Self Help Inc

Programs & Resources to Help Families & Individuals Thrive

2023 Community Assessment Report

Covering the Greater Brockton Area

and Select Communities within Bristol, Norfolk, and Plymouth Counties

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TABLE OF CONTENTS ►►►

Agency Description	3
Mission, History, Vision	3
Program Descriptions	4
Community Assessment Process	5
Community Profile	7
Community Needs Survey Results	11
Partner Survey Results	18
Community Focus Group	19
Statewide Focus Group	19
Customer Satisfaction	20
Key Findings Summary and Next Steps	20

The Self Help Inc. Board of Directors approved this *Community Assessment Report* on July 17, 2023.

Self Help Inc

Programs & Resources to Help Families & Individuals Thrive

MISSION, HISTORY, VISION ►►►

The mission of Self Help Inc. is to foster healthy, inclusive communities through programs and resources that empower residents to access equitable opportunity, achieve stability, and thrive. *Approved by the Self Help Inc. Board of Directors on April 24, 2023*

Our History ►

Self Help Inc. (SHI) is a non-profit 501 (c)(3) organization founded in 1965 as a community-based, multi-service agency and part of a network of more than 1,000 Community Action Agencies serving economically disadvantaged populations in cities, towns, and counties across the nation. This network got its start in 1964 with President Lyndon Johnson's declaration of a "War on Poverty" and the signing of the Economic Opportunity Act. The services and programs provided by Community Action Agencies are made possible thanks to core Federal funding provided through the Community Services Block Grant. Agencies are able to use this core funding, which in Massachusetts is distributed and overseen by the Commonwealth's Department of Housing and Community Development, to leverage additional public and private support.

For nearly 60 years, SHI has worked toward its mission by providing comprehensive health and human services in severely economically depressed communities in the Greater Brockton area of Massachusetts. SHI has worked to meet the changing needs of this region through programming that addresses both emergency needs, such as food and shelter for the newly poor, the recently unemployed, and the homeless, as well as long-term needs, focusing on empowering and assisting individuals and families to enhance their economic mobility and quality of life through adequate health care, nutrition, education, employment, socialization skills, and community development initiatives.

Our Vision ►

Self Help aspires to be a recognized community leader and partner in efforts to advocate for and progress toward an end to poverty. We envision our service area as a place where people in need feel supported, respected, and empowered to access equitable services, resources, and opportunities.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS ►►►

Coordinated Family and Community Engagement ►

The goal of the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement program is to provide families with children from birth to age six with access to locally available comprehensive services and supports that engage and strengthen families, in order to promote optimal child development and bolster school readiness. The program also looks to increase parent engagement in their child's learning, reduce parental isolation, and to promote knowledge of parenting through skill development and education. The CFCE parent-child playgroups are also geared toward ensuring children are ready for Kindergarten. The CFCE program offers families free parent-child community-based playgroups, literacy groups, STEM/STEAM groups, individual referrals, parent consultation and resources, parent workshops, Ages and Stages Developmental Screenings, and home visits to help improve family functioning.

Head Start ►

Head Start is a comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and family services program focused primarily on pre-school children ages 2.9-5 and their families living with low incomes. Self Help Head Start provides high quality education, a USDA sponsored nutrition program, developmental/behavioral and health/dental screenings, physical health and wellness activities for children and caregivers, nutrition classes for caregivers including healthy food to take home, a child development certificate class for parents/caregivers, and home visits to help improve home environments. In 2023, Self Help had the opportunity to operate an existing home-based Early Head Start program serving more than 80 families with children under three years old, and we hope to officially add this program to our offerings once it goes out to bid in 2024.

ParentChild+ ►

In January 2020 Self Help implemented ParentChild+ for the communities of Randolph and Holbrook, a national researched-based literacy program which works with parents and their two- and three-year-old children in one-on-one home and virtual visits. Self Help contracted with two trained community-based Early Learning Specialists to visit each at-risk family's home twice a week for 30 minutes to help the family learn creative ways to read and play with their child, and learn about literacy and child development, for a minimum of 23 weeks per year over a two-year cycle. Families are provided a free book or educational toy each week, receiving at least 46 new books and toys in total. The goal of the program is to help families be their child's first and best teacher and to prepare the child for school success. During 2024, ParentChild+ will expand to serve 23 communities.

Food Assistance ►

To help address growing food insecurity within our service area, Self Help offers SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) Application Assistance and coordinates and provides supplemental food as well as basic essentials such as diapers to food pantries operated by other local providers. For many years, Self Help operated the Attleboro Food Pantry serving the towns of Attleboro, North Attleboro, Norton, Mansfield and Plainville, and will open this site again by 2024. In addition, Self Help Head Start helps address food insecurity by offering families access to fresh fruits and vegetables as well as culturally appropriate foods.

Energy Programs ►

Self Help's Energy Programs are designed to provide relief to households most vulnerable to high home energy costs. The Fuel Assistance program helps low-income families and individuals pay for and lower the cost of heating their homes in winter and cooling in summer. The Energy Conservation program helps stretch participants' energy dollars by providing free upgrades for insulation and weatherization, replacement of energy-inefficient appliances, as well as heating system repairs and replacements for income-eligible households.

Tax Assistance ►

Self Help's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program runs seasonally during the tax season and is staffed by IRS-certified volunteers providing qualified participants with free basic and advanced income tax return preparation with electronic filing. The program aims to help participants maximize their tax returns, access credits available to them, develop enhanced financial literacy, and increase their savings.

Hand-in-Hand Case Management ►

In 2020 Self Help began offering the Hand-in-Hand Case Management program to elders who are home-bound and experiencing social isolation. Services are provided by a case manager at the client's home, in an easily accessible community space, and/or virtually. The case manager conducts Family Strengths and Needs Assessments with participants and provides assistance that may include referrals, help with applications for additional services such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, access to SHINE health insurance counseling services, accompanying clients to appointments, advocacy, organizational help, and socialization activities. Additionally, the case manager for this program also provides community outreach for all Self Help services and programs, to increase the organization's presence and impact in all communities we serve.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PROCESS ►►►

Overview ►

For approximately one year leading up to Summer 2023, Self Help led a comprehensive assessment of the needs within our service area, gathering and analyzing critical information from key stakeholders as well as the general public. The process was facilitated by a 13-member Planning Committee made up of both board and staff members and led by a Strategic Planning Specialist. Stakeholders included Self Help customers, board members, and staff, as well as partnering organizations and groups from the community, public, private, education, and faith-based sectors. Primary data was collected through the following methods:

- Web-based **community needs survey** distributed widely throughout our service area, including to past and current Self Help customers, non-customer low-income residents, and general community members, via text message, email, social media, and at community events and meetings
- Web-based **partners questionnaire** emailed to representatives of a range of organizations and groups from multiple sectors
- **Community focus group** including community members as well as representatives of local service providers
- **Statewide focus groups** discussing statewide needs with representatives from each of the MA's 23 Community Action Agencies

► **Self Help customer satisfaction surveys** collected throughout the year, with results reported to the board every six months

For more information on each primary data collection method, see *Key Findings*. In addition, **secondary data on key poverty indicators** was collected and analyzed in collaboration with data consultant MySidewalk (see *Statewide Collaboration Statement* below) and was used to develop the *Community Profile*.

