

Lakeview Pantry 2012 Client Survey: Identifying Client Barriers and Needs



Paper Information

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lakeview Pantry on Chicago's north side is one of the largest pantries in the city. Like other organizations around the city, state, and nation that provide the basic necessity of food to hungry people, Lakeview Pantry continues to experience a greatly increased need for its food services.

In light of this, Lakeview Pantry set out to explore the larger systems-level issues that push its clients to seek out the pantry in the first place. With the assistance of the Social IMPACT Research Center, Lakeview Pantry conducted a survey of 426 clients in November and December 2012.

Their intent behind doing this was simple: to understand not only how to improve the services they are currently providing and perhaps expand them, but to also understand where there might be opportunities for Lakeview Pantry to use its position and expertise to conduct advocacy and education efforts around the root causes of hunger in their service area. The findings are illuminating:

Lakeview Pantry clients are quite diverse, and Lakeview Pantry is a critical support for them.

- The average Lakeview Pantry client is female, middle-aged, and either black or white.
- Over one third of clients have children living with them.
- A large share of clients (15%) is U.S. veterans.
- Over half of clients heard about Lakeview Pantry from a friend or relative.
- Clients report that Lakeview Pantry has higher quality food and better customer service than other pantries, and they report high levels of satisfaction in these areas.
- Clients report feeling most supported by Lakeview Pantry, compared with support from family, friends, and clubs or community organizations.

Lakeview Pantry clients face distinct barriers in their lives that contribute to their need for food assistance.

- Clients report **multiple challenges** related to employment and education, income, housing, and health.
- A very large share (37%) of clients is **unemployed**.
- Many report **low levels of education**—two out of five clients have only a high school diploma or less.
- Over half of clients want to continue their education but many of them are held back by **education costs, health problems, and transportation barriers**.
- Clients report **very low incomes**, with an average annual household income of \$9,096.
- While clients report mental health problems at lower rates than other challenges, they do express very high levels of **loneliness** and a **lack of support** by members of their communities. This is compounded by their **extreme economic insecurity**, as they both struggle in getting basic necessities and feel like no one is willing to help.
- Although many clients are currently receiving some help for their issues, many report **unmet needs**.

Clients' barriers and their lack of other supports illuminate several key areas that Lakeview Pantry can consider to better address the causes of hunger.

- **Bolster employment-related assistance and advocacy:** use Lakeview Pantry’s advocacy strength to push for policies and programs that help disadvantaged workers gain work experience, skills, credentials, and better-paying jobs.
- **Bolster the case management program and sharpen employment and education assistance:** The majority of clients expressed interest in more intensive case management services and recommendations or referrals for public assistance, and they repeatedly expressed interest in employment- and education-related services.
- **Create a strong network of health partners for potential on-site health clinics or screenings and for referrals:** Most clients also said they would be likely to utilize recommendations or referrals to health care services from the pantry and services offered at the pantry itself. These both further reflect the service gap felt by clients and their trust in Lakeview Pantry.
- **Create a “community center” atmosphere and programming:** The majority of clients report that they would be likely to attend community events or social activities hosted by the pantry—this may be due to the fact that though clients feel lonely, they also feel supported by Lakeview Pantry and would therefore be comfortable turning to them for more community support.
- **Educate decision makers about the causes of hunger and advocate for policies and programs that help people get out of poverty:** Based on reported challenges and service needs, pantry clients would benefit from advocacy around issues such as health insurance coverage, creation or strengthening of job creation and training programs, streamlining access to income supports, preservation and building of affordable housing, and community-based mental health funding. Lakeview Pantry can use its advocacy strength to push for policies and programs that help not only meet people’s basic needs, thereby mitigating the worst impacts of poverty, but that move people out of poverty and on a path to economic security.

The results of this client survey clearly illustrate that hunger and the need for food assistance is symptomatic of larger social problems: unemployment, underemployment, low education levels, unaffordable housing, income inadequacy, physical and mental health problems. As Lakeview Pantry plans its future work, there is real opportunity to not only continue to successfully help meet people’s basic needs, but also be proactive in helping move clients out of poverty and play an advocacy role on these issues. This last role, of advocate, is one that Lakeview Pantry is strongly positioned to play. Lakeview Pantry can advocate with a voice grounded in its many years of experience and deep and meaningful ties to its clients, which lends tremendous credibility to what it is saying. In doing so, the pantry addresses hunger from multiple angles—keeping to its mission of feeding hungry people—and working on a systems-level to help ensure hungry people don’t stay hungry and new people don’t ever become hungry in the first place.

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of a client survey that Lakeview Pantry carried out in November and December 2012. The Social IMPACT Research Center (IMPACT) designed the survey, analyzed the data, and wrote this report.

Lakeview Pantry has commissioned two prior client surveys, one in 2005 and the other in 2009. Those surveys collected client demographic information, service utilization information, income and housing profiles, and information on how to improve various aspects of Lakeview Pantry's customer and food service distribution. This 2012 client survey builds off the earlier efforts and goes deeper by exploring the larger systems-level issues that push its clients to seek out the pantry in the first place.

Lakeview Pantry distributed the survey to 900 clients – every client who visited the pantry or received home-delivered food in the months of November and December 2012. The survey was translated into Russian and Spanish. A total of 426 clients responded to the survey, a response rate of 47%. Out of this total, 390 were in English, 26 were in Russian, and 10 were in Spanish.

