

## Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy – Washington County, June 9, 2009

### I. Introduction

Washington County, along with the rest of the State of Oregon and the nation, is in a time of great challenge. With the highest unemployment rate in recent history and demand for essential social services far exceeding the supply, low-income people in Washington County face hardship and insecurity of a scale and severity beyond that experienced in the previous decade. However, in this time of great challenge there is also great opportunity. Many of the factors which have brought our community to this point are far beyond the control of local government and service providers, yet there are things that can be done to improve the way services are planned and provided that will serve to mitigate the impact of the current crisis and prepare a path for a brighter future for low-income Washington County residents.

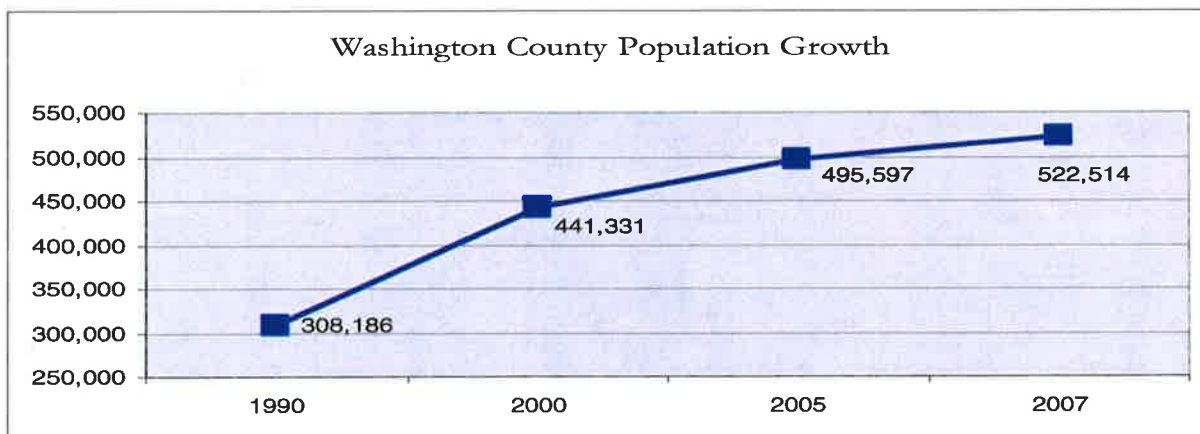
There is ongoing debate about the ability of a local anti-poverty strategy to impact the number of people in a community living in poverty because so many factors are either regional or national in scope (e.g., economic recession) or dependent on individual characteristics (e.g., presence of a disability that acts as a barrier to employment). While recognizing these facts, the goals set forth in this section are designed to meet the needs of the Washington County community.

The Anti-Poverty Strategy takes into account the following truths about poverty that have been well documented in national studies:

1. Entry into poverty often follows an event such as loss of employment, onset of a disability, change from a two-adult household to a single head of household, or entry of a child under the age of six into the household.
2. Children who are raised in poverty are more likely to live in poverty as adults.
3. Services alone cannot end poverty.

To learn more about the specific barriers experienced by Washington County residents living in poverty, an extensive needs assessment was conducted including interviews and a focus group with clients receiving services. Based on this information, we have identified a collaborative strategy involving multiple county service agencies to build better pathways for Washington County residents to achieve a higher degree of self-sufficiency.

