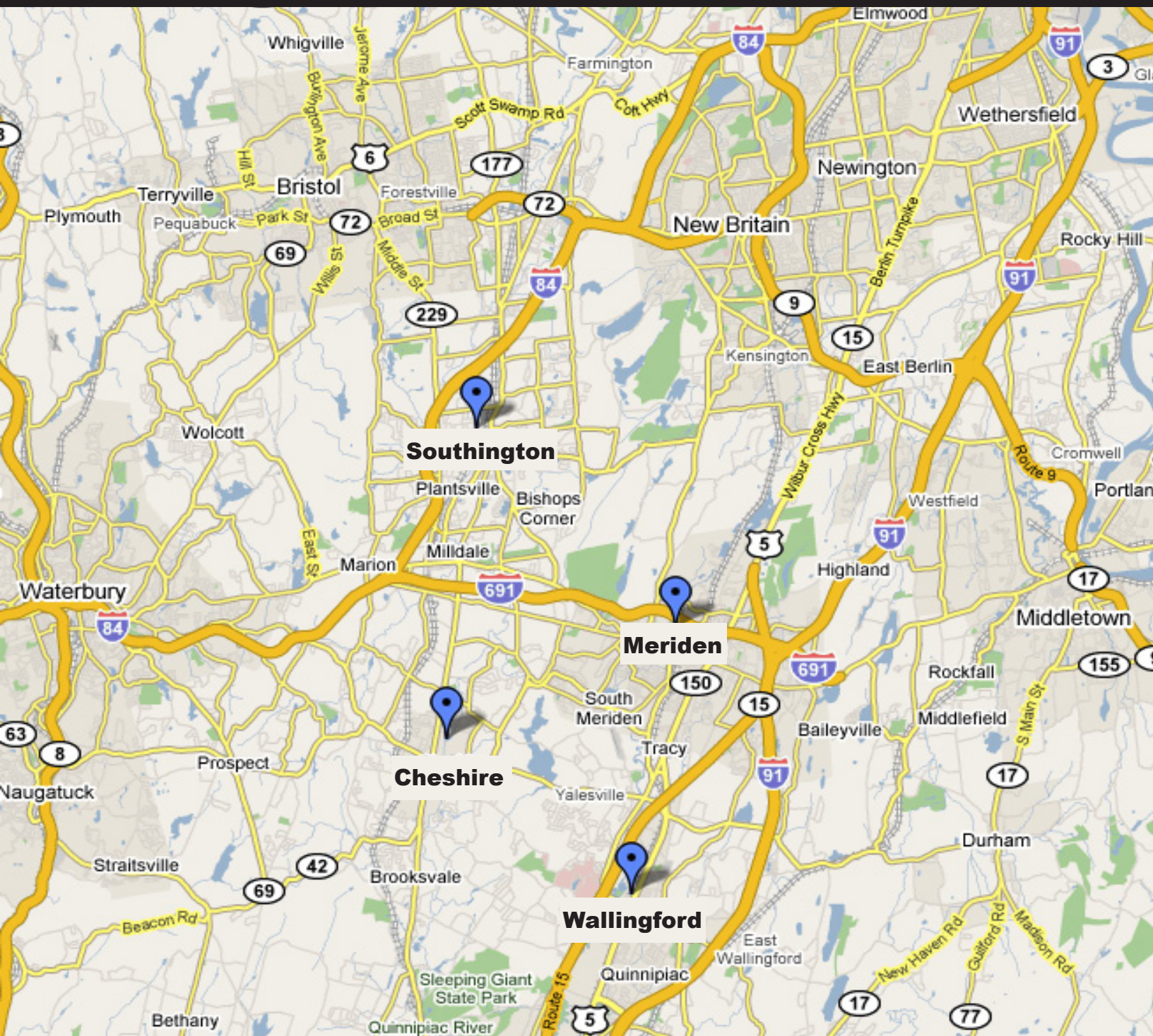


2008 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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United Way of Meriden & Wallingford, and
James H. Napier Foundation*



Community Results Center
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Community Results Center (CRC) of the United Way of Connecticut conducted a needs assessment for MidState Medical Center and the United Way of Meriden and Wallingford to help determine the best use of their resources to impact the lives of the communities they serve. In order to ensure that the perceptions and opinions of many segments of the community were included in the research, data were gathered from residents, community leaders, publicly available data sources, published reports, and from the United Way 2-1-1 information and referral service.

