



# Community and Workforce Assessment

Key Findings and Strategic Recommendations | 2023





## Acknowledgements

This assessment was overseen by, and conducted in collaboration with, the Miami County Land Reutilization Corporation and the Miami County Department of Development.

This initiative was possible through the financial support of the Miami County Commissioners, the collaboration of the Miami County Workforce Development Advisory Committee, and the expertise of social service, business leaders, community members throughout Miami County via survey, interview, and focus group participation.



# Community and Workforce Assessment Overview

The Miami County Community and Workforce Assessment was developed to provide Miami County stakeholders with data that:

- Helps to better understand transportation, childcare, and housing needs in the county, particularly as they relate to community members’ ability to gain and retain work.
- Shares community members’ perceptions of living/working in the county.
- Helps employers, nonprofits, and county/city/township/village agencies identify opportunities for addressing needs of workers and those seeking to enter the workforce in Miami County.

This executive summary provides key findings of the assessment, as well as data-driven recommendations and action opportunities.

## Executive Summary Sections

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- Section B** Miami County Workforce and Population Trends
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## Data Sources

*Data collected between February 2023 and July 2023\**



**Public  
Databases**



**Organizational  
Reports**



**Online  
Community Survey**  
(1,070 respondents)



**Community  
Focus Groups**  
(10)



**Subject Expert  
Interviews**  
(32)



**Online  
Employer Survey**  
(81 unique  
employer respondents)

Data for this assessment was collected by Measurement Resources Company in collaboration with Miami County Land Reutilization Corporation, the Miami County Department of Development, and the Miami County Workforce Development Advisory Committee.

It is important to note that this assessment is focused on childcare, transportation, and housing. Thus, mental health and other health access needs are outside the scope of this assessment but have been identified as urgent needs by other community and regional assessments.

# Investment Priorities Identified by Employers and Community Members



## Investment Priorities Identified by Community Members

In a community-wide survey, Miami County residents were asked what they would most like to see changed in the county, if anything. Respondents most frequently reported a need for:



**Year-Round, Age-Appropriate Entertainment and Recreation Options**  
Survey respondents desire more indoor (during winter and rainy days) and outdoor entertainment and recreation opportunities for young children, teens, and individuals with disabilities. Community members would also like to see more whole-family (multi-generational) community events and entertainment activities, including an easy way to learn about events/activities.



**More Affordable Housing and Variety of Housing Options**  
There is consensus among community survey respondents, employers, and social service providers that there is a need for housing initiatives that repurpose blight properties, that build a variety of housing sizes, that make home ownership more accessible and home repairs more affordable, and that incorporate the community's desire to preserve green spaces.



**Greater Availability and More Affordable Childcare**  
Community members and employers identified the urgent need for more affordable and more availability of childcare/preschool. In addition, parents/grandparents want more availability of before- and after-school programming and summer programming.



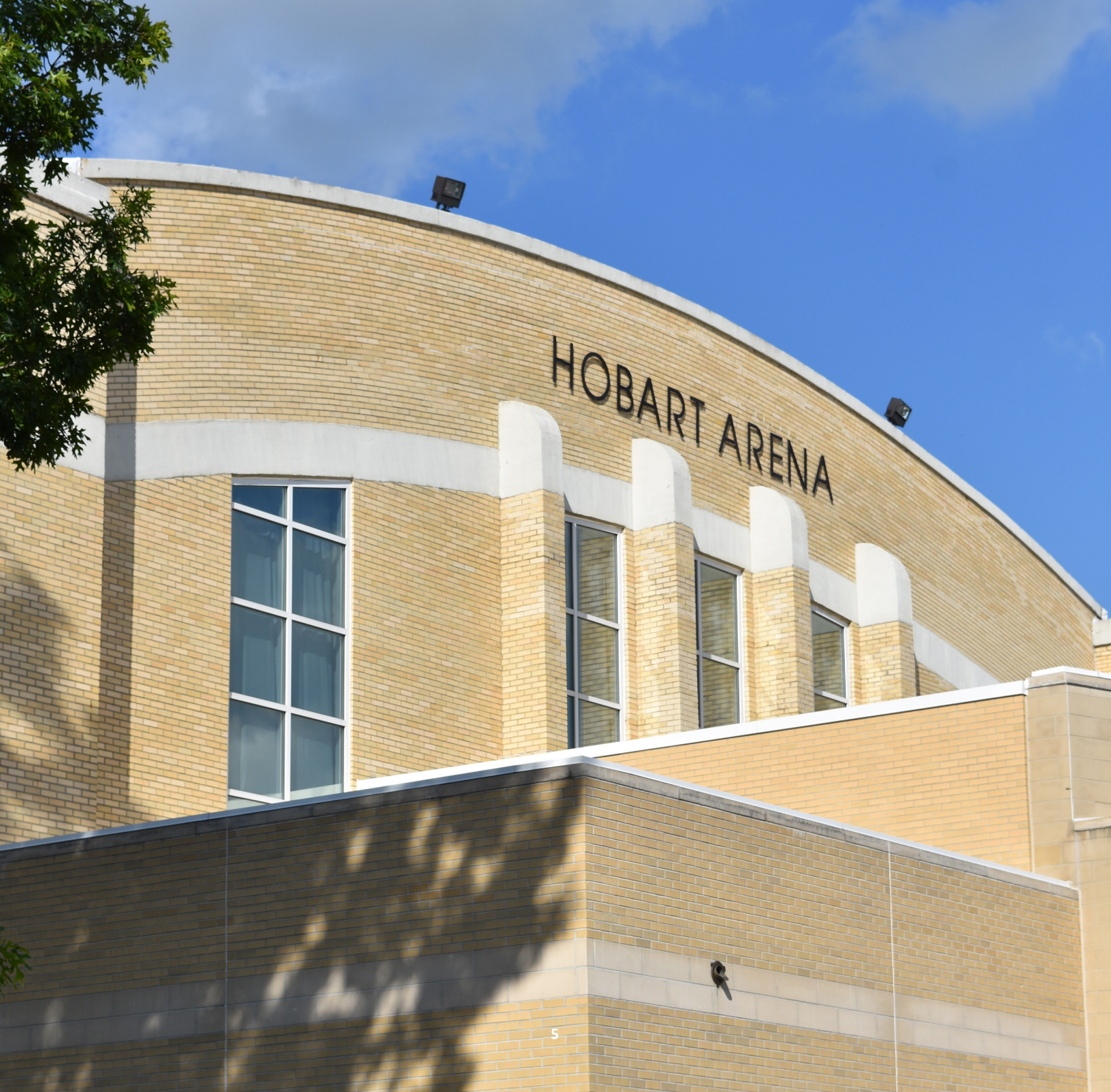
**Social Connectivity and Community Building**  
Community survey respondents highlighted a need for county initiatives that encourage building an inclusive sense of community and appreciation for diversity.

