

# Snapshot from the Back of the Yards: Jobs and the Struggle to Make Ends Meet

**A Community Survey Report by [Latinos Organized for Justice](#) a program of [Illinois Hunger Coalition](#)**

## Executive Summary

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

In light of the alarming 11.3%\* unemployment rate in Cook County, discussions about how to help families often focus on the creation of jobs. But our conversations with residents of the Back of the Yards community have uncovered stories that suggest that economic instability isn't just reserved for the jobless. To find out more about jobs and the economic situation of families in the Back of the Yards, Latinos Organized for Justice (LOJ) community leaders designed a survey and took to the streets in April, 2010 to talk to people in the neighborhood.

After interviewing 206 residents from the Back of the Yards, we found that 74% of households had one or more person working. While the majority (62%) of workers were working full-time, only 20% were making a living wage or above, and almost 60% were not receiving employer-provided benefits. These wages are even more alarming given that only 17% of households had more than one person working. Contrary to common perceptions of low-income families, we found that 88% of households had 5 or fewer household members. Further, 93% of households with children had two or more adult residents. Even though families were relatively small, our results suggest that for families in the Back of the Yards, *having just one breadwinner isn't enough*. Over half of our participants reported sometimes, rarely, or never having enough money to feed their families. While 70% of non-Latino participants utilized food stamps to fill in the gaps, only 42% of Latino families reported using food stamps.

In sum, we found that a having a job doesn't guarantee that rent will be paid, that electricity will turn on, or even than children will be fed. Our findings suggest that the injustice here is not simply the scarcity of jobs, but the scarcity of good jobs- that hard work is going uncompensated, and as a result, families are not able to meet their most basic needs.

**NOTE:** The results of this survey are not representative of the whole community, but rather are a "snapshot" taken from the community members we interviewed for the survey.

### **Report Highlights:**

- **The median household had 4 people- 2 adults, 2 children- with one member working full time, earning slightly above minimum wage (\$8.77).**
- **93%** of the households with children had two or more adult residents.
- **74%** of households had one or more person working, and **59%** of households had at least one person that did not have a job but was looking for work.
- **80%** of workers made less than the living wage for Chicago (\$11.03).
- **62%** of those that worked, reported working over 36 hours a week (full-time).
- **51%** of participants reported sometimes, rarely, or never having enough money for food to feed their family.
- **37%** of workers were making the federal minimum (\$8.00) wage or less.
- **17%** of households had more than one person working.
- **15%** of full-time workers reported receiving health care.

**This report was made possible by the hard work of community members in the Back of the Yards.** We would like to recognize LOJ leaders Mauricio Nava, Teresa Hernandez, Edgar Armas, Maria Socorro Andrade, Cira Isodoro and Genero Romero for helping to craft the survey and collect information. We would also like to thank Sister Joelleyn from Casa Catalina, Marcey Reyes and Aida Gomez from Seward elementary, and Diane Doherty of the Illinois Hunger Coalition. **Most importantly, we want to thank all of the survey participants who shared their stories.**

To contact Latinos Organized for Justice, call Maria Rodriguez at 312-629-9580

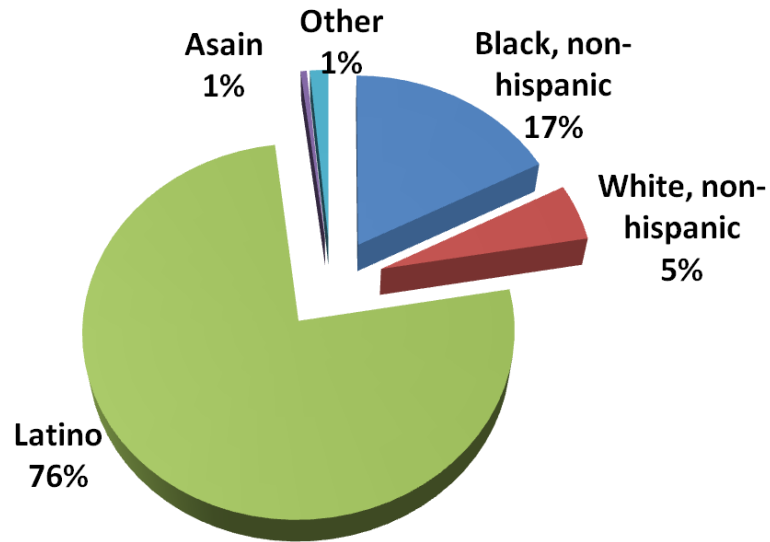
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A Community Survey Report by **Latinos Organized for Justice**

