

**AN UPDATE OF  
MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH  
COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT**

**PREPARED FOR:  
MAT-SU AGENCY PARTNERSHIP**



Research-Based Consulting

Juneau  
Anchorage

**JULY 2005**

# **AN UPDATE OF MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT**

**PREPARED FOR:  
MAT-SU AGENCY PARTNERSHIP**

**FUNDED BY:  
ALASKA DIVISION OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH  
ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH TRUST AUTHORITY  
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UNITED WAY OF MAT-SU  
VALLEY HEALTHY COMMUNITIES PROGRAM**

**PREPARED BY:**



**ANCHORAGE • JUNEAU**

**JULY 2005**

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## Introduction

The Mat-Su Agency Partnership (MAP), a community coalition of Matanuska-Susitna health, social, and education service agencies, contracted with McDowell Group, Inc., an Alaska research and consulting firm, to update a community assessment of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (Mat-Su). The last community assessment was conducted in 2002.

This updated assessment is based on a methodology called *COMPASS II®*, *Increasing the Capacity of People to Build Better Communities*. This community-building methodology was sponsored and developed by United Way of America. The concept behind *COMPASS II®* is that fostering a stronger Mat-Su community will take individuals, associations, businesses, and organizations “who are motivated to work with others to improve the social and economic conditions in which people live.”

The community assessment is intended to provide the Mat-Su Borough with an evaluation of the borough’s current status and priorities in broad terms, as well as an information resource for future, more detailed, planning.

This project is a result of financial support from several statewide and regional organizations and agencies, including Alaska Division of Behavioral Health, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Alaska Railroad Corporation, ConocoPhillips, Mat-Su Agency Partnership, Mat-Su Borough, Matanuska Valley Federal Credit Union, Rasmuson Foundation, Rotary Clubs of Palmer, Wasilla Noon and Wasilla Sunrise, United Way of Mat-Su, and Valley Healthy Communities Program.

## Methodology

Similar to the 2002 assessment, the McDowell Group used various methods to research the Mat-Su Borough’s community challenges and the assets available to meet those challenges. These methods included:

- A household survey: A telephone survey of 504 randomly selected households throughout the Borough was conducted. The 2005 instrument was similar to the 2002 instrument, allowing for some benchmarking and direct comparison of most survey results.
- A business survey. A survey was mailed to 523 Mat-Su businesses. Almost 17 percent of the businesses responded to the survey. The same survey instrument was used in the 2002 study. However, direct comparison of survey results was not appropriate given the self-selection bias of mail surveys.



- Key informant interviews. Interviews were conducted with a cross-section of 21 community leaders and representatives. While direct comparisons could not be made between the key informant research of 2002 and 2005, some common themes did emerge.
- Secondary data. Socioeconomic data from secondary sources provided a context for understanding the diversity within a rapidly changing Mat-Su Borough. Where new data was available, comparisons were made with socioeconomic data found in the 2002 study.
- Facilitated discussion groups. Unlike the 2002 study, the 2005 study included facilitated discussion group research. This research approach provided an opportunity to qualitatively probe further into the strengths and challenges affecting the needs or roles of particular populations in the Mat-Su.

## Socioeconomic Context

***Mat-Su is the fastest growing region in Alaska; the region continues to experience dramatic population shifts, including rapid growth and aging trends.***

- Between 1980 and 1990, Mat-Su's population more than doubled (123 percent). Between 1990 and 2000, the borough's population increased by 49 percent, averaging a 4.1 percent increase per year. The average growth rate increased to 4.3 percent between 2000 and 2004. For comparison, the Municipality of Anchorage saw an average annual growth rate of 1.5 percent between 2000 and 2004.
- Like the rest of Alaska and the nation, Mat-Su is experiencing an aging trend. In 2003, the average age of a Mat-Su resident had increased to 35 years, up from 31 years in 1990. The most rapid growth is found in the age group of over 45 years.
- The number of people who live in Mat-Su yet work in Anchorage has swelled. By 2000, a third of Mat-Su residents (35 percent) commuted to Anchorage compared with 28 percent in 1990.
- While three-quarters of Mat-Su jobs are in the private sector, 65 percent of total jobs were in the service sector. Trade (retail and wholesale), transportation, and utilities provide more than half of the service sector jobs.
- While the per capita income of Mat-Su residents grew 17 percent between 1998 and 2002, the average of \$28,100 (2002) is still below the statewide average of \$32,800. By comparison, the average Municipality of Anchorage's 2002 per capita income was \$37,400.
- The Mat-Su Borough School District is Alaska's second largest school district. School enrollment increased from 1991 until it peaked in 2003 at 14,400 students. The District is anticipating an additional 800 students in the 2005/2006 school year.

## **Matanuska-Susitna Borough Communities**

***The Matanuska-Susitna Borough is as large as West Virginia and includes a diverse combination of communities.***

- The City of Wasilla and the City of Palmer make up the “core” area of Mat-Su. These are the two largest communities in Mat-Su and are home to 16 percent of the borough’s population. People who live in the areas immediately surrounding Wasilla and Palmer tend to think of themselves as part of these communities, and make up an additional 59 percent of the Mat-Su population.
- Big Lake and Houston, located just northwest of Wasilla, represent 6 percent of the Mat-Su population. This area is a popular vacation and weekend destination for Anchorage residents yet these communities also serve as bedroom communities for commuters to Anchorage, Wasilla and Palmer.
- Willow, Trapper Creek, and Talkeetna are located as far as 73 miles northwest of Wasilla. These communities’ combined population accounts for 6 percent of the Mat-Su population. The per capita and household incomes in these communities are lower than borough-wide averages, and the percent of households below the poverty level is consistently much higher within these communities, as much as twice the borough-wide average. The median ages in these communities exceed the borough’s average age by as much as ten years.
- Sutton-Alpine and Chickaloon, located northeast of Palmer, represent a small percent (2 percent) of Mat-Su’s population. The Chickaloon area has a large concentration of Alaska Natives, more than three times the borough average.

## **Household Needs Assessment**

A total of 504 Mat-Su households were surveyed by telephone. Respondents were asked about their perceptions of community strengths, as well as community and individual household challenges.

### **Perceptions of Community Strengths**

***Generally, Mat-Su residents were significantly more positive than they were in 2002 when asked to rate their level of agreement with statements about their community’s unity, supportiveness, and commonality.***

**Table 1**  
**Community Strengths (Community Household Survey)**  
*Using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree, please describe whether you think the following statements apply to your community.*

	Percent of Total that Agreed (1 or 2 rating)	
	2005	2002
Come together to help each other out when they have a problem.	66%	14%
Trust each other.	42	21
Come together to work on common goals.	42	22
Get together formally and informally (for example at picnics or meetings).	42	19
Participate together in community activities with people who are different from themselves.	41	19
Consider the same things important.	33	29

Residents who volunteer and believe that they can affect change in their community are important forces in community-building.

- Just over half of Mat-Su households (55 percent) have members who volunteer in their community. This is a slight decline (60 percent) from 2002. Religious groups, schools and children or youth activities are the top three most popular arenas for volunteer involvement.
- Six out of ten residents believed they have significant or some opportunities to affect what happens in their community. Only one out of ten believed they had no opportunity.

### **Perceptions of Community and Household Challenges and Needs**

*Mat-Su residents believe the two major challenges facing their communities are alcohol abuse and lack of affordable medical care. These were the same two top concerns in 2002.*

- Next in community importance are methamphetamine abuse, adequate public transportation, and poor roads and traffic conditions.

*Similar to the 2002 assessment, at the household level, the top concerns for borough residents center on affordable health care. Mat-Su households are most concerned about lacking the money to get medical insurance, visit their doctor or buy prescription medications.*

### **Health and Well-Being**

*While tobacco use appears to be down, use of marijuana has risen slightly since 2002. Yet, few residents accessed substance abuse treatment services in the past year.*

- Mat-Su households that have members who use tobacco products appears to be declining; 35 percent in 2005 versus. 41 percent in 2002.
- Marijuana use appears to be increasing slightly. In 2005, 40 percent of Mat-Su households had members who have used marijuana at some point in their lives (versus 37 percent in 2002). Twenty-two percent of respondents said they have used this drug within the past year (versus 15 percent in 2002).
- Only 4 percent of residents reported that members of their household had used substance abuse treatment services in the last year.

***Only one in ten households does not have health insurance coverage, yet affordability of health care is still a top household concern.***

- Eleven percent of households have no health insurance coverage, down from 15 percent in 2002. Six out of 10 households in Mat-Su have some form of private insurance coverage. Military insurance increased more than six times from 2002, indicating an influx of military families into the Mat-Su.

***Suicidal thoughts still affect 6 percent of Mat-Su households and one out ten households had members who accessed mental health treatment services.***

- Consistent results between 2002 and 2005 (6 percent) were found regarding household members considering suicide in the last year.
- Eleven percent of residents reported that members of their household had used mental health treatment services in the last year.

## **Business Community Assessment**

Eighty-seven Mat-Su businesses responded to a survey that focused on ways in which businesses help to improve their communities through employee and community support.

### **Employee Support**

***Similar to the results in 2002, many Mat-Su businesses provide benefits to their employees; however, it appears that there is significant room for benefit coverage.***

- Two out of five business respondents offer health care benefits to their employees (41 percent).
- Employee Assistance Programs are available from 18 percent of these businesses.
- Eleven percent of responding businesses offer childcare services.

## Community Support

***Most businesses continue to provide support to their community through local purchasing, local hiring, charitable giving (cash and in-kind), and support for volunteerism.***

- All responding business purchased their goods and services locally whenever possible.
- Thirty-nine percent of responding businesses attempt to hire Mat-Su residents who are making the transition from welfare to work.
- Seventy-eight percent of business respondents make charitable contributions, with 52 percent giving more than \$1,000 annually.
- Businesses provide their own employees to help community groups. This includes providing employees with specific skills to help with group activities (39 percent), material and equipment (34 percent), and meeting spaces for community groups (30 percent).
- Seven out of ten responding businesses allow employees time off to volunteer. The median volunteer contribution is 80 hours per year per business.

***Most Mat-Su businesses appear to be involved in their community support programs. Some respondents are interested in becoming more involved in their community.***

- Three-quarters of responding businesses were involved in promoting economic development in the Mat-Su (75 percent), promoting volunteerism (63 percent) and good health (61 percent), and expanding business and industrial development in the Mat-Su (61 percent).
- Responding businesses are most interested in increasing neighborhood safety (22 percent) and becoming involved in beautifying community spaces (21 percent). Fostering racial harmony (20 percent) and designing a plan for community development (20 percent) are also of high interest.

## Community Key Informant Assessment

Executive interviews about community strengths and challenges were conducted with 21 key informants representing a range of Mat-Su communities and community interests.

### Community Strengths

***Several community strengths were identified by key informants. These strengths focused on the increasing awareness of community and household health, and social service needs, collaborative efforts between service providers, and tremendous opportunity resulting from population and economic growth.***

- There are several issues that bring the community together. Informants said their communities often rally around issues such as community planning, land use, and education.
- Several agencies or organizations were cited as playing critical roles in community building. These included: the Mat-Su Agency Partnership (MAP), United Way of Mat-Su, Chambers of Commerce, Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanas Clubs, and Love INC, a partnership of Mat-Su churches that provide assistance to Mat-Su residents.

## Community Challenges

***Rapid population growth, the increased demand for services, the geographic size of the Mat-Su Borough, and the lack of availability of services throughout the Mat-Su were the most significant challenges identified by the key informants.***

- Informants identified the most pressing health needs, including access to primary care, emergency services, mental health, substance abuse treatment, and affordable health care. A few informants noted the lack of detoxification centers in the borough.
- Many informants wanted to see more law enforcement and effective programs to deal with the emerging methamphetamine problem.
- Sexual assault (and its connection to substance abuse issues) was raised as a significant issue.
- Informants had concerns about programs that serve both ends of the age spectrum, citing adequate support for schools and youth activities, and senior services as important challenges.
- Affordable housing and the increasing problem of homelessness were mentioned as pressing issues by several informants.

## Discussion Group Assessments

The MAP steering committee wanted to enhance the research process in the 2005 assessment by adding facilitated discussion group research. This research supplemented the other study research components, providing an opportunity to qualitatively probe further into the strengths and challenges affecting particular populations in the Mat-Su. MAP members were invited to sponsor a discussion group regarding issues affecting their client base or areas of particular interest to the MAP membership. Five discussion groups were conducted. About 13 people attended each discussion group.

The discussion groups were focused around the following issues:

### **Youth Residential Treatment for Substance Abuse**

This group addressed two main areas:

- Youth residential treatment needs in the Mat-Su Valley
- Possible responses to those needs

Alaska Family Services sponsored this discussion group research.

### **Persons with Developmental Disabilities**

This discussion focused on the needs of Mat-Su Borough residents with developmental disabilities, and those with developmental disabilities and co-occurring mental health and/or substance abuse issues. The meeting addressed two main areas:

- Key trends and gaps in services
- Opportunities for improved services and collaboration

The discussion highlighted the fact that people with developmental disabilities face the same social service and economic issues as other Mat-Su residents though this challenge is compounded by their disabilities.

MAP, Mat-Su Services for Children and Adults, and Access Alaska sponsored this discussion group research.

### **Senior Services**

This discussion focused on the critical needs experienced by seniors today and the implications of important trends - such as the rapid growth in the number of seniors in the Mat-Su Borough, rising costs of care, increases in the number of seniors with complex needs, and reductions in public support - for senior programs.

Particular priorities include:

- Funding for support services to keep people living at home as long as possible, including senior centers, and home and community-based care.
- Funding to care for difficult cases, for example those with co-occurring disorders.
- Further development of senior centers as the access point for senior services and a nexus for resource referral and services.

- Better data on senior needs and utilization of services.

MAP, Palmer Senior Citizens Center, Alzheimer's Disease Resource Agency of Alaska, and Wasilla Area Seniors sponsored this discussion group research.

### **Early Childhood**

The purpose of this discussion group was to bring together a cross-section of the Mat-Su early childhood community to:

- Identify common issues and themes affecting the early development of Mat-Su's youngest children
- Explore interconnections and ideas for mutual action among service providers
- Identify data that supports the need for and impact of programs
- Identify shared priorities for the early development sector as a whole.

CSS Early Learning sponsored this discussion group research.

### **Faith-Based Services**

The Mat-Su faith-based community is involved in a wide variety of services, with an emphasis on providing food, clothing, and other emergency assistance. The discussion group identified a number of potential priorities for the faith-based community. The participants identified two broad types of intervention or assistance:

- Breaking cycles of decline and despair
- Providing help in crisis situations, especially where lives may be a stake.

In addition, the group recognized that community awareness of both the need for and the availability of their services is a critical component of all their activities.

MAP, Love INC, and Crossroads Community Church sponsored this discussion group research.

## **Summary**

The information from this assessment will continue to form the basis for much ongoing discussion by the Mat-Su community as a whole. The assessment identified both common goals and commonly perceived challenges in the Mat-Su. It also benchmarked shifts in community concerns since 2002.

As stated in the 2002 assessment, this research is one step in a longer process to enhance quality of life and economic status for Mat-Su residents.



The next steps envisioned by the Mat-Su Agency Partnership, through the *COMPASS II*® community process, include:

- Creating a powerfully stated vision for the future of the community
- Selecting priority issues and establishing targeted community outcomes
- Building an outcome-focused community impact plan
- Implementing actions to achieve targeted community outcomes
- Assessing the effectiveness of the process and making improvements, as appropriate.

Similar to its follow-up from the 2002 assessment study, MAP members are planning to publicly present the results of the 2005 findings. MAP also intends to evaluate any shifts in priority areas and their committee assignments to address these shifts.

## Introduction

In 2002, the Mat-Su Agency Partnership (MAP) contracted with McDowell Group to conduct a community assessment of the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Borough. The assessment was largely based on a community-building program called *COMPASS II®*, *Increasing the Capacity of People to Build Better Communities*, sponsored and developed by United Way of America. The program is driven by the concept that building communities requires individuals, associations, businesses, and organizations:

...who are motivated to work with others to improve the social and economic conditions in which people live. Also, it is intended for those who are striving to reform systems and policies and to facilitate people having easy access to the full range of resources they need to lead fulfilling and productive lives.<sup>1</sup>

After the 2002 assessment was completed, MAP members held facilitated community meetings and made several presentations about the assessment throughout the borough. A community forum meeting was also held in Wasilla with the purpose of evaluating the assessment and determining priority areas for MAP to focus on. Five priority areas were identified:

- Health insurance and access to health care
- Education
- Economic development
- Behavioral health
- Community planning

At subsequent MAP meetings, the membership confirmed these priority areas and committees were formed to define tasks to address them.

Because of the continued rapid growth in the Mat-Su Borough, MAP elected to update the community assessment. In 2005, McDowell Group was asked to update the assessment. The purpose of the update was to gather information about any changes in community strengths, challenges and issues over the past three years.

While the community assessment process provides detail from the residents and businesses of the Mat-Su Borough, it is only the third phase in a comprehensive eight-phase *COMPASS II®* plan. Phases IV through VIII include: creating a community vision; prioritizing key issues; building a community impact plan; implementing actions to achieve targeted outcomes; and assessing and monitoring the process, making improvements, as appropriate.

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<sup>1</sup> Compass II, *Guide to Community Building*, Section 2 page 3.

This project is a result of financial support from several statewide and regional organizations and agencies, including Alaska Division of Behavioral Health, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Alaska Railroad Corporation, ConocoPhillips, Mat-Su Agency Partnership, Mat-Su Borough, Matanuska Valley Federal Credit Union, Rasmuson Foundation, Rotary Clubs of Palmer, Wasilla Noon and Wasilla Sunrise, United Way of Mat-Su, and Valley Healthy Communities Program.

This report is organized to present a socioeconomic context of the diversity and rapidly changing Mat-Su area, and information gathered from the household and business surveys, and discussion group and key informant research.

## **Role of Mat-Su Agency Partnership**

For 18 years, MAP has met on the second Thursday of every month. During these meetings, approximately 30-40 representatives from health, education and social service organizations gather for a scheduled agency presentation and sharing of program information. The meetings draw consistent and regular participation from the communities of Talkeetna, Knik, Sutton, Chickaloon, Wasilla, Palmer, and Anchorage. A list of current MAP membership is found in Appendix D.

The members of MAP have chosen to remain a loose coalition rather than incorporating as a nonprofit because the membership values the way that MAP's structure fosters relationship-building, provides an ongoing system for networking, and strengthens communication between various sectors in the community.

MAP got its start in 1988 when a task force was organized to address the serious difficulties facing children and families in Mat-Su and the limited human service providers available to help. The task force evolved to become MAP, a coalition of health, education and social service organizations. MAP developed community-wide priorities for service expansion and communicated those priorities to elected officials and state government decision-makers. It also assessed the needs of Mat-Su children and families, surveying key informants and the community in 1993-1994.

MAP also addressed the issue of teen suicide, organizing the community and bringing together leaders from all major community agencies to develop suicide prevention, peer helper, and crisis response systems, which were implemented in Mat-Su high schools in 1990.

MAP spent several years seeking support and funding for a shelter to serve homeless and runaway youth in Mat-Su. By the mid 1990s, Kids are People provided safe homes and the Dorothy Saxton Shelter for youth ages 12-17 was up and running. During this time, MAP also focused on youth crime and violence by supporting the establishment of a multi-service youth facility that included detention beds, day treatment programs, and interagency transitioning and support services.

In 1997, MAP participated in a COMPASS Institute in Anchorage, and completed another needs assessment that led to the development of Mat-Su Info, an online database of health and human services. In 1998, the Partnership collaborated successfully with the State of Alaska, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to provide rural outreach for Denali KidCare, the children's health insurance program.

In 2002, MAP contracted with McDowell Group to conduct a community assessment based on the *COMPASS II*® community-building program. After the assessment was completed, MAP conducted a series of public meetings throughout the borough to provide an overview of the assessment results and gather feedback from the community. Each of these community meetings was facilitated by consultants from The Foraker Group and all interested persons were invited to attend.

The *2002 Community Needs Assessment* was presented at Sutton Elementary School in Sutton, Mid Valley Senior Center in Houston, Valley Hospital Medical Center in Wasilla, and Upper Susitna Senior Center near Talkeetna. Attendance ranged from 8 to 41 participants. During all forums, a scribe was present to take notes that were later transcribed and reviewed with a focus on keywords as indicators of subject matter interest in each of the four communities.

Presentations were also made to the Palmer City Council, Wasilla City Council, and the Mat-Su Borough, all of whom provided funding support for the 2002 assessment. In addition, 1,000 hard copies of the assessment were printed and distributed around the state.

A final community forum was held in Wasilla at a local restaurant. Dinner was provided and approximately 75 people attended. The purpose of this forum was to evaluate all of the assessment data and determine five priority areas for MAP to focus on. The priority areas included: health insurance and access to health care, education, economic development, behavioral health, and community planning. MAP membership confirmed these priority areas and formed committees to define tasks to address each of these priority areas.

Since 2002, the Mat-Su continued to grow rapidly, dynamically affecting the needs for health and social services. Because of these effects, MAP elected to update the community assessment in 2005, evaluating what shifts have occurred in Mat-Su household and community strengths and challenges.

Upon completion of the 2005 assessment, MAP members are planning to present the assessment findings at community forums, and evaluate any shifts in priority areas and committee assignments.

## Methodology

The methodological design for this project is based on the research program designed by *COMPASS II*<sup>®</sup> and laid out in its *Guide to Community Building*. The Mat-Su Agency Partnership Steering Committee was established to guide McDowell Group in the research process. The 2005 Committee comprised representatives from United Way of Mat-Su, Mat-Su Regional Medical Center, Sunshine Community Health Center, Valley Health Communities Program, CCS Early Learning, Alaska Family Services, Nugen's Ranch, Mat-Su Services for Children and Adults, Rasmuson Foundation, and Palmer Senior Citizens Center. They reviewed methodology used in 2002, and collaborated with McDowell Group in the refinements of the household and business survey instruments. They also were involved in the development of a key informant list and assisted in organizing five discussion groups.

McDowell Group met regularly with and submitted monthly progress reports to the Mat-Su Agency Partnership Steering Committee to report research milestones, and receive direction. At several Mat-Su Agency Partnership monthly meetings, the study's project manager presented oral progress reports.

## Socioeconomic Community Profiles

Brief community profiles were prepared to provide a context of the socioeconomic dimensions of the eight distinct communities selected in Mat-Su. Economic, employment, health, housing, education, and population data for each community was collected and compared with Mat-Su Borough data.

Several sources of data were used, including the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (ADOL), the U.S. Census Bureau and the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED).<sup>2</sup> Additional information was obtained from the Alaska Agricultural Statistical Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission.

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<sup>2</sup> ADOL population estimates, which are calculated for years between the census years, are based on Permanent Fund applications and other data. ADOL population estimates are as of July 1 each year. Census figures are based on actual counts, and are as of April 1 of each year. Two different methodologies and two different "count" periods can result in differing population estimates for a given community. The analysis of Census data is further complicated by the redefining of census tracts for the 2000 Census, meaning that the geographic area called "Knik" and "Sutton" in 1990 are not delineated as the same geographic areas in 2000. "Sutton-Alpine," "Knik-Fairview," and "Knik River" were added as new census areas in 2000. Buffalo Soapstone, Farm Loop, Fishhook, Gateway, Glacier View, Lake Louise Lakes, Petersville, Point MacKenzie, Tanaina, and Y (Sunshine) have also been added to the list of Census Designated Places since 1990. The result is that the population data is most accurate at the regional or sub-regional level versus the community level.

## Community Household Survey

A survey of 504 randomly selected Mat-Su households was conducted by telephone during March 2005. A sample representative of the population was selected for eight distinct communities, as defined by the Steering Committee. These eight communities included: Wasilla, Knik/Fairview, Meadow Lakes, Palmer, Butte/Lazy Mountain/Knik River, Big Lake/Houston, Willow/Trapper Creek/Talkeetna, and Sutton/Chickaloon/Glacier View. Outlying communities such as Chase, Skwentna, Lake Louise, and Susitna were not included in this study because their populations are too small to gather a representative sample within the available budget scope.

The *COMPASS II*® community household survey used in 2002 was reviewed and refined. Most often, questions remained consistent between the 2002 and 2005 version, allowing for benchmarking of results. Some questions used in 2002 were not asked in 2005 (largely to decrease the length of the survey), and some new questions were added.

While the sample was selected to proportionately represent the population within these communities, it was interesting to discover that while some households may live in Meadow Lakes or Knik-Fairview communities, as defined by census boundaries, they considered themselves to be residents of Wasilla. Similarly, many residents of Butte/Lazy Mountain/Knik River identified with Palmer. Therefore, while the number of completed surveys for Meadow Lakes, Knik-Fairview, Butte/Lazy Mountain/Knik River may not be individually representative of their population, they are proportionately representative when combined to a larger population area that identifies with Wasilla or Palmer. The survey's maximum margin of error at a 95 percent confidence level is  $\pm 4.5$  percent.

**Table 2**  
**Community Household Survey Sample**

	Sample Size	% of Total	Self-identified Residency % of Total
City of Wasilla	155	31%	40%
Knik/Fairview	60	12	5
Meadow Lakes	45	9	4
City of Palmer	87	17	28
Butte/Lazy Mountain/Knik River	38	8	6
Big Lake/Houston	60	12	7
Willow/Trapper Creek/ Talkeetna/Sunshine	53	11	9
Sutton/Chickaloon/Glacier View	17	3	2
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Subtotals do not add up to totals due to rounding

## Business Survey

The *COMPASS II*® business survey was customized for the Mat-Su business respondent. The survey was mailed to 523 businesses representing membership in the Greater Wasilla, Palmer, Big Lake, and Talkeetna Chambers of Commerce. Seventeen percent (87 businesses) responded to the survey. The study team used the same survey instrument used in 2002, capturing information on business employment practices, community support and leadership, interest in further community involvement, and perceptions of community strengths and challenges.

