

A Community Assessment

Findings from Residents & Leaders
of Fairfield County, South Carolina

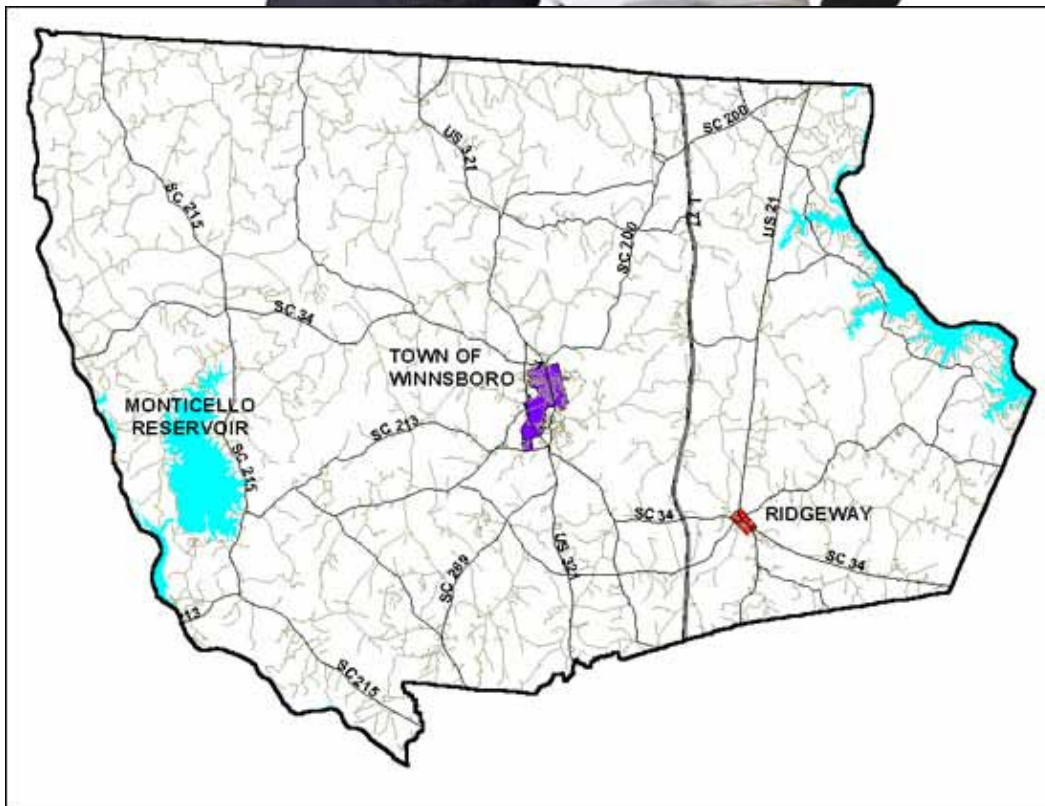


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For more information about this document or United Way of the Midlands, visit www.uway.org or call 803.733.5400.

I. Introduction

In spring of 2009 United Way of the Midlands (UWM), with community partners completed “Facing Facts”, a comprehensive community assessment of Richland and Lexington counties. UWM uses the information from assessments like this to guide planning and implementation of community activities. Because UWM serves six counties, it is imperative to collect data that reflect the specific and different needs for each county, including Fairfield.

The methodology for this assessment used three sets of data. Primary data were collected from focus groups of citizens/consumers of services and through online surveys of community leaders. Secondary data were collected from already existing reports like the U.S. Census Bureau and the 2008 Kids Count (see Appendix A for a complete list). Thirty-five of the 98 electronic surveys sent to leaders in the community were completed. Two focus groups were held in Winnsboro, the county seat, one at First Steps and the other at the Workforce Center OneStop, with a total of 17 people. All information was collected August-November 2009.

The goal of this assessment is to identify strengths and needs of Fairfield County, South Carolina. UWM focuses on three primary areas: education, health care, and financial stability. This assessment was conducted purposefully to address these three areas in Fairfield County. In addition to data that addresses the three key areas other quality of life issues surfaced.

