

Living on Hope:
*An Exploratory Study of Urban
Migration in Des Moines, Iowa*

A collaborative project between the Simpson Urban
Studies Institute (SUSI) and Urban Dreams

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	1
Introduction	6
Project Background.....	8
Data and Methods	11
Survey and Focus Groups.....	11
In-Depth Interviews	17
Stakeholder Interviews	18
Results.....	19
Survey and Focus Groups.....	19
In-Depth Interviews	36
Stakeholder Interviews	47
Discussion and Conclusion.....	57
Appendices.....	62

Executive Summary

Housing, employment, and education are just a few of the challenges individuals and families face when moving from one city or state to another. This exploratory project was intended to begin to build a picture of the perceived opportunities and specific issues that new residents encounter when moving into the Des Moines, Iowa area. More specifically, the focus was on African-American residents moving to Des Moines from larger urban centers such as Chicago, as this was perceived to be a population facing particular challenges in trying to successfully integrate into their new environment. The experience of Urban Dreams, a local social service agency, was a key impetus for this project since the agency often serves as a point of contact for new residents upon their arrival in Des Moines. The goal was to begin to understand the needs of the new residents, the impact on the local community, as well as what changes could be made to improve the experience and integration of future residents migrating to Des Moines from larger cities.

A survey and series of focus groups with 100 African-American community members who migrated to the Des Moines area within the past 20 years formed the basis for this project. Just over 50 percent of the residents surveyed moved to Des Moines within the past 10 years and just under half of the respondents relocated from Chicago, Illinois. In-depth interviews were also conducted with a number of the residents to provide more background and context with individual stories of how participants made the decision to move to Des Moines and what they encountered upon arrival. Additional context was also gained from a series of interviews with local public and social service agencies that could provide some perspective on this topic

based on their role in providing services to new residents or interacting with them in a variety of capacities.

The overall survey results indicate that seeking new and better opportunities formed the basis for the move for many of the participants. Concerns about crime and safety, including finding a safer place to live and escaping from crime, drugs, and gangs, as well as the search for new opportunities in terms of employment, lower cost of living, or better schools for children were top motivators for participants leaving their prior place of residence. These areas were also key factors in their selection of Iowa as their new home. The majority of the residents surveyed felt their quality of life had improved since moving to Des Moines and that they received many of the services they needed upon their arrival. Residents were particularly satisfied with their experiences with medical care, church or faith based organizations, schools, and job assistance they received when moving to Des Moines. Most participants also indicated they feel safe in their current neighborhood and believe it is unlikely that they will be a victim of crime. Overall, most respondents seemed to believe that their situation in Iowa was an improvement relative to their prior place of residence.

When asked about challenges they faced when they arrived in Iowa or what services they needed that were not available, some of the core themes centered on housing, employment, and transportation issues. Participants expressed concerns with trying to find affordable housing and that the lack of housing options made the transition hard so many lived with friends or family when they first moved to Des Moines rather than renting or owning their own home. A number of respondents indicated that finding a steady job was also particularly difficult and they pointed to the need for additional assistance in preparing for and finding

employment. Concerns about the availability of public transportation were also an issue for numerous residents, which related to options on where residents could live and work.

Respondents specifically pointed to the impact of not having bus service to particular areas outside of downtown, as well as the limited night and weekend hours for public transportation. These issues posed particular challenges for residents trying to find a way to successfully transition into their new home.

Additional services for children and families were also brought up as potential improvements to assist new residents. Community centers and low-cost options for families could help to improve the experience of new residents relocating to Des Moines, in terms of providing support to help them integrate into the community. Respondents also pointed to the challenge of not knowing what services are available and needing additional mechanisms to reach new residents and assist them in coordinating multiple needs. Some participants did also express concerns over perceived differential treatment based on race since their arrival in Des Moines, although this was not the case for the majority of those surveyed. Others tied negative experiences to the way people reacted to the fact that they were not from Des Moines. More particularly, some participants felt they were perceived or treated differently because they moved from a specific place such as Chicago. Each of these areas points to potential changes that could be made to improve the experiences of residents migrating to Des Moines from larger urban centers.

The stakeholder interviews brought out similar themes. Additional opportunities for affordable housing, enhanced public transportation, and job assistance were key areas based on the input from various services providers and stakeholders. The stakeholders in particular

pointed to the connection between these three areas in terms of the opportunities available to new residents, or conversely the way these could impose limitations on new residents in their transition to living in Des Moines. In addition, enhanced opportunities for families, expanded and coordinated health and mental health services, and a continued focus on education were also discussed by stakeholders. Even when such services are available, improving the way this information is communicated to new residents and providing a more centralized way to connect new residents to the services, was described as a key area for improvement.

Increasing diversity training for public or social service agencies may also help address potential trust issues between new residents and local service providers.

This study was intended to be exploratory and the sampling method utilized to identify participants for the survey and focus groups limits the generalizability of the findings. In addition, given the scope of the project it was not possible to include a comparison group, which makes it difficult to identify whether some of these issues are unique to African-American residents moving from other cities into Des Moines, or whether these needs are similar for other groups and particular segments of the existing community. The fact that nearly one-half of the participants moved to Des Moines more than ten years ago also makes it difficult to know whether some of the issues raised are current concerns or whether they reflect the particular time period in which people moved. It is also challenging to quantify the impact that urban migration may be having on the local community, based on existing data. The stakeholders in particular pointed to the fact that where someone moved from is often not tracked, so it is difficult to identify whether there are particular challenges connected to residents moving from other cities. Stakeholders cautioned against generalizing based on

anecdotal stories or even particular situations identified by the media, and rather focus on issues that can help improve the experience of all residents, including those moving to Des Moines from other areas.

Overall, the project was not intended to answer specific questions. Rather, the goal was to open the door to begin to understand the experiences of African-American residents migrating to Des Moines from larger cities and to provide an initial point of discussion on ways to improve the experience for the new residents. At the core, the common ground between those participants who migrated to Des Moines and the stakeholders was the idea that enhancing existing services and making it easier for new residents to connect to those services are key areas for improvement. The residents participating in the study indicated that they came to Iowa to escape crime and violence, to find new jobs, and to enhance the quality of life for themselves and their families. The information gained from this exploratory study can help to further the discussion on recommendations that can improve the experience for new residents, as well as help them more successfully integrate into the local community. To make that happen, it is important to continue the conversation about the needs of these residents, and to take steps to improve the services and options available. As one participant aptly stated, it is all about understanding the motivations, challenges and options available to new residents-
“To sum it up...opportunity.”

Introduction

In recent years, markets such as Chicago, Minneapolis, and Omaha have provided the largest sources of urban in-migration to the Des Moines Metro area. According to data compiled by the Urban Institute and confirmed with data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the highest percent of new residents were identified as having moved from these three urban areas between 2004 and 2010.^{1,2} Yet these official records may provide only part of the picture. The data published by the Urban Institute are based on recorded movements from Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax records when individual tax returns indicate a change of address. It is difficult to determine how many additional individuals or families may be moving into the Des Moines area on a regular basis that are not recorded by official tax records. Census data provides a similar picture, but is also somewhat limited in that it is compiled based on those migrating during the prior year. Information provided by local community organizations suggests that the migration may be more common than official records indicate and that particular groups, specifically African-American, low-income residents may be leaving larger urban centers in search of potential opportunities for themselves and their families in somewhat smaller metro areas such as Des Moines. There are various layers of questions this raises regarding the level of urban migration occurring from larger metro areas into Des Moines, the issues or challenges these new residents face when they initially arrive in the area, and the short and long-term impact this migration may be having on the local community.

¹ Urban Institute MetroTrends. (2012). [Map of Migration Patterns by Metro Area Based on IRS Statistics of Income Data]. Retrieved from http://datatools.metrotrends.org/charts/metrodta/MigrationMap_files/MigrationMap.cfm

² U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). American Community Survey, County-to-County Migration Flows, 5 Year ACS. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/migration/data/acs/county-to-county.html>

The purpose of this exploratory project was to begin to develop an initial understanding of the nature of this issue, what challenges these residents encounter when they arrive in Des Moines, and what steps may be taken to assist in their transition experience. In addition, this project should provide some perspective to better prepare the community and various service providers for the needs of new residents, and ways to both understand and address their needs as members of the Des Moines community in terms of education, housing, employment, health and social services, and related areas.

Based on information provided by community organizations such as Urban Dreams, a local social service provider in Des Moines, a core of the issue is that poor, black residents are leaving areas such as Chicago to move to Des Moines to find new opportunities, but when they arrive they are experiencing a variety of challenges. They may be unfamiliar with the local services and may have difficulty getting their kids into school and finding the assistance they need with employment, financial, and related issues. In addition, they are moving into a predominately white community and there may be a fundamental lack of trust and communication between the new residents and those working within the various social service agencies in the area. Those migrating to Des Moines may feel they are stigmatized within the community and may be reluctant to reach out to receive the services they need. These residents may be leaving areas where they were exposed to high crime and gang activity and this experience may also influence their ability to successfully integrate into their new community. In addition, these new residents may be bringing some of this experience with them, which may then lead to changes in crime and violence in Des Moines. The purpose of the initial phase of this exploratory project was to take a broader view of these issues to evaluate

how prevalent these concerns are for new residents, as well as the impact this urban migration may be having on the local community.

Project Background

The Urban Migration project was initiated from questions surrounding the effects of urban migration on Des Moines, IA. More specifically, members of Urban Dreams, a local social service agency in Des Moines, were questioning the impact of migration on African-American residents moving into Des Moines from larger urban centers such as Chicago, as well as how the influx of new residents may be affecting the broader community. The project was intended to provide exploratory research as the first phase of a larger effort to understand these issues. To begin to address this topic, this project involved background research focusing on existing official records of migration patterns into Des Moines. In looking at data from IRS tax records as compiled by the Urban Institute, as well as U.S. Census data on county-to-county migration patterns, overall the counties containing Chicago, IL, Omaha, NE, and Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN are some of the largest sources of urban in-migration into Polk County (Des Moines), IA in recent years.

Yet, addressing the overall migration pattern into Des Moines only provides part of the picture. Although this data provides important background, the focus of this project was not necessarily on quantifying how many people are moving into Des Moines, but rather was about qualifying or understanding the experiences of African-American residents moving into Des Moines from larger urban markets. Therefore, primary data sources for this project included a survey and focus group with local community members who have migrated into the Des Moines metro area. The emphasis of both the survey and focus groups was on understanding

the perspective of the individuals and families moving into Des Moines. Specifically, questions addressed aspects of their move, including when they moved, where they came from, why they left their prior place of residence, why they selected to move to the Des Moines metro area, as well as how they moved, who moved with them, and related issues.

In addition, the questions also attempted to address their experiences of these new residents when they first arrived in Iowa. In particular, the survey asked what services they utilized when arriving in Des Moines, what services they needed that were not available or were not easy to locate, what they found easiest and most challenging about the transition, how well they have adjusted to living in the area, and their feelings of safety and integration within their current neighborhood. They were also asked about their specific experience and interaction with particular functions such as schools, health care providers, churches or other faith-based organizations, the criminal justice system, and various social service agencies. Based on these experiences, participants were asked for their perspective about what could be done to improve the transition for others moving to Des Moines in the future. The survey also included demographic information on the participants such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, employment status, income level, marital status, number and age of children, both currently and at the time they moved to Des Moines.

