



NORTHEAST
RURAL
PHILANTHROPY DAYS
Phillips County

REGIONAL LISTENING TOUR REPORT



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Executive Summary

The Northeast Rural Philanthropy Days (NE RPD) Listening Tour provided a platform for statewide foundations to learn more about the broad challenges and issues facing the rural, nine-county region of Northeast Colorado. Covering 15,800 square miles of the northeastern corner of the state; the region includes Cheyenne, Kit Carson, Lincoln, Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma Counties. The tour was conducted in preparation for the NE RPD conference which will be held on June 8 - 10, 2016 in Phillips County, Colorado.

Where did we go? The Listening Tour took place on February 24 - 26, 2016. The tour delegation visited all nine counties in the region. The communities of Brush, Akron, Sterling, Julesburg, Holyoke, Wray, Burlington, Cheyenne Wells, and Hugo hosted their respective county meetings. A full itinerary is available in Appendix A.

What did we do? The Listening Tour delegation met with high-level community leaders in candid discussions about the character of the region, existing needs, community priorities and current collaborative initiatives to address such issues. Individuals working in the fields of education, government, health care, human services, business and economic development and other sectors participated in these discussions.

What did we hear? Each community visited during the Listening Tour highlighted traits that made it unique compared to other counties. However, as a whole, participants identified several common characteristics and regional needs. Listening Tour participants described the northeast region as a tight knit, agriculturally rich community. Many attendees spoke of the plentiful assets that the region has and the benefits of raising a family in northeast Colorado. Residents characterized themselves as having can-do attitudes, creating a strong and reliable community that continually pulls together to get things done.

Common regional needs are centered on the challenge of providing robust economic and educational opportunities, including attracting and retaining a qualified workforce, addressing the out-migration of their own youth, and providing quality education through career development; essential needs infrastructure, including the lack of quality, affordable childcare and housing, as well as growing food insecurity; and access to healthcare, including mental health services, substance abuse care, and transportation.

What is next? Each of the regional challenges that are described in this report are significant and impactful. As a result of the Listening Tour, key regional issues will be addressed during the NE RPD conference through educational programming, including topical funder panels and trainings on the Collective Impact model. Broadly, community leaders from across northeast Colorado shared their enthusiasm for moving the needle to more comprehensively address the root causes of the economic and infrastructure challenges addressed in this report. There is an existing level of collaboration and resource sharing that can be built upon using the successful models and best practices shared during the conference.

Introduction

Rural Philanthropy Days (RPD) was initiated to bridge the disparity of opportunities available to nonprofits and community leaders in rural Colorado compared with the state's metro areas. The first conference took place in 1991 to provide a platform for rural nonprofit professionals to network and build relationships with foundation staff. The conference also provides a forum for education about rural needs and opportunities for skill-building and networking. A partnership between Community Resource Center (CRC) and Anschutz Family Foundation, the statewide RPD program serves eight rural regions and coordinates two conferences per year. The last NE RPD conference took place in 2012 in Morgan County, and in 2016, Phillips County will host for the first time.

In 2012, a group of statewide funders expressed a desire to better understand the overarching needs of rural communities. To meet this need, programming was expanded to include a regional Listening Tour in advance of each conference. The purpose of the Listening Tour is for statewide and local foundations to learn more about the broad challenges and issues facing the different regions in Colorado. Each Listening Tour is designed to help grantmakers arrive at the RPD conference better prepared to collaborate and support local needs.

Amy Latham, Vice President of Philanthropy at The Colorado Health Foundation and Kristin Todd, Senior Vice President of Grants at Daniels Fund, co-chaired the Northeast Regional Listening Tour on February 24 - 26, 2016. In addition, senior leaders from Anschutz Family Foundation, Buell Foundation, Caring for Colorado Foundation, Corporation for National & Community Service, and Daniels Fund, as well as representatives from CRC and the NE RPD Steering Committee, attended the tour (Appendix B).

The goal of the Listening Tour is to allow funders to hear from community leaders - in open, candid discussions - about the characteristics of the region, existing needs, and efforts currently underway to address them. Three primary questions were asked at each meeting:

- 1. How would you describe the personality and culture in your community?*
- 2. What do you see as a key issue or need in your community?*
- 3. Are there any collaborations currently in place to address regional needs?*

In partnership with CRC, the NERPD Steering Committee organized the Listening Tour with substantial support from local communities, including: City of Brush, Washington County, Northeast CSU Regional Engagement Center, Sedgwick County Economic Development, Phillips County, Yuma County, Prairie Family Center, Cheyenne County, City of Cheyenne Wells, and Lincoln County Economic Development (Appendix C). Community leaders working in the arts and culture, business and economic development, education, agriculture and environment, government, health care, human services, and housing sectors were invited. The delegation met with more than 200 individuals (Appendix D) across nine meetings, visiting one community in each county, including: Brush in Morgan County, Akron in Washington County, Sterling in Logan County, Julesburg in Sedgwick County, Holyoke in Phillips County, Wray in Yuma County, Burlington in Kit Carson County, Cheyenne Wells in Cheyenne County, and Hugo in Lincoln County. The Listening Tour delegation also toured Green House Homes in Akron and the Rural Colorado Apparel Manufacturing Company in Wray.

This report summarizes the community characteristics, issues, and needs that were heard in these meetings. It is not intended to be a comprehensive summary of all regional needs.

Characteristics of the Northeast Colorado Region

The term *rural* does not just describe a geographic or population distinction. It is a complex construct that also represents a culture of the people. Rural areas have rich cultural backgrounds and heritages. Rural residents represent a large group of individuals, strongly influenced by a region's own culture, but are often not recognized as their own cultural group. Geographic isolation creates separation from other community members and requires independence and self-sufficiency. Agricultural heritage can contribute to a strong sense of independence, work ethic, and personal responsibility. As a region, cultural characteristics of northeast Colorado also include collaborative tight-knit communities, strong ties to the land, shared life experiences, and community pride.¹

Simply expressed, Listening Tour participants described the region as an agriculturally rich community and feel it is a good place to raise a family. Residents are characterized as having a can-do attitude creating a strong community that will pull together to get things done.

