



West Ohio Community Action Partnership



2021

Community Assessment Annual Update

AUGLAIZE & MERCER COUNTIES

This update to the community assessment for Auglaize and Mercer Counties does not reflect all of the changes that have occurred since the last report; rather it highlights some significant changes in the way we see barriers to low-income families attaining family stability; and the way in which we may approach possible solutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused us to shift into new roles in the community, serving people in need in a much different way, all while tripling the services we are providing. Our staff have been on the front lines of the pandemic for 22 months so far, with no slowdown in sight. Looking back, and seeing the number of families we helped in 2020, and now in 2021, there is much accomplished. We distributed millions of dollars to help people from losing their homes and continue to do so.

Auglaize County's population is 46,693 and has decreased in growth by .88% since 2010. Unlike Auglaize County, Mercer County has experienced a growth of 2.02% since 2010 with a population of 41,612 currently.

County	Population, 2021	Growth since 2010
Auglaize County, OH	46,693	-.88%
Mercer County, OH	41,612	+2.02%

World Population Review, 2021

Allen County has a significantly higher rate of individuals in poverty than both Auglaize and Mercer Counties. Allen County reports a total of 12,452 individuals, with Auglaize and Mercer Counties reporting 3,297 and 2,710 respectively. The median household income for Auglaize County is \$66,627, with Mercer County slightly lower at \$63, 537.

West Ohio CAP provided rent and mortgage assistance to individuals affected by COVID-19 due to employment changes, childcare changes, and more. The agency provided rent assistance to over 1,200 customers in 2021, as well as about 200 customers with mortgage

assistance in Allen, Auglaize and Mercer Counties. These are both significant increases considering in 2020 there were only a total of 276 eligible households being served with rent assistance through CSBG and other non-COVID-19 relief funding.

Auglaize County is comprised of 4,349 renter occupied units (21.4%). The state of Ohio is 34% renters, with a number of 1,587,312 renter households. Ohio's minimum wage is \$8.80, making the rent affordable price at minimum wage, \$458. In 2021, the fair market rent for a 2-bedroom unit in both Auglaize County and Mercer County is \$734. The previous year, rent for a two-bedroom unit was \$696 per month. This is a 5.46% increase year-over-year. Mercer County is comprised of 3,644 renter occupied units (19.7%). Compared to the rest of Ohio, the Mercer County Fair Market Rent area is less expensive than 93% of the state. In order to afford a 2 - bedroom unit at fair market rent, an individual in Auglaize and Mercer County would need to obtain an hourly wage of minimum \$14.12. Affordable rent continues to be an issue for Auglaize and Mercer Counties.

County	# of Renter Occupied Units	% of Renter Occupied Units	FMR for 2- bedroom in 2020	FMR for 2- bedroom in 2021	% increase from 2020 to 2021
Auglaize	4,349	21.4%	\$696	\$734	5.46%
Mercer	3,644	19.7%	\$696	\$734	5.46%

National Low-Income Housing Coalition, Out of Reach 2021
<https://www.rentdata.org/allen-county-oh/2021>

West Ohio CAP partnered with local agencies to provide non-congregate shelter to homeless families who needed to quarantine or isolate to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus in shelters and our communities. In 2021, we provided emergency lodging to over 250

households in the three counties we serve. There are several shelters available for homeless individuals or families in Allen, but no shelters in Auglaize or Mercer. There continues to be a lack of safe and affordable housing in all counties. WOCAP is committed to making sure that we are helping family's budget for housing and reduce other cost burdens to become better able to obtain/maintain housing in the future.

In a focus group conducted in Mercer County in 2021, they expressed a need for housing, specifically emergency housing in their county. The closest homeless shelter to Mercer County is in Lima, Ohio, which is not feasible for the homeless population. Another topic of discussion was the need for more transportation options, such as public transportation, for individuals to access medical appointments, employment, or continued education courses. The group also discussed how the county needs to confront the drug and alcohol problem many experience, even though many are in denial there is a problem in this area. Assisting those with mental health hardships was suggested as a good place to start.

In 2021, our agency has experienced an increase in the number of individuals needing assistance with evictions. This increase from 2020 is significant to point out because this shows that the need is still relevant and continues to increase even this long after the initial start of the COVID-19 public health emergency when individuals were losing their jobs and being affected negatively by the pandemic.

West Ohio CAP continued to actively respond to the changing conditions to fulfill the needs in the communities we serve through areas such as food assistance, transportation needs, appliances, clothing assistance and more. In the year 2021, we assisted over 25 individuals with transportation needs, over 15 with emergency food assistance, 15 with appliances, and over 20 with other emergency supportive services in Allen, Auglaize and Mercer Counties.

Individuals received assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the year 2021. In Auglaize County, there were an average of almost 1,300 households totaling an average of almost 3,000 active members each month in 2021. Of the total active members, an average of 1,600 each month were adults, and an average of over 1,000 were children. Mercer County had fewer numbers with an average of almost 1,000 households totaling an average of just under 2,000 active members each month in 2021. Of the total active members, an average of 1,000 each month were adults and an average of 800 were children.