The next part of the project involved telling the story of some of the individuals or families who have migrated to Des Moines. During the survey phase, volunteers were sought to participate in longer, in-depth interviews regarding their experiences. The purpose of these in-depth interviews was to develop a more detailed understanding of the challenges some of the families and individuals faced in moving to Iowa, as well as to gather specific stories that

could help to provide a more detailed, nuanced perspective of their experiences of particular residents.

The final component of the project involved meeting with stakeholders in the Des Moines area, to gather additional information from the perspective of those interacting with, or providing services to, new residents. A series of interviews were conducted to explore the perceived magnitude of in migration patterns on the Des Moines area in terms of education, health care, social services, housing, crime, and related issues. This provided a different perspective of how the service agencies had been impacted by new migrants and what the stakeholders perceive to be both met and unmet needs of these residents.

The outcome of this project is intended to open the door on policy-related discussions and opportunities to better address the needs of new residents and the community in the Des Moines metro area. Overall, the goal was to provide an initial analysis of the issues facing residents moving into the Des Moines area from larger urban centers and help to improve the resources currently available to these residents to meet their most pressing needs. In addition, the project was intended to develop an understanding of the effects the urban migration patterns are having on the local community in a variety of areas such as crime and violence, health and social services, and education. The information gained from the project is intended to begin to build a picture of what is occurring with urban migration in Des Moines and provide suggestions for how to improve the process of integrating new migrants who have selected the Des Moines area as their new home.

Data and Methods

As an exploratory project, the goal was to begin to develop some perspective on the issues faced by new migrants moving into Des Moines, as well as the potential impact new residents may be having on the local community. To accomplish this goal, multiple methods were utilized including surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and stakeholder interviews. Each portion of the research is discussed in more detail below.

Survey and Focus Groups

A primary data collection point for this project was a survey administered to residents who migrated to the Des Moines area within the past 20 years. The goal of the survey was to explore a variety of issues with these new residents, including their reasons for moving and selecting Des Moines for their new home, their experiences since moving to the area, challenges they have faced, and opportunities they see as critical to improve the experience for new residents in the future. The target population was African American adults, age 18 and older, who migrated to the Des Moines area within the past 20 years from larger urban centers such as Chicago.

The research team was unable to identify a publically available tool to develop a list of people moving into a particular area that also included demographic information, which made it difficult to develop a list for the target population to use to select a sample of participants for the survey and focus groups. Therefore, potential participants were identified based on a combination of a snowball and convenience sample. A snowball sample is typically where an initial contact is used to identify additional participants, who can then in turn also provide additional potential participants based on their connections. A convenience sample is

essentially when participants are selected based on availability, rather than based a specific selection method. Both of these are non-probability sampling methods, which limits the ability to generalize the results to a broader population since the participants are not randomly selected and may not be representative of the target population. However, given the exploratory nature of the project and the challenge of developing a population list or sampling frame, this sampling approach seemed reasonable to at least begin to gather data from members of the target population.

The initial connection for the snowball sample was Urban Dreams, a local social service agency that has frequent contact with new residents and in particular, African-American residents in Des Moines. A primary contact at the agency assisted in setting up the first set of meetings where the survey and focus group were administered. However, attendance was relatively small at these initial meetings and many of the participants appeared to be within the same social or familial circles, so for the later meetings the sample was expanded. This was accomplished through a marketing effort using fliers sent electronically and posted in hard-copy at various locations in Des Moines including social service agencies and bus stations. A copy of the flier can be found in Appendix A. In addition, a radio announcement regarding the meetings was developed and played on a local radio station that has a primary target audience of African-American residents in the Des Moines area.

Respondents were invited to a meeting at one of two social service agencies in central Des Moines. A series of meetings were held between March 8 and March 30, 2013. As participants arrived for the meeting, they were asked to sign in to document their participation in the process. At the beginning of each meeting, Wayne Ford, Director of Urban Dreams,

provided initial background and introduced the purpose of the project to all participants. One of the project team members then provided an additional overview of the project and the intended goals. Prior to administering the survey, participants were asked to review and sign a consent form to participate in the project (see Appendix B). The consent form provided them with information on any risks associated with the project. Participants were also informed that all survey and focus group information would remain both confidential and anonymous and that the project had been reviewed and approved by the Simpson College Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were then asked to complete an anonymous, self-report survey. The surveys were numbered, but were in no way connected with the consent form or any other identifying information for the participants. They were given approximately 30 minutes to complete the survey which consisted of a combination of 51 closed and open ended questions. A copy of the consent form, survey, and IRB application are available in Appendix B and the survey and focus group protocol can be found in Appendix C.

Data collected through the survey was entered into IBM SPSS Statistics 21 and responses to close ended questions were analyzed through frequencies, crosstabs, and descriptive statistics. Respondent answers to open ended questions were categorized into common themes, which were color coded in Microsoft Excel and then counted by how often themes appeared for each question. For example, a response was put into the category of “family” if respondents indicated there was familial influence on their decision to move. An example of this would be the response of “I have family here” to the question of why Iowa was chosen as the destination for their move. As an additional example, a theme of opportunity included responses such as “to better my life” and “to have better education.” Some responses

fell into more than one category, such as “to better the future of my family,” which fits into the family and opportunity themes and was then counted in both categories. Additional themes were identified such as employment, housing, and a general “assistance” category was created due to participants not having a common, specific response to one of the questions, but rather there was an overall theme of assistance such as food stamps and childcare. Categories were also created for crime and safety and the criminal justice system due to participants indicating that they chose to leave their previous home due to criminal activity and wanting a safer place to live, as well as responses centering on interactions with the criminal justice system. Lastly, a category was created for when people responded “none.” An example of this is when asked what services were utilized upon arriving to Iowa, some participants said “none.”

A total of 100 individuals participated in the survey and focus group process. In terms of demographic characteristics of the participants, as shown in table 1, approximately 44 percent of the participants were age 40 or younger, there was a relatively even split in terms of respondent sex with 58 percent of the sample reporting being female. Although not shown in the table, the majority of the respondents did identify themselves as Black or African American, which was the target population for the project. In terms of marital status, 27 percent of the respondents reported they were married at the time of the survey, while 73 percent were not currently married and out of the total, 36 percent had never been married. In addition, 85 percent of the sample reported having children, with an average of 3 children across all respondents. In terms of economic characteristics, three-fourths of respondents reported their 2012 household income to be \$10,000 or less and 62 percent of participants reported being unemployed at the time of the survey. Eighty-seven percent of participants reported living in

the city of Des Moines, Iowa and approximately 55 percent have lived in Iowa less than ten years, with 37 percent having moved to Iowa within the past five years as shown in chart 1. Nearly half of participants moved to Des Moines from Chicago, Illinois, while the remaining participants moved from a variety of other states or metro areas.

Demographics of Initial Sample		
Age	44% age 40 or younger	56% over age 40
Sex	58% female	42% male
Marital Status	27% married	73% not married
Education	61% high school or less	39% some college or higher
Employment	38% employed	62% unemployed
Years in Iowa	55% 10 years or less	45% Over 10 years
Prior residence	46% Chicago	54% Other
Income (2012)	75% \$0-\$10,000	25% \$10,000-\$50,000
Children	85% Yes	15% No

N=100 - percentages exclude missing data

Table 1: Participant Demographics

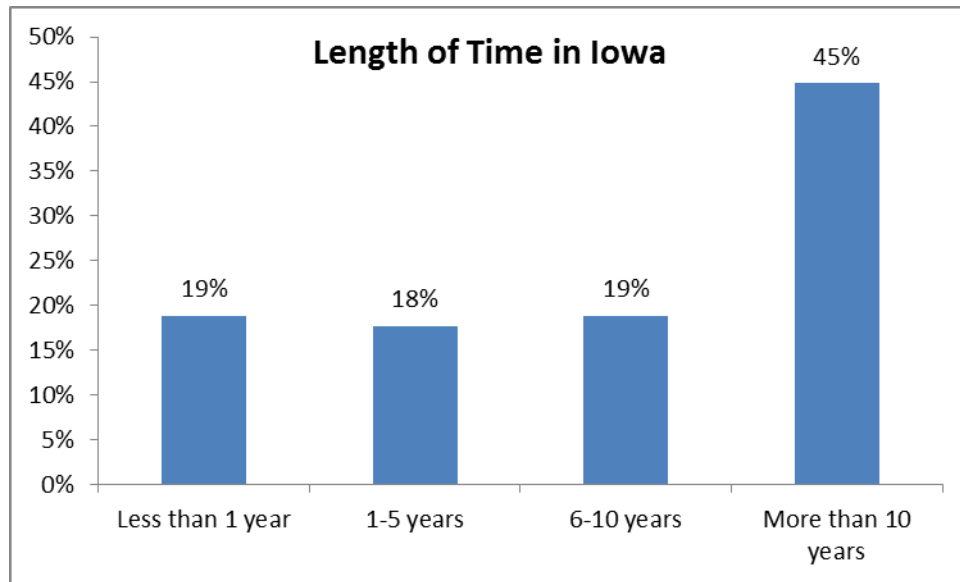


Chart 1: Participant Length of Residence in Iowa

After participants completed the survey, the surveys were collected and a project team member then provided an overview of the focus group process, including giving verbal

instructions to the group. The focus groups were semi-structured and were designed to last around 30 minutes. There were approximately 15 people per group, 8 groups total, with some variation in the number of participants per group. Copies of the focus group questions can be found in Appendix D and the protocol for the survey and focus groups is available in Appendix C. Focus group questions were designed to obtain additional background on issues respondents encountered during their transition to Des Moines, and to increase understanding of respondents' perspectives specifically around the reasons for moving from a larger city to the Des Moines area. Lastly, focus groups allowed for discussion around services that were helpful, along with obstacles or gaps in services participants encountered.

Prior to participation, survey respondents were given an overview of the purpose of the focus group and were advised of the time allotted for discussion, the roles of the researchers, and general guidelines for group discussion. Participants were also advised that comments from focus group sessions would remain anonymous, as was the case with the surveys. For most of the groups, there was one primary facilitator and a minimum of one person taking notes for each group. The facilitator led the discussion with semi-structured questions and also worked to keep the discussion on topic. In some groups this was particularly challenging with participants attempting to talk over each other, which made it difficult to keep the group on track and to take notes on comments made by various participants. The notes were combined after each group and the content was analyzed in the same manner as the open-ended survey questions in that themes were identified and then frequencies were compiled. Food and drinks were provided at each of the meetings and participants were also given a \$25 gift certificate at the conclusion of the meeting for their participation in the survey and focus group.

In-Depth Interviews

Participants in the survey and focus group sessions were advised that a sign-up sheet would be available for those interested in participating in a more in-depth interview, which would be arranged after the completion of all survey and focus group sessions. Participants were advised that from the pool of volunteers, individuals would be selected to participate in the in-depth interview portion of the project. Participants were also informed that the in-depth portion would be recorded on video and those selected would receive an additional gift card in the amount of \$25 for their time and participation. It was explained to the participants that the overall purpose of the in-depth interviews was to gain insight into the personal experiences of a few individuals and what they found to be easy or difficult about the transition to living in Iowa.