To paint a comprehensive picture of the clients visiting Lakeview Pantry, this report presents findings from the 2012 client survey in three main sections:

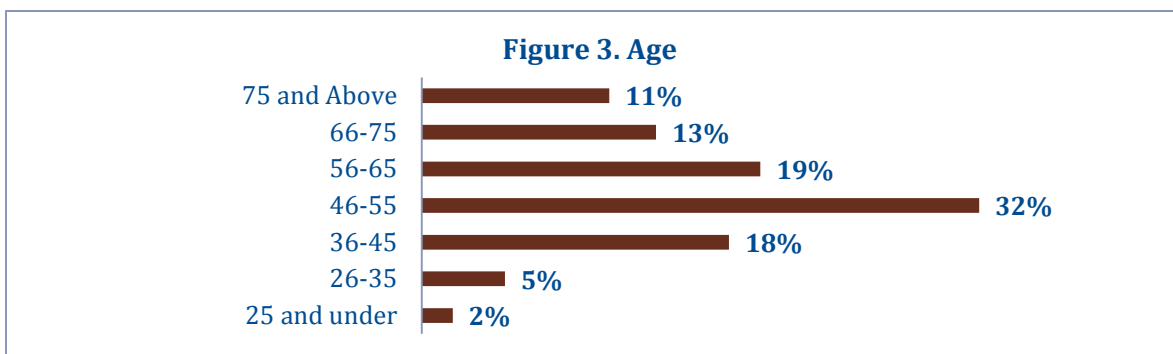
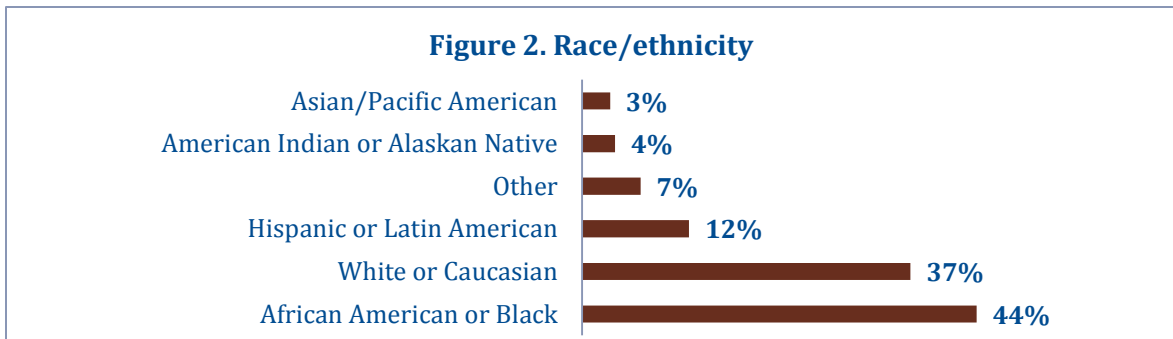
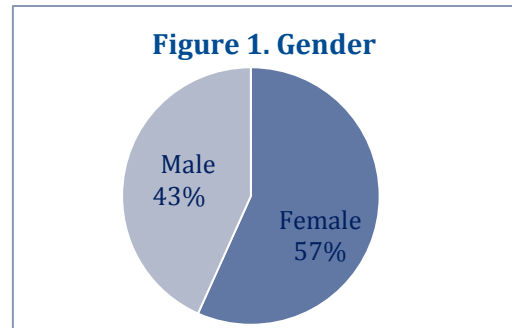
- First, the report presents demographic client profiles, describes how clients utilize Lakeview Pantry food and other services, and explains clients' satisfaction with services and their suggestions for improving those services.
- Second, the report explores four areas of life in which clients face challenges—employment and education, income, housing, and health. Clients report that struggling in these areas is what keeps them from reaching greater levels of overall life satisfaction and could also be what pushes clients to seek out Lakeview Pantry in the first place.
- Third, the report identifies areas where clients are not receiving adequate support related to employment and education, income, housing, and health. These gaps in services point to various opportunities for improving services, as well as options Lakeview Pantry can consider for developing or expanding on its educational and advocacy efforts.

CLIENT PROFILES: Who are Lakeview Pantry’s Clients?

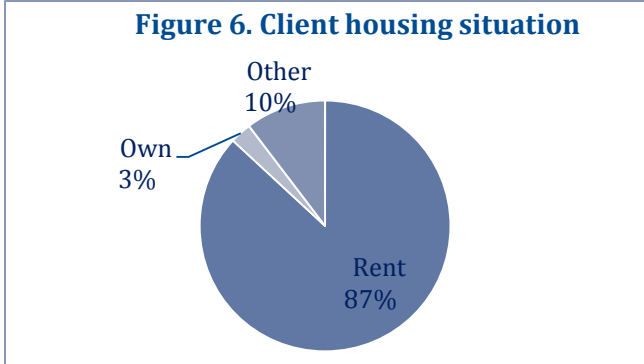
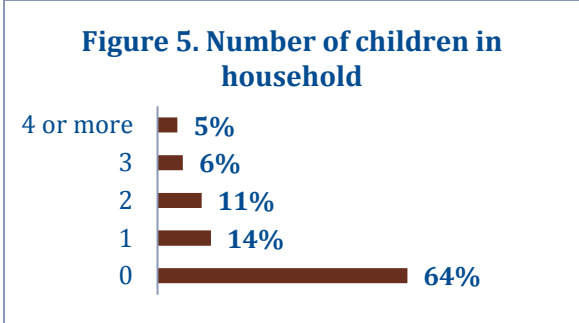
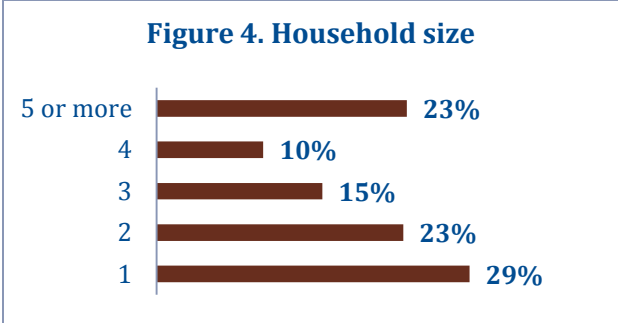
Demographic Characteristics

Out of the 426 clients who responded to the survey:

- Over half (57%) are female (Figure 1).
- 44% of clients are African American or Black, 37% are White or Caucasian, and 12% are Hispanic or Latin American (Figure 2).*
- 32% of clients are between the ages of 46 and 55 and 19% are between the ages of 56-65 (Figure 3).
- 29% of clients live alone, 23% live with one other person, and 48% live with 2 or more other people (Figure 4).
- 36% of clients have children living in their household—14% have 1 child, 11% have 2 children, and 11% have 3 or more children (Figure 5).
- 87% of clients rent their homes, and only 3% own their homes (Figure 6).
- 15% of clients are U.S. veterans.



