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## Center for Family Representation: Client Needs Assessment Executive Summary

**Project Description:** The Center for Family Representation (CFR) asked Action Research Partners (ARP) to assist in completing a client needs assessment. The needs assessment aims to inform decisions concerning additional services CFR might offer to clients and to aid CFR's efforts to prevent foster care placement and to stabilize reunification. The needs assessment, therefore, focuses on answering two questions:

1. What are the legal and social service needs of low-income parents charged with abuse or neglect by the city of New York not currently met by CFR's model of advocacy in family court and in the child welfare system?
2. How can CFR best meet those needs?

**Methods:** CFR and ARP developed a survey that focused on (1) whether clients experienced problems in particular services areas, (2) whether clients accessed professional services for their problems, and (3) what unmet service needs clients identified. The service need categories included housing, public benefits, criminal defense representation and juvenile justice, immigration, employment, education, family, and consumer issues. To supplement the survey data, ARP analyzed an extract from CFR's case management system (CMS) that included demographic information on CFR clients served during city fiscal years 2014 and 2015. CFR staff administered the survey to 356 clients (16% of active clients) from July 20, 2015 to October 30, 2015. Surveyed clients were similar to CFR's entire client population, though surveyed clients had worked with CFR longer, were more likely to be from Manhattan, and included fewer non-English speakers.

**Trends:** ARP identified two trends from CFR's client database that may affect service provision in the future.

- A quarter of CFR clients live in just seven of the 104 zip codes in Manhattan and Queens, suggesting that building relationships with schools, service providers, attorneys, and community-based organizations located in those areas may help CFR connect clients to services in their communities.
- Very few CFR clients are under age 21 (five percent of clients served in FY2015), suggesting that few are parenting while in foster care. Interventions designed for younger parents will benefit only a small proportion of CFR's client base. CFR should weigh carefully the high cost per client served against the high benefit of changing the child welfare trajectory of this vulnerable population.

**Opportunities:** Overall, four out of every five surveyed CFR clients reported that they experienced an unmet service need while working with CFR. The most common opportunities to address client needs are in the areas of housing where 60 percent of clients experienced a problem, public benefits (43 percent), criminal defense representation (39 percent), and employment (37 percent). Many clients, however, face problems that cut across multiple service categories: half of all surveyed clients reported problems in three or more service categories.

The bullets below highlight the service needs that the survey identified in each of the eight service categories.

### ***Housing***

- Sixty percent of surveyed clients experienced a housing problem, with 42 percent having experienced a housing problem unmet by current providers. Clients experienced problems with NYCHA and rental arrears more frequently than other housing issues.
- Clients suggest that CFR have attorneys accompany clients to housing court, and that CFR employ staff with expertise in landlord-tenant mediation and advocacy.

### ***Public Benefits***

- One-third of surveyed clients experienced an unmet public benefits need. Twenty-eight percent of surveyed clients reported problems with food stamps, WIC, or cash assistance, the highest of any single question on the survey.
- Clients seek assistance applying for services, especially in acquiring vital documents.

### ***Criminal Defense Representation and Juvenile Justice***

- Thirty-six percent of surveyed clients reported experiencing a criminal case while working with CFR.
- Solo practitioners (“18-B attorneys”) represented many of those clients with criminal cases.

### ***Language, Culture, and Immigration***

- The shift of the client population to Queens increases the importance of language fluency, cultural competency, and immigration expertise among CFR staff.
- While few clients reported experiencing immigration-related problems, the lack of representation of non-English speakers among respondents means that the survey likely underestimates this need.

### ***Employment***

- Only two in five surveyed clients reported holding jobs, and 28 percent experienced an unmet employment need.
- One in four surveyed clients experienced problems with job training or job placement.
- Clients seek career training and employment opportunities for themselves and their children.
- Clients suggest that CFR provide services to amend criminal and SCR records.

### ***Education***

- Ten percent of clients experienced education problems related to disability, IEP, or school placement.
- Many clients indicated they need help in advocating for their children with school staff, and that their children need afterschool programs, tutoring, summer programs, and GED programs.

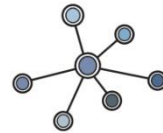
### ***Family***

- Eighteen percent of clients reported experiencing problems with child support, and few of these clients received needed services.
- CFR might consider providing representation in child support and divorce cases.
- Clients reported needing domestic violence support services, homemaking services, and play therapy for children.

### ***Consumer***

- Few clients (26 percent) reported experiencing consumer-related problems, but almost all needs were unmet.
- CFR might consider providing representation in bankruptcy, debt, and collections cases.
- Clients seek financial management training.

# CFR Client Needs Assessment



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# Overview

- ▶ Thank you for all your hard work on the survey!
- ▶ Questions and methods
- ▶ Trends from CFR's client database
- ▶ Assessment of client needs
  - Housing
  - Public Benefits
  - Criminal Defense and Juvenile Justice
  - Language, Culture, and Immigration
  - Employment
  - Education
  - Family
  - Consumer
- ▶ Discussion



# Questions

- ▶ What are the legal and social service needs of low-income parents charged with abuse or neglect by the city of New York *not currently met* by CFR's model of advocacy in family court and in the child welfare system?
- ▶ How can CFR best meet those needs?



# Methods

- ▶ Analyzed data from case management system (CMS)
  - All clients served in FY14 and FY15
- ▶ Conducted survey of clients
  - 356 clients surveyed
  - Data collected from July 20, 2015 to October 30, 2015
  - Survey sample is 16 percent of all active clients during those four months
  - Questions focused on (1) whether client experienced problems in particular service areas, (2) if so, whether client accessed professional services and which provider, and (3) other unmet service needs the client identified



# Methods

## Client Survey

- ▶ Are the surveyed clients representative of all CFR clients?
  - To answer this, we compared the demographics of surveyed clients to all CFR clients
- ▶ Yes, with three exceptions:
  - Surveyed clients **had been working with CFR for two months longer on average** compared to all clients
  - Surveyed clients **more likely to be from Manhattan** than all clients
  - Surveyed clients **less likely to be non-English speaking** than all clients

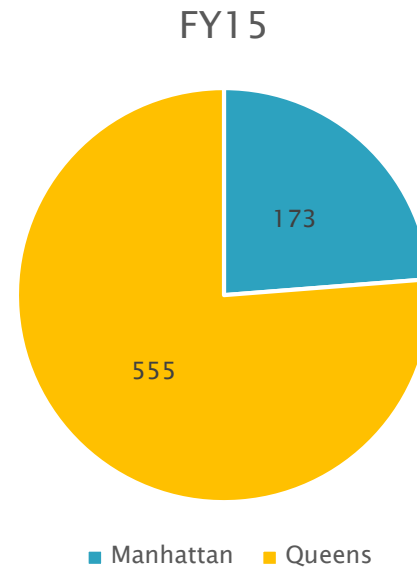
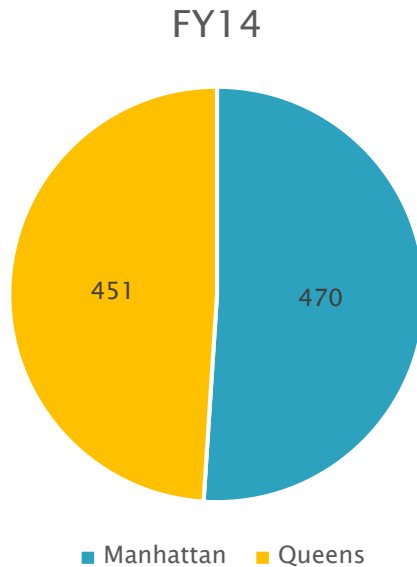


