

# JEFFERSON COUNTY LIBRARY

Feeding Minds - Fueling Dreams



## Jefferson County Library District Community Needs Assessment White Paper October 2022 Submitted by: comengage.us

### **Mission**

Feeding Minds. Fueling Dreams

### **Vision**

A thriving community empowered by knowledge.

# Purpose & Methodology

The Jefferson County Rural Library District (JCLD) serves the 22,000+ residents of unincorporated Jefferson County, WA, through a library branch in Port Hadlock, WA and a Bookmobile that provides weekly service to seven small communities around the county. In 2022, JCLD conducted a needs assessment survey of residents within its service area. Building on the District’s recently revised Vision, Mission, and Strategic Plan, the survey captured data aimed at answering the question, *“What does our community need to thrive and be empowered by knowledge?”*

## Project goals included:

- Assessing/identifying community assets, barriers, and gaps in needed services
- Identifying JCLD’s role(s) in connecting users to assets, removing barriers, and bridging/filling existing gaps
- Creation of an action plan/recommendations for JCLD that will connect residents to existing assets, remove barriers to access, and fill gaps/holes

The quantitative survey collected 741 responses from adult residents of unincorporated Jefferson County.

In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) served two purposes:

1. To mitigate the lack of input from underrepresented segments of the population less likely to take the survey.
2. To collect valuable feedback from community leaders directly involved in providing resources to those in need.

Jefferson County Library District (JCLD) invited 16 community organizations to participate in a 20–40-minute interview. All 16 community organizations participated, with some email and phone follow-up from JCLD and ComEngage.

- Interviews occurred from June 27 – July 25, 2022, via interviews recorded and transcribed on Zoom.
- Unfortunately, the first two interviews with Jefferson Land Trust and Chimacum Native Connections Action Group were not recorded successfully. Both organizations are enthusiastic partners and supporters of the library, with valuable ideas regarding library partnership on both outdoor and indigenous cultural programs.
- The 100% participation rate and sincere responses speak to the strength and commitment of this community network.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS			
Bayside Housing & Services – Board President	DASH – Board President	Jefferson County Immigrants’ Rights Advocates – Community Outreach Manager	Jefferson Land Trust – Executive Director
Brinnon School District – Superintendent	Dove House – Executive Director	Jefferson County Public Health Department – Director	Jefferson Transit – Interim GM
Chimacum Native Connections Action Group – Executive Director	Jefferson County Corrections – Chief of Corrections	Jefferson County PUD – Broadband/Communications Director	OLYCAP – Executive Director
Chimacum School District – Superintendent	Jefferson County Food Bank Association – Board President	Jefferson Economic Development Council – Board Chair	Quilcene School District – Superintendent

# Executive Summary

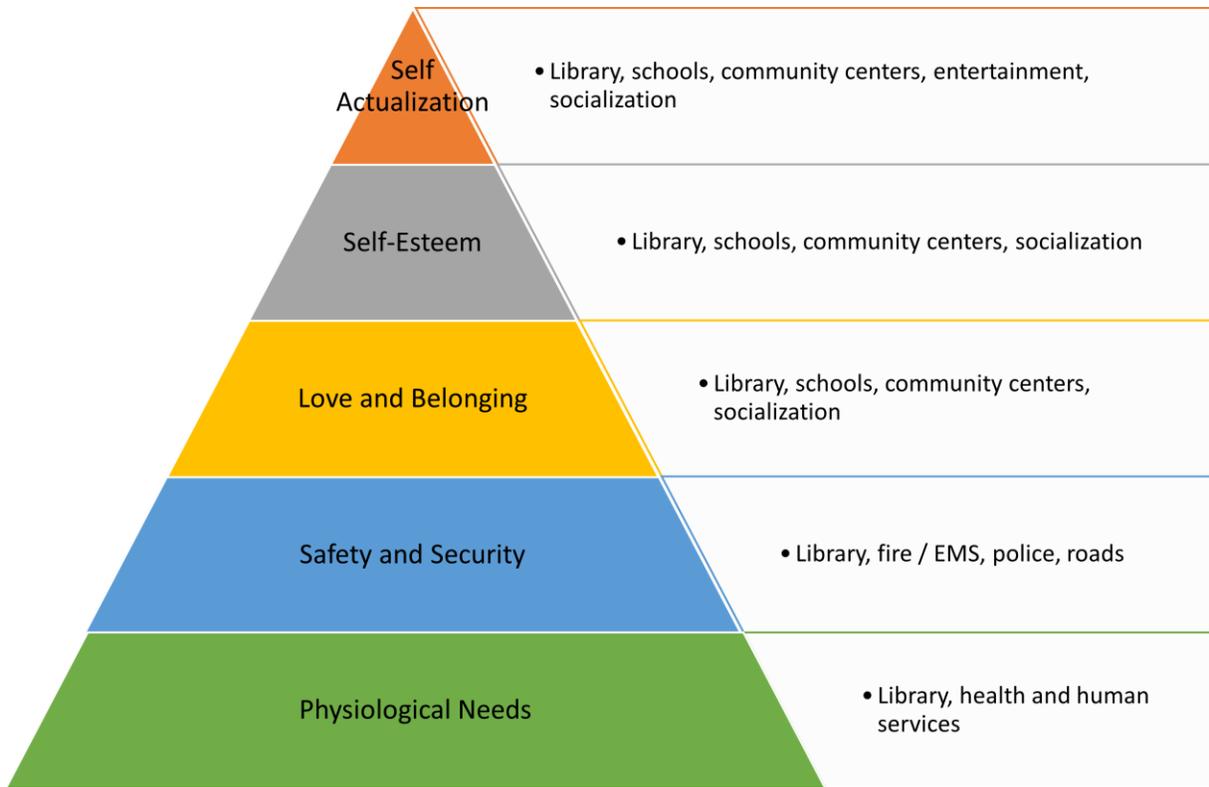
## What does a thriving community empowered by knowledge mean to you?

