

2023

Carver Center Community Needs Assessment Report

Executive Summary

Submitted to:

Anne Bradner, *Chief Executive Officer*

Yvette M. Hammel, *President, Board of Directors*

Prepared by:

Otoniel Lopez, *President* 



Carver Center Community Needs Assessment Report June 2023 – Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION AND DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

Few times in its 80-year history has Carver Center operated through a large-scale societal change as it has since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Carver, like many local community-based organizations, raced to meet the community’s critical needs resulting from the evolving social and economic impacts of COVID, including expanding its food pantry program. As Port Chester and other communities emerge from the crisis, Carver has needed to reassess the types and scales of its existing and potential programs and services to ensure they are aligned with the community’s needs. Carver isn’t alone in this respect, as many organizations and non-profits across the nation are wrestling with this same question—*are we appropriately and effectively meeting the needs of the community we serve in this post-COVID era?*



To tackle this, Carver Center commissioned a community needs assessment as part of its broader strategic planning process to gain the required knowledge and strengthen its community service. Through this study, Carver hopes to hone in on and meet current critical needs to help families avoid reaching points of crisis. In addition, these data will help Carver work strategically with its many partners across Port Chester and make informed decisions about how it leverages these resources accordingly. The study was conducted by **Aperio NY, Inc.**, a Westchester-based applied research and impact measurement firm specializing in data-driven organizational and community-wide impact studies.

STUDY DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

The study’s approach included the implementation of four major phases: (1) context-driven working sessions with Carver staff; (2) interviews with key community stakeholders; (3) community focus groups; and (4) administration of the Village-wide Community Needs Survey. The analysis and final reporting of all information and data collected can be found in the full Community Needs Assessment Report.

The study was driven by the following guiding questions:

Summarized in this doc

- What are the existing critical needs of Port Chester residents from the perspective of community stakeholders and adult community members?
- What are the most vital concerns of youth and adults going into the future?
- How do youth currently spend their out-of-school time?
- What activities most interest youth of different ages? What workforce interests do they have?
- Does COVID-19 still impact residents’ participation in programs/services?

Found in full report

- *What is Carver’s existing scope of programming, and where may gaps exist where direct community feedback could inform the need?*
- *When are residents most available to visit Carver Center for services?*
- *How aware are Port Chester residents of Carver and the services offered there?*
- *What are the most effective forms of communication according to community residents?*

Over the course of five months, the study yielded significant participation among community members including interviews with 34 individuals at 21 local organizations and agencies who provided important perspectives about the local population; four focus groups with 39 youth (ages 11 to 17), and five focus groups with 48 adults (ages 25 to seniors); and Community Needs Survey responses from 205 youth (ages 12-24) and 302 adults (ages 25 to seniors). All community focus groups and survey instruments were conducted in English and Spanish, including the customization of each by age group (i.e., teens, young adults, adults, seniors). A full demographic breakdown of the makeup of each participating group can be found in the full report.

