



**Voices of  
Gay, Lesbian,  
Bisexual and Transgender People  
In Worcester County**

*Needs Assessment Report of the  
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Partnership*

**September 2006**

Research conducted by

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The *Voices of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender People in Worcester County* report represents a groundbreaking effort by the Greater Worcester Community Foundation to examine and define the strengths and needs of Worcester County's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) community.

In May 2005 the Foundation received a \$100,000, two-to-one challenge grant from the National Lesbian and Gay Community Funding Partnership. The purpose was to establish a permanent philanthropic resource for the GLBT community in Worcester County so that their needs would be addressed more effectively. The National Funding Partnership was established in 1993 as a collaborative funding initiative between national funders and local community foundations to change the pattern of chronic under-funding of GLBT non-HIV/AIDS programs. The Worcester foundation is the 40<sup>th</sup> community foundation in the country to receive this grant and over 900 grants around the country have already funded programs serving youth, public education projects, anti-violence projects, grassroots organizations, support groups, media, arts and cultural projects, and capacity building at GLBT organizations

The Foundation plans to raise \$200,000 in matching funds over the next two years. A portion of the funding will be designated as the base of an endowment, while the majority of funds will be made available for grants.

A team of consultants, Dr. Judy Freiwirth and Wilbur Herrington, was retained to conduct a needs assessment of the Worcester County's GLBT community; this process is intended to inform both the Foundation's grant-making and fundraising efforts.

To help with the assessment, the Greater Worcester Community Foundation organized two committees: an advisory committee, and a needs assessment committee. Each committee included a diverse group of GLBT community members and allies from Worcester County.

The needs assessment committee contributed to the design of the survey, focus group, and key informant interview design. This committee also assisted with outreach efforts with regard to surveys and focus groups. Going forward, the advisory committee will play a role in the development of review guidelines and the selection of grantees, and assist in fundraising for the GLBT fund.

## **II. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the needs assessment was to gather data from GLBT individuals within Worcester County in order to bring forward the most important issues facing the GLBT community, including service gaps and key political advocacy issues. It was also designed to enable the Foundation to find out more about the community-based organizations and programs that currently serve Worcester County's GLBT population; identifying and prioritizing whatever gaps in services and programs may exist.

It is important to note that although we refer in this document to the GLBT community, the community is not a monolithic one. It includes people of broadly diverse class, racial, and ethnic/racial backgrounds, and differing gender identities. Broadly, the data revealed that the “GLBT community” of Worcester County isn’t necessarily a community in the traditional sense. Rather, it comprises many groups and subgroups, and is largely underground and invisible.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

The needs assessment was conducted from January through April of 2006. It was not intended to provide a complete census of the entire GLBT population of Worcester County. Rather, it was intended to gather a sampling of information from the GLBT community in order to identify broad needs, trends, and the array of opinions that exists in order to assist the Foundation’s in its grant decisions and fundraising efforts. Representational samples are difficult to obtain, as data on sexual orientation and gender identity is not collected in the decennial Census. There is no historical count of the number of GLBT individuals in Worcester County to draw any comparisons. Previous studies regarding the prevalence of homosexuality (not including bisexual or transgender populations) estimate four to ten percent of the overall population<sup>1</sup>. Using this as a basis, there may be approximately 30,000-75,000 lesbian and gay residents of Worcester County.

Five quantitative and qualitative methods were used for data collection:

1. ***A web-based individual survey***  
...completed by 376 individuals from Worcester County.
2. ***Key informant interviews***  
...with 10 individuals who represented some of the growing ethnic and racial communities in Worcester, had a long-term history with the Worcester County GLBT community, and had the ability to provide perspective with regard to broad trends and needs beyond their own personal stories.
3. ***A web-based organizational survey***  
...completed by 58 organizations from all regions within Worcester County. This included 12 GLBT organizations and programs, as well as 46 “GLBT-friendly” organizations.
4. ***Four focus groups***  
...a youth group, a transgender group, a mixed lesbian and gay men’s group, and a self-selected group comprised of needs assessment committee members.

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<sup>1</sup> McWhirter, D., Sanders, S. and Reinishch, J. (eds). (1990) *Homosexuality/Heterosexuality*. The Kinsey Institute Series. New York: Oxford University Press.

## 5. ***A brief environmental scan***

...of the existing GLBT organizations and programs that we could find and quantify.

### **A. Individual Survey**

The individual survey was primarily focused on GLBT individuals, but allies responded as well. For this assessment, we are defining an ally as “someone who does not identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, but personally supports GLBT equal rights and fair treatment.” As it was not possible to have a truly representative sample of the GLBT population in Worcester because of budget limitations, the targeted populations were determined by the feasibility of obtaining a sample and by the selection of subgroups targeted by the Foundation staff and needs assessment committee.

### **B. Outreach and Distribution**

A wide variety of outreach methods were used to obtain the most diverse sample possible, representing different sub-communities of the larger GLBT community and different geographic locations. Special emphasis was given to reaching individuals who may not be “out” or connected to current GLBT-related services or organizations in the County. The Foundation staff coordinated the outreach for all aspects of the assessment.

Outreach strategies included the following:

- Distribution of 1,200 outreach cards at key sites identified by needs assessment committee members. The cards publicized the individual survey and the web site address.
- Distribution of press releases to gay and mainstream media publicizing the assessment and asking GLBT individuals to fill out the survey and participate in focus groups
- Emails to organizations and individuals that are part of the Foundation’s network
- Announcement on the Foundation web site with web link to the survey
- List-serve postings
- Networking by needs assessment committee members
- Distribution by key organizations to their own networks, including their clients, members or constituents

We had intended to translate all written tools into Spanish and consulted with key leaders in the Latino community regarding the most effective outreach methods to the Latino community. The leaders, however, felt that written surveys were generally not an effective tool to use within the Latino community, even if the survey were translated into Spanish. Rather, they recommended we use focus groups as the preferred method.

## **C. Organizational Survey**

In addition to creating a survey for individuals to complete, we were also interested in the perspective of the organizations serving greater Worcester County. This web-based survey focused on key questions from the individual survey (such as their perceptions about key needs of GLBT individuals and advocacy priorities) as well as information about what parts of the GLBT community they serve. Letters with the survey link were emailed out to about 425 organizations, using a list generated by the needs assessment committee, the consultants, and the Foundation staff. The survey information was sent to three categories of organizations:

- a. GLBT-identified organizations,
- b. organizations who have a specific GLBT program, and;
- c. GLBT-friendly organizations who serve GLBT individuals.

Several forms of outreach were coordinated by the Foundation staff to increase the return rate, including reminder emails and targeted personal outreach by Foundation staff and needs assessment committee members.

Fifty-eight surveys were collected and included in the assessment. The groups represented a wide diversity of services and programs, each bringing a unique perspective to the needs assessment/community scan.

## **D. Focus Groups**

Focus groups are conversations allowing participants to discuss topic areas at length. Individuals are prompted to share their experiences and knowledge and hear from others. New ideas are often generated through the process of the group. The primary purpose of conducting focus groups was to complement the quantitative data generated by the individual and organizational surveys.

Through discussion with the needs assessment committee and staff, several different types of focus groups were organized, based on identified target populations. This decision reflected the need to learn about groups that were anticipated to have a smaller level of participation. Some of the areas we inquired about in the focus groups included (but were not limited to): their connection to the GLBT community, degree of openness with sexual orientation or gender identify, experiences with homophobia and discrimination; perceptions about strengths and challenges for the community; unmet needs for services and activities, key advocacy issues, and ways to strengthen the community.

Organizing the focus groups proved to be very challenging. Efforts were made by Foundation staff and committee members to organize additional focus groups, including a men of color, a women of color, and a bisexual group, but the staff and committee members were unable to recruit enough willing participants. In a follow-up interview with Foundation staff they discussed how organizing the focus groups proved to be much

more difficult than they expected. They had relied on the needs assessment committee to use their contacts in the community to assist with recruitment, but it appeared many of the committee members had limited contacts, particularly in communities of color. We also received feedback that potential bisexual participants were uncomfortable participating in a focus group, but seemed more willing to complete the online survey in light of its anonymity.

## **E. Key Informant Interviews**

Key individuals were interviewed in order to provide more in-depth information regarding some of the identified issues and to learn more about issues facing some of the communities of color and transgendered community. The needs assessment committee and Foundation staff identified the key informants for the interviews. Selection was based upon the informant's leadership within the GLBT community and/or the greater Worcester community, or their connections to specific targeted constituencies within the larger GLBT community. Nine individuals participated and included four men, three women, and one transgendered person. Of the nine, one was Latino, and one was Asian-American. The group included individuals who self-identified as either gay, lesbian or transgendered, while some did not self-disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. The group included individuals who were connected to the Central Mass Business Council, the City of Worcester, the media, Greater Boston businesses, the Southeast Asian and Latino GLBT community, and community nonprofits.