Responses related back to each organization’s focus but conformed to the basic “hierarchy of needs.”

- Meet basic human needs first, then focus on enriching lives.
- Community organizations provide support where needed to help community members **access** resources.

*“The main word is access, whether it’s access to knowledge, to services, or to a built environment and the natural environment. Access means there’s equity for people to consume those items in ways that keep their lives healthy and integrated.”*  
**Jefferson County Public Health Director**

*“People who have their basic needs met and can relax and do what we would consider leisure things. Being empowered and thriving would mean you’re not worried about eating and sleeping, and where are my kids going to go, and safety, and instead being able to do the fun things in our community, like our beaches and our libraries and all of our events. I think you’re thriving when you’re able to meet your needs and be participating in what we all love about living here.”* **Dove House**



**Jefferson County Community Organizations & Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

## What is the current impact of misinformation?

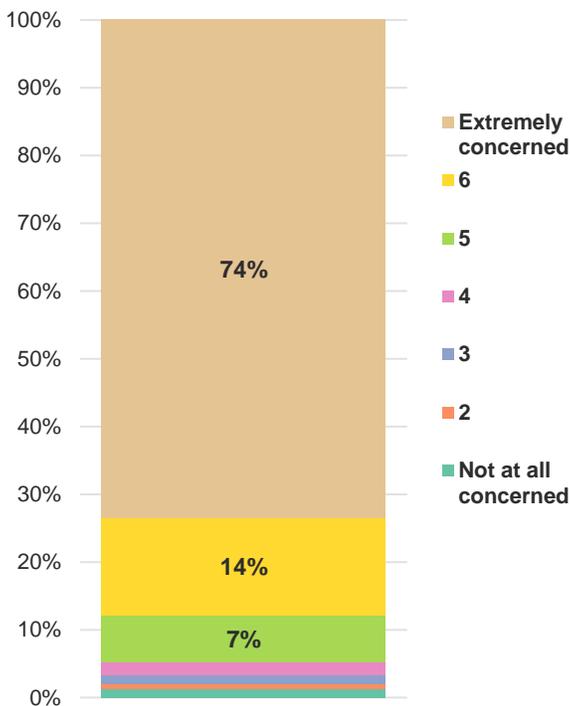
The research team included a question about the impact of misinformation in the quantitative survey as a special topic of interest for JCLD. The extreme response, shown in the chart below, prompted us to include a question on this topic in the IDIs. Again, the responses were even stronger than one would expect.

### IDI participants feel that misinformation poses a new, major challenge to the community:

- The Public Health Department and public schools feel this impact most.
- Misinformation undermines authority and credibility, hurts morale, and swallows up scarce resources.
- JCLD can play a major role in tackling misinformation by curating information sources and promoting better research skills (leveraging library databases when possible) and digital literacy.

