Community Needs Assessment

Our Community Vision:
All Windham and Tolland County residents will be economically secure.

Our Mission:
To provide under resourced individuals, families, and communities with access to opportunities that empower them to achieve and sustain economic stability.

The governing board formally accepts the completed Community Assessment on April 7, 2020 as required by CSBG standard 3.5
Executive Summary

This Community Needs Assessment was conducted by the Access Community Action Agency to evaluate the needs of residents of Windham and Tolland Counties. Access last conducted a CNA in 2017.

In the planning stages of this CNA, community partners and interested residents who responded to an open invitation from Access helped us create an effective community survey to use as a data gathering tool. The process we used to create the survey allowed us to gain various perspectives on what should be asked so we could obtain valuable information to inform our assessment. This strategy was successful and the results of the survey significantly contributed to conclusions reached in the CNA, and will only assist our organization as well as engaged partners in future planning on ways to meet identified needs.

What is clear from this CNA is that as we look at the needs of residents in our region through the lens of Community Action and the Mission of Access - To provide under-resourced individuals, families and communities with access to opportunities that empower them to achieve and sustain economic stability - is that the top five needs we identified all fall under the broad umbrella of the need for increased income and/or income supports.

- **Top Five Needs**: Specifically, the top 5 needs we identified are the need for increased:
  - Food Security
  - Emergency Shelter
  - Affordable Housing
  - Access to Jobs
  - Accessible Transportation

The results of this CNA will be used to inform the updating of our Strategic Framework, and our strategic Community Action Plan which will be completed by the end of June 2020. These documents will drive how we work to achieve our Mission over the coming months and years.

The rich information gathered has been due to a collaboration of many people. We want to thank all those who helped us with the phases of conducting the CNA from start to finish, including all the 282 individuals who completed our Community Survey - 235 from Windham County and 47 from Tolland County.

To view the Community Needs Assessment Survey 2020 Results Click on the below link:

[Access CNA Survey Results 2020](#)
• **Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic**

It is important to note that as we were completing this CNA, the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020 declared that COVID-19, the new coronavirus first identified in November 2019, had become a world pandemic.

As Access completed this Community Needs Assessment, COVID-19 was spreading quickly across the nation in general and northeast Connecticut in particular; although few cases had yet to be identified in Windham and Tolland Counties. Our community survey was completed prior to this date so did not consider or contemplate the impact of this pandemic.

In addition to the anticipated ongoing direct impact on the health of those we serve, COVID-19 will potentially result in large numbers of local residents being driven into poverty because of anticipated large numbers of layoffs and/or reduction of work hours.

The actual short and long term impact on our communities is still to be determined as these impacts are being experienced in real time, and given the unprecedented nature of this threat we can only predict that needs will likely intensify, and new needs will present in time.

Access is continuing to deliver vital services to those in our community who need them as best we can through electronic and telephonic means, while working diligently to keep our staff safe. Here is what we know about COVID-19 in Connecticut as this CNA was completed on March 30:

- 2,571 COVID-19 cases had been confirmed.
- CT Governor Lamont issued Executive Orders that:
  - urge residents to practice social distancing, stay home and stay safe.
  - Closed non-essential businesses
  - Closed schools until at least April 20, 2020.
- Over 100,000 people in Connecticut filed unemployment claims for the two week period from March 13 to March 25. The average had been 2,500 claims per week.

This links to an update from the U.S. Senator Chris Murphy

Mar 25, 2020, 8:17 PM U.S. Senator Chris Murphy email

This link gives additional updated information on the Coronavirus.

Coronavirus
Community Needs Assessment Background

Memorandum 49, United States Health and Human Services describes how the Office of Community Services (OCS) will carry out its compliance and technical assistance responsibilities for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program to help assure that the Community Services Network remains strong, focused, effective, and accountable. Memorandum 138, describes the requirements for state CSBG Lead Agencies to establish “performance goals, administrative standards, financial management requirements, and other requirements” that ensure an appropriate level of accountability and quality among the State’s eligible entities. The purpose of States using the organizations standard is to ensure each eligible entity has appropriate organizational capacity to fulfill the purposes of the CSBG Act.

Service Area Map

Organizational Profile

The Access Community Action Agency is a federal and state designated non-profit Community Action Agency (CAA) established in 1965. Access works with the low-income population of eastern Connecticut and takes a comprehensive look at the poverty-related challenges faced by individuals, families and communities in Windham and Tolland counties.
Our Community Vision: All Windham and Tolland County residents will be economically secure.