**Table 3**  
**Business Survey Sample**

	Sample Size	% of Total
Wasilla (also including Knik/Fairview, Meadow Lakes)	44	51%
Palmer (also including Butte/Lazy Mountain/Knik River)	30	34
Big Lake/Houston	3	3
Willow/Trapper Creek/Talkeetna	10	11
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100%*</b>

\*Subtotals do not add up to totals due to rounding

## Key Informant Interviews

The Mat-Su Agency Partnership Steering Committee provided a list of suggested community representatives to interview for this project. The list was reviewed by the study team and 21 community representatives were selected and interviewed. The selection was based on geographic distribution and community involvement and interest.

Each informant was asked a series of questions about their perspectives on their own community's strengths and weaknesses, to identify community needs in health, social, and education services, and provide suggestions on how to address these needs. A list of key informants can be found in Appendix B.

## Discussion Groups

Five discussion groups were facilitated as part of this study. The purpose of the discussion group research was provide more in-depth information about issues affecting Mat-Su's seniors, persons with developmental disabilities, young children, faith communities, and youth residential treatment for substance abuse.

These groups were often co-sponsored by organizations that had a special interest in their own community issues. A list of discussion group participants in found in Appendix C.



# **MATANUSKA-SUSITNA SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE**

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In this section, brief socioeconomic profiles are provided for the Mat-Su Borough and distinct Mat-Su communities to provide socioeconomic context to the survey findings. Detailed statistics for the Borough and individual communities can be found in Appendix A.

## **Overview**

The Mat-Su Borough, located about 40 miles northeast of Anchorage, encompasses more than 25,000 square miles of land and water.

There are three incorporated cities within the Mat-Su Borough: the first class City of Wasilla, the home rule City of Palmer, and the second class City of Houston. Wasilla has most recently begun to change its transportation infrastructure to accommodate the rapid growth that distinguishes the community as the economic center of the Mat-Su Borough. Palmer retains its importance as the historical and governmental center of the Mat-Su Borough. Houston borders the Parks Highway and the railroad, and is a popular destination for recreational activities.

There are 25 unincorporated regions or Census Designated Places in the Borough. Most of the communities within the Borough, including Willow, Farm Loop, Fishhook, Gateway, Houston, Big Lake, Meadow Lakes, Knik-Fairview, Lazy Mountain, Knik River, Lakes, Sutton-Alpine, Tanaina, and Chickaloon are located within 30 miles of either Palmer or Wasilla. The most distant communities from the economic center of the Mat-Su Borough – Talkeetna and Trapper Creek – are about 55 to 75 miles north of Wasilla.

## **Key Socioeconomic Trends**

Several diverse communities make up the Mat-Su area. While each community has experienced socioeconomic shifts, there are some overall key trends.

- There was strong population growth in the region for the last two decades. From 1990 to 2000, Mat-Su's population increased by 19,639 persons. Population estimates from 2000 to 2004 suggest that the region has grown again by 10,826 persons, or 4.3 percent annually. These increases earned the Mat-Su Borough the distinction of having the fastest population growth in Alaska.
- Communities or areas that experienced the most growth from 2000 to 2004 were Knik-Fairview (+2,174 people), Tanaina (+1,272), and Meadow Lakes (+1,126).



- Some communities within the Mat-Su Borough experienced slow growth or declines in the beginning years of 2000. The communities of Chase, Petersville, Skwentna, and Susitna all experienced declines from 2000.
- Much like the rest of Alaska, there is a notable aging trend occurring in the Mat-Su Borough. In 2003, the average age had increased to 34 from 31 in 1990.
- When examining age group distribution patterns, the Mat-Su Borough area has experienced faster growth in age groups over 45 relative to statewide averages. School age persons (those from 0 to 20 years) are increasing in numbers while their percentage of the total population has declined.
- In 1990, 28 percent of workers who lived in the Mat-Su Borough commuted to Anchorage. By 2000, that percentage had grown to 35 percent.
- There were 20,556 Mat-Su households in 2000, a 53 percent increase over the 13,394 households existing in 1990.
- From 2000 to 2003, Mat-Su employment increased by 2,642 jobs, mostly in the private sector. Government jobs increased by 314 overall, while federal government employment decreased slightly. Wages increased by \$115.7 million during this time.

## Demographics

### Population

In the decade of the 1980s, there was a 123 percent rate of growth in the Mat-Su Borough as the population expanded from 17,816 in 1980 to 39,683 in 1990. The subsequent decade also experienced growth, as the population increased by 49 percent to a population of 59,322 in 2000. Comparatively, this rate of growth in the 1990s was the highest found in Alaska, where the average rate of growth was only 15 percent for the same period. Growth has continued for the beginning of 2000 with an 18.2 percent change to an estimated 70,148 persons in 2004. The average annual percent change in population from 2000 to 2004 was 4.3 percent for the Mat-Su Borough. This compares to the Municipality of Anchorage which saw a 1.5 percent average annual change during the same timeframe.

**Table 4  
Matanuska Susitna Borough Population  
(1990, 2000 through 2004)**

<b>Community</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>Number Change '00 - '04</b>
<b>Matanuska-Susitna Borough</b>	<b>39,683</b>	<b>59,322</b>	<b>61,704</b>	<b>64,291</b>	<b>67,526</b>	<b>70,148</b>	<b>10,826</b>
Big Lake CDP	1,477	2,635	2,613	2,702	2,889	2,912	277
Buffalo Soapstone CDP	--	699	724	730	740	744	45
Butte CDP	2,039	2,561	2,735	2,773	2,919	2,963	402
Chase CDP	38	41	33	35	34	27	(14)
Chickaloon CDP	145	213	265	265	280	298	85
Farm Loop CDP	--	1,067	1,082	1,164	1,161	1,138	71
Fishhook CDP	--	2,030	2,179	2,233	2,335	2,606	576
Gateway CDP	--	2,952	3,117	3,213	3,305	3,554	602
Glacier View CDP	--	249	238	250	250	266	17
Houston City	697	1,202	1,160	1,262	1,351	1,368	166
Knik ANVSA	272	--	--	--	--	--	--
Knik-Fairview CDP	--	7,049	7,636	7,997	8,561	9,223	2,174
Knik River CDP	--	582	624	635	676	626	44
Lake Louise CDP	--	88	101	91	111	99	11
Lakes CDP	--	6,706	6,812	6,923	7,053	7,467	761
Lazy Mountain CDP	838	1,158	1,177	1,192	1,202	1,233	75
Meadow Lakes CDP	2,374	4,819	5,040	5,274	5,579	5,945	1,126
Palmer city /9	2,866	4,533	4,581	4,840	5,267	5,197	664
Petersville CDP	--	27	25	19	14	15	(12)
Point MacKenzie CDP	--	111	210	200	201	216	105
Skwentna CDP	85	111	94	88	95	81	(30)
Susitna CDP	--	37	40	36	38	31	(6)
Sutton-Alpine CDP	308	1,080	1,109	1,144	1,159	1,154	74
Talkeetna CDP	250	772	796	861	856	844	72
Tanaina CDP	--	4,993	5,260	5,597	5,865	6,265	1,272
Trapper Creek CDP	296	423	405	404	425	436	13
Wasilla City	4,028	5,469	5,517	5,959	6,387	6,109	640
Willow CDP	285	1,658	1,665	1,719	1,813	1,856	198
Y CDP	--	956	996	993	1,038	1,072	116
Remainder of Borough	23,685	5,101	5,470	5,692	5,922	6,403	1,302

CDP = Census Designated Place ANVSA = Alaska Native Village Statistical Area

Source: U.S. Census for 1990 and 2000 population data. 2001 through 2004 are population estimates provided by the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section, Demographics Unit.

The Knik-Fairview CDP experienced the greatest number increase in population since 2000 with an additional 2,174 persons. Tanaina CDP and Meadow Lakes CDP also saw increases of more than 1,000 persons. The Mat-Su Borough grew overall by 10,826 persons since the 2000 Census. Chase, Petersville, Skwentna, and Susitna lost population since the 2000 Census.

According to Census 2000, the Mat-Su Borough's ethnic mix is mostly Caucasian (88 percent) with Alaska Natives representing 6 percent of the population and less than 1 percent of the population was African American, Asian, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

### **Age and Gender Distribution**

The Mat-Su Borough underwent significant changes in the age structure of its population between 1990 and 2000. The proportion of children age 9 and under declined 5.1 percent, the proportion of residents age 25 to 39 declined 9 percent, and all other age classes increased. The portion of population aged 10 to 24 increased by 3.4 percent, and the population over 40 increased 10.6 percent. The largest increases in population that occurred were in the age groups between 45 and 60 years and in the age group older than 75 years.

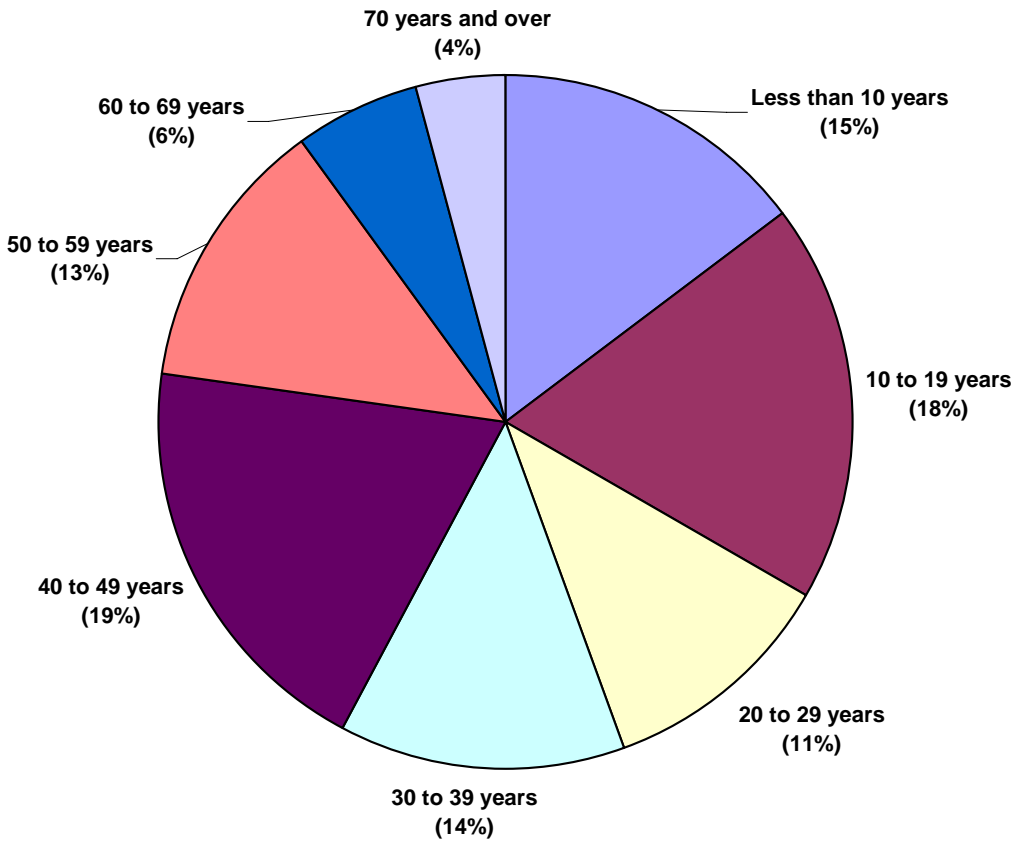
The most recent population and age estimates for the Borough show the largest age group in the Borough is the 40 to 49 year-old group with 19 percent of the population followed by the 10 to 19 year-old group with 18 percent of the population.

2003 population estimates show that almost 52 percent of the Mat-Su Borough population is male while 48 percent is female.

Borough-wide, the median age increased from 31 years in 1990 to 34.5 years in 2003. The median age in the Mat-Su is typically higher than the statewide median which for 2003 was 33 years.

The number of Mat-Su senior citizens is projected to triple over the next twenty years.

**Figure 1**  
**Matanuska-Susitna Borough Age Distribution**  
**(July 1, 2003)**



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section, Demographics Unit.

**Table 5  
Matanuska Susitna Borough and Alaska Population Projections  
(2008, 2013 through 2018)**

	Mat-Su	Mat-Su	Alaska	Alaska
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>2008 Projections</b>				
Under 5 years	6685	9%	56,430	8%
5 to 17 years	16,231	22	147,811	21
18 to 64 years	45,993	62	436,479	63
65 years and older	5,154	7	52,298	8
Total	74,063	100%	693,018	100%
<b>2013 Projections</b>				
Under 5 years	8196	9%	63,465	9%
5 to 17 years	19,415	22	151,044	21
18 to 64 years	52,486	60	449,788	61
65 years and older	7,154	8	69,555	10
Total	87,251	100%	733,852	100%
<b>2018 Projections</b>				
Under 5 years	9,477	9%	68,459	9%
5 to 17 years	24,311	24	163,411	21
18 to 64 years	58,481	57	452,262	58
65 years and older	10,487	10	92,356	12
Total	102,756	100%	776,488	100%

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section, Demographics Unit.

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

## Employment

The Mat-Su Borough has been affected greatly by its proximity to Anchorage. The number of Mat-Su residents who commute to Anchorage increased by 10 percent between 1990 and 2000. According to the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 35.4 percent of the Valley residents work in Anchorage.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Alaska Economic Trends - January 2003*, The Matanuska-Susitna Borough, An Economic Profile by Neal Fried, Labor Economist.

Total employment in the Mat-Su Borough grew by 2,642 workers from 2000 to 2003. Total wage and salary employment was 15,003 workers in 2003.<sup>4</sup> Total earnings of wage and salary workers grew by almost \$116 million during this same timeframe. According to the Census 2000, there are 2,734 self-employed workers in addition to the wage and salary workers in the Borough. Of the 255 Borough residents holding commercial fishing permits in 2003, 163 fishermen actually fished and had total gross fishing revenues of \$7.2 million.<sup>5</sup> About half of these earnings derive from the salmon fleet.

Private sector employment makes up 77.6 percent of the workers in the Valley with the government sector comprising the balance. Government workers, while making up 22.4 percent of the workers, account for 28.4 percent of the total earnings. Average monthly wages for Borough residents in 2003 was \$2,524. Government workers earn significantly more than that, however, with federal workers bringing in \$4,434 in average monthly wages, local government workers make \$3,156, and state government workers earn \$3,083.

The private sector offers the lion's share of jobs in the Borough with the service industries making up 65 percent of total jobs while earning 57.4 percent of the total wages. Trade, transportation, and utilities along with health care jobs are the major sub-categories in this group providing employment to more than half of these workers. Construction has grown by almost 400 jobs since 2000 as the Borough continues to experience high rates of growth.

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<sup>4</sup> Employment and Earnings Reports – various years, from the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section.

<sup>5</sup> Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission – 2003 preliminary data.

**Table 6**  
**Matanuska-Susitna Borough Employment and Earnings - 2003**

	Employment	Earnings	Percent of Total Employment	Percent of Total Earnings
<b>Total Industries</b>	<b>15,003</b>	<b>\$ 454,390,662</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Government</b>	<b>3,357</b>	<b>\$ 129,105,160</b>	<b>22.4</b>	<b>28.4</b>
Federal	182	9,674,918	1.2	2.1
State	952	35,236,010	6.3	7.8
Local	2,223	84,194,232	14.8	18.5
<b>Private Ownership</b>	<b>11,646</b>	<b>\$ 325,285,502</b>	<b>77.6</b>	<b>71.6</b>
Goods Producing	1,887	64,406,316	12.6	14.2
Natural Resource and Mining	120	3,847,423	0.8	0.8
Construction	1,546	53,881,032	10.3	11.9
Manufacturing	221	6,677,861	1.5	1.5
Service Providing	9,759	260,879,186	65.0	57.4
Trade, Transportation, Utilities	3,355	89,848,307	22.4	19.8
Information	498	23,738,151	3.3	5.2
Financial Activities	494	16,057,047	3.3	3.5
Professional, Business Services	836	27,361,334	5.6	6.0
Educational and Health Services	2,293	69,563,205	15.3	15.3
Leisure and Hospitality	1,760	24,658,946	11.7	5.4
Other Services	523	9,652,196	3.5	2.1

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development

The top three employment sectors – trade, transportation, and utilities, educational and health services, and local government – retain the largest number of employees. The fourth largest industry employer, leisure and hospitality, is a fairly new industry classification that attempts to capture employment in the tourism industry.

These industry sectors are apparent when examining the top employers in the Borough. The Mat-Su Borough School District is the largest employer in the Borough, with more than three times the number of jobs of the second leading employer, Valley Hospital Association.

**Table 7  
Mat-Su Borough Top 25 Employers in 2003**

Company Name	2003 Average Employment
Mat-Su Borough School District	1,742
Valley Hospital Association	492
Wal-Mart Associates Inc.	377
Safeway Inc. (Carrs)	325
Matanuska Susitna Borough	266
Fred Meyer Stores Inc.	230
Advanced Concepts in Education	213
Matanuska Telephone Association Inc.	191
University of Alaska	160
Mat-Su Services for Children and Adults Inc.	151
Alaska Department of Corrections	148
First Student Services LLC	146
Job Ready Inc.	133
Nye Frontier Ford Inc.	114
Alaska Home Care Inc.	109
Alaska Department of Health and Social Services	106
Matanuska Electric Association	102
Palmer-Wasilla Health System LLC	93
City of Wasilla	92
CIRI Alaska Tourism Corp.	88
Tony Chevrolet Buick Inc.	88
GCI Communication Corp.	86
Spenard Builders Supply Inc.	84
Alaska Department of Natural Resources	83
Sears Roebuck and Co.	81

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Although the agriculture industry does not represent a significant portion of employment within the Mat-Su Borough, the industry leads the state in agricultural production value. From 1996 to 2003, Mat-Su farmers produced an average of \$9.8 million in agriculture value, accounting for an average of 60 percent of the total agricultural production within Alaska.<sup>6</sup> The Mat-Valley has 40.2 percent of the state total for lands in crops. The Valley leads the state in potato production with 78 percent of the production and value for all of Alaska. In 2003, the Matanuska Valley produced 64 percent of the value of statewide crops and 73 percent of the value of livestock statewide.

<sup>6</sup> Alaska Agricultural Statistics Service 2004.



## Public Transportation

The Denali, Glenn, and Parks Highways all transect the Mat-Su Borough. Most communities in the Mat-Su are accessible from the highway. Seasonal bus service provides transportation to Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Canada. The Alaska State Railroad bisects the Borough, and stops in Wasilla and Talkeetna on its way from Anchorage to Mount McKinley and Fairbanks. At least nine public airports for small aircraft are scattered across the Borough. In 2003, there were three airports in the Mat-Su Borough reporting enplanements: Skwentna, Palmer, and Talkeetna.

Mat-Su Community Transit (MASCOT) is a private, non-profit transportation system, which operates a fixed route, para-transit, and coordinated service. Established in August 1999, MASCOT numbers have risen steadily from 125 rides during its first month in operation to 65,000 riders in calendar year 2004. There are currently 12 buses in the fleet able to accommodate 26 passengers and the door-to-door para-transit vehicle that can accommodate 10 passengers. MASCOT routes are open to the public and cover the communities of Wasilla, Palmer, Big Lake, Houston, and Knik/Fairview while also running a commuter route into the Anchorage area five times a day. In addition, MASCOT contracts with Alaska Valley Cab Company to provide "24/7" transportation service to elderly and people with disabilities on the Medicaid Choice Program living in the borough's core area.

In addition, there are many social service agencies (such as senior and early learning centers) that offer personalized transportation services for their clients.

## Housing

According to Census 2000, there were 20,556 households in the Mat-Su Borough, an increase of 53 percent over the 13,394 households in 1990. Almost 79 percent of the occupied housing units in the Valley are owner-occupied with the balance renter occupied. According the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation annual rental survey, the average rent for a home in the Mat-Su is \$984 per month while the average rent for an apartment is \$707.

Borough-wide, 8.3 percent of all households lack complete plumbing that includes hot and cold piped water, a flush toilet, and a bathtub or shower located in the housing unit. The number of households that lack complete kitchens (e.g., a sink with piped water, a range or cook top and oven, and a refrigerator) and phone service is 7.3 and 3.5 percent respectively. These percentages do not necessarily represent economic and infrastructure conditions solely, but may also represent choice in the level of services found in each household.

## Household Income

Per capita income in the Mat-Su Borough rose from \$24,053 in 1998 to \$28,128 in 2002, a 17 percent increase. Wage and salary earnings comprise 70 percent of total personal income for Mat-Su Valley residents while transfer payments make up 16 percent and dividends, interest, and rents make up the balance of 14 percent.

**Table 8**  
**Matanuska-Susitna Borough Personal Income Evaluation, 2002**

Personal Income	2002
Per capita personal income (dollars)	\$ 28,128
Total Personal income (millions of dollars)	\$1,830,767
Net Earnings	1,279,267
Transfer Payments	294,530
Dividends, interest, and rent	256,970
<b>Based on Population of:</b>	<b>65,088</b>

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis.

The per capita personal income of Mat-Su Borough residents was well below the statewide average of \$32,799 in 2002. The Municipality of Anchorage, at \$37,442, is well above the statewide average making the differential between the Valley and the Municipality quite large and partially explains the desire of Valley residents to commute to Anchorage for employment.

**Table 9**  
**Per Capita Personal Income, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Alaska, and Other Boroughs, 1999 -2002**

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Percent of State (under)
<b>Matanuska-Susitna Borough</b>	<b>24,053</b>	<b>\$ 24,227</b>	<b>\$ 25,905</b>	<b>\$ 27,743</b>	<b>\$ 28,128</b>	<b>(14.2)</b>
State of Alaska	27,560	28,100	29,863	31,837	32,799	-
Municipality of Anchorage	31,436	32,109	33,691	36,406	37,442	14.2
Fairbanks North Star Borough	25,179	25,889	27,832	28,894	30,081	(8.3)
City and Borough of Juneau	32,488	32,480	34,772	35,285	36,086	10.0

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts.

In 1990, 9.4 percent of the total Mat-Su population lived below the poverty threshold. This percentage was comparable to the percent of all Alaskans that were below the poverty threshold (9.0 percent). However, by 2000, the percent of Mat-Su population that lived below the poverty threshold grew to 11 percent, slightly higher than the state average of 9.4 percent.

## **Government**

The Mat-Su Borough is a second-class borough with an elected mayor and assembly. The Borough Manager is the chief administrator. Administrative duties of the Borough include tax assessment and collection, education, planning and zoning, parks and recreation, ports and harbors, emergency services, transportation systems, air pollution control, and historic preservation. Mat-Su Borough taxes include a 13.7 mills property tax rate and a 5 percent bed tax. The Mat-Su Borough does not assess a sales tax. According to the Alaska Department of Commerce Community and Economic Development, bed tax receipts for the Borough increased from \$121,778 in 1995 to \$716,992 in 2004.

### **Emergency Services**

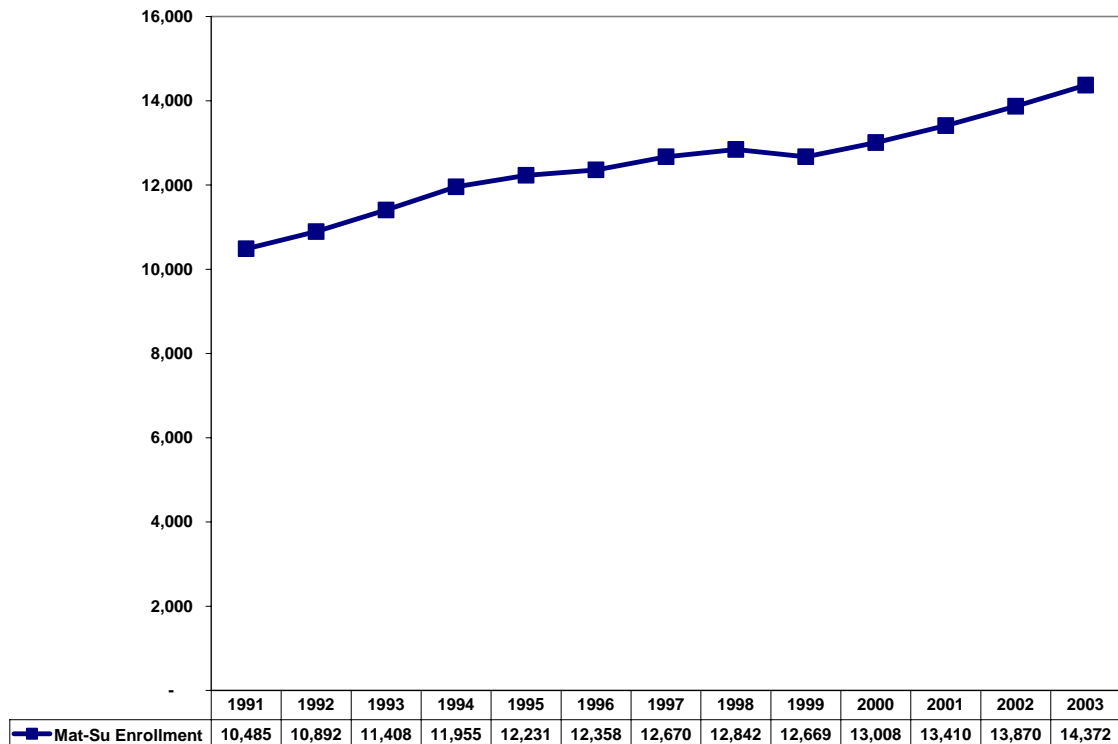
The Borough provides fire service that is augmented by volunteer fire departments within communities such as Sutton, Chickaloon, Houston, and Palmer. Except for the local police forces in Wasilla and Palmer, Mat-Su communities are provided police service by the Alaska State Troopers.

## **Education**

Mat-Su is the second largest school district in Alaska, behind Anchorage. The District contains 37 schools ranging in enrollments from 13 to more than 1,100 students. Its educational facilities include 18 elementary schools, 7 middle schools, 6 high schools, and 6 K-12 schools. Included in this count are 3 charter schools, 3 alternative schools, and 2 correspondence schools. Due to a lack of reporting requirements, it is unknown how many students are enrolled in private and home schools in the Mat-Su.

