

Communities Count 2008

Executive Summary

Mission

Communities Count is committed to improving community conditions through information advocacy— providing accurate and timely reports on the conditions that matter to King County families and communities in order to stimulate action.

Purpose

To report on the health and well-being of people and communities in King County, and to identify strengths as well as areas that need attention.

What This Report Offers:

- A set of 38 social, health, environmental and arts indicators for use by city and county government, public agencies, foundations, human service providers, non-profit agencies, community-based organizations, and King County residents, updated every three years.
- Indicators that reflect the valued conditions identified by King County residents.
- Information that is inclusive of the social and geographic diversity of King County.
- A perspective on regional differences and disparities by race, income, education, age and gender.
- An in-depth focus on timely and important issues. Communities Count 2008 takes a look at the trade-offs King County households are making in order to balance affordable housing, transportation and quality of life.

Overview of 2008 Findings

The majority of King County residents reported good quality in many aspects of life. On measures of neighborhood safety, social cohesion, stress and social support, community members were generally positive about their neighborhoods and lives. Some 85% were involved in community organizations and participated in life-enriching activities, and at least three-quarters participated in cultural and artistic activities. Most reported fairly good access to grocery stores, restaurants and entertainment. The County compared favorably to similar areas in the country in terms of employment in the arts and the number of arts and cultural establishments. Most parents reported that they had help with childrearing, read/told stories to their young children on a daily basis, and were able to find quality child care, if needed.

King County is making progress in many areas. The 2008 report finds a decline in the level of food insecurity in the County. High school graduation rates improved slightly in many school districts, and infant mortality continued to decline. Rates of violent crime and auto theft were down and motor vehicle injuries and deaths decreased. Adult smoking rates continued to decline. While far too few people are finding alternatives to driving alone to work, the percent that do drive alone has declined slightly. Water conservation is in evidence, and farmers markets are growing in number and size.

But in basic ways, many challenges still exist. Many families are not earning a living wage and 64% of jobs in King County do not pay a wage that will provide for the basic necessities for a family consisting of two adults and two children with one wage earner. Since the 2000 census, the percent of children living in poverty increased from 10% to over 14%. As of 2007, housing costs continued to rise and fewer families could afford to buy a home. Over one-fourth of County residents experienced discrimination in some form in the past year. More than half of employers did not make either paid sick time or pension plans available to full-time

employees. Rates of domestic violence remained basically unchanged, with just a slight decline in Seattle. Obesity rates nearly doubled in the past decade, and in 2007, over half of King County adults were either overweight or obese, and almost a quarter of young people were overweight or at risk of becoming so. Low-income residents and people of color continued to bear a disproportionate burden of toxic waste sites located in their neighborhoods. Countywide, the health of the environment continued to be threatened as more forested areas gave way to urban sprawl. Recent growth in acres of urban park and open space has declined slightly.

The 38 indicators are grouped into six categories: 1) Basic Needs and Social Well-Being, 2) Positive Development Through Life Stages, 3) Safety and Health, 4) Community Strength, 5) Natural and Built Environment, and 6) Arts and Culture. Differences by income and education levels, race/ethnicity, age, and gender, where these exist, are reported for every indicator. Regional differences were not generally large, although Seattle and South Region compared unfavorably with the rest of the County on many of the safety and health indicators.

Basic Needs and Social Well-Being

These indicators measure how well essential resources are distributed to everyone in the County—food, housing, income, social support, fairness and social acceptance.

