



**2007 Washington County  
Issues of Poverty  
*and*  
Community Action's Response**



1001 SW Baseline Street  
Hillsboro, OR 97123  
503.648.6646  
503.648.4175 Fax  
[www.communityaction4u.org](http://www.communityaction4u.org)

#### OUR PROGRAMS:

- Child Care Resource & Referral of Washington County
- Energy & Emergency Services
- Head Start/Early Head Start
- Housing and Homeless Services
- Information & Referral
- Opening Doors
- Weatherization

#### OUR PROMISE:

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community and are dedicated to helping individuals help themselves and each other.



January 2007

Dear Colleagues,

In partnership with the community, Community Action helps low-income people achieve self-determination and greater economic security. Since 1965, we have been addressing the causes and conditions of poverty in Washington County through a wide range of services and strategies. Our staff have extensive contact with people living here who are struggling to make ends meet. From this contact and the services that we provide, we have learned a great deal about the issues of poverty affecting our community.

A few years ago we decided to take a different approach to compiling a community needs assessment. A small group of staff and board members came together to discuss what we were learning and to identify some basic premises that we believed to be true about poverty in Washington County. This resulted in the establishment of the following seven premises of poverty:

1. The low-income population is increasing and diversifying.
2. Low wage jobs by themselves do not lift families out of poverty conditions, but they are an important first step.
3. People living in conditions of poverty are unable to meet their basic needs.
4. Public Assistance, or "welfare", is not an economic solution because it keeps families in poverty.
5. Lack of access to education and family-wage jobs limit earning potential.
6. Lack of access to affordable and adequate housing and health care has reached a crisis.
7. Children are disproportionately affected by poverty in Washington County, and the lack of sufficient support limits their potential to break the cycle of poverty.

We followed up with research to determine if there was data that supported these premises and refined our work along the way. This information has provided us with a useful educational tool and has helped to guide our organization as we plan our service strategies and program priorities to carry out our mission in Washington County. We want to share what we have learned in this updated version and hope that you will find it to be useful as well. You can also access this information from our web site [www.communityaction4u.org](http://www.communityaction4u.org). Should you have questions or feedback for us, please contact Katherine Galian at [kgalian@caowash.org](mailto:kgalian@caowash.org). We hope to hear from you.

