GATHERING THE VOICES OF THE COMMUNITY:
MOBILIZING THE WEST VALLEY AND IMPROVING LIVES

A SUMMARY OF THE WEST VALLEY COMMUNITY SCAN REPORT

MARCH 2005
THE WEST VALLEY COMMUNITY SCAN

Maricopa County is a vast and growing community full of great promise. As the 4th most populous county in the nation, boasting three of the top 10 fastest growing cities in the United States, Maricopa County continues to attract new residents, businesses and development. This rapid growth presents both opportunities and challenges that will require individuals, business, government and non-profits to work together in maintaining the Valley's reputation as a great place to live, work and play.

Western Maricopa County, consisting of 14 cities and towns including Avondale, Buckeye, El Mirage, Gila Bend, Glendale, Goodyear, Litchfield Park, Peoria, Sun City, Sun City West, Surprise, Tolleson, Wickenburg, and Youngtown, mirrors the growth opportunity and challenges of the broader County in many ways. In looking at the West Valley region, it is important to note the disparity that exists across the cities and towns. For example, the aggregate unemployment rate of 4.8% for the West Valley represents a low of 2% and a high of nearly 8% in some areas. Similarly, while some parts of the West Valley have as low as .8% of the population living in poverty, others have nearly 22%. This disparity occurs over most of the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the West Valley, depicting both a rich and vital community with many challenges and great need.

In light of the anticipated continued growth of Maricopa County, and more specifically, the West Valley, the goal of the West Valley Community Scan has been to develop an assessment of the current state of human services delivery in western Maricopa County. The results are intended to provide a baseline of information to be used in planning by local nonprofit organizations, government, businesses and faith organizations for the short- and long-term benefit of West Valley residents and communities.

GATHERING THE VOICES

Valley of the Sun United Way’s commitment to improving lives throughout Maricopa County spans 80 years. As an organization focused on addressing the most critical health and human service needs of our community, Valley of the Sun United Way was commissioned by the Stardust Foundation to conduct the West Valley Community Scan.

During the Fall of 2004, 19 Community Impact Forums were conducted by trained volunteer facilitators in 12 of the 14 West Valley communities. More than 400 participants, representing more than 150 organizations, came together to share their perspectives and to reach consensus around the question “What can the community focus on to most impact the quality of life in the West Valley?”

The West Valley Scan Steering Committee, representing public and private stakeholders with a vested interest in the success of West Valley communities, was convened by Valley of the Sun United Way to help provide strategic direction and oversight of the Scan’s development and implementation.

“PEOPLE NEED TO BE INVESTED IN THEIR COMMUNITY. WE NEED TO STEP OUTSIDE OF OUR COMFORT ZONE AND BECOME ACTIVELY INVOLVED. FAMILIES SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY EVENTS.”

- GLENDALE FORUM
OUR GROWING COMMUNITY...
BEGINNING OUR PLANNING NOW

MARICOPA COUNTY

• 4th most populous county in the United States, including three of the top 10 fastest growing cities in the country (Gilbert, Chandler and Peoria).  

• Geographic boundaries include 27 cities and towns.  

• In Maricopa County, 25.9% of residents over 25 had a bachelor's degree or higher, however 7.4% of the population had less than a 9th grade education.  

• For 2004, nearly 1.7 million people made up the workforce, 4.2% of which were unemployed.  

• The median income for families in Maricopa County in 1999 was $51,827, with 8.06% in poverty.  

WESTERN MARICOPA COUNTY

• Geographic boundaries include 14 cities and towns including Avondale, Buckeye, El Mirage, Gila Bend, Glendale, Goodyear, Litchfield Park, Peoria, Sun City, Sun City West, Surprise, Tolleson, Wickenburg, and Youngtown.  

• Of those West Valley residents over the age of 25, 6.4% had less than a 9th grade education and another 10% had some high school but no diploma.  

• The West Valley workforce is made up of more than 200,000 men and women over the age of 16. Of the civilian labor force in 2000, 4.8% were considered unemployed.  

• The three leading industries in the West Valley include Educational, Health and Social Services, and Retail and Manufacturing.  

• The median income for families in the West Valley in 1999 was $51,269, with 6.3% of families living in poverty.  

MARICOPA COUNTY POPULATION DENSITY FROM 2010 TO 2030

Nearly 3.4 million people with projected growth to reach 4.1 million by 2010 and 6.14 million by 2030.  

More than 550,000 with projected growth to reach more than 800,000 (not including Sun City and Sun City West) by 2010 and more than 1.9 million by 2030.  

"THE COMMUNITY NEEDS MORE MULTICULTURAL FESTIVALS AS WELL AS RESOURCE, HEALTH, AND WELLNESS FAIRS." - EL MIRAGE AND YOUNGTOWN FORUM
WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID WHEN ASKED:
"WHAT CAN THE COMMUNITY FOCUS ON TO MOST IMPACT THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE WEST VALLEY?"

