

Reasons for Moving in Nonmetro Iowa

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The Study

This report is the first in a series that examines the experiences of people who have recently moved to or from 19 selected nonmetropolitan counties of Iowa. The goal is to better understand the decisions and thoughts of people who have moved and what they think about the communities and areas where they have lived. The objective of this project is to help community leaders better understand local household moving trends so they can develop actionable strategies to address the reasons why people come, why people leave, enhance the qualities that cause people to stay, and thus stabilize or increase their populations.

The research results are from a survey of nonmetropolitan movers in 19 selected counties in Iowa (Adams, Appanoose, Cherokee, Davis, Decatur, Dickinson, Floyd, Hamilton, Hardin, Henry, Howard, Jefferson, Page, Ringgold, Sioux, Taylor, Union, Van Buren, Wayne).¹ People who had moved either into or out of these 19 counties were identified through a purchased database of new movers. The criteria to be included in the study were that both their new and past zip codes had to be known, at least one of the zip codes had to be from the selected 19 counties, and the zip codes had to be different, indicating a community move rather than just a move across the street or down the block.

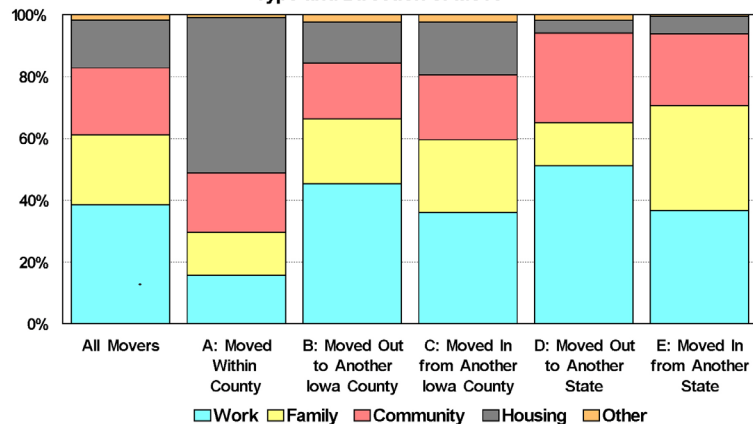
The survey asked questions about the respondent's previous location as well as their current location, reasons for moving, satisfaction with multiple factors in their communities, as well as their demographic, social, and economic situation. The surveys were mailed in the fall of 2005 and 737 respondents who met the study criteria replied for a response rate of 35 percent. Most respondents had moved during 2003 through 2005.

Findings

This study highlights the experiences of people who have recently moved to or from 19 selected nonmetropolitan counties of Iowa. The purpose is to increase understanding about why people move so community leaders and citizens can develop actionable strategies for attracting and retaining population. Using data from a survey mailed to residents who moved, this study finds that:

- General reasons for moving fall into four main categories: work, family, community, and housing.
- Among *all* movers, work factors were cited as being most important more often than the other reasons but the importance of the reasons for moving varied by the type and direction of move.
- More than a third (37.1%) of the respondents who moved into Iowa from other states said work was their most important reason compared with half (50.9%) of the respondents who moved out of Iowa to other states.
- Half (50.4%) of those who moved within the same county reported housing as their most important reason.
- Respondents coming into Iowa were more likely to note family reasons (33.3%) than those leaving the state (13.6%).
- When second or third reasons for moving were given, community factors were mentioned most frequently.
- Age and life-cycle stage have an impact on why people move. Half of respondents younger than age 35 cited work as most important. Nearly half (48.2%) of those 70 or older said family was most important.

Figure 1: Most Important Reason for Leaving Previous Location by Type and Direction of Move



Source: Community Vitality Center, New Movers Study

New Mover Studies: Reasons for Moving in Nonmetro Iowa

Five categories of movers are used to examine the results (Table 1). Among the respondents, 696 (94.4%) fit into just one of the five mover categories. The other 41 respondents (5.6%) had moved out of one of the study counties and into another of the 19 included counties. These 41 responses are included as both out-movers to another Iowa county and in-movers to a county in the study. However, in the results that follow, the category of *All Movers* includes only the 737 respondents without duplication.