## **F. Survey of Organizations and Environmental Scan**

We also conducted limited research to identify the GLBT organizations and GLBT programs in Worcester County. Our scan revealed that Worcester County has very few GLBT organizations and programs.

# **IV. NEEDS ASSESSMENT PARTICIPANTS**

## **A. Individual Survey**

### **a. Age, Race/Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation and Gender**

The ages of the 376 individual survey participants ranged between age 12 and 80. Seventy percent were between the ages of 30 and 60, with fairly even representation among 30-40, 40-50, and 50-60 year-old respondents. Youth (ages 12-24) represented 17% of the individual survey participants.

There was a good balance between those who self-identified as gay (37%) or lesbian (32%), with 13% self-identifying as bisexual. Twelve percent identified as heterosexual, and we assumed that most of them were GLBT allies. Four individuals within the heterosexual group also self-identified as transgender. In addition, there was a good balance between those self-identifying as female (52%) and male (42%), with

almost 6% (20 people) self-identifying as transgender (Table 1). Ten of the women self-identified as gay rather than lesbian.

| <b>Table 1: Individual Survey Respondent Self-identification<br/>N=376</b> |          |   |          |
|--|----------|---|----------|
| <b>Age</b>   | <b>%</b> | <b>Race/Ethnicity</b>                             | <b>%</b> |
| 12-18  | 3 %      | White   | 88 %     |
| 19-24  | 14 %     | Latino  | 4 %      |
| 25-29  | 10 %     | African American/Black                            | 2 %      |
| 30-39  | 19 %     | American Indian                                   | 3 %      |
| 40-49  | 29 %     | Multi-racial                                      | 3 %      |
| 50-59  | 22 %     | Asian-American, Pacific Islander, Southeast Asian | 1 %      |
| 60-69  | 3 %      | Cape Verdean                                      | .3 %     |
| 70-79  | .5 %     | Brazilian   | .3 %     |
| 80+  | .3 %     | Other   | 2 %      |
| <b>Sexual orientation</b>  | <b>%</b> | <b>Gender</b>                                     | <b>%</b> |
| Gay  | 37 %     | Male  | 40 %     |
| Lesbian  | 32 %     | Female  | 52 %     |
| Bisexual   | 13 %     | Transgender: Male to Female                       | 3.3 %    |
| Questioning  | 2 %      | Transgender: Female to Male                       | 2.2 %    |
| Heterosexual   | 12 %     | Other   | 2 %      |
| Other  | 2 %      |   |          |

Although the goal for individual survey respondents of color was much higher than was achieved, the respondent demographics did generally match the racial composition of Worcester County, according to the 2000 Census (Table 2).

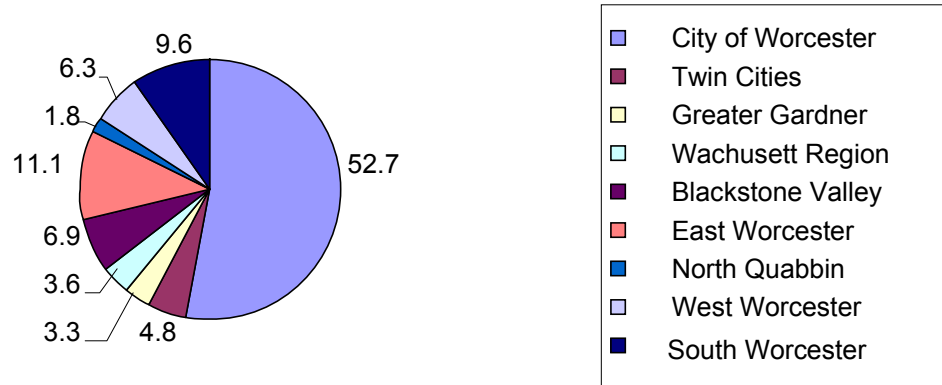
| <b>Table 2: Race and Ethnicity of Individual Respondents</b> |                           |                                     |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Race/Ethnicity</b>  | <b>Worcester County *</b> | <b>Needs Assessment Respondents</b> |
| White  | 89.6 %                    | 88 %                                |
| Latino   | 6.8 %                     | 4 %                                 |
| African American/Black                                       | 2.7 %                     | 2 %                                 |
| American Indian  | .3 %                      | 3 %                                 |
| Multi-racial   | 1.8 %                     | 3 %                                 |
| Asian-American, Pacific Islander, Southeast Asian            | 2.6 %                     | 1 %                                 |

\* Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census.

## b. Geographical Distribution

Individual survey respondents represented each region of Worcester County, with the majority from Worcester (53%), East Worcester/Metro west (11%), and South Worcester County (9%); (Chart 1).

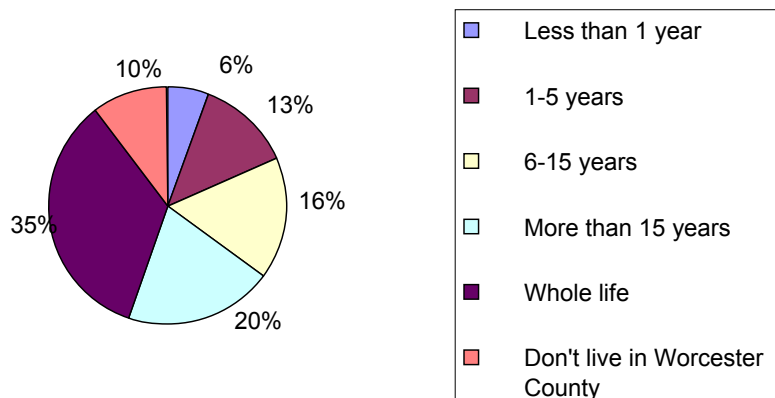
**Chart 1: Respondents Residence by Region**



## c. Living Situation

Most of the 376 survey respondents were long-time residents of Worcester County. More than half (55%) have lived in the County for over 15 years, with a third living in the County for their entire lives. Seventy-three percent currently work or go to school in Worcester County. Respondents reported that the primary reasons that they continue to live in Worcester County were work (62%) and family (53%), followed by community (31%) and school (19%); (Chart 2). Other influencing factors for continuing to live in Worcester included friends and affordable housing.

**Chart 2: Years lived in Worcester County**



#### d. Education

The individuals completing the survey were more likely than the overall County and State population to have a Bachelor's or higher degree. Sixty-six percent of the respondents had a college, Masters, or Doctoral degree; as compared to the 2000 Census, 30% of Worcester County residents and 33% of Massachusetts residents have at least a college degree. (Table 3) It is not known whether this is due to the limited population sampled, sample bias, or if GLBT individuals are on the whole more likely to pursue higher education.

| Education                 | %      |
|---------------------------|--------|
| Less than 12 years        | 1.4 %  |
| High school graduate/GED  | 5.3 %  |
| Tech training/certificate | 1.9 %  |
| Some college              | 23.0 % |
| College graduate          | 33.8 % |
| Masters degree            | 24.1 % |
| Doctoral level            | 8.6 %  |
| Other                     | 1.9 %  |

#### e. Employment and Income

While 70% of the individual survey respondents were employed full time, 11% were working part-time, and 10% were students. With the exception of the \$51,000-\$75,000 income level (which had a higher number of respondents), the household incomes of individual participants were distributed fairly evenly (Table 4).

According to the 2000 census, the median household income in Worcester County was \$47,874 and the state median household income was \$50,502. According to this survey, a little over half of the participants stated that their household income was at \$50,000 or greater, which is reflective of both the County and State median household incomes.

| Household Income | %    |
|------------------|------|
| 1-15,000         | 11 % |
| 16-30,000        | 13 % |
| 31-50,000        | 18 % |
| 51-75,000        | 25 % |
| 76-100,000       | 14 % |
| Over 100,000     | 18 % |

## f. Relationships and Family

Thirty-one percent of the survey participants were married, with 29% in a committed relationship with one partner, and 20% were “decidedly single.” Of those that self-identified as lesbians, 37% were in a committed relationship and 25% were married. Of those that self-identified as gay men, 27% were in a committed relationship, and 27% were married. Twenty-six percent of the gay men reported that they were “decidedly single” in contrast to the 15% of the lesbian group who were “decidedly single.”

Twenty-eight percent of the total survey participants had children; 34% of that group identified as lesbians and 12% identified as gay men. Twenty-one percent of lesbian participants stated that they plan to have or adopt children, while only 14% gay men planned to have or adopt children.

