

Ensuring Social Well-being and Harmony

Our Vision

Our community's social well-being requires that all residents, regardless of income, age, or ethnicity, have the means to achieve a satisfying quality of life. Meaningful access to key services, whether for basic survival needs or to improve the quality of life, are key indicators of a healthy, vibrant community where residents enjoy services that make life richer, whether it's convenient transportation, Internet access, civic participation, or equal access to our system of justice.



How Are We Doing?

While we have much to feel good about in our community, there are some indicators that suggest room for improvement. Voter turn-out was at a peak three years ago in the presidential election, but recently local turn-out has dipped below the State's average. While voter registration continues to trend upward, it lags behind the State. The area continues to have significantly higher rates of children in foster care, even though the number of founded reports of child abuse or neglect has declined. Twice as many low-income households lack Internet access than households in the area generally.

The recent economic recession impacted the area's social well-being. Help with finding a job and financial assistance with basic needs were reported as the most difficult services to obtain; transportation and legal assistance were among the top four for the area's population generally, as well as for its low-income and Hispanic population. Transportation continued to be the greatest unmet need for the area's seniors.

Civic Participation

While registering to vote is a key step in civic participation, exercising that right in elections at all levels demonstrates a higher level of civic involvement.

What does this measure?

Data shows the total number of registered voters in Harrisonburg, Rockingham County, and Virginia overall compared to the total population at the time, expressed as a percentage. Note that only about 80 percent of the state's population is eligible to vote. This percentage may vary somewhat by locality, depending on the number of children under the age of 18 and the number of non-citizens living there, among other things.

How are we doing?

Voter registration rates have improved across the board over the last decade, with a more dramatic increase in the City of Harrisonburg between 2005 and 2010. This was undoubtedly the result of the intense interest in the 2008 presidential election among college students and minorities, groups who traditionally have lower voter registration rates. Even so, local rates consistently lag behind the state average. Voter registration in the City of Harrisonburg is particularly low in relation to the City's total population. This may be explained in part by the relatively high number of children under the age of 18 in the City; the higher number of non-citizen immigrants; and the large number of college students who are included in the City's population but who may be registered to vote elsewhere.

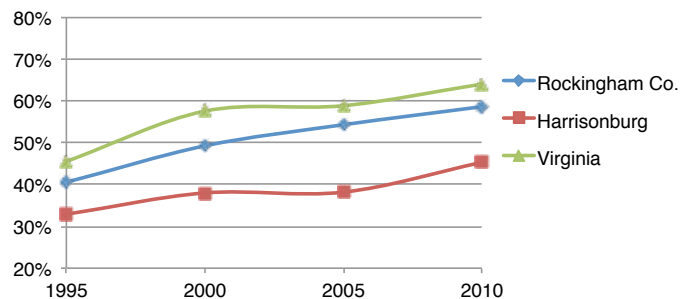
What does this measure?

Data shows the total number of votes cast in general elections in Harrisonburg, Rockingham County, and Virginia, divided by the number of registered voters.

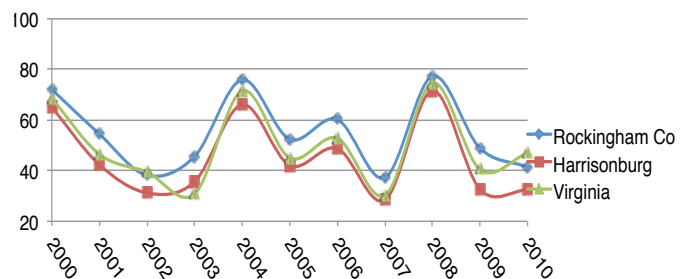
How are we doing?

As a general rule, Rockingham County experiences a higher voter turn-out rate than the state overall, regardless of the type of election. Conversely, Harrisonburg generally experiences a lower voter turn-out rate than the state and County. There was a surge in voter turn-out locally in the 2008 presidential election; however, the area has experienced low voter turn-out in the last two elections, with even Rockingham County's turn-out rate dipping below the state's overall voter turn-out rate for the first time in recent years.

Voter Registration



Voter Turn-out



Sources: Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Virginia State Board of Elections, University of Virginia, and Virginia Department of Social Services

Child Welfare

The well-being of children is crucial to any community, because children represent its future. Children are more likely to develop positively when they live in a home with a stable, permanent family. Child abuse and neglect are community problems that cross socioeconomic boundaries and often have profound, long-term impacts on the lives of children. When children must be removed from home because of abuse or neglect, the goal is to place them in a safe, permanent home as soon as possible, with their own family or an adoptive family.

