



**United Way of Grand Forks  
East Grand Forks & Area**



## Executive Summary

# United Way of Grand Forks, East Grand Forks and Area 2009-2010 Community Needs Assessment



**V E R N O N**  
RESEARCH GROUP

Vernon Research Group  
1962 First Avenue NE  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402  
[www.vernonresearch.com](http://www.vernonresearch.com)  
888-710-7278  
[www.vernonresearch.com](http://www.vernonresearch.com)



**United Way of Grand Forks  
East Grand Forks & Area**

United Way of Grand Forks,  
East Grand Forks & Area  
1407 24th Ave S Ste 400  
Grand Forks, ND 58201  
701-775-8661  
[www.unitedwaygfgf.org](http://www.unitedwaygfgf.org)

# Purpose

## Purpose of the Community Needs Assessment

The mission of the United Way of Grand Forks, East Grand Forks and Area (UWGFEGF) is to mobilize the community to make the changes that improve life for the people who live there. In order to identify the most pressing needs, raise the funds needed to make those changes, and channel resources to make the greatest possible impact, the UWGFEGF has partnered with Vernon Research Group to conduct a community needs assessment.

Information gathered from this study will be used to update the UWGFEGF strategic plan to meet the needs of the community, understand from residents, decision-makers and service providers the critical and emerging issues in the community, how these issues are currently being addressed and how the UWGFEGF can help.

To gather the information, a four-phased approach was utilized:

- ▼ Phase 1 was a series of in-depth interviews with community leaders and decision-makers in a variety of industries, including business, politics, government and social services, to identify gaps in services and critical or emerging issues.
- ▼ Phase 2 was a phone and Internet survey with the general population in the Greater Grand Forks area to prioritize the identified issues across the impact areas identified in Phase 1.
- ▼ Phase 3 was a service provider survey to gauge the attitudes and opinions of the individuals who meet the issues face-to-face, every day, as they walk through their doors.
- ▼ Phase 4 was composed of two focus groups with service providers to explore the issues generated in the three previous phases.

Underemployment, growing the economy, alcohol abuse, binge drinking, shortage of affordable housing and lack of affordable medical care were the themes throughout the four phases. Each stage provided unique insight into each of the issues and had its own prescriptions. As the Greater Grand Forks community looks to the future, it will need to understand how different sectors can work together to understand and continue to address these concerns.

The UWGFEGF and Vernon Research Group recognize that the community is diverse and will continue to grow and change, in turn, developing new needs while addressing others. Therefore, the UWGFEGF and Vernon Research Group view the findings as part of an ongoing effort to learn from decision-makers, community leaders, residents and service providers about how the UWGFEGF can better serve the Greater Grand Forks community.

---

---

The community needs assessment was designed to identify the most pressing needs, raise the needed funds, and channel resources to make the greatest possible impact.

---

---

---

---

The community needs assessment included in-depth interviews, phone surveys, Internet surveys, and two focus groups.

---

---

---

---

Underemployment, growing the economy, alcohol abuse, binge drinking, shortage of affordable housing and lack of affordable medical care were the themes throughout the four phases.

---

---

# Methodology

## Methodology to the Community Needs Assessment

Phase 1: 23 telephone in-depth interviews with community leaders and decision-makers. The respondents were chosen by the staff and board of the UWGFEGF as people knowledgeable about the community. Interviews lasted from approximately 20 minutes to one and a half hours. Each respondent was asked to give his or her opinions and perceptions about a variety of community issues to uncover:

- ▼ How has the community changed?
- ▼ What are the real and perceived needs of citizens in the area?
- ▼ What are the most critical issues?
- ▼ What are the emerging issues?
- ▼ What are the priorities?
- ▼ Where are the gaps in service?

