



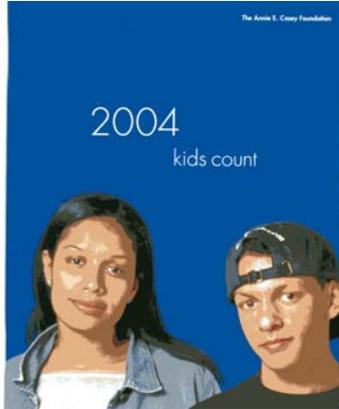
KIDS COUNT Issue

The Advocate

Vol. 13 No. 2

A newsletter on children's issues

June 2004



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Calendar of Upcoming Events

Events relating to helping children are available at:
www.tennessee.gov/tccy/webcalen.html

TCCY

For more information on the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth and its programs, check out the website at

www.tennessee.gov/tccy

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TCCY Unveils National KIDS COUNT Data Book 2004

Tennessee Ranked 43rd in Child Well-Being

The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth commemorated the release of the 2004 KIDS COUNT National Data Book with a press conference at the state Capitol on June 3. KIDS COUNT is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and TCCY is its Tennessee partner.

Tennessee made progress in child well-being in several areas, but overall the state remained 43rd in the annual KIDS COUNT national rankings.

Linda O'Neal, the agency's executive director told the group, "That means 42 states have better outcomes for children than we do. Tennessee rates have improved on six of the ten indicators, and gotten worse on four."

The report highlighted areas of progress and underscored the need to improve opportunities for success for all children.

"KIDS COUNT reports are like a compass and a road map, O'Neal said. "They help us see where we are with outcomes for children, and help us see where we need to go to make improvements."

This year the KIDS COUNT Data Book essay focused on the struggle for youth transitioning from childhood to adult independence. About 800 young adults age out of state custody in Tennessee each year, for a total of 4,000 over the next five years

O'Neal said, "Efforts to link these young adults with mentors, stable housing and educational and job opportunities are critical. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative at Vanderbilt is demonstrating success in connecting youth exiting foster care with the supportive services they need to succeed."

Speaking at the press conference were two youth who had been in the foster care system in Tennessee and are on the Tennessee Youth Advisory Council and

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involved with the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative at the Vanderbilt Child and Family Policy Center, Stacy Schumaker, who is a social work student at Belmont University, and Sidney Bynum, who is a certified nurse technician and a nursing student at Volunteer State Community College.

Schumaker was a strong advocate for her fellow foster children and for the need for more foster families. She said, "A connection to a strong family is very important."

Bynum spoke of her struggles as a young adult, "When I turned 18, I was taking care of my brother, working, and trying to go to school," she said.

O'Neal summed up the problem, saying, "All children, regardless of their background or financial status, need a set of basic connections to help them navigate young adulthood. Lots of young people, through no fault of their own, are unable to make critical connections with mentors or other adult advisors and have fewer resources and supports than they need."

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, which is also supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, relies heavily on members of a Community Partnership Board whose members serve in a variety of ways to assist former foster youth access needed services and supports. Cynthia DuRant, vice president and manager of Community Development for Tennessee and Arkansas for US Bank, also participated in the event. DuRant told the group that she did not like to be on the bottom and was willing to work to change that.

The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth Cindy Durham, Chair Nashville	
Angi Agle Oak Ridge	Trudy Hughes Maryville
Betty Anderson Covington	Drew Johnson Johnson City
Joe Askins Fayetteville	Jim Kidd Fayetteville
Natasha Blackshear Nashville	Mary Lee Dickson
P. Larry Boyd Rogersville	Christy Little Jackson
Murray Butler Henderson	Jerry Maness Memphis
Beverly Cosley Chattanooga	Sharon T. Massey Clarksville
Tabitha Dean Cordova	Linda Miller Memphis
James B. Ford Franklin	Susie Mitchell Johnson City
Susan Glassman Germantown	Marie Mobley Goodlettsville
Tim Goldsmith Memphis	Joetta Yarbro Dyersburg
Johnny Horne Chattanooga	Linda O'Neal

"We do know good public policy leads to better outcomes for children, O'Neal said. "TennCare is the major reason a larger percentage of Tennessee children have health insurance than in the nation as a whole, and more Tennessee 2-year-olds have been adequately immunized. And, of course, we all know healthy children are better able to succeed in school"

TennCare has almost closed the immunization gap between children on private insurance and those on Medicaid/TennCare. By providing better access to health care, TennCare has also contributed to improvements in the child death rate in Tennessee.