Since 1991, the percentage of school-aged children has decreased in relation to other age groups. However, school enrollment has increased annually since 1991, peaking in 2003 at 14,372 students. Expectations are for an additional 800 students in the 2005/2006 school year.

**Figure 2  
Historical Matanuska-Susitna Borough School Enrollment  
(1991 through 2003)**



Note: Enrollment is counted as of October 1 of the school year.  
Source: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development.

Student to teacher ratios for the Mat-Su Borough in 2003 were 18.1 students to each teacher.<sup>7</sup> This compares to the statewide average of 16.8 students to each teacher and may reflect the burgeoning population in the Borough and the difficulty of constructing schools in a timely manner.

## Health and Vital Statistics

In 2002, diseases of the heart were the leading cause of death for residents of the Mat-Su Borough. This is a change from 2000 and 2001 when cancer was the leading cause of death in the Borough. Cancer and accidents rank in the second and third positions for leading causes of death in 2002.

The Mat-Su Borough's unintentional injuries and motor vehicle accidents occur at higher rates than the state's average.

<sup>7</sup> Student to teacher ratios are not to be confused with classroom size. Statistics on classroom size are not maintained by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development.

The birth rate in the Mat-Su of 12.8 per 1,000 people is considerably lower than the state average of 15.4 for 2002. The Borough-wide teen birth rate of 28 births per 1,000 people is also significantly below the state's average teen birth rate of 41.7 per 1,000 people.

**Table 10**  
**Health Indicators for Mat-Su, Alaska, and U.S., 2002**

	Mat-Su Number of Events	Mat-Su Rate <sup>2</sup>	Alaska Number of Events	Alaska Rate	U.S. Rate <sup>4</sup>
<b>Mortality Statistics<sup>1</sup></b>					
All Causes	288	754.2	3034	800.9	845.3
Cancer	53	116.9	711	189.7	193.5
Lung Cancer	22	49.9	197	51.2	54.9
Diseases of the Heart	63	182.7	586	173	240.8
Coronary Heart Disease (Ischemic)	45	124.2	414	118.2	170.8
Cerebrovascular Disease (Stroke)	15	55.8*	157	55.4	56.2
Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease	12	36.3*	140	47	43.5
Diabetes	6	**	85	21.7	25.4
Homicide	4	**	42	6.2	6.1
Suicide	15	21.5*	131	20.9	10.9
Teen Suicides (15-19)	0	0	13	24.5	
Unintentional Injuries	43	69.6	346	59.2	36.9
Motor Vehicle Accidents <sup>4</sup>	14	26.4*	110	18.8	15.7
<b>Birth Statistics</b>					
Births to Residents	833	12.8	9945	15.4	13.9
Fertility (15-44)	833	59.3	9945	70.5	64.8
Teen Births (15-19)	82	28	1068	41.6	43
Young Teen Births (15-17)	30	15.3	318	19.7	23.2
<b>Prenatal Care Statistics<sup>5</sup></b>					
First Trimester Care	630	77.5	7650	80.5	83.7
Adequate Prenatal Care	580	74.4	5776	64.5	74.6
<b>Birth Outcomes<sup>5</sup></b>					
Pre-term Delivery	78	9.4	973	9.8	12.1
Low Birth Weight	43	5.2	577	5.8	7.8
<b>Infant Statistics</b>					
Infant Mortality	4	**	55	5.5	7

Source: The Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

1 Age-Adjusted rates are per 100,000 U.S. year 2000 standard population.

2 Rates based on fewer than 10 occurrences are not reported.

3 Birth statistics for these outcomes are percents, not rates.

4 US year 2002 rates are preliminary.

\* Rates based on fewer than 20 occurrences are statistically unreliable and should be used with caution.

\*\* Rates based on fewer than 10 occurrences are not reported.

## Community Profiles

### City of Wasilla

The City of Wasilla is located 43 miles north of Anchorage, approximately 11.5 miles west of Palmer. Wasilla is a first-class city incorporated in 1974. The city levies a 5 mills property tax. Property tax revenues in 2004 were nearly \$274,000. In addition the city has a sales tax of 2.5 percent. Sales tax revenue in Wasilla increased from \$4 million in 1995 to over \$7 million in 2004.

The population of Wasilla accounts for nearly 9 percent of the total Mat-Su Borough population. According to Census 2000, the highest percentage of the population in Wasilla falls within the zero to 19 years age bracket, with the second largest concentration within the 35 to 59 years age bracket. This disposition to a younger age bracket is reflected in the median age in Wasilla being 4.4 years lower than the Borough-wide average of 34.5 years.

According the Census 2000, the largest concentration of employment lies within the service industry, with the second largest concentration of residents being employed within the wholesale and retail trade industry. Private wage and salaried workers make up 68.8 percent of the workforce, and 22.6 percent of the workforce is employed by the local, state, and federal government.

Wasilla is highly accessible. The Parks and Glenn Highways provide quick and easy access, explaining why more than 30 percent of the workforce in Wasilla commutes to Anchorage. MASCOT provides public bus service within Wasilla and connects to other communities in the Mat-Su Borough. The Alaska Railroad stops in Wasilla, providing passengers and goods rail access to communities from Seward to Fairbanks. The City of Wasilla operates an airport that provides scheduled commuter and air taxi service. Floatplanes can land at any number of lakes within the vicinity.

According to Census 2000, family households represent almost 69 percent of the total households in Wasilla. The rate of owner-occupied households, however, is more than 20 percent less than the Borough-wide average of 78.9 percent. The median value of homes is \$10,000 more than the median value of \$125,800 within the Borough. Almost 99 percent of homes within the community of Wasilla have complete plumbing, kitchens, and receive phone service. The greater number of the homes within Wasilla has their own wells and septic systems. The city operates a water and sewer system.

### City of Palmer

The City of Palmer is located 42 miles northeast of Anchorage, 11.5 miles east of Wasilla. Palmer in a first class city incorporated in 1951. The city levies a 3 mills property tax, and a 3 percent sales tax.

The population in Palmer represents 7.4 percent of the total population for the Mat-Su Borough. According to Census 2000, the largest concentration of the population falls within the zero to 19 years age bracket. The median age for Palmer is 28.8, well below the Borough-wide median age of 34.5 years. Although the majority of Palmer's population is white, approximately 8.2 percent is Alaska Native.

According to Census 2000, wage and salary workers represent the largest percentage of employment in Palmer. There is a larger than average proportion of workers employed by government entities, which is explained by the importance of Palmer as the center of government activity in the Mat-Su Borough. The service and the wholesale and retail trade industries are the first and second largest in the community, employing 47.1 and 15.9 percent of the workforce, respectively.

Palmer is located on the Glenn Highway, and local roads provide adequate access to the community. MASCOT provides public bus service to Palmer residents and connections to other Mat-Su communities. There is a municipal airport in Palmer that provides access to private and chartered air services. There are seven additional private airstrips within the vicinity, as well as lakes for floatplane use. The Alaska Railroad's presence in Palmer provides for the transporting of cargo from Seward, Whittier, and Anchorage.

All homes in the City of Palmer are plumbed, and less than 1 percent of homes lack a complete kitchen or do not receive phone service. Although the percentage of owner-occupied homes is 14 percent lower than the Borough average of 78.9 percent, the percentage of family households is similar to the Borough average.

### **Wasilla-Palmer Surrounding Area**

The Wasilla-Palmer Region includes the surrounding communities of Gateway, Lakes, Farm Loop, Fishhook, Meadow Lakes, Tanaina, Knik-Fairview, Point MacKenzie, Butte, Lazy Mountain, and Knik River. These communities largely identify themselves either with Wasilla or with Palmer. This area serves as the largest concentration of households and population whose employment is found in Wasilla, Palmer, and Anchorage.

The combined population of these communities accounts for about 59 percent of the total population in the Mat-Su Borough. According to Census 2000, Palmer, Knik-Fairview, and Knik River all have higher than average Alaska Native populations. Every community has the largest percentage of the population falling within the 35 to 59 years age bracket. The median age for Butte, Lazy Mountain, and Knik River are consistently three years above the Borough-wide median age. The rest of the communities are for the most part comparable to or slightly lower than the Borough-wide median age of 34.5 years.

According to Census 2000, the primary industry in this region is services. Government is consistently the second largest employer of residents within these communities.



All of these communities are accessible by any number of the numerous local roads as well as the Parks and Glenn Highways. MASCOT provides public bus service. There are regularly scheduled commuter and air taxi services available at the Wasilla and Palmer airports. The Alaska Railroad passes through Wasilla, and there is a deep-water port located in Point MacKenzie. There is floatplane and airplane access across this region at the many lakes and private airstrips.

The majority of the homes in the areas surrounding Wasilla and Palmer have their own individual wells and septic tanks. Some areas have privately operated systems, or have access to the Borough system. According to Census 2000, the communities that have the highest percentage of households that lack complete plumbing are Buffalo Soapstone (24 percent), Lazy Mountain (16 percent), and Meadow Lakes (12 percent). Communities most lacking in complete kitchens are Buffalo Soapstone (15 percent), Meadow Lakes (11 percent), and Lazy Mountain (9 percent). The community that has the greatest lack of phone service is Knik River at 6 percent.

There are grade schools located in Knik-Fairview, Tanaina, Lakes, Meadow Lakes, Gateway, and Butte. There is a middle and high school located in the community of Lakes, as well as additional schools in Wasilla and Palmer that also serve these surrounding communities.

## **Big Lake and Houston**

The City of Houston and the community of Big Lake are located approximately 13 miles west of Wasilla. The City of Houston is a second-class city incorporated in 1966. The city levies a 3 mills property tax. The populations of these two communities represent 6 percent of the Mat-Su Borough population. Although the majority of the population is white, compared to Borough-wide averages, there is an increased presence of Alaska Natives within Houston and Big Lake.

The highest concentration of population lies within the 35 to 59 years age bracket. In Big Lake, this concentration explains a median age that is more than three years higher than the Borough-wide average.

The higher than average amounts of private wage and salaried workers living within these communities is explained through the growing popularity of these communities serving as bedroom communities to Wasilla, Palmer, and Anchorage. However, there is a higher than average presence of self-employed workers in the communities of Big Lake and Houston.

The service industry is prominent within Houston and Big Lake. Wholesale and retail trade, as well as agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting and mining, employ higher than average rates within the two communities.

Both Big Lake and Houston are accessible from the Parks Highway. MASCOT provides public bus service in these communities. Additionally, state-owned gravel airstrips and floatplane sites are present in Big Lake, and the Alaska Railroad and a privately owned turf airstrip are located in Houston.



According to Census 2000, the majority of the homes have their own wells and septic systems. However, both communities have much larger rates of households that lack complete plumbing, kitchens, and phone service. This can in part be explained by the fact that Big Lake and Houston are popular vacation and weekend destinations, and many homes in the area serve that purpose with lower than standard services.

### **Willow, Trapper Creek, Petersville, Talkeetna, and Y (Sunshine)**

Willow, Trapper Creek, Petersville, Talkeetna, and Y (Sunshine) are northwest of Wasilla, Big Lake, and Houston. Willow is 27 miles from Wasilla; Y, and Talkeetna about 57 miles, and Trapper Creek and Petersville are about 73 miles from Wasilla. The total population of these communities accounts for 6 percent of the total Mat-Su Borough. The majority of the population in these communities is white, and falls within the 35 to 59 years age category. The median ages within these communities exceed the Borough-wide average by as much as ten years, as is the case in Trapper Creek. The community that has the least difference in median ages is Talkeetna, where the median age still exceeds the Borough-wide average by five years.

Although private wage and salaried workers represent the largest type of employment in these areas, the percentage of self-employed workers is consistently higher in these areas compared to the Mat-Su Borough average.

According to Census 2000, the service industry represents the largest component of employment in these communities. In the case of Y (Sunshine), it is over twice that of the Mat-Su Borough average. Except for Trapper Creek, the wholesale and retail trade sectors employ the most people within these communities. In Trapper Creek, agriculture, forest, fishing, hunting and mining, and transportation, communication, and utilities sectors all tied for the second most important employer. The high level of agriculture, forest, fishing, hunting and mining presence within this community, almost triple the Mat-Su Borough average, somewhat reflects the importance of subsistence in this community that is largely removed from the Wasilla-Palmer region. The percent of individuals below poverty is consistently much higher within these communities, as much as twice the Borough-wide average.

All five communities are accessible from the Parks Highway. There are numerous airstrips, both private and public, throughout this region, including an ERA Aviation-owned heliport in Trapper Creek, a Department of Natural Resources-owned airstrip in Willow, and a Bureau of Land Management airstrip in Talkeetna. The region also has numerous lakes, making it highly accessible to floatplanes. An Alaska Railroad depot is located in Talkeetna.

The majority of the homes in this region have their own individual wells and septic tanks. Most homes have complete plumbing and kitchens, and phone service. The notable exception is in Trapper Creek, where 58 percent of the residents lack complete plumbing, 38 percent lack a complete kitchen, and 28 percent lack phone service, consistently the highest when compared to Willow, Talkeetna, and Y.

### **Sutton-Alpine and Chickaloon**

Sutton-Alpine and Chickaloon are located 11 and 26 miles northeast of Palmer. The combined population of these two communities represents approximately 2 percent of the total population in the Mat-Su Borough. The percent of population that is Alaska Native, largely found in the Chickaloon area, is more than three times the Borough average. The highest percent of the population falls within the 35 to 59 years age bracket. The median age in Sutton exceeds the Borough-wide average by three years, while the median age in Chickaloon exceeds the Borough-wide average by almost ten years.

The increased presence of self-employed and government workers relative to Borough-wide averages explains the decreased amount of private wage and salary employment. The poverty rate in Sutton is consistent with the Borough-wide average while the poverty rate in Chickaloon is only one quarter the Borough-wide average.

According to Census 2000, the service industry employs the highest percentage of workers within these two communities. However, public administration in Sutton employs twice the Borough-wide average due to the presence of government-supported jobs at the nearby correctional facilities. In Chickaloon, public administration employment is more than three times the Borough-wide average, as the Chickaloon Tribal Village Council is the largest employer in the community.

Both communities are accessible from the Glenn Highway. There is a gravel airstrip located at the Jonesville Mine, and additional private airstrips are located in the area.

The rate of owner-occupancy is higher than average in Sutton and Chickaloon, however, fewer of the households are family households compared to the Borough. The majority of households in Chickaloon have complete plumbing, kitchens and phone service. While the same is true for Sutton, the community has almost twice the average Borough-wide rate of households that lack complete plumbing and kitchens. Most homes within these two communities have their own wells and septic tanks.

A grade school is located in Sutton. Middle and high school students are transported by bus to Palmer. A village school for kindergarten through grade 12, operated by the Chickaloon Tribal Village Council, is located in Chickaloon.

## **Chase, Skwentna, Lake Louise, Susitna, and Glacier View**

Several communities are outside this study's scope because their populations are too small to get a representative sample. <sup>8</sup>However, a brief profile of these communities is provided. The communities of Chase, Skwentna, Lake Louise, Susitna, and Glacier View have a total population of 504, or 0.7 percent of the total population of the Mat-Su Borough. The residents of these communities often lead subsistence lifestyles, and employment tends to be seasonal. Except for Glacier View and Lake Louise, the other communities are not accessible by road. Chase is only accessible by the Alaska Railroad, Susitna by floatplane and boat, and Skwentna by plane or snow machine. Glacier View and Lake Louise are both accessible from the Glenn Highway and state-owned gravel airstrips located in each community, as well as floatplane access.

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<sup>8</sup> In the household survey, there were a few respondents that self-identified Glacier View as their area of residency.

# COMMUNITY HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

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A community household survey was conducted in eight communities or regions in the Mat-Su Borough. The *COMPASS II*® program provided a generic household survey that was then customized for the Mat-Su area. This survey benchmarked the 2002 survey results with some new baseline questions.

Information was gathered from 504 households about several subject areas. These included:

- perceptions of community strengths,
- perceptions of community challenges and issues,
- the incidence of specific challenges and issues residents' households, and
- demographic information.

## Perceptions of Community Strengths

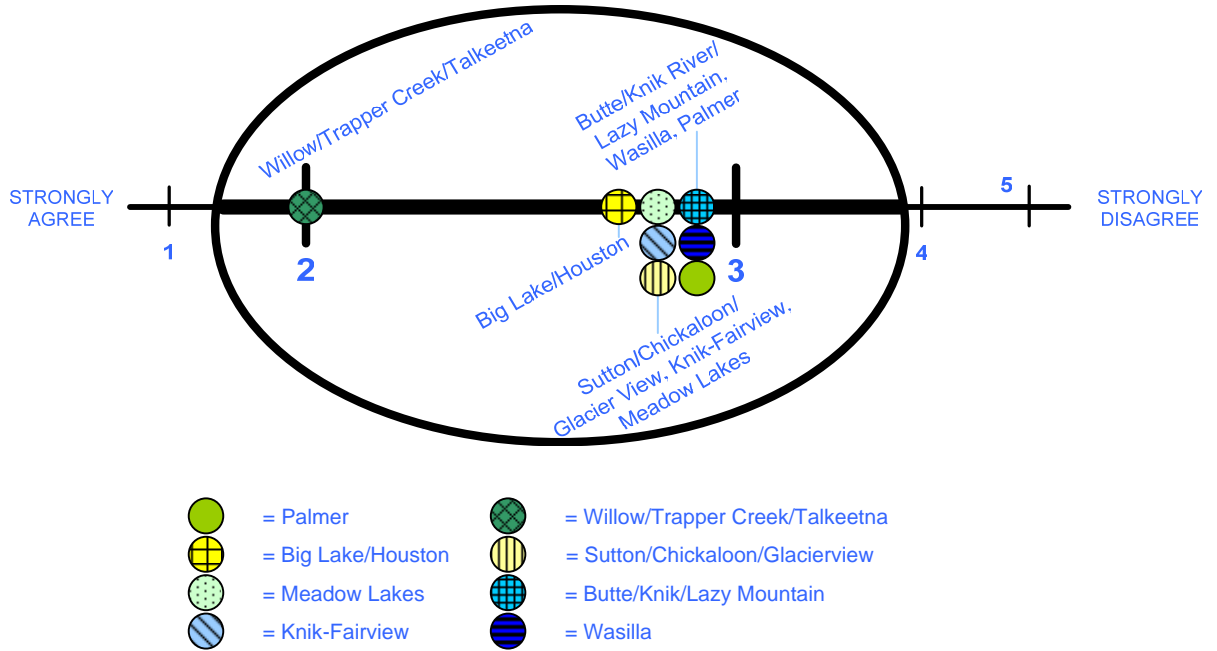
***Generally, a minority of residents agreed with positive statements about community supportiveness and unity. However, perceptions appear to be significantly more positive than found in the 2002 assessment.***

In order to assess their perceptions about the strength of their communities, residents were asked questions about the ways members of their communities gather, support and interact with one another. They were also asked if they volunteer in their communities, and if they feel that they are able to affect what happens in their communities.

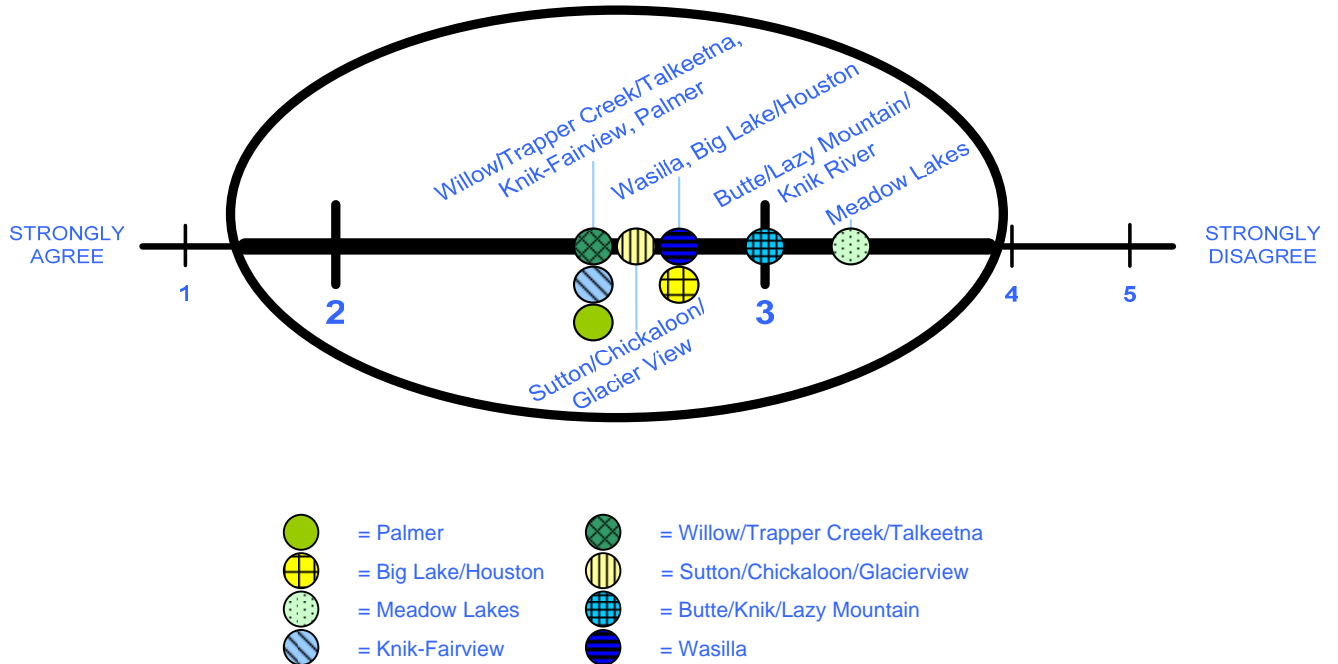
- Two-thirds of residents agree that people in their communities come together to help each other out when they have a problem.
- Four out of ten residents agreed that people in their communities trust each other, come together to work on common goals, gather informally and formally, and participate in activities with people who are different from themselves.
- Only a third of residents agreed that people in their communities consider the same things to be important.
- In all cases, perceptions of community supportiveness and unity appear to be growing significantly more positive since the 2002 assessment.



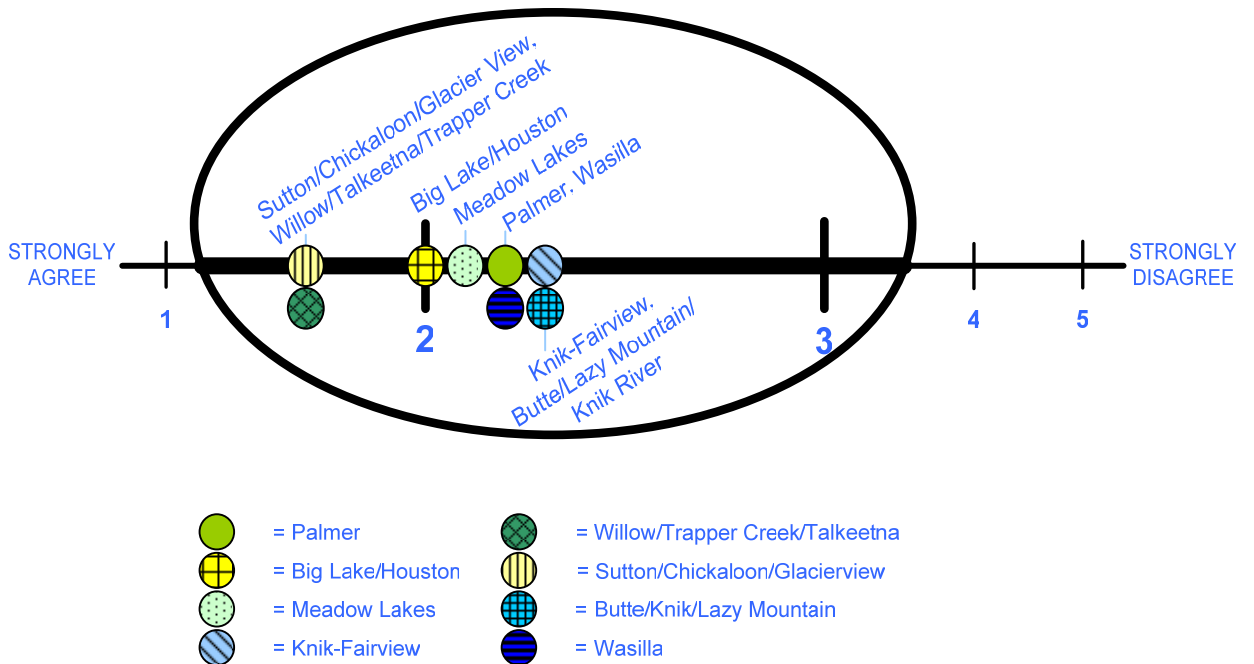
**Figure 4**  
**People in your community participate together in community activities with people who are different from themselves.**  
 Using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.