- At least half of jobs did not pay a living wage to support a household of more than 1 person. For a family of 4 with one working adult, the living wage income needed for basic necessities in King County was \$49,812 in 2007. In 2007, 9.9% of King County's population lived below the poverty level, up from 8.4% in 1999. Poverty among children increased as well. In 1999, 9.9% of children under age 18 were living in poverty, while that proportion increased to 14.3% in 2007.
- Poverty itself does not tell the full picture. The distribution of income in King County continued to be skewed toward the top 20% of households who received almost 48.9% of all income. African American households earned 51% of what white households earned, and Latino households had incomes about two-thirds that of white households.
- 6.8% of King County adults reported that household food often or sometimes did not last through the month with no money to buy more. Those most likely to not have adequate food were people making less than \$15,000 per year, young adults, African Americans, Latinos and those with less than a high school education. King County food banks served 110,292 households in 2007 and approximately 81,000 children.
- Housing affordability remained out of reach for many people in the County. Low-income households could afford rentals in only a few areas of South County. Home ownership was further out of reach. The cost of a median priced home was more than \$200,000 above what a family could afford with a median income.
- Most adults in the County report that they have someone to turn to for emotional support and essential help if needed. Some groups, though, report less social support—those earning less than \$25,000, people of color, and those not living in a couple relationship. Three-fifths of parents said they were coping very well with childrearing and over 80% had help all or most of the time with these tasks.
- 28% of King County residents reported that they had experienced discrimination within the past year, unchanged in the past 6 years. Those most likely to experience discrimination were younger people, those with less income and people of color. Acts of discrimination were most often based on age, gender, social class and race/ethnicity. The South Region and Seattle reported higher percentages of discrimination. Two-thirds of bias crimes were directed toward individuals on the basis of their race or ethnicity. There were 92 reported hate crimes, down from 100 in 2001 but still higher than 66 hate crimes in 2006.

Positive Development Through Life Stages

These indicators focus on life-long learning and healthy development across the lifecycle and in all aspects of life from work and school to leisure time and time with family and friends.

- Many employers did not offer paid leave for sickness, vacation or holidays, and even fewer—less than half—provided retirement plans. This situation has not changed substantially in the past 6 years.
- 84% of households read or told stories to their young children on a daily basis. Those with a higher educational level and those in a couple relationship were more likely to read to their young children everyday.

- Over half of King County children age 5 and younger were in child care on a regularly scheduled basis and 48% of these were in child care for at least 25 hours a week. Among older children (ages 6 through 14), 20% were in regularly scheduled care. 16% of parents of young children were dissatisfied with their childcare, mostly with quality, location, hours of operation or cost. Full-time infant care consumed up to 23% of median income and preschool care up to 16%.
- Approximately one in four kindergarten children in three King County school districts were not ready for school in at least one of five areas of child development: physical health and well-being, emotional maturity, social competence, language and cognitive development; communication skills and general knowledge. The percentage of children who were prepared varied considerably by neighborhood within the school districts.
- High school graduation rates improved slightly in 12 out of the 19 school districts in King County. 4th grade WASL scores exceeded those statewide, but have not risen in the past 3 years. Districts with scores below the County level were in the South Region and Seattle. Higher percents of white and Asian 10th graders passed the WASL, while low-income students and English language learners were less likely to meet the standard.
- “Protective factors” promote positive development and resilience in youth. Nearly 1 out of 5 students reported 2 or fewer positive factors in their life. 15% reported 10 or more risk factors.
- 84% of King County adults reported that they were very or somewhat active in at least three life-enriching activities. This percentage was higher among those with higher levels of education and income and among people younger than 65 years of age.

Safety and Health

These indicators measure environmental conditions and behaviors that impact health and safety as well as specific health outcomes.