Reasons for Moving and Type of Move

This report focuses on reasons for moving. The survey asked respondents to answer two open-ended questions, one which asked for the three most important reasons for leaving their previous location and a second which asked for the three most important reasons for selecting their current location.² The responses to these two questions were analyzed for content and merged into categories that summarize the ideas and themes provided by the respondents. Because the questions were open-ended and fill-in, many respondents included more than one meaningful reason in each of the items. Thus, the number of reasons given is larger than the number of respondents.

When the first, second, and third reasons were summed, respondents gave more than 2,280 reasons for leaving their previous location and over 2,360 for selecting their new location (Table 2). Overall, the reasons for leaving the previous place and choosing the new place fall into four broad categories: work (including job, income, education, and retirement), family (including relationships and health), community (including services, amenities, weather, and lifestyle), and housing (including ownership, and affordability). A very small number of responses did not fit into these four categories and are reported as “other.”

When thinking about why they left their previous location, the respondents’ first and most important reason focused on work most often (38.4 %), about equally

Category	Number	Type and Direction of Move
A: <i>Within County, Zipcode change</i>	85	Moved within one of the 19 study counties but changed zip code.
B: <i>Out To Another Iowa County</i>	206	Moved out of one of the study counties to another county in Iowa.
C: <i>In From Another Iowa County</i>	207	Moved from another county in Iowa into one of the study counties.
D: <i>Out To Another State</i>	121	Moved out of one of the study counties to another state.
E: <i>In From Another State</i>	159	Moved from another state into one of the study counties.

on family (22.3%) and community (22.0%), and least on housing (15.7%). Respondents who gave a second or a third important reason, tended to add community factors (45.4%) more than the other types.

Responses by mover category provided clear differences in the most important reason for leaving the previous location. In general, the pattern of reasons varied depending on whether the move was within a county (Group A), was between counties but within Iowa (Groups B and C), or the movers went either to or from Iowa and other states (Groups D and E) (Figure 1, Table 2).

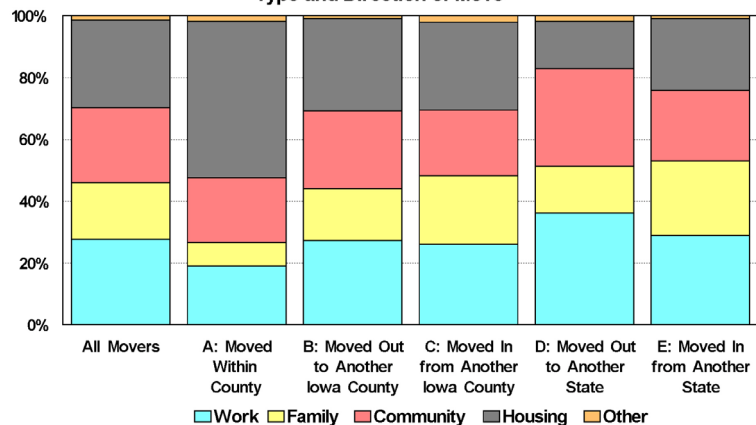
Half (50.4%) of those who moved within the same county (Group A) reported housing as their most important reason for moving. In contrast, housing was most important for only 4.7 percent of those who moved to other states (Group D) and 6.2 percent of those who moved into Iowa (Group E). Work related reasons were cited half the time (50.9%) by those moving out of Iowa to other states. However, for respondents moving into Iowa, work was cited as the most

important reason 37.1% of the time. Furthermore, work made up only 15.7 percent of the motivations for within-county movers. Movers coming into Iowa were much more likely to note family reasons (33.3%) than those leaving the state (13.6%).

Movers who went between counties but stayed in Iowa (Groups B and C) gave a pattern of reasons that more closely matched those of the in- and out-of-state movers (Groups D and E) than those who stayed within a county (Group A). However, the respondents moving between Iowa counties were more likely to cite housing reasons than persons moving between states. When considering the second and third reasons given for leaving the previous location, regardless of type and direction of move, community factors were mentioned most frequently. More than half (55.3%) of the second and third reasons given by those leaving Iowa involved community themes (Table 2).

