Making Ends Meet: The Plight of American Working Families

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About Foundation For The Carolinas

Foundation For The Carolinas is among the top ten largest community foundations with approximately $1.7 billion in assets. Since 1958, the Foundation has served as a catalyst for charitable good, connecting individuals, companies and organizations to needs and philanthropic opportunities across the region and beyond. Understanding the barriers to and fostering economic opportunity for all families in the Charlotte area is a major focus of the Foundation’s work. To this end, Foundation For The Carolinas is pleased to share this white paper in partnership with E4E Relief. Find out more about the Foundation and its work at www.fftc.org.

About E4E Relief

E4E Relief is the nation’s leading provider of employee relief fund programs, with more than a decade of experience helping companies across the United States. E4E Relief delivers an objective, streamlined process for providing cash grants to employees experiencing financial hardship due to unexpected life events. Nearly one million employees are currently served by E4E Relief employee disaster and hardship relief programs. Find out more at www.e4erelief.org.
Introduction

What does a single mother of three from Virginia earning $35,000 a year as a retail store manager have in common with a cook from Ohio who makes $15,000 a year? Or with a New Jersey mom who earns $29,000 a year as a warehouse worker? Or with a mother and father of two in Georgia who earn a combined income of $48,000 a year working in service jobs? Or even with a California father of four and home mortgage consultant who annually earns $72,000, which most would consider a decent salary?

All these working families experienced the bottom dropping out. One minute they were barely keeping their heads above water, and in the next, they were drowning in debt and desperation. Child support stopped coming into the Virginia family, and they subsequently lost their home to foreclosure. The cook became the sole guardian of her granddaughter after her adult daughter died suddenly. She was also burdened with finding $5,000 to bury her only child. Fire destroyed the house the New Jersey family was renting; a single mother with three kids and no renters’ insurance, she and her children lost everything, and for weeks, had to pay out-of-pocket for a room at Motel 6.

The family in Georgia got behind on their mortgage payments after the father had foot surgery, and one week later, their infant daughter had to have tubes inserted in both ears. The medical bills piled up as the father lost income during his unpaid medical leave. They resorted to taking out a high interest payday loan and ended up financially devastated when they couldn’t manage the payments. The California banker’s story follows a similar trajectory. His wife, who had earned considerably more than he did, lost her job of 18 years and hadn’t found another in over a year. After exhausting the wife’s 401K to make ends meet, the family got behind in their monthly payments. And then the banker had a heart attack and was off work for several months. They were desperate and had nowhere to turn.¹

These families are not alone. Every day people come to work carrying the burden and stress of personal financial insecurity. A 2014 survey of employee financial wellness conducted by Price Waterhouse Cooper indicates that nearly one in four employees has issues with personal finances that have been a major distraction at work. Thirty-nine percent say they spend three hours or more per week thinking about or dealing with such issues.² Financial stress can be attributed to poor planning and overspending on the part of many households. But others simply don’t have enough income to avoid the dilemma of living paycheck to paycheck. No matter the cause, when faced with an unexpected life event, disaster or other household emergency, working households at all income levels can easily be pushed over the edge.

This white paper illuminates the status of working American families, particularly those supported by lower-wage hourly workers. Furthermore, it underscores how financial stress can unduly affect productivity in the workplace and the value proposition to corporations of offering assistance to employees who are experiencing a financial hardship caused by an unexpected life event or disaster. An increasing number of businesses across the country offer programs that help their workers deal with financial and other challenges, whether through employee assistance programs, financial planning assistance, short-term loans and/or disaster and financial hardship relief programs. As more and more working families struggle in our current economic climate, the need for such programs is arguably greater than ever before in our recent history.
Living Paycheck to Paycheck

