

ASSESSING COMMUNITY ASSETS & OPPORTUNITIES

Asset Mapping in Penobscot, Piscataquis, & Hancock Counties

A CASE STUDY

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Foreword

ABOUT THE PLACE MATTERS PROJECT

The places in which we live, learn, and grow influence our trajectory in life. The transition from childhood to adulthood is often a challenging experience for young people. Leading research tells us that this important developmental phase, typically defined as ages 14 to 24, is significantly impacted by the community in which young people live and the resources to which they have access.¹ Yet communities are not equally resourced and many young people lack access to the support and services they need to thrive as young adults.

■ **System-Involved Youth** are a vulnerable and underserved population for whom the transition to adulthood is often marred with obstacles. At age eighteen, many of these young people age out of child-serving systems and are often left to navigate this difficult transition on their own. Youth with criminal records stemming from involvement in the justice system face additional barriers to employment, education, housing, and other essential resources.² This is further compounded by persistent opportunity gaps experienced by youth of color, girls, LGBTQ+, and gender nonconforming youth who often make up a disproportionate percentage of these system populations.^{3,4}

The relationships among demographics, system involvement, and subsequent outcomes are often referred to as “pipelines.” Some examples are the “school-to-prison pipeline,”^{5,6} the “child welfare-to-juvenile justice pipeline,”⁷ and even the “womb-to-foster care

System-Involved Youth

The term system-involved youth includes young people with lived experiences of any of the following: homelessness, educational pushout, the mental and behavioral health system, the child welfare system, and the youth justice system.

1 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2019. *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25388>

2 Hawes, S., King E., Sanchez, M., & Shaler G. (March 2017). *Unsealed fate: The unintended consequences of inadequate safeguarding of juvenile records in Maine*. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Ek6SCG>

3 Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2014). *Race for results: Building a path to opportunity for all children*. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/resources/race-for-results/>

4 Movement Advancement Project, Center for American Progress, and Youth First. (2017). *Unjust: LGBTQ youth incarcerated in the juvenile justice system*. Retrieved from <http://www.lgbtmap.org/criminal-justice-youthdetention>

5 Petteruti, A. (2011). *Education under arrest: The case against police in schools*. Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute. Retrieved from http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/educationunderarrest_fullreport.pdf

6 Whitaker, A., Torres-Guillen, S., Morton, M., Jordan, H., Coyle, S., Mann, A., & Sun, W. (n.d.). *Cops and no counselors: How the lack of school mental health staff is harming students*. American Civil Liberties Union. Retrieved from https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/030419-acluschooldisciplinereport.pdf

7 Herz, D.C., Ryan, J.P., & Bilchik, S. (2010). *Challenges facing crossover youth: An examination of juvenile-justice decision making and recidivism*. *Family Court Review*, 48(2), 305–321. doi:10.1111/j.1744-1617.2010.01312.x

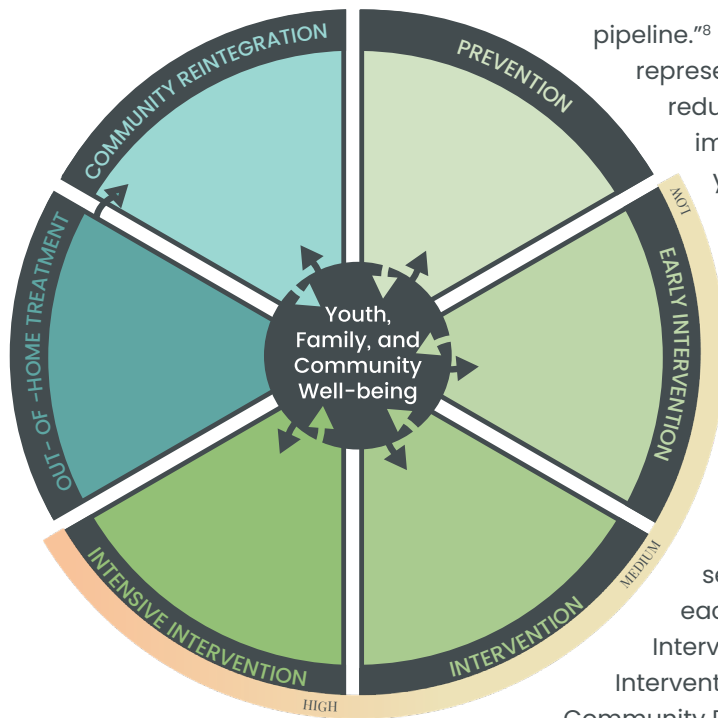


FIGURE 1
Community-based Continuum of Care

pipeline.⁸ Disrupting these pipelines represents a critical opportunity to reduce the negative, and often cyclical, impacts of system involvement on young people. **A significant body of research points to strategic investment in a community-based continuum of care as the most effective and efficient way to achieve this disruption.**⁹ Such a system of care would be shaped by the community and include a range of evidence-based, data-informed programs and services to support youth through each phase of care: Prevention, Early Intervention, Intervention, Intensive Intervention, Out-of-Home Treatment and Community Reintegration (Figure 1). For a more detailed description of the Place Matters Community-Based Continuum of Care, refer to the *Place Matters: Aligning Investments in a Community-Based Continuum of Care for Maine Youth Transitioning to Adulthood*¹⁰ report which is available on our website.¹¹

Recognizing the need for consistent and targeted services to support systems-involved, transition-aged youth, the Place Matters project aims to support the state of Maine and its communities in redesigning, implementing, and evaluating a community-based continuum of care through systems innovation, data resources, and community inclusion. Our work focuses on translating data and innovative practices into community-based solutions that are both responsive to local needs and supplement existing assets so that **all transition-aged young people in Maine thrive into adulthood.**

Housed under the Justice Policy Program at the University of Southern Maine’s Cutler Institute, the Place Matters team is a collaboration of researchers, policy advisors, data visualization experts, and directly impacted young people. The Place Matters project has received support from the following funders: the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Rocking Moon Foundation, the Maine Juvenile Justice Advisory Group, and the Maine Economic Improvement Fund.

8 Ketteringham, E.S., Cremer, S., & Becker, C. (2016). Healthy mothers, healthy babies: A reproductive justice response to the “Womb-to-Foster-Care Pipeline.” CUNY Law Review, 20(1), 77-125 Retrieved from <https://academicworks.cuny.edu/clr/vol20/iss1/4/>

9 Heilbrun, K., Sevin, N., Redding, R. (2005). Juvenile Delinquency: Prevention, Assessment, and Intervention. Oxford University Press.

10 Sanchez, M., King, E., & Ward, J. (2019). Place matters: Aligning investments in a community-based continuum of care for Maine youth transitioning to adulthood. Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine. Retrieved from <https://usm.maine.edu/sites/default/files/cutler/Place%20Matters%20CoC%20FINAL.pdf>

11 <https://justicepolicyprogr.wixsite.com/imagineanewfuture/place-matters>

PLACE MATTERS REPORT SERIES

Place Matters has produced a series of reports summarizing our research, community engagement and policy recommendations. The reports in this series are intended to inform and support the work of policy makers and community members dedicated to improving outcomes for Maine’s youth. As our work continues, additional reports and resources will be added to the series. All published reports can be accessed in full on our website.

Reports in the PlaceMatters series include:

Aligning Investments in a Community-Based Continuum of Care for Maine Youth Transitioning to Adulthood¹²

The first report in this series examines the influence of place on our developmental experiences, and how the resources and supports we have access to shape our pathways into adulthood. Citing national research and state level statics, this report highlights how Maine’s transition-aged, systems-involved youth are negatively impacted by inconsistently available community-based interventions and supports, particularly in rural areas. It further argues that these gaps in services are exacerbated by state reductions in services and fluctuating government contributions to the social safety net, leaving many of our most vulnerable young people without the support they need to thrive in their communities.

In response to this growing need, Place Matters calls on policy makers and community members to work collectively across our systems of care to align resources and efforts into a community-based continuum of care that is responsive to the needs of the diverse communities across Maine’s 16 counties. The second half of this report outlines Place Matters’ vision of such a continuum of care. It defines each of the six phases of care included in the continuum and provides examples of promising community-based programs from around the country. Finally, this report identifies six recommendations for policy makers, youth advocates and community members to ensure all Maine transition-aged youth experience a fair, equitable, and responsive system of care that contributes to positive youth outcomes (Figure 2). **In particular, community asset mapping was highlighted as an important first step in assessing a community’s assets and needs.**

Commit to aligned action that measurably improves positive youth outcomes for transition-aged youth.	Recommit to a leadership body that shares accountability across systems.	Identify community assets , needs and opportunities for investment .
Create opportunities for those with lived experiences to participate in building solutions.	Invest in strategies that focus on common measures of success .	Prioritize reinvestment in community-based interventions and capacity building.

Justice Reinvestment

The concept of justice reinvestment is central to the strategies of resourcing a community-based continuum of care and informs the work of the Place Matters project. The Urban Institute defines justice reinvestment as a system wide process designed for local leaders who want to rethink how they allocate resources throughout their criminal justice and social service system.

FIGURE 2
Six Recommendations for Positive Youth Outcomes

12 Sanchez, M., King, E., & Ward, J. (2019). Place matters: Aligning investments in a community-based continuum of care for Maine youth transitioning to adulthood. Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine. Retrieved from <https://usm.maine.edu/sites/default/files/cutler/Place%20Matters%20CoC%20FINAL.pdf>

From Pipelines to Informing Place-Based Strategies for Maine’s Older Youth¹³

The second report in this series uses county and state level data to illustrate the structural, place-based risk factors at play in communities across our state which negatively impact youth outcomes. Building on research that identifies social and economic factors as influential in shaping a young person’s predisposition for both risk and protective patterns of behavior, this report challenges the notion that individual choices drive delinquent or criminal behavior. Rather, key community characteristics have been consistently identified as determinants of youth vulnerability, risky behavior, and poor outcomes. Examples of these community level determinants include concentrated poverty, housing stability, school quality, and social capital.

