



2020 COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

Head Start Community Program of Morris County partners with families to provide comprehensive support for child development and school readiness, from prenatal to kindergarten ages, for the community's most vulnerable children.

The Head Start Community Program of Morris County (HSCPMC) was founded in 1965 with a summer program for 45 economically disadvantaged preschool children. The organization now provides services throughout Morris County, New Jersey, to 333 children from birth through five years, including expectant mothers. HSCPMC has become a strong partner in the community and annually assesses the community to offer support and guidance, in compliance with the Head Start Program Performance Standards (<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-11-determining-community-strengths-needs-resources>). The data* reported herein reflects the organization's annual community assessment update for 2020.

*Due to 2020 being a census year with new data not yet published, most recent reports available have been utilized. Data may vary providing a margin of error. Information may also be affected by the COVID 19 Pandemic in the Spring/Summer of 2020.

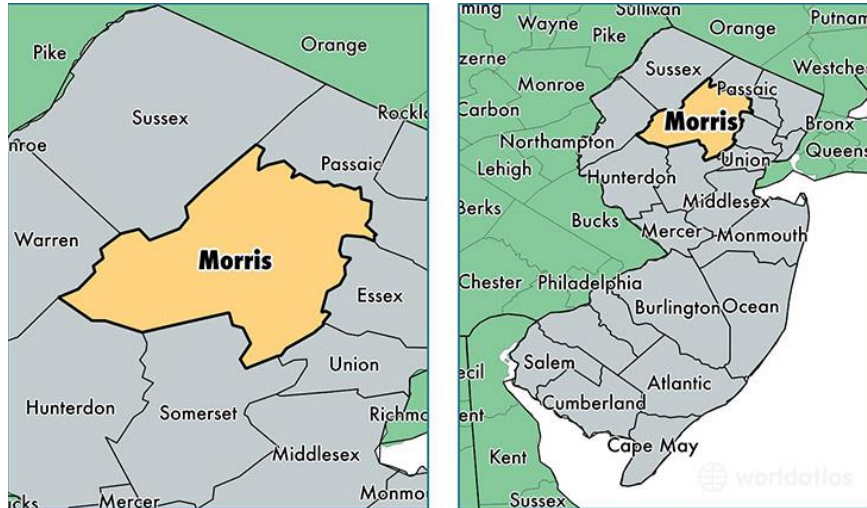
SERVICE AREA COMMUNITY

The community for which needs assessment has been conducted is Morris County, New Jersey. Located in the northern central part of the state, Morris County is considered a suburb to New York City. It is home to abundant parks and has two main "metropolitan" areas, Dover and Morristown. Morris County is surrounded by Sussex, Passaic, Bergen, Union, Hunterdon, Somerset, and Warren County. **Morris County** spans 472 sq. miles Morris and is the 7th largest county in NJ. Morris County consists of the following 39 local jurisdictions:



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- Boonton
- Boonton Twp.
- Butler
- Chatham Boro.
- Chatham Twp.
- Chester Boro.
- Chester Twp.
- Denville
- Dover
- East Hanover
- Florham Park
- Hanover
- Harding
- Jefferson
- Kinnelon
- Lincoln Park
- Long Hill
- Madison
- Mendham Boro.
- Mendham Twp.
- Mine Hill
- Montville
- Morris Twp.
- Morris Plains
- Morristown
- Mountain Lakes
- Mount Arlington
- Mount Olive
- Netcong
- Parsippany
- Pequannock
- Randolph
- Riverdale
- Rockaway Boro.
- Rockaway Twp.
- Roxbury
- Victory Gardens
- Washington
- Wharton





DEMOGRAPHIC MAKEUP OF HEAD START ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Morris County is home to an estimated 494,225 people in 2020, with a growth rate of 0.04% in the past year, according to the most recent United States census data. The county has a total of 39 local jurisdictions and spans 472 square miles. Morris County is an affluent county, with a median household income of \$116,283. However, there are communities within the county that struggle across a range of economic indicators. The Head Start program targets recruitment at the areas within the county of highest poverty concentrations, specifically, Dover, Morristown and surrounding areas. The towns with the lowest family median income are: Victory Gardens, Wharton, and Dover, with average median incomes of \$47,708 to \$71,799—57% to 36% lower than the county average. These towns are characterized by large Hispanic/Latino populations.

