



needs assets  
**Kenosha**  
**Racine**  
**assessment**

## Executive Summary

August 2010



Planning Council for Health and Human Services, Inc.  
1243 North 10th Street, Suite 200, Milwaukee, WI 53205  
414 224-0404 fax 414-224-0243 [www.planningcouncil.org](http://www.planningcouncil.org)

# COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENTS KENOSHA AND RACINE COUNTIES

August 2010

## Executive Summary

A healthy community is one in which the quality of life of all residents is supported across neighborhoods, age groups, ethnicities, cultures and abilities. In a healthy community, the most vulnerable groups have access to supportive institutions and programs that alleviate the negative social conditions that can undermine the entire community. There is growing recognition that living in poverty is one of the most stressful conditions, impacting not only those experiencing its effects but also the entire community. The Racine/Kenosha Community Action Agency (RKCAA) is an important resource helping to mitigate the negative effects of poverty on the Wisconsin counties of Racine and Kenosha.

Two community needs assessments were carried out by the Planning Council for Health and Human Services, Inc., in spring of 2010 to assist RKCAA in its mission to enable low-income individuals, in rural and urban areas, to attain the skills, knowledge and motivation to achieve self-sufficiency. The assessments examine data from a variety of sources—surveys and focus groups with low-income residents, focus groups with service providers, and key informant interviews—to develop an understanding of the key issues affecting individuals living in poverty in both counties. This executive summary identifies overall themes that emerged and points out similarities and differences between the two counties across the ten categories.

Both counties recently completed “Smart Growth” planning processes, and because the resulting long-range plans could have a significant impact on countywide decisions, they were examined in some detail for the preparation of the assessments. Loosely following the categories typically examined in a Smart Growth process, the needs assessments completed by the Planning Council bring together data for Kenosha and Racine in the following ten areas:

- Geography, land use and the environment;
- Demographics;
- Economy and employment;
- Transportation;
- Housing;
- Food security;
- Early education and children under 5;
- Education and school-aged youth;
- Elderly and adults with disabilities; and
- Public health.

Finally, there is a short list of some of the barriers that people perceive are preventing these issues from being resolved, along with a list of recommendations for future actions RKCAA, either on its own or in collaboration with others, may wish to take to continue to improve the lives of the low-income communities in Kenosha and Racine.

By examining the similarities and differences between the two counties, RKCAA can bring a big-picture perspective to its work in Racine and Kenosha, one that brings the communities together in new and exciting ways.

*“It is often said that Racine and Kenosha have their backs to each other. People say that Racine faces Milwaukee and Kenosha faces Chicago. Working together can be challenging at times.” (Key informant interview, 2010)*

The ability of RKCAA to engage all residents in efforts to improve the quality of life in Kenosha and Racine will help determine whether these two counties will work jointly on efforts to be healthy and desirable places to live for all residents in years to come.

## **Geography, Land Use & the Environment**

Kenosha and Racine counties occupy a similar geographic niche, with many miles of Lake Michigan shoreline along their eastern borders and rich farmland further inland. The I-94 interstate corridor that runs through the counties not only provides easy access to the Milwaukee area to the north and the Chicago area to the south, but it also neatly bisects the counties into eastern and western sections that are very different in character. The western parts of each county are much more rural and agricultural, while the eastern portions are more urbanized, with city centers and high concentrations of low-income communities.

Lakefront and parks. Findings of the Kenosha and the Racine needs assessments show that both counties recognize the importance of their Lake Michigan shoreline and plan to preserve and protect it. The cities of Kenosha and Racine also have plentiful public parks. Considering the high density of these cities, the existence of such open spaces can make an important contribution to the quality of life of all city residents, but most particularly to that of people living in poverty, who may not have easy access to transportation to visit open spaces in other parts of the county or state. The low-income individuals contacted as part of the needs assessments concurred, overwhelmingly agreeing in focus groups and surveys that they appreciate and value the area's lakes, parks and beaches as free and accessible open space where their families can interact and recreate together.

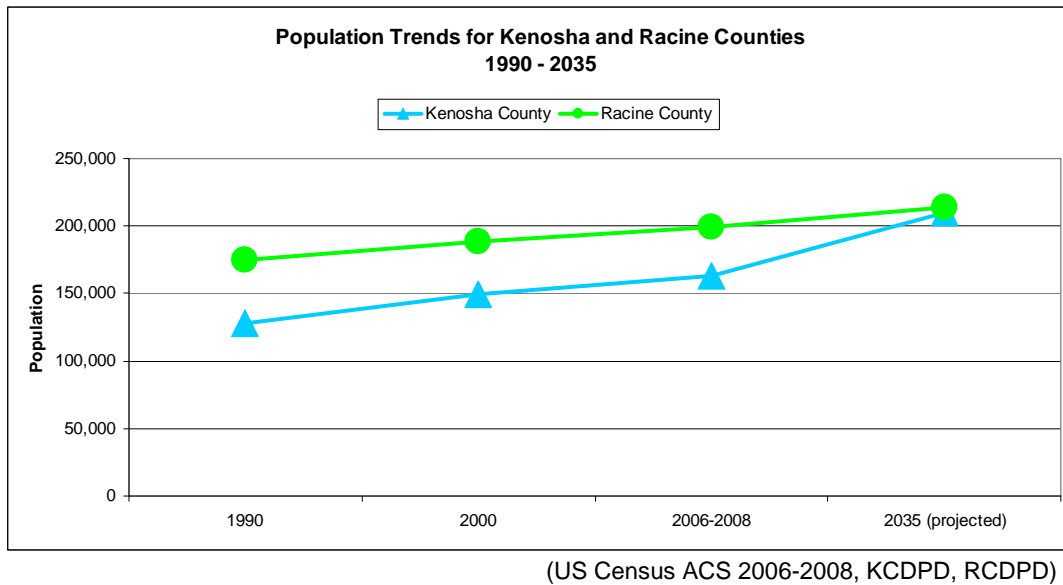
Air quality. Both Kenosha and Racine counties foresee a considerable amount of new development in the next 25 years. While such development can bring needed jobs to the community and possibly decrease air pollution regionally by keeping people close to home, it can also increase traffic congestion in the city, having a negative affect on air quality and public health for low income individuals confined to these neighborhoods.

