

Introduction

Why a Data Book on Children?

Kids Count. Children Matter. The way in which we, the adults, respond to the needs of our children will determine the future of New Hampshire, affecting business and industry, academic, cultural and community life. Prudent public policy enables all children to reach their full potential, nurturing the human capital necessary for the state to thrive.

Data on child well being provide a measuring tool of how well past public policies have supported children and families. Data can document troubling facts as well as trends. KIDS COUNT shows that children in the poorer communities in this state do not fare as well as children from wealthier communities, that where a child grows up can have tremendous impact on his or her life, and that children from the poorest towns in New Hampshire, compared to children in the wealthiest towns, are:

- ◆ Almost four times more likely to be born to a teen mother.
- ◆ One and a half times more likely to die before their first birthday.
- ◆ More than three times more likely to have stayed at a hospital for asthma-related conditions.
- ◆ Four times more likely to have dangerously high blood lead levels.
- ◆ 50% more likely to experience divorce.
- ◆ Only half as likely to score in the proficient or advanced level on standardized third-grade testing of language arts or mathematics.

Family well-being, as well as child well-being, varies by community, with families living in the poorer communities facing obstacles to economic advancement. Troubling trends such as these must be altered:

- ◆ An average drop in median family income of almost \$1,000 since 1989, compared to an increase in median family income of over \$4,000 in the wealthiest cluster.
- ◆ A loss of over \$2,000 in average median home values since 1989, compared to an average increase of over \$16,000 in the wealthiest cluster.

KIDS COUNT not only measures and informs, it challenges and, ideally, inspires. The data book allows you the reader, the teacher, the state representative, the parent, the small business owner, the community leader to:

- ◆ Assess how well past policies have supported children and families;
- ◆ Explain how multiple challenges can overwhelm a child, a family, and a community; and
- ◆ Articulate the need for better state and local planning to improve social conditions.

New Measuring Tools for 2003

Data are presented in this book in five interrelated areas: children and families, economic well-being, health, safety, and education. Whenever possible, data are broken down to the town level and analyzed through the lens of the economic clusters first presented in the 1996 Kids Count data book. For the first time, the 2003 data book creates elementary school wealth clusters, which allow for analysis of education data through an economic lens. A full explanation of the methodology for creating both the community wealth and elementary school wealth clusters is set forth in Appendices A through D.

New Indicators

Kids Count New Hampshire 2003 includes 16 new indicators on child and family well-being, bringing the total to 39. The new indicators are: children with caretakers in the labor force, child support, free/reduced price lunch enrollment, housing availability, tobacco use during pregnancy, childhood asthma, lead exposure, mental health, substance abuse, access to dental care, injuries to children, sexually transmitted diseases, child care, kindergarten enrollment, home schooling, and special education.

Comparison of 1990 & 2000 Census Data

This data book presents information from the US Census 2000 so as to chart some of the major changes in New Hampshire between 1990 and 2000. As set forth in Appendix A, Census information is used to update the wealth clusters for the first time since 1996.

Note on Indicators of School Readiness

Throughout this book, reference is made to data that are unavailable, but desirable. Some of those references were informed by the work of the New Hampshire School Readiness Team, a collaborative initiative headed by the Children's Alliance and funded by the Packard Foundation. The School Readiness Team identified more than a dozen key indicators of child, family, school and community readiness. The School Readiness Team found that at least half of those indicators could not be tracked due to lack of data. This book incorporates that work, calling for specific data collection to support better measures of school readiness.

Questions Posed, Questions Answered

This book both poses and answers questions regarding the well-being of New Hampshire children and families. For example:

On Children and Families

- ◆ Q: Based on changes in the population base, what kinds of public services will be in greater demand over the next 10 years? (A: See Sec. 1.1)
- ◆ Q: How has the structure of New Hampshire's labor force changed since 1990? Are single women with children more or less likely to have entered the labor force? (A: See Sec. 1.5)

On Economic Well Being

- ◆ Q: Do average hourly wages across New Hampshire cover the minimum financial needs of a two-parent family? Of a one-parent family? (A: See Sec. 2.1)
- ◆ Q: Has median family income increased or decreased for New Hampshire families over the last decade? (A: See Sec. 2.2)
- ◆ Q: What has happened to the available stock of housing units between 1990 and 2000? Where is housing least available? (A: See Sec. 2.10)

On Health

- ◆ Q: How has tobacco use changed among pregnant mothers over the last 10 years? (A: See Sec. 3.4)
- ◆ Q: In which areas of the state are children most likely to be over-exposed to lead? (A: See Sec. 3.7)

- ◆ Q: Are girls or boys more likely to be admitted to the emergency room for injuries related to assault? (A: See Sec. 3.12). Are boys or girls more likely to attempt suicide, or to succeed? (A: See Sec. 3.12 and Sec. 3.14)

On Safety

- ◆ Q: Who is most likely to refer children for the suspicion of abuse and neglect? Pediatricians? Families? Schools? (A: See Sec. 4.1)
- ◆ Q: How many children are currently in state placement? How long have they been in placement? How many placements have they experienced? What is the average duration of state placements? (A: See Sec. 4.2)

On Education

- ◆ Q: How many school districts still do not offer public kindergarten? (A: See Sec. 5.2)
- ◆ Q: In which elementary school districts are third grade students achieving the highest scores on the NHEIAP test? Where are third grade students scoring the lowest? What are some of the factors that may account for these differences? (A: See Sec. 5.5)
- ◆ Q: Which of the 14 disability designations is disproportionately represented among youth exiting the special education system because they drop out of high school? (A: See Sec. 5.4)

Within each section, the book identifies and questions unavailable data, calling for better data collection and utilization.

A Call to Action

While KIDS COUNT is a research book, documenting facts and trends, it is also a platform for advocacy. The book reflects and measures the reality of social conditions in the state, unmasking deep need and striking disparities. Against the backdrop of admirable national rankings, the book reveals that not all New Hampshire children enjoy equal access to opportunity and self-sufficiency. It quantifies the impact of public policies on children and families: from inadequate supports for low-income working parents to insufficient resources devoted to child protection to

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missed educational opportunities for children.

Research shows that whether a child achieves his or her potential depends on a number of factors, including: the presence of a supportive family, participation in a stable economy, access to medical care, residence in a safe and culturally enriching community, and decisions made by each child over the course of her or his lifetime. Policy and budgetary decisions at the federal, state and local levels can have significant impacts on all of these variables.

KIDS COUNT is best used to inform child friendly action, by policy makers, community leaders, advocates and . . . you the reader. New Hampshire's commitment to a citizen legislature, its small size, its principles of self-governance, give every resident a real voice. Every one of us can support child friendly policymaking in New Hampshire. Everyone of us can make a difference by calling for programs to build family self-sufficiency, to help all children enter ready schools ready to learn, to enable all of our children to reach their full potential.

The Children's Alliance of New Hampshire exists to help the citizens of New Hampshire raise their voices and advocate for our children. So please, take the next step. Join us. Visit our web site at www.ChildrenNH.org or call us at 603-225-2264 and learn about what you can do.



Ellen Shemitz, President
Children's Alliance of New Hampshire
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