



REPORT BRIEF

BASIC NEEDS NETWORK ASSESSMENT

A Snapshot of the Basic Needs Network of Human Services in Central Iowa

Each year, participant agencies:

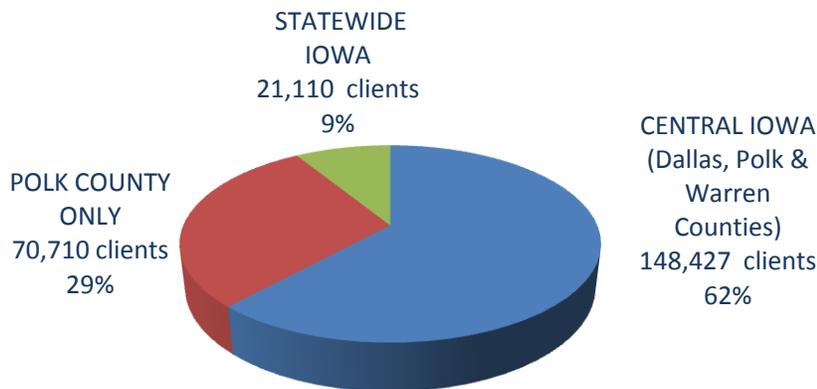
- Assist 240,000 Iowans
- Provide jobs for 2,439 workers
- Return \$546 million to the community in services, leveraged resources, and future cost avoidance

What programs and services are available to help people in Polk, Dallas, and Warren counties who need assistance with housing, food, medical care, and other basic needs? Who is being helped through this safety net? What is the community and economic impact of these programs? What are some opportunities to provide services more efficiently and effectively? Released in July 2012, the *Basic Needs Network Assessment & Mapping Project Report to the Community* answers these questions and more.

Analyzing data from 39 service providers, Phase I of the report provides a sampling of the basic needs safety network that exists in Central Iowa, related to the following program services and issue areas: Emergency Shelter and Housing; Supportive Services; Medical or Treatment Services; and Other Basic Needs Services. Analyses include client demographics and service provider profiles and impact, as well as community investment and resource allocation. Through a more in-depth review and further analysis of a subset of six (6) programs that provide rent and utility subsidies, Phase II of the report reveals the process by which clients navigate the safety net; identifies and diagrams barriers to service; and presents promising practices, models, and recommendations for system enhancements.

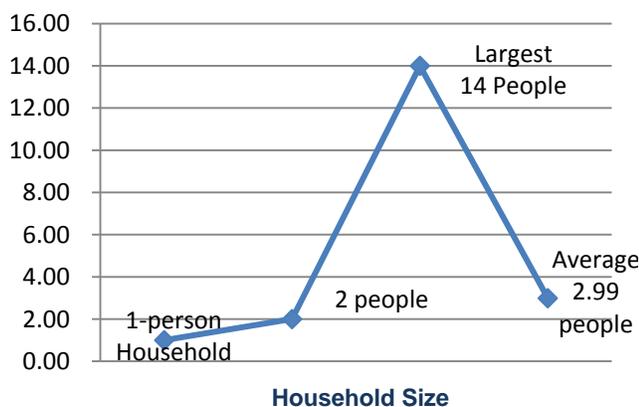
Most Service Providers in Polk County also Assist Iowans from Other Municipalities

All of the agencies have facilities in Polk County, with twelve (12) indicating a county-wide reach or constituency; sixteen (16) serve Central Iowa only; and eleven (11) have a state-wide reach (see chart below). Just 30% of surveyed agencies provide services exclusively to Polk County residents.



Total Non-duplicated Clients = 240,247

Iowans Struggling to Meet Basic Needs are Disproportionately Female and Young



Annually, agencies assist over 240,000 Iowans from 0-103 years of age who need help in meeting basic needs. Three of every five (60%) are women or girls and 45% are children or youth under the age of 25 years. One factor contributing to this disparity may be the “gender pay gap”, where Iowa women earn just \$75 for every \$100 earned by men. A parallel factor may be the high ratio of female-headed, single-parent households living below the federal poverty threshold.

