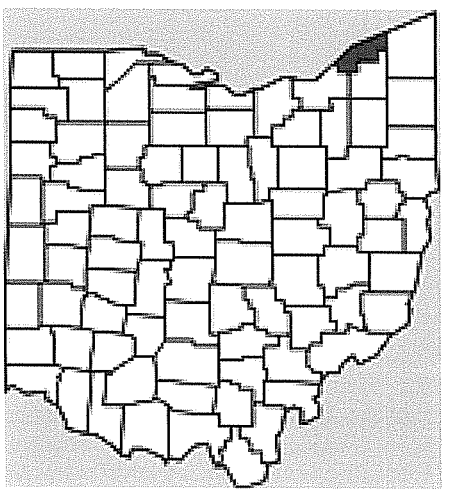
2009
Social Services
Needs Assessment

Lake County, Ohio



Completed by:

Lifeline, Inc.

Lake County's Community Action Agency

54 S. State Street, Suite 309

Painesville, Ohio 44077

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Lifeline, Inc. History & Mission

Lifeline was founded on June 19, 1973 with the mission of helping Lake County's low-income residents by providing assistance and life skills programming that was designed to increase self sufficiency. In 1980, Lifeline became a participating agency of the United Way of Lake County and in 1987 Lifeline was designated as Lake County's Community Action Agency by the Ohio Department of Development. Most recently, in 2008, Lifeline, Inc. was certified as a mental health agency by the Ohio Department of Mental Health as a provider of other mental health services for its Family Development Program.

Today Lifeline continues with much of the same mission of helping families and individuals break the cycle of poverty and achieve self sufficiency. This past winter, the Lifeline staff and its Board of Trustees completed a strategic planning process for the agency's future resulting in a reaffirmed motto and programming goals. Lifeline's motto "First to help, then to teach" recognizes Lifeline's diverse programming in the areas of emergency services and self sufficiency. Lifeline strives to help families in crisis and then teach them to become self sufficient.

Lifeline's Board and staff strongly believe that self-sufficiency means something different to every consumer who walks through our doors. To some it might mean securing safe, affordable and stable housing so that they have a place to sleep, shower and call home. To others it might mean being able to access prescription medicine and other healthcare services so that they can maintain their physical and mental health. And to others it might mean furthering their education or learning a basic skill. In an effort to promote self-sufficiency in a variety of ways, Lifeline provides a wide array of programs in the areas of healthcare, housing, energy and consumer education.

As a Community Action Agency, Lifeline also believes that it is uniquely poised to serve two distinct purposes in Lake County: to act as an advocate for our consumers and to ensure that as an agency, we are meeting critical community needs. Lifeline's Board and staff feel that it is essential that our consumers have a voice. Lifeline, Inc. regularly advocates on behalf of our consumers, both by discussing poverty-related issues with our local legislators and providing seats on our Board to low-income representatives. Lifeline strives to fill gaps in services within Lake County and ensures that we are meeting critical and emerging needs through its regular needs assessment process and consumer satisfaction surveying.

Lifeline, Inc. is significantly funded by the Community Service Block Grant via the Ohio Department of Development and through the HOME Funds Program and Homeless Prevention Program granted through the Lake County Board of Commissioners. Additional funding is allocated through the United Way of Lake County, and provided by the Ohio Department of Development's Housing Assistance Grant, the CVS Foundation, the Western Reserve Junior Service League and the Bikers Aiding Local Diabetics. Lifeline also hosts several of its own fundraising events each year and an annual campaign drive each fall.

Lifeline, Inc. 2008 Statistics

Lifeline, Inc., Lake County's Community Action Agency, served 849 unduplicated low-income families, or 1,810 individuals, in 2008 according to the agency year end report.

The report details the demographics of each household assisted by Lifeline in 2008. Of the 1,810 individuals served in 2008, 70% were Caucasian, 19% African-American, 9% Hispanic and 2% represented other ethnicities. Fifty-five percent of all individuals served were female.