## Race and Ethnicity

### Race and Ethnicity of Survey Participants (n= 202)



#### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- Over three quarters of the survey participants were Latino\*.
- At least 62% of the participants were Spanish speaking.
- 17% of the participants were Black, non-Hispanic, 5% were White, non-Hispanic, and less than 1% Asian.

\* NOTE: We use the term “Latino” to refer to individuals who identify as Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin. We recognize and appreciate the complexity of labeling this identity and are using the term “Latino” to keep the report as concise as possible.

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## Household Profile

### HIGHLIGHTS:

- The median\* household had 4 people- 2 adults, 2 children- with one member working full-time (36+ hours/week), earning slightly above the minimum wage (\$8.77).
- 93% of the households with children had two or more adult residents.
- 77% of the participants lived in a household with 5 people or less.
- 80% of the households with children, had three or less children.
- 15% of households had more than 3 children.

**Table 1 & 2: Number of Adults and Children per Household**

# of Adults* Per Household	Households	
	Number	Percent
0	0	0
1	24	12%
2	108	53%
3	45	22%
4	15	7%
5	9	4%
6	0	0%
7	2	1%
8+	1	0%

# of Children** Per Household	Household	
	Number	Percent
0	52	25%
1	37	18%
2	57	28%
3	28	14%
4	19	9%
5	8	4%
6	1	0%
7	1	0%
8+	1	0%

\*18 or older

\*\* Younger than 18

**\*What's a Median?** A median is a lot like an average- it gives us an idea of the middle in a set of numbers. We use it instead of the average because it is not as sensitive to very high and very low values.

*Imagine we ask 5 people about their hourly wages and these are their answers:  
(in dollars) 7.25, 8.00, 8.25, 9.00, 25.00*

The AVERAGE WAGE=  $7.25 + 8 + 8.25 + 9 + 25 = 57.5 \div 5 = \$11.50$

**The average wage is \$11.50.**

The MEDIAN WAGE= 7.25, 8.00, **8.25**, 9.00, 25.00 = The median is the middle number, 8.25.

**The median wage is \$8.25**

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## Working and Looking for Work

*“My husband drives a tow-truck. The pay is decent but we never know when he’s going to get work. As for me, I have been looking for a job for months. **It’s a catch 22- it’s like, they say you need experience to get a job, but then you need a job to get experience. It just doesn’t make sense.**”* Back of the Yards resident

### Highlights:

- 74% of households had one or more person working\*\*
- 59% of households had at least one person that did not have a job but was looking for work
- 26% of households had no one working
- 17% of households had more than one person working
- The average household had one person working

**Table 3 & 4: Working and Unemployed Household members**

People Working** per Household	Households (n=204)
0 people	26%
<b>1 person</b>	<b>56%</b>
2 people	13%
3 or more	4%

