



# 14 | COMMUNITY

Photo by: Rachel Hoffmann & Jalin Lutze

# A COMMUNITY PROFILE OF THE GREAT RIVERS REGION

## Introduction

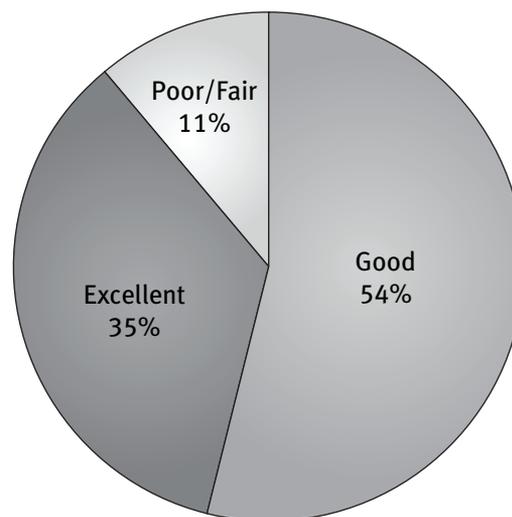
Residents of the Great Rivers Region are fortunate to live in an area with abundant natural resources, including lakes, rivers, wetlands, forests, and scenic bluffs. The region also offers rural areas with year-round recreation opportunities, such as hunting, skiing, fishing, and biking; as well as vibrant urban cities and villages with cultural opportunities, such as theaters, galleries, museums, and arts. Beyond the physical aspects of the area, residents also benefit from a strong sense of community. Cohesiveness, a sense of belonging, and shared ideals build a spirit of community that enhances society as a whole.

This portion of the COMPASS NOW Report offers a snapshot of the Great Rivers Region through a discussion of several factors related to community, the environment, and quality of life. The purpose of this profile is to highlight key indicators and present resident perceptions on a variety of issues facing our community, including the quality of the natural and built environment, public safety, care for vulnerable populations, and opportunities for cultural and leisure activities.

## How do people rate their community as a place to live?

In the COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey, residents of each county were asked to rate their community as a place to live (see **Figure 1**). Overall, 89% of respondents rated their community as good or excellent. La Crosse, Vernon, and Houston Counties rated their community higher than Monroe and Trempealeau respondents. Many factors or community traits can affect how residents rate the overall quality of their community. The quality of the environment, services available to protect or assist citizens in their daily life, feeling safe, having opportunities to be entertained, having a sense of belonging, and knowing that people care for you can all contribute to a higher sense of a quality community.

**Figure 1: The Community as a Place to Live**



Source: COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey

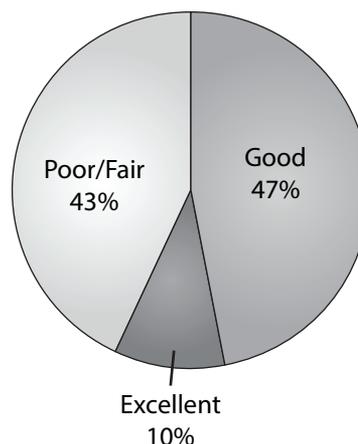
More than two-thirds of respondents rated their community as excellent or good with regard to being a place where all people are treated respectfully, regardless of their race, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, income level or disability. However, just over 43% of respondents rated their community as fair or poor with regards to being a place where people of different cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds were included in decision-making (**Figure 2**). This suggests a need to further address issues of diversity and equality in our communities.

**Figure 2: The Community as a Place that Respects Diversity**

**A Place Where People Are Treated Respectfully**



**A Place Where People of Different Cultural/Racial/Ethnic Backgrounds are Included in Decision-Making**



Source: COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey

## Quality of the Environment

**Clean air** is essential to our health and well-being, and the air we breathe impacts our quality of life. Air quality standards determined by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Minnesota and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) help protect the public from high concentrations of air pollutants that can impact human health. Ozone, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide contaminants are all well within standards in all five counties, and rate as some of the highest quality numbers in Wisconsin and Minnesota. In addition, all counties within the Great Rivers Region had fewer asthma-related ER visits than the state averages.

**Water pollution** degrades surface waters, making them unsafe for drinking, fishing, swimming, and other activities. Water pollution is monitored and controlled by regulating sources that discharge pollutants into waters of the United States. The EPA sets the discharge limits but also delegates regulatory authority to states that can then issue their own permits and set discharge limits that are at least as stringent as the EPAs. Many municipalities in the region are attempting to improve their stormwater runoff quality by implementing best management practices.

**River, lake and stream water quality** can impact the health, recreational interests, tourism, economy, and overall quality of life of an area's residents. States are responsible for listing waters that are impaired, not meeting their designated uses (fishing, swimming) due to pollutants, and submitting the lists to the EPA for review and approval.

All **municipal water systems** in the Great Rivers Region use groundwater as their source. Each municipality provides some level of treatment to the water before it reaches the public for use. Each community must test their drinking water periodically for various parameters, including inorganic minerals, man-made organic compounds, and bacteriological contaminants. Each of these water supply systems must meet EPA and Wisconsin or Minnesota DNR water quality standards. Within the Great Rivers Region, there are 47 municipal water systems that provide drinking water to residents. All 47 municipal water systems use chlorine to keep the water biologically safe throughout the distribution system. Other chemical treatments vary by county or municipality.

Because of the rural nature of the counties located in the Great Rivers Region, many residents rely on **private wells** to provide water for household use. The only way to determine the safety of the water for human or

livestock consumption is to have the water tested by the well user and sent to a certified laboratory in the region for analysis. There are a number of different reasons why private wells may become contaminated or observe changes in water quality. Some are due to natural causes, but many are caused by human activity. Because groundwater is actually precipitation that has infiltrated into the soil and rock, what we do on the land surface can often have a large effect on the quality of our groundwater resource and private wells.

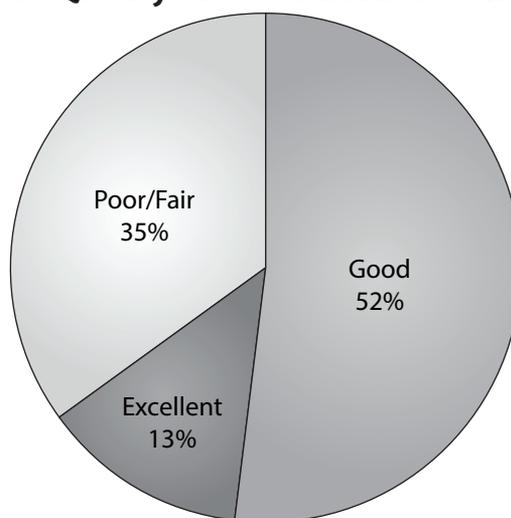
The amount of **waste** a community produces can have a huge impact on the natural environment and the quality of life. Medication disposal is an emerging and complex issue. County health departments, in conjunction with county sheriffs and waste management departments, organize drug round-up days to assist in the collection of unused and expired over-the-counter and prescription drugs. Regulations imposed by the Drug Enforcement Agency limit the collection of controlled substances such as Vicodin, Oxycontin, Ritalin, and Valium, which are often the most dangerous to have in the home. The Heroin Task Force, established in La Crosse County in 2013, put up seven medication drop boxes that have diverted over 1,200 pounds of medications from local waste streams, also preventing these drugs from potential abuse. Between the medication drop boxes and other focused community efforts, there were over 7,000 pounds of prescription medications collected in 2015 alone.

