

Skagit County Low-Income Needs Assessment 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: SERVICE PROVIDER CLIENT SURVEY

*A study of needs and resources for low-income
people in Skagit County, Washington*

Commissioned by

Skagit County Community Action Agency

Research and Reporting by

Cornerstone Strategies, Inc.

Funding partners include:

United Way of Skagit County

Puget Sound Energy

Skagit Valley Hospital

Skagit Community Foundation

Northwest Workforce Council

Group Health Cooperative

Island Hospital

Economic Development Association of Skagit County (EDASC)

United General Hospital

Skagit County



ALGER

ANACORTES

BOW

BURLINGTON

CLEAR LAKE

CONCRETE

CONWAY

EDISON

HAMILTON

LA CONNER

LYMAN

MARBLEMOUNT

MOUNT

VERNON

ROCKPORT

SEDRO-

WOOLLEY

Acknowledgements

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For online access to this report in Executive Summary or full report format, please visit the Skagit County Community Action Agency website at www.skagitcap.org.

Organizations interested in obtaining specialized reports may be arranged with Cornerstone Strategies at gregw@cstonestrategies.com

With Appreciation,
Karen Parnell, Project Director

Executive Summary

Introduction

Skagit County Community Action Agency, working with the support of other service providers, local government and the private sector, produces a comprehensive countywide needs assessment for the following purposes:

- ✓ Explore and illustrate the dimensions of poverty in Skagit County,
- ✓ Provide a strategic planning tool for agencies, organizations and individuals seeking to confront poverty in Skagit County, and
- ✓ Present a locally significant and reliable study for use by local communities and funders and to attract resources necessary to combat poverty in Skagit County.

Who was surveyed?

Overall, 656 households responded to the survey. These households include a total of 2,215 persons. During a 12-week period in the summer and fall of 2009, this project intensively sampled as many unduplicated households as possible from social and health service sites throughout the county. In addition, 92 staff from 59 agencies responded to our service provider survey.

What were the clients like?

- ❑ **Residency:** 43% of households live in Mount Vernon. The rest live in small cities or unincorporated Skagit County. 77% have lived in Skagit County for four years or longer.
- ❑ **Family status:** 62% of households are families with children; 43% include children 0-5 years old. 6% of respondents said that they have an aging parent living with them, and 5% of households with children at home said that they were a grandparent raising a grandchild.
- ❑ **Employment:** 53% of client households include wage earners; 17% rely, to some degree, on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Retirees make up 16% of the client respondents. Spanish speakers are more likely to have income from wages (82%).
- ❑ **Income:** 50% of client households report less than \$1,000 in total monthly household income; 73% have household incomes that are at or below the Federal Poverty Level.

- ❑ **Race and Ethnicity:** 55% of respondents are white, 10% Native American, 3% African-American, 1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, <1% Asian, and 2% represent other ethnic heritage; 34% of all respondents are of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.
- ❑ **Language:** 19% usually communicate in Spanish; 6% usually speak another non-English language.
- ❑ **Veterans:** 15% of respondent households have at least one veteran member.

What were the clients' high priority needs?

- ❑ High priority needs with lower availability: According to client respondents, affordable housing, medical care, dental care, home heating assistance and living wage jobs are high priority services that are hard to access. These are the same service gaps indicated in the 2005 LINA survey.
- ❑ Compared to other clients, those who normally speak Spanish identified the same service gaps. However, they also tend to give adult basic education higher importance ratings.
- ❑ Seniors (60 years old and older) also identified the same five service gaps in this survey; however, in 2005 they only identified affordable housing and dental care.
- ❑ Service providers agree with clients: affordable housing, affordable medical and dental care, and living wage jobs are priority needs with low availability. They would add to that list transportation and mental health treatment services.

What were the findings based on categories of need?

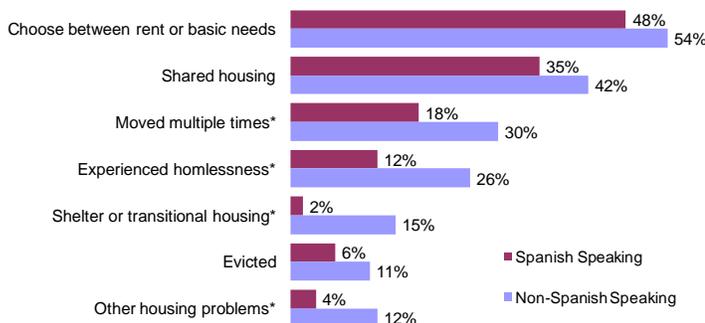
- Housing:** More than half of survey respondents (55%) rent their housing. Another 17% are homeowners. The remaining survey respondents currently share housing with another household (14%), live in transitional housing or an emergency shelter (6%), are homeless (6%), or live in employer-provided housing (1%).
- ❑ Survey respondents were asked about current housing problems as well as housing situations they had experienced in the past 12 months. More than half of respondents

reported that bad credit makes it hard to find a place to rent (54%). The affordability of renting or owning a home were also common barriers to stable housing, at 48% and 41% respectively.

- 67% of renters and 76% of homeowners pay more than 30% of their gross income per month for rent or mortgage;

Housing costs	Renters	Owners
Mean cost	\$ 530	\$ 989
Median cost	\$ 500	\$ 947
Mean cost burden (% of income spent on rent or mortgage)	50%	68%
Median cost burden	43%	53%
Cost burden >30% of income	67%	76%

- More than half of respondents (52%) said that in the last 12 months they had to choose between paying the rent or mortgage and other basic needs. 41% have had to share housing to avoid homelessness and many have moved multiple times in the past year (27%). About one in four respondents have experienced homelessness in the past year (23%).
- Spanish speaking households were less likely to have experienced each of these negative housing situations in the past year. Most significantly, they were less likely to have moved multiple times, have experienced homelessness, or have stayed in an emergency or transitional shelter.



- 71% say that they want to buy a home some day.

