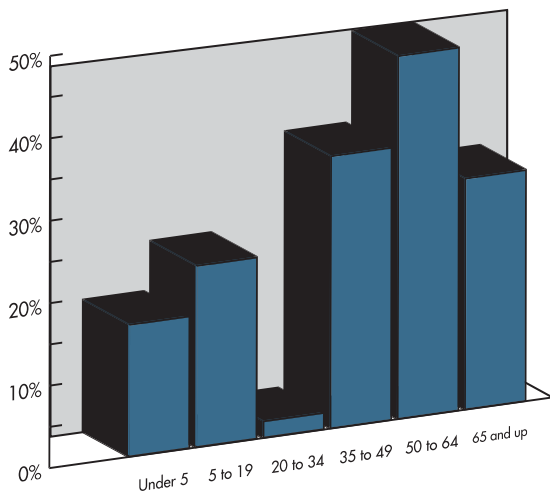


VISION NORTH 2005

The Northland continues to be one of the fastest growing communities in the Kansas City metropolitan area.



With a population of 275,000 in Clay and Platte Counties, the area experienced a 30 percent increase between 1990 and 2003. Significant increases occurred in the elderly population, particularly those over 75-years-old, and in non-white ethnic groups. Median household income increased by 4.7 percent since 1990 to \$48,347 in Clay County and by 8.9 percent to \$55,898 in Platte County, making it second only to Johnson County, Kansas in median household income.

While the growth is bringing great economic strength to the area, it is also challenging the social service network. Food stamp usage increased 55 percent from 1997 to 2003 and emergency assistance increased 49 percent. More than 41,000 people, 16 percent of the population, were living at or below the poverty level of \$18,750 for a family of four.

VISION NORTH 2005 is an assessment of the critical needs in Clay and Platte Counties today and a report card for the needs that were discovered five years ago in *Vision North 2000*. In 2000, four priority areas were identified and recommendations were made to improve each. These were:

- **CHILD CARE** - Improve the availability of affordable, quality child care.
- **DENTAL SERVICES** - Study the opportunities for providing dental care services to adults and children who do not have financial resources for such services.
- **TRANSPORTATION SERVICES** - Improve accessibility to services through an improved public transportation system.
- **YOUTH PROGRAMMING** - Increase the number of after school and summer recreational programs and social activities for middle school and high school age youth.

How successfully has the community met those challenges during the last five years?

Child Care



The Northland Child Care Council's 1998 report, "Meeting Child Care needs in the Northland," showed an extensive need for increased child care capacity in Clay and Platte Counties. Transportation to child care, programs for children with special needs, infant care and affordability were identified as priorities. At that time, there were only three child care centers accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and no accredited family child care providers.

Today, there are 13 accredited child care centers and 5 accredited family child care providers—a six-fold increase since 1999. In total, there are 124 child care centers in the

Northland, 99 in Clay County and 25 in Platte County, and 121 family child care homes. Of these, 67 percent offer infant care and 63 percent provide special needs care. Only 22 programs, or nine percent, report that they are "Spanish speaking." The average cost per week for an infant in a Northland child care center is \$160, and for family child care, \$127. This represents between 31 and 39 percent of the weekly income of two minimum-wage earners with only one child.

New centers are opening in the Northland, but not at a fast enough pace to support the population growth. The Head Start Center on the Maple Wood Community College campus has 200 families on its call-back list. In the tightening economy of the past few years, child care has not been a significant priority for employers.

Progress Over the Past Five Years Includes:

- Approximately \$225,000 invested by community funders to help Northland providers achieve high quality standards.
- Twice the number of providers, 934, participated in professional development in 2003, up from 407 in 1999.
- Transportation improved with the addition of an Area Transportation Authority (ATA) bus route to the Northland Human Services Center which houses YMCA child care services.
- Ford Motor Company and Spectrum Station at AmeriStar Casino began offering child care, joining employee-sponsored child care pioneers at North Kansas City Hospital, Cerner and CitiCorp.

Even with these improvements, only 10 percent of Northland child care centers and 4 percent of family care providers are accredited. Affordability continues to be a significant issue for parents. Two parents at minimum wage earn \$21,424 annually, which is too much to qualify for a state child care subsidy, but represents up to 39 percent of their weekly income for child care for one child.

What Remains To Be Done:

- Greater funding for professional development.
- Technical assistance to support providers in increasing quality
- Increased public awareness of the resource and referral systems to help parents find appropriate child care.
- Increased accreditation.
- Improved affordability or eligibility for subsidies.

Dental Services

No dentists practicing in the Northland would accept Medicaid reimbursement for dental services in 1999. Low-cost or free services were offered for some children through the Clay County Health Department, but no such services were available in Platte County. With the exception of a few dentists offering free services, no low-cost or subsidized dental services were available for adults.