Miami County stakeholders agree on the need to prioritize childcare, transportation, and housing to address workforce challenges. In addition to consensus, the county has structural strengths to leverage to address needs. Some strengths include:

- High rates of high school graduation, a population that meets the education requirements of entry-level jobs that employers are having difficulty filling.
- Positive perceptions among employers of having a business in Miami County.
- High rates of community members who have positive experiences living and raising their family in the county.
- Well established vocational schools.
- A good location for industry.
- A highly engaged nonprofit sector.
- And more...

Through collective action, Miami County can meaningfully address workforce and other community challenges.

# Population and Workforce Trends



## Miami County Population and Workforce Trends

Miami County workers are valuing workplace culture and schedule flexibility to nearly the same degree as pay/benefits.

When asked what qualities they value in a job, 523 community members provided open-ended responses. At similar rates, these workers most frequently identified pay/benefits, flexible work hours, a positive and supportive workplace culture, overall job satisfaction, and the meaningfulness/impact of a job as priorities.

Thirty-five percent of the county's full- and part-time workforce is paid by the hour. Miami County is successful in that it has an overall small unemployed population, only 2%. However, hourly earners are more likely to be economically insecure than salaried workers.

Miami County has a greater labor participation rate compared to the state overall, except when it comes to young families. Overall, the labor participation rate in the county is higher than in the U.S. and Ohio. Where Miami County falls below the state and national averages are in the participation rate of families, specifically those with children ages six years or younger, and those with children 17 years or younger.

Miami County is experiencing an estimated net-negative in workers commuting in and out of Miami County. It is estimated that 60% of Miami County residents that are employed commuted outside of the county to work in a nearby county. Fifty-two percent of the workforce in Miami County does not live in Miami County.

Generally, the population of workers commuting into Miami County is younger and makes less money than those commuting out. Workers who live in Miami County and commute elsewhere for work tend to make more money than those living and working in Miami County.

In Miami County, cost of living is outpacing wages and is disproportionately impacting single mothers, young adults, and older adults. In 2021, 26% of Miami County households were categorized as ALICE households, earning more than the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), but less than the basic cost of living. An additional 8% of households are at or below the FPL. Single-female-headed households with children are 2.5 times more likely to be below the ALICE threshold than single-male-headed households with children, and 11.9 times more likely than two-parent families. Nearly half of households in Piqua (49%) are categorized as ALICE or below FPL, compared to Troy (34%) and Tipp City (27%). Chronic household economic scarcity increases the likelihood of household income earners facing employment instability.

# Childcare Affordability and Availability



# Miami County Childcare Affordability and Availability

The childcare shortage in Miami County spans across needs, from after-school programming to traditional daycare to services for children with disabilities. There are opportunities for public-private partnerships to address needs in the short term, and there will also be a need to consider advocacy roles for the county to play at the state and federal levels. There is no one solution, but with policy change, engagement from the private sector, and partnership with childcare providers there are options for moving forward.



There is an overall shortage of childcare options in Miami County. Whether it be all day, before, or after school, providers are reporting long waitlists to get a spot at a center. There is also a need for childcare with the capacity to serve a range of children’s needs, from learning disabilities, trauma-informed care, to physical disabilities. “When their childcare plan falls through, some parents are having to choose dropping kids off with a stranger [found online as an unlicensed childcare provider] versus losing their job,” explained a local childcare provider.

On average, childcare is not affordable for households in Miami County and disproportionately impacts single mothers.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers childcare to be affordable if the expense is 7% or less of a household’s income. The average Miami County household is spending 28% of its income on childcare for two children. An average single mother in Miami County spends 14% more of their income on childcare than the average single father and 11% more compared to two-parent, two-child households. In Ohio, single parents are twice as likely to change jobs due to issues with childcare than two-parent households.



Some ZIP codes of Miami County are in higher need of access to childcare than others.



The Laura area (45337) has the highest proportion of children under five years of age and the second-highest proportion of children under 15 years of age in the county, while also having a higher percentage of single parent households. There are also no licensed childcare centers in this ZIP code, compounding the possible childcare burden the area is facing. The Potsdam area (45361) has the highest proportion of children under 15 years of age and the highest proportion of single parent homes in the county, indicating a potential greater need for before- and after-school care in this community.