- The majority of King County residents did not worry often about their own safety in their neighborhood, although almost 1 in 5 adults worried about that of their children. Residents in South Region reported significantly more concern about safety than residents of other regions. Those who were older and those with higher education and incomes over \$50,000 reported a greater feeling of safety.
- The overall crime rate in King County decreased significantly from a high of 9,270 per 100,000 in 1987 to 4,820 per 100,000. Both major violent crime and property crime decreased. Motor vehicle thefts, which had not followed this downward trend, declined starting in 2003. Identity theft was an increasing problem and Washington State ranked 9th highest in the nation.
- The rate of major domestic violence crimes has been decreasing in Seattle, but remained unchanged in the other regions. The level of accepted referrals by Child Protective Services was unchanged.
- The decline, since 1990, in hospitalizations and deaths due to motor vehicle crashes, continued for deaths but leveled off for injuries resulting in hospitalization throughout the County, with the exception of East Region which continued to experience a decline in hospitalizations. Men, ages 15-24 and 75 or older, had the highest motor vehicle injury death rates.
- Infant mortality declined to a rate of 4.3 per 1,000 births in the County. The rate was highest in South County, for African Americans and American Indian/Alaska Natives, and in high poverty areas.
- The teen birth rate has declined since 1992, leveling off in 2003. Seattle, North and East Regions have continued to show a decline. Rates declined sharply in high poverty neighborhoods. All racial/ethnic groups have experienced a drop or leveling of teen births, with the exception of Hispanic/Latinas, among whom the rate has risen.
- Overall, the average level of stress reported by King County residents was not especially high. It decreased among residents in East Region. By comparison, residents of Seattle and South Region reported more stress than residents of East Region. Younger adults, people of color, people with a high school education or less, and people who have lower incomes experience more stress than others.
- Abuse of alcohol and use of tobacco remain problems Countywide. Although smoking has declined, tobacco use remains common among younger adults, people of color, adults with lower income and lower educational levels. Males were 3 times more likely to report binge drinking than females. 5% of 8th graders reported smoking cigarettes and 12% reported using alcohol in the last month.

- The proportion of adults who are overweight and obese continued to increase in King County. In 2007, 55.5% of King County adults were overweight or obese, up from 47% in 1997. Just over half of adults met physical activity recommendations, with 16% reporting no leisure-time physical activity in the past month. Among youth, 22% were overweight or at-risk of overweight, and 39% met physical activity recommendations.
- Almost 7% of adults were severely limited in their daily activities due to poor health, increasing from 1998 to 2007. 21% of adults in the County reported a disability due to a lasting physical, emotional or mental problem, with or without accompanying poor health.
- Following a decline from 1993 to 2001, the percentage of King County adults under the age of 65 without health insurance rose to 13%. Uninsured rates were highest in South Region. Younger adults, Hispanic/Latinos, men, those with low income and those with low educational attainment were more likely to be uninsured. Approximately 15,000 children ages 18 or younger were uninsured in 2006.

Community Strength

These indicators reflect factors that contribute to community health such as involvement in neighborhoods and communities and service to others.

- A sense of neighborhood social cohesion among King County residents was fairly high, but varied by population group. People ages 45-64, those with incomes of \$50,000 or more and those in a couple relationship perceived greater social cohesion in their neighborhoods.
- In 2007, 85% of all King County adult residents were active in at least one community organization such as a neighborhood, political, civic, youth, cultural, educational, or religious group. Those who had completed college were more involved than those with a high school education or less.
- The majority of King County public school districts had policies or practices that encourage student participation in community service activities. Nearly half of King County adults performed community service, although people with higher incomes were more likely to have done so.

Natural and Built Environment

These indicators look at the quality of the natural environment and people's access to goods and services, transportation systems, and open spaces for recreation.