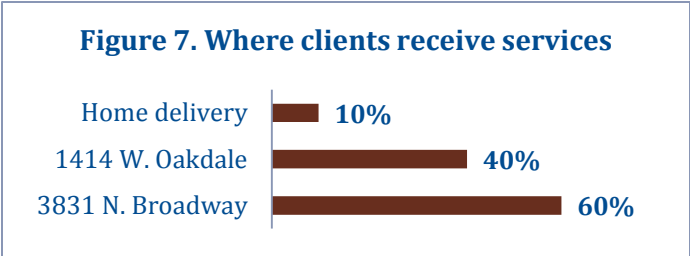
* Percentages do not add up to 100% because clients could select more than one response option.



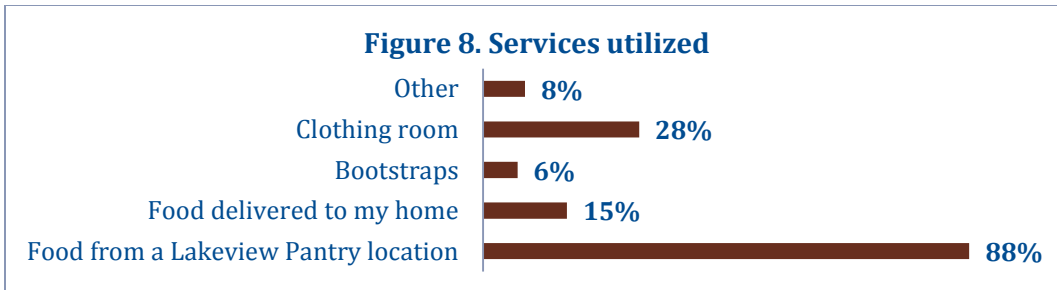
Service Utilization

Lakeview Pantry offers food pickup at two locations and also provides home delivery to homebound clients. In addition to its food services, Lakeview Pantry also operates a clothing room that donates clothing to clients and a case management program called Bootstraps.

- The majority of clients visit Lakeview Pantry’s 3831 N. Broadway location (Figure 7). The rest either go to 1414 W. Oakdale (40%) or receive home deliveries (10%).
- Food from a Lakeview Pantry location is the most highly utilized service (88% of clients report using this service), followed by the clothing room (28%) and home-delivered food (15%) (Figure 8).^{*} Clients use case management and other services at lower rates (6% and 8%, respectively).
- Most (67%) of clients heard about Lakeview Pantry from a friend or relative. A little over 17% were referred by another organization.



^{*} Percentages do not add up to 100% because clients could select more than one response option.



Service Satisfaction

Satisfaction with food

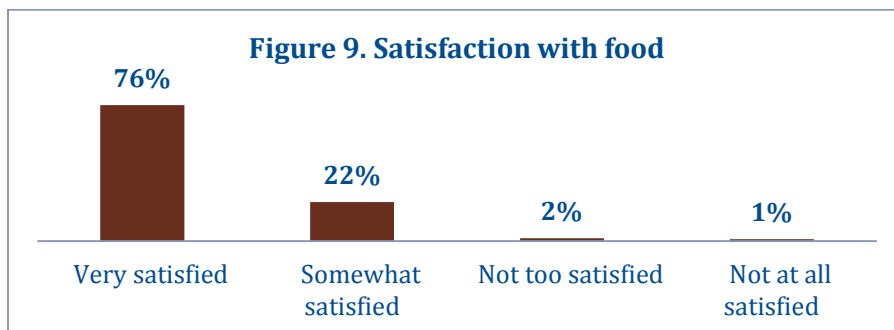
Many clients receive food from the pantry on a regular basis and describe a very strong need for the support, reporting tough choices between buying food and paying for other life expenses.

- 55% of all clients get food from Lakeview Pantry once a month.
- 18% receive food more frequently than once a month.
- About 50% of clients report that in the past year, they have had to choose between buying food and paying rent.
- 42% of clients report that in the past year, they have had to choose between buying food and buying medication.

“I am glad a friend told me about Lakeview Pantry and we are able to come and get some help we need to survive.”

*In the past year, **50%** of clients had to choose between buying food and paying rent.*

Satisfaction with Lakeview Pantry’s food is very high—the majority of clients (98%) are somewhat or very satisfied with the food they receive (Figure 9). About half of clients exclusively visit Lakeview Pantry for food. Of clients who also visit other pantries, 90% say that Lakeview Pantry’s food is better.



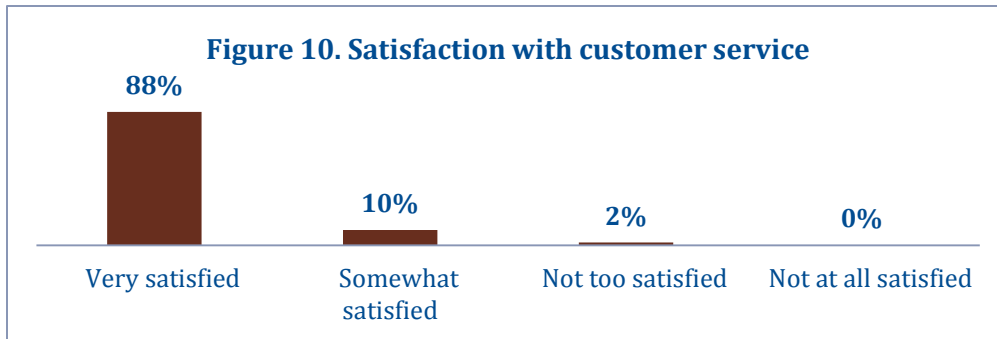
Satisfaction with customer service

Most clients (88%) are very satisfied with Lakeview Pantry’s customer service (Figure 10). Out of the half of clients who do visit other pantries, 81% say that Lakeview Pantry’s customer service is better and 18% say that it is about the same.

“The volunteers are so nice, and I appreciate their work.”

About 50% of clients would not do anything to improve services at Lakeview Pantry. Out of the clients who had thoughts on how to improve Lakeview Pantry, the most common suggestion was to increase its capacity: make the actual space bigger, provide more locations, or recruit more

volunteers. Other suggestions included specific foods or other supports that clients would like to see offered at the pantry (such as dog food, more fresh produce, more clothing in clothing room, and dental services), and to change the food distribution methods (lottery to first-come, first-served).



