

Poverty

Socioeconomic status, or class, is a major factor that greatly defines how people live in the world. According to the Children's Defense Fund, at the end of 2004 more than 13 million US children lived in poverty.

Why Are Poor Children More Likely to Be in the System?

The majority of children you will encounter as a CASA volunteer will be living at or below the poverty level. Developing a better understanding of the realities of poverty will assist you in being a better advocate.

Keep in mind, knowing people's socioeconomic status—like knowing their race, ethnicity, or other group membership—does not necessarily mean you can predict their attitudes or behavior. However, knowing their socioeconomic status does help you better understand their life experience, specifically some of the hardships they face.

While abuse and neglect occur in families at all socioeconomic levels, poor children are more likely to come to the attention of the child protection system. This happens for a variety of reasons. One reason is that middle- and upper-income families have access to many more resources within their families than poor people do.

Even though family crisis, including abuse, happens at all income levels, it is poor people who often have to turn to the system for support. For people living in poverty, initial contact with "the system" is usually for reasons other than abuse. The contact may be about accessing medical care, food stamps, housing, etc. Once this contact is initiated, these families are communicating with many "mandated reporters," increasing the likelihood that issues of child maltreatment and neglect will be investigated.

Poverty causes great stress in families. Because of this stress, poverty itself is a major risk factor of abuse, which increases the likelihood of both immediate and lasting negative effects on children. However, poverty is not a causal agent of abuse. Most poor parents do not abuse their children.

There are many myths and stereotypes associated with being poor. To separate myths from reality, it is important to look at what we do know about children and poverty in the United States.

Key Facts About American Children

1 IN 2 . . .

- Will live in a single-parent family at some point in childhood
- Never completes a single year of college

1 IN 3 . . .

- Is born to unmarried parents
- Will be poor at some point during childhood
- Is behind a year or more in school

1 IN 4 . . .

- Lives with only one parent
- Lives in a family where no parent has full-time, year-round employment

1 IN 5 . . .

- Is born poor
- Is born to a mother who did not graduate from high school
- Children under age 3 is poor now

1 IN 6 . . .

- Is poor now
- Is born to a mother who did not receive prenatal care in the first

1 IN 7 . . .

- Never graduates from high school
- Children eligible for federal childcare assistance through the Child Care and Development Block Grant receives it

1 IN 8 . . .

- Does not have health insurance
- Has an employed person in the family but is still poor
- Lives in a family receiving food stamps

From *The State of America's Children: Yearbook 2004*, Children's Defense Fund, Boston: Beacon Press, 2004, and the Anna E. Casey Foundation's *Kids Count Data Book*, 2001 and 2003.

Volunteer Training Curriculum, The National CASA Association

Klamath & Lake Community Action Services Programs

Local Resources

Klamath/Lake Community Action Services
850-5388

Klamath Housing Authority
884-0649

Klamath Senior Center
882-4098

Oregon Human Development Corporation
883-7186

Goodwill
884-9642

Klamath Crisis Center
884-0390

Klamath Falls Gospel Mission
882-4895

Consumer Credit Counseling
883-8118

Child Care Resource and Referral
882-2308

Self-Sufficiency
883-5511

Klamath/Lake Counties Food Bank
882-1223

United Christian Ministries
884-2364