July 2018

Dear Community Resident:

The Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative (ESPRI) was launched by New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo as an effort to reduce financial hardship in 16 high poverty communities across the state. The Village of Hempstead was the only community selected to participate on Long Island.

Phase I of ESPRI began one year ago and focused on assembling a plan for reducing financial hardship in the Village of Hempstead. A major portion of the planning phase included robust community outreach. This process was guided by a Steering Committee, Task Force and Workgroups comprised of community leaders, not for profit organizations, persons living in financial hardship, consumers, representatives of government, education, health, faith-based and business sectors within the community.

Our community engagement strategy intentionally sought the voices of Village of Hempstead residents experiencing financial hardship. What emerged from this feedback has created new opportunities to bring the community together around common goals of breaking the cycle of poverty and addressing the root causes of poverty.

This report would not have been possible if not for the generosity of time and the commitment to improving the Village of Hempstead on the part of these community members. I am grateful to all who have participated as we move into Phase II of the project which will invite organizations to work together to reach a set of shared goals to reduce poverty to create better coordination of services.

Sincerely,

Don Ryan
Mayor of the Village of Hempstead
### Households

**Median Household Income in 2016**
- Incorporated Village of Hempstead: $56,239
- Nassau County: $102,044
- New York State: $60,741

**Owners Paying more than 30% of Income on Housing Costs**
- Incorporated Village of Hempstead: 52.1%
- Nassau County: 38.8%
- New York State: 30.7%

**Renters Paying more than 30% of Income on Housing Costs**
- Incorporated Village of Hempstead: 62%
- Nassau County: 53.3%
- New York State: 50.5%

**Individual Poverty Rate**
- Incorporated Village of Hempstead: 20.3%
- Nassau County: 6.0%
- New York State: 15.5%

**Children Below Poverty**
- Incorporated Village of Hempstead: 30.6%
- Nassau County: 8.0%
- New York State: 21.9%

**Families Below 100% Poverty**
- Incorporated Village of Hempstead: 17.1%
- Nassau County: 4.2%
- New York State: 11.7%

**Families at 100-199% Poverty**
- Incorporated Village of Hempstead: 19.7%
- Nassau County: 7.7%
- New York State: 14.7%

**Families at 200-299% Poverty**
- Incorporated Village of Hempstead: 17.2%
- Nassau County: 9.7%
- New York State: 13.8%

**Families above 300% Poverty**
- Incorporated Village of Hempstead: 46%
- Nassau County: 78.4%
- New York State: 59.8%

**Poverty Rate, single mother-headed families**
- Incorporated Village of Hempstead: 30.3%
- Nassau County: 13.3%
- New York State: 27.6%

**% of Households receiving public assistance income**
- Incorporated Village of Hempstead: 4.9%
- Nassau County: 1.6%
- New York State: 3.4%

**% of Households receiving food stamps/SNAP**
- Incorporated Village of Hempstead: 22.3%
- Nassau County: 5.0%
- New York State: 15.4%

Education & Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Incorporated Village of Hempstead</th>
<th>Nassau County</th>
<th>New York State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 9th Grade (aged 25+)</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th-12th grade, no diploma (aged 25+)</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate (includes equivalency) (aged 25+)</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College (no degree) (aged 25+)</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s Degree (aged 25+)</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment/Population Ratio (aged 16+)</th>
<th>Incorporated Village of Hempstead</th>
<th>Nassau County</th>
<th>New York State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree (aged 25+)</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or Professional Degree (aged 25+)</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate (aged 16+)</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment/Population Ratio (aged 16+)</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Basic Demographic Profile


- **Black or African American**: 46.6% in Village of Hempstead, 11% in Nassau County, 14.4% in New York State.
- **Hispanic or Latino**: 45% in Village of Hempstead, 16.1% in Nassau County, 18.6% in New York State.
- **White**: 5.3% in Village of Hempstead, 62.2% in Nassau County, 56.4% in New York State.
- **Asian**: 1.3% in Village of Hempstead, 8.7% in Nassau County, 8.1% in New York State.
- **Non-Hispanic American Indian and Alaska Native**: 0.1% in Village of Hempstead, 0.2% in Nassau County, 0.2% in New York State.
- **Non-Hispanic Other Race**: 0.1% in Village of Hempstead, 0.5% in Nassau County, 0.5% in New York State.
- **Non-Hispanic Two or more Races**: 1.4% in Village of Hempstead, 1.5% in Nassau County, 1.8% in New York State.
- **% Foreign Born**: 22.6% in Village of Hempstead, 21.8% in Nassau County, 41% in New York State.

1.3% in Village of Hempstead, 8.7% in Nassau County, 8.1% in New York State.
Community Outreach & Engagement

To encourage community engagement, the Village created and continues to maintain a website, www.VillageofHempsteadESPRI.org with important information for all those who are interested in reimagining and reinventing its services for the poor. Given the growing number of Latino residents, who now account for 45% of the population, the website is accessible to Spanish speakers, and special efforts were made to bring Latinos into the planning process.