Phase 2: 336 telephone and 75 web surveys with area residents aged 18 and older, completed between November 30, 2009 and January 4, 2010, and averaged slightly less than 20 minutes per interview. Vernon Research Group, in conjunction with the UWGFEGF, designed a survey instrument to:

- ▼ Understand the perceived level of severity of identified community issues
- ▼ Measure how residents feel these problems have changed over time
- ▼ Assess residents' awareness of the social service options available in the Greater Grand Forks area
- ▼ Determine the priorities community members want leaders to focus their attention on
- ▼ Gauge how community members perceive government and non-profit leaders overall

Phase 3: 51 service providers completed an online survey between February 10, and February 23, 2010. The purpose of the service providers' study was to:

- ▼ Measure the change in level of severity of community challenges over time
- ▼ Understand the carriers to service and specific challenges facing service providers
- ▼ Identify how to coordinate and maximize services and resources

Phase 4: 15 service providers participated in two focus groups that were held on March 11 and March 12, 2010, at the United Way and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The participants came from a variety of sectors throughout the service provider industry, including homelessness, domestic violence, mental health, senior services and health care. The primary goals of this phase were two-fold: gain a deeper understanding of how service providers can use the findings of the previous phases and the role the UWGFEGF plays in the effort.

Specifically, the focus groups were designed to explore:

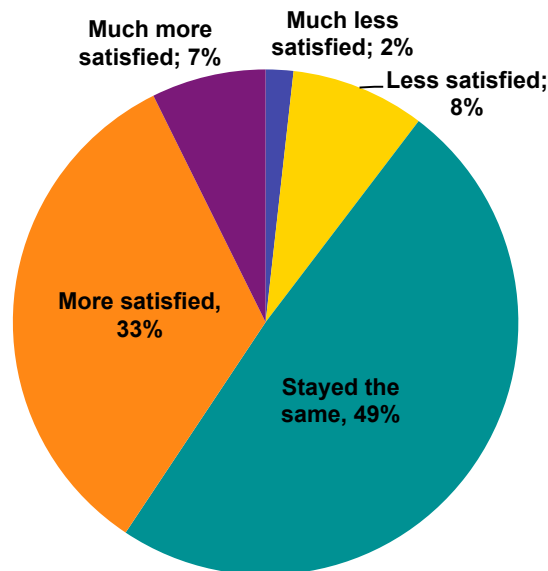
- ▼ The biggest challenges for service providers in the Greater Grand Forks area
- ▼ The role service providers play in addressing the critical issues identified by community residents
- ▼ How the gap between perception and the day-to-day realities of the severity of issues in Grand Forks can be addressed
- ▼ How service providers can present their impact in a meaningful way to community leaders, decision-makers and community residents

# Findings

## Quality of Life

40% of residents feel their quality of life has improved, while another half of the residents feel their quality of life has stayed the same. However, 10% of residents feel less satisfied.

*How has your quality of life, your personal satisfaction with the cultural and intellectual environment, in the Greater Grand Forks area changed in the past 5 years? Are you...*



<i>How has your quality of life, your personal satisfaction with the cultural and intellectual environment, in the Greater Grand Forks area changed in the past five years? *What is your age?</i>	18 to 34 (n=123)	35 to 54 (n=155)	55+ (n=118)	Total (n=411)
Much less satisfied	2%	1%	2%	2%
Less satisfied	7%	9%	9%	9%
Stayed the same	40%	53%	53%	49%
More satisfied	44%	29%	28%	33%
Much more satisfied	7%	8%	8%	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

<i>How has your quality of life, your personal satisfaction with the cultural and intellectual environment, in the Greater Grand Forks area changed in the past five years? *Gender</i>	Male (n=168)	Female (n=243)	Total (n=411)
Much less satisfied	1%	2%	2%
Less satisfied	5%	11%	9%
Stayed the same	48%	50%	49%
More satisfied	37%	31%	33%
Much more satisfied	9%	6%	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Residents aged 18 to 34 are significantly more likely to feel more satisfied with their overall quality of life than other age groups. In addition, we see that women are more likely to feel less satisfied than their male counterparts. We also see residents with less education, those who are unemployed and those who rent as significantly more likely to feel less satisfied with their overall quality of life.