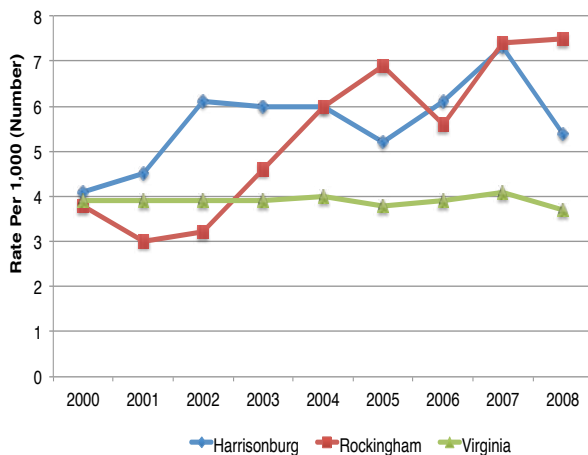
What does this measure?

The chart shows the total number of foster children in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County per 1,000 children under the age of 18, compared to the Commonwealth of Virginia as a whole.

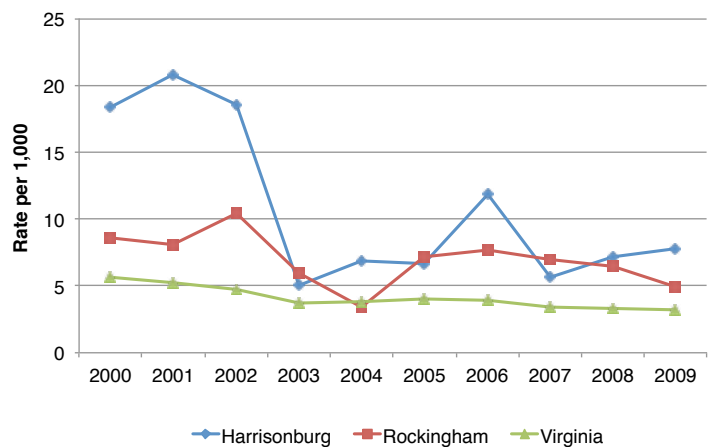
How are we doing?

The number of children in foster care in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County has generally increased from in 2001 to 2008, while the state average has remained steady.

Children in Foster Care



Abused or Neglected Children



What does this measure?

The data shows number of abused or neglected children (per 1,000 children under 18) reported using the total annual verified reports to the Harrisonburg-Rockingham County Social Services District, compared to the Commonwealth of Virginia as a whole.

How are we doing?

The number of founded reports of child abuse or neglect locally has generally declined since 2000, particularly in the City of Harrisonburg, but the local rate still remains significantly higher than the state as a whole.

Internet Access and Usage

Just as the advent of the telephone transformed society in the early 20th Century and the television had a similar impact during the second half of the 20th Century, the development of the Internet, the World Wide Web, personal computers, smart phones, tablets, and countless other new electronic gadgets have wrought a veritable revolution in the way we access data and communicate with each other in the early 21st Century. But has a “digital divide” arisen in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, excluding a significant portion of our community from the benefits of these developments?

What does this measure?

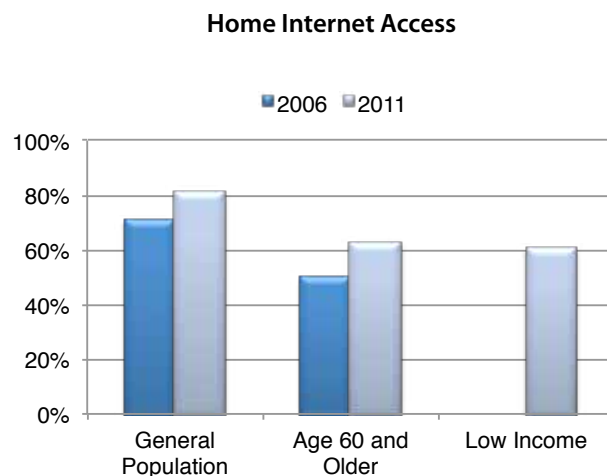
As the internet becomes the essential infrastructure for access to information and communication, it is crucial that all segments of our community have access. How significant is the digital divide in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County?

How are we doing?