As respondents thought about why they chose their new location, the pattern of reasons given was similar, yet different from the reasons they gave for leaving

Figure 2: Most Important Reason for Selecting Current Location by Type and Direction of Move



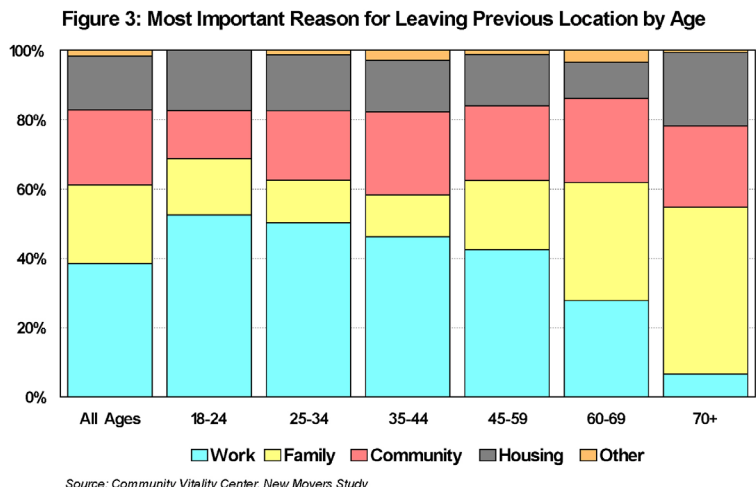
Source: Community Vitality Center, New Movers Study

Table 2. Most Important Reasons for Leaving Previous Location and Selecting Current Location by Type and Direction of Move.

	All Movers ^a	Type and Direction of Move				
		A: Within County, Changed Zipcode	B: Out To Different Iowa County	C: In From Different Iowa County	D: Out To Another State	E: In From Another State
Reasons Left Previous Location						
<i>Most Important Reason</i>						
Number of Reasons ^b	1,011	115	289	288	169	210
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Work, income, retirement, education	38.4	15.7	45.0	36.1	50.9	37.1
Family, friends, health	22.3	13.9	20.8	23.3	13.6	33.3
Community, services, amenities	22.0	19.1	18.0	21.2	29.0	22.9
Housing	15.7	50.4	13.8	17.0	4.7	6.2
Other	1.6	0.9	2.3	2.3	1.8	0.5
<i>Second and Third Reasons</i>						
Number of Reasons ^b	1,274	166	342	345	219	269
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Work, income, retirement, education	17.1	11.4	19.0	18.3	16.0	19.3
Family, friends, health	17.1	8.4	15.5	17.4	17.8	23.0
Community, services, amenities	45.4	39.2	44.7	40.9	55.3	45.0
Housing	17.4	37.3	18.1	20.3	6.8	11.2
Other	3.0	3.6	2.6	3.2	4.1	1.5
Reasons Selected Current Location						
<i>Most Important Reason</i>						
Number of Reasons ^b	1,005	105	284	290	161	219
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Work, income, retirement, education	27.6	19.0	27.1	25.9	36.0	29.2
Family, friends, health	18.3	7.6	16.9	22.1	14.9	23.7
Community, services, amenities	24.3	21.0	25.0	21.4	31.7	22.4
Housing	28.4	50.5	29.9	28.6	15.5	23.7
Other	1.5	1.9	1.1	2.1	1.9	0.9
<i>Second and Third Reasons</i>						
Number of Reasons ^b	1,361	148	350	399	252	288
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Work, income, retirement, education	13.7	6.1	16.0	13.8	17.5	12.2
Family, friends, health	15.4	10.1	14.0	15.5	13.1	20.5
Community, services, amenities	46.1	39.2	41.7	45.4	52.4	49.7
Housing	23.9	43.2	27.7	24.6	15.5	16.3
Other	1.0	1.4	0.6	0.8	1.6	1.4

^abased on 737 total respondents; ^bnumber of reasons exceeds number of respondents because many respondents gave more than one reason to the open-ended question

their previous place. Overall, 27.6 percent of the reasons for choosing the current location related to work, 18.3 percent involved family, 24.3 percent were community oriented, and 28.4 percent related to housing (Figure 2). In general, respondents cited housing *more* frequently and work *less* frequently as an important factor for selecting the new place than they had for leaving the old location (Figures 1, 2; Table 2). Family and community factors played a role in selecting the new location at about the same levels as in the decision to leave the previous place. As before, second and third reasons emphasized community factors.