Water quality. Planned new development in rural parts of the counties also has benefits in terms of bringing new jobs. However, paving over farmlands for new roads and parking can reduce the ground's natural filtering capacity, reducing water quality and eventually increasing the cost to provide potable water to area residents.

Contaminated sites. The cities of Racine and Kenosha have many old and abandoned industrial sites with soil and/or groundwater contamination including toxic and cancer-causing substances. The concentration of these sites in central city neighborhoods means that it is mainly poor and working-class people who face the increased health risks associated with exposure to such sites. On the other hand, such sites could be redeveloped for new commercial or industrial uses. Clean-up of such sites can lead to employment and environmental gains, leveraged investment, revitalized neighborhoods, and new sources of local revenue derived from previously unproductive land.

## Demographics

County population trends. According to U.S. Census American Community Survey 2006-2008 data, Kenosha County has 162,878 residents and Racine County has 198,870 residents. Over the next 25 years, due to its growing popularity as a “bedroom” community for the northern Chicago area, Kenosha projects 30% population growth; Racine projects more modest 13% population growth. The result is that by the year 2035, the populations of the two counties will be nearly equal.



Both counties predict the proportion of citizens aged 65 and above will increase much faster than will other segments of the population in the next twenty-five years. The Racine Smart Growth plan projects an 85% increase in seniors between 2000 and 2035 (20,000 additional seniors) and the Kenosha plan projects a nearly 100% increase (17,000 more seniors).

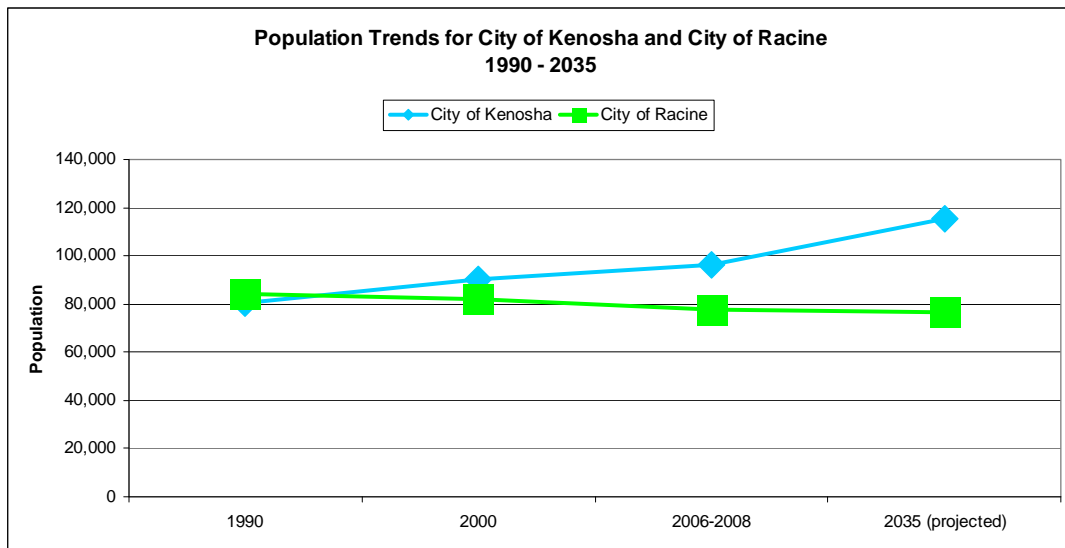
By 2030, all babyboomers will be 65 years of age or older. Persons age 65 and over would account for 20 percent of the County population in 2035, compared to 12 percent in 2000. Changes in age composition of the population may be expected to have many impacts, ranging from impacts on housing needs to impacts on the available labor force, particularly as baby-boomers move into their retirement years. (RCDPD 2009)

Another population of interest to RKCAA is children under the age of 5. The Racine Smart Growth plan projects almost no growth for this population between 2000 and 2035. In contrast, Kenosha County, which expects significant overall population growth, predicts a 38% growth in the number of children under age 5 between 2000 and 2035, or an additional 4,000 children.

City population trends. The 2006-2008 census data shows the City of Kenosha as having 96,205 residents and the City of Racine as having 77,890 residents. Persons of color are concentrated in the City of Kenosha (22% persons of color, or 20,545 individuals) and the City of Racine (35% persons of color, or 26,601 individuals). The majority identify as Black or African American (9% or 8,855 in Kenosha, 22% or 16,934 in Racine). There is also a sizeable Latino community in each city (13% or 12,312 in Kenosha, 18% or 13,967 in Racine). Other groups represented in smaller proportions include Native Americans, Asians, Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders and multi-racial individuals.

The City of Racine has lost 8% (down 6,400 individuals) of its overall population since 1990, and is the only city in the county that showed a drop in population between 2000 and 2006/08, so that the proportion of county residents who are living in the City of Racine decreased over that period. The Racine County Smart Growth plan predicts that the City of Racine will continue this downward trend over the next twenty-five years, losing between 1.5% and 3% of its population by 2035.

In contrast, the population of the City of Kenosha has increased 20% (up 15,853 individuals) in that same time period. Projections in the Kenosha Smart Growth plan show the city's growth rate for the next twenty-five years as staying at about the 20% level, adding approximately 21,000 people by 2035. Although this would be a substantial increase, these projections put the City of Kenosha among the slowest-growing municipalities in the county. For perspective, consider that Bristol East and Somers are expected to grow over 130% in that same time period and many other urbanized areas are projecting increases between 60% and 70%.