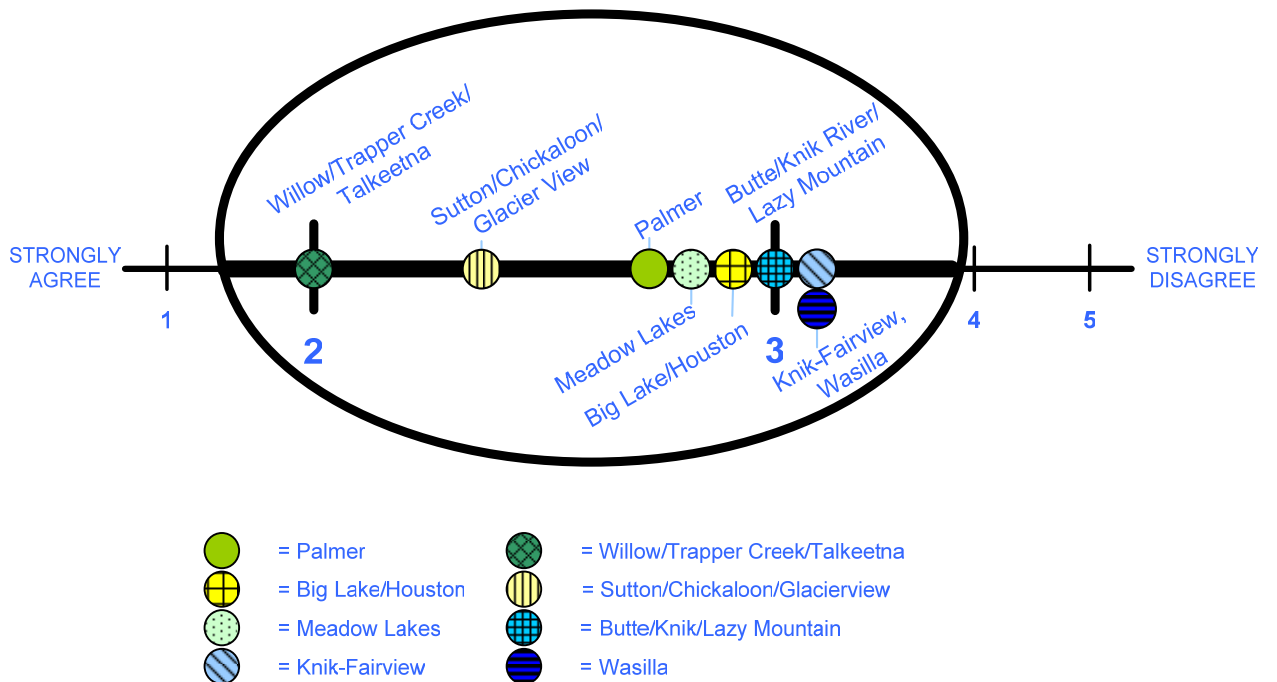
**Figure 5**  
**People in your community trust each other.**  
 Using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.



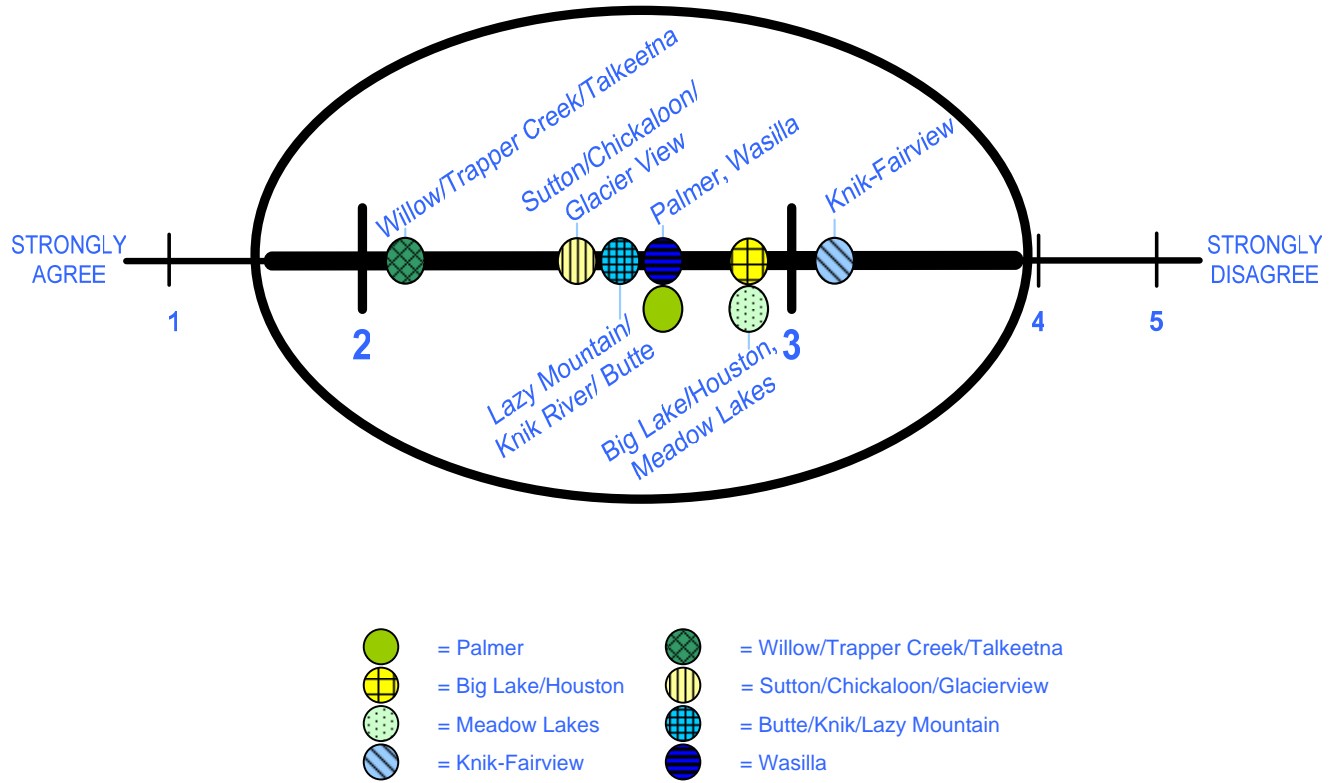
**Figure 6**  
**People in your community come together to help each other out when they have a problem.**  
 Using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.



**Figure 7**  
**People in your community gather together formally or informally, for example at picnics or meetings.**  
 Using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.



**Figure 8**  
**People in your community come together to work on common goals.**  
 Using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.





## Volunteerism

**The majority of residents said they had volunteered in the previous six months.**

- Volunteer efforts were most likely to be directed toward religious groups, schools, and children's or youth activities.
- Volunteerism fell off slightly from 2002 to 2005.

**Table 12  
Community Volunteerism, by Activity and Year**

Volunteered in the past six months?	Percent	
	2005	2002
Yes	55%	60%
No	45	40
Don't Know	--	<1
If yes, what activities do you volunteer for?	2005	2002
Religious group	25%	25%
School	23	30
Children or youth activities	21	25
Civic group, such as Kiwanis	13	12
Sports group	11	13
Hospital or health group	11	12
Groups that work with lower-income, seniors or homeless people	10	10
Human service organizations	8	14
Neighborhood group, such as neighborhood association	8	14
Environmental group	7	15
Cultural group, such as music group/museum	7	4
Refused	7	2
Others	4	17
Political group or candidate	3	5

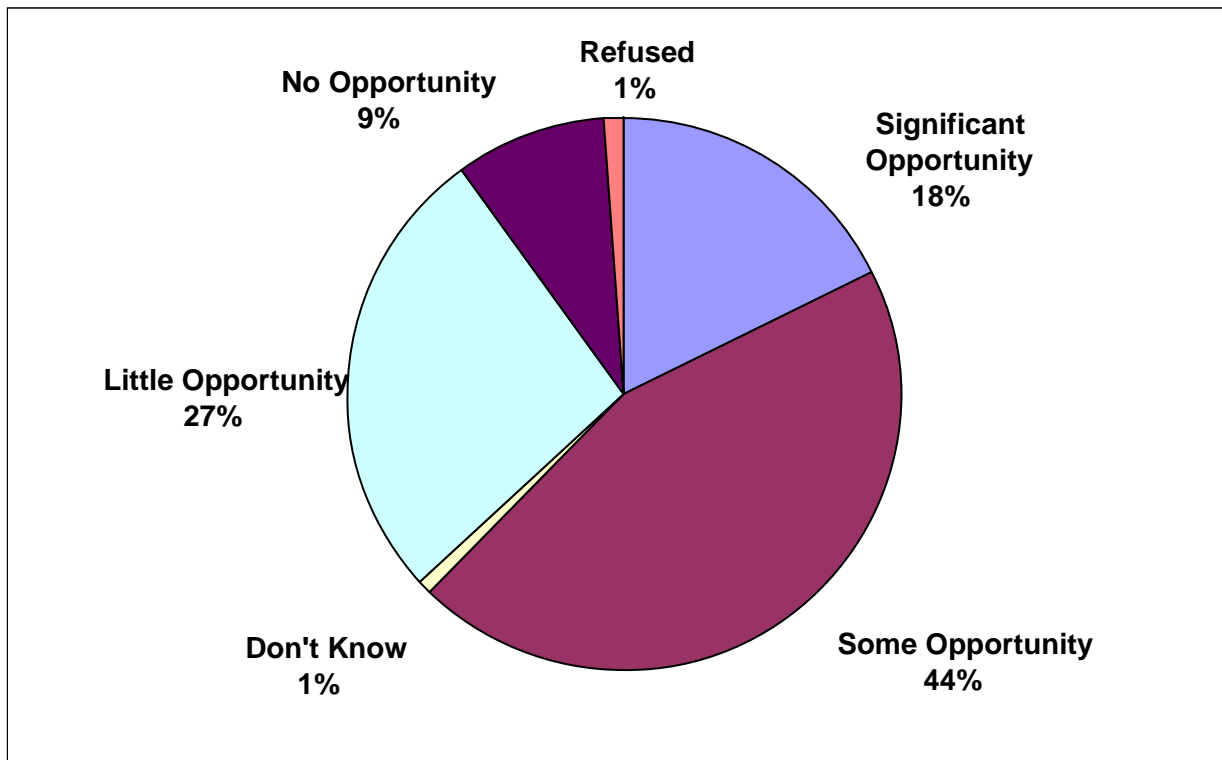
Note: Multiple responses were allowed so columns do not add up to 100 percent.

## Opportunity to Affect Communities

**Residents generally reported that they have opportunities to affect their communities.**

- The majority of residents indicated that they have the opportunity to affect their communities, with 44 percent perceiving some opportunity and another 18 percent perceiving significant opportunity.
- In comparison to 2002, only 31 percent perceived some opportunity to affect their communities, and 13 percent perceived significant opportunity. Although an unusual finding in 2002 was the high non-response rate (40 percent).
- Less than one in ten residents perceived no opportunity to affect his or her community.

**Figure 9**  
**Opportunity to Affect How Things Happen in Your Community**



## Perception of Community Challenges and Needs

***Residents' perceptions of challenges in their communities are generally moderate, with only two issues – alcohol abuse and lack of affordable health care – rated of high importance by more than half of Mat-Su residents.***

The survey solicited residents' views on challenges within their communities. People were asked to rate the importance of a variety of issues, including such subjects as accessible and affordable health care, drug and alcohol abuse, family violence, housing, and poverty.

Important issues are those rated 4 or 5 on a scale where 5 represents a "major issue" and 1 is "not an issue."

- Alcohol abuse was considered the most important community issue, with 53 percent of residents rating it 4 or 5 on the scale.
- A lack of affordable health care also was of high concern to residents. Just over half (51 percent) of residents rated it 4 or 5 on the scale.
- Substance abuse and lack of affordable health care were also the two top challenges found in the 2002 assessment study.
- Residents are concerned about methamphetamine abuse in their communities, with 49 percent identifying it as an important issue (4 or 5 on the 1 to 5 scale), including 32 percent who identified it as a "major issue" (rating of 5). The question about methamphetamine abuse was not asked in the 2002 survey so no comparison is available.
- Compared to the 2002 results, there appears to be a significant increase in the concern about employment and underemployment (42 percent in 2005 rating it 4 or 5 on the scale versus 27 percent in 2002). There also appears to be significant drops in concern regarding shortage of recreational facilities (33 percent in 2005 rating it 4 or 5 on the scale versus 43 percent in 2002), crime (31 percent in 2005 versus 39 percent in 2002), and teen pregnancy (28 percent in 2005 versus 39 percent in 2002).

**Table 13  
Community Challenges**

*Using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "not an issue" and 5 "a major issue," please describe whether you believe each of the following is an issue for people in your community.*

Issue	Percent identifying it as major issue (4 or 5 rating)	
	2005	2002
Alcohol abuse	53%	54%
Lack of affordable medical care	51	54
Methamphetamine abuse*	49	**
Inadequate public transportation	48	44
Poor roads or traffic conditions	47	49
Overcrowded classrooms	42	39
Unemployment or underemployment	42	27
Marijuana abuse	41	**
Lack of art and cultural activities	38	38
Family violence, abuse of children, adults	37	35
Lack of jobs	35	40
Poverty	34	32
Shortage of affordable housing	34	31
Shortage of recreational facilities	33	43
Crime	31	39
Lack of affordable child care	30	33
Teen pregnancy	28	39
Prescription drug abuse	26	**
Substandard housing	26	29
Other drug abuse	24	**
Mental illness or emotional issues	20	25
Unsafe school environment	16	16
Illiteracy	13	16
Water or air pollution	12	12
Noise pollution	12	12
Racial or ethnic discrimination	11	14
Overcrowded housing	10	11
Gangs	6	9
HIV or AIDS	5	9

\* Methamphetamine abuse was the topic of multiple media reports in Alaska and the Matanuska-Susitna region in the months preceding the administration of the 2005 COMPASS II® survey. The 2002 survey did not solicit information about methamphetamine abuse. Levels of concern about methamphetamines may be heightened due to the recent media coverage, or they may be constant over time. No comparison can be made based on this survey data.

\*\*Data on these issues were not collected in 2002.

## Top Three Challenges by Community

***Community by community, residents identify different issues as important. While some concerns are echoed through many of the communities, others may reflect specific community circumstances.***

The top three challenges, by self-identified community, were ranked based on the percentage of residents who rated the issue as a 4 or a 5 on a scale where 5 denotes a “major issue.”

These rankings help identify key concerns within communities. Caution should be used when examining results from communities with smaller sample sizes, as individual responses can significantly impact the total data set.

- Alcohol abuse is considered a major issue by residents in six of the eight communities.
- A lack of affordable medical care is also among the top three issues of six of the eight communities.
- Several issues, such as road conditions or a lack of art and cultural activities, emerged as concerns that were specific to one or two communities.

**Table 14**  
**Top Three Community Challenges**  
**Percent of Residents Rating Challenge as a 4 or a 5**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>% identifying it as major issue (4/5 Rating)</b>
<b>Palmer (n=140)</b>	
Alcohol abuse	53%
Methamphetamine abuse	50
Lack of affordable medical care	47
<b>Wasilla (n=200)</b>	
Methamphetamine abuse	58%
Poor roads or traffic conditions	56
Alcohol abuse	53
<b>Big Lake/Houston (n=37)</b>	
Unemployment or underemployment	73%
Lack of affordable medical care	62
Lack of art and cultural activities	54
Lack of jobs	54
<b>Butte/Lazy Mountain/Knik River</b>	
Unemployment or underemployment	57%
Lack of affordable medical care	57
Poor roads or traffic conditions	54
<b>Sutton/Chickaloon/Glacier View</b>	
Lack of affordable medical care	80%
Alcohol abuse	70
Inadequate public transportation	70
Lack of art and cultural activities	70
<b>Meadow Lakes</b>	
Methamphetamine abuse	65%
Shortage of recreational facilities	60
Alcohol abuse	55
Lack of affordable medical care	55
Lack of art and cultural activities	55
Overcrowded classrooms	55
<b>Knik-Fairview</b>	
Lack of affordable medical care	78%
Alcohol abuse	65
Overcrowded classrooms	57
Poverty	57
<b>Willow/Trapper Creek/Talkeetna</b>	
Unemployment or underemployment	70%
Lack of jobs	59
Alcohol abuse	54

\* Communities are self-identified by respondents.

## Perception of Household Challenges and Needs

***The three most important issue for Mat-Su households related to the affordability of health care services.***

Residents were asked about the issues they face in their own households. Overall, few residents indicated that the issues addressed in the survey were issues of concern within their own households.

People may consider issues affecting their own households to be very private. As a result, some under-representation of the importance of various issues in residents' own households may be assumed. For example, 53 percent of residents considered alcohol abuse an important issue for their communities, but only 4 percent of residents indicated that alcohol was an issue in their own households. Nevertheless, the survey results provide a valuable tool for examination of the relative importance of a number of issues in the households of Mat-Su Borough residents.

- The three most important household issues were not having enough money to get medical insurance (25 percent rating it 4 or 5 on the scale), visit the doctor (18 percent), and buy prescription medications (17 percent).
- The top two household issues in the 2002 study were also not having enough money to get medical insurance (26 percent), or visit the doctor (21 percent).
- Compared to the 2002 results, there appears to be significant drops in concern regarding having a lot of anxiety, stress, or depression (12 percent in 2005 rating it 4 or 5 on the scale versus 18 percent in 2002), finding it difficult to manage money or budget (7 percent in 2005 versus 17 percent in 2002), and not being able to afford entertainment (7 percent in 2005 versus 13 percent in 2002).

**Table 15**  
**Household Challenges**  
*Using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “not an issue” and 5 “a major issue,”  
please describe whether you believe each of the following  
is an issue for people in your community.*

Issue	Percent identifying it as major issue (4 or 5 rating)	
	2005	2002
Not having enough money to get medical insurance	25%	26%
Not having enough money for a visit to the doctor	18	21
Not having enough money to buy prescription medications	17	17
Not being able to afford legal help	14	16
Having a lot of anxiety, stress, or depression	12	18
Not being able to find work	10	15
Not being able to get care for a person with a disability or serious illness or a senior	9	11
Not being able to afford recreational activities	8	15
Finding it difficult to manage money or budget	7	17
Not being able to afford entertainment	7	13
Experiencing noise or other pollution	6	9
Not having enough money to pay for housing	6	9
Living in housing that needs major repairs	6	8
Children being unsafe at school	6	3
Not having enough money for food	6	9
Experiencing air or water pollution	5	4
Not having enough money to buy clothes and shoes	5	9
Not being able to find or afford child care	5	5
Not having enough room in your house for all the people who live there	5	9
Children or teenagers experiencing behavioral or emotional issues	4	7
Experiencing crime against your household	4	3
Experiencing an alcohol issue	4	5
Not being able to get transportation for a senior or a person with a disability	4	7
Experiencing a drug issue	2	3
Difficulty in reading well enough to get along	1	3
Experiencing physical conflict in the household	1	2
Experiencing household threats from gangs	1	1



## **Top Three Challenges by Household**

***In every community, issues related to the affordability of health care services were among the top three issues of concern.***

The top three challenges, by household, were ranked based on the percentage of residents who rated the issue as a 4 or a 5 on a scale where 5 denotes a “major issue.”

- The affordability of medical insurance, doctor visits, and prescription medications were frequently among the issues of greatest concern in Mat-Su communities.

**Table 16**  
**Top Three Household Challenges**  
**Percent of Residents Rating Challenge as a 4 or a 5**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Percent that state “Major Issue” (4-5)</b>
<b>Palmer (n=140)</b>	
Not having enough money to get medical insurance	22%
Not having enough money to pay for a visit to the doctor	18
Not being able to afford prescription medications	18
<b>Wasilla (n=200)</b>	
Not having enough money to get medical insurance	23%
Not having enough money to pay for a visit to the doctor	16
Not being able to afford prescription medications	15
<b>Big Lake/Houston (n=37)</b>	
Not having enough money to get medical insurance	41%
Not having enough money to buy prescription medications	30
Not having enough money to pay for a visit to the doctor	24
<b>Butte/Lazy Mountain/Knik River (n=28)</b>	
Not having enough money to get medical insurance	36%
Having a lot of anxiety, stress or depression	14
Not being able to find work	14
<b>Sutton/Chickaloon/Glacier View (n=10)</b>	
Not being able to afford legal help	60%
Living in a house that needs major repairs	60
Not having enough money to pay for a visit to the doctor	40
<b>Meadow Lakes (n=20)</b>	
Not being able to afford legal help	25%
Not having enough money to get medical insurance	20
Living in a house that needs major repairs	15
<b>Knik-Fairview (n=23)</b>	
Not having enough money to pay for a visit to the doctor	22%
Not having enough money to get medical insurance	22
Not being able to afford prescription medications	22
<b>Willow/Trapper Creek/Talkeetna (n=46)</b>	
Not having enough money to get medical insurance	30%
Not having enough money to pay for a visit to the doctor	20
Not having enough money to buy prescription medications	20

\* Communities are self-identified by respondents.

## Health and Well-Being

Residents were asked various questions about the health and well-being of members of their household, and their use of support services for issues relating to health and mental health. These included questions about health insurance coverage, use of substance abuse and mental health treatment services, suicide, domestic violence, and use of tobacco and marijuana.

Questions touching on issues of well-being are particularly sensitive. While refusal rates for these questions were relatively low in the 2005 survey (less than 3 percent in all cases), care should be given to the interpretation of the resultant data.

### Health Insurance Coverage

***Private insurance is by far the most common form of insurance for residents and their households. But more than 10 percent of residents are uninsured.***

- The majority of households (62 percent) have members who are privately insured.
- Military insurance increased more than six times from 2002. Six percent of residents said they receive insurance through the military in the 2005 survey, while less than 1 percent were insured through the military in 2002. This increase in military insurance may reflect an in-migration of military families into the Mat-Su.
- Eleven percent of households had no insurance, down from 15 percent in 2002. According to Alaska's Department of Health and Social Services, in 2000, 19 percent of Alaskans did not have year-round health insurance coverage. This is a higher percentage than the national average (14 percent) (*Healthy Alaskans 2010, 15-2*).

**Table 17**  
**Health Insurance Coverage**

*What type of health insurance coverage does your household have, if any?*

Type of Insurance	Percent of Total	
	2005	2002
<b>None</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>15%</b>
Private (Aetna, Blue Cross, Blue Shield, etc.)	62	60
Medicare	13	11
Medicaid	7	7
Denali Kid Care	6	5
Champus/TriCare (military)	6	<1
Veterans Administration	3	6
Native Health Service (Indian Health Service)	2	2
Worker's Compensation	<1	1
Other	<1	4
Don't know/unsure	1	3
Refused	3	*

Note: Residents were able to select multiple answers, so totals will not equal 100 percent.

\* There were no refusals in 2002.

### **Public Assistance**

***A minority of residents reported that members of their households receive public assistance.***

- Results are consistent with the 2000 Census, which found that 12 percent of households received Public Assistance in the Mat-Su Borough.

**Table 18**  
**Receipt of Public Assistance**

*Does anyone in your household receive public assistance, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, WIC, food stamps, or Supplemental Security Income?*

Response	Percent of Total
Yes	12%
No	86
Refused	3

## Substance Abuse Treatment

**Only 4 percent of residents reported that members of their households had used substance abuse treatment services in the last year.**

- Some residents indicated that members of their households had difficulty accessing substance abuse services. Reasons for this difficulty included a lack of insurance to pay for the services, and difficulty finding the services.

**Table 19**  
**Use of Substance Abuse Treatment Services**  
*Within the past 2 years, has anyone in your household used substance abuse treatment services?*

Response	Percent of Total
Yes	4%
No	93
Refused	3

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

## Mental Health Treatment

**One in ten residents said that members of their households had used mental health treatment services in the previous 12 months.**

- Some residents indicated members of their households had difficulty accessing mental health treatment services. The inability to afford services or to find services, a lack of insurance to cover services, the travel distance to access treatment, and the belief that householders did not actually need services were all cited as reasons for this difficulty.

**Table 20**  
**Use of Mental Health Treatment Services**  
*Within the past 2 years, has anyone in your household used mental health treatment services?*

Response	Percent of Total
Yes	11%
No	86
Don't Know	<1
Refused	2

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

## Suicide

**Six percent of residents indicated that members of their households had considered suicide in the preceding 12 months.**

- Results from the 2005 survey and the 2002 survey were nearly identical. In both cases, 6 percent of residents indicated that they had dealt with suicide issues in their households in the last year.
- Of the residents who indicated that member(s) of their household considered suicide, 45 percent indicated that resources to help deal with the issue were easy to find in their community. Nevertheless, 28 percent did not think resources were easy to find. About one in five residents said they or their household members did not seek help to deal with the issue.
- Again, caution should be used when examining results from communities with smaller sample sizes, as individual responses can significantly impact the total data set.

**Table 21  
Household Suicide Issues**

	Percent of Total	
	2005	2002
<b><i>Have any members of your household thought about suicide in the last 12 months?</i></b>		
Yes	6%	6%
No	91	90
Don't know	<1	3
Refused	3	<1
<b><i>Were resources to help with this issue easy to find in your community? (Of the 6 percent who answered "yes" to the above question)</i></b>		
Yes	45%	44%
No	28	25
Didn't seek help	17	n/a
Don't know	3	22
Refused	7	9

## Domestic Violence

**Three percent of residents indicated that members of their household had experienced domestic violence in the preceding year.**

- Of the three percent of residents who indicated that domestic violence had been an issue in their households, 71 percent indicated that community resources to help address the issue were easy to find.
- The 2005 data shows an improvement since 2002, in which four percent of residents indicated domestic violence had been an issue in their households, and only 48% indicated that community resources to help address the issue were easy to find.

**Table 22  
Household Domestic Violence Issues**

<i>Have any members of your household experienced domestic violence during the last 12 months?</i>	Percent of Total	
	2005	2002
Yes	3%	4%
No	94	95
Don't know	<1	<1
Refused	3	1
<i>If yes, were resources to help with this easy to find in your community? (Of the 3 percent who answered "yes" to the above question)</i>	2005	2002
Yes	71%	48%
No	21	20
Don't know	7	8
Refused	0	24

## Tobacco Use

**Nearly two-thirds of households represented in the survey had no tobacco users living in them. This represents a decline tobacco use from 2002.**

- Only 35 percent of surveyed households had members who use tobacco products.

**Table 23**  
**Household Tobacco Usage**  
*Do any members of your household use tobacco products?*

	Percent of Total	
	2005	2002
Yes	35%	41%
No	63	59
Refused	3	<1

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

### **Marijuana Use**

***One in five residents indicated that members of their household had used marijuana in the previous 12 months.***

- While 40 percent of residents indicated that a member or members of their household had used marijuana at some point in the past, only 22 percent said householders had used it in the preceding 12 months.
- This shows an increase in marijuana use from 2002, when 37 percent of residents indicated that a member or members of their household had used marijuana at some point in the past, and only 15 percent said householders had used it in the preceding 12 months.

**Table 24**  
**Household Marijuana Usage**

	Percent of Total	
	2005	2002
<b><i>Have any members of your household ever used marijuana?</i></b>		
Yes	40%	37%
No	56	58
Don't know	<1	3
Refused	3	1
<b><i>How about in the last 12 months?</i></b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2002</b>
Yes	22%	15%
No	74	62
Don't know	2	2
Refused	2	21

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.