Today's modern landfills are designed with environmental controls and must meet the DNR requirements. La Crosse County has both a waste-to-energy plant and a sanitary landfill. Most waste is taken to Xcel Energy's waste-to-energy plant, where it is burned to create energy. The plant processes more than 100,000 tons of waste per year. In 2013, nearly 57,511 tons – or 35.3% – of materials were separated from the waste stream and beneficially re-used. Large items are taken to the landfill, which spans 25 acres and can hold 1.8 million cubic yards of refuse. Houston County and part of Trempealeau County also use the waste-to-energy plant, and the La Crosse County Landfill. La Crosse County has a Household Hazardous Waste Facility where residents and businesses can take paint, batteries, chemicals, and electronic waste. La Crosse County's landfill receives more waste than any other county in the region, largely because of the industries located in the county, and the greater population. At current disposal rates, the landfill can continue to accept waste for approximately 30 more years.

### How do people rate the quality of the environment?

Respondents of the COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey were asked to rate the quality of water in our rivers and lakes. The results can be found in **Figure 3**. Almost 65% of respondents said the quality of water in lakes and rivers was excellent or good.

**Figure 3: Quality of Water in Rivers and Lakes**



Source: COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey

## Efforts to protect the environment

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Landfill waste is an inefficient use of resources, and since there is no national law that mandates **recycling**, state and local governments often introduce recycling requirements. Problematic recyclable materials include appliances, tires, batteries (lead acid), used oil, oil filters, fluorescent and HID lamps, and antifreeze. Non-problematic recyclable materials include textiles, cardboard, paper, aluminum, glass, plastic, carpet, pallets, latex paint, and organics.

Finding **alternative sources of energy** is a trend that is gaining momentum in the Great Rivers Region. Alternative, sustainable, or renewable energy is defined as generating energy in ways that does not use up natural resources or harm the environment. The most common forms of alternative energy development in our region are solar energy, wind energy, and biogas digestion (the conversion of methane gas into energy). These strategies both protect the environment and cut expenses for municipalities and businesses by becoming less dependent on electricity. The state of Wisconsin has registered and has partially funded over 2,200 projects since 2002 in the areas of biogas, biomass, solar electric, solar hot water, and wind projects.

**Wind turbines** or wind farms are emerging in the Great Rivers Region. Wind passing over a turbine creates rotary motion that turns an electric generator and creates electricity. While wind energy is clean, non-polluting, and non-depletable, the location of turbines requires careful consideration, requiring high open land where the winds are unimpeded by trees and buildings. Zoning and noise are other issues that require consideration. Despite this, in 2010, there were 104 business and residential wind energy projects listed on the Wisconsin's Focus on Energy website, including projects in Monroe and Vernon Counties. Since 2000, utility-scale wind generation in Wisconsin has grown by over 124%.

**Solar energy** is the conversion of light from the sun to electricity using photovoltaic (PV) cells. As light strikes the PV cell, it creates an electrical potential that generates a current of electricity. Even though there are many cloudy days in the upper Midwest, solar energy can still be a viable source of electricity. Wisconsin's Focus on Energy website identified over 1,000 solar electric and 970 solar hot water projects funded in the state over the past eight years. Businesses across the Great Rivers Region, particularly in La Crosse and Vernon Counties, are adding solar panels to building projects to assist in heating water, building or converting the energy into electricity.

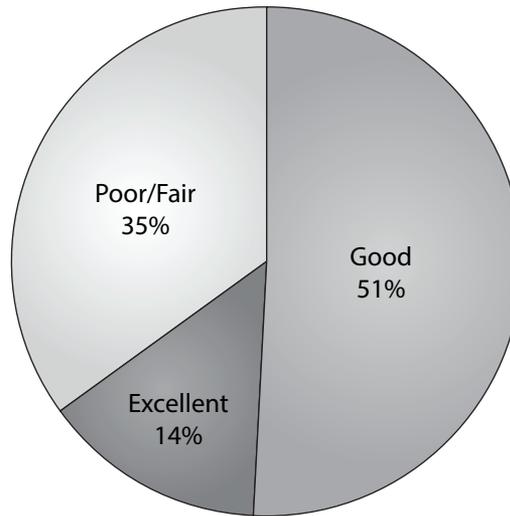
Gundersen Health System began a project in 2009 to convert **waste biogas** from City Brewing Company in La Crosse into electricity. In addition, they partnered with the La Crosse County Landfill on a project that converts waste biogas created from the landfill and turns it into clean electricity that is sent to the power grid. The engine also creates heat used to warm buildings and water on the Onalaska campus, and has made that campus 100% energy independent.

Communities and businesses in the Great Rivers Region are also focused on **energy efficiency**. This would include using the least amount of energy, for example, updating to Energy Star appliances or ensuring that energy is not wasted by poor or outdated construction. Many new buildings in the Great Rivers Region are receiving LEED certification. LEED, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is an internationally recognized green building certification system. "LEED promotes sustainable building and development practices through a suite of rating systems that recognize projects that implement strategies for better environmental and health performance <sup>1</sup>."

## How do people rate the efforts to protect the natural environment?

Respondents of the COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey were asked to rate efforts in our community to protect the environment. The results are shown in **Figure 4**. For the entire region, 65% of community respondents felt their community was doing a good or excellent job in this area, while 63.2% of Trempealeau County respondents rated their county's efforts as fair/poor. La Crosse County respondents rated environmental protection as excellent more often than other counties.

**Figure 4: Efforts to Protect the Environment**



Source: COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey

## The Built Environment

The term **built environment** refers to “the human-made surroundings that provide the setting for human activity, ranging in scale from personal shelter and buildings to neighborhoods and cities that can often include their supporting infrastructure, such as water supply or energy networks<sup>2</sup>.” It is typically those community assets that planning commissions and zoning authorities have concerned themselves with for many years. However, more recent attention is being paid to the built environment, as research shows that it plays a huge role in the overall health and quality of life of the population. Components of built environment include the transportation system, neighborhood and housing developments, roads and bike paths, and availability of healthy food.

**Transportation** planning is assessed and coordinated by Regional Planning Commissions (RPC) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO). Short and long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plans have been developed for areas of the Great Rivers Region<sup>3</sup>. The La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC) has been designated by the governors of Wisconsin and Minnesota as the MPO to perform transportation planning activities for most of La Crosse and Houston Counties.