Of the individuals served, 36% fell within the 0-17 age range; 55% fell within the 18-54 age range; 7% fell within the 55-69 age range; and 2% fell within the 70 years and older age range.

Of individuals age 24 and older, 55% had a high school diploma or GED; 23% had some post-secondary education in addition to a high school diploma or GED; 11% were non-graduates completing some high school; 4% had only education levels through 8th grade and 7% had completed a two or four year degree.

Of the 849 households assisted in 2008, 46% were single person homes; 27% were single-parent households headed by a female; 13% were two-parent households; 8% were couple households; 1% was single-parent households headed by a male and 5% were other types of households.

Other pertinent stats include: 43% of individuals served had no health insurance and 10% of individuals served were disabled. Of the 849 households served, 69% rented housing; 10% owned their own home; and 21% were homeless.

Several notable shifts in customer demographics were seen in 2008, possibly as a result of the changing economy and the changing face of need in Lake County. Likely the biggest shift Lifeline saw in 2008 was in the education level of our customers. In 2007, only 43% of Lifeline customers had a high school diploma or GED. In 2008 that jumped up to %55. The number of customers who have had some post-secondary education also grew, from 19% in 2007 to 23% in 2008. Overall, Lifeline has seen customers with a much higher level of education than in previous years.

Nearly every community within Lake County was served during 2008. Of the 1,810 individuals served, 54% were Painesville/Painesville Twp. residents; 9% each were from Willoughby/Willoughby Hills and Mentor/Mentor on the Lake; 6% each came from Eastlake and Madison; 5% came from Fairport Harbor; 3% each came from Willowick and Wickliffe; 2% were from Perry; 1% each came from Concord and Kirtland/Kirtland Hills; and less than 1% each came from Grand River, Leroy and Timberlake. No households were assisted in Lakeline or Waite Hill.

Another shift Lifeline has seen in 2008 is that the customer base is continuing to spread out of Painesville and its surrounding areas. For each of the last few years, Lifeline has seen fewer Painesville residents, but more customers from other areas of Lake County. Particularly in 2008, our customer bases grew in western Lake County, with increases in Willoughby, Willowick and Timberlake.

Lifeline, Inc. Needs Assessment Methodology

The data for the 2009 Needs Assessment have been collected in three different ways.

Focus Groups: Four focus groups were held to obtain the input of service providers on the needs and gaps in services within Lake County. In total, there were 30 participants in attendance, representing 20 Lake County non-profit, social service agencies.

The nominal group technique is a decision making process that encourages participation from all group members and allows for individual and group brainstorming, while also quickly making a determination for results. The process begins with individual group members silently writing their observations of the community needs on note cards. In a round-robin fashion, the cards are presented to the group for discussion and additional brainstorming. After all note cards are presented and discussed, participants begin to rank the needs in order of greatness. The group results are then tallied by Lifeline's staff facilitators.

We feel that the nominal group technique is advantageous because it allows for independent idea brainstorming followed by idea sharing, group discussion and ranking. We feel that this provides all participants an equal opportunity to have their opinions and observations presented to the group, which also spurs additional brainstorming during the group discussion. The ranking of the discussed needs allows Lifeline to easily evaluate the needs of our community as presented by the focus group participants.

Customer Surveying: We asked 16 of Lifeline's collaborating agencies to survey consumers at their organization so that we could evaluate the needs of the consumers from their own point of view. In order to assess a variety of needs, these 16 agencies included health clinics, mental health & addiction agencies, faith-based organizations, government service providers, educational assistance facilities and emergency service providers. A total of 325 surveys were sent to 16 agencies and 206 surveys were returned by 13 of them. This is a 63% return rate on the surveys.

On the surveys, participants were asked to answer several demographic questions, including questions about their family and housing types, and their type of health insurance. We also surveyed to see if they fit any specific population groups, including veterans, mental health consumers, ex-offenders, physically disabled and victims of domestic abuse. These surveys were all completed anonymously and privately.