As a result of the VISION NORTH 2000 process, a portable unit was determined to be the most cost-effective way to offer dental services. In 2002, Northland Health Care Access (NHCA) launched “Miles of Smiles” with one portable dental office, staffed by a dentist and two assistants. The program travels to elementary and middle schools as well as community settings to deliver prevention and treatment services to children.



Progress Over the Past Five Years Includes:

- More than 6,100 patient visits and 2,700 children served by the “Miles of Smiles” program.
- “Miles of Smiles” will serve almost half of all eligible children, 4,250, through its school and community visits after adding a second portable unit in early 2005.
- More than \$1.2 million invested by community funders, including an annual \$400,000 contribution by The Linscomb Foundation from 2001 through 2003 and their commitment of more than \$600,000 annually from 2004 through 2006; as well as a \$140,000 contribution by the Northland Community Foundation and the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation.
- The Clay County Health Department provides dental services for children age 5 to 18 who meet financial guidelines, serving almost 1,600 children in 2003.

What Remains To Be Done:

- Adult Dental Services: Since there are still no dentists accepting Medicaid, the only option for adults without the ability to pay is the Swope Health Northland Clinic. The addition of a full-time dentist at the clinic could significantly increase capacity.
- Orthodontic care should be provided to eligible children.
- Outreach to the dental community to develop comprehensive solutions to the dental access problem.

Improving the dental health of all Northlanders would not only contribute to the overall health of the area, but would enhance children’s ability to learn in school and adults’ employability. Dental disease is one of the most preventable health problems in the Northland—one which could be remedied through comprehensive prevention and treatment services.



Transportation Services

Access to services was a critical need for Northlanders, particularly the elderly, disabled and low-income persons when VISION NORTH 2000 was written. There were only 13 Area Transportation Authority (ATA) bus routes in the Northland.

Since Then:

- The number of public bus routes increased by four, with one route serving the Northland Human Service Center, where riders can access child care, health and social services.
- There are 11 bike-and-bus routes, expanding the transportation options for biker.
- ATA now offers “Share A Fare,” a half fare for those disabled or over 65 years old.
- RideShare creates carpools by matching commuters.
- Transportation services offered by area hospitals, local governments, service agencies and churches have increased.

Still, access to services remains a critical need for Northlanders, particularly the elderly, disabled and low-income persons. Work needs to be done to connect residents with existing services. Implementation of the SmartMoves regional transportation plan developed by the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) will help address many Northland transportation needs. But, this is a long-term solution due to the projected \$155 million cost and the legislative approval needed in both the Kansas and Missouri state legislatures.

What Remains To Be Done:

- **COMMUNICATION:** The 211 centralized referral system being developed by the regional United Way offers a way to connect residents with public and private transportation options.
- **COORDINATION:** The creation of a dedicated Northland transportation coordinator position would increase awareness of and access to existing transportation services, and develop a more complete assessment of needs.
- **SMARTMOVES:** Strong Northland advocacy for the regional SmartMoves transportation plan would assist in funding approval.

Youth Programming

Increasing the number of after-school and summer recreation programs; opening schools, churches and other community buildings in the evenings and weekends; and developing social and adult interaction opportunities for middle school and high school youth were identified as needs in 1999.

A lack of transportation to programs was a major barrier to program attendance.



Since Then:

- Community centers in North Kansas City, Parkville, Platte City and Riverside were built over the past five years, providing opportunities to develop more youth programming in partnership with youth-serving organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club and YMCA.
- Schools have multiple extracurricular activities; sports and recreation organizations offer after-school, weekend and summer activities; and school districts are also opening some of their buildings for community use during off hours.

But, there is a continued need for more after-school and summer recreation and social programs for middle school and high school youth. Children with restricted transportation options and financial resources still have limited access to the programs.

What Remains To Be Done:

- **PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT:** Partnerships with youth-serving organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCA can offer proven programs in Northland community centers and other facilities.
- **NEW APPROACHES:** A drop-in recreation center concept with organized learning opportunities (career, sports, vocational, etc.), can be explored as an option.
- **AWARENESS:** An online directory of youth activities would build awareness and participation.

NEW PRIORITIES IN 2005

In addition to the four priority areas of child care, dental care, transportation and youth services, several new priorities emerged throughout the VISION NORTH 2005 process.