Once volunteers indicated their interest in the in-depth interviews, the research team further narrowed the potential participants using the criteria of having lived in Des Moines less than five years and having migrated from a major metropolitan area. When potential candidates were contacted to arrange for the in-depth interview, the candidates needed to be willing to share their story and experiences as part of an on-camera, recorded interview that would be published as part of the project. As with the focus group sessions, the in-depth interviews were guided by a pre-determined set of questions. The interviewer also had the ability to add to interview questions to gain understanding of each participant's experience. A total of four interview participants were selected. The interviews were recorded and were then transcribed to identify specific comments or statements that connected to the themes developed from the survey and focus group information. Copies of the IRB application and

interview questions for the in-depth interviews can be found in Appendix E. The intent is to publish excerpts from the videos on the Simpson Urban Studies Institute (SUSI) website.

Stakeholder Interviews

In addition to the surveys and focus groups, the project team identified specific stakeholder groups in Des Moines who were likely to be able to provide input and perspective on issues faced by new residents moving into Des Moines, as well as the potential impact of immigration on the local community. Based on the data collected from the survey participants, certain areas of life seemed more challenging for the migrants including housing, transportation, employment, and interaction with criminal justice agencies. To get a better understanding of the perspective of staff from agencies that may be working with new residents moving into the Des Moines area, the research team set up meetings with a variety of agencies in Des Moines. Representatives from the following agencies were part of the in-person interview process: Polk County Health Department, Des Moines Public Schools, Urban Dreams, Fifth Judicial District - Department of Correctional Services, Fifth Judicial District – Juvenile Court Services, Hawthorn Hill, City of Des Moines Housing Services, Des Moines Police Department, United Way, and a local planning organization. It is important to note that some additional agencies were contacted, but a response was not received or interview times could not be established as part of the project.

For most of the agencies, the interviews were set up by one of the primary researchers and took place at a location suggested by the agency, usually their primary facility in Des Moines. The interviews were conducted by a researcher, in some cases with an assistant present to help facilitate discussion and take notes. The notes were then reviewed and

categorized for common themes. These interviews were intended to provide additional context to the information gathered from the survey and focus group participants. The goal was not to provide specifics from any individual person or agency, but rather to look for commonalities in the perceptions of how urban migration may be impacting both new residents and the local community. A copy of the stakeholder questions is available in Appendix F.

Results

The following section summarizes some of the key results from this exploratory project. Results are broken down by section, with common themes being identified throughout.

Survey and Focus Groups

The following section is based on the results of the survey, using both the closed and open-ended questions, along with content derived from the focus groups. The results include specifics such as why participants chose to move from their previous location, why they chose Iowa as their new residence, the services participants utilized upon their arrival to the area, as well as their satisfaction with these services and how they may be improved. The easiest and most difficult aspects of the transition as perceived by participants are summarized, ending with suggestions on how the transition process could be improved for future migrants. Finally, responses to questions surrounding current neighborhood issues such as disorganization, discrimination, victimization, and interaction with the criminal justice system, are provided as background on how participants are faring in Des Moines.

Why Move

To provide initial context for these participants, they were asked to indicate the primary motivators for their decision to move from their prior place of residence. Respondents were

provided with both closed and open ended questions regarding why they chose to leave and relocate to Des Moines. This information may provide insight into what services or opportunities respondents may be seeking when coming to the Des Moines area, and assist with specific recommendations for local service providers. As shown in chart 2, employment was selected most frequently as an influential reason for deciding to move from their previous residence. Seventy-nine percent of respondents indicated either obtaining a job or changing jobs influenced their decision to move somewhat or very much.

Although employment was a top reason given by participants, there was a common theme that concerns about crime and personal safety were also motivators. Desires to escape crime (78.5 percent), be in a safer neighborhood (75.6 percent), and get away from drugs and gangs (71.8 percent) were top influences for the majority of participants, followed closely by a lower cost of living (70.0 percent). When looking at those respondents that just selected “very much,” finding a safer neighborhood and to escape from crime were even higher than the desire to find employment. So overall, quality of life and economic factors were key drivers for these migrants to have relocated from their prior place of residence. Government assistance, better stores or facilities, changes in marital or romantic status, a housing-choice voucher program, and health-related issues were less likely to have weighed heavily into respondents’ decision to move.

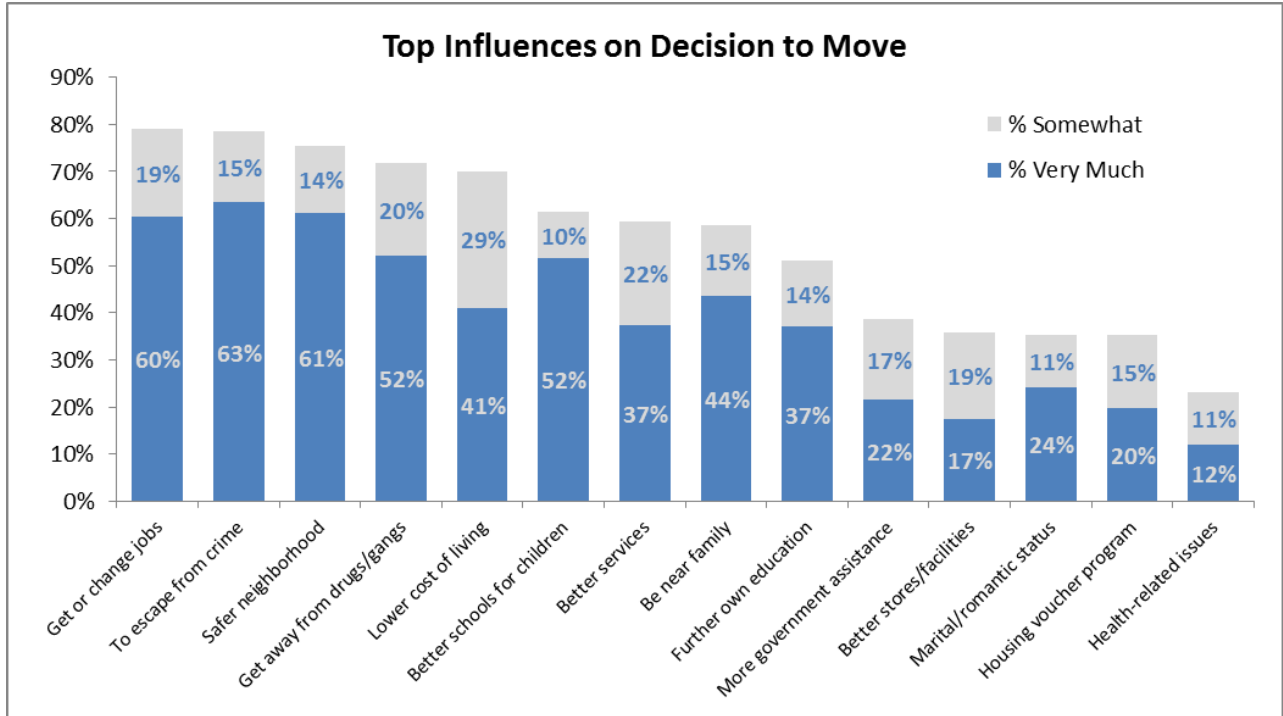


Chart 2: Top Influences on Decision to Move

Respondents’ background, particularly whether the respondent moved from Chicago or elsewhere, revealed differences in the strength of particular influences on the decision to move. Seventy-seven percent (76.7 percent) of those respondents having moved from Chicago indicated better schools for their children was either very much or somewhat of an influence, while only 48.9 percent of respondents having moved from other areas selected better schools as somewhat or very much a reason for their decision to move. There were also notable differences between those respondents having moved from Chicago or another area and whether a housing choice voucher program influenced their decision. Approximately twenty-nine percent of those who moved from Chicago indicated a housing choice voucher program was very much an influence on the decision to move, while only 12.5 percent of those who moved from another area said this was “very much” an influence. Respondents from Chicago

were also more likely to indicate that they moved to find a safer neighborhood than those from other areas, but the difference was relatively marginal.

Participants were also asked to respond to the open-ended question of “why did you move?” Family and opportunity emerged as the two dominant themes in respondent answers, followed by employment and concerns about safety or crime. Fifty-one (51) of the respondents indicated family was an influence on the decision. Family themes included respondents indicating they already had family living in the area and wanting a better environment to raise children. One respondent wrote “My family moved to Iowa so that we didn’t have to grow up in fear, so that we could succee[d] and grow to become healthy humans. We would be able to get a good education and be able to walk home without being bullied.” Opportunity was also influential on the decision to move, as it was mentioned by 41 participants, which is also connected to employment and concerns about safety or crime which were mentioned by 18 and 15 respondents, respectively. One respondent wrote that the reason for moving was “seeking a better life, and employment, education, place where I was living [there] was a lot of crime.” Another respondent commented that they were seeking a “better environment, more opportunities as a family.”

Focus group participants echoed the themes from the open-ended survey question. Family, opportunity and safety or crime issues were primary influencers on the decision to move. One participant relayed that family and friends “started calling” after they moved and “spoke well of Iowa.” A comment made by one focus group participant summarized each of these themes. When asked what influenced the decision to move, this participant stated “to have a chance” and alluded to a better education for children, finding employment, housing,

and an escape from crime. The desire to escape crime was specified in terms of removing themselves and their children from exposure to violence and other criminal activity. In addition to trying to alleviate the potential physical harm to themselves or their children, the desire to avoid being pulled into a criminal lifestyle was also relayed by a focus group participant. This individual stated “it was do something illegal so we can survive or move.” In addition, specific comments were also indicative of a belief that moving to a new city, in general, would provide opportunity or at least alleviate the possibility there would be no opportunities for any type of improvement in their life situation. One participant stated “if you want bigger and better, sometimes you have to move on,” while another participant stated “if you don’t move around, you get stuck.”

Why Iowa

Themes of crime and criminal activity, as well as job opportunities, were also evident in respondent answers regarding why they chose Iowa in particular as the location to move. As shown in chart 3 below, the most influential reasons for choosing Iowa were fewer issues with drugs and gangs (80 percent), less crime (79.1 percent), job opportunities or to change jobs (77.5 percent), and to be in a safer neighborhood (76.5 percent). These top responses were followed by lower cost of living, lower rent or housing costs, to seek educational opportunities and to be near family. Government assistance, changes in marital or romantic status, housing choice voucher programs, and having better stores or facilities nearby were less influential for participants on the decision to choose Iowa as their new home.