Reasons for Moving and Age

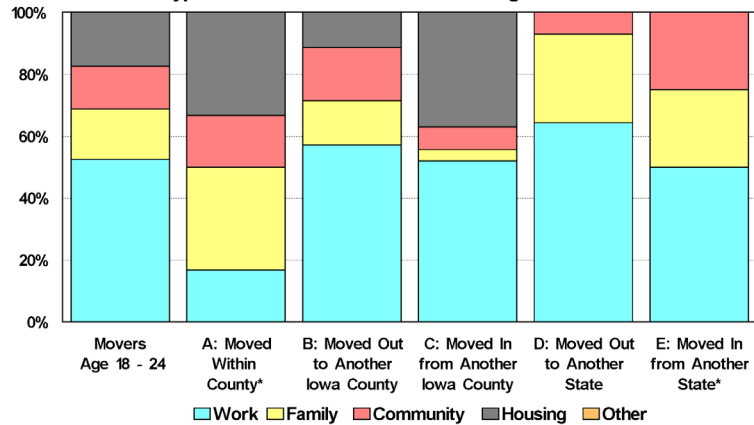
Age and life-cycle stage influence decisions about moving. The respondents were grouped into six age categories to examine the overall results (Figure 3, Tables 3, 5).³ When asked about why they left their previous location, there were significant differences by age in the reasons the respondents gave as most important. At least half of the responses by those age 18 – 34 indicated the most important reason for leaving was work related (including education) compared with 27.8 percent for those age 60 – 69 and 6.6 percent for those at least 70 years old. The pattern for work reasons contrasted with that for family motivations which were cited least often by those age 25 – 44 and most often by older respondents. Forty-eight percent of those 70 or older said family was most important. In contrast to the work and family reasons, both community-related factors and housing issues were mentioned as having relatively similar importance in the moving decision across the age categories.

The findings by age in reasons for selecting the new location were similar to those for leaving the previous place in that younger respondents were more likely than the oldest respondents to give a work reason as most important in the choice of their current location (Table 3). In addition, those who were older had more family considerations as they selected their new place and there was relatively little variation by age in mentioning community based reasons for their choice of a new place to live.

Reasons for Moving by Age and by Type of Move

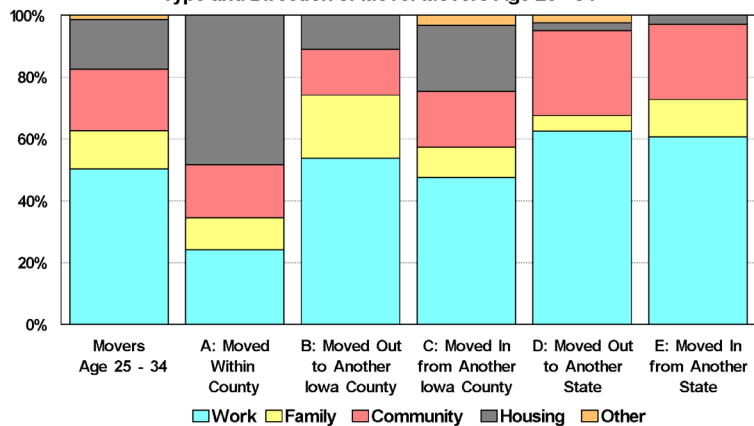
This study provides the ability to examine the reasons for moving by age and type of move together to look for decision patterns that might be unique or specific to one particular group or age combination (Table 4).⁴ One readily apparent trend pertains to respondents who stayed within the same county (Group A, Figures 4 – 9). These movers were highly motivated by housing reasons as the most important factor in their decision. Sixty-five percent of within-county movers who were 70 years or older cited housing as most

Figure 4: Most Important Reason for Leaving Previous Location by Type and Direction of Move: Movers Age 18 - 24