Recent Developments in Housing Services

- Skagit's 2009 homeless count of 2,306, compared to 1,182 in 2005, is the highest per capita in WA. Approximately 50% were children under age 18, of which 522 were homeless children in schools.
- 2060 Funding legislation begun in 2004 taps building permit fees to dedicate funds for low-income housing and homeless prevention, has grown to four bills. Variable with the real estate market, about \$500,000 is available annually, up from \$168,000 in 2004.
- SCCAA's emergency family shelter expanded from four to ten apartments in 2008. Re-named the William J. Shuler Family Development Center, services include self-sufficiency on-site support resources.
- SCCAA manages 43 transitional housing units across the county, up from 36 in 2005. Families receive subsidized rent and family support services for up to two years.
- Skagit Housing Connections, new in 2009, is a 1-Stop Homeless Service Center for those who are homeless or facing homelessness, with mortgage and rental funds, case management, and education services. The program streamlines services for hard-to-serve clients.
- Opened in November 2009, the nine-unit Anacortes Family Center (AFC) provides emergency and transitional shelter for single mothers, families with children, and single women. (<http://www.AnacortesFamily.org>) Fidalgo Island Share-a-Home, run by AFC, brings together home providers with home seekers looking for an affordable place to live. (<http://www.FidalgoFish.org>)
- The Wilson Hotel renovation, completed in 2006, provides 25 one bedroom and studio apartment managed by the Anacortes Housing Authority. It serves low and very-low-income renters and units include five which are handicap-accessible. Within walking distance of services, the hotel features five commercial spaces on the first floor.
- Home Trust of Skagit (HTS), a nonprofit community land trust (CLT) dedicated to creating permanent home ownership affordability, formed in 2009. Under SCCAA's umbrella, HTS works with groups in Anacortes, LaConner, and Hamilton. The 2005 LINA presented a CLT concept paper as part of relocation options for Hamilton.

- ❑ SCCAA acquired Channel Cove, an affordable neighborhood of 22 rental units in LaConner in late 2006. A feasibility study to transition four units to home ownership using the CLT model, and build ten new units in Phase II is underway.
- ❑ SCCAA's Volunteer Chore Program helps seniors and disabled adults stay in their homes with a focus on home repairs and handicap modifications. Expanding on this, an Anacortes 2009 ARRA project will provide local contractors home repair jobs to weatherize selected senior homes. Staff cite a trend of more seniors, often recent retirees, living on the edge of homelessness, a situation frequently aggravated by mental health issues which hamper their ability to carry out life management strategies.



Childhood Development and Parenting: 62% of respondents have children.

- ❑ **Affordability is the main barrier to child care services:** 44% say they can't find affordable child care. Parents frequently cite a lack of community child care services that provide: weekend care (21%), evening care (30%), infant care (34%), part-time care (20%), and care for special needs children (23%).
- ❑ **Children's health and dental care:** most parents (84%) say their children have some type of health insurance. Still, 16% of family households with children do not have children's health insurance.
- ❑ **Car safety seats:** 20% of households with children under the age of seven do not have car safety seats for each of their young children.
- ❑ **Youth problems:** When asked what problems their children experience, more than half of parents say their children have no problems. Of those that report problems, cited most frequently are emotional or behavioral problems, a learning disability, weight or eating habits (including concern about both overweight and underweight problems), and skipping or dropping out of school.

Recent Developments in Childhood Development and Parenting Services

- ❑ The Children's Council of Skagit County connects monthly to increase public awareness of early childhood education, provide family support, and coordinate agency

services. Members include a wide variety of agency representatives and individuals.

- ❑ Annually, Early Childhood Connections Conference provides STARS training for child care providers, with workshops in Spanish.
- ❑ Skagit's Early Head Start's ARRA stimulus funds will increase enrollment from 83 to 103 through Sept 2011, and will also provide minimal facility upgrades. After 8 years of flat funding, the program will receive a small operation increase in 2010.
- ❑ SCCAA provides early childhood education to children of families enrolled in their ESL classes. Even Start Family Literacy, begun in 2006 and held at Madison School, is a partnership of SCCAA, MVSD, Head Start, Migrant Head Start, and SVC.
- ❑ SVC's Child and Family Learning Center, opened in 2004, serves as a lab for WWU and SVC Early Childhood Education and Human Services students. It provides inclusive bilingual classrooms for HeadStart and SPARC.
- ❑ Welcome Baby was cut from the county budget in early 2009. Limited services are conducted by volunteers.
- ❑ The highly acclaimed At-Risk Intervention Specialist (ARIS) program, begun in 1991, is undergoing severe budget cuts and reorganization as 2009 closes. ARIS delivered successful services in the schools, community, and home settings, serving thousands of students, ages pre-school to eighteen.
- ❑ Skagit Preschool and Resource Center (SPARC) collaborates with Head Start, placing children with disabilities in their classrooms, and provides special education staff support in Head Start classrooms. SPARC retracted their Neuro-developmental Center, formerly an off-site location, to their main office in 2005.
- ❑ Best Place early learning centers under the county's 21st Century Learning Grant, phased out in 2005, transitioned to YMCA Child Care serving children one month through 12 years of age. Early learning centers operate full-time year round, with school-age sites operating on school district's schedule. Summer licensed school-age day camp programs operate and accept DSHS subsidies.
- ❑ Skagit's Child Care Resource & Referral, hosted by Volunteers of America, reported that 2007 licensed family child care centers numbered 168, a drop from 184 in 2004. 39% of licensed providers have Spanish-speaking

staff. Nearly 50% of requests for referrals in 2007 were for weekend or evening care, and over half were from low-income families.

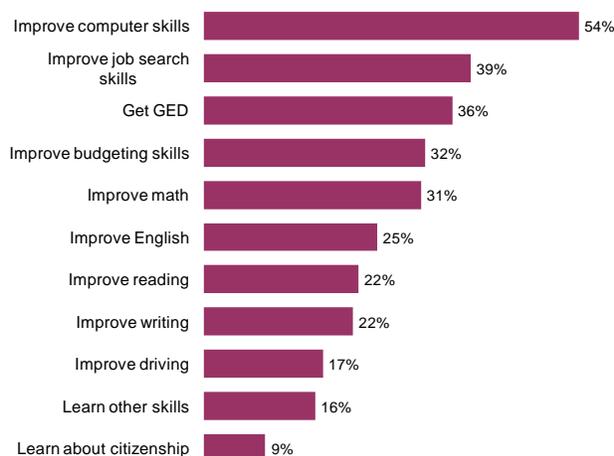
- ❑ Current active TANF cases in Oct 2009 is 1,032, of these cases 389 are child only cases where the parents or relatives are not active on TANF with the child. A 6-month average of 603 families received Working Child Care Connections each month in 2009, a 40% decrease from 1,000-plus in 2005. See discussion in Employment & Income.



