

Survey shows York City residents less satisfied

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For years, YorkCounts leaders have used census figures, health data and school-district statistics to paint a picture of a county where not all is as it should be.

Now York County residents have chimed in -- in a York College survey where city residents said they were significantly less satisfied with the quality of their lives than people who live elsewhere in the county.

The survey, conducted by the York College Institute of Applied Social Research, was required coursework for about 65 behavioral science students, but it was also meant to supplement the YorkCounts findings, said overseeing professor David Polk. Earlier this year, his students surveyed almost 100 York City residents and around 200 York County residents by mail or telephone.

"Most of the differences between the city and outside the city were statistically significant," Polk said. "Just as YorkCounts had picked up, there are some major discrepancies between the city and outside the city."

YorkCounts, founded in 1999 to improve quality of life in the county, has advocated for regionalization as a solution to many of York County's problems.

Findings: Among the survey findings:

--- When asked to rate their quality of life on a scale of 1 to 5, 63.6 percent of non-city residents gave the top scores of 4 and 5, compared to 36.1 percent of city dwellers.

--- Though 77.7 percent of non-city residents said they would remain in their present neighborhood even if they had the opportunity to leave, only 43.2 of city residents said they would like to stay.

--- City residents said they were less satisfied with their family, education, careers and financial matters than non-city residents, results that were statistically significant.

--- All but a few of the people surveyed who had children in York City schools said they would like to have their children in a different school district instead.

James DeBord, director of YorkCounts, praised the survey effort and said the results support much of what is already known about problems in the York area. Though the problems can be concentrated in some areas more than others, he said the area needs to work together to stem spreading crime and to improve the quality of education throughout the region.

"I think everyone recognizes the fact that we need to do better," DeBord said.

City council President Cameron Texter said the results demonstrate the problems of poverty and crime that are entrenched in some city neighborhoods.

Still, he said he expects the results are better than they would have been when he moved to York in 1989, when more storefronts were boarded up downtown than are today. He said the city is adding to its police rolls and doing what it can to bolster businesses and improve city life.

"We're dealing with these problems, we're trying to take action and we're trying to pull people in to help us solve these problems, because a lot of them are societal problems," Texter said.

He said people are demonstrating that things are getting better by staying in the city. Census figures show that the last few years, the city's decades-long population decline has stopped, and the population has increased for two years in a row.

Other survey results:

--- City and non-city residents had different perceptions of safety. When asked to rate safety on a scale of 1 to 5, 30.6 percent of city residents gave the city top scores of 4 or 5, compared to 20.2 percent of non-city residents. As far as rating the rest of the county, 51.1 percent of city residents gave a 4 or a 5, compared to 78.4 percent of non-city residents.

--- About 33 percent of those surveyed work outside the county and make up a higher-income group than those who work in the county. Of those commuters, 55.8 percent said they would rather work in the county.

--- Asked about their jobs, 17 percent of respondents said they have lost employment because of downsizing, and about half of that group said they were not able to find satisfactory employment afterward.

--- Overall, 90.9 percent of the county population makes charitable contributions, and 47.8 percent volunteers in the community.

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