Client Profiles: Summary

Clients express a deep appreciation for Lakeview Pantry’s staff, space, and open doors. One client writes, “My experiences with Lakeview Food Pantry [have] been very rewarding and helpful. I don’t know how we would make it without the aid to my family which you provide. Thank you so much.”

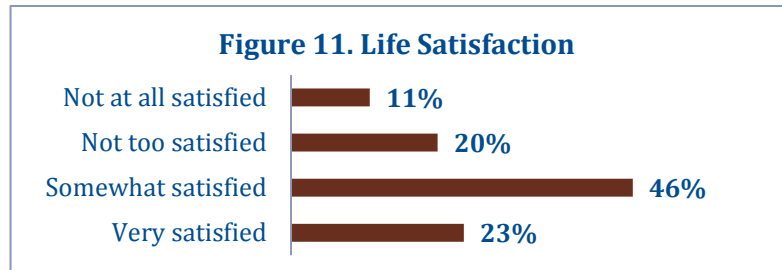
Another writes, “Pantry visits are often the highlight of my week because volunteers are genuinely nice and welcoming which creates a warm environment. The atmosphere is full of compassion and generosity that reaches out to all backgrounds.”

Finally, one clients captures the gratitude of many more when writing, “Lakeview has inspired me to continue my search for employment and other services because of the nice team members that welcomed me with open arms...we need more people in the world that [care] and I am forever grateful that this place [exists].”

While clients express their pleasure with Lakeview Pantry services, they also report distinct challenges in their lives. These challenges are explained in detail in the following section.

CHALLENGES FACED: Client Struggles with Stable Employment and Education, Income, Housing, and Health

Twenty-three percent of clients report that they are very satisfied with their lives overall, while 31% report that they feel not at all or not too satisfied (Figure 11). The top reasons clients attribute to their various reported levels of satisfaction are as follows:



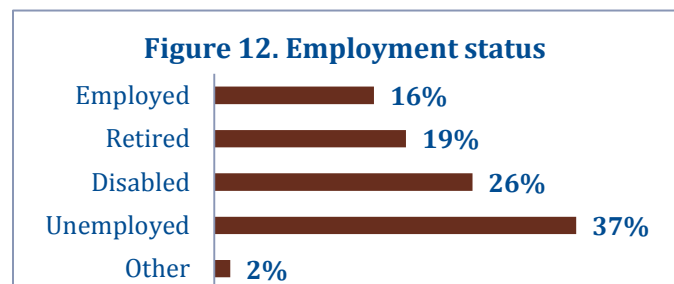
- They need education or employment (34%)
- They need money or economic independence (17%)
- They have unstable or bad housing (14%)
- They have health issues (14%)
- They feel lonely or depressed (14%)

These reasons for reported levels of life satisfaction —employment and education, income, housing, and physical and mental health— are more fully explored in turn below.

Employment and Education

Employment

About 37% of clients are unemployed; 45% are not working due to being either disabled or retired (Figure 12). Out of the 16% of clients who are employed, over half (57%) are not satisfied with their current jobs (Figure 13).



Eighty-one percent of employed but not satisfied clients state that the reason they are not satisfied is because their job does not pay enough (Figure 14). Another 41% do not like the hours they are scheduled or do not get enough hours.

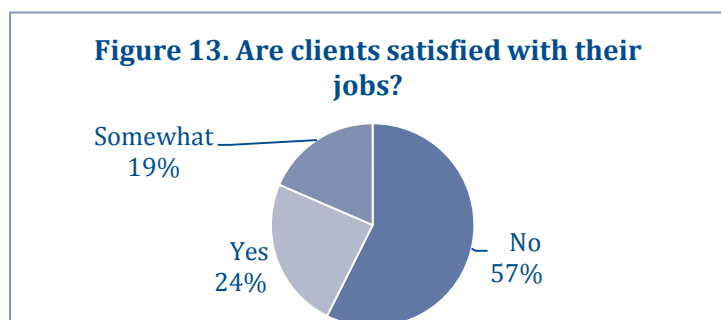


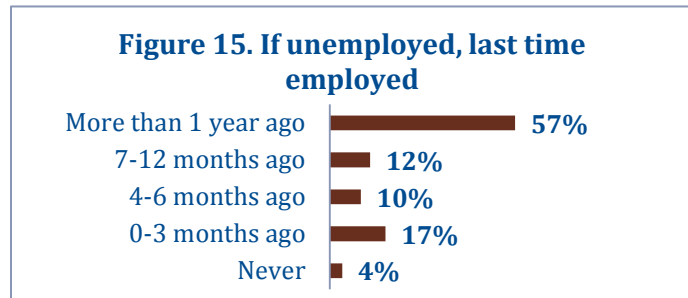
Figure 14. If somewhat or not satisfied, why not?

1. Job doesn't pay enough (81%)
2. Bad hours, not enough hours (41%)

Out of those clients who report being unemployed or unsatisfied with their jobs, 77% are looking for work. Over half (57%) of unemployed clients report that they haven't worked in over a year (Figure 15).

Clients report that the following things hold them back from finding a job:

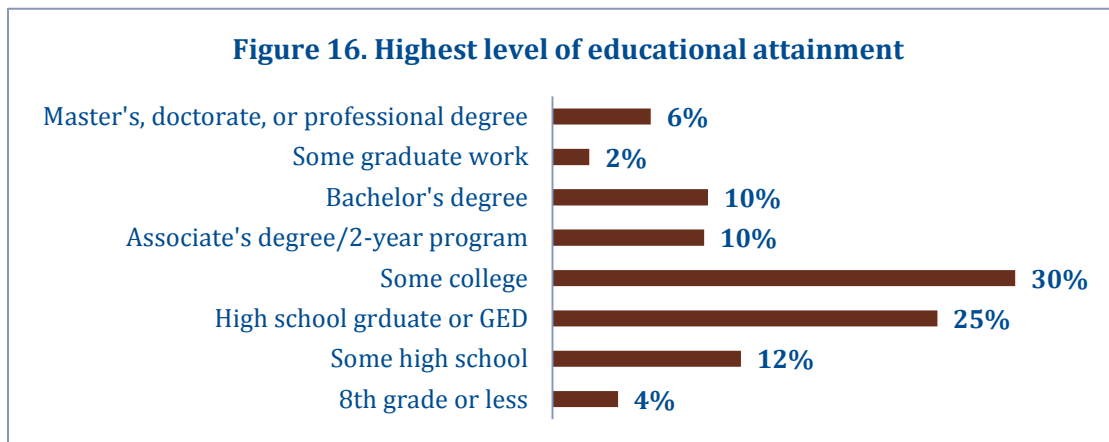
- There are not enough job openings (53%)
- Transportation problems (34%)
- Health problems or a disability (28%)
- No working phone (19%)
- A criminal record (17%)
- Limited access to a computer or limited computer skills (15%)



“My husband and I are both trying to get better employment so we can provide for our family better.”