Education, Communication and Literacy: More than a third of respondents have some form of post-secondary education. They have attended a trade school or some college education (25%), or have a two-year degree or higher (12%). About one in four survey respondents do not have a high school diploma or GED (26%).

Respondents were asked which free literacy services they would like to participate in to improve certain literacy skills.

- ❑ 54% want to improve their computer skills
- ❑ 32% would like to improve their finance and budgeting skills
- ❑ 36% want to obtain their high school equivalency degree (GED)
- ❑ 39% want to improve their job search skills
- ❑ Spanish-speaking clients are more interested in improving their English language skills (70%) and learning about citizenship (15%)



- ❑ **Communication:** Just over half of respondents have access to a working landline phone at home (55%), and just under half have home internet access (48%). Cell phones

are also common, with 44% having cell phone contracts, and 41% having a pre-paid or “pay as you go” cell phones. One in four respondents say they watch Spanish TV 26.

Recent Developments in Education, Communication and Literacy Services

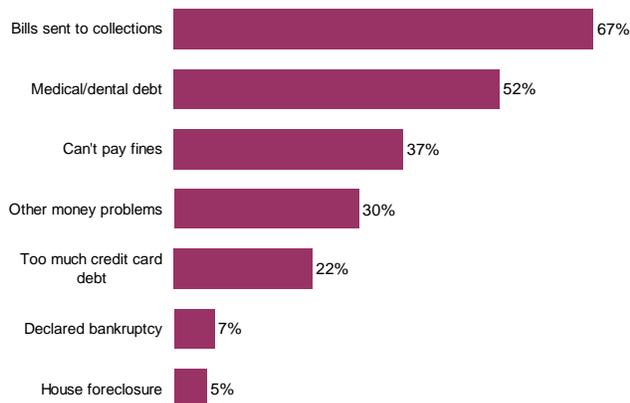
- ❑ Significant changes for SCCAA’s literacy services were the loss of 21st Century funding which impacted staffing levels and the ability to provide appropriate early childhood education. SCCAA has developed a skilled leadership base that has recruited, trained, and built an awesome team of early childhood staff. The 200 adults served by approximately 40 volunteers remains stable. Services provided by VISTAs, AmeriCorps VISTAs, and other volunteers is a large part of positive outcomes in families.
- ❑ SCCAA became the sponsoring organization for the Washington Reading Corps (WRC) AmeriCorps program in 2006 with positions in 19 elementary schools and early learning centers in Skagit, Whatcom, and Snohomish counties. In 2006, the program had 34 positions and one full time staff person. In 2007, it expanded to 60 positions and three full time staff, and currently WRC has 58 AmeriCorps members and three full-time staff. Services focusing on struggling readers reach 1,000 youth in Skagit County.
- ❑ Skagit Valley College charges \$25 per quarter, with low-income waivers available, to students enrolling in ABE, ESL, and GED classes, including assistance in GED test preparation. Also, see I-BEST information in Employment and Income section.
- ❑ Teen GED is headed up by a VISTA staff person through SCCAA’s literacy program. The program works in partnership with WorkSource where a computer lab is staffed with volunteer tutors. A new venture is being formed to provide educational support to detainees in the juvenile detention center.
- ❑ Goodwill Job Training & Education Programs provide ESOL (English speakers other than English) and in 2009 began offering citizenship education support.
- ❑ SCCAA administers Community Voice Mail, free 24-hour voice mail for homeless and phoneless individuals, through partnering sponsors. Services expanded in 2008 to provide access to local job opportunities and other vital resources through Broadcast

Messaging. Additionally, since 2006, WTAP (Washington Telephone Assistance Program) offers low-income households basic monthly phone service for \$8. Households receiving public assistance, such as TANF or Food Stamps qualify.

- ❑ SCCAA and the City of Mount Vernon partner to produce Spanish information and education to Comcast viewers on TV 26. 2009 contributing partners were Mount Vernon School District, Skagit Valley Hospital, and Washington State University. Special funding covered SVC's Champions of Diversity awards ceremony. Additional partners and sponsors are being sought to stabilize funding and expand programming.
- ❑ SVC-based KSVR radio (91.7 FM) provides a broad range of programming, including a weekly radio program produced by Washington State University (WSU) Extension. The WSU radio program provides information and education for Spanish listeners. Program funding was lost in June 2009 with WSU budget cuts. Interim funds maintained programming through 2009; however, the program's future is uncertain.



Financial and Legal Assistance: Among a list of seven types of money problems clients may have experienced in the 12 months prior to the survey, respondents most frequently reported having bills sent to collections (67%); having debt from medical or dental care (52%); and having fines that are hard to pay off (37%).



- ❑ Survey respondents were also asked what problems they had getting help with the financial situations they experienced. Thirty percent of respondents said they did not have any problems getting help with their finances. Of those who did have problems getting help,

two-thirds could not afford financial help (68%). The next most common issues were not knowing where to go (42%) and not have transportation to get financial help (22%).

- ❑ 33% of clients needed legal assistance in the past year, but could not afford it.
- ❑ The most frequent response to the need for legal assistance was to do nothing (42%); 27% turned to SCCA Legal Clinic for help.

