

## US States News

### WYOMING TO CELEBRATE WORLD POVERTY DAY, OCT. 17

October 22, 2007

The Wyoming Department of Workplace Services has issued the following news release:

This week our nation turns its attention to world poverty, "celebrating" World Poverty Day on October 17. Though the world and Wyoming have made great strides to reduce poverty in the last fifty years, over a billion people in the world subsist on less than a dollar a day. And seven out of ten of the world's hungry are women and girls, according to the UN World Food Program.

The "Equality State's" female citizens also face poverty. The federal poverty level is the determining factor for many federal and state assistance programs and the needed quotient in a calculation that determines the lives and coffers of families and communities. This antiquated method of measuring poverty was designed in 1960 and is based on an average cost of living at 30% for individual income. Currently, the cost of living is estimated at 50% of household income.

Thanks in large part to the efforts of First Lady Nancy Freudenthal, our citizens are better educated about the real costs of living in Wyoming. The Wyoming **Self-Sufficiency Standard** is more accurate and calculates how much money working adults need to meet their basic needs without receiving subsidies. By using the information in the Standard, we can learn more about what wages are adequate to pay for basic living costs such as: housing, child care, food, transportation, and health care. In 17 out of Wyoming's 23 counties, the average woman's wage cannot support herself and an infant child. For instance, in Laramie County, a single mom with an infant and pre-school child would need to make \$14.75 per hour in order to be self-sufficient. (The federal minimum wage is currently \$5.85 per hour).

In Wyoming, we value opportunity and independence, yet far too many Wyoming women are dependant on state and community subsidies. As the cost of living continues to increase, more and more Wyoming families are struggling, and a significant number of those families are headed by women. In Wyoming and across the United States, households headed by single mothers are most likely to live in poverty. 33% of single mother families in Wyoming are poor. According to the US Department of Labor, Wyoming women earn only 63 cents for every dollar earned by men, the largest wage disparity between genders in any state. Addressing poverty in Wyoming cannot be done without addressing the basic needs of single mothers, who shoulder a disproportionate share of poverty.

The issue of women and poverty is an issue that requires effective policy. It is also an issue that requires humanity and compassion. When a single mom cannot support themselves or their children's basic needs, the community supports them through taxes and government subsidies. This vicious circle increases the need for social service programs, and potentially the need for even more law enforcement. When single moms are in poverty, their children are in poverty; and this has a detrimental effect on our schools, our healthcare systems and our future.

By providing opportunities in Wyoming for economic independency, women become empowered and are positively affected, but so are children, communities, state tax coffers and our economy as a whole. The gender wage gap, for example, is estimated to have a total negative economic impact on the state of Wyoming between \$136 and \$240 million dollars annually (University of Wyoming, Wage Disparity Study, 2003). Narrowing the gender wage gap isn't just a

victory for Wyoming's women, it also a victory for Wyoming's communities.

Important work is happening in our state to help women obtain economic independence. The Wyoming Department of Workforce Services Employment and Training for Self-Sufficiency program constantly seeks to provide training and employment opportunities for low-income single moms and dads develop skills so they can enter high-demand occupations that pay better wages. Other programs like CLIMB Wyoming provide job and life skills training, as well as family centered case management to assist and place single moms into higher paying jobs. The Wyoming Women's Foundation is continually providing grants to organizations who offer women the opportunity to improve their lives and be in a position where they can realize their full potential. The Governor's office is calling attention to the **self-sufficiency standard**, and advocating for paths to self-sufficiency. This summer, Equality Initiatives was launched to raise awareness that "what is good for Wyoming's women and girls is good for Wyoming's communities." The initiative focuses on celebrating Wyoming's women while drawing needed attention to the realities of women's lives in Wyoming - realities such as poverty, lack of healthcare and quality childcare, poor wages and high rates of suicide and depression.

While exciting and innovative programs that focus on women and community are taking place in Wyoming, our work is far from done. We must recognize that at the heart of the matter we are bound one to another, that the future of a child in Laramie County is our future. That the struggle of the single mom in Natrona County to survive and to live decently is our struggle. That the failure anywhere to work to find solutions to these problems is our failure. So while the world and state partners turn their attention to poverty this week, I challenge everyone in Wyoming to think of poverty as a community problem which impacts women greatly. Positively combating poverty has a far greater reach in Wyoming than just our women.