# Trends

## Client population shifting from Manhattan to Queens

### New Clients by Borough, FY14 vs. FY15

Source: CMS



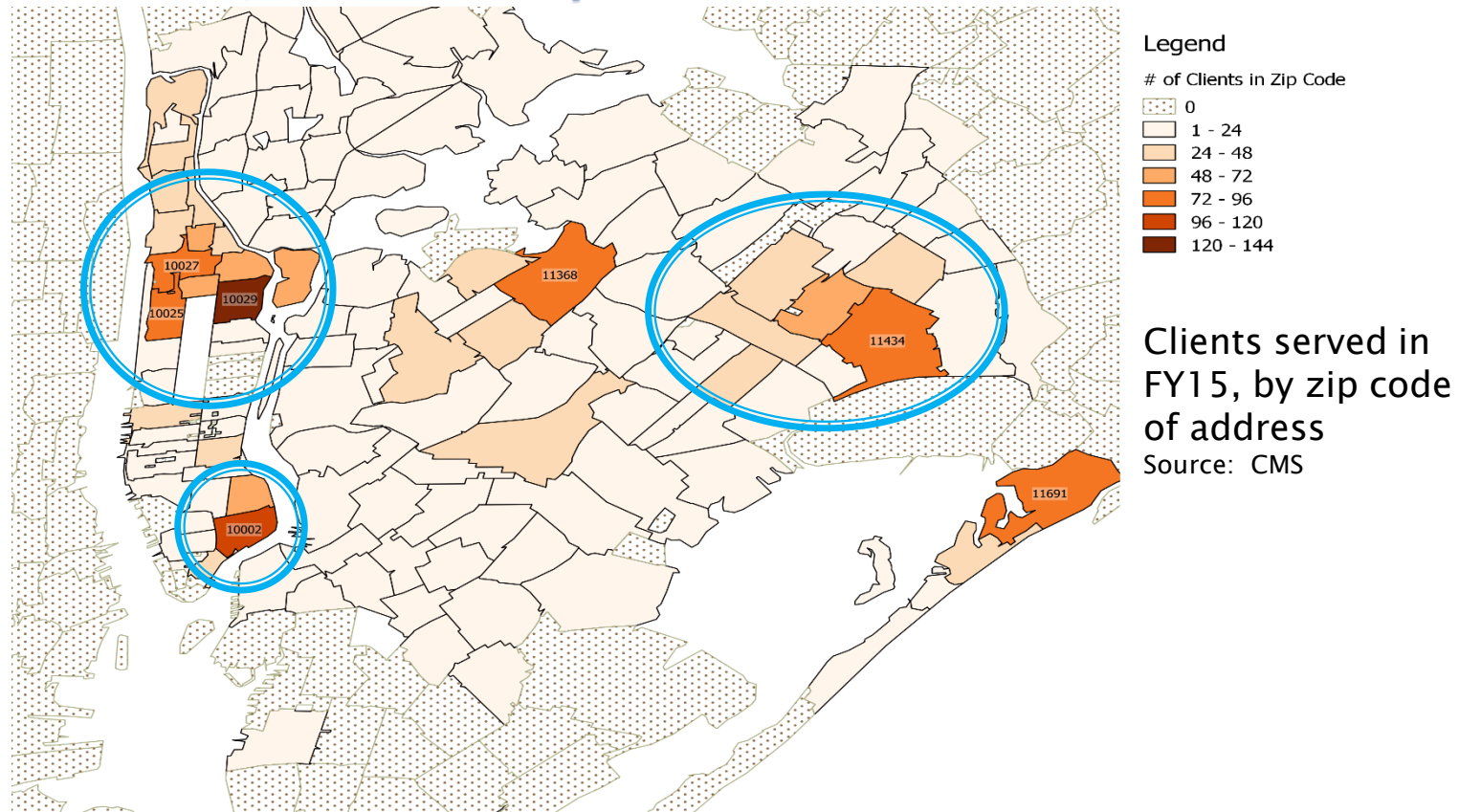
Three-quarters of new clients in fiscal year 2015 have cases in Queens





# Trends

## Clients concentrated in seven of 104 Manhattan/Queens zip codes



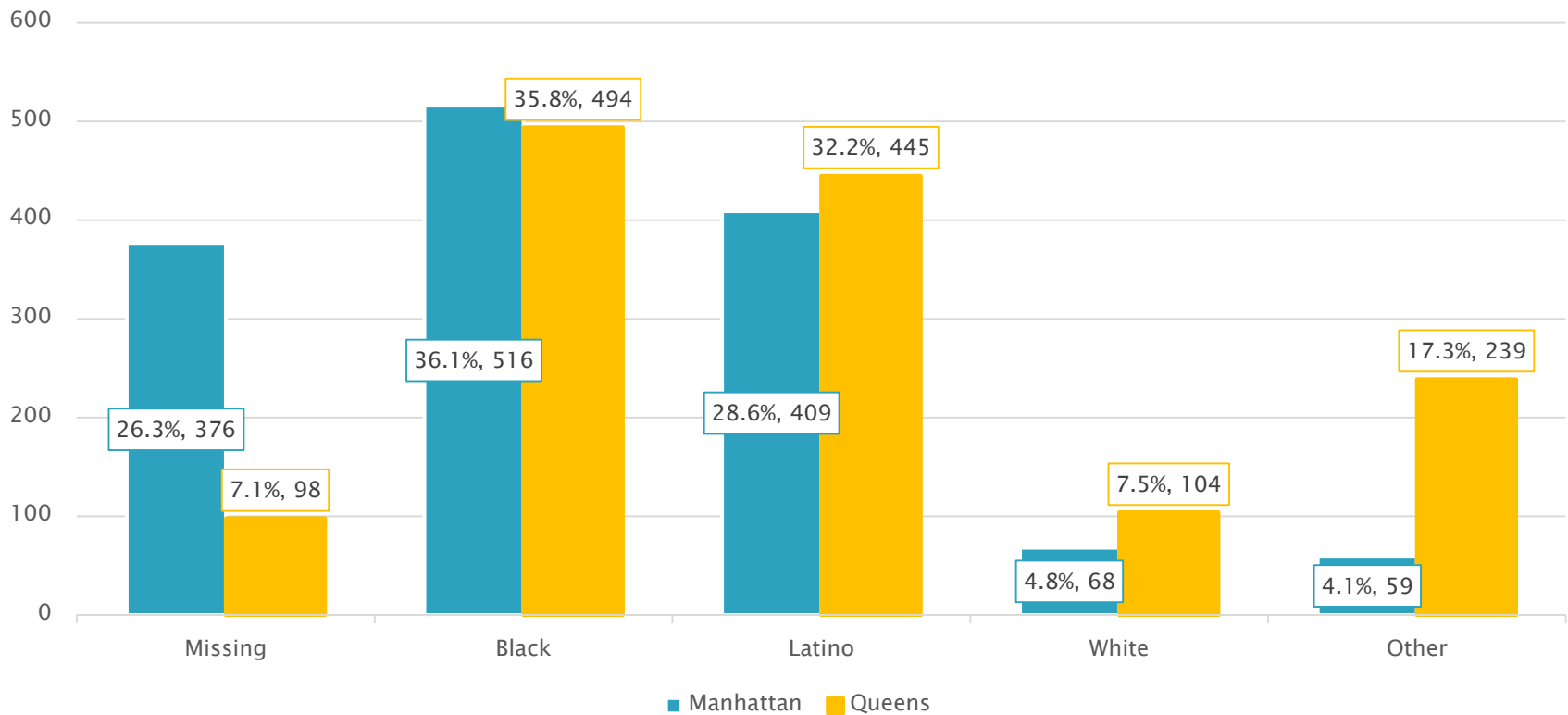
Suggests building relationships in those areas with schools, service providers, attorneys, and community based organizations



# Trends

## Difficult to draw conclusions about ethnicity from CMS due to missing data

Clients Served in FY15, by Ethnicity  
(Total=2808)



