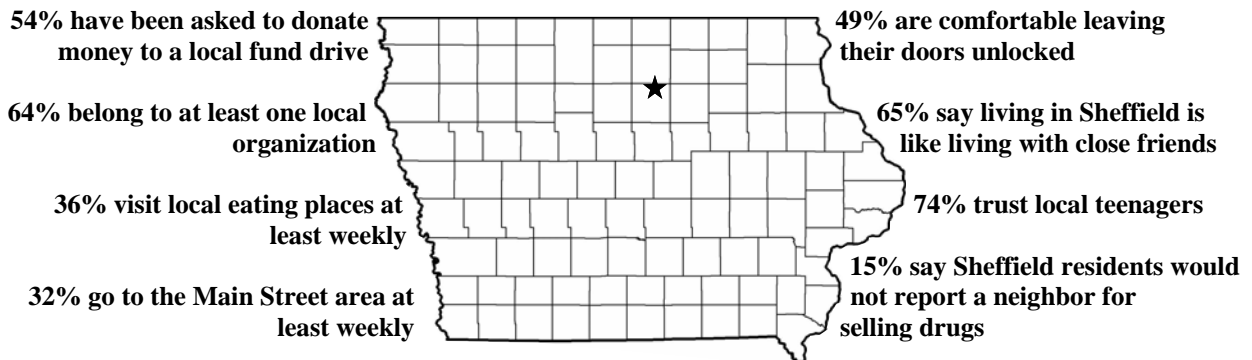


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN SHEFFIELD

In February 2004, the Rural Development Initiative Project at Iowa State University conducted a survey designed to look at changes in the social conditions in Iowa's rural towns. The survey was mailed to nearly 15,000 households in 99 towns, one of which was Sheffield. Ten years ago, residents of these same 99 communities were asked to complete a similar survey. The households for both surveys were selected randomly from local telephone directories (150 households per community). In 1994, 121 Sheffield residents responded to the survey, and 92 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Sheffield residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN SHEFFIELD IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

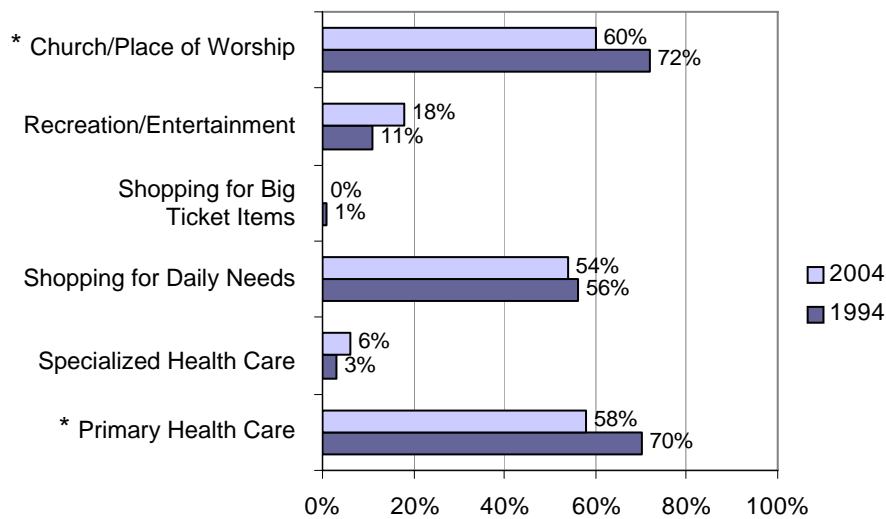


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Sheffield residents stay in town for some services, but travel for others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Sheffield. While over half of residents in both years reported shopping for daily needs in town, virtually no one said they

shopped for big ticket items locally. Fifty-eight percent reported receiving primary health care in town in 2004, down significantly from 1994. Fewer than one in five residents utilized local specialized health care or local recreation/entertainment in 1994 and 2004. Finally, 60 percent reported attending local church/place of worship in 2004, a significant decrease from 72 percent in 1994.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Sheffield, differences in percentages between 2004 and 1994 of less than 11 percent should be considered a statistical "dead-heat." That is, they fall within the margin of error range, which occurs whenever samples are used to draw conclusions about a larger group. With the modest sample sizes used in this study, the differences must be relatively large before we can be confident that they are real. Throughout the report, differences that are equal to or exceed 11 percent are statistically significant and are indicated with an asterisk (\*).