Sincerely,  
Jerralynn Ness, Executive Director

## Glossary of Terms

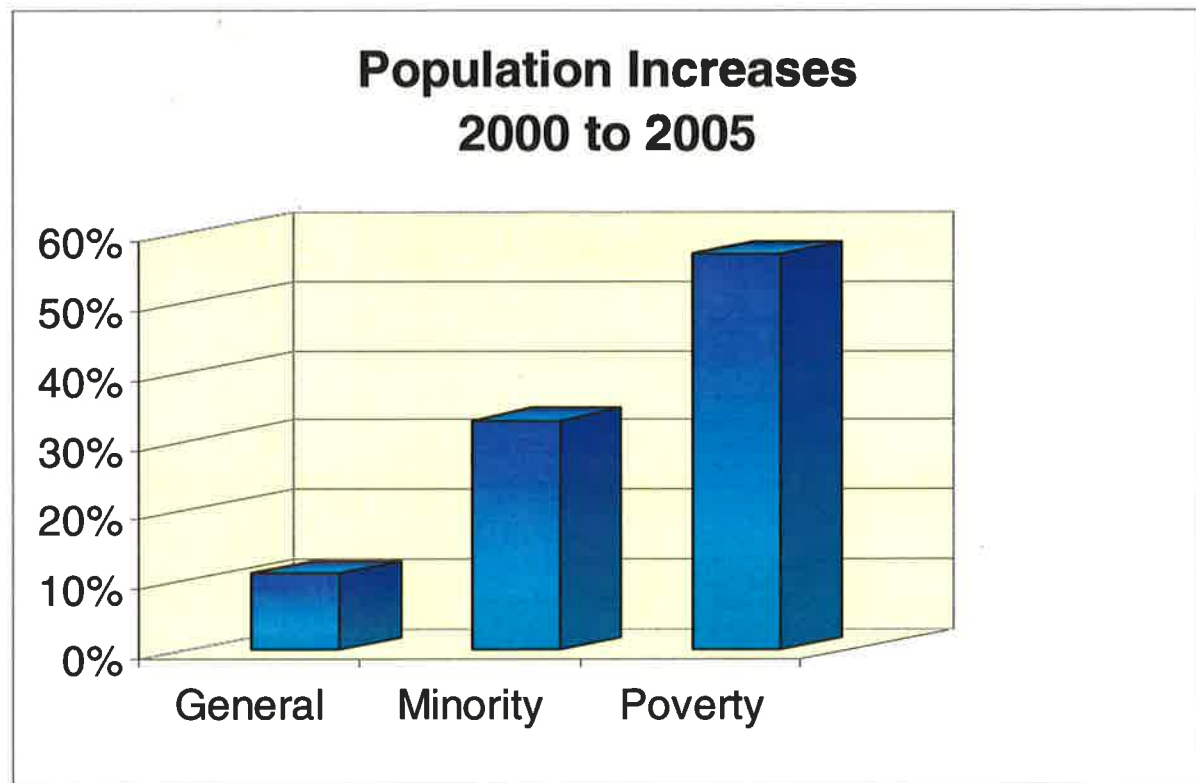
- ☞ Affordable Housing: Total cost of rent and utilities is not more than 30% of the household's gross income.
- ☞ Affordable Housing Income: The income necessary to afford market rate housing.
- ☞ Basic Family Budget: Researched by the Economic Policy Institute, the Basic Family Budget is a realistic measure of the income required to have a safe and decent, though basic, standard of living. It comprises only the amounts a family needs to spend on food, shelter, clothing, transportation and other necessary costs. It does not include savings, restaurant meals, insurance or funds for emergencies. The Basic Family budget used in this document is based on a family of three with one adult and two preschool-aged children and assumes that the family is receiving no public assistance.
- ☞ Basic Needs: Items that are essential to the health and safety of the family. These items include food, shelter, heat, utilities, health care, clothing, transportation and child care.
- ☞ Child Care: Care for a child under 12 either in the child's own home by a paid caregiver, in the home of a paid caregiver or in a child care center. Costs of child care vary depending on the age of the child and the setting in which the care is provided.
- ☞ Conditions of Poverty: People living in conditions of poverty are unable to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter, heat, utilities, clothing, transportation, health and child care.
- ☞ Family of Three: All cost estimates are based on a family of three consisting of one adult and two preschool age children.
- ☞ Federal Poverty Level: Established by the Social Security Administration in 1964. The poverty level is based on USDA estimates of food costs and the 1955 Food Consumption Survey that showed that families spent roughly one-third of their income on food. It is calculated by multiplying estimated food costs by three with adjustments for family size and is used as a statistical tool to calculate the number of people in poverty. The poverty level is revised annually by the Census Bureau to allow for changes in the cost of living as reflected in the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). The poverty level is the same for all parts of the country (except Alaska and Hawaii); it is not adjusted for regional, state or local variations in the cost of living. For a family of three, the 2006 Federal Poverty Level is \$16,600 per year.
- ☞ Head Start: Head Start is a national program that promotes school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to low-income children and families.
- ☞ Low-Income: A family is low-income if their annual income is less than 50% of the area median income or 185% of the federal poverty level for their household size. For the purposes of this document, low-income is \$30,550 for a family of three.
- ☞ Median Family Income: The median family income is determined by dividing the total number of family incomes in a specific region into two equal parts. The median is the income at which there are an equal number of families with higher and lower incomes. Unlike the Federal Poverty Level, median income is specific to a geographic region; for the purposes of this document, the Portland Metro Area. Median Family Income for this area is \$64,879.
- ☞ Low-Wage Industries: Those with jobs paying an average wage of less than \$30,000 per year. The average wage of a worker in low-wage industries in Oregon is \$19,800 per year.
- ☞ Public Assistance – Welfare: Temporary Aid to Needy Families, or TANF, was created by the Welfare Reform Law of 1996. TANF became effective July 1, 1997, and replaced what was then commonly known as welfare: *Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)* and the *Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS)* programs. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program provides cash assistance to low-income families with children while they strive to become self-sufficient. The goal of the program is to reduce the number of families living in poverty, through employment and community resources. To qualify for TANF, families must have very few assets and little or no income. The current maximum monthly benefit for a family of three is \$503. Many families in the TANF program must participate in the JOBS employment and training program, which helps them prepare for and find work. They may also receive help with problems around housing, child care, alcohol or drug abuse, domestic-violence and other factors that affect family stability.

## Washington County Issues of Poverty

**Premise # 1:** The low-income population is increasing and diversifying.

### Supporting Data:

- The Washington County population living below the federal poverty line is growing nearly 6 times faster than the general population.<sup>1</sup>
- The minority population in Washington County has increased 33% from 99,091 in 2000 to 131,870 in 2005.<sup>1</sup>
- While minorities constitute 27% of general population, they are 35% of total poverty population.<sup>1</sup>