Overall, the local level of home Internet access closely mirrors the national statistic of 79 percent. The most significant “digital divides” locally are economic and generational, a phenomenon not at all unique to the area. The generational digital divide appears to be gradually closing as older area residents are joining those who are accustomed to using the Internet in their personal and professional lives.

Much more troubling is the finding that twice as many low-income area households continue to lack home Internet access as compared to the area’s general population. While we do not have comparable data from the 2006 survey to see if the gap for low-income area households is decreasing or not, the existing gap for low-income households is significant.

- Some 81% of the households surveyed in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County have Internet access in their homes, up from 70% just five years ago
- For those age 60 or older, almost 63% have Internet access at home, up from about 50% five years ago.
- Just 60% of low-income area households have Internet access at home.

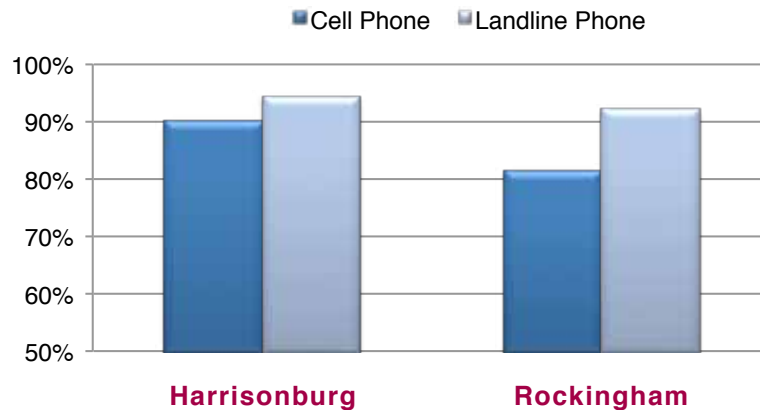


Sources: HCC 2010 Community Survey; Pew Internet & American Life Project.

Cell Phone and Landline Usage

The majority of Harrisonburg City and Rockingham County residents report still having landlines despite the growing usage of cell phones. While cell phone usage for County residents is slightly less than usage in the City, overall residents in both areas report using both types of phone services.

Cell Phones and Landline Phones



Sources: HCC 2010 Community Survey; Pew Internet & American Life Project.

