



555 West Washington Ave, Suite 200
Madison, WI 53703

www.wccf.org
☎ 608-284-0580
✉ 608-284-0583

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Contact: Bob Jacobson (608) 284-0580

New WisKids Publication Highlights Long-Term Consequences of Child Maltreatment
State and County Data Reveal Need for More Resources to Prevent and Treat Abuse and Neglect

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) today released a new WisKids Count Data Book, *Safer, Healthier, Happier*. The report explores the long-term impact and social costs of child maltreatment, and tracks county-by-county data related to child maltreatment in Wisconsin. In the publication, WCCF calls on state leaders to commit to an overhaul of the funding system for child welfare, and recommends steps for the state to take to ensure that a strong local system exists to prevent child maltreatment.

“As a state, we must make a commitment to support the child welfare system responsibly and effectively,” said Charity Eleson, WCCF executive director. “We need to improve upon our current patchwork funding approach, consisting of 72 different systems with varying capabilities. Along with that change, we must provide the system with the capacity for implementing best practice strategies that have been proven to keep children safe and help families heal.”

According to experts, child maltreatment has a life-long effect. Neglect, trauma and chronic stress early in life change a child’s brain chemistry, often resulting in behavior and learning problems that stretch into adulthood. Eleson noted that being abused or neglected as a child increases the likelihood of being arrested as a juvenile by as much as 53 percent and the probability of being arrested as an adult for a violent crime by 38 percent. Nationally, people with childhood histories of trauma, abuse and neglect make up *almost the entire criminal justice population*.

“The damage from child maltreatment resonates throughout adulthood, creating huge social costs,” Eleson said. “The best response is to put prevention at the top of our agenda and keep kids *out* of the child protective service system entirely.”

In its WisKids essay, WCCF notes that because resources are scarce, Wisconsin’s child welfare system tends to focus on the most urgent cases, those where there is an immediate threat of harm to the child. This comes at the expense of prevention and efforts to place children in permanent settings--investments that have proven to dramatically improve outcomes for kids in the long run.

The report’s findings include:

- The rate of reports of child abuse and neglect increased slightly between 2000 and 2005, but the rate of substantiations of abuse remained fairly constant.
- Out-of-home placements for children have decreased from 7 per thousand to 5 per thousand.
- Children of color in Wisconsin are overrepresented in all levels of the child welfare system, from reporting through out-of-home placements.
- Children aging out of Wisconsin's child welfare system without a permanent home are ill-equipped to be successful.
- The state's share of the cost of child welfare has remained stagnant, while the cost of providing services has increased an estimated 85 percent.
- Child poverty increased in Wisconsin between 2000 and 2006 by 37,000 children (from 155,000 in 2000 to 192,000 in 2006).
- Juvenile arrests dropped significantly from 91 per 1,000 children in 2000 to 80 per thousand in 2005.
- Similarly, the number of children in correctional institutions dropped from 932 to 654.
- Births to teen mothers (15 to 19) continue to decline (from 36 per 1,000 in 2000 to 31 per 1,000 in 2006).
- The percentage of births to single mothers increased from 30 percent in 2000 to 34 percent in 2006.

Safer, Healthier, Happier is available online at http://wccf.org/pdf/wiskidscount_20072008_fullbook.pdf. County-level data can be viewed at http://www.wccf.org/kidcount_data.php. For more information or to obtain a hard copy of the book, contact Martha Cranley at mcranley@wccf.org.

WisKids Count is part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's nationwide Kids Count project, which tracks, analyzes and communicates information about the health and well-being of children and families in Wisconsin.