This report asserts that understanding youth outcomes as a product of place is critical for both policy discussions and informing investments in strategies. Furthermore, we must have a clear, comprehensive, and data-informed understanding of the challenges young people face in our communities in order to create population level change. By analyzing the current trends in youth outcomes, we can accurately identify where young people are succeeding and where we need to redesign and reinvest our efforts. To that end, this report provides in-depth analysis of 14 place-based economic and social determinants of youth outcomes, comparing trends across counties using a specific population data point selected to measure each determinant (Figure 3). For example, the median family income was used to compare the determinant of Household Economic Well-being across counties as well as at the state level. In addition to exploring these key determinants of youth outcomes, the report also includes “snapshots” for each of Maine’s 16 counties providing a deeper look at each county’s strengths and opportunities to inform the level and type of investments needed in a community. Further, these determinants provide a baseline of population level indicators against which to measure subsequent progress.

 Household Economic Well-being	 Community Financial Security
 Economic Inclusion	 Housing Affordability
 School Quality	 Community Security
 Social Belonging	 Area Economic Growth
 Human Capital	 Youth Homelessness
 Youth Justice Involvement	 Child Welfare System Involvement
 Educational Pushout	 Mental & Behavioral Health Care

FIGURE 3
Economic and Social Determinants of Youth Outcomes



Assessing Community Assets & Opportunities – A Case Study of Asset Mapping in Androscoggin County

The third report in the Place Matters series provides a case study of asset mapping in Maine’s communities. Turning to Androscoggin County as a community in which to pilot this grassroots approach, the report explores existing assets and needs in the county. It looks at how this information can inform investments in a community-based continuum of care that is responsive to both population level data as well as the voices of youth and individuals who live and work in that community.

Drawing on the comprehensive data analysis conducted in the second Place Matters report, this report first examines Androscoggin County’s strengths and opportunities regarding the social and economic determinants previously outlined. The second part of this report synthesizes this information with local expertise and experiences gained by engaging young people and adults in asset mapping and community dialogues. The report provides analysis of this important qualitative data, highlighting common themes that emerged from community insights on existing assets and opportunities for investment. The report concludes with recommendations to further efforts to improve youth outcomes in Androscoggin County stemming from both the community’s insights and best practices identified through research from around the nation.

Transitioning From Youth to Adulthood – Mapping the Impact of Systems & Places on Youth Pathways (Forthcoming)

The fourth report in this series seeks to lift up the voices of Maine’s youth and place their lived experiences at the center of public discourse and decision-making. This study elicited life stories from 36 youth (age 14-24) using art-based narrative inquiry methods to map their journeys from childhood to adulthood. This forthcoming report will offer a deeper look at the firsthand experiences of Maine’s systems-involved youth and explore how their stories can and should inform the development of a community-based continuum of care.

A Toolkit for Community Asset Mapping (Forthcoming)

The fifth report in this series offers a guide for policy makers, community organizers, and youth advocates wanting to conduct asset mapping in their communities. The report will walk users through the steps of analyzing population level data, engaging youth expertise, eliciting cross-systems feedback and using the information gathered to elevate community action in order to improve youth outcomes. It will share best practices and recommendations as well as results-focused tools and resources to support this important foundational step in developing a community-based continuum of care.

¹³ Sanchez, M., King, E., and Dumont, R. (2019). Place matters: From pipelines to place-based strategies for Maine’s older youth. Retrieved from https://cec47d12-75a7-45a9-98a1-99f79c71ca5b.filesusr.com/ugd/d5b6af_2ce1a22f71814c94936d1309e4e79198.pdf

Introduction

Every community or place has positive elements, referred to in this report as **assets**, whether they be programs, institutions, organizations, or people.¹⁴ They also have place-based structural risk factors and service gaps that represent **opportunities** for community level investments. To understand where and how to best direct resources within a community it is necessary to be informed about the current landscape of that community's assets, needs, and opportunities. Community members are often the best source of information about their community. Aligning population and system data with the experiences and expertise of community members develops a clearer picture of what services currently exist, what services should exist, and what steps are needed to build an effective community-based continuum of care.¹⁵

■ **Community Asset Mapping** is a strength-based approach to gathering information about community resources in order to guide solutions within that community through a combination of population level data analysis and community stakeholder engagement. This report provides a case study of asset mapping in three counties in Maine, exploring existing assets and needs in Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Hancock counties. It also looks at how this information can inform investments in a community-based continuum of care that is responsive to both population level data as well as the voices of youth and individuals who live and work in that community.

ABOUT PENOBSCOT, PISCATAQUIS, & HANCOCK COUNTIES

All together, the population of Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Hancock counties represent 17% of the Maine population with 223,920¹⁶ people. Of those residents, 61,516 or 27%¹⁷ are under the age of 24.

Penobscot has the largest population in this region with 152,148 people. Penobscot is the county in the region with the majority of services and activities, centered in the Bangor Metropolitan area. Penobscot County is also home to the University of Maine at Orono. Bangor is the largest city in this region, with 32,262 people.

A Note on Terminology

The terms "asset" and "opportunity" may be utilized in this report in ways that are unfamiliar to certain readers. For the Place Matters project, an asset is any program, service, organization, individual, or other resource that contributes positively to a community in some way. The term "opportunity" or "opportunities" is used, at times, where some readers may expect a word like "challenge." This is done in the interest of taking a strength-based approach to this analysis.

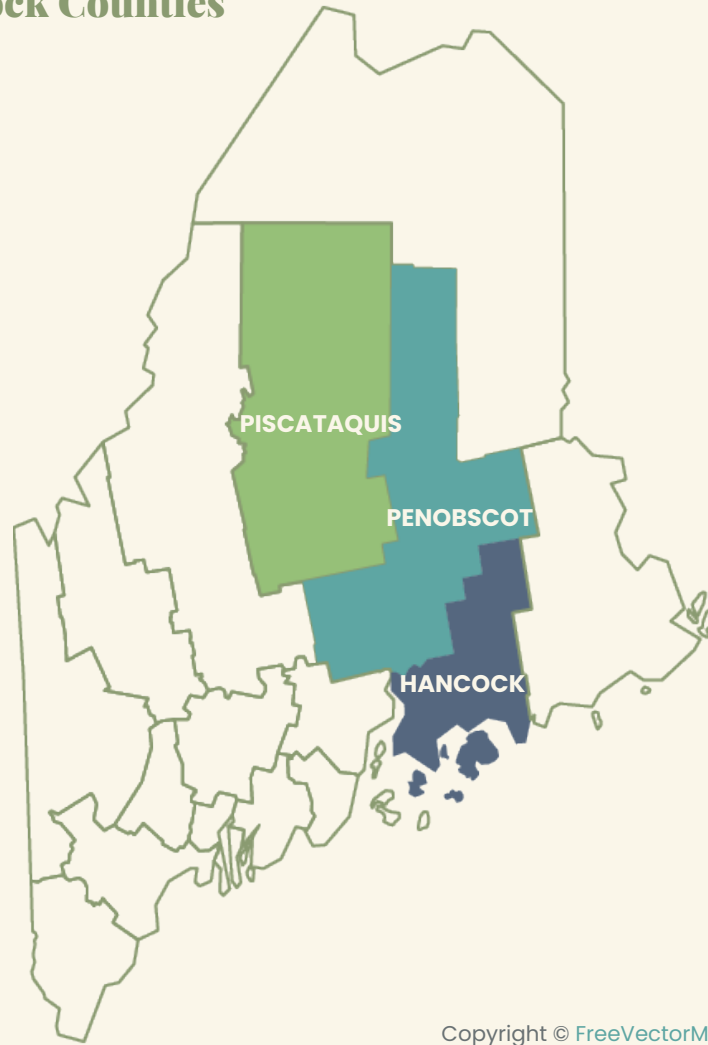
¹⁴ Kretzmann, J., & McKnight, J. (1993). Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets. Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research.

¹⁵ This toolkit is not being offered as a complete accounting of every program, service, or organization focused on youth in these counties. There are programs, services, and organizations that are doing beneficial work in the region that were not captured by this process.

¹⁶ All population level statistics from: United States Bureau of the Census. (2019). Quick Facts. Retrieved November, 3, 2020 from, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts>

¹⁷ Population breakouts by age from: United States Bureau of the Census. (2018). American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables. Retrieved November 03, 2020 from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>

Penobscot, Piscataquis, & Hancock Counties



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Hancock has a population of 54,987 people and is well-known for its coastal towns like Bar Harbor, and natural attractions including **Acadia National Park**. Ellsworth (8,180 people) is the largest town in Hancock county and where many of the organizations that operate in that area are located.

Piscataquis County is one of the most rural counties in Maine, with a population of 16,785 people and only 4.4 people per square mile. Dover-Foxcroft is the largest town in Piscataquis with 4,037 people,¹⁸ and most of the county's population is concentrated in the southern part of the county, with the northern section dominated by parks and wilderness including **Baxter State Park** and the **Allagash Wilderness Waterway**.

