



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Elizabeth Hughes

417-527-0399

director@christianactionministries.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SUBJECT: FIRST-EVER COMPREHENSIVE STUDY ON POVERTY AND HEALTH IN STONE & TANEY COUNTIES UNDERWAY

Branson, MO—U.S. Census Bureau currently reports the poverty rate at more than 17 percent in Taney County. Those working in public education, social services or ministries are aware of the overwhelming need, but many who do not may remain unacquainted with this sobering fact.

On average, 3,800 people rely on Christian Action Ministries for emergency food each month. Jesus Was Homeless serves approximately 1,600. Salvation Army of Branson sees more than 600 people each month.

“We’ve seen the need increase exponentially over the last two years,” explained Bryan Stallings, Jesus Was Homeless CEO/Founder. “I believe that if we don’t address poverty, our community will be at a tipping point very soon.”

Over several months a total of 18 leaders of businesses, agencies and ministries met to determine what it would take to get started on an effort to address the systemic issues attached to poverty.

“We know that not one person, ministry, or institution can accomplish this feat. Only in unity, with Christ at the helm, will our community move the needle on poverty,” said Elizabeth Hughes, executive director of Christian Action Ministries.

The challenges of poverty are easily identified, but to date, there is not a comprehensive report to gauge areas indicating and/or contributing to poverty in Ozark Mountain Country. The question is “How can you know what to address without truly knowing your weaknesses and strengths?”

What resulted was a proposal to conduct a 24-month community assessment of poverty and health in Stone and Taney counties. In September, the Community Assessment on Poverty began. The research includes not only Taney County but Stone, which has a poverty rate of 15 percent.

Moore Strategic Consultants, out of Brentwood, Tennessee, is contracted to assist in this evaluation. The Moore firm has facilitated numerous similar projects across the nation, including reliant upon the leisure and travel industry.

Phase one of the study includes collecting and analyzing existing data from Ozark Mountain Country. From this information, the coalition and research firm can begin to pinpoint areas of concern and gaps in information.



In the second phase, the assessment will gather community input from across Stone and Taney counties, as well as look at other communities from across the nation that have implemented innovative approaches to address poverty.

On February 1, the community is invited to weigh in on this issue at the S. Truett Poverty Summit, which will serve as the kick off to the community listening tour for this project.

“College of the Ozarks, along with area ministries, schools, churches, agencies, and community members, is seeking to identify the root causes of poverty in Stone and Taney counties,” said Dr. Sue Head, Vice President for Cultural Affairs and Dean of Character Education. The upcoming S. Truett Poverty Summit will be the first stop on the “listening tour,” which is vital to creating a successful roadmap for moving the needle on poverty.” To register for the Poverty Summit, please go to <http://www.cofo.edu/poverty>.

In phase three, the coalition assisted by the extended community will examine everything learned and begin to compile a report that reflects the state of Ozark Mountain Country.

The result will provide a comprehensive look at indicators of poverty in Stone and Taney counties, as well as recommendations on how to move the needle on poverty. The intention is to create a baseline measurement tool and strategic plan from which to work.

“By being intentional to join Christ where He’s at work, our steps are being guided to accomplish His will for all families in Ozark Mountain Country,” said John Baltes, Silver Dollar City Foundation President.

The Community Assessment on Poverty and Health is part of a larger collaboration to address challenges facing the Ozark Mountain Community. In May, the Branson Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau’s Five in 5, The Family Project by the Silver Dollar City Foundation and the Stone and Taney County Substance Use Initiative united with Christian Action Ministries to collaborate in a greater effort.

Each of these initiatives have set out to address a facet of the poverty challenge. Representing nearly 300 organizations and businesses, these initiatives are working together to aid the existing efforts of area agencies and ministries and unite the community for addressing poverty and the effects of poverty.

“The four initiatives serve as a multi-faceted assault on poverty,” said Hughes. “For generations, God has used the Ozark Mountains as a beacon of hope and a ‘light on a hill.’ We see Him, again, at work in our land.”

Organizers of the initiatives welcome the community to get involved three ways initially: 1. By bringing awareness to the issue of poverty and its effects in Stone and Taney Counties; 2. By supporting existing agencies and ministries doing good works on the front lines today; and 3. By joining the initiatives in their efforts as they identify needs.



The Coalition, Research Focus Areas & Upcoming Dates

THE COALITION

Cox Medical Center Branson
Silver Dollar City Foundation
Taney County Health Department
Stone County Health Department
College of the Ozarks
Jesus Was Homeless
Sight & Sound Theatres
Branson Police Department
Ozarks Community Action Corporation
Faith Community Health
City of Branson
Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church
Taney County Community Foundation
Table Rock Lake Community Foundation
Branson Public Schools
Ozarks Wellness Network
Missouri Foundation for Health
Christian Action Ministries

RESEARCH FOCUS AREAS

Transportation
Education
Public Safety
Economic Development
Affordable Housing
Health

UPCOMING:

January—

- **First Results from Affordable Housing Study by Taney County Partnerships**
- **End-of-Year Report Stone & Taney Counties Substance Use Initiative—A two-year summary of community change**

February 1—

- **S. Truett Cathy Poverty Summit/Kick-off of Community Listening Tour, College of the Ozarks**