Our Mission: To provide under resourced individuals, families, and communities with access to opportunities that empower them to achieve and sustain economic stability.

Our Strategic Commitments:

- Ensure access to adequate Healthy Food, and safe decent Affordable Housing
- Provide access to Jobs and Other Pathways to Self-Reliance
- Mobilize Stakeholders to Advocate and Act to ensure economic stability is more accessible

Our Values: Compassion, Empowerment, Respect, Synergy, Accountability, and Excellence

Board of Directors - Access has a 15-member tripartite Board of Directors. Five members are from the private sector, five from the public sector, and five representing our low-income constituents.

Programs and Service Provided by Access:

Those that provide services in Multiple Domains:

- **Case Management / HSI** - Access Family Advocates assess customer needs and develop plans for assistance with employment, Department of Social Service benefits, housing, transportation, and referrals. Access offers assistance with in-house programs and linkages to a network of community providers utilizing the Human Service Infrastructure (HSI) delivery service model embracing the “No Wrong Door” philosophy. Funding through a contract with CT Department of Social Services (DSS).

- **Case Management / SSBG** – free services or activities that help individuals and families to meet their needs and move toward increased self-reliance. Access Family Advocates will determine eligibility based on income guidelines. Funding through a contract with the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA) and CT DSS.

- **Town of Columbia Outreach** - Individuals age 60 and over in Columbia may receive case management, information, assistance, outreach, and education services at Beckish Senior Center. Funding made available by the Town of Columbia.

- **Crossroads – Supportive Work Education Transitional Program** - This eight-bed residential, community-based, supervised clustered apartment transitional living program in Norwich works to prepare assists older adolescent girls and boys in the care of transitioning to independent living as they leave the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to transition to independent community living care. Contracted with and licensed by DCF

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP Outreach/HSI)** – The Bilingual Case Management Family Advocates and the Family Advocate Outreach Specialist attends events
throughout the community providing information to eligible low-income people, who are not currently participating in SNAP, on the nutritional benefits of the program and assist in enrollment. Contracted with CAFCA and CT DSS

Employment:

- **Access to Employment (A2E)** - A training program designed to help under and unemployed individuals in northeastern Connecticut become job ready, and to find and maintain successful employment in specifically identified job openings in the region. Funded by grants.

Housing:

- **The Emergency Shelter** - A 40-bed facility available to homeless families and single adults. The Shelter program is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Guests are provided 3 meals a day and basic needs items as necessary. Support for every adult includes comprehensive case management. Action plans assist individuals to address needs such as medical, housing, employment, treatment programs and transportation. Customers are required to actively participate in housing and job searches. Funded by CT DOH

- **Northeast Overnight Cold-Weather No Freeze Shelter (Danielson)** - Provides a safe warm place for up to 30 individuals per night who are experiencing homelessness during the winter in northeast Connecticut. This project came together through a collaboration of local nonprofits, local town governments, faith communities, businesses and concerned residents. Funding made possible by private and municipal donations.

- **Eastern CT Coordinated Access Network (Eastern CT CAN)** – 2-1-1 refers anyone experiencing a housing crisis to the CAN; where they are then provided with a standardized, assessment and referral process to access community resources. The primary goal is to help communities focus on rapidly ending each person’s homelessness by connecting them with appropriate housing and resources as quickly as possible. Funding provided by CT Department of Housing (DOH), CT Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) and AIDS CT.

- **Rapid Rehousing (RRH)** - An evidence-based approach to end homelessness as quickly as possible for families and individuals. This program uses targeted financial assistance and short-term services to quickly return individuals and families who slipped into homelessness back into housing and stability. Funded by CT DOH.

- **Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) /Youth Rapid Rehousing (YRRH)** – Is a coordinated community approach to preventing and ending youth homelessness. This program provides youth with housing assistance and case management support, in order to connect them to safe, decent housing, a place to live where they can establish a solid foundation for a successful future. Funded by CT DOH and The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
○ **Shelter Diversion** – Divert individuals and families from becoming homeless or from entering emergency shelter within 14 days of becoming homeless. Funding made available by the Town of Stonington through a Community Development Block Grant.

○ **CT Energy Assistance Program**: The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a federally funded program that purchases home heating assistance for income eligible households. The energy program is state-administrated by CT DSS through the CT Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) and funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services.