This community assessment is in no way meant to be a complete look at the county. There are limits to this assessment. One limit being that data were collected from a small number of participants. This assessment is only a snapshot of the community obtained through personal stories and experiences, and drawn together with the secondary data as an attempt to find some meaningful answers. The hope for this assessment is that it will provide motivation and direction for the community and interested stakeholders to continue a dialogue on the needs and strengths of the community.



II. Snapshot of the County

Fairfield County is located in the Midlands region of South Carolina. Fairfield County's population in 2000 was 23,454 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The 2012 projected population is 25,134 (Central Midlands Council of Governments Demographic Detail Summary Report, 2008). Winnsboro (population 3,599) is the county seat of Fairfield; the second most recognized town is Ridgeway (population 328) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The closest metropolitan area is the capital city of South Carolina, Columbia, which is located approximately 33 miles south of Winnsboro. Fairfield is a rural county. In 2000 Fairfield had 34.1 people per square mile, compared to the state of South Carolina which had 133.2 people per square mile (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

The Fairfield County Chamber of Commerce website has a list of top employers. From this list the two with the highest number of employees recorded are V.C. Summer Station- SCE&G and Fairfield County School District; each having 630 employees (Fairfield County Chamber of Commerce). In 2007 the county was 57.3% African American and 41.6% Caucasian. The number of children in poverty was estimated in 2005 to be 27.7% of all children under age 18 (Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Referring to the table below, it is obvious that Fairfield County has more poverty than surrounding counties and the state overall.

Table 1: Economic Difference between County, State and Country in 2007

	Median Household Income	% of Persons Living Below Poverty
Fairfield County	\$34,174	17.8%
Richland County	\$47,787	12.7%
Lexington County	\$51,040	10.9%
Newberry County	\$39,766	16.7%
State of South Carolina	\$43,508	15.1%
United States	\$50,740	13.0%