In 2008, the Mississippi River RPC developed the “Regional Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan<sup>4</sup>.” This plan summarized transportation for La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties. Overall, the Great Rivers Region is served by many forms of transportation. The region, for the most part, is very rural, and providing transportation services to a rural community is challenging and expensive. In the region, few existing services are coordinated across county boundaries. Some informal cooperation between agencies has taken place but with minimal success. The MRRPC transportation plan summarized the largest transportation issues that are needed in the future to meet the increasing transportation needs of the region's population. They identified the following challenges:

- The homeless population is growing and lacks the ability to pay for a transportation pass.
- There is a lack of appropriate reimbursement for transportation to individuals who are on Medical Assistance.
- There is a negative impact of rising fuel costs on taxis and other forms of transportation, all of which become inaccessible for many residents due to the cost.
- There is a need for more wheelchair spaces on mini-buses.
- A more coordinated effort of informing people about transportation services available is needed.
- There are spatial mismatches. Many people, such as retail and warehouse workers, need transportation to and from work during hours when there may be limited services available.
- There is a lack of awareness by the general public and employers of transportation needs for low income individuals.
- Literacy is a problem for some populations that need transportation services.

There are general transportation fixed route services connecting areas of La Crosse, La Crescent and Onalaska. The Onalaska/Holmen/West Salem Public Transit (OHWSPT) is a demand-response, door-to-door public transportation system serving the citizens of the city of Onalaska and the villages of Holmen and West Salem. In 2009, the La Crosse County Aging Unit contracted with a third party to provide shared-ride taxi service to any resident in the town of Holland, the village of Bangor, and the village of Rockland. Find-A-Ride is a grant-funded transportation referral service administered by the La Crosse County Aging Unit. The service currently helps travelers connect to transportation services in La Crosse County, but plans are being made to do the same in Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties in Wisconsin, as well as in the southeast portion of Minnesota and the northeast portion of Iowa. Additional public transit services available in the planning area include Semcac and the “33 Express.” The aging unit provides transportation services to the elderly (60 years and older) and adults with disabilities throughout La Crosse County through the La Crosse County Minibus, and the Volunteer Driver Program (VDP). Several not-for-profit organizations and churches also provide some transportation services for their customers/clients.

According to data from the U.S. Census, the main method of commuting to work is driving a car alone. See **Table 1**. With increasing fuel prices and increased unemployment and poverty, transportation can provide a significant financial challenge. In Spring 2009, *Active Living La Crescent* conducted a survey of La Crescent residents to measure knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to active living and community design<sup>5</sup>. The survey revealed that 39% of the respondents walked or biked for functional purposes, and 3% walked or biked to work. More than half of the respondents stated they would be more active if bike facilities were available.

**Table 1: Means of Transportation to Work (2009-2013)**

	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston
<b>Drove Alone</b>	87%	76%	81%	75.5%	80%
<b>Carpooled</b>	10%	9.5%	8.5%	23.5%	8%
<b>Public</b>	2%	14%	0.5%	0.5%	11%
<b>Other</b>	1%	0.5%	10%	0.5%	1%

Source: U.S. Census, Commuting (Journey to Work) Worker Flows, 2009-2013

**Complete streets** is a policy that divides transportation dollars so that alternative transportation options are represented in any design, reconstruction or improving of roadways. This policy enables access and safety measures for all ages and abilities for all modes of transportation including auto, bicyclists, pedestrians, mass transit, and rail. The movement is an attempt to diversify the dependence of a single-use transportation system. The benefits of a complete streets policy include improved safety, encouragement of walking and bicycling for people of all ages, increased transportation capacity, and improved air quality<sup>6</sup>. A complete streets policy was passed in La Crosse County and several municipalities within the county in 2011. Although Complete Streets is funded in the Wisconsin state budget, there are currently efforts to repeal or de-fund the policy. In 2013, the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin awarded La Crosse Silver-Level designation as a Bicycle Friendly Community (BFC) and named several Bicycle-Friendly Businesses (BFB). La Crosse now has the largest number of BFB's of any city in Wisconsin. The city of Onalaska received a Bronze-Level BFC designation, recognizing its commitment to investing in bicycling promotion, education programs, infrastructure, and pro-bicycling policies.

In addition to transportation and accessibility, the built environment is an important indicator of the **availability of healthy foods**. Farmers markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA) are sources of fresh foods in our community. In recent years, the Cameron Street Farmers Market in the city of La Crosse started accepting debit and Electronic Benefit Transfer cards (EBT), also known as "food stamps," for those enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This is a step forward in making healthy foods more affordable for community members enrolled in the SNAP program by allowing them to purchase local, organic, fresh, and seasonal foods.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported that, in 2010, between 10% and 21% of the Great Rivers Region had low food access. However, this range was still lower than both Wisconsin and Minnesota state averages of 23% and 31%. Research has shown that health is significantly poorer in areas where residents have poor-to-little access to healthy food. **Food deserts** are communities, particularly low-income areas, in which residents do not live in close proximity to affordable and healthy food retailers. Healthy food options in these communities are hard to find or are unaffordable. There are food deserts in urban, rural and tribal communities. Data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's website shows food deserts exist in much of Vernon and Monroe Counties, and in a small area in the city of La Crosse.

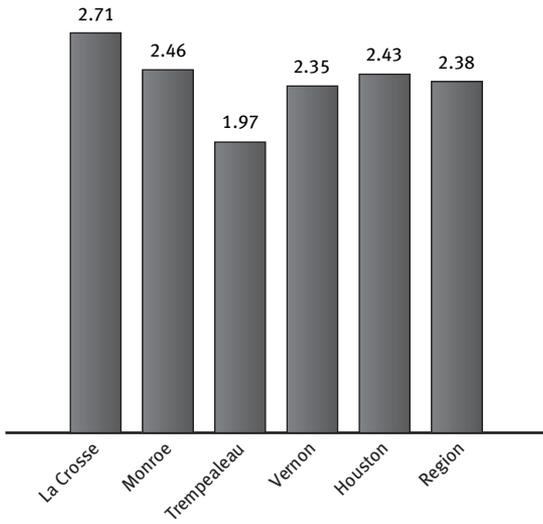
### How do people rate the built environment?

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Respondents of the COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey were asked to rate the quality of several components of the built environment in their community. **Figure 5** shows the average score by county. La Crosse County respondents gave the highest average score of 2.71 out of 4 (with 4 being excellent). Overall, 14.4% of Great Rivers Region respondents rated bike routes as excellent, while 45.7% rated them as fair/poor.

