

Welfare cases up 47% in B.C. since last year

More parents and couples able to work but unable to find jobs during recession

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More than 10,000 able-bodied British Columbians have been added to the welfare rolls since the recession took hold last fall.

As of March 2009, there were 32,014 welfare recipients capable of working as defined by the government, up from 21,793 in September — a 47-per-cent jump.

Couples — with or without children — capable of working have been especially hard hit by the downturn.

The number of two-parent families able to work but receiving income assistance increased 75 per cent between September and March, while the number of couples without children on welfare has increased 67 per cent. The number of employable single males without children on welfare jumped 59 per cent.

“Those are groups that have the highest attachment to the labour force, so

they’re the ones who react the most when there’s a downturn,” said University of B.C. economics professor Craig Riddell.

“It’s what you’d expect in a downturn. That’s what a social safety net is supposed to do — help people when they need help.”

Single parents and single females without children have also been enrolling for welfare in higher numbers — but the increase hasn’t been as steep for couples and men without kids.

The number of employable single parents on welfare increased 25 per cent between September and March, while the number of single women increased 33 per cent.

Riddell said that in the recessions of the early ’80s and early ’90s, the number of people on income assistance also shot up. Their numbers decreased as the economy improved, but more people remained on welfare after both recessions ended than before they began.

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