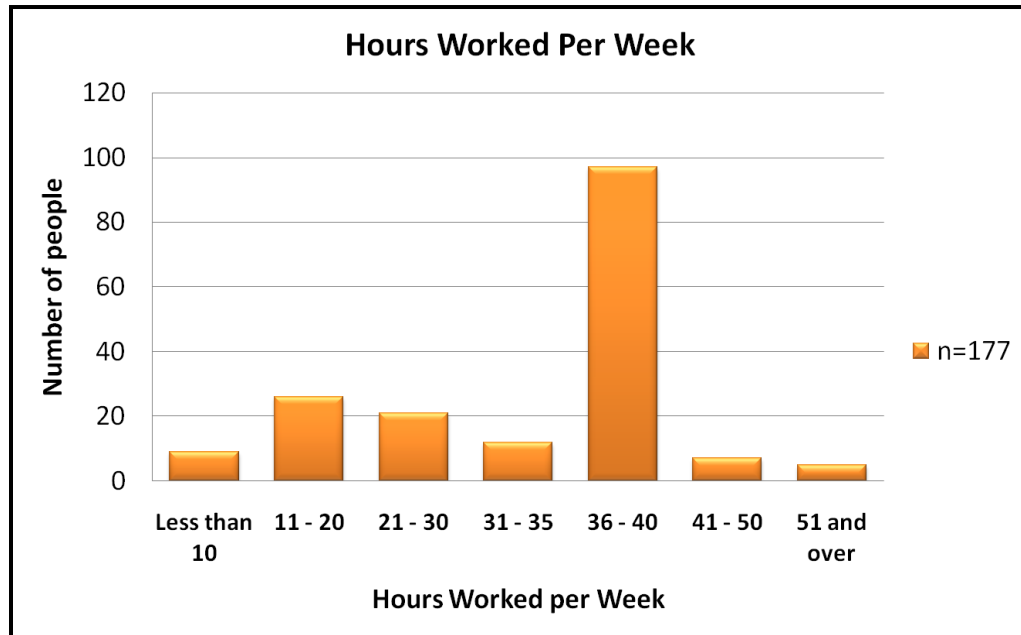
Unemployed* per Household	Households (n=187)
0 people	41%
<b>1 person</b>	<b>41%</b>
2 people	15%
3 or more	3%

- \*\* “Working” refers to paid work and does not refer to unpaid home-makers.
- Unemployed” refers to individuals who do not have a job but are currently looking for work.

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## Hours Worked per Week

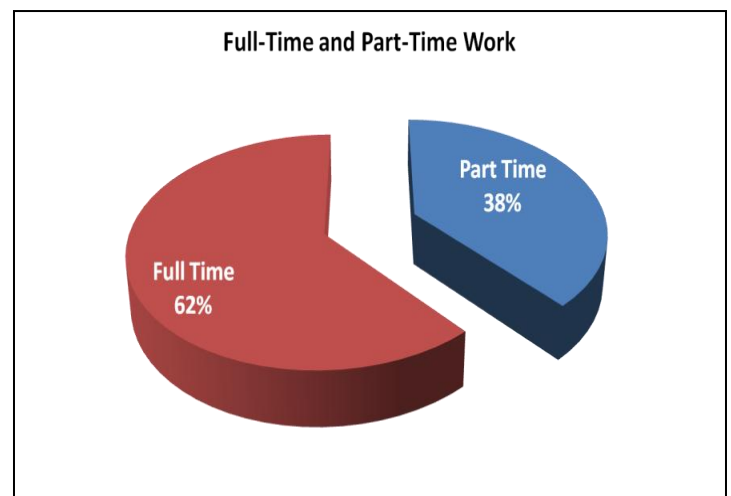


### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- 62% of those that worked, reported working over 36 hours a week (full-time).
- 38% of those that worked, reported working less than 36 hours (part-time).
- Of the people that worked full-time almost one third did not have a fixed working schedule (either the number of hours, or schedule of hours changed week to week or month to month).

*“I work 40 hours a week and I never had to ask for food before. Now that I have a wife and kids, my check isn’t enough to pay for food for my family.”*