Recent Developments in Financial and Legal Services

- ❑ Financial Education, is being addressed as part of SCCAA's literacy program. A VISTA is working to form an Asset Development and Microenterprise Coalition. Community volunteers provide financial education in banking & savings, budgeting, debt-elimination and credit repair for community members, literacy students and SCCAA's housing program participants.
- ❑ SCCAA's Volunteer Legal Program reports increased requests for services, especially in the last year, with family law, housing, and consumer issues, including bankruptcy comprising the main presenting problems. Hispanic clients accessing this program have increased to comprise 32% of clients receiving services in 2008 and 2009, compared to 28% in 2004.
- ❑ The Dispute Resolution Center (DRC), formerly a county-run mediation department, merged in late 2009 with Volunteers of America Dispute Resolution Center. The DRC provides contracted services to the county and has secure funding from a surcharge on district and civil court filing fees. Services are available on a sliding income scale. Volunteer mediators provide low cost mediation, facilitation and training. www.voaww.org/drc
- ❑ The Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI), begun in July 2009, is one of seven WA pilots. JDAI promotes system improvements resulting in less use of secure confinement without increasing criminal activity or failed court appearances. Skagit's program includes a focus on disparate Hispanic youth detention, which comprised about 33% of all referrals to the juvenile court and 36% of all juvenile detention admissions in 2009.
- ❑ Catholic Community Service's Family Immigration Program, opened in 2006, provides legal services in family immigration and citizenship, including family reunification, family petitions, immigrant visa and adjustment

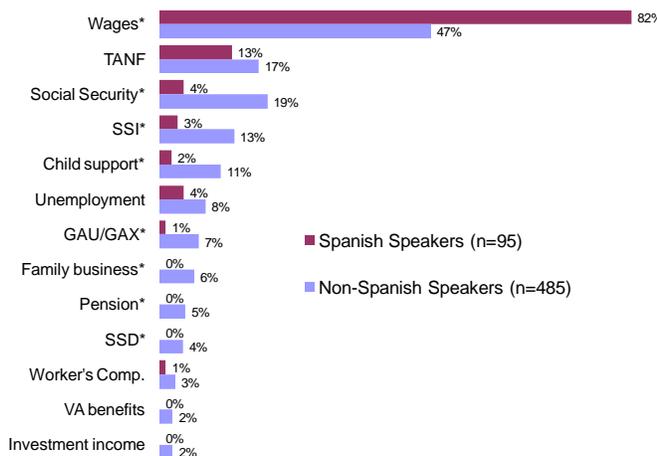
of status applications. Service to renew Lawful Permanent Resident cards, work permits and other documents is also provided. CCS can provide services in multiple languages. www.ccsww.org

- ❑ Long-Term Care Ombudsman program for Skagit, Whatcom, Island, and San Juan was moved from Northwest Regional Council to SCCAA in January 2008. Many issues involve eviction and/or discharge of senior and disabled residents from area long-term care settings.



Employment and Income: Getting or keeping a job was a problem for nearly two in three (65%) of all respondent households. Respondents cite lack of available jobs, recent layoff, their own job skills, a physical or mental disability, and lack of transportation as the main barriers to employment for household members.

Compared to other respondents, clients who usually speak Spanish are more likely to have income from wages (82% compared to 47%), and less likely to have income from Social Security and SSI.



Recent Developments in Employment Services

- ❑ WorkSource Skagit Career Center (www.WorkSourceNorthwest.com), a one-stop comprehensive career center opened in 2006. Varied services are available in-person or on-line. Service numbers doubled in 2009 over those in 2008.
- ❑ Skagit Valley College partnered with eight school districts to obtain a \$24.4 million legislative allocation to establish the Northwest Career & Technology Academy to open in 2010. It will provide technical job-skills training to high school students.

- ❑ EDASC, providing assistance to those looking to start, sustain or expand a business, partnered with SVC's Business Resource Center to establish the Latino Business Retention and Expansion Initiative in 2004. A 2009 re-crafted mission offers access to capital and other resources to support Latino enterprises. (www.skagit.org)

- ❑ Skagit Valley College's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST), launched in 2006, pairs English as a Second Language (ESL)/Adult Basic Education (ABE) instructors with professional-technical instructors to provide dual literacy education and workforce skills.

- ❑ SCCAA became the Skagit contractor in 2007 for WorkFirst Community Jobs & Supported Work programs, providing paid and unpaid work experiences for TANF parents at nonprofit organizations and public agencies.

- ❑ SCCAA's volunteer center expanded in 2008 to the Skagit Volunteer Center, able to provide its volunteer and pre-employment opportunities 24/7 through on-line at www.1800volunteer.org or linked at www.skagitcap.org.

- ❑ Since 2007, Goodwill Job Training & Education has offered broader career services and computer training, the latter also for ESOL (English speakers of other languages). Their 5-month retail and merchandising program was discontinued in 2007.

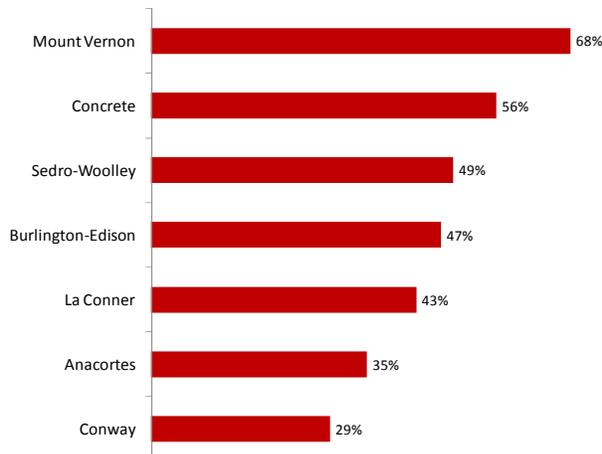
- ❑ DSHS Working Connections Child Care monthly caseload in 2009 decreased 40% compared to the 2005 study. Services peaked in late 2008, then declined as service-related and manufacturing jobs also declined.



Food and Nutrition: 23% of clients say that someone in their household had gone hungry for lack of food.

- ❑ 80% of clients relied on one or more food assistance programs.
- ❑ Food stamps, food banks, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (popularly known as WIC) are the most frequently mentioned assistance programs used.
- ❑ Among Skagit County school districts, Mount Vernon and Concrete exhibited the highest eligibility rates: 68% and 56% respectively during the current school year. Sedro-Woolley, La Conner, and Burlington-Edison each have

nearly half of their enrollment eligible for free or reduced price meals. Conway (29%) and Anacortes (35%) exhibit the lowest eligibility rates, near or exceeding one-third of enrollment.