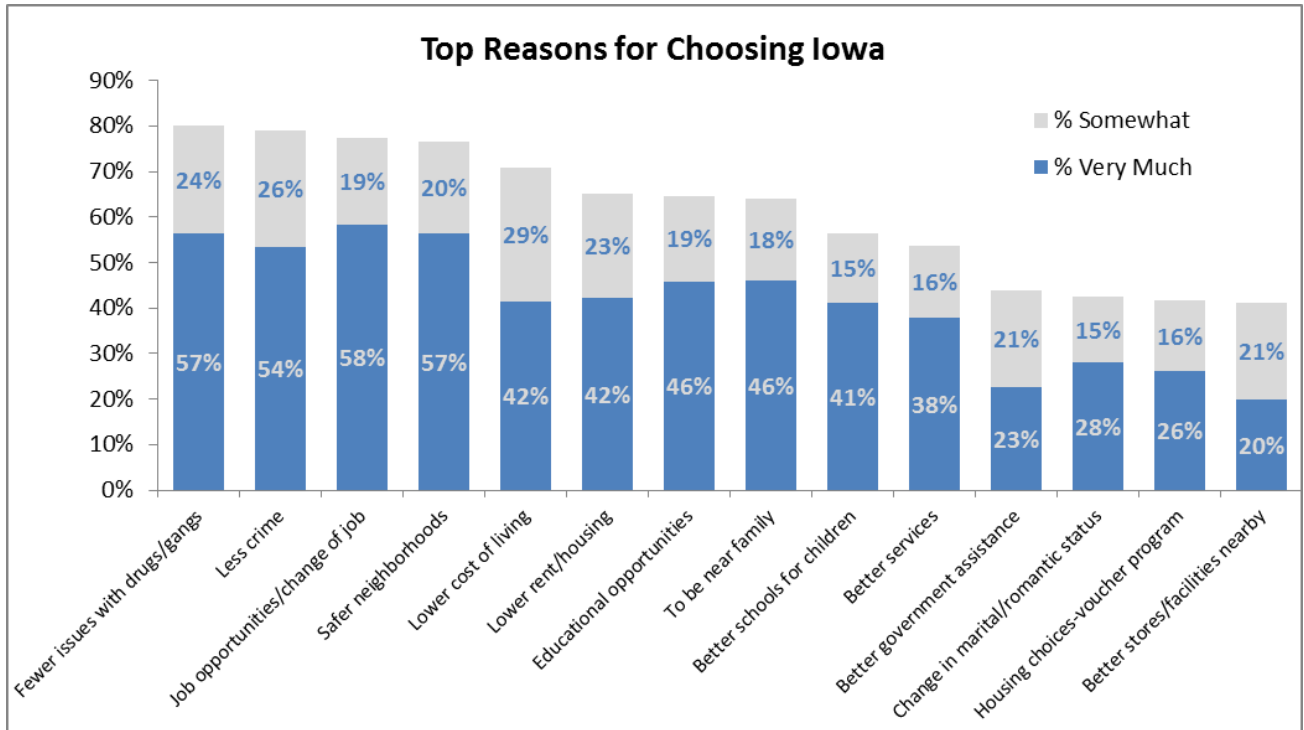


Chart 3: Top Reasons for Choosing Iowa

Responses to open-ended survey questions regarding why Iowa was chosen revealed family, opportunity, and employment as the reasons most often cited. Family (50) and opportunity (35) were the primary themes that emerged, followed by employment opportunities (16). Focus group participants reported themes of opportunity, schools for children, low crime, and family already living in Des Moines as influential factors in the selection of Iowa for their new residence. For example, one respondent indicated that they had a “...cousin that used to visit in Chicago – said there were jobs here – had to come find out for self – fell in love once got here – totally different than where came from – like Mayberry – fell in love with it.” Another respondent indicated that they wanted “...to give my kids as well as myself a better lifestyle” while another indicated they would “...hear a lot about the city –

better jobs, better living – not as much violence [as] Chicago.” One responded showed the family connection when they stated:

“Well, I had a cousin that moved from Chicago and she would come and visit, and she kept on asking to come to Iowa on a visit for a week. And she guarantee[d] me a job. [Add] that I was on welfare and I said why not I try it. I got a job went back to Chicago. I added the plus from the minus. I thank God I and my children had a new start and I had a job....”

Quality of life since move

In addition to determining reasons respondents wanted to move and why they chose Iowa in particular, survey questions also sought to determine the perceptions of changes in the quality of life for participants since moving to Iowa. Most respondents indicated their quality of life improved since they relocated. Results are illustrated in chart 4, with approximately 82 percent of participants indicating their quality of life had gotten somewhat or much better since moving to Iowa.

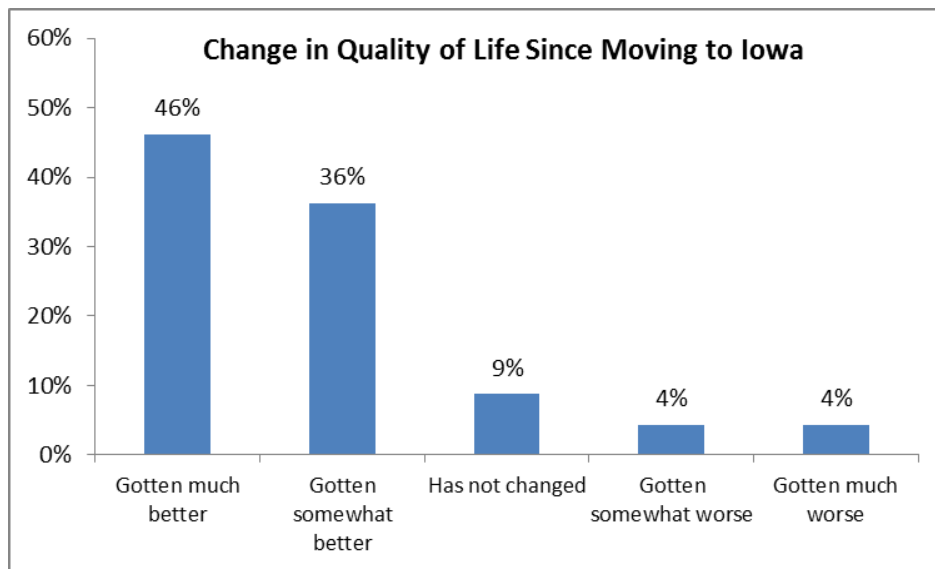


Chart 4: Change in Quality of Life Since Moving to Iowa

Participants were also specifically asked to explain how their quality of life changed since relocating to Iowa. When responding to this open ended survey question, 63 respondents indicated their quality of life improved, four respondents indicated their life had gotten worse, and the remaining did not answer the question. Some comments that illustrate the improvements that respondents perceived included statements such as “I don’t run [the] streets anymore or hang on [the] corner all day,” and I am “not looking over my shoulder.” Respondents also mentioned “...employment opportunities [are] a whole lot better and education as well...” along with being “...able to provide [for] my family more.” One respondent in particular stated that “My children have a great education, I remarried and now have a house, a job, a good husband. When I came to Iowa all we came with were 4 bags of clothes.” Yet, not all respondents have seen an improvement. One in particular stated, “When I first got here – thought I would truly make it – as I have been here longer – hard to get and keep a job – now having trouble getting disability – hard to survive here – no programs to get assistance – to help keep positive [I] turn to drugs/alcohol.” Overall, most respondents thought their life had gotten better, but some pointed to particular challenges when they moved to Iowa.

Services utilized on arrival and satisfaction with services

To shed light on how local services impacted changes in their quality of life, respondents were provided with a list of several services which may be commonly utilized by residents upon arrival to a new community. Charts 5 and 6 below illustrate services respondents were most and least satisfied with upon arrival to Des Moines. Medical care, church or faith-based organizations, schools for children, and job assistance topped the services with the highest satisfaction levels among respondents.

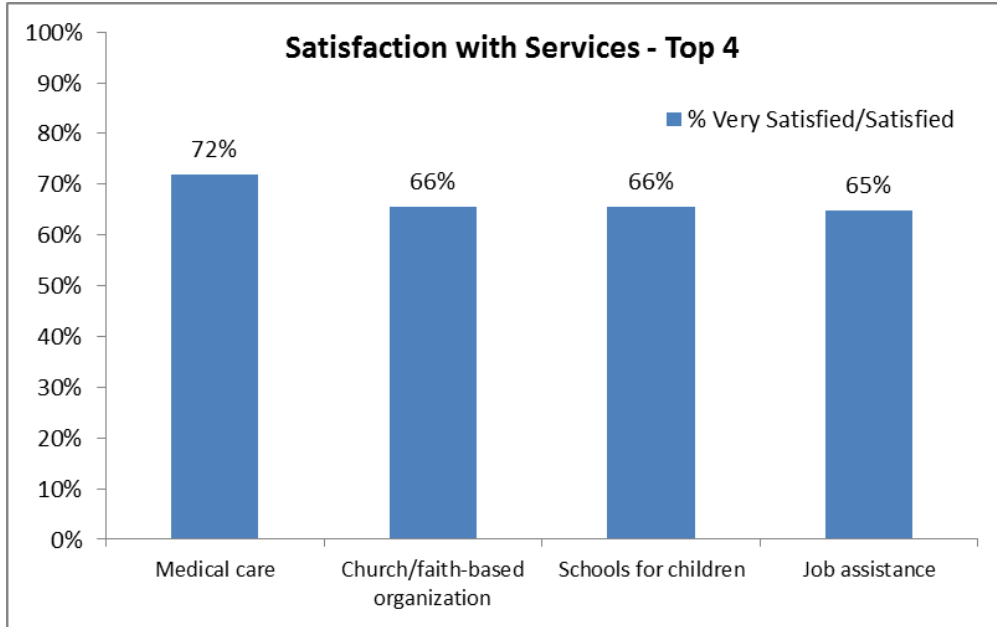


Chart 5: Satisfaction Level with Services – Top 4

Services selected by respondents as those they were the least satisfied with were criminal justice agencies (police, probation, parole, etc), public transportation, housing assistance, and government financial assistance.

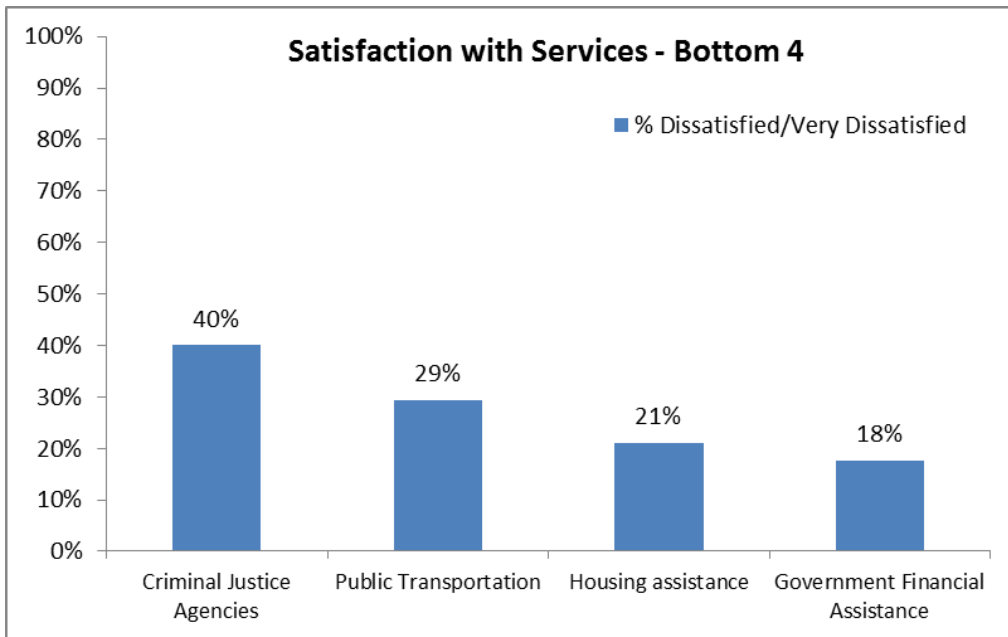


Chart 6: Satisfaction with Services – Bottom 4

Whether the respondent had moved from Chicago or from another area also revealed differences in level of satisfaction with certain services. Respondents moving from Chicago were more satisfied than those moving from another area with schools for children (79.5 percent very satisfied/satisfied compared to 52.2 percent from other areas) and childcare services (50 percent very satisfied/satisfied compared to 28.9 percent from other areas). As previously discussed, results indicated respondents moving from Chicago were more likely to be seeking better schools for their children. Those who moved from an area other than Chicago more frequently indicated they did not use these services or were unsure regarding level of satisfaction.