*"I'm really glad you asked this question because I don't think it's being asked enough. I think misinformation will become the most powerful enemy of public education. I think it will continue to make it harder to do our work. It distracts from what's real and true, and it bogs us down in things like public records requests, because people get all stewed up about something that's not real, and they start doing frivolous records requests. It's sucking the life out of people. We don't have the resources to counter it and I do think it's going to affect everything."* **Quilcene School District**

Concern for impacts of misinformation



Source: JCLD Community Needs Survey 2022; n=741

*"Misinformation and disinformation are a scourge on our evolving society. It has, in so many ways, made things complicated and challenging. It's offensive. It's difficult to handle as a staff. We know that people are wildly influenced by whatever they see on the Internet, and we know that many people have attenuating skills to try to sift through what's presented to them, but that skill-building needs to be nurtured."*

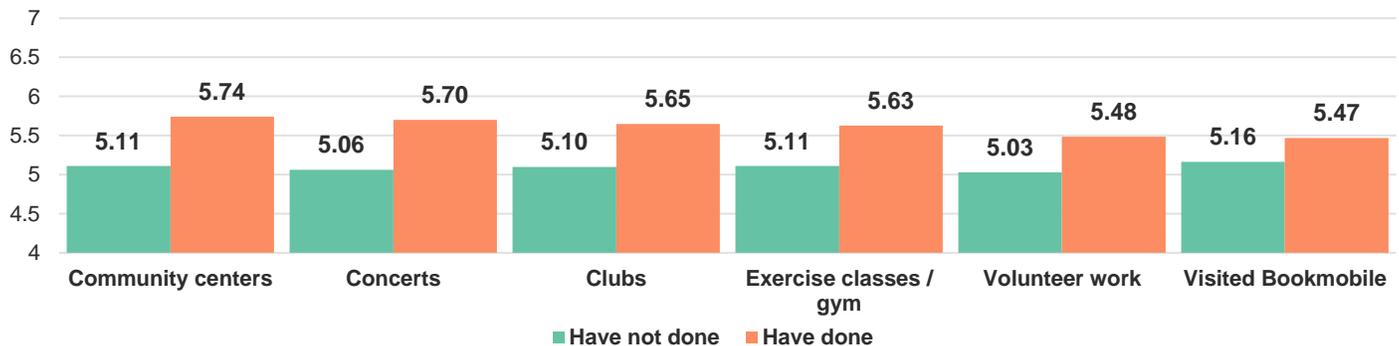
*We've been under an unusual magnifying glass, given that public health is at the eye of this enormous emergency. We've learned to always push good information and clarify information for consumers. We typically decide that everyone's opinion and the things they share on the Internet are generally worthy of discussion. We do everything we can to have consistent sources. We want people to really focus on reputable sources. We constantly repost strategies for people to remember how to seek clear information that's accurate and from reputable sources."*

*We're actually good people. We disseminate this information because our M.O., like the libraries, is to educate people. We're learning. It has been a bit of a stumble through COVID because we've had vitriol and divisiveness toward us about the topics that we hold so dear that are meant to keep the public safe. But it's been a real learning curve for us."* **Jefferson County Public Health Director**

## What community resources are well-utilized, underutilized, and resource gaps or unmet needs?

**Well-utilized resources:** As the County Public Health Director stated, “People use services in this community deeply.”

- JCLD, schools, and public health agencies reach the widest range of Jefferson County residents.
- Strong partnerships exist between public agencies and non-profit community organizations. The people running these organizations are deeply committed to serving their communities’ diverse needs.
- Free public transit, clubs, community centers, arts programs, and parks are believed to be heavily utilized.



Source: JCLD Community Needs Survey 2022; n=741

Mean for all respondents = 5.2, where 1 = No sense of community at all and 7 = Strong sense of community

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) where:

Dependent variable = How would you rate the sense of community in your area?

Predictors = Participation in social activities, use of bookmobile, use of library in the last 12 months