○ **Supportive Housing for Families** - Dedicated to family preservation and reunification, Access is contracted by The Connection, Inc.® to provide Supportive Housing for Families (SHF) in our region. Rendering intensive home-based case management and subsidized housing to families who are in successful compliance with their Department of Children and Families (DCF) treatment plan. Contracted with The Connection, Inc.®

○ **Next Steps Supportive Housing** - Provides assistance to chronically homeless single adults in obtaining and maintaining permanent housing through case management, education, rental vouchers and other support. Contracted with the CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and HUD.

○ **Accessing Home Ownership Program** – Designed to assist interested income eligible buyers in purchasing two-family income producing properties in eight targeted high opportunity communities in northeast Connecticut. duplex or townhouse that they. A buyer must live in one unit and rent the other unit to income-eligible tenants. Funded by CT DOH.

○ **Property Management of Affordable Housing** - Access manages 200 units of subsidized and unsubsidized affordable housing throughout northeast CT. Properties managed include:
  - Willington Woods in Willington and Elisha Brook in Franklin featuring 32 and 27 HUD funded and subsidized one-bedroom units for seniors,
  - Button Hill in Willington with 24 townhouses for seniors,
  - Salem Village with 96 one-bedroom HUD and U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) funded and subsidized units for seniors
  - Parker Place with 37 units for seniors funded by the Town of Tolland, CT DOH, Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston through their local partner Berkshire Bank, Tax Credit Investors and the CT Housing Finance Authority.
  - Access also owns and manages nine affordable apartments and Hawkins House, with six units, both in Danielson CT.

**Health and Social /Behavioral Development**

○ **Emergency Food Pantry** - the Emergency Food Pantry Service is available at both the Willimantic and Danielson locations for individuals and families throughout Windham and Tolland Counties who find themselves in a situation where they run the risk of being
without food. Primarily funded by private donations.

- **Mobile Food Pantry** – Our Food Van picks up and distributes food to four towns identified in Windham and Tolland Counties as food insecure. It increases access to nutritious food for families with little or no access to local food banks, grocery stores or soup kitchens. Information on SNAP benefits and making healthy food choices are distributed. Van purchased with funds provided by the CT Housing and Educational Facilities Authority. Operations are funded by CSBG and HSI and private donations.

- **Women, Infants and Children (WIC) - Nutrition Program** - Provides nutritious, supplemental no-cost food assistance, nutrition education, health service referrals, and breast feeding support to eligible families. EBT cards Vouchers are provided for the purchase of specific WIC-approved foods that can be exchanged at participating local stores and markets. WIC is state-administered through the CT Department of Public Health (DPH) and funded by the USDA.

- **Child & Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)** - Reimburses participating licensed home child care providers in Connecticut for serving nutritious meals and snacks to the day care children in their care. CACFP offers nutrition consultations with CACFP nutrition experts through home visits and monthly newsletters. CACFP currently has 150 licensed home care providers serving approximately 1,200 children. Contracted with CT Department of Education.

**Results That Matter - Fiscal Year 2019:**

*Access* served over 20,200 individuals and over 7,500 families from October 1, 2018 - September 30, 2019, which is over 8% of the population of Windham and Tolland Counties.

3,328 adults and 1,198 children didn’t go hungry because they received supplemental food equivalent to 54,312 meals; of these customers 3,078 received their meals from our mobile food pantry.

1,853 women, infants, & children are healthier because they redeemed $1,698,963 worth of healthy food vouchers.

643 families obtained and/or maintained safe and affordable housing through *Access*; of these 36 families and 27 individuals, who were chronically homeless, were permanently housed.

The **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)** is *Access’* largest program, purchasing home heating fuel for more than 6,000 income-eligible households with heating assistance. (Data taken from the *Access* CSBG Annual Report). Non-qualifying applicants are provided energy assistance referrals to other community partners with different eligibility limits/factors. Although this is a program that significantly meets the community’s need for help to pay for home heating fuel, because of the high poverty rate in the region we know there
are many in the community who qualify but are not applying. This was also affirmed by our Community Survey results.

**Community Needs Assessment Process**

**Planning:** In the planning stage of conducting the Community Needs Assessment a meeting was convened on August 27, 2019 to establish a timeline of activities. Access chose to invite residents and service providers in Windham and Tolland Counties to be a part of the process of writing a comprehensive survey. Invitation postcards were distributed to contact lists throughout the community network by email and hard copies were handed out at outreach sites and in the office lobbies. Plans were also made to conduct focus groups, social media outreach, and key informant interviews.

- **Focus Group I: Community Discussion; Community Needs Assessment**

  Friday September 13, 2019 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. 1315 Main Street, Willimantic CT

  - **Purpose:** Residents and service providers of Windham and Tolland Counties volunteered an hour of their time for the purpose of developing survey questions that ask about and examine the most pressing needs of low-income members in our community.