In addition, we also asked participants to answer questions about their specific needs, including what services they were currently applying for assistance for, what barriers have prevented them from receiving assistance in the past and what the biggest concern for their family right now is. We also asked them to identify what services they are in need of that they cannot obtain right now and would like to see available in the future.

Real Data: In addition to surveying consumers and asking service providers for their observations and opinions, data was also collected from a variety of credible sources. This data includes demographics and statistics for Lake County and the State of Ohio. A resource listing of this data is in the back of this assessment.

Lake County Demographics & Statistics

Lake County, located in northeast Ohio along the shore of Lake Erie, boasted an estimated population of 233,392 in 2007, according to the Lake County Profile prepared by the Ohio Department of Development. This makes Lake County the eleventh most populous county in Ohio. The population has steadily increased each year for the past ten years and is projected to continue to increase through 2020, with a projected population of 234,520 in 2020.

The median household income for Lake County residents in 1999 was $48,763, however, 26.7% of the population made under $30,000 in 1999.

Ratio of Income in 1999 to Poverty Level

Below 50% of poverty level	5,274	2.4%
50% to 99% of poverty level	6,098	2.7%
100% to 149% of poverty level	10,404	4.6%
150% to 199% of poverty level	14,780	6.6%
200% of poverty level or higher	188,124	83.7%
	224,680	**100.0%**

Self-Sufficiency in Lake County

Lake County continues to be a very expensive place to live, particularly for low income individuals and families. According to the 2008 Ohio Self-sufficiency Standard, it takes an annual wage of between $20,208 and $59,944 to support various family types in Lake County. In one instance, when a household has one adult and one school age child, the self-sufficiency standard for Lake County is the highest in Ohio at $33,365 needed to maintain self-sufficiency. For families with one adult, one preschooler and one school age child, Ohio ranks the sixth highest, with a wage of $43,736 needed to maintain self-sufficiency.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Lake County, 2008

MONTHLY COSTS	Adult	Adult + Preschooler	Adult + Infant Preschooler	Adult + Preschooler School age	Adult + School age Teenager	Adult + Infant Preschooler School age
Housing	688	829	829	829	829	1062
Childcare	0	569	1220	1013	444	1664
Food	223	337	439	505	585	593
Transportation	205	212	212	212	212	212
Healthcare	137	315	329	335	359	350
Miscellaneous	125	226	303	289	243	388
Taxes	305	541	790	728	481	1077
Earned Income Tax Credit (-)	0	0	0	0	-79	0
Child Care Tax Credit (-)	0	-63	-100	-100	-63	-100
Child Tax Credit (-)	0	-83	-167	-167	-167	-250
SELF-SUFFICIENCY WAGE						
Hourly	$9.57	$16.38	$21.90	$20.71	$16.16	$28.38
Monthly	$1,684	$2,882	$3,854	$3,645	$2,844	$4,995
Annual	$20,208	$34,588	$46,250	$43,736	$34,132	$59,944

Healthcare in Lake County

According to the Healthy Ohio Community Profile 2008, prepared by the Ohio Department of Health, in 2006 Lake County had 71 physicians, which generated a rate of 3.1 physicians per 10,000 people, compared to the 25.4 rate for Ohio. The study shows that in 2006, 10.4% of the Lake County adult population lacked insurance and that 3.8% of children lacked insurance. These compare to the state averages of 12.5% for adults and 5.4% for children.

Employment in Lake County

Historically, the unemployment rate in Lake County has been low. The chart below shows a historical perspective of the civilian labor force in Lake County and how it has changed since 2003.