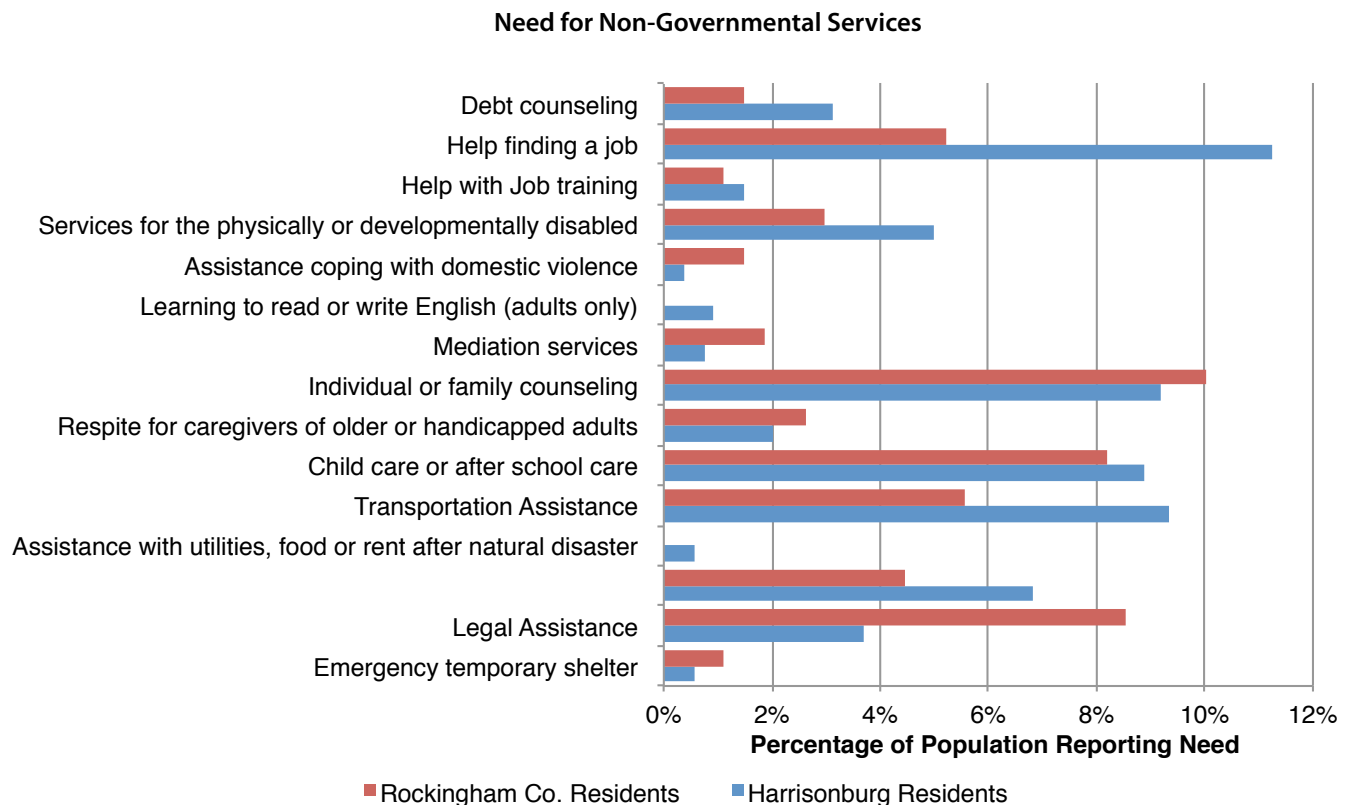
Non-Governmental Services

A key factor in the quality of life and social well-being of the community is the availability and accessibility of various basic non-governmental, non-medical human services, not only for the general public at large, but also for those segments of the population who may be isolated, vulnerable, or needy. On this and the following pages we provide data we obtained in our community needs assessment survey revealing the differing needs for various services among diverse segments of our community, as well as how accessible those services are for those who actually need them.

Among the general population, the most frequently needed non-governmental, non-medical services included:

- Help finding a job
- Individual or family counseling
- Transportation assistance
- Assistance with utilities, food, or rent
- Legal assistance

With the exception of “Help finding a job,” which was added to the survey in 2010, these same needs likewise topped the 2006 survey.