Workers’ employment is being affected by childcare issues, no matter one’s education level.

Among Ohioans with high school being their highest level of education and with a child between the ages of zero to five, 18% reported changing jobs due to childcare issues in 2021. Additionally, 12% of college graduates and 13% of residents with some college reported changing jobs due to childcare issues in 2021.



The cost of childcare is both a barrier to families’ ability to access childcare and to providers’ ability to expand the number of children they serve. Providers are in a position where they are charging what parents can afford, which is often less than the true cost of the service according to providers. Some providers in the county reported that they had enough classroom space to serve more children, but not enough staff. To keep childcare respectively attainable, providers are having to lower wages for their staff. In turn, some providers experience staff turnover and longer lengths in job vacancies.

Grandfamilies, grandparents who are primary guardians to their grandchildren, are experiencing high levels of need, including high barriers to accessing childcare and other social services for children in their care. “We are seeing that grandfamilies don’t know where to start and are making their first call to the YMCA,” explained a YMCA staff member.



# Transportation Affordability and Availability



## Miami County Transportation Affordability and Availability

With Miami County community members heavily dependent on personal vehicles for transportation, the cost of transportation is making it difficult for younger and lower-income workers to make it to work and/or keeping people from entering the workforce altogether. While not discussed here, this assessment and the Troy Foundation's 2020 Community Needs Assessment found that the lack of transportation was also impacting older adults' and low-income households' ability to access healthcare, grocery stores/healthy foods, and social activities.

**Not having a personal vehicle in Miami County disproportionately affects younger workers' and single parents' ability to get to work on time.**

Based on community survey data, the younger a worker, the more likely they are to report having missed work due to transportation issues. Community survey respondents who are 24 years or younger are about 2.5 times more likely to not be able to pay for a \$550 emergency expense compared to older respondents.

A single adult can expect to pay at least \$5,356 annually (14% of median income) on transportation costs, like lease payments, gas, insurance, registration, and repairs. The percentage of median income spent on these items increases to 32% for a single mother and drops to around 13% for a two-income, two-child household.

**The cost of having a personal vehicle affects workers' ability to apply for a job and to have reliable transportation to work.**

Twenty-four percent of unemployed or underemployed survey respondents identified cost of transportation and/or unreliable vehicle/unreliable public transportation as one of their greatest barriers to employment. Thirteen percent of survey respondents that are unemployed but seeking work are relying on a friend/family vehicle for transportation. The median earnings for those driving their own vehicle to work is \$38,921, compared to \$26,000 to \$30,000 median earnings of those carpooling or using public transportation, respectively. Based off qualitative data from community focus groups, some families are experiencing an impossible choice between owning a car (and paying to use it) and childcare.

Based on community survey results, workers who rely on public transportation are 9.3% times more likely to miss work (sometimes, often, or always) due to the lack of, or cost of, transportation than those who have a personal vehicle. Also, workers relying primarily on a friend's or family member's vehicle are 6.7% times more likely to report missing work due to transportation issues than individuals who rely on a personal vehicle.

**There is greater demand for public transportation options for work than local providers can supply.**

Community Rides reported they have enough demand to justify more vans, but that they do not have the funds. Miami County Public Transit does not provide any third shift rides and sometimes has to turn away riders during peak commuting hours.

# Housing Affordability and Availability



# Miami County Housing Affordability and Availability

Community stakeholders agree that the lack of affordable housing and the limited variety of housing availability is an urgent concern. Residents' experiences reported in survey and focus groups results are supported by trends seen in various housing and population databases.

Miami County has a lower diversity in housing choices/sizes.

Housing in the county is predominantly (80.4%) single-family homes (i.e., single unit detached housing). This rate is higher than both the state (70.7%) and the nation (62.9%). Buildings containing five or more apartments in the county (6.5%) are also much lower than for the state and nation (14.2% and 18.1% respectively). In surveys and focus groups, community members consistently identified the need for more apartments (at affordable prices) for younger adults, older adults, and single parents.

One- to three-bedroom units at Fair Market Rent and below are needed by older adults, young adults, and single parents. At the same time, single-family home building has outpaced multi-unit development in Miami County. In 2022, the number of permits authorized reached its highest since 2004, seeing 167 multi-family unit permits and 228 single-family home permits. However, only 104 multi-family unit permits were authorized between 2011 to 2019, compared to the 2,017 single-family permits authorized over the same period.



Troy (45373) and Piqua (45356) are experiencing increasing vacancies, while Tipp City (45371), Northeast Miami County, and parts of Southwest Miami County are experiencing decreasing vacancies. ZIP Codes 45326 (Fletcher), 45337 (Laura), and 45371 (Tipp City) have experienced a population increase and a vacancy decrease from 2010 to 2021, indicating a likely increase in demand for housing, but decrease in housing availability. The vacancy rate of all residencies (rental or homeowner) in Miami County is at 6.9%, less than Ohio (9.1%) and the U.S. (11.2%).

Renters in Miami County are more than twice as likely to be housing cost burdened than homeowners. Overall, 20.3% of all households in Miami County are considered housing cost burdened. There is a lack of affordable housing choices for much of the population in Miami County that need two or more bedrooms as well. Nearly 25% of the population cannot afford any Fair Market Rent (FMR) priced unit, and 57% of the County's households cannot afford a two-bedroom unit at FMR prices without being housing cost burdened.

