



2013

**Brown County
Community
Survey Report**

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In order to stay informed about the needs and assets of Brown County, the Tracy Family Foundation created a Community Survey in June 2013. The Tracy Family Foundation (TFF), established in 1997 by the family of Robert and Dorothy Tracy, awards grants to nonprofit organizations providing programs and services for residents of Brown County and throughout west central Illinois. These dollars have funded a wide range of needed services for youth and families to improve their quality of life.

The purpose of the 2013 Brown County Survey is to provide data showing progress (or lack of) made since the last community survey in 2005. It also is to provide community leaders, organizations, businesses, individuals, and the Tracy Family Foundation with a comprehensive view of the public's opinions of the assets, needs, challenges, and priorities for Brown County. In addition, the survey provides community stakeholders current data to assist in making informed decisions, and give direction on future funding decisions.

The last county wide survey was done in 2005 when TFF partnered with The Medical Foundation (TMF) and the University of Illinois Extension-Adams/Brown Unit to assess the community strengths and needs.

The 2005 and 2013 survey reports are available at www.browncountyil.com or www.tracyfoundation.org.

METHODOLOGY

The 2013 survey was available to the community through both an online version and hard copy. The survey consisted of 30 questions, 18 of which consisted of general information regarding the surveyor. The survey questions contained multiple choice and short answer.

Community members were given a link to the survey at Survey Monkey. Hard copies were available and dropped off at the following locations: Mt. Sterling YMCA, Brown County Public Library (Mt. Sterling), Post Offices (Mt. Sterling, Versailles, and Timewell), Brown County State Bank, Farmers National Bank, Farmers State Banks (Mt. Sterling, Versailles, and Timewell), Mt. Sterling Savings Center, and Mt. Sterling City Hall.

The survey was communicated to the public by email, Democrat-Message Newspaper, Facebook, flyers at local businesses, hard copies available at various locations throughout the county, church bulletins, and at community meetings.

Data was collected from 345 community members. Forty-one individuals completed the hard copy survey and 304 completed the survey online. Majority of people who completed the survey were between the ages of 22 and 65. According the 2010 Census, Brown County population is 6,937 people. This number includes the prison population which is estimated at 1,900 people, leaving the true

population being 5,037. With this population and 345 completed surveys, this was about a 6.9% return rate for the 2013 Community Survey.

TIMELINE

The survey was open to the community from June 13 – July 4th 2013. From July 2013 to January 2014, data was collected, analyzed, and summarized into a summary report. In February 2014, the results from the survey were made available to the public.

HIGHLIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

As in any community, Brown County has many things to celebrate! Progress has been made in numerous areas since the 2005 Brown County Needs & Asset Survey. These are noteworthy changes!

The **high level of satisfaction** among the **Ambulance and Fire Protection** community services can very likely be attributed to the addition of a new Fire & Ambulance Service building, and of course, the dedicated men and women who serve and protect the county in this area. The annexation of Brown County into a Mass Transit District can very likely be attributed to the jump in satisfaction in **Transportation**. With over 2000 members at the Mt. Sterling YMCA, one can easily see how the satisfaction rate of **Parks & Recreation Facilities** has jumped from 68.7% to 81%.

Brown County continues to be a **good place to raise children!** *(Survey results: 90% in 2005 and 89% in 2013)*

People working together to improve their community has sky-rocketed since 2005! *(Survey results: 59% in 2005....85% in 2013)* People believe that the **future of Brown County looks bright!** *(Survey results: 61% in 2005 and 77% in 2013)*

Yet, as in all communities, there continue to be opportunities for improvement.

High Quality Schools has become the No. 1 priority! In the 2013 survey, 93% ranked schools as a high priority, while in 2005, only 76% of the respondents ranked schools as a high priority. Taking a further look into the schools, 95% of the respondents believe that accomplishments of youth beyond just sports deserve more recognition. Only 23% responded that the Fine Arts programs in the schools meet or exceed student needs. This is a decline from 47% in 2005. Only 66% responded that school sports meet or exceed student needs. This is a decline from 88% in 2005. Only 49% responded that the academic programs meet or exceed student needs. All around, there are lots of opportunities for improvement. The good news is that schools are the highest ranking priority!

There is a rising appetite to **improve the appearance of Brown County.** *(Survey Results: 59% in 2005 and 73% in 2013)* Housing has increased as a priority. *(Survey Results: 55% in 2005 and 71% in 2013)* **Promoting Tourism** is gaining more attention as a priority. *(Survey Results: 30% in 2005 and 43% in 2013)* There is also a growing appetite to prioritize **Services for Senior Citizens** *(Survey Results: 48% in 2005 and 60% in 2013)* There remains a huge opportunity to improve **Adult and Youth Recreational Opportunities.**

How do Opportunities turn from Challenges to Community Assets? **Leadership** is the key. With 73% of survey respondents agreeing that Brown County community members want more leadership opportunities, Opportunities are very likely to turn into Community Assets in the near future.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Several questions in the 2013 survey were the same (or very similar) to the ones in 2005 survey. When available, a comparison of the two years is provided. The Quantitative Results are broken out by Opinions, Priorities, and Focus Areas.