Recent Developments in Food and Nutrition Services

- ❑ Skagit County's Food Bank Distribution Center (FDBC), purchased by Skagit County in 2007 and operated by SCCAA, shares space with Sedro Woolley's Helping Hands Food Bank. An expansion is planned to modify the existing plant to more efficiently serve 13 area food banks and five hot meal programs.
- ❑ Skagit Food Share Alliance, formed in 2008, works with local farmers to purchase locally grown produce for food banks and hot meal programs. A first-annual Bite of Skagit, fundraiser to support SFSA was held in 2009.
- ❑ Skagit's food banks provided 246 lbs of food/household in 2009 as compared to 227 lbs in 2005. SeaMar's food bank closed in mid-year 2009, shifting the load of homeless individuals formerly served at this operation to other area food banks.
- ❑ SCCAA oversees the Basic Food Outreach Program (BFO) for DSHS Region 3, a 5-county region. Income eligibility guidelines increased from 130% FPL to 200% in October 2008. Since 2005, households approved for food stamps in Skagit County have increased approximately 72% from 5,036 to 8,675, with one in seven Skagit County households relying on food stamps.
- ❑ Whole grains and fresh vegetables became part of the regular WIC package in 2009. Farmer's Market WIC food coupons (\$22,750)

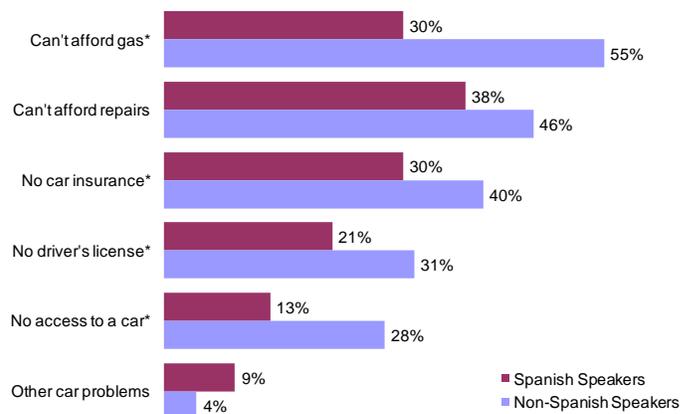
increase the nutritional value and variety of diets of low-income young families. WIC brings \$2,834,828 to local markets annually.

- ❑ Skagit County's Meals on Wheels served over 130,000 meals in 2009. Despite cuts in staff and funding in 2009, services are being maintained, partially through 250 volunteers.



Transportation: Almost half (47%) of respondent households say that transportation has been a major problem in the past year.

- ❑ 51% cannot afford gas; about half cannot afford car repairs; 38% have no car insurance, 25% have no access to a car, and 29% do not have a driver's license (compared to only 17% in 2005).
- ❑ Spanish speaking clients were significantly less likely to report having had a transportation problem in the past year (39% compared to 47%). When asked about specific types of transportation problems, Spanish speakers were less likely to report most problems, significantly: not being able to afford gas; not having insurance; not having a driver's license; and not having access to a car.



- ❑ 22% of households regularly use Skagit Transit, up significantly from 13% in 2005. Of those that don't, about half (51%) say they prefer to use their car; 20% say that the bus schedule does not work for them; 19% say there is no bus stop close to home, and 13% say there is no bus service where they are going.

Recent Developments in Transportation Services

- ❑ Requests come to many Skagit service providers for gas vouchers, auto repair, and SKAT passes. Gas prices, which peaked in

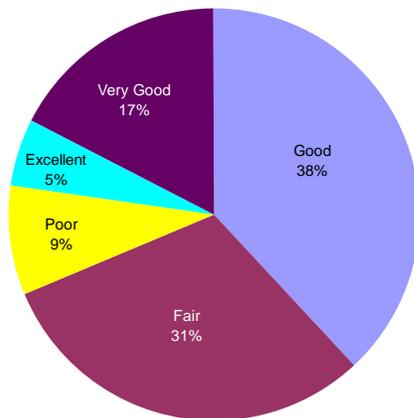
Summer 2008 at \$4.37/gallon in the Seattle area, have leveled to an average of \$2.80/gallon, compared to 2005 prices which fluctuated from a low of \$1.75 to \$2.80.

- Skagit Transit (SKAT) provides service throughout most of Skagit County, with 13 fixed routes, up from 10 in 2005, and 11 Dial-A-Ride routes, in addition to a Vanpool program for commuters. Expanded transit service beginning in May 2009, resulted in increased service hours, additional trips on the Everett Express, new fixed and Dial-a-Ride routes, expanded Saturday service, and the re-introduction of Sunday service in urban areas, efforts funded by sales tax dollars resulting from the approval of the 2009 *Proposition 1*. Other services link passengers to Island and Whatcom County transits. Regular monthly fare cards are \$25/month, up from \$15 in 2005. www.SkagitTransit.org.



Health and Healthcare: A majority of respondents rate their general health positively, reporting good (38%), very good (17%), or excellent (5%) health status. About a third of respondents said their health was fair (31%) and less than ten percent had poor health.

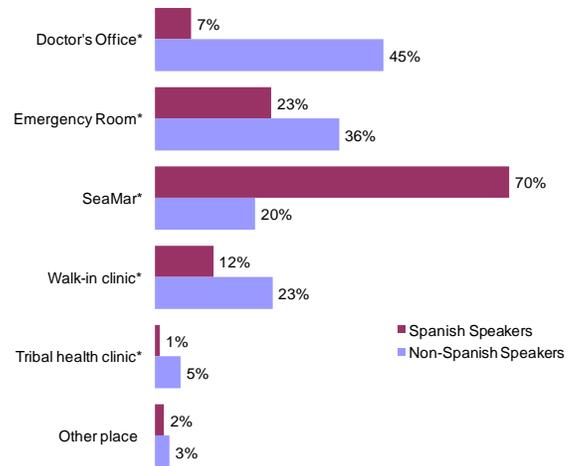
Respondent Health Status



Sampled households were divided into three roughly equal sized groups based on income. Those in the lowest income group were nearly twice as likely to report poor or fair health as those in the highest income group.

- Uninsured:** Among low-income Skagit County clients, 28% are uninsured (34% in 2005).
- Primary care:** Survey respondents reported that they usually get their medical care from a private doctor's office (39%), a community health clinic such as Sea Mar (29%), or the hospital emergency department (34%).