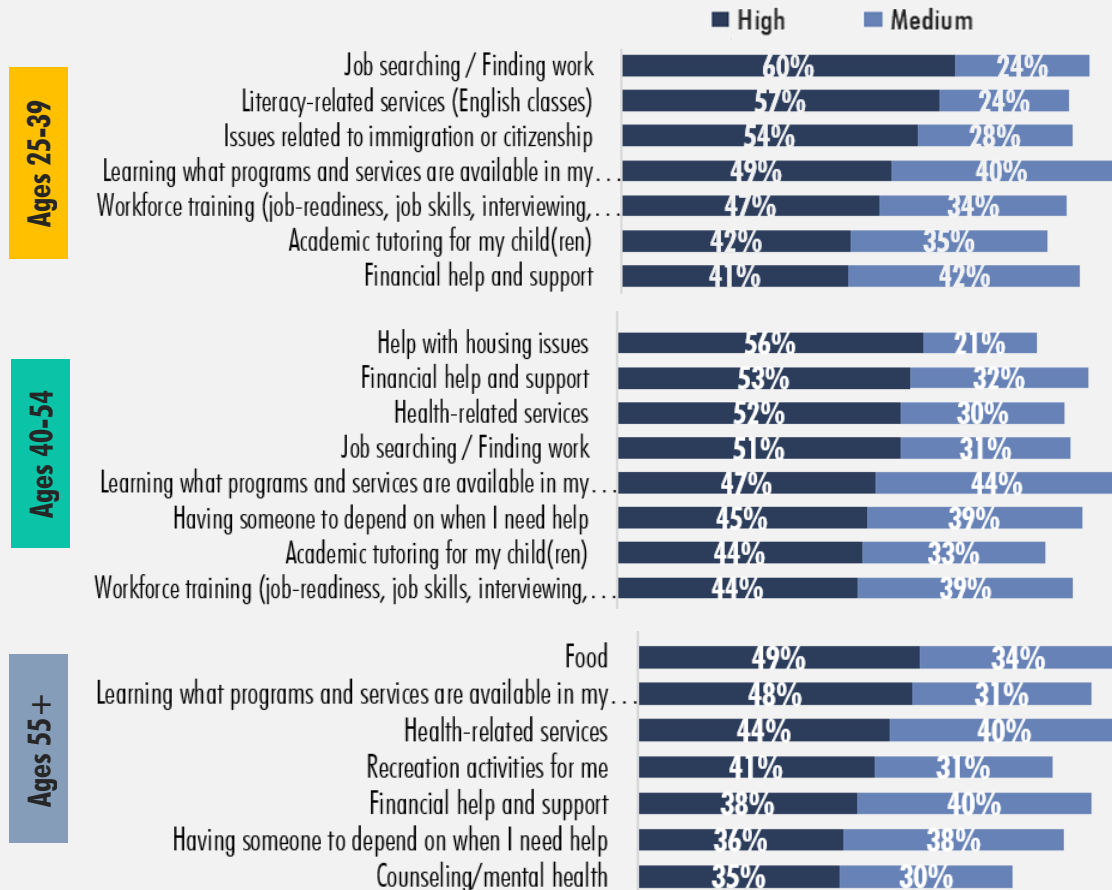
FINDINGS & OUTCOMES

Excerpts of the study’s findings under each major study question can be found in the following subsections below.

Immediate Critical Needs of Adult Community Members

The study’s main focus was on identifying the most *critical* immediate needs of local residents to assist Carver in making informed decisions around its strategic planning over the coming months. Adult respondents over age 25 were asked to rate their level of need across 20 areas most vital to families. The Figure below presents a truncated version of these data by responding age group. Only the ratings of *High* and *Medium* are included, and remaining balance is assumed *Low* [critical need].