There are 30,161 youth aged 14-24 who are transitioning to adulthood in the general population of Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Hancock counties.¹⁹ Within that older youth population are a number of system populations that can be supported by a community-based continuum of care. Examples of early indicators of involvement in these counties' system populations include approximately 1,189 youth who were disconnected from school, 950 were referred to Maine's behavioral health system, 2,848 youth who were referred to child welfare, 371 youth who were referred to the juvenile justice system, and 164 youth who have experienced homelessness.²⁰ Furthermore, many of these youth are involved in multiple systems. Although a lack of interoperability and data sharing across systems makes quantifying multiple system involvement challenging in Maine, national data shows substantial numbers of youth who experience multiple system involvement, often with inadequate supports amplifying poor outcomes.²¹ Additionally, as system-involved youth transition to adulthood, their outcomes impact and are impacted by the well-being of the broader community,²² illustrating the reciprocal effects of place.

Penobscot, Piscataquis, & Hancock Youth

EARLY INDICATORS OF INVOLVEMENT IN SYSTEM POPULATIONS

- 1189** disconnected from school
- 2848** referred in child welfare
- 371** referred to the juvenile justice system
- 164** have experienced homelessness

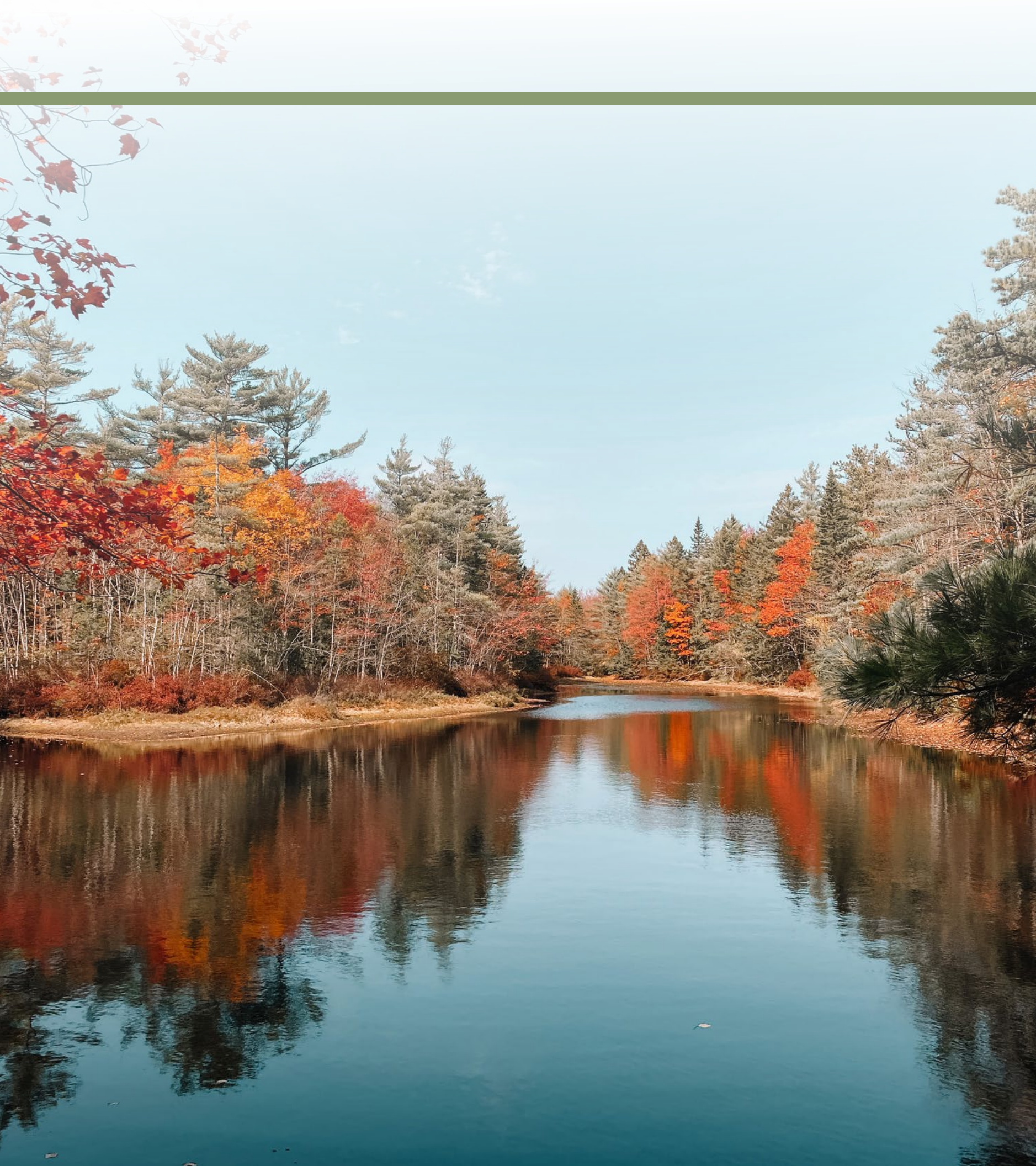
18 All population data comes from United States Bureau of the Census. (2019). Quick Facts. Retrieved November, 3, 2020 from, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts>

19 Puzzanchera, C., Sladky, A. and Kang, W. (2020). Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: 1990-2019. Retrieved from <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/>

20 Homeless counts and counts of youth disconnected from school come from the Maine Department of Education, 2018 data. Counts of youth receiving behavior health services and youth involved with the child welfare system come from the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, 2017 data. Counts of youth involved with the juvenile justice system come from the Maine Department of Corrections, 2017 data.

21 Currie, J., & Tekin, E. (2006). Does child abuse cause crime? NBER Working Paper No. 12171. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w12171>

22 As was demonstrated in Sanchez, M., King, E., and Dumont, R. (2019). Place matters: From pipelines to place-based strategies for Maine's older youth. Retrieved from https://cec47d12-75a7-45a9-98a1-99f79c71ca5b.filesusr.com/ugd/d5b6af_2ce1a22f71814c94936d1309e4e79198.pdf



Methods

EXAMINATION OF POPULATION LEVEL QUANTITATIVE DATA

Data gathering in this region began with an examination of population level quantitative data. Drawing on the comprehensive analysis conducted for the second Place Matters report,²³ this report uses the social and economic determinants previously outlined by the Place Matters project to explore Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Hancock counties' community level factors demonstrated to influence youth trends and identify areas of strength and opportunities for investment. This foundational information provided critical context and baseline data from which to launch our community stakeholder engagement.

For a complete description of the methodology behind those indicators, please refer to the Place Matters: From Pipelines to Informing Place-Based Strategies²⁴ report, which is available on [our website](#).

VALIDATING POPULATION FACTORS, IDENTIFYING ASSETS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The qualitative phase of the research sought to synthesize the current population level data with local expertise and experiences by engaging young people and adults in virtual asset mapping and key informant interviews.²⁵ Sampling prioritized community stakeholders representing a wide variety of youth-serving organizations and agencies. In total, approximately 100 people were engaged in this process.

23 Sanchez, M., King, E., and Dumont, R. (2019). Place matters: From pipelines to place-based strategies for Maine's older youth. Retrieved from https://cec47d12-75a7-45a9-98a1-99f79c71ca5b.filesusr.com/ugd/d5b6af_2c1a22f71814c94936d1309e4e79198.pdf

24 Sanchez, M., King, E., and Dumont, R. (2019). Place matters: From pipelines to place-based strategies for Maine's older youth. Retrieved from https://cec47d12-75a7-45a9-98a1-99f79c71ca5b.filesusr.com/ugd/d5b6af_2c1a22f71814c94936d1309e4e79198.pdf

25 Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the planned in-person event for this region was postponed and thus data collection continued with a virtual method. Assets were first found through thorough online research and follow up calls with providers, then validated through the online survey and key informant interviews.

VIRTUAL COMMUNITY ASSET MAPPING

A Virtual Community Asset Mapping activity was conducted with community stakeholders to validate assets identified online by research staff and to collect additional assets, needs, and opportunities for investment in Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Hancock counties. The virtual asset mapping activity was sent to a list of 265 Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Hancock county stakeholders and community service providers in October and November 2020. In total, survey responses were received from 14 participants (5% response rate) from these three counties. In addition to the online survey, secondary research was conducted to find additional assets and services. The assets were verified through follow-up calls and emails and were then included in the named assets lists from the online survey.

Participants were invited to name assets in their community that help meet the needs of youth in each of the six phases of care on the Place Matter's continuum of care: Prevention, Early Intervention, Intervention, Intensive Intervention, Out-of-Home Treatment, and Community Reintegration. Individuals were asked to focus on one county and were also asked to share any gaps in service or opportunities for growth in each of these areas. This report presents a summary of the assets named in the online survey.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

To supplement and expand on the data gathered through online research and from the virtual asset mapping survey, key informant interviews were completed with 25 stakeholders in in November 2020. Individuals were asked to discuss assets in their communities as well as gaps and opportunities for development. The data from these interviews were incorporated into the data gathered through secondary research and in the online survey.

Additional qualitative data was gathered through two focus groups (n=37) made up of corrections staff as well as regional management. These focus groups featured discussions of assets and opportunities in the specific counties that are the focus of this report, as well as statewide. Data relevant to assets and opportunities in the three counties was incorporated into analysis that informed this report.

CODING & DATA ANALYSIS

Following the deployment of the Virtual Community Asset Mapping survey, the data was exported and the lists of assets and needs generated was cleaned and entered into a dataset. Internet research was conducted to expand the asset list, confirm accurate information, and add additional details for each organization or service named. Additional assets named in the interviews were added, duplicates were removed, and data was analyzed for themes such as phases of care, service sector, etc. Qualitative comments about gaps and opportunities were coded and grouped into themes for summarizing.



LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH & REPORT

The authors of this report acknowledge that there are likely many programs, services, and organizations doing beneficial work in this region that were not captured by this process. This report intends to present a picture of the assets and opportunities that were frequently named by community members who participated in the online survey. The assets and opportunities included within this report do not represent an exhaustive list for each county. The county level results summarized in this report reflect the information and opinions shared by the participants and are not intended to represent an exhaustive list of youth assets or needs in each of the counties. The phases of care assigned to assets were provided by attendees and may not accurately represent the full spectrum of supports and services these programs or organizations offer.

Additionally, this report is not intended to serve as an evaluation of the effectiveness of the programs identified. Establishing effectiveness for all populations, especially for those defined by race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation is complex and not possible within the resources available for this report. However, the authors admittedly hold an interest in strengthening data capacity for program performance measurement within and programs as a direction for future research and evaluation.

Finally, the global pandemic had impact on the methodology, timeline, and data gathered for this report. In the future, authors would like to be able to interview more directly impacted youth and families from this region to inform stakeholders of important community level assets and opportunities for investments.

By the Numbers

MEASURES OF SOCIAL & ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS

The population level data analysis conducted for the *Place Matters: From Pipelines to Informing Place-Based Strategies*²⁶ report served as the starting point for a closer look at Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Hancock counties' youth outcomes toward the result: All Maine transition aged youth (14-24) are experiencing belonging and thriving in their communities.

Based on a diverse body of research, that report identified nine community indicators that shape outcomes for youth and families²⁷ along with five indicators of early system involvement for a total of 14 place-based social and economic determinants of youth outcomes. These determinants provide a framework for assessing population level factors and outcomes at the county level and comparing these trends across counties by using a specific population data point selected to measure each determinant. For example, the median family income was used to compare the determinant of Household Economic Well-being across counties as well as at the state level. The chart on the following page (Figure 4) lists all 14 determinants along with a short description and the population data point selected to measure each. Indicators that are unfavorable in comparison to the state are emphasized in the following tables, with the exception of the three indicators chosen for the mental and behavioral health care system involvement outcome.²⁸ The measures summarized here have limitations. Together they serve as a baseline to highlight what is needed in terms of a data-informed understanding of underlying factors and root causes that often are precursors to systems involvement for Maine's youth. For more information on how these determinants were developed, and to review analysis of state and county youth outcomes, please refer to the *Place Matters: From Pipelines to Informing Place-Based Strategies*²⁹ report, which is available on [our website](#).

²⁶ Sanchez, M., King, E., and Dumont, R. (2019). Place matters: From pipelines to place-based strategies for Maine's older youth. Retrieved from https://cec47d12-75a7-45a9-98a1-99f79c71ca5b.filesusr.com/ugd/d5b6af_2ce1a22f71814c94936d1309e4e79198.pdf

²⁷ In looking at population outcomes, it is beyond the scope and resources of this report to prove a causal relationship between underlying social forces, the assets that mitigate them, and the system outcomes that youth experience. But an examination of these indicators side by side suggests a relationship between population conditions and early system involvement in these counties.

²⁸ The goal for communities isn't necessarily a reduction or increase mental or behavioral health care involvement, but rather achieving a fuller understanding about how and why young people are identified for services, which is why there is no clear way to highlight comparisons to the state as favorable or unfavorable.

²⁹ Sanchez, M., King, E., and Dumont, R. (2019). Place matters: From pipelines to place-based strategies for Maine's older youth. Retrieved from https://cec47d12-75a7-45a9-98a1-99f79c71ca5b.filesusr.com/ugd/d5b6af_2ce1a22f71814c94936d1309e4e79198.pdf

SNAPSHOT PENOBSOT, PISCATAQUIS, & HANCOCK COUNTIES















	Determinant	Description	Measure	HANCOCK RATE	PENOBSOT RATE	PISCATAQUIS RATE	MAINE RATE
ECONOMIC & SOCIAL WELL-BEING	 HOUSEHOLD ECONOMIC WELLBEING	Economic stability is directly tied to the ability of individuals and families to access quality school systems, housing, healthcare, and participate fully in the workforce and economic life of their communities.	Household Income The midpoint of income distribution.	\$51,438	\$47,886	\$38,797	\$53,024
	 HOUSING AFFORDABILITY	Having access to quality, affordable housing has a profound impact on individual and family well-being.	Housing Cost Burden Housing burden rates.	30%	30%	32%	31%
	 AREA ECONOMIC GROWTH	Area economic growth and opportunity is a crucial component of community well-being. The ability of community members to obtain work and a livable wage has great bearing on the financial security of individuals and families.	Unemployment Percentage of civilian labor force that is unemployed.	5.7%	6.5%	7.8%	5.3%
	 FINANCIAL SECURITY	Young people who grow up in communities affected by poverty experience negative outcomes such as: less economic mobility over the course of a lifetime, worse health outcomes, increased exposure to and participation in crime and delinquency.	Poverty The percent of families below the poverty line.	7.6%	9.9%	12.1%	8.4%
	 ECONOMIC INCLUSION	In communities where economic opportunities and income are unequal, families and individuals who have a lesser share in the community's economic prosperity suffer worse outcomes.	Income Inequality The Gini Coefficient is a measure of income inequality that can range from 0 to 1. The higher the Gini Coefficient (closer to 1) the more uneven the income distribution of a given community.	0.466	0.452	0.44	0.453
	 SCHOOL QUALITY	School quality refers to a variety of measures including student and teacher engagement, access to advanced curriculum, readiness for college, and a safe school environment.	4 Year High School Graduation Rate The percent of freshmen who graduate in four years.	87%	86%	85%	87%
	 COMMUNITY SECURITY	Exposure to crime, violence, and social disorder decreases perceived and actual security in homes and communities.	Crime The number of reported violent crime offenses per 100,000 population.	10.6	16.6	10.6	16.3
	 SOCIAL BELONGING	Youth sense of belonging entails having access to full participation in community life, being respected at a basic human level, and feeling "part of" the community such that one can co-create that community and rely on the community for support.	Social Belonging Answers of agree or strongly agree from the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) in 2017.	60.8%	54.5%	47.2%	57.3%
	 HUMAN CAPITAL	Human capital can be described as the capabilities and understanding that exist in a community that can be used in a productive way. A community's education level is a major component of human capital.	Education Level The percent of the population with a BA or higher in 2017.	32%	26%	18%	30%
SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT	 EDUCATIONAL PUSHOUT	In-school and out-of-school suspensions are a form of exclusionary school discipline and are an early indicator of educational push-out.	Suspension Rates Rate of suspensions for every 100 students in 2017.	4.5	3.3	11.2	5.2
	 MENTAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT	Research has consistently demonstrated the importance of early community level responses to youth with emerging emotional, behavioral and developmental challenges.	Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 504 plans Percent of student population with an IEP or a 504 plan in 2018.	21.6	22.1	19.5	21.3
			Targeted Case Management (TCM) Behavioral Services Percent of youth who receive TCM behavioral services in a community as the result of a confirmed diagnosis in 2017.	13.0	5.9	12.0	2.56
			Targeted Case Management (TCM) Developmental Services Percent of youth who receive TCM developmental services in a community as the result of a confirmed diagnosis in 2017.	1.05	1.75	1.59	7.5
	 YOUTH HOMELESSNESS	It is known nationally that there is significant overlap between youth experiencing homelessness and the justice system, as well as with the child welfare system, and disproportionality in how homelessness impacts Black/ African Americans.	Student Homelessness Rates The percent of student population who report homelessness in 2018.	0.68%	0.56%	0.28%	0.72%
	 YOUTH JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT	Youth justice involvement can be understood as an outcome of adverse community environments, as well as a determinant of a community's well-being in terms of community members' health, economic prosperity, and public safety.	DOC Referrals from Law Enforcement Rate per 100 of population age 14-24 referred to corrections in 2017.	5.92	3.14	3.71	4.34
 CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT	Similar to juvenile justice involvement, involvement in the child welfare system is both an outcome of adverse community environments and a determinant of community well-being.	DHHS Referrals Rate per 100 of appropriate reports to child protective services in 2018.	5.4	7.7	7.1	6.5	

FIGURE 4
14 Place-based Social and Economic Determinants of Youth Outcomes

PENOBSCOT, PISCATAQUIS, AND HANCOCK’S YOUTH OUTCOMES & DETERMINANTS

Using the social and economic determinants outlined in the previous section we are able to gain a better understanding of the placed-based risk factors at play in these three counties. The previous chart (Figure 4) provides a “County Snapshot” comparing each county’s social and economic determinant measurements with state averages.

Penobscot County

Penobscot County, the service hub for the region, had a higher-than-average unemployment rate (6.5%), and a higher-than-average poverty rate (9.9%) compared to most counties in Maine. These data may point to a certain amount of financial stress under which individuals and families are living in Penobscot County. Though Penobscot County has a crime rate that is higher than most other counties in Maine (16.6 incidents per 1000 people), Maine is overall a low crime state, ranking lowest in the country for violent crime in 2018.³⁰ When considering nearby counties such as Somerset (17.7 incidents per 1000 people) or Kennebec (16.4 incidents per 1000 people), the crime rates in Penobscot are not alarming, though this could be an area for improvement. Penobscot County also had higher than average rates of reports to child welfare (7.7 reports per 100 youth) in comparison to the rest of the state, and a lower percentage of adults with a bachelor’s degree or higher level of education. With one of the largest high schools in the state (**Bangor High School**) and a number of higher education opportunities, this may demonstrate missed opportunities to harness educational pathways as an asset in these communities. However, Penobscot County was one of three counties to decrease suspension rates between 2015 and 2017 and had **one of the lowest rates of referral to the youth justice system in the state** (3.1 referrals per 100 youth). Though troubling connections may be made between Penobscot County’s economic data, public safety data, and child welfare data, this county shows signs that it is finding success keeping young people in school and out of the criminal justice system.