**Underutilized resources** pose three challenges: awareness, outreach, and access

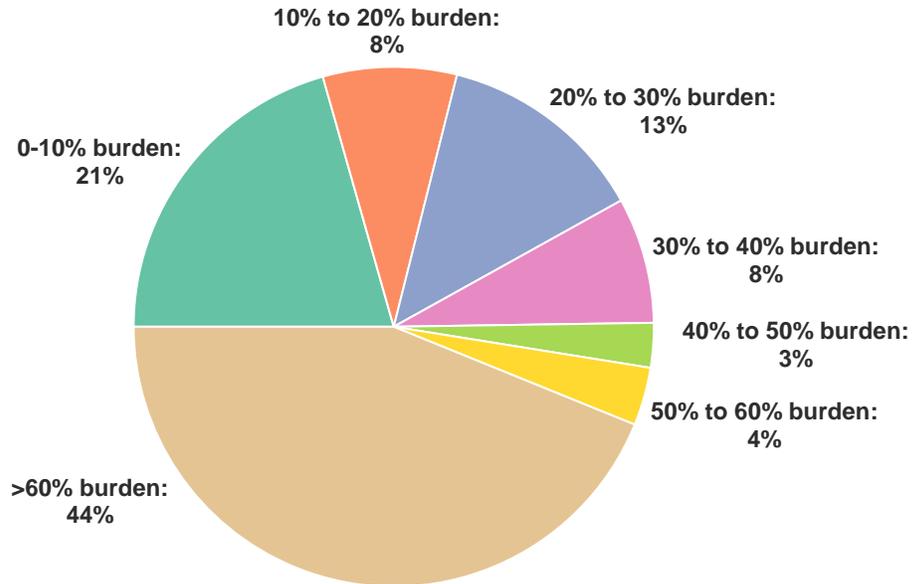
- **Awareness** – some don’t know resources exist (e.g., free bus service). Others may not see the benefit.
- **Outreach** – old school techniques like word of mouth are still most effective with certain audiences, but more difficult with a lower post-COVID level of human interaction.
- **Access** – a recurring theme. “Meet people where they are” has multiple meanings which we will explore in detail.

*“Information is not being shared the way it was pre-pandemic. For the previous 100 years you’d run into people and learn what they were doing. You had this random serendipitous encounter, hearing what somebody’s working on. The number of individual encounters on a daily basis right now is 1% of what it was 3 years ago. It’s a lot harder. I don’t think the replacement has occurred. I don’t know if it will occur for how people interact in a social, intellectual sort of context.”*

**Jefferson Economic Development Council**

**Resource gaps and unmet needs** – HOUSING, HOUSING, HOUSING, plus some others. Housing consistently came up as the most pressing concern and the one that is most commonly shared.

## Housing Burden Categories



Source: JCLD Community Needs Survey 2022; n=741  
Approximately what percentage of your take home / after-tax income goes to cover the cost of housing?

### The lack of affordable housing is the leading challenge facing Jefferson County:

- Limited by infrastructure, zoning, long-lingering NIMBYism/fear of change,
- Many are unsheltered or living in sub-standard, overcrowded, or overpriced conditions,
- Creates a negative feedback loop with young people leaving Jefferson County, further weakening the labor force.

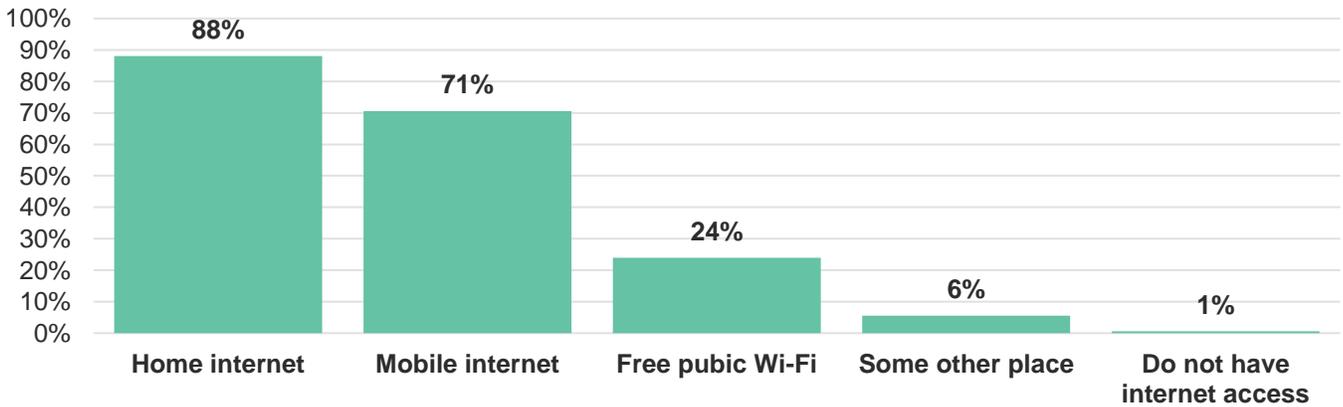
*“There's limited shopping up here on the Peninsula. Part of that has been the fault of planning and zoning. It always goes back to this idea of trying to stay true to what the community looks like and not fall victim to suburban growth or the onslaught of urbanization or gentrification.*

*Then add to that, as I'm sure you've heard over and over again, the housing issue. Finding housing is near impossible unless you have a lot of money. For the working class or those on a limited or fixed income, trying to find rental units in any way aligned with what you can make at low level jobs here is just not going to happen. The last affordable housing was built 15 years ago. Our agency is in the midst of a build right now that's only going to be 43 units. A drop in the bucket. A \$15.5 million bucket. That's the cost of the building.” OLYCAP*