Efforts to address teen pregnancy over the past decade in Tennessee have led to improvements in the teen birth rate. And strategies as diverse as suicide prevention efforts, graduated driver licensing, and emphasis on wearing seat belts and bicycle helmets have contributed to improvements in the teen death rate.

Randal Lea, executive assistant to Commissioner Viola Miller at the Department of Children's Services and another member of the Community Partnership Board, spoke about the department's plans to better serve transitioning youth.

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KIDS COUNT

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KIDS COUNT measures identify needed improvements, and an area critical to the state's future is education. Tennessee continues to lag the national averages in measures of educational progress. Although the state's high school drop-out rate has improved, nearly one in five young adults is disconnected from the workforce. Seventeen percent of Tennesseans ages 18 to 24 are not enrolled in school, are not working and have no degree after high school.

Studies are clear that one of the best long term strategies for improving outcomes for children is to provide quality early childhood education for at risk four year olds. This is one of the single best strategies to increase the chances these children will succeed in

school, not have to repeat a grade, be more likely to graduate from high school prepared for higher education or the work force, and less likely to be teen parents, or involved in substance abuse or the juvenile justice system. Quality early childhood education is an investment in the long term economic future of Tennessee as the state strives to develop a better skilled and educated work force to compete in a global economy.

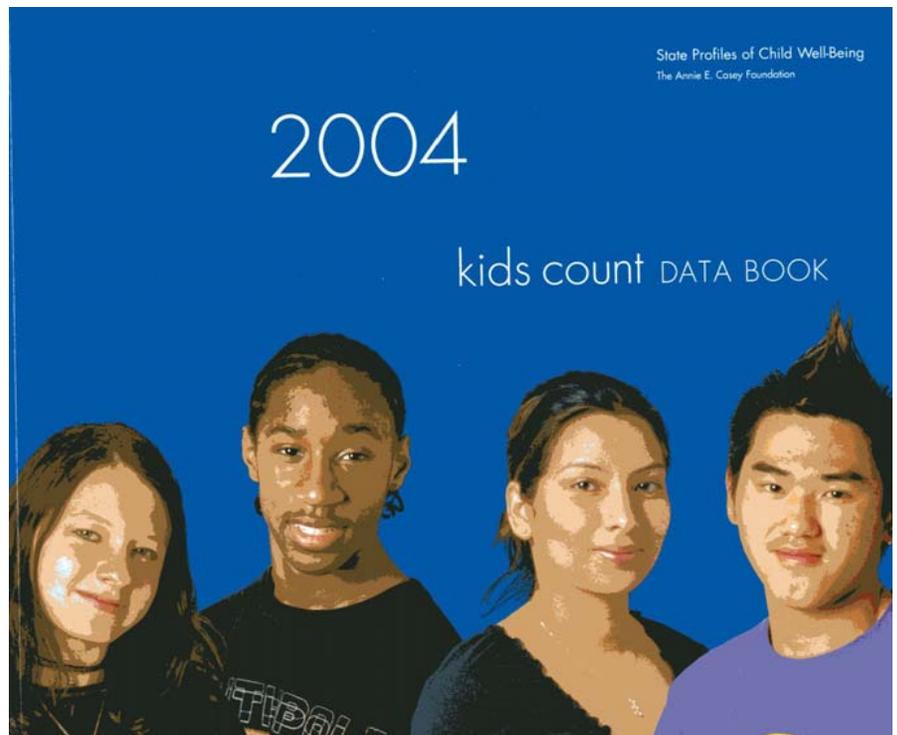
With the decline in the economy in Tennessee, more children are living in families where no parent had a full-time, year-round job, where the state's ranking slipped to 43rd compared to 30th in the 2003 report. Median income of families in Tennessee is substantially below the national average. More children live in extreme poverty in Tennessee than in the nation as a whole, and 25 percent of young adults live in poverty compared to 20 percent nationally.