(US Census ACS 2006-2008, KCDPD, RCDPD)

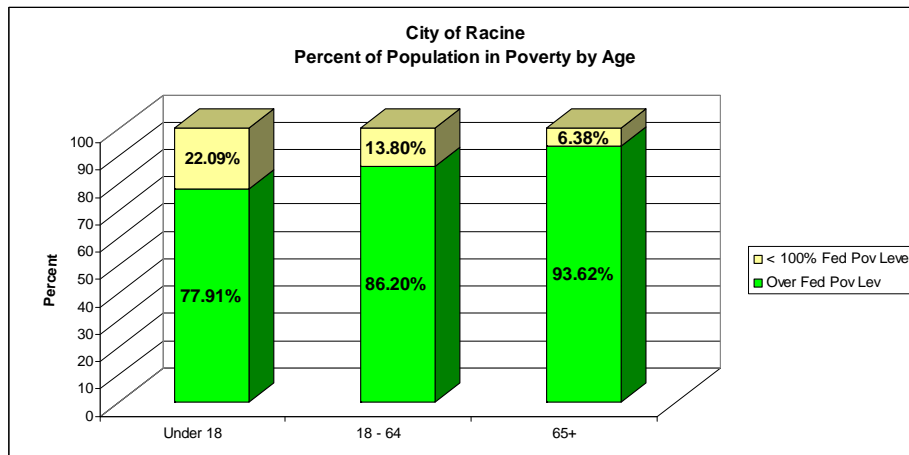
Residents over 65 have their own trend lines. In the City of Kenosha, the percent of the population that is over 65 has been decreasing over the past twenty years. In the City of Racine, the percent of the population that is over 65 decreased between 1990 and 2000, but rose slightly between 2000 and 2006/08. These downward/flat historic trends within the cities are significantly different than the huge upward trends projected countywide for seniors years cited above.

The percentage of both cities' populations that is under the age of 5 has fallen slightly over the past twenty years. Based on the Smart Growth plan projections for overall population change in these cities in the next twenty-five years, the City of Kenosha should see moderate growth of around 20% in its population of children under age 5 in the next two decades and the City of Racine should see this population stay nearly unchanged.

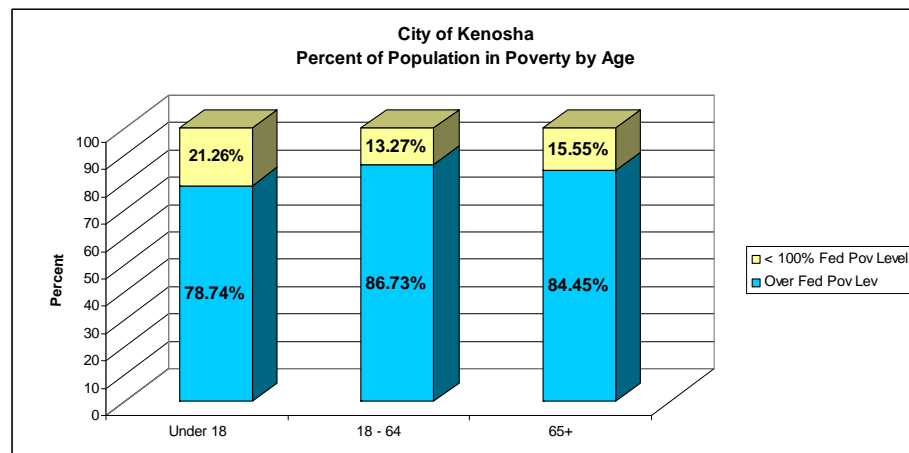
## Economy & Employment

According to the Center on Wisconsin Strategy, the current recession is noteworthy in its severity when compared to the three most recent downturns of 2001, 1990 and 1981. Like the rest of the state, Kenosha and Racine have been strongly impacted by the effects of the ongoing economic recession. Data from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development shows that since 2007 and accelerating throughout 2008 and 2009, both counties have lost jobs in most sectors and wages have stagnated or gone down. Job recovery is expected to take many months, if not years. "After the 2001 economic recession, it took Wisconsin twenty-six months before job numbers began to increase again . . . it was fifty months before the state's jobs recovered to pre-2001 levels." (Wi DWD 2009).

Poverty rates by age. The most up-to-date poverty data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (2006-2008) does not reflect the full effect of the recession, so the current poverty rates can be assumed to be even higher than reported here. In both counties, poverty is concentrated in the urban areas of the cities of Kenosha and Racine, which have identical 15% poverty rates. In these two cities, the highest poverty rates are experienced by youth; about one in five children under 18 here lives below the federal poverty level.



(US Census ACS 2006-2008)

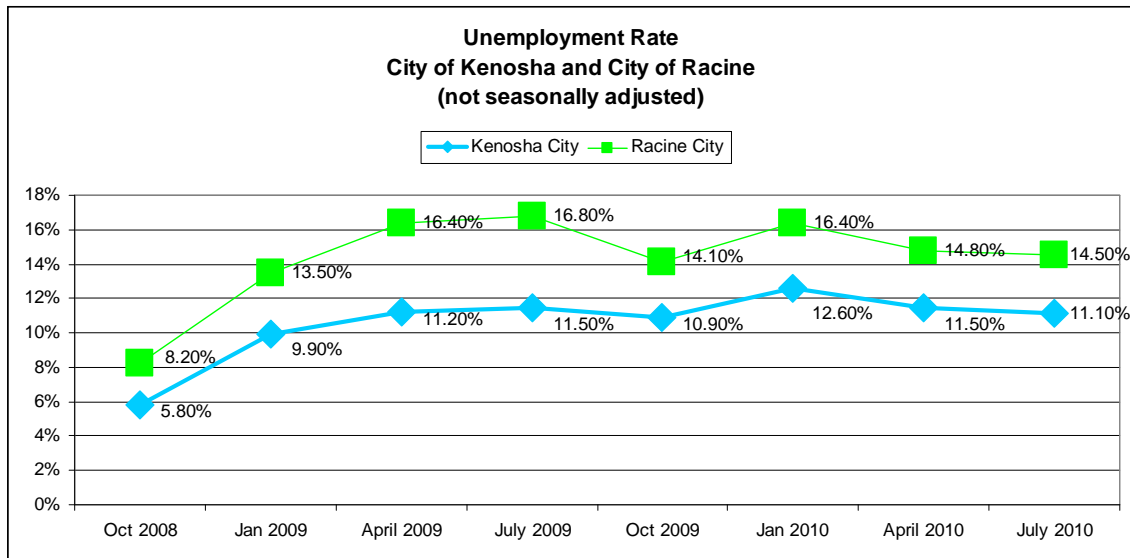


(US Census ACS 2006-2008)

Examining sub-groups, in the City of Kenosha, the highest poverty rate of any age group is experienced by children under the age of five (24% or 1,756 children), while in the City of Racine youth ages 5-11 have the highest poverty rate (24% or 1,948 youth).