Difficulties with access to services

In addition to identifying services respondents were most satisfied with, respondents were asked to describe any difficulties they encountered with accessing various services upon arriving in Des Moines. Open-ended survey questions revealed 26 respondents felt they had no difficulties accessing services. In terms of common themes where there were difficulties identified, 25 participants indicated housing was a specific area that was difficult to access or locate, while employment was cited by 11 respondents as an area of challenge. Focus group participants also pointed to housing and employment as areas where they experienced difficulty. Looking back at the survey results, approximately 43 percent of the participants lived with family or friends when they first moved to Des Moines and approximately 20 percent were homeless or lived in a shelter. Approximately 30 percent of respondents rented their own apartment and 1 percent owned their own home when the first moved to Des Moines.

In addition, focus group participants also voiced difficulties with transportation, specifically the bus system in Des Moines. Some said the bus system in Des Moines was poor overall, while others indicated specific concerns such as limited times and location of services made it difficult to find or maintain employment, particularly outside of the city center. As an example, some pointed out that buses do not run at night and some people work nights and this is particularly difficult if their job is outside of the central part of Des Moines. Some participants were also concerned that the limited busing hindered their ability to get themselves and their children to school.

Transition to Iowa

As with experiences with local services, individuals also discussed factors which positively or negatively contributed to their transition into the Des Moines community. Open-ended survey questions and focus group content provided insight into the easiest and most difficult experiences in the move to Iowa. Employment was cited most often (21 respondents) as the easiest part of the transition to Iowa, which corresponded to the survey results, although it was still not stated by the majority of participants. Open ended survey questions regarding employment included common themes surrounding “finding a job,” “getting a job,” and “keeping employment.” The availability of housing (13 respondents) and having personal social support systems available (13 respondents) were noted the most frequently following employment issues as helping ease the transition to Iowa.

Employment was also noted as one of the most difficult issues impacting transition, with respondent comments (18) including statements such as “getting a job” and “finding good permanent employment” being difficult. General adjustment issues, such as “not knowing

what to do” and “just getting used to the environment” were noted by respondents (16) and were the second most common area of transition difficulty. Further, one respondent indicated “adjusting to racism face-to-face everyday” was a challenge encountered when transitioning from their prior place of residence.

As was seen in the open-ended survey questions, focus groups also provided mixed views regarding how employment either contributed to the ease of the transition or made the transition more difficult. Participants voiced that employment was both the hardest and easiest part of their move to Iowa. Housing was portrayed as an area making transition difficult, as was the bus system in Des Moines, along with separation from family and friends. Participants also noted that less violence in Des Moines, compared to where they had moved from, made the transition easy. Concerns with the criminal justice system were also painted as an area that was difficult in terms of successfully adjusting to life in Iowa.

Suggestions for making transition easier

Respondents were asked an open-ended survey question regarding suggestions for making the transition to Iowa easier. The primary theme in respondent answers was increased services. Forty respondents indicated more services such as for jobs, housing, and programs for children would be helpful. These comments echo other information received from respondents in terms of challenges in their transition to living in Des Moines. In addition to services, nine respondents made comments related to planning ahead, researching before, and seeking out help following the move to make the transition to Iowa easier for new residents. In other words, although some pointed to the need for additional help to be provided, some participants recognized the importance of taking steps to ensure the success of the move.

Input regarding what would make the transition process easier was also asked of focus group participants. Focus group comments resembled those in the survey. Participants pointed to more services generally, as well as specifically for families and children, and enhanced marketing to increase awareness of services and opportunities. A specific suggestion from focus group participants was to have a community center for kids, similar to a YMCA, but that does not require a fee. Respondents also mentioned having after school programs that do not cost money. Having low cost or free opportunities for families was an area brought out by participants to help families successfully transition to living in Des Moines.

Housing was also pointed out by focus group participants as an area that could use improvement. For example, one participant said “it’s faster to get Section 8 here. Maybe because there are less people, but it’s difficult for felons to get housing.” Another participant shared that “all properties don’t take Section 8 because the previous tenants didn’t take care of the property.” Yet, it was also said that “[You] can’t starve in Iowa...or be homeless.” These mixed reviews make it difficult to identify the circumstances under which housing is more or less challenging for residents migrating to the area. Some focus group participants also portrayed the criminal justice system to be an area for improvement, in terms of challenges they encountered when moving to the area. Lastly, it was suggested that the bus system be changed to accommodate those whose hours of employment involve nights and weekends.

Perception of differential treatment

To understand more about their perceptions since relocating to the Des Moines area, participants were asked more specific questions regarding their recent experiences with racial bias and victimization, as well as their overall feelings of safety in their current neighborhood.

These issues were included in the survey in part based on input from Urban Dreams that these may be particular challenges faced by African-American residents moving from larger urban areas into Des Moines. Respondents were asked if they felt they had been treated unfairly on one or more occasions within the past six months because of their race or ethnicity in particular circumstances such as a store or restaurant, in their own neighborhood, at their child’s school, or in dealing with police. As shown in chart 7, responses ranged from a low of 16 percent at their child’s school to a high of 43 percent in dealing with the police. The majority of respondents did not indicate that they felt they experienced differential treatment based on race within the past six months, but it is still an area of concern for some residents, at least in specific circumstances. In particular, a relatively high proportion of respondents felt they experienced disparate treatment in dealing with the police or in a store or restaurant within the past six months.

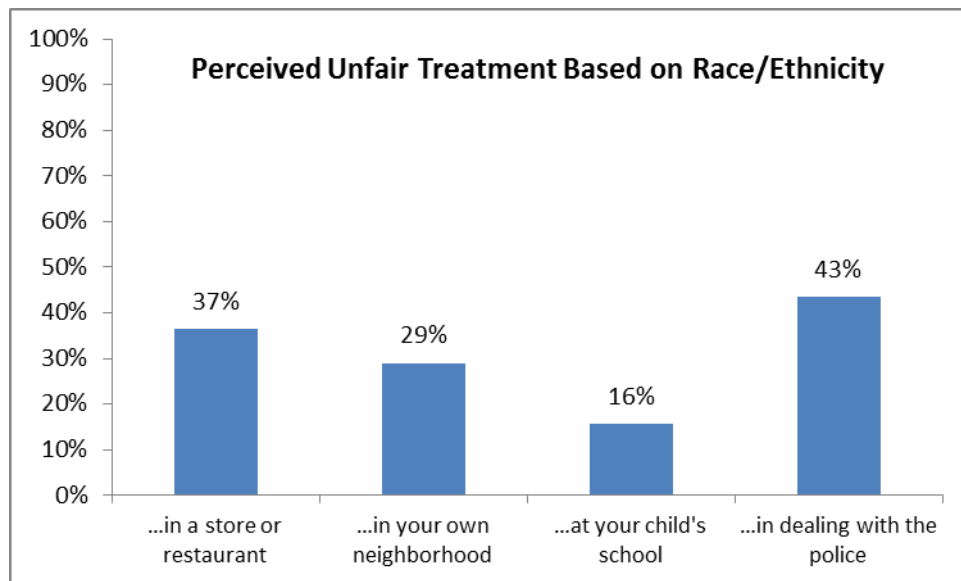


Chart 7: Perception of Unfair Treatment Based on Race/Ethnicity

The focus group discussion also brought out comments related to the topic of racial bias or discrimination, despite the fact that there were not particular questions on this topic. A number of focus group participants did raise issues related to the perception that they were treated differently based on race. Some focus group participants specifically voiced feeling they had been treated unfairly during interactions with the criminal justice system. One participant stated that “Police are unfair to women, unfair to black men, mistreat people.” Another commented that “...there is a difference between the West side and other places. If you go to Jordan Creek, you’ll be swarmed down on by police in the parking lot because they think you stole something.”

This was carried a bit further when respondents were asked whether they had direct interaction within the criminal justice system since moving to Iowa. Approximately 50 percent of participants indicated they have interacted with the criminal justice system. Respondents were then asked to describe their experience. Twenty-four respondents indicated their experience was negative and 13 specifically implied or indicated they felt they were treated unfairly. One respondent voiced he felt the criminal justice system was “prejudice – when find out where you come from – want to manhandle you – bully you – take away your manhood – police – hard when every time you turn around someone you know is in trouble and they want to bring you into it.” Another respondent indicated that “Things are different now. When I first got here it wasn’t like it is now. It’s gotten worse. Police are unfair to women, unfair to black men, [they] mistreat people.” Another respondent described a particular encounter with the criminal justice system which they characterized as a “...very bad encounter, horrible, very racist. Blatant, degrading I feel scared for [my] life as a result.”

Yet, some respondents again indicated that their perception of differential treatment was more about being from another area or being from Chicago in particular. One participant stated that “...people can tell you are not from Des Moines by the way you talk.” Others indicated that “If you’re from Chicago, you’re labeled by both blacks and whites,” and “..you are labeled as having an attitude and being more violence prone.” One particular participant believed that “We came from Chicago and we are made an example. If you are from Des Moines, consequences are less. If you are from Chicago or elsewhere, the consequences imposed by courts are harsher.” This connects to the idea discussed earlier in terms of the perception that coming from Chicago carries a stigma, which may impact experiences and opportunities for new residents. Based on this exploratory research it is difficult to separate perceived differential treatment based on race from the possibility that there is a stigma associated with being from a larger city, and in particular from Chicago. What is evident is that at least some of the participants believe they are treated differently based on one or both of these factors.

Neighborhood issues and Victimization

In terms of crime issues in their current neighborhood in Des Moines, respondents were asked both about their overall perception of safety, as well as their victimization experience. When asked about safety in their current neighborhood, participants overall indicated they feel relatively safe. Specifically, 89.4 percent of respondents felt safe or very safe during the day and 82.6 percent had the same feeling of safety at night. The majority of respondents (64.5 percent) also indicated they believe it is not very likely or not at all likely that they will be the victim of a crime in their neighborhood.

Respondents were then asked to identify if they or someone they live with were ever victimized in their current neighborhood. Examples of victimization from which respondents could select included home break-ins, thefts, and assaults. Despite the fact that most respondents indicated it was unlikely they would be victimized, 45 percent of all survey respondents reported some form of victimization in their current neighborhood. Most of the victimizations were thefts, vehicle thefts, or property damage. In total, approximately 40 percent of respondents reported some type of property crime, while less than 20 percent reported violent crime victimization, such as being beaten or assaulted, stabbed, shot, or threatened with a gun or knife.

Criminal activity was also addressed in regard to respondents’ perceptions of current neighborhood issues, along with other potential neighborhood concerns as shown in chart 8.