## RATINGS OF LOCAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES

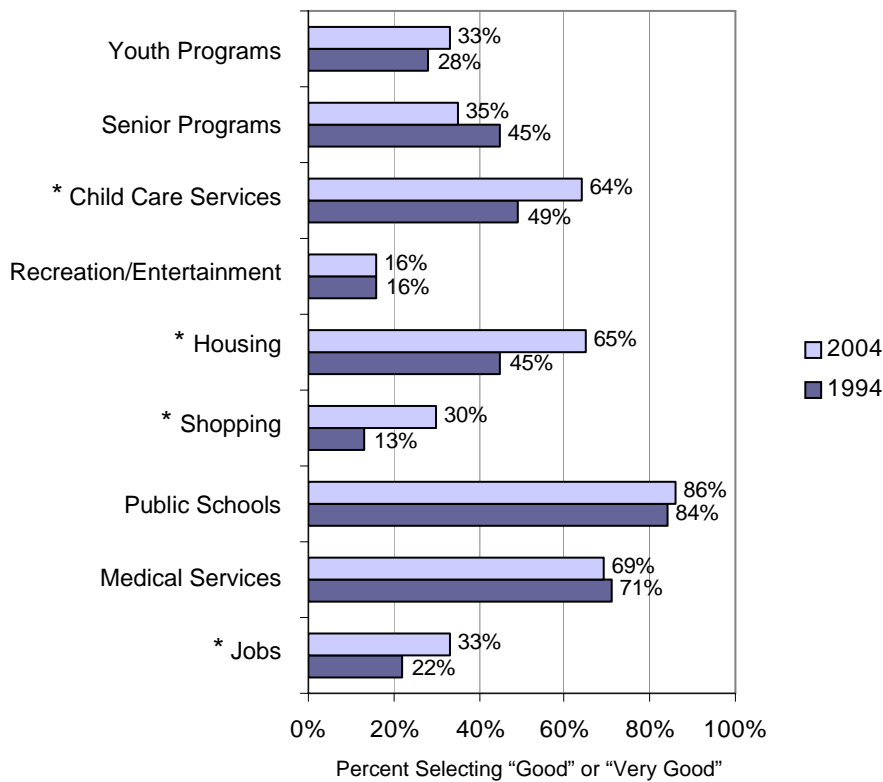


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

Nine local services were listed on the questionnaire along with instructions to rate each as “very good,” “good,” “fair,” “poor,” or “not available.” Figure 2 shows the percentage of residents who rated each service as “good” or “very good” in 1994 and 2004. A large majority of residents gave positive ratings to public schools and medical services in both survey years. Recreation/entertainment received the lowest positive assessments in 1994 and 2004. Youth programs, senior programs, shopping, and jobs were each rated favorably by about one-third of residents in 2004. The percentage of residents giving favorable ratings to child care services, housing, shopping, and jobs increased significantly over the decade. Ratings for other services did not change significantly over the decade.

## RATINGS OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Respondents were asked to provide ratings for seven services normally provided by local governments. Figure 3 shows the percentage of residents rating each service as “good” or “very good” for 2004 and 1994. In general, Sheffield residents reported being satisfied with local government services. More than nine in ten residents rated emergency response, garbage collection, and fire protection as favorable. The condition of parks and police protection also received positive ratings from a large majority of residents. The percentage of favorable ratings for the condition of streets in Sheffield increased from 45 percent in 1994 to 69 percent in 2004. There was also an increase in the percentage of positive ratings for water from 65 to 81 percent.