Racial and Ethnic Composition

Data from the Bank Street College of Education's National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), as well as the Census Bureau, draw a strong correlation between race/ethnicity and poverty. Communities of color are disproportionately affected by poverty in New Jersey. Youngsters in low-income families are overwhelmingly represented by children of color. Data from the Center show that 52% of New Jersey's Hispanic children and 49% of New Jersey's Black children live in low-income families.

The resident population of Morris County is 70.54% White/Non-Hispanic, 10.46% Asian, 13.71% Hispanic/Latino, 3.35% Black, and 1.84% Other/Mixed Race. In Morris County as in New Jersey, Census data indicate that Hispanics and Blacks represent a disproportionately high percentage—24.5%—of low-income families. These are families with a high need for Head Start and Early Head Start services. Among Morris County's municipalities, there are four that are predominantly (over 50%) minority communities: Victory Gardens, Dover, Morristown, and



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Wharton. The communities with the highest percentage and total population of Hispanic/Latino residents are Dover, Victory Gardens (a suburb of Dover), Wharton, and Morristown, respectively. Dover has a poverty rate of 11.2%, Wharton 4.1%, and Victory Gardens tops the county at 25%. Morristown also has a high percentage of Black residents, and a poverty rate of 7.4%. Poverty rates for these communities point to a need for Head Start services, with large concentrations of eligible children and families. The vast majority of families served by Head Start Community Program of Morris County live in these four municipalities, and more than 90% of families served by the agency are Hispanic/Latino.

An additional area of the community for potential need for Head Start services is Parsippany-Troy Hills Township. Through a partnership with the County of Morris, Head Start of Morris County can offer services in close proximity to many of these families' homes. Parsippany is a sprawling borough, some 25 square miles in size, with a large, ethnically diverse population that includes 41.9% foreign-born residents. The community's diversity is characterized by a 38.6% Asian population and a growing, 10.54% Hispanic population, along with a 4.1% Black population. Approximately 4.5% of Parsippany residents live below Federal Poverty Guidelines, and 4.4% of the town's population is under the age of five. With a total population of 51,561 (2019), an estimated 5434 people are Hispanic, and applying municipal population trends means that 127 of those children will need services. Likewise, approximately 2114 people are Black, with an estimated 45 children living in poverty. At least 172 Parsippany children should be eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start services.

It is important to note that anecdotal data collected during community assessment (survey responses) and program operations (staff observations) indicate that population numbers, especially minority populations, are likely underreported due to a substantial undocumented immigrant population.



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According to the data collected in terms of the number of Head Start-eligible children and families in the service area, our community continues to be underserved with Head Start and Early Head Start services. With a U.S. Census 2019 estimated population of 491,845, and 5% of the population under age five (24,592), it is estimated that 1,156 children in Morris County were Head Start eligible in the past program year. This is a conservative number, based on poverty alone, applying the 4.7% poverty level according to Census data. Communities in the service area with the highest percentage of young children (under 5 years) include Chatham, Victory Gardens, Dover, Boonton and Morris Plains (respectively).

According to Advocates for Children of New Jersey Kids Count 2019 data, it is estimated that 10% of Latino children are living below the Poverty Threshold, which concurs with the fact that 90+ percent of the children served by our agency are in this population group. Overall, approximately 32% of eligible children in Morris County received ongoing Head Start or Early Head Start services from Head Start Community Program of Morris County or NORWESCAP. Our agency is currently serving 333 of these children, including 10 pregnant women, between two Head Start/Early Head Start grant awards (02CH3121 & 02CH011231).

According to the NJ Department of Health, the general fertility rate among New Jersey women is 60.1 births per 1,000 women of childbearing age (2018). The rate among Hispanics (65.9) and Blacks (62) is higher. According to the Center for Health Statistics from the NJ Department of Health, the share of births in Morris County to unmarried mothers was 16% in 2018. As of April 2019, births to unmarried mothers in Morris County was overall 16%, but the rates of births to unmarried mothers among Blacks and Hispanics were more than triple the rate among Whites. Statistics show that nonmarital births are at higher risk of having adverse birth outcomes such as low birthweight, preterm birth, and infant mortality than are children born to married women. Moreover, children born to single mothers typically have more limited social and financial resources; they would stand to benefit from Early Head Start services. For 2018, the number of



births in Morris County was 4548. If 4.7% (poverty rate) of those births occurred to families living in poverty, the number of pregnant women in need of services would be approximately 214. Again, this number is conservative, giving the higher birth rates and higher rates of poverty for the Black and Hispanic populations.

