

# *Tulsa World*

## **Cost-of-living study opens eyes**

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### **A study finds that financial self-sufficiency eludes most.**

A report released Tuesday on the cost of living in Oklahoma had something to surprise just about everybody.

Dick Williamson, chairman of the Tulsa Workforce Investment Board and local manufacturing concern T.D.

Williamson, said it illustrated that financial independence is "really a collection of things most of us take for granted, but for others some of the pieces are missing."

For those entering the work force or struggling to make ends meet, the report provides direction, Resonance career counselor Nancy Weber said.

"This affects everything we do," Weber said when she heard about the study, titled "The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Oklahoma."

Steve Gilbert, chief executive officer of Tulsa Workforce Investment, said the businessmen on his board "will have their eyes opened as to what it costs working people to raise a family."

The report was prepared by Wider Opportunities for Women, a Washington, D.C.-based employment organization, and Diana Pierce of the University of Washington.

It was sponsored by the Community Action Project of Tulsa County with funding from the Ford Foundation.

Pierce developed the Self-Sufficiency Standard model to measure the expenses of specific family compositions in specific locations. Oklahoma is the 21st state to which she has applied the methodology.

The standards are in part a response to the inadequacy of the 35-year-old federal poverty standards, which take into account only one factor -- the cost of food. Pierce found that the true cost of self-sufficiency for an Oklahoma family of three was 50 percent to 140 percent above the poverty line.

"Are we saying all of these people are poor?" asked David Blatt of the Community Action Project. "The answer is no. We're not trying to expand the definition of poverty. What this really does is create an understanding of why people who are not poor are still having difficulty."

The study found that a single adult with two children must earn the equivalent of \$15.74 an hour to achieve financial self-sufficiency.

Jennifer Brooks of Wider Opportunities for Women noted that few people

leaving job training or Welfare to Work programs earn anything close to that. Some states and cities, she said, use self-sufficiency standards to monitor the effectiveness of such programs and to counsel the working poor.

Weber understands how important that can be.

"A lot of my clients come in and say, 'I must be a terrible budgeter. I can't figure out where I'm blowing it.' You open up these tables and realize they're not blowing it. They're not making enough money.

"Their self-esteem really takes a hit, because they really do blame themselves."

By using the information in the study, Weber said, she can help her clients make better job and training choices.

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