## Demographics

***Residents were asked demographic questions to how they self-identified their city or area of residency in the Mat-Su Borough, gender, and race, as well as their age and the ages of other members of their households. Residents were also asked how long they had lived in their communities.***

- The majority of residents (61 percent) were female.
- Eighty-six percent of the residents identified themselves as white/Caucasian. Another five percent of the residents said they were Alaska Native or American Indian. Other racial backgrounds (represented by 2 percent or less of the residents) were Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander, and African American.
- Forty percent of the residents indicated that they live in Wasilla, with another 28 percent in Palmer, and 7 percent or less in the other communities in the Mat-Su Borough. It is important to note that residents identified their communities themselves, rather than selecting their community from a list. This means, for example, that some residents may have said that they live in Knik-Fairview, while their next-door neighbors may have identified themselves as Wasilla residents.

**Table 25  
Gender, Race and Age**

	Percent of Total
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	40%
Female	61
<b>Race</b>	
White/Caucasian	86%
Alaska Native/American Indian	5
Hispanic	2
Asian or Pacific Islander	<1
African American	<1
Other	<1
Don't know	<1
Refused	6
<b>Respondent Age</b>	
18-24	6%
25-34	12
35-44	19
45-54	31
55-64	18
65 and older	14
Refused	<1
Average Respondent Age	49 years
<b>Percent of households with residents aged...</b>	
Under 18	48%
18 to 24	16
25 to 34	15
35 to 44	25
45 to 54	33
55 to 64	18
65 to 74	8
75 and older	3
No other household members	15

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

- Wasilla and Palmer are home to the greatest percentages of Mat-Su Borough residents, with 40 percent and 28 percent of residents living in the communities, respectively.

- Although the Mat-Su Borough is the fastest-growing area in Alaska, more than two-thirds of the residents have lived in their community for longer than 5 years.

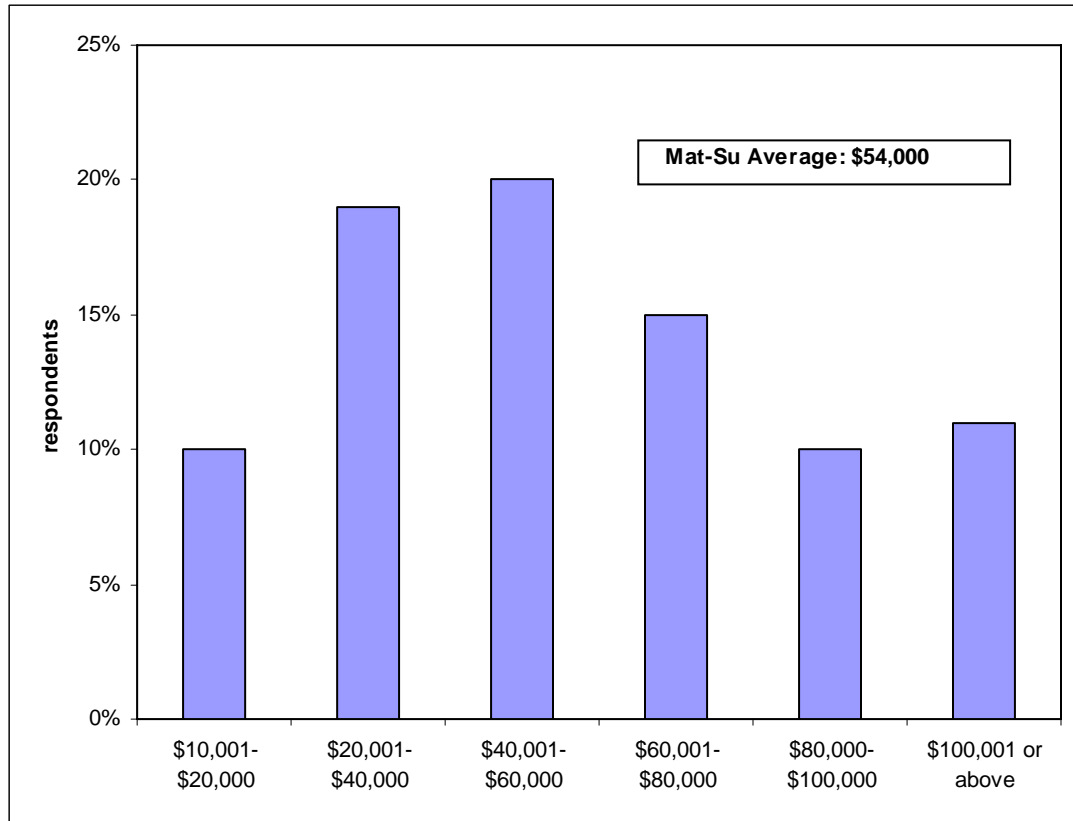
**Table 26**  
**Self-Identified City or Location of Residency and Duration of Residency**

	Percent of Total
<b>Self-identified location of residence</b>	
City of Wasilla	40%
City of Palmer	28
Big Lake/Houston	7
Butte/Lazy Mountain/Knik River	6
Knik-Fairview	5
Trapper Creek/Talkeetna/Sunshine	5
Meadow Lakes	4
Willow	4
Sutton/Chickaloon/Glacier View	2
<b>Length of time residing in community</b>	
Less than 2 years	13%
2.1 to 4 years	13
4.1 to 6 years	13
6.1 to 8 years	6
8.1 to 10 years	7
Over 10 years	48
<b>Average</b>	<b>14 years</b>

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

- The greatest percentages of residents fell in the \$20,001 to \$40,000, and \$40,001 to \$60,000 annual household income categories (19 percent and 20 percent, respectively).

**Figure 10**  
**Household Income, 2004**  
**Percent of Residents per Income Category**



Note: Residents were asked to identify their annual household incomes within a series of ranges. Averages are calculated using the midpoints of those ranges.

- Knik-Fairview residents reported the highest average household incomes for tax year 2004, replacing Palmer households as the highest earners from the 2002 survey (2001 tax year).
- Residents from the Willow/Trapper Creek/Talkeetna area reported the lowest household incomes in both survey years.
- Respondents can consider information about household income to be private, and refusal rates can be high on income questions. In this case, the refusal rate was relatively low, at 10 percent.

**Table 27**  
**Average Annual Household Income 2001 and 2004,**  
**by Self-Identified Residency**

Location	Average (\$)	
	2004	2001
<b>Matanuska-Susitna Borough</b>	<b>\$55,400</b>	<b>\$47,200</b>
Knik-Fairview	62,700	49,800
City of Palmer	58,900	51,200
City of Wasilla	58,200	49,600
Butte/Lazy Mountain/Knik River	55,400	46,400
Meadow Lakes	51,300	49,800
Big Lake/Houston	48,400	40,500
Willow/Trapper Creek/Talkeetna	42,700	38,500
Sutton/Chickaloon	34,000	40,700

Note: Residents were asked to identify their annual household incomes within a series of ranges. Averages are calculated using the midpoints of those ranges.

The COMPASS II® tool provided a business survey that was customized for the Mat-Su environment. The purpose of the business survey was to increase the understanding of businesses that are already engaged in improving the community, and identify potential participants who are interested in providing a leadership role in developing and implementing a community impact plan. The survey focuses on the following two ways in which businesses help to improve their community:

- Supporting community initiatives and projects
- Directly supporting their employees

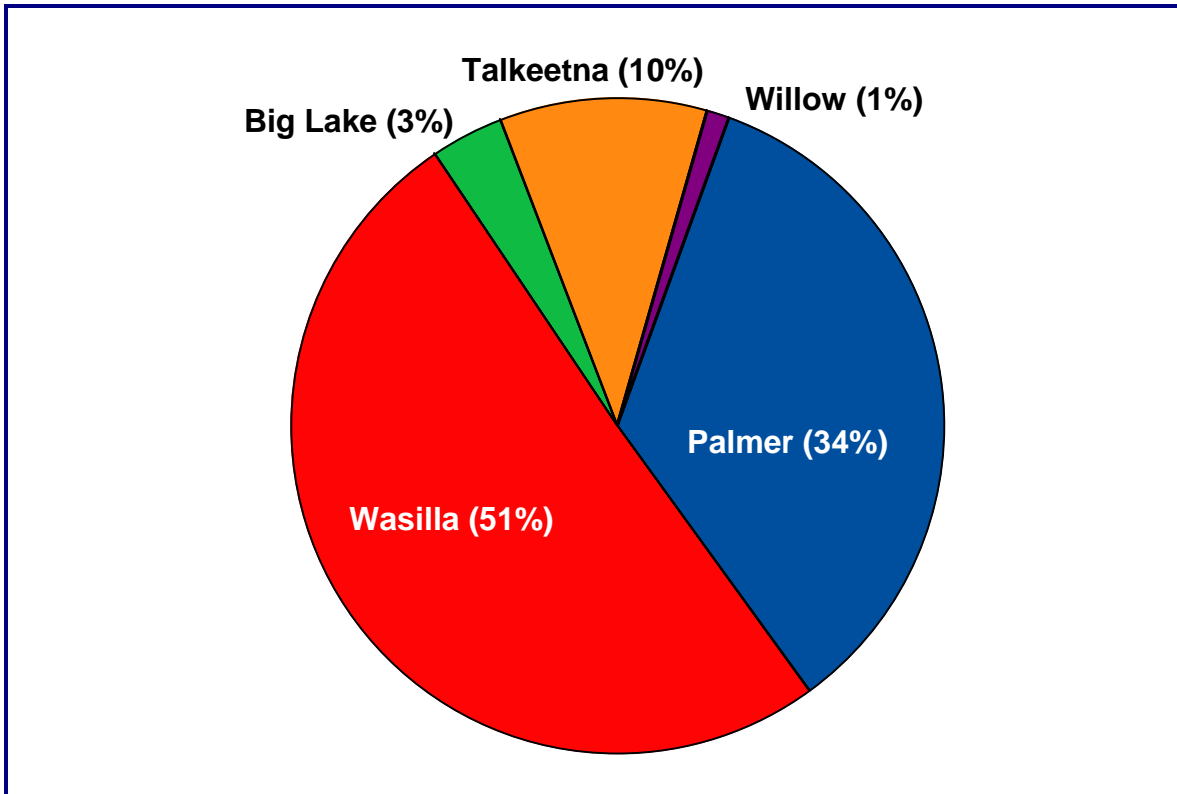
The customized survey was mailed to 523 businesses throughout the Mat-Su Borough. Almost 17 percent of these businesses (87) responded to the survey.

The same survey instrument was used in the 2002 study; however, direct comparisons to survey results would not be appropriate because of the different base of businesses surveyed. Also, with a mail survey, there is strong self-selection bias, meaning there is no randomness or representative sample of Mat-Su's business community. Therefore, the results are largely qualitative in nature and provide some generalities of business involvement in the Mat-Su community.

## Profile of Business Respondents

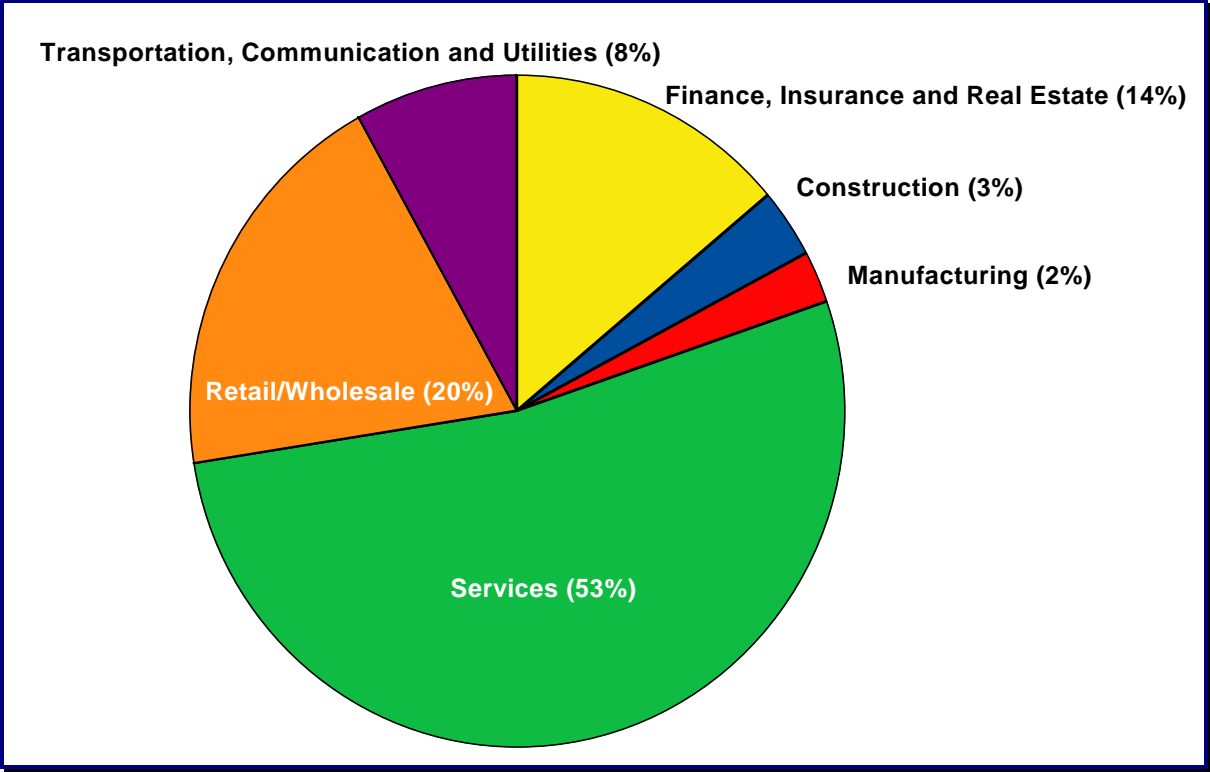
The 87 businesses who responded to the survey were based in Palmer, Wasilla, Big Lake, Talkeetna, and Willow. The majority, 51 percent, were based out of Wasilla, followed by 34 percent from Palmer.

**Figure 11**  
**Community Location of Business Respondents**



The business respondents represented six different industry sectors. These sectors include: services (53 percent), retail/wholesale (20 percent), finance, insurance & real estate (14 percent), transportation, communication & utilities (8 percent), construction (3 percent), and manufacturing (2 percent).

**Figure 12**  
**Type of Business Respondents, by Industry Sector**





The average business respondent employed 12 full-time employees and four part-time employees.

**Table 28  
Number of Employees**

	<b>% of Total</b>
<b>Number of Full-time Employees</b>	
None	18%
1-4	50
5-10	7
Over 10	22
No response	3
<b>Average Full-Time Employees</b>	<b>12 employees</b>
<b>Number of Part-time Employees</b>	
None	37%
1-4	35
5-10	8
Over 10	15
No response	5
<b>Average Part-Time Employees</b>	<b>4 employees</b>

Note: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

## Employee Support

Businesses provide support in their community through a variety of means, including the provision of benefits to their employees.

### Employee Benefits

- Two out of five business respondents offer health care benefits to their employees (41 percent).
- Employee Assistance Programs are available from 18 percent of these businesses.
- Eleven percent of responding businesses offer childcare services.

**Table 29**  
**Employee Benefits**  
*Does your company offer...?*

	<b>% of Total</b>
<b>Health care benefits</b>	
Yes	41%
No	52
No response	7
<b>Child care services</b>	
Yes	11%
No	82
No response	7
<b>Employee Assistance Program</b>	
Yes	18%
No	71
No response	10

Note: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

## Community Support

Businesses also make important contributions to their communities through their local purchasing, local hiring, charitable contributions, and support for volunteerism.

### Local Purchasing

- All responding Mat-Su businesses purchase goods and service locally, whenever possible.

### Local Hiring

- Almost two out of five of the responding businesses strive to hire local residents who are transitioning from welfare to work.

**Table 30**  
**Local Hiring Practices**

<i>Does your company reach out to hire local people who are trying to transition from welfare to work?</i>	<b>% of Total</b>
Yes	39%
No	52
No response	9

## **Charitable Contributions**

Depending on the size of company's revenues, number of employees, business self-interest, and personal interests of owners or managers, the range of organizations supported and the amount of financial support can vary widely.

Businesses were asked to list the organizations that they made their top three charitable contributions.

- The top three charitable contributions made by the responding businesses went to approximately 92 organizations, representing a large variety of organizations, schools, and churches.
- Organizations that support work in the social services and medical health arenas receive the largest support, followed by United Way of Mat-Su, and civic and sports organizations.

**Table 31**  
**Types of Top Three Organizations Charitably Supported**  
**by Mat-Su Business Respondents, 2004**

Type of Organizations	% of Total
<b>Social Services</b> ( <i>America's Second Harvest, Bishop's Attic, CARE, Challenge Alaska, Food Bank, Habitat for Humanity, homeless shelters, HOPE Community Resources, local emergency relief program, MADD, Operation Santa Claus, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Upper Susitna Seniors, Valley Women's Resource Center, Outdoor Dream Foundation</i> ))	16%
<b>Health</b> ( <i>4As, Alzheimer's Society, American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, Blood Bank of Alaska, Breast Cancer Society, Heart Reach Pregnancy Crisis Center, Hospice, MS Society, Muscular Dystrophy Association, National Vaccine Information, St. Jude's Hospital</i> )	16
<b>United Way of Mat-Su</b>	12
<b>Civic Organizations</b> ( <i>Alaska Peace Officers, Alaska State Fair, Houston Volunteer Fire Department, Elks, Shriners, Kiwanis Club, Lions, Rotary, VFW, Mat-Su Crimestoppers</i> )	12
<b>Sports Organizations</b> ( <i>Alaska Working Retriever Club, Ducks Unlimited, Hockey Association, ice arena, Iditarod, Mat-Su Baseball, Rubbed Grouse Society, softball team, Special Olympics, local sports teams, Tesoro Iron Dog, Valley Women's Golf Association</i> )	11
<b>Youth Services</b> ( <i>Big Brother/Big Sister, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, The Children's Place, Toys for Tots, youth baseball, youth basketball, youth soccer</i> )	9
<b>Education</b> ( <i>local schools, scholarships, booster clubs, school sports</i> )	6
<b>Business Organizations</b> ( <i>Big Lake Chamber of Commerce, Greater Wasilla Chamber of Commerce, Palmer Chamber of Commerce, Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau, Construction Trades Academy, National Gay and Lesbian Journalists Association</i> )	5
<b>Churches</b> ( <i>Catholic Churches, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Latter Day Saints, other churches</i> )	4
<b>Arts and Culture</b> ( <i>Denali Arts Council, Library, Valley Performing Arts, Valley Quilter's Guild</i> )	3
<b>Environment</b> ( <i>Alaska Conservation Foundation, Audubon Society, Denali Foundation</i> )	3
<b>Animal Causes</b> ( <i>Aurora Dog Mushers, Friends of Pets, Animal Sanctuary</i> )	2
<b>Communication Organizations</b> ( <i>Public Radio, Public Television, KTNA</i> )	2

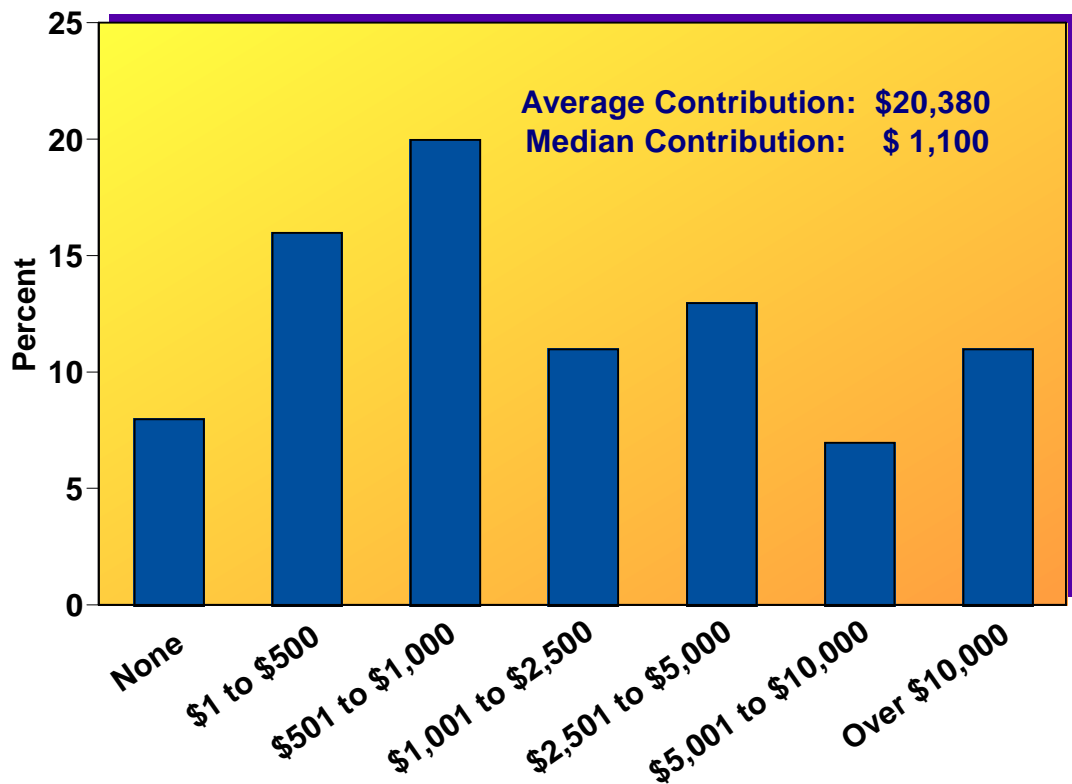
- Almost one out of ten responding businesses did not make charitable contributions in 2004.
- However, one out of four businesses contributes between \$1,000 and \$5,000 annually.
- The average annual contribution to local charities for the responding businesses was \$20,380.

- However, when looking at the median contribution, the amount is significantly lower at \$1,100 annually.

**Table 32**  
**Company Level of Annual Charitable Contributions, 2004**

Value	% of Total
None	8%
\$1-\$500	16
\$501-\$1,000	20
\$1,001-\$2,500	11
\$2,501-\$5,000	13
\$5,001-\$10,000	7
Over \$10,000	11
No Response	14
<b>Average contribution</b>	<b>\$20,380</b>
<b>Median contribution</b>	<b>\$1,100</b>

**Figure 13**  
**Company Level of Annual Charitable Contributions, 2004**



## Volunteer Efforts

- Almost seven out of ten responding businesses allow employees time off to volunteer.
- The average Mat-Su business respondent contributes 552 hours of volunteer support annually; however, one out of five businesses make no volunteer contributions.
- The median volunteer contribution is 80 hours per year per business respondent.

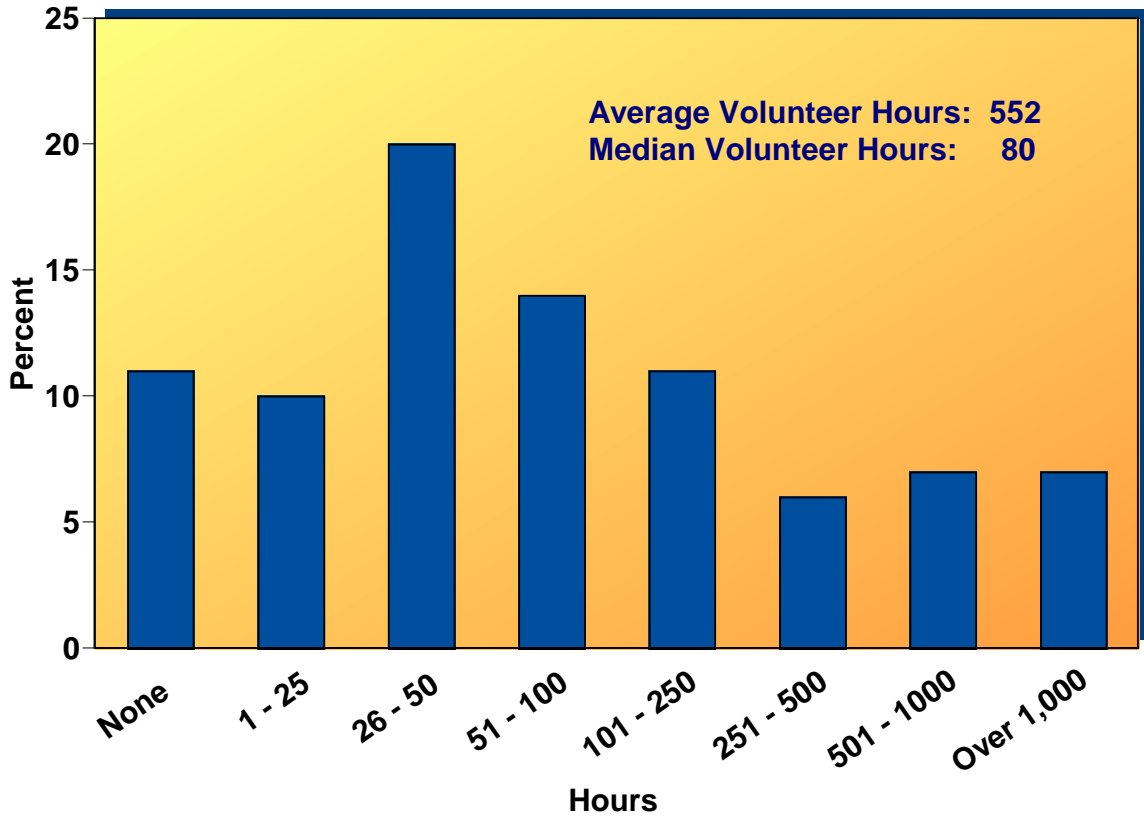
**Table 33**  
**Support of Employee Volunteerism**  
*Does your company allow employees time off (either paid or unpaid) for volunteer work?*

Hours	% of Total
Yes	69%
No	22
No response	9

**Table 34**  
**Company Level of Annual Volunteer Hour Contributions, 2004**

Hours	% of Total
None	11 %
1-25	10
26-50	20
51-100	14
101-250	11
251-500	6
501-1,000	7
1,001 and over	7
No response	14
<b>Average hours</b>	<b>552 hours</b>
<b>Median hours</b>	<b>80 hours</b>

**Figure 14**  
**Company Level of Annual Volunteer Hour Contributions, 2004**

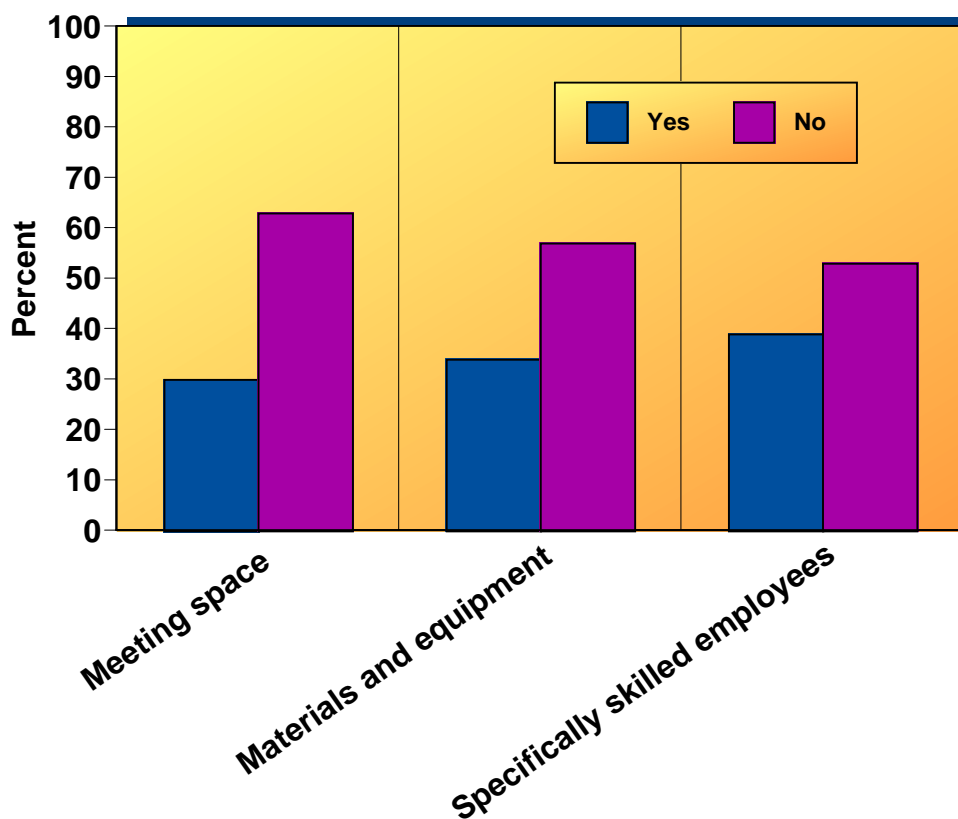


### **In-Kind Support**

Support for community goes beyond money and people – it can also include in-kind support.

