

Poverty in Washington County

Compiled by Community Action - visit us at www.communityaction4u.org

What do we mean by poverty? Federal poverty guidelines: \$18,392 annual household income for a family of four or \$8.85/hour. This is \$1.80 above minimum wage.

Why are People Poor? There are many causes of poverty. The county has begun to classify poverty into four categories: special needs/long-term/episodic/unemployment.

Why are so many children poor? To afford housing in Washington County, a family needs income of \$31,803 or \$15.29/hour (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2002). Many families are paying ½ or more of their income for housing, making them vulnerable to a housing slide. They are choosing among their basic needs because their income doesn't cover all their expenses.

Many agricultural jobs still exist and, traditionally, poverty has been associated with farm workers. Farm workers do earn some of the lowest wages in our county but we are seeing the growth in poverty among all of the "working poor" not just farm workers. Many of the jobs created in the past decade are in the service sector, offering lower wages not living wages, and often don't provide health care coverage.

Many working parents are struggling and the problem is compounded by the high cost of child care.

What are the poverty trends? The entire county is growing so poverty is growing too, but not proportionately.

- Between 1990-2002: county population grew 51%; poverty grew 119%

We estimate that county-wide there are approximately 121,367 people who are struggling to make ends meet (based on 200% of federal poverty level).

How is your community doing with indicators of poverty?

- Tualatin: Experienced a 77% increase in poverty between 1990-2000
- Hillsboro: Has the fastest growing "welfare" caseload in the state
- Gaston/Banks: Lack of child care – worst area of the county if you need a provider
- Beaverton: 4,300 requests for emergency services- the most in the county
- Tigard: 1,900 households sought emergency food boxes last year
- North Plains: 20% of households are paying more than 1/3 of income for their Housing
- Forest Grove: 22% of residents over the age of 25 have less than a high school education; ½ of those have less than a 9th grade education