The state faces many challenges.

"We also know when we bring together all aspects of the community – state and local government, business, private non-profits, the faith community - we can better support young adults," she added. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative provides us the opportunity to determine what is most effective in helping former foster youth succeed. We need to build on the lessons learned in Nashville and implement successful strategies statewide so the 800 children aging out of state custody each year have an increased opportunity for success.

"We all eventually pay the price if our children and young adults are not prepared to succeed academically and take on the responsibilities of adulthood," O'Neal said earlier.

The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth is an independent agency created by the Tennessee General Assembly. Its primary mission is to advocate for improvements in the quality of life for Tennessee children and families. 



See additional information on Page 4-5.

Overall Rank [43]

Percent Change from 1996 to 2001

Indicators*	W O R S E		B E T T E R		Trend Data		National Rank <i>National Rank is based on 2001 figures</i>
	1996-2001	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001	
Percent low-birthweight babies	5				STATE: 8.8 NATIONAL: 7.4	9.2 7.7	[45]
Infant mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)	2				STATE: 8.5 NATIONAL: 7.3	8.7 6.8	[44]
Child death rate (deaths per 100,000 children ages 1-14)			21		STATE: 29 NATIONAL: 26	23 22	[29]
Rate of teen deaths by accident, homicide, and suicide (deaths per 100,000 teens ages 15-19)			19		STATE: 80 NATIONAL: 60	65 50	[38]
Teen birth rate (births per 1,000 females ages 15-17)			23		STATE: 39 NATIONAL: 33	30 25	[38]
Percent of teens who are high school dropouts (ages 16-19)			15		STATE: 13 NATIONAL: 10	11 9	[35]
Percent of teens not attending school and not working (ages 16-19)			15		STATE: 13 NATIONAL: 9	11 8	[41]
Percent of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment			7		STATE: 27 NATIONAL: 28	29 25	[43]
Percent of children in poverty (data reflect poverty in 1995 and 2000)			18		STATE: 22 NATIONAL: 21	18 16	[34]
Percent of families with children headed by a single parent			3		STATE: 29 NATIONAL: 27	30 28	[36]

*See Definitions and Data Sources, page 000.

Patterned bars indicate national change.

Solid bars indicate state change.

Background Information

Demographic Data

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Number of Children and Young Adults: 2002		
Total state population	5,797,289	100%
Total young adults ages 18–24	553,941	10%
Total children under age 18	1,404,661	24%
Race and Hispanic Origin of Young Adults (ages 18–24): 2002		
White*	408,848	74%
Black/African American*	109,460	20%
American Indian/Alaskan Native*	1,454	less than 0.5%
Asian*	7,324	1%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander*	307	less than 0.5%
More than one race*	5,505	1%
Hispanic/Latino	21,043	4%

*Non-Hispanic

Child Health

	STATE	NATIONAL
Children without health insurance: 2001	7%	12%
2-year-olds who were immunized: 2002	81%	79%

Economic Conditions of Families

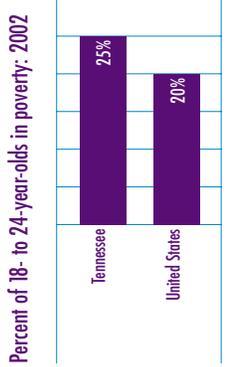
	STATE	NATIONAL
Median income of families with children: 2001	\$42,300	\$51,100
Children in extreme poverty (income below 50% of poverty level): 2001	10%	7%
Female-headed families receiving child support or alimony: 2001	33%	35%