Spanish speaking clients were much more likely than others to seek medical care at SeaMar, though less likely to seek medical care at a doctor's office, the emergency room, a walk-in clinic, or the Tribal health clinic.



- More than a third of respondents reported that someone in their household had a problem getting needed medical care (37%) or dental care (40%) in the past 12 months. Almost as common, were problems in getting needed prescriptions (31%). By far, the most common reasons for not receiving any of four types of health care (medical, dental, mental health, or prescriptions) are the high cost and not having insurance. Not knowing where to go was a significant barrier for mental health care (23%).

Recent Developments in Health Care Services

- Skagit County Alliance for Health Care Access (SCAHA) formed in 2009 to address health care access for the uninsured, those with Medicaid or Medicare, and undocumented individuals.
- Apple Health for Kids is free health/dental coverage for children, citizen and non-citizens, 18 or younger in families below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. Families up to 300% FPL may be eligible for coverage for a low cost.
- Washington State Basic Health monthly premium increased from \$36 to \$61.60 with a yearly deductible increase from \$150 to \$250. With enrollment frozen in early 2009 and further cuts in late December, its future is uncertain.
- WA's Medicaid-funded Maternity Support Services (MSS) received major cuts in 2009.

New criteria restrict services for low risk women, with highest service levels for women at risk for premature birth. In 2007, 59.8% of Skagit births were Medicaid-covered, compared to WA's 47.3%. State deficits still threaten MSS.

- ❑ 2009 expansion of Skagit Valley Hospital allowed placement of a Veteran's Health Care Center as well as an urgent care clinic for SeaMar on the SVH campus.
- ❑ Medicaid reimbursable dental care was supplied to 9,602 people in Skagit County in 2008, of which 2,216 were adults (18-64) and 212 were seniors (65+). Currently, nine dental clinics in Skagit County accept medical coupons.
- ❑ SeaMar Dental Clinics provide 4 operatories in Burlington and 5 in Mount Vernon, serving low-income adults and children on a sliding-fee or with medical coupons. The Mount Vernon clinic plans to expand to a total of 10 operatories.
- ❑ The ABCD program (Access to Baby and Child Dentistry), new to Skagit County in 2004, is overseen by the health department. It provides enhanced reimbursements to dentists for serving Medicaid-eligible infants through age five with fluoride treatments and parent education on early teeth and gum care. ABCD

often provides points of entry for other family members to a dental home. The health department also applies free dental sealants to qualified 2nd grade children in schools that have a high threshold of enrollments eligible for free/reduced school lunches. The sealant program, in its tenth year, has brought about significant improvements in children's dental health.

- ❑ SCCAA's Mobile Dental Unit conducted 16 clinics in 2009, compared to 28 in 2005, the reduction spurred by competition from other communities for Northwest Medical Team's mobile unit as well as difficulty in recruiting dentists. A 3-year VISTA dental care access project is addressing this community problem.
- ❑ Catholic Community Services (CCS) began a school-based mental health program in 2008 serving K-8 in all school districts. Masters level therapists served 329 families in 2008-09. The program is funded by one tenth of one per cent sales tax dollars
- ❑ Peer Connection Center, a drop-in day activity center for individuals with diagnosed mental health conditions opened in 2007, serves up to 1,500 peers per month. Start-up funds, partially met through the county's one-tenth of one percent state taxes, will expire at the end of 2009. The center faces serious financial challenges to maintain its current service level.

Low-income service gaps. Low-income client survey respondents and a separate sample of 92 Skagit County social and health service provider staff (in a separate survey) rated both the *importance* and the *availability* of 15 categories of services for low-income people in Skagit County. Clients rated the importance and availability of services to their own household; providers rated the importance and availability of the services to their client population. Below, we examine the similarities and differences in client and provider perspectives as a method of analyzing low-income service gaps in Skagit County.

Gap analysis using importance-availability coordinate system. Because respondents rated these services on five-point scales,¹ one way to analyze these data is to calculate the average *importance* and *availability* scores for each service. These data form the basis of an *importance-availability* coordinate rating system (see figures on following page). The average importance and availability ratings among clients and providers were calculated and plotted on the graph. The lines making up the “*crosshairs*” of each graph represent the average importance score and the average availability score for each group of respondents.

The importance-availability charts are divided into quadrants that rate low-income services as follows:

Quadrant I *Services that rank above average in importance, but below average in availability*

