

# Single Mom Initiative

**T**he Economic Self-Reliance Center at Brigham Young University houses various initiatives on which university students and faculty partner with organizations to engage in activities that promote economic self-reliance. One of these initiatives is the Single Mom Initiative (SMI). During 2006 the Single Mom Initiative has accomplished a great deal to help the increasing number of single mothers in Utah become economically self-reliant.

The number of single-mother families in the United States has tripled over the last thirty years. There are now more than fifty thousand single-mother households in Utah. While their numbers are increasing, single-mother families remain disproportionately represented among the working poor. Nearly 30 percent of Utah's single-mother families live below the poverty line. Single-mother households are five times more likely to be below the poverty line when compared with two-parent households.

In 2005 BYU's Economic Self-Reliance Center and the Single Mom Foundation joined forces to create the Single Mom Initiative. The SMI is a multi-year, multi-disciplinary research effort with the goal of improving knowledge about the circumstances of single moms in Utah, the unique challenges they face, and the interventions that best promote their economic self-reliance.

The SMI began with a review of academic literature and secondary data sources relevant to single mothers in Utah. A summary of the literature and data was presented in a learning lab (or small workshop) held in May 2006 and attended by twenty-eight researchers and practitioners from fourteen organizations.



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The learning lab allowed the SMI to not only share its findings with researchers and practitioners, but also to receive input into creating the SMI's initial research focus. The learning lab attendees narrowed down a long list of issues facing single mothers to four top concerns: education, financial assets, childcare, and emotional well-being. These four issues have become the initial research focus for the SMI.

Since the May 2006 learning lab, the SMI has begun working on several research projects. The SMI has been preparing for a statewide survey of single moms that began in February 2007. The SMI also began a project in partnership with the Utah Individual Development Account Network, a nonprofit organization operating a matched savings program for low-income people. The SMI will examine the impact of the program on single mothers and their families.

The SMI believes these and other projects will provide researchers and practitioners with a wealth of information about single mothers in Utah, information that can be used by practitioners to improve the supports available to single mothers as they progress towards economic self-reliance.