** State & County QuickFacts, U.S. Census Bureau, 2007*

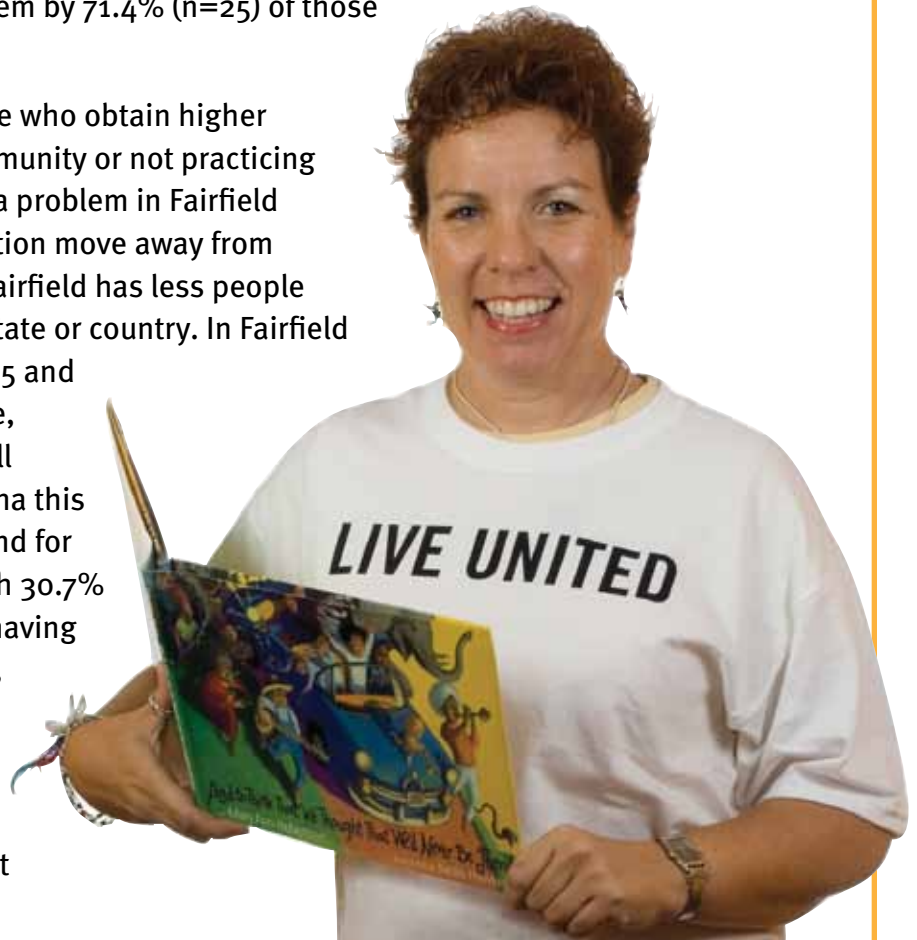


III. Education

Education is a broad topic and community feedback raised issues of continuing education for adults in the community as well as the need to improve quality in grades K-12 and offer more afterschool activities for children. There is no institute of higher education in the county at this time, but Midlands Technical College has plans to put a campus in Fairfield County in the next year or so. Most community leaders also found this to be an issue as 77.1% (n=27) rated “available, educated workforce” and 71.4% (n=25) “adult literacy” as a big problem in the county. Members of the focus groups commented that schools are overcrowded and the curriculum is not challenging enough. Consumers expressed the need for Fairfield Magnet School for Math and Science to be expanded and for acceptance to be based on academics and not a lottery system. The Fairfield School District 2008 Annual District Report Card has the absolute rating of “at-risk”. The district has been rated at-risk since 2006 and this is the lowest rating that is possible. At-risk is defined on the report card as “District performance fails to meet the standards for progress toward the 2010 SC Performance Goal” (The State of South Carolina Annual District Report Card, 2008). Fairfield Central High’s on-time graduation rate is 65.2% (The State of South Carolina Annual School Report Card, 2008). Fairfield County falls right in the middle of the other counties on rankings for this and this number is very similar to the average for all the counties in the state. The quality of education in the county was rated as a big problem by 71.4% (n=25) of those who took the online survey.

The concept of “brain drain”, those who obtain higher education moving away from the community or not practicing in the community, was mentioned as a problem in Fairfield County. Whether those with an education move away from Fairfield or not, the data shows that Fairfield has less people with a college education than in the state or country. In Fairfield County, 15.9% of the population age 25 and older have a college degree (associate, bachelors, graduate or professional all included). In the state of South Carolina this percentage is much higher at 27.1% and for the United States it is even higher with 30.7% of the population 25 years and older having a college degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

When we speak of education, it is important to look at issues that affect the whole child and not just



III. Education *(continued)*

academics. Members of both focus groups pointed out that there is “nothing for children to do” in the county and 44.1% (n=15) community leaders also agree that there are not enough after-school programs. Points around this issue were: the Fairfield County Recreation Center cut programs for the summer; programs that are available cost too much; there is no available day care drop in program; there is no safe place for children to hang out (skating rink was closed, no decent park, no movie theatre, the community pool was only open six weeks this summer with short hours); there are no afterschool programs for any ages; there need to be more extracurricular programs offered other than football. One might expect that if there is “nothing for children to do” then they would be involved in delinquent or risky behaviors. However, the 2008 Kids Count Report indicates adolescent risk behaviors are not significantly greater in the county. There is only one exception to this; adolescents in Fairfield County were almost twice as likely to have hit their boyfriend or girlfriend in the past twelve months. Out of all children in the county 40.2% of them live in a single-parent family (Fairfield County Kids Count Report, 2008). This number is high, when compared to other counties in South Carolina; Fairfield ranks 37 out of 46. With only one parent in the home they cannot be providing productive activities for their children at all times and this needs to be supplemented for by the schools and other groups in the community.