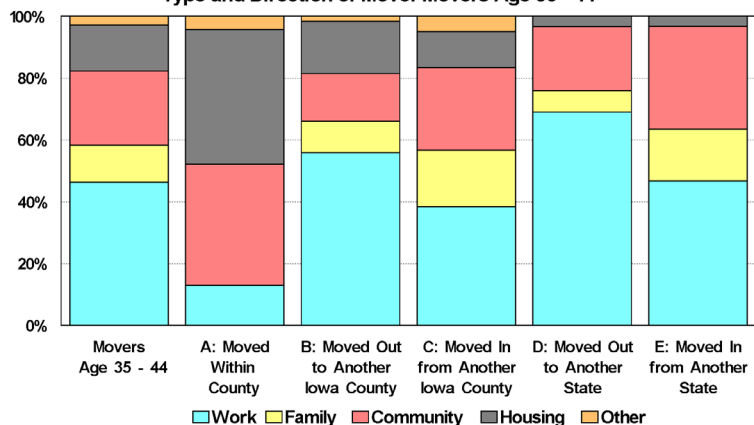
Source: Community Vitality Center, New Movers Study *caution with results for this group, fewer than 10 respondents

Figure 5: Most Important Reason for Leaving Previous Location by Type and Direction of Move: Movers Age 25 - 34



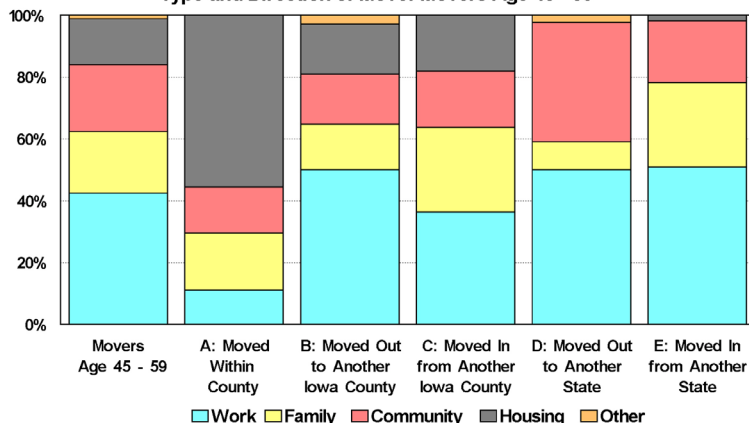
Source: Community Vitality Center, New Movers Study

Figure 6: Most Important Reason for Leaving Previous Location by Type and Direction of Move: Movers Age 35 - 44



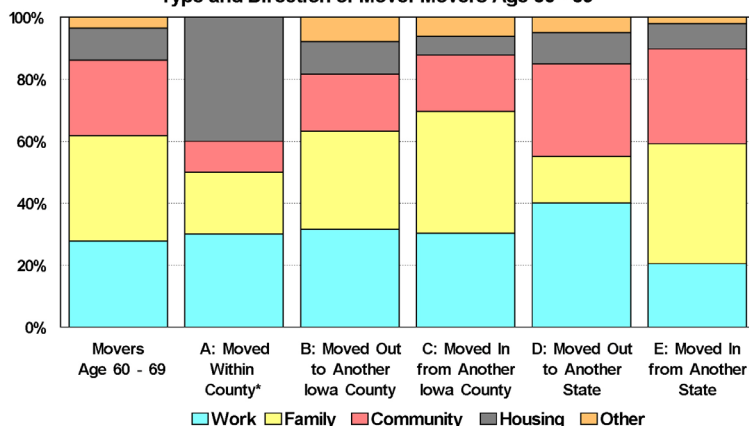
Source: Community Vitality Center, New Movers Study

Figure 7: Most Important Reason for Leaving Previous Location by Type and Direction of Move: Movers Age 45 - 59