Statewide Collaboration Statement ►

The MA Community Action network is known for its strong collaborative spirit. Through our statewide association, MASSCAP, representatives from member organizations meet regularly as part of nearly a dozen Communities of Practice, including Planners, Human Resources, CFO/Fiscal, Communications and Development, Executive Directors, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program, Information Technology, DEI Roundtable, and Food Insecurity.

The Planners' COP is long standing and has been a source of ongoing best practice sharing. Over the last year, in preparation for the 2024-2026 Community Needs Assessment Report and Strategic Plan (CARSP), the Planners' COP has focused on CSBG compliance with Organizational Standards related to the ROMA cycle, Community Needs Assessment, and Strategic Planning.

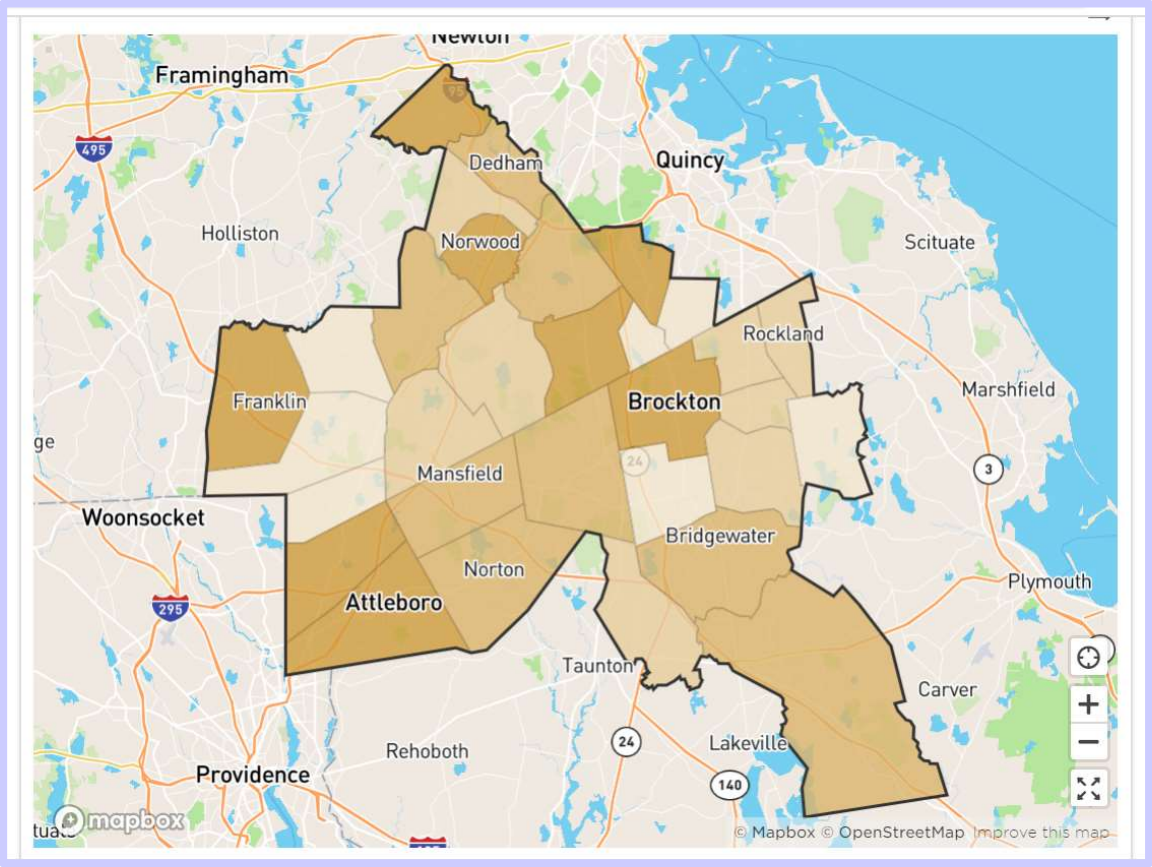
Specifically, the Planners' COP has collaborated in three primary ways to prepare partner organizations for success in the CARSP process:

1	In fall of 2022, the MASSCAP Planners' COP collaborated to develop and refine a list of standardized survey questions to assess community needs. The Community Needs Survey is intended to capture feedback from a wide range of stakeholders on the most pressing needs facing residents. The standardization of the survey tool throughout the network allows for aggregation of data collected across the Commonwealth, creating a more complete picture of statewide needs as well as a comparison of needs between different geographical regions.
2	Also in the fall of 2022, a subgroup of the MASSCAP Planner's COP worked with representatives from MySidewalk, a data curating and visualization tool, to create a common framework for presenting key indicators of the causes and conditions of poverty in Massachusetts. The result was a set of service-area specific dashboards representing key indicators in the domains of Demographics, Poverty, Education, Employment, Health, Social and Behavioral Development, Housing, Income, Infrastructure and Asset Development, and Transportation. These dashboards give each agency easy access to important secondary data for their own Community Needs Assessment Reports and provide a consistent framework through which to look at poverty across Massachusetts' Community Action network.
3	As a team, the MASSCAP Planners' COP determined an efficient methodology for capturing both statewide and regional information about needs, existing services, and gaps would be to conduct focus groups with COP Planners. Thus, in early March 2023, MASSCAP facilitated a series of focus groups with Planners who attended the regularly scheduled COP meeting. (See *Statewide Focus Group*.)

COMMUNITY PROFILE ►►►

The MA Association for Community Action, the MA Department of Housing and Community Development, and data consultant MySidewalk have partnered to develop interactive online dashboards with key data on demographics, poverty, education, employment, health, housing, and income for all communities in the state. The following pages include dashboard data for SHI's service area (https://dashboards.mysidewalk.com/community-needs-assessment-masscap-shi) and for Brockton specifically (https://dashboards.mysidewalk.com/community-needs-assessment-masscap-shi-brockton).

The Self Help dashboard covers all communities in our service area *(note that communities within Self Help's federally designated Community Services Block Grant service area are followed by an asterisk)*: Abington*, Attleboro*, Avon*, Bridgewater*, Brockton*, Canton*, Dedham, East Bridgewater*, Easton*, Foxboro, Franklin, Hanson*, Holbrook*, Mansfield*, Middleboro, Needham, Norfolk, North Attleboro*, Norton*, Norwood, Plainville*, Randolph*, Raynham, Rockland*, Sharon*, Stoughton*, Walpole, West Bridgewater*, Westwood, Whitman*, and Wrentham. County- and state-level data are also included. We encourage you to explore these resources online, which include a wealth of additional information along with helpful charts and graphs.



See *Appendix A* for the complete list of MySidewalk online data dashboards, covering the service areas of all 23 Massachusetts Community Action Agencies, the state's 14 counties, plus bonus areas like the Gateway Cities.