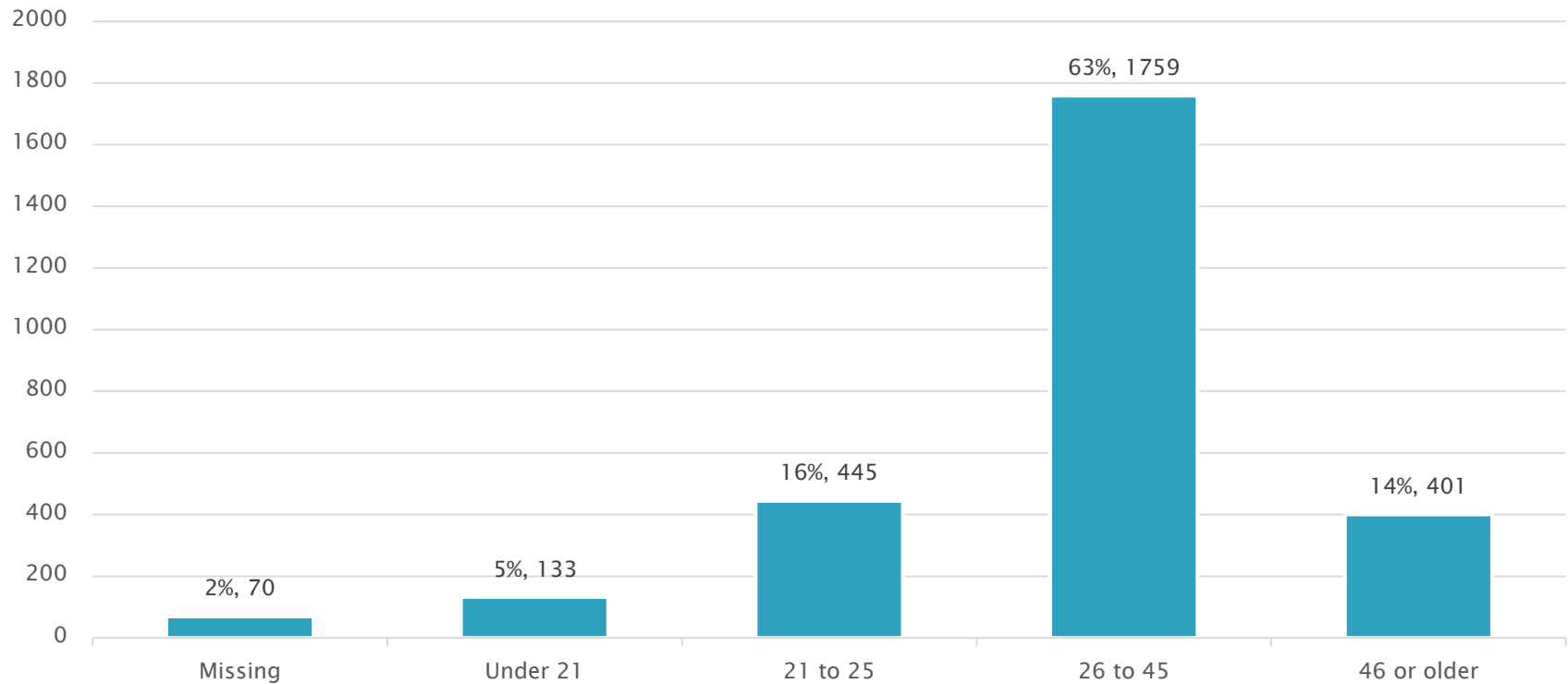
# Trends

Mostly adults, very few clients are parenting while in foster care themselves

Clients Served in FY15, by Age Group

(Total=2808)

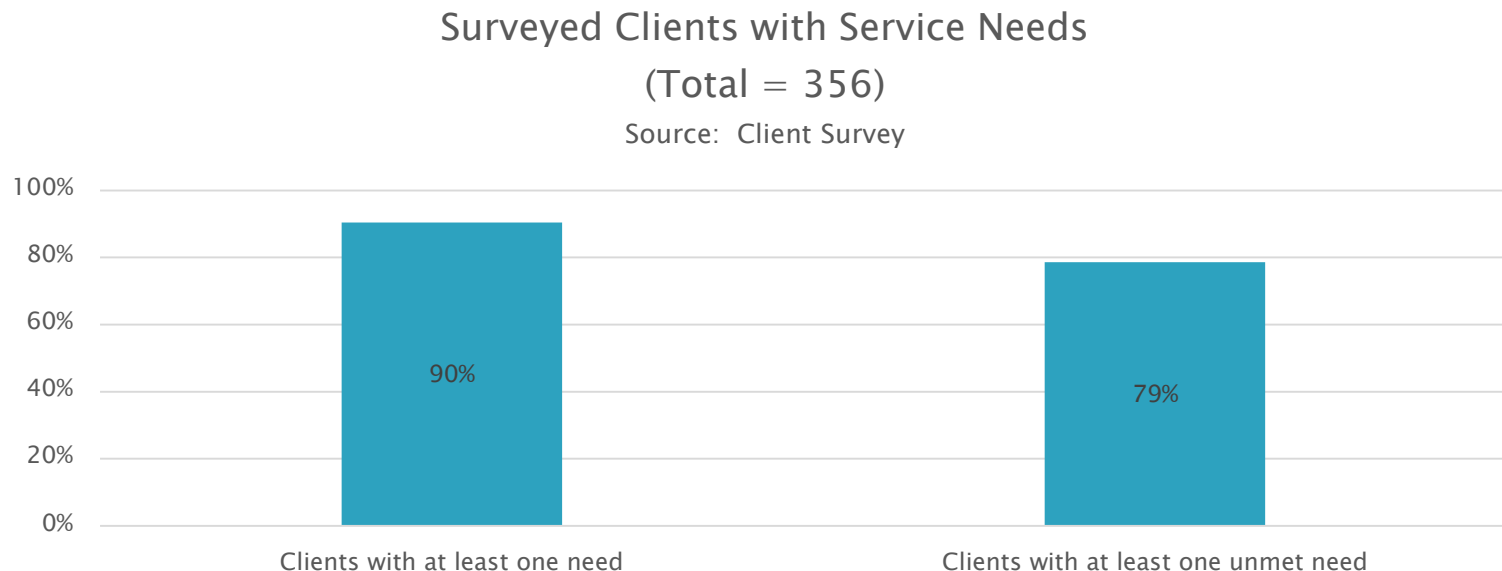
Source: CMS



# Needs Assessment

## Overall

- Opportunity: four out of every five surveyed clients experienced an unmet service need while working with CFR



# Needs Assessment

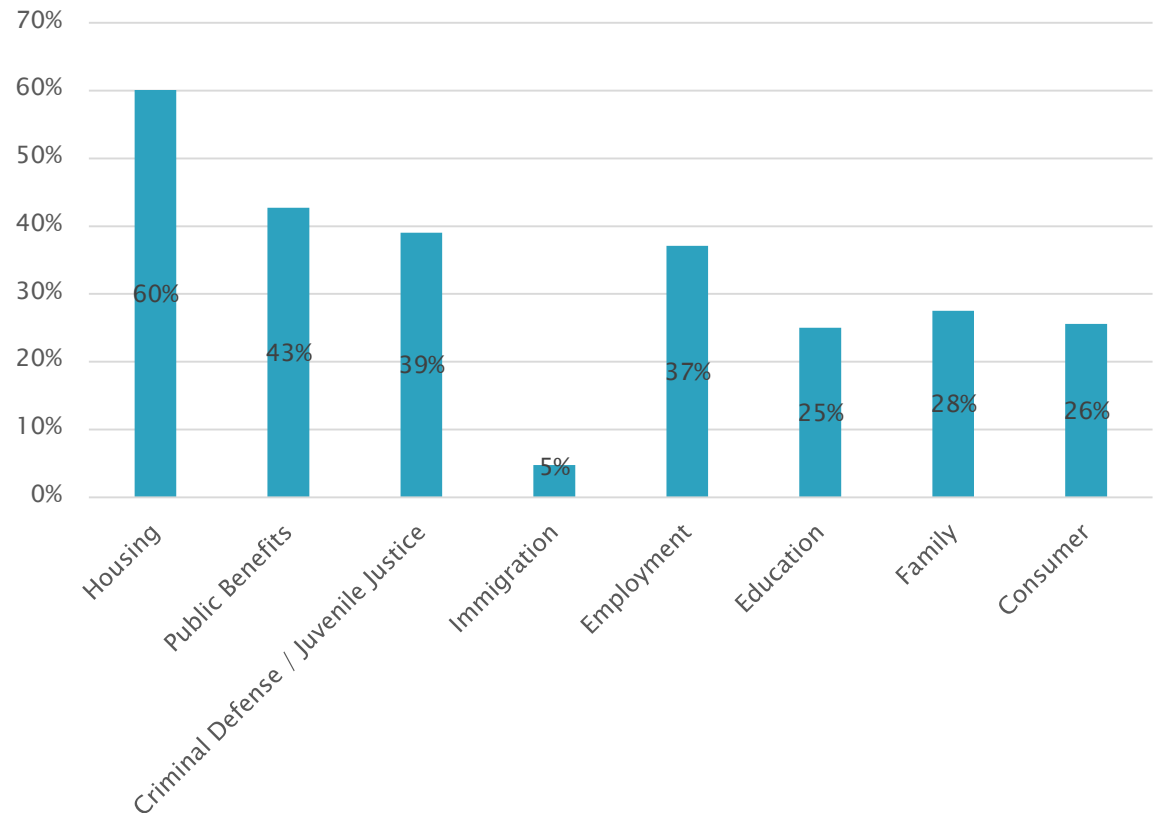
## Overall

- Opportunities in housing, public benefits, criminal defense, and employment

Percent of surveyed clients with service needs by service categories

(Total = 356)