  - **Attendance:** Fifteen people were in attendance. Five were employees of Access from Family Support Programs, Community Engagement, Homelessness Prevention and Planning and Performance. One is an intern from UConn for our Access to Employment (A2E) program. Two people came from The ROOT Center for Advanced Recovery, one from EASTCONN Educational Service Center, one from Windham Area Interface Ministries (WAIM), one from Windham Public Schools, one from VestA Affordable Housing, one from the nonprofit conservation, The Last Green Valley (TLGV) and two unaffiliated community residents.

  - **Outcome Summary** A list of community survey questions was presented to the attendees for review and an open discussion followed. Upon deciding what relevant information we needed to be derived from the data, in the analysis stage of the assessment, new questions were developed and others edited.

    The individuals that attended were engaged and represented a variety of community interests contributing to a well-rounded and insightful discussion. Questions that would be directed toward trauma, neighborhood safety, and knowledge of how to access homelessness resources were added.

Another meeting was scheduled in Killingly on September 27, 2019 to repeat and complete the survey question planning process and prepare for survey distribution.
Focus Group II - Community Discussion: Community Needs Assessment

Friday September 27, 2019 1:00 pm- 3:00 pm Killingly Library 25 Westcott Rd., Danielson CT

- **Purpose**: Residents and representatives of Windham and Tolland Counties volunteered 2 hours of their time for the purpose of developing survey questions that ask about and examine the most pressing needs of low-income members in our community.

- **Attendance**: Fourteen people were in attendance. Five were employees of Access from Community Engagement, Homelessness Prevention, and Planning and Performance. One from Solutions on Homelessness, one from the Killingly School system, two from Perceptions Program, one from ROOTS, one from The Sexual Assault Crisis Center, one Community Resident, one Killingly Library, Director and one Credit Union President.

- **Outcome Summary**: The group was presented with the revised version of the survey based on the results of the first forum. This Killingly catchment area presents with needs that may vary from Willimantic due to its rural nature. Suggestions were made to ask questions that would identify the needs of individuals, but because the Community Survey is anonymous and directed to decipher community needs, we would be unable to collect data at the individual level. After open discussion, some adjustments were made and agreement was reached on how the Survey would be presented.

All of the attendees provided their email addresses and offered to share the survey link when it is complete by posting it on social media, their websites and email lists to Windham and Tolland County contacts of diverse sectors.

Finalizing the Survey and Implementing Distribution

The survey was completed in English and translated into Spanish so we could offer both languages. We put it into an online link and sent it to Rhonda Evans, Deputy Director CT Association for Community Action and Certified Results Oriented Management Accountability (ROMA) Trainer for review. Rhonda responded on Monday December 9, 2019 and we made edits/corrections based on her feedback.

Distribution and posting of the survey began Monday January 13, 2019 and the request for responses ended on Friday February 14, 2019. 283 residents of Windham and Tolland Counties took part in the Community Needs Assessment by taking the survey and many shared it with their contacts as requested in the email message* that accompanied the links.

*A note was included in the email expressing the importance of completing the 2020 United States Census to prevent a low count in our service area.
Community Needs Assessment Survey 2020:
Samples of the distributed surveys in both English and Spanish
English Version: https://form.jotform.com/200713797731155
Spanish Version: https://form.jotform.com/200714593196155

Community Needs Assessment Survey Results 2020:
Link to view the Community Needs Assessment Survey Results 2020:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/147ttVF7Ff3BhMsr5zV7t8O4OCPaU886Pm6zPPk_2Pj/edit?usp=sharing

- **Social Media Outreach:** The 2020 survey links were posted on Mail Chimp (an email marketing service), Access Facebook, Twitter and Google.

- **Partners that participated in the needs assessment and/or distributed the survey:**
  - *Faith Based Organizations:* St. Johns Church, All Hallows Church, Windham Area Interface Ministries (WAIM) and Trinity Episcopal of Brooklyn.
  - *Private sector persons or organization:* Access supporters, board of directors, employees and customers, Community members of elderly and disabled housing, and local real estate agents and private business owners.
  - *Community-based organizations:* Windham No Freeze Shelter, Thompson Ecumenical Empowerment Group (TEEG), Root Center for Advanced Recovery, The Last Green Valley (TLGV) and Perception Program.
  - *Public sector individuals:* Service area Town Halls, local CT Selectmen and Representatives, libraries, and credit Union.
  - *Low income individuals:* Over seventy individuals that participated in the Community Needs Assessment by taking the survey identified as being from a low-income household.
Community Survey Participation

Windham County CNA Survey Participation

*235 respondents took the survey from Windham County

Tolland County CNA Survey Participation

*47 respondents took the survey from Tolland County
Community Survey Results:

- **Homelessness/Transitional Housing**
  
  Over 10% of the 280 CNA survey respondents answered that they were homeless or in transitional housing when asked about their current housing status.

