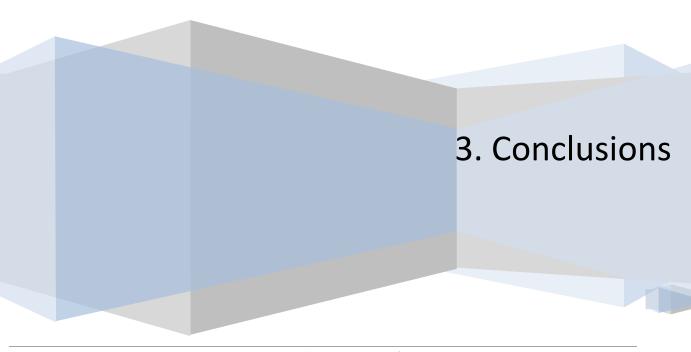
Texoma Council of Governments

2011-2015 Texoma Needs Assessment

A Study of Unmet Needs for Low-Income Texomans who Seek Self-Sufficiency



3. CONCLUSIONS

Through the experience with applying various approaches to qualitative research, we have gained a new appreciation for the study of such a broad and complex subject. The interviews point out complicating factors that Texomans experience on a day-to-day basis. Identifying the top needs does not do the experience of poverty justice because often a household is experiencing multiple setbacks at once that compound the effects of one another. Finding just one solution for their condition requires more than one avenue of attack.

Given the opportunity to conduct additional research there are several opportunities that we would have liked to have pursued, including:

- While we limited the scope of this study to identify and quantify the critical needs and services for low income Texomans who seek self-sufficiency, we are left with more questions about the causes and barriers to attaining self-sufficiency. Discussions with key informants brought up unique observations and feedback on the possible causes of poverty in Texoma. These causes tended to center around substance abuse, family violence, and a multi-generational culture of poverty. These issues could have come up in the open-ended critical needs question, but did not very often because respondents were only asked to consider the most critical needs and services in their communities.
- Explore the possibility that there is a disconnect between local perceptions of poverty and the actual experience of poverty in our communities. There are several aspects of this study that seem to indicate this could be an issue in Texoma. By surveying clients, service providers, and community members extensively about the most critical services and assistance for low-income Texomans seeking self-sufficiency, there appeared to be noteworthy differences in responses. Community members and service providers indicated employment and education as not services, while clients tended to indicate direct services such as utility bill assistance and food assistance over employment and education. Studies conducted in other parts of the country have indicated there is disconnect between general thinking about poverty and the individual experience. This

321

manifests in misperceptions on very basic trends in poverty such as the distribution of wealth as studies have shown Americans assume the distribution of wealth is more equal than it is in reality¹.

Investigate and identify differences societal causes of poverty, such as large-scale, socioeconomic factors, and individual causes of poverty, such as why a family can or cannot earn a family-supporting wage. The responses gathered in the primary survey questions do not lend themselves to interpreting the approach the respondent took in providing their answer. Again, if there is a disconnect between our perceptions of poverty that the experience of poverty, a specific look at this issue may lend interesting results.

With that said, the unmet needs and vital services identified in this study will be the basis of the Community Action Plan for services and expenditures through the year 2015. TCOG will continue to work with local jurisdictions and community organizations to create economic opportunities and improve quality of life for the Texoma Region. CSBG funds will support the Texoma Council of Governments and the offering of direct services (including education assistance and other supportive services) to low income Texomans to help alleviate causes of poverty in our region.

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322

¹ Norton, Michael I., and Ariely, Dan. *Building a Better American: One Wealth Quintile at a Time*. Accessed on October 12, 2010, http://www.people.hbs.edu/mnorton/norton%20ariely%20in%20press.pdf.

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324

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