

CSBG Spotlight: Living on the Edge in Kansas

by Beenu Puri

On October 12, 2004, Kansas's Community Action Agencies (CAAs) released *Living on the Edge: A Report on the State of Low-Income Working Kansas Families*. The report was developed by the Kansas Association of Community Action Programs (KACAP), in partnership with Morris Communications and the Kansas Housing Resources Corporation. The report was funded by the state's Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Program. Within the report, data from multiple sources is incorporated to underline the current economic situation within the state and the challenges that exist for low-income individuals and families. The report's key findings have been identified by the Kansas Community Action Network and have become vital to the focus of KACAP's advocacy. Below are some of the reports highlights.

Federal standards classify 11% of Kansas as poor. Yet by looking at the basic family needs budget, 25% of the Kansas population does not have sufficient incomes to meet their basic needs.

There is a \$12,771 "economic reality gap" between what the US government classifies as poor and the dollar figure estimated to cover the basic costs of living in Kansas.

Between 1999 and 2003, Kansas lost more than 40,000 well-paying jobs while unemployment levels increased more than 100%. In addition, 18,000 Kansans have exhausted their unemployment benefits while jobs that are created are well below requirements to meet basic family needs.

Housing costs have risen, therefore imposing an unfair burden upon low-income individuals in the state. Most of the population spends more than 30% of their incomes on rent alone.

On average, child care at an adequate and affordable center in Kansas, if available, for a four-year old costs \$4,500.

Over one in ten residents of Kansas (13%) do not have health insurance and almost all of those uninsured (84%) are working families.

Due to the importance of the reports findings, KACAP recommended a statewide summit be held to address the findings as well as find solutions for the poverty in the state. Governor Sebelius' Health and Human Services Cabinet team have supported the idea of the anti-poverty summit.

In addition to the statewide summit to create a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy, KACAP proposed policy recommendations to state and federal leaders to consider. Among those recommendations for federal leaders are the design of a more flexible system to measure economic challenges, raising the minimum wage, fully funding the Community Services Block Grant to assist CAAs in Kansas, support federal housing subsidies for working poor families and continue to

support Head Start and Early Head Start. For state leaders, KACAP recommends strengthening Workforce Development Programs, providing quality and affordable child care to low income families, support the Kansas Home Ownership Program, and find cost effective ways to provide health insurance for all low-income working individuals and families in Kansas.

Living on the Edge: A Report on the State of Low-Income Working Kansas Families can be viewed by visiting www.kacap.org. For more information on the report, please contact Tawny Stottlemire, Executive Director of KACAP at 785-235-9561 or at tawny@kacap.org.