## B. Profile of Participating Organizations

In addition to gathering information from individuals, the assessment sought the perspective of organizations serving GLBT people in the County. Fifty-eight organizations completed the survey. Three GLBT-specific organizations and nine GLBT programs (within larger organizations) were represented. (Note: two surveys were completed for one organization, by both the GLBT program and a representative from the host organization).

### a. Programs and Services

The total participating organizations provide a very diverse array of services and programs: 53% provide educational services, 50% provide human/social services, (53%), and 33 % provide youth support. Table 5 represents the range of programs and services provided by the 58 participating organizations. (Note: only services/activities that are provided by at least 10% of the participating organizations are represented in this table.)

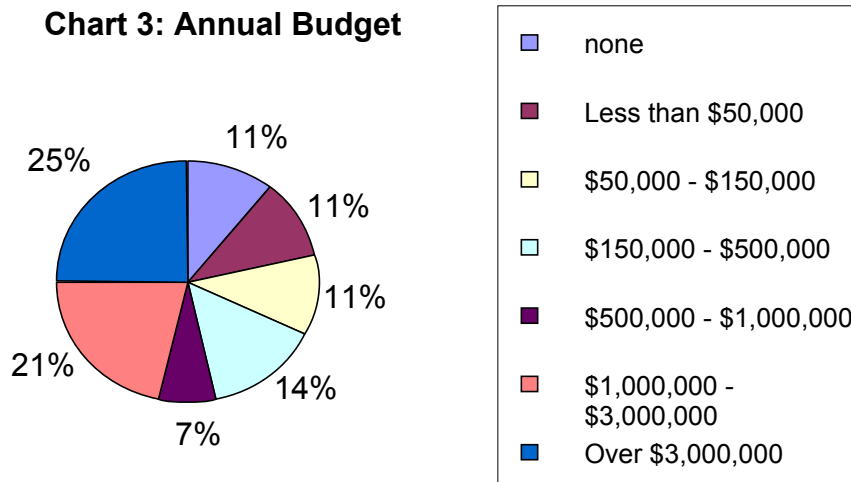
| <b>Programs and services/activities</b> | <b>Percent of Organizations</b> |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Education                               | 53 %                            |
| Human services                          | 50 %                            |
| Youth support                           | 34 %                            |
| Community organizing                    | 22 %                            |
| Recreation                              | 22 %                            |
| Advocacy/human rights/public policy     | 21 %                            |
| Family/parenting /adoption              | 21 %                            |
| Mental health                           | 21 %                            |
| Substance abuse                         | 17 %                            |
| Housing                                 | 17 %                            |
| Self-help                               | 15 %                            |

|                      |      |
|----------------------|------|
| Health care          | 15 % |
| Arts and culture     | 14 % |
| Social or networking | 12 % |
| HIV/AIDS             | 10 % |
| Economic Development | 10 % |
| Legal advocacy       | 10 % |

**b. Budget Size**

Forty-six percent of the responding organizations reported budgets of one million or more, although there was a fairly even spread across the other budget categories, including organizations with no budget. The GLBT groups and programs tended to have smaller budgets, reporting 46% having a budget of less than \$50,000 (Chart 3).

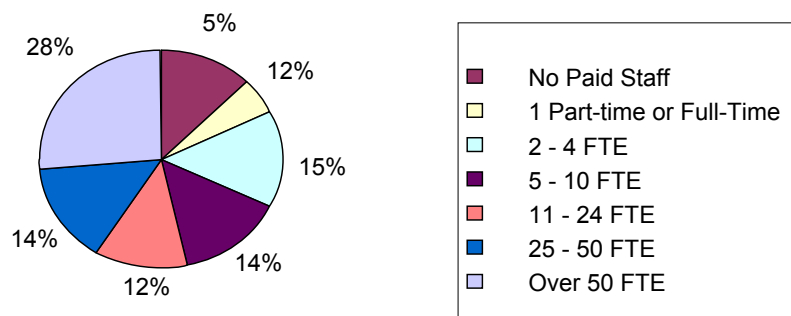
**Chart 3: Annual Budget**



**c. Staff Size**

There was also a fairly representative spread across categories for staff size from nine to 50 staff, with the largest percentage of organizations with staff of over 50 (27%); (Chart 4).

**Chart 4: Staff Size**



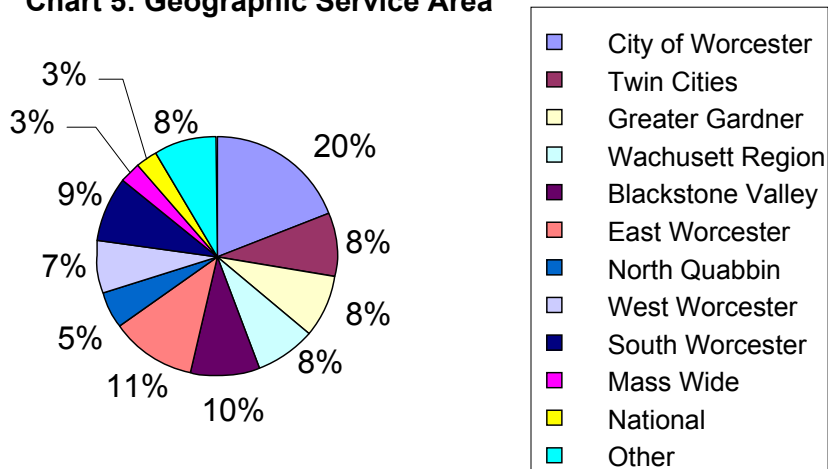
#### d. Longevity of Organization

Seventy-six percent of the total organizations have been in existence for 20 years or more, with only one organization being established within the past five years.

#### e. Organizational Service Areas

All regions were served by the participant organizations, representing a fairly even percent across regions. Fifty-nine percent of the organizational representatives indicated they served the City of Worcester, and 35% indicated they served the East Worcester/Metro West area. The percentage for serving the other regions tended to range from 20% to 29% (Chart 5).

Chart 5: Geographic Service Area



#### f. Collaborations with GLBT Services

Forty-three percent of the organizations stated that they collaborated with GLBT-identified organizations or programs, while 24% indicated they have not collaborated at all with GLBT organizations. It was interesting to note that 23% revealed that they did not know if their organization collaborated with GLBT organizations. The most frequently mentioned GLBT-identified organizations included: Safe Homes, SWAGLY, BAGLY, and AIDS Project Worcester. Of the GLBT organizations and programs, 100% report collaborating with other GLBT organizations. The high percentage (47%) of groups reporting that they did not collaborate with GLBT organizations or didn't know if they did suggests that there is a need to increase the amount of collaboration between GLBT groups and non-GLBT organizations. Such collaborations may increase access and information about services to the GLBT community.

### g. Number of “Out” Staff and Board Members

Thirty-eight percent of the organizations stated that they had one to five “out” GLBT staff members within their organization or program, 23% stated that there were no “out” staff or board members, and 20% stated that they did not know. Thirty percent of the organizations stated that their boards had one to five “out” board members, while 62% indicated either that there were no “out” board members or they did not know (Table 6).

| Number of “Out” Staff or Board | Response Percent for Staff | Response Percent for Board | Response Percent for Volunteers |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Don’t know                     | 20 %                       | 39 %                       | 52 %                            |
| None                           | 23 %                       | 23 %                       | 5 %                             |
| 1-5                            | 38 %                       | 30 %                       | 29 %                            |
| 6-10                           | 7 %                        | 5 %                        | 9 %                             |
| 11-20                          | 5 %                        | 0 %                        | 2 %                             |
| More than 21                   | 7 %                        | 0 %                        | 4 %                             |

### h. Needs Assessments of GLBT constituents

Only four of the total 58 organizations conducted a needs assessment of their GLBT constituents, three of those were GLBT organizations or programs.

### i. Constituents Served by the Participating Organizations

Most of the organizations reported that they did not know who their GLBT constituents were, and how they self-identified. About 45% reported that did not know whether their clients were lesbian or gay. About 65% did not know whether their clients were bisexual or transgendered. About 30% of the organizations estimated that less than 10% of their client base were GLBT individuals. (Table 7) It is unclear why organizations generally did not know the percentage of GLBT clients using their service; it may be due to organizations not being specifically welcoming or sensitive to GLBT clients and their needs.

| Sexual Orientation or Identity | Less than 10% | 10-24% | 25-74% | 75-100% | Don’t Know |
|--------------------------------|---------------|--------|--------|---------|------------|
| <b>Lesbian</b>                 | 30 %          | 14 %   | 9 %    | 2 %     | 45 %       |
| <b>Gay</b>                     | 34 %          | 9 %    | 7 %    | 4 %     | 46 %       |
| <b>Bisexual</b>                | 30 %          | 7 %    | 2 %    | 0 %     | 61 %       |
| <b>Transgendered</b>           | 33 %          | 2 %    | 0 %    | 0 %     | 65 %       |

## C. Profile of GLBT organizations and GLBT programs

Twelve organizations completed this section of the survey (with one organization completing it twice). The following represents responses from the twelve organizations.