Hancock County

Though Hancock County had a higher-than-average unemployment rate (5.7), the poverty rate was lower (7.6%) than the rest of the state. **Hancock County also had the highest rate of youth justice referrals in Maine (5.9 referrals per 100 youth)**. On the other hand, Hancock’s report rate to the child welfare system was lower than average (5.4 reports per 100 young people). It also had one of the highest percentages (61%) of young people reporting that they matter in their communities. Overall, Hancock County data paints a picture of a county that has great potential to protect its young people from negative involvement in public serving systems but may need more attention paid to prevention for young people at risk of entering the youth justice system.

Penobscot county had one of the lowest rates of referral to the youth justice system in Maine.

Hancock county youth are referred to the youth justice system more frequently than youth in any other county in Maine.



Piscataquis County

Piscataquis County **had the lowest average household income in the state in 2017 (\$47,886)**. It had the second highest percentage of housing burdened households (32%) and the second lowest percentage of adults with bachelor’s degrees or higher (18%). Piscataquis also had the third highest poverty rate in the state with 12.1% of families living below the poverty level. With low high school graduation rates (85%) and high suspension rates (11.2 per 100 students, it is notable that **Piscataquis also had the lowest percentage of young people who reported feelings of belonging in their community (47.2%) in the state**. Young people who are disconnected from school or feel pushed out of the educational system may struggle to feel connected to their communities. On the positive side, Piscataquis had the biggest drop in homelessness rates between 2017 and 2018 (from 1.0% to 0.3%). Crime rates in Piscataquis are also relatively low in comparison to the rest of the state (10.6 crimes per 1000 persons) and referrals to the youth justice system are also lower than average (3.71). In 2019, out of 83 referrals to the corrections in the entire county for Piscataquis County youth, only 1 young person was detained. These data raise the possibility that Piscataquis is finding success interrupting a ‘school to prison pipeline,’ combatting youth homelessness, and protecting public safety, even if young people in Piscataquis may feel unsure about their place in those communities.

Piscataquis county youth are less likely to report feelings of belonging in their community than youth in any other county in Maine.

³⁰ United States Department of Justice. (2018). Crime in the United States, 2018. Retrieved from <https://ucr.fbi.gov/>



Local Expertise & Experience

SUMMARY OF IDENTIFIED COMMUNITY ASSETS

In total, 197 unique assets were identified across Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Hancock counties. Across the region, assets were named in all six phases of care on the Place Matters continuum, indicating some level of access to services and supports addressing each phase regionally. However, 90% of assets were targeted towards prevention, early intervention, and intervention services and programs. There is a clear gap in programs for more intensive treatment and community re-integration. While many assets served multiple counties in the region, the majority of assets were located in Penobscot (57%), followed by Hancock (31%), and Piscataquis (12%). When looking at specific cities/towns, most were located in Bangor (38%), Ellsworth (14%), and Dover-Foxcroft (10%), all of which were clear service hubs for the surrounding towns. The lack of programmatic assets named for rural Piscataquis and Hancock counties indicates a potential local service desert in the more rural areas. Community collaboratives, however, are very robust in these counties. In particular, the people of Piscataquis county band together for their young people in a way that could be brought to scale in other communities. The most longstanding Local Case Resolution Committee in the state originated from Piscataquis county and has continued to meet, regardless of funding or a change from executive leadership for over two decades.

Many assets were named frequently across all three counties. These included the various public school systems (**Foxcroft Academy, Bangor Schools, Ellsworth Schools**, etc.), the **YMCA, Community Health and Counseling Services (CHCS), Penquis, Community CARE, Wings**, and the various hospital systems including **Acadia Hospital**. Many of the individual housing assistance and homeless shelter programs were also mentioned frequently (**Shaw House, Bangor Area Homeless Shelter**). **The Wabanaki Health and Wellness Agency** was also mentioned multiple times for their work with tribal populations in the region. Many stakeholders interviewed spoke of how they mindfully leverage local community engagement with broader regional and statewide reform goals.

Qualitative data on community assets and opportunities for investment were gathered from secondary research, virtual asset mapping, and key informant interviews. Analysis of this data revealed several common themes and frequently identified assets as important resources for youth and the community. These included:

- **A strong sense of community, local collaboration, and local innovation** to address poverty and other local issues was one of the most commonly mentioned strengths across all three counties.
- **School systems, adult education programs, and higher education opportunities** were mentioned frequently as important gathering places in the smaller communities, but also as a key provider of prevention and early intervention opportunities in all areas.
- The number of **mental health services and community recovery support programs** have expanded in numbers in recent years and community support has increased for people who need help.
- **Housing and homeless resources, and food assistance programs** in various locations were frequently mentioned for their support and assistance to youth and families.

Local Community and Collaborations

Community leaders and collaboratives that provide key intermediary and backbone functions are strong hallmarks of the central region. These entities can act to create and strengthen early childhood and community prevention strategies. Participants from every county reflected positively regarding the community’s ability to step in and help solve problems when they arise. Many applauded the collaboration among various groups and organizations to gather resources to help those in need. In particular, participants cited examples of local efforts to gather and distribute food, wifi hot spots during COVID-19, and other items. This was most prevalent in the more rural parts of these counties, but was also a theme mentioned by participants from the Bangor-Brewer area as well. For example, the organization **Food AND Medicine** was highlighted by several participants for their grassroots approach to addressing community needs and combating poverty.

“There is an abundance of different organizations in the community. We are a very close-knit community. If there is a tragedy or something, everyone is supportive of families in need”

HANCOCK COUNTY PARTICIPANT

Participants discussed the necessity of local innovations and community collaborations to address service, funding, or other resource gaps. **The Health Equity Alliance (HEAL)** is an example of an organization that was developed by community members in response to the gap in advocacy and services for people living with HIV/AIDS. The HEAL program has since expanded into an organization that facilitates education, advocacy and action to marginalized communities throughout central and into parts of downeast Maine. Many participants also cited collaborations with corporate partners and businesses in the community to raise funds and resource needs. One participant provided an example of a bank in their community offering meeting spaces for nonprofit organizations and coordinating fundraising efforts and events to raise awareness about issues. Other participants discussed the benefit of corporate partners donating food directly to local programs rather than to larger state-wide organizations, reporting that this assisted these resources in being disseminated into the local community more rapidly. Other alliances and coalitions mentioned included: **Downeast Community Partners**, the **Bangor Area Recovery Network (BARN)/ Bangor Area Recovering Community Coalition (BARCC)**, and **Piscataquis Valley Adult Education Cooperative (PVAEC)**. Overall, participants from all three counties repeatedly lauded the efforts of organizations, coalitions, and alliances to collaborate, share resources, and knit together a safety net from many disparate supports.

Local School Systems, Adult Education, and Higher Education Opportunities

The local public school systems were commonly mentioned by participants as central community gathering places, providers of important prevention programming, key places for supporting at-risk youth, and places that are ripe for further investments. Many participants discussed the significant role that local schools play as hubs for services and resources to support youth and to prevent risky behaviors and disengagement. For example, **Foxcroft Academy** was mentioned by multiple participants in Piscataquis County, particularly for the youth sports program and the community support that was generated by that organization for the youth teams. In Hancock County, **Ellsworth High School** was named for its successful alternative education program and food pantry that supports young people and their families. Participants discussed the importance of the support that the alternative education program provides to at-risk youth as a key early intervention strategy in that community. Participants from Penobscot County named numerous alternative education programs and higher education opportunities. **Penobscot Job Corps** was also highlighted for their history of providing free, individualized career and skills-based training to transition aged youth. Several participants also mentioned a variety of programs at the **University of Maine Orono** campus focusing on youth development and educational opportunities at **Husson University** and various community colleges across the region. Taken together, these assets represent a potential emerging opportunity pipeline across the region to help address regional economic and workforce development needs.

“There’s never enough resources to go around but what I see in our area is that there really is a commitment to thinking about how can we meet the needs that exist in our community with the resources that exist. Not just talk but real action.”

PENOBSCOT COUNTY PARTICIPANT

“The Alternative Education programs in this county are actually truly incredible and provide a lot of support and encouragement for students who are in that yellow group of about to fail, about to use, about to get in trouble with the law etc. They do a wonderful job wrapping their arms around these kids but it could be made a more robust program with better funding—like maybe home visits”

HANCOCK COUNTY PARTICIPANT

Mental Health Services and Community Recovery Support Programs

Access and availability to mental health services and community recovery support were mentioned as both assets and opportunities in the region. The widespread demand for mental health and substance use services has resulted in an increase in options, awareness, and a reduction in stigma. In fact, organizations focused on mental health, substance use treatment, and case management represented 20% of the assets named in the region. One participant from Penobscot County talked about the impact of the opioid crisis and how community members in recent years have increased their willingness to donate to recovery support programs, as well as the active community support for recovery coaching. Another participant talked about harm reduction efforts taking place in Hancock County, mentioning an initiative involving the **Ellsworth Police Department** called **Project Hope** which has provided training to officers and gives people the opportunity to reach out and ask for help without fear of arrest.

Many mental health service organizations were mentioned by participants from all three counties. **Community Health and Counseling Services (CHCS)** was the number one named asset overall for the region. Other frequently mentioned assets for mental health services included: **Community Care, Penquis, Dirigo Counseling Clinic, Pathways, and Acadia Hospital**. There were also a number of substance use and recovery specific assets named by participants, including: **Wellspring, Opiate-Free Island Partnership (OFIP), the LEAD program,** and the previously mentioned **Bangor Area Recovery Network (BARN)** and **Health Equity Alliance (HEAL)**. While there were a wide variety of services mentioned, the majority were located in the Bangor or Ellsworth areas and thus mental health and substance use services were also discussed as an opportunity for investment and expansion, particularly in rural parts of the region.

