



More 'working poor' depend on food stamps

By Tom Vacar

KTVU.com

CONCORD, Calif. —

Recovery? What recovery? That's the question millions of working age Americans are asking as they join the millions of more traditional food stamp recipients: young children and the elderly.

Recent numbers are setting records and boggling minds.

Gita Shah and her husband have three kids, they say they did things right but still ended up at the food bank to supplement their food stamps.

"They tell you: go to school, get your degree and those careers will be open and they weren't," says Shah.

Shah has a psychology degree from University of California at Berkeley and her husband works a full time job. But burdened with a crushing student loan debt, Shah says her husband's income isn't enough for the family of five.

"There is a sense of feeling dependent and I think that's not something any of us want to feel," adds Shah.

Shah says her unpaid full-time job is now at home.

"We home school and that's a full-time job in and of itself," she said.

For the first time ever, households headed by working age people are the largest users of food stamps. One in seven Americans are on food stamp assistance. One food bank staff veteran, 15 years on the job, sees it every day. "

"Fifteen years ago, it was mostly homeless and single parents. Now today, it's everybody - working families. Both of them working, and they still can make it," says staff member Nazimool Ghani.

"It keeps us afloat and at the end of the day, that's what we really need," says Shah.

Unfortunately some predict things will get worse before they get better.

"Part of it is because there has been some cuts recently to the Food Stamp Program and we're looking at possibly some more cuts," says Contra Costa Food Bank Spokeswoman Lisa Sherrill. Tim Grayson, Concord's Mayor, who helps hand out the bags, says it's bigger than mayors, governors and Presidents.

"Concord does represent the working middle class. We are a testament of the widening gap between haves and have nots," Mayor Grayson said.

A half century ago, President Lyndon Johnson said that the war on poverty he started is a war we surely could win. It has turned out to be the longest war in U.S. history.