suggested topics for additional education and development included homelessness, crisis management and response, poverty, racism and stereotyping, the effects of early childhood trauma, cultural competence, and mental illness. Employees asked for more in-depth onboard training and support.

There is a lot of racism that goes on in the area. A lot of people are afraid to go into programs due to the fear of racism. The County should do workshops and talk about how they are here to help. —Community Member

I wish others knew how hard everyone works. [It is] hard to be personable and take time to explain when there isn't enough time to get work done.
—Employee

Most unwanted behaviors are trauma response. —Service Recipient

Incredibly impactful services are being provided here. This support increases the safety and quality of life for many. These services are essential and appreciated. —Service Recipient

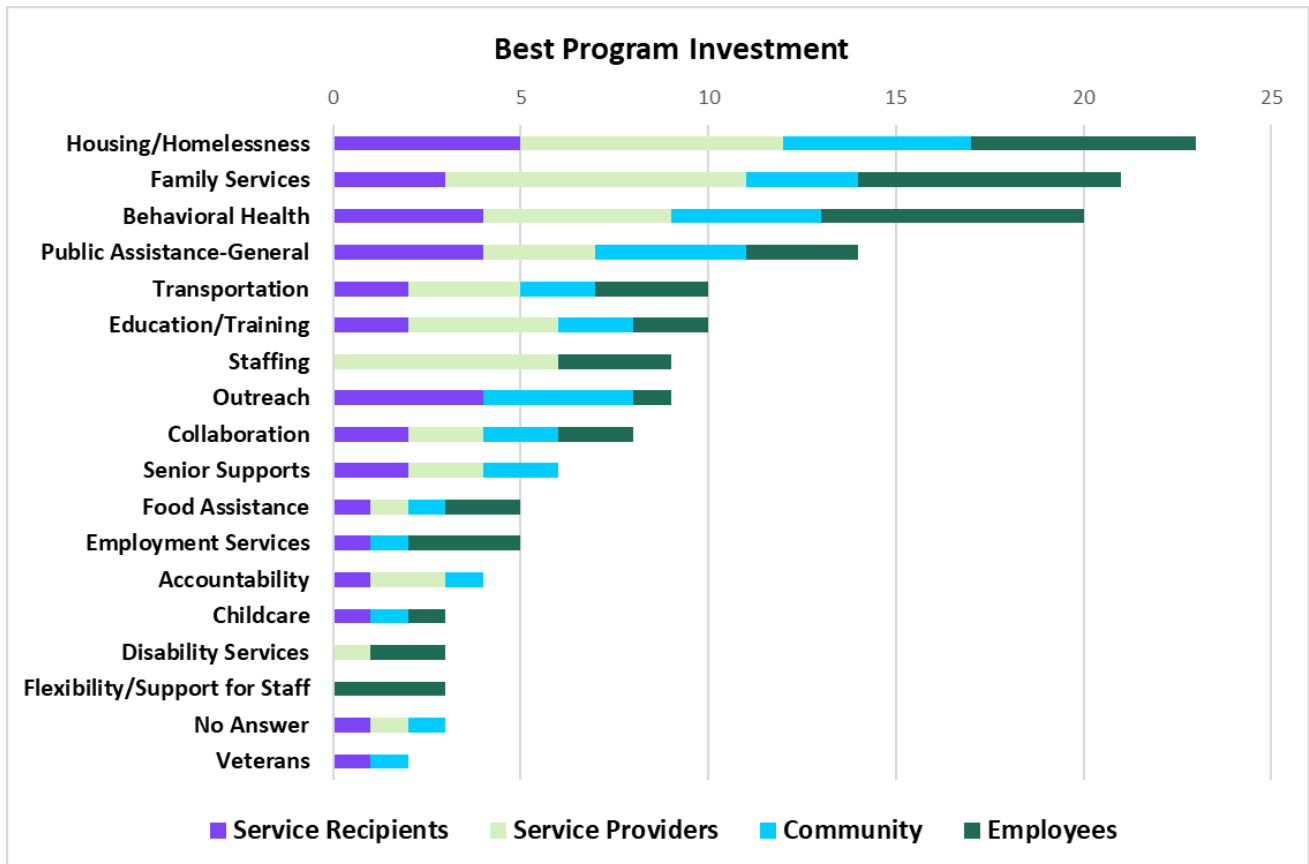
My ARMHS worker changed my life. It's a big problem how many people could use their help. We need more of them.
—Service Recipient

Focus on basic needs, food housing and medical. Bridge the gaps for services that might not be covered, help with needs not currently offered.
— Service Recipient

Asking for help comes with a lot of shame, getting assistance needs to be destigmatized. —Service Recipient

Question 10: Knowing that funding is limited, what do you think is the best program investment the County can make in Health and Human Services?

Interview groups identified the best program investments as housing, family services, behavioral health services, and public assistance programs.



Housing was identified by service recipients, providers and community members as the overall top need for which County funding should be utilized. Interviewees in every group pointed out the lack of affordable and livable housing in the area. They specified that the County should invest in housing programs, housing assistance and shelters.

Those who prioritized investment in children and families focused on assistance programs, including childcare and healthcare. The importance of providing quality family preservation supports, foster care, adoption, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment were also identified in this focus area. Intergenerational programs were favored as a strategy to prevent or end cycles of trauma.