**Figure 5: Availability of Safe Bike Routes to School or Work, Mean Score by County and Overall Region Rating by Percent**

**Safe Bike Routes to School or Work: Median Score**



**Safe Bike Routes to School or Work: Percent of Respondents**



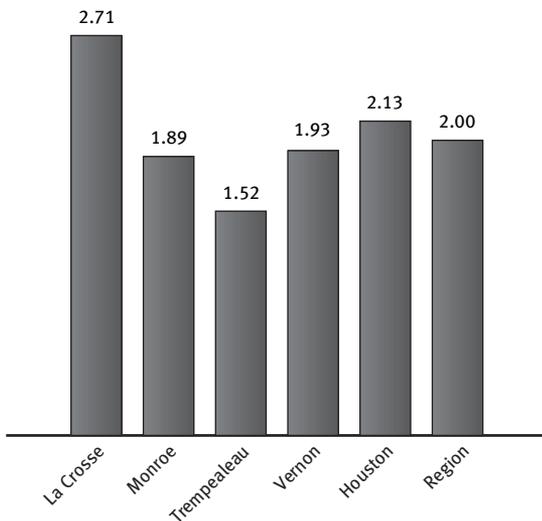
Scale: 1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, 4=Excellent

Source: COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey

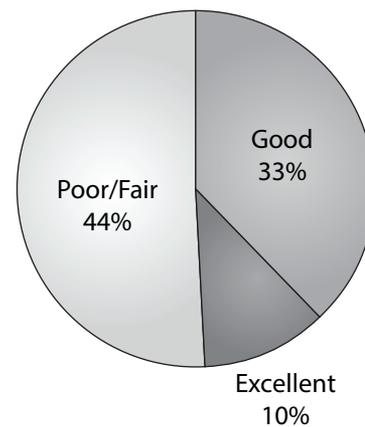
**Figure 6** shows how respondents rated the accessibility of convenient public transportation. La Crosse County respondents scored this the highest, while Trempealeau County rated the accessibility of public transportation lowest, at 1.52 points out of 4. Overall, only 10% of respondents rated this as excellent, while 44% rated public transportation accessibility as fair/poor. This question did not apply to 13% of respondents.

**Figure 6: Accessibility of Convenient Public Transportation, Average Score by County and Overall Region by Percent**

**Accessibility of Convenient Public Transportation: Median Score**



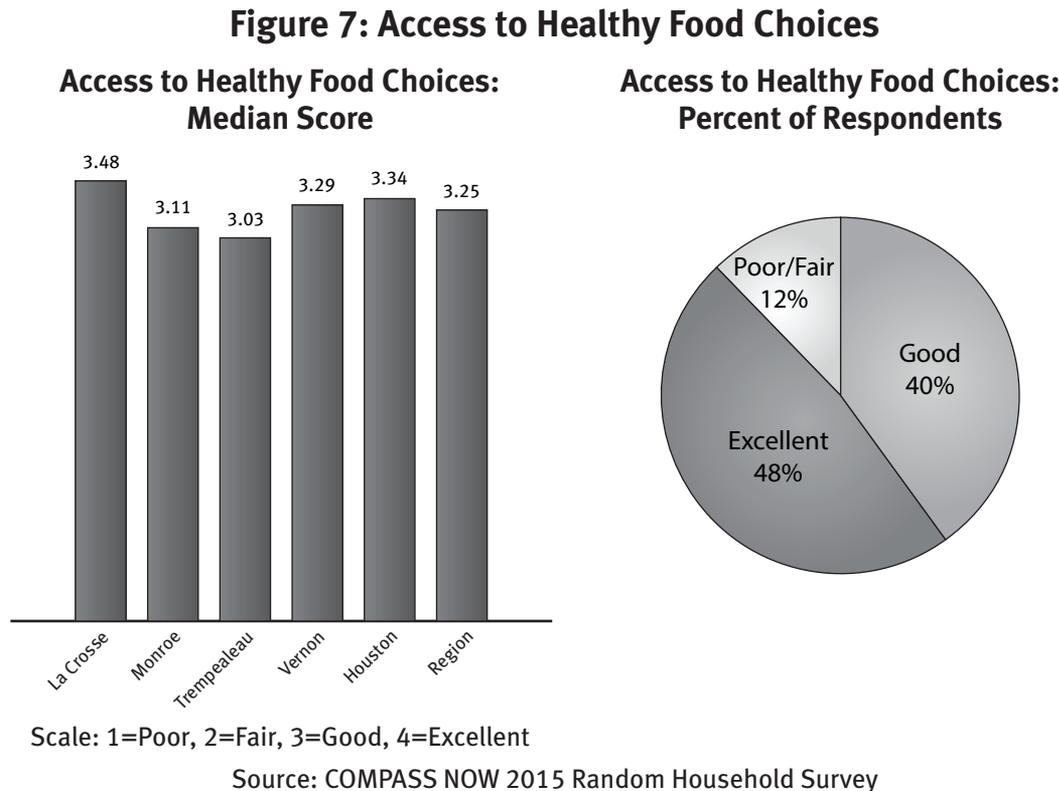
**Accessibility of Public Transportation: Percent of Respondents**



Scale: 1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, 4=Excellent

Source: COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey

**Figure 7** shows how COMPASS NOW 2015 respondents rated their access to healthy food choices. La Crosse County respondents rated this highest on average, with a score of 3.48 points out of 4. In general, 88% of Great Rivers Region respondents rated access to healthy food choices as good or excellent.



### The safety of our communities

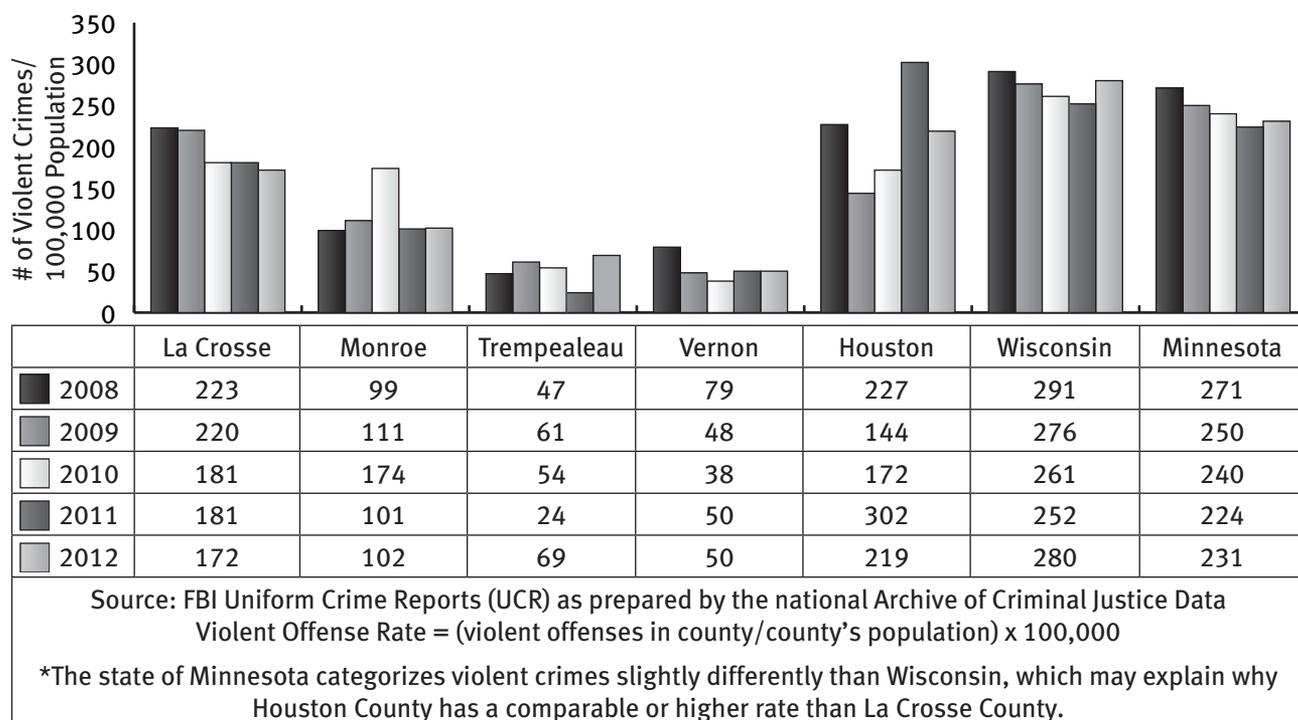
There are several ways to examine the safety of our communities. We can examine property crime rates or person-to-person crime rates. Deterrence to crime based on law enforcement presence is also critical. How safe we feel our community is and how much we trust one another to watch out for each other are also important when considering public safety. **Property crimes**, or property offenses, include burglary, theft, arson, motor vehicle theft, and criminal damage to property. These types of crimes do not involve face-to-face confrontation between a perpetrator and a victim. Crime rate levels are dependent upon the willingness of victims to report crimes and are generally higher in more populated areas. **Table 2** shows the number of property offenses in the Great Rivers Region from 2008 to 2012. Houston County saw the largest decrease from 207 total property offenses in 2008 to only 48 in 2012.