Community Profile Data ▶

Demographics	SHI Service Area	Brockton	Norfolk County	Plymouth County	Massachusetts
Total Population	736,865	104,216	720,403	527,602	6,991,852
White	72.3%	29.3%	72.4%	78.8%	69.7%
Black	11.1%	39.8%	6.8%	8.9%	6.7%
Hispanic/Latino	5.9%	12.1%	5%	4.2%	12.4%
Immigrants	15%	31.8%	19.2%	10.2%	17.3%
Poverty	**SHI Service Area**	**Brockton**	**Norfolk County**	**Plymouth County**	**Massachusetts**
Below Poverty Line	6.3%	11.3%	6.1%	6.4%	9.6%
Low Income (Below 200% Poverty)	15.4%	29.6%	13.9%	16.1%	20.7%
Working and Still Below Poverty	3.3%	5.4%	3.3%	3.2%	4.9%
Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	10.3%	28.6%	7.1%	10.5%	12.2%
On Medicaid	19.7%	43.8%	14.5%	20.1%	22.5%
Households without Internet	6.6%	12.6%	5.5%	6.7%	8.1%
Education & Employment	**SHI Service Area**	**Brockton**	**Norfolk County**	**Plymouth County**	**Massachusetts**
Preschool Enrollment	6.3%	4.2%	7.4%	6.7%	5.9%
Bachelor's Degree (Age 25+)	25.8%	14.1%	29.1%	24.6%	24.8%
Unemployment Rate	5.4%	8.1%	5.1%	5.1%	5.4%
Health	**SHI Service Area**	**Brockton**	**Norfolk County**	**Plymouth County**	**Massachusetts**
Fair or Poor Health	13.9%	21.3%	12.1%	14.7%	15.1%
Living with Disability	10.7%	12.9%	9.4%	11.1%	11.6%
2021 Opioid-Related Deaths*	-	56	165	168	2,290
Confirmed & Probable COVID-19 Deaths to Date as of April 13, 2023**	-	536	2,352	1,975	24,573
Housing	**SHI Service Area**	**Brockton**	**Norfolk County**	**Plymouth County**	**Massachusetts**
Vacant Units	4.1%	4.9%	4.3%	8%	8.9%
Homeownership Rate	73.1%	56.8%	68.3%	77.5%	62.4%
Median Monthly Rent	$1,531	$1,322	$1,781	$1,406	$1,429
Median Home Value	$439,686	$304,414	$529,200	$409,600	$424,700
Excessive Housing Costs – Renters***	48.7%	50.2%	45.9%	48.5%	46.6%
Excessive Housing Costs – Owners***	25.3%	32.7%	25.9%	27.9%	26.1%
Income	**SHI Service Area**	**Brockton**	**Norfolk County**	**Plymouth County**	**Massachusetts**
Median Earnings	$56,113	$39,752	$58,108	$48,737	$48,078
Median Household Income	$106,947	$71,440	$112,089	$98,190	$89,026

Source unless otherwise noted: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2017-2021

**Source: MA Department of Public Health Dashboard on Opioid Statistics, https://www.mass.gov/lists/current-opioid-statistics*

***Source: MA Department of Public Health COVID-19 Dashboard, https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-response-reporting*

****Renters or owners spending 30% or more of income on housing*

Takeaways ▶

Demographics	SHI's service area has a higher rate of black residents and a lower rate of Hispanic residents than Massachusetts. Brockton, the most populous city in our service area and where a majority of our clients reside, has a significantly higher rate of black residents and much lower rate of white residents than both SHI's service area and Massachusetts, and has a similar rate of Hispanic residents to the state. Randolph, SHI's third most-served community, is also home to a much higher rate of black residents (71.4%). While SHI's service area and the state have a similar proportion of immigrants, it's twice as high in Brockton. The total population is increasing across all areas.
Poverty	Compared to US Census Bureau ACS 2018 data included in SHI's *2022-2023 Community Assessment Report and Strategic Plan*, poverty rates have decreased across SHI's service area, the City of Brockton, Norfolk County, Plymouth County, and Massachusetts. SHI's service area overall and the two counties have lower poverty rates and fewer low-income residents than the state, yet in Brockton these statistics are significantly higher. There is also a higher percentage of people in Brockton who are living in poverty despite working.
Education and Employment	SHI's service area has a similar percentage of 25-year-olds with bachelor's degrees compared to Massachusetts and has the same unemployment rate, but Brockton's rates are lower and higher respectively. Across all areas, the top employment industries are education and healthcare, followed by scientific, professional, and retail (source: LODES Version 7.5 2019).
Health	SHI's service area overall has a similar rate to Massachusetts of residents in fair or poor health, with this rate higher in Brockton. Though the COVID-19 death rate has decreased significantly over the years since the pandemic began, many of our community members are still suffering emotionally and financially due to the loss of loved ones. And though the pandemic often overshadowed the country's long-raging opioid epidemic, opioid overdose-related deaths in Massachusetts rose by 9.4% from 2020 to 2021.
Housing	Finding affordable housing in our service area is no easy feat, with the rate of vacant units in SHI's service area as a whole and in Brockton specifically about half the state's rate (Randolph's is even lower at 3.2%), and with almost half of renters spending 30% or more of their income on housing costs.
Income	While the median earnings and median household incomes are higher for SHI's service area than the state, a large wealth gap in our area means that wealthier communities lift the average up, while communities like the three most-served by SHI -- Brockton, Attleboro, and Randolph -- all lag behind Massachusetts as a whole. And while the MA minimum wage recently increased to $15.00 per hour, according to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, a family of one adult with two kids needs $52.84 an hour to make ends meet (source: https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/25021).

SHI Service Area Data by Gender and Race/Ethnicity* ►

SHI Service Area	Female	Male	Black	White	Hispanic
	Percentages are of the total in category.		*Percentages are the rate for the specific population.*		
Below Poverty Line	58.6%	41.4%	11.1%	5.4%	14.2%
Living with Disability	53.1%	46.9%	9.5%	11.2%	10.7%
No Health Insurance	41.4%	58.6%	4%	1.8%	4.7%
Bachelor's Degree (Age 25+)	25.4%	26.1%	29.2%	45.5%	-
	Percentages are the rate for the specific population.				
Unemployment Rate**	3.4%	4.1%	5.5%	3.5%	5.4%
Median Earnings	$47,368	$69,603	-	-	-
Median Household Income	-	-	$91,321	$106,146	$117,287

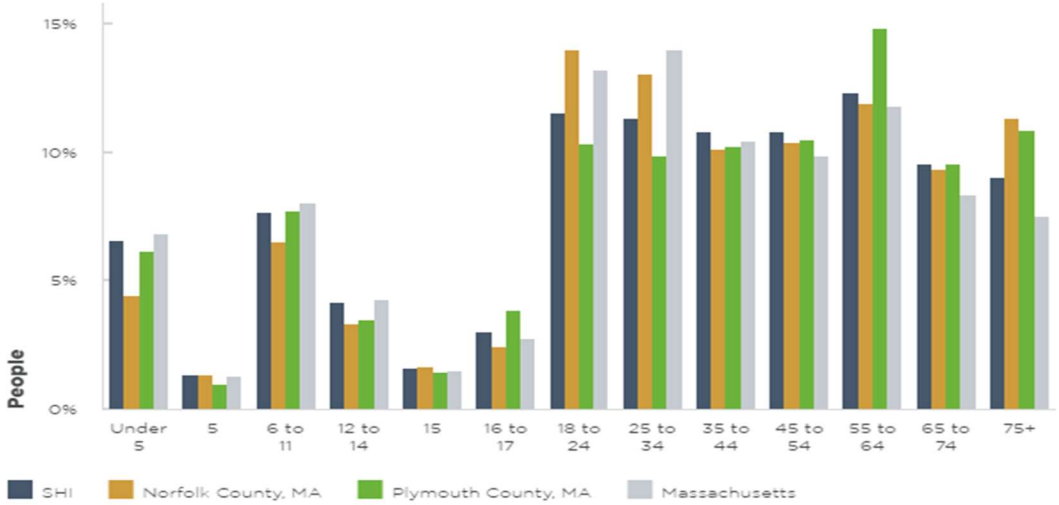
Source unless otherwise noted: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2017-2021