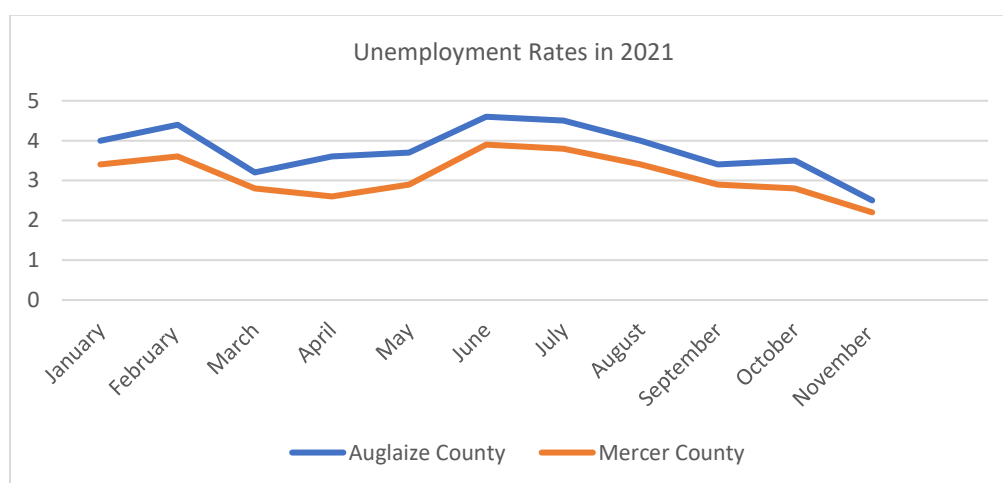
Working together, West Ohio CAP and the City of Lima acquired both public and private sector funding in the amount of \$2.4 million for the upcoming CSBG Grant two-year period, to address lead hazards in Lima and the surrounding communities. The quality of housing remains a concern. There is a concentration of pre-1978 housing in the City of Lima, but also in the rural areas as well. There is a high risk for lead hazards in these homes that go unabated. Home repairs completed remained the same with a total of 2 homes in both 2020 and 2021. In Auglaize and Mercer, West Ohio CAP will focus efforts to improve housing with the home repair funds. Both lead hazard control and home repair programs have been affected by the pandemic. There is a shortage of availability of contractors, and licensed lead abatement contractors. WOCAP received funds in October of this year from the Ohio Department of Health to educate the public and recruit contractors willing to get licensed for lead abatement.

In 2021, our agency has provided over 450 households with utility assistance, not including the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) or the Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) program. For the services of HEAP, PIPP, Winter Crisis and Summer Crisis, there was a decrease in the number served between the years 2020 and 2021. There was a total of over

1,000 households more served in 2020 than projected for end of year 2021. This can reflect the increased need for services in 2020 for those who may not have needed services in the past.

Homeownership and Financial Management classes continued to be held virtually to serve customers interested in increasing their financial knowledge and/or becoming homeowners. In the past year, our agency assisted 7 individuals in purchasing their first homes with a \$474,947.00 housing mortgage value over the life of the project. Homeownership numbers have decreased due to pandemic unemployment and the competitive housing market. WOCAP's Housing Team continues to build community relationships through presentations at local agencies, as well as meeting with financial institutions, realtors, insurance agents, and community and neighborhood organizations.

The unemployment rate in Auglaize County as of October 2021 peaked in the month of June with 4.6 %, totaling 1,091 people, and was the lowest of the year in the month of March with 3.2%, totaling 804. In Mercer County, unemployment as of October 2021 peaked in the month of June with 3.9% or 900 people, and April was the lowest month with 2.6% unemployment, totaling 616 people.



West Ohio CAP has played a vital role in the community, working to improve and increase services to eligible West Ohio CAP clients, by providing access to home repair services, lead abatement, transportation, eye glasses, and work supports such as uniforms. The income limit for eligibility went from 125% to 200% Federal Poverty Guidelines. CSBG's income increase of eligibility has allowed West Ohio CAP to serve more individuals than in the past. In addition, West Ohio CAP continued to advocate for change to improve the quality and affordability of housing for low-income people.

The work documented in this summary confirms that West Ohio CAP and other local service agencies had a positive impact on the local community, especially assisting additional individuals during the hardships that arose from the COVID-19 pandemic. West Ohio CAP continues to focus on self-sufficiency programs such as financial management and efforts towards affordable housing. Parenting and early childhood interventions are still needed to help families get out of the cycle of poverty. However, it is clear that West Ohio CAP alone cannot solve the persistent poverty cycle burdening so many Auglaize and Mercer County residents.

The accomplishments documented in the most recent Community Assessment reflects not only the work of West Ohio CAP, but of many other community organizations and government entities working together. These partnerships resulted in positive community-wide changes in education, employment, housing, transportation, and social services. One of this community's best assets is the ability to work together, with other community stakeholders, on these important issues. West Ohio CAP is proud to be part of this community and looks forward to continuing to work together with other local service and government agencies alike, to improve the standard of living for all Auglaize and Mercer County residents.

Sources

<https://ohio.hometownlocator.com>

World Population Review, 2021

<https://www.rentdata.org/mercercountyoh/2021>

<https://www.rentdata.org/auglaizecountyoh/2021>

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