Lake County Civilian Labor Force

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Civilian Labor Force	131,700	131,200	131,500	132,700	132,500
Employed	124,300	124,100	124,900	126,400	125,600
Unemployed	7,400	7,100	6,600	6,400	6,900
Unemployment Rate	5.6	5.4	5.0	4.8	5.2

Ohio County Profiles, Lake County

According to the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services, Bureau of Labor Market Information, the Unemployment rate for Lake County in April 2009 was at 8.5%, just slightly below the U.S. rate of 8.6% and the Ohio rate of 10.2%. Lake County ranked 78th of Ohio's 88 counties, with one of the lower unemployment rates for the state. The April 2009 civilian labor force totaled 130,300, including 119,200 employed and 11,100 unemployed.

Unemployment Rates in Lake County--Historical Data

	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate
Jan. 2008	131,600	123,300	8,300	6.3
Jan. 2009	128,100	119,000	9,100	7.1
Feb. 2008	131,600	123,300	8,300	6.3
Feb. 2009	130,300	118,700	11,600	8.9
Mar. 2008	131,600	123,800	7,700	5.9
Mar. 2009	129,400	118,600	10,800	8.4
Apr. 2008	132,300	125,400	6,900	5.2
Apr. 2009	130,300	119,200	11,100	8.5

Ohio Workforce Informer, April 2009 statistics

Major employers in Lake County continue to be manufacturing companies ABB, Inc., Avery Dennison Corp., Lubrizol Corp. and STERIS Corp.; health systems, including Lake Hospital System and the Cleveland Clinic Health System; utility provider First Energy Corp.; and government entities, the Lake County government, the Mentor Exempted Village Board of Education and the Willoughby-Eastlake Board of Education.

Housing in Lake County

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the Fair Market Rent for a two bedroom apartment in Ohio is $683/month. In Lake County, the FMR is $694 for a two bedroom apartment. The annual income that is needed to afford the FMR in Lake County is demonstrated in this chart.

Annual Income Needed to Afford the FMR

0 Bedroom	$19,840
1 Bedroom	$23,040
2 Bedrooms	$27,760
3 Bedrooms	$35,600
4 Bedrooms	$37,800

National Low Income Housing Coalition

Further compounding the high cost of housing in Lake County is the current demand for both public housing and housing choice vouchers. According to data from the Lake Metropolitan Housing Authority, currently Lake County has 240 public housing units, all of which are filled and have a waiting list of approximately 6 months. Lake County has 1,424 residents receiving housing choice vouchers, but the waiting list is currently closed with approximately 90 households on the waiting list.

Homelessness continues to exist in Lake County. According to the Winter 2009 Point in Time study done by the Coalition for Housing & Support Services of Lake County, 17 families with dependent children were homeless, comprising 65 individuals. There were 78 households without children identified as homeless, comprising 87 individuals. A total count of 152 homeless persons was identified as homeless on January 27, 2009. Many of these homeless persons sited mental illness and chronic substance abuse as factors affecting their situation.

211 in Lake County

First quarter 2008 calls for assistance through the 211 Lake County information and referral line have also increased over the first quarter of 2008, as shown below.

NUMBER OF CALLS-211 Lake County

	2009 (Jan-Apr)	2008 (Jan-Apr)	Increase/decrease	% change
Total Calls	**11,104**	9,388	1,716	18%
Average calls/week	**653**	552	101	18%
Unduplicated clients	**9,475**	7,614	1,861	24%

The top needs that consumers called for in the first quarter of 2009 included food (15% of needs), housing payment assistance (9%), utility assistance (9%), material goods like clothing, furniture and household goods (6%) and emergency housing (6%).The top unmet needs in the first quarter of 2009 included lack of capacity at the homeless shelter, rent payment assistance (consumers were ineligible or assistance was not available) and utility assistance (consumer was already served or was ineligible).