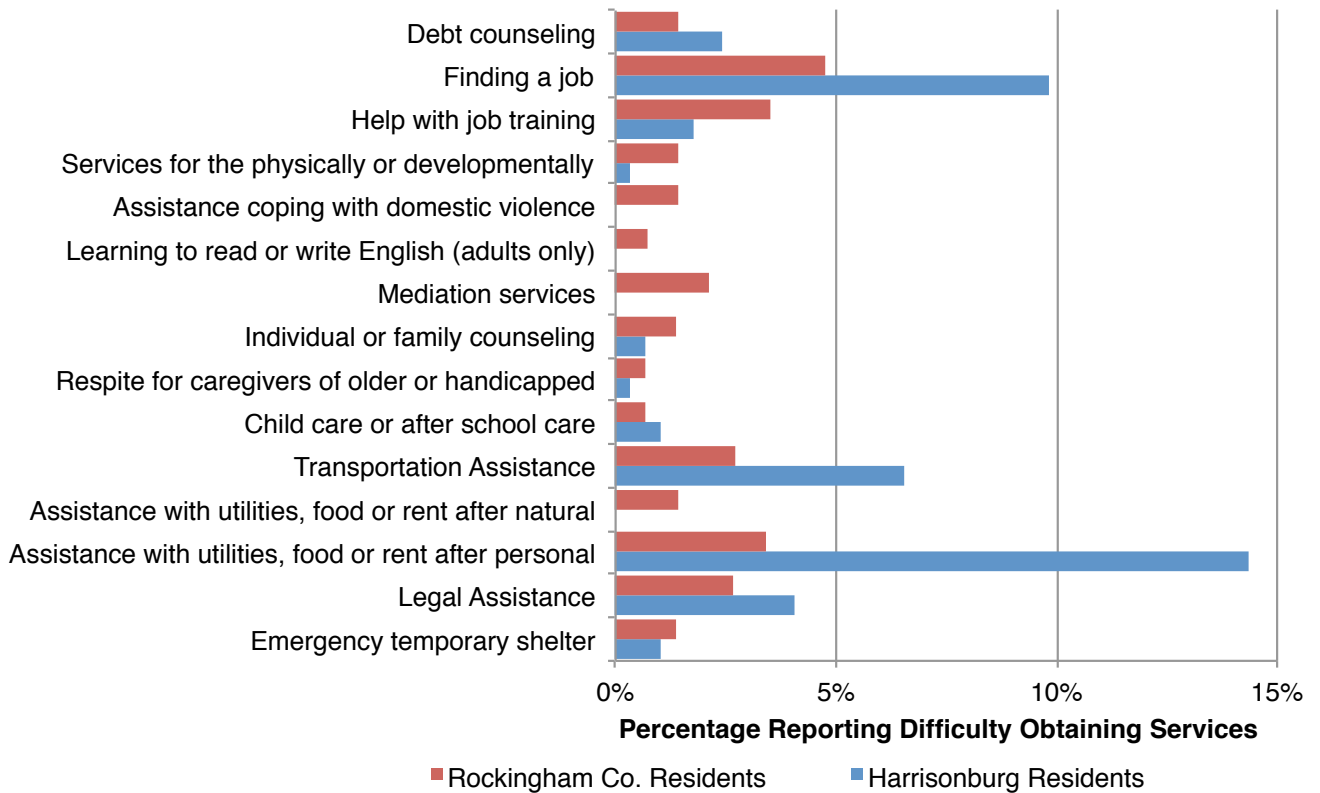


Source: HCC Community Survey, 2010

Although all services were generally accessible, the general population most frequently reported difficulty in accessing the following services:

- Assistance with utilities, food, or rent after personal emergencies
- Help in finding a job
- Transportation assistance
- Legal assistance

Accessibility to the General Public



Source: HCC Community Survey 2010

The Hispanic Community

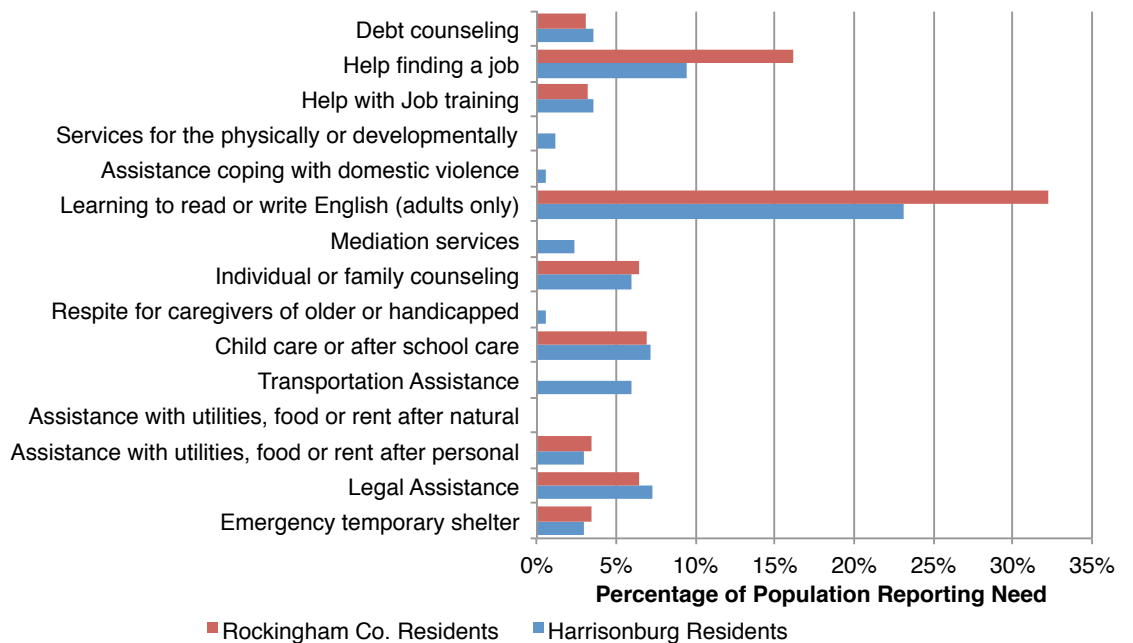
The Hispanic community has grown exponentially in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County over the last decade. It is crucial to them and to the community at large that they be integrated into our societal fabric; however, because of language and cultural barriers, they may have greater difficulty in accessing the services that facilitate that process.

Among the Hispanic population, the overwhelmingly most frequently reported services needed continued to be assistance learning to read and write English.