**For additional data on demographics, poverty, education, employment, health, housing, and income broken down by gender and race/ethnicity, visit https://dashboards.mysidewalk.com/community-needs-assessment-masscap-shi for Self Help's full service area and https://dashboards.mysidewalk.com/community-needs-assessment-masscap-shi-brockton for Brockton specifically. Also note that percentages of genders outside of female and male and of races/ethnicities outside of white, black, and Hispanic are statistically low within SHI's service area and have not been included in this chart. More detailed breakdowns can be found online at the links provided.*

***2023 Q1, from https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee_e16.htm*

Takeaways ►

Disparities: Within SHI's service area, more females are living in poverty and are disabled than males. More males are without health insurance. The poverty rate is more than double for black than white residents, and even higher for those identifying as Hispanic. White residents have had more access to higher education, with a higher rate of bachelor's degrees than black residents. Unemployment is higher for black and Hispanic residents than white residents, and higher for males than females. Unemployment is highest for black men at 6%. Median earnings are much higher for males than females, and median household income is lowest for black householders.



Source: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2017-2021

Poverty and Unemployment by Age ►

Poverty: Within SHI's service area and Plymouth County, the 55-64 group have the highest poverty rates, while 18-34-year-olds struggle most in Norfolk County and the state as a whole. *(See graph to right.)*

Unemployment: Within Massachusetts, the 20-24 group has the highest unemployment rate (7.2%), with major racial and ethnic disparities for the age group. Young adults who are white had a rate of 6.6%, compared to those who are Hispanic at 9% and those who are black at 10.9%. (*Source: 2023 Q1, from https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee_e16.htm)*

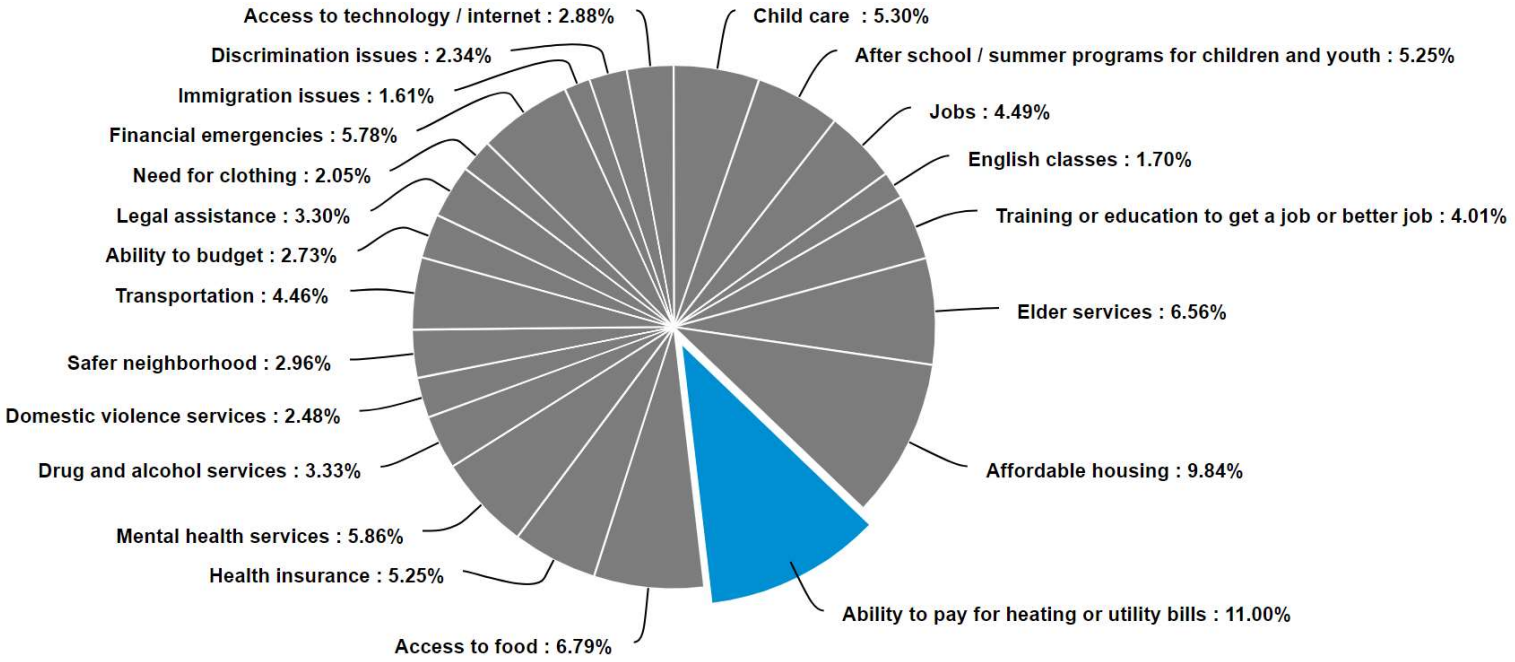
COMMUNITY NEEDS SURVEY RESULTS ►►►

The community needs survey was texted to 12,721 phone numbers, approximately 90% of which were Self Help customers and/or household members of customers. The survey was emailed to 9,152 clients, 7,012 community members, and 195 community partners who were asked to complete the survey and also share with their stakeholders and customers. Our partners email list included non-profit and faith-based organizations, for-profit businesses and corporations, consortiums/collaborations, school districts, post-secondary education institutions, financial institutions, and health service organizations. All Self Help board and staff members were also asked to complete and share the survey. In total, we received **1,308** survey responses.