Inflated costs of materials, labor, and land are making it fiscally challenging for developers to build new, quality, affordable housing without significant government subsidies offered to developers.

There is an urgent need to develop rental units at or below Fair Market Rent to house the county's needed workforce. According to employer survey results and interviews, home services and construction/development businesses are also experiencing workforce shortages. They are also concerned that seasoned tradespeople are retiring at a higher rate than they are being replaced. This is driving up housing development labor costs.

# Strategic Recommendations



## Strategic Recommendations for Addressing Barriers to Employment

Data from the assessment identified several populations that are more likely to be underemployed or unemployed, such as lower-income adults (particularly those without a private vehicle); parents with children under the age of 6 years; young adults entering the workforce; and single mothers. The action opportunities recommended below are informed by expert interviews with community stakeholders and other background research. These opportunities aim to target support at individuals facing higher barriers to employment and are listed in no order of importance.

### Action Opportunity #1: Connect with the Miami County Public Health Department and connect with the county's current [Community Health Improvement Plan \(CHIP\)](#).

The county's CHIP (implemented at least through 2025) identified the below priorities and strategies that overlap barriers to employment:

- **Access to Care, Strategy 3:** Community education and marketing of transportation services.
- **Maternal and Child Health, Strategy 1:** Increase educational opportunities for parents seeking childcare and increase educational resources on how to become a childcare worker.
- **Mental Health and Addiction, Strategy 1:** Increase the number of certified peer supporters in Miami County, which supports job readiness and retention.
- **Mental Health and Addiction, Strategy 3:** Initiate a targeted media campaign to address adult binge drinking, which supports job readiness and retention for social service providers supporting individuals in addiction recovery.

### Action Opportunity #2: Establish a membership organization that meets employees at work to provide job coaching and social service navigation aimed at improving job retention.

Businesses pay a membership fee to have trauma-informed job coaches and service navigators serve their employees on-site, one or more days a week. The service model is designed so that employees get the help they need without disrupting work or requiring additional transportation/time to an office of social services. Examples of services to employees could include:

- Childcare center and after-school recommendations/placement
- One-on-one social services navigation
- One-on-one job coaching such as communicating with supervisors
- Financial planning and benefits navigation
- English learning
- Housing navigation
- Stress management
- Identifying cohorts of employees to carpool
- Access to emergency funds/loans for car repairs

**Through an online search, the below companies can serve as models for county partners to reference.**

#### Ohio Employer Resource Network

<https://www.ern-oh.com/>

Member businesses of the Ohio Employer Resource Network have access to Success Coaches, who work on-site to assist employees with retaining employment, including coaching on workplace etiquette and how to communicate with supervisors. Funding can be from chambers, grants, membership fees, etc. According to ORN's 2021 Annual Report, "employers experienced an average ROI of 1,054% with 21% of their employees utilizing an on-site Success Coach." Businesses pay a membership fee based on how often the Success Coach visits the worksite. Current Ohio ERNs include Ashland, Cuyahoga, Jackson, Lucas, Marion, Mahoning, Montgomery, Richmond, Ross, and Vinton counties.

**Table 1. Ohio ERN’s Most Needed Services Among Employees They Served In 2022\***

Service Type	Number of Employees That Received Service
Government Agency Navigation	696
Career/Life Coaching	694
Transportation	259
Housing	251
Financial Literacy Education	235
Food Bank Navigation	209
Education	189
Utilities	181
Counseling	113
Health Insurance Access	84

**The Source**

<https://www.grsource.org/>

The Source deploys a Resource Navigator, or private caseworker, to each member company. Navigators meet with employees at work to help them through the barriers/challenges they are facing. The Source reports an average return on investment of 250% by measuring:

- The amount of community funds leveraged to provide support
- The cost of retention savings to the company
- The amount of training support dollars leveraged
- The value of the private casework time

**WorkLife Partnership**

<https://www.worklifepartnership.org/>

In addition to employee resource navigators, this model also includes consulting services for business leadership and human resources in improving job quality and trends in issues their specific employees are facing. Their resource navigators have expertise in housing, stress management, transportation, childcare, goal setting, navigating medical bills, and more. They report that “92% of surveyed employees say they feel good working for a company that partners with WorkLife Partnerships.”



### Action Opportunity #3: Facilitate opportunities for Miami County business owners and supervisory staff to learn strategies for improving employee retention.

Highlighted below is a selection of services and resources designed for employers. These resources help employers better understand how economic instability, stress, and/or trauma can impact how employees 'show up' to work, as well as provide practical ways in which employers can help employees stabilize their lives and employment.



**aha! Process, Inc.**, well known for their “Bridges Out of Poverty” and “Getting Ahead” curriculums, offers a range of employer-centered workshops and consultation options that build business leaders’ skills and capacity to stabilize the lives of their entry-level and low-wage workers, increasing employee retention and boosts productivity. Below is a selection of their services as described by their website. A full catalog of services can be accessed here: <https://www.ahaprocess.com/catalog/>

- **Workplace Stability:** Designed for employers, it focuses on addressing the challenges of economic diversity in the workplace to improve employee retention, bottom lines, and productivity. There is also an “on-demand professional development” option for Workplace Stability, which is a train-the-trainer model.
- **Getting Ahead in the Workplace:** Designed for employees, this is a workbook of 15 facilitated sessions to help under-resourced people build resources and gain control over their future stories, for a better life at home and at work. There is also a version specifically designed for individuals transitioning out of incarceration.



