



# Virginia Cooperative Extension

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## Newport News 2023 Situation Analysis Report

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## Summary of community issues and Extension office response

Priority Issue	Planned Unit Response
Strengthening Local Food Systems	Collaborative effort between Master Gardener, Family and Consumer Sciences, and Family Nutrition Program education to teach Newport News residents how to harvest their own fresh produce and create healthy meals to combat food desserts and insecurities.
Addressing Adult and Youth Mental Health	Collaborative effort between the Family and Consumer Sciences Agent and the 4-H Youth Development Agent to utilize human development and mental health resources provided by the Human Development Program Team to educate residents in mental health resources, healthy stress management, and drug abuse/misuse.
Youth Development: Leadership, Citizenship, and Other Life Skills	4-H Youth Development Agent to provide educational programming such as ‘Character Counts’, ‘Mental Health First Aid’, and Social and Emotional Wellness classes that aim to increase youths character, leadership skills, and social and emotional capacity.
Addressing Hunger Issues	Collaborative partnership with Newport News organizations to point residents suffering from food insecurities to resources and agencies that can provide on-sight assistance such as food, financial coaching, clothing, and utility vouchers. A referral system and resource list is currently being updated to distribute to families in need as requested.
Preventing Youth Violence	Collaborative partnership between Newport News Public Schools and 4-H Youth Development Agent to increase programming centered Character Counts, Bullying Prevention and Awareness, and Citizenship target the underlying issues of good decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution.

# Introduction

Newport News Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) Staff participated in a comprehensive Situation Analysis during the calendar year 2023. The Newport News Extension Office does not have an active Extension Leadership Council. Therefore, Newport News Extension Staff developed the survey tool used in this analysis. The staff also developed the most current unit profile using both statistical information and collecting input from community participants on perceived issues. Data was compiled and examined. Results obtained from this process were used to identify key issues facing the community- providing a roadmap for the expansion and development of Extension programs in Newport News.

## The goals of this project were two-fold:

1. To provide a comprehensive survey for community leaders, residents, volunteers, program partners and participants in order to gather information on fundamental issues facing local residents, uncover barriers and challenges which threaten quality of life, and outline additional concerns local residents would like to see addressed.
2. To use the findings of the situation analysis to determine which issues reflect local priorities and identify which issues can be addressed by utilizing Extension resources.

This situation analysis is the first component of the Extension Programming Model. It helps the organization provide needs-based programming which proactively evolves as community needs change. The process was led by the Newport News Extension Staff in adherence to guidelines and procedures outlined through a series of training sessions provided by Virginia Cooperative Extension personnel from Virginia Tech. Both quantitative data (which led to the development of a Unit Profile) and qualitative data gathered from community leaders, residents, volunteers, and program partners and participants provided the foundation for the outcome in this report.

Extension staff collected data from the general public primarily through the use of an online Qualtrics survey. The survey format and questions were adapted from survey templates provided by Virginia Cooperative Extension. The survey provided participants with a large degree of autonomy in identifying areas of top priority. Extension staff developed an email list of community leaders, residents, volunteers, and program partners and participants to participate in the survey. This list included the communities in which we serve such as 4-H leaders and members, Master Gardeners, Master Financial Volunteers, Master Food Volunteers, Community Minority groups, public and private organizations, Newport News Human Services partners, Newport News Public School teachers, etc.

Links to the survey were distributed via email and were also made available on the Newport News Extension website and Facebook page. Our city liaisons at Human Services and program partners such as THRIVE Peninsula Foodbank and Newport News Public Schools assisted the office in distributing the survey to their staff, volunteers, and partners via their email lists. The survey link was also provided in an article entry in the Newport News Now Online Newsletter that is distributed weekly via email to residents all over Newport News; as well as on the local Newport News channel, NNTV, as a running slideshow for two months. Sixty days were allotted for participants to complete the survey.