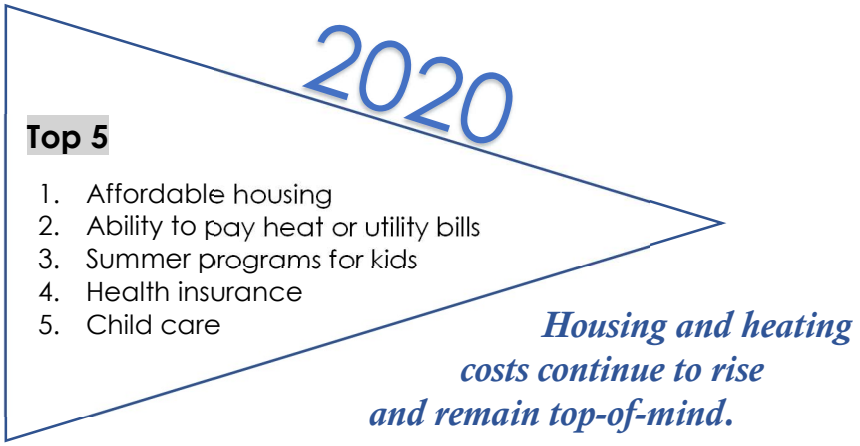
Respondent Demographics ►

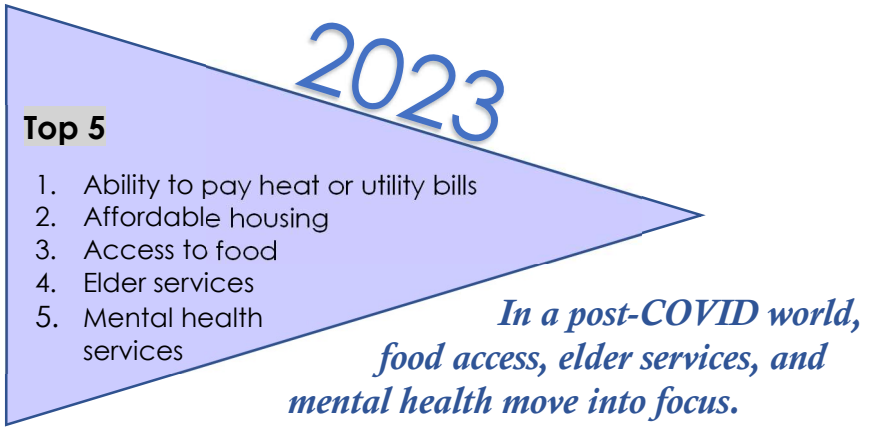
Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Residence: Top 5		Age		Monthly Household Income		Served by SHI in Last Year	
Female:	76.98%	**White:**	69.38%	**Brockton:**	20.53%	**45-64:**	44.46%	**Under $2,000:**	48.33%	**Yes:**	86.92%
Male:	22.47%	**Black:**	17.95%	**Attleboro:**	7.35%	**65+:**	32.38%	**$2,000-$4,000:**	40.44%	**No:**	13.08%
Non-binary:	0.44%	**Hispanic:**	7.61%	**Randolph:**	7.24%	**25-44:**	22.72%	**$4,001-$6,000:**	8.11%		
Other:	0.11%	**Other:**	6.5%	**Rockland:**	4.39%	**18-24:**	0.33%	**Over $6,000:**	3.11%		
		Multiple:	3.08%	**Norwood:**	4.06%	**Under 18:**	0.11%				
		Asian:	1.98%								
		Native American:	1%								

QUESTION ► What do you think are the TOP needs impacting people in your community?



Top Needs Then and Now ►

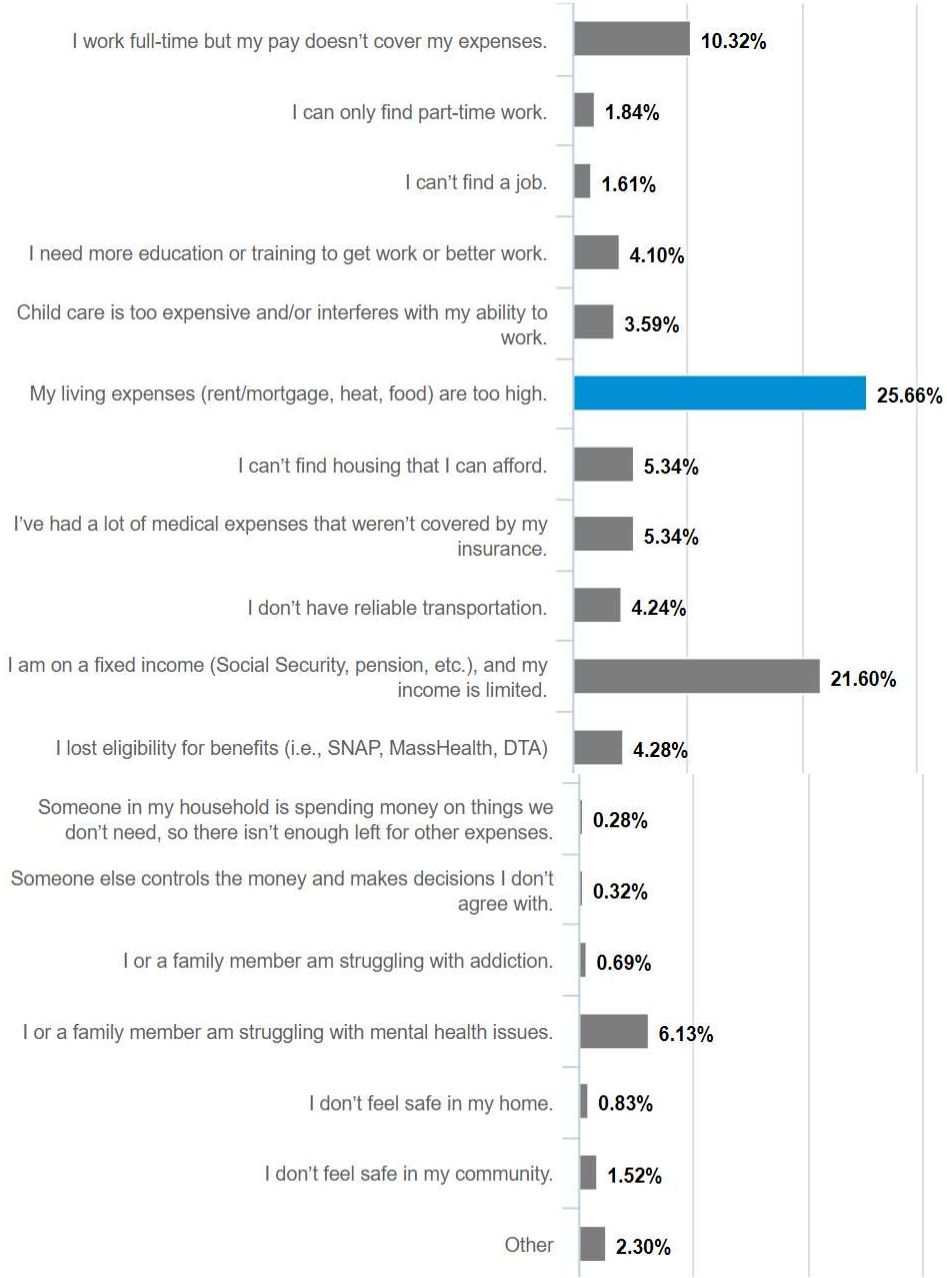




Needs Impacting People in Your Community: Top Five by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Age, Residence ►

Gender					
Female	Paying heat/utility bills	Affordable housing	Access to food	Mental health services	Financial emergencies
Male	Paying heat/utility bills	Elder services	Affordable housing	Access to food	Health insurance
Race/Ethnicity					
Black	Paying heat/utility bills	Affordable housing	Afterschool/Summer programs for kids	Childcare	Jobs
White	Paying heat/utility bills	Affordable housing	Elder services	Access to food	Mental health services
Hispanic	Affordable housing	Paying heat/utility bills	Jobs	Training or education to get a job/better job	Afterschool/Summer programs for kids
Age					
Under 65	Paying heat/utility bills	Affordable housing	Access to food	Mental health services	Childcare
65+	Paying heat/utility bills	Elder services	Affordable housing	Access to food	Health insurance
Residence					
Brockton	Paying heat/utility bills	Affordable housing	Elder services	Access to food	Childcare
Attleboro	Affordable housing	Paying heat/utility bills	Access to food	Elder services	Mental health services
Randolph	Paying heat/utility bills	Affordable housing	Elder services	Access to food	Mental health services

QUESTION ► What keeps you or your family from feeling more financially stable?



2020

Top 5

1. Living expenses too high
2. Living on fixed income
3. Work full-time but pay doesn't cover expenses
4. Childcare too expensive and interferes with work
5. Can't find housing I can afford

High cost of living, fixed and stagnant incomes, and lack of jobs that pay an actual living wage are still holding families back.

2023

Top 5

1. Living expenses too high
2. Living on fixed income
3. Work full-time but doesn't cover expenses
4. Struggling with mental health
5. TIE: a. Can't find housing I can afford, b. Medical expenses not covered by insurance

Three years into the pandemic, mental health issues and medical expenses have taken a toll on stability.