Across the income spectrum, working American households have faced dramatic rises in financial hardships and insecurity since the Great Recession and its lingering aftermath. Being "flat broke" has become a chronic condition for many, even for a growing number of middle-income families. Today, nearly half of all American families live paycheck to paycheck. Census Bureau data reveal that the median income of all working-age households in the U.S. decreased by about 9 percent since the recession began in December 2007—from $63,527 in 2007 to $58,448 in 2013 (all figures in 2013 dollars.) The median income in 2013 was at the same level it was in 1995, a 17-year setback. Households with adults aged 25–34 have fallen the farthest. Between 2002 and 2013, the median household income of this cohort dropped an astonishing 11 percent, leaving their real incomes below those of same-aged households in 1972. As shown below, all but those families in the top income quintile in the US experienced income loss since 2001. Loss in net wealth over this time period was much more significant.
Prospects for reversing the downward trend in median income are not looking good for the immediate future. Job growth that has been occurring since the recession officially ended in 2009 has been heavily weighted with low-wage jobs. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics\footnote{v}:

- Lower-wage industries accounted for only 22 percent of job losses during the downturn, but 44 percent of jobs gained over the past four years.
- Mid-wage industries accounted for 37 percent of job losses, but only 26 percent of job gains.
- Higher-wage industries accounted for 41 percent of job losses, but only 30 percent of job gains.

Not surprising, the number of households living in poverty has grown during these challenging economic times. In 2013, a little over 14.5 percent of all Americans lived in poverty—roughly 45.3 million people in one in four households.\footnote{vi} Nearly one out of five American families with children under the age of 18 now lives in poverty. The number of individuals and families living at or below the federal poverty line ($23,624 for a family of four) has not been as high since the 1960s.\footnote{vii} Some analysts expect the U.S. poverty rate to remain above pre-recession levels through much, if not most, of the remainder of the decade, given the relatively slow pace of economic recovery.\footnote{viii}

The Pew Research Center has mapped where the largest concentrations of people in poverty live in the United States and how these numbers have changed over time. By far, the greatest number of people in poverty can be
found in the southern states, although since 1969, the western states have increased their share of poverty households.\textsuperscript{x}

But looking at poverty status alone doesn’t tell the whole story. The Census Bureau identifies another group of struggling Americans: those considered “low-income”, earning up to 200% of the poverty threshold or $47,668 for a family of four in 2013. The annual income of these families translates to a combined hourly full-time wage of $22.92 for family earners. One in three U.S. families now falls into this income category. A subset of these low-income earners includes those termed the “near poor.” These are the families earning up to 150% of the poverty threshold—$35,775 for a family of four, or earning up to $17.20 per hour full-time. Bank tellers, security officers, retail supervisors and warehouse associates are examples of workers whose salaries typically fall within this near-poverty wage range.

Single-parent families are at greater risk of economic hardship than two-parent families, largely because the latter have twice the earnings potential. The Working Poor Families Project, which was supported by several major national foundations, reports that while families headed by a working mom comprise less than a quarter of all working families, they make up nearly 40 percent of all low-income ones. And their numbers are on the rise: the share of working families headed by a woman that are low-income increased from 54 percent in 2007 to 58 percent in 2012. African American single-mother families are disproportionately represented among low-income families, with 65 percent of them falling into the low income category.\textsuperscript{x}

Contributing to the increasing number of low-income families across the U.S. is the rise of people who have shifted from full-time to part-time employment involuntarily. Companies have cutback hours of workers to offset the increasing cost of providing costly benefits and/or to or otherwise remain competitive. This trend is particularly pronounced in retail and other service industry jobs, which typically pay lower wages. In addition to having reduced incomes, these part-time workers are often challenged with unpredictable work schedules, making it more difficult for them to find a second job, flexible childcare and public transportation during non-peak times. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that between 2004 and 2009, the number of people involuntarily working part-time jobs more than doubled. As the economy has improved, the number of affected workers has begun to decline. However, in mid-2014, the number is still a little more than double pre-recession figures.
Even if the economic climate were more favorable, many in lower-wage and middle-income families will not earn enough to meet their basic needs. They often take on crippling amounts of debt to get by. Cost of living is a major factor playing into the family affordability equation. As wages have fallen or stagnated in recent years, consumer costs have steadily risen. A family that spent $1,000 on consumer goods in 2000 would have to spend $1,384 on those same goods in 2014, an approximate 38% increase in fourteen years. The largest increases in consumer costs have been for medical care, goods and services—including energy, and utilities—and transportation.

