

Monmouth ACTS: *Assisting Community through Services*
Meeting the Human Service Needs of Monmouth County Residents
Today and Tomorrow

The profile of Monmouth County residents has changed significantly over the last 20 years. The composition of county residents is increasingly diverse with a rising number of older residents. While Monmouth is a relatively wealthy county, many residents struggle to have their basic needs met. Challenges such as addiction, increasing mental health needs, homelessness and food insecurity have become more commonplace, with many people feeling isolated and alone. Since the turn of the century, there had not been a fresh formal look at the needs of Monmouth County residents and how services and supports can respond to these needs. With all of this in mind, Monmouth County undertook a Human Services Needs Assessment in late 2016. The assessment looked at the needs and aspirations of county residents, and the strengths, capabilities, and interests of residents, service providers and community stakeholders. The assessment was conducted within a framework of individual and family success from birth to the end of life and four life areas, or pillars essential to positive life outcomes. The goals for each phase of life are:

- *Early Childhood Success* (0-8 years old) - All young children will be safe, healthy, and ready to learn.
- *Positive Youth Development* (9-15 years old) - All school-age children and youth will be living in a permanent home, achieving in school, and connected to their families and communities.
- *Strong Transitions to Adulthood* (16-26 years old) - Youth transitioning to adulthood will be on positive pathways to economic and social independence with strong and responsible family and community ties.
- *Productive Adulthood* (27- 62) - adults will achieve their greatest potential for economic and social independence as responsible and contributing community members.
- *Successful Aging* (63 and over)- aging adults will maintain their greatest level of independence, functioning, and dignity as valued members of their families and communities
- *Strong Families, Strong Communities* – Families and communities will have the knowledge, resources, and skills to successfully support their families and community members from birth to the end of life.

The four foundational pillars for individual and family success include strong family relationships and community connections, safety and financial security, positive health and well-being and lifelong learning and education.

The individual and family success approach acknowledges that appropriate resources and services are required to successfully support people's developmental journeys through life. This framework asks what supports could help them succeed and avoid crises through proactive support, what people need when in crisis, and how people can move beyond crises to a better life.



The Needs Assessment, conducted by JANUS Solutions on behalf of the county, is entitled “*A Call to Action*”. The assessment drew upon myriad sources of data as well as over 1,100 voices of residents through individual interviews, focus groups and a community survey and was guided by a steering committee of community stakeholders and public officials. In sum, the assessment identified a number of emerging needs that require attention, large areas of strength and expertise in the Monmouth community, and opportunities for improvement. In recognition of the current strain on public budgets, the assessment identified areas where progress could occur without the addition of large new investments, as well as select areas that are under-funded. It contained recommendations in three areas:

1. **Community Information Sharing, Education/Dialogue, and Resource Navigation**

- Help county residents to understand what services and supports are available, and how to access and navigate them.
- Provide information about relevant human service issues, challenges and opportunities.

2. **Collaboration and Innovation**

- The county will approach human service planning, funding and service delivery in a more holistic, integrated fashion through public/private partnerships and the mobilization of the rich resources within the county.
- Create innovative and collaborative approaches to meet many of the needs identified by better use of existing resources and new relationships.

3. **Unmet Service Needs**

- Address unmet service needs through an effective, integrated comprehensive planning process.
- Address larger and longer-term challenges through advocacy and new service approaches.

The human services needs assessment was presented to the Board of Freeholders at their Open Session on June 8, 2017. The county accepted the recommendations in the needs assessment, and in response to “**The Call to Action**” has initiated a bold new initiative to take on the human service challenges of the future, **Monmouth ACTS**.

Monmouth ACTS is a public-private partnership between county government and the human services stakeholder community. The **Monmouth ACTS Steering Committee** and each sub-team, or **Hub**, is co-lead by county leaders and their community counterparts, with a wide array of key stakeholders joining the process. The Steering Committee and each Hub are examining the needs and challenges serving particular populations service areas to make concrete recommendations for short- and longer-term change based on the recommendations of the needs assessment. The Steering Committee oversees and coordinates the work of the Hubs in these specific areas;

- Early Childhood Success
- Positive Youth Development
- Aging
- Homelessness
- Transportation
- Financial empowerment
- Mental Health & Addictions

The goal of the Steering Committee and each hub is to design and support the implementation of organized systems of services and supports to the residents of Monmouth County. The activities will focus on residents learning about how to access the services they need, how they can initiate and navigate the complexities of modern-day service delivery and to assure that the services and continuity of support residents might want, or need, is there for them. In addition to the Hubs identified above, the county has established a public/private **Communications Team** to assure that Monmouth County residents have easy and friendly access to the information and resources they need.

Over time, as the **Monmouth ACTS** work progresses, the county intends to integrate this work with the many existing planning and coordination bodies to assure that planning and service coordination is performed in the most effective, responsive and efficient manner possible.