Languages Spoken

The vast majority of children served by Head Start Community Program of Morris County's programs are dual language learners, supported by the agency's bilingual, bicultural staff. More than 90% of families served report a home language of Spanish. Other languages in the program, occurring to a much smaller extent, are English, Arabic, and indigenous languages. According to Census data, these are also home language patterns occurring in the service area—consistent with our enrollment. Nearly a quarter (24.5%) of Morris County residents are speakers of a non-English language, which is higher than the national average of 21.9%. In 2018, the most common non-English language spoken in Morris County was Spanish. 10.7% of the overall population of Morris County are native Spanish speakers. Additionally, 1.86% speak Chinese languages (Mandarin, Cantonese), but these are not languages that have emerged in our programs. The county is also home to approximately 3,000 speakers of Arabic, a language that is trending upward in families served by our program.

Children in Foster Care

Statewide data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) or the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) tell us that some 35.8%, or approximately 1978, of children in foster care are under age five, although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact number in our serving area. Connections with service providers such as CASA, Child and Family Resources,



Homeless Solutions, Family Promise of Morris County Jersey Battered Women's Services, Deidre's House, and the local Office of Child Protection and Permanency ensure that vulnerable children experiencing homelessness, foster care placements, abuse or other traumas are referred to our agency to be placed at the top of the waiting list.

Children Experiencing Homelessness

This past year, we served one homeless child and one child in foster (kinship) care. The Morris County Point In Time annual homeless count identified a total of 88 children under 18 years old experiencing homelessness, all in sheltered or emergency housing (Monarch Housing Associates, 2020). The Monarch Housing report also noted that persons identifying as Black are overrepresented in the population experiencing homelessness; persons identifying as Black are 6.87% of the population in poverty and 22.7% of the identified population experiencing homelessness. The report also noted that persons identifying as Hispanic/Latino are also overrepresented among the population living in poverty and homelessness; persons identifying as Hispanic/Latino are 25.6% of the population in poverty and 16.3% of the identified population experiencing homelessness.

Children with Disabilities

Community assessment gathers data from multiple sources regarding children with disabilities, including the NJ Department of Education and Early Intervention. We also collect anecdotal data from the Child Study Team staff members who participate in our annual community assessment, as well as agency Special Services and Mental Health staff. A wealth of disability services, supports and resources is available for Morris County children and families, and community assessment noted this as a strength of our service area. In our own organization, a total of 36 children with documented special needs were served in a least



restrictive environment. The breakdown of this number was 20 children in our EHS programs with Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) and 16 children with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Throughout the county, the total number of children ages three to five with disabilities was 730. In our current service area locations, Dover reported 52 children ages three to five with disabilities, Wharton reported 16 children ages three to five, and Morris School District reported 48 children ages three to five. According to the most recent NJ Department of Health Division of Family Health Services County Performance and Determination Report, 715 children in Morris County from birth to age three were served with IFSPs. Across early childhood disability determinations, types of disabilities include Speech or Language Delay/Impairment; Developmental Delay for children under five; Fine Motor/Gross Motor Delay; Sensory & Regulatory Concerns/Challenging Behaviors; Hearing impairment; Autism; Multiple Disabilities; Intellectual Disability; Orthopedic Impairment; and Visual Impairment. The children with disabilities served by our Early Head Start and Head Start programs this past year were predominantly supported due to speech/language delay or impairment. Several also displayed co-morbidity with fine or gross motor delay.

In accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), disabilities services are available for children ages three-five through local Boards of Education. As per the NJ Department of Education, the county-wide rate of students receiving special education in or outside of a childcare setting is nearly 61%. Nearly 40% of the county's preschool disabled students reside in service areas for one of five districts: Morris School district, Mount Olive, Dover, Jefferson, and Parsippany Troy-Hills. Head Start Community Program of Morris County has strong collaborative relationships with lead educational agencies which enable services such as speech, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and behavioral supports to be provided to children with identified disabilities.