Affordable Housing

Health Care

The Arts

Recreation

The Following Broad Themes Emerged:

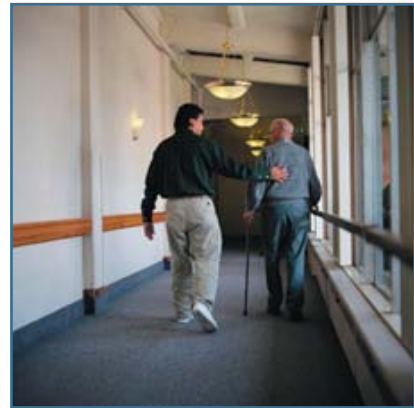
- The interdependence of recreation, the arts and human services have direct influence on the quality of life.
- The importance of revitalizing the older areas of the Northland, including its infrastructure, housing stock, neighborhoods and human services.
- Regionalism – recognition that quality of life in the Northland is inextricably tied to the metropolitan area (e.g., SmartMoves, Metro Green and the bistate cultural district).
- Collaboration, coordination and partnerships – building on a Northland strength.
- The need to support, advocate and build upon existing strategies (neighborhood revitalization, trails and transportation plans).

Affordable Housing

As development expands to keep pace with population growth, the Northland is experiencing an imbalance in new housing prices. In 2004, the average new home in Clay County sold for \$224,000; and in Platte County, for \$262,000. Resale values were lower at \$150,000 for Clay and \$174,000 in Platte, but even at these levels, home ownership is out of the reach of many Northlanders. The need for quality, affordable housing emerged throughout the *Vision North 2005* process.

Concerns surfaced about seniors on fixed incomes whose older homes, particularly those in the southern part of Clay County, are beginning to deteriorate. A lack of affordable housing acts as a barrier to recruiting and retaining a strong work force and makes it more difficult to maintain safe, strong neighborhoods with predominantly owner-occupied housing.

One way to meet housing needs is to encourage different types of housing to meet the diverse needs of community residents. Seniors and those with disabilities, for example, may need single-level housing with low maintenance requirements. Mixed income housing may be an option that can also improve school performance and create strong, diverse neighborhoods. Revitalizing older neighborhoods, including home repair and rehabilitation, might be a more affordable way to improve neighborhoods and homes.



Health Care



Health care needs are a priority in three primary areas: adult dental services; health care for the uninsured and underinsured; and mental health/substance abuse services, particularly for adolescents. The number of residents who are without adequate health care insurance has gone up over the past five years. An estimated 18,500 Northlanders (6.8 percent) have no health insurance, and many thousands more are estimated to be underinsured.

Two of the major Northland hospitals are reporting a 40 percent average increase in individuals who cannot pay medical bills and who use emergency rooms for primary care. In addition, changes in Missouri Medicaid have resulted in fewer providers accepting Medicaid and more families not qualifying. These factors contribute to the use of emergency rooms for primary care.

The most significant trend in mental health is the increase in services to children and adolescents. Tri-County Mental Health Services reports that 33 percent of all new clients are children and adolescent, compared to 25 percent in 2000—a 32 percent increase. Data on Northland teens from the Partnership for Children shows that 56 percent of 12th graders and 46 percent of 10th graders drink alcohol. Additionally, Northland 10th and 12th graders report a higher level of marijuana use than the metropolitan area as a whole. These percentages suggest that as many as 6600 teens may be concerned about their alcohol use and 4800 about their use of drugs.

Lack of availability of substance abuse services, particularly for adolescents, is a concern. Only two agencies located in the Northland provide outpatient substance abuse services to adolescents. One hospital offers inpatient behavioral health care in a separate 8-bed adolescent unit.

The Arts

A study sponsored by the Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas City identified a strong market potential in the Northland for arts growth. It suggested that residents “consider all of metropolitan KC as their cultural community, indicating that investment in audiences and cultural assets warrants regional strategies on all fronts.” Collaboration and coordination is the key to supporting and enhancing existing arts organizations and artists, both in the Northland and the metropolitan area, and to avoiding duplication of facilities under development, such as the Performing Arts Center in downtown Kansas City.

A Northland Arts Council should be developed as an umbrella organization. This Council could affiliate with the Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas City, following the model of the Northland Community Foundation and the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation.

The recommended focus of the new Arts Council would be four-fold:

- Developing a master plan for Northland arts, including programs for children and youth.
- Increasing community awareness of the arts.
- Strengthening existing arts organizations.
- Building public/private partnership opportunities.

Recreation

The highest priority for recreation in the area is to continue to build the comprehensive system of more than 600 miles of trails and greenways outlined in the Northland Trails Vision Plan. More than 51 percent of households have at least one member using trails. To date, seven miles of trails have been built, with the hope of completing 70 miles by 2010. The 20-mile Missouri Riverfront Trail, which will connect two riverfront parks, is scheduled to begin construction in the summer of 2005. The trails offer not only recreational opportunities, but contribute significantly to the quality of life through their natural beauty, encouragement of physical activity and psychological impact.