**Premise # 1:** The low-income population is increasing and diversifying.

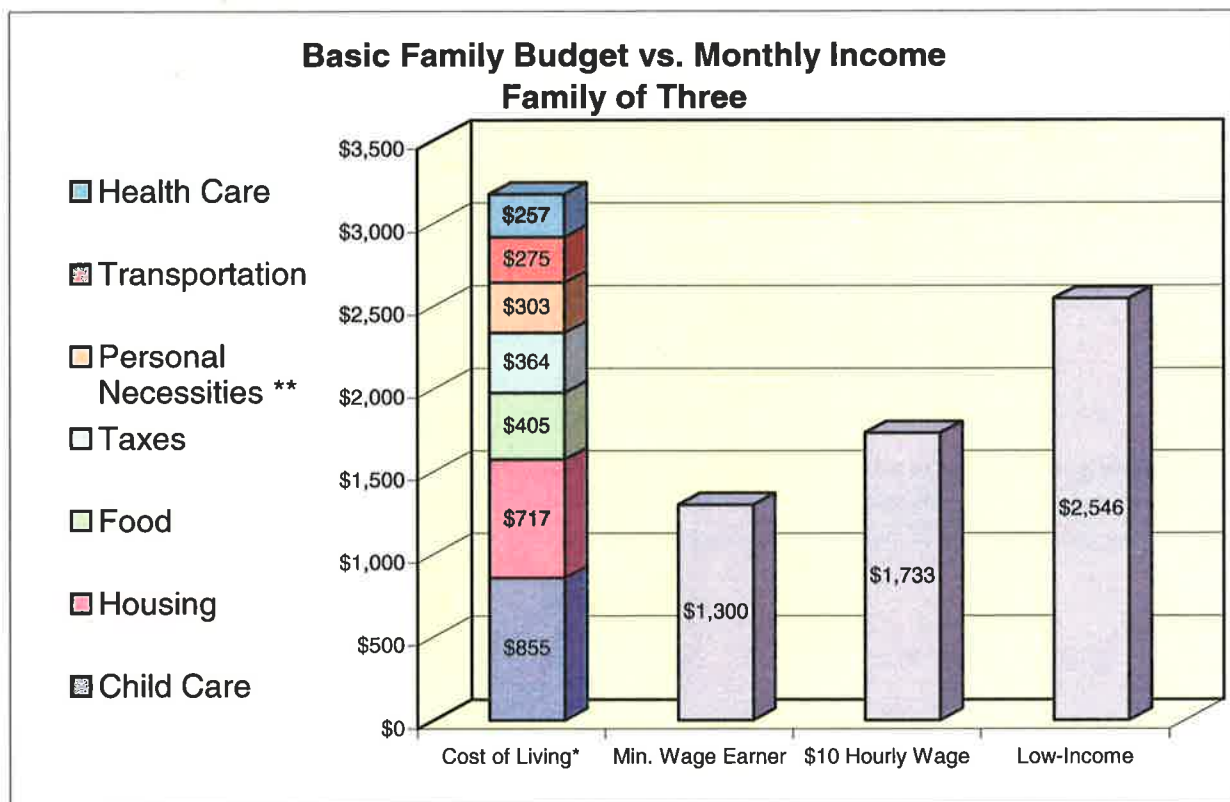
**Current Community Action Strategies:**

- Our services focus on promoting self-determination and removing barriers to economic security.
- We expand partnerships & collaborations to increase community responsiveness to local needs.
- Community Action educates the community about poverty issues and advocates for changes needed to reduce poverty and poverty conditions.
- We are serving more families with Energy Assistance and Weatherization and are expanding services related to housing, homelessness, and child care.
- We deliver services in Spanish and English.
- We reach out to pregnant low-income women through Opening Doors, Vietnamese child care providers through Child Care Resource and Referral, and to Somali families, and children of incarcerated women, through Early Head Start.
- We are making adjustments in infrastructure and services that will build our capacity for major increases in Head Start and other services.

**Premise # 2:** Low wage jobs by themselves do not lift families out of poverty conditions, but they are an important first step. An increasing number of families experiencing conditions of poverty are working, but earning less than \$30,000 annually, leaving them economically insecure.

**Supporting Data:**

- Poverty level for a family of three is \$16,600<sup>2</sup> annually, yet a single parent working full time earning minimum wage has an annual income of \$15,600.
- In Washington County a household of three is considered “low-income” if they earn \$30,550 or less per year.<sup>3</sup>
- Since November 2000 low-wage industries (those paying less than \$30,000/year on average) accounted for 63% of all job growth in Oregon.<sup>4</sup>
- To maintain employment families need reliable child care. The market rate for child care ranges from \$433 to \$863 per month, per child depending on the age of the child and type of care.<sup>5</sup>



\* Cost of living based on Basic Family Budget<sup>6</sup>

\*\* Necessities include: clothing, personal care expenses, household supplies, reading materials, school supplies, and other miscellaneous items of necessity from the Consumer Expenditure Survey.