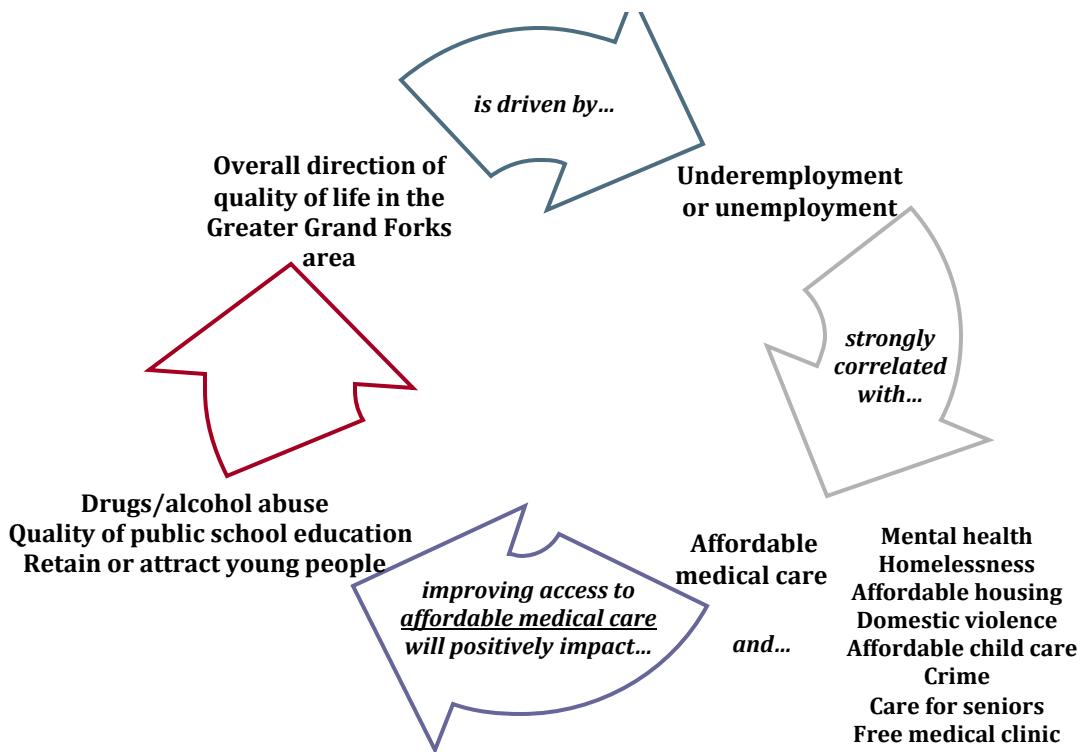
# Findings

## Drivers of Quality of Life

Social science research is not an exact science, as is the case with any science dealing with people, their opinions, perceptions, behaviors, etc. Statistically, correlations and regression analysis of data can help us to establish relationships between variables. While we cannot make judgments with certainty as to causality, we can tell if there is a specific relationship that exists beyond chance. Such is the case with drivers of quality of life.

Here, you see that there is strong correlative value between the perceptions of respondents as to whether quality of life is getting better or worse and the seriousness they attribute to each of the tested issues or challenges. Based upon analysis of the data, we can make certain assumptions of the sociological implications of the relationships established between variables.

The following chart demonstrates how the analysis of the data in this study can provide direction for the UWGFEGF, both in terms of allocation of resources and doing the greatest good for the most people. In other words, sometimes improvements in one area will positively impact others.



