

The Boston Globe

March 20, 2005, Sunday

STUDY: MOST CANNOT BUY BASICS  
DATA MAY HELP TARGET FAMILY AID

By Stephanie Vosk, Globe Correspondent

After a fire in her Codman Square apartment building 16 months ago forced her to move out, Tyeshea Clarke has been living with her two children at a shelter in Roxbury. The \$500 a month she paid for her two-bedroom apartment was a deal she has not been able to find again in Boston.

"I thought about leaving the city, but everything I have is here," said Clarke, 24, who works in sterile processing in the operating room at Massachusetts General Hospital.

Even though she works and feels she is lucky to have health-care benefits for her single-parent family through her job, which she found through a work transition program called Partners Healthcare, she doubts she will be able to afford a place to live without a state subsidy.

Clarke spoke at a presentation last week to highlight a report by the Women's Union showing that 63 percent of Dudley-Square-area families, or more than 5,100 households, have incomes below the Family Economic **Self-Sufficiency standard**. The measure was developed by The Women's Union in Boston, an advocate for economic self-sufficiency for women and families, to determine by neighborhood the cost to a family of meeting basic needs without government subsidies. The Dudley neighborhood, which included about half of Roxbury and a small part of Dorchester, was the first Boston neighborhood to be evaluated using the measure. The report also found that the cost of supporting a family in Boston rose by about 30 percent between 1998 and 2003.

"Armed with this community-level information, we can develop targeted local strategies," Mary Lassen, president and CEO of the Women's Union, told community members at a conference Tuesday. "We can promote public policy changes that will strengthen families in the Dudley area."

Sharon Stapleton, a single mother of two in Dorchester who works as a preschool teacher 40 hours a week, told the audience it is still difficult to make ends meet even with state rental assistance. Stapleton brings home \$1,600 a month. She said 60 percent of her paycheck goes to paying rent on her apartment in a triple-decker on Floyd Street. Still more of her paycheck goes toward day care for her 11-year-old son three days a week. The other two days she leaves him home alone.

"It's out of my control because I have to work those extra two days at work, and I can't be there with him to monitor his safety," Stapleton said. Still more of her salary goes to putting her daughter through school at Clark Atlanta University in Georgia.

"I am a self-sufficient person," Stapleton told the community members in the audience, as her hand shook behind the podium. "But my income is very low; it cannot work for me."

The report calculated the cost of living in Boston at a basic level of self-sufficiency for one adult to be \$21,362 in 2003, up from \$15,888 in 1998. In addition, it found the cost for one adult with one preschooler and one school-age child to be \$51,284 in 2003, 31 percent above the \$39,156 said to be needed in 1998.

The report maintains that the approximately two-thirds of families in the Dudley area with incomes below the standard, must routinely make choices among paying for rent, food, health care, and utilities. The median income for households in the Dudley area was found to be \$25,715 in 2000. The median income for all households in Boston was found to be \$38,306 in the same year.

While Clarke plans to take classes through the Partners Healthcare program to become an RN and earn more, her long-term goals will have to wait.

"Right now I need some place to live," she said.

**NOTES:**

CITY WEEKLY / ROXBURY

**LOAD-DATE:** March 23, 2005