Critical Areas of Need for Adults (by Age Group) - Truncated from Full Chart



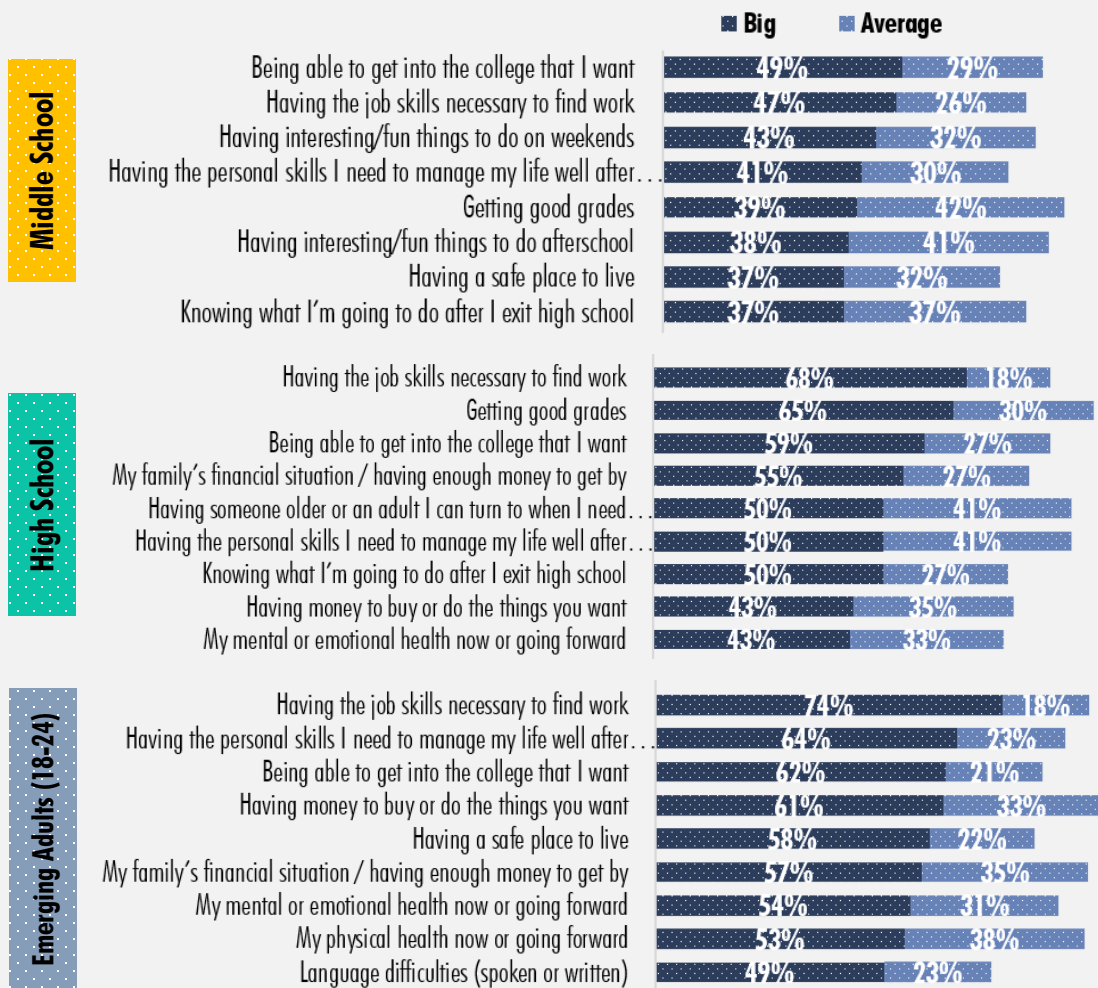
As seen in the figures above:

- The need for jobs, English classes, and support with immigration/citizenship was *highly critical* for 54% to 60% of 25 to 39-year-olds.
- For the older 55+ group, their needs were much more critical around food, learning about programs/services available to them, health-related services and recreational activities for themselves (41-49% rated *highly critical*)
- Overall, it is worth noting that the need for learning what programs/services are available locally was vital for all three age groups (between 47-49% *highly critical* among them).

Most Significant Concerns of Youth

The figure below presents the Youth’s main areas of *concern*, presented by youth age group. The Figure has been truncated from the original figure in the full report. Also, only the ratings of *Big* and *Average* are included, and remaining balance is assumed to have received a rating of *Small* [concern].

Greatest Areas of Concern for Youth (by Age Group) - Truncated from Full Chart



The age-disaggregated youth survey results (above) are interesting in that although many of the most significant concerns across the age groups align, the level of concern becomes more pronounced the older youth get. This suggests that the areas that youth most need support with may require greater levels of intervention earlier in their development before they become areas of critical need when entering adulthood. In one example, among the youth age groups, having a *big concern* over having the jobs skills necessary to find work goes from 47% in middle school, to 68% in high school, to 74% among the emerging adults aged 18-24. Another important area was concern over mental and emotional health, also addressed in the focus group findings below. This item did not make the top 12 areas of concern for middle schoolers, but appears as the 9th ranked area of *big concern* among high schoolers (43%), and as the 7th ranked area of *big concern* for emerging adults where over half of the respondents (54%) selected the highest rating.

Critical Needs and Concerns Expressed through Community Conversations

The community stakeholder interviews and focus groups with adults and youth were also a vital component to providing information on critical needs. Here we attempt to concisely summarize the themes and thoughts expressed by all the individuals who lent their time during these conversations. The feedback shared around the needs of the community below are organized based on the interviewer’s interpretation of their level of significance from the vantage point of the interviewees. These data were not quantifiable, but a best attempt to provide some hierarchical ranking of the needs based on both the amount of conversation and strength of the feedback.