Table 2: Difference in Adolescent Risk Behaviors between Fairfield County and the State

Risk behavior	Fairfield County	South Carolina
Hit your boyfriend or girlfriend? (past 12 months)	15.4%	8.7%
Used any illicit drug (past 30 days)	18.2%	20.0%
Been in a fight with someone? (past 12 months)	29.6%	28.0%
Received detention or in-school suspension? (past 12 months)	27.1%	32.7%
Seriously considered attempting suicide? (past 12 months)	6.1%	8.7%
* 2008 Fairfield County Kids Count Report, 2008 South Carolina Kids Count Report		

IV. Health

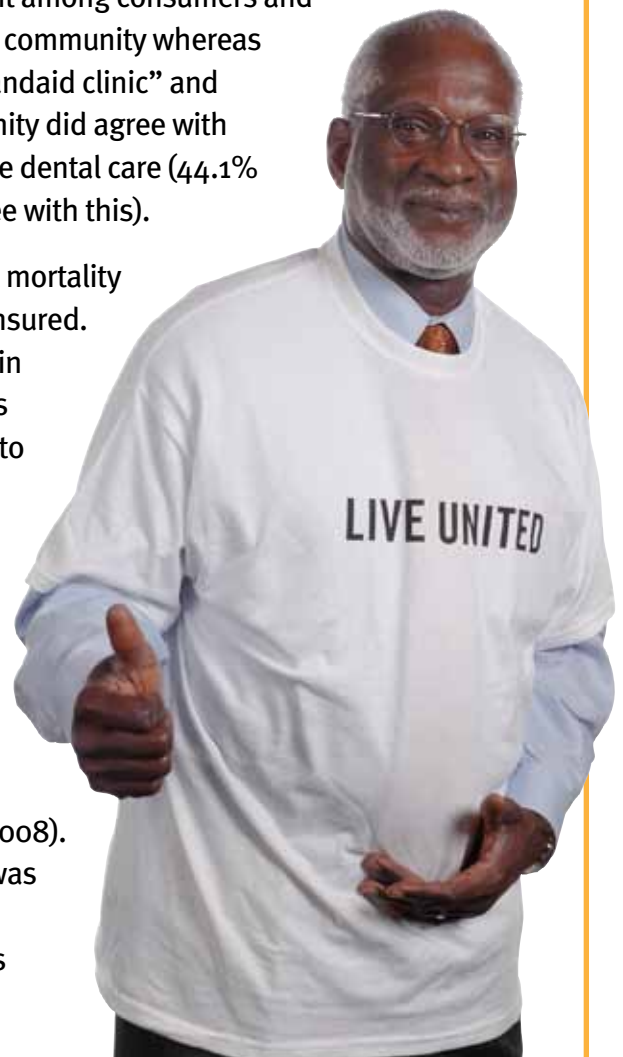
Major findings in the area of health were a discrepancy among views of the hospital and needing more health care facilities in the county especially for specialty care. Consumers reported high prescription costs, the lack of specialty care and slow ambulance response in rural parts of the county. Community leaders noted health care as a problem in regards to the cost of health insurance (65.7% ranked this as a big problem) and alcohol and drug abuse (65.7% ranked this as a big problem). Members of the focus groups did not talk much about alcohol or drug abuse except to mention that it was a concern among youth.

Perceptions of the Fairfield Memorial Hospital were different among consumers and leaders. Community leaders see the hospital as an asset in the community whereas members at both focus groups referred to the hospital as a “bandaid clinic” and reported not trusting the hospital. Stakeholders in the community did agree with consumers that there are not enough available places to receive dental care (44.1% agree with this) or to receive health care in general (67.6% agree with this).