  ![Pie Chart]

  [211Counts Connecticut]

  The top service request received by 211 Infoline from March 26, 2019 through March 24, 2020 in Windham County was for Housing and Shelter at 26.6%, it is the second most common request in Tolland County at 19.5%.

- **Stress Related to Poverty**
  
  61% of those surveyed said they experienced a stressful event in the last 3 years. Some shared that they were homeless. Many reported experiencing loss due to health issues, family death, divorce, and joblessness; while some had debt due to foreclosure and student loans. Over 10% of the individuals surveyed claimed they had no one to turn to in times of crisis.

  When asked as part of the CNA survey:
  
  - Are there things you need but struggle to pay for?, over 52% of those surveyed answered “Yes”.
  - Does your household run out of food before the end of the month? Over 18% of those surveyed answered yes.
  - Over 20% of those surveyed said they use SNAP, Food Banks, or both.
**Stigma Associated With Poverty**

When asked Do you think negative assumptions are made about people with low-income?, over 80% of those surveyed answered “yes”, and less than 20% answered “no”.

In an October 2016 article titled, “The Stigma of Poverty,” by Greig Inglis, a research Fellow for the Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research (SCPHRP), wrote that “the experience of poverty extends beyond material and economic disadvantage. People living in poverty often describe encountering various forms of stigma, prejudice and discrimination. Poverty stigma is evident in the everyday language that we use to discuss poverty, public attitudes on the causes of poverty, and in media and political discourses over issues such as benefits. Poverty stigma creates divisions between ‘the poor’ and the ‘non-poor which serve to justify and maintain socioeconomic inequalities, and can also cause people living in poverty to feel socially excluded and ashamed.

Stigma is harmful to health, and in the case of poverty, may deter individuals from claiming all of the benefits that they are entitled to, thereby further limiting low incomes.”

https://povertyalliance.wordpress.com/2016/10/19/the-stigma-of-poverty/

**Population and Poverty Rates of Windham County**

- Windham County, CT population 116,674
- Median age 41
- Poverty Rate: 11.1%
- Unemployment Rate: 3.5%

**Windham County** is one of Connecticut’s easternmost counties, stretching from Ashford in the west to Killingly in the east. The Windham region boasts a booming manufacturing sector, with manufacturing employment showing an increase of 2.1% in 2018. Companies like Micro Precision LLC, Whitcraft, and Frito Lay to name a few, produce products ranging from naval defense and aerospace industries, to popular snack foods.

In addition to Windham’s growing manufacturing sector, the region has, Eastern Connecticut State University and Quinebaug Valley Community College. Over 24% of Windham residents have a bachelor’s degree or higher. Of the 8,262 firms, almost half of them are minority, female, or veteran owned**.

The median income for Windham County is $62,553, higher than the national average of $61,937. However, it should be noted that the cost of living is 27.7% higher in Connecticut than the national
average. The Windham County Crime rate is 10.6, far below the US rate of 22.7. In Windham County, CT 94.7% of the population has health coverage, with 51.1% on employee plans, 21% on Medicaid, 10.9% on Medicare, 10.2% on non-group plans, and 1.57% on military or VA plans.

There are two hospitals in Windham County - Windham Hospital, and Day Kimball Hospital. In 2018 Windham County was reported to have the highest prevalence of diabetes in Connecticut - over one in ten residents have been diagnosed with diabetes. The infant mortality rate in Windham County is 5.0 per 1000 births, lower than the US rate of 5.8.

**Poverty by Age and Gender**

- Females 25 – 34 are the largest demographic living in poverty.
- 11.1% (12.3k out of 111k people) live below the poverty line, a number that is lower than the national average of 13.1%.
- In 2017, full-time male employees in CT made on average 1.44 times more than female employees.

[Data provided by the Census Bureau ACS 5-year estimate](https://datausa.io/profile/geo/windham-county-ct)
● **Poverty by Race and Ethnicity**
Estimates of the most common racial or ethnic groups living below the poverty line in Windham County, CT - White, (8,991) followed by Hispanic (4,086) and Other (1,545).