**Table 2: Number of Property Offenses**

Type of Offense and Year	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston
<b>Total Property Crimes</b>					
2008	3,056	955	326	319	207
2009	3,073	599	361	329	187
2010	2,799	1,026	399	256	128
2011	2,880	855	290	313	81
2012	3,181	1,130	298	261	48
<b>Burglary</b>					
2008	462	187	66	72	45
2009	522	82	73	79	53
2010	531	168	102	67	24
2011	552	188	70	100	14
2012	656	175	68	56	12
<b>Theft</b>					
2008	2,462	728	238	217	151
2009	2,430	507	268	236	129
2010	2,157	813	280	173	46
2011	2,225	634	212	202	62
2012	2,449	917	221	194	32
<b>Motor Vehicle Theft</b>					
2008	119	35	22	30	11
2009	108	7	20	11	4
2010	101	40	17	15	58
2011	99	32	8	10	4
2012	73	31	9	10	4
<b>Arson</b>					
2008	13	5	0	0	0
2009	13	3	0	3	1
2010	10	5	0	1	0
2011	4	1	0	1	1
2012	3	7	0	1	0
Source: State of Minnesota Department of Public Safety, Uniform Crime Report from 2009 through 2013; Wisconsin Law Enforcement Network, Crime in Wisconsin Report for years 2008 through 2013					

**Violent crimes** involve face-to-face confrontations between a victim and a perpetrator. Violent crime offenses include murder, non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Violent crimes can be committed with or without the use of a weapon. Similar to property crime, violent crimes are more common in more heavily populated areas, as seen when comparing La Crosse County to the rest of the Great Rivers Region (see **Figure 8**). The state of Minnesota categorizes violent crimes slightly differently from Wisconsin, which helps explain why much smaller Houston County has a comparable or higher violent crime rate than La Crosse County in most years. In general, counties in the Great Rivers Region have lower violent crime rates than both state averages.

**Figure 8: Violent Crime Rates in Great Rivers Region\***



**Sexual assault** takes on many forms, including attacks such as rape or attempted rape, as well as any unwanted sexual contact, or threats. Some types of sexual acts which fall under the category of sexual assault include forced sexual intercourse (rape), sodomy (oral or anal sexual acts), child molestation, incest, fondling and attempted rape. Sexual assault in any form is often a devastating crime. Assaultants can be strangers, acquaintances, friends, or family members. The National Institute of Justice estimates that 40-50% of perpetrators are sexual partners of the victim. Moreover, the *National Crime Victimization Study: 2009-2013 Report*, conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice, reported that 82% of all sexual assaults are conducted by someone the victim knows. Sexual assault is the most under-reported crime in America. Many factors contribute to under-reporting including shame and embarrassment, self-blame, fear of media exposure, fear of further injury or retaliation, and fear of a legal system that often puts the victim's behavior and history on trial. Forcible fondling is consistently the most common offense type. **Table 3** shows the sexual assault rates in Wisconsin between 2006 and 2010.

Year	Rate per 100,000 population	% Change
2006	95.1	N/A
2007	92.5	+2.7%
2008	82.6	-0.7%
2009	82.2	-0.5%
2010	85.9	+4.5%

Source: *Wisconsin Sexual Assaults in Wisconsin Report*, from years 2008 through 2010; 2006 sexual assault rate calculated using population data from 2010 U.S. Census.

**Domestic abuse** is defined by Wisconsin Statutes, s. 968.075, as the intentional infliction of physical pain, injury or illness, intentional impairment of physical condition, sexual assault, or a physical act that causes the other person to reasonably fear that any of these actions will occur. Domestic abuse applies to acts engaged in by an adult person against his or her spouse, former spouse, an adult with whom the person resides or formerly resided, or an adult with whom the person has a child in common. Domestic abuse can include physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence an intimate partner. In 2012, there were 28,729 domestic abuse incidents reported to law enforcement and referred to Wisconsin district attorneys' offices. In 2011, Minnesota District Courts handled 27,288 domestic violence cases.

**Sex offenders** pose an ongoing risk of engaging in sex offenses even after being released from incarceration or commitment. By law, persons convicted of a sex offense have a reduced expectation of privacy because of the public's interest in safety. Sex offender registries publish the residential address of sex offenders under supervision and following the expiration of their sentence<sup>8</sup>. The registries serve as a means of monitoring and tracking the whereabouts of sex offenders in the community. The Wisconsin and Minnesota Department of Corrections maintain sex offender registries. The state of Wisconsin ranks fifth in the country for the highest number of sex offenders per population, while Minnesota has the least number of sex offenders of any state in the nation. **Table 4** shows the number of sex offenders in the Great Rivers Region. La Crosse County has the highest rate of sexual offenders, while Vernon County has the lowest.

County	Number of Registered Sex Offenders	Rate of Sex Offenders per 10,000 Population
La Crosse	279	30.6
Monroe	53	16.1
Trempealeau	27	12.4
Vernon	3	1.4
Houston	9	6.2

Source: Wisconsin Department of Correction, Sex Offenders Registry; Minnesota Department of Corrections, Level 3 Predatory Offenders.  
Rate calculations based on 2010 U.S. Census data.

