

COMMUNITY *News*

Community Assessment Points Way Toward Economic Development

To give our region's economy a jump start, we need to reach outside our own networks and start mixing it up with people we don't already know.

That's one of the suggestions to emerge from the Community Foundation's 2019 Community Assessment, a project we commissioned to explore the challenges to economic development in our area, and to recommend solutions.

The Foundation contracted with Lisa Horn, president of Horn Research in Slaterville Springs, to conduct the study, which focuses on three major issues: a scarcity of candidates to fill upcoming leadership positions at local companies and organizations; challenges with diversity, equity and inclusion in local leadership; and the impact of those factors on workforce and economic development.

To explore those issues, Horn interviewed 53 stakeholders, including staff and board members at companies,

schools, nonprofits, funding organizations and government entities across Broome, Chenango, Delaware, Otsego and Tioga Counties. She also used input from a focus group of young professionals in Broome County and gave an online questionnaire to the Foundation's Young Professional's Advisory Committee.

One thing the interviews revealed is that when the rising generation of professionals and their older counterparts consider some of our communities' crucial issues, there's a big difference in what they see.

For instance, 42.3 percent of Baby Boomers, and 38.1 percent of respondents in Generation X, say their communities are doing well with respect to diversity, inclusion and equity. But just 16.7 percent of Generation Y (the first wave of Millennials) and 13.3 percent of younger Millennials took that positive view.

And younger people are much more concerned about how to keep the demands of their jobs from eating into

The study recommends that organizations in our region:

- Provide leadership training about generational and cultural differences
- Develop meaningful mentorship opportunities
- Facilitate conversations about generational differences and diversity, inclusion and equity
- Encourage and support collaborative approaches to transportation, housing and child care
- Support efforts to revisit drug testing and criminal conviction criteria in hiring
- Share success stories and otherwise foster community pride

their personal lives, Horn said. "That's not to say that they're not ambitious or don't want to be successful. But they want balance."

One reason it's hard to find qualified candidates for leadership positions, the study found, is that so many people live in professional and social siloes. When there's no overlap among networks—when people know whom they know, with no chance to make new connections—there's often no opportunity to make a connection between an open position and a promising candidate.

Those siloes pose barriers for young people who want to advance, and want to learn from older executives, but can't

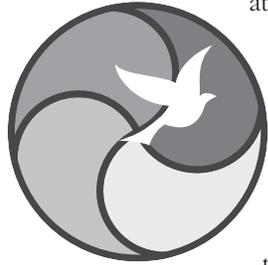
make the right connections. "I heard it from some of the more experienced leaders as well, that they don't know how to connect with the younger folks," Horn says.

Those same non-overlapping networks also make it hard to draw people from diverse backgrounds into leadership positions. Insular community cultures don't help either, nor does the fact that groups of mainly white, upper class, older citizens still control many of the leadership positions, respondents said.

Another question the study explored is why so many positions go unfilled in our

Grant Helps to Close Gap in Services for Adolescents

Our region has too few mental health providers, with the shortage especially acute for therapists who work with adolescents. The Foundation's 2015 Regional Needs Assessment identified that gap between resources and need, but no one had to point out the problem to staff at Endwell's Samaritan Counseling Center. They understand it all too well.



As of January, the Center had 53 clients who were 19 years of age or younger when they enrolled for mental health services. At the same time, 70 people were waiting for the chance to bring their children in for counseling, says Marian

Towers, the organization's executive director.

Numerous issues may bring a young person to the Center for one-on-one counseling. "Maybe the child is having trouble in school and is acting out," Towers says. "Maybe there's bullying. Maybe there are issues at home—parents are separating. Maybe someone close to them has died."

Counseling children and adolescents is a special calling, often requiring specialized strategies. "Sometimes the younger ones are not even able to express or communicate what they're thinking, because they can't articulate it yet," Towers says. Counselors might use toys or simple games to interact with younger children, and more sophisticated games to work with teens. Then a counselor looks to body language and facial expressions for clues about the client's state of mind.

Therapists also put in extra work to learn about a young client's environment, such as meeting with parents and/or contacting teachers, guidance counselors or medical professionals. These activities are necessary and important and require extra time above and beyond the counseling session, Towers says.

Insurance companies don't reimburse for time therapists spend on such activities, which fall outside the formal definition of counseling. That creates special challenges for counselors who want to do the best for their clients but also need to earn a living.

A recent \$12,765 grant from the Community Foundation will provide a stable initial pay stream as the Samaritan Counseling Center adds a new counselor to the staff, hired specifically to work with adolescents.

Not every counselor is eager to serve children or adolescents, Towers says. "Working with a young person who cannot, or doesn't want to, express what is going on in their home or at school is difficult. It makes it more challenging to identify underlying issues and offer support in the form of coping and communication skills in a friendly, non-threatening way."

The Community Foundation's grant will help the Samaritan Counseling Center add another of these dedicated and sorely-needed counselors to its staff.