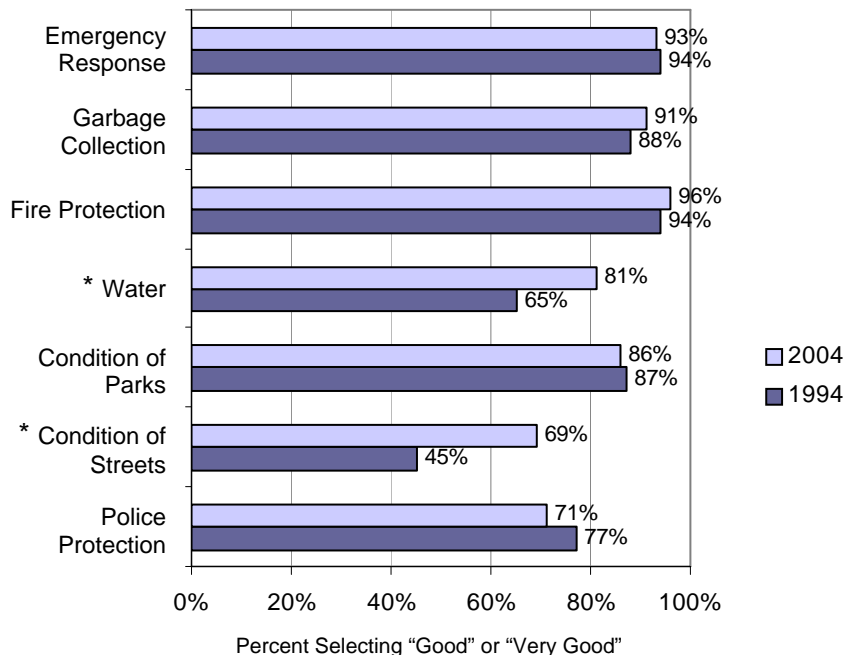
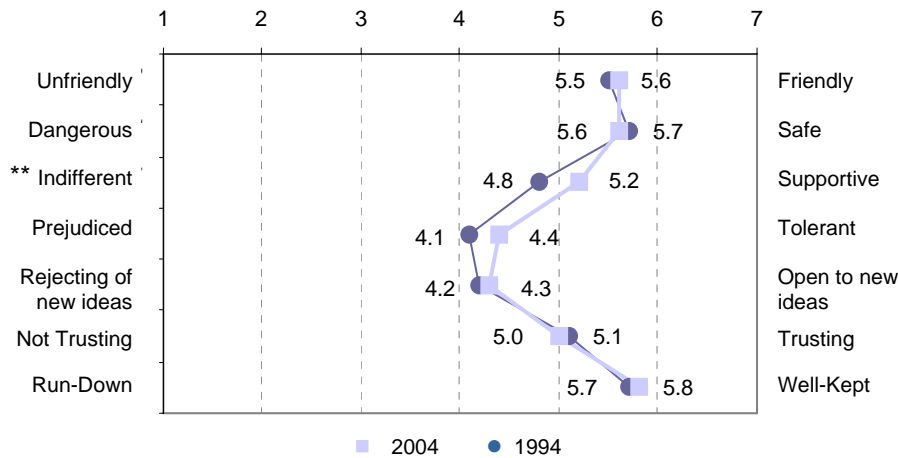


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## SHEFFIELD'S SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

In spite of the frequently publicized economic challenges faced by many of Iowa's small towns, they are regularly praised for having favorable social climates. A main goal of this project has been to determine the extent to which Iowa's rural towns possess favorable social environments. Accordingly, a variety of questions were included on the survey asking residents to evaluate various social attributes of their communities.



**Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale**

Residents were presented with a list of qualities and asked to evaluate their town on each quality using a 7-point scale. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in 1994 and again in 2004, residents assigned the highest rating to the appearance of Sheffield, followed closely by the safety and friendliness of the town. The lowest ratings in both years were assigned to the extent to which Sheffield is open to new ideas and tolerant. One significant change over the past decade is that in 2004, residents rated Sheffield as less supportive than they rated it in 1994.

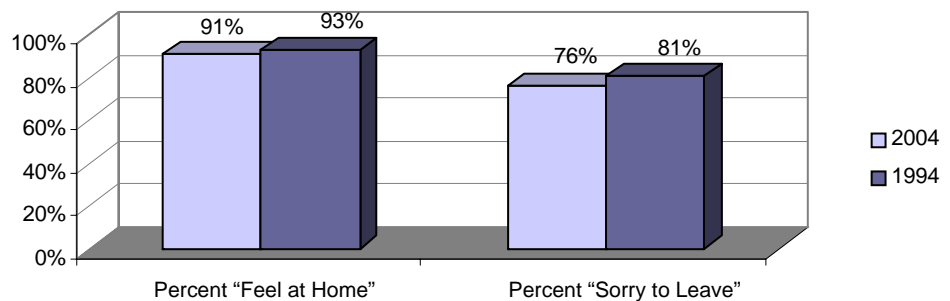
\*\* The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only those items designated by double asterisks (\*\*) have differences large enough to fall outside of the statistical margin of error and can thus be considered to have changed since 1994.