**Premise # 2:** Low wage jobs by themselves do not lift families out of poverty conditions, but they are an important first step. An increasing number of families experiencing conditions of poverty are working but earning less than \$30,000 annually, leaving them economically insecure.

**Current Community Action Strategies:**

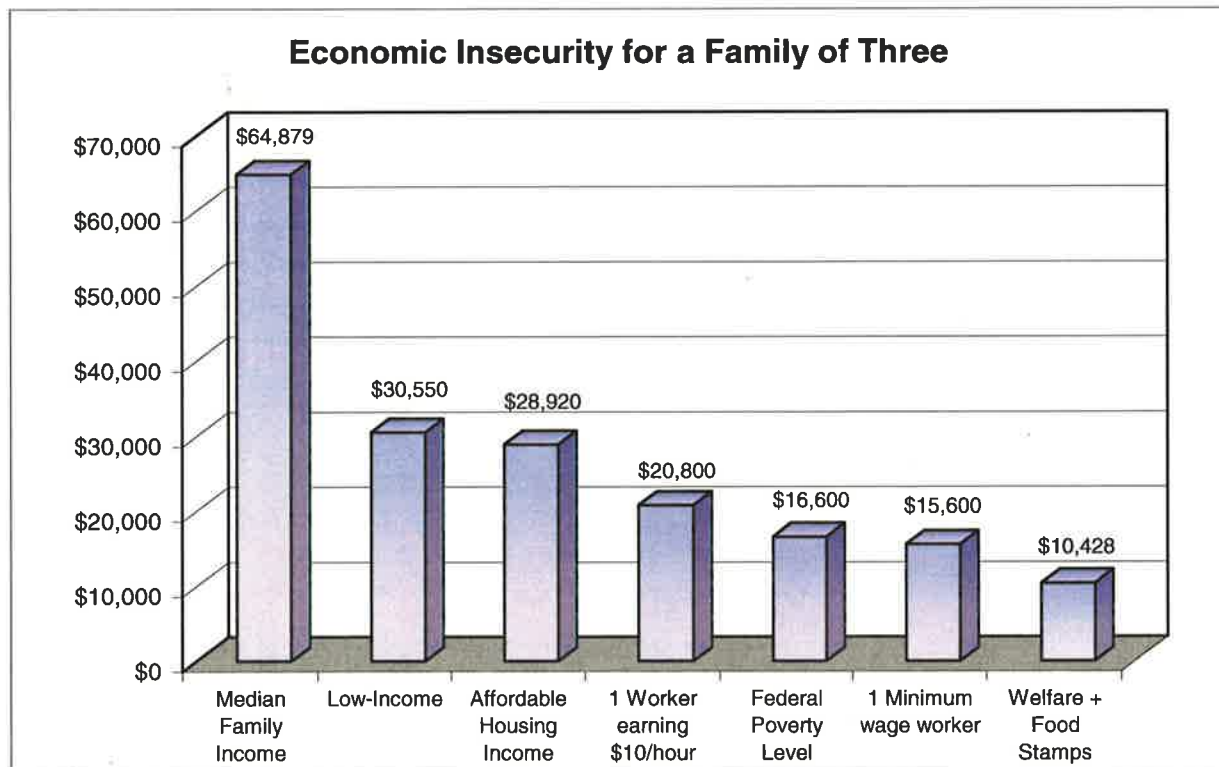
- We work with each individual family to tailor services to their needs.
- We provide child care to support families in the work force because stable child care contributes to increased job performance and opportunities for advancement.\*
- We increase the quality of child care, community-wide, through education and training of providers.
- We provide working parents with no-cost child care referrals to help them access safe and affordable child care services.
- We provide adult education to increase competence and opportunity for greater economic security.
- We work in collaboration with community partners to help homeless individuals reduce barriers to employment.
- We work in partnership with CASH (Creating Assets, Savings & Hope) to provide free tax preparation in order to increase the number of eligible taxpayers applying for federal and state Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) and other tax credits.

\* Loss of funding has resulted in a reduction in the number of children who receive child care through Community Action, including the closure of our before and after school program in Forest Grove School District and the conversion of 30 full day Head Start slots to part day preschool.

**Premise # 3:** People living in conditions of poverty are unable to meet their basic needs. Many residents living at levels above the poverty rate are economically unstable and are making choices between these basic needs. One ordinary, unexpected expense can be catastrophic.

**Supporting Data:**

- Every month, nearly 13,000 people in Washington County access food pantries because they cannot afford to feed their family.<sup>7</sup>
- On any given night over 1,000 people in Washington County are homeless.<sup>8</sup>
- 80,000 people in Washington County live without health insurance.<sup>9</sup>
- In 2005-2006, 7,014 households couldn't afford to keep the heat on in their homes.<sup>10</sup>





**Premise # 3:** People living in conditions of poverty are unable to meet their basic needs. Many residents living at levels above the poverty rate are economically unstable and are making choices between these basic needs. One ordinary, unexpected expense can be catastrophic.