Housing and Food Assistance for Youth and Families

Housing and food assistance programs and resources were frequently mentioned as both assets and needs in all three counties. There were many reports of local housing support programs and homeless shelters throughout the region, however, the majority were located in the Bangor and Ellsworth areas. Commonly mentioned housing and homeless resources included: the **Shaw House, the Bangor Area Homeless Shelter, Hope House of Bangor, Penquis, and Living Innovations**. The **Shaw House** was one of the most commonly mentioned assets in the region for their work with homeless, at-risk, and runaway youth.

Food assistance programs were the number one category named by participants for the region, representing 22% of assets named. Many of the homeless assistance programs and shelters named by participants also provide food programs or work with other local organizations to provide food to the people they serve. In addition, there were a number

“Because the opioid crisis has hit so many people in this community some of the stigma is breaking down. There is still work to be done but there has been advances in the community. As people are individually impacted by the crisis the begin personalizing the issues and starting to have compassion for others. We have also seen an increase in willingness to donate to recovery support as well as active community support for coaching and efforts to help those in recovery and struggling with substance use disorder. Our city commissioner has been supportive as well, providing grant funding for this work.”

HANCOCK COUNTY PARTICIPANT

of assets mentioned that provide food assistance to the broader community such as **Food AND Medicine, Good Shepard Food Bank,** and **Manna Ministries/Molly Ministries**. Participants also cited examples of local groups (churches, schools) and corporate donors participating in food drives to donate to people in their communities. **The Piscataquis Regional Food Center** was emphasized for their work in Piscataquis County and the large regional “redistribution” center that they run in partnership with **Good Shepard Food Bank**. This organization partners with other local entities to provide meal programs, advocacy, and education programs throughout Piscataquis County. Though there were a large number of housing and food assistance assets named in the region, a theme across the data gathered for this report was that there is a need to expand these services in terms of location, accessibility, and variety of services offered.

HIGHLIGHTED ORGANIZATIONS

The following programs and organizations were frequently named by individuals who contributed asset data for this report and are listed here in alphabetical order. While there were many more assets named, these organizations are provided as examples worth considering for expansion or replication throughout Maine as we work to redesign our systems of care.

Bangor Area Recovery Network (BARN)

The Bangor Area Recovery Network is a Brewer-based organization whose mission is “to provide a sustainable and reliable community recovery center that supports the needs of people affected by addiction.” They run a peer-based recovery community center for people of all backgrounds and provide a variety of non-clinical services to support the recovery community in the Bangor area. Services include support groups, coaching, telephone recovery support, skills building groups, substance-free recreation, and advocacy and awareness activities. The organization is a grassroots, peer lead, nonprofit run by people who are themselves in recovery. For more information see bangorrecovery.org.

Community Health and Counseling Services (CHCS)

Community Health and Counseling Services (CHCS) was the most frequently mentioned asset in the region. Based in Bangor, CHCS is a non-profit organization which provides community-based home health, hospice, and mental health services to adults and children throughout Maine. They collaborate with primary care providers and provide families and children with intensive help for emotional or behavioral problems in a family setting. For more information see chcs-me.org.

Downeast Community Partners

Downeast Community Partners (DCP) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve quality of life and reduce poverty in Downeast Maine. The organization is the result of a merger of two nonprofit organizations serving Hancock and Washington Counties which aligned to consolidate efforts and expand services. Today DCP has offices in Ellsworth and Machias where they provide a variety of children’s education programs, housing, heating and home repair assistance, transportation services, elder services, financial supports and coaching, and family support programs. For more information see downeastcommunitypartners.org.

Health Equity Alliance (HEAL)

Started as the Downeast AIDS Network, which then merged with the Eastern Maine AIDS Network, HEAL seeks to advance both health and social justice through working with and serving marginalized communities, as well as in partnership with other local organizations and initiatives. HEAL offers a variety of services, programs, and supports, including HIV care and testing, LGBTQ+ support and advocacy, community training, medical case management, harm reduction services, substance use treatment and support, a food pantry, and youth programs and support groups. For more information, see <https://www.mainehealthequity.org/>.

Piscataquis Valley Adult Education Cooperative (PVAEC)

Piscataquis Valley Adult Education (PVAE) is a collaborative of academic learning centers in four school districts- Dexter, Dover-Foxcroft, Guilford, and Milo. The co-op, based in Dover-Foxcroft, allows the districts to pool resources (funding, staff) to better serve the local communities. Cooperatives like PVAEC, are an example of how rural-based organizations can combine efforts to better serve the local communities. PVAEC provides career readiness training, college transition assistance, high school diploma programs, adult transitions courses, and enrichment activities. For more information see pvaec.maineadulted.org.

The Shaw House

The Shaw House is a Bangor-based shelter providing wrap around services to youth from surrounding counties. They provide a youth emergency shelter for youth aged 10-20 where staff not only provide a safe place to stay, but also help with obtaining food and clothing and referrals to crisis intervention services when needed. In addition, there is a day program to provide 24-hour support for youth including counseling services, case management, and family reunification when appropriate. The Shaw House also conducts outreach programs to help at-risk and homeless youth and runs a transitional living program, youth health clinic, and a school program. For more information see theshawhouse.org.

Wings for Children and Families (Wings)

Wings was one of the most commonly mentioned assets in the region. Wings is a Bangor-based nonprofit organization which partners with parents and providers to offer case management and wraparound planning for children and families. Wings operates in six locations: Bangor, Machias, Presque Isle, Ellsworth, Waterville, and Medway. Wings has a stated commitment to providing the highest quality wraparound services for children and families in Maine and has been named as one of the best places in Maine to work for several years running. For more information see wingsinc.org.



SUMMARY OF IDENTIFIED OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTMENT

These data inform the challenges young people may be facing in the region as well as opportunities for investment to leverage community assets to address them. Several themes emerged from this data including the need to increase: **service disparities in access rural parts of each county, youth-focused substance use prevention and recovery supports, and transportation and access to services.**

Service Deserts and Rural Disparities

One theme that emerged from the qualitative data were the clear disparities between rural communities and more urban and suburban areas in the region. The majority of services and programs named were located in the Bangor and Ellsworth areas, leaving much of Piscataquis and Hancock counties with little or no local options. The expansion of telehealth options was cited by many respondents as a key opportunity to help expand access to services for people in rural areas. While COVID has created more of a norm around telehealth, the extreme disparity in broadband access that these same communities face further inhibits access to these key supports.

All data points to the existence of a number of access barriers that prevent people from obtaining adequate healthcare, mental health supports, and substance use treatment. Access was also an issue for prevention-focused programs. Access and affordability were discussed in relation to a lack of insurance coverage and long waitlists for available services.

Another barrier to accessing services that was cited by participants was transportation. Transportation is a massive issue in rural areas of the state where there are little to no options for public transportation, making it hard for people to get to appointments, jobs, and recreational activities. Many participants discussed the long commutes that some had in order to receive services (driving 1-1.5 hours) and cultural differences in rural versus urban communities in terms of service provision.

Others wished for more of a "rural rides" or flexible transportation support, as services like Uber, Lyft and taxis are limited in these towns. Locally based community networks of care need support and resources to address the longstanding³¹ lack of service access, proximity, appropriateness, effectiveness and coordination in rural areas.

Youth-Focused Prevention and Recovery Support

Another need that was raised by participants is the need for substance use programs and agencies willing to serve youth. While participants discussed the growing community support for people in recovery, they also cited a high demand for services that outstripped capacity and a lack of programs targeting youth, particularly those older youth navigating a transition to adulthood. Participants discussed the benefits of increasing evidence-based prevention education programming, more early interventions for youth at-risk for substance use, as well as trauma-informed care for youth whose parents are struggling with substance use. Other options that were raised included the "recovery high school" model, the drug court model, and the potential of passing legislation to lift or remove felony drug charges for people in recovery.

³¹ Public Consulting Group. (2018). Maine Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child and Family Services/Children's Behavioral Health Services Assessment (Final Report). Retrieved from <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/cbhs/documents/ME-OCFS-CBHS-Assessment-Final-Report.pdf>

Piscataquis County

As one of the most rural areas in Maine, everything in Piscataquis County is rooted in the local community. In many respects, Piscataquis County may exemplify some of Maine’s best place-based, community led efforts to mitigate risk to youth and community wellbeing. Participants from Piscataquis County expressed admiration for their community for coming together to support others in times of hardship. They also described a sense of mistrust for outsiders and large “urban” organizations, and a preference for local services and providers. Many individuals who live and work in Piscataquis County described the county as a place of strong community connections and resilience, with deep needs, but with the ingenuity and innovation that comes from scarcity.

The biggest challenge for Piscataquis County named by participants and evidenced by the data gathered for this report is the disparities across the board. In many service categories, residents from Piscataquis County must drive into Bangor or do without. Participants cited a cultural difference between people in Piscataquis County and Penobscot, and a potential disconnect between Penobscot County providers and Piscataquis community members due to the distance and disparities between the two counties. This divide, both physical and potentially cultural, leads to a lack of needed treatment and support in Piscataquis’ rural communities that is accessible, responsive and equitable.