- About three-quarters of King County residents were satisfied with their access to grocery stores, restaurants and entertainment. Young people and those with higher education levels were less satisfied.
- 67% of workers drove alone to their jobs, a slight decrease since 1990. There was a marginal increase in the percent that used public transportation, biked or walked to work, or worked at home. Satisfaction with commuting time and access to transit declined since 2004. While traffic delays have decreased since 1999, the cost to the traveler in time and fuel has increased.
- The total amount of toxic chemicals released into the air by major manufacturing facilities in King County decreased by about half from 2000 to 2006. South Region and Seattle had a larger percent of these facilities and a greater proportion of the County's total population. A greater percent of Superfund and hazardous waste sites were located in neighborhoods with higher proportions of low-income residents and people of color.
- Air quality in King County has remained steady since 2001. Ground-level ozone, largely from on-road vehicles, and particulate matter, mainly from wood burning in fireplaces and outdoor yard waste burning, remained a concern and continued to determine the air quality rating in King County.
- Water quantity and quality showed a mixed result. Water contained in snow pack and minimum stream flow showed diminished levels in recent years, and salmon populations are drastically below historical levels. At the same time, retail water consumption declined and water quality in Lake Washington was at a healthy level.
- Impervious surface area increased in King County. In the past 26 years over 1,000 miles of roads were built. Forested land continued to decline as well as forest cover along streams, a critical factor in protecting aquatic life and filtering pollution. The square footage of new homes has begun to decrease, however the amount of urban parks and open space declined slightly.

Arts and Culture

These indicators document opportunities for and level of individual participation in the arts and cultural activities as well as public and private support for these.

- King County residents reported substantial direct participation in artistic, cultural and literary activities. More than three-quarters wrote, read, or participated in a book club, almost half were involved in some sort of art or craft activity, and between one-fourth and one-third made music or danced. Similarly, the majority of residents attended artistic, cultural or literary events.
- In 2007, King County arts and cultural organizations received \$3,405 per 1,000 residents from 4Culture, and \$891 per 1,000 residents from the Washington State Arts Commission. Seattle based organizations received an additional \$3,720 per 1,000 Seattle residents from the Seattle Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs. Arts attendance is another important source of funding; at the same time, even among the largest professional organizations in King County, well over 13% of admissions were free.
- In 2005, 4.8 out of every 1,000 employed persons in King County worked in arts organizations, 3.5 in retail art galleries/dealers, art schools, or book and music stores and 2.6 in video rental stores, movie theaters, or as independent artists. The heaviest concentration of arts employment was in Seattle. The Seattle-Bellevue-Everett Metropolitan District represents more than three-quarters of all arts employment in Washington State (excluding self-employment).

How Do We Respond?

Communities Count provides a way to look at the health, well-being and vitality of King County and where we need to work to insure a good quality of life for all who live here. King County has many strengths and our residents in general experience good health and well-being. But economic shifts are occurring and we now see more residents experiencing poverty. Basic needs like housing and health care are too costly for our neighbors who lose their jobs or whose incomes fail to keep up with the cost of living. These growing gaps make it less likely that we will see progress on many other indicators, especially physical and mental health and children's health and development.

How do we respond? As individuals we need to keep doing the things that work: nurturing and reading to our children, supporting our schools, volunteering with community organizations, eating well and exercising regularly; we can all be more active neighbors and help the children, youth and elders around us; we can rely increasingly on public transportation and sustainable gardening methods and support our library systems, local artists, and the rich array of diverse cultural events.

We face challenges that require collective action and a long view. Businesses and corporations need to step up to help make King County a place where people can balance work, family, friends and community involvement. Local governments need to work together and across jurisdictions to address the policies that affect these issues. Local funders need to use this report to inform their investments.

We, the people of King County, need to participate in the work of our democracy: staying informed, getting involved, and standing up for the things that are important to us. Living wages, affordable housing, access to quality child care and health care are challenges demanding collective action.

We must decide what are the most effective actions and policies to improve health and social well-being for all of our neighbors and communities — and we must take action.

Photo on the opposite page is from Youth in Focus (YIF), a youth development program offering photography classes and service learning opportunities. Through the Freelance Project, YIF's job-training program, students develop photographic and professional skills, and offer low cost services to community organizations.