Poverty rates by race/ethnicity. Of those living below the poverty level in both counties, the majority are white (63% or 11,868 in Kenosha, 56% or 12,077 in Racine). In the City of Kenosha, whites also make up the majority of persons living below the poverty level (58% or 8,498) but in the City of Racine, whites make up just under half of low income individuals (45% or 5,723). Poverty affects the races disproportionately; persons of color in both counties are more likely to be living in poverty than are white residents. Median household income for African American families in the City of Kenosha (\$30,533) is one-third less than that of White families (\$49,116). The ratio is similar in the City of Racine.

Jobs. Manufacturers have historically provided both the largest number of jobs in Racine and Kenosha. That has been changing and now education and health care are employing more people. The days of large employers offering high wages and good benefits are over: now there are a high number of small firms paying low wages in both counties. The recession has caused unemployment to increase in both major cities, as shown in the chart below.



(WiDWD 2009-2010)

The focus groups, surveys and key informant interviews conducted for the needs assessments all concurred that the need for jobs is one of the top concerns for people living in poverty in the area. Many individuals mentioned the Kenosha Jobs Center, the Racine Workforce Development Center and the Spanish Center as important “one-stop shops” addressing the needs of people in poverty. Available job programs for youth were seen as positive but limited in the numbers of youth served. Job-related concerns identified by focus group participants and key informants during the needs assessment included:

- Lack of jobs that pay a living wage;
- Lack of jobs that offer career paths;
- Individuals lacking the soft skills required for employment;
- Difficulty getting needed education to meet job requirements; and
- Lack of other items needed to get and hold a job (phone, computer, driver’s license).

## Transportation

Lack of public transportation does not affect all populations equally. People living on low incomes, the elderly and people with disabilities rely more on public transportation than do other groups. Often living far from jobs and services like medical care, these individuals suffer disproportionately from the lack of public transportation in Racine and Kenosha counties. In focus groups conducted with low-income individuals for this report, and also in key informant interviews, transportation was frequently mentioned as a significant challenge in both Kenosha and Racine.

Buses. Many of the new jobs being created in Racine and Kenosha counties are along the I-94 corridor in new business parks, yet buses do not travel there from central city neighborhoods where many low income persons need jobs. In particular, the lack of buses connecting the cities with the parts of the counties that are west of the interstate is perceived as a major challenge, as is the fact that buses do not run very late or very frequently. The focus groups revealed that low-income residents also feel the buses do not go to places they need to go, such as Walmart in Kenosha, which is a one-stop shop not only for food and clothing, but also for medication. The lack of public transportation between the eastern, urbanized sections of the counties and the western, rural areas also affects many low income individuals—particularly children—living in central city neighborhoods in Racine and Kenosha by limiting their access to open and recreational spaces. This restriction could have consequences in terms of reducing the likelihood that these individuals will be able to be physically active, contributing to other problems such as obesity. On a positive note, some City of Kenosha buses have bike racks, which can help city residents access bike paths and various parts of the city more easily.

High-speed rail. Similarly, a lack of rapid and inexpensive train access to the much larger (and higher-paying) Milwaukee and Chicago job markets constrains low-income Racine and Kenosha job seekers.

## Housing

Homeownership. The current economic recession has caused large increases in housing foreclosures nationwide, and Kenosha and Racine are no exceptions. Both counties saw foreclosures grow to record numbers in 2007 and 2008, before the recession had fully hit. Comparing percent change in foreclosures between the first quarter of 2009 and the first quarter of 2010 shows that the problem is worse in Racine County. Experts agree that low-income communities are bearing most of the burden of the current foreclosure crisis. Vulnerable and less financially secure consumers have been principal targets for subprime loans, for instance, women are more likely to receive subprime loans than men (Fishbein 2006).

Income & Housing. Homeownership is commonly seen as an important step out of poverty, so the current foreclosure crisis is a setback after several years of economic expansion through the early 2000s. Rental payments for nearly half of low-income residents in the cities of Racine and Kenosha consume more than 30% of their income, the benchmark for what is considered affordable rent. Households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing have less money available for other important expenses, like utilities, food and medications. In a survey, one-third of Kenosha low-income respondents strongly agreed that getting help paying utility bills is a challenge.

Government programs meant to assist individuals to find affordable housing have huge waiting lists. The waiting list of the Racine County Housing Authority is over 1,800 households. In Kenosha County, the waiting list for subsidized housing is about 1,000 households. In focus groups, low-income residents often mentioned the waiting lists for housing as a significant problem and expressed a desire for more assistance in locating affordable housing.

In the key informant interviews and the focus groups, access to and the availability of affordable, safe, and decent housing was mentioned frequently as a need for people in poverty. Housing vouchers were described as limited and some neighborhoods with less inexpensive housing options were described as having some safety concerns.

Quality of Neighborhood Life. The increased number of foreclosed houses means people are living in neighborhoods with more vacant buildings, which can in turn indicate an increased risk of burglary and robbery (Wilson 2008). Such situations bring about further decline to already at-risk neighborhoods, and can undo any progress the cities of Racine and Kenosha may have made during the relatively prosperous 1990's and early 2000's (Wilson 2008).