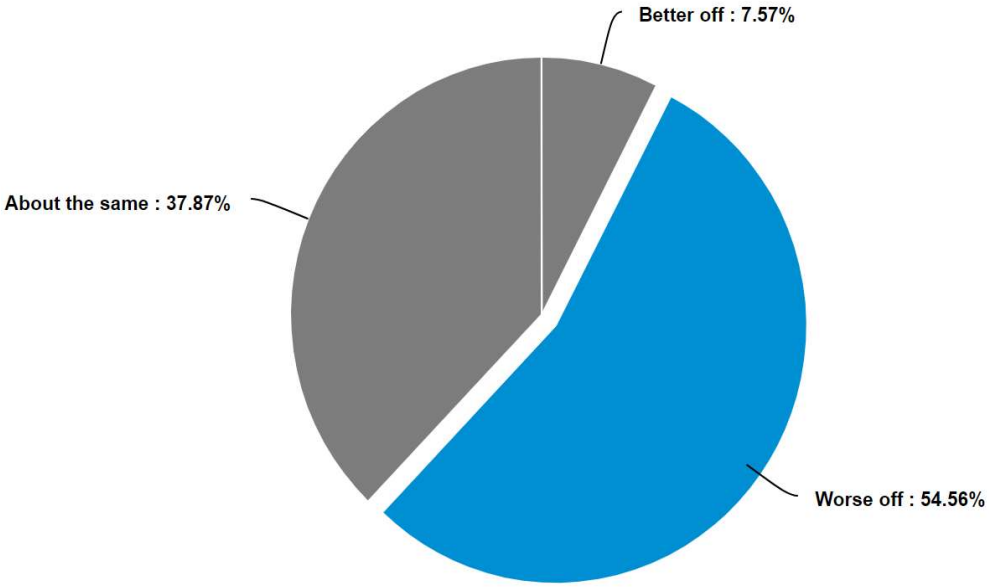
What keeps you from feeling more financially stable: Top Five by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Age, Residence ►

Gender					
Female	Living expenses too high	Living on fixed income	Work full-time but doesn't cover expenses	Struggling with mental health	Can't find housing I can afford
Male	Living on fixed income	Living expenses too high	Medical expenses not covered by insurance	Work full-time but doesn't cover expenses	Don't have reliable transportation
Race/Ethnicity					
Black	Living expenses too high	Work full-time but doesn't cover expenses	Living on fixed income	Need education/training to get work/better work	Can't find housing I can afford
White	Living expenses too high	Living on fixed income	Work full-time but doesn't cover expenses	Struggling with mental health	Medical expenses not covered by insurance
Hispanic	Living expenses too high	Work full-time but doesn't cover expenses	Living on fixed income	Need education/training to get work/better work	Childcare is too expensive and interferes with work
Age					
Under 65	Living expenses too high	Living on fixed income	Work full-time but doesn't cover expenses	Struggling with mental health	Can't find housing I can afford
65+	Living on fixed income	Living expenses too high	Medical expenses not covered by insurance	Don't have reliable transportation	Struggling with mental health
Residence					
Brockton	Living expenses too high	Living on fixed income	Work full-time but doesn't cover expenses	Can't find housing I can afford	Struggling with mental health
Attleboro	Living expenses too high	Living on fixed income	Work full-time but doesn't cover expenses	Lost eligibility for benefits	Can't find housing I can afford
Randolph	Living expenses too high	Living on fixed income	Work full-time but doesn't cover expenses	Struggling with mental health	Need education/training to get work/better work

Similarities and Differences Across Demographics ►

Across all demographics and communities, the high cost of living (especially heat/utilities and housing) and living on a fixed income carried the biggest impact. For all groups except those 65 and older, work not paying a living wage was a top factor preventing stability. Mental health hit the top five in all subsets except the black, Hispanic, and male groups. Black and Hispanic respondents expressed more concern about childcare, jobs, and training/education than white respondents, who were thinking about elder services, mental health, and medical expenses. Some differences can be explained by the variations in how survey responses were distributed across age groups, which is reflective of how age distributions differ across races/ethnicities in the area (the white population is aging and shrinking, while black and Hispanic populations are younger and growing). While the rate of those ages 45-64 was similar for black, white, and Hispanic respondents, the white group skewed much older. Only 8.7% and 15.95% of Hispanic and black respondents respectively were 65-plus, compared to 39.78% of white respondents. Those 25-44 made up 50.72% and 39.26% of the Hispanic and black groups and just 15.21% of the white group. Across all age groups 22.47% were male, yet the proportion of males within the 65-plus group was higher at 35.84%, and you can see survey results for males and 65-plus are similar, with concerns about medical expenses, transportation, elder services, and health insurance.

QUESTION ► Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, are you and your family now better off, worse off, or about the same?



By Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Age, Residence ►

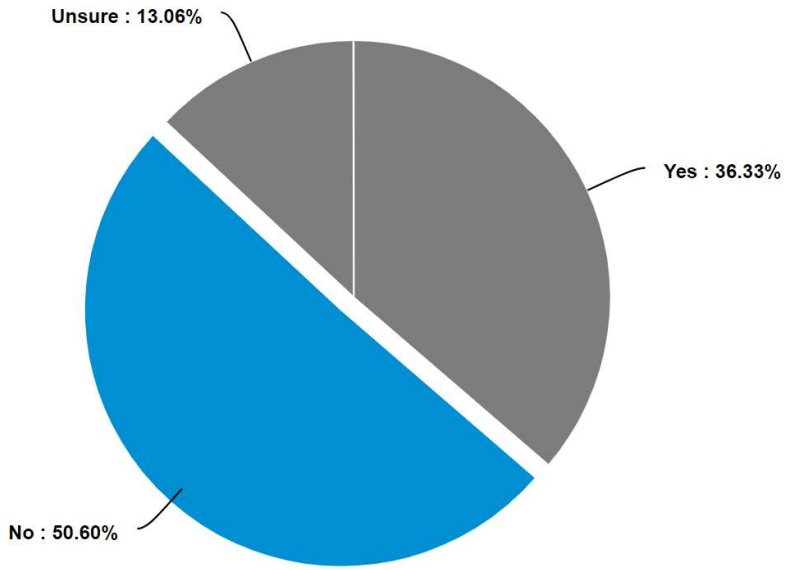
Gender	Better Off	Worse Off	Same
Female	6.87%	54.65%	38.48%
Male	10.29%	53.43%	36.27%
Race/Ethnicity			
Black	9.20%	46.63%	44.17%
White	6.34%	57.21%	36.45%
Hispanic	10.14%	55.07%	34.78%
Age			
Under 65	6.97%	56.73%	36.30%
65+	8.81%	50.17%	41.02%
Residence			
Brockton	7.49%	52.94%	39.57%
Attleboro	8.96%	53.73%	37.31%
Randolph	12.12%	40.91%	46.97%

Inflation, Inflation, Inflation

When asked why they felt they were worse off, more responses were related to inflation and cost of living expenses than any other factor. Cost of food was included in 130 responses. There were 122 instances of people reporting that "everything" is more expensive. Income staying the same or decreasing, or living on a fixed income, while costs continue to rise was referenced 75 times, and the words "bills" and "cost" were used in 70 and 69 responses respectively.

