



Southern Rhode Island

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The status of RI's kids

Monday, 13 April 2009

Annual Kids Count report includes local poverty, lead exposure and education stats

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Rhode Island Kids Count (RIKC) released its 15th annual report on the well-being of Rhode Island's children Monday. The fact book tracked the progress in the well-being of children and youth across the state and in each of the 39 cities and towns.

"The 2009 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook shows areas of progress and areas where we need to make improvements. The recent crisis in our state and in our nation places children and families at risk as they struggle to pay the high costs of housing, food, heat, gas and child care," said RIKC Executive Director Elizabeth Burke Bryant.

In 2007, 42 percent of Hispanic children, 29 percent of Asian children and 26 percent of black children in Rhode Island were living in poverty. According to the 2007 American Community Survey, 17.5 percent (40,468) of Rhode Island's 231,579 children lived below the federal poverty threshold.

Of the Rhode Island high school class of 2008, 74 percent of students graduated on time in four years, 3 percent completed their GED within four years of entering high school, 7 percent were still in school in the fall and 16 percent had dropped out of school.

"Every day Rhode Island loses 20 students enrolled in high school who fail to graduate with a diploma," said Bryant.

But how did towns fare locally?

In 2000 North Kingstown had a child population of 6,848. Of those children 20 percent lived in single-parent families, 9.7 percent of the children lived in families below the federal poverty threshold and 3 percent of the children lived in households with grandparents financially responsible for them.

"Even a relatively wealthy community like North Kingstown has pockets of poverty. Some of these children's families rely on public assistance to make ends meet," said Stephanie Geller, RIKC policy analyst.

In 2008, 1,244 children under the age of 19 received medical assistance and 160 received cash assistance. Of the 818 children eligible to receive food stamp benefits, only 532 received them.

The town's infant mortality rate has been "steadily" rising since 2004 and is now 10.6 per 1,000 births, higher than the state rate of 6.3 per 1,000 births, according to Geller.

Bryant explains the increasing rate of infant mortality in town could be due to many factors, including poor preconception health status of the mother, delayed or no prenatal care, smoking during pregnancy, pregnancies involving more than one fetus, maternal age over 40 or under 20 at the time of birth, having low education levels, and marital status.

"Please keep in mind that due to the small numbers of births per community per year, we present this data over a five year period. In North Kingstown there were 1,319 births over the five year period from 2003 to 2007 and 14 of those infants died in their first year of life over that five year period," Bryant said.

Last year 30 percent of domestic violence incidents happened with children present.

North Kingstown saw a high school graduation rate of 88 percent. While 19 percent of schools statewide are making "insufficient progress," no school in North Kingstown has this status.

In 2000, Exeter saw child population of 1,589, of that number 15 percent lived in single-parent families, 7.5 percent of the children lived in families below the federal poverty threshold and 10 percent of the children lived in households with grandparents financially responsible for grandchildren. In 2008, 230 children received medical assistance.

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Exeter saw a higher percentage of fourth and eighth graders perform at or above the proficiency level for reading and math than the state as a whole. Not a single school in Exeter was included in the 19 percent of schools statewide that are making insufficient progress.

Exeter saw a high school graduation rate of 87 percent.

In 2000, Jamestown saw a child population of 1,238, of that number 15 percent lived in single-parent families, 1.4 percent of the children lived in families below the federal poverty threshold and zero percent lived in households with grandparents financially responsible for grandchildren.

Like North Kingstown, Jamestown being a wealthy community, still has areas of poverty. An estimated 36 children were eligible to receive food stamps benefits and only 21 received them.

In 2008, 96 children received medical assistance and 11 received cash assistance. An estimated 36 children were eligible to receive food stamp benefits, only 21 received them.

An area of concern around the state is lead exposure. Children living in homes built before 1978 are at risk for lead poisoning. But Jamestown is improving in the amount of lead cases.

"The percentage of children with elevated blood lead levels has been steadily decreasing in Jamestown and this year no children were reported to have an elevated blood lead level," Bryant said.

Another positive aspect to Jamestown is that all kindergartners have access to full-day kindergarten, while the state as a whole only 58 percent have that same access.

RIKC is a nationally recognized children's policy and advocacy organization that provides information on child well-being, stimulates dialogue on children's issues and promotes accountability and action.

To view the entire KIDS COUNT factbook visit www.rikidscount.org.

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