**United Way of Northwest Vermont and Working Bridges** developed a toolkit for employers that could be replicated for Miami County. Access the toolkit here: <https://www.unitedwaynwvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Mental-Health-Toolkit-Updated.pdf>



**National Fund for Workforce Solutions** developed “A Trauma-Informed Approach to Workforce: An Introductory Guide for Employers and Workforce Development Organizations.” This report adapts “trauma-informed care,” which is more notably known in healthcare and social service industries, to workforce development. It communicates to employers how different stresses, Adverse Childhood Experiences, and traumas can impact employees and their job performance. It also includes information for employers on how to take steps towards a trauma-informed workplace. Access the report here: <https://nationalfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/A-Trauma-Informed-Approach-to-Workforce.pdf>



**Mental Health America of Ohio**, and other agencies, offer free Mental Health First Aid for Adults (MHFA) training for Ohio residents. There are also options to have trainings scheduled specifically for one’s company or agency. MHFA trainings are “An evidence-based program that has been adopted by over 20 countries. Mental Health First Aid teaches adults how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders.”

#### Action Opportunity #4: Coordinate with local employers to, first, quantify the cost of employee turnover and vacancies and, second, the return on investment of changing positions from hourly to salaried.

In survey responses, employers reported increased turnover, length of vacancies, and costs of recruitment since 2020. In some industries, full-time salaried positions experience less turnover. Also, an increase in the total percentage of salaried positions in Miami County may benefit not only workers but also the community overall. It is important to note that in some industries, particularly those with unions, the employees prefer having hourly wages because it more easily allows for overtime options and other benefits they prefer.

The county can work in collaboration with city departments to run the analysis for public positions, creating a model for private businesses to replicate. For private businesses, explore the feasibility of identifying a consultant who could support smaller and larger businesses in creating job plans for shifting hourly positions to salaried positions. These plans could include incentives to the extent they align with the county's strategic plans in housing, childcare and transportation.

#### Action Opportunity #5: Establish public-private partnerships to develop marketing campaigns that increase awareness and interest in joining trades and professions key to housing, transportation, and childcare.

Some employers believe young adults perceive manufacturing and other 'hard labor' jobs as "dirty," based on the experiences of their fathers/grandfathers. However, local colleges, trade schools, and school districts are already taking action to expose students (and their teachers) to modernized manufacturing and trades jobs in the county. For example, employers make presentations at schools and students/teachers are invited on tours designed to change perceptions of these career fields.

While perception change is important in recruiting/retaining local talent, there is also an opportunity to reach workforce populations that do not have a familial history/stigma of working in trades and/or manufacturing in Miami County. Dayton-Kettering region is one of the country's metropolitan areas with the greatest increases in net domestic migration (1.2%). New Americans and immigrants in the U.S. are choosing employment in rural and suburban communities seeking lower costs of living compared to urban areas. In fact, Dayton was recognized by the [George W. Bush Presidential Center](#) as one of the top nine cities in the mid-Atlantic/Midwest for immigrant-welcoming initiatives. Cincinnati and Akron are also in the top nine, indicating that counties like Miami County are uniquely positioned to recruit workers from these cities.



## Strategic Recommendations for Addressing Childcare Shortages

The childcare shortage in Miami County spans across needs, from after-school programming and traditional daycare to services for children with disabilities. Additionally, Ohio's 2023 to 2025 operating budget did not include a comprehensive investment in the state's childcare industry to meet needs across the state. The childcare shortage will also be exacerbated by the expiration of the Federal Emergency Childcare Funding on September 30, 2023.

With policy change, engagement from the private sector, and partnership with childcare providers there are opportunities to increase childcare services availability. Public-private partnerships are best positioned to address needs in the short term, but state and federal interventions will likely be needed to make significant and sustainable changes to the childcare market. The county will need to consider the advocacy role they will play at the state and federal levels.

A benefit of the Miami County Community and Workforce Assessment is that, while the childcare shortage has broad impacts, data has helped identify populations with which pilot initiatives can start. The below recommendations are in no order of importance and are informed by expert interviews with community stakeholders and other background research.

### Action Opportunity #1: Prioritize initiatives that support single parents, mothers in particular, and that help employers identify how they can adjust benefits and increase the flexibility of their work hours/shifts to make them more accessible to single mothers.

Single mothers face some of the highest barriers to employment and childcare. Single mothers are being boxed out of jobs and careers that pay higher wages due to lack of transportation, lack of childcare, and the rigidity of work hours in available career fields. Pilot initiatives that focus on single mothers would also help inform how to best support other high-barrier populations.

For example, [a manufacturer in Knox County, Ohio](#), "established a new part-time shift for parents: 8:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. (the company's traditional full-time shifts run from 6:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and from 9:30 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.). This would allow parents to drop their children off in the morning, work a six-hour shift and get off in time to pick them up after the final bell rings." The manufacturer partnered with the nearby schools to advertise the position to parents.

### Action Opportunity #2: Prioritize increasing access to childcare in school districts experiencing poorer outcomes in kindergarten readiness proficiencies.

Access to childcare plays an important role in children's kindergarten readiness and wellbeing over a lifespan, as well as a community's overall sustainability ([The Center For High Impact Philanthropy](#), [The University of Pennsylvania](#)). School districts with higher than the county's average of economically disadvantaged students and/or students with disabilities are also counties experiencing lower rates of students demonstrating proficiency in kindergarten readiness.