As the data shows, Piscataquis is one of the most impoverished communities in

Maine and has one of the lowest rates of adults with college degrees. Youth who wish to pursue higher education often leave the area, and few return to the county due to the lack of options to connect them to a local career or college pathway. Housing was also a commonly mentioned gap for youth in Piscataquis County as there is no local youth shelter. Participants expressed a desire to expand locally based programs and enhance the community collaboration to support youth in Piscataquis County. One participant described Piscataquis county’s homegrown, organic “host home” model; how the community comes together to support housing instable youth in the area. This may explain recent improvements in Piscataquis’ homelessness data; certainly it is an example of how Piscataquis County communities have fostered a solution that could be replicated in other areas of Maine. As evidenced by its long history of developing responsive service strategies, Piscataquis county is a community that is able to pilot local interventions and formalize them to be scaled and adapted by other communities. More recreational opportunities and youth development options could potentially address the low feelings of social belonging in that county. More interventions that focus on decreasing school pushout and increasing school success and educational pathways could help Piscataquis County youth thrive locally, expand local youth apprenticeship opportunities, increase educational attainment, and potentially raise social capital and economic prospects for the county.

“Directive to join Bangor group and we said no. We are going to stay separate and advocate for our community. But we are not going to surrender our local focus. It was a hard and brave thing to do.”

PISCATAQUIS COUNTY PARTICIPANT

“Youth do not want to utilize Shaw house if they are from Piscataquis. They want to stay in their communities. There needs to be more homeless resources located in this county.”

PISCATAQUIS COUNTY PARTICIPANT

Hancock County

Hancock County, while not as rural as Piscataquis, is facing a similar lack of general services in its more rural areas. The majority of assets are based in Ellsworth, but many residents have to drive to Bangor or to Machias in Washington County to receive services. Many service providers operating in Washington County cover Hancock County too. Several Hancock County participants spoke glowingly of the resource sharing and relationships that exist between Hancock and Washington County providers. But Hancock County participants also expressed concerns regarding long waitlists and a lack of transportation options, two barriers to services for Hancock County community members.

While there were many recreational assets and arts programs for youth mentioned in Hancock County, there were little named assets that focus on youth skills development or economic opportunities for young people. As the data showed, Hancock County had a higher-than-average unemployment rate in comparison to the rest of the state. There is a stark contrast in opportunities for youth between the wealthier coastal towns and other areas of Hancock County.

Participants expressed a desire to see more resources for homeless youth like local shelters, a need for more affordable housing for families, more local intensive treatment options for mental health and substance use, and more wraparound programs for youth. Many respondents also discussed a need for more parenting support for parents with at-risk youth in their homes and alternatives to incarceration for justice involved youth with substance use problems. Such programming could begin to address the issues with youth justice involvement that Hancock County is facing. One participant from Hancock expressed a desire for collaboration between systems and shared data tracking, in particular making the point that collaboration is needed between schools and the various public systems to help identify at-risk youth and intervene while they are still in school.

“A huge need is Transportation – try and be an hour from Ellsworth with a drug condition, with no family and no support, how are you going to get to Ellsworth and back to get the help you need?”

HANCOCK COUNTY PARTICIPANT

“It would be nice to have a resourced treatment court that was resourced like veterans court, with good doctors who have time and could get help. All of my clients I feel like are people who really need help-social workers, housing, treatment-they don’t need to be in jail”

HANCOCK COUTNY PARTICIPANT

Penobscot County

Penobscot is the service hub for the region and hosts a wide variety of assets for youth. The main areas of concern among participants from Penobscot were access to affordable housing and substance use prevention and treatment. In particular, participants mentioned a need for affordable rentals and transitional housing. The demand for affordable housing options in the Bangor area is particularly high because of the concentration of services in that area.

Access to mental health services was another area of concern for Penobscot stakeholders. While there are a large number of assets and services for mental health and substance use treatment in the Bangor area, many participants expressed a concern that the demand is higher than what those providers can cover. One participant reported that the services in the area are still operating on the demand levels from five or more years ago and thus waitlists are increasingly long for people who need help. Providers consistently voiced the desire to build more capacity in order to service the number of referral needs and frustration that resources are not scaled to meet the demand of rising populations. Due to the fact that the Bangor area is a service hub for many surrounding counties and towns (as Bangor has a reputation for being low barrier and responsive for directly impacted populations seeking support), providers are not only serving local residents, but people from all over the region. Participants expressed a high level of need for intensive recovery support programs and mental health services. In particular, the lack of detox beds was mentioned, and it was reported that people are often sent out of state for these services. There is also a need for more residential treatment facilities and counselors who can provide long-term care. In addition, participants reported that recovery support often extends beyond treatment to include transportation, mentorship, and peer support, activities which often go unfunded. Expanding telehealth services and coverage was also raised as an opportunity which could reach more people and expand access to youth and people in rural settings. Participants also expressed concern for the trauma that children in the area are experiencing as a result of their parents' substance use and incarceration. Participants highlighted the need to support those families and children as a critical issue. Increased support to families in need of more stability in the area could help Penobscot County strengthen local delivery of the child welfare system and multi-generational, family strengthening strategies for those impacted by adverse community and childhood experiences.

In addition to more intensive services, participants from Penobscot County expressed the need for more effective prevention services such as education programs and utilizing the schools as service hubs for youth. While Penobscot has a multitude of educational opportunities for youth and adults, high school graduation rates and the rates of adults with college degrees is lower than the state average. Expanding youth mentorship and development programs would help to engage and support youth, but such services must be accessible. While the Bangor area has seen a large amount of economic development in recent years, there is still a gap in career opportunities for college educated adults. Penobscot County needs a more diverse range of career opportunities for young adults with college degrees to encourage them to stay in or return to the community after college.

"Housing – access to housing, affordable rentals, transitional housing. Eight times out of ten the issue that brings people through our organization's door is that they're homeless. Even if we can get a voucher, finding an apartment to use it on is impossible. Shortage of housing is amplified in Bangor, because resources are here and so there's enough to get by."

PENOBSCOT COUNTY PARTICIPANT

"People need more than just a program or a service, they really need someone who can walk them through a change. A lot of what I do isn't just running my program, it's sitting with people, giving them rides, showing them how to do something, keeping them company while they do it"

PENOBSCOT COUNTY PARTICIPANT



While it is the most urban city in the region, participants from the Bangor-Brewer area also described the community as “close-knit” and named support from local community leaders as an asset. There was a common desire to see more collaboration among providers, systems, and support organizations, to create a community-based network of care to address all of the challenges named by the individuals who live and work in Penobscot County.

“Access to mental health services and substance use treatment is a huge issue. We have people all across the state on waitlists today and the need is only increasing. Expanding coverage to include telehealth in response to Covid made a big difference. We need telehealth coverage to become a permanent in state Maine even after Covid is resolved. It reduces barriers to accessing services such as transpiration and it also appeals to young people. “

PENOBSCOT COUNTY PARTICIPANT



Recommendations

Expand funding and programming to address rural disparities

The communities of Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Hancock have a history of collaboration with each other and surrounding counties to come up under young people and families facing a multitude of obstacles. However, current demands for basic needs, like affordable housing, transportation, and food assistance, are overwhelming local groups and organizations with limited and inequitable access to programs and resources. Communities are doing what they can to provide immediate assistance, but much more funding and systems development is needed to ensure all children and families in Maine have access to housing, food, and transportation supports and to strengthen service access, quality and responsiveness. State and federal funding streams must be expanded and allocated to engage locally-based collaborations in closing equity gaps addressing needs to support system involved, transition aged youth in being on a pathway to social and economic success. Piscataquis County's home-grown approach to fight youth homelessness in the area should be assessed, supported, and potentially expanded, and the county may benefit from more local resources to address housing insecurity and other aforementioned needs. Hancock County needs more transportation options to link rural youth and families with assets in the coastal areas. Penobscot County could use support scaling up available housing stock and availability for a continuum of rental housing, transitional housing, and inclusive supportive housing programs for transition aged youth specifically, as well as other directly impacted families and populations in the region.

Leverage the asset of community collaboration to co-design and deliver evidence-based education prevention programs and development opportunities for transition aged youth

Evidence-based education and prevention programs that focus on substance use prevention and mental health awareness, among other focus areas, are needed for all youth in Maine, not just these three counties. However, this region is unique in the sense of the potential for a strong, aligned opportunity pipeline among the aforementioned assets that exist in schools, colleges and universities in these three counties. With its longstanding, durable collaboratives and track record for aligning local and regional needs, the community capacity exists in these counties to align the impacts of promising programs toward population level outcomes. Such programs need to be implemented early on and repeated often to reach youth in order to lift aspirations, belonging, and develop more scaffolding for the transition to adulthood. In addition, all Maine youth need to have access to development programs and mentorships to help them learn life skills and promote positive development opportunities as they transition into adulthood. It is universally understood that positive adult relationships are key to helping youth, especially system-involved youth, succeed in becoming independent, healthy adults. The high rates of youth justice involvement in Hancock County compared to the rest of

the region and the rest of the state point to a need in that county for more interventions that can protect young people from becoming derailed by that system. Penobscot County would benefit from additional mentorship and youth development programming to increase school persistence and college matriculation, as well as aspirations for its transition-aged youth. Piscataquis County would similarly benefit from such programming, especially programs and opportunities that build relationships between young people and adults and Piscataquis County to strengthen civic ties.

Expand and assess impact of drug policies and programs that ensure youth are better off as they transition to adulthood

System involved youth are at high risk for adult criminal justice involvement without access to key data informed education and intervention related to substance use. There are a number of promising attempts to develop a continuum of recovery and harm reduction supports in the region, some with promising outcomes and others unknown. This region is a potential incubation site for piloting and assessing the impact of a range of interventions. **The Penobscot Indian Nation Healing to Wellness Court** is one model for a court-based, wholistic response. Maine has a successful **Veterans Treatment Court**. Since 2011, this program has been supporting veterans whose substance use or mental health disorders have contributed to criminal conduct.³² Maine also has **Adult Drug Treatment Courts** in several counties across the state including Hancock and Penobscot counties. The most important elements of these interventions are intended to address wellbeing and community support and reduce further criminalization of addiction. This concept could be expanded to youth in transition to adulthood who are navigating their relationship to substances during a key period of adolescent brain development and stability planning.