So, what does it cost a family to live a modest lifestyle these days? The Economic Policy Institute (EPI), a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank in Washington DC, has developed a Family Budget Calculator that measures the income a family needs to attain a secure, yet modest living standard. The Calculator uses community-specific costs of housing, food, child care, transportation, health care, other necessities and taxes for 615 U.S. communities and six family types. Annual modest budgets calculated for a cross-section of urban communities are reflected on the following graph.
Annual Family Budgets Needed for Four-Person Families to Meet Basic Needs in Select Communities*

- New York, NY: $93,502
- Boston, MA: $85,641
- San Francisco, CA: $82,639
- Washington DC: $81,280
- Philadelphia: $77,293
- Los Angeles, CA: $76,424
- Minneapolis, MN: $73,526
- San Diego, CA: $73,473
- Seattle, WA: $70,025
- Denver, CO: $69,924
- Chicago, IL: $69,028
- Portland, OR: $68,722
- Phoenix, AZ: $68,489
- Detroit, MI: $66,896
- Miami, FL: $66,501
- Kansas City, MO-KA: $66,419
- Charlotte NC: $64,728
- Dallas, TX: $64,704
- St. Louis, MO: $64,332
- Houston, TX: $63,600
- Tampa-St. Petersburg: $61,979
- Louisville, KY: $61,171
- Cincinatti, OH: $60,689
- Mobile, AL: $60,136
- Albequerque, NM: $59,962
- Memphis, TN: $58,084

*Four person families assuming two-parents and two children
Cities listed represent Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs)
Source: Economic Policy Institute Family Budget Calculator updated for 2013

US Poverty threshold ($23,624 for family of 4 in 2013)
As expected, New York City had the highest cost of living in 2013 (latest data available from EPI.) For a two-parent family of four to afford basic necessities in New York, the parent(s) would need to earn $94,676 a year, or a total full-time wage of $45.52 an hour. Cost of living varies widely across the country, but even in Marshall County Mississippi, which EPI has identified as having the lowest cost of living among the communities included in the Calculator, a family of four would need $48,144 annually ($23.15 an hour) to meet its basic expenses. This wage is more than twice the federal poverty line.

Expenses within specific categories identified in the Calculator further tell the story of what working families are up against.

