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### Need rises sharply in Aspen and Roaring Fork Valley

More residents living 'on the edge' amid recession

[Katie Redding](#)

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ASPEN — At the Roaring Fork Valley branch of Catholic Charities, increased requests for emergency assistance have kept staff busy enough in the last month and a half that no one has had time to calculate the increase, regional director Marian McDonough said.

But she's been struck by the fact that the people asking for emergency assistance are changing. They're well-dressed, she said. Some have jobs.

"They have a need now where they haven't in the past," McDonough said.

Catholic Charities isn't alone. At Pitkin County Social Services, director Nan Sundeen said public assistance applications are up between 25 and 30 percent this year. At Aspen's Buddy Program, requests for scholarships to participate in after-school activities are up 54 percent since June, according to executive director Catherine Anne Provine.

"I would guess that it's because the money for extracurricular activities isn't available at home," she said.

Sundeen said that despite Aspen's wealthy image, approximately 20 percent of Pitkin County residents are living beyond their means in any given year. When layoffs happen, she said, people in that income bracket can instantly be thrown into crisis.

"A large number of people live on the edge here," she said. "It's sort of the compromise of living the dream."

McDonough said she's really seeing the economic impact begin to hit the para-professional class. But she noted that almost everyone has been affected, at some level, by the recent downturn — citing a recent conversation with a real estate agent struggling to sell houses.

"It's scary times," she said.

#### Counseling demand up, too

Demand for direct services isn't the only thing on the rise. Throughout the valley, agencies and nonprofits also are seeing an increased need for counseling services.

Sundeen said she has been studying data on the social and emotional impacts of the Great Depression. She learned that family violence and child neglect go up, statistically, in an economic downturn. Local data backs that theory up.

Pitkin County has seen a 60 percent increase in child welfare referrals this year, said Sundeen. She did cautiously attribute much of this rise to the fact that the county has recently implemented a child protection team in Aspen — meaning more eyes are looking for instances of child abuse or neglect.

But she also thinks some of the rise may be due to the recession. Money problems create a lot of pressure in families and on children, she said.

Provine said the Buddy Program has seen a 30 percent increase this year in referrals to its services, which match at-risk youth with adult mentors. She agrees with Sundeen's assessment, and theorized that their increased referrals were a direct result of families facing increased challenges.

At the Youth Zone, which counsels at-risk youth, the Aspen-Parachute region has seen a 10 percent increase in demand for services this year, according to Evan Zislis, the division manager for Aspen, Basalt and Carbondale. He, too, attributed part of the rise to the organization's proactive approach to finding kids who need them — but also to the economic downturn.

"When times are tough for parents, and parenting starts to slide, kids are more likely to find themselves

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in situations where they need to be scooped up," he said.

### Funding on the decline

Not unexpectedly, those charged with meeting this increased need overwhelmingly agreed that funding is on the decline.

Aspen Education Foundation board member Michele Lueck recently said that nationwide, nonprofits are budgeting for a 30-50 percent funding decline for next year, and a 50 percent decline in 2010.

Locally, Zislis said Youth Zone is predicting a 25 percent decline in its revenue for the 2008-09 fiscal year. The organization is seeing an across-the-board decline in giving that includes both foundations and individual donors, he said.

At the Buddy Program, Provine said that one local grantor has delayed grants until mid-2009, when it is more certain of its funding stream. Another potential non-local grantor informed the Buddy Program that it was only funding issues such as homelessness, food banks and indigent care next year, she added.

McDonough said some of their contributors have told Catholic Charities they won't be able to fund them next year at previous levels.

But she noted that the Colorado Springs-based El Pomar Foundation recently announced it would be bucking the trend and giving out more money, in order to help with the declining revenue streams at nonprofits.

Hopefully, she said, some other foundations will follow suit.

Provine said she had "full faith" that Aspenites would rise to meet the increased need throughout the valley — as long as nonprofits do a good job of getting the word out.

"I believe people will come forward, because that's what we do in this community," she said.

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hm123 wrote:

Make sure all applicants are lawful residents if any public funds head their way. Should help ease it a bit.

And if any taxpayer services are involved (Does Catholic Charities still get your tax dollars for instance?) well, gov, watch out. It is illegal and the law "abrogates Gov't immunity."

'Secure and Verifiable ID' Act. HB 03 -1224

[http://www.leg.state.co.us/2003a/inetcbill.nsf/fsbillcont/0135EC67932E44C487256CAB00008F:Open&file=1224\\_enr.pdf](http://www.leg.state.co.us/2003a/inetcbill.nsf/fsbillcont/0135EC67932E44C487256CAB00008F:Open&file=1224_enr.pdf)

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