



Johnson County Safety Net - Then and Now

The trend line of the number of Johnson County children receiving welfare cash assistance reveals three significant event in the past 20 years - welfare reform, the Great Recession, and policies implemented by the Brownback administration.

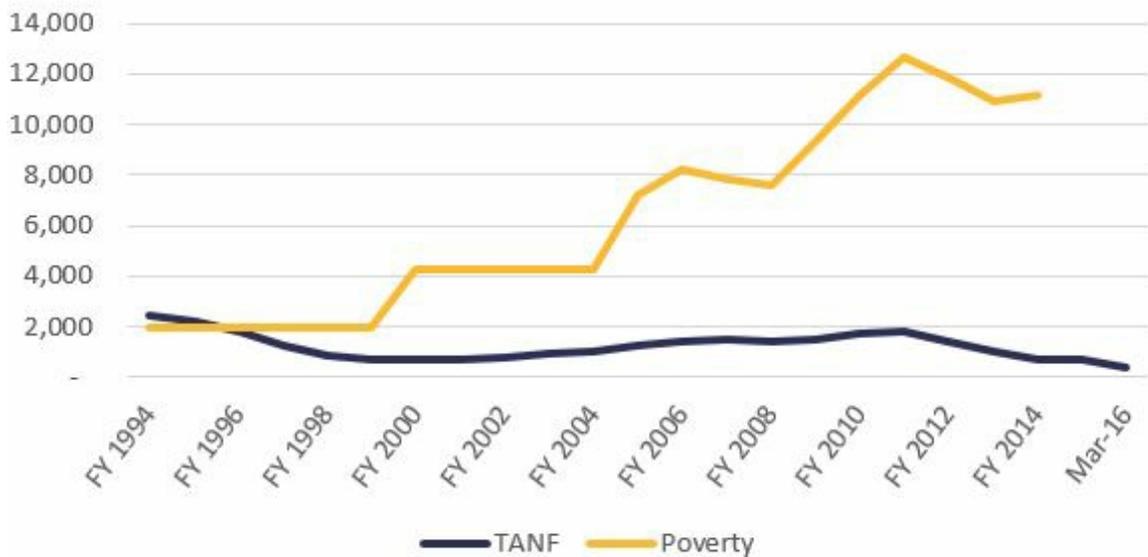
Welfare Reform: For those with a long memory, you will recall welfare reform in **1996**. Dramatic change in federal law changed Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Work requirements were added and the number of participants dropped. A strong economy in the late 1990s aided in the initial transition from welfare to work for many parents.

The Great Recession: Officially, the recession began **December 2007 and ended June 2009**. Poverty estimates from the Census Bureau would suggest that many families continue to experience the effects of a slow recovery.

Brownback Administration: Governor Brownback took office **January 2011**. His administration implemented numerous policy changes; legislative actions, including the [HOPE Act](#), further restricted access to TANF. (For more information: [Kansas Could Do More for Poor Families with Children](#), 2013, UCS. [Repairing the Kansas Safety Net: Ensuring Families Can Make Ends Meet](#), 2016, Kansas Action for Children)

The Trend: The graph below shows two trends lines. The gold line represents the number of Johnson County children living in families with income below the federal poverty level. The blue line is the number of children, on average, receiving TANF each month during the fiscal year. The last data point is for March 2016, when 420 children received TANF cash assistance.

Comparison of Johnson County children below poverty and receiving TANF



Sources: TANF - SRS/DCF County Packets Poverty: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, ACS 3-year estimates.

The Kansas Safety Net

A recent report by Kansas Action for Children draws attention to policy changes in Kansas that have weakened the safety net for struggling families with children. The report offers recommendations for how policymakers can strengthen the safety net in order to meet the basic needs of Kansas' poorest children. ([Read the report here.](#))

Not only are fewer poor children receiving critical support from Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), but the value of cash assistance has been eroded by inflation. In 2000, each eligible family member received, on average, \$117 a month. If payments kept pace with inflation, the 2016 amount would be \$162. Yet, today, the average monthly payment is \$114. (Source: UCS calculation of [Annual County Packet Reports](#), SRS/DCF)

A Message from Karen

With less than a month before leaving my position as director, I have been cleaning out old files, which has led to many trips down memory lane. This enews reflects one of those trips -- a look back at piles of data provided to UCS by SRS (before the days of computerization), as well as more recent files downloaded from the DCF website. One thing is clear, fewer children and families are helped by cash public assistance. (And even for those eligible, the benefit has less purchasing power.) Research shows that children in families with fewer resources complete fewer years of school, work and earn

less as adults, experience poorer health, and are more likely to use safety net supports. Isn't it in our own best interest to make sure that families who need assistance can get it?

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