Source: Client Survey



# Needs Assessment

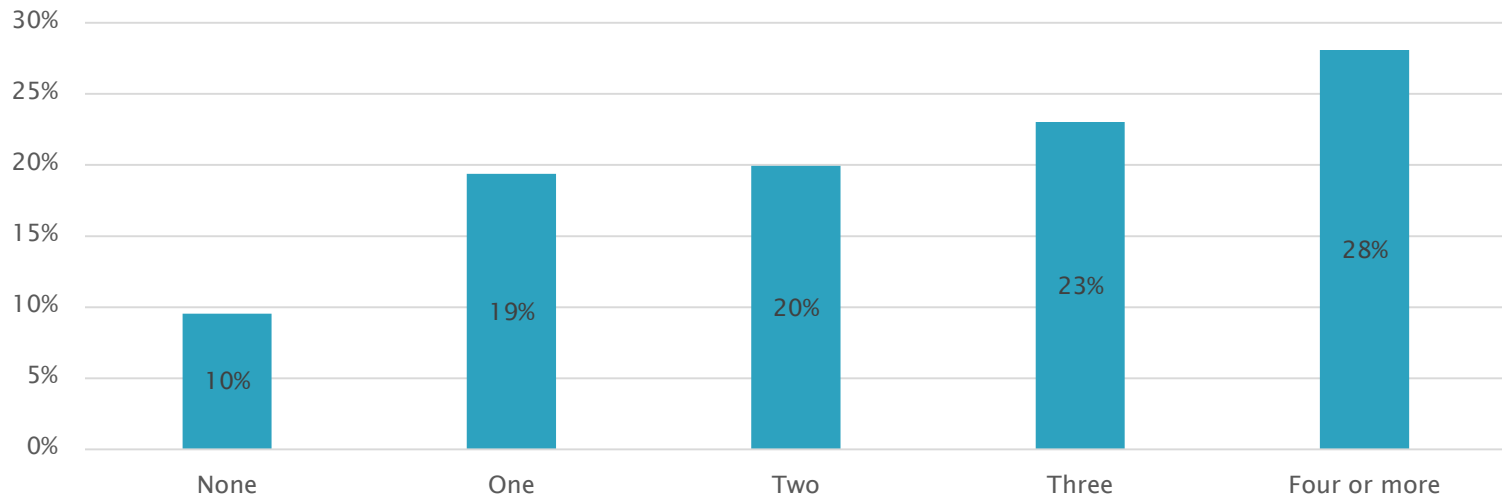
## Overall

- ▶ Many clients face problems that intersect multiple service categories

Surveyed clients with service needs, by number of service categories

(Total = 356)

Source: Client Survey



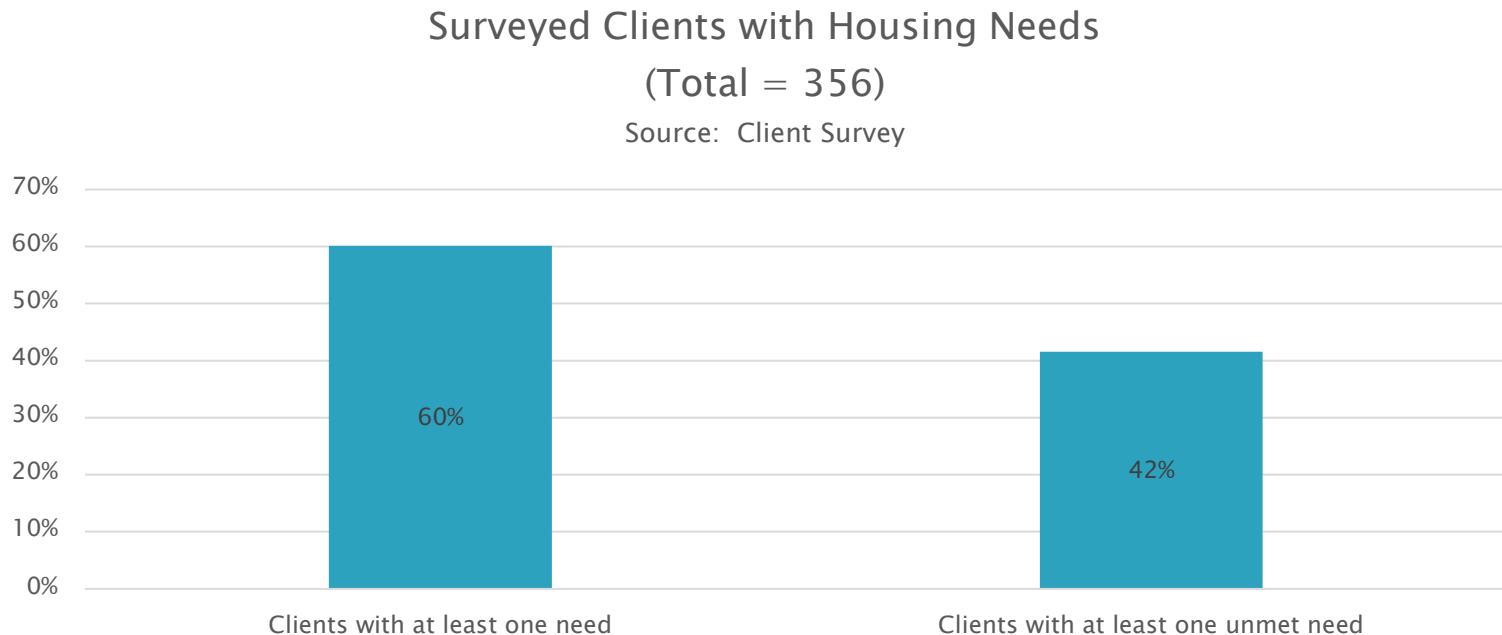
*Service categories are housing, public benefits, criminal defense, immigration, employment, education, family, and consumer*



# Needs Assessment

## Housing

- ▶ Housing issues affect 60 percent of clients and are mostly unmet by current providers



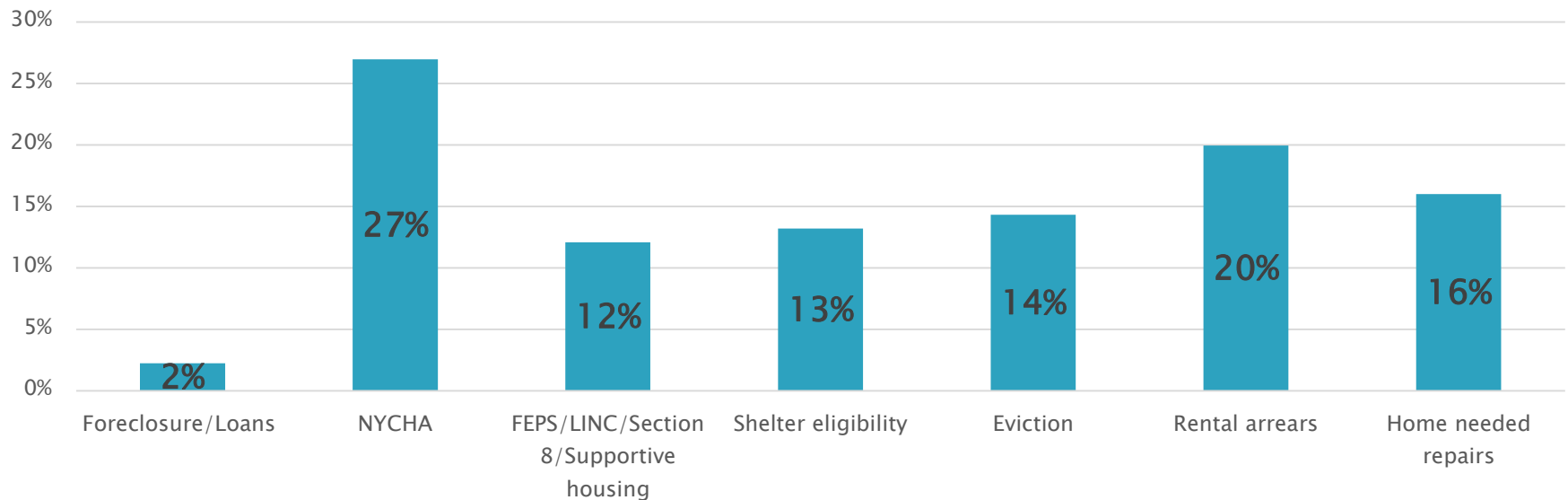
# Needs Assessment

## Housing

- ▶ NYCHA and rental arrears are the most common housing issues

Housing: Surveyed Clients Who Experienced Problems with ...  
(Total = 356)