COMPETITIVE GRANTS: FALL 2019

Grant Funding to be used for Capital Projects, Programs and Operating Support



COMMUNITY FUND

Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga County \$15,000 for their food pantry (*Tioga*)

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Broome County \$11,000 for a summer employment/youth leadership program in Western Broome (*Broome*)

Deposit Foundation \$7,981 for the senior citizen transportation program (*Broome/Delaware*)

Samaritan Counseling Center \$12,765 to expand mental health services for adolescents (*Broome*)

Spencer-Van Etten Central School District \$2,254 for their new Biotechnology in Agriculture program (*Tioga*)

SUNY Delhi Research Foundation \$15,000 for SUNY Delhi's Business Innovation Hub (*Delaware*)

Unadilla Valley Central School District \$10,000 for student service projects giving back to the community (*Chenango*)

Whitney Point Central Schools District \$15,000 for a pre-literacy program for families in the district (*Broome*)

Windsor Central School District \$6,000 for a school-based telemedicine outreach program (*Broome*)

Your Home Public Library \$15,000 for the repair of the historic front porch (*Broome*)

YOUNG PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Binghamton Zoo at Ross Park \$1,000 for a web-portal that will support the professional development of zoo staff (*Broome*)

Commerce Chenango \$500 for the Young professional kick-off event in Norwich (*Chenango*)

TOTAL: \$111,500

New York Food for New York Schools

Tasty, healthy, locally-produced foods will soon enliven menus at more schools in our region, thanks to a recent grant from the Community Foundation's Chobani Community Impact Fund. The three-year, \$60,000 grant will help the Food and Health Network (FaHN) of South Central New York expand its Farm to School program in Delaware, Chenango and Otsego Counties.

A program of the Rural Health Network of South Central New York, FaHN is an eight-county coalition that works to increase food security and promote the regional food system. Its Farm to School program worked with 26 school districts in 2019, serving as an intermediary between meal programs in the schools and regional farmers, food distributors and food processors. Schools in the program spent more than \$449,000 in 2019 on local produce, beans and meat.

People who work in school meal programs and people who work in the regional food supply chain operate in different worlds, with different requirements, regulations and vocabularies, says Erin Summerlee, director of the FaHN program. FaHN's Farm to School coordinator, Jessica Barbini, translates between the two and helps to develop purchasing relationships.

The process starts in the kitchen. "Jess works with schools to understand their menus and help with new recipe development," Summerlee says. She makes sure that new recipes are feasible for kitchen staff to prepare, and that students will enjoy the new dishes.

Once a district has developed a new menu, Barbini determines which products it needs, in what quantities, and which of those foods are seasonably available. She then helps the district run a solicitation, and guides farmers in submitting their bids for that business. With contracts awarded and signed, Barbini creates delivery schedules and otherwise coordinates delivery logistics.

Besides working with school staff and food producers, Farm to School also gets



Food and Health Network's Farm to School program gets young people involved in developing menus and promoting locally produced foods.

students involved. For instance, several times a month, FaHN convenes groups of students for taste-testing events. "These inform our recipe development process, but they're also a great way to get the kids used to new things and get their engagement," Summerlee says. Partners such as Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the AmeriCorps members who make up FaHN's Farm to School Corps, lead activities for students in class and after school and help with school gardens.

Until recently, FaHN's Farm to School program did the bulk of its work in Broome and Tioga Counties. Over the past two years, though, it has used a federal Farm to School grant to bring the initiative to the Sidney Central School District and Delaware-Chenango-Madison-Otsego BOCES. That pilot program ended in December 2019. The grant from the Chobani Community Impact Fund will let FaHN build on that experience, extending the program to more districts in Delaware,

Chenango and Otsego.

The grant will help pay for staffing, technical assistance, outreach and materials for activities such as the taste tests. "Another goal of this grant is to help establish more regional connections, communication and information sharing among schools

While Farm to School raises the bar for school cuisine, it also boosts local economies.

doing Farm to School, and also hold training and networking opportunities," Summerlee says.

While Farm to School raises the bar for school cuisine, it also boosts local economies. "Farmers are struggling to keep farms in their families, and any strategy we can use to increase the markets for those farmers, food businesses and distributors is really important," Summerlee says. "Schools are such a large potential market that there's a lot of opportunity to support local businesses."



The Community Foundation for South Central New York serves Broome, Chenango, Delaware, Otsego and Tioga counties.

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communities while, at the same time, workers have trouble finding jobs. Some of the reasons, Horn found, include a lack of adequate transportation, affordable child care and housing options; low wages; mandatory drug testing; and employers who don't spread the word about open positions, or don't conduct effective recruiting campaigns.

Among the forces that hinder economic development, one of the less obvious ones the study uncovered is a widespread sense that our communities aren't good places to live. The news on that front isn't all bad, though. "The bulk of respondents said their

community's self-perception was negative, but a large portion also noted that it was improving," Horn writes in the study.

So what's the way forward? The study points to several areas where the Community Foundation and other organizations could help to promote important changes. One is to build bridges among separate networks, both to address the leadership gap and to increase leadership diversity. As one step toward those ends, the Foundation is evaluating tools that might help organizations measure how well they are fostering diversity, inclusion and equity.

You'll find the full Community Assessment on the Community Foundation's web site. We look forward to collaborating with other organizations to put the recommendations into action.

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