Agricultural Community – A Great Place to Raise a Family

The importance of agriculture and family in the region was repeatedly highlighted by Listening Tour participants. Agriculture is seen as the anchor and stabilizing factor in the region's economy. With feet firmly planted in the rich historical legacy of the region, communities have worked hard to preserve and pass on the region's heritage as they look forward to the future. Although the northeast region as a whole is seen as self-reliant, not necessarily relying on or waiting for help from outside the area, residents are viewed as generous in helping each other when families and neighbors experience hard times. With the help of each other and a pioneer spirit, families have persevered and remained resilient through the ups and downs of rural life.

Pull Together - Get It Done

Local community members described the characteristics of the region as "get'er doners." As one person expressed, residents are not looking for permission - they are looking for help to accomplish a goal. Often out of necessity in a geographically large but sparsely populated region, collaboration is a strength in northeast Colorado. Community members often think outside of the box to solve problems in order to meet the needs of residents. Individuals often wear multiple hats in the community and place a high value on volunteerism. Whether it is downtown beautification, renewed interest in the availability of outdoor activities for physical fitness, or community-wide efforts to resurrect local historic movie theaters, the region pulls together when there is a project that needs to be done.

Assets and Successes within the Region

The northeast region has numerous assets and a variety of regional successes were highlighted during the Listening Tour. The region is rich with diverse individuals and strong partnerships, creating a spirit of strength and efficiency across the nine counties. Communities have several projects and programs currently in place and

¹ Crosby, R. A., Wendel, M. L., Vanderpool, R. C., & Casey, B. R. (2012). *Rural populations and health: Determinants, disparities, and solutions* (1st ed.) Jossey-Bass.

underway to address regional concerns such as a diminishing workforce, lack of behavioral health services and barriers to accessing healthcare.

Morgan County highlighted the new Centennial Mental Health Center facility as an exciting new community asset. Morgan Community College is also a substantial asset to the region, providing a variety of customized trainings for business, industry and workplace education in several locations. Although pressed for adequate funding, schools in Washington County have become more collaborative and have focused on providing more individualization for students. Logan County residents spoke of the recent efforts to revitalize and beautify downtown areas in hopes of attracting new individuals into the community. Residents in Phillips County are proud of their many community spaces, in which local groups and organizations can gather in order to address local issues and build relationships. Great healthcare facilities and community centers with a wide array of fitness classes are strengths within Yuma County. Similarly in Kit Carson County, residents highlighted community centers and local schools as being the heart of their communities. In Cheyenne County, participants emphasized their efforts to engage youth by transforming an old high school building into a theater. Lincoln County is rich in organizational partnerships and referenced efforts through the Fresh Food Fund to save the county from being considered a food desert.

Viewed as the heart of small towns, the counties in the northeast region rally around local school districts, with several benefiting from capital construction grants through the “Building Excellent Schools Today” (BEST) program. Although still a concern in most of the region, several communities have made recent efforts to focus on collaborative efforts in order to address the need for quality, affordable childcare. On the other end of the spectrum, there are also innovative solutions being implemented to address the needs of an increasingly aging population in the region. Each county was given the chance to speak to the exciting and successful programs and partnerships that exist within their communities, painting a vibrant picture of the passion and drive that exists among individuals in the northeast region.

Cross-Cutting Regional Issues

Economic & Educational Opportunity

Rural communities across Colorado and the nation face a similar problem: residents are aging rapidly and youth are quickly leaving for the city. To combat this issue, many have sought out unique solutions to revitalize downtowns, attract tourism and jobs, and entice young families to return to small-town living after they’ve attained higher education or acquired new skills. Northeast Colorado faces a similar challenge; economic and educational opportunity remains a barrier to young families and professionals who may want to return to their hometown, but cannot justify lower wages and few career pathways. There is a significant need to identify creative ways to diversify the economy of the region, recruit and retain professionals, and provide quality education through entrance to the workforce.

Employment & Livable Wages

Many residents in the northeast region of Colorado find employment in the agricultural sector. The unemployment rate is often skewed due to agriculture layoffs that are not regularly captured in unemployment data. In recent years, the number of working farmers in the region has dwindled. Many small family farms struggle to compete with commercial operations and participants expressed concern for transitioning farms from one

generation to the next. It is often difficult for young farmers to start-up or expand due to high initial investment costs. Many attendees spoke of the dangers that come with relying on a single industry to drive the economy of the region. Some counties rely almost exclusively on agriculture, emphasizing that when small farms die, the community tends to go with it. While agriculture is a major asset, the need to diversify workforce opportunities and industries is apparent. Diversification will undoubtedly create a more sustainable and stable economy and provide a wider variety of employment opportunities for those interested in moving to the region.

The concern over generational transitions also affects small business owners who have difficulty in succession planning when they are ready to retire. Students or young adults working in small, local businesses often seek out higher paying jobs in the metro area. Similar issues exist in civic engagement and the need to fill community leadership roles. Phillips and Sedgwick counties spoke of their efforts to create a Young Adults Civic Engagement program in hopes of involving young families in community leadership.

Several major employers, such as Cargill, offer employment opportunities for migrant agricultural workers who settled in parts of the region in the 1980's. With at least twenty different languages and dialects spoken in the Fort Morgan area, communication barriers are often a concern. These large employers are attracted to the centralized geography of the northeast region. Located near a number of major interstates, the region could serve as a convenient location for distribution centers. While companies have shown interest in building facilities within the region, communities often lack the required skilled workforce. Companies that offer lower wage jobs have cited a difficulty in finding workers who can pass a background check and drug screening.

The challenge to find a consistent, skilled workforce also crosses into professional sectors. Attendees spoke of the difficulties in recruiting qualified healthcare professionals and educators. There is a high need for qualified physicians, specialists, dentists and mental health professionals, yet little incentive and opportunity to draw these individuals into the region. Often, young teachers and healthcare professionals will move into rural communities to fulfill training requirements or qualify for federal student loan forgiveness. While these individuals are valuable to the community, they often are lured back to the city. Attendees discussed ways in which they can work on keep young professionals in the northeast and allowing them the opportunity to put down roots in their communities after their few years of work.