### a. GLBT Constituents

Table 8 describes the GLBT organization and program's estimates about their constituents' sexual orientation and identity. For example, 8% of the organizations report that 25% -74% of their constituents self-identify as bisexual.

| Sexual Orientation or Identity | Less than 10% | 10-24% | 25-74% | 75%-100% | Don't Know |
|--------------------------------|---------------|--------|--------|----------|------------|
| Lesbian                        | 23 %          | 15 %   | 38 %   | 8 %      | 15 %       |
| Gay                            | 31 %          | 15 %   | 23 %   | 15 %     | 15 %       |
| Bisexual                       | 54 %          | 23 %   | 8 %    | 0 %      | 15 %       |
| Transgendered                  | 77 %          | 8 %    | 0 %    | 0 %      | 15 %       |

Table 9 represents an additional breakdown of the populations that the GLBT organizations and programs report they are serving.

| Populations                      | # of Organizations Serving Population |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Lesbians                         | 11 %                                  |
| Gay men                          | 10 %                                  |
| Bisexuals                        | 9 %                                   |
| Transgender                      | 8 %                                   |
| Questioning                      | 9 %                                   |
| GLBT youth (up to age 21)        | 6 %                                   |
| GLBT parents/families            | 4 %                                   |
| Older GLBT people (65 and older) | 3 %                                   |
| Low-income                       | 8 %                                   |
| Parents/families of GLBT people  | 3 %                                   |
| Allies                           | 9 %                                   |

### b. Underserved Communities

The GLBT organizations and programs were asked who, within the broader GLBT community, were the most the most underserved communities in their service area. Immigrants and transgendered people were cited as the most underserved, followed by elders, youth, bisexuals and people of color.

### c. Priority Organizational Needs

Nine of the 12 organizations identified fundraising as one of their three priority organization capacity needs. Other needs identified by more than two groups included: marketing/public relations, volunteer development, program planning and development, and membership development.

## **V. KEY FINDINGS AND THEMES**

The following is a summary of some of the key themes that emerged from the composite data.

### **A. Differential Experiences within the GLBT Community**

The data revealed that different sectors of the GLBT community have had a wide range of experiences in Worcester County. Some sectors of the community – particularly people of color, immigrants, working class residents, transgender people, and youth – do not have the same access to information, services, and support as other sectors of the community.

The data also revealed significant variances in the respondents' personal experiences of homophobia and discrimination, often leading to individual reluctance to being “out,” visible, and active in the community.

### **B. Perceived GLBT Community Strengths**

Individual survey participants were asked to identify the GLBT community's strengths. It was significant that individual survey participants, focus groups, and key informants could only identify a few strengths within the community. The most frequently cited strength was that there were open and supportive religious institutions in the County (28%).

Focus group participants and key informants, who were primarily from the city of Worcester, spoke to how they thought that the acceptance of GLBT individuals had improved over the last 10-15 years. Some felt that Worcester was more welcoming, friendlier, and more accepting of different people, compared to other cities such as Boston and Providence. Some believed that with the increasing number of immigrants moving to Worcester has had a positive influence on Worcester becoming more tolerant of differences. One survey participant stated:

*“When I go out, I enjoy seeing a lot of people I know. Have a few drinks, play pool. In Worcester, people are friendlier, it's less shallow: They are glad to see you, say hi. In Boston or Providence that's less likely. Worcester has a lot of potential. But it lacks the structure of a community. We're very diverse, gay Latinos, African - American, Asian, wealthy, less so...”*

Another participant was hopeful in that the GLBT community was now finally talking about the need for more visibility as a community and stated:

*“All of us now talk about the need for more visibility...to come out of the closet as a community.”*

Of the various data sources, the key informants convey the most positive comments about the current GLBT community and its potential for the future, although three of the nine were not able to identify any current strengths. Some of the strengths that were cited include:

- The growing number of openly gay people in the community
- Past efforts to organize around specific advocacy issues, most recently gay marriage
- The city of Worcester’s participation in the gay marriage advocacy efforts
- The emergence of a more successful Gay Pride event—transforming from a parade to an annual block party
- *The Pulse* (a Worcester “lifestyle and entertainment magazine”)
- The inclusion of gay people within the power structure of Worcester

Key informants believed that one of the most significant strengths and one that had potential for growth was an emerging gay business community, specifically the influence of the Central Mass Business Council. It is important to note, however, that the sample of informants was biased toward the Business Council, as three of the nine key informants were actively involved with the Council. They felt that the development of Water Street as a potential “gay area” would provide an opportunity for the community to gather and become more visible.

Other key informants’ comments regarding community strengths include the following:

*“The conservative landscape is changing...Worcester is on the map with same sex marriage issue, as the city clerk offered to provide certificate to out of the state couples.”*

*“Gay pride is now much better –block party and moving from four drag queens marching down Main Street to a block party has greatly improved the image of the community and accessibility.”*

## **C. Perceived Challenges**

### **a. The Perceived Lack of a GLBT Community in Worcester County**

A significant portion of the individual survey participants felt that there was no substantive GLBT community in Worcester. Many called it “invisible.” Some spoke about the divisions between the visible and invisible elements of the community, citing their concern that a significant portion of the Worcester GLBT community was still “closeted,” including many high profile individuals in Worcester. Many participants

commented on the “invisible” nature of the community. Two representative comments about this issue are included below:

*“There are two communities—the visible community and the invisible community...how do you make the invisible visible and meld the two groups?...those that go to gay bars and those that don’t...how do you bridge that gap?”*

*“As far as I know, there is little to know about “the community” in Worcester and I come from another area with a very large and active community, so I know what it looks like. The gay community is invisible here.”*

*“Since we have moved here I have seen very little evidence of community at all. Rage is closed, Worcester Magazine doesn’t seem to cover it, and I don’t see much publicity for gay events (which leads me to think there aren’t many).”*

Others spoke to the fragmented nature of the community. One participant stated:

*“I hate to say it, but I honestly don’t see many or any strengths in the Worcester GLBT community. It appears to be a scattered, fragmented community. I don’t know if this is because people are too closeted in Central Mass or what the deal is, but I have found very little by way of a community.”*

Numerous reasons were offered for the lack of a cohesive and visible community, including concerns about safety, worries about the effects of “coming out” on work and family, the political conservatism within Worcester County, the fact that there is no visible GLBT center within Worcester County, the large number of closeted individuals, significant class and racial segregation, the proximity of vital Boston, Northampton and Providence GLBT communities, and the long-standing isolation of Worcester’s colleges (and thereby the college gay/straight alliances).

The lack of a visible GLBT center or culture was addressed by another participant:

*“Worcester is not a good place for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender people...not that it is intolerant...but there is no gay culture here...there was more to do here in the 70’s and 80’s for gay people...I recommend to the youth that if they can get out of here to go for it...no life for gay people here in Worcester County...”*

Others spoke to Worcester’s relatively small size as both a strength and a challenge. Focus group participants thought that it was more difficult for people who have lived in Worcester County all their lives to come out, as they had so many family members and long-time friends living in the same location. One participant spoke to this issue:

*“While on one hand its [Worcester’s] smallness lends itself to see people you know and feel more friendly, it also makes it more difficult for people to come out.”*

The competing proximity of the Boston and Providence GLBT communities was cited by one participant:

*“We’re so close to Providence and Boston, if it doesn’t have wide mass appeal, it’s difficult to sustain here. Couldn’t keep an art theatre running here or a bookstore. So many other opportunities are so easily accessible [to Worcester].”*

Personal experiences of homophobia, harassment, or discrimination in Worcester County also seemed to be a key factor in preventing a significant portion of the GLBT individuals from being more visible. Almost half of the individual survey participants revealed that they felt that they were made to feel uncomfortable as a result of being a GLBT individual; almost one-third indicated that they had experienced verbal threats or abuse.

It also appears that the lack of an advocacy organization may contribute to the lack of GLBT community visibility from within the community and the general public. For related, additional information pertaining to issues of political advocacy, see the section, “Most Important Political Advocacy Issues.”