### Annual Family Modest Budgets for Four-Person Families per Expense Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) or HUD Fair Market Rent (FMR) Metro Area</th>
<th>Monthly Housing</th>
<th>Monthly Food</th>
<th>Monthly Child Care</th>
<th>Monthly Transportation</th>
<th>Monthly Health Care</th>
<th>Monthly Other Necessities</th>
<th>Monthly Taxes</th>
<th>Monthly Total</th>
<th>Annual Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$1,474</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$2,006</td>
<td>$577</td>
<td>$1,629</td>
<td>$570</td>
<td>$879</td>
<td>$7,890</td>
<td>$94,676</td>
</tr>
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<td>Boston MA</td>
<td>$1,444</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$1,505</td>
<td>$607</td>
<td>$1,585</td>
<td>$563</td>
<td>$751</td>
<td>$7,209</td>
<td>$86,502</td>
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<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$1,795</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$953</td>
<td>$607</td>
<td>$1,574</td>
<td>$652</td>
<td>$551</td>
<td>$6,887</td>
<td>$82,639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia PA</td>
<td>$1,119</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$1,264</td>
<td>$607</td>
<td>$1,670</td>
<td>$479</td>
<td>$601</td>
<td>$6,494</td>
<td>$77,928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>$1,421</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$953</td>
<td>$577</td>
<td>$1,573</td>
<td>$557</td>
<td>$382</td>
<td>$6,217</td>
<td>$74,605</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minneapolis MN</td>
<td>$920</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$1,432</td>
<td>$607</td>
<td>$1,524</td>
<td>$428</td>
<td>$520</td>
<td>$6,186</td>
<td>$74,218</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>$966</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$1,285</td>
<td>$603</td>
<td>$1,466</td>
<td>$440</td>
<td>$574</td>
<td>$6,088</td>
<td>$73,055</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td>$1,382</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$953</td>
<td>$607</td>
<td>$1,354</td>
<td>$547</td>
<td>$376</td>
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<td>Denver, CO</td>
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<td>$1,172</td>
<td>$607</td>
<td>$1,422</td>
<td>$403</td>
<td>$426</td>
<td>$5,605</td>
<td>$67,255</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kansas City, MO</td>
<td>$783</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$1,181</td>
<td>$607</td>
<td>$1,463</td>
<td>$393</td>
<td>$397</td>
<td>$5,561</td>
<td>$66,729</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miami, FL</td>
<td>$1,122</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$864</td>
<td>$607</td>
<td>$1,431</td>
<td>$480</td>
<td>$298</td>
<td>$5,556</td>
<td>$66,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte, NC</td>
<td>$793</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$1,062</td>
<td>$607</td>
<td>$1,479</td>
<td>$430</td>
<td>$386</td>
<td>$5,729</td>
<td>$68,742</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dallas, TX</td>
<td>$887</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$961</td>
<td>$607</td>
<td>$1,526</td>
<td>$420</td>
<td>$247</td>
<td>$5,402</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston, TX</td>
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<td>$754</td>
<td>$961</td>
<td>$577</td>
<td>$1,380</td>
<td>$435</td>
<td>$258</td>
<td>$5,310</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>$874</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$833</td>
<td>$577</td>
<td>$1,401</td>
<td>$417</td>
<td>$310</td>
<td>$5,166</td>
<td>$61,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisville, KY</td>
<td>$731</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$963</td>
<td>$607</td>
<td>$1,368</td>
<td>$380</td>
<td>$333</td>
<td>$5,136</td>
<td>$61,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati, OH</td>
<td>$740</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$985</td>
<td>$607</td>
<td>$1,368</td>
<td>$382</td>
<td>$246</td>
<td>$5,081</td>
<td>$60,977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile, AL</td>
<td>$762</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$915</td>
<td>$607</td>
<td>$1,268</td>
<td>$388</td>
<td>$347</td>
<td>$5,041</td>
<td>$60,491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memphis, TN</td>
<td>$768</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$881</td>
<td>$607</td>
<td>$1,264</td>
<td>$390</td>
<td>$185</td>
<td>$4,849</td>
<td>$58,190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CPI Calculator 2014

As shown in the above expense table, child care, housing and health care costs consistently account for the greatest expenses in an average family’s budget. According to a 2012 report released from Child Care Aware of America, the average annual cost of full-time child care for an infant in a center ranged from $4,600 in Mississippi to nearly $15,000 in Massachusetts; for a four-year-old in a center, the costs ranged from about $3,900 to nearly $11,700.

And childcare costs are rising. The cost of infant care in a center or family child care home increased about 2 percent in 2011, where the cost of care for a 4-year-old increased by more than 4 percent.

“Working parents are caught in a bind - they need child care to continue to work and support their families, but costs keep going up, stretching family budgets to the limit.” - Child Care Aware America
The burden is even heavier for parents with multiple children in care. Center-based child care fees for two children (an infant and a 4-year-old) exceeded annual median rent payments in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Some locations are more expensive for parents than others. New York, Minnesota, Oregon, Colorado, Hawaii, Kansas, California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Indiana and Wisconsin were the ten least-affordable states for full-time infant care in a center in 2011. xiv

Housing costs are also significant for families and on the rise in many locations. Rental rates picked up in 2011 when housing market demand increased. A standard in the housing market is that families should not pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs, including utilities. Based on the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s fair market rent (FMR) for communities, CPI’s data shows a broad span of housing costs across geographic areas. For the sampling of cities listed in this report, the FMR for a middle of the market two-bedroom rental unit including utilities in 2012 ranged from $740 month in the Cincinnati metro area to as high as $1,474 in the New York metro area. For a household to afford the updated 2013 national average FMR of $984 for a two-bedroom rental unit (at 30% of income), it would need to generate $18.92 in hourly wages or nearly $40,000 a year.