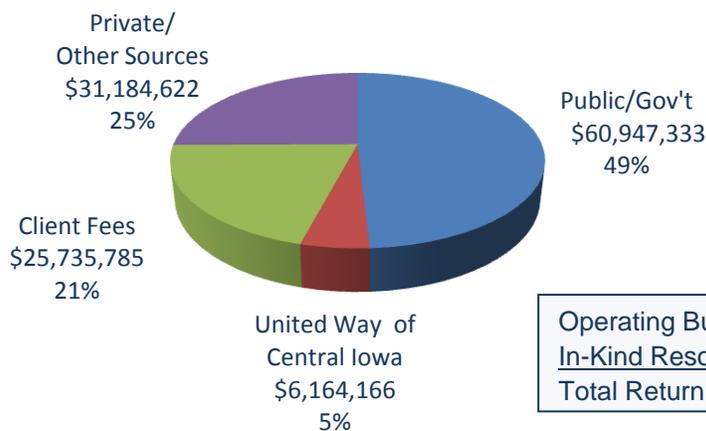
Public assistance programs often require household income to be at or below 185% of the federal poverty threshold for families to qualify for benefits. For a 3-person household to move beyond poverty, this would require income of about \$33,500 each year.

The average 3-person client household assisted through the basic needs safety net in Central Iowa is struggling to survive on < \$20,000 annually.

A growing body of research suggests a family of three (3) requires annual income of roughly \$44,000 - \$54,370 to achieve sustainable self-sufficiency with no income or work supports. Read more at www.wowonline.org/resources/publications.

Yearly Safety Net Investment is \$124 Million – Community Return on Investment is \$546 Million

With operating budgets of \$124 million*, public funds account for 49% of agency revenues; United Way of Central Iowa provides 5%; 21% is paid by clients; and 25% are private donations. This direct financial investment, plus the value of leveraged in-kind resources and future cost avoidance resulting from safety net interventions, provides a return of \$4.40 per \$1.00 invested.



Operating Budgets	\$124,031,906
In-Kind Resources & Cost Avoidance	+ 422,291,907
Total Return on Investment	\$546,323,813

*System-wide, \$81 of every \$100 is devoted to programs and participant services.

Rent and Utility Subsidies Help Over 13,600 Polk County Residents Avoid Homelessness

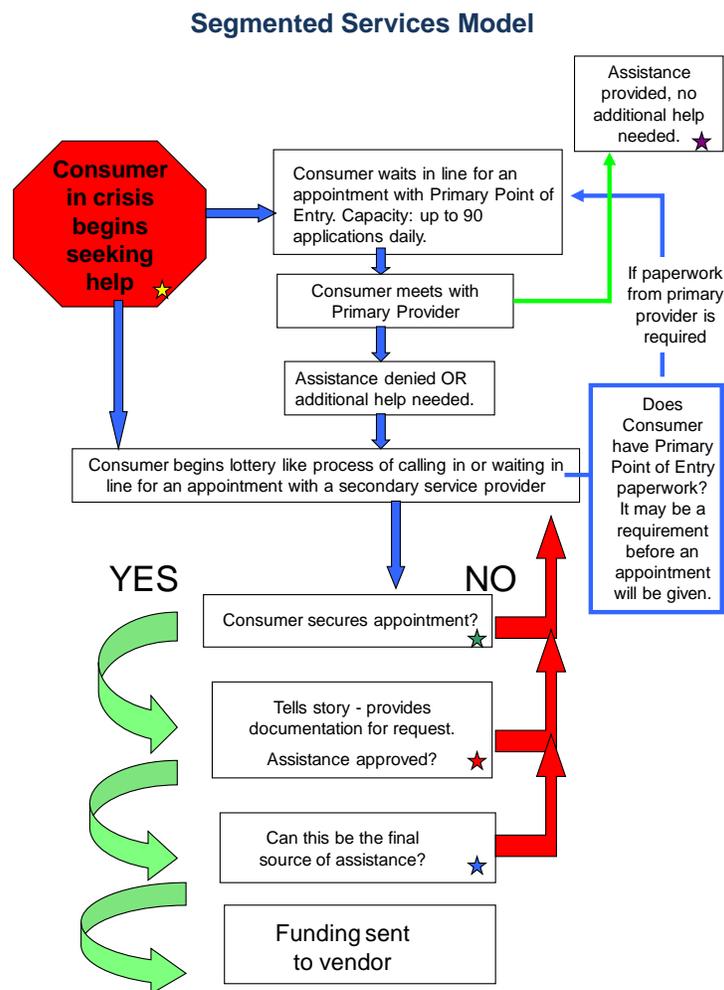
An in-depth review and analysis was conducted with six (6) agencies that provide rent and utility subsidies for residents of Polk County. This informal network included five (5) nonprofits and Polk County General Assistance. Annually, these programs provide \$1,741,900 in assistance that helps about 5,000 families stay in their homes and avoid homelessness. More than 99% of households are screened through Polk County General Assistance. Additionally, this agency facilitates distribution of 70% of available funds, resulting in Polk County emerging as the primary provider for rent and utility subsidies.

