



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
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For Immediate Release

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Presents:

Westerly Data in Your Backyard

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**Westerly, RI, October 17, 2007** - Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst, Kat Keenan presented data from the *2007 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* to an audience of community and policy leaders. As part of the *Data in Your Backyard Series*, the presentation highlighted indicators of child well-being in Westerly and included a community discussion about the implications of the data. The presentation, the first of its kind in Westerly, was held on **Wednesday, October 17, 2007 from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at the Greater Westerly-Pawcatuck Chamber of Commerce, One Chamber Way, Westerly, RI.**

**Family and Community**

According to *Census 2000*, there were 5,406 children under the age of 18 residing in Westerly, a 7% increase from the 1990 decennial census. Children represent approximately one-quarter (24%) of the town's population, with White, non-Hispanic children comprising 92% of all children in Westerly.

In 2000, 26% of all children in Westerly were living in single-parent households, lower than the state rate (30%) but higher than neighboring towns, Charlestown (18%), Hopkinton, (17%) and Richmond (15%). Children living in single-parent families are at increased risk of living in poverty, low academic achievement, low levels of social and emotional well-being and increased levels of depression and stress.

## **Economic Well-Being**

The 2000 Census data indicate that 10% of all children in Westerly under age 18 live below 100% of the federal poverty threshold (\$20,444 for a family of four). Of the 534 children living below the poverty threshold in Westerly, one in five (105) lived in extreme poverty, defined as income at or below half of the federal poverty line (or \$8,121 for a family of three). Research shows that families who have incomes above the poverty threshold also struggle to make ends meet. More than a quarter (27%) of children in Westerly under age 18 live below 200% of the federal poverty threshold (\$40,888 for a family of four).

According to new data from the Census Bureau's *2006 American Community Survey*, child poverty in Rhode Island decreased from 19.5% in 2005 to 15.1% in 2006. Rhode Island now ranks 17<sup>th</sup> in the country for child poverty, an improvement from last year when Rhode Island ranked 35<sup>th</sup>. "This significant drop in Rhode Island's child poverty rate is good news for Rhode Island families," stated Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "We are seeing the results of our state's investments in children." The *2006 American Community Survey* data, released by the U.S. Census Bureau in August 2007, indicate that the total number of Rhode Island children living in poverty decreased from 46,894 children under age 18 in 2005 to 35,456 children in 2006. Bryant noted, "We know that children living in families with incomes below the poverty threshold are at much higher risk for poor outcomes. Reducing child poverty rates directly influences a child's chance for success."

## **Health**

Data from the 2007 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook reveal that Westerly faces some challenges with health indicators of well-being. Between 2001 and 2005, Westerly had the 4<sup>th</sup> highest percentage of women receiving delayed prenatal care at 13.3%, higher than the state rate of 9.4%. Women receiving late or no prenatal care are at increased risk of poor birth outcomes, such as preterm births, low birthweight and infant mortality.

- Between 2001 and 2005 in Westerly, there were 1,349 births. Of these, 123 or 9% were preterm, compared to 12% for the state as a whole.
- Between 1996-2000 and 2001-2005, the percentage of infants born low birthweight in Westerly increased 34%, from 5.6% to 7.5%. Between 2001 and 2005, Westerly's rate for low birthweight infants was nearly equal to the state rate of 8.0%.
- For the period of 2001-2005 the infant mortality rate in Westerly was 8.9 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. This was an increase since the period of 1996-2000, when the infant mortality rate in Westerly was at a low of 2.9 infant deaths per 1,000 live births.

Between 2001 and 2005, Westerly had a teen birth rate of 14.3 births per every 1,000 girls ages 15-17, compared to the state rate of 19.5 births per 1,000 girls ages 15-17. The teen birth rate in Westerly for older teens ages 18-19 was 71.5 per 1,000 teens, significantly higher than the state rate of 44.0 per 1,000 teens ages 18-19. Between 2001 and 2005, there were 110 births to teen girls ages 15-19 in Westerly, with 72% (79) of these births occurring to older teens ages 18-19. Kat Keenan, Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT noted, "The high rates of teen pregnancy for older teens in Westerly are a cause for concern. Research shows that babies born to older teens do not have much better outcomes than those born to teens in younger age groups. Families who delay childbearing until their mid-to-late 20s are more likely to have better education and economic status and have children who are healthier and more successful in school."

### **Education**

Data from the *2007 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* were presented on several indicators focused on programs that can lead to increased school readiness and school success, including full-day kindergarten and early care and education. Access to full-day kindergarten in Westerly has improved, with 100% of kindergarten children enrolled in a full-day program in the 2006-2007 school year compared to only 4% in the 1999-2000 school year. The percentage of kindergarten children attending full-day programs statewide is 50%. Research shows that children in full-day kindergarten benefit academically and are more likely to be ready for first grade than children in half-day kindergarten.

Other education highlights include:

- During the 2005-2006 school year, 23% of Westerly's children ages 3-21 were enrolled in special education, compared to 21% for the state as a whole.
- The mobility rate in Westerly (12%) is similar to the neighboring district of Chariho (10%), but lower than the core city aggregate (28%) and lower than the state rate (17%).
- The fourth grade reading proficiency level in Westerly (74%) is higher than Rhode Island (63%) as a whole, but slightly lower than the neighboring district of Chariho (80%).
- All 7 schools in Westerly are classified as high performing schools.
- In 2005, the Westerly high school graduation rate was 88%, a decrease from 2004 (91%). Westerly's graduation rate is higher than the state rate of 85%, but lower than Chariho's graduation rate of 91%.

Ms. Bryant noted, "We are pleased to be in Westerly today to talk with community leaders about the well-being of children in your community and in Rhode Island. Westerly has seen progress in so many areas that influence outcomes for children, but there is still work to do. Increased access to prenatal care and services for teens are two critical areas of concern. It is essential to work together to ensure that every child born in Westerly has a successful and healthy start in life."

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the economic well-being, health, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.