



WAGING A LIVING

Fact Sheet

Series / Broadcast

The term "working poor" should be an oxymoron. If you work full time, you should not be poor, but more than 30 million Americans - one in four workers - are stuck in jobs that pay less than the federal poverty level for a family of four. WAGING A LIVING chronicles the battles of four low-wage workers to lift their families out of poverty. Shot over a three-year period in the northeast and California, this observational documentary captured the dreams, frustrations, and accomplishments of a diverse group of workers who struggled to live from paycheck to paycheck. By presenting an unvarnished look at the barriers these workers must overcome to escape poverty, the film offered a sobering view of the elusive American Dream.

WAGING A LIVING was produced and directed by Roger Weisberg. Weisberg's co-producer in New York is Eddie Rosenstein. The co-producers in California were Frances Reid, Deborah Hoffmann, and Pamela Harris. A production of Public Policy Productions, WAGING A LIVING was broadcast as part of PBS' acclaimed P.O.V. series during its 2006 season.

Campaign Overview / Key Issues

The WAGING A LIVING outreach campaign expanded public awareness and dialogue, provided media resources, and worked in partnership with public television stations and key community organizations engaged in local initiatives to strengthen families and neighborhoods. Overall, efforts supported two Core Results – families have increased earnings and income, and families have increased levels of assets.

Phase 1 of the outreach campaign (2003 and 2004) focused on Workplace Essential Skills (WES) and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). These activities continued throughout the campaign. Phase 2 of the campaign began in 2005 when the full-length documentary was available for start-up station outreach campaigns. Activities included community events that offered screenings, discussions, and action planning.

Stations and *Making Connections* site teams built bridges between WAGING A LIVING and the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign, especially in relationship to economic and employment issues. The outreach campaign also tied into the PBS Web site as well as coordinated activities with P.O.V.

Funders

Outreach funding has been provided by generous grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Campaign Media Tools and Resources

1. Workplace Essential Skills

Produced by Kentucky Educational Television (KET) and developed in partnership with PBS and the National Center on Adult Literacy, Workplace Essential Skills (WES) is a comprehensive integrated multimedia learning system, with television programs/videos, workbooks, an interactive online component, and a teacher's guide. The purpose of WES is to prepare low-income workers to improve their reading, writing, math, and job skills. Its anticipated outcomes are to assist these workers in finding a new job, training for a better job, or becoming more successful on the job they already have.

The four WES content areas (and workbooks) are Employment, Communication & Writing, Reading, and Math. The 25 videotape lessons (curriculum areas) cover such relevant workforce topics as

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Matching Skills and Jobs, Ready for Work, The Language of Work, and Communicating with Co-Workers and Supervisors.

The WAGING A LIVING pilot project in 2003 and 2004 provided training and technical assistance to community adult education personnel to implement Workplace Essential Skills (WES) programming and curriculum materials to low-wage workers. The four pilot sites were Seattle, Louisville, San Francisco, and Hartford. Stations were encouraged to work with the *Making Connections* site team and serve residents in *Making Connections* neighborhoods.

While two projects, Hartford and Kentucky, remained affiliated with the WAGING A LIVING outreach campaign, all community adult education sites planned to continue using the WES program and materials.

2. Earned Income Tax Credit

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a *refundable tax credit*, meaning that even workers who do not owe income tax may receive a refund. The size of the credit is based on the amount of income earned and the number of qualifying children in a household. Administered through the tax system, (Internal Revenue Service), the EITC is designed to offset the burden of Social Security payroll taxes on low-wage workers, supplement earnings, and complement efforts to help families make the transition from welfare to work. Initiated in 1975, the EITC has been expanded three times (1986, 1990, 1993), transforming it into one of the federal government's most significant efforts to boost the income of low-wage workers, increase the value of low-wage work, and reduce poverty, primarily among working families with children.

From December through April, communities engaged in The Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* encouraged families who qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to take advantage of this wealth-building opportunity. A service of the IRS, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites provided free tax help to low-income taxpayers during tax season To support AECF's initiative as well as build awareness for WAGING A LIVING and its focus on low-income workers, Outreach Extensions conducted a pilot campaign related to EITC at five public television stations and/or community sites. Targeting low-income neighborhoods, the 2004 sites included the three 2003 pilot sites, Seattle, WA; Louisville, KY; and Indianapolis, IN; as well as two new sites – Hartford, CT and San Antonio, TX. Each site designed its own project.

3. THE MONEY TRAP

In addition to WES and the EITC, stations and the *Making Connections* sites could choose to build outreach projects around **THE MONEY TRAP**. Part of AECF's Family Economic Success, THE MONEY TRAP highlighted common financial predicaments that ensnare unwary, low-income consumers. The 18-minute documentary presented the real-life stories of four people meeting a variety of financial challenges. The Spanish language version was entitled *La Trampa del Dinero*. The documentary was produced by N.A.K. Production Associates in association with The Hatcher Group and The Aspen Institute.

4. Station Grants Program

Stations and *Making Connections* sites applied for outreach grants.

5. Ancillary Materials

Outreach Extensions circulated a preview copy of WAGING A LIVING to selected stations/*Making Connections* sites and convened a focus group by telephone to identify ways that the content could be linked to the economic activities/Core Results of the *Making Connections* sites. Once key outreach themes were identified, OE created a Web-based discussion guide. Similar to AGING OUT, producer Roger Weisberg created separate videos for the individual stories (families) presented in the film. Relevant customized questions and a Core Results document were developed.

6. Web site

Information on and resources for the outreach campaign were available on the Making Connections Media Outreach Initiative Web site. The campaign tied into the PBS/WNET Web site.

7. Communications / Technical Assistance

Outreach Extensions provided customized technical assistance to all stations conducting local grant-funded campaigns. Stations and *Making Connections* sites were informed about campaign activities and resources via e-mail on an ongoing basis.

National Strategic Partners

For the Workplace Essential Skills pilot project, Outreach Extensions worked with Kentucky Educational Television. Milli Fazey, WES director of training and development, conducted site trainings.



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