Assistance Provided per Family is Low – Stability Measurements are Missing

The average amount of cumulative assistance provided per household per year is \$352, or about \$29 per month; assistance per person is \$128, or \$10.67 per month. Currently, no agency tracks the *requested* amount of assistance. No agency utilizes longitudinal follow-up measurements to ensure families are stably housed after financial assistance has been disbursed to the landlord or utility company – a process that can take up to three weeks, or longer.

Segmented Services Make it Challenging for Families to Access the Help They Need

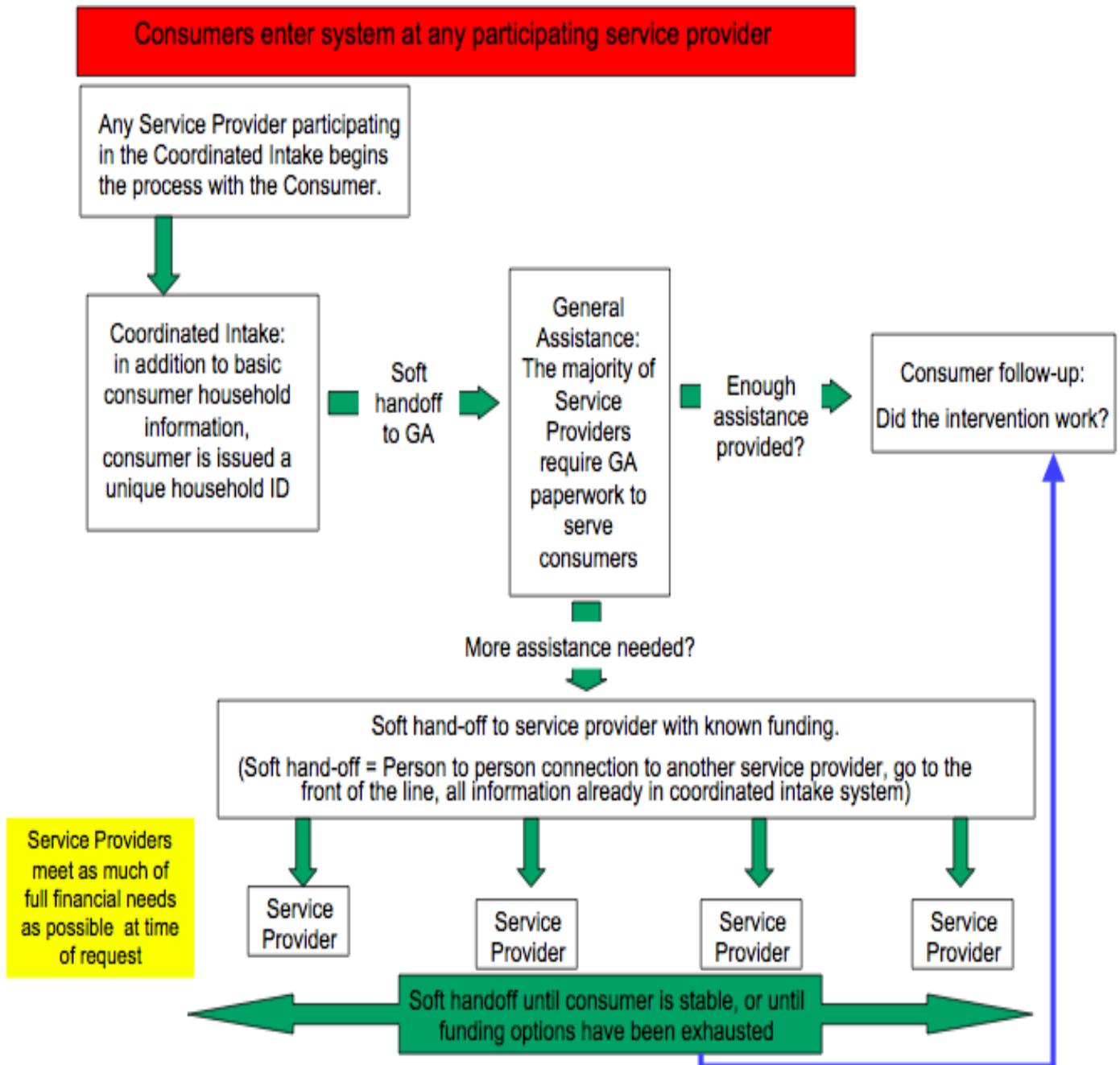
The segmented services model shown below reveals a coordinated, yet inefficient, process of how rent and utility assistance is currently accessed and provided in Polk County. Segmented services create significant barriers for families in need of emergency assistance.