IDEA ensures that services are available for younger children and their families, too. Early Intervention services are available for eligible infants and toddlers,



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providing the support they need to make progress in life skills, as well as services for families who care for them. Through Early Intervention, babies and toddlers can receive services at home or in the community. Early Head Start Special Services staff coordinates these services for children in the Early Head Start Home-based and Center-based programs. According to the New Jersey Early Intervention System (NJEIS) County Performance Report July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2019, 89.29% of eligible children received all services on their IFSP in a timely manner. Of the families served, 94.12% reported that intervention services helped their children develop and learn.

A trend noted in community assessment which we have continued to see over the past several years has been an increase in visual impairments. An ongoing partnership with Optical Academy to provide vision screenings and free or very low-cost eyeglasses for children is an important community resource to address this need. Also, information about the possible consequences of young children's use of screens is provided to parents as part of Head Start Community Program of Morris County parent education programming.

A wide array of specialized programs and services is also available to provide disabilities services to young children in the service area. Morris Sussex Resource Net connects disabled children and adults with a range of services and resources, depending on need. P.G. Chambers School in Cedar Knolls provides comprehensive special education and therapy programs for children with disabilities and developmental delays, along with inclusive early education for children with and without disabilities. The Lake Drive School for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in Mountain Lakes serves approximately 250 students, ages birth through high school. Caring Partners of Morris/Sussex is an independent, non-profit Care Management Organization that coordinates services, resources and supports to children and young adults with complex needs that include: behavioral/emotional, intellectual/developmental and substance use. Caring Partners works with child-family teams to develop individualized service plans. Celebrate the Children is a non-profit, state-approved private school, which



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serves students ages 3-21 with autism and other challenges in relating and communicating. The SPAN Parent Advocacy Network is available locally and statewide to empower families as advocates and partners in improving education, health, and mental health outcomes for infants, toddlers, children, and youth.

EDUCATION, HEALTH, NUTRITION AND SOCIAL SERVICE NEEDS OF HEAD START-ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Information about the needs of Head Start-eligible children, pregnant women, and families in the service area was obtained through family assessments and through community surveys conducted through Survey Monkey and via telephone interviews. Qualitative data was provided by enrolled families, community service providers, and agency staff.

Education needs of families in the community were assessed. English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes are a prevalent need for Head Start-eligible families. Community providers and Head Start staff observed that some immigrant families are not literate in their home oral language, nor do they have driver's licenses. There are also a number of families who are well educated in their country of origin, but their educational credentials and marginal English communication skills do not translate to equivalent employment opportunities here.

There are 41 public school districts in Morris County. In 2018, New Jersey had one of the country's highest graduation rates. The county-wide graduation rate is 94%, higher than the statewide adjusted cohort graduation rate of 90.9%. Morris county has a 6% school dropout rate. Whereas data do not show significant discrepancies between male and female educational attainment, there is a clear discrepancy in educational attainment among racial groups. Some 75% of Asian populations and 52.5% of White populations in Morris County have a Bachelor's degree or higher. However, only 27% of Hispanics and 39.9% of Blacks hold a Bachelor's degree.



According to the Rutgers Data Hub, 42% of households are paying more than 30% of income on rent in Morris County. Survey data noted that many families in the high-poverty communities in our service areas rent apartments in urban concentrations of immigrant tenants. Often multiple generations live in one home. There was a dearth of low-income housing identified in the community, and many immigrants live in crowded conditions, with “stacking” anecdotally identified as a community problem. With regard to housing and the homeless, it was noted that mental health problems characterize the homeless adult population.

In terms of child well-being, according to the Rutgers Child Welfare Data Hub, Morris County has over 5000 children currently being served by the Division of Child Protection and Permanency. Statewide, there were close to 5,000 children placed in kinship or foster care; the most recent data from 2018 referenced 95 of those children being from Morris County. Among children served through both in- and out-of-home placements, the most common circumstances were caregiver substance use (out-of-home: 74%; in-home: 44%) and caregiver mental health issues (out-of-home: 66%; in-home: 29%). Domestic violence, housing issues, financial issues, or child mental health challenges affected over one-third of children in out-of-home placement. Child abuse and neglect were areas of concern noted by community health and social services providers—with both being exacerbated by the pandemic.