Source: Client Survey





# Needs Assessment

## Housing

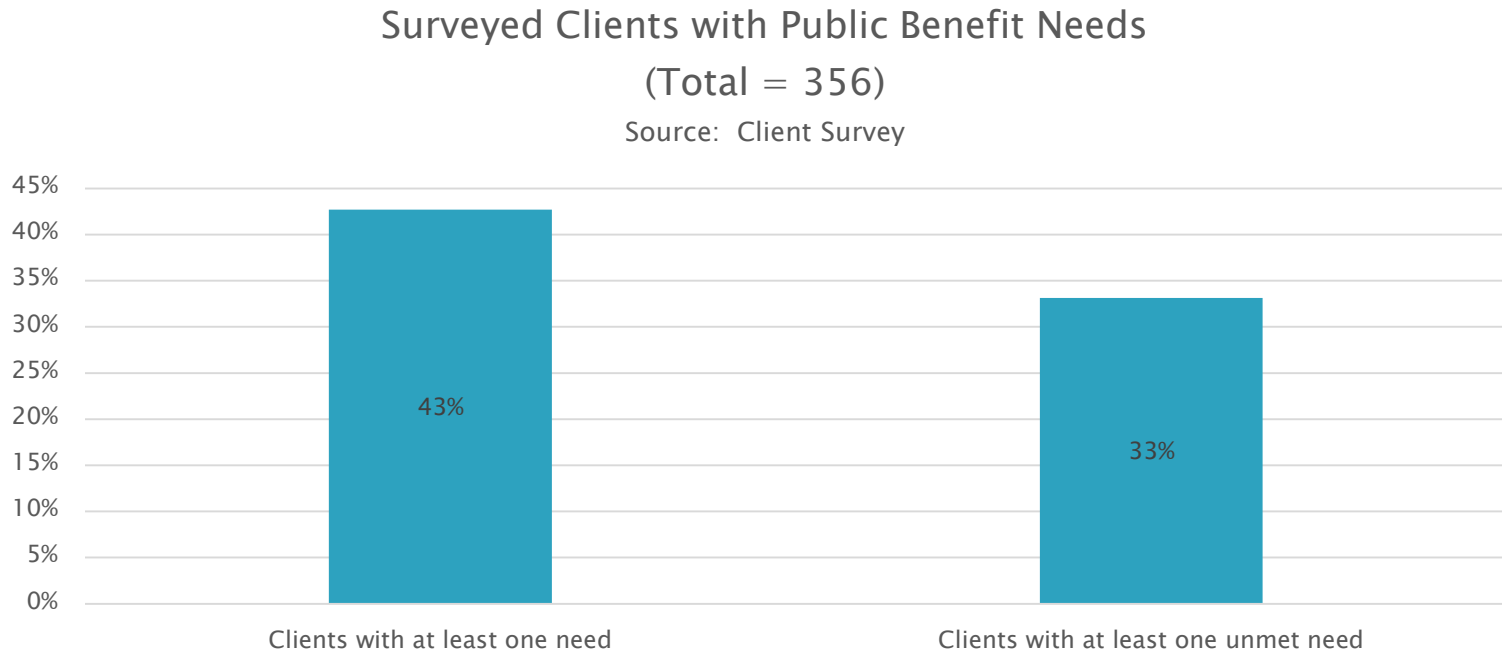
- ▶ How are housing needs currently being met?
  - Clients contact appropriate city agencies, but many do not receive services
  - Foster care and preventive services agencies help with applications and advocacy, particularly with NYCHA
  - Though clients utilize eviction prevention services through HRA and DHS, legal assistance is not provided
- ▶ Opportunities:
  - Clients suggest
    - Attorneys to accompany them to housing court
    - Specialized housing staff to help with landlord-tenant mediation and advocacy
  - Additional service needs: furniture for apartment



# Needs Assessment

## Public Benefits

- ▶ One-third of clients experienced an unmet public benefits need



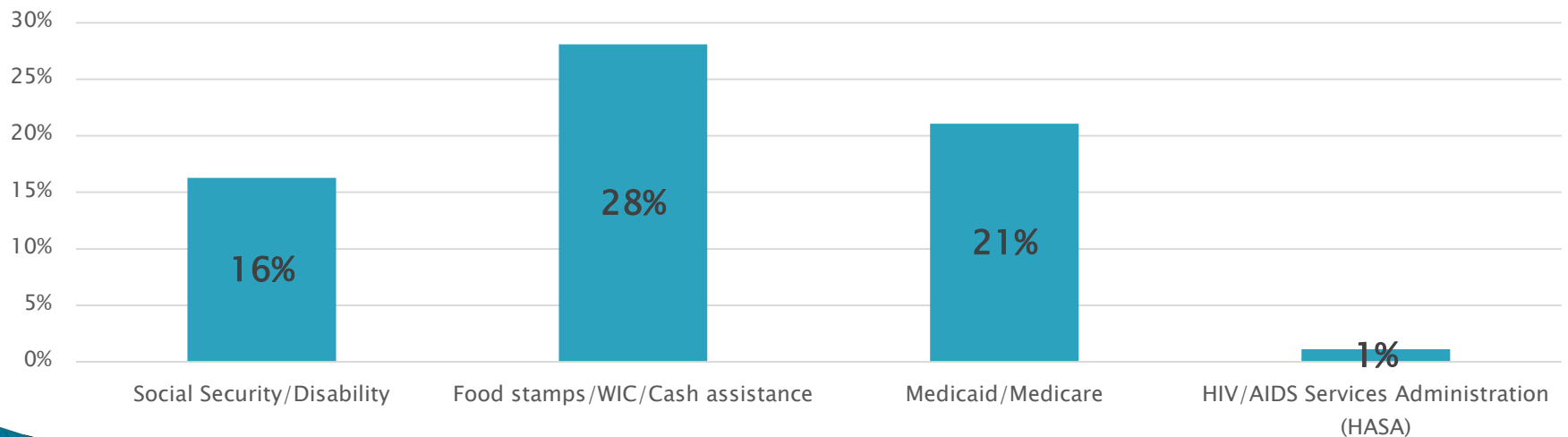
# Needs Assessment

## Public Benefits

- ▶ 28 percent of clients had problems with food stamps/WIC/cash assistance, the highest of any area on the survey

Public Benefits: Surveyed Clients Who Experienced Problems with ...  
(Total = 356)

Source: Client Survey



# Needs Assessment

## Public Benefits

- ▶ How are public benefits needs currently being met?
  - Only one in four clients who experienced problems with public benefits accessed services
  - Clients are working with HRA or foster care and preventive services agencies, but not often receiving services
  - Some clients engaged a private attorney for help with social security and disability
  
- ▶ Opportunities:
  - Clients seek assistance applying for services
  - Acquiring vital documents is an issue
    - High school diplomas, credit reports, birth certificates, social security cards, and pay stubs
  - Additional service needs: Access-A-Ride, Bridges to Health (B2H)



# Needs Assessment

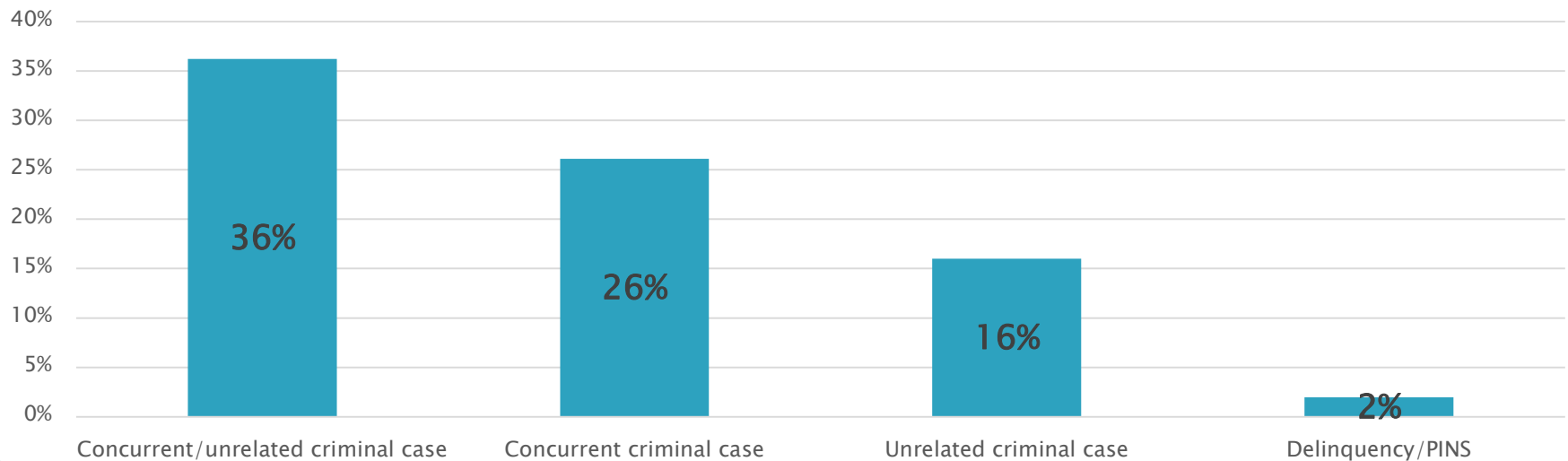
## Criminal Defense and Juvenile Justice

- ▶ 36 percent of clients experienced a criminal case while working with CFR

Criminal Defense and Juvenile Justice: Surveyed Clients Who Experienced Problems with ...