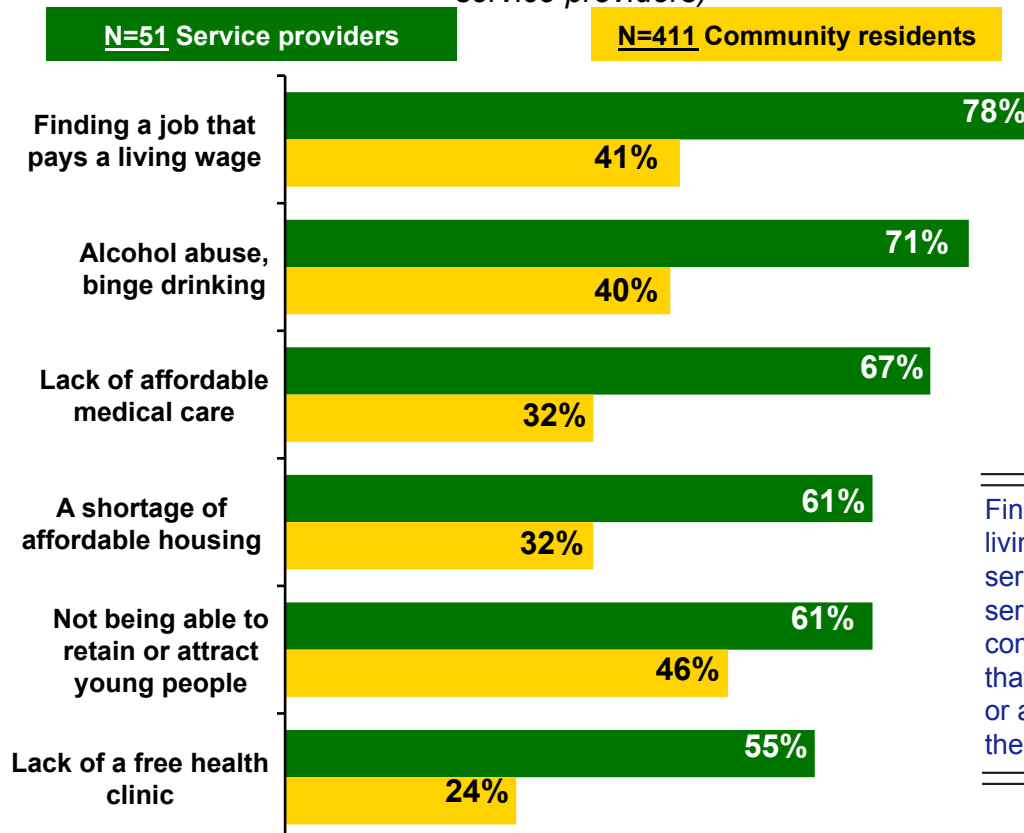
# Findings

## Most Serious Problems

When asked to rate the level of severity of 17 issues, service providers felt finding a job that pays a living wage was the most serious, while community residents said not being able to retain or attract young people is the most serious.

We see a significant difference between the percentage of service providers and community residents when ranking the severity of issues. While both groups agreed that finding a job that paid a living wage was a serious issue in the community, only 41% of community residents said it was an extremely serious issue, while 78% of service providers gave such a rating.

*Q4. Please rate how serious you believe the problem is in the community, where 1 is "not at all serious" and 10 is "extremely serious." (Attributes receiving highest "extremely serious" rating by service providers)*



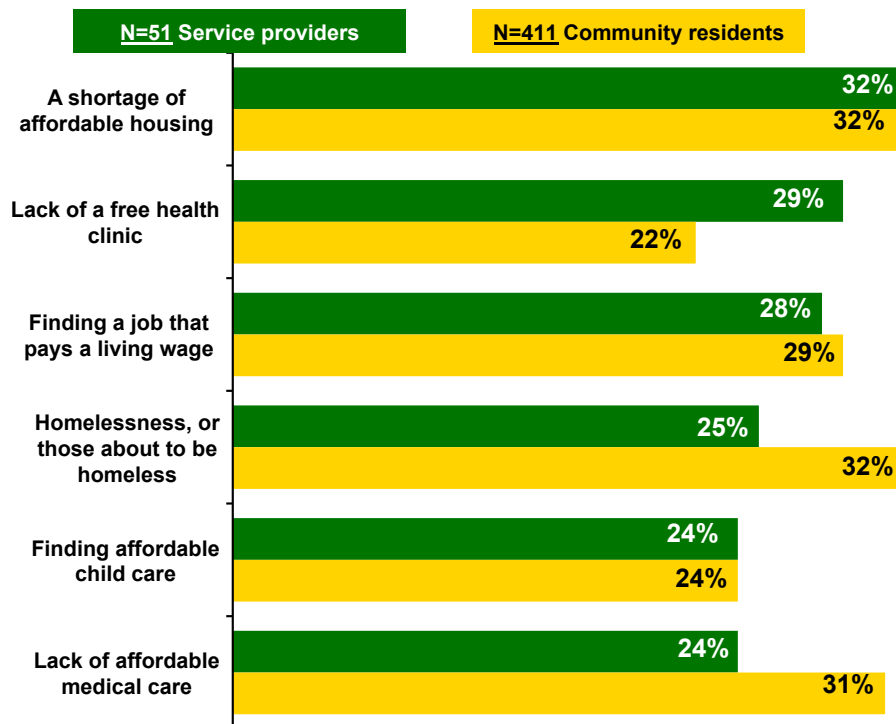
Finding a job that pays a living wage is the most serious issue noted by service providers, while community residents feel that not being able to retain or attract young people is the most serious.