Education

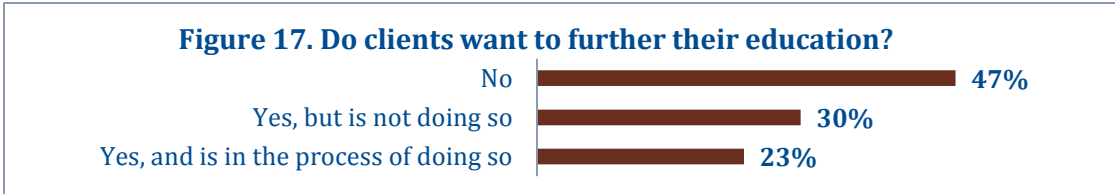
Almost one third (30%) of clients have completed some college as their highest level of education (Figure 16). One quarter have only completed high school or received a GED. A smaller percentage (10%) have completed a bachelor’s degree, 16% have attained less than a high school diploma, and 10% have received an Associate’s degree.



- The majority of clients (89%) are not in school or taking classes.
 - Of those not enrolled in classes, 26% have a high school diploma, and 29% have some college experience.
 - Out of those who are enrolled in classes, 32% have completed some college, and 34% have a bachelor’s degree or higher.
- Almost half of clients (47%) do not wish to further their education (Figure 17) – of those, 41% have a high school diploma or less, 24% have some college experience, and 35% have an associate’s degree or higher.
- Of the 53% of clients who do wish to further their education, 40% have a high school diploma or less, 36% have some college experience, and 24% have an associate’s degree or higher.
- Out of all clients, 30% want to further their education but are not doing so.

“I would love to go back to school but cannot afford it.”

- Most report that the reasons for not continuing education are because education costs are prohibitive (41%), a health problem or disability is holding them back (29%), or they have problems getting to education facilities because of a lack of transportation (23%).



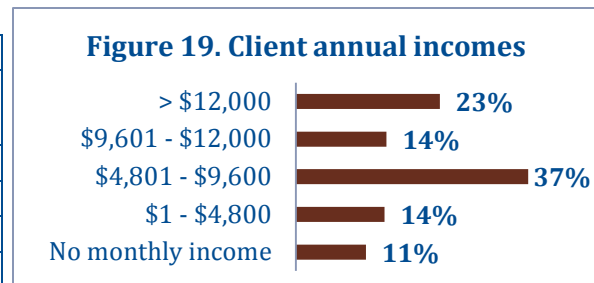
Income

Likely due to high unemployment rates and underemployment, Lakeview Pantry clients have extremely low incomes. The average monthly household income of all clients who shared information about their income (71% of survey respondents) is \$758 per month. Calculated annually, that is an income of \$9,096 per year. Thirty-three percent have incomes between \$601 and \$800 a month, or between \$7,212 and \$9,600 per year. Over two thirds (76%) have annual incomes of \$12,000 or less (Figure 19).

As a point of reference, according to federal poverty guidelines,³ a single person is considered living in poverty if he/she has an annual income of \$11,490 or less, and a family of three is in poverty if they have an annual income of \$19,530 or less. A single person is in extreme poverty if he/she earns \$5,745 or less annually, and a family of three is in extreme poverty if they earn \$9,765 or less annually (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Poverty Guideline (2013)

Persons in household	Annual income - poverty	Annual income - extreme poverty
1	\$ 11,490	\$ 5,745
2	\$ 15,510	\$ 7,755
3	\$ 19,530	\$ 9,765
4	\$ 23,550	\$ 11,775



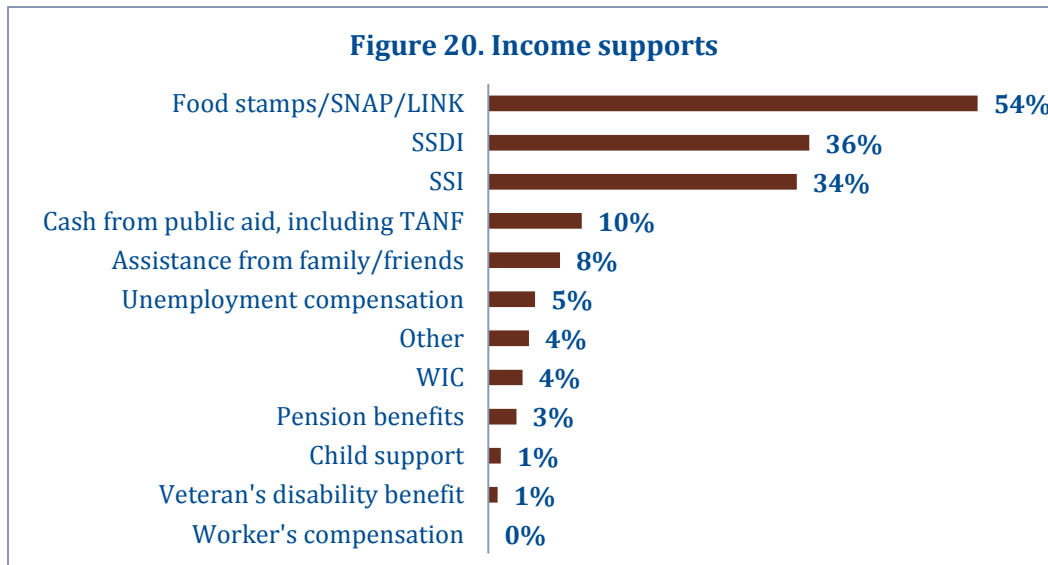
Most clients (68%) receive some type of income support. Out of these 68% of clients:*

- Over half receive support from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- Over one third receives Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, *2013 Poverty Guidelines*, retrieved from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/13poverty.cfm>

* Percentages do not add up to 100% because clients could select more than one response option.