The reality is that one out of three U.S. households (renters and home owners) is considered “cost-burdened”, meaning they pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs. But approximately half of all renter households are cost-burdened, and one in four is considered “extremely cost-burdened”; this means the household is paying more than 50 percent of its income on housing costs. The share of cost-burdened households rose steadily between 2001 and 2011, but declined slightly in 2012.xv

Families are also spending more on healthcare than in the past. Since 2003, insurance premiums have shot up 80 percent, nearly three times as fast as wages (31 percent) and inflation (27 percent.)xvi As Obamacare plays out over the next several years, employers will continue to adopt strategies to keep down their company healthcare insurance costs, which may result in higher overall costs and/or reduced benefits to their employees.

When the Bottom Drops Out

According to a recent Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED) report, nearly half (44%) of all households in the US are “liquid asset poor,” meaning they have less than three months of savings. A quarter of these households are middle class, while four out of five low-income households have no liquid assets. xvii Consequently, when a life event or emergency occurs—a health issue, divorce, death of a spouse or child, car accident or major repairs, domestic violence, house fire, etc.—a large segment of American households are imminently vulnerable to the financial and emotional upheaval caused by such loss. Those earning lower wages and with a limited network of personal support, family or otherwise, are the most vulnerable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In absence of adequate savings, households are using a range of strategies to get by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Using bank overdraft as short-term loan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Borrowing from family or friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Late payments or skipped payments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Payday loans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pawn shops to sell material goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Auto title pawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Credit cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Retirement savings or liquidation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Often families faced with a financial hardship are already tapped out on credit. The Urban Institute recently published an extensive report on delinquent debt in America pointing out that more than one out of three people with credit history (35.1 percent) have debts and unpaid bills that have been reported to collection agencies. The average debt in collections in 2013 was $5,178; this includes non-mortgage bills, such as balances on an individual’s credit cards, medical bills, or utility bills that are over 180 days past their due date and have been forwarded to collections agencies. Delinquent debt is overwhelmingly concentrated in Southern and Western states.xviii

Another trend that reflects the growing financial bind some workers have found themselves in is the increasing number of them who are withdrawing and/or borrowing from their 401(k) or other retirement accounts. Lower-wage earners are overrepresented in this crowd. Borrowing or withdrawing from a 401(k) is typically the last resort of short-term funding for families. According to a recent Gallup survey, 48 percent of non-retired Americans plan to rely on retirement accounts as a major source of income, up from 42 percent in 2009 though down from a high of 54 percent in 2008. Not only can workers accrue considerable penalties from such early withdrawals or unpaid loans, they also put their retirement security in jeopardy.

**The bottom dropped out for these working families...**

- A single mother earning $22,000 as an assistant retail store manager had to have hip surgery. The company she worked for did not provide short-term disability. She needed support to help pay her rent while she was off work recovering from her operation.

- The husband of a service manager earning $34,000 for a company had a stroke and could no longer work. After his unemployment ran out, the mother of two scrambled to pay the bills while working and also caring for her husband.

- A father of three earning $64,000 as bank supervisor awoke in the middle of the night to three inches of water rising in his rental house. Within two hours, he and his family were forced to evacuate, as the water eventually reached to four feet. They lost everything, including the two cars parked in the driveway, which were both totaled. Without rental insurance, the family needed help to find another place and secure transportation to get to work.

**Consequences to Employers of Financial Stress of Workers**

Whether caused by a natural disaster, job loss in the family, extraordinary medical expenses, an emergency home repair or a host of other crises, an unexpected jolt to a family’s financial situation can be incredibly stressful. Bottom-line, the bills still need to be paid. The pressure can be overwhelming; it’s difficult for people experiencing these challenges to not be affected in the workplace.