EMPLOYMENT	Cheyenne	Kit Carson	Lincoln	Logan	Morgan	Phillips	Sedgwick	Washington	Yuma	Colorado
Labor Force	1,144	3,810	1,796	11,062	15,010	2,619	1,198	2,948	5,571	2,806,544
Unemployment Rate (2014)	3.50%	4.20%	4.80%	3.50%	4.20%	2.30%	3.70%	2.50%	2.60%	5%
Median Household Income (2013)	\$50,379	\$41,495	\$43,701	\$40,637	\$43,209	\$44,064	\$36,749	\$40,914	\$43,361	\$58,942
Average Hourly Wage	\$17.85	\$15.78	\$15.00	\$16.80	\$18.90	\$17.20	\$15.95	\$19.75	\$17.88	\$24.00
Poverty Rate	13.40%	15.50%	16.30%	20.30%	16.30%	15.00%	17.60%	16.80%	16.00%	13.20%
Companies	304	834	626	577	667	135	71	105	370	547,770
"Nonprofits" 501c3 Public Charities	25	63	51	140	181	55	37	47	106	7,721

Closely related to employment is another challenge expressed by nearly every county - livable wages. The region relies heavily on agriculture to generate income, and low agricultural commodity prices and oil valuation affect the wealth of the communities as a whole. Median income is less than the state average and has not increased at the same rate over the past four years. Some participants noted that there can be a misconception regarding the cost of living in rural communities. Housing may be less expensive, but the cost of goods and services and required travel to access these goods increase the overall expense. Wages typically do not reflect the cost of living and can be a major barrier to building a qualified workforce in the region.

Education & Career Development

Many aspects of education emerged as challenges to be addressed in the region. The shortage of teachers in rural Colorado communities is a primary concern. Low wages for teaching positions are a major barrier to recruiting and retaining a strong workforce. Neighboring rural communities in Nebraska and Kansas as well as metro school districts pay significantly more, so much so that a new teacher in the Denver Metro may have a higher salary than a long-time teacher in local rural districts. Rural schools have become a training ground for new teachers to gain experience and then leave, leading to difficulty in retaining individuals once they are in the communities. Highly Qualified Teacher requirements set by the federal government are also perceived as an added barrier for recruiting teachers. Despite these challenges, participants of the Listening Tour did not see consolidation of school districts as an option. Schools are considered the heart of rural communities and losing them may threaten the life of the town itself. The northeast region values its ability to offer small class sizes, and many service providers share resources and opportunities across districts.

For rural educators, their role is rarely just as a teacher, but also a counselor, sports coach, and mentor. Many of these educators feel ill-equipped to support an increasing number of students with special needs, behavioral health concerns, or those whose families are in crisis. Some partnerships are in place to help meet these needs, but a greater infrastructure is necessary for schools to better support struggling students. The need for an alternative model of education was identified within Washington County, which has an especially high population of students with special needs, making safety a key concern.

Poor fourth grade reading proficiency levels were attributed to poverty, lack of access to enrichment activities, lack of access to language instruction, and English language deficiencies in immigrant populations. Strong English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction is needed for migrant agricultural families entering the school systems. Morgan County in particular expressed the challenges that come from having at least 20 different languages spoken within the county. Additionally, collaboration between social service agencies addressing early childhood and school readiness are needed in order to supplement gaps that exist within schools and to address language barriers within several communities.

Expanding career technical education (CTE) classes would be beneficial in growing the qualified workforce in the region as well better preparing youth for future success. More agricultural programming and high tech labs are needed to keep up with cutting-edge agricultural technology such as ag-precision and drones. Regional higher education providers Morgan Community College and Northeastern Junior College provide opportunities for dual-credit hours and financial aid, but financial and geographic barriers persist across the region. More CTE programs such as welding, collision repair, and EMT training could also provide job opportunities where there are local

workforce shortages. A technical career building path is needed from high school to employment that does not require a degree to support student transitions.

Education and Youth	Cheyenne	Kit Carson	Lincoln	Logan	Morgan	Phillips	Sedgwick	Washington	Yuma	Colorado
Young Child Population (<5)	138	475		1,125	2,218	249	128	234	738	337,626
Kinder. Full- Day	64.30%	100%	29.20%	61.10%	95.80%	100%	100%	100%	100%	70.30%
Under 18 in Poverty	20.30%	19.50%	24.50%	19.00%	20.40%	17.30%	22.90%	19.90%	17.90%	17.10%
Free and Red. Lunch	43.10%	56.90%	43.50%	43.00%	60.00%	41.50%	43.20%	48.30%	54.10%	40.90%
4th Graders NOT Proficient in Reading	N/A	32.00%	14.90%	27.80%	38.00%	29.40%	35.10%	38.20%	37.40%	32%
HS Graduation Rate	83.30%	88.70%	74.60%	87.40%	77.80%	86.60%	22.20%	91.70%	91.20%	73.90%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	21.80%	13.90%	16.10%	15.80%	15.10%	16.80%	15.00%	18.50%	17.70%	37.00%

Out-Migration of Youth

Many attendees spoke of the difficulty to keep youth in the region after graduation from high school. Graduation rates are high in the region, yet many students often move to the Front Range or out of state in order to attend universities and colleges. This out-migration of the region's youth, also referred to as "brain drain", is largely due to young adults and families seeking economic opportunities not provided in the northeast region. Community leaders would like to see the young people who leave to pursue higher education return to the area with skills and a commitment to grow the community. Efforts have been made to 'grow our own' professionals, especially in the education sector. More incentives for returning young adults, such as paid student teaching programs, could offer assistance in this area. Individuals raised in the region have a deeper understanding of the culture and needs of the Northeast, and communities would benefit from community leaders and school board members with local roots.