- Almost two out of five business respondents provide employees who have specific skills (39 percent), one out of three businesses provide materials and equipment (34 percent), and three out of ten businesses provide meeting space (30 percent) to help community groups.

**Figure 15  
Business In-Kind Community Support**



## Opinions on Needed Services

Responding businesses share their perspectives on what services they believe are most needed in their community. The comments submitted by responding businesses have been sorted into a number of key areas of interest and are not altered, except for spelling and some grammar.

### Children and Youth Services

- *More help and services to support families with children*
- *Keep youth on a good track, offering activities and support here in the Valley. Help foster our future adults, give them the opportunity for making good choices and increase their success, now and in their future.*
- *Skateboard Park in Palmer for kids*
- *Activity area for kids and teenagers (i.e., skate park)*
- *Youth programs/organizations*
- *We need a new theatre; the sports complex is great and most needed. Youth theatre and promoting youth jobs and training*
- *Place for youths to go that is properly maintained and safe. Quality after-hours programs for teens not involved in school activities*



## **Health and Social Services**

- *Volunteerism--more people getting involved*
- *More coordination between human service and education providers of existing programs and services, and joint planning*
- *Coordination of social programs -- a one-stop place, or brochure listing them that business can provide to clientele*
- *Funding for senior services is not adequate. Seniors constitute the fastest growing segment of the Borough's population (by far), and that trend is expected to continue. We are, in light of recent cuts, forced to provide more services for less reimbursement. Not sure how long we can be successful in our mission to serve, considering the circumstances.*
- *More mental health services available to people during the winter months*
- *Developmental Disability and mental health services*
- *Affordable mental health (sliding scale)*
- *More drug and alcohol rehabilitation assistance*
- *Better understanding of social problems created by drug/alcohol abuse in community, especially how it affects our children*
- *Public health nurse (State of Alaska)*
- *Medical specialists*
- *Affordable health insurance/services*
- *Discount health plans*
- *Health care (including mental) for uninsured & working poor, and under-insured. Drug/alcohol abuse intervention facilities, education, affordable housing*
- *Low cost housing, better transportation, temporary housing alternatives for singles and families who are homeless*

## **Business Support/Development Services**

- *Don't need Walmarts in Palmer -- see where consultant in Anchorage talked about not making Anchorage like every other city or they won't come. Feel the same about Valley. Small, independent shop to sell general merchandise in Palmer. American made products!*
- *Economic development, beautifying our communities, encouraging diversity in our Valley population -- being welcoming*
- *More emphasis on the importance of "Shop the Valley"*
- *Restaurants, big box stores*
- *Costco, downhill ski resort at Hatcher Pass. Industrial development at Port MacKenzie*
- *Development of tasteful tourist attractions, especially winter activities*

## **Education/Job Training**

- *Full funding for schools -- proactive not reactive*
- *A vibrant college that addresses the employment needs of our community -- more emphasis on career track, 2-year, community college-style courses. Our community is growing while enrollment at our local college has plummeted over*

*the past five years. This needs to be turned around. Over 10 years ago, Mat-Su had a full-time equivalent enrollment of over 700 students. Today, that number is around 650 students -- and the Borough population has exploded. Why isn't the college growing also?*

- *4-year college*
- *More opportunities for youth in career development*
- *Educational reform--Our Mat-Su schools are very overcrowded and we all know it yet our Borough leaders are doing very little to alleviate this big problem. Firmly believe we need qualified leaders to handle our fast growth taking place. Mayor Anderson and others in charge are not performing with the best interests of the majority at heart. We need more experienced, qualified, business-minded people in charge. We all keep hearing and knowing about how many businesses/people are moving to the Mat-Su, which would in turn raise the number of businesses and people being taxed, but yet our Borough still raises those already being taxed. Loss of faith with this administration. Things looking bleak for those of us who clearly see the misleading going on.*
- *Jobs training school*
- *Job service office, seasonal April or March to August [in Talkeetna area].*
- *Unemployment office*

### **Government Services**

- *Parks, Arts Center, and Library*
- *Arts and culture. Recreational services/parks*
- *Music venues other than bars and lodges. We need outlets for creative, original musicians to be creative, and receive the respect that they crave Strong focus on recreational access and deserve.*
- *Social and recreational opportunities/activities.*
- *Zoning*
- *Improved planning for development*
- *Better planning on growth. Burning restrictions. Ordinances for air quality.*
- *More fire and police*
- *More police--traffic enforcement, presence in community*
- *More police patrol to monitor home and property theft.*
- *Police presence in Jim Creek to reduce vandalism*
- *Increased law enforcement personnel, basic infrastructure services, such as road maintenance, etc*
- *Better idea for "empty" oil canisters at Refuse Station*
- *City water and sewer (2 comments), recycling center*
- *Snowmachine and 4-wheeler crushing facilities*
- *Dentist, recycling center, teen center, alternative access road parallel to railroad tracks, pedestrian underpass (AKRR), organized as city*

### **Transportation Services**

- *Commuter train services from airport and downtown*

- *More bus services.*
- *1. Public Transportation. 2. Commuter train to Anchorage with good transportation networks on both ends. (2 comments) 3. Making Valley towns (Palmer/Wasilla) walker-friendly all year (blade the sidewalks in winter.)*
- *Clean year-round pedestrian walkways*
- *Better and faster road maintenance and upgrading*
- *Improved roads. (2 comments) Paved city streets.*

## **Support of Community Initiatives**

Mat-Su businesses appear to be very involved in their community support activities.

### **Current Support in the Community**

Three-quarters of responding Mat-Su businesses (75 percent) are actively involved in promoting economic development and almost two-thirds are promoting volunteering (63 percent) and expanding business and industrial development (61 percent).

**Table 35  
Current Community Support**

<b>Currently Participating In...</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Promoting economic development in Mat-Su	75%
Promoting volunteering	63
Promoting good health	61
Expanding business and industrial development in Mat-Su	61
Promoting community networks	58
Promoting youth development	53
Promoting commercial revitalization in Mat-Su	53
Building community trust	53
Promoting entrepreneurship	47
Promoting commercial real estate improvement in Mat-Su	39
Promoting arts and culture	38
Increasing availability of recreation opportunities	38
Fostering racial harmony	37
Beautifying community spaces	36
Increasing neighborhood safety	35
Connecting neighbors who need help with those who can help	35
Promoting educational reform	31
Preparing people for jobs	31
Increasing availability of and access to jobs	31
Designing a plan for community development	30
Increasing affordable housing and home ownership	22
Improving access to transportation	16

Other additional activities that business respondents are currently participating include “Increase youth/child safety” and “Guide the growth of our community.”

## **Interest in Becoming Involved in the Community**

Businesses were asked how they would most like to be involved in improving or plan to improve their community.

Businesses are most interested in increasing neighborhood safety (22 percent) and becoming involved in beautifying community spaces (21 percent). Fostering racial harmony (20 percent) and designing a plan for community development (20 percent) are also of high interest.

**Table 36  
Community Support of Responding Business**

Community Initiative/Project	Currently Participating	Interested in Participating	Not Interested in Participating
Increasing neighborhood safety	35%	22%	43%
Beautifying community spaces	36	21	43
Fostering racial harmony	37	20	43
Designing a plan for community development	30	20	50
Promoting educational reform	31	19	50
Promoting good health	61	19	20
Promoting arts and culture	38	18	44
Promoting youth development	53	16	31
Increasing availability of recreation opportunities	38	16	46
Improving access to transportation	16	15	68
Expanding business and industrial development in Mat-Su	61	13	26
Preparing people for jobs	31	13	56
Building community trust	53	12	35
Increasing affordable housing and home ownership	22	12	66
Connecting neighbors who need help with those who can help	35	11	54
Promoting volunteering	63	11	26
Promoting community networks	58	11	31
Increasing availability of and access to jobs	31	10	59
Promoting economic development in Mat-Su	75	10	15
Promoting commercial revitalization in Mat-Su	53	8	39
Promoting entrepreneurship	47	8	45
Promoting commercial real estate improvement in Mat-Su	39	8	53

Other additional activities that business respondents are interested in participating in include “Promoting land use planning,” “Helping seniors to remain independent,” Offer internships to Talkeetna students,” and “Affordable health services.”

Business respondents also provided written responses to a question inquiring about their interest in further involvement in their community. These responses, as written, are found below:

### **Additional Involvement**

- *Forming a Business Improvement District.*
- *Educational endeavors.*
- *Volunteering through Big Lake and Houston Chamber of Commerce.*
- *By creating, promoting, maintaining health/wellness approach in compatible areas, i.e., massage in Oncology Department of new hospital, and/or massage emergency response team with conjunction with Red Cross.*
- *By providing education regarding health care, continued service in rotary and Wasilla Chamber of Commerce.*
- *Through our church, we spend a lot of time and money on youth programs. Training and self-esteem programs. Confidence and preparing for work place and real life.*
- *Development of affordable housing in Palmer for seniors of limited means.*
- *We're involved in the home-building business. Building homes to code and safety is important and helps to keep our community safe and improved.*
- *Continue to provide business with a clean and safe place to lease.*
- *Cultural Arts Center--Enhance/enlarge Historical Museum, MATF, Develop Iditarod Trail Museum Complex/trails.*

### **Maintain Current Involvement**

- *We feel our level of involvement is appropriate for a company of this size. We have no plans to increase our involvement*
- *I give many hours to Palmer Chamber, Hospice, Credit Union, school reading to below par first and second grade readers, Senior Advisory Board, environmental issues that affect all of us.*
- *Maximized at this time.*

### **How Businesses Improve Quality of Life**

Businesses were asked how they have helped to improve the quality of life locally. Several responses were given, centering on how they operate their business and their involvement in the community. These include:

#### **Business Practices**

- *Have been working on many different projects in 33 years here. One important phase is clean water and air. Are economic development plans nil without those two ingredients -- Local disposal of sewage never addressed. Should not be going into Cook Inlet in primary state with EPA waiver.*
- *Free presentations to schools and other organizations.*

- *Largest provider of senior services in Mat-Su Borough. Often provide services out-of-pocket for individuals who are unable to make donations or ineligible for programs, such as Medicaid Waiver.*
- *We sell water filtration equipment that greatly improves the quality of life for each family.*
- *By encouraging wellness and self empowerment with our professional network and clientele.*
- *Our company has recently moved to Mat-Su Valley and because of our move, we now use only local suppliers where possible, subcontractors and hire locally. We are proud to be involved in a growing, vibrant community.*
- *We provide chiropractic care to families for the betterment of health. This in turn makes them more productive at home, work, and school.*
- *Provided assistance to business owners and jobs to applicants.*
- *Our business has done a series of free events for families to enjoy.*
- *As the local newspaper and most complete source of information for news and events in Mat-Su, we feel it is our responsibility to continually promote quality of life issues in Mat-Su. We report on issues that need improvement, as well as highlight methods that work well.*
- *Talkeetna Chamber, Org. -- Calendar and News of Community of Talkeetna. Online information platform for locals and tourists alike. Advertising platform for businesses, arts council, and more.*
- *Provided well paying jobs.*
- *Developed business to help with tourist growth in our community.*
- *We have put many articles about meetings and plans for communities in Talkeetna, Trapper Creek, and Willow, in our newspaper.*

### **Community Involvement**

- *Promoting creative writing with contests, readings, events. Working together with other downtown merchants to sponsor community events.*
- *Many contributions (although small) to various school groups.*
- *Actively participate in community service.*
- *Work on projects with Chamber of Commerce and Talkeetna Community Council, Inc. Worked for Talkeetna Food Bank.*
- *Volunteering on developing Y Council Comprehensive Plan.*
- *Participated in neighborhood clean-up.*
- *Educational opportunities, community awareness of social issues.*
- *We help through sponsorship monies to non-profit organizations like the Children's Place, Wasilla Food Bank, Heart Reach Crisis, participate in local health fairs, participate in fundraising effort for MDA.*
- *Additional volunteer time and donations to start up a Family Promise Organization (Temporary housing for families who are homeless in the Mat-Su.*
- *Participation in City of Palmer "planning workshops" re: Fred Meyer construction, hospital water line extension project and United Way strategies for managing growth.*

## Summary of 2002 and 2005 Business Survey Findings

While direct comparisons cannot be made between the 2002 and 2005 business survey results, there are some similar themes that emerge.

- Similar to the results in 2002, many Mat-Su businesses provide benefits to their employees; however, it appears that there is significant room for benefit coverage.
- Mat-Su businesses continue to support their communities through purchasing and hiring locally.
- Mat-Su businesses support their community through charitable giving both in cash and in-kind. While a wide range of organizations and events are supported, it appears that health and social service agencies are primary areas of support.
- Mat-Su businesses continue to be most involved in issues that affect their business environment, such as promoting economic development and expanding business and industrial development in the Mat-Su.



## **PERSPECTIVES OF COMMUNITY KEY INFORMANTS**

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MAP's Steering Committee provided a list of suggested community representatives to interview for this project. The list was reviewed by the study team and 21 community representatives were selected and interviewed. The selection was based on geographic distribution, and community involvement and interest. Each informant was asked a series of questions about their perspectives on their own community's strengths and weaknesses, to identify community needs, and provide suggestions on how to address these needs. A list of key informants can be found in Appendix B.

Executive interviews were conducted during the months of May and June 2005. Interview participants offered many different perspectives informed by their respective participation in a wide range of professional and community involvement activities. The intention of these interviews is not to capture all community viewpoints - selected comments included in this report are the opinions of individuals and should be considered as a starting point for further dialogue on community issues. They are included to provide a basis for understanding some of Mat-Su's strengths, challenges and the assets the community has to address the most urgent social needs, but are not representative of the whole spectrum of public opinion.

### **Community Strengths**

Informants identified an increasing awareness of borough-wide social problems and more resources to address some of these issues as among the Mat-Su's strengths as a community. A respondent said, "The Borough does a good job looking at things from a community perspective." Another said, "There are now more social service providers in the area, but real community support wasn't always here. Some prominent media stories have raised awareness of social issues - foster kids being abused, meth(amphetamine) arrests, DUI, deaths from drunk driving. There used to be perceived as "their problem" (other communities) but now there's more discussion of these events in the community about these being borough-wide issues."

Several informants mentioned the generosity of the Mat-Su community as a strength; an informant said, "Look at Care for Kara! Where there is a specific need, we get organized. The outpouring of individuals and volunteers was tremendous." A few informants noted the strength of the faith community. One participant said "the Christian community is a large strength." Another participant echoed, "There is a strong religious or spiritual connection in the Valley. There are a lot of churches."

Informants described new efforts in the Mat-Su to make health and emergency services available borough-wide: the creation of a new Borough agency to handle cases of child sexual abuse, efforts to merge services, combat domestic violence and substance abuse as co-occurring disorders, and the development of new community health centers.

A participant described the strength, “There is collaboration, grass roots problem-solving, and a strong link between the health and social service sector, and the business community.” Another participant stated, “We know how to work together. A lot of time we really do collaborate and share our resources. It is just the way things get done.” “There is a lot of willingness to volunteer,” added another informant.

The staff and dedicated volunteers of emergency medical and fire fighting services were identified as among the most important assets for the Mat-Su Borough. An interview participant said, “EMS area-wide services are excellent; they have phenomenal skill levels and expertise. Emergency services are also improving in more remote areas like Skwentna and Talkeetna.” Another informant stated, “There is great support for our police, fire and emergency responders.” The new hospital development, with better access and fuller range of specialties, was also mentioned as a significant asset and important resource in the community.

Mat-Su’s other community assets include high quality of life, the distinct characteristics of each of the borough’s communities, and strong feelings of community pride among residents. An interview participant said, “People feel proud to be from Talkeetna or Palmer or Wasilla, and people want to address their community’s problems. It will help the whole borough if we translate this pride and concern and responsibility as a member of each community to the Mat-Su Borough overall.” Another respondent said, “There is a larger sense of community in the smaller towns because it’s a small community - in Talkeetna and Sunshine, neighbors look out for neighbors. There are individual-based relationships - we know one another, rather than seeing people as members of “some other group that’s costing us money.” “There is a whole sense of being real—we are what we are. These are good things, simplicity,” added another interviewee. Or put another way by another interviewee, “We are still a great place to live. We struggle like any other community, but we a lot to be proud of. It is not all doom and gloom.”

While several informants say the Mat-Su’s rapid growth has been a tremendous disruption, others believe growth brought positive developments. As one participant put it, “Growth is good and sound. Growth in the school system is very positive. Economic growth and businesses are expanding, the economic growth is very positive.” Another participant stated, “Growth brings in money, services, and economic strength.”

Many informants mentioned how the geography of the Mat-Su contributes to the strength of its community. As one participant noted, “Geography is our strength. There is lots of land available and recreational opportunities.” “We are rich in resources, beautiful, and an extremely desirable place to live. Good schools,” stated one participant. Other participants added, “We live in a beautiful place. We have great access to recreational opportunities and wildlife. We are in good proximity to Denali National Park, and I like being near Anchorage, a bigger city.”

## **Community Building Issues and Institutions**

Community planning was identified as among the issues that bring residents together as a community. One interview participant said, “Smaller communities are now scrambling to do community planning to control impacts of growth - sprawl and lost community identity. They want to preserve localized town centers.” Another respondent noted that, “When it comes to community planning we have lively discussions - if one person disagrees with a proposed plan, 45 people come out of the woodwork to support or fight that person.”

Several informants said that education is another issue that brings residents of the Mat-Su Borough together; one respondent felt this was “especially true when the borough is faced with the potential for school closings or funding cuts.” Another informant felt it was important to build more schools in anticipation of continued population growth. The threat of forest fires, including the Millers Reach fire, and the recent expansion of the Valley Hospital between Wasilla and Palmer, and coal-bed methane controversy were other issues perceived as bringing residents together. One participant stated, “Most people want their family to be well-educated. Education brings people together to improve the quality (of education).”

While a few interview participants had difficulty identifying effective community institutions, others readily identified community and city councils, Chambers of Commerce, Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanas Clubs, the tri-city council, and the Mat-Su Agency Partnership (MAP) as among the organizations working for positive changes in the borough. One participant stated that, “MAP is trying to bring agencies together.”

A participant added to this list by stating, “The United Way (of Mat-Su) has helped. Originally it just raised money, but now it is helping (with) education and pass-through grants. Hopefully, the Valley Hospital Foundation will be useful in bring people to the table to address questions on how we can help the community through education, taking care of their bodies, clean air, and other quality of life issues.”

Another participant noted about the United Way, “It has a lot of contact with the profit community. It is doing a remarkable job. It is probably the most aggressive (organization) for getting the community together for non-disaster type circumstances.” Love INC (In the Name of Christ) was also noted as playing a collaborative role.

One interviewee stated “it is important to help the agencies and communities. It takes a whole community effort to make things happen, including business. It is so important to invest in your community” and adding, “Conformity is not unity, but we can each do our part. We don’t have to argue about the little things, let’s still address it. There is no one good way. It may make several ways (to solve a problem).”

One interviewee suggested that the Mat-Su Borough Assembly should travel to remote communities such as Trapper Creek, Talkeetna and Lake Louise. The Light of Hope program acknowledging foster kids and foster parents was also identified as an effective community building program.

## Community Challenges

Rapid population growth, the increased demand for services, the vast size of the borough and the availability of services throughout the Mat-Su were among the most significant challenges identified by interview participants.

In regard to the population boom experienced by the borough, a respondent stated, “Mat-Su has grown to the point where we’re experiencing all the worst changes of rapid growth and none of the benefits.” While it was acknowledged that business expansion can be good, one participant stated, “There is good and bad with the arrivals of the box stores. Small businesses are drying up. Corporate commitment to the community is not the same. Something is lost with these box stores. They bring in a new dynamic with their growth in the Mat-Su.”

Some said the borough is too large and the distances between communities too great for residents to feel part of a single community. The Mat-Su was described by one respondent as “a series of communities.” Another respondent reported, “There is not a community-minded attitude among residents of the borough.” Several interview participants felt this has resulted in competition among communities. “It’s hard to initiate or get buy-in for borough-wide projects. For example, with emergency preparedness, a coordinated response is the best response, but communities compete for limited resources. It’s hard to sell a sales tax for borough-wide projects. People want the projects for their communities.”

According to another participant, there are also “distinct philosophical differences between the residents of the different communities. There have been longstanding differences of opinion between the communities of Wasilla and Palmer, but residents probably don’t remember why.” An informant said progress is being made to improve the collaboration between the communities of Palmer, Wasilla and Houston. A tri-city discussion group has been formed and there has already been agreement on transportation issues, a sales tax joint resolution, and bringing codes into agreement between the three cities. However, it was noted that the Borough was invited to two meetings but did not attend either meeting.

A participant felt the Mat-Su “has no viable arts community. There aren’t poetry readings, book clubs, or galleries.”

Informants acknowledged that the role of government, and specifically community planning, is often a divisive issue, because “many landowners who bought property prior to covenants are upset that planning is underway, new rules for them to follow as they develop their private land.” Another said, “Some people want the old Alaska way – to build or do anything and everything they want and some people want structure. Overall, Mat-Su is violently anti-zoning, but the population influx has changed this a little. People moving here from urban areas want services – roads, schools – and planning for commercial and residential zoning rather than haphazard growth.”

A respondent described the challenges the Mat-Su faces in community building and finding common goals as natural for “a borough the size of West Virginia – there is a public perception or frustration in Mat-Su that we should all think alike because it’s just a borough, while no one expects the whole state of West Virginia to think alike.” A respondent felt it was important to “build a sense of shared community throughout the borough because our communities’ problems are shared. We need to get beyond the “us and them dichotomy” (my community vs. other Mat-Su communities).”

Another informant expressed concern over whether the Borough leadership was working to address these health and safety needs, stating, “The Assembly seems unwilling to pursue having health or public safety authority.” Another said, “We should be first class. The Borough should have hired a PR (public relations) firm to bring us to the next level. We suffer because we failed to educate the public.” Yet another participant added, “There is a role for Borough and city government, but we are seeing reluctance. It doesn’t feel very coordinated.” Several informants mentioned they thought the Borough government was weak and not as effective as it could be.

Participants said there are perceptions of inequality in services among residents of different communities in the Mat-Su. Interviewees reported that some services such as road maintenance, schools, behavior, mental and medical health, and emergency services are reaching all communities but there is still room for improvement. Remote communities are not always the ones without access to services, according to an interviewee who stated, “Some services that the core area needs are available in rural areas only. Federal or grant funding often targets these rural areas. There is a need for a community nonprofit radio station and sliding-fee medical services in the core areas, too.” Another interviewee expressed their opinion, “Generally, the interests of the core area are different than Talkeetna, Trapper Creek, Sutton and Chickaloon. I am not sure we have served them well. The gulf is widening as the core grows.”

### **Most Urgent Needs**

Key informants were asked to identify the two or three most urgent community needs or challenges in the Mat-Su. While many issues were commented on, there were some general themes around availability and access to some key health and social services. Issues surrounding education were also mentioned.

Health services were identified as among the top challenges facing the Mat-Su, including primary care, emergency services, mental health, substance abuse treatment, and sliding fee scales. Access to health care for uninsured and lower-income families was described as particularly limited in the borough.