The report focuses on the communities of Meriden, Wallingford, Cheshire and Southington. An analysis of the data gathered found a number of issues that frequently came to light. This report organizes these issues into the following categories: basic needs; health; children and youth; and older adults. The report also includes a profile of these four communities, detailing demographic and economic conditions.

Basic Needs

The current economic climate was often the first issue discussed during the focus groups. At the time these groups met, gas prices were rising and heating oil prices were expected to double from last winter's rates. Participants discussed the impact of those rising costs on agencies that provide basic needs to families and on the resources needed to assist families facing financial difficulties. Participants of the focus groups discussed the need for more jobs and transportation options as well. The needs assessment survey found concern over public safety and identified barriers to social service support.

- **Employment and Financial Stability** – The need for more job training and workforce development is among the top five needs in Meriden, Wallingford and Cheshire. At 7.5 percent, Meriden's unemployment rate exceeds the State average of 6.1 percent. Meriden has lost close to 2,000 jobs since 2000. The unemployment rate rose in all of these towns except for Wallingford which gained over 2,800 jobs since 2000. The poverty rate is below the State average in Wallingford, Cheshire and Southington, but at 11 percent, Meriden's rate for individuals in poverty exceeds the State's rate of 7.9 percent.
- **Food and Utilities** – During the information gathering period of this needs assessment, food, gas and heating oil prices were increasing and there was concern over whether the social service community will be able to meet these needs in these communities. Requests to United Way 2-1-1 for information related to utility assistance increased 25 percent for these four towns in fiscal year 2008 compared with fiscal year 2007. Requests to 2-1-1 for information about food assistance increased 17 percent during that same time period.
- **Shelter** – The availability of affordable housing was identified as a top five need in all four communities, with 65 percent of survey respondents rating the availability of affordable housing as fair or poor. Focus group discussions on housing included the need for emergency housing options. Participants in Wallingford cited the need for a year-round emergency shelter. Participants in Meriden called for the development of emergency housing options.
- **Transportation** – Access to public transportation was also identified as a top five need in all four communities. In Cheshire and Southington, it was the number one need. Sixty-one percent of survey respondents rated public transportation as fair or poor.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Public Safety** – The need for safe, crime-free neighborhoods was identified as the top need in Meriden. A 2007 Community Survey in Meriden found that many residents do not feel safe in the City’s parks and in the downtown business area after dark.
- **Social Service Support** – The needs assessment survey sought to identify whether there are barriers to receiving support from social service agencies. The survey found transportation, language, long waiting lists for service and program fees to be among the biggest barriers.

Health

- **Access to Health Care** – Focus group participants discussed issues that tend to be universal in nature when it comes to accessing health care; the limited options for those who are uninsured or underinsured and the challenge of meeting rising deductibles and co-pays for those who are insured.
- **Health Issues** – A review of some major health issues provides a further portrait of these communities. The health issues discussed include, top five causes of death, infant mortality, heart disease, cancers, diabetes, asthma, accidents, births to teens, childhood obesity and childhood dental care.

Children and Youth

- **Population and Poverty** – There are close to 40,000 children and youth in these 4 towns, comprising about a quarter of the population. Meriden has the highest rate of children living in families below the federal poverty level.
- **Early Education** – In all four of these communities at least 82 percent of children in Kindergarten have had preschool experience. Focus group discussions centered on the need for more infant and toddler care and more affordable child care.
- **Education** – While most of these towns exceed the State average in terms of standardized test scores, disparities exist for racial and economic minorities. More than half of those responding to the needs assessment survey report that opportunities aimed at helping children and youth succeed exist in these towns. However, it was suggested in interviews and focus group discussions that more after-school programs are needed, especially for younger teens with emotional or mental health challenges.

Older Adults

- **Transportation** – While transportation options exist in all towns for older adults, focus group discussions centered on the need for more on-demand transportation options that offer door-to-door service and include personal assistance for those needing help with stairs or carrying packages.
- **General Supports for Older Adults** – Among the programs mentioned that are needed to help older adults maintain independence and stay in their homes are adult day care programs, financial literacy programs and a directory of the services available to older adults. There was also a call for programs that support older adults who are caring for grandchildren.