Explore if the before- and after- school program model that Dayton YMCA has implemented would be of interest to Miami County's schools and YMCAs. The Dayton model includes a partnership between schools and their local YMCAs, whereby YMCA staff provide before- and after-school programming directly on school campuses. With schools providing the building space, there is lower overhead and sufficient space to serve many students. This allows the cost of the before- and after-school service to be at a lower cost for parents. It also saves on transportation and time for the families having to only drop off and pick up at schools.

### Action Opportunity #3: Prioritize bringing current childcare centers to full operational capacity and lowering barriers for in-home providers to obtain their license.

Childcare experts in the county identified a need to support in-home providers by lowering barriers (but not lowering safety and training requirements) to earning their licenses. The licensing process can be long and convoluted when doing it alone.

Local childcare centers have also faced financial barriers to expanding their space and offering competitive wages. Public-private partnerships could be developed to infuse funds. For example, in the past, local foundations and the county's Habitat for Humanity provided funds for making center's building repairs to meet inspection standards.

It is also recommended that the county leverages its local experts, like Child Care Choices, who have both localized- and systems-level understandings of the needs of center-based and in-home providers.

#### Action Opportunity #4: Identify statewide partnerships to collectively advocate for state policy change that support rural- and semi-rural counties.

Childcare shortages, and the rising cost of childcare, will likely require statewide intervention to obtain sustainable access to all families. Households in Miami County are experiencing the same childcare cost burden as families across the state.

Other states who have comprehensively invested in their childcare systems are experiencing meaningful success. For example, New Mexico established near universal free childcare in 2021 by doubling income eligibility for childcare assistance, eliminating parent copayments, and capping childcare costs at 7% for a household. In the [state's annual impact report](#), they wrote, "We hear stories from parents who were struggling to afford the costs of childcare who now have achieved a level of financial stability that they never thought possible. Removing the financial stresses of childcare opens so many possibilities for families, whether it's job stability, starting a new career, or going back to school to learn new skills. This transformational expansion also provides more high-quality early learning experiences for thousands of children."

There is also the bipartisan "[Expanding Childcare in Rural America \(ECRA\) Act of 2023](#)," introduced in the U.S. Senate, which aims to improve the availability and quality, and lower the cost of childcare in agricultural and rural communities. If in support of the Act, Miami County should speak with their state representatives and other rural counties in Ohio to build broader support. There is [support across many Ohio groups for the Act](#), including but not limited to: the American Farmland Trust, Ohio Farm Bureau, Ohio Farmers Union, Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development, Ohio Association of Child Care Providers, and American Farm Bureau Federation.

There are statewide organizations sharing information and leading advocacy efforts, such as:

- Groundwork Ohio (<https://www.groundworkohio.org/>)
- Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children (<https://www.oeaeyc.org/public-policy>)
- Child Care and Development Block Grant in Ohio ([https://www.ffyf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2023\\_CCDBG-Fact-Sheet\\_OH.pdf](https://www.ffyf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2023_CCDBG-Fact-Sheet_OH.pdf))

#### Action Opportunity #5: Support employers in identifying the return on investment for offering childcare benefits and for investing in countywide initiatives to increase the local supply of childcare.

According to the [U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation](#), companies that add childcare benefits can decrease employee absences by 30% and turnover by 60%. Some first steps include: identifying how many employees are in need of childcare, the extent of support they need, the employers' willingness to provide assistance, and the options the employer is willing to consider. Childcare benefits can range from on-site centers to financial assistance, to after-school tutoring subsidies, to transportation and more.

For larger employers looking to support benefits related to housing and childcare for their employees, a service like Mirza may be of interest. According to Mirza's website, employers can contract them to assess their workforces' childcare and/or housing subsidy needs, and then manage employees' childcare benefits and "handle all payouts, compliance and accounting and help maximize tax breaks and benefits." [Our Platform — Mirza \(heymirza.com\)](#)

## Strategic Recommendations for Addressing Transportation Barriers

With Miami County community members heavily dependent on personal vehicles for transportation, the cost of transportation is making it difficult for younger and lower-income workers to make it to work and/or keeping people from entering the workforce altogether. While not discussed here, this assessment and the Troy Foundation's 2020 Community Needs Assessment found that the lack of transportation was also impacting older adults' and low-income households' ability to access healthcare, grocery stores/healthy foods, and social activities.

As pointed out by DMH-Dayton Fund at The Dayton Foundation and the MVRPC Institute for Livable & Equitable Communities, Miami County's population is aging overall. Since 2020, for the first time in history, older adults (60+ years) outnumbered children under 18 years. The percentage of the county's population that out-lives their ability/capacity to drive will continue to grow. A need for public transportation has already been identified in the county. While not directly related to workforce needs, there is an opportunity to triangulate transportation efforts, addressing both work-based transportation needs and older-adult transportation needs before it becomes an even larger issue to tackle.

The below recommendations are in no order of importance and were informed by expert interviews with community stakeholders and other background research.

### Action Opportunity #1: Increase workers' access to affordable car repair services, emergency grants for car repairs, and insurance/gas subsidies.

Public-Private partnerships, for example, could include the development of a pooled transportation fund; agreements for priority service from car repair schools in the county and car repairs centers near places of employment; or contracts for priority/subsidized car service with local garages.

### Action Opportunity #2: Convene employers in the county to increase investment in transportation services or fee-for-service agreements to better resource Miami County Public Transit and Community Rides.

A positive return on investment (ROI) for employers would be more likely if cohorts of employees residing in the same or near neighborhoods took the same transit van to and from work. This way, employers are benefiting from one or more groups of staff arriving on time, and the transit provider benefits from a more regular driving schedule. With memorandums of agreement in place, employers could offer potential applicants an option to be matched with a cohort of other employees to share rides to work. It is likely that investments from private employers will be critical to funding a larger, third-shift transportation schedule.