![Poverty by Race and Ethnicity](image)

Data provided by the Census Bureau ACS 5-year estimate
[https://datausa.io/profile/geo/windham-county-ct](https://datausa.io/profile/geo/windham-county-ct)

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**Windham County, CT Education Attainment Breakdown**

![Educational Attainment](image)

Data provided by Town Charts
Population and Poverty Rates of Tolland County

- Population: 151,596
- Median age 37.9
- Poverty rate of 6.48%
- Unemployment Rate 2.9%

Tolland County consists of 13 individual towns from Somers in the west to Mansfield in the east. It is home to one of the nation’s highest ranking public universities, the University of Connecticut, and 41.2% of the county achieved a bachelor degree or higher.

The largest industries in Tolland County are Educational Services (11,740 people), Health Care & Social Assistance (11,099 people), and Manufacturing (9,335 people). The area is also close to major job markets in Hartford and Springfield. There is a growing sector of technology firms in the area including Nerac, Gerber Technology, and TTM Technologies, and Cognizant.

The average median income for Tolland County is $81,312, over 31% higher than the national average. The Tolland County Crime is 30% below the U.S. average. In Tolland County, CT 96.5% of the population has health coverage, with 63.2% on employee plans, 10.2% on Medicaid, 10.7% on Medicare, 11.7% on non-group plans, and 0.713% on military or VA plans.

There are two hospitals in Tolland County, Rockville Hospital and Johnson Memorial Hospital. Tolland County has the lowest prevalence of diabetes in Connecticut at 7.1%. The infant mortality rate in Tolland is 4.4 per 1000 births, lower than the U.S. rate of 5.8.

- **Poverty by Age and Gender Tolland County, CT**
  - Males 18 – 24 are the largest demographics living in poverty. A key reason for this is because of the high number of University of CT male students living in college-owned, operated or affiliated housing. While this is a significant number, the individuals in this demographic are generally only in the community for a short period of time (2-4 yrs.), because as they complete their studies they move on to other communities, or acquire employment. However, while there is high turnover of the individuals who comprise this demographic, the high number of low-income males in the community remains constant.
  - 6.48% (8.8k out of 136k people) live below the poverty line, a number that is significantly lower than the national average of 13.1%.
Poverty by Race and Ethnicity Tolland County, CT

Estimates of the most common racial or ethnic groups living below the poverty line: White (7,120), followed by Hispanic (1,160) and Black (558)

Data provided by the Census Bureau [https://datausa.io/profile/geo/tolland-county-ct](https://datausa.io/profile/geo/tolland-county-ct)
Tolland County, CT Education Attainment Breakdown

Data provided by Town Charts
https://www.towncharts.com/Connecticut/Education/Tolland-County-CT-Education-data.html

Interviews with Community Leaders

Interviews were conducted with some community leaders to gather information on their perspective on community needs. Information on those leaders and where excerpts from those interviews can be found is below.

- **Interviewee: Reverend Jane Hale**, Pastor of Trinity Episcopal Church in Brooklyn CT and an Access Board Member.
  Conducted 2/11/2020
  Excerpts can be found at:
  https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HRngb4WmXhwWMWPACWBHqEXA27Dz5UJDF36OHrG1-A/edit?usp=sharing

- **First Selectman Rick Ives**, Town of Brooklyn CT and an Access Board Member.
  Conducted 3/9/20
  Excerpts can be found at:
  Interview Excerpts with First Selectman Rick Ives, Town of Brooklyn CT and Access Board Member
• **Town Administrator Mark Walter**, Town of Columbia CT.  
  *Conducted 3/11/20*  
  *Excerpts can be found at:*  
  [Interviews Excerpts with, Town Administrator Mark Walter, Town of Columbia CT](#)

**Veterans Focus Group**  
*Access* conducted a two-hour forum with 20 Veterans at the Willimantic Salvation Army Veterans Coffee House.  
*Facilitated on 3/4/20*  
*Excerpts can be found at:*  
[Veterans Focus Group Excerpts](#)

**Identified Gaps in Services and Barriers**

- **Public Transportation**  
  Public Transit busses have not run in Plainfield since June of 1998, so for 22 years there has been an impactful gap in public transportation through the town; commuters can travel by bus to the town’s borders but no further. The cut off of bus routes through Plainfield excludes travel South to surrounding towns of Jewett City, Lisbon, Norwich and beyond, restricting the pursuit of opportunities that lay outside the dead zone.

- **Childcare**  
  When it comes to providing children access to high-quality programs, Connecticut comes in 21st place for 4-year-olds in preschool and 10th place for 3-year-olds, according to the annual rankings by Rutgers Graduate School for Education National Institute for Early Education Research.  