Promising Practices and Program Models

The study identifies a number of promising practices and methodologies, including the coordinated services model shown below, that provide opportunities to address barriers to service, improve consumer experiences, and enhance program outcomes.

Coordinated Services Model



General Observations and Recommendations

The need for homelessness prevention and housing stabilization services in Central Iowa is relentless and growing. A finite pool of funding and resources is stretched and shrinking. Increasing administrative, reporting, liability avoidance and fundraising requirements demand that service providers do more with less. The process by which consumers seek assistance is unnecessarily convoluted and inefficient.

These factors and more require that Central Iowa community leaders, funders, and providers recognize that a paradigm shift is critical and imminent. The solution cannot be to do more of the same and expect different results.

The positive aspect of this study is that it has the potential to serve as a catalyst to dramatically impact the quality of life for thousands of Central Iowans. Key recommendations are to:

1. Engage with and seek buy-in from diverse constituencies to develop and implement a Coordinated Services Model.
2. Create a community-wide coordinated services model and data tracking system that is accessible by and networked across service agencies.
3. Within a coordinated services model for providing rent and utility assistance, maximize the role of Polk County General Assistance as the primary provider.
4. Consider using a subset system, such as the DMARC Food Pantry Network, as a preliminary intake screening asset for the primary provider.
5. Secure and/or reallocate resources to support a longitudinal assessment for ensuring families are stably housed after financial assistance has been disbursed – and create options for additional assistance, as necessary.
6. Identify and research successful community intake and assessment models and bodies of research, and modify or apply elements that could work well in Central Iowa.
7. Explore other promising practices and service models. Specifically, examine those that use service hubs or regions, and models that link housing and homelessness prevention activities with supportive services.
8. Bring all possible resources to bear on the issues identified in this report.
9. Secure long-term resource commitments from community leaders and major funders, as well as other diverse constituencies, to ensure the transition to and long-term sustainability of a more effective and efficient system.
10. Extract the rent and utility assistance component from the broader discussion about coordinated intake and services, and begin...

View the full report at: www.dmreligious.org/basicneeds. Research for this study was commissioned and facilitated by United Way of Central Iowa and made possible through the extraordinary cooperation of the participating agencies and their representatives.

The recommendations are solely those of the project team and authors.