The website features:

- Information regarding the ESPRI program, committees, plans, and mission
- Online applications to join all ESPRI committees
- Updates on ESPRI news, events, committee meetings and funding opportunities
- Resource information for 2-1-1 Long Island’s Call Center & Database, Hempstead’s Education Program, and Nassau County’s Business Resource Guide
- Accessibility and engagement opportunities with ESPRI, including email, Facebook and Twitter

Community Member Profile

Bethany has two children and works hard to balance the responsibilities of single parenting and full-time employment. She earns $36,920 as a patient aide in a Long-Term Care Facility. That’s above the official poverty level but the average apartment in Hempstead rents for $1,821 and many landlords won’t allow children. So she considers herself lucky to have found one for $1,480. But that’s still more than half her take home pay, leaving only about $725 left for everything else.

That’s why she sacrificed health insurance for herself, opting for the state-subsidized Child Health Plus for the kids. They also qualify for reduced price lunch at school but her income is just too high to receive food stamps. So she relies on a church pantry to stretch her food budget. But she can’t afford a car and must rely on a neighbor or public transportation – another $112 a month – to get around.
An Opportunity to Create Change

What was clear, even before the Task Force drilled deeply into the data and specific issues, such as economic empowerment, education and criminal justice, was the difference between statistical and functional poverty. The federal poverty level for a family with two adults and two children is about $25,000 throughout the nation. About 21% of Hempstead residents fall below the Federal Poverty Level. Median household income in the village, $56,239, is about half of that for the county and less than a third of neighboring communities. But, United Way of New York State has reported in its ALICE studies that a family of four in Nassau – one of the most expensive counties in the country – must earn an average of about $81,000 to afford life’s basic necessities.

The ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Project was initiated by United Way of Northern New Jersey several years ago to bring focus to the families and individuals who work but whose salaries do not provide sufficient resources to meet basic needs.

More information about the ALICE Project can be found at www.unitedwayalice.org

To ensure there were no barriers to involvement, our ESPRI committees reached out to the community – “where people gathered,” whether it was Sunday church services and civic meetings or the National Night Out and parades. In building consensus, we sought to develop trusting relations with ministers and other stakeholders.

At least 1200 people have attended meetings in a variety of venues, and more than 100 stakeholders, including human services experts, joined steering committee, workgroups and outreach efforts. Our volunteers and staff conducted in-depth analyses of the challenges confronting Hempstead, and presented their work regularly to the public. The extent of public involvement in ESPRI has instilled a sense of common purpose.

By taking a multi-pronged approach, the Task Force sought community input on three primary issues:

- What is the current state of the challenges and obstacles that individuals, families and communities face to financial stability?
- What are the underlying causes of the financial hardship faced by community members?
- What changes need to be made in order to alleviate financial hardship within the community?
Face-to-face meetings not only generated input and provided a sense of community ownership, but also identified local drivers of poverty. A key engagement strategy was a survey of individual Hempstead residents. Nearly 600 Hempstead residents were heard through a survey conducted everywhere from on the Internet to at soup kitchens. A broad array of venues were chosen to maximize participation and amplify the voices of the poor. (The full results of the survey and resident comments are available at villageofhempsteadespri.org). In the survey, as well as at focus groups, town hall meetings and other means of outreach, participants called for more jobs and affordable housing, increased access to health enhanced care, school resources and safer neighborhoods and business districts.

The topics of safety, education, job training and communication appeared over and over. In short, residents wanted more opportunity – for themselves, their children and their community. They wanted the tools to build a life free of poverty and filled with potential. They wanted the same responsiveness afforded those who live in more prosperous villages only a stones’ throw away.

The responses from both face-to-face meetings and the community survey fell into three recurrent themes, broad “buckets” – Employment & Career Readiness; Youth & Adult Mentoring; and Navigation & Resources – that encompassed the drivers of local poverty, urgent unmet needs, and possible solutions.

Equipped with these broad categories and a long list of detailed community concerns and suggestions, work groups took on the challenge of refining them into policy or programmatic proposals. The teams continued to work closely with community partners and experts from a variety of fields. Each of the work groups assessed recommendations from public meetings and surveys for their potential impact, cost and sustainability. Then the Steering Committee selected the most promising proposals from each work group with an emphasis on commonalities across sectors. The top cross-cutting, evidence-based recommendations, were endorsed by all six work groups. The following pages highlight these recommendations.

“...the world outside is as hard as the one within the prison walls. With no income, he can’t buy a MetroCard to look for work or a bag of groceries to help his mother out. Having his own place seems an impossible dream. He knows he needs more people and programs who can make a difference.
Drivers of Poverty Identified in Face-to-Face Meetings

- Access to quality healthcare, mental health and substance abuse services
- Fragmented services and uncoordinated navigation for the poor
- Limited communication and information sharing

Survey Findings

- 94.1% of respondents with children said that they would utilize a resource center in a centralized location of the Village where they could receive multiple services and information

PROPOSAL:

A community Resource Center connecting individuals to a range of support services.