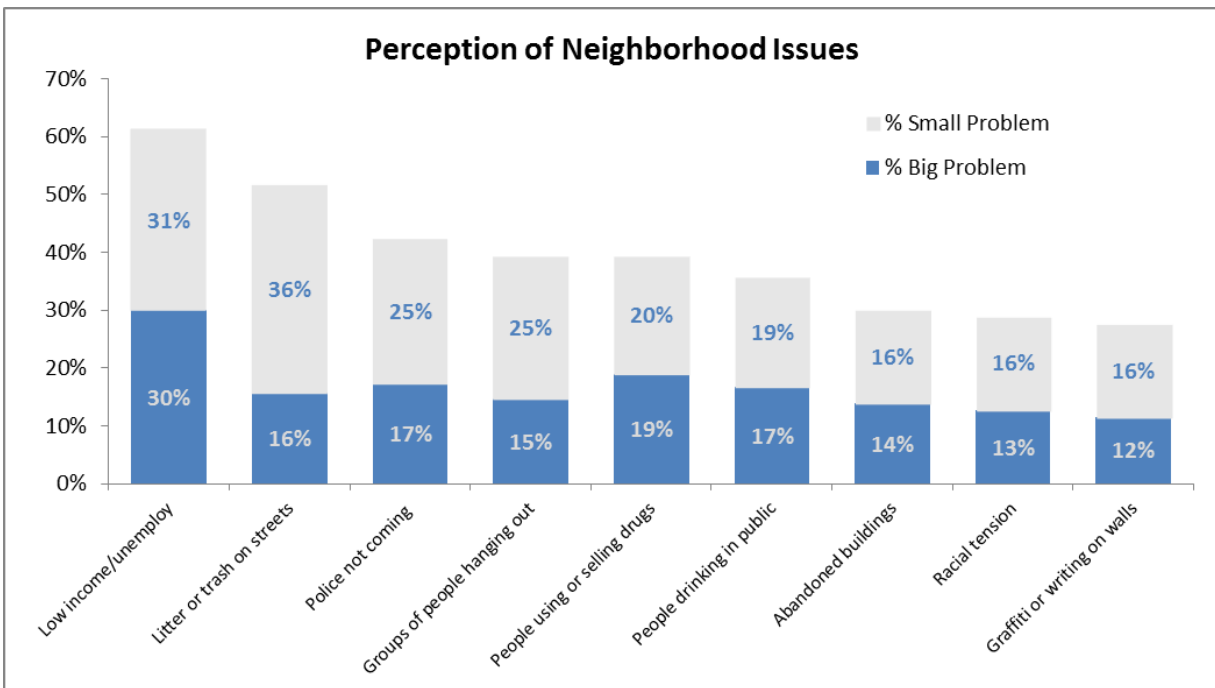


Chart 8: Perception of Neighborhood Issues

Respondents were specifically asked if these issues were a “big problem,” “small problem,” “no problem,” or “I don’t know.” Low income or unemployment was cited as a problem by the highest percent of respondents (61 percent) followed by litter or trash on streets (52 percent) and the police not coming when called (42 percent). However, when looking only at those items identified as a big problem, the second most commonly cited problem was people using or selling drugs (19 percent). Overall, respondents seemed to think their quality of life had improved and they felt relatively positive about their current neighborhood in Des Moines, despite some of the challenges and transition issues they experienced.

In-Depth Interviews

After completing the surveys and focus groups with the 100 initial participants, those interested in participating more in-depth interviews were asked to fill out a sign-up form. From this form, contact was made with multiple participants in an attempt to schedule videotaped, in-depth interviews. A total of 4 interviews were completed with survey participants, namely Ebony Sayles, Tim Wilborn, Mildred Coplen, and Saveno Seals, along with an interview with Wayne Ford, Director of Urban Dreams. The purpose of these interviews was to provide individual stories and additional context to the information collected during the surveys and focus groups. Excerpts from the various interviews are included below, to illustrate where participants echoed some of the themes found in the overall group.

In terms of experiences with moving and the motivation to relocate, Ebony echoed the themes of family, opportunity, and a new start. As she stated:

Well, for me we were just recently living in Georgia, in Atlanta, Georgia. And the economy, the school system, everything was so messed up. So I was like I need a

new start where I can be able to provide for my children and my family and still pursue my education and my goals and my career without struggling. To provide for my family I can focus. One day it was just, I was so fed up I got on the internet and I Googled: best places to live due to the economy, best places to live for people that have backgrounds, and opportunities for children to go to school...So when everything started coming up that I was searching I was like okay, Des Moines kept coming up...I came up here, I see what everything was like, upon my first day of being here I got offered a job, so I was like you know I will stay a couple months and work the job and then I went back with the checks I had accumulated and I got everything together and paid some bills up, paid for our truck...So we came and everything since then has been falling into place. [We had] no family, no support system, but it was better opportunities. So I went with my gut, my gut was telling me to walk out on faith and try it and I'm so glad I did. Like the schools are better, my kids are involved, the people embraced us, they're offering other resources, and they helped us get situated. So for me, it was like the best choice to come here.

When asked about why she left Chicago and later Atlanta, she again hit on the common themes described earlier of escaping crime and violence and seeking new and better opportunities. Ebony stated:

For me, in Chicago there is no opportunities. Like for one, it's like 100,000 short of the population of New York, the ratio [of] jobs versus the people is slim, the resources to people like me, I was young I made a mistake, but that didn't define

my future. It was like I got tired of stumbling in Chicago to find my way, I graduate high school, so it wasn't like I needed to go back to school or anything, it's just there wasn't no hope there with all the killings and all the break ins. It's like you can't even let your kids go to school because there's so much violence going on throughout the day, you're scared your children are going to get hurt...So for me it was like I'm done I can't do it here anymore, and it was like I had to stand: either fall to something I didn't want to be a part of or to survive. What do people do to survive? They go steal, they take, and they do stuff that they don't have no business doing. I was like I don't want to go into that, there has to be something better than this. So I left, I mean I had to get out of there and this is where I'm at.

Saveno expressed similar reasons for leaving Chicago, to get away from violence and have a new start. In his words:

They was hot and they was shooting everywhere, you know, and I didn't want to get caught in the gun fire, you know and there was just a lot of things going on in Chicago. I didn't have no prospects of getting to a job and it was hard going to a job and associating with people that you didn't like to be around and the people who I came down here with, who invited me down here were very upgraded people, nice people. This was my way out, I had been living in Chicago all my life, you know, about 55 years before I moved here and that was enough for me. I moved from the inner city, inner Chicago to the suburbs of Chicago and it seemed like the gangs followed. So there was no way of getting away unless I

traveled somewhere else, I know there's other gangs there, but a smaller place like this. The south side of Chicago where I was born at is as big as Des Moines, you know, so I have been all over Chicago, so it was easy to maneuver the city, you know. Since I've been here it has been fantastic.

In terms of their experience since arriving in Iowa, the interview participants varied in their views. Tim described specific concerns with bias due to race, in particular with the judicial system. Tim stated, based on his experiences, that:

I've had situations where, true story, what I'm about to tell you everybody is guilty. I'm not putting any false pretense, nobody did anything wrong. You know for getting pulled over for traffic stops, I get pulled over for traffic stops for no reason all the time. Everything is right, good. Every time I've been speeding I get the ticket and I understand I was speeding, I legitimately should have got a ticket. So I'm sitting in the passenger seat and the person, a Caucasian driver driving. All outdoors, no one has ever gotten a ticket. Now I'm not saying, maybe it was extreme luck or circumstances, but to have two situations where I've gotten pulled over and got a ticket and two situations where somebody else got pulled over, they were legitimately speeding and didn't get the ticket. It kind of makes you wonder...I don't want to play the race card because I feel like the race card has been played too many times. But when you see things and you want to point it out, I don't want to point it out because I feel like it's been overused.

Yet, Ebony connected issues more to assumptions made because she was originally from Chicago, that there was bias regarding residents who migrated from Chicago. Ebony expressed

feeling like she was treated the same as those who caused problems in the community. In her words it happened:

All the time. All the time. That's why I don't even tell people that I am originally from Chicago. I always tell people: 'No I just moved here from Atlanta.' You know, 'I'm from Atlanta' because as soon as you say Chicago, first, they're going to try and relate you to someone else that they have met or they know. Second, automatically your chances go down. They think that whatever experience that they already experienced for somebody that's there, you're the same way. I was brought up with both my parents, both my grandparents, aunties, uncles; I had a good strong support system. Why would you suggest that, and you don't even know me, that I'm just like them. I'm not out here trying to kill or take something from somebody, none of that. So it happens a lot of the time. When we had the last discussion group or whatever we were talking about that. And I tell everybody that I'm not from Chicago.

Mildred echoed the same sentiment, that there was particular attention on situations involving residents who relocated from Chicago. As she stated:

...I used to hear it a lot every time something happened. Oh that's those people from Chicago, that's the Chicago gang, that's the Chicago group, and I'm standing there like why is it always about Chicago? And the police don't make it no better, every time something happens, before when I got here it wasn't the person who got shot was from Chicago, the person who got shot was from Minnesota or St. Louis. Now, you hear the man who was killed up here, he was

from Chicago, but then the young kid who got killed from Oakridge they say he was from Iowa, no. So, they're starting to point out now every time a shooting happens if a person from Chicago did the shooting or the person from Chicago got shot.

Wayne Ford also expressed concern that Chicago migrants were treated differently, which was part of the original motivation for this project.

So because we're different, we talk different, we want to be a part of the American dream. So that's when I recognized that because people from Chicago and other blacks are being treated differently than Des Moines blacks. Des Moines blacks is a black who is going to conform "Yes, sir," "No, sir," ain't going to talk loud because they don't want to offend you because you're white, all those things that I never had to worry about. So I start seeing that transformation, then I started saying that I need to start preparing the community that I love for this urban migration... Blacks come to me and tell me, who are not from here, say: 'Man, Wayne, I came with all my dreams and I want to make my life better, but I go through a different type of resistance.

Transportation issues, in Chicago the buses run all night...[here] people follow me and stare at me, and then I read in the paper all the time that when something is wrong Chicago is almost [always] blamed.' So they come here to get away ...this is the field of dreams...they come here and they recognize that this is a good community, but they have no idea how [to] live. Now in Chicago, you can't go into a store in most parts, the inner city and pick up food. The man

tell you what you want behind glass. That's how you live in Chicago. So it's a different type of dynamics...these city people have no idea about the resistance they are getting, today in this community.

The interview participants also had recommendations about how to improve the current situation and the experience of those moving into the community. Ebony would recommend assistance with jobs, housing, financial planning, and other services to help new residents find a stable footing in Des Moines. In her words:

I would say, for the most part, the affordable housing. For me right now I am paying market rent, but due to the jobs that I have been able to retain is making it doable, but what about those that are disabled, or those who are not well-educated such as myself? I had a back-up plan so to speak, I wasn't just coming up here didn't know what to do so to speak, I had a plan. So for the people who don't have any type of ambition or dreams, they just wanted to start over because where they were at wasn't working for them. I would suggest that the city put more programming in place where they can help people become more stable. Say for instance your first place, most of the people who come up here they have to go through general assistance... When they come here have them do a program that helps them work on their finances, helps them attain a job, not just oh you're giving them the lease for a job, they have to get a job in order to get these benefits, then once they make that step, then start helping them with their housing because the homeless rate is kind of high here too, but the shelters and stuff is full because it's so small, but now because Des Moines is

growing their population is growing it's like they need to open up more resources...So make homeownership programs available to people who like me do have jobs, they are trying to learn the steps they need to take to be more stable and give back to Des Moines. A lot of people here, they get started, they get on their feet and then it's like they hit a brick wall, but if aid and general assistance and these resources are staying like committed and staying connected to the people instead of just letting them get the services they need or resources, keep them going, make it a long term relationship, check up on them. Like 'Hi, we have this going on we're having a workshop for finances, you and your family need to come out and be a part of this, this is to help you make the next step.' Have credit workshops, help the people build their credit, this is going to help Des Moines economy, it's going to help the economy. Besides just giving them food stamps, cash assistance, and a shelter, help them be more stable, help them form that foundation that they really need. I think that if they did that Des Moines could really be a prosperous city.