FIVE EMERGING THEMES
In synthesizing the information and feedback collected through the Community Impact Forums, the following five themes or areas of opportunity emerged:

FIVE THEMATIC ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Communication and Collaboration
Community members want organizations to work toward the common good together with networking and feedback between organizations whether nonprofit or governmental.

Community Planning and Development
Community members indicated a desire for and opportunity to coordinate future community activities and services, especially the placement of several community centers that will serve as the centerpieces for community, economic and neighborhood redevelopment. The community input strongly urged nonprofit and government organizations to coordinate this planning in both a community fashion as well as across the 14 West Valley communities.

Education
Community members want improvements, including quality and access to all areas of education from K-12 to after school and higher education to life-long learning opportunities.

Health, Wellness and Safety
The community members believe a variety of service areas are important and essential to an improved quality of life. Many of these services focus on the need to address the issues facing women and their families – Health: Access to quality, affordable healthcare in all service areas and an increase in emergency financial assistance. Wellness: Mental and substance abuse programs, mentoring, youth prevention, parenting, affordable housing and neighborhood improvements. Safety: public safety, domestic violence shelters, advocacy, quality and affordable child care.

Transportation
Community members want coordinated transportation between cities that includes comprehensive bus routes and shuttles to important services such as medical, education and health facilities and the establishment of a West Valley Transportation Task Force to educate the communities on transportation plans and availability.

"WE NEED BETTER COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS AND GOVERNMENT. SERVICES, AGENCIES, AND PROGRAMS SHOULD BE PROMOTED BETTER SO THE COMMUNITY IS MORE AWARE OF THEM."

- SURPRISE FORUM
MOVING FROM RESULTS TO ACTION

With the five thematic areas identified, the next step is to provide each community with a practical tool for planning and problem-solving. The following Community Planning Model has been developed to provide communities, partnerships and individuals with a framework for moving through a series of steps that identify issues, opportunities, strategies and action plans for affecting change.

A COMMUNITY PLANNING MODEL
FIVE THEMATIC ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE WEST VALLEY COMMUNITY SCAN

WHAT CHANGE ARE WE TRYING TO CREATE?
WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY OF SUCCESS? (i.e. Infrastructure, Personnel, System)
WHAT WILL WE DO TO MAKE THE DESIRED CHANGE OCCUR? (i.e. Strategies, Processes, Stakeholders)
WHAT’S THE PLAN OF ACTION? WHO, will do WHAT, by WHEN?
IMPLEMENTATION

KEY QUESTIONS THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED INCLUDE:
- What do we want our community to become?
- What are all the possible actions we can take to improve the quality of life in our community, given our vision statement?
- How do we organize and proceed to implement our plan?
- Who is going to lead and who is going to follow to implement our plan?
- Where do we find all the resources to support the implementation of our plan?

NEXT STEPS:
- Launch Community Task Forces to move forward with planning to address specific community changes identified in the West Valley Scan.
- West Valley Community members engage in an ongoing dialogue and support community change efforts.
- West Valley Community leaders bring together the human service community in the West Valley.
- Valley of the Sun United Way to reconvene community Task Forces to report on program updates regarding change efforts.
THANK YOU TO THE WEST VALLEY COMMUNITIES, OUR PARTNERS AND THE PARTICIPANTS FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP AND COMMITMENT TO CREATING A STRONG AND THRIVING WEST VALLEY.

WEST VALLEY SCAN STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS:
- Arizona Interfaith Network
- Arizona State University, Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Management
- Arizona State University West, Partnership for Community Development
- Arizona Department of Economic Security
- Arizona Department of Economic Security
- City of El Mirage
- City of Surprise
- Glendale Human Services Council Inc
- Institute for Cultural Affairs
- Maricopa Association of Governments
- Southwest Community Network
- Town of Buckeye
- Town of Buckeye
- Town of Buckeye

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HOW CAN YOU HELP? / WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?
The work that needs to be accomplished within the five thematic areas will require community collaboration within each city or town, and across the western Maricopa County region. The Community Task Forces are asked to continue meeting, involving more stakeholders and continuing work on a chosen area of the plan. The Executive Summary and complete West Valley Community Scan Report may be found on the Valley of the Sun United Way web-site at: www.vsuw.org.

SOURCES
1 Census Bureau 2000, www.census.gov
2 Arizona Department of Economic Security, www.de.state.az.us
4 Maricopa County Website, www.maricopa.gov

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"PROVIDE FUNDING FOR COLLABORATION BETWEEN AGENCIES. MAKE MORE EMERGENCY FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR MEDICINE, HOUSING, AND GAS."
- BUCKEYE FORUM