Rates of traffic crash fatalities for Great Rivers Region residents from 2010-2014 are shown in **Table 5**. A traffic crash involves at least one motor vehicle and results in an injury or death to any person or damage to any property. Road traffic crashes are responsible for more harm than all other forms of transportation combined. Traffic crashes are generally placed into categories such as fatal, injury, and property damage. Traffic crashes are caused by many things, including driver fatigue, driver intoxication, bad weather events, failure of brake or steering systems, slow driver reaction-time, and roadway obstructions. In total, there were 24 traffic crash fatalities in the Great Rivers Region in 2014.

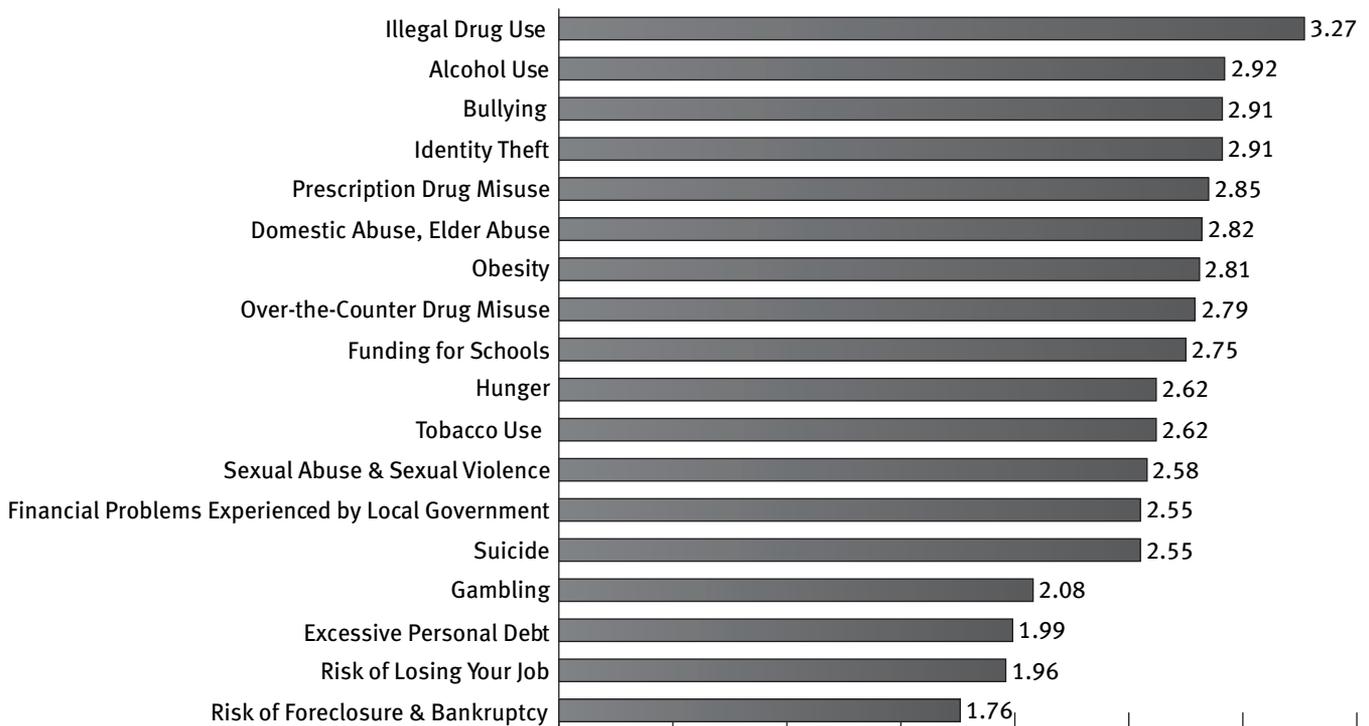
County	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
La Crosse	6	17	9	5	8
Monroe	7	2	4	7	4
Trempealeau	5	7	2	4	7
Vernon	3	7	10	4	5
Houston	1	1	1	2	0

Source: Wisconsin Department of Transportation; Minnesota Department of Safety

### How concerned are residents about safety?

In the COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey, residents were asked to rate a series of 18 concerns in the community. These results are shown in **Figure 9**. Of the concerns related to issues within the Community section, illegal drug use, bullying, prescription drug misuse, over-the-counter drug misuse, and domestic abuse, child abuse, and elder abuse were rated in the top half.

**Figure 9: Rating of Community Concerns**



Scale: No Concern=1; Very Concerned=4

Source: COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey

**Table 6** shows a comparison of issues by county. Illegal drug use is the top rated concern by all counties. Alcohol use is second for La Crosse and Vernon Counties. Houston and Trempealeau Counties ranked identify theft as their second highest concern. Monroe County ranked prescription drug misuse as their second highest concern. The risk of foreclosure or bankruptcy is the lowest rated concern for all counties.

**Table 6: Ranking of Community Concerns by County**

Rank	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston
1	Illegal Drug Use				
2	Alcohol Use	Prescription Drug Misuse	Bullying/Identity Theft*	Alcohol Use	Bullying
3	Prescription Drug Misuse	Alcohol Use	Bullying/Identity Theft*	Obesity	Identity Theft
4	Identity Theft	Identity Theft	Funding for Schools	Identity Theft	Funding for Schools
5	Bullying	Bullying	Obesity	Bullying	Alcohol Use
6	Over-the Counter Drug Misuse	Over-the-Counter Drug Misuse	Alcohol Use	Funding for Schools	Obesity
7	Domestic Abuse, Child Abuse, Elder Abuse				
8	Obesity	Obesity	Suicide	Tobacco Use	Suicide
9	Funding for Schools	Funding for Schools	Tobacco Use	Prescription Drug Misuse	Over-the-Counter Drug Misuse
10	Hunger	Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence	Prescription Drug Misuse	Over-the-Counter Drug Misuse	Tobacco Use
11	Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence	Tobacco Use	Financial Problems Experienced by Local Governments	Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence	Prescription Drug Misuse
12	Suicide	Financial Problems Experienced by Local Governments	Over-the-Counter Drug Misuse	Hunger	Hunger
13	Tobacco Use	Hunger	Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence	Financial Problems Experienced by Local Governments	Financial Problems Experienced by Local Governments
14	Financial Problems Experienced by Local Governments	Suicide	Hunger	Suicide	Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence
15	Gambling	Gambling	Gambling	Gambling	Excessive Personal Debt
16	Risk of Losing Your Job	Excessive Personal Debt	Risk of Losing Your Job	Excessive Personal Debt	Gambling
17	Excessive Personal Debt	Risk of Losing Your Job	Excessive Personal Debt	Risk of Losing Your Job	Risk of Losing Your Job
18	Risk of Foreclosure and Bankruptcy				