*Back of the Yards resident*



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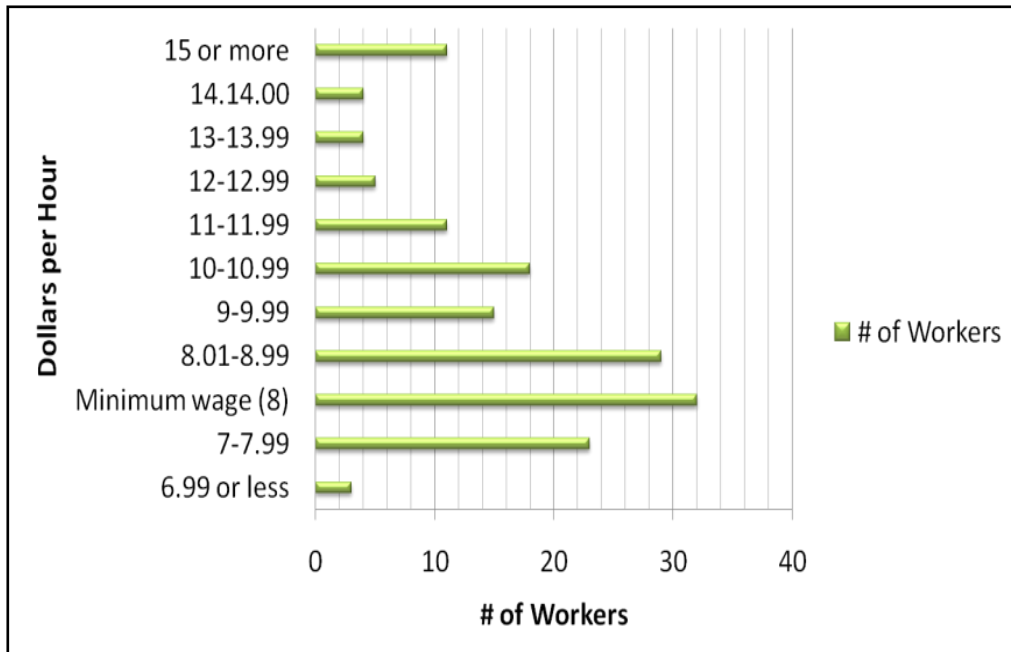
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## Wages

***“I spoke with a man who worked 40 hours a week and only received 300 dollars in cash every two weeks. He said he was happy to have a job, but that he wasn’t making enough to support his family.”*** LOJ Leader

Distribution of Hourly Wages (n=155)	
Minimum Wage (\$8.00) or Below	<b>37%</b>
\$8.01 to \$11:02	<b>43%</b>
Living Wage (\$11.03) or above:	<b>20%</b>