During the month of November 2023, Extension staff compiled participant comments and survey results. Data was formatted and analyzed using the Qualtrics system. Additional data was gathered from existing sources such as the US Census Bureau's statistics, local government resources, and the VCE Situation Analysis Resource website. As Extension Staff met to discuss and review the data, they generated a list of the top five community priorities.

## Key Identified Issues

3. Strengthening Local Food Systems
4. Addressing Adult and Youth Mental Health
5. Youth Development: Leadership, Citizenship, and Other Life Skills
6. Addressing Hunger Issues
7. Preventing Youth Violence

Priorities identified within this document only outline some of the key issues our community is facing. As emerging issues become more apparent and Newport News continues to grow and diversify, new priorities will arise. Understanding community is a dynamic process. Accordingly, Extension programs are poised to address new challenges with eagerness, commitment, and innovation.

## Demographic Data of Survey Participants

With all the outreach efforts used, forty-two Newport News residents participated in the survey. The following graphs and data outline the demographic breakdown of the participants.

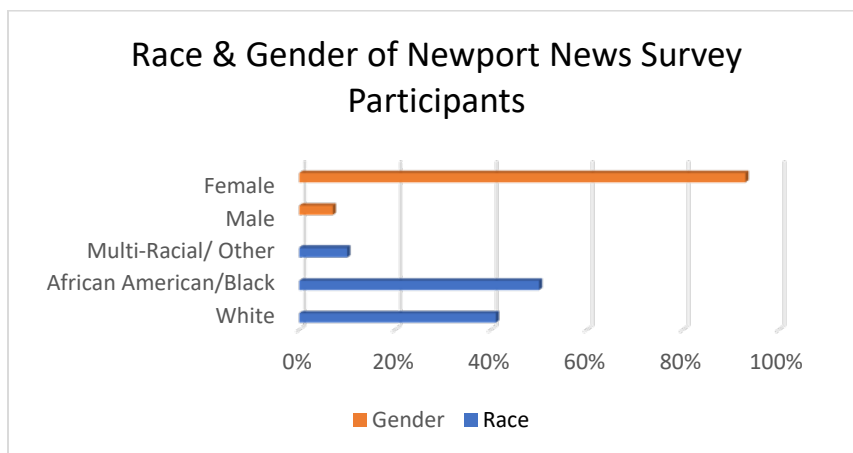


Figure 4. Racial/ethnicity and gender breakdown by percentages of Newport News residents that participated in the 2023 Situation Analysis survey.

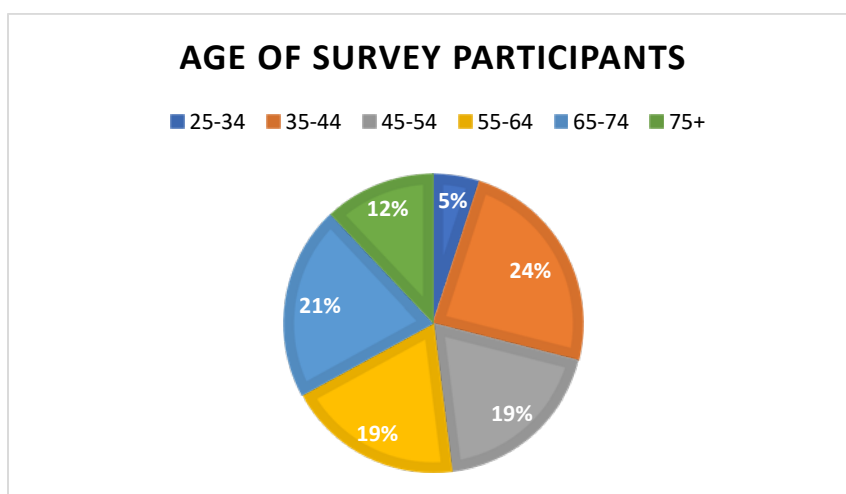


Figure 5. Age breakdown by percentages of Newport News residents that participated in the 2023 Situation Analysis survey.