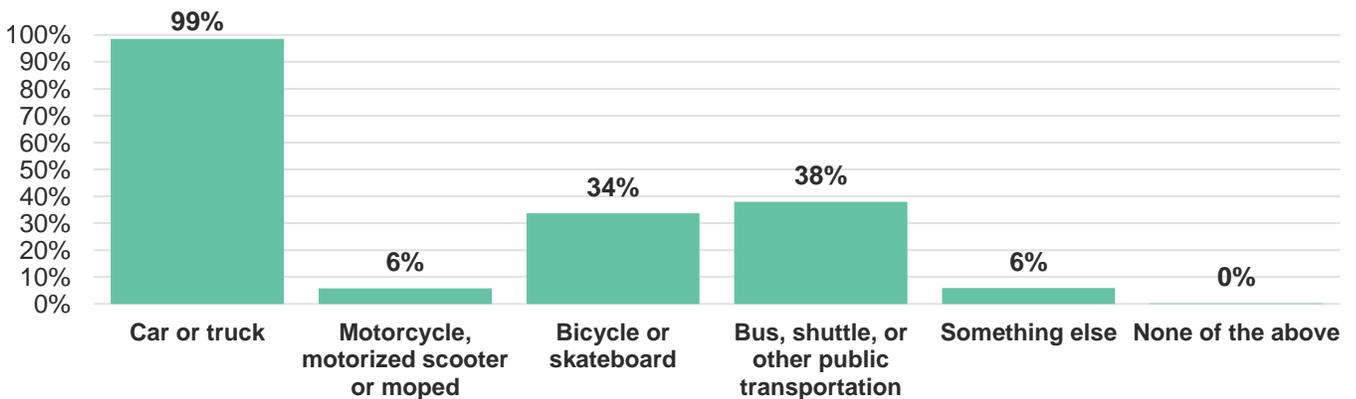
**Other resource gaps and unmet needs – primarily access issues – are felt more acutely by the segments of the population we were not able to reach in the survey, as shown on the following charts related to Internet access and transportation. This highlights the value of the insight provided by the community leaders who serve those populations directly.**

**Other resource gaps and unmet needs mentioned by participants include:**

- **Transportation** – free public transit links residents to Poulsbo and Kingston and is a highly-valued resource, but limited funding and many remote areas make it impossible to meet all needs.
- **Internet availability** is limited and unreliable in many areas.
- **Schools** are under-resourced and some face declining enrollment.
- **Mental health professionals, childcare providers, and access to grocery options** are lacking and costly.



Source: JCLD Community Needs Survey 2022; n=741  
Do you access the Internet... (Select all that apply)



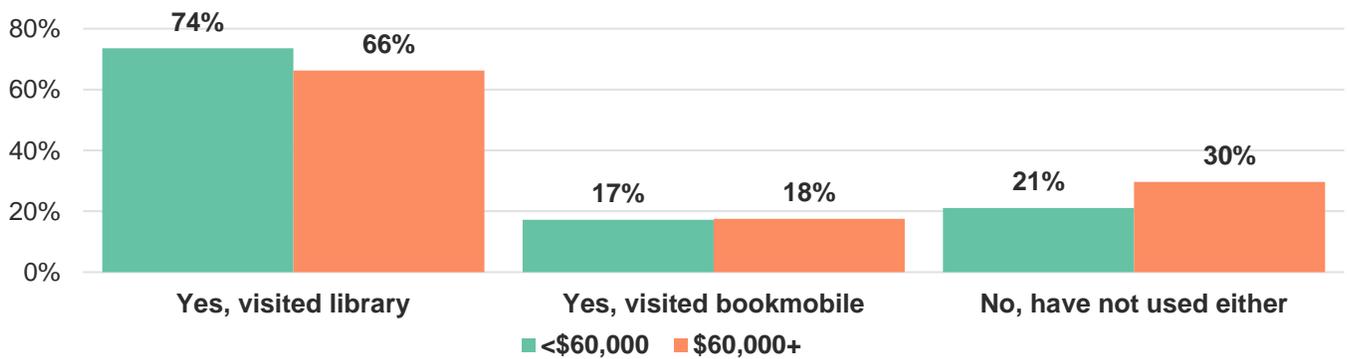
Source: JCLD Community Needs Survey 2022; n=741  
Which of the following transportation options do you currently have access to? (Select all that apply)

## Library resources

Participants were asked who uses and doesn't use the library, what barriers prevent wider use, and what programs or services might increase use/attract non-users.

Younger families, older residents, the unsheltered and "non-destinational," and avid readers/media users of all ages were cited as **heavy library users**.