To combat such decline, many police departments subscribe to the "broken windows" theory, which posits that physical signs of disorder in a neighborhood such as broken windows, graffiti, or abandoned buildings actually create apathy and fear among residents. To avoid an escalating descent into decay and violence, police departments, social welfare agencies and neighborhood groups are encouraged to monitor such minor crimes, repair physical damage quickly, and find new uses for vacant buildings as quickly as possible (Wilson 1982).

Other theories argue that physical and social disorder are the results of crime rather than the cause. These theories posit that crime increases when social ties are weak, or when neighborhoods experience a convergence of poverty, informal organizations that sponsor criminal activity like gangs and illegal activities like prostitution or drug sales (Tuthill 2008).

It is also worth considering whether the current pattern of widespread housing foreclosures, many occurring in previously stable, suburban areas, could spread problems like crime to new parts of Racine and Kenosha counties. Will crime increase as incomes fall and vacancies proliferate? For example, in the City of Charlotte, North Carolina, police officers noticed that entire suburban neighborhoods with many vacant houses in foreclosure were beginning to show signs of disorder and blight similar to central city neighborhoods.

Quality of Housing Stock. A small percentage of housing stock in the two counties studied is substandard, and the evidence shows that lower income households are more likely to live in housing with problems. Lead paint, in particular, is a problem in both the City of Kenosha, where over 20,000 housing units are estimated to contain lead paint, and the City of Racine, where the number is about the same. Both cities have successful lead testing for children and lead abatement projects, but due to the numbers of affected housing units, it will be many years before the problem can be eliminated.

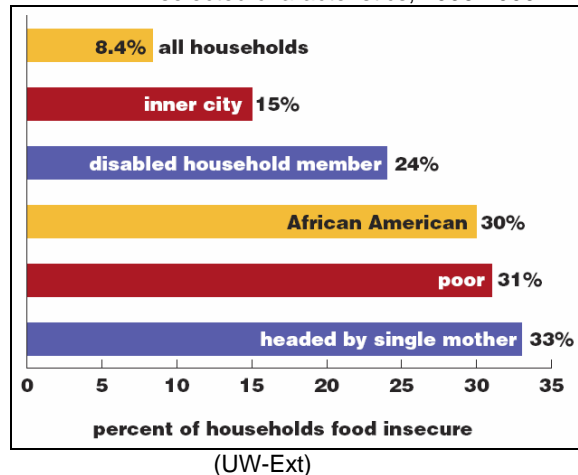
Homelessness. Pinpointing the exact number of homeless individuals is difficult, but area providers of services to the homeless estimate there are at least 1,200 such individuals in Racine and about 2,000 in Kenosha, about half of whom are children. Veterans make up a unique category of homeless individuals because they are more likely to have special needs such as mental illness.

## Food Security

Nationally. According to the USDA, food insecurity—defined as not having enough food for an active, healthy life—is an increasing problem across the country. In 2008, 14.6% of households experienced food insecurity, up from 11.1% in 2007. Typically, households classified as having very low food security experienced the condition in seven or eight months of the year, for a few days in each of those months. Rates of food insecurity were substantially higher than the national average for households with incomes near or below the Federal poverty line, households with children headed by single women or single men, and Black and Hispanic households. Food insecurity was more common in large cities and rural areas than in suburban areas and other outlying areas around large cities.

Food security in Wisconsin. More than 60% of Wisconsin food pantry clients report four or more visits per year, and 27% report ten or more visits per year. Elementary school families in Wisconsin that are food insecure are as likely to report food pantry use as food stamp receipt (approximately 35%) (WFSC 2008).

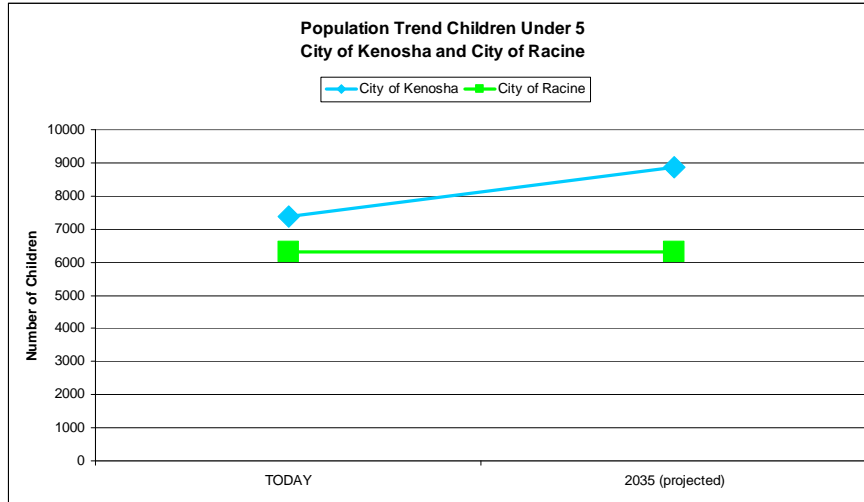
**Food insecurity in Wisconsin:** Rates among households with selected characteristics, 1996-2000



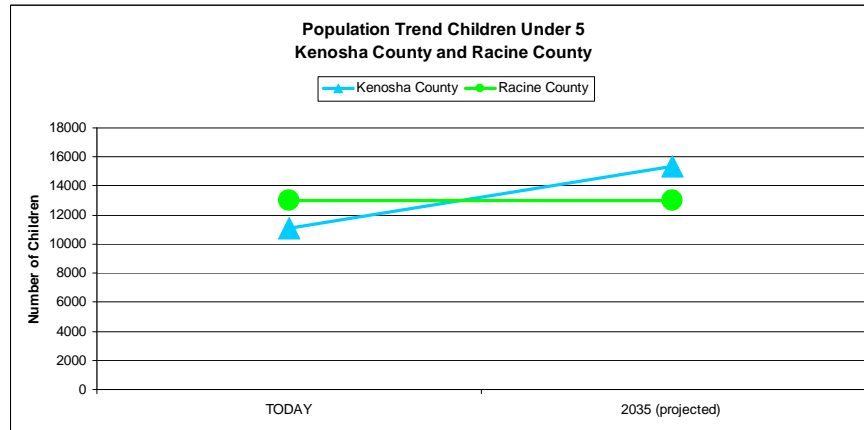
Food security locally. In Racine and Kenosha, households receiving federal food aid are concentrated in the cities of Racine and Kenosha, and such programs reported increased enrollments from fiscal year 2009 to fiscal year 2010. The cities' school districts reported increased numbers of children enrolling in the free or reduced lunch and breakfast programs in the 2009-2010 school year. Food pantries in both cities are also reporting increased usage. On a positive note, several area farmer's markets participate in the WIC Farmer's Market Nutrition Program, which helps low-income families access fresh fruits and vegetables during the growing season.