2009 Lifeline Needs Assessment Focus Group Data

Top Social Service Needs:

1. Access to, or retention of, safe and affordable housing	125 votes*
2. Employment	77 votes*
3. Increased access to medical and dental services	68 votes*
4. Transportation	59 votes*
5. Consumer advocacy/Ombudsman program	24 votes
6. Expanded assistance with utility bills	14 votes*

* ***Recommended as a need in all four focus groups***

Additional needs that received significant vote totals:

- Countywide payee program
- Increased access to nutritional food
- Expanded legal assistance
- Quality & affordable childcare
- Additional prevention services
- Additional drug/alcohol services (counseling, in-county detox facility)
- More after-care programs
- More affordable education opportunities on all levels

More details on top social service needs:

Access to and retention of safe and affordable housing encompassed many observations. Many of these included the need for more affordable rental housing units in Lake County, more funding for emergency rent assistance and higher income guidelines for securing assistance. More specific areas of interest in the housing sector included the need for expanded housing for mental health consumers, additional supportive housing units, structured day drop-in center for the homeless and transitional housing units for the re-entry population. In terms of home owners, there were several votes for additional funding for home maintenance and repairs.

Employment was a significant need that came up in every focus group. Specific needs mentioned included additional job training programs, employment coaching and job seeking support services, career counseling for high school students and job training for displaced workers. Also included in this category was the need for increased income via higher paying jobs.

Increased access to medical and dental services also included a wide variety of needs. The need for additional funding for prescription assistance and healthcare services for those who lack insurance were heavily voted for. The need for emergency adult dental care was also listed as a high need. Other specific needs receiving votes included chronic care for the undocumented population, concerns about the wait time throughout the Medicaid application process and the availability of healthcare services for those who do not qualify for Medicaid or Medicare.

Transportation included two specific needs, including public transit and private automobile assistance. In regards to public transit, two prominent needs were for expanded routes and hours of operation and lower rates, as well as the need for additional out of county options, particularly to Cleveland's hospitals. Transportation also included votes for additional funding to help customers who do own vehicles with maintenance and repairs, as well as with gas vouchers.

The need for a consumer advocate, or an ombudsman program was discussed heavily at one focus group. Because of the current economy, focus group participants felt strongly that it is more challenging than ever for a newcomer to social services to navigate the system. A consumer advocate, or ombudsman, would be someone who could physically help new applicants through the social services system in Lake County.

Expanded assistance with utility bills included the need for year round assistance, particularly during non-HEAP months, as well as higher income guidelines for assistance.

2009 Consumer Survey Data

	Total Replies	% of Total Replies
Housing type:		
Rent	78	39%
Staying with someone	53	26%
Currently homeless	45	23%
Own	24	12%
TOTAL	**200**	**100%**
Access to healthcare:		
Public insurance	95	46%
No insurance	88	43%
Private insurance	23	11%
TOTAL	**206**	**100%**
Household type:		
Single	104	51%
Couple	55	27%
Single parent	44	22%
TOTAL	**203**	**100%**
What type of service are you applying for today?		
Food	49	
Clothing	39	
Rent or housing assistance	37	
Mental health	36	
General health concerns	34	
Nutrition	28	
Drug & alcohol	28	
Utility assistance	24	
GED/ABLE	20	
Reproductive health	14	
Legal assistance	14	
Child care	10	
Budget counseling	5	
TOTAL	**333**	

	Total Replies	% of Total Replies
Please check: I am...		
A high school graduate	119	48%
A mental health consumer	45	18%
A domestic violence survivor	37	15%
Physically disabled	19	8%
A parent of a child with mental health issues	16	6%
A veteran	9	4%
Recently released from prison	6	2%
TOTAL	**251**	

2009 Consumer Survey Data

The Biggest Concern for My Family Right Now is:	
Housing	39
Health insurance	29
Employment	28
Paying household bills	27
Money/economy	18
More drug & alcohol treatment/counseling programs/sober housing	15
Buying food	14
My health	7
Emergency rent	7
Mental health concerns	6
High utility bills	5
Clothing	5
Transportation	5
Getting Disability benefits	3
Continuing my education	3
Foreclosure prevention	3
Being able to buy a home	3
Recreation Center/safe place for my children to do activities	2
Quality daycare	1
Cost of a drivers' license	1
TOTAL	**221**

