

Could You Live on a Poverty Budget?

It's an interesting exercise to build for yourself an imaginary budget based on the federal poverty line (FPL). In 2013 the FPL for a family of four was \$23,550 annually or \$1,962.50 per month. Perhaps an easier way to grasp this is to imagine a person working full-time and earning about \$11.32 per hour. Now imagine that person supporting a household of four.

Let's construct a struggling family's monthly budget for, let's say, a mom and three kids. Let's try to find the cheapest way we can to survive on our own in Kittitas County.

Small home or apartment: \$700, Utilities: \$200, assuming again that the home is small. Meals should be modest so let's assume \$1.50 per meal, per person, with three meals per day for four: \$540. No car payment; let's assume she owns an older vehicle. Two tanks of gas, however at \$3.25 per gallon: \$97.25. Phone? \$40 for one of those limited cell phones. Childcare? This was difficult. Licensed care facilities cost a lot. If our struggling family has only one child that must have care while a parent is away working, and does not have a grandparent or other person to rely on, then it would cost on average \$600. Let's reduce that to \$400.

Summary Poverty Budget:

Rent	\$700
Utilities	\$200
Meals	\$540
Fuel	\$97
Phone	\$40
Childcare	\$400
Total	\$1977

Oops. We already exceeded our budget by \$14.50.

Let's ponder the list. Obviously we have lowballed the rent and child care. A quick internet search and you'll find few two-bedroom apartments for \$700. But notice also there is no money in our budget for healthcare, medicine, clothing, shoes, housewares, school supplies, or car repair...much less internet access, a computer, TV, movies or education. No vacation for this family. No savings either. And we didn't even consider that this family pays taxes.

Here's one more point to ponder. In the scenario above, if the person made a penny more per hour, her family wouldn't be considered in poverty by the federal government!

Could you live on this budget while supporting three kids in Kittitas County?

What would happen in this scenario if the family had a mortgage of, say, \$1,100 per month and a modest car payment of \$150? What would happen if mom were hospitalized?

This is precisely why we need food banks, charities, and faith based groups who extend kindness to people who are just trying to survive. Thank goodness for HopeSource and partner agencies diligently trying to keep our social safety net from breaking.



Krista Yusi is a Support Services Associate at HopeSource.