



## Teaching Leaflet

### Understanding Poverty

#### Lesson Three: If They'd Just Get A Job, They Wouldn't Need Help

#### “The Working Poor<sup>1</sup>”

##### Definition

Persons who spend at least 27 weeks in the labor force, but whose incomes still fall below the official poverty line.

##### Populations Most Likely Affected

- Persons with less than a high school degree
- Families with children under the age of 18
- Families headed by single mothers

In 2007, 4.2 million families in this country were living below the poverty line even though they had at least one person in their family working for at least 6 months during the year. Of these 4.2 million families, the families with children were much more likely to live below the poverty line than families without children. The working poor are not only people working part-time jobs. 3.9 million people with full-time or salaried jobs are working poor.

The US Department of Labor lists three major reasons why people fall below the poverty line even though they are in the labor force. The first is due to low earnings. In 2007, the low earnings threshold was \$305.17 per week. People making at or below this income level are considered to have low earnings. Secondly, many people who are working poor experience periods of unemployment. Periods of unemployment include times when people are looking for a job while not employed or have been laid off from their job but are expecting to be recalled. Lastly, many people who are the working poor experience involuntary part-time employment. Involuntary part-time employment occurs when a person has to work fewer than 35 hours per week for at least one week in a year because of business conditions or because they cannot find full-time work.

<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Labor, United States Bureau of Statistics. (2009, March). *A profile of the working poor, 2007*. <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpswp2007.pdf>.