Source: Community Vitality Center, New Movers Study

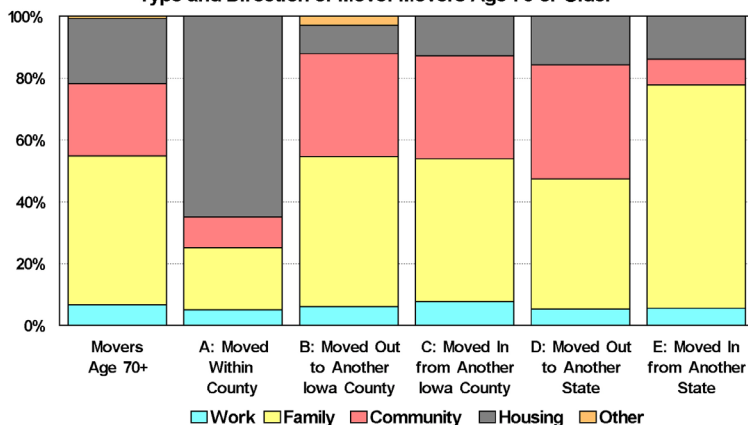
Figure 8: Most Important Reason for Leaving Previous Location by Type and Direction of Move: Movers Age 60 - 69



Source: Community Vitality Center, New Movers Study

*caution with results for this group, fewer than 10 respondents

Figure 9: Most Important Reason for Leaving Previous Location by Type and Direction of Move: Movers Age 70 or Older



Source: Community Vitality Center, New Movers Study

important. And, with the exception of the youngest respondents, 40 percent or more of the other age groups said housing was most important if they moved within a county.

For the most part, work reasons, which included education, dominated the responses of persons 18 – 24 but family motivations were also important for those of this age moving between Iowa and other states (Figure 4, Groups B – E). In addition, those in the 18 – 24 age group who moved into the study counties from elsewhere in Iowa gave housing reasons as the most important factor 37 percent of the time. Respondents who were 25 – 34 had a pattern of work responses similar to the youngest group, but were somewhat more likely to cite community reasons and less likely to mention family factors than those 18 – 24 (Figure 5, Figure 4).

Among the respondents age 35 – 44, those moving from Iowa to other states gave work reasons more often (69%) than any other group or age category (Figure 6, Group D). Those of this age moving in from other states, cited work motivations less often (46.7%) than those who left, but community issues more often (33.3% vs. 20.7%). Within-county movers of the 35 – 44 age gave community reasons more often (39.1%) than any other group or age category (Figure 6, Group A).

Work factors remained important among movers age 45 – 59 but were mentioned somewhat less than by the next younger age group (Figure 7, Figure 6). Community reasons were especially important (38.6%) in the decisions of these movers who went out of Iowa to other states.

It was with the responses from the movers who were age 60 – 69 that work-related motivations generally declined relative to their respective younger counterparts (Figure 8). In addition, persons age 60 – 69 were generally more likely to state family reasons than younger movers. For the most part, family and community factors guided the moving decisions of the oldest age group (70+) who seldom (5.0% – 7.7%) cited work or even retirement as the reason for leaving the previous

Table 3. Most Important Reason for Leaving Previous Location and Selecting Current Location by Age.

	All Ages ^a	Age in Years					
		18 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 59	60 – 69	70 or Older
Reasons Left Previous Location							
Number of Reasons ^b	997	80	211	175	250	144	137
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Work, income, retirement, education	38.5	52.5	50.2	46.3	42.4	27.8	6.6
Family, friends, health	22.6	16.3	12.3	12.0	20.0	34.0	48.2
Community, services, amenities	21.7	13.8	19.9	24.0	21.6	24.3	23.4
Housing	15.5	17.5	16.1	14.9	14.8	10.4	21.2
Other	1.7	0.0	1.4	2.9	1.2	3.5	0.7
Reasons Selected Current Location							
Number of Reasons ^b	994	84	207	170	250	154	129
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Work, income, retirement, education	27.6	40.5	38.6	37.1	30.4	9.7	4.7
Family, friends, health	18.4	15.5	15.5	10.0	10.4	29.2	38.8
Community, services, amenities	24.3	20.2	23.7	24.7	24.8	25.3	25.6
Housing	28.2	23.8	22.2	25.9	32.8	32.5	29.5
Other	1.5	0.0	0.0	2.4	1.6	3.2	1.6

^abased on 728 respondents who completed the age question; ^bnumber of reasons exceeds number of respondents because many gave more than one reason to the open-ended question.

location (Figure 9). Family issues dominated (72.2%) the motivations of these movers coming to Iowa from other states (Group E).

