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Study finds hefty increase in area poverty rates

If there are six families from the western Wayne County area in a room together, three of them need food stamps.

That startling discovery came from a survey performed for Starfish Family Services by Data Driven Detroit, a local firm. Chief Executive Officer of Starfish Ann Kalass made the announcement of the Community Needs Assessment results in part, she said, “to call attention to the vulnerabilities of low-income families and the difficulties that they face on a daily basis.”

Starfish, based in Inkster, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping at-risk families.

The assessment study was commissioned by Starfish, Kalass said, to identify the most pressing needs of families and young children in 14 western Wayne County communities, including Canton, Inkster, Northville, Northville Township, Plymouth, Plymouth Township, Wayne and Westland.

The study results showed that nine of the 13 school districts involved have 50 percent or more students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch programs.

In Inkster, Dearborn, Wayne and Taylor, 15 percent or more of households earn less than \$20,000 annually, according to the data collected.

Kalass said the numbers also showed that poverty rates from 2000 to 2009 increased from 16 to 24 percent for all respondents, and from 23 to 35 percent for children in the area.

Residents in western Wayne County receiving food stamps increased by 120 percent over a nine-year period, the survey revealed, with nearly one in three residents needing food stamps to help feed their families.

“This study was commissioned to help us assess the deepest needs of the children and families we serve,” Kalass said. “What we found was more need than we even realized.”

“Starfish is already using this information in our planning so we can help ensure even the most vulnerable kids get to school ready to succeed,” she added.

“We decided to share this study with decision-makers, community members and the general public,” she said.

“We hope that this study will create dialogue across city and county lines and enable us to work together to build stronger families and brighter futures for the youngest members of our community.”

Kalass said that entire 100-page report is available in summary and in its entirety at www.starfishonline.org.

Starfish was founded in 1963 and is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to breaking the cycle of poverty by creating family success. Each year, Starfish helps more than 9,000 individuals, children and families. Information is available at www.starfishonline.org.

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