

Focus Group (N = 5; 43 participants) Themes

Challenges/Barriers:

1. Opportunity (economic, educational - socioeconomic status)

"And there's no work here."

"Or if you have criminal past they don't let you live it down here and so you can't. And people do change whether they was in their early 20's or... people do change when they grow up. And um, so XXX, they don't let you live it down if you've got anything on your record"

"I took a drug test I had been locked up for [inaudible, multiple people speaking at once] now. As soon as I came home from prison I had a good mindset. I went there, passed the interview, passed the drug test but they would not have me. So that holds a lot of people back and they just continue their old ways."

"I mean we've got the employment office here but they don't really help either cuz you have to have a computer to see the jobs then you take the thing to them and they give you three addresses and then you have to go do it yourself. They don't help out any more like they used to. They used to sit you down at their desk and go through the lists of jobs, tell you what they are, how much you make, and which ones you was interested in. They don't do that now, they haven't done that for years."

"I don't know how they expect this town to grow which I assume they don't want the town to grow. We have like 10 to 15 churches within a few miles of each other. I mean there's churches everywhere and fast food places everywhere. Nothing for kids to do. Anything that helps the community."

"Because jobs, we have to have money to...that's why theft has gone up because for some people to make money and sometimes that's the only way. Once you get stuck in that cycle it's really hard to get out of it. And that's the way you're used to make money it's hard to go to a new job and hard to do something other than that."

"The two I would say are substance abuse and lower paying jobs, there just aren't a lot of sustainable jobs. There are people having to work 2 or 3 jobs just to live"

"It's almost like we are at a tipping point where if we could get a few more jobs to bring in more revenue to our community... the growth of our community has remained stagnant for so long that it's really hard for any business to feel confident to come in and know they will be successful so they tend to take their business to a community that they see is growing"

"It's also generational, the framework of poverty, it's hard to break that cycle."

“Then it’s the generational thing, if mom and dad didnt go to school then they probably aren't going to go either and we tend to see large family groups here, we aren't from here either but it seems like there are only a few last names, because they are all related and they tend to stay in this county where there's not opportunities for higher education because all that's here is a technical school, and there aren't any higher paying jobs, it's mostly blue collar and factory work.”

“They have had families, and they have had families and all through the years and no one has really gone to college, when they get into Baxters which is a huge employer for McDowell county, they make good money right out of high school so there is not incentive to get any higher education because I can just go work at Baxter's for a decent salary and as time goes on they had good money at 20 years old, but as you get family, a mortgage, a house, and debt, that money doesn't go as far as it did before.”

“McDowell County is known as the meth headquarters of western North Carolina. There's so much of that sort of stuff and there are plenty of really good people in this community and stuff like that gives it a really bad name”

“Places like the church and the YMCA, they are trying to make it more available to people, but then that kind of stems into another thing where there is a lack of transportation to actually get to those places to get the healthy food.”

“It’s also that we don’t give parents enough credit as well, a lot of people... we do have parents who struggle to make ends meet and some are working two jobs... their priority is not going out and exercising, its putting food on the table and a roof over their heads. It would be a very unusual thought for them to go out and exercise because, they have to go out and do this in order to keep this going and I have to do this to keep this going... so i want to take up for some of the parents too because we do have some deadbeat parents but we also have single moms who are working two jobs and trying to keep a roof over their head.....”

“A lot of people looking for jobs and low income housing.”

“My daughter went to college for two years at Virginia college and got a degree in paralegal but she can’t use it here in McDowell County. There’s no jobs here for paralegal [inaudible] unless she goes to Charlotte or Raleigh or something like that, I don’t reckon there’s any jobs like that here in Marion. She’s working at Dollar Tree.”

2. Access (transportation, food, healthcare, entertainment)

“There’s no public transit here. Yeah if you don’t own a vehicle it’s kind of hard to get anywhere and you’ll have to walk a lot.”

“There are two taxi companies in town, they don’t work past 5 p.m. and if you’re with the transportation with DSS, with the shelter here, it takes one hour to get to Walmart, one hour to get it all done, one hour, one day, and that’s it.”

“It’s there but it’s limited, I feel limited with being a senior to begin with, and then on top of that when you go out there is limitation on your movement and what you can accomplish I don’t have a car, I have a husband and neither one of us can really get anywhere because we don’t drive.”