- **Offsite programs** – the Bookmobile and books at the Food Bank and County Corrections are highly valued. The Bookmobile is vital to South County schools, homeschoolers, and loyal users.
- Participants emphasized the value of **onsite and online library programs** like Tech Tuesdays and children's programs.



Source: JCLD Community Needs Survey 2022; n=741  
In the past 12 months, have you visited the Jefferson County Library or used the Bookmobile?

**Perceived usage is lower** among teens and adults who get their media elsewhere, residents unfamiliar with libraries, and those with transportation/access issues.

*"I'm from Mexico. I had to take the bus for about an hour and then walk a long way to go to the library. It was this big, beautiful building, but far away. I didn't have access to books. There still is not very good access to books or anything. I grew up without books. Our community is not used to it, because in Mexico it's not very common for people to go to their library."*  
**Jefferson County Immigrant Rights Advocates**

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## Internet, technology, and other factors act as barriers to accessing library resources on multiple levels.

- Many have no Wi-fi or unreliable Wi-fi at home.
- Others aren't tech-savvy and strongly prefer to do library business in person, though they may have transportation issues. Inside the library, they may struggle with things like self-checkout.
- **Transportation is a major barrier** to accessing library resources for “shut-ins” or those with infrequent bus service.
  - Evening bus service from the library at closing may not be available, buses may not serve the Bookmobile's route.

*“I firmly believe if people don't have a safe place to get their basic needs met, then they're not going to go look for other resources because all your energy is spent on that.”* **Chimacum School District**

## Participant suggestions for increasing use and attracting non-users fell into three categories – **Access, Outreach, and Innovative Programs and Services**

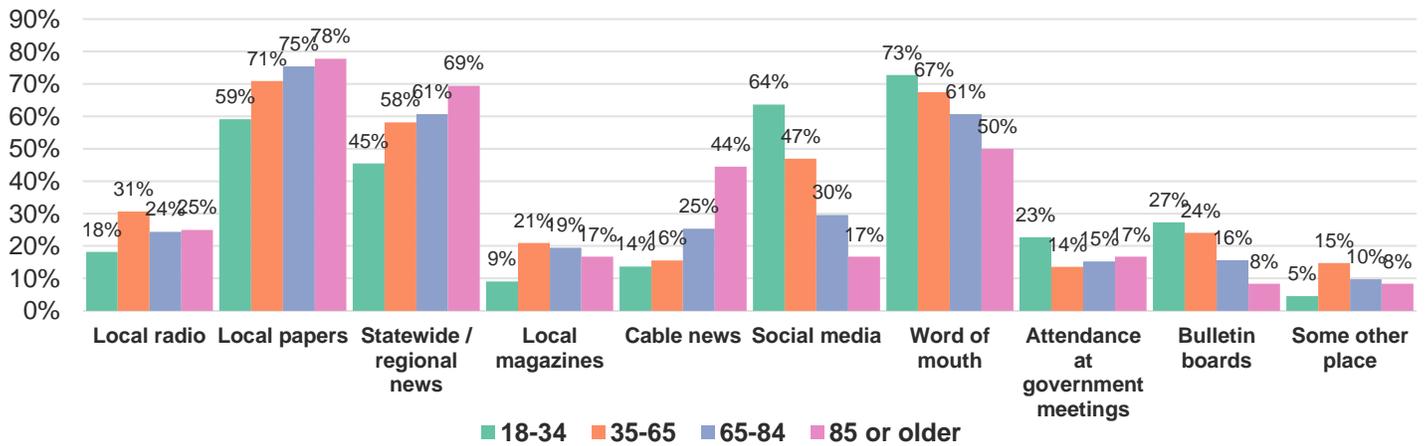
**Access** means reaching out to community members who don't or can't come to the library, but it also means making library resources accessible to those who lack the skillset/comfort level to use them.

- Consider enhancing **offsite programs and services** or attracting new users to the Port Hadlock branch:
  - Participants suggested better coordinating bus and Bookmobile routes, improving access for disabled people.
  - Other suggestions included distribution of Spanish-language reading material in strategically located community library boxes or reinvigorating volunteer programs to increase the overall level of involvement.
- **Increasing access via technology** again requires a two-sided push and pull strategy that ‘meets people where they are.’
  - **Help push technology out into the community:** support programs to scale up the availability of laptops/tablets to those in need when strong, reliable rural Wi-Fi becomes available, maximize remote learning with neighborhood tech/learning centers.
  - **Pull people into technology with hands-on help and training:** establish a comfort level regardless of ability, experience, or English proficiency.
- Look into service options for non-users who work during library hours and have trouble getting there when it's open.

