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*"Making A Difference Throughout Hamilton County"*

## **Executive Summary**

### **2016 Greater Hamilton County Needs Assessment**

How would you improve life in Hamilton County? That is the question the Enhance Hamilton County Foundation Board has been asking. As a result, we decided to support a community needs assessment to assist us in grant making, charitable endowment development, and community leadership.

The purpose of the Enhanced Hamilton County Foundation's 2016 Greater Hamilton Community Assessment is to identify the needs in the county. In collaboration with Power Up YOUTH, Upper Des Moines Opportunity, Ameri-Corps and the Community Ally, over 60 Hamilton County residents were interviewed to discuss their perception of the needs of Hamilton County and its residents. The results indicated the need to address many social service problems, cultural supports, and conservation/water quality issues.

The assessment is organized under the six philanthropic categories under the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines. These include: Arts and Culture, Community Betterment, Education, Recreation/ Environment, Health and Human Services, and Youth Development. Under each of these categories three community priorities are identified by the number of times interviewees mentioned them as a need. The following is a summary of those needs:

#### **Arts and Culture:**

- Hamilton County has a huge influx of Asian and Latino immigrants. All Cultures Equal assists in meeting the needs of those who are non-English speaking and persons integrating into the American culture. All Cultures Equal is a "cannot fail" organization and needs to be sustained.
- By preserving historic structures, we are able to share the very spaces and environments in which the generations before us lived. These structures from the past can be an asset in building a sense of community identity and pride and draw new residents and tourists into the county.
- There are many local opportunities to engage in Arts and Culture throughout Hamilton County. Even so, many of the interview participants believed the Arts were an underdeveloped resource.

#### **Community Betterment:**

- Transportation in rural areas and smaller communities were continuously cited as a need by the interviewees.
- Improving community connections among organizations to work on common problems together would bring continuing collaboration that would successfully address county issues that are resistant to change.



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- Making communities an affordable and safe place to live is the priority of many mayors in our communities. Maintaining city infrastructure, improving the health of our main streets, and cleaning up properties were cited. Community leaders also are looking for ways to work together with other communities to solve common problems and to increase volunteerism.

#### **Education:**

- Tutoring is a gap in services as identified by 26 service providers.
- Transportation in smaller communities, start-up funds, and finding locations for after school programs have inhibited some areas from developing after school programming for many latch key children.
- All Hamilton County Schools report the three barriers for learning are: more students reside in homes that are non-English speaking, high poverty of families, and mental health issues in parents and in students of all ages.

#### **Recreation and Environment:**

- By creating more physical and social environments, every community leader would like to provide their citizens with more opportunities to socially engage with others and to develop active healthy lifestyles.
- Farmers have made strides in conservation, wetland restoration and healthy water quality. However, there is still a concern to maintain these conservation efforts and enhance improvements.
- Maintaining Hamilton County park infrastructures has become a challenge since funding has been reduced by the government. Hiking trails, roads, buildings, canoe accesses and keeping weeds at bay take funding that is not always available.

#### **Health and Human Services:**

- Hamilton County is fortunate to have two substance abuse treatment agencies. However, treatment is costly to our citizens. Prevention is the key to keeping young brains healthy, creating safe environments to live and reducing mental illness in our residents.
- Addressing the high percentage of mental health issues in parents and in students were cited repeatedly by interviewees.
- Preventing hospitalizations from chronic diseases such as mental health, substance abuse, diabetes, obesity, hypertension and sexual health included educating the public on topics using Health Coaches, comprehensive sex education, teen clinics and other prevention methods.



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### **Youth Development:**

- Many of our teens are focused on technology and need the communication skills to interact face-to-face. Increasing adult-youth communications and interactions including youth assisting adults to solve community problems and adults learning more about technology will bring youth and adults together.
- Providing support to children of overwhelmed and disengaged parents trapped in family conflict, substance abuse, poverty and child abuse would reduce the generational dysfunction of families.
- There are a few mentoring opportunities in the county but a formal mentoring program does not exist. Formal mentoring programs select, matches and supports mentors with children who need it the most.

As the Enhance Hamilton County Foundation Board reviewed the community assessment during a special retreat, some of the topics that came to mind of the directors included (not all listed and not listed in order of importance):

- Mental health
- At risk families and children (drugs, alcohol, abuse of all types)
- Mentoring school children
- Poverty
- Bridging cultural differences
- Distressed single family dwellings
- Distressed Retail/Commercial property
- Drug/Alcohol abuse young and old
- Tearing down "community silos"
- Continuity between communities
- Water quality
- Building bridges with all possible philanthropists, small or large

In conclusion, our philanthropic foundation has three functions: grant making, asset development, and community leadership. We will be using the 2016 Greater Hamilton County Community Assessment to base our grant making decisions, to guide charitable interests and gift giving, and bring together leaders to work on common problems and initiate change.

If you are interested in reading the entire 2016 Greater Hamilton County Community Assessment, please go to the Resources page on our website ([enhancehamiltoncounty.org](http://enhancehamiltoncounty.org)).