“There's nothing really for youth to do, we have a bowling alley, but I mean is there anything else for the youth to do?.... Well the schools offer their sports programs and things, but again I know some people, my son in law was a coach for the little kids for a long time, I assume they still have those things here now, they have basketball games, baseball, soccer, but you have to sign up for them and maybe some of the children don't have transportation to go to those things. There is a hindrance for them getting there.”

“I think McDowell County does need some more resources because comparing them to say Buncombe County and other counties around they don't have the adequate doctors and nursing staff.”

“They don't have rheumatologist in McDowell County do they? The closest one is in Asheville. That is a hard thing for people in my program, because people don't have a lot of money on their own anyways, so the doctors that are around are...”

“McDowell County doesn't have a pediatric dentist, the closest one is in Asheville.”

“I mean a hospital has to see you regardless but if you don't have insurance they won't give you the best care. And if you get a prescription you may not be able to afford it. I can't get food stamps, Medicaid, housing, anything. I've been in a lot much trouble in the past I'm disqualified. But people change and they should understand that I think.”

“Just that the health care is so expensive.”

“The access we have to processed food is really great in the county unfortunately...”

“...until recently, no public transportation, and even what we have starting now is fairly limited so the folks in a 10 mile radius from the town center... the further out you go... we have a huge county and there are so many people living in so many places, you don't even know that they're tucked back in there. They would not probably have access, if they get a ride to the grocery store, that is good for them, they're not gonna go... hey can we stop by the produce stand on Tuesday afternoon? Or go to the farmers market. So for sure the folks that live in the more rural areas of this county.”

3. Health outcomes (substance abuse/addiction, obesity/diabetes)

“I really believe it's obesity, sorry, but people think I'm skinny, but I'm not, I'm at a good weight and I've disciplined myself, being a diabetic, I didn't just starve myself for 15 years, but there are diabetics around me that are eating everything, they aren't taking care of themselves, so they are getting into real health problems later in life, I want to stay well, but that seems to be a great problem, just nationwide,....”

“I'm going to go back to not having anything to do for the youth, I'm not talking about... there is a bar... they will drink and go get high, there is nothing else for us to do, that are mommy aged... the 18 to 45 age. Everyone wants to do the same...”

“We all think the same, I'm getting old, but I still want to do the same things I did when I was a kid, but addiction is such a problem because... meth and crack, they took over! They took over, they take over your life and... I became non-productive, I lost everything... I lost it all twice!

Here I am starting over, there are so many people out there that are still using... it's just a terrible thing in our society, and heroin, they have even got a ribbon up because there is so much overdosing on opiates and heroin."

"That's why we have children out here. The drugs...they're bad. Our kids are getting suspended from school for drugs, they gotta get from somewhere and I understand all that. But then we go into that repetitive cycle of the parents are coming home from prison with a good amount of [inaudible] but then getting on back down."

"There's a lot of obesity because of all the fast food."

"Drugs. I know a lot of people that don't live in this county but know of this county and the most drug-infested county there is."

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Assets/Strengths:

1. Faith-based communities

“One positive is that there are several food banks and groceries that you can receive through churches here and I have been a part of that, my husband and I have a very limited income and just a little extra food now and then helped the both of us. There are positives, but I think the work, employment is so hard to get in a rural community a county that is more rural than urban and job opportunities are very very scarce and so we find that with help, with, it’s just one person, again, limitation, and I’m sorry, but the government hasn’t been too helpful and it limits people too. I’m not against the government, but it’s a reality.”

“It’s peaceful, you know, it’s beautiful and we do have this church, and a couple other churches that really help when there’s no other way of getting any food.”

“Other churches give out food too. A lot of churches give out food.”

2. Geography/recreation

“The mountains, the peace...”

“I love the outdoor stuff here, there are mountains to climb, there are bike trails to bike, greenways to walk, playgrounds to play on and it’s all free, that’s the nice part about us moving here is that there is so much outdoor recreation available in this county, waterfalls to go and visit and that are maintained well.”

3. Social capital (trust, family support systems)

“People do have good intentions and I like that the older teaching our youth self-respect values and rules. I like that about this little old town.”

“I know a couple time when they come out there a few of the kids didn’t have coats or clothes they brought a truck full of clothes and stuff and handed them out.”

“Yeah there’s a lot of good intentions here.”

“this is where our family is, that’s what I love about McDowell County, my whole family is here and the community is so close knit, no matter what group you fit in you just grow and bond with everyone, but then that’s also the downfall of it, that everyone knows everyone”