"Since the pandemic everything has increased in price while the income we received from part-time employment disappeared. Food, transportation, housing, utilities, medical care, pet care - there is no part of my life that has not been impacted by COVID-19. I don't see it improving anytime soon." *~ Brockton Resident, January 2023*

QUESTION ► Are you able to pay your bills on time each month?

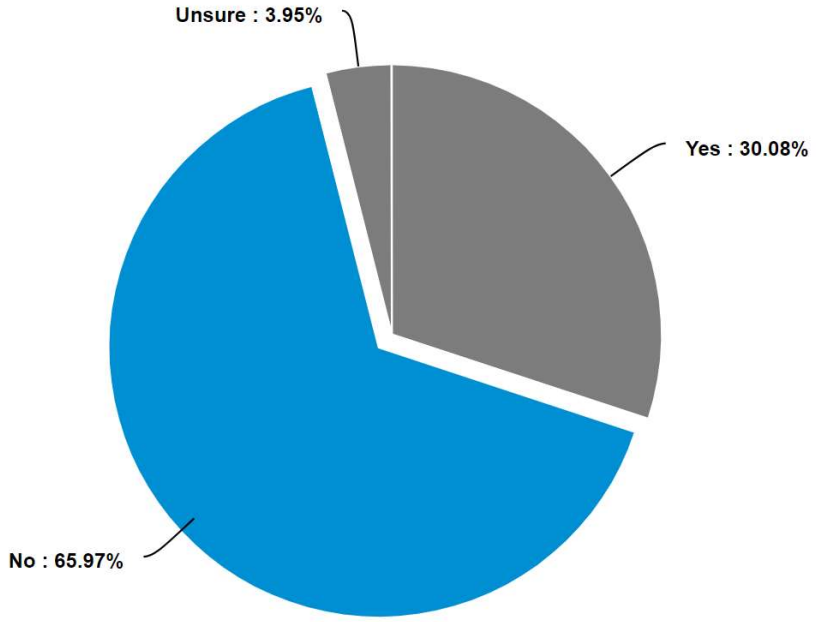


By Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Age, Residence ►

Gender	Yes	No	Unsure
Female	33.91%	54.94%	11.16%
Male	45.49%	35.29%	19.12%
Race/Ethnicity			
Black	16.56%	72.39%	11.04%
White	44.69%	43.11%	12.20%
Hispanic	21.74%	66.67%	11.59%
Age			
Under 65	26.58%	60.29%	13.13%
65+	56.61%	30.51%	12.88%
Residence			
Brockton	22.99%	62.57%	14.44%
Attleboro	41.79%	46.27%	11.94%
Randolph	45.45%	40.91%	13.64%

Black and Hispanic respondents, females and those under 65 reported having a harder time paying bills on time, while white respondents, males, and those 65 and older felt more confident.

QUESTION ► Do you currently have at least $500 set aside for emergencies?



By Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Age, Residence ►

Gender	Yes	No	Unsure
Female	26.47%	70.39%	3.15%
Male	42.65%	50.49%	6.86%
Race/Ethnicity			
Black	17.18%	77.91%	4.91%
White	34.55%	62.28%	3.17%
Hispanic	21.74%	72.46%	5.80%
Age			
Under 65	20.91%	75.2%	3.89%
65+	49.15%	46.78%	4.07%
Residence			
Brockton	24.06%	72.73%	3.21%
Attleboro	25.37%	73.13%	1.49%
Randolph	36.36%	59.09%	4.55%

Once again, black, Hispanic, female, and under-65 respondents more frequently reported not having savings than males and 65+.

In Your Words ►

"Many of our elderly can't pay for all their meds, food, or bills, but do not go and get help. How can we reach them and help them?"

"Our family is dual income but still struggles to make ends meet with the current heating and housing costs."

"The anxiety of losing my home and trying to find affordable housing is crippling."

"We have much less money, we have bigger bills, and our mental health has suffered."

"I'm struggling to pay bills and rent, can't find a full-time at-home job, and I'm unable to get mental health help for my kids."

"Food prices are so high we can't even afford to buy meat or eggs."

"Our income is fixed and hasn't changed, but the food bill is way up."

"When your income doesn't change but your expenses do, it's very hard to make ends meet.

"I retired during COVID due to job availabilities. Now I'm living on Social Security, my budget is tighter, and I'm finding it difficult to make ends meet. I often juggle utility bills or use credit cards to pay them. My small savings is dwindling."

"I work much harder for less money. I make only a few dollars more an hour than I did 30 years ago while my bills are 10 times higher. No accountant could make that work."

Summary ►

Top Needs Impacting Our Service Area Overall:

1. Ability to pay heat or utility bills
2. Affordable housing
3. Access to food
4. Elder services
5. Mental health Services

Plus…

►Childcare ranks sixth overall and in the top five for black, under 65, and Brockton respondents

►Black and Hispanic respondents included afterschool/summer programs for kids, jobs, and training/education for better jobs in their top five

Top Factors Keeping People From Financial Stability:

1. Living expenses too high
2. Living on fixed income
3. Work full-time but doesn't cover expenses
4. Struggling with mental health
5. a. Can't find housing I can afford
   b. Medical expenses not covered by insurance

Plus…

►Need for education/training to get better jobs was in the top five for Black, Hispanic, and Randolph residents

►Expense of childcare ranked high for Hispanic respondents

Partners Questionnaire Results ►►►

After collecting and analyzing the community needs surveys and secondary data, the Self Help Planning Committee developed a follow-up partners questionnaire to learn more about poverty, providers, services, and service gaps in our region. The questionnaire was sent to 1,375 community partner email addresses including representatives from adult education programs, behavioral and mental health services, city/town officials and staff, childcare centers and preschools, disability services, domestic violence services, elder services, healthcare services, employment/workforce development organizations/departments, faith-based organizations, financial institutions, higher education institutions, housing programs, immigrant groups/services, libraries, municipal emergency services, neighborhood groups, public schools, senior centers, service provider collaboratives, special education services, substance use services, veterans services, YMCAs, and youth programs. Representatives of 29 organizations began the questionnaire, with eight completing 100% of the questions, representing a variety of groups from different sectors and including Catholic Charities, United Way, local school districts, and public libraries, to name a few. Self Help is also fortunate to have board members who represent other community partners and bring together different sectors to tackle poverty together, and who were involved in directly providing and collecting from their members input on needs in our area. Some groups represented on our board include the City of Brockton, City of Attleboro, Town of Stoughton, Town of Randolph, Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, Brockton Housing Authority, Mt Moriah Baptist Church, Old Colony YMCA, and Pozerski Hatch & Company, PC.

Questions ►

►	What are the driving forces/issues that contribute to poverty in your region?
►	Who do you see as the most vulnerable populations in your community and why?
►	How well is your community currently addressing these needs?
►	What other needs do you think should be a top priority for Self Help and other community providers over the next three years?

Takeaways ►

"There are a number of incredible nonprofits, yet they don't cover all the need and the demand continues to grow. More support is necessary."

Primary issues contributing to poverty fell into the following categories: living expenses, including cost and availability of housing, food, childcare, and transportation; barriers for those with health, mental health, and substance use issues; barriers for immigrants and non-English-speakers; and work, wages, and education/training for work.

Vulnerable populations included: minorities, people of color, single parent households, elderly, people living with disabilities, young adults, working poor, people living in poverty, immigrants, people in recovery, people with substance use disorders and their children, people with mental illness and their children, victims of domestic violence, and unemployed and underemployed people and their children.