Saveno had similar suggestions, but also pointed to the need for more social service agencies, transportation, and medical assistance.

Well, I would say stand by what the community actions is going on in the city of Des Moines with the less fortunate people and neighborhoods and stuff. Like Urban Dreams and Spectrum and few other ventures who have helped me along the way....My issue with Des Moines right now is with the bus service because a lot of people do commute with public transportation and they need to get there,

but they cut it off at an early time... So, they know a majority of the people use the public transportation, it's like they're punishing you so to speak. Like, if you're not done by nine o'clock, then you gotta have a car to get around. The other thing is they're only giving everybody so much part time because of the Obama Care Act and the Medicare and I think that is setting us up for failure because no one can really live off of part times. I have to get two jobs just to consider it full time...Other than that they need to provide more stuff and more structure to make sure these people get stable when they get here.

Tim also discussed the need for public transportation and job assistance, as well as resource guides, particularly to share information about culturally diverse businesses. As he stated:

I will be honest with you, because of the limited amount of bus service I have never taken a bus because anywhere I needed to go there wasn't a direct line I needed to get there. If there was a city planning standpoint I would just run the buses up and down the major streets. Like, straight up and down Fleur and east and west across University, Hickman, Douglas. So that way it's a lot easier to transfer and get where you need to be. The bus system here, it's going to take a while to get you where you need to be...Now in Chicago we have a great mass transit system. So if you wanna move you can get around to wherever you want to for a couple bucks you can be wherever you need to be within reason. Here without like [an] automobile, I didn't even have a driver's license, so I couldn't get around...Job resources, I mean it would be awesome just to have networking, people looking to hire, people you know with prior discipline, prior judicial

concerns...background checks might be too stringent for some of people. To have those opportunities, there's also people who are looking to grow, they just want to leave Chicago, they don't have problems with the judicial system, they just want to go somewhere grow and spread their wings....I mean just simple resource guides, where you can find...maybe it already exists, but I don't know where it is. But you know places that you know like African American business or culturally diverse businesses...I mean just the basics, you know; from like hair care products, resources, what's available to you. And also transportation resources, if you move from a metropolitan area to here, if you don't have a car, you can't get a job, you can't maintain that job.

Mildred echoed the concept of needing a centralized location for services, as well as transportation to assist with employment opportunities and the ability to reach various services. As she indicated:

What I've been trying to do for the longest time...a one stop shop. If they can just give us one building for a one stop shop, to where they don't have to run here for a birth certificate, here for a social security card, over here just to get a printout of the last twelve months of your unemployment, you gotta go over here about assistance, over here to see about clothes. If you got someone from each organization in this one building that would hit all of them, I think that would work because that's where a lot of people get lost at...You can't do very much when you have to wait for the bus, can't catch the bus here you have to

catch the bus there. So the day is gone by the time they went to only two places and then ain't nothing been done...

Wayne Ford specifically focused on the need to be accepting of people regardless of where they are from, as well as enhanced services such as mental health, cultural training, and related activities. As he stated:

They need a welcome wagon. These people need the American Dream and they need the welcome basket to say they are welcome. We need to welcome the people...Okay, I mentioned the welcome wagon, but mental health. I mean it's hard to get mental help. I'm the only person I know [with Urban Dreams] who is open after 5 o'clock. Mental health in Chicago and most cities don't stop at 5 o'clock. They have no idea, matter of fact I'm working with Urban Dreams now to have the first 24-hour social service building in America. I recognize, everybody recognizes this, that you can't stop your support services at 5 o'clock. So, one thing is opening up one. Also, another thing is do some cultural training with the police department, with the welfare [workers]. So here we gotta have a system where people begin being sensitized to this urban migration the same way they was trained or taught for the Asian migration and other great migrations that have happened to this great state. We are known to welcome people, but the black migration has not got the same welcome...let's welcome all people regardless of what country they come from or what ghetto they come from.

Overall, the in-depth interviews supported the themes expressed by the survey and focus group participants, while providing additional detail and context to the experiences of the selected participants. The intent is to make portions of these interviews available on the Simpson Urban Studies Institute (SUSI) website.

Stakeholder Interviews

The goal with the stakeholder interviews was to gain perspective from key public and social service agencies that may interact with, or provide services to, individuals and families moving into the Des Moines area. The intent with these interviews was not to point out specifics from individual participants or agencies, but rather to identify common themes in terms of the perception of changes in the community, as well as services needed to help successfully integrate new residents. Representatives from the following organizations participated in the interview process: Polk County Health Department, Des Moines Public Schools, Urban Dreams, Fifth Judicial District - Department of Correctional Services, Fifth Judicial District – Juvenile Court Services, Hawthorn Hill, City of Des Moines Housing Services, Des Moines Police Department, United Way, and a local planning organization.

In terms of common themes, many of the stakeholder participants indicated that a challenge with this topic is that there is not typically a tracking mechanism in place to identify whether people using various services have relocated from other areas, or if they have relocated, where they are coming from. This makes it difficult to quantify the impact that migration may be having on programs and services offered in Des Moines. The perception shared by a number of the stakeholders was that they were not aware of specific increases or changes in recent years in terms of the number of African-American residents moving into Des

Moines from places such as Chicago. A few of the participants did indicate that they see changing patterns over time depending on circumstances, such as times when there is specific funding available for various housing programs. Others indicated that they do notice a pattern that when they are working with families from Chicago or other areas and they seem to have more than one family at the same time. This may point to the tendency for families to network with one another when determining whether and where to move, which was echoed by the survey and focus group participants in terms of influences on their relocation decision.

Overall many of the stakeholders identified common issues between new migrants and longer-term residents in terms of specific needs with housing, education, employment, transportation, and related areas, although some of these issues may be amplified for new residents, particularly if they have limited financial resources at the time of the move. A number of stakeholders also pointed to seeing more significant issues arising in recent years not necessarily with urban migrants, but rather with changes in international immigration patterns in Des Moines. Additional challenges such as language and cultural differences can make the integration process even more challenging for those new residents coming into the Des Moines community from other countries.

When looking at particular needs of new residents, a few key areas were brought up by stakeholders. There was a common theme of a need to expand particular services to meet the needs of both new and existing residents. Mental health and consolidated health care services were a key area, as these are often challenging for new residents particularly if they are also faced with financial challenges to obtain needed services. Health and mental health concerns

can be a limiting factor for new residents if they are unable to receive services to meet identified needs.

Transportation was also pointed out as an important issue for new residents. It was mentioned that this is, at least to some extent, a known issue. However, the depth of the concerns and the impact transportation can have on the employment, housing, and economic opportunities for new residents may be understated. Not having access to a public transportation system that reaches a wide variety of locations across the metro area and includes late evening and weekend hours, poses challenges in terms of where these new residents can live and work. It is also particularly striking for people moving from larger cities such as Chicago, since the public transportation network is more embedded as a part of city life. Stakeholders pointed to the importance of looking long-term at transportation issues and considering alternative options such as shuttle services to open additional means for residents to be able to live and work in a variety of areas in and around Des Moines.

Housing, which in a number of ways is connected to transportation issues, was also raised as a key area by stakeholders. According to information provided by the interview participants, there is limited availability of affordable housing in Des Moines and there is a significant waiting list to obtain assisted housing. Since there are so many families waiting for assistance, even the waiting list is typically closed and does not allow for new families to be added. Based on information provided by stakeholders, when the waiting list was opened for a short period in 2011, more than 4,000 applications were received to be added to the waiting list. Stakeholders indicated that there are some transfer or “portability” options for new residents moving into Des Moines, particularly if they receive housing assistance in another city.

This gives them the option to “port in” and receive assistance in a new area without having to be on the waiting list. However, this option is not open to many new residents and affordable housing has very limited availability in Des Moines, which can make it difficult for new residents to meet their housing needs upon arrival. One stakeholder in particular pointed to the additional challenge of various housing options requiring credit or background checks, which can also severely limit what is available to some new residents. Also, there may be a need to reconsider particular housing restrictions such as modifying the limits on the number of people who can cohabitate, since this can restrict the ability to accommodate some family arrangements for residents.

In addition to affordable housing challenges, a particular issue for homeless families is finding a place in Des Moines that will take everyone. Some shelter locations only take mothers and children so fathers have to find alternate arrangements, which can then split up the family at least for a period of time. There is also limited availability for shelter services generally. In addition, one stakeholder pointed out that various housing programs such as rapid rehousing, which are intended to move people quickly into permanent housing, do not work well without supportive services such as employment assistance and childcare. Overall, stakeholders pointed to the need for a wider mix of options in housing to open opportunities to new residents moving into Des Moines.

Transportation and housing also have a direct tie to employment opportunities for new residents. As discussed earlier, part of the motivation for people moving to Des Moines is economic opportunity in terms of jobs and education, but a lack of financial resources can also make the transition to a new community particularly difficult. Additional resources for

identifying and securing employment are therefore also central to the experiences of new residents. A range of services including skill-based education, job search assistance, résumé preparation, coaching on how to dress and prepare for interviews, and related tools were described as important ways to help new residents become economically self-sufficient. Also increasing entrepreneurial opportunities can provide ways for residents to explore a variety of job options and contribute to the community in different ways. Providing a variety of employment assistance, as well as having a broader mix of housing and transportation options would open additional employment opportunities for new residents in a wider part of the metro area.

The importance of additional services and opportunities for children and families was also a point of discussion. Based on input from various stakeholders, the availability of funding for community centers, after school programs, and mentoring programs were discussed as important areas to help with issues facing youth in the community and in particular, for youth moving in from other cities. In addition, enhancing educational support to keep these youth in school, emphasizing the importance of the link between schools and community partners to work with youth on multiple paths to graduation, and trying to keep kids engaged in school and other activities can be important focal points going forward. The Des Moines Public Schools are working to look at the unique issues faced by youth and develop individualized programs for kids when there are behavioral or other issues, which can be beneficial to both new and existing residents. In addition to school-based efforts, opportunities such as parenting classes can assist both new and existing residents in addressing issues with youth or within families.

An additional point of discussion with a number of stakeholders was the question of whether there are particular issues that are more directly tied to new residents coming from larger cities. A number of stakeholders made similar comments related to the perception that African-American residents, and in particular youth from other cities, may come into Des Moines with more of a “swagger” or a perception that they are now a “big fish in a little pond.” Youth from other cities may present themselves as being more street-wise than youth from Des Moines. A number of stakeholders expressed the belief that this may influence how they act, as well as how they are perceived in school and within the community. It may also be an issue with recognizing that Des Moines is a smaller community and that actions that may have been accepted or at least tolerated in larger cities such as Chicago, may not be ignored in Des Moines. There may also be a lower level of anonymity in a city such as Des Moines, which may impact the likelihood that new residents, and youth in particular, may receive negative attention for particular actions or may increase the chances that they will come into contact with the criminal justice system. There was also a perception expressed by a number of stakeholders that new residents may be more likely to distrust the police, which may reflect their beliefs or experiences from their prior place of residence.

