

# More than one-quarter of people younger than 18 struggle to get by

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**Diane Stevenson / Statesman Journal**  
Emilio Tinoco, 6, of Salem has fun playing under the parachute during "Family Night" activities at Riverfront Park.

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Poverty has been a painful reality for many more people since the recession, but according to the 2010 American Community Survey results released Thursday, children are among its greatest victims.

In Marion County, 27 percent of children under age 18 live below the poverty level. In Polk County, 29.3 percent of children live in poverty.

Families of children younger than 5 headed by single mothers are struggling the most, according to the survey, with more than half of such families in Marion County living in poverty.

For all Marion County families with children younger than 5, the poverty rate rose from 15.5 percent in 2009 to 27.4 percent in 2010. For married couple families with children younger than 5, the poverty rate rose from 3.3 percent to 15.2 percent.

Regan Gray, policy director for Children First for Oregon, said growing up in stressful situations will have lasting impact on children.

"We know that children that live in poverty usually suffer from circumstances that brings," she said. "They'll have lower educational attainment, school achievement, behavioral and emotional well-being and physical health issues."

For single mother Sandy Campos, tears flow more easily than words when she thinks of her struggles the past four years.

Divorce, custody issues and unemployment all have weighed heavily on the Woodburn resident.

"It's been really bad," she said Thursday through tears.

She's trying to go to school full time — she's studying at Chemeketa Community College to become a dental assistant. But that's not easy with an 8-month-old daughter, Trinity.

"Really, I just live day by day," said Campos, 32, a client at Family Building Blocks, a nonprofit

relief nursery and child abuse prevention agency.

Family Building Blocks focuses on nurturing early childhood development and preventing maltreatment of children growing up in stressful environments.

By providing social and parenting support, the organization aims to ease the impacts of risk factors such as poverty, substance abuse and unemployment.

About three of four families in Family Building Blocks are unemployed. More than 80 percent live below poverty level.

When parents are in crisis, teacher supervisor Ben Fennimore said, they're not able to build healthy relationships with their children, which is essential to their growth and development.

Gray said she hopes state and federal lawmakers will re-examine budget cuts to public support systems, like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Employment Related Day Care.

According to the Oregon Department of Human Services, the average family receiving cash assistance from TANF is headed by a single mother of two children.

For many families Fennimore works with at Family Building Blocks, he said, public assistance keeps families off the streets.

"Investments we make now will pay forward in the future," Gray said.

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