# Findings

## Change in Issues Over Time

In a change from the previous page, we see similarities in the percentage for service providers and community residents when discussing the level of change with affordable housing, finding a job that pays a living wage and finding affordable child care. Those differences we do see in lack of a free health clinic, homelessness and lack of affordable medical care are small.

*Q5. How have the following problems changed over the past few years in Grand Forks? Have they gotten better, stayed the same or gotten worse? (Attributes receiving the highest "gotten worse" rating by service providers)*



---

---

32% of residents and service providers feel that the availability of affordable housing has gotten worse over the past few years.

---

---

# Findings

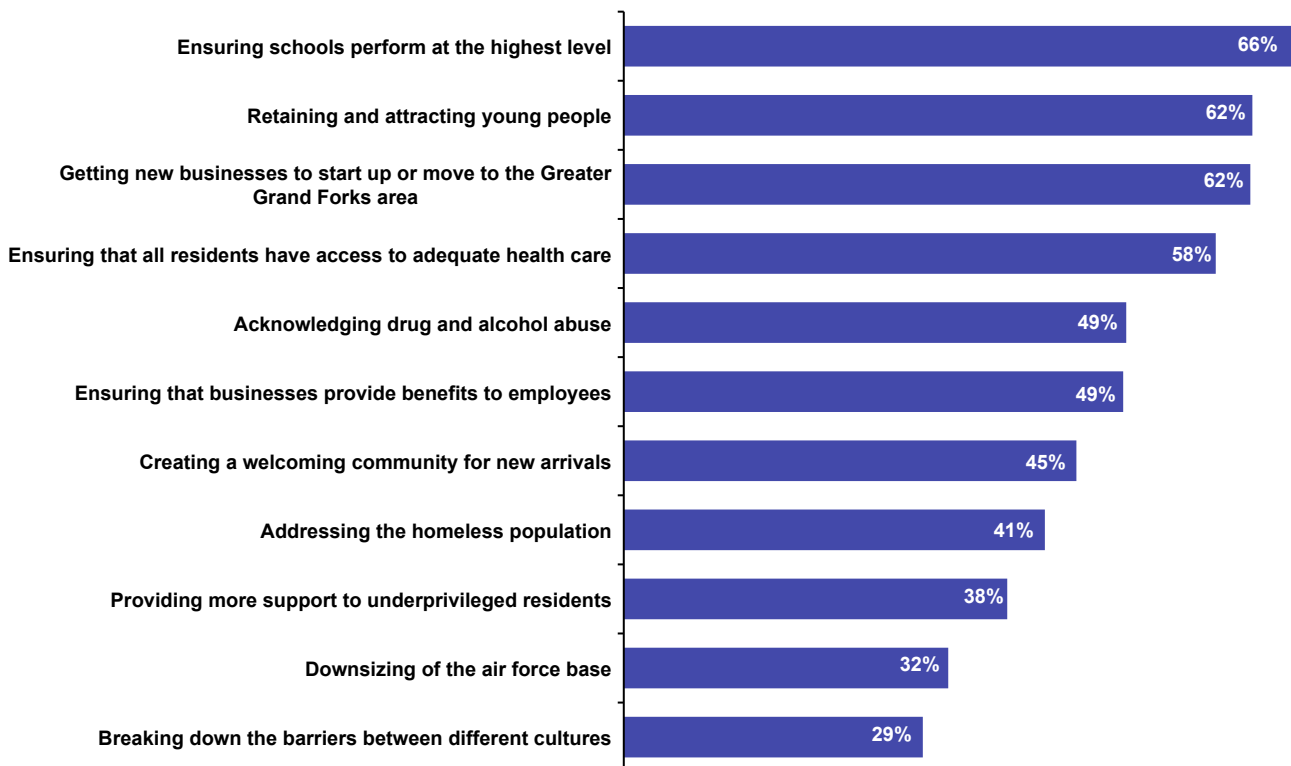
## Priorities of Community and Leadership