## **b. Divisions and Fragmentation within the Community**

Participants appreciated the community’s diversity in both race/ethnicity and class, but also spoke to the significant class differences that they believed were impacting the GLBT community. Focus group participants discussed the GLBT community’s class divisions, indicating that some groups felt uncomfortable spending time with people of a different economic class. Others revealed how people of different classes spent their social time in different venues and institutions, leading to further segregation and division within the community.

One survey participant described some of the divisions this way:

*“Those with means go other places. Travel more to Providence, Boston, and Northampton. Those without, stick around. At the Floating Dance Floor [a monthly women’s dance], there are working class not professionals. Lawyers and real estate agents at Club Car. Rave [gay men’s bar, now known as Blu] doesn’t want women.”*

Still others spoke about how the trend towards adoption and families has unfortunately contributed to the division within the community, that is, between families and those more child-focused, and those that lived single lives.

Focus group comments include the following:

*“It [the GLBT community] is “not as wild as Boston...” and “Boring people who happened to be gay.”*

*“Worcester’s strength is its weakness: our GLBT community is very respectable. Has its strengths but not inclusive. Probably shouldn’t be as respectable. Its face is a middle class, married family with kids. That’s what you see in the paper.”*

The transgendered participants cited specific divisions between the transgendered community and the rest of the gay community. One participant described this division as: *“There is a sort of trans-ghetto and we can’t access the resources...there is transphobia...it has not been eliminated from the greater GLBT community.”*

## **D. Experience as a GLBT Person in Worcester County**

### **a. Safety, Discrimination, and Homophobia**

The needs assessment committee was interested in measuring perceived safety, discrimination, and acceptance of GLBT people in Worcester County. The survey, therefore, asked participants to indicate whether or not they had personally experienced homophobia, harassment, or discrimination in Worcester County over the past two years. From the results of the individual survey, safety issues are clearly an important issue currently facing the GLBT community. Almost half of the participants indicated that they were made to feel uncomfortable as a result of being a GLBT individual, 28% stated that they had experienced a verbal threat or abuse, and 13% were ignored or not served.

Other issues that were identified by at least 25 participants included: receiving hate mail/phone calls, experiencing vandalism/property damage, being excluded from participating in an organization or event, and job loss or loss of a promotion. Thirty-six percent of the individual survey participants stated that they had not experienced any personal discrimination or harassment in Worcester County in the past two years.

Forty-five percent of the participants in the individual survey also indicated that they thought that anti-GLBT violence/hate crimes, advocacy for civil rights, and combating homophobia (43%) were three of the most important issues needing to be addressed by the community at this time. The organizational representatives reflected similar opinions on these issues, identifying anti-GLBT violence/hate crimes (42%); the need for advocacy for civil rights (50%); and the need to combat homophobia in the non-GLBT community (53%) as the most important issues political/advocacy issues to address.

The focus group participants also identified their concerns about personal safety and discrimination issues, particularly the transgendered and youth focus groups. The experience of discrimination was particularly poignant and can best be communicated by the participants themselves. Some representational quotes from two transgendered participants include:

*“...I lost my job...and not able to find a job. My former boss undermines every opportunity...not even temp work. In the gay community, there’s not a lot of tolerance either. Few close friends come to bars and sit with us...there is a lot of ignorance.”*

*“It’s scary...safety is on the line. I walk into a bathroom and I’m petrified to use the men’s room. Passing is scary. When I tried to change my ID at the registry, the lady*

*gave me a hell of a time and the whole place was listening. I could have gotten the crap kicked out of me. Once you pass, it can still be scary.”*

One youth participant stated:

*“I see a lot of discrimination. I was kicked off school wrestling, football, basketball, chorus and band, because I am bi. I used a different locker room, but they were talking about me.”*

Other poignant comments were described by survey participants:

*“I think it's important to note that I was once falsely arrested in a known gay area [in Worcester]...I was punched, screamed at, and humiliated, and hurt very badly by an officer of the law...it was one of the single most upsetting experiences of my adult life in Worcester...the case was subsequently dropped after I retained a good lawyer.”*

*“There is zero tolerance for non-heterosexuals. For a time, there were no doctors in the area willing to take on a trans-sexual patient. The police have advised me to keep a “low profile.” There is some support for teens/adolescents in the academic community, but for adults of my age there is nothing in the general community. The local politicians...are sensitive to their majority constituents (sadly not especially tolerant of gender). The one supportive quasi-religious entity is the Unitarian Church. There is even subtle discrimination among therapists and physicians as to being fully accepting/supportive of TS/TG individuals. Employers are reluctant to hire, citing concerns for employees and/or community welfare. This has been the situation in Gardner/Athol region for nearly two decades.”*

It is important to note, however, that people of color’s experience of discrimination and harassment differed in a number of areas from the total sample of individual participants. For example, the people of color survey participants experienced “being ignored or not served” at a much higher rate (37%) than the full sample at 13%. In addition the people of color group experienced a higher rating for “job loss/loss of promotion” at 21%, while the total sample only indicated at 8%. Moreover, verbal abuse and threats were also experienced at a slightly higher level by the people of color (39%), than the full sample at (28%). The differing experiences are likely more reflective of discrimination due to race or ethnicity rather than to sexual orientation.

## **b. Disclosure of Sexual and Gender Identify - “Being Out”**

In order to measure the climate for GLBT persons in the County, participants were asked how open they were about their sexual orientation and gender identity in different sectors of their lives.

### **Individual survey**

The findings from the individual survey revealed a mixed picture, indicating that some respondents stated that that they were very much “out” to the people in their lives,

and others felt they needed to remain closed, especially with family and work. Generally, participants were most likely to be very open with their GLBT friends (84%) and non-GLBT friends (59%), and least likely to be out at work, especially with their supervisors and supervisees. Forty-four percent of the participants revealed that they were not open or only somewhat open with their co-workers, and 41% were not open or somewhat open with supervisors. Thirty-nine percent revealed that they were not open or only somewhat open with their supervisees.

About 30% were not open at all or only somewhat open to their parents and 25% were not open at all or only somewhat open to their siblings. Forty-three percent were not open or only somewhat open to relatives.

The experiences of men and women regarding openness and experiences of support seemed to be consistent. The high percentage of participants who were not open in work situations, however, represented further data supporting the invisibility of the community.

The participant responses from students indicated a very mixed picture as to how open they were. Of the 119 students, they were fairly evenly divided between those that were open with teachers, counselors and other students, those who were somewhat open and those who were not open at all.

#### **Focus groups and key informants:**

The focus groups and key informants revealed additional personal experiences in coming out, particularly the youth focus group that relayed difficulties in coming out to family

Some of the personal experiences included the following:

*"I got fired from my first job. I had a rainbow sticker on my bag. Someone saw it. A 40 year old at [job location] told me that my sex preference needs to stay out of work and that I don't need to come in. I can't keep a job for a year. There's too much harassment."*

*"I came out at 10 to myself as bi...I told my mom at 13...She started yelling, I never raised you like that. God doesn't appreciate that. She hung up on me. I thought, 'Oh my God, she's not going to accept me.' I was crying... People tried to calm me. She didn't pick up [the phone] for a month. Finally, I talked to her and she said, 'You're still my daughter. I love you, no matter what.' My sister and brother are scared to talk to me and don't come near me when I visit. At the beginning, it was really hard. I haven't seen my mom in a long time."*

Numerous participants spoke about a significant portion of the Worcester GLBT community still being "closeted" and attributed this reluctance to be open to Worcester's conservatism and to the discrimination and homophobia that still exists within the City. Several informants cited the Worcester school system and elected officials as contributing to the continuing experience of discrimination and homophobia within the City. One informant spoke about Worcester's school system being one of the few

systems that refused to participate in the Department of Education's Safe School program for Gay and Lesbian Youth Initiative.

This informant and others described the school system's significant lack of support to GLBT youth or GLBT families.

*"Increasing numbers of GLBT families are finding that dealing with the school system is a challenge...we had an experience with the public schools in which the principal told us that our [child] should lie...and say that she had a mother and father...we have a long way to go with tolerance."*

Others spoke to the invisibility of parts of the community. One participant stated:

*"There's a big closeted community [in Worcester]. A lot of people in Worcester who are queer would rather be dragged down Main Street than dare admit it. They're in denial. It's a township of denial."*

Other informants discussed the numbers of high profile individuals in Worcester who had influence in the City but because they remain closeted and reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation, they have had limited impact in assisting the GLBT community.

### **c. Perceptions of Support and Acceptance**

Since the act of "coming out" does not in itself guarantee support, participants were also asked to indicate how much support they felt from these different groups of people, including family, friends, work or school related contacts. Not surprisingly, the findings indicated that the respondents generally felt the greatest support and acceptance from their friends, with more mixed results regarding family members, with their feeling the more support from siblings (45% a great deal and 25% some support) and only some support (32%) from other family and relatives.