As with the arts, there is a need to strengthen collaboration and build awareness in the community. The Parks Partners group is an excellent foundation for this collaboration. A comprehensive inventory of recreation opportunities, public, private and not-for-profit providers, is critical in connecting residents with the diversity of options available in the Northland.

Other recommendations include:

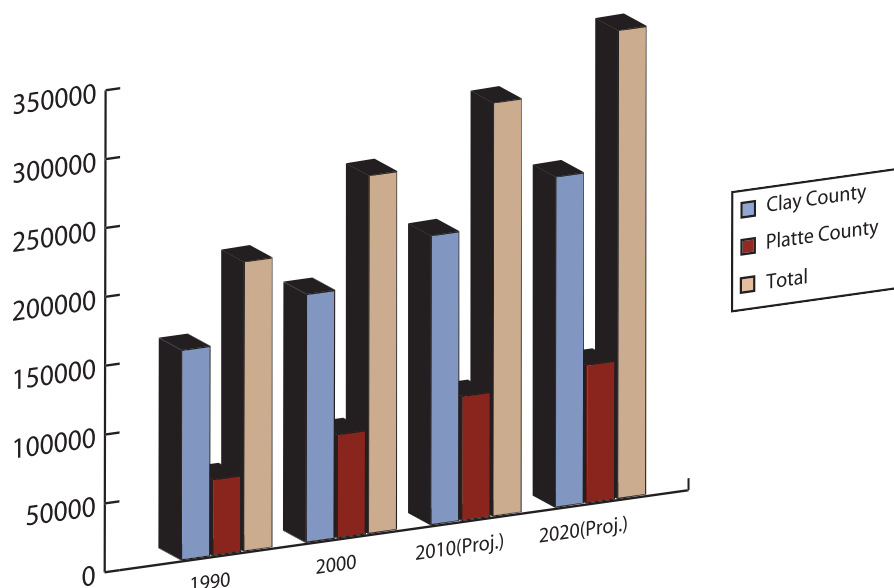
- A comprehensive trail and greenway system tied to stormwater management and area transportation.
- Program outreach to support health and wellness to targeted populations.
- Recognizing and supporting community treasures to keep them alive and viable.
- A comprehensive inventory of recreational opportunities (public, private and non-for-profit)

Recommendations

Substantial progress has been made as a result of Vision North 2000, particularly in the areas of child care and dental services for children. But work remains to be done. Vision North 2005 offers the following recommendations:

- Support the 211 referral service under development by United Way.
- Create a Northland Transportation coordinator position.
- Coordinate Northland advocacy in support of the SmartMoves transportation plan.
- Collaborate on and expand home repair/rehabilitation programs.
- Expand the home repair grant and Neighborhood Solutions programs created by Northland Neighborhoods.
- Provide funds to expand dental services for children and adults.
- Hold listening conferences around emerging issues such as affordable housing and health care.
- Build youth leadership opportunities around youth programming needs.
- Expand school/community/business partnerships to address neighborhood needs, including “community schools” as centers for children and families.
- Promote business partnerships with parks to support maintenance and enhancement.
- Create an arts “season ticket” for multiple organizations/events.
- Develop a stronger visual arts presence throughout the Northland and in key sites, such as KCI, Zona Rosa, etc.
- Strengthen the cultural competency of service agencies through programs like Cultural Connections (United Way of Johnson County).

Population Growth





Background

In 1999, the Northland Community Foundation in partnership with Northland United Way Services (NUWS), conducted a study of the social services needs and challenges in Clay and Platte Counties. Called Vision North 2000, the assessment identified four priority needs for the Northland and established task forces to address these needs. A commitment was made to the community to provide a progress report five years later which would document the results of Vision North 2000 initiatives. In 2004, the two organizations initiated Vision North 2005 to fulfill that commitment and produce a second report.

Methodology

The Northland Community Foundation (NCF) contracted with MarketPlan Associates, a Kansas City-based consulting firm, to conduct the assessment. The project was led by a six-person Steering Committee, representing NCF, NUWS and the Northland community; and a 28-person Advisory Committee, composed of business, not-for-profit, local government, arts and recreation leaders from both Clay and Platte Counties. Project methodology included 1) extensive update and analysis of demographic, social indicator and community needs data; 2) work with four issue teams, with 130 members contributing expertise in human services, arts and recreation; 3) personal interviews with community and service provider leaders; and 4) a client survey of 240 persons in six diverse agencies. A total of 445 persons participated directly in the Vision North 2005 process. Dozens more were contacted during the data-gathering phase.

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Vision North 2005 needs
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