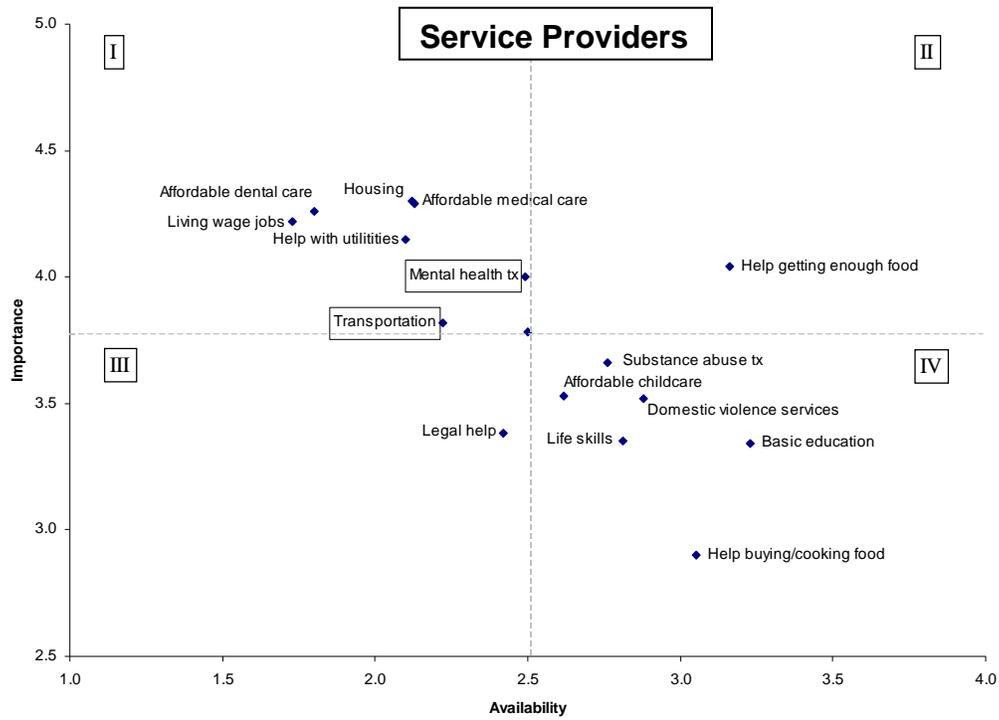
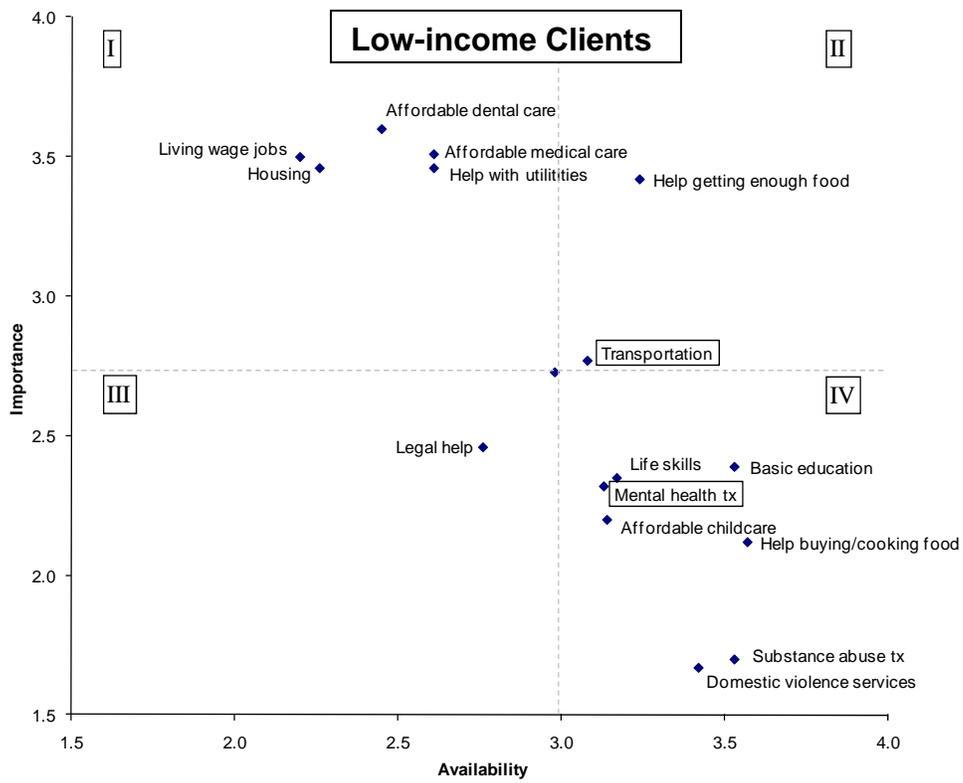
Quadrant II *Above average in importance and availability*

Quadrant III *Below average in importance and availability*

Quadrant IV *Below average in importance, but above average in availability*

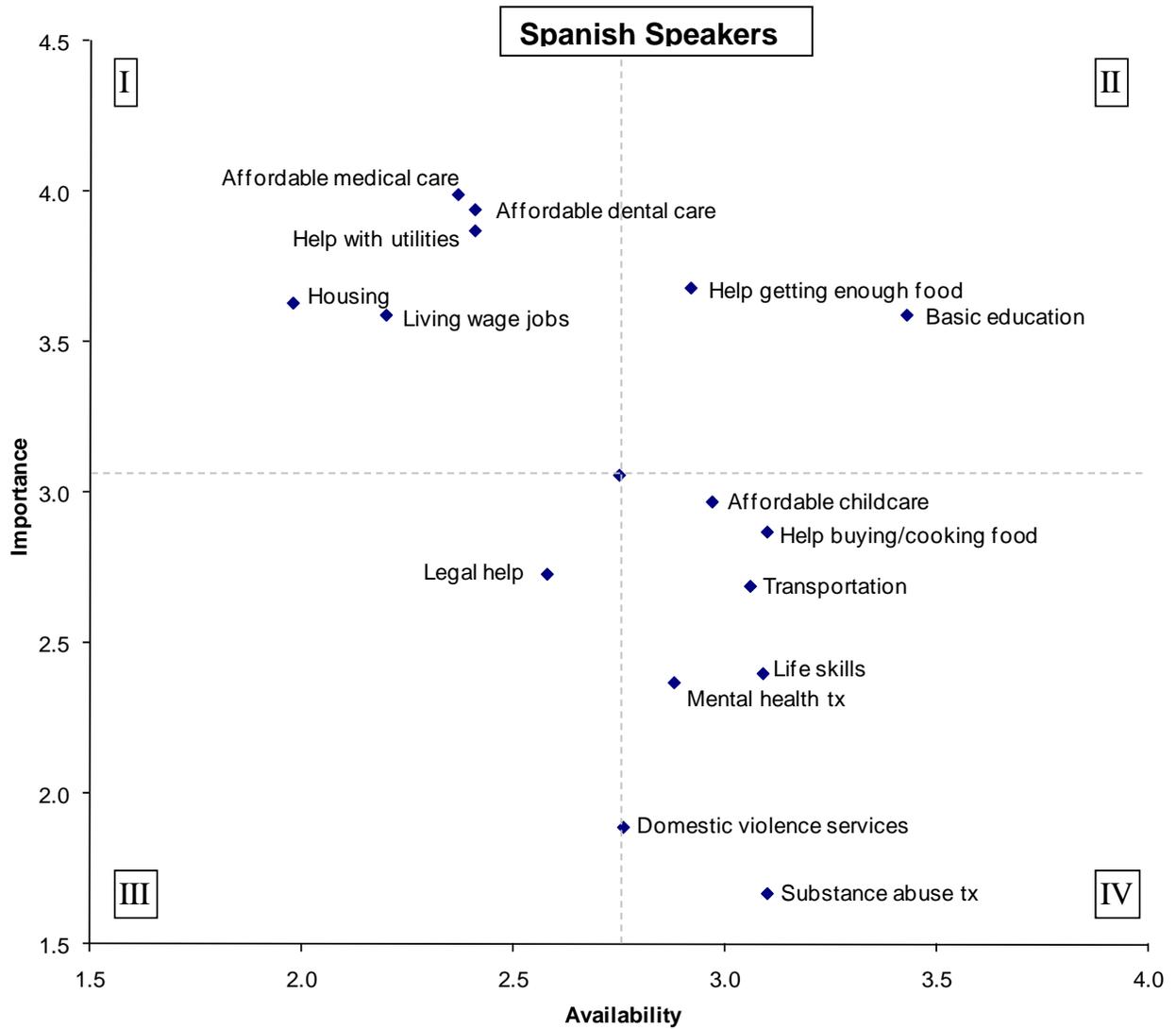
Individuals and organizations planning for future services may want to pay particular attention to the services that appear in the first quadrant (labeled “I”) of both the low-income client and service provider graphs. These are the services that, on average, both groups agree are very important to low-income households and hard to access. For this study, we find that both groups agree that affordable housing, medical and dental care, living wage jobs, and energy assistance are in high demand but relatively scarce (service providers would add transportation and mental health services to that list). This should not be interpreted to mean that the other services are not worthy of attention. Certainly there are many households in dire need of these services and not enough resources to satisfy that need. However, the services that appear in quadrant I are those for which the gap between need and supply is the largest, based on low-income client and service provider perceptions.