Priorities and ideas for the next three years included: increasing wages, affordable housing development, increasing childcare center availability and staffing, more English-language classes and translation services, more effective outreach and awareness of available programs, streamlined and integrated services, more support for teachers and childcare workers, free pubic transportation, parent education, and better long-term, collaborative community planning around areas of need with public and private involvement.

Community Focus Group ►►►

In partnership with the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) Advisory Committee, on February 28, 2023, a focus group of 18 community members and service provider representatives discussed the community assessment process, the needs impacting our service area, and the services and gaps in services to address those needs. Participants included representatives of CFCE staff, Self Help leadership, Rockland Public Library, Norton Public Library, Stoughton Food Pantry, Family and Community Resources Inc., Middleboro Public Schools, Childcare Network, Community Action of Cape Cod and Islands, and Brockton Area Multi-Services Inc. (BAMSI).

The group focused primarily on housing, living expenses, childcare, health and wellness, elderly, food insecurity, and equity. Lack of funding and staffing were noted as significant barriers to adequately addressing community needs, with staffing being a particular concern for childcare centers particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The group expressed concern about increasing mental health needs among community members, particularly children, and also noted that opioid addiction continues to plague much of the area.

Statewide Focus Group ►►►

In March 2023, the statewide Planners' Community of Practice facilitated by the Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP), with representatives from all 23 Community Action Agencies covering every city and town across the Commonwealth, participated in focus groups to discuss statewide and regional needs, services, and gaps in services. The focus groups were broken out by top need area identified through the common community needs survey process. At that time, top needs were: DEI/immigrant services, mental health and health care, inflation/cost of living and basic needs, and housing.

The DEI/immigrant services group talked about the need for translation services, literacy, and legal services, and how needs vary depending on the unique cultures represented in each of our communities. The mental health and health care group discussed the significant need for more mental health support particularly for young people, the role Community Action can play, and how community-based and health care organizations can better work together. The living expenses group noted community members' struggles to afford housing, utilities, food, and childcare, and the impact of Covid-19 relief programs coming to an end. The housing group talked about the need for affordable housing development, the impact of remote work on the housing market, and the end of Covid-era rental assistance funds.

Discussions about how different Community Action Agencies are planning to address these issues, and ways agencies can work together regionally and statewide, will be ongoing during 2024.

Customer Satisfaction ►►►

On an ongoing basis, Self Help collects customer satisfaction data via hard-copy surveys available through each of our programs and at all our sites, and via an electronic version of the survey posted on our website and social media sites. Every six months, the survey is also emailed out to Self Help's customer list. Survey results are presented to Self Help's board of directors at the April and October meetings for review and discussion, to help inform agency and program planning. Results from 193 surveys collected between October 2021 and March 2023 were analyzed and used to inform this community assessment report.

Interestingly, while about 55% of community needs survey respondents stated that they felt worse off than before the COVID-19 pandemic, only 17% of Self Help customers who completed satisfaction surveys during a similar timeframe (between October 2022 and March 2023) felt worse off than one year ago, which might suggest that things are starting to improve again post-pandemic, and/or that those who receive Self Help services generally feel better off. A majority of survey respondents also reported that their situation is better because of the help Self Help provided (81%) and they are able to take care of themselves and/or their families better because of the assistance they received (78%).

Key Findings Summary and Next Steps ►►►

After conducting a comprehensive community needs assessment with the help of partners and community members between June 2022 and June 2023, the services of a Planning Specialist were utilized to thoroughly analyze all available data and present recommendations to the Self Help Leadership Team, Planning Committee and Board of Directors for review, discussion, and final prioritization of the following top needs to focus on over the next three years, 2024-2026:

1	**Living Expenses:** Individuals and families need resources and support to be able to afford basic living expenses like food and heat/utilities.
2	**Elder services:** Elders need resources, support, and integrated services to be able to age at home with dignity.
3	**Mental Heath:** Individuals and families need access to affordable, accessible mental health care.
4	**Childcare and Parenting Support:** Families need affordable childcare and support services to enable children to thrive, caregivers to work, and families to succeed.
5	**Employment Support:** Individuals need employment services and support to gain access to higher paying and more rewarding jobs.

Next Steps ►

Between June and December 2023, Self Help board, staff, and partners will continue to evaluate our existing programs and services and explore how to address gaps in services to meet the identified top needs. Current Self Help programs addressing these needs include:

Living Expenses	Elder Services	Mental Health	Childcare & Parenting Support	Employment Support
• Energy Programs • Food Assistance • Head Start • Tax Assistance	• Hand-in-Hand Case Management	• CFCE • Head Start • Hand-in-Hand	• Head Start • Early Head Start • CFCE • ParentChild+	• Head Start Apprenticeship Program

We already have exciting plans in the works to expand our ability to address these needs in our area. Here's what's coming up in 2024:

Living Expenses	**Basic Needs:** Self Help will participate in a two-year pilot program through the Massachusetts Association for Community Action to provide free diapers to families and ease their overall financial burden. **Emergency Needs:** Self Help will provide emergency assistance to help with critical needs thanks to funding from the Easton Charitable Foundation. **Food:** Self Help will reopen the Attleboro Food Pantry serving the towns of Attleboro, North Attleboro, Norton, Mansfield and Plainville. **Housing:** Self Help will be involved with the Brockton Housing Partnership's strategic planning efforts, surveying leaders, residents, and city government to help plan efforts to address housing needs in the Brockton area.
Elder Services	Self Help staff will volunteer at the Easton Festival of Trees fundraising event in December 2023, with some of the funding going to our Hand-in-Hand program to assist elders with high prescription costs and home repair services.
Mental Health	**Life is Good Playmaker Project:** Self Help has partnered with Life is Good to provide the Playmaker University training to our staff in 2024 and 2025. This program provides research-based, trauma-informed, and play-focused content designed to support professional standards, reduce burnout, and create positive relationships and environments that children need to heal, learn, and thrive.
Childcare and Parenting Support	**ParentChild+:** In 2024 this program will expand to serve 23 communities. **Early Head Start:** Self Help adopted this program in 2023, providing home-based support to children under three and their caregivers to help with parent-child interactions, daily routines, and household materials. In 2024 we hope to win the bid to officially add Early Head Stat to our offerings. **CFCE:** We continue to grow our parent ambassador leadership program with six current ambassador and three more planned for 2024 to run monthly Parent Talks with families and an annual Parent Café. **Playmaker Project:** See *Mental Health*, above.
Employment Support	**Head Start Apprenticeship Program:** In partnership with Massasoit Community College and MassHire, Self Help Head Start will offer apprenticeships to select individuals taking relevant college coursework work in early childhood education. Participants will receive ongoing coaching and support from a consultant and upon completion will receive their Child Development Associate credential and be eligible for Early Education and Care Certification. **Neighborworks Housing Solutions Employment Partnership:** Self Help is partnering with Neighborworks Housing Solutions to find a pathway for their housing clients to gain employment experience within our agency.

In addition to exploring how to better address these critical community needs, Self Help is also assessing our internal operations and workplace culture to continuously strive to be a great place to work as a community-based employer. We are gathering feedback from our board and staff members, reviewing our policies, and working hard to meet the 58 national CSBG Organizational Standards. In addition, as part of the Massachusetts Association for Community Action, Self Help and the state's 22 other Community Action Agencies have finalized new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policies and our agency will adopt these in 2024.