Additional Services I'd Like to See Become Available in Lake County are:
More children's activities/programs
Agencies with longer, more flexible hours
Prescription assistance more than once per year
More medical assistance
Assistance for people without minor children
More assistance for military families
More mental health facilities &mental health supportive housing
In-County Detox facility
Free education
Computer classes
Homeless shelter in Western Lake Co.
More quality day care services
Adult dental clinic
More job placement programs
Increased access to transportation
Programs for parents with older children (clothing & nutrition)
Structured day shelter for homeless
Housing assistance for ex-offenders
Partial hospitalization program
More home repair/maintenance programs
Expanded legal aid services
More translators at agencies
Additional assistance with utilities

What has prevented you from getting help in the past?	
My income was too high	56
I didn't have transportation	44
I needed help faster than the agency could provide it	41
My background (felony record, citizenship, etc.)	18
I didn't have the correct paperwork	15
Agency hours didn't fit my schedule	13
They didn't speak my language	5
TOTAL	**192**

2009 Lifeline Needs Assessment Focus Group Data

Top Management & Environmental Needs:

1. Increased funding is needed to meet the increased demand for services

2. Better inter-agency communication

3. Reduced waiting lists (increased ability to meet client needs quickly)

4. Increased Spanish speaking staff at agencies/available translation services

5. Easier access to services (better information sharing amongst agencies)

6. More educational outreach regarding available services & guidelines

7. Increased understanding of public assistance programs & guidelines at Lake County Job & Family Services would make referrals more efficient

2009 Lifeline Needs Assessment Consumer Survey Data

Seven key barriers to service delivery were identified by consumers who participated in the survey. Several of these are issues that could be addressed by the various service providers, while some issues are customer-related. These barriers included:

1. Didn't meet income guidelines
2. Lack of transportation to the agency
3. Needed help faster than the agency could provide services
4. Client background (ex-offender, citizenship, etc.)
5. Client lacked the required paperwork to complete an application
6. Agency hours didn't fit client schedules
7. Agency staff didn't speak my language

Resources

2-1-1 Lake County Caller Statistics—January-April 2009

Civilian Labor Force Estimates April 2009: Prepared by the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services, Bureau of Labor Market Information

Healthy Ohio Community Profiles Lake County 2008: Prepared by the Ohio Department of Health

Lake County, Ohio Profile: Prepared by the Ohio Department of Development, Office of Policy, Research and Strategic Planning

The National Low Income Housing Coalition: www.nlihc.org

The Ohio Workforce Informer, Labor Market Info: www.ohioworkforceinformer.org

Point in Time Count—January 2009, The Coalition for Housing & Support Services of Lake County

The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Ohio 2008: Prepared for the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies

Special Thanks

The 2009 Needs Assessment wouldn't have been possible without the support of many of Lifeline's collaborative partners.

Thank you to the 30 individuals who participated in one of our focus groups—your professional opinions and observations are very valuable. And thank you to Morley Library for providing a convenient location for our focus groups.

Thank you to the following agencies who distributed our consumer surveys to their participants so that we could get a well-rounded assessment of consumer needs.

Birthright
Crossroads Early Head Start
Family Planning Association of Northeast Ohio
Forbes House
Lake County Department of Job & Family Services
Lake County Free Medical Clinic
Lake Geauga Recovery Centers
Lifeline, Inc.
Neighboring
Painesville City ABLE
Project Hope
Salvation Army
WIC

Thank you to Sue Mize at 211 Lake County for providing 2008 and 2009 211 call data and to the Coalition for Housing & Support Services of Lake County for providing their January 2009 Homeless Point In Time Study.

Finally, thank you to Lifeline staff members, Cate Hearn, Michelle Mezaris and Maribel Young for all of the hard work that went into collecting the data needed to make this needs assessment possible.