Thirty-three percent of survey participants listed their income as less than \$50,000, while 36% responded to have an income between \$50,000-\$99,999. Most participants had a college education with 36% having Bachelor's degrees and 33% Master's degrees. Fifty-five percent of participants were employed full-time while 31% were retired. Five percent of participants identified as unemployed and looking for work, while another 5% were employed working part-time.

## Unit Profile

The city of Newport News can best be described as a diverse, thriving population in the heart of a metropolitan area. It ranks as the fourth largest city in Hampton Roads, VA, and is the sixth largest city in Virginia with a population estimated at 184,587 in 2021 (U.S. Census, 2021). Newport News sits on the southern end of the Virginia Peninsula formed by the James River and York River.

Newport News is an independent city as it is not affiliated with a county. Demographically, Newport News is in many ways typical of metropolitan America. It contains within its boundaries an urban core, a ring of older, settled neighborhoods, and booming suburban developments. Its citizens' age, educational, occupational and socioeconomic characteristics by large reflect the typical American demographic profile (Newport News VCE Situation Analysis, 2018).

## Age, Sex, and Race Origin Data

Age distribution data from the 2021 U.S. Census shows the greatest percentage in the population are adults 20-24 years old at 7.97%. However, the median age of residents is 33 years old. Five percent of residents in Newport News are 60 years of age or older, whereas 7.45% of residents are 19 and younger. The female population ranks the highest in Newport News at 51.6%, compared to 48% of males. Veterans also make up a high percentage of the city's population with 19,771 veterans reported as residents between 2017 and 2021. Of these veterans, 7.8% are foreign-born persons (City of Newport News Comprehensive Plan, 2018)

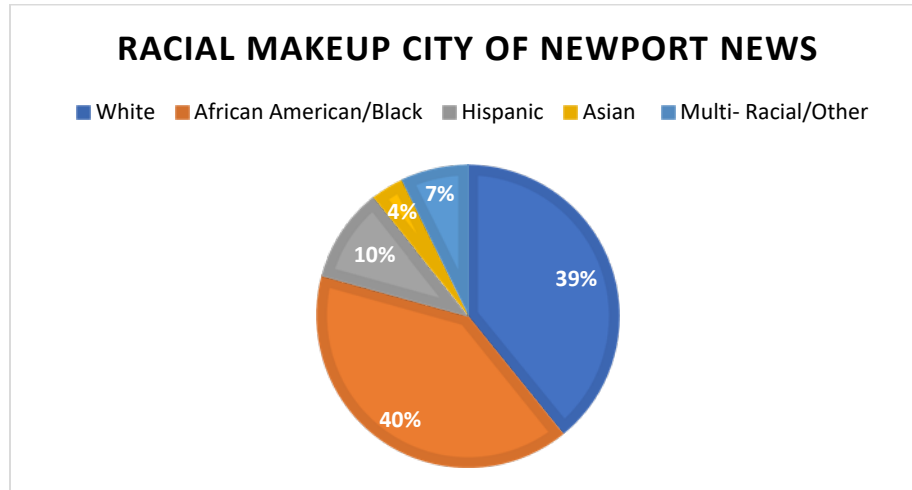


Figure 1. Racial/ethnicity makeup of the city based on 2021 Census data.

The only percentage of growth identified for a specific race was residents that reported being two or more races, increasing from 4.80% in 2017 to 5.09% in 2021. As well as the Hispanic population, growing from 8.60% in 2017 to 10% in 2021. On the contrary, the White population has decreased in the city, going from 49% in 2017 to 40% in 2021. The data indicated the rest of the population remained reasonably consistent, with not much increase or decrease from 2017 to now.