Prevalent community health issues were also explored. According to the Center for Health Statistics, New Jersey Department of Health (2017), the Morris County percentage of mothers receiving first trimester prenatal care (PNC) was 74.7%. However, there was a significant difference in onset of PNC by race/ethnicity with over 80% of White and Asian mothers receiving early PNC compared to 65% of Hispanic and 60% of Black mothers. One factor identified in the lack of prenatal care was lack of health insurance, and it is significant that the Hispanic population had the highest rates of uninsured status—almost 20%. Approximately 80% of



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county residents had a medical home, which correlates with data on the uninsured. A family's access to regular medical care is also connected with child immunizations, and the percentage of children between 19-35 months who received the recommended immunizations was 70% statewide. Children enrolled at Head Start Community Program of Morris County had 100% vaccination compliance rates.

Overall air and water quality in Morris County is good, however the presence of lead paint is an issue in older buildings in the county's urban centers. Although New Jersey regulations require health care providers to test for lead exposure among all one- and two-year old children, just 69.3% of Morris County children in this group were tested. The percentage of tested children under age three with a Confirmed Elevated Blood Lead Level was 1.5%. Correlations with poverty were noted here. Community health providers observed that this issue is being closely monitored in the Dover community, due to the presence of lead paint in older buildings where many families living in poverty reside. Head Start Community Program of Morris County makes lead poisoning prevention education programs available to families of enrolled children.

Prevalent local health problems identified were obesity, alcohol and drug abuse. Childhood obesity and the need for access to healthy food was an issue that was noted as significant for the local Hispanic community. Head Start Community Program of Morris County secured Quality Improvement funding from the Office of Head Start to engage the services of a Community Health and Nutrition Coordinator to address these issues.

Yet these problems paled in comparison to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. The pandemic has heavily impacted on the Hispanic communities of Morris County, both in terms of health and economic effects. While Morris County rates generally followed statewide trends, Dover and Morristown have consistently led the county in COVID-19 cases and deaths—and the geographic area of the municipality of Dover is just 2.7 miles. Moreover, it is significant that Morris



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County's unemployment rates went from 2.9% in March 2020 to 13.5% in July 2020, indicative of the pandemic's devastating economic effects on the community.

Families reported food insecurity as an added health issue which was a result of their inability to work during the pandemic. In Morris County, about 26,330 were considered food insecure before the pandemic, according to Feeding America's "Map the Meal Gap" interactive study. Feeding America, whose 200 member food banks include Community FoodBank of New Jersey in Hillside, reports both higher demand for services and more need for volunteer and donor support.

According to Feeding America, job loss and other economic crises associated with the coronavirus could push the rate of food insecurity in Morris County to 9.7 percent by the end of 2020. The many local restaurants which employ members of the Head Start-eligible community in cooking, cleaning and service positions were devastated by the pandemic. The industries which employ families in our community have been drastically impacted, and the direct service positions held by many of our parents are not eligible for work-at-home arrangements that are common to the white-collar community.

Work, School and Training Schedules of Parents with Eligible Children

It is typical for parents with eligible children in the service area to work in landscaping, cleaning, restaurant, and hotel industries. Low-paying, part-time jobs are common among the eligible families in the service area. Landscaping and day laborer jobs held by many men in the community may be seasonal and subject to instability. Parent schedules are reportedly varied and often revolve around second shift work, with many adults working more than job—some juggling several part-time positions. Community providers, staff, and parents all referred to the fact that families combine multiple part-time jobs and frequently work non-traditional hours. Discussions with the Morris County Child Care Work



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Group, sponsored by Homeless Solutions, noted that wraparound care and off hours/weekend care are needed to meet schedules of this population. Parents and community members expressed positive feedback for Head Start's Aftercare program, funded by state child care subsidy, which was created in response to families' requests. This wraparound care program is paused due to the pandemic, as state child care licensing prohibited the movement of children between class groups.

Data was collected on transportation and communication relative to families' employment experiences and schedules. Local train stations and access to NJ Transit bus hubs make the community accessible. Nonetheless, Dover and Morristown are predominantly walking communities for the population that is eligible for Head Start services. Many recent immigrants do not have a car, nor are they able to obtain a driver's license. It was observed that families eligible for Head Start services use taxis as a primary means of transportation, especially during the winter months. Mean travel time to work county-wide was 31 minutes.

During the pandemic, communication devices became more important than ever for Head Start-eligible families. Free WIFI services were readily available, and most local school districts offered families the use of one tablet or laptop to provide access to remote learning services. Over 90% of households have a computer and Internet. Almost all parents have a smart phone with access to the internet.

