

Youth Living in Poverty

According to data published by the U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates for Washington Counties, 2010, approximately 18.2 percent (283,993) of Washington's children under age 18 lived below the poverty level in 2010. This represents over a 13.7 percent increase in the number of children living in poverty from 2009 (249,866). The number of children living in poverty in Washington State increased by 22.3 percent from 2006 to 2010. While children account for only 1 out of every 4 people in Washington, they account for nearly 1 of every 3 people in poverty.

An indicator of children living in poverty is the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program. In Washington State, the number of children eligible for the free and reduced lunch program has increased during the past five years, from 388,254 in 2007 to 467,279 in 2011. This is an increase of over 20 percent. The largest increase in National School Lunch program occurred between 2008 and 2009 when the number of eligible students went from 400,760 (2008) to 433,017(2009).

Perhaps even more indicative of poverty is the increase in Washington's unemployment rate. That rate increased from 4.9 percent in 2006 to 9.4 percent in 2010. The rate for 2011 only fell to 9.2 percent and through the first nine months of 2012, the rate averaged 8.4 percent. According to Greg Weeks, economist for Brandt Information Services and former LMEA Director, Employment Security Department, State of Washington, *"Poverty estimates tracked closely with the unemployment rate through 2011. Thus far in 2012, Washington is recovering even more slowly than the nation, and the state poverty rate can be expected to follow a similar trend. The Washington State Economic and Revenue Forecast Council expects the slow pace of economic recovery to continue, with the unemployment rate projected to stay above 7.0 percent through 2015."*

Children and youth living in poverty is widely recognized as an indicator of well being. Poverty is closely linked to inadequate prenatal care, low birth weight, low academic

achievement, risky behavior, and emotional problems. In addition to the physical and emotional health issues associated with poverty, the Child Trends Data Bank points out that, "...poverty in childhood and adolescence is associated with a higher risk for negative cognitive and academic outcomes, including decreased cognitive abilities and development, less school attendance, lower reading and math test scores, increased distractibility, and higher rates of grade failure and early high school dropout. Poor children are also more likely than other children to have externalizing and other behavior problems, increased aggression, and emotional problems, and are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors during adolescence".

According to Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D., A Framework for Understanding Poverty, poverty is more than a lack of financial resources. Further, the extent of a person's ability to leave poverty is more dependent upon other resources than it is upon financial resources. Dr. Payne explains that poverty is "the extent to which an individual does without resources." She goes on to identify resources in eight areas: 1) financial, 2) emotional, 3) mental, 4) spiritual, 5) physical, 6) support systems, 7) relationships/role models, and 8) knowledge of hidden rules. This is important in that crime and poverty are so inter-relational. An understanding of the extent of resource deficits in these areas is instrumental to understanding juvenile delinquency and effective prevention, intervention and treatment strategies.