*“The library has amazing things you can check out. Not everybody is aware of some of those things, but there has to be some initiative. Did you at least go to the library website? Or did you walk into the library and look at one of their displays? There has to be at least one minor inch towards wanting to have that information. If not, that's probably not your audience.”* **OLYCAP**

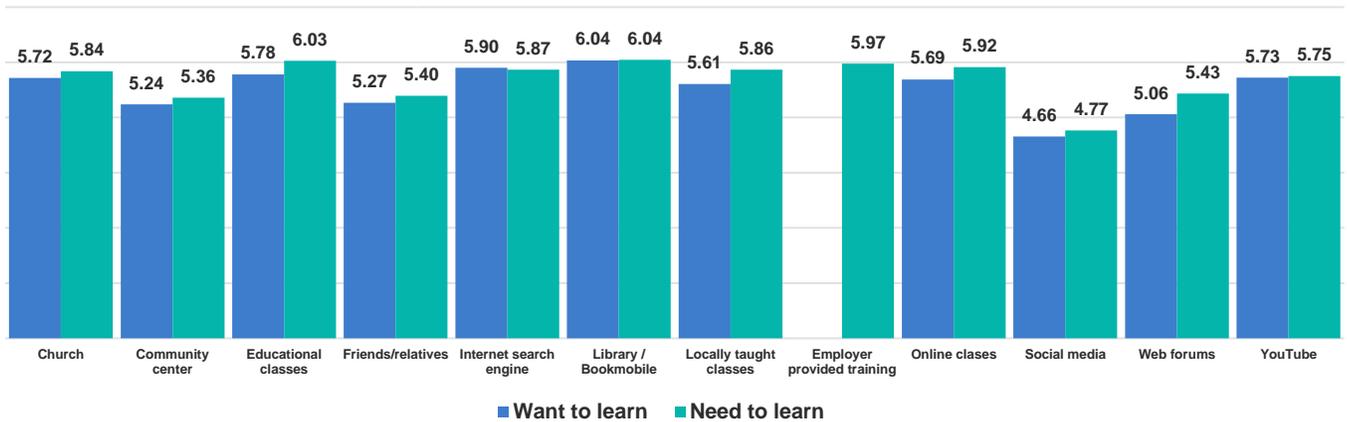
The key takeaways for **effective outreach and awareness** are to leverage strong relationships with community partners who serve non-library-users, providing low-tech outreach methods like word of mouth, paper brochures, and local radio/newspapers.

### Information Sources Used – By Age



Source: JCLD Community Needs Survey 2022; n=741: “Below is a list of several places you might go to learn something or find information. Please check each one you have used in the past 12 months”

### Helpfulness of Information Sources



Source: JCLD Community Needs Survey 2022; n=741: “Below is a list of several places you might go to learn something or find information. Please check each one you have used in the past 12 months”

*“There's only one newspaper. Well, there's technically 2 newspapers, but that type of outreach works for our clientele. The local radio station, you know, putting flyers up at various places. Word of mouth is one of the most important elements, but also all of the entities that take the time to go and do community presentations at the Rotary and other places to let folks know.” OLYCAP*

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Participants suggested several **innovative programs or services** JCLD could offer to serve the community:

- Programs for young mothers and children, or focusing on research skills and digital literacy, the outdoors, or local indigenous culture.
- Expanding partnerships with schools, possibly up to a level of seamless integration, with fully shared staff and resources.
- Expanding or modifying library facilities at the Port Hadlock branch – indoor and outdoor programming and services that fully take advantage of the property’s assets and available space.

## The Next Five Years

Participants were asked what changes they think would help the community thrive and be empowered by knowledge in the next five years.

**Future community needs where JCLD could have a prominent role:**

- **Technology & the Internet**– Internet coverage will likely be county-wide in five years according to the PUD. One participant compared this possibility to FDR’s rural electrification program, posing both opportunities and challenges.
  - Grants to provide hardware for low-income residents, digital literacy training, ongoing tech training/assistance.
- **Education** – Leverage technology and lessons learned from COVID
  - Integration between school and JCLD resources.
  - Hybrid remote and in-person education at all levels – embracing the best of both modes, potentially including neighborhood resource centers.
  - Early childhood and continuing education to promote interpersonal engagement, personal growth, and a love of reading – youth programs, book clubs, Tech Tuesdays, job search assistance, etc.