Community members also expressed the need for a deeper engagement of adolescents living in the region. Cultural and recreational needs of young people must be addressed in order to recruit and retain the region's youth. Some communities have made efforts to increase fitness, recreation, and outdoor gathering places to provide community entertainment and opportunities for healthy activities. Additionally, communities spoke of the desire to create opportunities for service learning projects, apprenticeships and internships. Such opportunities would allow youth to be more involved and invested in the community, while also contributing to the local economy and building the capacity of local businesses. By giving leadership opportunities to local youth, they are able to learn valuable skills that can be utilized after graduation from high school.

Essential Needs

Creative solutions to these economic barriers have begun to attract more young people looking to start a family, however providing adequate essential services remains a challenge. A dearth of quality and affordable housing, early childhood providers, and food insecurity must be addressed in order to retain young families and uphold a high quality of living.

Early Childhood Care & Education

Child care was a significant need referenced across the region. Many communities spoke of the challenges that come with being a “childcare desert,” an area in which there are no available licensed childcare providers. Some community members discussed the difficulties of becoming a licensed childcare provider and the high costs of doing so. Wages for early childhood providers are extremely low and many providers struggle to pay the expense of licensure. This is not just a regional issue but rather a statewide need. Recent studies have found that early childhood educators and childcare providers are vastly underpaid in Colorado. Many childcare leaders and teachers have an annual salary that is barely enough to cover basic needs and living expenses.² A chronically underpaid workforce leads to high turnover and difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified staff members. Not only is this detrimental to communities, but also the social-emotional well-being of the children within those communities. With few childcare providers in the region, the facilities that do exist often lack the capacity to serve all children in need of care. The severe lack of quality child care was cited as a substantial factor prohibiting professionals from moving into the region and in retaining young families who often must decide between paying for childcare and keeping both parents employed.

Affordable Housing

Listening Tour participants expressed a need for both quality and affordable housing. There is a general shortage of housing available to rent or own in the region. Housing prices were driven up due to increased demand from the wind and oil industries, however, prices did not decrease when the industries left the region. With high housing prices and wages that are typically lower than Colorado’s average median income, a significant barrier to homeownership exists in the region. Although traditional homelessness was not cited as a challenge in the region, there are many individuals residing in sub-standard living conditions. This often includes multiple families living in one home or 'surfing' from the couch of one friend to the next.

HOUSING	Cheyenne	Kit Carson	Lincoln	Logan	Morgan	Phillips	Sedgwick	Washington	Yuma	Colorado
Total Housing Units	941	3,499	2,420	8,953	11,440	1,900	1,312	2,408	4,446	2,222,782
Owner Occupied Housing Units	76.9%	66.4%	66.6%	5,564	6,631	1,154	647	1,479	2,567	1,972,868
Renter-Occupied Housing Units	23.10%	33.60%	33.4%	2,451	3,815	514	296	540	1,244	679,768
Vacant Housing	19.4%	13.9%	19.5%	10.5%	8.7%	12.2%	28.1%	16.2%	14.3%	11%
Average Home Price	\$84K	\$121K	\$124K	\$120K	\$137K	\$133K	\$81K	\$111K	\$137K	\$238K
Average Monthly Rental Cost	\$600	\$644	\$677	\$617	\$695	\$595	\$514	\$575	\$562	\$753

The high cost of new housing developments poses a barrier in encouraging investment in the region. There is a great deal of interest in addressing the shortage of affordable housing, but an economic solution within the region has not yet been identified. A need for outside support to help address the lack of adequate housing infrastructure

² Qualistar Colorado & The Women's Foundation of Colorado (2015). Leading Colorado's early care and education workforce. *Qualistar Colorado*.

was expressed. Funding for subsidized housing is no longer available to expand low-income housing. In Cheyenne County, community members discussed an example of unaffordable building strategies and unsustainable models for service providers. The county was given funding through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to build a handful of houses that were valued and sold for approximately one-third of the cost needed to build them. Although it was possible to build a few affordable housing units, there was not nearly enough funding to meet the needs of the community. There is an especially high need for vulnerable populations such as veterans and elderly populations who cannot afford the high housing costs within the region. Some attendees also spoke of the need for transitional housing facilities that offer holistic recovery services for individuals dealing with substance abuse.

Due to the lack of affordable housing, it is not uncommon for people to commute between counties to work. Quality housing options are a major component in attracting professionals within sectors experiencing shortages, such as healthcare and education. The shortage of housing also stifles any potential economic development, as there is less incentive and opportunity for new entrepreneurs to settle in the region.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity was a concern brought up by several counties during the Listening Tour. Northeast communities deal with the common paradox many rural agriculture communities face; although the economy is driven by agriculture and food production, much of the region experiences food insecurity and lacks access to a community grocery store. Several organizations have taken on providing support through programs such as food pantries, backpack programs at schools, mobile food banks, senior commodities, and Meals on Wheels. Residents in Kit Carson County spoke of the importance of partnerships with community foods banks and Food Bank of the Rockies. Higher prices for groceries compared to metro areas contribute to the challenge. There is a significant disparity in the price for fresh produce. Keeping a small, locally owned grocery store in some communities has been a challenge that has taken a great deal of effort and collaboration to achieve.

Districts face growing food insecurity among children in schools, especially those with high poverty populations. Some communities have adopted creative ways to address this need, such as The Blessings in a Backpack Program that is highly utilized in Morgan County. The Blessings in a Backpack program sends nearly 400 children home with food each week in Fort Morgan. One school plans to start a pantry to provide food and basic personal care items for children in hopes of alleviating financial stress at home and contributing to the basic wellbeing of students.

Access to Health Care Services

Several factors contribute to the ability of Northeast Colorado residents to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. The challenge of accessing adequate health care services within the region is significant and complex. High turnover and a lack of providers and health care professionals, transportation to quality care, and growing mental health and substance abuse needs contribute to a burdened health care system in the region.