  10 people taking the Community Needs Survey said that childcare was a barrier to finding or keeping a job. We have listed a few local programs that provide childcare; Care 4 Kids will typically run out of funding leaving a temporary gap in services until the funding comes through. Parents submit a redetermination every year and if the funding is unavailable it is retroactive to the care start date.

  **Care 4 Kids** - This program works to find affordable child care for low to moderate income families in Connecticut. The program is a partnership between the State of Connecticut, the families in the program and the providers who take care of the children. Eligible families must meet the income requirement of less than 50% of the state median income, live in Connecticut, be working or attending temporary family cash assistance (Jobs First) approved education or training activity, and meet the program’s income requirements. Children must be under age 13, or if the child has special needs, be under age 19.
Windham Early Childhood Program - The Windham Regional Community Council Early Childhood Program offers a quality full day early childhood program for 31 School Readiness students, ages 6 weeks to 3 years old, as well as Before/After School program for elementary school students. The center is open from 7:15am - 5:15pm Monday through Friday and is located on the Willimantic City bus line.

EASTCONN Early Head Start - EASTCONN’s Early Head Start is a federally funded program that provides support and resources to income-eligible pregnant women, children ages birth to three and their families.

EASTCONN’s Head Start - Is a federally funded program for income-eligible children, age’s three to five. Options include center-based programming in Killingly, Putnam, and Plainfield and a home-based program serving Tolland County. Windham Public Schools administers a center-based program in the greater Windham area.

- **Education and Cognitive Development**
  When asked in the CNA; Which do you view as major causes of poverty in your area? 115 people answered substance abuse. CT specialists providing opioid treatment and prevention services were recently approved almost $1.5 billion in funding through the State Opioid Response Grants. This will help with the need for additional services to deal with the opioid epidemic in our service area and provide needed resources. Treatment programs, rehab centers and sober houses are important utilized referral contacts.
  
  https://ctmirror.org/2020/01/02/congress-acts-connecticut-war-on-opioids-continues/

- **Health and Social/Behavioral Development**:
  Some of the answers to the CNA identify a need for supportive relationships to prevent feelings of loneliness and isolation as well as strategies to balance work/life stress.

**The top 5 Needs: The top five identified needs for both Windham and Tolland Counties are:**

1. **Food Security**
2. **Emergency Shelter**
3. **Affordable Housing**
4. **Access to Jobs**
5. **Accessible Transportation**

- **Food Security**: *Need for food security in both Windham and Tolland Counties*
  
  ○ **Incidence of Food Insecurity**: Overall, 12.4% of Connecticut households reported not having enough money to buy food to meet their family needs in the last 12 months. Among the food insecure households, 61.6% reported that this happened almost every month or some months but not every month.
A study done by The Zwick Center for Food and Resource Policy* shows that Windham in particular is negatively affected by food insecurity, with 15.1% percent of residents impacted, while over 10% in Tolland County say they are food insecure. Food insecurity is also affecting students in the area. There are two Universities in the Windham and Tolland County area, Eastern Connecticut University in Windham, and The University of Connecticut in Tolland. In a survey conducted as a part of their food insecurity initiative, titled the “UConn Access to Food Effort Initiative,” UConn found that 26 percent of the survey’s almost 1500 participants were worried that they would not have enough food due to a lack of resources, and that over 10 percent of UConn students had gone an entire day without eating.


- **Access Mobile Food Van** distributes food to 4 towns identified in Fiscal Year 2016 as food insecure in Windham and Tolland Counties. The food distribution towns are Stafford, Willington, Eastford, and Sterling. Based on updated information on food insecure towns, it could be beneficial to evaluate if distribution sites should be added or altered. Increased services will impact the miles on the van, maintenance costs, and personnel time. Since most of the money to finance this service is through private donations, plans to secure additional funding would need to be discussed.
Proposal to change eligibility requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are predicted to have a substantial impact on Connecticut residents that will no longer be eligible for the program. It is only sensical that this will negatively impact the already existing problem of food insecurity in Windham County and the need for food will escalate.