“Talkeetna has health services and people come here from the lower Valley for care; many people in the borough are falling through the cracks,” said a participant. It was reported that there is a three month waiting list for psychiatric evaluations in the borough, and evaluations may not be available for children. An informant in the health field said, “There needs to be more awareness of mental illness. Agencies are currently competing for funding and this method doesn’t promote collaboration.”

A few informants noted the lack of detoxification centers. In addition to substance abuse treatment services, the need for borough-wide law enforcement, particularly for methamphetamine labs, was another challenge identified by interview participants. “We need more police officers,” said a participant. An interviewee said, “The Mat-Su drug problem stopped being funny a long time ago. We need to involve the schools, troopers, youth court, and people with expertise to explain the medical ramifications of substance abuse.” Another informant state, “We need some type of unity on the drug issue. People are taking it too casually.”

Sexual assault, and its linkage to substance abuse issues, was considered a large issue in the Mat-Su. An informant suggested that “A lot of drug and alcohol abuse is done by people with mental illnesses. They self-medicate or over-medicate. This issue covers all social classes and evolves from families with abuse histories.” Another participant stated, “Everyone is affected by drug and alcohol abuse. It affects family wellness, mental illness, domestic violence and erodes the integrity of the family. It affects the whole infrastructure of public safety and public health.”

A participant expressed their concern around services for children, stating “We say we value children, but we don’t back it up. We barely fund our schools or after-school programs. They say, ‘Children are our future,’ yet they really don’t focus efforts. Hope is not a parenting method.” “Crowded classrooms and student to teacher ratios are unacceptable” stated one participant. Another participant puts it, “Youth—they are the leaders of tomorrow. They are our future nurses, doctors, and administrators. It is our responsibility to give them the tools to succeed. They will be competing with the world. Without the proper education and motivation, they will become a burden to society.”



Another participant noted their concern about the aging factor in the population growth trends, “Are we planning for our future senior service needs? Communities are not dealing with people who need these services.” The participant added, “We’ve spent so much money to increase the longevity of individuals through heart surgery, etc. Socially, it is a good thing, but we forgot to create an infrastructure to help people as they get older. There is not an ample support network, like transportation, nutrition, etc. We can find money for hospitals, but not community-based care for their needs in the home...Why do we lack the intelligence to rationalize this out?”

Several informants mentioned the pressing issue of affordable housing and homelessness. “Homelessness is becoming more visible,” stated an interviewee, “Historically, people in the winter couch-surfed, and didn’t pan-handle like in Anchorage. But this last summer, a few (panhandlers) showed up at the Carrs Safeway.”

One participant mentioned transportation issues as a top issue, “Transportation is the key to services and it is necessary for our lifestyles and particularly more important as gas prices go up. As the Valley grows, the transportation needs are going to increase being stressful. We are extremely challenged to address these needs.”

## **Summary of 2002 and 2005 Key Informant Findings**

While direct comparisons cannot be made between statements made by key informants in the 2002 and 2005 assessments, some similar themes emerged. Common themes regarding the Mat-Su’s assets include a strong sense of community and residents’ desire to help others, continued growth in access to health care services throughout the Borough, increased coordination in the delivery of social services, the beauty of the natural environment and the strength of the Borough’s education system.

### **Strong Sense of Community**

- Interview participants believe Mat-Su residents share a strong sense of community and history.
- Residents have a “can-do” frontier spirit and share a willingness to help other residents in difficult times.

### **Health Care**

- The Sunshine Clinic in Talkeetna is considered a valuable resource for residents of the Upper Valley; in particular, the sliding fee scale has been valuable in increasing health care options for low-income residents of the Borough.
- There is a continuing positive trend in the availability of medical services throughout the Borough, including more medical specialists.

## **Social Services**

- Social services agencies are working to coordinate their efforts throughout the Borough.
- Mat-Su residents contribute to the strong volunteer sector and are generous charitable donors.
- There is a strong, active faith community involved in social services delivery.

## **Other Assets**

- Borough residents enjoy a beautiful natural environment and an overall high quality of life.
- The Borough has a quality education system.

## **Challenges**

Areas of common agreement between participants in the 2002 and 2005 studies in regard to challenges facing the Mat-Su include impacts from the phenomenal population growth the Borough has experienced, alcohol and drug abuse, limited resources to treat substance abuse, mental health and behavioral issues, a lack of recreational activities and the need for Borough-wide planning initiatives.

- Interview participants in 2002 and 2005 expressed concern over alcohol and drug abuse among residents of the Mat-Su. Interview participants in the 2005 survey frequently mentioned methamphetamine as a specific concern; several respondents said there has been an increase in the discussion of drug abuse as a Borough-wide issue.
- Participants in both studies expressed the concern that a shortage of recreational opportunities in the Borough may exacerbate drug and alcohol abuse, especially among youth.
- Participants said there is a critical lack of mental health and substance abuse treatment services in the Borough.
- Participants in both studies said the Borough faces many challenges in keeping up with demand for services due to rapid population growth. The anticipated growth of the senior population and the necessity of planning for future needs of this age group was a concern expressed by participants in both studies. There was also concern that services are not adequately available throughout the borough; there are fewer services available in the rural areas.
- There is a need for a common vision for all residents of the Mat-Su and regional efforts on strategic planning, health, public safety, domestic violence and other social needs.



## ***DISCUSSION GROUP RESEARCH***

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The MAP steering committee wanted to enhance the research process in the 2005 assessment by adding facilitated discussion group research. This research approach provided an opportunity to qualitatively probe further into the strengths and challenges affecting the needs or roles of particular populations in the Mat-Su. Several MAP member agencies stepped forward and sponsored discussion group research about their client base or other key areas of particular interest to the MAP membership.

As a result, five discussion groups were facilitated by McDowell Group. The groups addressed issues affecting:

- Youth residential treatment for substance abuse
- Persons with developmental disabilities
- Senior services
- Early childhood
- Faith-based services

Each discussion group ran two to three hours in length. A discussion guide was developed prior to the discussion in collaboration with the organization or agency arranging for the event. All discussion groups were held in either Wasilla or Palmer. Efforts were made to include participants outside the core population area of the Mat-Su Borough. Between 13 and 17 invited participants attended each of the discussions. The lists of participants in each group are found in Appendix C.

Summaries of the discussion group findings are presented below.

### **Youth Residential Treatment for Substance Abuse**

The thirteen participants in the facilitated discussion represented twelve organizations or agencies. These organizations offer local law enforcement and youth detention programs, substance abuse residential and non-residential treatment, mental health treatment, public health services, medical services, custodial care and programs, and local, state, and congressional legislative support for youth substance abuse treatment programs. The discussion group was organized and sponsored by Alaska Family Services.

The meeting addressed two main areas:

- Youth residential treatment needs in the Mat-Su Valley
- Possible responses to those needs

Participants represented expertise in a range of relevant fields. As a result, some initial discussion was devoted to sharing perspectives and specialized knowledge among the participants, including best practices.

### **Key Meeting Points**

The group identified the referral point as a critical bottleneck in the process of identifying and serving youth that need drug/alcohol treatment. This is mainly because youth who need intensive or residential services must be referred quickly, often resulting in less than optimum or appropriate placements.

Placement options include out-of-town/region or out-of-state youth residential programs, placement in overly restrictive settings, and return to undesirable family situations. Lack of immediate assessment and referral options is felt particularly keenly by the Office of Children's Services and law enforcement.

Collaboration and wrap-around services were viewed as a high priority. Methamphetamines are rapidly upping the stakes and challenging existing services.

Regional treatment needs were identified:

- There are no full-time youth residential options available in the Mat-Su.
- Agencies who work with youth in state custody are confident there is a need for residential treatment.
- Demand for behavior health services is growing the fastest in the north Mat-Su Borough.
- When law enforcement responds to an event, they must determine what to do with the youth. Jail or the emergency room may not be the best and most appropriate option.
- There appears to be more referral options, preferential treatment and "incentives" for youth in State custodial care than the population of youth who are not in State custody who need substance abuse treatment.
- Treatment works best when families are involved in the treatment program and have "ownership" in their children's treatment, either through participation in counseling, residential-to home transition plans, or financial commitments to the program.

- Currently, there are two main restraints on the referral process: assessing co-occurring conditions and quick access to local “least restrictive setting” options.

## Persons with Developmental Disabilities

There were 14 participants in the discussion group, representing individuals with developmental disabilities, parents of children with developmental disabilities, Mat-Su Borough School District, faith and secular social service providers, and vocational rehabilitation. The Mat-Su Services for Children and Adults and Access Alaska organized and co-sponsored the discussion group. The Mat-Su Agency Partnership was the third sponsor.

The discussion focused on the needs of Mat-Su Borough residents with developmental disabilities, and those with developmental disabilities and co-occurring mental health and/or substance abuse issues (also referred to below as “multiple diagnoses”). The meeting addressed two main areas:

- Key trends and gaps in services
- Opportunities for improved services and collaboration

The meeting was also designed to give participants an opportunity to speak to each other about matters of common interest and potential collaboration.

### Key Meeting Points

The discussion highlighted the fact that people with developmental disabilities face all the social service and economic issues that other Mat-Su residents face, compounded by their disabilities. A wide range of services exists to meet these needs, but many are becoming severely strained by the size and complexity of need coupled with declining funding. Issues particularly affecting clients with developmental disabilities include:

- Gaps in services caused by funding shortfalls, regulatory requirements, pre-eligibility waiting lists, multiple diagnoses, and geographic isolation
- Lack of service options for many, particularly among the growing population of elderly
- Need for timely/accurate diagnosis
- Lack of family and sibling support services
- Lack of employment and training opportunities for those with disabilities
- Lack of mechanisms to assure that information about services and eligibility requirements are presented to clients and their families at the time the need arises

- Reluctance of healthcare providers to serve Medicaid patients
- Reluctance of mental and behavior health providers to serve developmentally disabled clients
- Public stigma attached to disabilities, often resulting in reluctance on the part of families/primary caregivers to seek the help they need
- Lack of a homeless shelter in the Valley

Of these, the discussion suggested that the following are particular priorities:

1. Supply clear, timely, and comprehensive information about clinical care considerations, client rights, available services, and eligibility requirements.
2. Alleviate significant client (and family) hardships due to wait lists for services and gaps in funding and regulation that leave needy individuals and families wholly or partly without services. For example, clients who fail to meet technical eligibility criteria and critical transition points at which services may be disrupted, such as graduation from high school and attainment of adulthood (22 years of age).
3. Lack of services to support families and siblings with the skills, knowledge, resources and emotional support needed to care for family members with developmental disabilities and to cope with the related financial and emotional stress.
4. Lack of funding and regulatory reform to address key trends such as population growth, demographic shifts (particularly aging primary care givers), growth in drug and alcohol abuse, and lack of affordable housing.

## Senior Services

The thirteen participants in the facilitated discussion represented eight organizations or agencies. These organizations offer a variety of senior services from home care services to assisted living services. A daughter caring for her elderly father also participated. The discussion group was organized by the Palmer Senior Citizens Center. Co-sponsors included: Palmer Senior Citizens Center, Alzheimer's Disease Resource Agency of Alaska, Wasilla Area Seniors, Inc. and the Mat-Su Agency Partnership.

Discussion was directed at the critical needs of seniors today and the implications of important trends such as the rapid growth in the number of seniors (tripling between 2000 and 2025), rising cost of care, increase in the number of seniors with complex needs, and reductions in public support for senior programs. The meeting was also designed to give participants an opportunity to speak to each other about matters of common interest and potential collaboration.

## Key Meeting Points

Senior needs, especially those of difficult cases (often with a psychiatric component) are stretching the care community beyond its limits. The system lacks a process and resources for seniors whose needs have outstripped the capacity of ordinary senior centers and assisted living facilities, placing increasing pressure on those facilities. Population growth and the physical size of the Mat-Su Borough add to the problem. New approaches and new funding are needed to address the rapidly expanding need.

Particular priorities include:

- Funding for support services to keep people living at home as long as possible, including senior centers and home-care services.
- Funding to care for difficult cases, for example, those with co-occurring disorders. In particular, better access to psychiatric services, nursing home beds, and higher level assisted living beds.
- Further development of senior centers as the access point for senior services and a nexus for resource referral and services.
- Better data on senior needs and utilization of services.

In addition to a lack of program funds, there are a number of barriers to meeting the directive to maintain people in their highest functioning environment. The administrative load imposed by state funding may be prohibitive to families and smaller, local providers. The tendency of Alaska families to move away from parents to places outside their communities and outside the state means fewer family resources are available. Finally, when volunteers must substitute for professional services, it imposes a significant management and monitoring challenge.

Transportation is also a major barrier for seniors who need services, especially for those seniors living in the northern or rural portions of the Borough. Ordinary public transportation is often inappropriate. Seniors often need door-to-door service with assistance getting from home to the vehicle. Health issues may make it difficult for them to adhere to a scheduled route. In response, there has been a proliferation of senior-center vans in the borough, but more are needed.

Funding to care for difficult cases, for example, those with co-occurring disorders is limited. In particular, better access to psychiatric services, nursing home beds, and higher level assisted living beds. Currently, the Mat-Su Borough lacks skilled care (nursing) beds, acute care facility, and geriatric psychiatric services. There is a shortage both in the borough and statewide of psychiatric services for outpatient care. There is often a wait list of 6 months to a year to address emergency situations (e.g. a psychotic break).

CNAs, PCAs, and family caregivers need training in how to care for seniors with Alzheimer's and other dementia conditions. There is no funding for spouse caregiving, which limits family options and may force seniors out of their homes earlier than necessary. There is good training available for families, but not enough to meet the need. They need professional level training. Respite is another critical issue for families. Medicaid may cover respite, but it remains very difficult for family caregivers to get badly needed breaks.

Seniors and their families need help learning about what is available and how to access it. Senior centers are well positioned to provide this service while at the same time keeping seniors connected to the broader community.

The greatest gap in senior care is for those who are neither destitute nor wealthy. Families that do not meet income guidelines to qualify for Medicaid do not have access to services unless they can pay for them themselves. Depending on the duration of care needed, this generally requires a substantial net worth, with hundreds of thousands of dollars in liquid assets (i.e., cash). For those who are not wealthy, care of an older family member can bring a family into poverty. Family members who relinquish a career to care for a parent – even when they are paid as a caregiver – may well find themselves unemployed and financially drained at the time the parent dies. End-of-life care is a critical function that is currently being provided almost entirely by HOSPICE. Here, again, family eligibility can be a problem for families that are neither destitute nor wealthy.

The shift of lower income residents to the northern, more rural parts of the borough creates challenges for all senior services. Care coordination and transportation are critical.

As the fastest growing area in the state, the Mat-Su Borough will feel the greatest brunt as the senior population triples over the next twenty years. With services currently inadequate, the additional numbers of seniors, the need to serve more difficult cases resulting from longer life spans and drug and alcohol abuse, and the increasing cost of health care all suggest that properly serving Mat-Su seniors twenty years from now could cost four to five times current levels, not counting inflation. Indications that the State plans to cut funding for seniors, rather than increase it to meet the growing need, has service providers perplexed and extremely concerned.

## **Early Childhood**

The twelve participants represented eight organizations. These organizations provide a wide range of services. They offer pre-kindergarten care, assistance to low income families, child care subsidies, care for developmentally challenged children, child care provider referrals, parent and child care provider training, and work with families who are experiencing difficulties. The discussion group was organized and sponsored by the CCS Early Learning Center.

The purpose of the meeting was to bring together a cross-section of the Mat-Su Early Childhood community to:

- Identify common issues and themes affecting the early development of Mat-Su's children (age 0 to 5 years)
- Explore interconnections and ideas for mutual action among service providers
- Identify data that supports the need for and impact of programs
- Identify shared priorities for the early development sector as a whole

### **Top Priorities Identified**

Participants identified nineteen issues that, in their experience, are important factors for the Early Childhood sector. They also observed that many of the issues could be combined into broader categories. The group decided the three top priorities were:

- Child Abuse and Neglect
- Transportation
- Health and Behavioral Issues

Participants identified areas of need with respect to each issue, what is now being done to address those needs, and any relevant data or data sources to support the need for or impact of programs.

#### **Child Abuse and Neglect**

Below is a list of needs identified as not being adequately addressed through existing programs.

- Parents with mental health issues
- Parent reluctance to get help, or parents who opt out of help, possibly because a violent domestic partner interferes
- Greater awareness of what constitutes neglect, e.g., cultural and generational implications
- Better community awareness, e.g., ability of third parties to recognize and report problems
- Lack of clear avenues for people to report problems or otherwise take action, e.g., concern about anonymity
- Lack of access to services for women who are not working but have small children (possible ways to address include support groups and informal child activities, e.g., Time for Tots at the Sports Complex)



- The Children’s Place reported that 35 percent of the children they serve who are six years and younger are sexually abused
- More materials addressing prevention and build awareness of parents on how to keep their children in safe environments

### **Transportation**

Below is a list of needs identified as not being adequately addressed through existing programs.

- Anecdotal evidence is that parents want door-to-door transportation, especially those most in need. (Do we have evidence that providing transportation increases service utilization? Are some approaches better than others, e.g., van service vs. bus vouchers?)
- Federal dollars for transportation are being ramped down.

Barriers to improved transport include:

- MASCOT is expensive
- Buses, and even vans, may not be suitable for use by young children
- Insurance for client transport services is very expensive
- People don’t know about available transport services
- The “Alaska lifestyle” works against use of public transportation
- Really a community development issue

### **Health and Behavioral**

Below is a list of needs identified as not being adequately addressed through existing programs.

- Growth of IEP kids in Head Start – Now 16% to 20% of children have a diagnosed special need
- Children diagnosed with special needs may be “shadowed” or provided with one-on-one care at schools, but after-school services are not funded to support this continued level of assistance
- There is a waiting list for services
- Kids may be barred from pre-school because of behavioral issues, but have not been classified with a disability or diagnosis
- Parent mental health and substance abuse issues
- Contributes to staff turnover and impacts parent workforce participation



- Range of conditions that affect children’s behavior is huge
- Parents (Two-income and single-parent homes) working long hours, commuting, odd hours, multiple jobs lead to stress and lack of structure at home
- Toddlers and three-year-olds are not appropriate candidates for group care
- Primary health care needs of young children are not being met. Services are fragmented and funding is not available. This includes, especially, dental care
- Denali Kidcare eligibility thresholds have gone up and low reimbursement rates discourage more dentists from getting involved in addressing these needs. (multiple mentions)
- There is a need for more parent education about health issues (especially dental), e.g., homes that are on well water and not ingesting fluoride additives
- Also need to educate parents to recognize and address behavioral problems in their kids
- Home conditions, like lack of sleep and good nutrition can be significant contributing factors
- Need more proactive and preventative policies to address early childhood behavior issues, with the potential to lessen the strain on the public school system and other programs in the future
- Solutions must be comprehensive and accessible, but the field is justifiably reluctant to label young children

## **Faith-based Services**

The seventeen participants in the facilitated discussion represented twelve churches and other faith-based organizations. These churches and organizations offer a variety of social services from biblical counseling to food support to homeless shelters for families. The discussion group was organized by Love INC and co-sponsored by Love INC, Crossroads Community Church and the Mat-Su Agency Partnership.

## Key Meeting Points

The Mat-Su faith-based community is involved in a wide variety of services, with an emphasis on food, clothing and other emergency assistance. Providers tend to look for gaps in services and opportunities to help people overcome temporary hardships. Access to volunteers is a strength of the community, while a historical lack of coordination among faith-based providers suggests an opportunity for improvement.

The discussion identified a number of potential priorities for the faith-based community in the Mat-Su Borough. Since many faith-based organizations were not represented, the list must be considered provisional. However, it suggests a number of concerns and considerations that are likely to widely-held throughout the faith-based community.

The discussion also highlighted a particular character of faith-based services. Government-provided or government-funded services are often focused on issues or locations that impact large numbers of people or areas that are highly visible to the public. For example, drug and alcohol abuse tends to be a priority for government because it results in crime, auto fatalities, public violence and disorder, and other highly visible impacts. Faith-based providers, however, tend to be drawn to opportunities to make a difference in individual lives and family situations. Their natural focus is often on service to the individual rather than service to the larger society.

This focus on the individual leads, in turn, to a particular skill of the faith-based community, namely matching people who want to help with people who need help. The discussion was particularly useful in suggesting the potential advantages of churches and other faith-based organizations working together to leverage this grassroots nature of many of their services. Religious organizations have a great deal of detailed knowledge about what people need and how they respond to social pressures. Organizations like Love INC can be instrumental in helping organizations pool this knowledge and leverage the skills and resources they have developed among their individual congregations and church communities.

The individuals who participated in the discussion generally agreed that their organizations' services were motivated by a biblical mandate that instructs followers to:

- Feed the hungry
- Cloth the naked
- Visit the prisons and the sick
- Help widows and orphans
- House the homeless

- Heal the broken-hearted
- Preach the Gospel

The group did not try to interpret the biblical mandate in detail, but individual participants said that, for them, the mandate implies a focus on:

- Life-threatening emergencies
- People who are not able to advocate for themselves
- The whole person/whole family, for example, overcoming shame associated with needing help
- Economic stability to alleviate stress and make resources more available to all

The group developed a list of community concerns and discussed which ones might be most important and/or appropriate for the faith-based community to address. The list included the following:

- Generational problems; individual, family and peer counseling; marriage and pregnancy counseling
- Suicide prevention/suicide and drug crisis lines
- Customized employment to break cycles of poverty and homelessness
- Teen/youth center and activities to keep youth out of trouble
- Housing and homelessness. This issue is very much on the minds of faith-based providers. It was noted that housing is a very broad and complex field, including emergency shelter for the homeless, transitional housing for individuals and families, supportive housing for people with special needs, maternity housing, and services to maintain people in housing through emergencies such as emergency utility payments.
- Help for those transitioning from prison – this is an area where little is available in the way of help or resources. Ex-prisoners are often destined to offend again because they are not eligible for many public assistance programs, cannot get job assistance or work, housing and help with personal issues.
- Access to medical care and medical insurance. The poor have almost no access to good dental care and doctors often refuse to treat Medicaid patients.
- Services for remote parts of the borough and transportation barriers in general
- Feeding the needy – There is great concern that potential interruption of the USDA Commodities program due to loss of its operating space will

place impossible demands on other food providers. The need for emergency food is large and growing rapidly. Faith-based agencies are concerned that there are not enough resources available to meet this trend.

- Drug and alcohol abuse – especially noted was the need for a detox facility in the borough, and also a rehab center.

When the group completed an exercise to prioritize the list, two broad types of intervention or assistance emerged. These are listed below along with the specific services that participants felt represent the highest priorities for faith-based providers:

#### **Breaking cycles of decline and despair**

- Addressing problems that are passed from generation to generation
- Group and peer counseling, mentoring, and life-skills training
- Strengthening families with parenting skills, and marriage and family counseling

#### **Providing help in crisis situations, especially where lives may be at stake.**

- Housing for the homeless and those in danger of becoming homeless
- Suicide prevention, crisis lines for drugs/alcohol/pregnancy/suicide
- Assisting with transition from prison. Breaking the offender cycle with employment, counseling and stable housing
- Drug/alcohol detox and rehabilitation support
- Emergency food to address an expanding need in the community

In addition, the group recognized that community awareness of both the need and the services available is a critical component of all their activities.

