

Kane County leads charge in dealing with poverty

According to an annual report released by the State of Utah and the Community Action Partnership of Utah (CAP Utah), Kane County has seen a 18 percent decrease in the number of individuals living in poverty.

The 2009 Annual Report on Poverty in Utah documents statistics and factors as to why the number of families in poverty fluctuates.

"Kane County is one of the few in Utah that has actually seen a decrease of those living in poverty," said CAP Utah Executive Director Heather Tritten. "Our statewide statistics are not nearly so positive. In fact, this is the first time in decades that we're seeing families who have lived in the middle class for their entire lives teeter on the poverty line."

One key finding from CAP Utah's report is how poverty has

infiltrated Utah's middle and working class families. In 2007, more than 250,000 people, or 10 percent of all Utah residents, lived below the poverty level; additionally, 91,000 or 11 percent of all Utah children lived below the poverty level.

A January 2009 assessment of Utah's nine Community Action Agencies, which help impoverished families get back to full, quality employment, showed 61 percent of people seeking services were doing so for the first time ever.

Utah's unemployment rate jumped 58 percent in 2008.

The Utah Dept. of Workforce Services has seen a 195 percent increase in initial filings for unemployment insurance benefits since 2008. Additionally, emergency food services and food stamps have seen a 30 percent rise. Even with Kane

County's positive numbers in poverty, the county has seen a 33 percent increase in food stamp caseloads.

CAP Utah and State of Utah experts believe that several factors have caused the rise of poverty in Utah. First, Utah's average wage is 80 percent of the national wage, which is the 37th lowest in the nation. Utah also has the nation's second lowest per-capita income at \$30,291 as compared with the national average of \$36,751.

"Families are facing additional difficulties due to increasing healthcare premiums and out-of-pocket costs, and this is contributing to families looking at poverty for the first time," Trit-

ten said. "Over the last decade, the portion of premiums paid by Utah families increased 73 percent and their portions of premiums increased 98 percent. This contributes to the fact that 67 percent of our state's uninsured are actually working families."

As a result of Congress passing the stimulus package, CAP Utah's nine local agencies were able to receive grants in an effort to improve emergency housing services allowing people to remain stable in their homes while they look for employment or recover from a crisis.

The state will also continue to work with CAP and county organizations to increase programs

serving homeless populations. Work programs, training opportunities and access to education will be improved and expanded. Utah's Community Action Agencies will be increasing services, putting a new focus on job creation and training.

"Although our goal of reducing poverty is daunting, we can make great strides by working together," Tritten said. "The Poverty Report helps communities become aware about the challenges facing so many Utah families. But the most important step is becoming engaged in making a difference."

The full 2009 Annual Report on Poverty in Utah is available online at www.caputah.org.



Pigskin Predictions Winner Week #3

Boyd Glover (r) was the winner of week #3 in the SUN Pigskin Predictions football contest by getting eight correct. For his efforts, Glover received a \$50 gift certificate to the Sound Room Radio Shack from Kent Hunt (l).

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