- About one third receives Supplemental Security Income (SSI) (Figure 20).



Having adequate income is the cornerstone of being able to pay for basic necessities. Likely due to their extremely low levels of income, clients collectively point to various challenges related to having inadequate funds—and they indicate that they are not receiving adequate supports in these areas. For instance:

- 48% of clients have problems getting groceries regularly.
 - Out of these clients, 90% of them report either not receiving help or needing more help.
- 39% express problems getting regular transportation.
 - Out of these clients, 95% report that they are not receiving help or that they need more help.
- 35% of clients report that they could use help with getting public benefits and income supports.
 - Out of these clients, 96% report either not receiving help with this issue or receiving some help but needing more.
- 28% of clients say they have problems with learning how to budget money.
 - Out of these clients, 99% reflect that they are either not receiving help or could use more of it.
- 18% of clients report having problems with legal issues.
 - Out of these clients, 95% either are not receiving help or could use more of it.

“I do not want to be stuck depending on SS disability, housing voucher, and food pantry. I want to be able to be in position to pay [for my] own living space, food, health care needs, and donate to the pantry.”

Housing

Thirty-two percent of clients report having problems with housing. Out of these clients, 27% state that the space is not big enough, 20% say the building is not well maintained, and 17% say the neighbors cause disturbances (Figure 21). The biggest issue, though, is that many (63%) simply cannot afford their rent or mortgage. Nine percent have more than one issue with housing. Out of the clients who are having issues with housing, 97% reflect that they either are not receiving help or could use more help (Figure 22).

*“I need more money
and a place to stay.”*

Figure 21. Types of housing issues

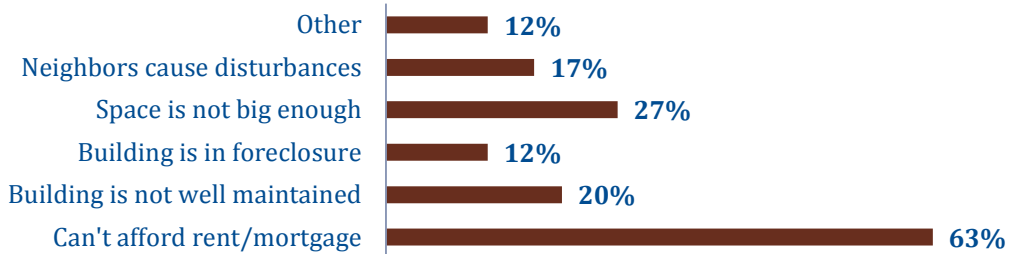
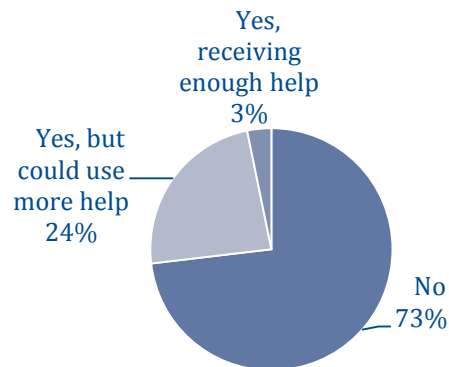


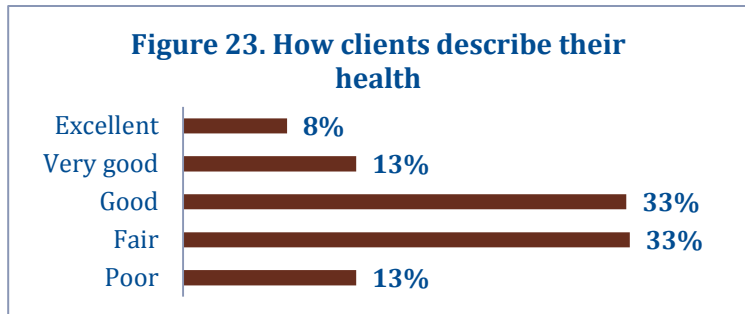
Figure 22. Receiving help with housing issues



Physical and Mental Health

The last area in which clients experience challenges contributing to their reported levels of life satisfaction is health.

- 46% of clients describe their health as either poor or fair (Figure 23).
- 46% describe their health as good or very good.



Physical Health

Clients report the following chronic physical health issues:

- 48% have high blood pressure.
- 22% have asthma.
- 22% have diabetes.
- 12% report that they struggle with obesity.
- 7% report having cancer.

47% of clients' households are not fully covered by health insurance.

"I wish I could stop smoking and I wish I could have better heart health."