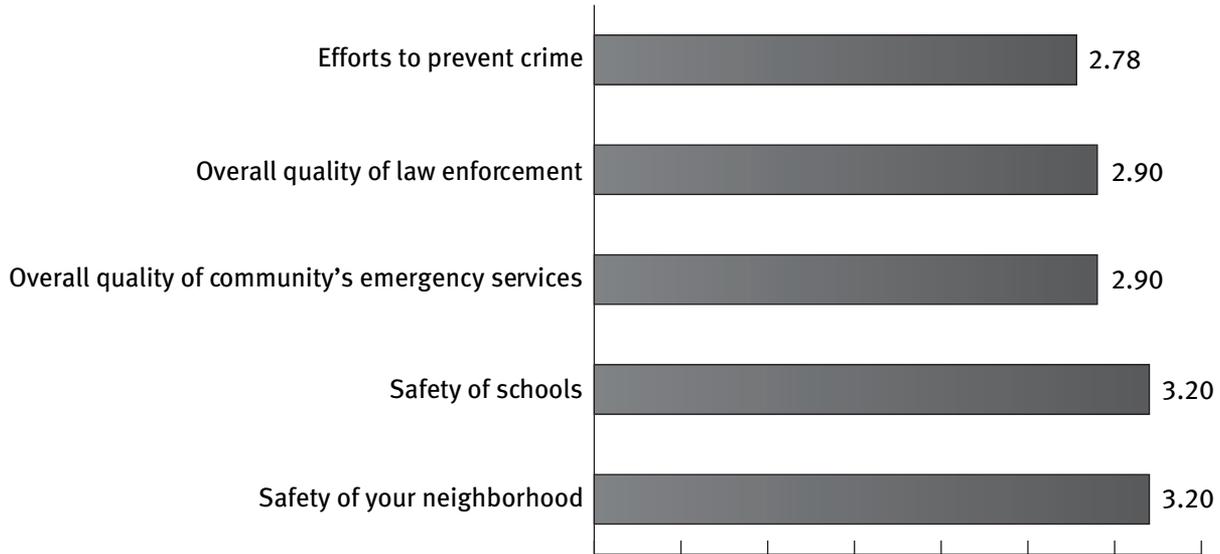
Source: COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey

\*Bullying and Identity Theft scored the same in Trempealeau County responses; therefore, they are listed in both the second and third place ranking.

## How people rate the safety of the community

Respondents of the COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey were asked to rate the safety of their community, including the quality of emergency and law enforcement services, safety of schools and neighborhoods, the community's ability to respond to safety threats, and overall efforts to prevent crime. **Figure 10** shows these details. Both safety of schools and safety of neighborhoods scored the highest. Efforts to prevent crime scored the lowest at 2.78 points out of a possible 4.

**Figure 10: Rating of Quality of Public Safety Concerns**



Scale: No Concern=1; Very Concerned=4

Source: COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey

## Care for Vulnerable Populations

Vulnerable populations include economically disadvantaged, racial and ethnic minorities, the uninsured, low-income children, elderly, and the homeless. A community can be evaluated on how it cares for these vulnerable populations. All people need a place to live and to call home.

A good quality of life depends on a housing supply that meets the demands of an increasing aging population. There are a variety of options for **senior living**. These can include senior apartments, a family household, living alone, and assisted living facilities. Independent living or senior apartments are designed specifically for independent senior adults who want to enjoy a lifestyle filled with recreational, educational, and social activities with other seniors. These facilities are designed for people who can live on their own but want the security and/or convenience of community living. Public housing authorities manage housing options for the elderly, as well for the disabled and low-income families. Limited options for a growing population often lead to housing projects losing their intended purpose. Assisted living facilities can be a freestanding part of a continuing care community that provides independent, assisted and nursing care affiliated with a nursing home. Assisted living facilities are often specialized services brought into independent retirement communities. It is difficult to gauge adequacy of housing opportunities in our communities since the occupancy rates can vary daily for some types of facility.

According the Bureau of Labor Statistics, about 43% of families had children under the age of 18 living with them. Although a variety of **child care** options exist, quality child care that is affordable may be difficult to find. The cost of child care varies depending on the type of child care setting, age, and number of children, and whether the childcare provider is certified, licensed, or unregulated. State government subsidies for

regulated child care may be available for families with a gross income at or less than 185% of the poverty level. Childcare needs become more challenging and more costly for families with multiple children, and during summer months. Part-time child care can sometimes be difficult to find. There was a total of 5,580 licensed childcare slots in the Great Rivers Region in 2014. See **Table 7** for more.

County	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
La Crosse	3,832	4,263	4,317	4,052	4,140
Monroe	649	673	731	642	580
Trempealeau	577	614	552	522	536
Vernon	537	345	356	340	324

Source: KIDSCOUNT Data Center.  
Houston County data was unavailable.

**Table 8** shows details related to the cost of child care in Wisconsin and Minnesota for 2012. Minnesota averages higher child care costs than the state of Wisconsin, most significantly for the cost of infant care.

State	Number of Birth to 4-Year-Olds	Both Parents Working Full Time	Avg. Cost (Center), Infant	Avg. Cost (Center), 4-Year-Old	Avg. Cost (Childcare Center), Infant	Avg. Cost, (Family Childcare Center), 4-Year-Old
Wisconsin	356,267	195,646	\$10,775	\$9,588	\$7,849	\$7,060
Minnesota	5,279,601	210,497	\$13,579	\$10,470	\$7,686	\$6,947

Source: Child Care Aware of America, *Child Care in America, 2012 State Fact Sheets*