OPINIONS

OPINIONS		
<u>Indicator</u>	% Agree or Strongly Agree	
	<u>2005</u>	<u>2013</u>
Brown County is a good place to raise children	90.40%	89.10%
People in Brown County work together to improve the community	59.20%	84.60%
I would recommend BC as a good place to live	77.40%	83.90%
Residents have plenty of opportunities to volunteer and get involved in civic improvement activities	Not Available	80.20%
The quality of life in Brown County has improved in recent years	78.60%	78.40%
The future of Brown County looks bright	61.10%	77.20%
I am satisfied with the overall appearance of public and private property in Brown County	Not Available	53.60%
People in Brown County are satisfied with things as they are	50.10%	40.10%

Survey Comments

“I love the people here. Everyone is so nice and welcoming. Uptown has so much potential to be a nice, beautiful place for people passing through to see and be attracted to coming in to local businesses. The businesses we do have are great! The sense of community here is just one of the many reasons I love living in Brown County.”

PRIORITIES

PRIORITIES on issues		
<u>Indicator</u>	% High or Very High	
	<u>2005</u>	<u>2013</u>
High quality schools	75.50%	92.80%
Retaining youth in the county	77.10%	78.30%
Appearance of the County	59.40%	73.20%
Recreational and entertainment options for adults and youth	Not Available	71.50%
Housing	54.70%	70.50%
Services for youth	70.50%	65.90%
Health and medical services	69.90%	65.40%
Services for senior citizens	48.20%	59.60%
Services for families in need	58.10%	58.90%
Revitalizing uptown Mt. Sterling	67.00%	58.00%
Arts and culture opportunities	59.90%	55.50%
Leadership development opportunities	Not Available	50.70%
Volunteer opportunities	47.40%	43.70%

Survey Comments

“We are a caring, family oriented community and are willing to help those in need. We are a small community, but have big plans and will work together to accomplish them.”

“A great place to live!!! Great community with lots of caring people to volunteer to make our hometown a better place for our children!!!”



Photo of volunteers for Building Communities: Mission in Action, which is a project of the Mt. Sterling YMCA. Community members come together to help the elderly and low-income residents of Brown County with outside home improvement projects.

FOCUS AREAS

The 2013 survey focused on six areas: Community Services, Economic Development, Housing, Leadership, Parks and Recreation, and Youth and Education. Comments made by respondents in each Focus Area support the quantitative data results.

Level of satisfaction with COMMUNITY SERVICES		
<u>Indicator</u>	% Satisfied or Very Satisfied	
	<u>2005</u>	<u>2013</u>
Ambulance	78.80%	93.30%
Fire Protection	83.00%	92.70%
Public Library	73.10%	83.20%
Parks and Recreation Facilities	68.70%	81.00%
Transportation	30.60%	77.80%
Dental	Not Available	73.60%
Health & Medical	Not Available	71.20%
Law Enforcement	62.30%	70.70%
Mental Health	Not Available	68.20%
Internet Access	Not Available	67.90%
Elementary School	Not Available	67.40%
Social and Family	Not Available	59.70%
Middle School	Not Available	59.40%
Employment and Job Training	46.60%	58.20%
St. Mary School	Not Available	58.20%
High School	Not Available	54.10%
Condition of Streets	Not Available	52.90%
Senior Citizens	Not Available	51.80%
Condition of Sidewalks	Not Available	42.70%

Survey Comments:

“While some areas of the county have decent Internet access, there are still too many that don’t. Satellite access is not sufficient.”

“Some streets have no sidewalks at all, others are busted up and missing sections, very difficult to push a stroller.”



Priority for ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT programs		
Indicator	% High or Very High	
	2005	2013
Retaining existing businesses	Not Available	79.20%
Attracting new retail businesses	67.90%	74.30%
Supporting existing businesses	70.70%	72.30%
Preserving and promoting agriculture/agribusiness	66.20%	72.20%
Improving and revitalizing the downtown areas	Not Available	67.20%
Providing incentives to attract new businesses	60.60%	66.40%
Encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship	58.60%	66.30%
Supporting and expanding health care services	64.60%	63.00%
Promoting new residential development	50.80%	62.20%
Attracting new service businesses	54.30%	61.80%
Expanding existing businesses	Not Available	61.50%
Attracting manufacturing businesses	58.30%	53.90%
Promoting tourism	29.90%	42.70%

Survey Comments

"I think we need to take better advantage of what we have in our community and use that to attract other businesses because they can thrive here. Yes we are small but that also means cost of business is cheaper. Why not try and make a push to attract more businesses into town?"

"The improvements on Main Street are impressive and I am hoping they will continue."

