

## Oregon's working poor now total 600,000

ASTORIA (AP) — It doesn't matter how hard Jessica Bouvia and Alex Forsgrem work.

Forsgrem, 24, makes \$7.20 an hour working full-time at KB Toys, while Bouvia, 20, makes \$8.86 working at the OshKosh store.

At the end of the month, the Astoria couple are left with nothing, as they cobble together the two salaries to support their 4-year-old daughter, Wynter.

They are a family caught in the middle, with pay checks that are too big for them to qualify for state or federal assistance, but too small to pay for basic services.

A report released last week by the nonpartisan Children First for Oregon organization says that they are among 600,000 Oregonians classified as the "working poor" — a population that has more than doubled since the late 1970s.

"Those low-income working families, they're working very hard, but they still struggle to pay for and have the resources to pay for the basics like health insurance, housing and child-care and nutrition," said Marie Hoeven, executive director of Children First.

"Often these parents are choosing between the basic elements children need for healthy development and education. They are families that are constantly on the brink of falling into financial crisis."

The county-by-county report says that nearly 22 percent of Clatsop County children border on poverty, making them almost as vulnerable to deprivation as the 17 percent of children who are actually classified as poor.

Statewide, a third of Oregon children live in or near poverty.

Children First defines low-income families as those living below twice the federal poverty line, or \$36,800 a year for a family of four.

Living from paycheck to paycheck often means families have no vacation time, no emergency funds, no financial investments and are stretched for food.

Paying for health insurance is a challenge, as evidenced by the more than 80,000 children in Oregon who go without it, according to the report. In the Bouvia household, the entire family goes without health insurance because they make too much to qualify for the Oregon Health Plan.