

1 in 5 in poverty: Report says 7000 northern kids at risk

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ALMOST one in five children in the New England North West are living below the poverty line, a new report has found.

This is higher than the state average of one in seven, as revealed in the latest NSW Council of Social Services Cost of Living report. Almost 7000 children under the age of 15 in our region are living below the poverty line, representing 19.52 per cent. But the most critical areas were Tenterfield – which had the third-highest child poverty rates (more than a quarter of impoverished children) after Brewarrina and Kyogle – and the Gwydir local government area, which was sixth on the list.

Tamworth Family Support Services business development manager Leigh Smith said the situation for middle- to low-income families (earning less than \$75,000) was becoming drastic. In the past three months, the number of local calls for help to their service increased by more than 80 per cent.

Mr Smith said he found it “staggering” that 40 per cent of households surveyed were unable to afford more than \$500 in savings.

“They’re living week-to-week, which actually places them at risk of homelessness,” Mr Smith said.

“They’re living on the borderline, and if there’s an emergency they need to pay for, everything else gets thrown into chaos.

“They could be homeless in four to six weeks.”

He said the issue went “hand in hand” with reports of higher rental costs, unaffordable housing, fuel increases and rising basic living expenses.

“One in five middle- to low-income families can’t afford a decent, secure home, which includes adequate roofing, security and a room for each child over 10,” Mr Smith said.

“One in three can’t afford dental care and that can lead to other medical issues and cause a flow-on effect.”

He said the majority of calls they received were from families with young children.

Locals wanting to help those struggling with the cost of living could donate non-perishable foods, or pick up an extra pair of socks or underwear when they went shopping to donate to various dedicated services in the region.

The NCROSS report surveyed 400 people from middle- to low-income households and was based on child disadvantage figures from 2011-12, presented to state parliament last year.