High-performing schools, attracting and retaining young people and bringing new businesses to the Greater Grand Forks area should be the priorities for leaders.

Residents also feel that leaders should focus less on downsizing of the air force base and breaking down barriers between different cultures.

**N=411**

*Percent of community residents who feel the following are urgent priorities for area leaders:*



# Findings

## Perception of Community and Leadership

Residents are less likely to feel that government leaders are effective in addressing community issues. In addition, agreement was low that the community is one where people have enough money for basic needs, like food, clothing and housing.

### Percent of community residents who agree with the following statements:

#### Our community...



Only 24% of residents feel that the community has the right people in place for future growth and development.

# Findings

## The Economy and its Effect on Social Services

There were five critical issues that service providers identified: underemployment, affordable housing, alcohol abuse, homelessness and affordable medical care. There is a sense that if underemployment were addressed, finding a job that paid a living wage and many of the other issues would also be diminished.

Service providers recognize that addressing underemployment and affordable housing will require a variety of solutions and organizations. When local leaders work to attract businesses to the area, service providers feel there needs to be less focus on service industry positions that are usually low-wage and part-time positions.

<b><i>Q2. What one thing might the community do to address underemployment?</i></b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Bring in more competitive industry and job opportunities, less retail and service industry jobs	7	29%
Raise wages	4	17%
More pulling together and joining forces - collaboration	3	13%
Bring living expenses down	2	8%
Recruit young people	2	8%
Limit taxpayer subsidies to companies that provide benefits and a reasonable wage	1	4%
Offer more money management classes	1	4%
Continue economic development to increase jobs in Grand Forks	1	4%
Provide incentives for thriving industries/employers in the community	1	4%
Improve economy	1	4%
Talk about livable wages for families	1	4%
<i>Total (23 respondents gave 24 responses)</i>	24	100%

# Findings

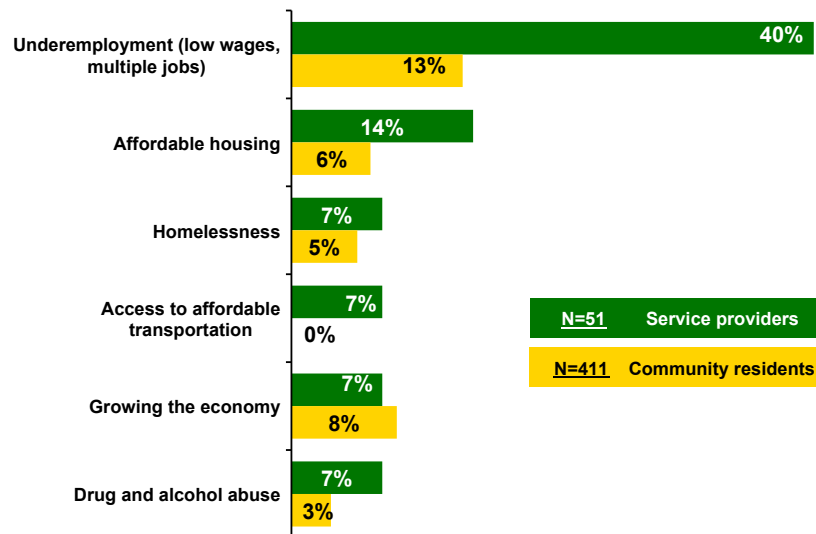
## Critical Issues

A goal of the community needs assessment is to understand where there are differences between community leaders and decision-makers, service providers and residents. When asked, “In your opinion, what is the critical issue facing the Greater Grand Forks area?,” service providers and residents agreed on underemployment, while community leaders and decision-makers said diversifying the economy. Service providers and community residents ranked growing or diversifying the economy fifth and second, respectively. Affordable housing was ranked third overall for community leaders and decision-makers, second for service providers and fourth for community residents.