- **Emergency Shelter:** The need for temporary emergency shelter for the homeless
  - **Access Emergency Shelter**: Access operates one of only 2 year-round homeless shelters for individuals and families in northeast Connecticut located in Danielson with 40 beds. During the winter months up to 15 additional people who were non-residents were allowed to stay overnight in the first floor community room. Neither the staff nor the facility is equipped to safely accommodate that many people, especially with young children in the building. To reduce the risk identified in the Access Agency Risk Assessment and taking into consideration the safety of the families staying at the shelter it was decided to adhere to the Governors cold weather protocol when the State of Emergency was in force but not to open the doors as a no freeze shelter to non-residents beyond that point which created a service gap in March 2019.
  - **Northeast CT Overnight Cold-Weather Shelter Project**: Individuals experiencing homelessness during the winter months in northeast Connecticut are at risk of freezing to death. Recognizing that solving this problem would take a community-wide effort, the Access President/CEO Peter DeBiasi initiated in April 2019 a collaborative effort with local service providers, churches, towns and volunteers to brainstorm and work toward solutions. Eventually it was agreed that opening a 30 bed no-freeze shelter from December to March was the solution. Funds and supplies were raised that were needed to make the project successful. Sites were scouted and one was secured in December 2019. The No Freeze Shelter opened in January 2020 and will close March 31.

![Where do the homeless sleep?](https://ctmirror.org/2020/01/08/homelessness-is-down-in-ct-here-are-5-things-to-know/)
**Affordable Housing: Need for safe affordable housing in both Windham and Tolland Counties**

Last year, over 72,000 calls were made to 2-1-1 requesting housing assistance through the Coordinated Access Networks (CAN) system. In a public press release dated January 14, 2020 Governor Ned Lamont said “Increasing the availability of housing for those who are most vulnerable to becoming homeless results in stronger, safer, and more stable communities where families thrive and businesses grow,” Governor Lamont said. “By having support in place for those who are on the verge of becoming homeless, we can rapidly respond to the situations they are facing. Connecticut’s state agencies and nonprofit providers have formed a solid partnership and collaborative approach on these efforts – and I applaud each of them because the work they are doing is turning lives around.”

**Access to Jobs: Need for Living Wage Jobs and or Job Training in both Windham and Tolland Counties**

The need for living wage jobs in Windham and Tolland Counties is important considering the poverty rates. A living wage may be defined differently for low-income workers facing the “Benefits Cliff”, when a raise in earnings results in a loss of subsidies reducing the overall income instead of increasing it, families can find themselves worse off financially than before.

The CT Department of Labor ran a Help Wanted Report for Windham and Tolland Counties for January of 2020. This shows that jobs are available in our catchment area but many of the positions require specific qualifications raising the question; Is the community need a lack of employment opportunities, a trained workforce or both? The graph titled Windham County, CT Education Attainment Breakdown on page 17 shows that the largest percentage 32.7% of residents do not have an education beyond High School. The Tolland County, CT Education Attainment Breakdown graph on page 20 shows that 39.7% of residents have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

**Employment Trends for both Windham and Tolland Counties**

As exhibited in the chart below, the unemployment rate in Windham and Tolland Counties declined every month from January through April 2019 due to strong seasonal patterns. Many industries in the United States are influenced: agriculture, education, retail, hospitality, even healthcare - have strong seasonal patterns. Our catchment area hires for all of the seasonal positions mentioned contributing to the fluctuation in the unemployment rates during these months.
• **Accessible Transportation:** - *Need for Reliable Transportation:*

The nonprofit Alliance of Northeastern Connecticut (NANC) will conduct a Transportation Hackathon, it will be an opportunity for key stakeholders to come together and spend a focused amount of time brainstorming on innovative solutions to the problems with our current transportation systems as well as identifying needed financial resources.

(*Note: Transportation is also mentioned in the interviews on page; 20 and in the Veterans Focus Group and “Gaps in Services” on page; 21)

**Conclusion:**

After administering and reviewing the results of the Community Needs Survey completed by 282 individuals, interviews and focus groups, and review of data relevant to needs in the region, we saw no significant changes from what we learned in our 2017 CNA.

Poverty in our region continues to be significant in rural and small urban centers. The top 5 needs identified related to the impact of poverty on the region are Food Security, Emergency Shelter, Affordable Housing, Access to Jobs, and Accessible Transportation.

Access will use what we have learned from this extensive assessment to inform decisions we make regarding how we will work to carry out our Mission, as well as identifying and finding ways to meet our Strategic Commitments. For over 55 years, Access has been a trusted, integral part of the northeast Connecticut region, partnering to fight poverty.
We remain committed to carry out our Mission - To provide under-resourced individuals, families, and communities with access to opportunities that empower them to achieve and sustain economic stability, in service to residents northeast CT in particular.

This Board approved Community Needs Assessment is accessible electronically to the general public on our website at www.accessagency.org