## Early Education & Children Under 5

**Demographics.** As mentioned earlier, Kenosha and Racine are projecting different growth patterns for this population through 2035, as seen in the two charts below. In both the City of Racine and the City of Kenosha, nearly one-quarter of children in this age group lives in poverty, higher than the rates for both the counties and for the state.



(US Census ACS 2006-2008, KCDPD, RCDPD)



(US Census ACS 2006-2008, KCDPD, RCDPD)

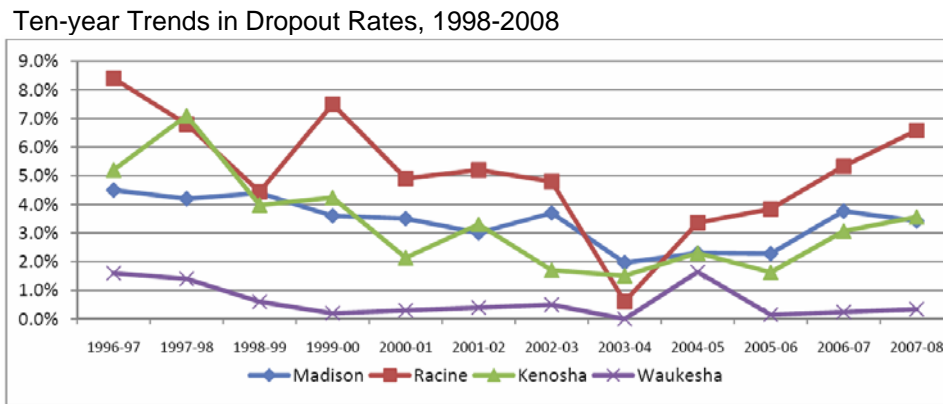
**Children with special needs and disabilities.** It can be estimated that at least 15% of children in this age group in Racine and Kenosha have special needs or disabilities, based on statewide data. Children living below the federal poverty level are more likely to have a disability than are other children (17.7% v 14.8%). In focus groups, Racine low-income residents said it was difficult to find day care centers that would take children with autism or other complex needs.

**Childhood obesity and physical activity.** Documentation of the Racine Head Start program shows that obesity among Racine-area children is increasing. This is similar to statewide trends and is probably also true for Kenosha-area children.

## Education and School-aged Youth

**Demographics.** Youth between the ages of 5 and 18 make up about one-fifth of the populations of the cities of Kenosha and Racine. In both cities, about one in five young people in this age group lives in poverty, higher than the county and statewide rates.

**Educational achievement.** According to a 2009 report by the Public Policy Forum, Wisconsin's—and more specifically Southeastern Wisconsin's—achievement gap between the races in educational outcomes is consistently wider than the average racial gap across all states. The same report shows that racial disparities among Southeastern Wisconsin student cohorts in both reading and math WKCE scores remained about the same between 2004 and 2009. On WKCE reading and math scores, as well as on several other indicators including number of students taking the ACT test, students in the Kenosha Unified School District (KUSD) are doing better than are students in the Racine Unified School District (RUSD). One example of the differences between the districts can be seen in the chart below, which compares dropout rates over a recent ten-year period.



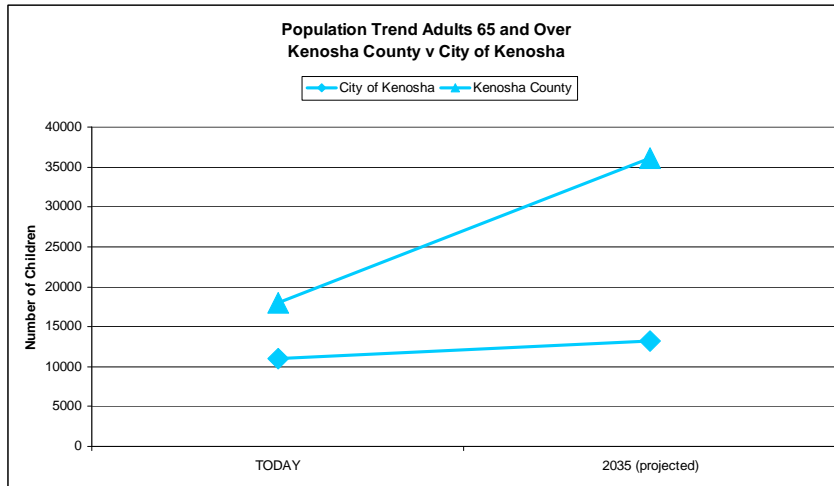
(Public Policy Forum 2009)

**Youth with special needs and disabilities.** In both KUSD and RUSD, the concentration of youth with disabilities is higher than it is in the school districts west of the interstate. KUSD has a slightly lower percentage of students with disabilities (13% or 2,976) than does RUSD (17% or 1,176). The most frequent disability found in KUSD students is special learning disability; in RUSD the most frequent disability for RUSD students is speech language impairment. In focus groups, low income parents said schools do not listen to parents of children with disabilities or involve them early enough when behavior problems first start. Parents also said there are often long waiting lists for services for children with special needs.