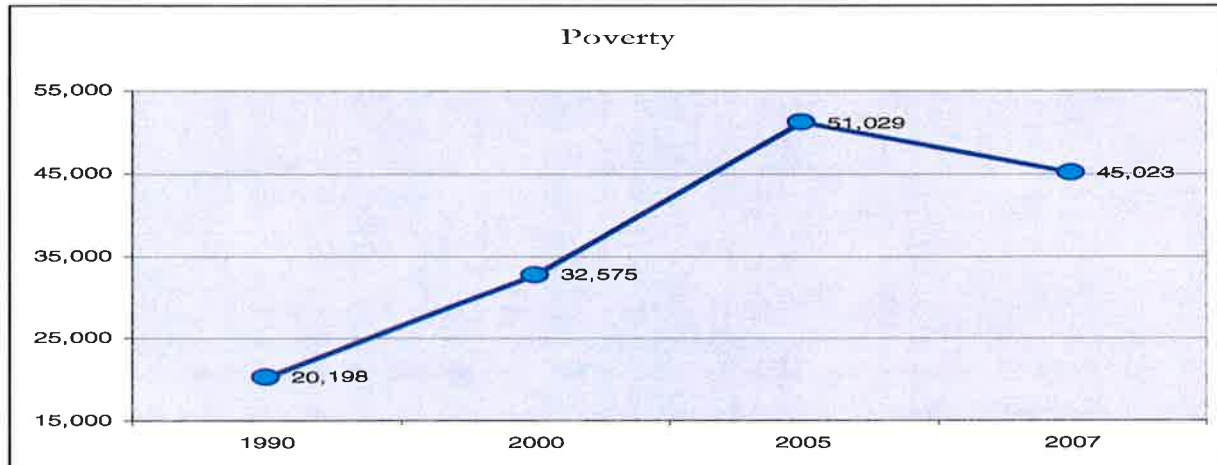
### II. Needs Assessment



US Census & American Community Survey

Washington County has experienced tremendous growth and change since 1990. While the population of the State of Oregon grew 9.5% from 2000 to 2007, Washington County's population grew 18.3%.

During the same time period, the poverty population also experienced significant growth and change.



US Census & American community Survey

	1990	2000	2005	2007
<b>Minority in poverty</b>	3,704	11,185	17,993	23,268
<b>% of poverty population</b>	18%	34%	35%	52%
<b>Children under 18 in poverty</b>	6,132	10,384	16,879	15,524
<b>% of poverty population</b>	30%	32%	33%	34%
<b>Children under 5 in poverty</b>	2,288	3,473	5,594	4,271
<b>% of poverty population</b>	11%	11%	11%	9%
<b>seniors over 65 in poverty</b>	2,065	1,245	2,411	2,815
<b>% of poverty population</b>	10%	4%	5%	6%
<b>200% of poverty</b>	62,275	91,043	129,914	122,267
<b>% of total population</b>	20%	21%	26%	23%
<b>50% of poverty</b>	8,501	14,100	18,492	19,989
<b>% of poverty population</b>	42%	43%	36%	44%
<b>High School Graduate in poverty</b>	N/A	8,468	9,089	18,276
<b>% of poverty population</b>	N/A	26%	18%	41%
<b>Employed in poverty</b>	N/A	N/A	15,225	11,374
<b>% of poverty population</b>	N/A	N/A	30%	25%
<b>Disabled in poverty (over 5 years of age)</b>	N/A	7135	7,356	9,430
<b>% of poverty population</b>	N/A	22%	14%	21%

US Census & American community Survey

While the American Community Survey of the US Census Bureau indicates a decrease in the poverty rate from 2005 to 2007, more current indicators from Washington County suggest that poverty is again on the rise.

- Recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for two parent families have increased 49.3% from April 2008 to April 2009.
- The total households receiving Food Stamps increased 31.5% March 2008 to March 2009.

- As of April, 2009 the Washington County unemployment rate was 10.9% compared to 4.4% in April 2008.
- Rental Assistance requests increased 70% from January 2008 to January 2009.
- On a single night in January 2009, 1,243 individuals and 714 households were homeless.
- During the 08-09 school year, 35% of all public school students qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch compared to 32.6% the previous year.

	Washington County Population	Washington County Poverty Population
Minority	29%	52%
Disabled	11%	21%
Children	26%	34%
Children Under 5	7%	9%
Seniors over 65	9%	6%

US Census & American community Survey

While people with disabilities and most racial/ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented in the poverty population, the strategies contained here do not seek to address the particular needs of each subgroup. These strategies address broader themes that impact all persons living in poverty and are intended to compliment the goals of plans specifically geared towards meeting the needs of subpopulations.