Other Early Childhood Education Programs that Serve Eligible Children

Capacity for child care in the area was examined as part of community assessment. State child care subsidy slots are available through Child and Family Resources, the Morris County child care resource and referral agency. The Morris County Office of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) also connects families with subsidized child care.



The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown child care into a state of crisis in our community. According to a September 2020 report by the county child care resource and referral agency, Child and Family Resources (CFR), there is a need for stabilization and infrastructure supports. The impact of COVID-19 has led to widespread child care program closures. Programs that are open are experiencing low child enrollment (compared to pre-COVID) and increased operating costs which are related to restrictions in the number of children that can be in child care center classrooms for public health purposes and increased cleaning and sanitization requirements. In addition, additional staff is necessary, to prevent comingling between groups and support active supervision. CFR reports that the approximate total of licensed child care centers in Morris County dropped from 270 in March 2020 to 200 in June 2020. Additionally, the total number of registered family child care providers—an important resource for infant care—dropped from 36 to 31. Licensing regulations had limited group size to 10 children and effective September 21, the group size capacity increased to 15 children.

Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) reported on a rally held by Congressman Tom Malinowski in March 2020, which brought attention to the community problem of child care deserts. The definition of a child care desert is: “an area where demand for space in licensed child-care programs far outpaces local capacity.” The Center for American Progress (CAP) established the term to define census tracts where there is a ratio of more than three young children to every licensed child care slot. CAP researchers developed the term in accordance with U.S. Census Bureau child care research that showed that 83 percent of parents with children 5 years or younger reported problems finding affordable, quality care – and some groups are hurt more than others. Three Morris County towns were identified as being child care deserts—Dover, Netcong and Wharton—all of which are in our service area. In March, 2020, there were 3,951 infant-toddler slots in Morris County’s licensed child care centers—but 9,731 children under age three needing care because both parents were in the work



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force. This problem has been markedly exacerbated by the recent pandemic, with the overall program closures severely limiting the number of child care slots for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

Community assessment explored the trend of public preschool expanding in the service area. Preschool Expansion funding was available in the Morris School District, Wharton Borough Public Schools, Boonton, Netcong, and Dover Public Schools. New expansion districts include Rockaway Borough, Mine Hill and Butler. Although the NJ Department of Education no longer breaks down enrollment data by grade, the most recently available 2018/2019 pre-k universe numbers have been identified as follows: Dover – 478, Wharton – 134, Rockaway Borough – 108, Mine Hill – 92, Boonton – 170, Netcong – 58, Morristown – 712.

Families served by Head Start reported that home services to support families caring for their own child is a good fit for infants, which is a positive, given the lack of center-based slots for infants. Home visiting programs in Morris County are provided by Head Start Community Program of Morris County, NORWESCAP, Healthy Families (Parents as Teachers), and the Nurse/Family Partnership (Dept. of Children and Families). Many Hispanic mothers in Dover reported caring for their infants themselves at home and not working outside the home—despite living in poverty. There appears to be a cultural component here and a value in the community for mothers to stay close with their children, frequently reporting exclusive breastfeeding throughout their children’s early infancy.

Community Resources

Resources to support nutrition are plentiful in the service area. St. John’s Church Shelter, Trinity Lutheran Church Soup Kitchen, and Interfaith Food Pantry serve families in need without regard to immigration status. Head Start Community Program of Morris County collaborates with a Free Farmers Market program in Dover and the Interfaith Food Pantry in Morristown offer many healthful nutrition options which combat food insecurity in the community. Some of the food



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pantries and other services available to the Morris County community are: Table of Hope in Morristown, Interfaith Food Pantry in Morris Plains (directly next to the Head Start facility), Nourish NJ in Morristown, Market Street Mission in Morristown. Nutritional resources to support young children include the Saint Joseph Medical Center WIC Program, available through St. Margaret Church, Morristown; Boonton United Methodist Church, Boonton; and Zufall Health Center, Dover.

During the pandemic, Head Start Community Program of Morris County, and local school districts have provided weekly grocery bags and/or grab'n'go meals to support child nutrition, to compensate for the meals children may have missed due to less time in school or child care. More than ever, local food pantries have had an essential role in combatting food insecurity in the Head Start-eligible community in the Morris County service area.