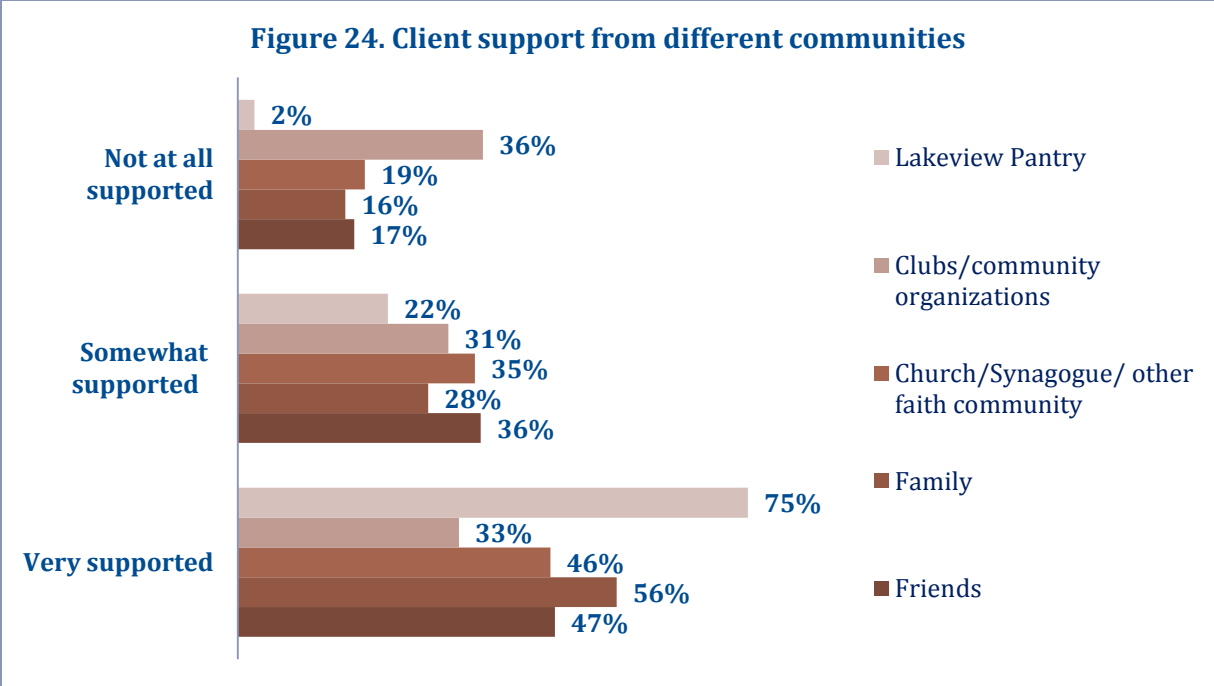
The majority of clients (83%) are getting treatment for these conditions. However, 27% of clients do not have a regular place for health care check-ups. And 47% report that they or someone in their household are not covered by health insurance.

These health issues have a severe impact on clients. Out of all clients, 50% say that physical health problems interfere with their ability to find work.

Mental Health

Clients also report a distinct mental health service gap. Clients do report low incidences of substance abuse and mental health problems for themselves or someone in their households (6% report a problem with alcohol, 3% with drugs, and 33% report a mental health problem). However, it is likely that clients may have been hesitant to honestly report these things given the sensitive nature of the topic and the public setting in which most took the survey (the Lakeview Pantry waiting room). Those who do report problems also report a gap in services— 40% of those with an alcohol problem, 67% with a drug problem, and 24% with a mental health problem report that they are not receiving all the treatment they need. The mental health gap is also reflected by the low levels of support clients feel in general by various members of their community (Figure 24).

"I'm very lonely."



A clear majority of clients (75%) feel very supported by Lakeview Pantry. However, the levels of positive support clients feel from other members of their communities are not as high. These lower levels of support felt by clubs and friends (relative to family and Lakeview Pantry, for example) could be what contribute to many clients feeling like they do not have many people in their lives to talk to. Many clients wrote in multiple sections of the survey, “I’m very lonely.” Other clients express a desire for someone to talk to because they are depressed.

Challenges Faced: Summary

These results help explain the main issues that have brought clients into Lakeview Pantry. All four of these issues—employment and education, income, housing, and physical and mental health—appear very interrelated and connected in clients’ lives. For example, one client writes, “I don’t have a job and I can barely make ends meet.” Another writes, “I need money for transportation and more school.” One more says, “I lost my apartment and my job and it has been since 2010 and I am still searching for employment.” Finally, multiple clients simply express, “I need help.” All of this suggests that these barriers are complex and reinforce one another.

The principal barrier, it seems, is the challenge of finding a job and maintaining a stable income. Without it, their likelihood of getting decent housing, having greater life stability, and even attaining basic things like transportation to and from work or school, greatly decreases. There is a definite opportunity to educate around and advocate for services and supports that help address the challenges Lakeview Pantry clients face, related to education and employment, income, housing, and physical and mental health. The next section explores these opportunities in more detail.

OPPORTUNITIES: Filling Gaps through Services, Education, and Advocacy

This section identifies the principal opportunities for services, as stated by the clients, in the following areas: employment and education, income, and physical and mental health. Since the biggest issue that clients have with housing is affordability, the area for opportunity as it relates to housing is folded in with income (though there is certainly opportunity for education and advocacy efforts around the availability of affordable housing). Following each section, a blue arrow points to the big picture opportunity for Lakeview Pantry to engage in education and advocacy or to improve or expand their services.

Employment and Education

Given clients' challenges in the areas of employment and education, clients report moderate levels of likelihood to use various employment- and education-related services.

- 87% of clients report they are either very or somewhat likely to use referrals and recommendations for education or employment assistance at Lakeview Pantry (Figure 25).
- 72% reflect being very or somewhat likely to take advantage of educational opportunities at the pantry.
- 88% report they are very or somewhat likely to use employment assistance services.

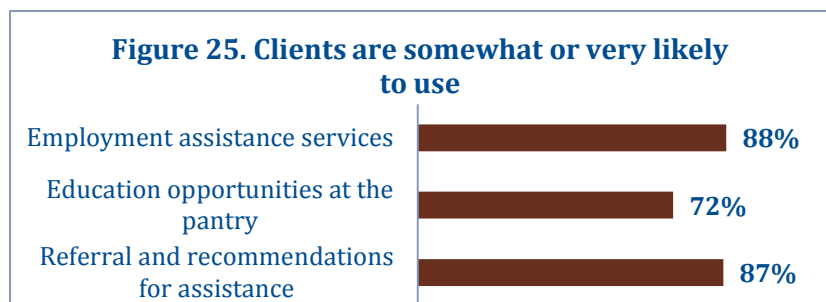


Figure 26. Top services of interest

1. Job training (24%)
2. Computer training (18%)
3. Job fairs or placements (13%)
4. Basic education classes (6%)
5. Short-term work opportunities (6%)

Out of those who identified other specific services of interest (Figure 26):

- 24% reflect a desire for job training (ranging from vocational to health care to general job training classes).
- 18% report an interest in computer training.
- 13% express interest in job fairs, placements, or referrals.



Bolster employment-related assistance and use the pantry's advocacy strength to push for policies and programs that help disadvantaged workers gain work experience, skills, credentials, and better-paying jobs.