Numerous studies and employee surveys have been undertaken, all leading to the common conclusion that when workers are dealing with financial stress at home, higher health expenses, higher turnover and absenteeism and drops in productivity are likely to occur in the workplace. And the situation doesn’t appear to be improving. One survey, undertaken annually by Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), looks at financial wellness in the workplace.
Over 400 higher-level human resource professionals from numerous companies were included in the 2014 survey that found that despite the improving overall economy, employees continue to face ongoing struggles for a variety of reasons.

SHRM’s research shows that 38 percent of workers are facing more personal finance challenges in 2014 than they did in 2007 at the onset of the Great Recession, and that slightly more than a quarter (23 percent) of respondents indicated employees experienced more financial challenges now than they did in 2013, with medical expenses near the top of the concerns. Nearly two-thirds of responding HR professionals agreed or strongly agreed that employees were more likely to request a loan from their 401K or other retirement plan in the 12 months prior to the survey than in previous years. Furthermore, seven out of ten respondents indicated that personal financial challenges have a large or some impact on their employee’s performance, with the greatest impact on employees’ ability to focus on work, overall productivity and absenteeism and tardiness.

Employees’ financial stress and its impact in the workplace can have significant impact on an employer’s bottom-line. The costs of lost productivity, absenteeism, hiring temporary help and other impacts add up over time. A 2010 study conducted by the Federal Reserve of Kansas revealed that on average, the cost to employers of such stress is around $5,000 per affected employee. The study also found that companies that have a high percentage of employees in vulnerable demographics—i.e. lower-wage earners including single mothers—are more likely to experience the financial stress costs than other companies. However, financial stress can cut across all levels of employees. A financial hardship can burden a company manager as readily as a front-line employee. No matter who’s experiencing it in an organization, the impact of the stress can radiate to fellow employees and have implications across the board.

**How Some Businesses are Helping Their Employees Cope during Difficult Times**

Many large, medium and small businesses have created a culture that acknowledges the well-being of their employees and encourages them to step forward when dealing with a personal crisis that is, or could have, an impact on their performance at work. They are using a variety of complementary strategies to help their employees cope. For example, Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are common among organizations, particularly larger ones. Through these programs, workers have access to counseling and other support to deal with personal issues such as depression, marital/family strife, addiction or grief that may be affecting their job performance. Some businesses offer financial counseling to their employees to teach them the skills they need to better handle their financial situations and thus reduce the stress at work.

Companies also recognize that unexpected, catastrophic events or circumstances can arise in an employee’s life, and many have chosen to establish disaster and hardship funds specifically for their employees. These charitable programs are either administered through a third-party employee relief fund provider or through an in-house program. For example, when Hurricane Sandy hit the northeast coast several years ago, a number of companies that employed affected workers stepped in to provide financial relief, housing and other assistance. Such programs often assist workers when faced with the examples of financial hardships highlighted in this report. Some disaster and hardship programs exist due, in part or whole, to the contributions of employees who have galvanized to help their fellow employees in times of hardship. Others are fully sponsored by the companies.
Conclusion

As companies continue to shake off the impacts of the Great Recession on their bottom-line, many are rebounding and becoming stronger in the process. However, as evidenced in the data provided in this report, many of the people who work for them are not doing as well. Despite working hard, more American families are struggling to make ends meet than in any other time in recent history. Wages have remained relatively stagnant, more people are involuntarily working part-time without benefits and costs are rising. Not only is this the case for lower-income families, but for middle-income families as well. One major setback—a health issue, loss of a job in a two-family earning household, death of a child or spouse, a house fire—can easily and quickly cause a working family to spiral down into dire financial circumstances. The fortunate news for some of these workers and families is that when bad things happen to good people, many of the companies they work for have their backs.
Endnotes

i Actual stories from cases processed by e4e.


vii Ibid.


xi Ibid.


