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Majority Say They're Worse Off in 2009 But Are Positive About Future
2009 Face of Poverty Today report released

LINCOLN, Neb. (July 2, 2010) – Sixty-two percent of respondents say they were worse off in 2009 than in 2008, but almost 59 percent believe that they will be better off in the future.

The 2009 Face of Poverty Today in Lincoln, Nebraska report was issued today by the Center for People in Need. For the fourth annual survey, 2,310 respondents living at or below the federal poverty guideline filled out questionnaires during the Center's Toyland for Kids toy distribution in December. Their responses were entered into a database by volunteers from the Lancaster County Medical Society, and the report was prepared by Dr. Maria Rosario de Guzman, University of Nebraska Extension Specialist in Adolescent Development and Assistant Professor of Child, Youth and Family Studies.

“What is surprising is the number of people who are living in poverty and are in worse shape than in the past, but who are optimistic about their future,” said Beatty Brasch, executive director of the Center for People in Need. “I think that is inspiring to the rest of us who are not struggling on a day-to-day basis – that you can be positive even when things aren't going well.”

The survey asked questions about the characteristics of respondents' households, education and employment, insurance and health care, food and utilities, child care, transportation, clothing and personal care, and voting and voter registration. This is the first year questions were asked about the effects of poverty on the family. About 91 percent of respondents report they have “some” or “a lot” of stress from worrying about money.

While 62 percent feel they are not better off now than last year, the 38 percent who feel they are better off attribute that attitude to jobs – either they have a job now but didn't have one last year, they got a better job, they have more hours, or are getting more pay. Those who are worse off also attributed that to jobs – losing a job, having fewer hours or getting less pay. Other reasons cited for being worse off include worsening finances (e.g. pay is the same, but costs are higher), difficulty with transportation, and relationship difficulties.

Health care is also a concern for those surveyed. A large percentage of respondents reported having difficulties paying for prescription medicine. Sixty-one percent report that someone in the household has gone without prescriptions and 46 percent have taken less than the prescribed dosage. Seventy percent have trouble paying for insurance sometimes or always.

A supplement to the Faces of Poverty survey, “One in Five: Food Insecurity Among Children in Lincoln and Lancaster County, Nebraska,” focuses on families with children. One of the most alarming statistics from the report is that 74 percent of adults in the survey sometimes, often or always have trouble buying food for their children. Families indicate they cope with food shortages by choosing between food and paying bills (72 percent), by a household member skipping meals (45 percent), by children not eating nutritious meals at home (24 percent) or by children going hungry (5 percent).

The Center for People in Need, 3901 N. 27th St., Unit 1, provides comprehensive services and opportunities to support low-income, high needs families and individuals as they strive to lift themselves out of poverty and achieve economic self-sufficiency. Electronic copies of these reports are available at www.centerforpeopleinneed.org or by calling 476-4357.