Income

Many clients indicate interest in income-related services and assistance if they were provided by Lakeview Pantry:

- 73% of clients report being very or somewhat likely to utilize recommendations and referrals to public assistance if provided by Lakeview Pantry (Figure 27).
- 76% of clients report an interest in using more intensive case management, which could help to ensure that income-related needs are being addressed.

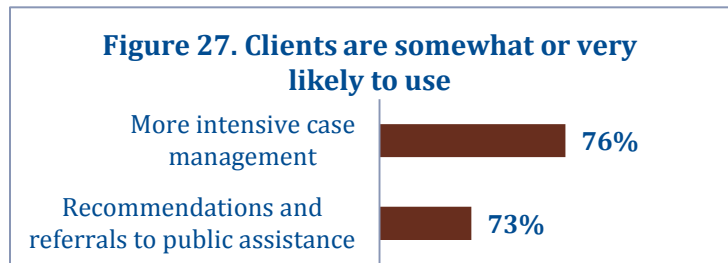


Figure 28. Top services of interest

1. Employment and education services (16%)
2. Housing services and rental assistance (11%)
3. More basic goods provision (10%)
4. Budgeting assistance (6%)
5. Assistance getting benefits (3%)

Out of those who identified other services of interest related to income, the top services suggested were (Figure 28):

- 16% reiterated that they want employment and education services.
- 11% are interested in housing services and rental assistance.
- 10% want basic goods, such as clothing, food, and transportation.
- 6% express an interest in budgeting classes and money management training.



Create a more robust and far-reaching case management program – focusing on not just referring, but helping remove barriers for clients to getting the supports they need to get by and get ahead.

Health

Client responses point to distinct gaps in services related to both physical and mental health, which also speak to potential opportunities for Lakeview Pantry to increase its preventative and mental health advocacy efforts.

Physical Health

Clients show interest in health services, either through referrals or at the pantry:

- 75% of clients report they are very or somewhat likely to use recommendations or referrals to

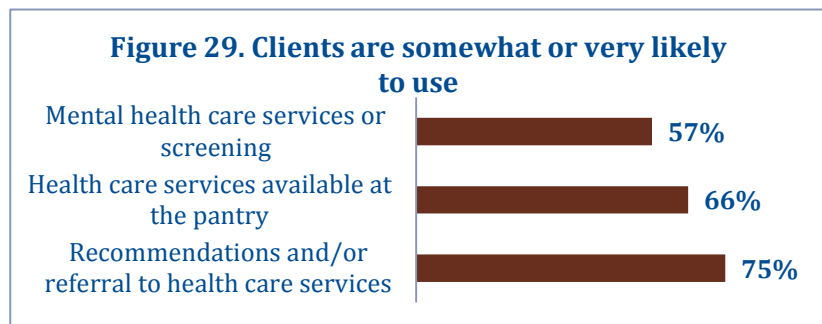


Figure 30. Top services of interest

1. Dental and optical services (33%)
2. Preventative health services (18%)
3. Prescription assistance (16%)
4. Nutrition and exercise (10%)

health care services if provided by Lakeview Pantry (Figure 29).

- 66% of clients report being very or somewhat likely to use health services at the pantry itself.

Out of those who identified other specific services of interest, the top services suggested were (Figure 30):

- 33% express an interest in dental and optical services.
- 18% request preventative health services such as flu shots, blood pressure check-ups, and diabetes screenings.
- 16% want financial help getting prescriptions.
- 10% have an interest in nutrition and exercise classes.

Mental Health

While clients report low levels of mental health problems when asked directly about it, they do express very high levels of loneliness and lack of support. Their interest in potential mental health-related services offered by Lakeview Pantry mirror this. Fifty-seven percent report an interest in mental health services or screenings if offered by Lakeview Pantry (as previously illustrated in Figure 29). The majority of clients also express an interest in social activities and services at the pantry (Figure 31).

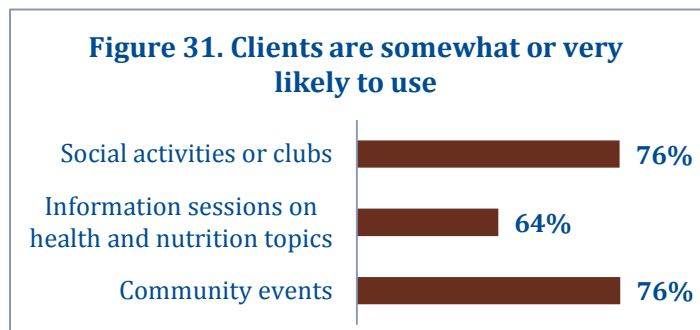


Figure 32. Top services of interest

1. Social activities and support groups (18%)
2. Employment and education services (16%)
3. More basic goods provision (8%)

- 76% of clients are somewhat or very likely to use social activities or clubs.
- 76% report being somewhat or very likely to attend community events.

Out of those who identified specific services of interest, the top other services suggested were (Figure 32):

- 18% want social activities or support groups because they need friendship, counseling, or, in the words of one client, “someone to talk to.”
- 16% reiterate an interest in employment and educational services to increase support.
- 8% again express the need for basic goods, like food, clothing, and CTA cards to feel more supported.



Create a strong network of health partners for potential on-site health clinics or screenings and for referrals, with a particular emphasis on health services that are hard for uninsured and underinsured clients to access, like dental and optical care. Create a “community center” atmosphere and programming.

CONCLUSION

As the results of this client survey demonstrate, hunger and the need for food assistance is symptomatic of larger social problems: unemployment, underemployment, low education levels, unaffordable housing, income inadequacy, and physical and mental health problems. As Lakeview Pantry plots its course for the next several years, there is real opportunity to not only help meet people’s basic needs (which these results indicate it’s doing quite well), but also be proactive in helping move clients out of poverty by playing an advocacy role on these issues. This last role, of advocate, is one that Lakeview Pantry is strongly positioned to play. Lakeview Pantry can advocate with a voice grounded in its many years of experience and deep and meaningful ties to its clients, which lends tremendous credibility to what its saying. In doing so, the pantry addresses hunger from multiple angles—keeping to its mission of feeding hungry people—and working on a systems-level to help ensure hungry people don’t stay hungry and new people don’t ever become hungry in the first place.



Educate decision makers about the causes of hunger and advocate for policies and programs that help people get out of poverty.