### Focus Group and Interview Findings

In order to gather information directly from Washington County residents, forty one-on-one interviews were conducted by Portland State University students in November 2009. Participants were low-income Washington County residents recruited by Community Action Energy and Emergency Rent and Housing and Homeless Services, Community Partners for Affordable Housing, Tualatin Valley Housing Partners, Bienestar and Washington County Department of Housing. In addition, one focus group was conducted in Spanish with seven Head-Start parents in February 2009. Major findings and identified values from this work are presented below:

### Major Findings

1. Frustration with social service system: While individual services are helpful in reducing causes or conditions of poverty, the system as a whole appears difficult to access and navigate. Clients would like to see increased co-location, coordination and transparency. Clients find the system to be categorical rather than comprehensive, requiring them to interact with multiple service systems in order to meet their needs. Clients requested more personalized assistance navigating the system.
2. Perverse reward system: Abrupt cut-off from services and fear of failure serve as disincentives to increase self sufficiency. Families felt as though they are better-off keeping their benefits. The inability to build or hold assets while receiving assistance perpetuates poverty. The current economic climate has made families even more risk averse as people feel that the future is particularly unpredictable.
3. Strengthen safety net: Housing and health care are most needed. There is a desire for more on-demand short-term services with simple applications to facilitate access and help

people through a rough spot. Clients need more clarity around what services are available and how to access them. Increased outreach could help people know about services when they need them. Extended hours could better accommodate work schedules. Combining services with housing could improve accessibility.

4. Housing support: Waiting for Section 8 vouchers for 1- 3 years and processing paperwork is intensive and burdensome. Once a family receives the voucher, it is difficult to find housing. Time and inspection requirements are burdensome for families. Multiple application fees drain family budgets. It is difficult to find available units that will accept vouchers, including ADA accessible units. When short-term rental subsidies are not connected to employment supports to assist with increasing income it can result in families losing housing.
5. Transportation: Lack of a dense, high-frequency public transportation network limits opportunities for employment, housing and involvement in community activities. There is a need for more flexibility in transportation options.
6. Health care: There is a need for better health care. Public health care programs are not accessible to adults who do not have disabilities. Prescriptions and over the counter medications are unaffordable. Taking time off to care for sick children places employment at risk, and for parents without paid sick leave, it eats into family budget. Mental health care is particularly difficult to access. Bureaucracy and paperwork are barriers to timely coverage. Long waits, inattentive providers and lack of sensitivity to needs were also mentioned.
7. Barriers to employment: These included transportation limitations, presence of disability in the household, lack of documentation, lack of opportunities, and lack of affordable child care.

### **Identified Values**

1. Co-located, coordinated and comprehensive services
2. Service enriched housing - resident services viewed as valuable in fostering a sense of community, supporting children and parents and providing essential services
3. Case management/individualized support services
4. Housing, employment and school stability
5. Educational/enrichment opportunities for adults and children- ESL, life skills, homework support, quality schools, quality child care

### **III. Goals and Strategies**

A work group convened over the course of several months to design strategies that took into account information received during the interviews and focus groups, in addition to direct agency experiences that reflected a need for improvements. The group utilized an anti-poverty framework developed for Community Action agencies nationwide to assess poverty conditions in 5 dimensions. The group assessed Washington County in each of the dimensions based on the feedback from the client interviews, quantitative data and their own agency's experience. The following is the outcome of that assessment:

Dimension: Public Policy

Level: Vulnerable

Rationale: General sense of public policy being indifferent to the needs of the low-income population, or not viewing it to be the role of local government to address these needs. Very few proactive policies aimed at improving the quality of life for low-income residents. Also

need to increase advocacy at state and national levels to address issues around funding formulas given rapid growth in Washington County.