Resources for the homeless include Homeless Solutions, Family Promise of Morris County, and Market Street Mission offer temporary housing for families in need, although the available supply is characterized by waiting lists. Jersey Battered Women's Services (JBWS), a private, confidential service welcoming all survivors (and family members) of dating, domestic, or partner abuse offers safe house and transitional housing options.

Educational resources in the service area are particularly strong. Free ESL classes and tutoring are available from a variety of sources, although many in-person opportunities have been paused due to the pandemic. In Dover, El Primer Paso provides free ESL classes which focus on communication skills for the workplace and social environments. The Morris County Office of Temporary Assistance (OTA) also has a Refugee Resettlement Program, which provides financial assistance and support services to families who have been granted asylum by the United States Government from political or religious persecution. The OTA has offices in Morristown and Dover, in close proximity to Head Start facilities. Literacy Volunteers of Morris County also provides free ESL and tutoring services



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for adults who live in Morris County. They must also be planning to remain in the U.S. permanently and be able to commit to meeting their tutor for at least one hour a week for a minimum of one year. Free ESL classes are also offered by the Morris County School of Technology from the NJ State Department of Labor, and the Urban League of Morris County. Fee-based instruction is available through County College of Morris and community school programs affiliated with school districts near Head Start locations, as well as several local commercial language schools.

An innovative educational program is available through Fairleigh Dickinson University (Madison), with courses available in Dover. The Program, Puerta al Futuro (Gateway to the Future), seeks to promote higher education in the Hispanic community. The program enables Spanish-speaking adults to learn English and to earn a college degree through progressive all-Spanish to all-English coursework. Grants and loans are available for those that meet financial aid criteria. As of October 2018, the program had an enrollment of 620 full- and part-time adult students.

Mental health services are also varied and typically available for low-income families, through a wide net of community providers. County programs are available, but require social security numbers. In addition, there is a strong network of community providers that serve all families, regardless of citizenship status. This includes Cornerstone Family Programs, Newbridge Services, Hope House, Family Intervention Services, New Jersey Self-Help Clearinghouse, and the Mental Health Association of Morris County. Our agency collaborates with Cornerstone Family Programs to provide a mental health consultant available to families. In addition, beginning in the 2020/2021 school year, a new collaboration for trauma-informed mental health services for children, families and staff has been facilitated through Head Start/Early Head Start Quality Improvement funding. Through the collaboration, Head Start Community Program of Morris County and Family Intervention Services, a local mental health services agency



with licensed clinicians, can provide robust mental health and wellbeing services for children and staff.

Community Strengths

Community needs assessment participants, including parents of enrolled children, staff, community members and providers, identified many strengths of the local community through survey responses. The diversity and rich cultural fiber of the local area were repeatedly referenced. Cooperative relationships between races and ethnic groups support a wide variety of cultures, educational backgrounds, beliefs and experiences. The availability of resources to support bilingual communications was noted, however a gap was identified for more obscure languages.

A strong work ethic was noted, as well as the opportunity for employment in a robust economy—prior to the pandemic. Community unity, with strong support of family and friends available in the community was a frequently noted strength. Family relationships were cited by survey participants, as well as a supportive community that works together to accomplish goals which benefit many, such as nutrition programs to combat local food insecurity. The closeness of the community, available transportation, easily walkable town, full-day preschool and kindergarten, availability of Head Start services and programs offered.

Excellent healthcare programs were also identified as a strength of the community. Zufall Community Health Centers, a federally qualified health center, are located in the heart of the communities we serve, with locations in Dover and Morristown. The Zufall Delta Dental Mobile provides dental services to our populations, and Zufall is the dental home to much of Morris County's low-income community. Local hospitals, Atlantic Health Morristown Medical Center (Morristown) and Saint Clare's Health in Dover and Denville, offer free or low-cost clinics for children and families.



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According to the Monmouth University Polling Institute, Morris County was rated #1 in the state for Quality of Life, and #19 in the nation. 89% of Morris County residents rated their hometown as positive. Traffic and affordable housing received the lowest ratings among county residents, with Job Opportunities holding at 49%. High positive ratings were noted in the areas of Environmental Quality, Open Space, Local Schools, Crime and Safety, Road Conditions, Public Transit, Race Relations and Cultural Activities.