

In Face Of Searing Economic Crunch, Urban League Offers Safety Net

(NAPSA)—While the rest of the nation may be on its way to regaining its footing in the wake of the terrorist attacks and the ensuing economic downturn, black America may take significantly longer to recover.

Already, reports indicate that disproportionate numbers of blacks are in danger of losing their homes through foreclosure, more are being laid off, and more small businesses are being forced to either cut workers' hours or close. Perhaps even more alarming, according to the National Urban League, the oldest and largest community-based movement devoted to empowering African Americans, middle class blacks—and not just low wage earners—are increasingly turning to the organization for assistance.

“9/11’ created a ripple effect that quickly turned into a flood for African Americans,” says Dr. William Spriggs, director of the National Urban League’s Institute for Opportunity and Equality.

Spriggs says that black unemployment, while typically twice that of whites, had remained under double digits for the last four years; however, the September 11th attacks—and the effects of the earlier economic downturn—propelled that number to a disturbing 10.2 percent by December. As recently as August, black unemployment had been 8.4 percent, and economists believe a full percentage point increase to be alarming. White unemployment rose from 4.3 percent to 5.1 percent within the same period.

Middle-class African Americans like Carla Langley find themselves caught in the cross-fire. Langley is 42 years old, and a single mother with an 18-year-old son. She’d worked for United Airways for 22 years, earning \$43,000 annually, and with overtime, \$50,000. But United Airways, a major employer in the Pittsburgh area, had to cut jobs in a ravaged travel industry. Langley



A job-training program may help many overcome poverty and achieve their dreams.

was just one of the more than 40,000 who lost their jobs when the airlines floundered.

“My last day of work was October 11th,” says Langley. “They were laying us off. I had seniority so I took a voluntary furlough; I didn’t get severance. I thought this was my chance to seek another career.”

In a matter of weeks, Langley says, she was submerged beneath her bills. Her tenant had moved out, her son turned 18 and his father stopped sending child support, closing the door on two dependable sources of income.

“I decided to go to the League because I was behind in my mortgage. I hadn’t started receiving unemployment, and I needed direction because I hadn’t been out there in 20 years,” Langley says.

The Pittsburgh Urban League is working with Langley through its Home Owners Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program. Available at many of the League’s 111 affiliates, the program also offers credit counseling and

financial workshops.

The number of folks seeking job training has risen, too. Bill Foster, director of the Pittsburgh Urban League’s Employment Training and Economic Empowerment department, said in October his division saw the highest number of clients seeking assistance.

Foster says the League’s One-Stop placement centers, are like supermarkets for job seekers—offering résumé evaluation, job referrals and placements.

“To get African Americans back on track, we need immediate and long-term solutions like an economic stimulus package that addresses the needs of low-wage workers,” says Spriggs, “and greater eligibility for unemployment insurance.”

Now, Carla Langley has received a temporary suspension of foreclosure, and the Urban League is helping her job hunt.

For information about the Urban League’s programs or to make a donation, call your local chapter or visit www.nul.org.