Providing a Continuum of Care

Those rural providers who choose to stay in the region face unique challenges in serving their communities. With so few physicians across the dispersed region, many feel professionally isolated because they have few, if any, colleagues in the community to consult regarding difficult cases. Rural physicians are also more frequently on call, and can quickly suffer from burn out due to longer work hours. More patient visits, cultural isolation, lower annual

incomes, and the stress of providing care for other people contributes to the high turnover rate of primary care physicians in rural areas.³

Lack of workforce in healthcare extends across the field, from Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and nurses to specialists. Patients who require care that local critical access hospitals in the region cannot provide must be transported to care facilities outside of the area, often in the Front Range. In communities like Washington County, where there is no hospital, the ambulance service acts as the emergency room and requires significant collaboration with hospitals in neighboring counties. Transportation to and from healthcare and emergency services can be extremely difficult and poses a major barrier in accessing care. It also creates a higher cost of care incurred by the patient and the county. The Washington County ambulance service alone covers over 2,000 square miles and is all volunteer run. This structure is not uncommon in rural communities, and places an extreme burden on county services.

Access to care can be especially difficult for the aging population found in northeast Colorado. There was great concern expressed for seniors across seven of the nine counties. There is an inadequate infrastructure to offer support for this population, who generally have greater health and social support needs. A continuum of care from in-home support, senior centers, assisted living, and nursing homes is needed. Washington County has been working to address this issue through the building of new community-based nursing home facility. In addition to the lack of physical structures, a lack of certified nurse's aides, in-home care, and a competitive wage for long-term care providers are also barriers to supporting aging adults

HEALTH WORKFORCE	Cheyenne	Kit Carson	Lincoln	Logan	Morgan	Phillips	Sedgwick	Washington	Yuma	Colorado
Physicians	0	3	6	23	29	6	2	1	13	11,894
Primary Care Physicians	0	N/A	N/A	13	13	4	2	1	8	3,332
Dentists	0	2	1	9	11	1	1	1	2	3,747
Registered Nurses	21	63	45	196	254	40	10	37	89	59,305
Psychologists	0	0	0	4	3	0	0	0	1	2,479
Clinical Social Workers (2015)	0	2	2	1	5	0	0	1	3	3,926
Free & Income Based Clinics	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	217
WIC Clinics	1	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	166
Rural Health Clinics	2	2	0	1	2	1	1	2	0	52

Transportation

With 15,800 square miles encompassing the geographically vast region, transportation is necessary to carry out normal daily functions and access essential services. Insufficient public or affordable transportation is a significant barrier that isolates low-income populations, those who have lost their driver’s license, and elderly individuals. The region is very car-dependent and without access to a vehicle, individuals are left without a way to get to and from work and community functions. Transportation can be especially difficult for those accessing specialty care

³ Pathman, D. E., Konrad, T. R., Dann, R., & Koch, G. (2004). Retention of primary care physicians in rural health professional shortage areas. *American Journal of Public Health, 94*(10), 1723–1729. doi:10.2105/ajph.94.10.1723

and mental health services that exist outside of the region. Many people find themselves travel long distances, often to facilities and service providers in the Front Range.

In order to help alleviate these regional challenges, the Northeast Colorado Association of Local Governments (NECALG) provides direct services for public transportation through County Express. NECALG serves the six most northeastern counties of the region - Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma. The County Express workforce is primarily comprised of retired teachers and others who receive Public Employee Retirement Association (PERA) benefits. A shortage of drivers was noted across the region, contributing to an inadequate transportation workforce. Uniquely, the County Express receives Medicaid reimbursement for non-emergent medical transportation, allowing for inexpensive transportation to medical clinics and hospitals.

Additionally, the East Central Council of Local Governments (ECCOG) operates the Outback Express public transit system in Cheyenne, Kit Carson and Lincoln Counties. Transportation on Outback Express costs twenty-five cents within the city limits of Burlington, but transportation for individuals outside of the city limits can be more challenging. Elderly home owners living outside of the town center require regular access to transportation services for daily chores like going to the grocery store or pharmacy. With the region's increasingly aging population, this need is expected to increase.

Mental Health & Substance Abuse

Accessibility and availability of mental health services was identified as a significant barrier in every county during the Listening Tour, with the main challenge being a lack of mental health professionals in the region. Centennial Mental Health (CMH) is the community mental health center that serves all nine counties in the region. While certainly a large asset to the region, CMH acknowledges the difficulty in attracting and retaining mental health providers in rural communities and recognizes the need to address the problem of high turn-over within the organization. Mental health providers are few and far between in the northeast, and CMH does not have the capacity to serve the needs of all individuals within the region. Many residents referenced the opportunity for more tele-health options in order to address the gap.

The stigma associated with accessing mental health services was another identified issue. Acceptability of receiving mental health services in rural areas is affected by decreased anonymity due to the interconnected nature of rural communities and the knowledge that CMH is one of the only mental health providers in the region. Often, by simply parking at the office of a mental health provider, residents may face word spreading of their use of services. As a result, with the benefits and drawbacks of the tight-knit nature of rural communities, residents with mental health concerns can face increased burdens of isolation and loneliness.⁴ The combination of these factors often causes rural residents suffering from mental health disorders to seek treatment later after more serious symptoms have developed or to avoid seeking treatment at all. As a result, more intensive treatment is required in a setting where even the most basic mental health resources are lacking.

There is a significant need for mental health professionals within school settings. Many residents highlighted the growing population of children experiencing behavioral health concerns. There are very few school social workers and counselors to address these issues, and teachers are often tasked with addressing behavioral health issues

⁴ Warren, J., & Smalley, B. K. (Eds.). (2014). *Rural public health: Best practices and preventive models*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.

that arise between students and families. Listening Tour attendees discussed the need for funding of school-based programs that focus on behavioral health and promoting healthy lifestyle choices.

Additionally, residents spoke of concerns around substance use and suicide. Large disparities exist between rates of substance abuse and suicide in rural and urban regions due to the complex and often entangled physical and cultural realities of rural living. Methamphetamine use in particular is an increasing problem many communities in Northeast Colorado, although alcohol abuse remains the most common challenge. Access to appropriate inpatient and outpatient substance use care is lower in rural areas, preventing access to evidence-based care for substance use. The northeast region continues to work to address and lessen community incidents of substance abuse and suicide.