## **E. Key Service Gaps for the GLBT Community**

### **a. Highest Priority Service Needs**

All individual and organizational participants were asked to describe what services were most lacking for the GLBT community in Worcester, and what areas needed the most attention. The three priorities that emerged were the need to:

1. strengthen the organizational capacity of current GLBT organizations,
2. increase support for youth, including safety for GLBT youth in schools, and ensure that parents have appropriate information about GLBT issues, and
3. increase access to GLBT-welcoming health care and other types of service providers.

Individual survey participants identified second priority issues including:

1. increase legal services,
2. provide support and services for elders, and
3. increase access to GLBT-welcoming mental health services.

Table 10 compares the responses about service needs between the individual survey respondents and organizations. The numbers below, represent the percent of individuals and organization respondents who designated a specific service area as three priorities.

| <b>Table 10: Comparison of Individual and Organizational Perceptions about Most Important Service Needs</b> |                              |                                |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>GLBT Services Needs</b>  | <b>Individual Response %</b> | <b>Organization Response %</b> |
| Strengthening current GLBT organizations  | 45 %                         | 30 %                           |
| Youth support   | 36 %                         | 34 %                           |
| Safety for GLBT youth in schools  | 31 %                         | 34 %                           |
| Ensuring parents have information for supporting GLBT youth   | 25 %                         | 24 %                           |
| Increasing access to GLBT-welcoming health care   | 19 %                         | 22 %                           |
| Legal services  | 17 %                         | 10 %                           |
| Support/services for elders   | 16 %                         | 12 %                           |
| Increasing access to GLBT-welcoming mental health services  | 16 %                         | 12 %                           |
| Adoption/foster care for GLBT families  | 12 %                         | 16 %                           |
| HIV/AIDS services   | 11 %                         | 8 %                            |
| Domestic violence & prevention  | 11 %                         | 10 %                           |
| Affordable housing  | 11 %                         | 10 %                           |
| Substance abuse treatment   | 10 %                         | 12 %                           |
| Other   | 11 %                         | 26 %                           |

It is interesting to note that there were no significant differences in the priorities identified by gay men versus lesbians, although the men indicated a somewhat higher priority for HIV/AIDS services and elder services than the women, while the women rated welcoming health care at a slightly higher rate (22%) than the men (14%). Surprisingly, the youth participants rated with issues similarly to the adult respondents. Their responses reflected slightly higher ratings for the need for youth support and welcoming health care, and lower ratings for elder services.

**These high priority areas are described next.**

**Priority 1: Strengthen current GLBT organizations**

We conducted a scan of the existing GLBT organizations and programs, and concluded that Worcester County has very few GLBT organizations and programs. Our scan revealed only seven GLBT organizations, and thirteen gay/straight alliances, including high school and college GLBT student organizations. There are another five

GLBT-specific programs within larger organizations, including two GLBT youth support programs (Safe Homes of Central Massachusetts and the Teen Safety and Support Network), a transgender support group (the New Horizons TRANS Group), and two domestic violence programs for lesbians.<sup>2</sup>

According to survey participants, the existing organizations do not adequately meet the needs of the Worcester County GLBT community. These organizations generally have small budgets and limited organizational capacity, and, although they reach each geographic region of the county, their ability to address community needs is very limited.

The organizations themselves reported that their most significant needs include assistance with fundraising, marketing and public relations, volunteer and member development, and program development. A thorough analysis of these organizations was not within the purview of this needs assessment, but a future comprehensive assessment will be useful to better identify their capabilities and needs.

The data revealed that there are no GLBT political advocacy organizations or networks currently functioning in the county, although some individuals said they connect with Mass Equality (a statewide organization) on gay marriage issues.

### **Priority 2: Increase support services for GLBT youth**

Both the individual and organizational surveys indicated that the greatest service-related needs lie in the area of GLBT youth. Fifty-five percent of the individual respondents indicated that safety issues in schools were the most important service issue for the community, with 44% stating that support for GLBT youth issues was critical.

Thirty-six percent indicated that additional or expanded services for GLBT youth were the highest priority. Although many survey participants recognized that a few organizations in Worcester are indeed providing important services, their very limited capacity was often cited.

The data revealed that the current youth programs are not fully able to address the need for GLBT youth support in Worcester County, and that expanded and new GLBT youth programs are urgently needed.

### **Priority 3: Increase access to GLBT-welcoming health care**

Focus group and key informants identified the lack of access to GLBT-welcoming health care as a critical service gap. When seeking health care services, many

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<sup>2</sup> For the comprehensive list of GLBT organizations found in our scan, see Appendix A. The addendum at the end of the Appendix lists the GLBT businesses and social destinations that we found, as well.

respondents said they had experienced discrimination or a lack of sensitivity related to their sexual orientation and/or sexual identity.

**F. Discrimination and a Lack of Information are Key Barriers When Accessing Services, Resources, and Activities**

**a. Key Barriers**

The data reveals that discrimination and a lack of information are key barriers for GLBT individuals in accessing a variety of services and resources. Seventy-five percent of individual survey participants indicated that they lacked information about where to go to receive services or resources, and about half of the participants reported that the services they needed were not available in Worcester County. About one-third of the participants reported experiencing discrimination - due to their sexual orientation - when seeking services.

**b. How Individuals Access Information about Resources, Services, and Activities**

Individuals cited the four most useful ways were through:

1. GLBT friends and partners
2. The Internet, web sites, email lists, and blogs
3. Gay media and publications
4. Local GLBT organizations

There were important differences between individual responses about how they find out about information/resources/activities and how the organizations reported people find about their services. Individuals report that they receive little information from school, clergy, health care providers, other social service agencies, and counselors. In contrast, over 50% of the organizations thought that their constituents found out services in school (compared to 8% of the individuals); close to 50% of the organizations reported that their constituents received information from other social service and health care providers, and counselors. The contrasting responses between the two groups were particularly striking.

It is important to note that it is unknown whether the organizational responses are based on assumptions and perceptions or on formal data collection. We assume, however, given the general lack of knowledge among most of the organizations about their GLBT constituencies, the responses are based on perceptions. We also assume that the GLBT organizations may lack the capacity to collect this type of data (Table 11).

| <b>Table 11 : How Individuals Find Out About Services, Resources and Activities</b> |                            |                                 |                          |
|---|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Communication Vehicles</b>   | <b>Individual Response</b> | <b>GLBT Organizations &amp;</b> | <b>All Organizations</b> |
|   |                            |                                 |                          |

| Programs                             |      |      |      |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|------|
| GLBT friends/partners                | 73 % | 58 % | 53 % |
| Internet/web sites/blogs/email lists | 46 % | 67 % | 61 % |
| Gay media                            | 39 % | 67 % | 38 % |
| Local GLBT organizations             | 36 % | 50 % | 46 % |
| Clubs/bars                           | 24 % | 33 % | 30 % |
| Clergy/religious institutions        | 10 % | 25 % | 23 % |
| School                               | 8 %  | 58 % | 54 % |
| Social service agency                | 6 %  | 42 % | 39 % |
| Counselors                           | 6 %  | 42 % | 39 % |
| Heterosexual friends                 | 5 %  | 25 % | 23 % |
| Health care providers                | 5 %  | 33 % | 30 % |
| Telephone hotline                    | .3 % | 25 % | 23 % |

**b. Choosing to Go Outside of Worcester for Services**

The data revealed that experiences of discrimination and lack of information have resulted in almost half the survey participants going outside of Worcester for health services, with a majority going to Boston to organizations such as the Fenway Community Health Center, where they said they find services that are:

- not available in Worcester,
- more welcoming and sensitive to them as GLBT individuals, and
- perceived to be of higher quality.

The transgendered focus group spoke to the lack of information and access to services as a primary issue for the community. Eighty-nine percent of the transgendered survey participants (or eight of the nine transgendered respondents to this question) cited not knowing where to go as a key barrier. Almost half of the transgendered participants stated that the service was not available or that they experienced discrimination due to their gender identity.

The primary reasons for participants to seek services outside of Worcester are reflected in Table 11.

| Table 11: Reasons for Outside Worcester for Services |                  |
|--|------------------|
| Reasons  | Response Percent |
| GLBT - welcoming services not available in Worcester | 46 %             |
| Reputation for serving the GLBT community            | 45 %             |
| Quality of services better outside Worcester         | 35 %             |
| Recommendation from another person                   | 33 %             |
| More accessible                                      | 19 %             |
| More confidential outside Worcester                  | 15 %             |
| Cost   | 8 %              |

#### **d. Barriers for GLBT Individuals of Color**

It is important to note that persons of color experienced very different barriers. Fifty percent of the respondents of color cited that cost and long waiting lists were the most significant barriers for them in obtaining services.