Other health care data worth mentioning include the infant mortality rate, drug and alcohol rates in Fairfield, and the number of uninsured. The infant mortality rate has risen from 3.1 per 1000 live births in 1994-1996 to 11.1 per 1000 for 2004-2006 (Fairfield County Kids Count Report, 2008). Overall, the number of persons admitted to drug and alcohol treatment centers have declined since 2003 in Fairfield County. The percent of change from 2003 to 2008 is -27.9%, however between 2007 to 2008 the percentage of change was 3.7% (DAODAS, 2008). Alcohol is the main substance causing admittance across all of these years, with alcohol being the primary problem in 113 admittances in 2008 compared to 30 for cocaine and 47 for marijuana (DAODAS, 2008). The age group with the biggest increase in admittance from 2007 to 2008 is 12 to 17 year olds (DAODAS, 2008). The most up-to-date information for the number of uninsured was found from the U.S. Census Bureau 2006 estimate released in August of 2009. According to the data, Fairfield County has less uninsured than surrounding counties and the state.

Table 3: Estimates of Health Insurance Coverage

Geographic Location	% Uninsured
Newberry County	22.7%
Richland County	16.9%
Lexington County	18.1%
Fairfield County	16.8%
State of South Carolina	19.2%
<i>*U.S. Census Bureau, 2009</i>	



V. Financial Stability

Unemployment and lack of public transportation were the main issues reported leading to financial instability for residents in Fairfield County. The lack of available, well paying jobs was the number one issue rated as a big problem in Fairfield County by community leaders with 91.4% (n=32) rating it as a big problem and the rest (n=3) rating it as a medium problem. Related to this was the issue brought up at the focus groups that training may be expensive or some people may not qualify for the training due to the guidelines set. Examples of guidelines may be requiring a GED (General Education Development), for the person to be literate or be able to pass a background check.

The 2000 U.S. Census data shows that the most common occupation category in Fairfield County is production, transportation, and material moving occupations with about 30% of the population in these types of work. In South Carolina in 2000 the greatest number of people (30%) are in the occupation category of management, professional and related occupations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). This confirms what is already known, that the loss of manufacturing plants in the county had a large, negative impact on the economy there. The unemployment rate as of September 2009 is 12.9% for Fairfield County; compared to 11.6% for the state, 9.5% for Richland County and 8.3% for Lexington County (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009).

Lack of public transportation was also raised by both focus groups as an area of concern. There is a transit bus system in the county, but no one seemed clear on exactly