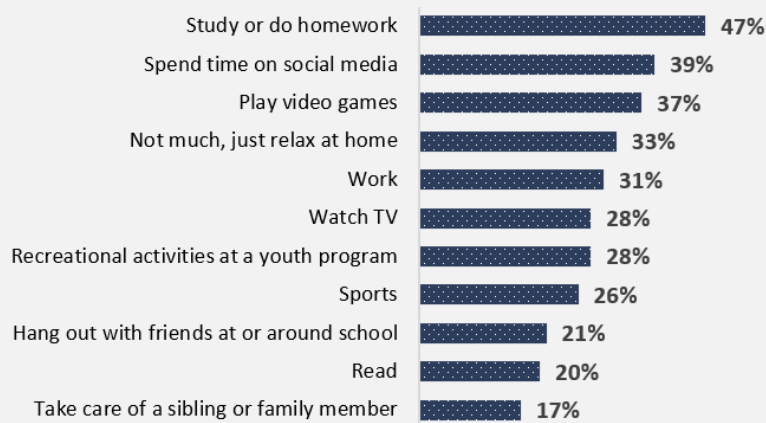
Area	Summarization of Feedback
Housing	Support with housing-related issues was the most vital need among adult focus group respondents and stakeholder interviewees. There was a substantial level of anxiety over rising rents, finding adequate living spaces for families that are affordable and comfortable, and the increasing need for larger number of individuals to live together in quarters meant for smaller numbers. All of these issues are resulting in quality of life, strained budgets that affect nutrition and health, ability for young people to do academic work in adequate spaces, unreported abuse, and increased responsibilities of youth to care for younger siblings or older family members.
Information dissemination	Community adults believe they lack lacking information needed to understand all their options for programs and services available to them in the community. They desire a “place to go to” when seeking information regarding their critical needs. There’s a perceived knowledge gap in the community regarding services and programs available. Most important areas mentioned were: healthcare-related information including mental health, literacy and ESL-related education, youth programming and academic help, and others.
Youth engagement	Stakeholders and community adults believe there is a strong need for increased afterschool and weekend engagement for youth, especially for pre-teens and teens. Many are disengaged socially. Life skills and soft skills especially noted among youth and adults as critical areas of need for all youth, including opportunities for workforce development and future planning, whether academic or career-related.
Medical and mental health, including use of substances	Residents don’t know all their healthcare-related options and simply aren’t accessing what they have a right to. Adults expressed frustration over finding immediate medical care when needed locally. They fear calling for ambulatory help and being driven to hospitals that would charge them high fees that they cannot pay. Mental health was also strongly expressed as a challenge by the adults for themselves and for youth. Youth also confirmed that there is a critical challenge among youth around mental health, especially depression and anxiety. Youth strongly believe there is a growing substance use crisis among high schoolers and that many friends they know choose to do those over other activities after school. (See full report for set of youth and adult quotes in these areas)
Food	Access to affordable food continues to be a challenge since COVID, but adults are thankful for the many options they have in Port Chester to access this need.

Area	Summarization of Feedback
Childcare	With strained budgets, more adults are seeking for new work opportunities, necessitating adequate childcare, with not enough affordable options available to them. Many families are choosing to pool childcare amongst themselves within their own homes, which raises questions around adequate care. Parents also express needing parenting skills to best raise their children.
Carver as information and service hub of services	There is a community for case management, medical/mental health access and information, community forums, support in application processes, and others. The idea of organizational partnerships where external programs provide these services under Carver’s roof for increased access to families and community members was mentioned. The idea of Carver as a “whole-family service center” seemed to resonate with interviewees—Carver already serves most age groups, so various individuals commented on how Carver could brand itself to the community around a holistic approach.
Other	Digital skills, especially for seniors; ESL classes; job postings and job readiness skills (e.g., interviewing); wage theft information; guidance around domestic violence and safe resources; mentoring for youth; recreational programs for seniors who are finding themselves highly isolated since COVID; financial education for the unbanked; support with postsecondary application and college info; info and sessions around substance abuse; and information specifically for special needs populations (early intervention, programs for youth, benefits for families, etc.).

