



MY VIEW

## Boyer: Poverty series goes beyond the data

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Our world is filled with data, and a large part of what we do as journalists is report that data to the general public. Journalists frequently produce stories on unemployment rates, school test scores, batting averages, milk prices, population changes, etc. Too often, however, these stories don't provide much context on what the numbers really mean.

One of those figures frequently cited in news media reports is the poverty rate. In Cayuga County, that rate is 12.2 percent for the overall population, and 17.9 percent for children under 18. In the city of Auburn, that figure jumps to 18.4 percent and 24.2 percent, respectively.

But what do those numbers really mean?

Our newsroom has been working hard to find answers to that question over the past couple of months, and the result of that effort will be published in a special six-day print and online series that kicks off Sunday.

The series, "Wealth of hardship: Cayuga County's growing poverty problem," examines the data that define the extent of poverty in our local area with a deeper look at the root causes and symptoms of poverty. We've talked to local experts on the frontlines of the nationwide War on Poverty launched 50 years ago, and we'll be sharing their insights. We're also going to be running online polls, a blog and hold a live online community discussion at the end of the week.

At the heart of this report, though, are the stories of people in this community who have personally faced the struggle. All of their stories are different, illustrating the reality that there is no typical profile of poverty. Yet all of their stories have commonalities that reinforce the truth that financial hardship can pull any of us into its grips.

I'm proud of the work our staff has done on this project, and impressed with the support and cooperation we've received from the agencies and professionals who have worked with us on this endeavor.

Most of all, I'm grateful to these men and women who had the courage to share their stories with our readers. It's terrifying to put your life in the public eye, especially when you're in or have gone through a difficult experience that can generate second-guessing and judgment from others. But these stories are what's needed to see beyond the figures and engage in discussion and action to improve the situation.