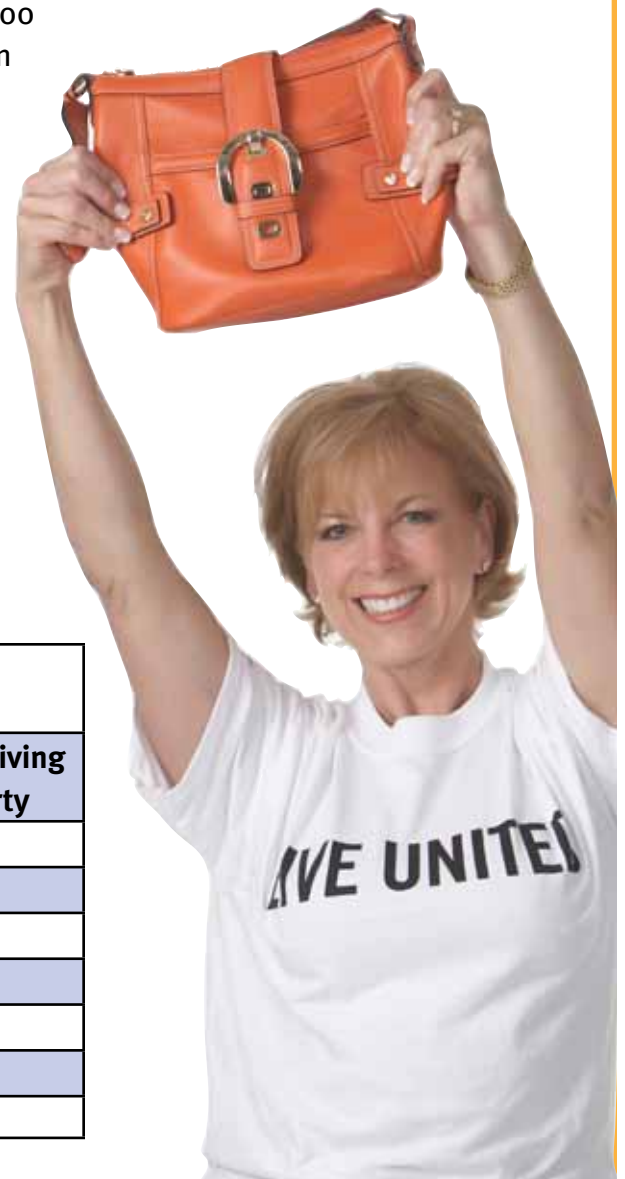


Table 4: Economic Difference between Counties, State and Country in 2007

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** State & County QuickFacts, U.S. Census Bureau, 2007*

V. Financial Stability *(continued)*

how it operates. They reported there are not enough stops; routes are infrequent as well as no service to many rural areas. Although the percentage of workers who use public transportation to get to work in this state is low (.8%), it is still twice the rate of workers in Fairfield County (.4%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Half of the community leaders said that public transportation services are not effective. Another reason mentioned for the need of better transportation for the residents is that many of them travel out of the county for work due to lack of jobs in the county. The data does not show residents of Fairfield County traveling much farther than in other parts of South Carolina. The mean travel time to work for the county is 28.3 minutes compared to the state at 24.3 minutes average per commute (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). However, a substantially higher percentage of residents in Fairfield do work outside of the county compared to the percentages for the stated and country.

Table 5: Working in County of Residence vs. Outside				
Place of Work	Newberry	Fairfield	SC	US
In county of residence	65.1%	49.6%	72.4%	73.3%
Outside of county of residence	34.1%	47.4%	22.9%	23.1%
* U.S. Census Bureau, 2000				



VI. Other Quality of Life Issues

Two issues were raised during this assessment that did not clearly fit into the three key areas, but are of interest to improving the quality of life for Fairfield County residents. The two issues were regarding the lack of communication and retail in the county. The issue of communication was raised by community leaders and consumers of services alike. Focus group participants made it clear that a problem in the community was the public not being aware of services and pointed to the lack of local media being responsible. These residents were concerned that if one lives outside of city limits they will have limited if not no internet access. The public library was reported as the only place in the county for the public to use the internet. There is a thirty minute limit on use and the library only stays open late one night until 7pm. One member of the focus group remarked “DSS (Department of Social Services) is our welcoming center”. “Local media” was considered a medium or big problem by 80% of the community leaders who took the online survey as well. Consumers reported it would be helpful if the local newspaper’s cost was reduced and if it was printed once a week instead of twice as they did not feel there was enough information to put in the paper two times a week so they were less apt to buy it. They also reported communication could be improved if there was a local radio station, community center and newsletter to let the residents know of available services.

Consumers reported on a lack on retail in the county. One consumer commented, “You can’t buy a decent pair of shoes here”. There is no mall in the county and Wal-Mart is the go-to store for all the resident’s needs. Along similar lines it was noted by consumers that there is a lack of restaurants in the county especially those that deliver food to homes. The lack of retail and restaurants also contributes to the lack of jobs in the county. This is an issue of inequality. The lack of retail and restaurants has a greater effect on families that are more financially unstable, as they have less accessibility to areas where more shopping and dining are available, due to financial or transportation constraints.

VII. Conclusion

Overall there was a feeling of disappointment and frustration among participants at the focus groups. The focus groups started by discussing the advantages to living in Fairfield County and some people wanted to skip over this part and go right to talking about the disadvantages. These feelings were reflected among the leaders in the community as well. Out of the 25 issues listed on the online survey the majority of leaders ranked all of them as a medium or big problem. Eighteen of the issues have the highest percent ranking them as a big problem (see Appendix B for a list of the 25 issues). Sixty percent of community leaders do not think Fairfield County is a good place to raise children and 65.7% do not think citizens in the county are motivated or ready to make significant changes to improve the quality of life for all citizens. The following table shows seven separate statements in which community leaders indicated if they agreed or disagreed with the statement. The question was answered by some as “do not know”.