Youth Engagement in Port Chester

Determining how youth currently spend their afterschool time is an important data point for Carver. It reveals the degree of engagement (or lack thereof) among Port Chester youth and emerging adults in everyday community activities. This context helps support decisions around the types of activities offered. The full report provides these data by age group. The survey asked youth respondents to select all the activities (among 16 options) in which they participate during the afterschool hours of 3 to 6 p.m. As shown in the figure, the top five of six activities in which youth participate most often do not typically involve in-person social engagement with other youth (e.g., homework, social media, video games, relaxing at home). When the data were broken out by the three youth age groups (see full report), most middle schoolers indicated studying or playing video games, the largest proportion of high schoolers reported spending their time on social media or studying/doing homework, and emerging adults indicated spending most of their time working.

Youth Afterschool Engagement (All Youth; Truncated from Original Chart)

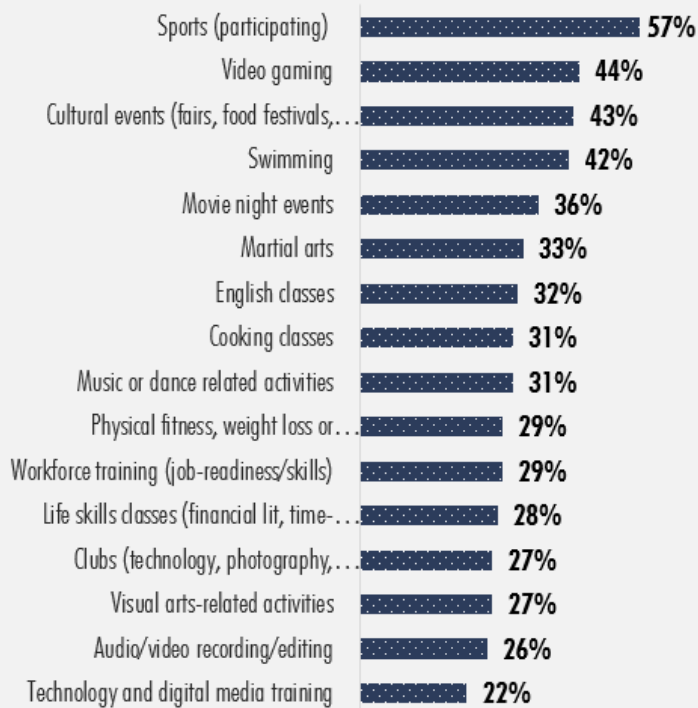


These items were also grouped in a separate analysis to assess what proportion of youth do not participate in any meaningful social engagement activity (not charted). It was found that 70% of youth are at least engaged in one socially engaging in-person activity (i.e., hanging out somewhere and with someone [3 categories in full chart], a recreational activity, sports, church, or working). When social media time or playing video games was added as engagement activities, the percentage increased to 89%; in other words, between 11% and 30% of youth are not meaningfully socially engaged, depending on whether one considers social media or playing video games a meaningful social engagement activity.

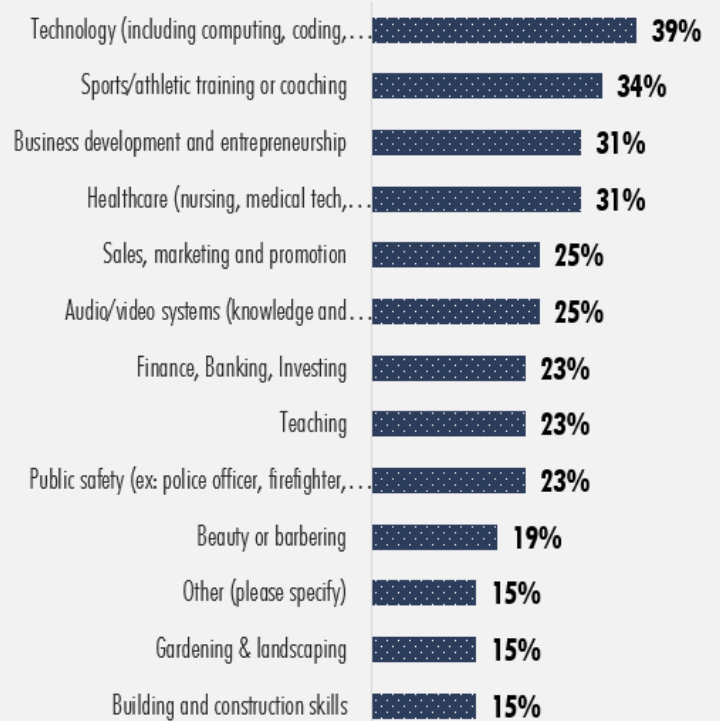
Primary Interests of Port Chester Youth

The survey allowed youth to provide direct input regarding their interests and their most desired programmatic activities, including workforce-related interests, given the growing availability of these programs. The figure below presents youth responses to the 'select all that apply' questions regarding their interests in a series of youth-related activities workforce trainings if offered by any organization like Carver.

