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D.C. poverty level likely higher than report shows

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DAVIS COUNTY — Davis County figures released Thursday by the Community Action Partnership of Utah may be deceiving, as they show a decrease in the poverty rate in the county, while Utah as a whole has seen a significant increase in those rates.

The reason?

The numbers released by the agency for counties are from the Utah Department of Workforce Services and represent the poverty rate between 2007 and 2008, prior to the current economic downturn, while the state numbers are for 2009. Figures from local agencies helping those in need indicate the number of people needing help skyrocketing even in Davis County.

Still, Davis County is still probably doing better than many areas of the state.

The 2010 Annual Report on Poverty in Utah shows Utahns' per capita income 1.3 percent below the national average, dropping an additional 3.7 percent from 2008 to 2009. With incomes decreasing and unemployment continuing to rise, more Utahns are going hungry.

The report says that one in five households in the state experienced food hardships in 2009. And, even though food banks are reporting that donations are up, pantries are seeing even more requests for help.

Paul Leggett, executive director of CAP Utah said, "I don't think it's a surprise, but overall Utahns have lower wages, and with less money being put into the economy, the ability of families to buy homes and basic necessities is decreasing," he said. "What may be a surprise is this year's poverty report shows income in Utah is decreasing faster than the rest of the nation, meaning we have to work even harder to recover from the job losses of the last couple of years."

Figures released last fall show there were 1,330 homeless students enrolled in the Davis School District and 617 individuals who received shelter. Area food pantries are seeing requests for help rise monthly. Last December, the Bountiful Community Food Pantry served more than 2,000 individuals, double the number they saw in 2007.

CAP figures show that 11.5 percent of the state's population lived in poverty in



2009, a significant jump over the previous year when 9.6 percent of Utahns reported living in poverty.

The 2008 figures indicate only 6.1 percent of Davis County residents live below the poverty line, which still equated to 17,875 individuals, 7,364 of them children. The 2008 figures also show only 629 people homeless in Davis County in 2008.

The report shows unemployment at 5.9 percent in Davis County, and 7.4 percent statewide. There were more than 7,000 children living in poverty in the latest county figures, while the 2009 figures show more than 100,000 youngsters, or 12.2 percent of the population living in poverty statewide.

The number of Utahns using food stamps was 259,107 last year, while 20,674 Davis County residents were using food stamps in 2008.

More than 36 percent of Utah children were participating in free or reduced price lunch programs, compared with 25.6 percent of Davis County kids two years ago.

It appears more Davis County residents have health insurance, with 10.5 percent of Davis County residents reporting having no health insurance in 2008, while 14.8 percent of Utahns as a whole had no health insurance in 2009.

The report is a collaboration between the Utah State Community Services Office and CAP Utah. Because poverty has many varied causes and solutions, it provides information on housing and homelessness, health care, food and nutrition, education, and other factors. The report can be seen in its entirety at www.caputah.org.

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