Education

	STATE	NATIONAL
4th grade students who scored below basic reading level: 2003	43%	38%
8th grade students who scored below basic reading level: 2003	31%	28%
4th grade students who scored below basic math level: 2003	30%	24%
8th grade students who scored below basic math level: 2003	41%	33%

Vulnerable Youth

Number of persons ages 15–19 in foster care: 2001	4,033
Number of mothers under age 20: 2002	20,284
Number of persons incarcerated in juvenile detention facilities: 2001	1,655



Disconnected Young Adults

Disconnected young adults are persons ages 18–24 who

- are not enrolled in school
- are not working
- have no degree beyond high school

Number of young adults who are disconnected: 2002	87,000
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Percent of young adults who are disconnected: 2002

Entity	Percent
Tennessee	17%
United States	15%

The Rural South:

Listening to Families in Alabama, Kentucky, and Tennessee

Working with its KIDS COUNT partners in Alabama and Kentucky, TCCY released a publication about the problems of rural communities.

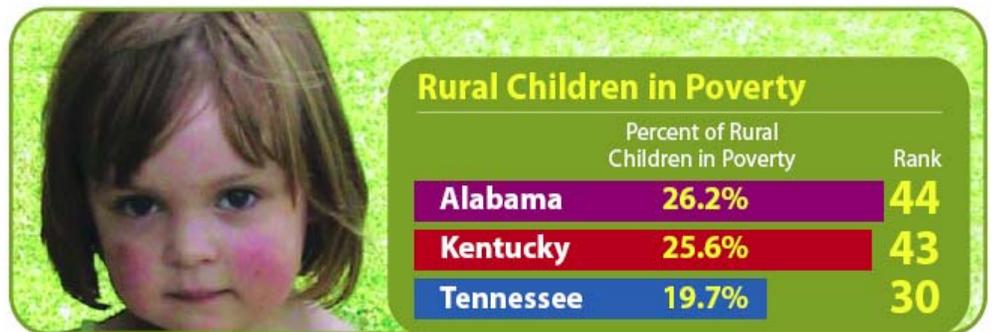
Southern rural communities are strong,

but community solutions are needed to address their problems, according to *The Rural South: Listening to Families in Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee*.

The study drew from focus groups across the three states and the best available data to present a picture of rural communities in the three states.

“Healthy rural areas are central to Tennessee’s economic well-being,” said Linda O’Neal, executive director of the

Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, which collaborated to produce the report. “Rural areas supply manpower, energy, agriculture, timber, mining, and raw materials. They are also central to the vision we have of this state and nation and our values. We must all work together to strengthen these struggling rural communities in Tennessee.”



Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of data from the 2000 Census (Demographic Profiles: 100-Percent and Sample Data) and the U.S. Census Bureau metropolitan area definitions as of June 1999. Rank of 1 being best; 50 being worst.

The Advocate is published by the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth as an information forum on children’s issues. The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, an independent state agency, serves as an advocacy agency and information resource for planning and coordination of policies, programs, and services on behalf of the state’s children and youth. The 21-member Commission, appointed by the governor, works with other agencies and with regional councils on children and youth in each development district to collect information and solve problems in children’s services. To receive *The Advocate*, contact Fay L. Delk, Publications Editor, Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, 710 James Robertson Parkway, 9th Floor, Nashville, TN 37243-0800. Phone: (615) 741-2633. Fax

The problems and solutions for rural and non-rural families are systemic and interconnected, the report stated. From within rural communities, visionary citizens and leaders can support economic opportunities by nurturing small businesses and reviving main streets. Public policies and investments that support workforce and job development, home ownership and lifelong learning can assist in leveling the playing field for rural families.