HEALTH INDICATORS	Cheyenne	Kit Carson	Lincoln	Logan	Morgan	Phillips	Sedgwick	Washington	Yuma	Colorado
Uninsured Rate	12.8%	12.8%	12.8%	12.8%	12.8%	12.8%	12.8%	12.8%	12.8%	14.3%
Underinsured (2015)	15.4%	15.4%	15.4%	23.7%	23.7%	23.7%	23.7%	23.7%	23.7%	16.4%
Underinsured 0-18 Years	11.2%	11.2%	11.2%	11.2%	11.2%	11.2%	11.2%	11.2%	11.2%	9.2%
Enrolled in Medicaid	18.9%	21.1%	21.4%	19.9%	25.2%	22%	25.3%	18.8%	22.2%	13.7%
EBNE Children	11.3%	11.5%	15.2%	15.4%	10%	12.6%	11.9%	14.4%	11.3%	11.5%
EBNE Adults	8.8%	8.4%	7.1%	7.1%	6%	10.5%	7.7%	9%	7.4%	26.1%

Next Steps

Each of the regional needs and concerns explored in this report are important and significant. On June 9, 2016, the second day of the NE RPD conference, the Steering Committee will convene a panel of grantmakers and community leaders to discuss the landscape of the themes that emerged from the Listening Tour. Additionally, expert panels will discuss the intersection of early childhood education and mental health care as well as youth engagement and retention in the northeast. Multiple skill-building sessions will address the Collective Impact model, which may provide a structure for Northeast Colorado communities to address the root causes of the challenges outlined in this report. Learn more about the conference at www.northeastrpd.org.

Appendices

Appendix A. Listening Tour Itinerary

Wednesday, February 24

7:45 – 9:30 AM - Travel from Denver to Brush

10:00 – 11:30 AM - Listening Tour with Morgan County

- Host: City of Brush
- Contact: Tyler Purvis, Marketing Director

11:45 AM – 12:15 PM – Travel from Brush to Akron

12:30 – 2:00 PM - Listening Tour + Lunch with Washington County

- Host: Washington County
- Contact: Chris Packer, County Administrator

2:15 – 3:00 PM: Site Visit – Green House Nursing Homes

3:00 – 3:45 PM - Travel from Akron to Sterling

4:00 – 5:30 PM - Listening Tour with Logan County

- Host: Northeast CSU Regional Engagement Center
- Contact: Karen Ramey-Torres, Executive Director

5:45 – 6:00 PM - Walking Tour of Downtown Art Features

6:00 – 7:30 PM - Steering Committee Reception @ Old Town Bistro

Thursday, February 25

8:00 – 9:15 AM - Travel from Sterling to Julesburg

9:30 – 11:00 AM - Listening Tour with Sedgwick County

- Host: Sedgwick County Economic Development
- Contact: Mike Sullivan, Executive Director

11:00 – 11:45 AM - Travel from Julesburg to Holyoke

12:00 – 1:30 PM - Listening Tour + Lunch with Phillips County

- Host: Phillips County
- Contact: Randy Schafer, County Administrator

1:45 – 2:30 PM – Travel from Holyoke to Wray

2:30 – 3:15 PM - Site Visit – Rural Colorado Apparel Manufacturing

3:30 –5:00 PM - Listening Tour with Yuma County

- Host: Yuma County
- Contact: Kara Hoover, County Administrator

6:00 – 7:30 PM – Private Dinner – 4th and Main Grille; 402 Main Street, Wray 80758

Friday, February 26

8:00 – 9:00 AM - Travel from Wray to Burlington

9:30 – 11:00 AM - Listening Tour with Kit Carson County

- Host: Prairie Family Center
- Contact: Jordie Mann, Grants Manager

11:15 – 12:15 PM – Lunch & Listening Tour De-Brief

12:15 – 1:00 PM: Travel from Burlington to Cheyenne Wells

1:00 – 2:30 PM - Listening Tour with Cheyenne County

- Host: Cheyenne County & City of Cheyenne Wells
- Contact: Linda Roth, Public Health Director
- Contact: Cindy Hoffman, Town of Cheyenne Wells City Clerk

2:45 – 4:15 PM - Travel from Cheyenne Wells to Hugo

4:30 – 6:00 PM - Listening Tour with Lincoln County

- Host: Lincoln County Economic Development
- Contact: Troy McCue, Executive Director

6:00 – 7:30 PM - Return to Denver

Appendix B. Listening Tour Delegation

Anschutz Family Foundation

Debbie Jessup, Executive Director

Buell Foundation

Susan Steele, Executive Director

Caring for Colorado

Linda Reiner, Vice President

Community Resource Center

Maria Fabula, Chief Executive Officer

Leah Rausch, Rural Partnerships Program Manager

Amanda Barlow, Rural Philanthropy Days Program Manager

The Colorado Health Foundation

Amy Latham, Vice President

Corporation for National and Community Service

Dan Dunlap

Daniels Fund

Kristin Todd

Appendix C. Community Hosts & Support

Community Hosts

Cheyenne County

Linda Roth, Cheyenne County

Kit Carson County

Jordie Mann, Prairie Family Center

Lincoln County

Troy McCue, Lincoln County Economic Development

Logan County

Karen Ramey-Torres, Northeast CSU Regional Engagement Center

Morgan County

Tyler Purvis, City of Brush

Phillips County

Randy Schafer, Phillips County

Sedgwick County

Mike Sullivan, Sedgwick County Economic Development

Washington County

Chris Packer, Washington County

Yuma County

Kara Hoover, Yuma County

Funder and Government Steering Committee Support

Kate Berg

Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative

Patricia Brewster-Willeke

Rural Communities Resource Center

Jildi Gentry

Morgan County Early Childhood Council

Kara Hoover

Yuma County

Kandice Kramer

Northeast Colorado Health Department

Bethleen McCall

Yuma Conservation District

Jackie Reynolds

Phillips County Department of Human Services

Jodi Walker

Kids at Their Best

Appendix D. Community Meeting Attendees

Cheyenne County

Linda Beek

Historical Colorado Historical Society

Cindy Hoffman

Town of Cheyenne Wells

Mary Snyder

Cheyenne Manor

Nancy Bogenhagen

Cheyenne County Commissioner

Amy Johnson

KCRD

Kara Uhland

Cheyenne Wells Theatre Committee

Linda Corbin

Town of Cheyenne Wells

Honey Richardson

Cheyenne County Department of Health and Human Services

Angie Weed

ESA Sorority

Virginia Hallagan

Keefe Memorial Hospital

Linda Roth

Cheyenne County Public Health

Pat Hevner

Town of Cheyenne Wells

Monty Smith

Cheyenne Wells Theatre Committee

Kit Carson County

Shila Adolf

Bethune School District RE-5

Debbie Lamm

Dynamic Dimensions Inc.