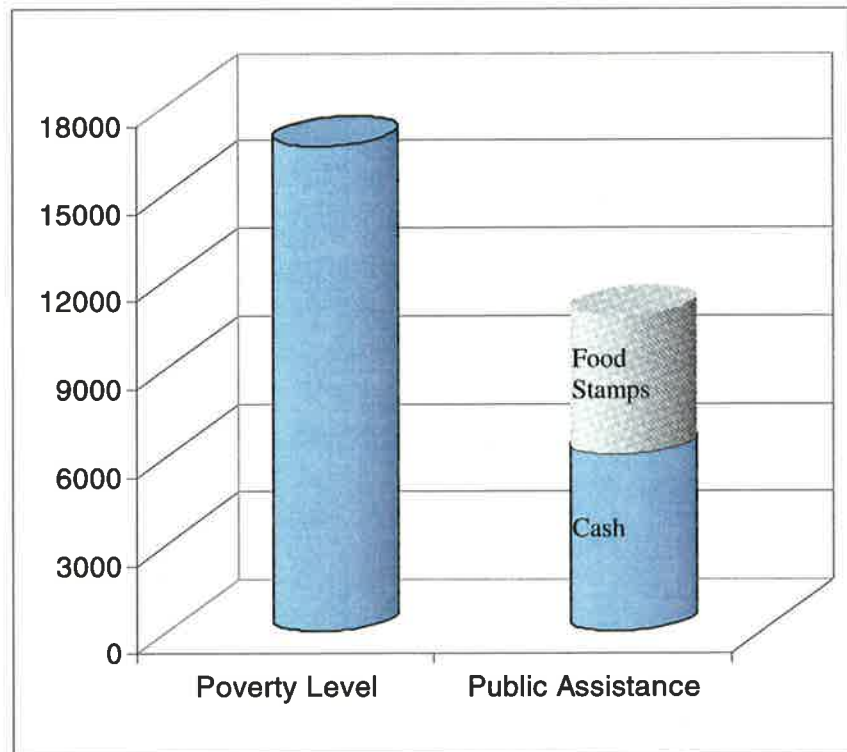
**Current Community Action Strategies:**

- We provide emergency assistance for heat, electricity, rent and services to stabilize housing.
- We weatherize homes to increase warmth and reduce costs.
- We shelter homeless families with children.
- We provide emergency food boxes from our Hillsboro Shelter Home.
- We provide one county-wide shelter access number for homeless families.
- We provide health services to Head Start children and connect low-income pregnant women to pre-natal care and other support services.
- We have increased access to health and human service resources through 211*info*.

**Premise # 4:** Public Assistance, or “welfare”, is not an economic solution because it keeps families in poverty.

**Supporting Data:**

- A family of three eligible for public assistance receives \$503/mo, which would total \$6,036/year,<sup>11</sup> \$10,000 below the federal poverty line.
- In Washington County there are 7,061 families living below the federal poverty line<sup>1</sup>. Less than half of them received public assistance in 2005.<sup>11</sup>
- More than half of the households that accessed emergency food services in 2005 found that food stamps were not enough to keep their families fed.<sup>12</sup>



**Premise # 4:** Public Assistance, or “welfare”, is not an economic solution because it keeps families in poverty.

**Current Community Action Strategies:**

- We partner with the Department of Human Services to provide Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) to families transitioning from welfare to work.
- We provide emergency and basic needs services to families on “welfare” to reduce the conditions of poverty or prevent destitution.
- We advocate for state and federal policies that better support families as they transition from welfare to work.

**Premise # 5:** Lack of access to education and family-wage jobs limit earning potential.

**Supporting Data:**

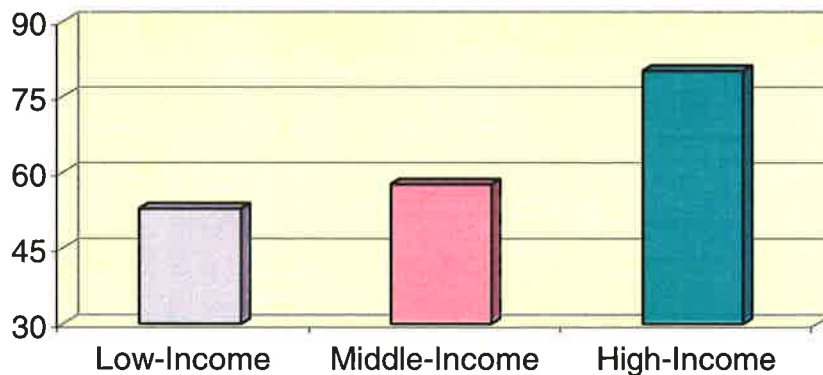
**Education**

- In 2004-2005, 717 students dropped out of Washington County high schools.<sup>13</sup>
- In 2003-2004, nearly twice as many low-income students as middle and high income students left Oregon high schools without earning a diploma.<sup>13</sup>
- The average cost of tuition and fees at Oregon Colleges and Universities increased 27% from 2000-2001 to 2004-2005 making higher education less accessible for middle and low-income students.<sup>14</sup>