In assessing the ROI of rides-to-work initiatives, the fact that providing one adult access to transit services from a "two-adult-one-vehicle household" frees up their partner to use the household vehicle to seek work as well.

There are nonprofits in Miami County with knowledge and skills to manage the administrative needs of a coordinated transportation service, but there is a need for benefiting companies to contribute funds to help cover overhead costs. A strength of the county's current transportation providers is their organizational flexibility and a solid understanding of the cost of service, the employee hours needed to conduct a program, and equipment needs.

### Action Opportunity #3: Apply for [Mobility Management](#) funds from the Ohio Department of Transportation.

This funding is flexible. A mobility manager can conduct studies, help convene public-private partnership, serve as a transportation community navigator, and more. Amounts awarded are \$55,000 to \$60,000 a year for salary, and you can request a budget up to \$100,000 for marketing, administrative services, etc. The grant can then be reapplied for each year.

Serena Anderson (Manager, Regional Transit Programs) at the Miami County Regional Planning Commission can provide further details about the Mobility Management grant proposals and the granting process. It is recommended that the county contacts her for further details. Letters of Intent for applying for the grant are due in June.

#### Action Opportunity #4: Explore the feasibility of a shared ride-scheduling platform (online and application) that allows workers to schedule a ride and develops the best routes for the transportation provider.

Both Miami County Public Transit and Community Rides described the administrative task of scheduling ride requests and designing routes as consuming a good amount of time. If service numbers due increase, the organizations could benefit from a geo-scheduling application. Because both providers already share referrals with one another, if the organizations were able to share a scheduling application it could save both on cost and make scheduling rides to work easier for community members.

#### Action Opportunity #5: For all organizations/agencies providing subsidized transportation in the county, establish consistent measures to track and report.

Compatible data will be key to making a collective case for support and communicating return on investment. According to experts in rural demand response transportation (DRT) systems like Miami County, there are six measures key for understanding performance: vehicle-hours, vehicle-miles, passenger trips, total operating expenses, accidents/safety incidents, and on-time trips.<sup>1</sup>

#### Action Opportunity #6: Make childcare and transportation a strategic focus of city and housing development plans.

Transportation to and from children’s activities and daycare is a significant part of the daily commute for families and should hold similar weight in city planning. See “Strategic Action Areas for Addressing Housing Needs” for more discussion on the topic.



<sup>1</sup> Ellis, Elizabeth H., and Brian E. McCollom. Guidebook for Rural Demand-Response Transportation: Measuring, Assessing, and Improving Performance. Transportation Research Board, 2009, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Guidebook\\_for\\_Rural\\_Demand\\_response\\_Tran/LOB-VM9NaVcYC?q=demand+response+transportation&gbpv=1#f=false](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Guidebook_for_Rural_Demand_response_Tran/LOB-VM9NaVcYC?q=demand+response+transportation&gbpv=1#f=false)

## Strategic Recommendations for Addressing Housing Needs

Community stakeholders agree that the lack of affordable housing and the limited variety of housing availability is an urgent concern. Residents' anecdotal experiences are further supported by trends seen in various housing and population databases. The recommendations below are informed by local and regional stakeholders, as well as a broader review of literature on how communities are addressing housing needs. The below recommendations are in no order of importance.

### Action Opportunity #1: Be proactive about building community buy-in for new housing development by centering the community's priorities in housing proposals/messaging.

NIMBY mentality ("not in my backyard") can significantly stall housing and multi-family unit developments. According to some developers and housing-related service providers in the county, NIMBY is not yet widespread in Miami County compared to other communities they have worked in.

To build community-based buy-in for housing developments it is key to plan for, and communicate how, new housing plans will improve the overall quality of life for the area. To foster such buy-in, county stakeholders throughout this assessment identified the importance of considering how a housing plans will address the below:

- Make equitable investments in communities throughout the county.
- Make an honest effort to contract local labor, developers, and contractors to the extent local businesses can meet demand.
- Access to childcare and after-school programming.
- Increase available youth/teen activities, both indoors and outdoors.
- Access to transit (e.g., shuttle or public transit) for healthcare or grocery shopping.
- Access to bike/walking paths that connect communities to each other.
- Revitalize existing blight, both buildings and land plots.
- Access to one, two, or three-bedroom units at Fair Market Rent prices, with subsidized rates available to older adults, single mothers, and young professionals.
- Balance new development with preserving access to outdoor, open spaces representative of rural living.
- Build multi-generational complexes that provide amenities geared towards young families and their grandparents. Features to highlight are wheelchair accessibility and on-site or low-barrier connectivity (shuttles/public transit) to healthcare centers, grocery stores, and other entertainment. In a childcare shortage, working parents are relying more and more on grandparents for childcare. At the same time, aging adults need housing that does not isolate them.

For example, developing mixed-unit complex plans could include on-site amenities like a grocery store or a grocery receiving center on the first level; or a childcare center; or before/after-school programming that provides tutoring/home-work support and fun, recreational activities; or outdoor/indoor recreation center for youth and teens, like a skate park or tech center.