### Worker’s Hourly Wages: Dollars Earned per Hour

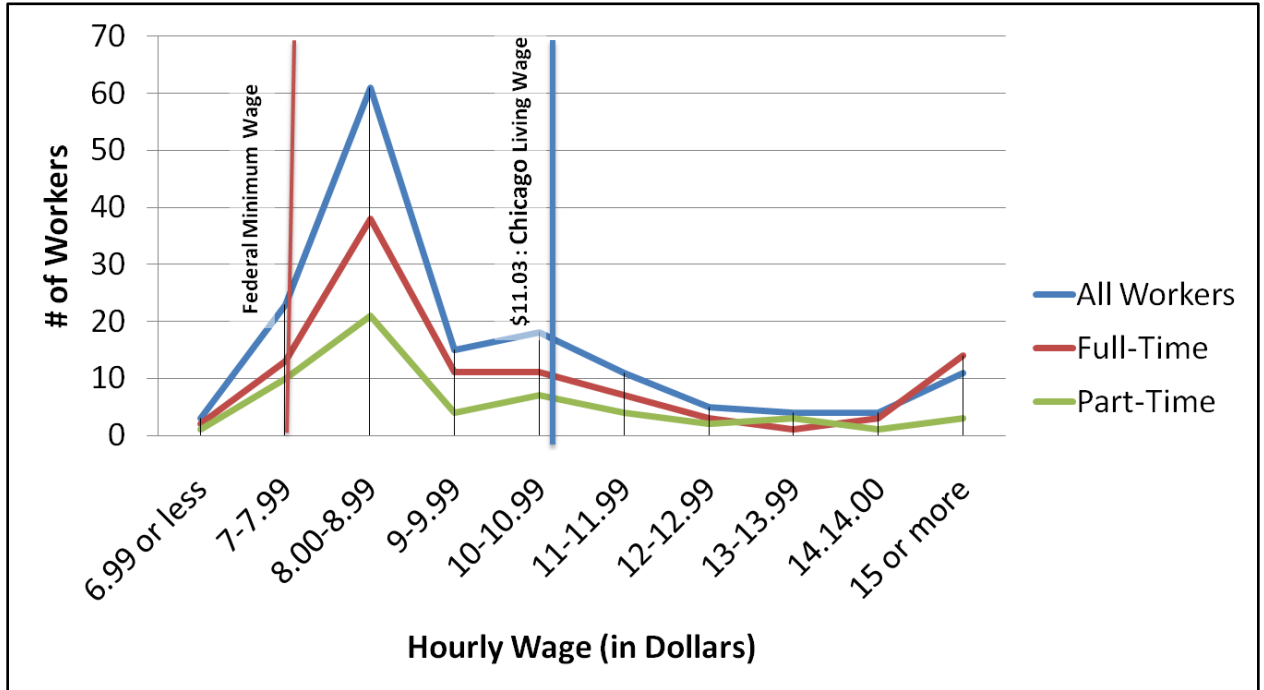


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## Living Wages

### Distribution of Part-Time and Full-Time Hourly Wages in Dollars



#### HIGHLIGHTS:

- **80%** of workers made less than the living wage for the city of Chicago (\$11.03).
- **37%** of workers were making the federal minimum wage or less.
- **57%** of full-time workers made less than \$9.00 an hour.
- **18%** of those working full-time reported wages above the living wage.

#### More About Living Wages in Cook County:

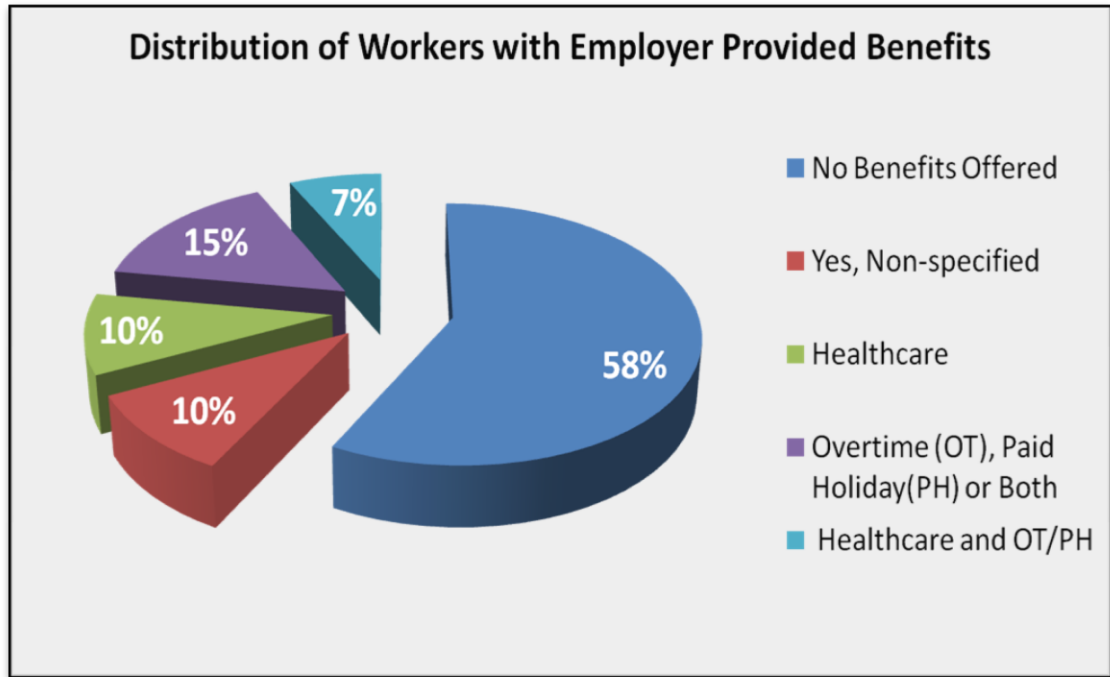
According to living wage estimates, the hourly rate an individual working full-time must earn to support a family of 4 (2 adults and 2 children) in Cook County is

**\$29.61\***

*Living Wage estimates are calculated based on the Consumer Price Index for living expenses such as food, housing, utilities, medical, transportation, taxes and other expenditures.*