Ken Viken

Burlington Rotary

Burry Bessee

United Methodist Church

Jordie Mann

Prairie Family Center

Cory Wall

Kit Carson County Commissioner

Cindy Halde

Our Hometown Charitable Foundation

Valerie Rhoades

Morgan Community College

Deena Ziegler

Prairie Family Center

Dave Hornung

Kit Carson County Commissioner

Tom Satterly

Burlington School District RE – 6J

Lincoln County

Mary Andersen

Limon Heritage Society

Melody Bolton

Limon Workforce Center

Becky Carter

Colorado East Action Agency

Kristi Constance

KC Electric Association

Susie Cook

Centennial Mental Health

Gary Ensign

Lincoln County

Cindy Ferree

Limon Child Development Center

Jim Herron

*Lincoln County Economic
Development*

Joe Kiely

*Town of Limon/Ports to Plains
Alliance*

John LaBorde

Lincoln County Historical Society

Troy McCue

*Lincoln County Economic
Development*

Dan Merewether

Karval Community Alliance

Linda Messer

Lincoln Community Hospital

Megan Mosher

Lincoln Community Hospital

Lucille Reimer

Limon Memorial Library

Ed Schifferns

Lincoln County Commissioner

Ed Schifferns

Lincoln County Commissioner

Dave Smith

Hugo Community Member

Kevin Stansbury

Lincoln Community Hospital

Dave Stone

Town of Limon

Ken Stroud

Town of Hugo

Judy Thelen

Hugo Improvement Association

John Thelen

Town of Hugo

Patricia Vice

Town of Genoa

Julie Witt

*Cheyenne, Kit Carson, Lincoln
County Early Childhood Council*

Randy Younger

First National Bank of Hugo-Limon

Logan County

Mark Collard

Peetz Public School

Lori Jones

*Logan County Economic
Development*

Byron Pelton

Logan County Commissioner

Jan DeLay

RE-1 Valley School District

Wendy Kalan

Peace Lutheran Church

Brett Powell

Logan County Sheriff

Dave Donaldson

Logan County Commissioner

Tyson Kerr

City of Sterling

Karen Ramey-Torres

*Northeast CSU Regional
Engagement Center*

Joann Gilliland

*Sterling High School Athletic
Booster Club*

Jay Lee

Northeastern Junior College

Don Saling

City of Sterling

Spencer Green

Centennial Mental Health

Joe McBride

Logan County

Kaydeane Samber

Banner Health

Shelly Greenwood

*Logan County Economic
Development*

Ashton McPhie

Cooperating Ministries

Kim Sellers

*Logan County Chamber of
Commerce*

Forrest Hershberger

South Platte Sentinel

Steve Meier

Bank of Colorado

Dan Torres Jr.

City of Sterling

Liz Hickman

Centennial Mental Health

Trae Miller

*Logan County Economic
Development*

Sara Waite

Sterling Journal Advocate

Cindy Johnson

Eastern Colorado Community Fund

Kathleen Murray

Centennial Mental Health

Tom Westfall

*El Pomar Northeast regional
Council*

Morgan County

Mike Cook

Bank of Colorado

Fred Cook

Town of Log Lane

Emily Eby

Centennial Mental Health

Lee Foley

Brush Area Chamber of Commerce

Dawn Garcia

Colorado Department of Labor and Employment

Jildi Gentry

Morgan County Early Childhood Council

Elise Gerken

East Morgan County Hospital

Shelly Griffith

Eben Ezer Lutheran Care

Kerry Hart

Morgan Community College

Elizabeth Hickman

Centennial Mental Health

Andrea Kneib

Viaero Wireless

Kari Linker

Morgan Community College

Trish McClain

Northeast Colorado Health Department

Laura McConnell

Brush Library

Josh Miller

City of Fort Morgan

Ron Pflug

Fort Morgan School District

Tyler Purvis

City of Brush!

Chuck Schonberger

City of Brush!