## APPENDIX A: COMMUNITY SOCIOECONOMIC DATA

**Appendix Table 1  
Wasilla and Palmer**

	Palmer	Wasilla	Mat-Su
<b>Population</b>			
Total Population	4,533	5,469	59,322
<b>By Age</b>			
Age 0 - 19	37.8%	36.4%	34.9%
Age 20 - 34	21.5%	20.6%	16.4%
Age 35 - 59	29.8%	33.6%	39.9%
Age 60 +	10.9%	9.4%	8.8%
Median Age	28.8 years	29.7 years	34.1 years
<b>By Race</b>			
White:	80.9%	85.5%	87.6%
Alaska Native or American Indian	8.2%	5.2%	5.5%
Black	2.1%	0.6%	0.7%
Asian	1.1%	1.3%	0.7%
Hawaiian Native	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%
Other Race	1.1%	1.3%	0.9%
Two or More Races	6.3%	5.9%	4.6%
<b>Housing Characteristics</b>			
Total Households	1,472	1,979	20,556
Avg. Household Size	2.8	2.8	2.8
Owner-Occupied Housing	64.5%	55.8%	78.9%
Median Value Owned Homes	\$ 102,600	\$ 137,700	\$ 125,800
Renter-Occupied Housing	35.5%	44.2%	21.1%
Median Rent Paid	\$ 623	\$ 705	\$ 700
Family Households	71.9%	68.8%	73.2%
<b>Percent of Households that</b>			
Lack Complete Plumbing	0.0%	1.3%	8.3%
Lack a Complete Kitchen	0.8%	1.0%	7.3%
Lack Phone Service	0.4%	0.8%	3.5%
<b>Income and Poverty Levels</b>			
Per Capita Income	\$ 17,203	\$ 21,127	\$ 21,105
Median Household Income	\$ 45,571	\$ 48,226	\$ 51,221
Percent Below Poverty	12.7%	9.6%	11.0%
<b>Employment</b>			
Total Employment	1,869	2,451	25,356
Percent Unemployed	10.8%	11.2%	10.3%
Military	2.7%	0.3%	1.5%
Private Wage & Salary Workers	63.3%	68.8%	66.7%
Self-Employed Workers	9.7%	7.8%	10.8%
Government Workers	24.2%	22.6%	20.5%
Unpaid Family Workers	0.0%	0.4%	0.5%
<b>Employment by Industry</b>			
AFF, Hunting & Mining	3.7%	3.9%	5.6%
Construction	6.2%	10.4%	11.2%
Manufacturing	2.0%	2.7%	2.3%
Wholesale & Retail Trade	15.9%	17.4%	15.1%
Transportation Communications and Utilities	8.5%	10.7%	11.9%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	4.4%	4.2%	3.6%
Services	47.1%	39.7%	40.9%
Public Administration	9.4%	10.6%	7.8%

Source: U.S. Census 1990 and 2000

**Appendix Table 2  
Wasilla-Palmer Surrounding Areas**

	Butte	Lazy Mtn	Knik River	Knik-Fairview	Meadow Lakes	Gate-way	Lakes	Tanaina	Farm Loop	Fish-hook	Buffalo Soap-stone	Mat-Su
<b>Population</b>												
Total Population	2,561	1,158	582	7,049	4,819	2,952	6,706	4,993	1,067	2,030	699	59,322
<b>By Age</b>												
Age 0 - 19	33.1%	34.3%	34.0%	35.9%	35.7%	36.8%	35.8%	38.5%	39.6%	36.8%	37.2%	34.9%
Age 20 - 34	15.0%	13.5%	13.7%	16.8%	17.9%	15.4%	14.4%	16.6%	11.9%	15.2%	15.6%	16.4%
Age 35 - 59	41.0%	41.7%	44.5%	40.1%	38.8%	39.8%	42.4%	39.8%	40.5%	41.8%	41.6%	39.9%
Age 60 +	11.0%	10.5%	7.7%	7.2%	7.6%	7.9%	7.4%	5.1%	8.1%	6.2%	5.6%	8.8%
Median Age (years)	36.2	36.4	36.2	33.2	32.7	33.3	34.8	31.5	33.7	33.2	33.4	34.1
<b>By Race:</b>												
White	92.5%	92.7%	85.7%	87.9%	87.9%	88.2%	89.5%	87.9%	93.0%	91.4%	89.7%	87.6%
AK Native/Amer. Ind.	2.9%	2.9%	6.7%	5.7%	5.4%	4.0%	4.6%	4.7%	3.374%	3.5%	4.4%	5.5%
Black	0.5%	0.1%	0.2%	0.7%	0.5%	0.7%	0.6%	0.5%	0.281%	0.4%	0.3%	0.7%
Asian	0.1%	1.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.6%	0.9%	0.5%	0.6%	0.281%	0.8%	0.4%	0.7%
Hawaiian Native	0.1%	0.0%	0.9%	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.094%	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%
Other Race	0.5%	0.2%	1.4%	0.8%	0.6%	1.0%	0.6%	1.4%	0.187%	0.7%	1.1%	0.9%
Two or More Races	3.4%	3.1%	5.2%	4.1%	4.8%	5.0%	4.2%	4.9%	2.812%	3.0%	4.0%	4.6%
<b>Housing Characteristics</b>												
Total Households	884	410	216	2,375	1,702	981	2,217	1,609	334	663	233	20,556
Avg. Household Size	2.9	2.8	2.7	3.0	2.8	3.4	3.0	3.1	3.2	3.0	3.0	2.8
Owner-Occ. Housing	82.1%	82.2%	85.6%	84.0%	81.3%	80.1%	84.8%	85.0%	82.3%	85.4%	83.7%	78.9%
Median \$ Own. Homes	\$126,500	\$106,900	\$121,600	\$127,800	\$105,300	\$157,300	\$137,700	\$125,400	\$124,600	\$131,100	\$105,700	\$125,800
Renter-Occ. Housing	17.9%	17.8%	14.4%	16.0%	18.7%	19.9%	15.2%	15.0%	17.7%	14.6%	16.3%	21.1%
Median Rent Paid	\$ 686	\$ 659	\$ 806	\$ 781	\$ 675	\$ 699	\$ 735	\$ 798	\$ 596	\$ 446	\$ 993	\$ 700
Family Households	76.0%	74.1%	68.5%	76.4%	71.4%	79.7%	80.1%	78.7%	80.5%	76.8%	73.8%	73.2%
<b>% Households lacking</b>												
Complete Plumbing	7.1%	16.0%	8.6%	8.8%	12.0%	1.1%	0.8%	4.0%	0.0%	8.0%	23.9%	8.3%
Complete Kitchen	5.5%	9.3%	5.9%	6.5%	11.4%	0.5%	1.5%	4.0%	3.0%	6.9%	14.8%	7.3%
Phone Service:	2.9%	0.0%	6.4%	3.7%	3.5%	0.6%	1.0%	0.6%	3.3%	2.7%	2.2%	3.5%
<b>Income &amp; Poverty Levels</b>												
Per Capita Income	\$22,522	\$22,789	\$19,104	\$20,895	\$17,295	\$24,548	\$23,485	\$23,967	\$ 20,880	\$20,042	\$18,021	\$21,105
Median House. Income	\$55,573	\$46,500	\$55,000	\$52,113	\$41,030	\$60,385	\$63,250	\$64,493	\$ 55,234	\$55,179	\$41,250	\$51,211
Percent Below Poverty	9.8%	7.8%	15.3%	11.1%	17.1%	7.2%	6.9%	7.5%	7.2%	8.5%	22.2%	11.0%
<b>Employment</b>												
Total Employment	1,115	534	297	2,789	1,978	1,292	3,156	2,334	514	934	277	25,356
Percent Unemployed	8.9%	10.8%	21.1%	13.5%	9.7%	7.4%	7.0%	9.3%	2.7%	6.6%	7.3%	10.3%
Military	0.6%	3.9%	4.0%	1.3%	0.0%	5.0%	2.1%	2.6%	1.8%	0.6%	3.6%	1.5%
Private Wage & Salary	66.5%	59.9%	51.5%	68.0%	72.3%	60.6%	69.9%	68.3%	70.2%	64.6%	67.9%	66.7%
Self-Employed Workers	10.5%	15.4%	8.4%	12.2%	14.0%	7.6%	7.2%	7.5%	7.0%	10.6%	13.7%	10.8%
Government Workers	21.2%	20.8%	24.2%	18.0%	13.7%	26.3%	20.9%	21.7%	21.0%	23.7%	13.0%	20.5%
Unpaid Family Workers	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	1.8%	0.5%
<b>Employment by Industry</b>												
AFF, Hunting & Mining	8.3%	6.7%	2.4%	6.1%	4.7%	6.1%	5.1%	5.8%	4.5%	4.8%	11.9%	5.6%
Construction	11.5%	23.6%	15.2%	13.3%	10.9%	9.7%	10.4%	12.8%	8.0%	15.5%	17.7%	11.2%
Manufacturing	3.4%	2.1%	0.0%	2.0%	3.9%	0.9%	2.3%	0.4%	1.2%	0.7%	5.1%	2.3%
Whole. & Retail Trade	11.6%	6.2%	17.2%	14.4%	19.9%	14.4%	16.0%	11.7%	13.0%	13.2%	11.2%	15.1%
Trans, Comm., & Util.	14.1%	3.7%	6.7%	11.5%	10.6%	10.1%	12.8%	18.9%	12.8%	6.1%	15.5%	11.9%
FIRE	2.2%	1.7%	1.7%	4.9%	2.9%	2.2%	5.4%	5.1%	5.1%	0.6%	0.0%	3.6%
Services	39.2%	44.0%	34.3%	41.0%	43.0%	42.4%	37.6%	35.5%	43.2%	51.0%	31.0%	40.9%
Public Administration	9.2%	8.1%	6.7%	5.4%	4.1%	9.1%	8.3%	7.3%	10.5%	7.4%	4.0%	7.8%

Source: U.S. Census 1990 and 2000

**Appendix Table 3  
Big Lake and Houston**

	Big Lake	Houston	Mat-Su
<b>Population</b>			
Total Population	2,635	1202	59,322
<b>By Age</b>			
Age 0 - 19	29.7%	34.2%	34.9%
Age 20 - 34	15.9%	17.2%	16.4%
Age 35 - 59	42.9%	39.1%	39.9%
Age 60 +	11.5%	9.5%	8.8%
Median Age	37.8 years	34.1 years	34.1 years
<b>By Race</b>			
White	87.1%	84.0%	87.6%
Alaska Native or American Indian	7.3%	8.2%	5.5%
Black	0.3%	0.3%	0.7%
Asian	0.3%	0.7%	0.7%
Hawaiian Native	0.0%	0.3%	0.1%
Other Race	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%
Two or More Races	4.0%	5.5%	4.6%
<b>Housing Characteristics</b>			
Total Households	971	445	20,556
Avg. Household Size	2.6	2.7	2.8
Owner-Occupied Housing	84.7%	80.0%	78.9%
Median Value Owned Homes	\$ 108,100	\$ 91,400	\$ 125,800
Renter-Occupied Housing	15.3%	20.0%	21.1%
Median Rent Paid	\$ 705	\$ 575	\$ 700
Family Households	66.7%	65.8%	73.2%
<b>Percent of Households that</b>			
Lack Complete Plumbing	13.3%	17.0%	8.3%
Lack a Complete Kitchen	14.4%	14.8%	7.3%
Lack Phone Service	6.3%	5.6%	3.5%
<b>Income and Poverty Levels</b>			
Per Capita Income	\$ 19,285	\$ 17,213	\$ 21,105
Median Household Income	\$ 43,382	\$ 39,615	\$ 51,221
Percent Below Poverty	14.6%	17.1%	11.0%
<b>Employment</b>			
Total Employment	1,068	452	25,356
Percent Unemployed	13.5%	17.7%	10.3%
Military	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%
Private Wage & Salary Workers	68.1%	71.9%	66.7%
Self-Employed Workers	14.4%	12.6%	10.8%
Government Workers	16.5%	15.5%	20.5%
Unpaid Family Workers	1.0%	0.0%	0.5%
<b>Employment by Industry</b>			
AFF, Hunting & Mining	8.4%	10.8%	5.6%
Construction	10.8%	11.1%	11.2%
Manufacturing	4.6%	3.3%	2.3%
Wholesale & Retail Trade	17.2%	21.5%	15.1%
Transportation, Communications, & Utilities	12.0%	10.4%	11.9%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	4.9%	1.8%	3.6%
Services	37.5%	36.3%	40.9%
Public Administration	4.7%	4.9%	7.8%

Source: U.S. Census 1990 and 2000

**Appendix Table 4  
Sutton-Alpine and Chickaloon**

	Sutton-Alpine	Chickaloon	Mat-Su
<b>Population</b>			
Total Population	1,080	213	59,322
<b>By Age</b>			
Age 0 - 19	21.9%	27.2%	34.9%
Age 20 - 34	23.5%	6.6%	16.4%
Age 35 - 59	46.6%	58.7%	39.9%
Age 60 +	8.0%	7.5%	8.8%
Median Age	37 years	43.8 years	34.1 years
<b>By Race</b>			
White	67.5%	77.9%	87.6%
Alaska Native or American Indian	22.4%	15.5%	5.5%
Black	4.5%	1.4%	0.7%
Asian	0.3%	0.9%	0.7%
Hawaiian Native	0.4%	0.0%	0.1%
Other Race	0.7%	1.9%	0.9%
Two or More Races	4.2%	2.3%	4.6%
<b>Housing Characteristics</b>			
Total Households	278	87	20,556
Avg. Household Size	2.5	2.5	2.8
Owner-Occupied Housing	83.1%	82.8%	78.9%
Median Value Owned Homes	\$ 69,200	\$ 99,200	\$ 125,800
Renter-Occupied Housing	16.9%	17.2%	21.1%
Median Rent Paid	\$ 325	\$ -	\$ 700
Family Households	64.7%	66.7%	73.2%
<b>Percent of Households that</b>			
Lack Complete Plumbing	16.4%	6.5%	8.3%
Lack a Complete Kitchen	12.2%	6.5%	7.3%
Lack Phone Service	1.8%	0.0%	3.5%
<b>Income and Poverty Levels</b>			
Per Capita Income	\$ 20,436	\$ 14,755	\$ 21,105
Median Household Income	\$ 35,652	\$ 49,792	\$ 51,221
Percent Below Poverty	11.3%	2.8%	11.0%
<b>Employment</b>			
Total Employment	245	116	25,356
Percent Unemployed	7.4%	24.2%	10.3%
Military	3.3%	0.0%	1.5%
Private Wage & Salary Workers	52.7%	38.8%	66.7%
Self-Employed Workers	14.3%	25.0%	10.8%
Government Workers	29.8%	36.2%	20.5%
Unpaid Family Workers	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
<b>Employment by Industry</b>			
AFF, Hunting & Mining	11.8%	0.0%	5.6%
Construction	10.6%	12.9%	11.2%
Manufacturing	2.9%	0.0%	2.3%
Wholesale & Retail Trade	5.7%	5.2%	15.1%
Transportation, Communication, & Utilities	11.8%	19.8%	11.9%
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	2.4%	0.0%	3.6%
Services	37.1%	37.1%	40.9%
Public Administration	14.3%	25.0%	7.8%

Source: U.S. Census 1990 and 2000



**Appendix Table 5  
Trapper Creek, Y, Talkeetna, Petersville, and Willow**

	Willow	Trapper Creek	Talkeetna	Y (Sunshine)	Petersville	Mat-Su
<b>Population</b>						
Total Population	1,658	423	772	956	27	59,322
<b>By Age</b>						
Age 0 - 19	29.7%	25.8%	26.6%	27.4%		34.9%
Age 20 - 34	11.6%	8.0%	16.5%	12.8%		16.4%
Age 35 - 59	45.0%	51.5%	47.5%	46.0%		39.9%
Age 60 +	13.7%	14.7%	9.5%	13.8%		8.8%
Median Age	40.1 years	44.1 years	39 years	40.8 years		34.1 years
<b>By Race</b>						
White	92.4%	87.7%	88.0%	85.9%		87.6%
Alaska Native or American Indian	3.1%	8.3%	3.0%	6.6%		5.5%
Black	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.6%		0.7%
Asian	0.2%	0.5%	0.1%	0.6%		0.7%
Hawaiian Native	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%		0.1%
Other Race	0.4%	0.0%	1.3%	0.8%		0.9%
Two or More Races	3.9%	3.3%	6.9%	5.4%		4.6%
<b>Housing Characteristics</b>						
Total Households	654	182	358	412		20,556
Avg. Household Size	2.5	2.3	2.2	2.3		2.8
Owner-Occupied Housing	87.2%	85.2%	73.5%	85.0%		78.9%
Median Value Owned Homes	\$ 117,900	\$ 47,500	\$ 88,000	\$ 58,900		\$ 125,800
Renter-Occupied Housing	12.8%	14.8%	26.5%	15.0%		21.1%
Median Rent Paid	\$ 445	\$ 439	\$ 612	\$ 472		\$ 700
Family Households	67.0%	68.1%	50.6%	61.4%		73.2%
<b>Percent of Households that</b>						
Lack Complete Plumbing	18.8%	57.9%	24.9%	35.0%		8.3%
Lack a Complete Kitchen	18.5%	38.3%	20.5%	35.2%		7.3%
Lack Phone Service	12.1%	27.9%	9.7%	18.5%		3.5%
<b>Income and Poverty Levels</b>						
Per Capita Income	\$ 22,323	\$ 18,247	\$ 23,695	\$ 15,437		\$ 21,105
Median Household Income	\$ 38,906	\$ 27,031	\$ 38,289	\$ 31,848		\$ 51,221
Percent Below Poverty	22.1%	24.7%	10.8%	17.4%		11.0%
<b>Employment</b>						
Total Employment	625	125	463	253		25,356
Percent Unemployed	11.7%	8.1%	14.4%	24.3%		10.3%
Military	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%		1.5%
Private Wage & Salary Workers	70.4%	56.8%	66.1%	58.9%		66.7%
Self-Employed Workers	17.0%	20.0%	10.8%	18.2%		10.8%
Government Workers	9.1%	23.2%	23.1%	16.6%		20.5%
Unpaid Family Workers	3.5%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%		0.5%
<b>Employment by Industry</b>						
AFF, Hunting & Mining	6.1%	16.0%	3.0%	0.0%		5.6%
Construction	13.0%	12.0%	5.6%	12.3%		11.2%
Manufacturing	1.8%	7.2%	1.7%	0.0%		2.3%
Wholesale & Retail Trade	23.8%	0.0%	17.9%	30.0%		15.1%
Transportation, Comm., & Utilities	16.3%	16.0%	14.7%	7.9%		11.9%
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%		3.6%
Services	31.4%	37.6%	48.6%	40.3%		40.9%
Public Administration	4.3%	11.2%	8.4%	9.5%		7.8%

Source: U.S. Census 1990 and 2000

**Appendix Table 6  
Outlying Areas**

	Chase	Skwentna	Lake Louise	Susitna	Glacier View	Mat-Su
<b>Population</b>						
Total Population	41	111	88	37	249	59,322
<b>By Age</b>						
Age 0 - 19						34.9%
Age 20 - 34						16.4%
Age 35 - 59						39.9%
Age 60 +						8.8%
Median Age						34.1 years
<b>By Race</b>						
White						87.6%
Alaska Native or American Indian						5.5%
Black						0.7%
Asian						0.7%
Hawaiian Native						0.1%
Other Race						0.9%
Two or More Races						4.6%
<b>Housing Characteristics</b>						
Total Households						20,556
Avg. Household Size						2.8
Owner-Occupied Housing						78.9%
Median Value Owned Homes						\$ 125,800
Renter-Occupied Housing						21.1%
Median Rent Paid						\$ 700
Family Households						73.2%
<b>Percent of Households that</b>						
Lack Complete Plumbing						8.3%
Lack a Complete Kitchen						7.3%
Lack Phone Service						3.5%
<b>Income and Poverty Levels</b>						
Per Capita Income						\$ 21,105
Median Household Income						\$ 51,221
Percent Below Poverty						11.0%
<b>Employment</b>						
Total Employment						25,356
Percent Unemployed						10.3%
Military						1.5%
Private Wage & Salary Workers						66.7%
Self-Employed Workers						10.8%
Government Workers						20.5%
Unpaid Family Workers						0.5%
<b>Employment by Industry</b>						
AFF, Hunting & Mining						5.6%
Construction						11.2%
Manufacturing						2.3%
Wholesale & Retail Trade						15.1%
Transportation, Comm., & Utilities						11.9%
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate						3.6%
Services						40.9%
Public Administration						7.8%

Source: U.S. Census 1990 and 2000

## ***APPENDIX B: LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS***

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**Dr. Cathy Baldwin-Johnson**, Pediatrician

**Jim Beck**, Executive Director, Access Alaska

**Clyde Boyer**, CPA, President of the Board of Directors, Mat-Su Regional Medical Center/Valley Hospital Association

**John Cannon**, Executive Director, Mat-Su Services for Children and Adults

**Bob Doyle**, Chief Administrator, Mat-Su Borough School District

**Sue Drover**, Grant writer and volunteer for Upper Susitna Senior Center, Sunshine

**Sandy Garley**, Director of Planning, City of Wasilla

**Senator Lyda Green**, Alaska Legislator since 1994

**Bill Hogan**, Director, Division of Behavior Health, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services

**John Klapperich**, President, Greater Wasilla Chamber of Commerce

**Jack Krill**, Director, Fire Chief, Central Mat-Su Fire Department

**Ingrid Ling**, Tribal Health Director, Chickaloon Traditional Tribal Council

**Barb Mannix**, Talkeetna business owner

**Cheryl Metiva**, Executive Director, Greater Wasilla Chamber of Commerce

**Elsie O'Bryan**, Mid-Valley Seniors, Houston

**Linda Pettyjohn**, Executive Director, Love INC

**Sammye Pokryfki**, Program Officer, The Rasmuson Foundation

**Don Savage**, Chief of Police, City of Wasilla

**Reverend Charles Smeltzer**, Greater Grace Church of Trapper Creek, Upper Su Valley Food Bank

**John Stein**, former Executive Director, Kids are People, former Mayor of Wasilla

**Richard Tubbs**, Executive Director, Palmer Senior Citizens Center

## **APPENDIX C: LIST OF DISCUSSION GROUP PARTICIPANTS**

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There were five discussion groups held as part of this study. Below are the participants in each of these facilitated discussions.

### **Youth Residential Treatment for Substance Abuse**

**Donn Bennice**, CEO, Alaska Family Services

**Greg Van Kirk**, Regional Field Office Manager, Office of Children's Services

**Elizabeth Gill**, Clinical Director, Alaska Family Services

**Senator Lyda Green**, Alaska State Legislature

**Carol Gustafson**, Congressional Delegation Representative, U.S. Congress

**Bill Herman**, Trust Program Officer, The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority

**Dianne Keller**, Mayor, City of Wasilla

**Beth Juarez**, Public Health Nurse, DHSS

**Ray Michaelson**, Superintendent, Mat-Su Youth Facility

**David Newell**, Executive Director, Denali Family Services

**Don Savage**, Chief of Police, City of Wasilla

**Karen Schaff**, ARCH-Treatment Services Director, Volunteers of America

**Norman Stevens**, CEO, Valley Hospital

### **Persons with Developmentally Disabilities**

**Melody Adams**, individual with developmental disabilities

**Sandra Adams**, parent

**John Cannon**, Executive Director, MSSCA

**Daniel Edell**, individual with development disabilities

**Mercedes Henry**, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

**Lucy Hope**, Assistant Director, Special Education, Mat-Su Borough School District

**Layne Larson-Collins**, parent

**Michelle O'Hara**, Regional Director, Access Alaska

**Linda Pettyjohn**, Executive Director, Love INC.

**Pauline Richards**, Network Director, HOPE

**Andra Silgailis**, Core Services Supervisor, Access Alaska

**Donna Swihart**, parent and member of the Governor's Council for Disabilities and Special Education

**Trish Walter**, MSSCA

**Karen Walton**, Executive Director, MASCOT

## **Senior Services**

**Dixi Amidon**, Outreach Coordinator, Alzheimer's Resource Agency

**LaVonne Boyd**, Senior Advocate, Mid Valley Seniors

**Babetta Daddino**, Director, Valley Health Services

**Kizzenkeea Davis**, daughter, home caring her elderly father

**Lynda Garcia**, Administrator, Palmer Pioneers Home

**Freda Hatton**, Chairman, Mat-Su Borough Seniors Advisory Board

**Mike Hervey**, Administrator, North Star Assisted Living

**Allison Layman**, Living Well Care Coordinator, Palmer Senior Citizens Center

**Gabriel Layman**, Senior Services Advocate, Palmer Senior Citizens Center

**Mary McConnell**, Social Worker, Palmer Pioneers Home

**Mae Tischer**, Past President, Upper Susitna Seniors

**Richard Tubbs**, Executive Director, Palmer Senior Citizens Center

**Rachel Westbrook**, Office Manager, Palmer Senior Citizens Center

## **Faith-based Services**

**Steve Bowman**, Family Promise of Mat-Su

**Pastor Cyndye Brewer**, New Harvest A.R.C.

**Pastor Ed Blocker**, Valley Open Bible Fellowship

**Garry Forrester**, Valley Residential Services

**Alice Holinger**, Food Pantry of Wasilla

**Major Dan Hughes**, Salvation Army

**Pastor Sergiy Korelov**, Word of Life International Ministry

**Toneia Mayes**, Heart Reach Pregnancy Center

**Trevor Olson**, Missions Director, Crossroads Community Church

**Linda Pettyjohn**, Executive Director, Love In the Name of Christ (INC)

**Denise Piatt**, Recovery Director, Crossroads Community Church

**Deborah Price**, Board Member, Love INC

**Pastor Paul Riley**, Prison Chaplin

**Evylyn Stearns**, Salvation Army

**Carol Ursprung**, Counselor Coordinator, Love INC

**Kathy Webb**, Food Pantry of Wasilla

**Reverend Henry Woodell**, First Presbyterian Church

**Dimitri**, Visiting Russian Minister

## **Early Childhood**

**Jen Downey**, The Children's Place

**Dorene Eckman**, Division of Public Assistance, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services

**Lucy Hope**, Student Support Services, Mat-Su Borough School District

**Linda Ketchum**, Executive Director, CCS Early Learning

**Jean Kincaid**, Mat-Su Services for Children and Adults

**Carol Jensen**, Child Care Connection

**Donna Johnson**, Programs Director, CCS Early Learning

**Karena Merrill**, WIC Program

**Marci Orth**, Federal Programs, Mat-Su Borough School District

**Sammye Pokryfki**, (former) Executive Director, United Way of Mat-Su

**John Weetman**, Federal Programs, Mat-Su Borough School District

**Teri Willard**, Division of Public Assistance, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services

## ***APPENDIX D: LIST OF MAT-SU AGENCY PARTNERSHIP MEMBERS***

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### **General Membership\***

ACCESS Alaska  
Alaska Attachment & Bonding Associates  
Alaska Family Services  
Alpha Counseling & Education Services  
American Red Cross – Mat-Su Branch  
Aurora Borealis Services & Counseling  
Behavioral Health Services of Mat-Su  
City of Wasilla – Mat-Su Youth Court  
Co-Occurring Disorders Institute Inc. (CODI)  
Chugiak Children’s Services/Early Learning  
Daybreak, Inc.  
Family Promise Mat-Su  
Finding your Future  
Girl Scouts Susitna Council  
Hope Community Resources, Inc.  
Kids Are People  
LINKS Mat-Su Parent Resource Center  
Love In the Name of Christ (Love INC)  
MASCOT  
Mat-Su Borough School District (Career/Tech Ed)  
Mat-Su College  
Mat-Su National Organization for Women (NOW)  
Mat-Su Public Health Center  
Mat-Su Services for Children & Adults  
Mat-Su Youth Facility/Division of Juvenile Justice  
Nugen’s Ranch  
Office of Children’s Services

Palmer Senior Citizens Center, Inc.  
Palmer Trial Court/Coordinated Resource Project  
Alaska Division of Public Assistance  
Salvation Army – Mat-Su Division  
Sunshine Community Health Center  
The Children’s Place  
United Way of Mat-Su  
Valley CASA Program  
Valley Healthy Communities Program  
Valley Hospital  
Valley Residential Services

### **Associate Membership\***

All Alaska Pediatric Partnership  
Anchorage Daily News  
Camp Fire USA Alaska Council  
Christmas Friendship Dinner  
Heartreach Pregnancy Center  
Integrated Services for Children & Families  
Sammye Pokryfki  
UAF Cooperative Extension Service  
U.S. Congressional Office  
Valley Eye Associates PC

\* As of May 4, 2005