¹ Importance scale ranged from 1, for “*not important*” to 5, for “*extremely important*”; Availability scale ranged from 1, for “*very hard to get*” to 5, for “*very easy to get*”



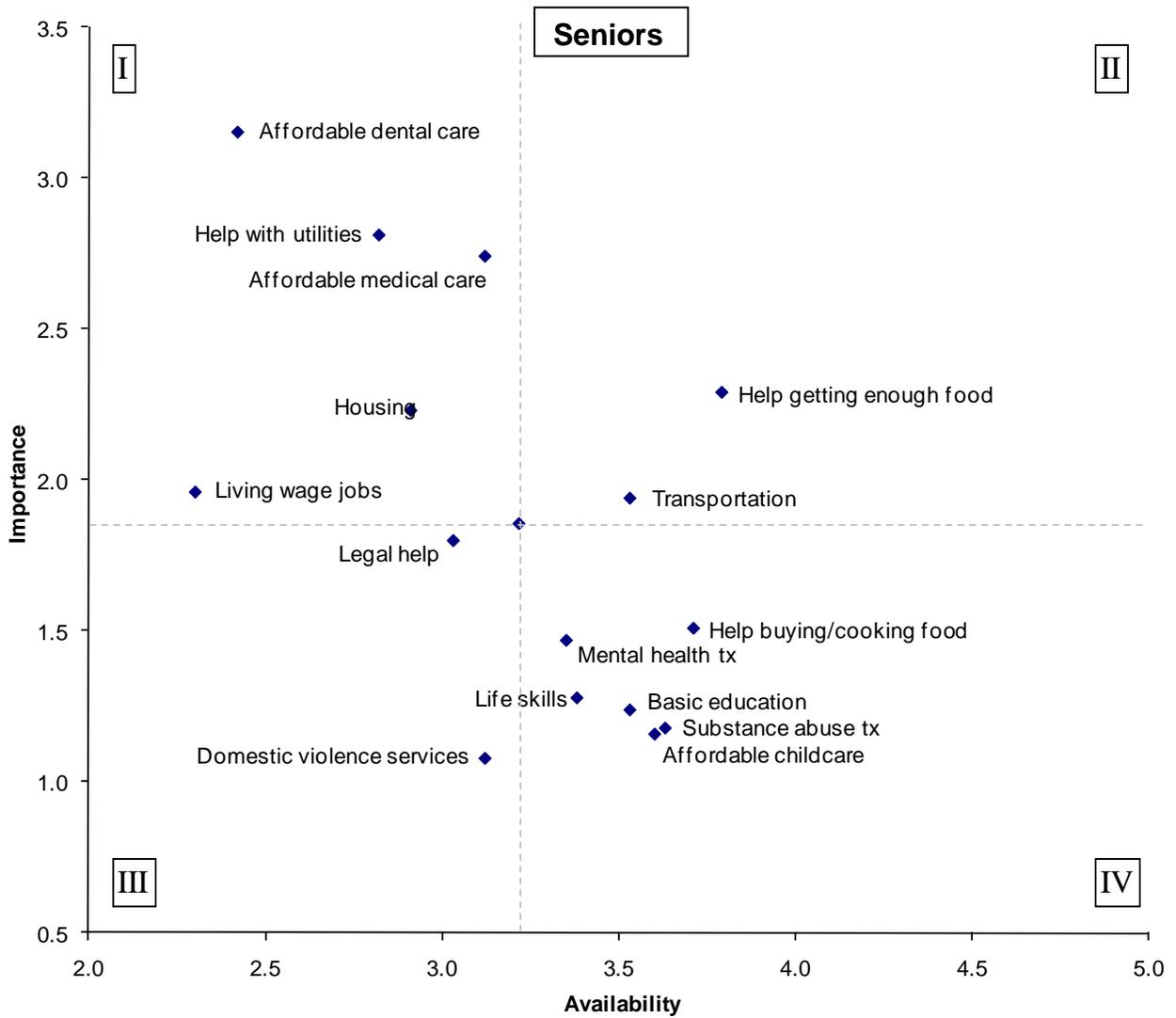
Spanish-speaking consumers: Clients who normally speak Spanish at home consider the same services above average in importance, yet below average in availability: affordable housing, dental and medical care, energy assistance and

living wage jobs. Spanish speaking clients tend to assign higher importance scores to adult basic education. They also see transportation as slightly less important and more available.



Senior consumers: Compared to the overall sample of low-income clients, senior clients (60 years and older) perceive the same services to be high in importance and low in availability; however, in 2005, seniors identified only affordable housing and dental

care as high unmet needs. Since then, help with utilities, affordable medical care, and living wage jobs are perceived by our senior citizens as being highly important, but relatively unavailable.



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STRATEGIES

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