(Total = 356)

Source: Client Survey



# Needs Assessment

## Criminal Defense and Juvenile Justice

- ▶ How are criminal defense representation needs met?
  - Most clients are represented by 18-B and Legal Aid Society attorneys
  - Some clients are represented by Queens Law Associates and private attorneys
  
- ▶ Opportunities:
  - 18-B attorneys represent a significant percentage of clients with criminal cases
  - Clients emphasize how criminal cases may affect reunification, employment, housing, and immigration status
  - Additional service needs: reentry services for incarcerated clients, training on court processes and rights



# Needs Assessment

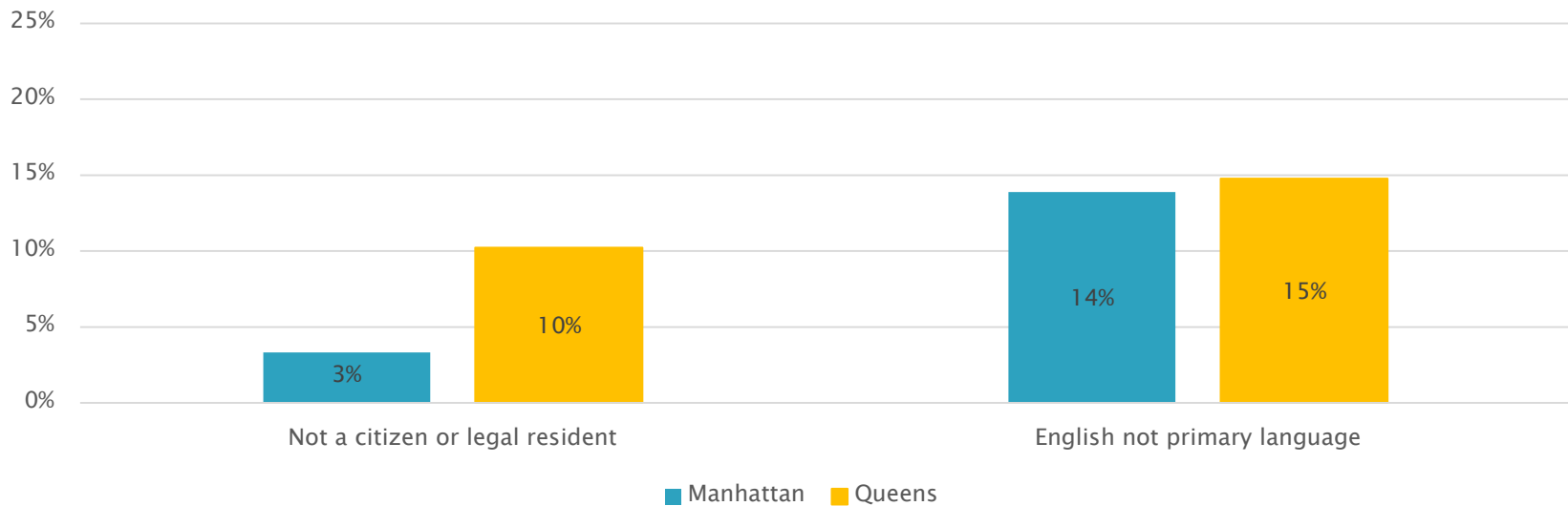
## Language, Culture, and Immigration

- Competence in language, culture, and immigration growing in importance

Client Immigration Status by Borough

(Total = 356)

Source: Client Survey



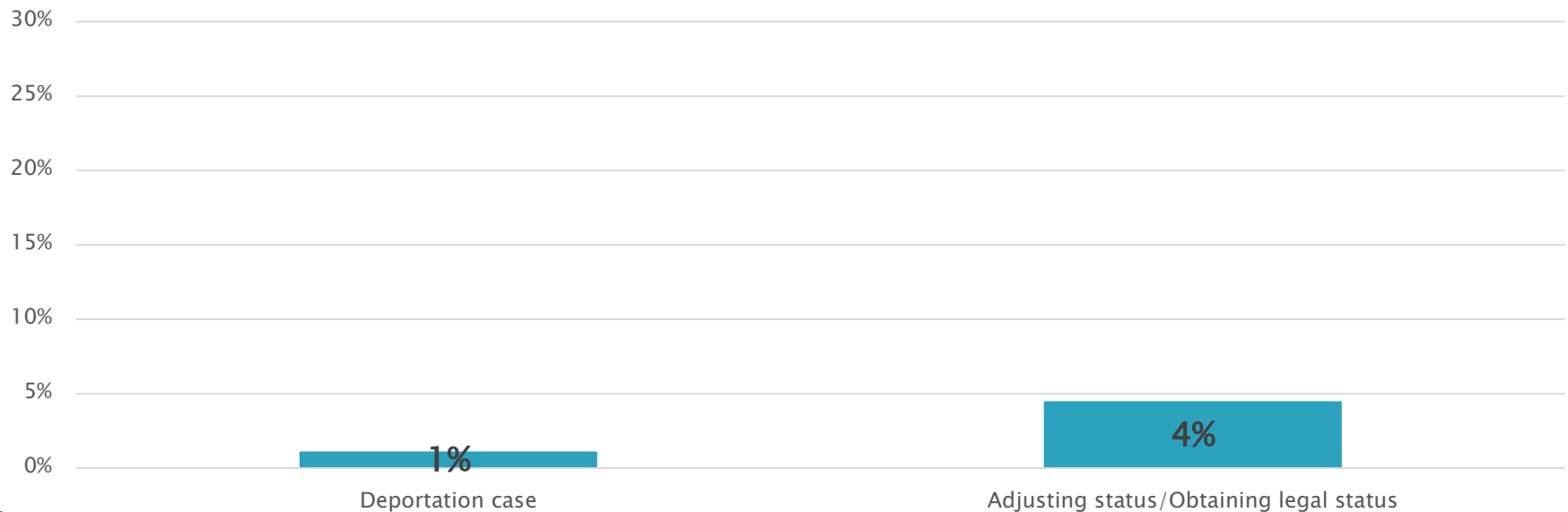
# Needs Assessment

## Language, Culture, and Immigration

- ▶ However, few clients report experiencing immigration-related service needs

Immigration: Surveyed Clients Who Experienced Problems with ...  
(Total = 356)