## Education Data

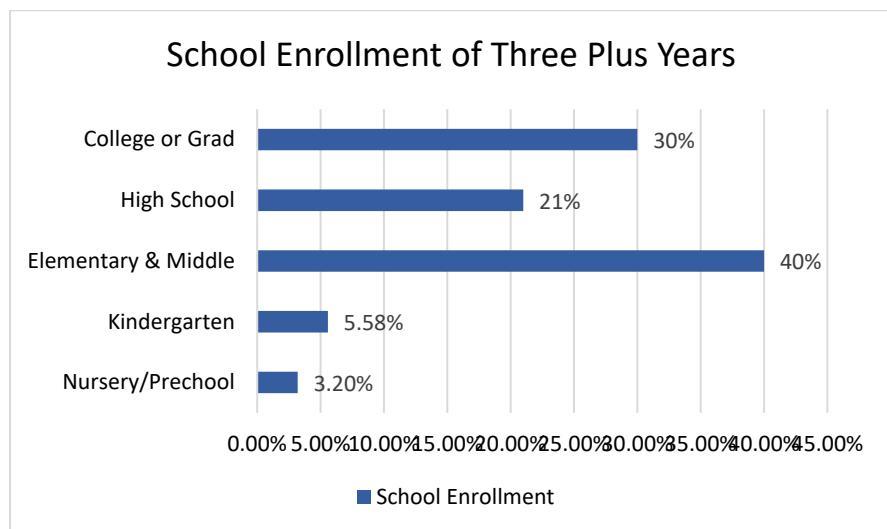


Figure 2. Over 45,000 Newport News residents have enrolled in school for at least three plus years. The graph above shows the breakdown of percentages by education level based upon 2021 US Census data.

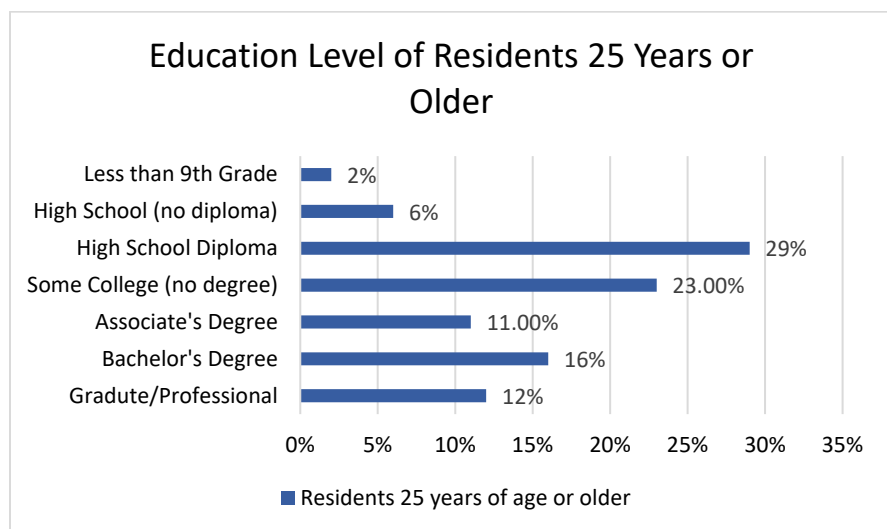


Figure 3. Over 119,00 Newport News residents 25 years of age and older have attained some level of education. The graph above shows the percentage breakdown by education level according to the 2021 U.S. Census.