Level of satisfaction with HOUSING		
Indicator	% Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied	
	2005	2013
Availability of rental housing	66.90%	55.30%
Quality of rental housing	67.10%	53.70%
Availability of affordable housing for purchase	60.10%	41.90%
Quality of affordable housing for purchase	60.20%	41.70%
Availability of "mid-level" residential housing for purchase	60.40%	37.10%
Availability of "entry-level" residential housing for purchase	55.20%	36.40%
Overall appearance of housing	35.70%	31.20%
Availability of "high-end" residential housing for purchase	47.40%	22.70%
Availability of subsidized public housing	26.00%	13.80%

Survey Comments

"I believe better rental opportunities and more mid-range home would draw people to our community."

Agree regarding LEARDERSHIP		
Indicator	% Agree or Strongly Agree	
	2005	2013
BC would benefit if there were more leadership development opportunities for youth	Not Available	88.30%
BC would benefit if there were more leadership development opportunities for adults	Not Available	84.50%
Leadership training would encourage more people to serve on non-profit boards and in publicly elected positions	Not Available	80.60%
BC community members would like to have more leadership development opportunities	Not Available	73.10%

Survey Comments

"I wish more youth would be or want to be involved with improving their community."

Level of Satisfaction regarding PARKS/RECREATION/ENTERTAINMENT		
Indicator	% Satisfied and Very Satisfied	
	2005	2013
Park maintenance	Not Available	84.40%
Recreational facilities at park	Not Available	74.40%
Recreational programs for youth	Not Available	63.40%
Recreational programs for adults	Not Available	50.50%
Youth entertainment opportunities	Not Available	31.90%
Adult entertainment opportunities	Not Available	25.60%

Survey Comments

"More opportunities for social interaction for adults. If I don't see people at work, the grocery store, or church I never see them."

"More outdoor recreational opportunities, trails, parks, bike paths."



Agree regarding YOUTH AND EDUCATION		
Indicator	% Agree or Strongly Agree	
	2005	2013
The accomplishments of youth, beyond sports, deserve more recognition	Not Available	94.70%
Youth make a positive contribution in the community	75.90%	82.80%
Youth are leaving the community due to lack of job opportunities	Not Available	82.20%
Our schools are safe for students and teachers	90.00%	80.80%
There should be youth representation on local boards	Not Available	80.60%
There are ample opportunities for parents and community members to volunteer at the school	Not Available	76.60%
Sports programs meet or exceed student needs	88.20%	66.00%
Parents are actively involved in the school system	66.90%	57.00%
Brown County schools prepare students for college	46.80%	51.70%
Academic programs meet or exceed student needs	Not Available	49.40%
School personnel communicate with residents, parents, and students	59.00%	49.00%
Youth in the community are Ready for College, Ready for Work when they complete high school	Not Available	44.80%
Course offerings meet or exceed student needs	48.50%	41.90%
Our schools and community offer enough opportunities for youth to contribute to the community	Not Available	38.50%
Technology and vocational education programs are adequate	45.20%	36.30%
Fine Arts programs (art, drama, music) meet or exceed student needs	46.50%	23.00%

Survey Comments

“Any events for the youth should have youth involvement either as part of the committee or simply volunteering to develop the event or program.”

“Our youth need a place to hang out that will be safe and open to all. A building would be nice with competent chaperones.”

“We need to keep what Fine Arts programs we have and need more.”

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

As stated earlier in the Report, comments made by respondents in each Focus Area support the quantitative results.

In addition, respondents were also given the opportunity to comment on the following questions. The Top 5 choices for each question are noted in bullet points.

- What economic development projects they would like to see happen over the next 5 years?
 - ❖ Restaurant
 - ❖ Revitalize Uptown/Streetscape improvements/Clean up yards & homes
 - ❖ Retail store with clothing and home goods
 - ❖ Rental and Housing options
 - ❖ Business & Job retention and expansion
- What retail businesses they would like to see open in Mt. Sterling?
 - ❖ Restaurant
 - ❖ Retail store with clothing and home goods
 - ❖ Farm and Home Supply store
 - ❖ Grocery Store
 - ❖ Hobby Store
- What youth services or activities they would like to see available?
 - ❖ Entertainment options such as putt-putt golf, skating, moving theater, bowling, and teen hang-out center
 - ❖ Community service opportunities
 - ❖ Job opportunities
 - ❖ Fine Arts
 - ❖ Job shadowing
- What they would change about Brown County?
 - ❖ Improve schools
 - ❖ People's attitudes
 - ❖ Increase entertainment options
 - ❖ Appearance of properties, homes, Uptown, and Main St.
 - ❖ Housing
- What they felt are the greatest assets in Brown County?
 - ❖ The people!
 - ❖ Dot Foods and the Tracy Family Foundation
 - ❖ Small, hometown feel and sense of community
 - ❖ Low crime/safe
 - ❖ YMCA

Thank you!

A special thanks to everyone that took the time to complete the 2013 Brown County Survey. Survey report can be found on the following websites www.browncountyil.com and www.tracyfoundation.org and hard copies will be located at Brown County Public Library, Mt. Sterling YMCA, and Mt. Sterling City Hall.