Statement	Agree	Disagree
There are a sufficient number of health and social services in Fairfield County.	54.3%	42.9%
Fairfield County is a good place to raise children.	28.6%	60%
Fairfield County is a good place to grow old.	54.3%	40%
Fairfield County has a strong sense of community.	68.6%	28.6%
Fairfield County citizens are motivated and ready to make significant changes to improve the quality of life for all citizens.	28.6%	65.7%
There is economic opportunity in Fairfield County.	22.9%&	77.1%
Fairfield County is a safe place to live.	54.3%	31.4%

While this assessment has mainly focused on the current needs in Fairfield County, the strengths and resources should not be forgotten. All focus groups listed right away a strong sense of community and 68.6% of community leaders also agree that this is true for Fairfield County. It seemed to be a common theme that the small town atmosphere is a benefit with everyone knowing everyone and watching out for each other. Others pointed to the natural landscape with the lakes close by and the outdoor recreational opportunities, the “laid back” atmosphere and the potential for tourism and development. Others mentioned the history of the area and the historic homes and landmarks. Focus groups members also pointed to low property taxes and housing costs as an

VII. Conclusion *(continued)*

advantage to living in Fairfield County. In 2005 Fairfield County had the highest home ownership rate in the midlands with 77.4% owning their own home (Central Midlands Council of Governments Region Report for Fairfield County, 2005). The median rent and mortgage payments are less in Fairfield County than in the state of South Carolina and than in Richland County, according to 2000 Census data. Fairfield County is comparable to Newberry in terms of housing costs.

Another reported benefit to living in Fairfield County is the proximity to the state capital and major highways. A stated resource of the county is the huge tax base of the nuclear plant, V.C. Summer Station- SCE&G.

As previously stated it is important to remember that this community assessment is not a complete look at the county. The sample was a convenience sample and was not randomly selected. The sample was also small with only about 1/3 of leaders who were sent surveys responded. This assessment should be used as a starting point to addressing the needs in Fairfield County and to begin conversation on what changes are realistic and feasible for the community.

Table 7: Difference in Housing Cost Between Fairfield County and the State

Housing	Fairfield County	Richland County	Newberry County	South Carolina
Median rent	\$395	\$570	\$385	\$510
Median mortgage	\$727	\$962	\$757	\$894

* U.S. Census Bureau, 2000



Appendix A: References

The secondary data collected came from the following sources:

- 2008 Kids Count including First Steps to Success and Success by Seventeen in Fairfield County
- Central Midlands Council of Governments Region Report 2005 and 2007-2008 Assessment of Needs for Senior Services of Citizens in the Central Midlands Region of South Carolina
- South Carolina Community Profiles: Fairfield County Profile (uses 2000 US Census data)
- South Carolina Mature Adults Count: 2003 Fairfield County Report
- U.S. Census Bureau
- Fairfield County Young Adult Report 2002
- Fairfield County Healthy Partners: Local Public Health System Performance Assessment 2009
- 2008 School Report Cards
- United Way's 2002 Community Assessment for Fairfield and Newberry
- Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services, 2008

Appendix B: Methodology

Focus Groups:

The first focus group was held at First Steps in Winnsboro and the second at the Winnsboro Workforce Center. In total, there were 17 people who attended the focus groups. Twelve of the 17 live in Fairfield County and the average time lived in the county is 20.2 years. Fifty percent of the focus group participants have a total annual household income under \$14,999. Fifty three percent of the participants have a two year college degree or higher and 75% were employed full time. Out of the total 17 participants for both groups, seven were African American, four Caucasian and one Hispanic. Out of the total 17 participants 13 were female and four were male.

Each participant was told the purpose of this assessment and signed a voluntary informed consent. The focus groups were facilitated by UWM staff. The information was collected through a series of opened questions. Questions discussed: What do you like about living in Fairfield County or what are the advantages to living in Fairfield County?, What are disadvantages, problems or barriers in the community?, Out of these problem areas which are most important and can be realistically improved? What kinds of services are most needed in Fairfield County and who could provide these?