**Family Wage Jobs**

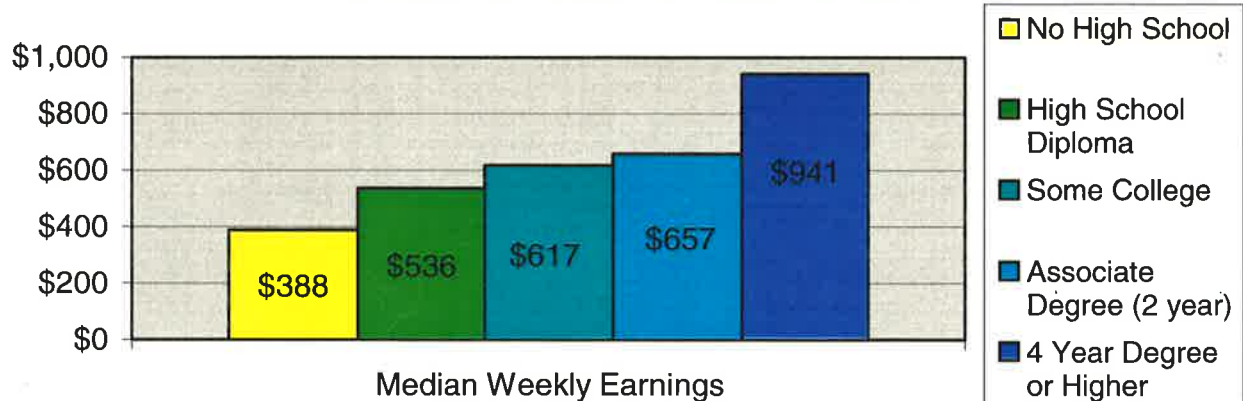
- Since November of 2000, low-wage industries accounted for 63% of all net job growth in Oregon.<sup>15</sup>
- Low-wage jobs account for more than one-third of all Oregon jobs.<sup>15</sup>
- The average annual income of a low-wage jobholder in Oregon is \$19,800.<sup>16</sup>

**Enrollment Rates of College Eligible High School Graduates by Income Level - 2003**



National data from the National Center for Education Statistics

**The More You Learn The More You Earn**



**Premise # 5:** Lack of access to education and family-wage jobs limit earning potential.

**Current Community Action Strategies:**

- We prepare children for success in school and involve parents and caregivers to reinforce the importance of education.
- We help homeless children enroll in, and remain in, school.
- We provide computer access for low-income families and Head Start children.
- We encourage leadership development through parent involvement on Head Start Policy Council.
- We have established funds to help low income adults pay for needed education and training.
- We provide an address and phone number for job seeking homeless people.
- We stabilize housing so families can concentrate on work search or employment.