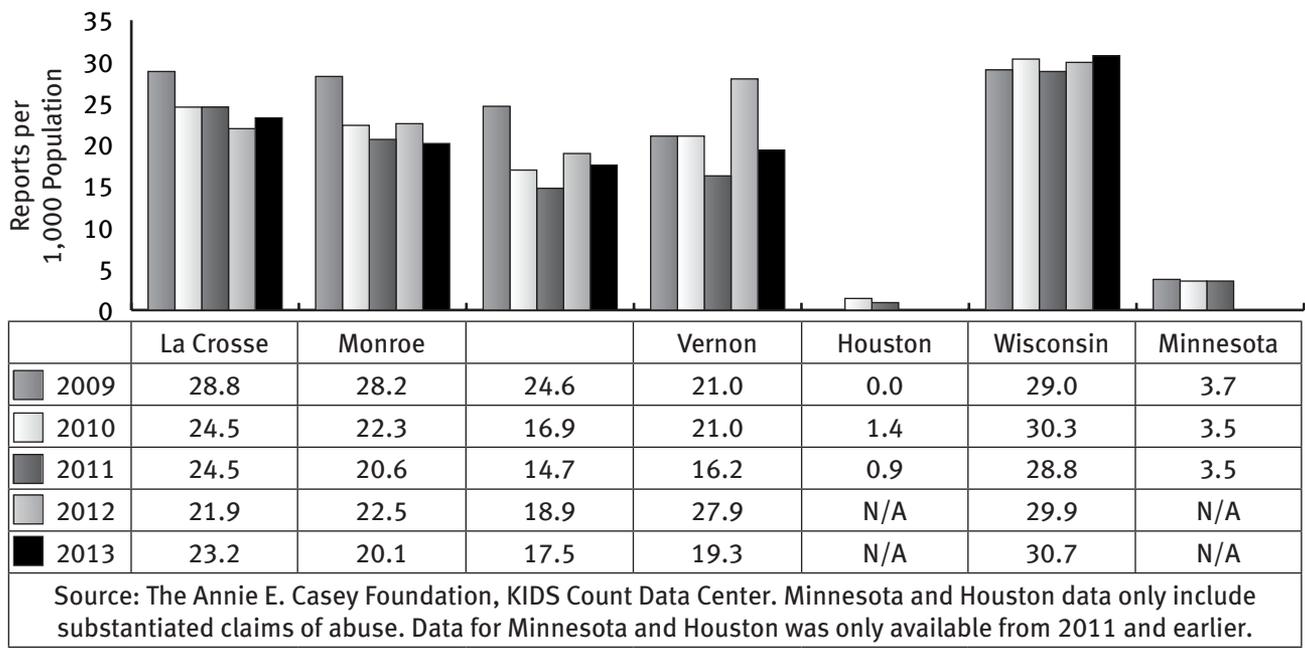
### Abuse of Vulnerable Populations

Wisconsin law defines **elder abuse** as occurring when any person at or above the age of 60 has been subjected to any of the following four categories of abuse: physical abuse, material exploitation, neglect, and self-neglect. The National Center on Elder Abuse had expanded this to include sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and abandonment. Reporting elder abuse is voluntary and not required by medical professionals or other service providers. If an elderly person is legally competent, he or she may refuse an investigation. Shame, fear, and not knowing how to get help may result in an underreporting of elder abuse.

In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) define **child maltreatment** as any act or series of acts of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child. Child abuse can occur in a child's home, or in the organizations, schools or communities the child interacts with. There are four major categories of child abuse: neglect, physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, and child sexual abuse.

The U.S. Administration for Children and Families reported that from 2008 to 2012, overall rates of victimization declined by 4.19%, from 9.5 to 9.2 per 1,000 children in the population. This results in an estimated 30,000 fewer victims in 2012 (686,000) compared with 2008 (716,000). **Figure 11** shows the number of child abuse and neglect reports per 1,000 people for the Great Rivers Region. La Crosse had the highest rates of child abuse and neglect reports; however, they were still lower than the state average.

**Figure 11: Child Abuse and Neglect Reports (Rate per 1,000)**



Child abuse and neglect also make victims more susceptible to negative health outcomes later in life. The **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study** is one of the largest investigations ever conducted that assesses the associations between childhood maltreatment and later-life health and well-being. This study determined that certain negative experiences in childhood, including verbal and sexual abuse, separation or divorce of parents, living with a problem drinker or street drug user, not having enough to eat, and having a family member in prison, were correlated with a higher likelihood of developing negative health problems in adulthood, including alcoholism, depression, illicit drug use, adolescent pregnancy, and early initiation of smoking and sexual activity.

ACEs and their negative health impacts are reflected in many COMPASS NOW indicators such as rates of illegal drug use, domestic violence, and child abuse, as well as rates of chronic disease, obesity, smoking, and unhealthy behaviors. By exploring the root causes of both the ACEs themselves and their associated outcomes, and addressing them as a community, the Great Rivers Region can begin to impact the overall health of the community on a variety of fronts.

**How people rate the care of vulnerable populations**

Respondents of the COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey were asked to rate several items related to the community’s care for vulnerable populations. These items included: a place that meets the needs of elderly, a place that meets the needs of persons with disabilities, availability of quality child care, ability to pay for quality child care, and efforts to prevent abuse or neglect. Overall, residents rated these items very similarly. **Figure 12** offers further details.

**Figure 12: Rating of Community Concerns**



Scale: No Concern=1; Very Concerned=4

Source: COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey

### Opportunities to enhance culture/quality of life

Many of the qualities discussed in this report have an impact on the quality of life for citizens. In order for the community to attract citizens and keep them happy and thriving, it is important that the community offer a variety of cultural opportunities that can enhance quality of life.

In a society where lifelong learning is valued, public **libraries** play an important fundamental role. Public libraries provide educational and cultural opportunities for people of all ages. Libraries provide a variety of activities and a range of reading materials to accommodate diverse learners and learning styles. Libraries play an important role in supporting childhood education through creative and fun summer reading programs for children and young people. Public libraries also offer guidance and training in information search.

Funding for public libraries comes mainly from local, county, state, and federal sources. Adequate funding for public libraries enhances the quality of life in a community and also allows the library to offer programs, services, and updated collections. In challenging economic times, public libraries offer important cost saving services such as free internet and computer access and traditional circulated items such as books, DVDs, videos, and audiocassettes. Library services are difficult to measure, in part, because their benefits are often intangible. The amount of library materials circulated is an indication of utilization but does not fully measure library service usage.

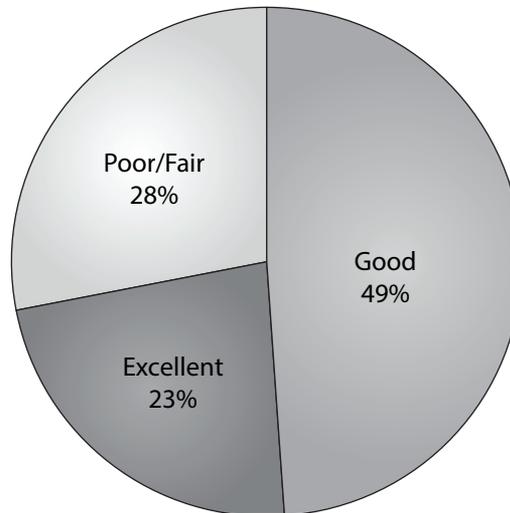
Within the Great Rivers Region there are eight movie **theaters** and nine live theater venues for music, arts, and theater performances. In addition, most school districts have at least one theater performance each year, increasing the number of fine arts available to residents. The newest of these theaters is the Weber Center for Performing Arts, which had its grand opening in January 2013. The Weber Center is a collaborative venue, supporting the missions of La Crosse Community Theatre and Viterbo University. It serves as a performance and administrative center for La Crosse Community Theatre, providing opportunities for creativity and personal growth. It also serves as a performance and learning center expanding and advancing Viterbo's regional and national arts reputation. The American Alliance for Theatre and Education reports that participating in drama activities improves reading comprehension, both verbal and non-verbal, as well as communication skills<sup>9</sup>. Drama participants are also more likely to have higher rates of school attendance and less likely to drop out of school<sup>9</sup>.

## How people rate the quality of leisure time opportunities

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Respondents of the COMPASS NOW Random Household Surveys were asked to rate several items related to the community's perception of leisure time opportunities in the community. **Figure 13** shows how Great Rivers Region respondents answered.

**Figure 13: Availability of Leisure Time Opportunities**



Source: COMPASS NOW 2015 Random Household Survey

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