Critical issues mentioned by community leaders and decision-makers, in order of frequency:

- ▼ Diversifying economy
- ▼ Underemployment
- ▼ Affordable housing
- ▼ Lack of population growth
- ▼ Retention of youths
- ▼ Retention of highly educated people

***In your opinion, what is the critical issue facing the Greater Grand Forks area? (Top six issues for service providers)***



Service providers struggle to help community leaders, decision-makers and residents understand the needs of the community. One point to note is the percentage of people who mentioned these critical issues in each group, specifically, service providers and community residents. While both groups agreed that underemployment was the most critical issue, 40% of service providers mentioned it, while only 13% of community residents mentioned it. “Don’t know” was the response most often given by community residents to the question, at 22%.

# Findings

## Connecting the Dots: Addressing the Underlying Issues

Service providers spoke about their work with clients who struggle with mental issues, substance abuse, domestic violence and education, to name a few, which, in many cases, are the triggers that lead issues outlined in the previous stages. As service providers work to create a healthy community, they feel their biggest challenge is funding. It is not simply securing resources, it is the competition for and the politicalization of funding that makes service providers' lives more difficult. In addition to funding, as service providers work to address the issues in the community, they face the following challenges:

- ▼ Clients who continue to be more complicated
- ▼ Perception that there isn't a problem
- ▼ Perception that there is a duplication of services
- ▼ Underutilization of services by those in need (proudful community)

As service providers work to improve the quality of life in the Greater Grand Forks area, they need the UWGFEFG to help them promote their work. Specifically:

- ▼ Create a metric that allows for easy evaluation of programs
- ▼ Create a social health indicator for the Grand Forks area similar to the economic indicator
- ▼ Create an environment where we are talking about issues and not just money
- ▼ Demonstrate that social service providers help make the area more appealing to businesses and others looking to visit or relocate by making the community safer
- ▼ Develop talking points that every non-profit can use to promote the industry
- ▼ Endorse the expertise and experience of those in the non-profit industry
- ▼ Help non-profits create a brand; what does a community that cares look like?
- ▼ Help community leaders, decision-makers and residents make the connection that a healthy community means a healthy social service network
- ▼ Keep the conversation going
- ▼ Market the efforts of non-profits to the community
- ▼ Promote the collaboration and communication among service providers and community leaders, decision-makers and residents
- ▼ Provide more opportunities for the public and private sectors to discuss issues and barriers

As one service provider stated, "We met the unmet needs of our most venerable citizens; we are their advocate." As Grand Forks works to address underemployment, growing the economy, alcohol abuse, binge drinking, shortage of affordable housing and lack of affordable medical care, it will need the input of service providers who have been working to address many of the underlying issues in an effort to create a healthy community.

---

---

Phase 4 was composed of two focus groups with service providers to explore the issues generated in the previous three phases.

---

---

---

---

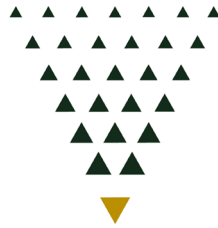
As Grand Forks works to address underemployment, growing the economy, alcohol abuse, binge drinking, shortage of affordable housing and lack of affordable medical care, it will need the input of service providers who have been working to address many of the underlying issues in an effort to create a healthy community.

---

---



**United Way of Grand Forks  
East Grand Forks & Area**



**V E R N O N**  
**RESEARCH GROUP**

1962 First Avenue NE  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402  
888-710-7278  
[www.vernonresearch.com](http://www.vernonresearch.com)