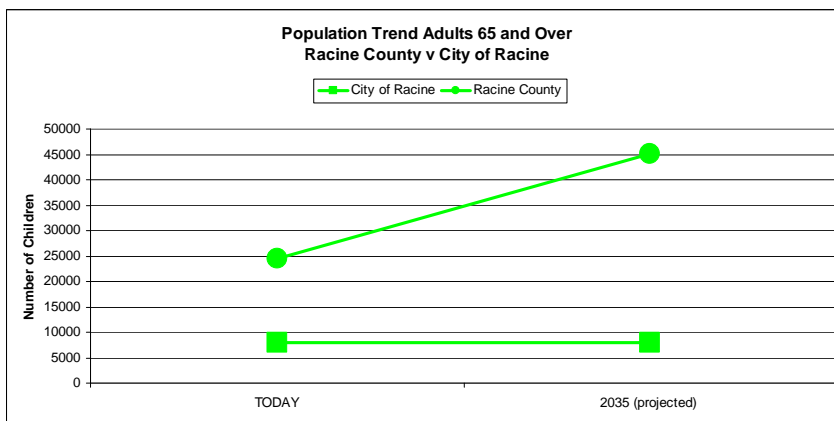
**Youth-serving agencies.** Focus groups with service providers and low-income residents revealed that more youth centers and programs for youth are needed such as group homes, mentoring, pregnancy prevention programs, programs outside of the central city, substance abuse prevention programs, and bilingual programs. There were also questions from the focus group with residents about the competence of youth agency staff, background checks and adequacy of supervision in some instances.

## Elderly and Adults with Disabilities

**Demographics.** In both Kenosha and Racine Counties, about one in ten residents is an adult age 65 or over. The City of Kenosha has a higher percentage of seniors living in poverty than does Kenosha County (14% v 11%). The opposite situation exists in Racine, where the percentage of low-income seniors in the City of Racine is lower than the percentage in the County (6% v 12%). Over the next 25 years, Kenosha County projects an increase of nearly 100% in the number of seniors, and Racine County projects an increase of over 85%. Much smaller increases in the elderly population are projected for the region’s major cities, shifting the concentration of elderly away from the cities and into the rural parts of both counties.



(US Census ACS 2006-2008, KCDPD, RCDPD)



(US Census ACS 2006-2008, KCDPD, RCDPD)

**Unique needs of this population.** The age group with the highest percentage of people with disabilities is seniors 65 and older, therefore as the populations of Racine and Kenosha age it is reasonable to assume that the number of individuals with disabilities will also increase. Transportation, housing and health care are top needs for both the elderly and people with disabilities. In a focus group, seniors noted that these services are not very convenient and often are not accessible for people with disabilities. Both low-income and elderly focus group participants said finding affordable and accessible housing in the neighborhoods where they want to live is often a problem. They also said that even with Medicare Part D, paying for prescription drugs is a serious problem for many low-income seniors.

## Public Health

Access to health care. Recent legislative efforts at the federal level may eventually improve access to health care, but currently many Americans lack such access. According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, younger adults ages 18 to 44 are more likely to be uninsured than other age groups; 14% in this age group were uninsured in 2007. The same source says Hispanic adults ages 18 to 64 were more likely to be uninsured in Wisconsin in 2007 than were non-Hispanic black and non-Hispanic whites of the same age group and black adults were more likely to be uninsured than whites in the same age group.

Statistics for Kenosha County show that several years ago, the percent of uninsured residents was higher than the state average, and the same was probably true in Racine County as well. However, in recent years those percentages have been falling, possibly as a result of Badger Care Plus. This health insurance program operated by the state of Wisconsin is considered a national leader in attempting to cover all children in the state. The program was expanded in July 2009 to cover adults without dependent children but was forced to stop accepting applicants less than four months later after receiving 500 to 600 applications a day.

- The BadgerCare Plus Core plan now provides basic coverage for 60,000 adults who do not have dependent children. The state pays about 38% of the cost of that program. Under health care reform, the federal government initially will pay the full cost, with the amount eventually declining to 90% by 2019 (MJS 2010)
- BadgerCare Plus now provides coverage to adults with dependent children (769,525 people) who live in families with incomes of 133% to 200% of the federal poverty level, or \$29,326 to \$44,100 for a family of four. The state typically pays about 38% of the cost. Under health care reform, the federal government potentially could pay the full cost of providing insurance for those adults. (MJS 2010)
- BadgerCare Plus now has a waiting list of 46,000 people; national health reform should eventually cover most of these individuals (MJS 2010)

Despite the availability of these programs, focus group participants and key informants alike stated that there is a need for more medical providers to accept BadgerCare Plus, a need to increase the number of dentists, and a need for dollars to cover out-of-pocket expenses for medications or co-pays.

Pregnancy and childbirth. Both Racine and Kenosha have teen birth rates that are double the state average. The counties also have large disparities between the black and white infant mortality rates, with the rate for blacks three to four times higher than the rate for whites.

