



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

Contact:
Katherine Chu, Communications Manager
401.351.9400, ext. 22 / kchu@rikidscount.org

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Makes Data Local at *'Woonsocket Data in Your Backyard' Event*

Woonsocket has the highest rates of child poverty and extreme poverty in the state

Woonsocket has the highest rate of child abuse and neglect in the state

School Breakfast Program participation rates continue to increase

Woonsocket, RI (November 9, 2016) – At the *Woonsocket Data in Your Backyard* presentation, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Senior Policy Analyst Stephanie Geller led a data-driven community discussion on the well-being of Woonsocket children and families. The presentation's data comes from the *2016 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*, and includes improvements and declines in economic well-being, education, health, child welfare, and safety.

The *Woonsocket Data in Your Backyard* presentation was held on Wednesday, November 9, 2016 from 10:00am – 11:30am at Connecting for Children and Families at The Chaplin-Perez Center, 37 Center Street, Woonsocket, RI.

Challenges and progress discussed at the *Data in Your Backyard* presentation include:

Woonsocket has the highest rates of poverty and extreme poverty among children in the state

Although childhood poverty exists in every Rhode Island community, it is particularly concentrated in the core cities of Providence, Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Woonsocket. Children in poverty, especially those who experience poverty in early childhood and for extended periods, are more likely to have physical and behavioral health problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents, and earn less or be unemployed as adults.

The poverty data are based on the federal poverty threshold which is defined as an income of \$19,096 for a family of three with two children and \$24,036 for a family of four with two children. A family is in extreme poverty if their income is less than half the poverty threshold (\$9,548 for a family of three). In Woonsocket, 42% of all children live in poverty, and 20% of all children live in extreme poverty. These rates are the highest in the state.

Woonsocket infants born at highest risk

Infants born at highest risk are babies born to a teenage, unmarried mother who has not graduated from high school. Most children facing these three economic and social risk factors at birth continue to face great challenges throughout childhood. Infants born at highest risk are nine times more likely to grow up in poverty than a child born to a married woman over age 20 with a high school diploma. At 4%, Woonsocket's rate of infants born at highest risk is the second highest in the state.

Woonsocket has the highest rate of child abuse and neglect in the state

Children need love, affection, and nurturing from their parents or caregivers for healthy physical and emotional development. Experiencing child abuse or neglect can have lifelong consequences for a child's health, well-being, and relationships with others.

- In 2015, there were 310 Woonsocket children who were victims of child abuse and neglect, a rate of 31.4 victims per 1,000 children ages birth to 18. This is the highest rate of child abuse and neglect in the state.

Homeless Woonsocket children

Compared with their peers, homeless children are more likely to become ill, go hungry, develop mental health issues, and exhibit delinquent or aggressive behaviors. Homelessness also contributes to poor educational outcomes for children. Homeless children are more likely to change schools, be absent from school, and have lower reading and math scores than children who have housing.

- During the 2014-2015 school year, Rhode Island public school personnel identified 1,031 children as homeless statewide. Woonsocket Public Schools personnel identified 100 children as homeless in Woonsocket, out of 5,995 total enrolled.

High rate of chronic absence at all elementary, middle, and high school levels

Regular attendance at school is an essential step for children to succeed academically and do well in life. Students who are frequently absent from school miss critical academic and social learning opportunities and are at risk of disengagement from school, academic failure, and dropping out.

- In Woonsocket, almost one in three (32%) K-3 students missed 18+ days of school during the 2014-2015 school year, the highest in the state.
- Woonsocket's chronic absence rates in middle school (38%) and high school (51%) during the 2014-2015 school year, also were the highest in the state.

School Breakfast Program participation rates continue to increase

Students who eat breakfast have higher math and reading scores, fewer absences, improved attentiveness, and lower incidences of social and emotional problems. Woonsocket schools offer Universal School Breakfast, which provides free breakfast to all students regardless of income. In many Woonsocket schools, breakfast is offered right in the classroom, which helps more children get a healthy meal to start the day.

- In October 2015, 48% of low-income Woonsocket children and 47% of all Woonsocket children participated in the Universal School Breakfast Program. Woonsocket has the fourth highest school breakfast participation rate in the state.

"Woonsocket's strategies to increase school breakfast participation are paying off," said Geller.

"Woonsocket's participation rate is now 48%, up from 35% in 2012. By offering Universal School Breakfast – and in some cases, breakfast right in the classroom – Woonsocket prioritizes the health and education of their most vulnerable children."

All data and information presented at *Woonsocket Data in Your Backyard* is available on Rhode Island KIDS COUNT's website: www.rikidscount.org.

###

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