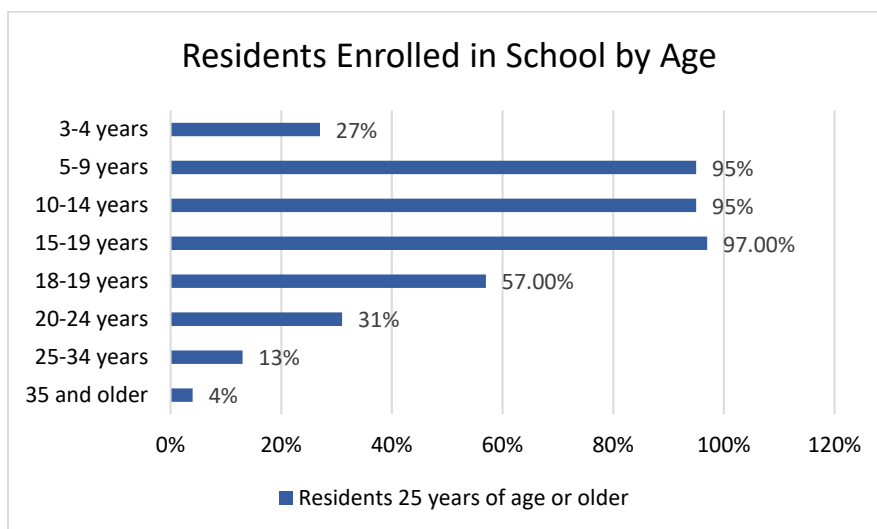


Figure 3. Percentage of Newport News residents enrolled in school by age according to the 2021 U.S. Census.

## Income and Poverty Data

Between 2018 and 2022, the Census reported that Newport News' per capita income was \$36,135, compared to resident's household income of \$63,355. The city holds a 14.7% poverty rate, compared to the 12.5% rate of the country. Five-point six percent of the population is currently unemployed, with 23% of Newport News children currently living in poverty. No recent data was acquired for total employment establishments in the city. For workers aged 16 and up, Newport News holds an average time of 23 minutes of travel time to work. Noting that a majority of the city's poverty population live in Downtown Newport News with only public transportation as a consistent resource, the data leads to the assumption that 23 minutes of traveling can be inconvenient and unaffordable for most impoverished families (City of Newport News Comprehensive Plan, 2018). Therefore, availability or lack thereof, and convenience of employment opportunities in Newport News should be addressed when aiding the needs of the poverty population (Newport News VCE Situation Analysis, 2018).

## Health Data

The Census reports 10.9% of the City's population under the age of 65 lives with a disability. While 9.8% of the population under 65 lives without health insurance. Forty-one percent of adult residents are obese and 24% report to be physically inactive. Newport News ranks at 103 in the country for adult obesity (Newport News VCE Situation Analysis, 2018). Nine-point five percent of adults in the city live with diabetes, while 13.4% of low-income preschoolers are obese. There are only 1.9 grocery stores in a one-mile distance per 10,000 people, compared to eight fast food restaurants in a one-mile distance per 10,000 people. Shockingly there is 0.1% of farmer's markets per 10,000 people. Thirty five percent of low-income families are receiving SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits in the city.

## Community and Resident Perspectives

Issues identified in the Newport News VCE Situation Analysis were revealed using a citywide online survey that allowed participants to make statements about the issues they felt were most important. Key issues identified were: Strengthening Local Food Systems, Addressing Adult and Youth Mental Health, Youth Development: Leadership, Citizenship, and Other Life Skills, Addressing Hunger Issues, and Preventing Youth Violence.

The following are some excerpts of resident perspectives that relate to our priority issues provided from the survey:

## **Strengthening Local Food Systems and Addressing Hunger Issues**

“Fresh food scarcity, ignorance of gardening for edible food Few people have tasted a fresh garden grown tomato; or fresh lettuce or fresh green beans. There are not enough community gardens and instructors or overseers to serve the whole Hampton Roads Community.”

“Food Nutrition, food desserts, and healthy eating. This is because many students are from downtown Newport News, have poor diets, don't have access to nutritional education, or fresh food, and don't often have the resources to improve their situation!”

“We have a lot of families in Newport News who have food insecurity, even with SNAP and WIC benefits. With the cost of groceries (and everything) increasing, food resources and/or access to nutritional food would be helpful for these families.”

“Getting back to gardening basics with an emphasis on vegetable, fruits, food production, flowers, etc., move away from being environmentalists and the wannabe native plant society”

## **Addressing Mental Health and Preventing Youth Violence**

“Improving public health is the most important thing. We are currently in a health crisis and Newport news residents have it particularly bad when compared to other localities in the state of VA.”