**Premise # 6:** Lack of access to affordable and adequate housing and health care has reached a crisis.

**Supporting Data:**

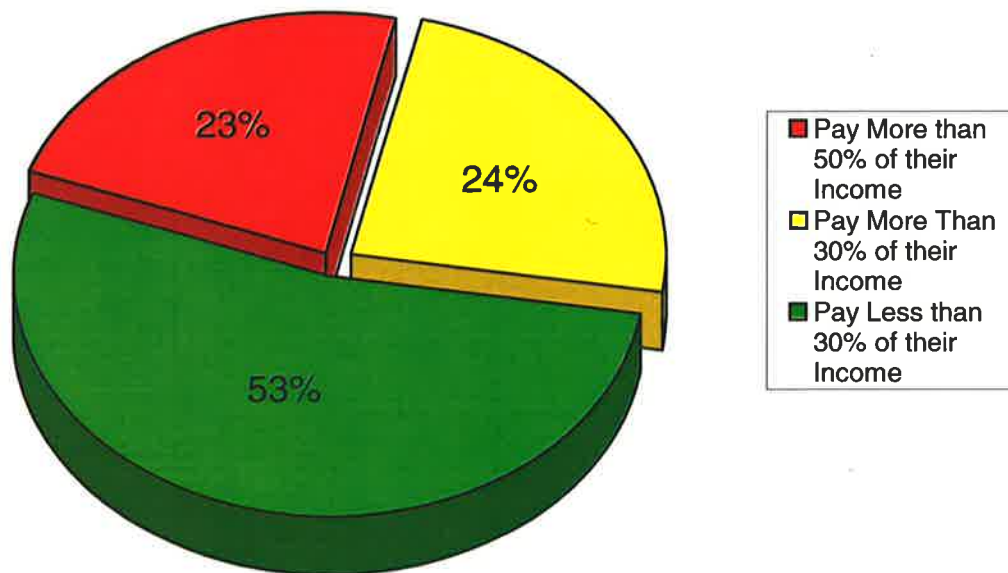
**Housing:**

- Nearly half of Washington County renters at all income levels live in housing that is unaffordable.<sup>1</sup>
- A full time worker must earn \$13.90 per hour to afford a two-bedroom market rate unit; market rent for a 2-bedroom apartment is \$723 per month.<sup>17</sup>
- There is a 3-5 year waiting list for subsidized housing vouchers, with approximately 5,544 households waiting.<sup>18</sup>

**Health Care**

- Approximately 80,000 people in Washington County have no health insurance.<sup>19</sup>
- 67% of people accessing free health care for the uninsured are employed.<sup>20</sup>
- 40% of Oregon employers offer no health care benefits.<sup>15</sup>

**Renters Lack Affordable Housing**



**Premise # 6:** Lack of access to affordable and adequate housing and health care has reached a crisis.

**Current Community Action Strategies:**

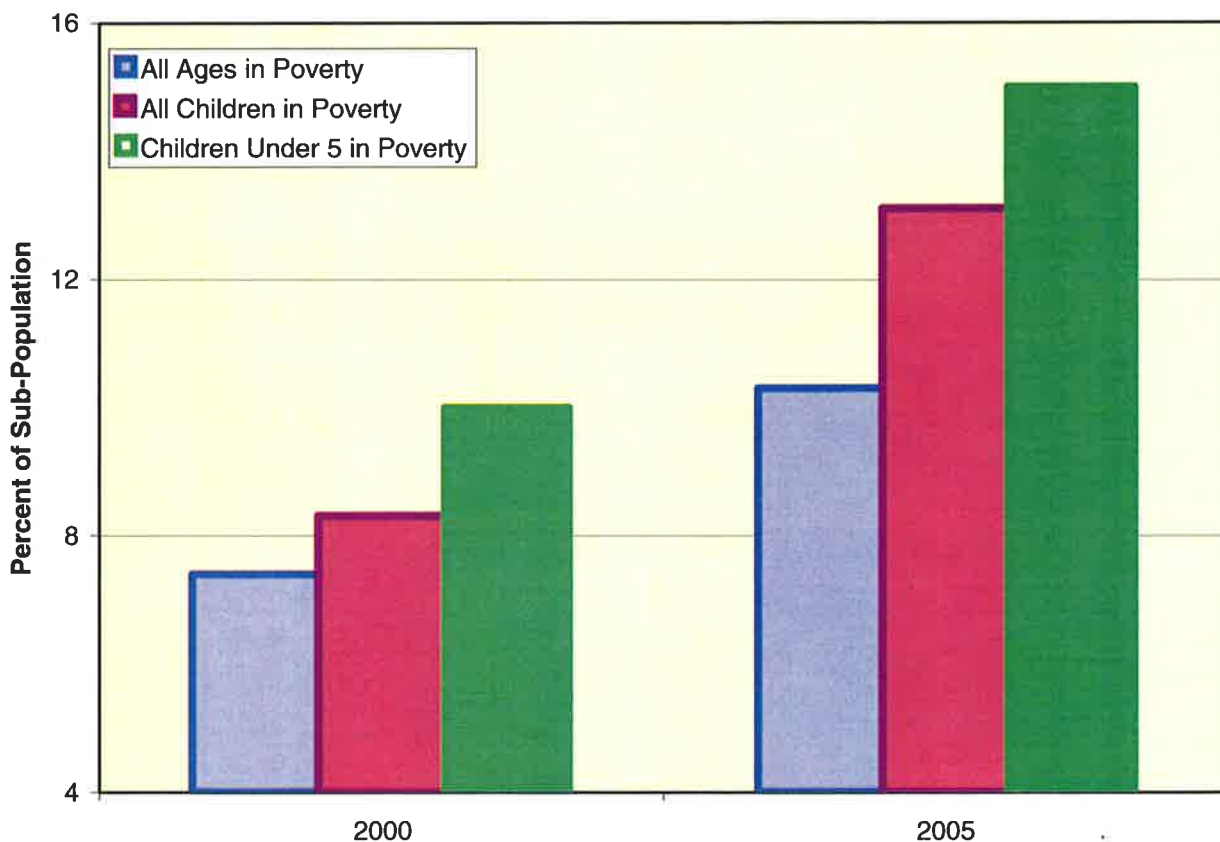
- We provide rent assistance to prevent homelessness.
- We work with local landlords to increase the number of those willing to accept low-income and formerly homeless tenants.
- We provide leadership for greater collaborations to address housing and homeless issues.
- We advocate and support efforts to build affordable housing and educate the community and policy makers about the need.
- We connect pregnant women participating in Opening Doors to prenatal care and assure that their newborns have health care.
- We ensure Head Start children have medical, dental and developmental screenings, get connected to a “medical home”, and receive needed medical and dental treatment.
- We assist the Essential Health Clinic with volunteer leadership and translation support.