Appendix B: Methodology *(continued)*

Community Leader Online Survey:

Survey Monkey was utilized to create this survey and then the survey was distributed out through email to 98 people considered leaders in the community. These stakeholders or leaders were identified through UWM staff, the Fairfield Coordinating Council, and Fairfield Community Health Partners. The survey targeted those who are directors of agencies, board members, service providers and members of government. Out of the 98 surveys sent out 35 were completed. Out of those who completed the survey, 57.1% (n=20) live in Fairfield County and out of those who live in the county, 52.3% (n=14) have lived in Fairfield County for over 20 years. Other demographic information about those who took the surveys: 88.6% (n=31) are employed full time, 81.8% (n=27) are married, 60.6% (n=20) are female, 75% (n=24) Caucasian, 18.8% (n=6) African American, 3.1% (n=1) Asian, 3.1% (n=1) Native American. The most common income range (for 29%, n=9) was \$70,000-\$84,999 and the most common education level (42.4%, n=14) was master's or professional degree.

The survey included questions about barriers to service, the community's greatest strengths or assets, issues that can feasibly be improved and the statements from Table 4. The survey listed 25 issues and had two questions related to these issues. The first question was to rate how big of a problem the issue was using a likert scale of "not a problem at all", "little problem", "medium problem", "big problem" or "do not know". For the second question, also using a likert scale, the leader had to select the best answer for each issue from "No services available", "Services are available, but they are not effective", "Effective services exist, but there are not enough available", "Services fully meet the need", "Do not know".

The 25 issues on the survey are as follows:

- Healthcare
- Access to health insurance
- Cost of health insurance
- Availability of dental care
- Access to dental care (especially for low income individuals)
- Cost of prescription drugs
- Consistent, reliable transportation to work
- Transportation for people with special needs
- Public transportation
- Quality childcare
- Affordable childcare
- Adult literacy
- Afterschool programs
- Quality of education (K-12)
- Family violence
- Parenting programs/ supports
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Mental health services
- Available, well-paying jobs
- Available, educated workforce
- Local media (radio, television, newspaper and internet access)
- Affordable housing
- Homelessness
- Crime
- Coordination among service providers to address community needs

2009-10

Your Contributions in Action



What does United Way do?

United Way of the Midlands is a nonprofit, volunteer-driven organization that unites donors, companies, volunteers, partner agencies, and other organizations to improve lives and achieve measurable results that make our community stronger in Calhoun, Fairfield, Lexington, Newberry, Orangeburg and Richland counties.

United Way achieves this by doing two things:

- 1) Helping people in need right now through ongoing support of dozens of essential local programs
- 2) Working to eliminate future needs by fixing underlying causes that negatively impact student success, homelessness, financial stability and access to health care.

United Way has a unique ability to help us come together as a community to identify and address the issues that take everyone to solve. Those issues, like making sure children are ready to start school, keeping kids in school through high school graduation and beyond, providing dental care and access to primary care for at risk children and families, and helping families become more financially stable, cross lines of race, gender, geography, faith and economic status and therefore require us to work together to ensure positive and systemic change. Your contribution is combined with those made by others to impact our community in ways no single organization or individual can.

Where does the money go?

United Way of the Midlands works to promote lasting change in the areas of EDUCATION, INCOME and HEALTH. We target issues such as homelessness, student success and access to health care. We recognize that there are basic things we all need for a good life: a quality education that leads to a stable job, income that can support a family through retirement, and good health.

Community Impact Resources in the Midlands for 2009-10

Education	\$1,372,289
Financial Stability	\$3,589,614
Health	\$995,231
2-1-1, Increasing Volunteerism & Strengthening Community Organizations	\$1,460,860
Designations to Partner Agencies	\$2,789,434

Total: \$10,107,428



WHEN WE REACH OUT A HAND TO ONE WE AFFECT THE CONDITION OF ALL.