### SOCIAL TIES

“Everybody knows everybody” is often cited as a feature of small towns. The extent to which people know and interact with each other influences commitment to the community and interest in its well-being. As such, questions were included to assess local social ties. In 2004, 58 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Sheffield, compared to 67 percent in 1994. Fifty-three percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town, a significant decrease from 64 percent in 1994. As for relatives, 22 percent of residents in 2004 and 23 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Sheffield.

### COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Sheffield residents feel at home in their community? The vast majority of residents reported that they feel at home in Sheffield in both 1994 and 2004 (see Figure 5). Furthermore, almost eight in ten indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Sheffield. These responses indicate that most Sheffield residents feel attached to their community.



**Figure 5: Community Attachment**

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Sheffield, 70 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” At the same time, just under half of residents reported participating in a local community improvement project in the year prior to the survey, and about the same percentage described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities and events (see Figure 6). This is essentially unchanged from the 1994 results. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three factors mentioned by Sheffield residents were lack of time (54%), not being asked by others to volunteer (47%), and not knowing how to become involved in community activities (32%).

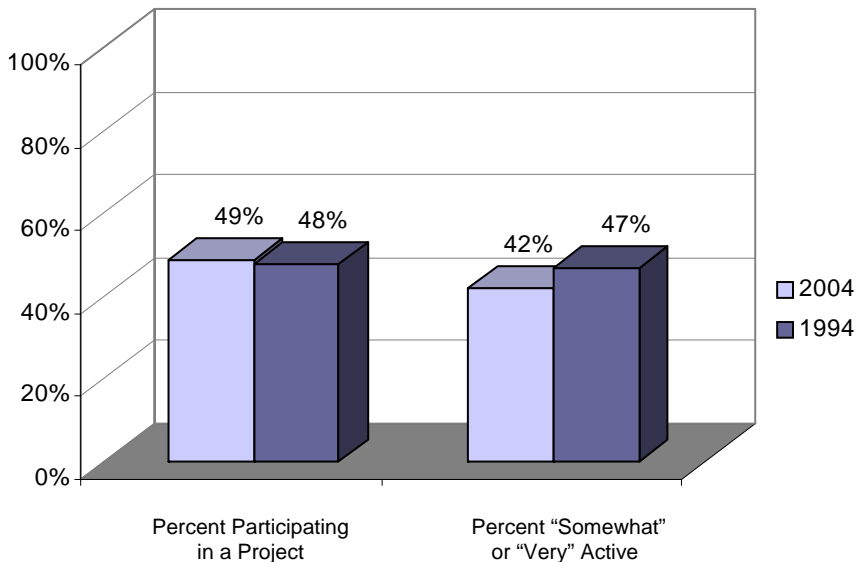


Figure 6: Community Involvement

## SUMMARY

A major goal of this project is to examine changes in the social conditions in rural Iowa over the past decade. As previously discussed, the differences between 2004 and 1994 shown in this report must be interpreted to account for the margin of error—that is, we cannot say with confidence that a change has occurred unless the difference is equal to or greater than 11 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Sheffield over the past decade? Fewer Sheffield residents are patronizing local churches or places of worship and local primary health care than ten years ago. The evaluations of the quality of local services and facilities have changed in that positive ratings for child care services, housing, shopping, and jobs have increased. Ratings for local government services remain high, with increased positive ratings for water and the condition of streets in Sheffield.

The social environment has changed very little. Residents still describe Sheffield as a well-kept, safe, and friendly community. At the same time, residents view it as less supportive than in 1994. Residents remain strongly attached to Sheffield and most indicated that community involvement is good or very good. Levels of community participation were unchanged over the decade. It is interesting to note that two of the top three reasons given for not being involved in community projects were that no one had asked them and that they didn’t know how to get involved. These responses suggest potential strategies for increasing community participation in the future.

The past decade has been challenging for Iowa’s small towns. We hope this information will prove useful in planning for Sheffield’s future. **We wish to thank the Sheffield residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

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