The next three most frequently needed non-governmental, non-medical services included:

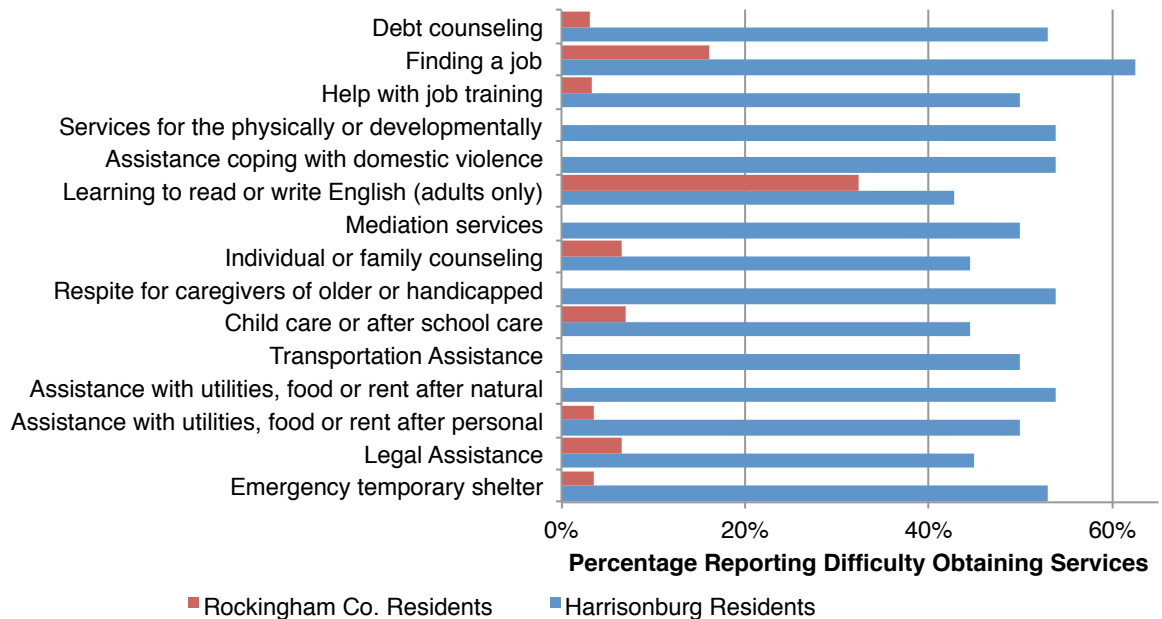
- Help finding a job
- Child or after-school care
- Legal assistance
- Individual or family counseling

The Needs of the Hispanic Population for Various Non-Governmental Services



The Hispanic population likewise continued to report considerably more difficulty in accessing services than did the general public. Oddly, there is a significant discrepancy between the responses of Hispanic residents of the County compared to those in the City, with the City responses reporting uniform difficulty in accessing services, while the County responses were more varied with much lower levels of difficulty in accessing services.

