

Report: Child abuse and neglect sees increase in Jackson County

By Tarryl Q. Jackson | Jackson Citizen Patr...

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As unemployment and poverty rose in Jackson County in the last decade, so did child abuse and neglect, according to a statewide report being released today.

Between 2000 and 2008, the number of confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect more than doubled in Jackson County, according to the Kids Count in Michigan report. Jackson County ranked 66th-best out of 83 counties for confirmed abuse and neglect victims.

BY THE NUMBERS

Some Jackson County highlights in the latest Kids Count report:

840 — The number of confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect, or 21.5 per 1,000 children (2008). Jackson County ranked 66th-best of 83 counties in Michigan.

12,094 — The number of students who received free/reduced lunches, or 47.2 percent (2008). Jackson County ranked 40th of 83 counties.

122.6 — The rate of children in families investigated on suspicion of abuse or neglect, per 1,000 children (2008). Jackson County ranked 71st of 83 counties.

7,657 — The number of children in poverty, or 20.1 percent (2007). Jackson County ranked 43rd of 83 counties.

Source: Kids Count in Michigan 2009 data book.

The rate of children living in families that were investigated on suspicion of abuse or neglect also increased from 68.5 to 122.6 per 1,000 children during that period.

"This makes a big impact on our whole community," said Keri Keck, executive director of the Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect of Jackson County. "It's very concerning when you hear that more families are leaving Jackson, yet this number (of victims) is skyrocketing."

Also shaky is the economic security of area children. The number of students receiving free and reduced lunches jumped from 10,132 in 2006, or 37.5 percent of children, to 12,094 in 2008, or 47.2 percent.

"There seems to be some steep challenges," said Sheri Butters, director of the **Great Start Collaborative of Jackson County**. "A lot of these things are not going to see changes overnight."

More encouragingly, child health rates have improved in the county.

Between 2000 and 2007, the child death rate dropped from 25.1 to 12.2 per 100,000 children; the teen death rate dropped from 47.6 to 29.1 per 100,000 teens; and the infant mortality rate declined from 11.5 to 9.3 per 1,000 infants.

Births to teens also decreased from 57.5 to 50.6 per 1,000 teens in that time period.

The number of women who had live births and received less than adequate prenatal care decreased from 930 to 572 — or from 45.2 percent to 28.1 percent.

Local efforts such as House-to-House and the county's Prenatal Task Force and **Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative** have been working to reduce the area's infant mortality rate, pre-term births, teen births and low birth weights.

Education in Jackson County made strides as well. Between 2003 and 2008, the rate of students below proficiency in math declined — from 37.3 to 12.3 percent for fourth-graders and from 55.5 to 26.5 percent for eighth-graders.

Keck said more parenting education and partnerships with other agencies to provide more resources to families may help reduce the area's child abuse and neglect.

"There are some wonderful things happening in Jackson, but we need to focus on the child abuse and neglect piece," she said.

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