“It’s quite a few things that I feel need to be addressed and especially in the city of Newport News. From the lack of affordable housing, lack of resources and not just for the low income. You have lots of households that don’t make a whole lot but make too much to receive government assistance. Then it’s a lack of available daycares and the price of daycare has risen significantly over the years. Then you have the violence and the list goes on. Issues with the school system and so much more.”

“Housing instability. There is a lack of safe, affordable housing and eviction rates are on the rise. Many of the lower income residents of the area are unable to find adequate, safe, and affordable housing. Additionally, violence, specifically gun violence, in the Newport News neighborhoods are on the rise.”

“Poverty and housing instability. I am a Human Services professional and work with families at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Many times, the reason is no or low income/poverty. Unstable housing and homelessness are extremely traumatic for the entire family, particularly children. There is also not enough affordable housing in the local area, which makes it all the more difficult to stably house families long-term.”

## **Youth Development: Leadership, Citizenship, and Other Life Skills**

“More real and accessible at-risk youth services, and educational opportunities. with free tutor and help with college admission.”

“I believe that making the residents of Newport News more aware of the importance of the effect climate change has on our environment and choosing gardening techniques that will enhance our environment. Also, teaching our youth the importance of sustainable environmental practices.”

“Empowering youth is my top interest with a teenager at home and youth group/ their wellbeing is our future.”

“Health care for young adults, and free tutoring for underprivileged children.”

“Homelessness, and independent facilities for kids aging out of foster care. This is a need for individuals to have a safe place to live and learn independence.”



# Community Issues

## Issue 1: Strengthening the Local Food System

The 2023 Newport News community survey showed that 78.6% rated strengthening the local food system as very important. Addressing hunger issues was rated almost equally as important with 76% of participants prioritizing this issue. Relative issues included teaching homeowners to grow their own fruits and vegetables and educating residents about home, school and community gardening. All food system issues ranked 70% or higher on the level of importance for Newport News residents.

## Issue 2: Addressing Adult and Youth Mental Health

Addressing adult and youth mental health issues ranked as the second highest priority of our survey. Seventy-eight percent of participants identified addressing mental health to be very important. Factors affecting the mental health of Newport News residents vary. However, survey results show a high percentage of hunger and health issues, youth violence, lack of adult mentorship, poverty, and lack of housing to be key contributing factors. Participants ranked preventing suicide and helping communities increase their quality of life at 73% of importance in an effort to emphasize quality mental health.

## Issue 3: Helping Youth Develop Leadership, Citizenship, and Other Life Skills

Seventy-eight-point six percent of Newport News residents that completed the needs assessment selected this issue as being very important and as positive youth development professionals, we understand why. For many youth, adolescence is a time of increased pressure for problem solving and personal decision. They are called upon to make many difficult decisions including choices regarding career, school involvement, and risky behaviors. Choices made at this time have the power to influence many aspects of their future. Therefore, it is essential that they are well aware of the potential impact of their decisions and learn effective decision-making skills. Learning life skills is equally important. Life skills are the essential abilities individuals can learn that will help them to be successful in living a productive and satisfying life. Mental Health concerns such as preventing suicide was also ranked high at 73.8% by residents of Newport News as a life skill needed for positive youth development. Educating the next generation about healthy relationships, suicide prevention, college preparedness, and citizenship skills is vital for them to flourish.

## Issue 4: Addressing Hunger Issues

Addressing hunger issues was the fourth priority of our survey results with 76% of participants considering it a high priority. Home gardening education to help with food desserts and youth going hungry ranked at 73% of high importance to address food insecurity. Addressing poverty and homelessness ranked at 69% of importance as it often is a contributing factor of hunger issues. Specifically for youth, 64% of participants felt it was important to address before and after school challenges as many impoverished youth do not have access to food outside of school. safety.

## Issue 5: Preventing Youth Violence

Youth violence was ranked “very important” to 76.2% of participants and there was a focus on preventing crimes, gang involvement, and drug use. Incidents of crime, discipline, and violence can be prevented, especially when a community comes together to identify and support the needs of the youth in the locality. The City of Newport News has placed youth violence as a top priority for many years. The city has received a federal grant to help reduce youth violence and gang activity in at-risk youth through services and case management. However, there are many more youth in need of prevention and early intervention services.