#### **e. Influencing Factors for Choosing a Service or Resource**

The individual participants were asked how important specific factors were to them when they chose a specific service or resource. The most important factors were:

1. The quality of services (95%)
2. Assurances of confidentiality (83%)
3. Location and accessibility (77%)
4. The service/resource's reputation for serving the GLBT community (75%)

Participants expressed mixed opinion as to how important it was to them that they are able to choose the sexual orientation or gender identity of the person with whom they interact for services or resources. There was an interesting difference between the opinions of men and women on this issue. Those that identify as lesbians were fairly evenly divided on these issues, with about half stating it was important and about half that it was not important. The gay men, however, felt that the ability to choose the sexual orientation or gender identity of the person who provides services or resources was much less important.

#### **e. Need to Educate Referral Sources**

The data reveals that not only is more widely disseminated information about existing GLBT-friendly and sensitive service providers in Worcester County urgently needed, but increased education and awareness for local providers regarding GLBT health-related issues is especially necessary.

### **G. Key Advocacy Issues Facing GLBT Community**

#### **a. Individual and Organizational Priorities**

Individual and organizational survey participants identified the following issues as the most important issues facing the GLBT community:

- preserving the right for gay couples to marry,
- advocacy for civil rights,
- advocacy for the rights and recognition of GLBT families, and
- homophobia in the non-GLBT community.

Table 12 compares the individual respondents' priorities for political advocacy issues with those of the organizations. It is interesting to note that the individuals indicated a

much higher priority for “preserving the right to marry for GLBT couples” than the organizational representatives, while the organizations selected “combating homophobia” as their number one priority.

| <b>Issue</b>   | <b>Individual Respondents</b> | <b>Organizational Respondents</b> |
|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Preserving the right to marry for GLBT couples             | 66 %                          | 27 %                              |
| Advocating for civil rights                                | 45 %                          | 50 %                              |
| Advocating for the rights and recognition of GLBT families | 44 %                          | 40 %                              |
| Combating homophobia in the non-GLBT community             | 42 %                          | 54 %                              |

### **c. Barriers to Addressing Political/Advocacy Issues**

The lack of a central place or forum for GLBT individuals to come together to discuss needs, advocacy and organizing issues was cited as the key barrier from both individuals and organizations.

The lack of leadership within the GLBT community was the second most important barrier cited by the individuals (50%) and organizations (44%). Other barriers included the lack of GLBT advocacy organizations, a lack of media representation, lack of community organizing skills, and lack of access to information. See Table 13 for the key priorities selected by the survey participants.

The focus group participants cited additional barriers, including Worcester’s conservatism, the large numbers of people who are still closeted, and the segregation in the GLBT community.

Although the 12 GLBT organizations and programs believed that they were addressing some of these priority issues, most assessment participants felt that these efforts were not adequate and specific advocacy organizations were needed.

| <b>Barriers</b>  | <b>Individual Response</b> | <b>Organization Response</b> |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| No central place or forum for GLBT individuals to come together to discuss needs, advocacy and organizing issues | 68 %                       | 56 %                         |
| Lack of GLBT leadership  | 50 %                       | 44 %                         |
| Lack of GLBT advocacy organizations  | 42 %                       | 40 %                         |
| Not enough GLBT representation in the media  | 44 %                       | 31 %                         |
| Lacking community organizing skill for advocacy and mobilization within the community                            | 39 %                       | 17 %                         |
| Lack access to information about these issues  | 34 %                       | 23 %                         |
| Individuals feel helpless in advocating for GLBT rights  | 29 %                       | 17 %                         |
| Lack of an effective statewide GLBT advocacy organization  | 27 %                       | 40 %                         |

#### **d. Challenges with Past Advocacy Initiatives**

The focus groups and key informants were also asked their about perceptions about past successes and challenges with advocacy/community organizing efforts and initiatives within the community. Participants spoke about several advocacy initiatives, and experiences with two organizations – the Greater Equality Network (GWEN) and the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Central Mass both of which initially had strong participation and energy, but faded over time and no longer exist. When asked about reasons for the difficulty in sustaining these initiatives and organizations, a number of reasons were offered. They included the following issues (in no particular order)

- Lack of clear mission and focus
- A lack of effective leadership
- Specific personalities and personality conflicts prevented the organizations from being successful
- Lack of funding
- Lack of organizational infrastructure and/or interest in building an organization
- Lack of organizational and leadership skills
- Ineffective outreach and relationship-building with GLBT communities of color

One key informant described the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Central Massachusetts's challenges this way:

*"It didn't have a good structure. It was one of those groups that wanted to reach for the stars, but didn't have a good stairs (sic) to get to it."*

The recent gay marriage initiative was viewed more positively, although it was not able to sustain itself. One focus group participant described it as follows:

*"A large diverse community came out over equal marriage. They had a rallying cry and leadership from various sub-communities. It's disintegrated into email lists".*

Another participant described his experiences with past advocacy efforts:

*"The history of [GLBT advocacy initiatives in] Worcester is that you get a group together with a lot of momentum. Over 15 years...lots have come and gone. They [initiatives] get started, then there's infighting, backlash. They're not inclusive enough [usually only one person of color at the meetings]. With the gay marriage issue, it gained momentum. Nobody wants to take leadership, and when someone does, people don't like it. There are issues with the person, methods, with GWEN, the board. Lots of nitpicking and it falls apart."*

Still another participant spoke about internalized homophobia being a critical factor in the lack of success and sustainability of some of the previous advocacy initiatives.

*“I think there was some internalized homophobia in some of the coalition work...They would say, ‘let’s not do things that are gay’ or take a compromise position rather than saying, ‘this is what I need.’”*

## **H. Need for GLBT Advocacy Organizations; Leadership; and Organizing Skills**

The data reveals a critical need for effective and sustained GLBT advocacy organizations with effective leadership and early inclusion of people of color. The lack of advocacy organizations and effective leadership in Worcester County was seen as a barrier to successfully addressing political advocacy issues

The data also reveals that renewed energy could be mobilized with regard to marital rights for gay couples either through a local chapter of a statewide organization, or a to-be-created Worcester County-based organization. Some respondents, however, think that too much emphasis and funding is being directed to the issue of marital rights for gay couples, while other issues of civil rights, discrimination, and homophobia are being ignored.

Participants spoke to the need for adequate funding and staffing, inclusiveness of people of color into the leadership structures from the very beginning, and effective organizational structures and processes for any new initiatives. The data also indicated that community organizing skills were also urgently needed within the community in order to build and sustain a more effective organizational structure and process going forward.

The data suggests that a Worcester County organization having a focused but broader agenda than gay marriage could be developed. Such an organization could address the multiple civil rights and other political advocacy issues facing Worcester County’s GLBT community.

In order not to replicate past missteps, the organizational infrastructure and process would need to be inclusive of all sectors of the community from the very beginning, and would require thoughtful design, diverse and effective leadership and leadership development, and adequate funding to sustain its success.

In addition, some respondents spoke to the need for developing one-to-one relationships with GLBT individuals of color and immigrants, and for developing closer ties with the more “closeted” sectors of the community prior to convening the first meeting of such an organization.

The findings also suggest that there is an urgent need for some successful organizing efforts, to both combat the sense of helplessness (and pessimism about the possibilities for change in these issues. In addition, the data reveals that providing opportunities to learn effective organizing and leadership skills will be critical for the community’s future advocacy efforts.

Lessons learned from previous community organizing initiatives would include (but not be limited to) the need to:

- build close relationships with diverse class and race/ethnic sectors of the GLBT community, particularly with GLBT communities of color
- include these sectors at the very earliest stages of planning,
- build a very broad and inclusive coalition with new leadership at the early planning stages,
- form solid relationships with community leaders to support key initiatives, and
- plan for adequate funding, organizational infrastructure, and staffing for the planning stages, as well as for sustaining the center.

## **I. Need for a GLBT Community Center**

The data shows that significant need exists for a central place where the GLBT community can come together for both political advocacy organizing, cultural events, and for social and recreational activities. The lack of such a center was identified as a barrier to real community-building. Participants stated that a GLBT community center would not only bring the community together, but also raise its overall visibility both within and outside the community.

Fifty-eight percent of the total individual survey and 60% of the GLBT participants expressed interest in the formation of such a center. All sectors of the GLBT participants rated their interest in a community center as very high. Focus group and key informants spoke to how a community center would help raise the visibility of the community and help build a sense of community. Seventy-five percent of the GLBT organizations programs and 47% of all the organizations also through a center was one of the most important resources to consider

Numerous visions of such a center emerged, but most participants envisioned it as a place that would attract a broad spectrum of community members, have a multi-generational focus, provide youth support, serve as a meeting place for GLBT organizing and advocacy initiatives, and promote cultural activities and events.