Summary

Reasons for moving fall into four main categories: work, family, community, and housing. There were differences in the most important factors cited by the respondents based on their age and the type of move made.

A large proportion of the within-county movers, regardless of age, were making their moves primarily for housing purposes. Work, community, and family issues had varying roles, but housing issues were the most important factors for many of these within-county movers.

On the other hand, the longer distance movers very often listed work considerations as the highest primary motivation for moving, especially among those who moved to or from Iowa. In addition, work factors were generally ranked highest for respondents who were younger than 60.

Community and family factors had varying levels of importance for movers between counties and between states. Finally, the longer the distance of the move, the

less likely that housing played a role in the decision to leave the previous place.

Persons moving out of Iowa were predominantly motivated by work factors, with community issues generally being mentioned second most often. For many of these movers, family factors played little role in their reasons for moving with the exception of the youngest and the oldest groups.

In contrast, respondents coming into Iowa had a pattern of moving decisions that was relatively balanced among the three factors of work, family, and community. The movers entering the state were more likely to note family reasons than those leaving Iowa. Family factors dominated the motivations of movers 70 and older, although community issues were cited as second most important for this age group.

Movers between counties in Iowa, whether into or out of the study counties, provided a pattern of reasons that was relatively balanced among the three factors of work, family, and community. Housing was more important for respondents going between counties than for those going between states. In addition, housing issues played a larger role in the decision of choosing the new location than in the decision to leave the previous place.

Thinking About Next Steps

Young persons did move into these nonmetropolitan locations and our findings show that work factors were key in the moving decisions of the younger residents. This pattern was evident whether the move was in or out to other counties in Iowa or to and from other states. To attract younger residents, communities must have work opportunities available in the area. Without a suitable work situation, younger people will go elsewhere.

Respondents coming into the study counties, whether from other Iowa areas or from other states, frequently had more family-related factors in their decision than those who left. There are people, both younger and older, who live outside the state but with families in Iowa who would like to live closer to them. Communities might consider assisting relatives of current residents who would like to be closer. Family factors increased in importance for the respondents 60 or older and were the most prominent feature for those at least 70. Communities could look at facilitating family unification in innovative ways or assisting middle-aged residents with appropriate housing and activities for their older parents.

Table 4. Most Important Reasons for Leaving Previous Location by Type and Direction of Move and Age.		Type and Direction of Move				
		All Movers ^a	A: Within County, Changed Zipcode	B: Out To Different Iowa County	C: In From Different Iowa County	D: Out To Another State
All Ages						
Number of Reasons ^b	997	115	287	286	166	207
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Work, income, retirement, education	38.5	15.7	45.3	36.0	51.2	36.7
Family, friends, health	22.6	13.9	20.9	23.4	13.9	33.8
Community, services, amenities	21.7	19.1	18.1	21.0	28.9	23.2
Housing	15.5	50.4	13.2	17.1	4.2	5.8
Other	1.7	0.9	2.4	2.4	1.8	0.5
Age 18 - 24						
Number of Reasons ^b	80	6 ^c	35	27	14	4 ^c
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Work, income, retirement, education	52.5	16.7	57.1	51.9	64.3	50.0
Family, friends, health	16.3	33.3	14.3	3.7	28.6	25.0
Community, services, amenities	13.8	16.7	17.1	7.4	7.1	25.0
Housing	17.5	33.3	11.4	37.0	0.0	0.0
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Age 25 - 34						
Number of Reasons ^b	211	29	54	61	40	33
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Work, income, retirement, education	50.2	24.1	53.7	47.5	62.5	60.6
Family, friends, health	12.3	10.3	20.4	9.8	5.0	12.1
Community, services, amenities	19.9	17.2	14.8	18.0	27.5	24.2
Housing	16.1	48.3	11.1	21.3	2.5	3.0
Other	1.4	0.0	0.0	3.3	2.5	0.0
Age 35 - 44						
Number of Reasons ^b	175	23	59	60	29	30
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Work, income, retirement, education	46.3	13.0	55.9	38.3	69.0	46.7
Family, friends, health	12.0	0.0	10.2	18.3	6.9	16.7
Community, services, amenities	24.0	39.1	15.3	26.7	20.7	33.3
Housing	14.9	43.5	16.9	11.7	3.4	3.3
Other	2.9	4.3	1.7	5.0	0.0	0.0
Age 45 - 59						
Number of Reasons ^b	250	27	68	66	44	55
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Work, income, retirement, education	42.4	11.1	50.0	36.4	50.0	50.9
Family, friends, health	20.0	18.5	14.7	27.3	9.1	27.3
Community, services, amenities	21.6	14.8	16.2	18.2	38.6	20.0
Housing	14.8	55.6	16.2	18.2	0.0	1.8
Other	1.2	0.0	2.9	0.0	2.3	0.0
Age 60 - 69						
Number of Reasons ^b	144	10 ^c	38	33	20	49
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Work, income, retirement, education	27.8	30.0	31.6	30.3	40.0	20.4
Family, friends, health	34.0	20.0	31.6	39.4	15.0	38.8
Community, services, amenities	24.3	10.0	18.4	18.2	30.0	30.6
Housing	10.4	40.0	10.5	6.1	10.0	8.2
Other	3.5	0.0	7.9	6.1	5.0	2.0
Age 70 or older						
Number of Reasons ^b	137	20	33	39	19	36
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Work, income, retirement, education	6.6	5.0	6.1	7.7	5.3	5.6
Family, friends, health	48.2	20.0	48.5	46.2	42.1	72.2
Community, services, amenities	23.4	10.0	33.3	33.3	36.8	8.3
Housing	21.2	65.0	9.1	12.8	15.8	13.9
Other	0.7	0.0	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

