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# Forum at JALC addresses fight against poverty

By Codell Rodriguez, The Southern

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CARTERVILLE - A group gathered at John A. Logan College Thursday to talk about giving everyone equal access to children's healthcare, housing and economic opportunities.

Panelists representing various organizations geared toward equal opportunity spoke and took questions from the audience. The first presenter was Doug Schenkelberg, associate director of policy at the Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights. He stressed that people should get involved and talk to their legislators about putting forth programs to end poverty.

"The problem is not that we don't have enough good ideas," Schenkelberg said. "The problem is we don't have the will."

Kate Ritter, senior policy associate for Illinois Action for Children, spoke about the importance of lowering co-pays for child health care. She said with Illinois having such a high poverty rate, the co-pays take too much out of families' budgets. She said with President Obama's economic stimulus package, lowering co-pays and making affordable child health care available for all families is something the state may be able to do.

"We have some hope," Ritter said. This is the year when we can actually do something."

Andrea Kovach, staff attorney for the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law spoke about making everyone aware of available healthcare programs such as All Kids and Family Care. She said 8 percent of children in Illinois are uninsured and people need to know what is available for them.

Sharon Hess, executive director of Southern Coalition for the Homeless, stressed the importance of having quality housing for everyone.

"We believe real strongly that having decent, affordable housing is fundamental for becoming self-sufficient," Hess said.

Laurie Longville, director of Child Care Resource and Referral, a sponsor of the forum, said the issues discussed were important for helping put a dent in poverty.

"If we want healthy communities, we have to have healthy and safe families and healthy children," Longville said.

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