Youth Programmatic Interests



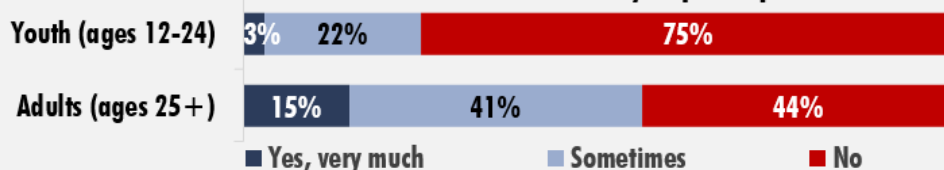
Youth Workforce Development Interests



Continuing Effects of COVID-19 on Engagement

The COVID-19 public health crisis over the past three-plus years warranted the inclusion of questions regarding the impact of the pandemic on how youth and adults of all ages view their ongoing engagement in programming. Respondents were asked if COVID-19 continues to impact the activities in which they participate. Overall, adults are currently much more concerned with COVID than youth. There also did not appear to be much of a difference in concern across the different adult age groups despite the widespread public awareness that COVID symptoms manifested themselves more strongly with increase in age.

Does COVID-19 still affect in what activities you participate?



KEY TAKEAWAYS & CONCLUSIONS

Many community organizations and stakeholders, including various key personnel within Carver Center lent hours of their time to contribute to the learnings in this study. The full report should serve as a tool for stimulating and augmenting the conversation around community needs and how to better serve individuals of all ages within the Village. There is much experience and expertise that exists among the many community-serving members of the Village, and data-driven reporting such as this needs assessment should be utilized to supplement and strengthen decision making. These data also help to prevent any potential biases that may exist in the assumptions made about community members or groups and how they should be served. Carver Center commissioned this study given its important role in serving the community, but the findings here are for the benefit all community-serving groups.

The fleshed out set of recommendations are found in the full report, but below we present some key takeaways and implications summarized from the outcomes reported above:

- **Information dissemination is of critical importance to residents.** Throughout the study, it was evident that community members are eager to learn more about what programs and services exist to better equip themselves with the tools needed to take meaningful action for themselves and their families. Residents often mentioned wanting a place to go to for information.
- **Housing challenges are creating many difficulties for families.** Quite often, conversations with stakeholders and community members revisited the growing and immense challenge around housing, including affordability and access. This important need has also led to other challenges resulting from either stretched family budgets or quality of life issues related to larger number of individuals needing to live together. Residents are simply asking for solutions.
- **When exploring needs, youth strongly desire “fun” social engagement, but also firmly want support in planning and preparing for their future.** Youth are quite keen to the challenges faced by their parents and other adults in the community. They understand the need to be better prepared for adulthood and want help in doing so. They also need social engagement to avoid the pitfalls that are facing many of their friends from drug use to mental health challenges.
- **There is a high level of concern in the community over mental health issues.** Concerns over mental health were often mentioned across the many conversations conducted with community stakeholders, adults and youth. Although Carver is not a healthcare provider, there are opportunities for partnerships in this arena to help address this very critical need among young people. Related areas include adult counseling, parent education, privacy concerns for youth access of counseling support (i.e., fear of parents knowing they seek help), peer support groups, and others.
- **Carver Center is a well-known and trusted member of the community.** Other data in the full report clearly indicated that the community is well aware of Carver and its good work, which provides it a strong foundation for interaction with and addressing many of the needs of the community. Carver is well situated to solidify its unique function as an entity that bring efforts together or fill gaps that may exist, while still effectively serving the community in its areas of greatest strength.