Each community is unique, but Southern families are strong and supportive, according to the report. However, their communities do not have the jobs they need to provide for their children’s future. Lack of jobs was a consistent theme in intensive focus group discussions and interviews with more than 150 rural residents in 12 communities (including Grundy, Hancock, Houston and Lake counties). Manufacturing jobs have been lost, as plants have moved because of national trade and tax policies, leaving small towns that may never fully recover. People continue to feel connected to these communities and frequently commute long distances for work, education, training and even basic shopping. In a third

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Rural

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Rural Families Face Dilemmas

Everyone in the community watches out for each other's children, but there are few after-school activities available.

There is a sense of safety for residents in Southern rural communities, yet they recognize the increasing allure of drugs for teens.

They enjoy the quiet seclusion of their homes, but must travel great distances to buy necessities at discount prices or to find medical or dental care.

Everybody knows everybody, but if you're not from the "right family," you may not have access to jobs, services, or supports.

Many believe the cost of living is more affordable in rural areas, but lower wages negate the more affordable aspects of rural life.

Even if parents or youth could pursue higher education or skill building, jobs are not available that would allow them to remain in their home areas.

Parents want their children to better themselves through education, but do not want to see them leave family connections behind in order to get jobs.

of Tennessee counties more than 10 percent of workers travel more than one hour to get to work.

In most rural counties in Tennessee only 10 percent or less of the adult population has attained a bachelor's degree. The lack of high paying jobs leads to a "brain drain." One respondent said, "Even with a degree you can end up in the mines."

Schools and churches are tremendous resources in their communities, but they have limited means, residents report. Child care and out-of-school programs are two key supports needed for rural children. Parents worry that without positive activities, children turn to drugs. Their fears are all too real: juvenile drug abuse arrests in rural counties of the three states went up almost 50 percent between 1994 and 2000, but only 1 percent in urban areas.

The report was produced by the Southern Rural Family Strengthening Collaboration. The Collaboration, made up of the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, Kentucky Youth Advocates and Voices for Alabama's Children, was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT project.

The report is available on the TCCY website at www.tennessee.gov/tccy/kc-rp-04.htm. For more information, contact TCCY at (615) 741-2633. 

Children's Caucus Focuses on Foster Care, Permanency and Transitions

Nearly 250 child advocates gathered as TCCY convened a Children's Caucus on June 16 in the House Chamber of the State Capitol. The event focused on children in foster care, especially older children, and the problems they face as they transition out of care.

Representatives of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care and the National Foster Care Association, as well as Tennessee officials and experts, participated in the program. The participation by young people who had been in foster care was especially meaningful for participants.



Support for the out-of-state speakers was provided by the Vanderbilt Child and Family Policy Center's Fostering Results Project and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. Other sponsors included the National Association of Social Workers, the Tennessee Conference on Social Welfare, the Select Committee on Children and Youth, and Tennessee Voices for Children.

Michelle Crowley and Stacy Shumaker, with the Fostering Results Project, spoke about their experiences as foster children.

Gary Stangler, executive director of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, reported on the recently released *Fostering the Future: Safety, Permanence and Well-Being for Children in Foster Care* report. The report, the result of a year-long process, called for increasing states' flexibility to use federal funding, expanding federal foster care maintenance and adoption assistance to all children regardless of family income, encouraging state innovations through an improved federal waiver process, and improving the outcome review process.

Viola Miller, commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Children's Services, responded to the report. Tennessee is preparing legislation to create a legal guardianship option to provide stable and safe families to children for whom neither return to their homes or adoption are viable options.

Robin Nixon, executive director of the National Foster Care Coalition, also spoke. The Coalition combines the efforts of national foundations and organizations to raise awareness of foster care and the needs of transitioning children.

Additional information was provided by Rep. Sherry Jones with the Select Committee on Children and Youth; Tim Goldsmith with Youth Villages and a TCCY Commission member; and Audrey Corder, executive director of the Office of Family and Child Well-Being at the Tennessee Department of Children's Services.

In addition to children's services professionals, including many from the Tennessee Department of Children's Services, participants included foster parents, former foster children, attorneys, and Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteers.



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