Area of Potential Impact: Yes

Dimension: Equity

Level: Safe

Rationale: General perception of Washington County as a welcoming place for all people. No racial tensions identified although language can be a barrier to accessing services.

Area of Potential Impact: No

Dimension: Civic Capital

Level: Vulnerable

Rationale: While there are some areas in which civic engagement has been high and participation by low-income individuals is strong, overall there is a lack of opportunity for meaningful input into community affairs. Systems were viewed as arbitrary and people expressed a diminished sense of autonomy.

Area of Potential Impact: Yes

Dimension: Service & Support Systems

Level: Stable

Rationale: Good services are available and good communication exists among providers. More services are focused on reactionary assistance as opposed to prevention and there is room for improvement in coordination of services.

Area of Potential Impact: Yes

Dimension: Economic Opportunity

Level: Vulnerable

Rationale: Washington County's economy is contracting. Unemployment has risen steadily over the past year and many families are facing uncertainty.

Area of Potential Impact: No

The group chose to focus strategies on three dimensions: Public Policy, Service and Support Systems and Civic Engagement. The following strategies represent a collaborative approach to improving anti-poverty related services in Washington County.

**Goal 1: Remove Barriers**

**Dimension: Public Policy – Innovative public policy that affirmatively seeks new ways to promote the economic development and well-being of low income residents.**

(Current Level – Vulnerable)

<b>Identified Goals</b>	<b>Identified Strategies</b>	<b>Lead Entity</b>
Locating affordable housing and services to promote resident access to regional opportunity structures	Opportunity Mapping Outreach, promotion, and partnership building to use maps to inform policy development	Office of Community Development (maps)
Increased Communication, Collaboration, and Coordination between funders	Establish funders forum to identify areas of potential collaboration	Office of Community Development
Bring together community leaders to develop awareness of poverty issues. Agency heads need to be involved to effect policy level changes	Leadership meeting, create sub committee of HPAC or Community Action Board	Community Action  Department of Housing Services
Increase general public leadership around issues of poverty, low income, and economic support issues	Engage VAN Economic Security Initiative	Community Action in Partnership with VAN

## Goal 2: Improve Service Delivery System

**Dimension: Service and Support Systems - Comprehensive and integrated services that appear seamless to consumers. Community wide strategic planning that is focused on prevention and is responsive and strongly consumer driven system.**

(Current level - Stable)

Identified Goals	Identified Strategies	Lead Entity
Increase service integration	Develop long range plan for strategic coordination of services: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Set up steering committee of agencies that have an interest</li> <li>2. Investigate successful models of coordinated service delivery (for example, co-location vs. increased coordination)</li> <li>3. Share information about long-range plans</li> <li>4. Pilot projects</li> </ol>	Community Action  Family Resource Centers
Increase provider awareness of services available within community	Bi-monthly I&R breakfasts At least annual service provider fair (breakfast on steroids)	Community Action
Address the perverse reward system by reducing “cliff effect” and increasing self-sufficiency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Convene group to look at “cliff” problem</li> <li>2. Staff position to develop report on local impact and best practices</li> </ol>	
Increase consumer ability to access services particularly health care and transportation services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify current barriers to accessing these services.</li> <li>2. Engage with appropriate partners to address barriers</li> <li>3. Develop plan to make services more accessible</li> </ol>	

**Goal 3: Increase and/or Improve Formal and Informal Support Systems.**

**Dimension: Civic Capital - Low-income and minority residents have strong sense of community and belonging. Investment in the social and political well-being of the community is high.**

(Current Level – Vulnerable)

Identified Goals	Identified Strategies	Lead Entity
Increase opportunities for meaningful participation in community affairs	Engage residents in development of consolidated plan	Office of Community Development
	Develop strategies to engage community members in leadership activities	
	Investigate opportunities for participation in civic life - Boards, commissions and planning committees - Citizen Participation Organizations - Parent Teacher Associations - Site Councils	
	Include low-income and minority representation on boards and planning committees	

*To be added by lead entities: Indicators and timeframes.*