^abased on 728 respondents who completed the age question; ^bnumber of reasons exceeds number of respondents because many gave more than one reason to the open-ended question; ^ccaution urged with results for this group because fewer than 10 respondents.

New Mover Studies: Reasons for Moving in Nonmetro Iowa

Table 5. Age of Respondent by Type and Direction of Move.

Age Categories	All Movers ^a	Type and Direction of Move				
		A: Within County, Changed Zipcode	B: Out To Different Iowa County	C: In From Different Iowa County	D: Out To Another State	E: In From Another State
Median Age	46.0	45.0	43.0	44.0	41.0	53.5
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
18 – 24	8.8	7.1	12.7	10.2	9.3	2.6
25 – 34	21.6	24.7	21.0	22.0	24.6	15.4
35 – 44	17.7	16.5	21.5	19.0	19.5	14.7
45 – 59	24.3	23.5	20.5	24.4	24.6	28.2
60 – 69	14.3	8.2	14.1	11.7	12.7	21.8
70 or older	13.3	20.0	10.2	12.7	9.3	17.3
Total Number of Respondents	728	85	205	205	118	156
18 – 24	64	6	26	21	11	4
25 – 34	157	21	43	45	29	24
35 – 44	129	14	44	39	23	23
45 – 59	177	20	42	50	29	44
60 – 69	104	7	29	24	15	34
70 or older	97	17	21	26	11	27

^abased on 728 total respondents who completed the age question.

Community factors played a role in the decisions of many respondents, although not necessarily as the single, most important reason for the move. For many of the movers younger than 45, however, community issues were generally more important than family factors. Communities may want to periodically review and assess their amenities and services to think about what might be improved or added to enhance the attractiveness of their community or location.

Housing may not necessarily be the key factor as an initial decision is made to leave a previous location, but housing

factors play a larger role as a new resident decides on a new location and neighborhood in which to settle. Our findings show that housing is a key factor in localized moves and indicates that communities must have housing that residents find pleasing, that meets their needs, and is affordable in order to retain people and families once they have arrived.

Notes

1. The 19 counties were selected based on population, migration patterns shown in Census 2000, and geographic distribution across Iowa.

2. The survey questionnaire is available on the Community Vitality Center web site at: www.cvcia.org.

3. The median age of respondents was 46, but ranged from 41 for those leaving for other states to 53.5 for the respondents who came into Iowa (Table 5).

4. Because three age by mover categories (18 – 24, Within County; 18 – 24, In From Other States; 60 – 69, Within County) have fewer than 10 respondents, the results for those groups must be considered more tentative than the findings for the other groups.

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