

## Working Poor Abundant

**By Sue Major Holmes**

*Associated Press*

New Mexico has the highest percentage of low-income working families and the greatest percentage of children living in low-income working families in the nation, according to a new report.

Forty-six percent of New Mexico's children live in low-income working families, according to the national report, "Still Working Hard, Still Falling Short," released Tuesday in this state by New Mexico Voices for Children.

In New Mexico, 76 percent of low-income families work, compared with 72 percent in the U.S. as a whole. Low income is defined as 200 percent of the poverty level. In 2006, the year on which the statistics are based, that was \$20,614 for a family of four, making the threshold \$41,228.

Nationally, more than one in four working families — 42 million adults and children — were low-income in 2006, according to the report, which used data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2006 American Community Survey.

Since the ranks of the working poor grew by 350,000 families during a period of economic expansion, the numbers are likely to grow during the current economic downturn, the report warned.

"The current economic climate means we should be doing something, we really should be doing something," said Gerry Bradley, research director for New Mexico Voices for Children. "Ordinarily it's a slow-motion crisis, but this has speeded up."

New Mexico, for example, could do more to promote food stamps, which are funded by the federal government, Bradley said. Only about 70 percent of those eligible for food stamps receive them, he said.

Recent economic good times didn't reach the lower levels of the work force, he said.

Per capita income in New Mexico has actually improved and the state now ranks 43rd, Bradley said. "But when you have poverty numbers that are like this, you realize that even though the economy of the state was doing pretty good over last five or six years, it wasn't helping people at the bottom of the wage scale or living standard," he said.

Nearly 37 percent of New Mexico's jobs are in occupations that pay below the federal poverty level for a family of four, ranking the state 48th on that measure, behind West Virginia and Mississippi.

The report said 55 percent of low-income working families in New Mexico

have at least one parent without any education beyond high school and 34 percent have at least one parent without a high school diploma.

It also found that 48 percent of minority working families in New Mexico are low-income.

The report was produced by the Working Poor Families Project, a national initiative supported by the Annie E. Casey, Ford, Joyce and C.S. Mott foundations to examine conditions of working families.

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# N.M. has large number of low-income families

BY SUE MAJOR HOLMES  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

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# Income

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“One thing we need to do, and are doing, is attract better paying jobs,” said Sharon Kayne, a spokeswoman for New Mexico Voices for Children. “But we also need to make sure our work force has the skill levels and the education required for most better paying jobs. We have to make sure that with any economic incentives we give out to get companies to move here, we’re not giving out incentives for minimum wage jobs.”

# Report: State tops low income family categories

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It also found that 48 percent of minority working families in New Mexico are low-income.

Federal and state resources for adult education or for skills training programs meet only about a tenth of the need, but inadequate education plays a major role in preventing low-income workers from improving their economic outlook, Voices for Children said.

Voices for Children wants to see higher wages in New Mexico but also a support system for working families — food stamps, child care, health insurance — "because we know wages are not high enough to support a decent standard of living even with improvement at the low range of the wage scale," Bradley said.

# State has high number of low-income working families

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