# **Future Programming to Address Community Issues**

## **Issue 1: Strengthening the Local Food System**

Though VCE cannot address all factors that pertain to the local food system, hunger issues and food insecurities, we do offer various educational opportunities addressing the needs of healthy foods and enhancing access to locally grown fresh produce. The Newport News VCE Master Gardener (MG) program consistently collaborates with local partners like THRIVE Peninsula Foodbank to develop outdoor community gardens that residents in need can access for fresh foods. With the help of MG's and VCE's Master Financial Coaches, THRIVE offers clients one-on-one budget coaching, rent and utility assistance, and access to the food pantry; one of the few with fresh produce and frozen meats. Master Gardeners also work in the Newport News Public School System teaching students about growing their own food, as well as the importance of native plants and planting for pollinators. In the last 2 years, the Newport News MG Association awarded 5 schools a total of \$2,300 to build pollinator gardens, plant herbs for families, and other gardening projects that support the STEM program.

The Family Nutrition Program's SNAP-Ed agents are implementing policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes to help make the smart choice the easy choice when shopping for healthy foods in the community. PSE changes occur in schools, food retail stores, and farmers markets that accept SNAP. The Shop Smart, Eat Smart (SSES) program is designed so that SNAP-Ed Agents can partner with food stores in low-income areas or stores with high SNAP redemption. Strategies include in-store marketing, store layout design, healthy food demonstrations, and consumer engagement and education. The goal is to encourage purchases of healthy foods among SNAP participants, therefore increasing demand for healthy foods. Opportunities in Phase 2 of SSES will support inventory changes that add healthy food options to SNAP-authorized retail stores. Future efforts include collaborating with food retail stores in Newport News to promote healthy food access. Farmers markets that accept SNAP can participate in the VA Fresh Match program, allowing SNAP participants to double the amount of produce that they purchase at the farmers market. A goal is to increase the number of farmers markets that accept SNAP to help increase healthy food access for the citizens of Newport News.

## **Issue 2: Addressing Adult and Youth Mental Health**

Extension's Human Development Program Team focuses on educational outreach and resources to assist Virginians with mental and emotional health. The Program Team currently implements two action plans to address mental health across the state: Balancing Life and Mental Well-Being and Behavioral Health/Substance Misuse Prevention. The Balancing Life plan offers free online classes that allow Virginia residents of all ages to be educated on various topics to improve their mental health. The series includes topics such as Avoiding Burnout at Work and Home, Taking Charge Over Fear and Anxiety, Connecting with Nature for Better Well-being, and Managing Stress in Uncertain Times. The Mental Well-Being and Behavioral Health/Substance Misuse Prevention plan provides educational resources that address levels of stress that lead to substance misuse among youth and adults. The education sheds light on addiction and mental health disorders using curriculum like Health Rocks, a 4-H Youth Development program that promotes the reduction of tobacco, alcohol, vaping and drug use in teens. As well as, the Right Before Your Eyes drug paraphernalia simulation that brings awareness to methods used to hide paraphernalia at home or in school; and over-the-counter medications and household items that are being ingested for drug misuse.

The FCS Agent in the Newport News office is a member of the Human Development Program Team and regularly assists with identifying topics for the Balancing Life series. The FCS program offers local adult and youth mental health classes focusing on stress management and self-care. The Balancing Life recordings are also made available to Newport News residents through VCE's YouTube channel, and are given as a resource at the FCS Agent's mental health classes. Both the FCS and 4-H Youth Development Agents plan to increase the mental health resources they offer in the city by continuing to buy-into the state-level action plans listed above. As members of the Human Development Team, they also have the ability to be trained in Health Rocks and Right Before Your Eyes curricula to implement with Newport News residents.