Children’s Mental Health services are very important; they build a safety net.

— Service Provider

Service providers expressed the need to focus on **staffing** as a top priority. Community workforce shortages and staff retention issues have caused long waits to access to behavioral health services (mental health and substance abuse) in a time when those needs are sharply rising.

Question 11: Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Service recipients expressed appreciation in their responses to this question. One interviewee indicated that BCHHS has come a long way and that they are experiencing better service from County staff than they have in the past. A couple requests for more classes on employment opportunities and interview training were also heard.

Service providers indicated the importance of continued and improved communication between community agencies. One provider interviewed expressed that they have a strong partnership with BCHHS and that they understand each other's goals and needs.

Employees shared concerns about staff shortages and turnover. Some interviewees said that they enjoyed working at BCHHS and felt supported by leadership. One staff member asked for increased communication from supervisors regarding topics such as audit results and budget information.

Community members communicated their support for this County Outreach Project. They expressed a need for more outreach and education regarding what Beltrami County Health and Human Services has to offer to its communities.

Use multiple social media platforms and advertising to spread the word about the resources available and how to access them.

—Community Member

I feel well treated and well respected when I come in here. —Service Recipient

Without the services being offered, I would be lost. My daughter would not be able to live at home and would have probably millions in medical debt. —Service Recipient

Continue to do what you do because you help a lot of people.

—Service Recipient

Creating the time to hear and have conversations is important. Creating a welcoming space—Native American art, pictures, birch bark, eagles—goes a long way. —Service Provider

Our work is hard but we strive to do our best to help our community. I feel good about coming to work and enjoy my team and supervisor.

—Employee

Section 5:

Action Steps

Findings from this project will be incorporated into the BCHHS five-year plan, which will guide future service to Beltrami County citizens. While this project was making its way to publication, BCHHS already incorporated some of the key themes and ideas into the plan.

Those who contributed with their time and input can rest assured that their insights were helpful in answering our question: **“What can BCHHS do to best support the needs of the community and its members?”**

Section 6:

Discussion of the Project Process

Overall, the project went well and the ideas that emerged will be very helpful to BCHHS planning. That said, the process was time intensive. Setting and reaching firm project deadlines for this new endeavor was challenging.

Staff members who served on the Outreach Project Team were dedicated to producing an end-product that accurately represented what they heard in the interviews. Together they learned about the philosophy of this interview structure and techniques of interviewing. They wrote questions to get at the “heart” of the information they were seeking. They learned how to code qualitative data, analyzed the findings and worked on the final report. Staying dedicated to the team approach, all of these steps took time, but now a County-specific blueprint is available for replication.

Designating four different interview groups added a layer of complexity to each phase of the work. The 100 Cups of Coffee project that served as a guide for this replication had just one interview group. **If this project is replicated in the future**, writing a separate list of questions that just pertain to employees should be considered. Also worthy of consideration would be contracting with an outside agency for portions of the work.

Section 7:

Acknowledgements

We would like to sincerely thank the people that gave their time to be interviewed. Boozhoo to all service recipients who trusted that our Project Team would listen intently and that Beltrami County Health and Human Services would use what was shared.

This project could never have been completed without the commitment of our staff and partners. From the agency leadership that had the interest in pursuing this project to the many staff and community members that participated.

Special thanks to the Beltrami County Resiliency Team who inspired this project and to Wendy Thompson, Beltrami Area Service Collaborative, who assisted and offered technical assistance as we endeavored to make the information collected meaningful.

Appendix A:

Interview Questions

QUESTION 1:

- A. In your opinion, what is the greatest need of people in our area?
- B. What do you think Beltrami County Health and Human Services can do to help address that need?

QUESTION 2:

- A. Have you—or someone you know— needed to access or use County services? *(yes/no)*
- B. (If yes) What was that experience like?

QUESTION 3:

Just like other organizations, Beltrami County Health and Human Services has a mission statement to guide their work. Their mission statement is to “. . . Promote community and family strength and work to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all Beltrami County residents.”

- A. What have you noticed that the County is doing to reach this goal?
- B. What is *one change* that the County could make to move them closer to this goal?

QUESTION 4:

- A. What would be/is important to you when you interact with Health and Human Services employees?
EMPLOYEE Question– What do you think is important for HHS employees to consider when they interact with the people they serve?
- B. If you have interacted with the HHS, what went well and what needs improvement?
EMPLOYEE Question– When you consider how HHS employees interact with the public, what is going well and what needs improvement?

QUESTION 5:

Thinking about yourself or someone you know who has received County services, what impact did that experience have on their situation?

QUESTION 6:

What do you think the County can do to better support community members who are Indigenous, Black, Latino or People of Color when they are accessing and receiving services?

QUESTION 7:

What would be helpful for all Beltrami County staff to understand about Indigenous culture, values, or experiences in this area?

QUESTION 8:

- A. Do you feel that partnerships between the County and community service providers are strong enough to address the needs of our area?
- B. What has worked well with these partnerships and what could be improved?

QUESTION 9:

What's something *you know* that you wish the County understood and paid attention to?

QUESTION 10:

Knowing that funding is limited, what do you think is the best program investment the County can make in Health and Human Services?

QUESTION 11:

Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