Source: Client Survey





# Needs Assessment

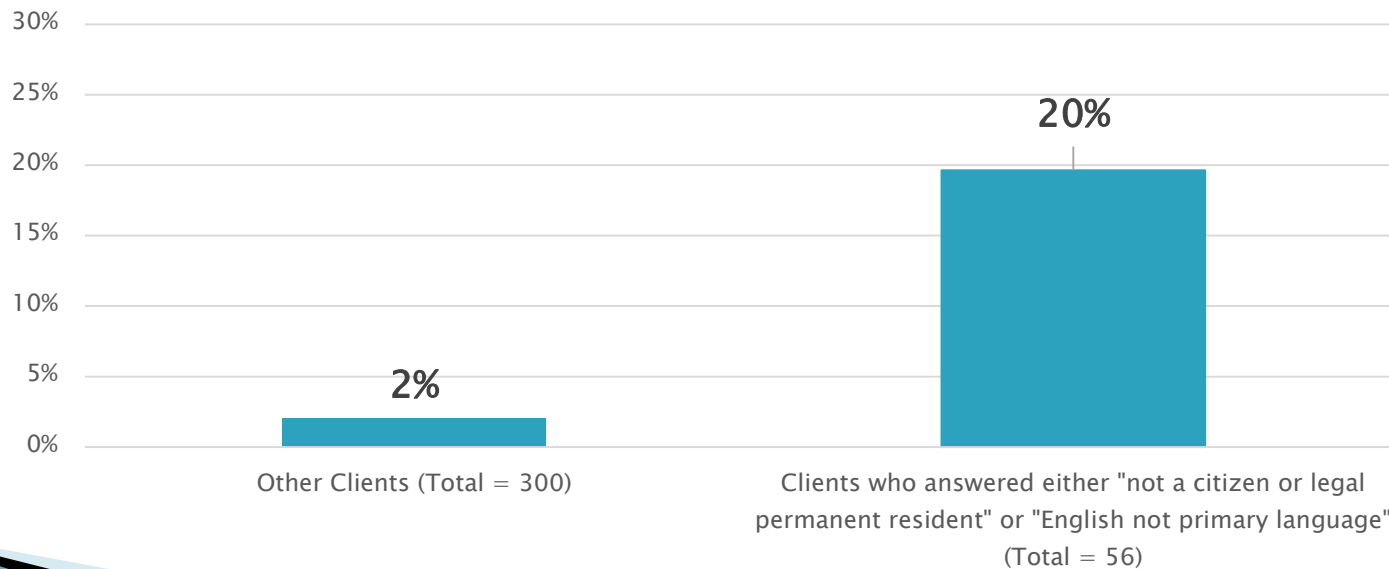
## Language, Culture, and Immigration

- But the survey may have underestimated immigration-related service needs

Surveyed Clients Who Experienced Problems with Immigration,  
by Immigration and Language Status

(Total = 356)

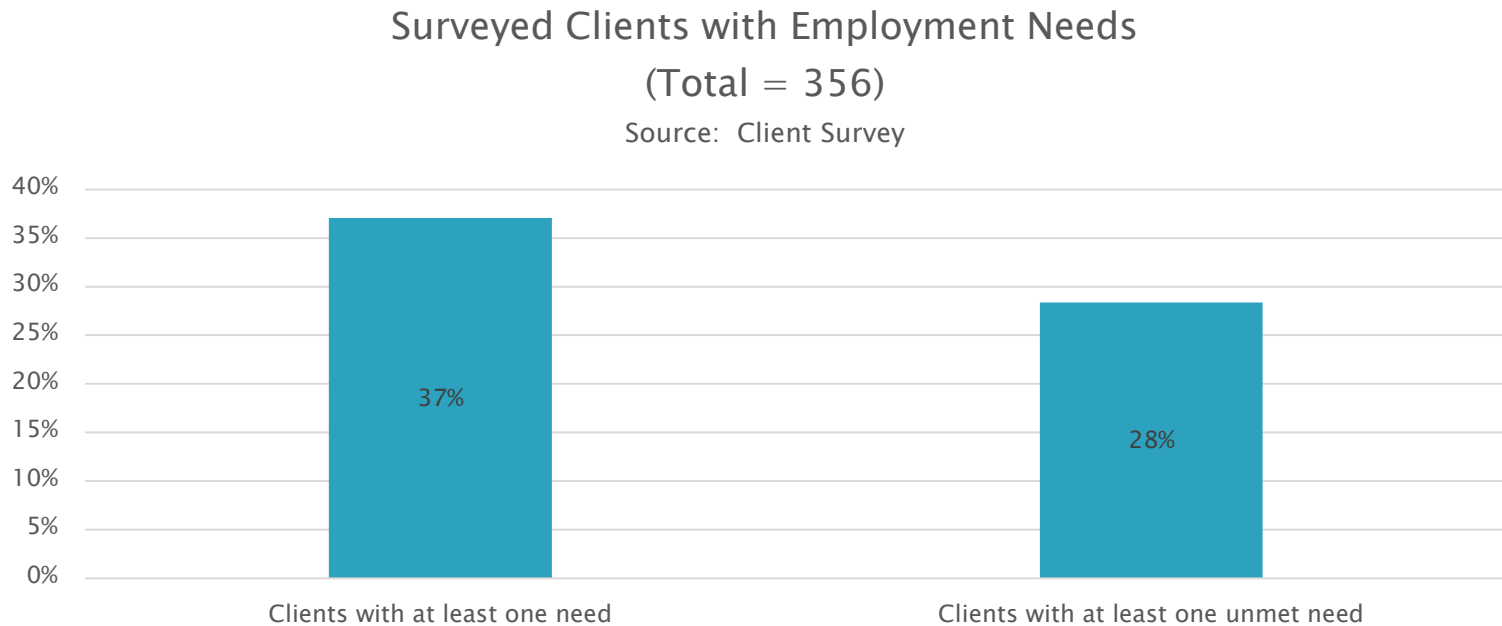
Source: Client Survey



# Needs Assessment

## Employment

- ▶ Two out of five CFR clients are employed
- ▶ Twenty-eight percent of clients had an unmet employment need



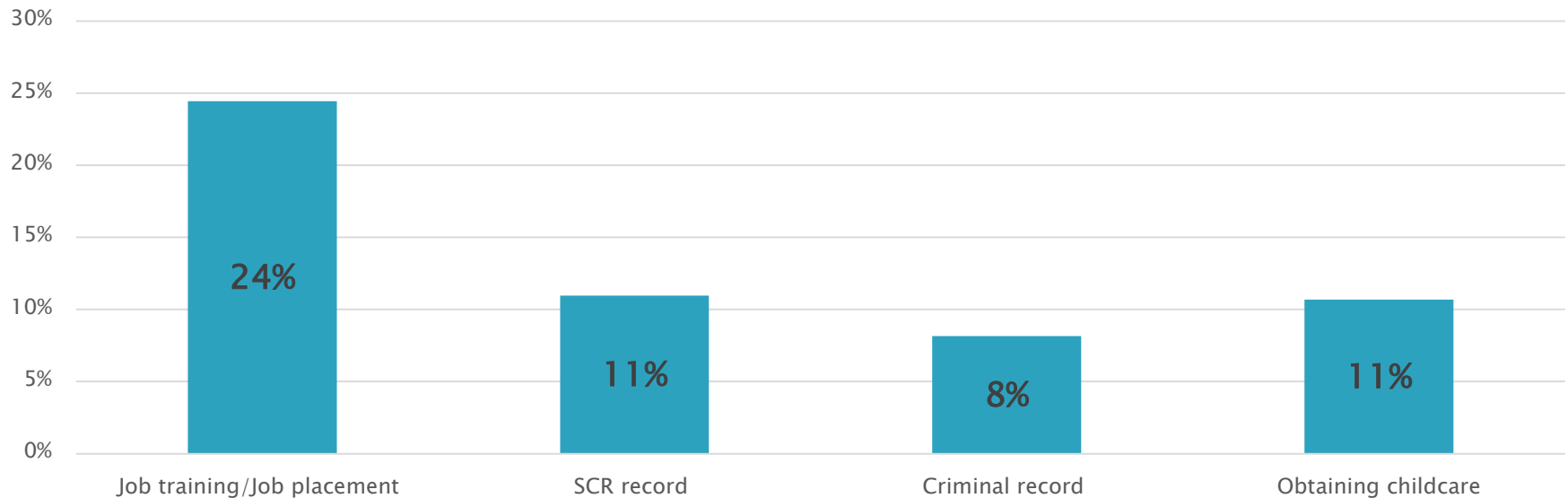
# Needs Assessment

## Employment

- ▶ One in four clients had issues with job training and job placement

Employment: Surveyed Clients Who Experienced Problems with ...  
(Total = 356)

Source: Client Survey



# Needs Assessment

## Employment

- ▶ How are employment needs currently being met?
  - Job training/placement: HRA, Summer Youth Employment Program
  - Childcare: ACS, foster care or preventive services agencies
  
- ▶ Opportunities:
  - Clients listed CFR as already providing services to amend criminal and SCR records
    - Suggests growing this capacity
  - Career training and employment opportunities for youth
  - Additional service needs: Acces–VR, acquiring a loan to pay for job training



