What we know about Benton County ...

The number of persons and children in poverty is a difficult measure to estimate at the county level. The latest estimate available for Benton County (for 1993) indicates that 858 persons were living at or below poverty (see Appendix A for poverty thresholds) and that 309 (12%) of them were children. Of those children, 111 were under the age of 5. Indiana’s public school children have access to the Free and Reduced Fee Lunch Program and 21% of those enrolled in K-12 in Benton County were signed up for this nutrition based option in October 1997.

While significant numbers of persons continue to live at or below the poverty line, the 1990s have been a time of significant change in the welfare system in our country and in our state. In 1995, Indiana statutorily changed its welfare system (about one year before the Federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996). Indiana’s reforms revolve around a series of programs that include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Data for Benton County</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>% Change ‘96 to ‘97</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Assistance to Needy Families</td>
<td>Monthly Average Number of Families</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed Parent Program</td>
<td>Monthly Average Number of Families</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Stamps</td>
<td>Monthly Average Number of Persons</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Administered by the Family & Social Services Administration.

TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) is a means tested program designed to provide temporary assistance, in the form of cash payments, to low income families with children. Benton County had 24 families on TANF in June 1997, compared to 38 families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in June 1990. The percent of Benton County residents receiving TANF in 1997 was 0.6 (see Appendix A for details on eligibility).

Questions to ponder ...

Do those eligible access these services? For those who need assistance after their two years of TANF is over, what options are left in this county if they remain jobless or are earning less than a liveable wage?