### Action Opportunity #2: In developing a county-wide housing plan, engage key stakeholders.

Throughout the assessment, community members identified the importance of seeking out key stakeholders such as:

- residents of various age ranges
- social service providers
- parents, and in particular single mothers
- representatives of the local housing development workforce and trade schools/programs
- childcare providers
- school representatives
- park/city planners for ensuring connectivity (e.g., walkways, bike paths, traffic)
- experts who can advise the community on the establishment of a Tax Increment Financing (TIF)
- city planners that can advise on water drainage and utility access, including high-speed internet

- private and public owners of blight buildings/properties
- local experts in federal housing grants and housing choice vouchers like the Miami Metropolitan Housing Authority and City of Troy representatives knowledgeable of community development

This report serves as a current state assessment of housing, which can be leveraged to develop a shared vision of the future for housing in Miami County. Next for the county is to agree on the barriers to obtaining this vision and identifying next action steps to leverage local, regional, and state partnerships to overcome those barriers.

### Action Opportunity #3: Recruit the next generation of construction workers and tradespeople by marketing competitive pay and the opportunity to be part of something bigger/have a positive impact on their community.

As Miami County develops its housing plans, adults and young adults are likely to be attracted to an opportunity of being part of it. When recruiting, vocational schools could advertise specific, local projects students/apprentices will be a part of (and at the same time learn an in-demand skill).

There is a fair amount of speculation as to what will happen to the nation’s housing market. What is known is that housing units will continue to need to be built and repaired to meet population growth. Therefore, what is guaranteed is that the state will continue to need more trades workers and educational institutions with the capacity to recruit students and keep pace with changing technologies. Given the county’s established vocational schools, and its proximity to major cities and more rural towns, the county is well positioned to be a hub for feeding the trades workforce pipeline across the state.

[Rural Studio](#) is an Auburn University project and is an initiative where students in training “design and construct an [affordable home] that is given to a local resident who needs it.” The model combines education and housing funds to lower the cost of development, a major barrier to building affordable housing. Explore the feasibility of replicating this model with local trade schools, Dayton colleges, and Miami County agencies addressing affordable housing. The project could rehabilitate blighted properties as well.

### Action Opportunity #4: Convene county- and local-level partners to acquire infill housing or blighted properties to rehabilitate into affordable housing.

Unprompted, entities such as Miami County’s Habitat for Humanity, the Western Ohio Home Builders Association, community foundations, older adult service providers, and recovery/transitional supportive service providers, all expressed their readiness to collaborate on this specific effort. Following a model like [Dayton’s County Corp Housing](#) was suggested by several county stakeholders, as well as community members.

### Action Opportunity #5: Assess the impact and replicability of initiatives like the Piqua Village Apartments.

Miami Metropolitan Housing Authority’s partnership with Redwood Housing to sustain the Piqua Village Apartments could be leveraged to replicate in other areas of the county. Redwood Housing partnered with the Housing Authority to save on property taxes, reallocating funds to repair and upgrade the apartment building. At the same time, the Housing Authority received much needed unrestricted grant dollars from Redwood Housing to support other housing initiatives, a first time the Housing Authority had access to unrestricted funds.

### Action Opportunity #6: Join forces with non-profit developers and the Miami Metropolitan Housing Authority (MMHA).

The MMHA’s 2023-2027 strategic plan includes increasing housing capacity by way of increasing affordable rental housing; promoting the development of affordable ‘starter homes;’ and increasing landlord participation in the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

The county, in partnership with the MMHA, could explore the feasibility and opportunity of utilizing a greater percentage of its voucher units for project-based units. Per the [U.S. Housing and Urban Development's](#) website, "Project-based vouchers (PBVs) are a component of a public housing agency's (PHA's) Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. PHAs are not allocated additional funding for PBV units; the PHA uses its tenant-based voucher funding to allocate project-based units to a project. Projects are typically selected for PBVs through a competitive process managed by the PHA; although in certain cases projects may be selected non-competitively. A PHA can use up to 20 percent of its authorized voucher units to project-base units in a specific project if the owner agrees to either rehabilitate or construct the units, or the owner agrees to set-aside a portion of the units in an existing development. In certain cases, the PHA may use an additional 10 percent of its authorized voucher units for PBV assistance."

The county may also consider consulting [Upholdings](#), an affordable housing development and management company that has demonstrated success in the Midwest. In fact, they manage Westhaven, a permanent supportive housing development in Columbus.

### Action Opportunity #7: Seek federal funding from the [Rural Development U.S. Department of Agriculture \(RDUSDA\) – Ohio Office](#).

In 2023, 13 counties in Ohio (not Miami County) received grant awards, ranging from \$16,500 to \$10,000,000. RDUSDA has a number of initiatives that the county can leverage in support of affordable housing (and transportation), including healthy food financing, cooperative development funds, rural placemaking, and Strategic Economic and Community Development (SECD) funding to build and implement community investment plans. RDUSDA loan programs include business development, community facilities, electric, energy, multifamily housing, single family housing, telecommunications, water and environment, and cooperative services.

RDUSDA's Ohio-based contacts can be found [here](#) and a list of their granting programs [here](#).

### Action Opportunity #8: Review these additional resources for strategies and tools that can be replicated/repurposed for Miami County.

*The Rural Development Policy Toolkit*, published by Smart Growth America, provides resources and policies to consider. Access it here: [https://smartgrowthamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/rural-toolkit\\_affordable-housing.pdf](https://smartgrowthamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/rural-toolkit_affordable-housing.pdf)

*Addressing Affordable Housing in Rural Communities, A Developer's Perspective* is accessible at: <https://economicdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/articles/september-14-2021-lunch-n-learn-addressing-affordable-housing-in-rural-communities-a-developers-perspective/>