# Needs Assessment

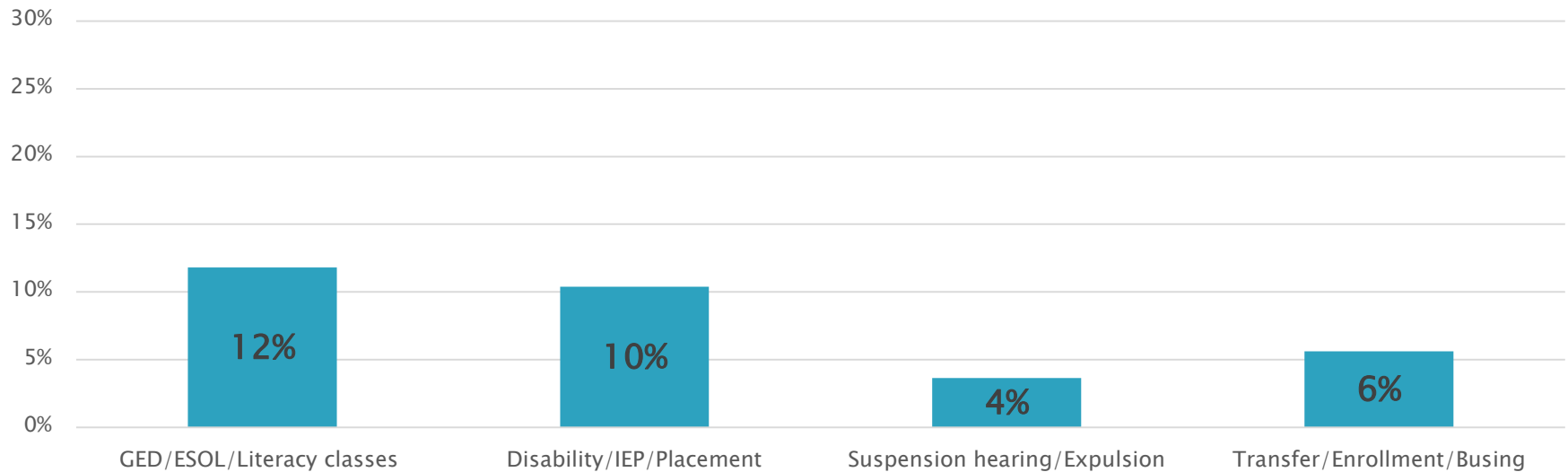
## Education

- ▶ Ten percent of clients had education problems related to disability/IEP/placement

Education: Surveyed Clients Who Experienced Problems with ...

(Total = 356)

Source: Client Survey



# Needs Assessment

## Education

- ▶ How are educational service needs met?
  - GED courses and testing through EOC or other private providers
  - DOE-related issues either through direct advocacy or with assistance from foster care or preventive services agencies
  
- ▶ Opportunities:
  - Advocacy with schools on behalf of clients
  - Additional service needs: afterschool programs and tutoring, summer programs, GED testing, CPR training



# Needs Assessment

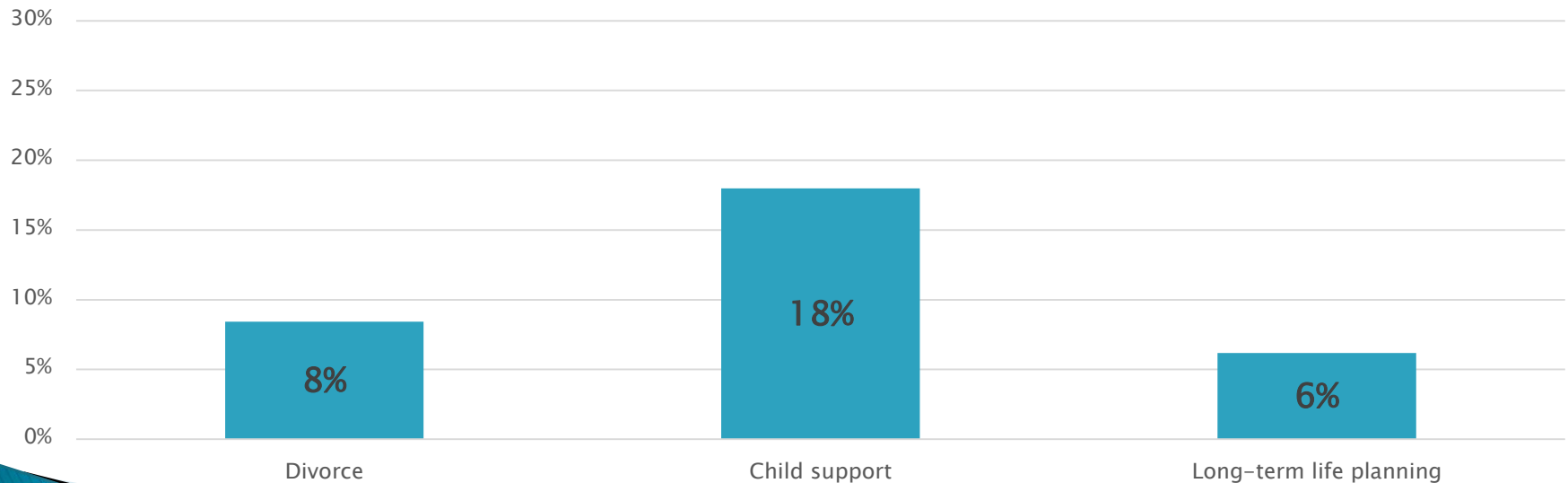
## Family

- ▶ Eighteen percent of clients experienced problems with child support, and few received needed services

Family: Surveyed Clients Who Experienced Problems with ...

(Total = 356)

Source: Client Survey



# Needs Assessment

## Family

- ▶ How are family service needs met?
  - Divorce: private attorneys
  - Child support: generally unmet
  - Long-term life planning: HRA, OPWDD, social work services at hospitals
  
- ▶ Opportunities:
  - Child support and divorce case representation
  - Additional service needs: domestic violence counseling and support services, homemaking services, play therapy for children (“Mommy and me” classes)





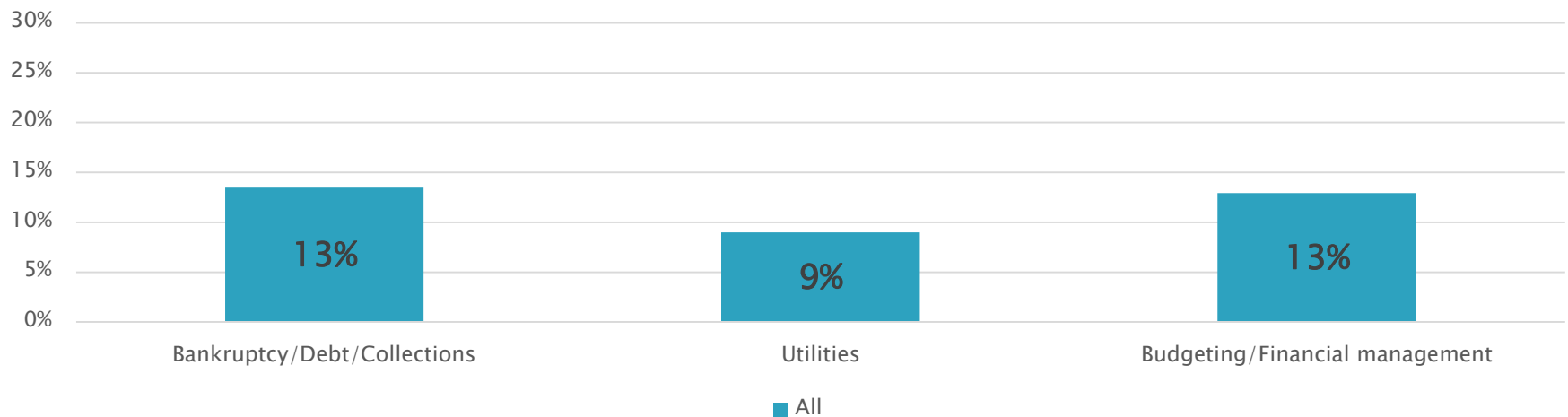
# Needs Assessment

## Consumer

- ▶ Few clients experienced consumer-related problems, but almost all needs were unmet

Consumer: Surveyed Clients Who Experienced Problems with ...  
(Total = 356)

Source: Client Survey



# Needs Assessment

## Consumer

- ▶ How are consumer service needs met?
  - Bankruptcy/Debt/Collections: private attorneys
  - Utilities: Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) through HRA and OTDA
  - Budgeting/Financial Management: unmet
  
- ▶ Opportunities:
  - Bankruptcy/Debt/Collections case representation
  - Financial management training



# Discussion

- ▶ In what areas does CFR want deeper analyses?
  - Breakdowns of needs by borough, age, or zip code
  - Service need overlaps
  - Comparisons of survey data to CMS data
  - Lists of providers that clients mentioned
  - Presentation, written report, or executive summary
  
- ▶ How do these trends correspond with CFR's knowledge of clients?
  - What findings are surprising?
  - Questions and comments?