**Premise #7:** Children are disproportionately affected by poverty in Washington County, and the lack of sufficient support limits their potential to break the cycle of poverty.

### Supporting Data

- From 2000 to 2005 the number of children living in poverty in Washington County increased 63% while the general poverty population increased 57%.<sup>1</sup>
- Children in poverty consistently fare worse than their peers in physical health, cognitive abilities, school achievement and emotional or behavioral health.<sup>21</sup>
- For every child enrolled in Head Start there is another child on the waiting list.<sup>22</sup>
- During the 2005-06 school year, 1,362 Washington County students were homeless.<sup>23</sup>
- On any given day, 117,000 children in Oregon do not have health insurance.<sup>24</sup>

**Increases in the Poverty Population**





**Premise #7:** Children are disproportionately affected by poverty in Washington County, and the lack of sufficient support limits their potential to break the cycle of poverty.

**Current Community Action Strategies:**

- We are working toward, and planning for, Head Start expansion that could increase enrollment from 645 to over 1,000.
- We increase the quality of child care children receive through training and technical assistance to child care centers and family child care providers.
- We provided before and after school care to low-income migrant children in the Forest Grove School District.\*
- We provide a variety of services and support to homeless children so they can succeed in school.
- We increase the number of healthy babies by providing pregnancy support to low income pregnant mothers.
- We promote healthy child development through programs for at-risk parents.
- We direct 57% of agency resources to children's issues.

\* When our KidZone/AKD program in Forest Grove schools closed, we worked with the local school district, other non-profits, and the Oregon Employment Division to help identify another provider for before and after school care for migrant children.

## Footnotes

- 1 United States Census Bureau, 2000 Decennial Census and 2005 American Community Survey: Washington County population in 2000: 445,342, in 2005: 495,597; Population below federal poverty level in 2000: 32,575, in 2005: 51,029; 2005 Minority population: 132,589, 2005 Minority population below federal poverty level: 17,993
- 2 Federal Register, January 24, 2006
- 3 Washington County Office of Community Development, 2006 Poverty Guidelines
- 4 Oregon Center for Public Policy, Who's Getting Ahead – Opportunity in a Growing Economy, September 2006
- 5 2006 Oregon Child Care Market Rate Study, Table 10/pg 22
- 6 Basic Family Budget developed by the Economic Policy Institute based on cost estimates for a family of three with one working adult and two preschool-aged children.
- 7 Oregon Food Bank
- 8 January 2006 One Night Shelter Count
- 9 Washington County Health Department Website
- 10 Community Action Energy Assistance Program
- 11 Oregon Department of Human Services
- 12 Oregon Food Bank – The State of Hunger, July 1, 2005 – June 30, 2006
- 13 Oregon Department of Education
- 14 Institute for College Access and Success, Economic Diversity of Colleges, 2005 Data, [www.economicdiversity.org](http://www.economicdiversity.org)
- 15 Oregon Center for Public Policy, “Who's Getting Ahead? Opportunity in a Growing Economy”, September 2006. pg 16
- 16 Oregon Employment Department – OLMIS Report: Low-Wage Industries Continue to Fuel Oregon Job Growth, August 2006
- 17 National Low-Income Housing Coalition, Oregon Out of Reach, 2005
- 18 Washington County Department of Housing Services
- 19 Washington County Health Department Website
- 20 Essential Health Clinic Newsletter, November 2004
- 21 Princeton University, The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, The Future of Children, “The Effects of Poverty on Children, 1997”
- 22 Community Action Head Start
- 23 The Oregonian, To more kids, homework doesn't include a home, 11/16/06
- 24 Children First for Oregon, 2006 report card

2007 Washington County Issues of Poverty is a publication of

**Community Action**

1001 SW Baseline Street, Hillsboro, OR 97123

Community Action is a private, non-profit corporation.  
In partnership with the community, Community Action  
assists low-income people to achieve self-determination.

For further information, contact Resource Development  
503.693.3255, or visit our website:

[www.communityaction4u.org](http://www.communityaction4u.org)

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Jerralynn Ness

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