



***OCCSW*** *Okaloosa County Commission  
on the Status of Women*

# Okaloosa County Economic Status of Women Calendar Year 2009

This report is dedicated to the memory of Nancy Mitchell,  
whose tireless efforts were instrumental in its formation and  
the interview process

The Okaloosa County Commission on the Status of Women (OCCSW) and the League of Women Voters of Okaloosa County (LWVOC) worked on a joint report to determine the status of women in the county during 2009. Twenty-seven government and social service organizations in Okaloosa County were interviewed to obtain demographics by gender. We knew that getting statistics by gender might be difficult, so we also sought anecdotal comments. This report is not intended to be a formal, statistical representation, but, instead, it is intended to be a “snapshot in time.”

We were attempting to identify how women fared during the 2009 recession, and to see if they did well, so-so, or poorly. Our goal was to gain a better understanding of the status and needs of women in our county through our findings. 2009 is the latest information available which also just happens to be the height of the economic downturn.

According to Jobs Plus, there are approximately 72,104 women in Okaloosa County. Of that number, 42,264 women worked either full time or part time with a median income of \$21,666.00. It appears that approximately fifty-nine percent of the women in Okaloosa County are employed. We don't have a definitive number but it stands to reason that many women are retired, work in the home raising families and some may be currently looking for employment. Thus, we are focusing this report on those women who are either unemployed or underemployed and in need of outside help.

We found that in the county, there are 7 soup kitchens, 27 food pantries and 12 sack lunch sites. There are eight feeding programs in Fort Walton Beach, three in Crestview and two

in Destin. Feeding programs serve thousands of people each month. These are mostly adults with very few children being fed. This is due to the fear that the Department of Children & Families will remove children from homeless families. About twenty-five percent are women. The Women Infants and Children program (WIC) served 2, 675 women and 6,278 infants and children in Okaloosa County in 2009.

Some organizations help both employed and unemployed women. They assist with mental health counseling, financial counseling, casework, utilities, rent, emergency assistance and help with medical and dental needs.

One organization reported assisting several thousand individuals this past year. Of these three-fourths were women. Approximately one half of these were employed. Most had children and three-fourths of those were either never married or divorced. Almost everyone received groceries in addition to other assistance. Many are referred to other organizations for housing. Many are disabled but very few receive SSI or Social Security Disability. A new trend that we noticed is grandmothers taking care of children so that the mothers can work.

One program serves several thousand people. Forty percent of the women are married and sixty percent are single. Almost all (eighty percent) have children. More are on food stamps than are unemployed. In 2009 more women lost jobs and needed help.

In the Okaloosa County jail, nine hundred twenty-two women were incarcerated in Okaloosa County in 2009, that's 14-15% of the total jail population. Although women are more likely to receive bail, there is no significant difference in length of incarceration than men. The types of crime include bad checks, prostitution, drug related (25% sales, 75% use), battery, DUI, suspended licenses.

Our local domestic violence center served 644 women, 80 of whom stayed in the emergency shelter. The 24 hour hotline served 850 women. . More single than married women were served.

One difficulty we ran into was finding statistics by gender. We found that all of these agencies and organizations are in need of additional funding and that it would be useful to have someone specifically monitoring gender issues in the county.

We are grateful to those members of The League of Women Voters and the Okaloosa County Commission on the status of women who helped in gathering the information needed for this report.

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