Employer Provided Benefits

***“They offer me benefits, but it costs too much and I can’t afford to pay for it so I just go without.”*** Back of the Yards resident



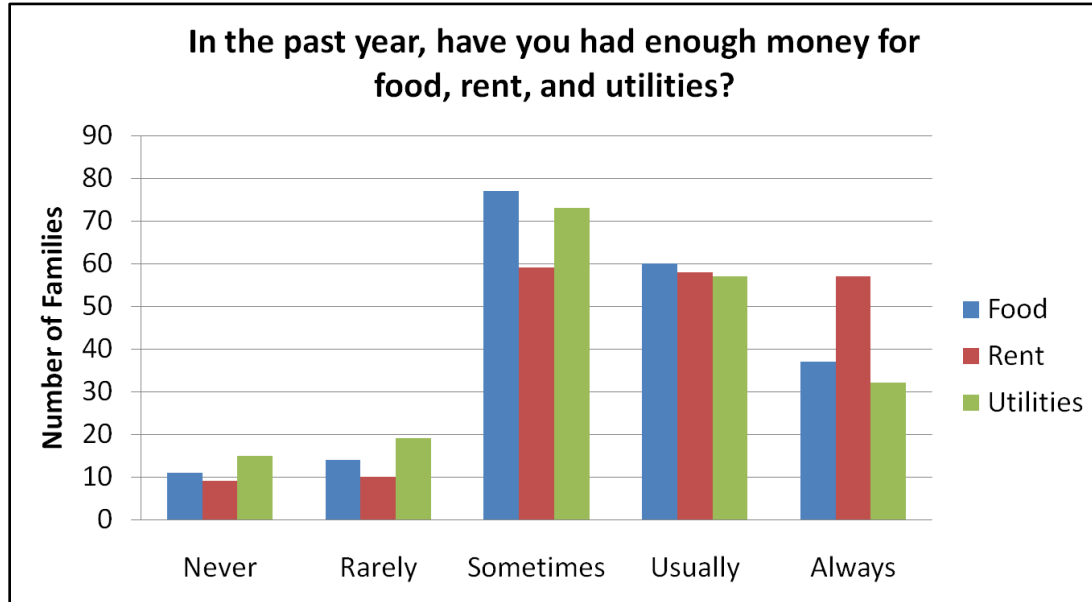
\*"Benefits" include employer-provided healthcare, overtime, and paid holidays

<b>Employer Provided Benefits (n=170)</b>	
None	<b>58%</b>
Yes, Non-specified benefits	<b>10%</b>
Healthcare (HC) only	<b>10%</b>
Over Time (OT), Paid Holiday (PH) or both	<b>15%</b>
Combination HC and OT/PH	<b>7%</b>

**Highlights:**

- 58% of workers did not receive any employer provided benefits.
- 17% of workers reported receiving employer provided health care.
- 48% of full-time workers did not receive any benefits.
- 15% of full-time workers reported receiving health

***“Rent always comes first, then you see what you have for everything else.”*** Back of the Yards, Resident



**Table 7: In the past year, have you had enough money for food, rent and utilities?**

	Food (n=199)	Rent (n= 193)	Utilities (n=196)
Always	19%	30%	16%
Usually	30%	30%	29%
Sometimes	39%	31%	37%
Rarely	7%	5%	10%
Never	6%	5%	8%

***“When I asked the man if his family received food stamps, he looked at me as if I had offended him. Many Latinos reacted this way, I don’t think they see food stamps as a solution.”*** LOJ Leader

**Table 8: Household Food Stamp Participation**

	Latino, Hispanic (n=149)	Non- Hispanic (n=33)
NO	58%	30%
YES	42%	70%

**Highlights:**

- **51%** of participants reported sometimes, rarely, or never having enough money for food to feed their family.
- **19%** of participants reported being able to always afford enough food for their family.
- **30%** of families reported always having enough money to pay rent.
- **70%** of Non-Hispanic participants reported that someone in their household received food stamps
- **42%** of Latino participants reported that someone in their household received food stamps