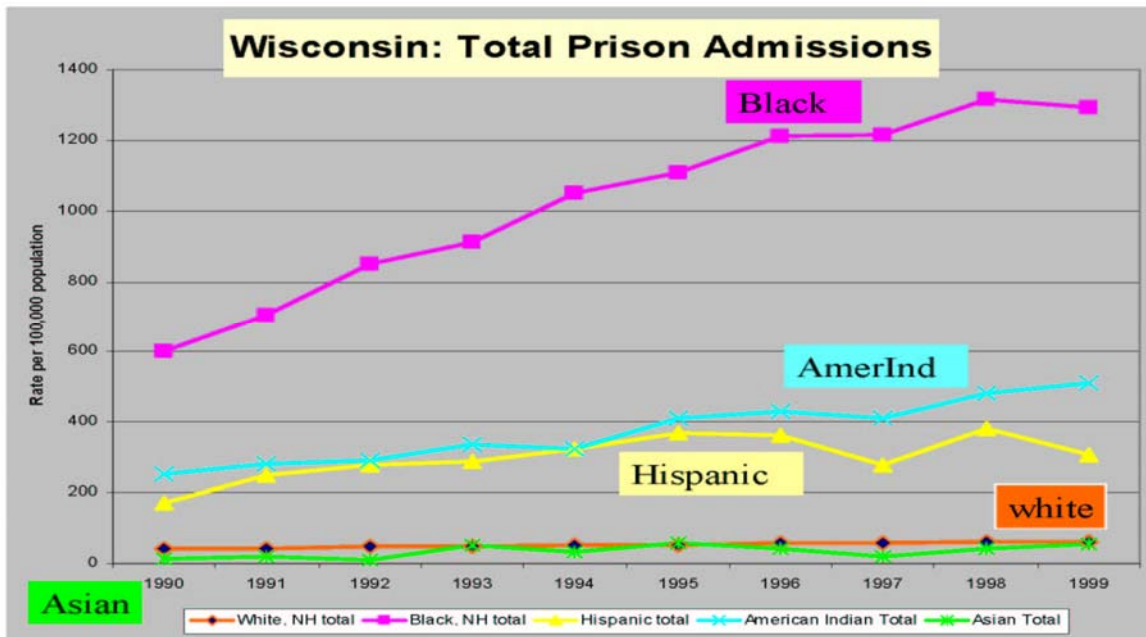
Obesity & diabetes. Programs serving children in both Kenosha and Racine are reporting increased incidence of obesity. Adults in both counties are more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes than the state average. According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, people of color are more likely to be overweight/obese and to develop diabetes, with American Indians the most likely, followed by blacks and then Hispanics.

STDs and HIV. According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, HIV infections have been increasing in Wisconsin for several years. These increases are largely attributed to increases among young men who have sex with men of all racial/ethnic groups. Cases of HIV in heterosexual females, primarily among African Americans, have also increased. Racine and Kenosha Counties have the highest rates of HIV infection in the state, after Milwaukee County, and extremely high rates of STDs as well.

Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. In both Kenosha and Racine Counties, the majority of those arrested for drug offenses are adults, and the majority of those arrests are for marijuana.

Mental health. Key informants and focus group participants identified a need to ensure that proper inpatient and outpatient crisis and ongoing behavioral health services are available in both counties.

Crime and violence. US imprisonment rates are much higher than the rest of the world, and within the U.S., African Americans are imprisoned at least eight times as often as European Americans, while American Indians and Hispanics are imprisoned at two to three times the European American rate. As a result, nationally about a third of African American men are under the supervision of the criminal justice system, and about 12% of African American men in their 20s and 30s are incarcerated. Wisconsin follows these national trends, as seen below.



(Oliver)

*“These astronomical incarceration rates have huge social and economic consequences for black women, black children, and black communities. High incarceration rates ruin people’s lives and make the problem worse, by making it harder for young people who have done wrong to be rehabilitated, find jobs, and become productive members of society. Children whose parents are sent to prison are especially harmed by these policies.” (Oliver)*

## **Barriers**

In key informant interviews, community leaders were asked about barriers they believe are preventing Racine and Kenosha from addressing the problems faced by people living in poverty in the two counties. Some of the barriers most frequently mentioned were:

- The lack of jobs and insufficient income to meet life demands were listed in both counties as barriers for people in poverty;
- A lack of understanding of poverty, its impact on the lives of individuals and the larger community (the intersection of education, employment, transportation, etc. and the compounding consequences experienced by people in poverty);
- The limited availability of services, the manner in which people are treated when accessing services, limited agency capacity, the lack of coordination in service delivery, and the difficulty residents have navigating the service delivery system;
- The lack of political support to address issues related to poverty;
- The lack of affordable housing; and
- Social conditions of the community that make it difficult to address poverty, including disillusionment about poverty and no sense of hope that things can change.

## Recommendations

The following are broad areas for future work that could be undertaken by RKCAA in support of healthy communities to benefit all residents of Racine and Kenosha Counties. These broad recommendations are intended to spur reflection on the part of RKCAA staff and board members, as well as the community as a whole, for new strategies to improve the quality of life in both counties.

- People living in poverty are often disproportionately affected by the adverse consequences of environmental and land-use decisions, but everyone in the community is affected. RKCAA should consider ways to mitigate the negative impacts of land-use and environmental decisions on quality of life for everyone.
- The interconnected nature of many of the barriers that keep people in poverty from getting and keeping good jobs is a problem that has been exacerbated by the current recession. RKCAA can play a role in helping low-income individuals keep jobs by offering supportive services like child care. Ways RKCAA can help include:
  - Communicating the needs of low-income workers to the business community; and
  - Collaborating with adult education providers to develop strategies to alleviate the barriers that prevent low-income adults from improving their skills through education.
- RKCAA should find ways to support the development of convenient, affordable public transportation in both counties, particularly “west of the interstate.”
- Along with continuing its weatherization and housing assistance programs, RKCAA should help Kenosha and Racine better meet the housing needs of low-income residents.
- By running food pantries, emergency food assistance and WIC services, RKCAA is at the forefront of fighting food insecurity in Kenosha and Racine. Additional actions RKCAA might consider taking to meet the food security needs of residents include:
  - Working with area school systems to develop policies that improve the quality of food provided through the free and reduced lunch programs; and
  - Increasing outreach and education to expand use of federal nutrition programs by low-income individuals.
- The Head Start services provided by RKCAA in Racine (examined in detail in a separate report) are seen as being important community assets. Along with continuing these services, RKCAA can support families with very young children by working with agencies to develop a neighborhood-based strategy to focus on childhood obesity and ensuring that there are enough early childhood services for the increasing number of children under age 5 that will be living in the City of Kenosha in upcoming years.
- RKCAA should find ways to link to organizations working with school-aged youth to support the educational employment needs of low-income youth in Racine and Kenosha.
- Monitor the trends that predict increased numbers of elderly and low-income elderly will be living outside the City of Racine to ensure services follow.
- RKCAA should support a public health agenda that considers the particular needs of vulnerable populations in Racine and Kenosha Counties.

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