**Key themes among comments about future community needs where the library would be in a support role:**

- Maintaining the positive momentum in community partnerships, training, engagement, and inclusion.
- Housing needs can be addressed in the next five years through infrastructure improvements and flexible application of Housing Quality Standards to substandard dwellings in need of repair.
- Addressing transportation gaps, mental health and substance abuse, climate change response.

*“If you could somehow get Internet service out there and get people so they’re comfortable using it, and it’s probably not costing them anything, and they have the technology and interact with it. I think you’ll then alleviate some of the knowledge issues we have in the county and people will become more aware of the services that are available. We’re not there now, because we still have a lot of people who are very uncomfortable with the technology. They don’t have any access to it because it’s not available where they’re at, or they don’t have the financial wherewithal to even pay for a basic service.”* **Jefferson County Food Bank Association**

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## Wave a Magic Wand

To conclude, participants were asked what community resources they would like to see in Jefferson County if they could wave a magic wand and avoid any limitations or constraints.

Participants clearly view housing as the #1 problem/challenge facing Jefferson County, followed by technology/Internet/misinformation, education and early childhood development, public and mental health, and transportation.

### Address the county's housing crisis

- Break the logjam with permitting and infrastructure.
- Bridge the gap between those who see the need for growth and those who resist change.
  - Find good models for well-managed growth,
  - Have people who have gone through the process explain the benefits and allay concerns,
  - Work together as a community to balance growth and infrastructure with the preservation of the natural environment and rural character that make Jefferson County special.

### Provide solutions for technology, education, and public health that mirror those described previously

- It is worth emphasizing the growing level of concern expressed for teen mothers and their young children, teen mental health, substance abuse, and suicide, as well as the suggestion that satellite public health services are needed in South County and other remote areas.

### Work on improving transportation infrastructure and alternatives

- Infrastructure improvements to promote safety and social spaces – better roads, complete streets, bike paths, streetlights and sidewalks, and ADA accessibility.
- Innovative solutions like bike or scooter rental stations to improve mobility.

*"I'd be interested in a decentralized library system where it's one house per X number of miles is rented as its own free information and education center. If there are neighborhood learning centers where 20 kids can come in, and it can have a multi-functional use, and it's all connected to the fastest Internet we've got, with the hardware in place, that could have a profound effect on improving education.*

*Often when my kids were in online school during the pandemic, it occurred to me that one person who has a fabulous online curriculum can teach 1,000 kids. The hard part is doing it really well, and that's its own medium. It doesn't have to take away from in-person stuff, which is important. There's something magical about having a big school, big community events, but there's different ways we could orient some of those activities. I don't think we need to have 1,000 kids in one building to be learning an hour of math. They can do a lot of activities in smaller clusters. The library could be intimately tied into that sort of digital information system." **Jefferson County PUD***

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## Conclusions & Recommendations

This study revealed several strong themes regarding the challenges facing Jefferson County:

- **Access to resources** – particularly by JCLD non-users and members of the community with special needs.
- **Technology and the Internet** – do residents have it and do they know how to use it (properly)?
- **Misinformation** – a need for curation and digital literacy education.
- **Housing** – clearly the most pressing issue, approaching crisis-level. What is JCLD's role?
- **Transportation** – making the most of limited resources in a remote, rural county.
- **Community partnerships & engagement** – a strong positive, moving in the right direction. Must be maintained.

JCLD is a valued hub in a network of community organizations providing resources to those in need.

- The organizations interviewed for this project represent an interconnected network with two hubs whose clientele include the entire county:
  - The County Public Health Department and other healthcare providers serve all residents, providing for basic human needs.
  - JCLD helps residents meet their basic needs, but also provides resources that enrich people's lives beyond that baseline.
- This network of community organizations contains many talented and committed individuals who have made considerable progress and must take their partnerships even further.
- None of these organizations, including JCLD, have the resources to be all things to all people and always "Go where they are." This highlights the importance of partnerships.

Jefferson County Immigrant Rights Advocates provides a great example:

- Over the past 6 years, this new organization reached out to the Latino community through their churches, built a trusting relationship, and hired an active and enthusiastic volunteer from the immigrant community to be Community Outreach Manager.
- They are making great progress in engaging the Latino immigrant community.
- When asked about non-Latino immigrant communities, their response perfectly illustrates the ongoing challenge with non-users and the underrepresented – **getting to know them better**:

*"Spanish is the big language besides English, but we are going to try to also reach out to meet other immigrants that are not Hispanic. We're going to work on that to try to see where the other immigrants are from, because we know there are people from the Philippines, Japan, and other places. We're still trying to discover that. Our organization is still saying we need to look for these other people to include them in our community."*

**Jefferson County Immigrants' Rights Advocates**