Support local collaboratives to address continuum of care service gaps and evaluation

One organization cannot address the needs for all youth in a location, and thus collaborative efforts must be implemented to help provide more support to youth and families. There are local collaboratives in the counties discussed in this report that are serving a critical intermediary role in these places: convening and building bridges amongst cross sector stakeholders, developing resources and steering those resource flows, supporting training and capacity building, and prioritizing advocacy for local issues and needs. As recommended in previous reports³³, a community-based continuum of care must address all phases and meet youth where they are to make an impact on the wellbeing of youth, families, and communities. The number one issue mentioned in this region was access to services, especially mental health and substance use treatment services. These services are critical to preventing homelessness and system involvement, and to help to enable young people to become healthy, self-sufficient adults. Local collaboratives must be empowered, authorized and resourced to advocate for changes like expanded insurance coverage that includes mental health and substance use treatment. Further, local collaboratives must be empowered,

³² For more information see https://www.courts.maine.gov/maine_courts/drug/veterans.html

³³ Sanchez, M., King, E., and Dumont, R. (2019). Place matters: From pipelines to place-based strategies for Maine's older youth. Retrieved from https://cec47d12-75a7-45a9-98a1-99f79c71ca5b.filesusr.com/ugd/d5b6af_2ce1a22f71814c94936d1309e4e79198.pdf



authorized and resourced to develop and support education and awareness programs aimed at reducing stigma and encouraging young people to seek help. It is the people who live in work in these counties who are the experts on what is needed, but addressing these needs requires tools and support to be aligned in order to make further impact.

Recognize the role of schools as rural service hubs, and resource them accordingly

Schools were repeatedly named as assets by participants, and were often described as central to community life in many places. In rural areas, schools are often one of the few publicly funded resources that youth and families can rely on, and many educators, staff, and administrators are working overtime to assess and support youth and families facing obstacles. Increasing the number of trained professionals like publicly funded social workers, restorative justice practitioners, and behavioral health professionals in schools, especially in rural schools, will increase the likelihood that young people and families will find help when they need it. If the only publicly funded social workers are in child welfare and youth justice systems, we risk inadvertently driving youth to those systems to address issues of public neglect instead of issues of public safety.



Conclusion

In Hancock, Piscataquis, and Penobscot counties, community members have experience with coming together, pooling resources, and finding new solutions for longstanding problems. In many of these communities, resources have been stretched thin for a long time. Yet, even with scarce resources, in many places young people and families are showing incredible resilience in the face of real obstacles. Both Piscataquis and Penobscot County show signs of protecting their young people from involvement in the youth justice system. Piscataquis additionally has demonstrated real gains in addressing youth housing insecurity. In Hancock County, young people seem to feel more engaged with their communities than in other parts of the region and may experience less negative interaction with the child welfare system.

Deeper exploration of how these counties achieve positive outcomes is needed to understand how such results could be replicated in other parts of the state. By harnessing the power of the relationships and collaborations that already exist in these counties, it may be possible to pilot and study new initiatives that lead to new discoveries about how to best serve young people. However, if it was possible to collaborate a way out of poverty and negative system involvement, these counties would have accomplished this feat decades ago. More resources are needed to build a system of care that supports youth and families in this region.

APPENDIX A

Named Assets in Hancock County

Acadia National Park	Healthy Acadia
Adult Drug Court	Healthy Island Project
AMHC Sexual Assault Services	Island Food Pantry
ARISE Addiction Recovery	Island Health & Wellness Foundation
Bread of Life Food Pantry	Island Heritage Trust
Bucksport Community Concerns – Food Pantry	Kids Peace
Bucksport Regional Health Center	Lamoine State Park
Common Good Soup Kitchen	Life Line Ministries Food Pantry
Community Compass	Loaves & Fishes Food Pantry, Inc.
Community Health & Counseling Services	Maine Career Centers
Community Housing of Maine	Maine Seacoast Mission
Covenant Community Land Trust	Mano en Mano
Department of Corrections	Mount Desert Island Hospital
DHHS	New Ventures Maine
Down East Inter-Group	Next Step
Downeast Community Partners	OHI Maine
Downeast Horizons	Open Table MDI
Downeast Transportation Inc (DTI)	Opera House Arts
Eastern Maine Development Corporation	Opiate-Free Island Partnership, Inc.
Ellsworth / MDI Housing Authorities	Pine Tree Legal Services
Ellsworth Adult Education	Project Hope- Ellsworth Police Department
Emmaus Center Food Pantry	Ready by 21 Mentoring
Emmaus Homeless Shelter	Restorative Justice Project Maine
Everybody Eats	The Community Caring Collaborative
Families First Community Center	The Island Community Center
H.O.M.E. Inc	The Welcome Table
Hancock County Technical Center	Tree of Life Food Pantry
Haystack Mountain School of Crafts	University of Maine Cooperative Extension
Health Equity Alliance	West's Transportation

Westside Food Pantry
 What's for Suppa? Food Pantry
 Your Place, Inc.

APPENDIX B

Named Assets in Penobscot County

4-H Cooperative Extension	Crossroads Ministries Food Pantry	Katahdin Friends, Inc.	Penobscot Job Corps
A Time To Rise – Counseling & Wellness LLC.	Dawn Levasseur LCSW	Kiwanis Bangor	Penobscot Nation
Alliance Case Management	Department of Corrections (DOC)	Lincoln Regional Food Cupboard	Penobscot Nation– Parent Partner Program
Amicus	DHHS	Literacy Volunteers	Penobscot Nation Tribal Court
Bangor Adult & Community Education	Dirigo Counseling	Living Innovations	Penobscot Theater
Bangor Area Homeless Shelter	Discovery House – Bangor	Mabel Wadsworth Center	Penquis
Bangor Area Recovery Network	Eastern Maine Community College	Maine Association of Recovery Residences	Pine Tree Legal
Bangor Housing	Eastern Maine Development Corporation	Maine Mental Health Connections Inc	Rape Response Services
Bangor Parks and Recreation	Ecumenical Food Cupboard	Maine Wabanaki REACH	Recreation Committee
Bangor Region YMCA	Family Food Pantry of Carmel	Manna Ministries	RSU 19 Adult Education
Bangor Regional Program	Food AND Medicine	MAS Community Health	Safe Place Food Pantry
Bangor Schools	For Kids' Sake	MERT Enterprises	Saint Andre Home
Beal College	Fresh Start Sober Living	NEWBURGH FOOD PANTRY	Saint Joseph's Hospital
Big Brothers Big Sisters	Game Loft	Newport Apostolic Bible Church Food Pantry at Gateway Church	Salvation Army
Branches LLC	Hampden Neighborhood Food Cupboard	Newport Community Food Bank	Samaritan Inc.
Brewer Area Food Pantry	Hands-On EDUCATION	NFI North, Inc.	Seeds of Hope Food Pantry
Brian Moynihan LCPC	Haworth Academic Center	Northeast Technical Institute	SequelCare of Maine
Catholic Charities of Maine	Health Equity Alliance	Northern Light Acadia Hospital	Shaw House
Chester Baptist Church Food Pantry	Healthy Northern Penobscot	Oasis Food Pantry	St. Anne / Penobscot Nation DHS Food Pantry
Children's Dyslexia Center	Higher Ground Services	OHI Maine	The Learning Center
Clifton Community Food Bank	Holly Billings LCSW	Old Town / Orono YMCA	The Shepard Godparent home
Clifton, Holden, Eddington Food Support (CHEFS)	Hope House (Acadia Recovery Community)	Old Town Recreation Center	Together Place Food Pantry
Collins Center for the Arts	Husson University	Orono Adult Education	Tri – Town Baptist Food Pantry
Community Care	I Care Ministries Food Pantry	Partners for Peace	Tri-County Career Center
Community Health and Counseling Services	Independent Service Coordination of Maine	Pathways of Maine	UCP of Maine
Cooperative Extension	Ironwood	Peace & Justice Center of Eastern Maine	United Technologies Center
Corinna Food Pantry	Jim Green Counseling	Penobscot County Sheriff's Office	Wellspring
Creative Options	Journeys Mental Health		Widows and Orphans Food Cupboard
			Wings, Inc.

APPENDIX C

Named Assets in Piscataquis County

Alliance Case Management	Cooperative
Amicus	Rape Response Services
Center Theater	Tri-County Career Center
Community Care	UCP of Maine
Cooperative Extension	UMC Ecumenical Food Cupboard
Department of Corrections (DOC)	USDA - Piscataquis County Water and Soil District
DHHS (Bangor Office)	Wings, Inc.
Dover-Foxcroft Kiwanis	
Dover-Foxcroft Area Food Cupboard	
Eastern Maine Development Corporation	
Foxcroft Academy	
Guilford Economic Partnership Food Pantry	
Helping Hands With Heart	
Hometown Health Center	
Independent Service Coordination of Maine	
Journeys Mental Health	
Living Innovations	
Mabel Wadsworth Center	
Maine Adult Education Association	
NAMI Maine	
NFI North, Inc.	
Northern Light Mayo Hospital	
Partnership Food Pantry	
Penquis	
Pine Tree Legal	
Piscataquis Positive Action	
Piscataquis Regional Food Center	
Piscataquis Regional YMCA	
Piscataquis Valley Adult Education	

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PLACE MATTERS