"Addressing poverty on a systemic basis and garnering support from the public is essential to bringing better job opportunities, economic growth, and community stability to the Village of Hempstead"
2: Vocational Training

Drivers of Poverty Identified in Face-to-Face Meetings

- Shortage of vocational training programs in high-growth, high-demand sectors
- Stagnant wages for the least skilled
- Unskilled labor force with low-paying jobs and limited benefits

Survey Findings

- Over 40% of ex-offenders in the survey had not completed high school
- Young adults in our survey experienced high rates of unemployment (19.4%), as did ex-offenders (28.3%)

PROPOSAL:
Vocational training programs linked to a business and employment council to help young adults and ex-offenders move to self-sufficiency.
3: Ex-Offender System Navigators

Drivers of Poverty Identified in Face-to-Face Meetings

- The cycle of incarceration – re-entry and recidivism

Survey Findings

- Only 38 out of 113 survey respondents who’ve been incarcerated applied for any of these certificates:
  - Certificate of Good Conduct
  - Certificate of Relief
  - Certificate of Disposition
  - Certificate of Good Standing

- 16 out of 38 individuals gained employment by having the required certificate

PROPOSAL:
A system navigator program to help ex-offenders in particular obtain certificates of relief, disposition, good conduct and good standing, and link to a credible messenger program and new social network.
4: After-School Programs

Drivers of Poverty Identified in Face-to-Face Meetings

- Lack of early childhood support
- Limited after-school and summer learning programs for children and youth

Survey Findings

- When asked to rate the importance of various community and service improvements on a five-point scale, 51% of respondents with school-age children gave after-school programs the top “very important” rating.

PROPOSAL:

After-school programs to help students academically, socially and emotionally.
Drivers of Poverty Identified in Face-to-Face Meetings

- Increasing cost of living

Survey Findings

- Nearly one in three employed respondents described their finances as “poor” (32.7%), a larger share than those that reported being in “good” or “excellent” shape combined (19.9%). The largest group (47.4%) had “fair” finances – explained in the questionnaire as “I struggle to make ends meet”.

PROPOSAL:

Financial literacy program to help individuals manage their finances.
6: High School Mentoring/Limited English Proficiency

Drivers of Poverty Identified in Face-to-Face Meetings

- Access to early childhood care and education
- Limited adult and youth mentors

Survey Findings

- 45% of residents in households with children reported that English is not the primary language spoken at home

PROPOSAL:

Mentoring program to provide students with guidance and support throughout high school with an appreciation for the needs of new arrivals and those with limited English Proficiency (LEP).
Drivers of Poverty Identified in Face-to-Face Meetings

- Increasing health care costs
- Lack of access to quality healthcare, mental health and substance abuse services

Survey Findings

- Over half of respondents (53.1%) told us that they had trouble paying co-pays, deductibles, and other health costs. Nearly three-quarters of this group (73.9%) had at least one member of their household go to the emergency room in the past year.

PROPOSAL:
Community health worker program to connect individuals to healthcare and social services.
Drivers of Poverty Identified in Face-to-Face Meetings

- People’s inability to move up the ladder
- Limited job training and skills
- Limited access to educational resources

**PROPOSAL:**

Project Self-Sufficiency provides opportunities to low-income Section 8 families for education, job training, counseling, financial literacy, coaching and other forms of social service assistance to obtain financial stability and self-sustainability.
Conclusion

It’s not that Hempstead is alone, on Long Island or around the state. Despite one of the longest economic expansions in history, more than three million New Yorkers, including a million children, currently live in poverty. As Governor Cuomo pointed out, “Many of the poor live in concentrated pockets where inadequate housing, high unemployment, underperforming schools, poor health and neighborhood crime fuse together to create an increasingly complicated problem, requiring equally interconnected solutions.”

The state modeled the ESPRI on the widely-recognized Rochester Anti-Poverty Task Force, which marshaled a broad coalition of state and local government, businesses, nonprofit agencies and especially residents to redesign efforts to address poverty – the process has been successfully tested in one of the state’s poorest cities. As in the Rochester area, if the Hempstead plan is considered successful in identifying specific, measurable means to achieve its goals, “the State will make targeted investments in capital projects to improve the quality, efficiency and reach of services that address poverty, including job training, public safety, and health and nutrition programs.”

Additionally, after Hempstead has published a Request For Proposals (RFP) on specific programs, New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance will provide the funding for the new initiatives. Moving forward, United Way of Long Island will take direction from the Mayor’s Office of the Incorporated Village of Hempstead in sustaining the ESPRI project which may include forging relationships to spur investment and identify funding from government, corporate and private foundations to enhance services currently available.

United Way of Long Island along with its community partners hopes that the momentum generated by the ESPRI initiative can be used to rally residents around an array of renewal efforts. Through the ESPRI initiative in Hempstead, we discovered a deep, enthusiastic desire for change and a reservoir of good ideas for doing so.