### **Issue 3: Helping Youth Develop Leadership, Citizenship, and Other Life Skills**

Extension is addressing these issues through the 4-H Youth Development Program. Developing life skills is a key element of Extension 4-H programming and has been shown to have measurable impacts. The goal of 4-H Youth programming is to provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for young people to experience life skills, to practice them until they are learned, and be able to use them as necessary throughout a lifetime. Through the experiential learning process, youth internalize the knowledge and gain the ability to apply the skills appropriately. Programs such as 'Character Counts', 'Mental Health First Aid', and Social and Emotional Wellness classes will be utilized to provide support to the youth.

### **Issue 4: Addressing Hunger Issues**

Though VCE cannot address all factors that pertain to hunger issues and food insecurities, we do partner with various local organizations to direct families in need of immediate food assistance. The FCS Agent currently partners with THRIVE Peninsula Foodbank and Grove Christian Outreach to direct families in need of food, clothes, and financial assistance. A referral system has been established between each organization and the local office that allows clients to receive one-on-one budget coaching, nutrition education, and have access to food and clothing pantries. The FCS Agent has a resource list of affordable and emergency housing, as well as emergency food assistance that is available for Newport News families. The agent also has a working partnership with the Prevention Services Bureau of the local Department of Human Services. With this partnership the agent is also able to educate residents in need of nutrition and financial literacy that can assist with hunger and increase their dietary health. Additionally, the FCS agent provides several nutrition and financial classes available at no cost to the public that include various topics such as grocery shopping on a budget, meal prep and planning, how to read a nutrition label, healthy snacking for youth, cutting back on added sugars, cooking classes, and more.

The Family Nutrition Program (FNP) has SNAP-Ed Program Assistants to educate youth and adults in eating healthy with limited food resources. Youth Program Assistants partner with Newport News Public Schools and youth community centers to provide a 6-class nutrition workshop that introduces youth to healthy fruits, vegetables, and recipes they may have never tried before. Youth get hands-on cooking demonstrations and education during and after school hours that they can use at home. Community partners have often donated recipe ingredients to students to take home and make with their families. Adult Program Assistants work with residents receiving SNAP, WIC, and TANF to provide expanded food and nutrition education (EFNEP). This education focuses on food and nutrition security of adults, especially first-time moms, to improve family well-being, reduce obesity, and increase food safety.

### **Issue 5: Preventing Youth Violence**

Youth violence prevention is a serious concern and should be addressed using an interdisciplinary approach. Extension programs, through 4-H Youth Development, offer several educational opportunities aimed at equipping youth with tools, resources, and skills needed to influence a positive outcome as an adult.

These programs such as Character Counts, Bullying Prevention and Awareness, and Citizenship target the underlying issues of good decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution. As stated above 'Mental Well-Being and Behavioral Health/Substance Misuse Prevention' plan will be implemented in the coming years to help assist with substance misuse issues. The Newport News Extension 4-H Agent will collaborate with community partners and on City initiatives to provide 4-H programming to youth around Newport News. This goal to include community partners will also help to facilitate more positive adult and youth relationships in the future. The residents of Newport News placed high value on adults mentoring youth and it was ranked "very important" by 73.8% of those who completed the needs assessment. The hope is that these programs will change the attitudes and behaviors of those who tolerate bullying in schools, peer groups, and communities.

## Conclusion

There were many issues identified in our Situation Analysis needs assessment. However, the seven issues described in this report were the highest ranked and most important issues identified by residents of Newport News. Although we cannot resolve every issue, the Newport News Virginia Cooperative Extension office has various programs that can meet the needs of residents. We are currently providing education in several topic areas that assist local government in their initiatives to reduce unhealthy qualities of life for Newport News residents. Through partnerships, volunteers, and support from local government, the Newport News Extension office will continue to provide education on nutrition, food safety and accessibility, financial literacy, positive youth development, and environmentally friendly water use and gardening skills.

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- Kennedy K., Mitchell S., and Soffee, J. 2018. Newport News Virginia Cooperative Extension Situation Analysis Report
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