Summary Table of Social and Health Indicators

2008 Indicators	King County Progress Since Last Report:	King County Trend ^Δ :	Group Comparisons*:						
	Getting Better Getting Worse No Change Undetermined	Increase Decrease No Change Undetermined	★ Significant Differences = No Significant Differences ? Undetermined	Region	Race †	Income	Education	Age	Gender
Basic Needs & Social Well-Being:									
Adequate Food		?	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
Affordable Housing		↑	★	?	★	?	?	?	?
Living Wage Income		↓	★	?	?	?	?	?	?
Income Distribution		↑	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Social Support			=	★	★	=	=	=	=
Freedom from Discrimination: Experience			=	★	★	★	★	★	=
: Hate Crimes			?	★	?	?	?	?	?
Positive Development Through Life Stages:									
Family-Friendly Employment Benefits		?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Parent Involvement in Child's Learning			★	=	★	★	=	=	=
Quality, Affordable Child Care		↓	★	?	?	?	?	?	?
School Readiness			?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Academic Achievement: Assessment			★	?	?	?	?	?	?
: On-Time Graduation		?	★	?	?	?	?	?	?
Risk & Protect Factors in Youth		?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Participation in Life Enriching Activities			=	=	★	★	★	★	=
Safety & Health:									
Perceived Neighborhood Safety		↑	★	=	★	★	★	★	=
Crime: Violent Crime Rate		↓	★	?	?	?	?	?	?
: Murder Rate		↓	★	★	★	=	★	★	★
Violence in the Home: Domestic Violence		↓	★	?	?	?	?	?	?
: CPS Referrals		?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Motor Vehicle Crash: Deaths		↓	★	★	?	?	★	★	★
: Hospitalizations			★	?	?	?	★	★	★
Infant Mortality		↓	★	★	★	?	★	?	?
Teen Births			★	★	★	?	?	?	?
Stress		↓	★	★	★	★	★	★	=
Tobacco and Alcohol: Adult Tobacco Use		↓	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
: Youth Tobacco Use			?	?	?	?	?	?	?
: Adult Binge Drinking			★	★	=	=	★	★	★
: Youth Alcohol Use			?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Physical Activity and Weight: Adult Activity			★	★	★	★	★	★	=
: Adult Overweight		↑	★	★	★	★	★	★	?
Physical Activity and Weight: Youth Activity			★	★	?	?	?	?	?
: Youth Overweight			★	★	?	?	?	?	?
Limitation in Daily Activities		↑	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
Health Insurance Coverage and Access			★	★	★	★	★	★	★

Summary Table of Social and Health Indicators

2008 Indicators	King County Progress Since Last Report:	King County Trend [^] :	Group Comparisons*:						
	Getting Better Getting Worse No Change Undetermined	Increase Decrease No Change Undetermined	★ Significant Differences = No Significant Differences ? Undetermined	Region	Race †	Income	Education	Age	Gender
Community Strength:									
Neighborhood Social Cohesion			★	=	★	=	★	=	
Involvement in Community Organizations			=	=	=	★	=	=	
Community Service			?	?	?	?	?	?	
Natural and Built Environment:									
Ease of Access to Shops & Services		?	=	=	=	★	★	=	
Transportation Choices			★	?	?	?	?	?	
Pollution in Neighborhoods	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	
Air Quality	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	
Water Quality and Quantity	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	
Land Cover			★	?	?	?	?	?	
Farmland			?	?	?	?	?	?	
Arts and Culture:									
Participation in Arts and Culture			★	=	★	★	★	★	
Presence of Arts and Culture	?	?	★	?	?	?	?	?	
Employment in Arts and Culture	?	?	★	?	?	?	?	?	
Funding for Arts and Culture Activities	?	?	★	?	?	?	?	?	

[^] Indicates whether there was a statistically significant increase or decrease in the measure for King County over the most recent years for which data are available. A question mark indicates that testing for trends was not possible.

* Differences are reported as significant (★) if any one group is statistically higher or lower than another. The equal sign indicates that there are no statistically significant differences. A question mark indicates that testing for significant differences was not possible.

† Includes any significant differences by Hispanic ethnicity that were found.

NA = Not applicable.

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