Many of the stakeholders indicated that it is difficult to identify or quantify whether there is a particular pattern of changing crime or gang activity in recent years, tied specifically to new residents coming in from larger cities. A number of the stakeholders held the perception that crime and gang issues were primarily local, although there may be some influence from other cities. There was some concern raised by stakeholders that much of the discussion on the perception that things are changing in Des Moines, that they are getting worse in terms of

gangs, crime, and violence, is based on individual anecdotal stories rather than a large-scale, common pattern that can be identified. Participants expressed that there are perceptions that are not necessarily supported by data and may not be entirely accurate or supportable. There is not currently a direct way to track the proportion of offenders, victims, or gang members that have connections to other cities or moved to Des Moines from other places. Stakeholders did mention however, that it is important to note that this connection is sometimes made by the media which can develop a perception that may or not be a reflection of reality.

At the same time, stakeholders express that part of the challenge that is particular to African-American residents moving into Des Moines is the issue of trust. These new residents are moving into a community that has a relatively low level of racial and ethnic diversity and what diversity there is tends to be concentrated in particular areas within the city. As of the 2010 Census, 76 percent of the population of Des Moines was categorized as “White,” with approximately 10 percent of the population categorized as “Black or African-American.” Although the level of racial and ethnic diversity in Des Moines is higher than for Iowa as a whole, which is listed as over 91 percent “White” based on the 2010 Census, it is strikingly lower than other cities such as Chicago. Based on U.S. Census data, the population of Chicago is categorized as 45 percent “White” and 33 percent “Black or African-American.” Therefore, for African-American residents moving into Des Moines from larger cities such as Chicago, there may be challenges with developing trust and feeling accepted in the community. As discussed by both stakeholders and those participating in the survey and focus groups, new residents may also encounter real or perceived differential treatment based on race. As both stakeholders

and community participants pointed out, there may be a need to increase the level and frequency of diversity training for various public or social service agencies in Des Moines.

Although it is outside of the scope to address racial differences in detail, the context of disproportionate outcomes by race was pointed out by a number of stakeholders in describing challenges that may be faced by African-American residents moving from larger cities. Yet stakeholders also pointed to some of the same perceptions raised by the survey and interview participants. A few stakeholders pointed out that there may be some negative perception regarding those individuals or families coming from larger cities and in particular, those coming from Chicago. Stakeholders shared stories from new residents about people not returning phone calls and the perception that it was tied to having a Chicago area code. They also explained that the media and some community members may specifically point out situations that involve residents who came from Chicago, which may add to the perception that these new residents are “causing problems” in Des Moines, despite the fact that it is difficult to quantify whether such a pattern exists.

In looking broadly at what could improve the experiences of new residents, a number of stakeholders pointed out that many services are available in Des Moines, although there may be a somewhat narrower range of such services than you may find in larger urban areas. Part of the issue therefore, is not the availability of services, but rather the knowledge of and access to those services. Stakeholders expressed a need to tell people where to find services. For example, 2-1-1 is available, which is a tool to quickly identify human services information, but there is a limited budget to get the word out and it is difficult for various service agencies to help when they do not know who is in need of assistance. Having a welcome center or

“welcome wagon” with a more centralized way to notify residents about services, as well as connect them directly to those services, could be beneficial to those moving in from other cities. One stakeholder in particular described the need for case management services the first few days when someone arrives to assess their needs, get kids enrolled in school, identify busing or child care arrangements, find housing, assist them with online job searches and interview preparation focusing on their skills and abilities and providing assistance in moving their benefits from their prior residence. This type of comprehensive servicing could go a long way in helping new residents to navigate various aspect of the move and help them more quickly and successfully integrate into the Des Moines community.

Stakeholders also pointed out that there is a need to continue to gather input from the community and stakeholders, to bring people in from the community to be part of the solution. This project was intended to be one piece of that process. As one stakeholder pointed out, there is a need to have a “rich mix” of opportunities for people from a variety of backgrounds to help enhance the experience for both new and existing residents in Des Moines. The conversation needs to continue in order to improve the experiences of residents on a go-forward basis.

Limitations

Overall, this was an exploratory project that was intended to begin to examine various issues surrounding the experiences of African-American residents moving from larger urban centers such as Chicago into the Des Moines area, as well as the perceived impact this may be having on the local community. There are a number of limitations to the study that should be taken into consideration when reviewing the results. First, the sampling method was based on

a combination of a snowball and a convenience sample, which makes it difficult to generalize the findings to a broader population. Early in the project the idea of developing a “census” of African-American families through the Des Moines Public School District was explored, but the project team was unable to find a way to move this forward, given privacy concerns and restrictions. Therefore, the sample that was established for the survey and focus group participants came from connections through Urban Dreams, a local social service agency, with additional participants being identified through the initial participant group. In addition, participants were sought through the flyer and radio spot that were used to advertise the project. It is difficult to know therefore, how these particular residents compare to the overall population of African-American residents moving into Des Moines from larger cities in the past 20 years and whether their views and experiences would be representative of the population.

In addition, as discussed earlier, it became evident early in survey and focus group process that many of the participants knew each other. This interconnection between the participants may lead to common experiences influencing the results. In particular, it is difficult to know if the high percent of participants from Chicago was in part due to this connection, over and above the fact that Chicago is one of the primary sources for in-migration into Des Moines. The timing of the move for the participants is also a concern. Given that part of the intent of the project was to identify services or other needs for new migrants, the fact that the a relatively high percent of the participants had been in Des Moines more than 10 years (45 percent) makes it difficult to identify whether the needs identified are core issues for new residents or whether they reflect prior concerns faced by residents moving here more than 10 years ago. Given the way this project was carried out, there was also a lack of a comparison

group in that information was not collected on the experiences of other racial or ethnic groups moving into Des Moines. The surveys and focus groups were only carried out with the specific focus on African-American residents who moved to Des Moines from a larger city. This was in part due to the specific focus of the project as set forth by Urban Dreams, but was also impacted by the budget available for the project.

In addition, the topic of the impact of this urban migration on the local community is difficult to address, since most government and social service agencies do not specifically track data regarding whether people utilizing various services have migrated from other cities and where they have moved from. There is limited information available to quantify the extent and effect of urban migration on various aspects of the local community. Overall, since this project was intended to be exploratory and did not necessarily set out to answer particular questions, the limitations discussed above should be taken into account, but the core themes identified through the surveys, focus groups, and interviews can provide context for further discussion regarding these issues.

Discussion and Conclusion

A primary purpose of this project was to begin to understand the experiences of African-American residents moving into Des Moines from larger urban centers such as Chicago, as well as to consider what changes could be made to improve the integration of these new residents. A survey and series of focus groups with 100 African-American residents who migrated to the Des Moines area within the past 20 years formed the basis for this project. In addition, in-depth interviews with a number of participants helped to provide additional context to the experiences of new migrants, and the information from the stakeholder interviews also

provided an alternative perspective on the key issues facing new residents, as well as the impact the urban migration may be having on the local community.

The overall survey results indicate that seeking new and better opportunities formed the basis for the move for many of the participants. Concerns about crime and safety, including finding a safer place to live and escaping from crime, drugs, and gangs, as well as the search for new opportunities in terms of employment, lower cost of living, or better schools for children were top motivators for participants leaving their prior place of residence. These areas were also key factors in their selection of Iowa as their new home. The majority of the residents surveyed felt their quality of life had improved since moving to Des Moines and that they received many of the services they needed upon their arrival. Residents were particularly satisfied with their experiences with medical care, church or faith based organizations, schools, and the job assistance they received when moving to Des Moines. Most participants also indicated they feel safe in their current neighborhood and believe it is unlikely that they will be a victim of crime. Overall, most respondents seemed to believe that their situation in Iowa was an improvement relative to their prior place of residence.

When asked about challenges they faced when they arrived in Iowa or what services they needed that were not available, some of the core themes centered on housing, employment, and transportation issues. Participants expressed concerns with trying to find affordable housing and that the lack of housing options made the transition hard so many lived with friends or family when they first moved to Des Moines rather than renting or owning their own home. A number of respondents indicated that finding a steady job was also particularly difficult and they pointed to the need for additional assistance in preparing for and finding

employment. Concerns about the availability of public transportation were also issues for numerous residents, which related to options on where residents could live and work. Respondents specifically pointed to the impact of not having bus service to particular areas outside of downtown, as well as the limited night and weekend hours for public transportation. These issues posed particular challenges for residents trying to find a way to successfully transition into their new home.

Additional services for children and families were also brought up as potential improvements to assist new residents. Community centers and low-cost options for families could help to improve the experience of new residents relocating to Des Moines, in terms of providing support to help them integrate into the community. Respondents also pointed to the challenge of just not knowing what services are available and needing additional mechanisms to reach new residents and assist them in coordinating multiple needs. Some participants did also express concerns over perceived differential treatment based on race since their arrival in Des Moines, although this was not the case for the majority of the new residents. Others tied negative experiences to the way people reacted to the fact that they were not from Des Moines. More particularly, some participants felt they were perceived or treated differently because they moved from a specific place such as Chicago. Each of these areas points to potential changes that could be made to improve the experiences of residents migrating to Des Moines from larger urban centers.

The stakeholder interviews brought out similar themes. Additional opportunities for affordable housing, enhanced public transportation, and job assistance were key areas based on the input from various services providers and stakeholders. The stakeholders in particular

pointed to the connection between these three areas in terms of the opportunities available to new residents, or conversely the way these could impose limitations on new residents in their transition to living in Des Moines. In addition, enhanced opportunities for families, expanded and coordinated health and mental health services, and a continued focus on education were also discussed by stakeholders. Even when such services are available, improving the way this information is communicated to new residents and providing a more centralized way to connect new residents to the services, was described as a key improvement by numerous stakeholders. Increasing diversity training for public or social service agencies may also help address potential trust issues between new residents and local service providers.

This study was intended to be exploratory and the sampling method utilized to identify participants for the survey and focus groups limits the generalizability of the findings. In addition, given the scope of the project it was not possible to include a comparison group, which makes it difficult to identify whether some of these issues are unique to African-American residents moving from other cities into Des Moines, or whether these needs are similar for other groups and particular segments of the existing community. The fact that nearly one-half of the participants moved to Des Moines more than ten years ago also makes it difficult to know whether some of the issues raised are current concerns or whether they reflect the particular time period in which people moved. It is also challenging to quantify the impact that urban migration may be having on the local community, based on existing data. The stakeholders in particular pointed to the fact that where someone moved from is often not tracked, so it is difficult to identify whether there are particular challenges connected to residents moving from other cities. Stakeholders cautioned against generalizing based on

anecdotal stories or even particular situations identified by the media, and rather focus on areas that can help improve the experience of all residents, including those moving to Des Moines from other areas.

Overall, the project was not intended to answer specific questions. Rather, the goal was to open the door to begin to understand the experiences of African-American residents migrating to Des Moines from larger cities and to provide an initial point of discussion on ways to improve the experience for the new residents. At the core, the common ground between those participants who migrated to Des Moines and the stakeholders was the idea that enhancing existing services and making it easier for new residents to connect to those services are key areas for improvement. The residents participating in the study indicated that they came to Iowa to escape crime and violence, to find new jobs, and to enhance the quality of life for themselves and their families. The information gained from this exploratory study can help to further the discussion on recommendations that can improve the experience for new residents, as well as help them more successfully integrate into the local community. To make that happen, it is important to continue the conversation about the needs of these residents, and to take steps to improve the services and options available. As one participant aptly stated, it is all about understanding the motivations, challenges and options available to new residents-
“To sum it up...opportunity.”