Accessibility to the Hispanic Population



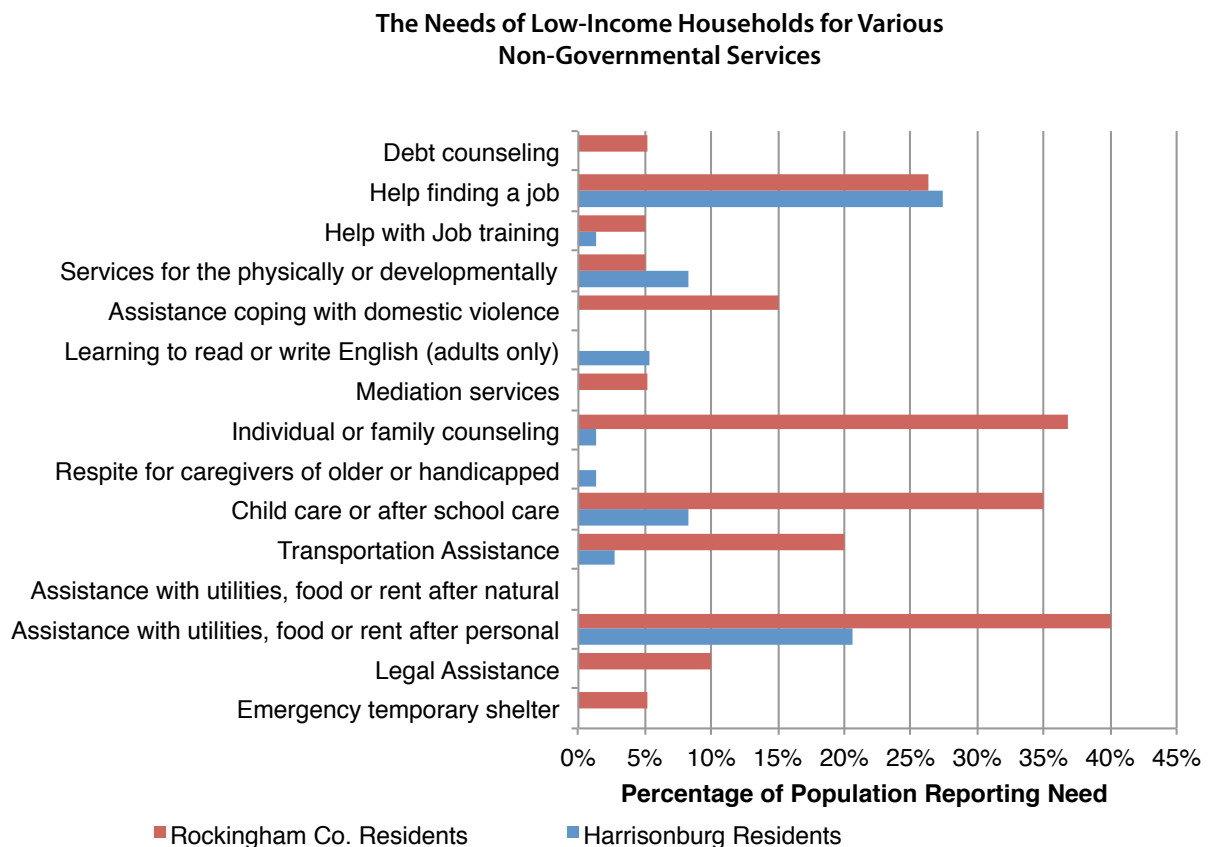
Low-income Households

As a result of their economic situation, low-income households often face different and greater challenges and problems in their daily lives than the general population. While they may need to access services more frequently, they have greater difficulty doing so because of limited ability to pay for such services.

Among low-income households, the most needed non-governmental, non-medical services included:

- Individual or family counseling
- Assistance with utilities, food, or rent after personal emergencies
- Child or after-school care
- Help finding a job

For many services, there is a wide disparity between the needs of low-income residents in the City compared to those in the County.