Others spoke about the need to organize such a Center in a new and different way from the very earliest stages—not just to call a meeting of the usual people, but carefully include people from other parts of the community at the very beginning of the early planning. They spoke about the importance of using a variety of approaches to be inclusive, and to make sure people of color, GLBT immigrants, and those from divergent classes are included in the early planning discussions from the beginning. Still others focused on the need to do outreach in very different ways than in previous initiatives, such as building one-to-one relationships with parts of the community that have been less visible.

One participant spoke to the importance of who is in the leadership, who is involved from the beginning of the project, and who eventually gets hired to run such a center.

One participant described an alternative way to approach the organizing of such a Center as:

*“We need to build long range relationships with closeted minority communities. The same outreach doesn’t work. It takes layers to find these people. They don’t visit the regular venues...We need to hire people who represent those we serve, African-American, Latino...so they don’t just see one color but a variety.”*

## **J. Need for Cultural, Social, and Recreational Events and Activities for the GLBT Community**

Seventy percent of the GLBT survey participants cited the need for increased social and cultural events/activities for the GLBT that do not revolve around the bars in the city. Again, as with services, participants discussed the lack of places that the community can go for cultural and social activities in which they can feel safe and comfortable. Such activities or places where individuals can meet can contribute to building a sense of community and pride, and ultimately provide more visibility for the community. Activities and events could be hosted at a GLBT community center, and in designated areas throughout the county

The focus groups and key informant interviews focused much more on the need for social and cultural activities for the community than the individual survey. It may be that the focus groups self-selected for folks who were more visible and “out” in the community and may experience different priorities. Respondents go outside of Worcester primarily for social activities (79%), recreation (65%), cultural activities (55%), and a sense of connectiveness to the GLBT community (48%). A smaller but still significant percent go outside of Worcester for community advocacy meetings, events or actions (33%).

Forty-seven percent and 33% of the GLBT groups expressed interest in a GLBT professional network. Thirty-nine percent of the individuals and 75% of the GLBT organizations/programs expressed interest in GLBT educational forums.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

The gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities in Worcester County are grappling with questions of how to best address unmet needs, inclusion and division, invisibility, and political advocacy strategy.

The challenges ahead for the GLBT community involve not only planning how to best meet the key needs of the community, but also how to be inclusive of the many diverse voices and groups within the community. Our hope is that this information will not only be useful to the Foundation in its decision-making about funding these needs, but will provide critical information for the GLBT community itself and will aid in the empowerment of the community to successfully address these issues.

## Appendix A

### Worcester County GLBT Organizations

The following is a result of an organizational scan of GLBT-identified organizations and programs located in Worcester County. **Please note** that this is an abbreviated list.

#### GLBT organizations

1. Greater Worcester PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of GLBT Community)
2. Worcester Pride Association
3. The Floating Dance Floor - monthly women's dance
4. Central Mass Business Council - a group of business professionals with the goal of promoting their business as equality-based to the GLBT community

#### GLBT youth and student organizations

1. SWAGLY (Supporters of Worcester Area Gay and Lesbian youth) - a small youth support group
2. AAGLY (Athol Alliance of Gay and Lesbian Youth) - a small youth support group
3. Montachusett Alliance of Gay and Lesbian Youth - Leominster
4. Numerous gay-straight alliances (GSA) at colleges and some high schools
  - 1) Clark University GLBT Alliance
  - 2) Clark University-BILAGA - bisexual and lesbian
  - 3) Worcester State College
  - 4) Allies Assumption
  - 5) Allies - College of the Holy Cross
  - 6) "1 in 10 Friends" - Fitchburg State College
  - 7) Spectrum Club - Mt. Wachusett Community College
  - 8) Gay/Straight Alliance of Becker College
  - 9) UMass Medical, GLBT subcommittee
  - 10) Worcester Polytechnic Institute
  - 11) Bancroft School
  - 12) GSA Auburn High School
  - 13) Worcester Academy

#### GLBT programs within a larger organization

1. New Horizons Trans Group – transgender support group through AIDS Project Worcester
2. Safe Homes of Central Massachusetts -- a drop-in support program for GLBT youth age 14-23, a program of The Bridge of Central Massachusetts
3. Teen Safety and Support Network – a GLBT youth support program up to age 21, a program of Community Healthlink
4. Domestic violence services for lesbians, program of New England Learning Center for Women in Transition (NELCWIT) for the North Quabbin region

#### GLBT faith-based programs we heard about

1. GLBT Episcopal Alliance, Worcester
2. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance, St. Camilus Church, Fitchburg

#### Worcester GLBT businesses/social

1. Club Car Bar and Grille
2. BLU Ultralounge and Nightclub
3. S.P.Q.R.
4. American Bistro
5. MB Lounge

#### Allied groups

1. Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry

## Appendix B- Press Releases

**For Immediate Release:** February 24, 2006  
Greater Worcester Community Foundation  
(508) 755-0980  
[www.greaterworchester.org](http://www.greaterworchester.org)

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### **Greater Worcester Community Foundation Conducts Needs Assessment on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Issues**

**(Worcester, MA)** – Greater Worcester Community Foundation announces a groundbreaking effort to research the strengths and needs of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) community in Worcester County. The needs assessment will offer, for the first time, a real sense of the GLBT community in Worcester and is a critical component for future fundraising and grantmaking. Until March 17, 2006, GLBT members of the community are asked to fill-in an online survey to provide this very necessary information. Please visit [www.greaterworchester.org](http://www.greaterworchester.org) for more information.

This needs assessment is one component of a larger initiative at the Greater Worcester Community Foundation. The Foundation recently received a two-year \$100,000 challenge grant from Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues to begin building a permanent philanthropic resource for the GLBT community in Worcester County. Greater Worcester Community Foundation is the 40<sup>th</sup> community foundation in the country to receive this grant.

The award requires the Greater Worcester Community Foundation to secure \$200,000 in contributions in order to receive the \$100,000. The majority of funds must be used in creating an outright grant program, while up to 25% will establish a permanent endowment fund to address Greater Worcester GLBT needs for perpetuity.

“We are truly excited about this grant and the opportunities it will provide for furthering our mission of building healthy and vibrant communities in the greater Worcester area,” said Ann T. Lisi, executive director of Greater Worcester Community Foundation. “Our work is cut out for us and we still have much to do as we begin to raise the additional funds needed to secure this grant, but we are confident that with the community’s support, we will be able to achieve significant accomplishments in supporting the GLBT community in ways which will be identified in the needs assessment.”

Since 1994, Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues has worked with 39 community foundations to award nearly 900 grants for a broad range of programs and purposes including programs serving youth, public education projects, anti-violence projects, grassroots organizations, support groups, media, arts and cultural projects, and for infrastructure and capacity building at GLBT organizations.

The Greater Worcester Community Foundation is a grant maker, a resource for philanthropy and a community builder. It is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1975 by local citizens who envisioned a coordinated endowment as a means to build a cohesive and vibrant community and to respond to changing conditions. In its thirty-year history, the Greater Worcester Community Foundation has awarded over \$45 million to cultural, educational, human service and civic organizations, and we have built a

charitable endowment exceeding \$100 million in over 340 named funds created by area citizens. For more information about the Greater Worcester Community Foundation visit [www.greaterworchester.org](http://www.greaterworchester.org).

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**For Immediate Release:** March 20, 2006  
Greater Worcester Community Foundation  
(508) 755-0980  
[www.greaterworchester.org](http://www.greaterworchester.org)

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### **Greater Worcester Community Foundation Needs Gay and Lesbian Focus Group Participants**

**(Worcester, MA)** – Are you are a gay man or lesbian living in Worcester County who is willing to participate in a two hour confidential focus group on Wednesday, March 29<sup>th</sup> from 5:00-7:00 PM? If so, please call 508.755.0980 or email [gwcf@greaterworchester.org](mailto:gwcf@greaterworchester.org) for location information.

Greater Worcester Community Foundation has heard from over 370 individuals in our online survey researching the strengths and needs of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community in Worcester County. Now we are in the process of conducting focus groups and we want to hear from gay men and lesbians living in Worcester County.

This needs assessment is one component of a larger initiative at the Greater Worcester Community Foundation. The Foundation recently received a two-year \$100,000 challenge grant from Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues to begin building a permanent philanthropic resource for the GLBT community in Worcester County. Greater Worcester Community Foundation is the 40<sup>th</sup> community foundation in the country to receive this grant.

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