Lori Searls

Viaero Wireless

Ron Shaver

City of Fort Morgan

Suzanna Spears

Morgan Community College

James Thompson

Office of Senator Michael Bennet

Linda Thrope

East Morgan County Hospital

Jodi Walker

Kids At Their Best

Larry Worth

Transit and Rail Advisory Committee

Phillips County

Nici Akey

*Phillips County Economic
Development*

Tom Bennett

First Pioneer Bank

Andrea Calhoun

Melissa Memorial Hospital

Candie Carpenter

Haxtun-Fleming Herald

Nancy Colgazier

*Melissa Memorial Hospital
Foundation*

Brooke Dirks

Phillips County Farmer/Rancher

Sara Firme

Haxtun Chamber of Commerce

Brian Gales

Bank of Colorado

Darcy Garretson

Haxtun School District

Hillary Heier

Bank of Colorado

Trisha Herman

*Phillips County Family Education
Services*

Mary Beth Hovel

Haxtun Community Hospital

Trampas Hutches

Melissa Memorial Hospital

Joe Kinnie

Phillips County Commissioner

Teresa Mailander

Phillips County Arts

George Michael

Town of Haxtun

Carissa Mill

Holyoke Chamber of Commerce

Sandra Rahe

Holyoke School Athletics

Jackie Reynolds

*Phillips County Department of
Human Services*

Laura Roth

Heginbotham Library

Randy Schafer

Phillips County

Joy Schafer

Town of Paoli/Mobile Food Pantry

Kathy Schneller

Phillips County Farmer

Harlan Stern

Phillips County Commissioner

Orville Tonsing

Town of Holyoke

Deb Williamson

Bank of the West

Steve Young

CHS Grainland

Sedgwick County

Jim Beck

Sedgwick County Commissioner

Anna Blatham

Sedgwick Day Program

Carol Cross

*Sedgwick County Community
Member*

Jessie Doleshal

Highline Electric

Paula Franker

Town of Julesburg

Tom Hanna

Sedgwick County Sheriff

Doris Heath

Sedgwick County Nursing Home

Laura Hensley

Sedgwick Day Program

Marsha Hill

Hippodrome Theater

Gina Johnson

Fort Sedgwick Park

Ivy Joy Johnson

Joy Mission

Cary Johnson

Joy Mission

Rhonda Jones

Town of Sedgwick

Dennis Kahn

CSU Extension

Gary Lancaster

Fort Sedgwick Park

Linda Langelo

CSU Extension

Brian Miller

Sedgwick County Recreation

Marielle Nelson

William Stretesky Foundation

Kim Orth

Stretesky Foundation

Peggy Owens

Town of Sedgwick

Beth Ritter

Julesburg Advocate

Glen Sandquist

Sedgwick County Commissioner

Kirstin Schelling

Centennial Mental Health Center

Anna Scott

Campbell Foundation

Mike Sullivan

*Sedgwick County Economic
Development*

Brian Talamantes

CSU Extension

Mark Turner

Sedgwick County Commissioner

Laurie Umkee

*Sedgwick County Community
Member*

Sherri Yahn

*Northeast Colorado Health
Department*

Washington County

Kendra Anderson
Otis School District

Michael Bowers
Lone Star School District

Brenda Chapin
Baby Bear Hugs

Laura Clark
SB Clark Companies

Monica Clark Peterson
SB Clark Companies
Jessica Filla
Washington County Clinic

David Foy
Washington County Commissioner

Emily Gibson
Washington County Connections

Corby Kneeder
CHS, Inc.

Lea Ann Laybourn
Washington County Commissioner

Ed Lundquist
Akron School District

Bryan McCall
Otis Fire
Becky Meyer
Washington County Connections

Chris Packer
Washington County

Michelle Patterson
Otis School District

Dencia Raish
Town of Akron

Brenda Rhea
Washington County Nursing Homes

Susan Sonnenberg
Lone Star School District

Tony Wells
Washington County Ambulance

Yuma County

Ron Akey
City of Wray

Rich Birnie
Yuma Museum

Dee Blecha
Wray School District

Becky Bledsoe
Local Philanthropist/Civic Leader

Bob Bledsoe
Local Philanthropist/Civic Leader

Lance Bohall
Wray Area Foundation, Inc.

Patricia Brewster-Willeke
Rural Communities Resource Center

Barbie Corey
City of Yuma

Brian Cunningham
21st Century Equipment

Margo Ebersole
Las Estrellas

Alex Garcia
Rural Communities Resource Center

Tom Gregg
Veterans Services

Ardith Hendrix
Wray Museum

Kara Hoover
Yuma County

Anney Orona
Las Estrellas

Jay Owens
Town of Eckley

Danny Prather
Kitzmiller/Bales

Kenny Rogers
Yuma County Rancher

Dan Seedorf
Bank of Colorado

Jenny Sullivan
Wray Community District Hospital

Keith Wagonner
First Pioneer National Bank

Don Brown

*State of Colorado Agriculture
Commission*

Jane Buchanan

Local Philanthropist/Civic Leader

Trent Bushner

Yuma County Commissioner

Darlene Carpio

*Yuma County Economic
Development*

Sara Chico

*Rural Communities Resource
Center*

Bob Loyd

*El Pomar Regional Council &
Kitzmiller/Bales*

Karen Loyd

*El Pomar Regional Council &
Kitzmiller/Bales*

Dallas Madsen

Quality Farm and Ranch Center

Bethleen McCall

Yuma Conservation District

Ryan Noble

Yuma County Rancher

Richard Walter

Liberty J-4 School District

Phyllis Williams

Yuma County Human Services

Dean Wingfield

Yuma County Commissioner

Dallas Madsen

Quality Farm and Ranch Center

Appendix E. Characteristics of the Northeast Region

Cheyenne	Kit Carson	Lincoln
Independent Community Everyone Matters Intelligent Residents Tenacious Resilient Stubborn Resourceful Loyal Caring	Accepting Caring Come together Community Close-knit Growing Hard Working Independent Innovative Loving Supportive Welcoming	Agricultural Cautious Committed Dedication to community Diverse Enthusiastic Workforce Friendly "Get'er Doners" Hard Working Ready for Development Outgoing Passionate Pride Progressive Rural Resilient Rooted in history Volunteerism

Logan	Morgan	Phillips
Agricultural Beautiful Building Momentum Charming Collaborative Energetic Revitalization Engaged Generous Family Friendly Hard Working Hidden Gem Hopeful Independent Innovative Isolated Potential Pride Progressively Conservative Resourceful Selflessness Traditional Welcoming	Child care desert Collaboration Community Participation Diverse Family Friendly Homegrown Happiness Opportunity Collaborative	Agricultural Collaborative Committed Strong Compassionate Determined Family Oriented Giving Hard Working Rich in Arts and Culture Opportunistic Optimism Improving Involved Progressive Supportive Visionary Welcoming Work in Progress

Sedgwick	Washington	Yuma
Accepting Agricultural Big Attitude Big Ideas Big Spirit Caring Collaborative Diamond in the Rough Diverse Eager to Make it Work Faith-based Community Historic Hopeful Open Opportunistic Positive Pride Tolerant Volunteerism Welcoming Wholesome	Agricultural Caring Close Knit Collaboration Come together Community Faith-based Community Family Oriented Frontier Generous Good Hearted Resourceful Safe Supportive Teamwork Volunteer Wild West Roots	Agricultural All-American Can-do Attitude Caring Conservative Diverse Do it ourselves Family Oriented Forward Thinking Friendly Giving Go Getters Helpful Historic Innovative Middle Class Passionate Progressive Proud Resilient Resourceful Strong Supportive Traditional Trail Blazers Volunteerism Welcoming