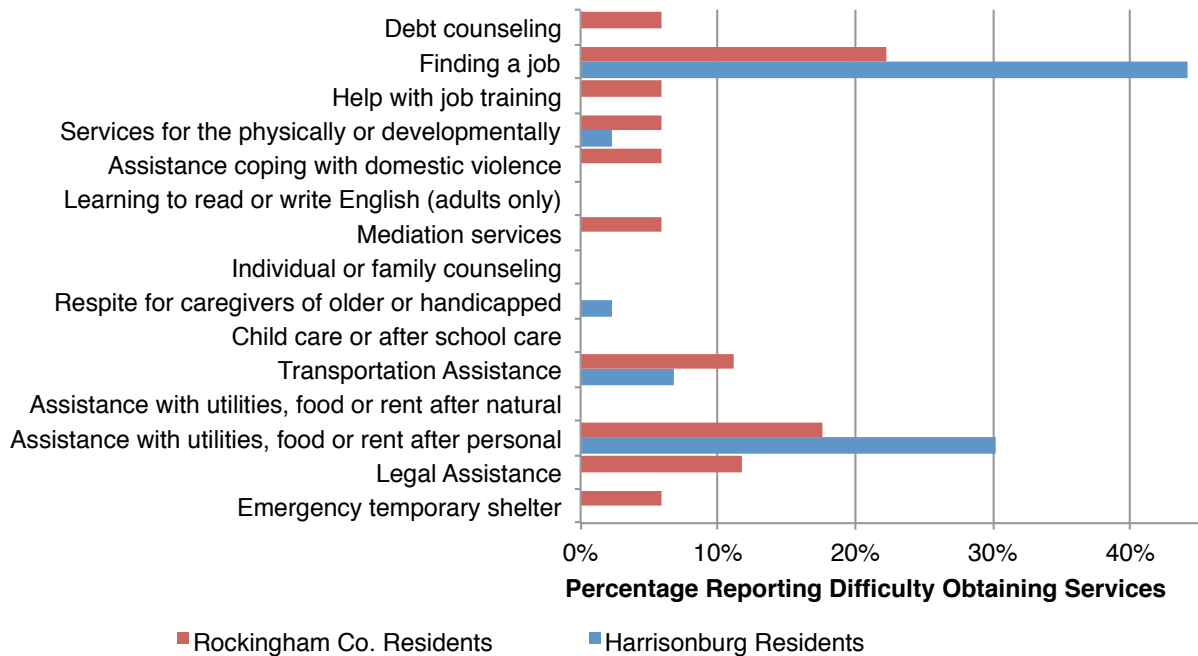


Source: HCC Community Survey 2010

Low-income households reported greater difficulty accessing the following services:

- Help in finding a job
- Assistance with utilities, food, or rent after personal emergencies.
- Transportation assistance
- Legal assistance

Accessibility to Low-Income Households



Source: HCC Community Survey 2010

Older Adults

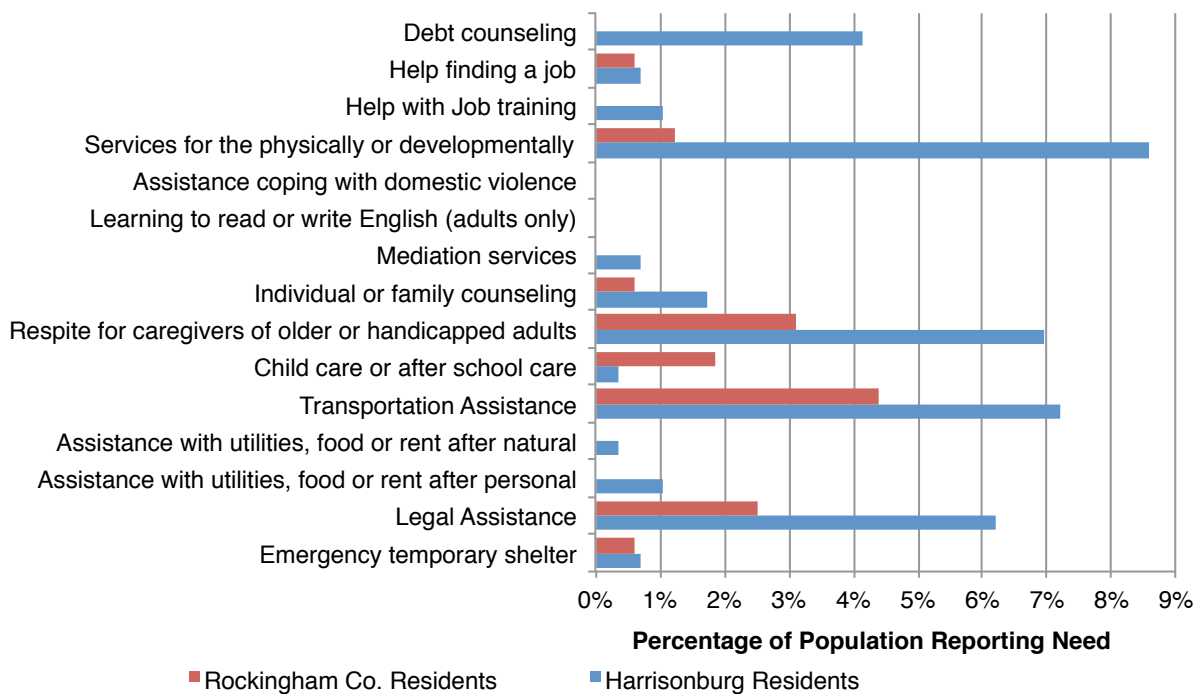
Maintaining and improving the quality of life of older adults involves different sets of demands on non-governmental, non-medical providers.

Among older adults, the most frequently needed non-governmental, non-medical services included:

- Transportation assistance
- Services for the physically or developmentally disabled
- Respite for caregivers of older or handicapped adults
- Legal assistance

Respite Care increased in relative importance since the 2006 survey, joining the other three services listed above in the top four identified needs.

The Needs of Older Adults for Various Non-Governmental Services



Older adults in Harrisonburg overwhelmingly identified Transportation services as the service in which they experienced the most difficulty accessing. Older adults most frequently reported difficulty accessing the following services overall:

- Transportation services
- Debt counseling
- Assistance with utilities, food, or rent after natural disasters
- Services for the physically or developmentally disabled

Accessibility to Older Adults

