



The Advocate

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A newsletter on children's issues

June 2007



State of the Child Identifies Solutions for Children

Why a Blueprint for the Success of Tennessee's Children?

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Calendar of Events

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

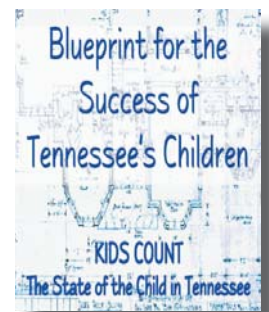
TCCY

For more information on the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth and its programs, check out the website at: www.tennessee.gov/tccy.

Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth

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The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth developed this Blueprint for the Success of Tennessee's Children to identify strategies that reflect good stewardship of state resources and strengthen community connectedness to support children and families. These strategies should guide the development of public policies and systems. Blueprint strategies are based on partnerships to provide opportunities for Tennessee children and families to be personally successful. At the same time they lay the foundation for the successful economic growth and development of Tennessee's tomorrow.



The *Blueprint for the Success of Tennessee's Children* can guide efforts to build those public structures and systems that provide a foundation for a community solutions approach. The long-term goal is to create a legacy of a nurturing and just society, enabling children to flourish so they may contribute positively to future economic growth of Tennessee.

Our legacy needs to be one of responsibility as a community and as a state. In the last 50 years, in Tennessee and the nation as a whole, we have built a series of modern networks that are essential to our economy and our quality of life – our power grid, phone systems, water systems, interstate highways and the Internet. Tennesseans need to work together so our public structures, systems and networks that support the development of healthy, productive citizens have comparable rankings.

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Overarching Themes

Two overarching themes underlie solutions: The need for a coordinated system of care to provide a seamless approach to accessing services, and the need to focus on services and practices that have demonstrated success producing desired outcomes.

KIDS COUNT State of the Child: A Blueprint for the Success of Tennessee's Children is available on TCCY's website at www.tennessee.gov/tccy/kc-soc06.html.
Updated data is available at www.aecf.org/cgi-bin/cliks.cgi

Coordinated System of Care

Goal: Implement a Coordinated System of Care to maximize existing resources and strengthen collaborative community efforts to better meet the needs of children and families in Tennessee.

A coordinated system of care requires the participation by families and the community at large. When children have additional or special needs, supportive, coordinated, community-based systems of care enhance opportunities for successful outcomes. The values of a System of Care are:

- Child-centered and family-driven, with the needs of the child and family dictating the types and mix of services provided.
- Community-based, with the locus of services, as well as management and decision making responsibility, resting at the community level.
- Culturally competent, with agencies, programs and services that are responsive to the cultural, racial and ethnic differences of the populations they serve.

The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth Cindy Durham, Chair Nashville	
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Beverly Cosley Chattanooga	Christy Little Jackson
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James B. Ford Franklin	Diane Neighbors Nashville
Susan Glassman Germantown	Sue Pilson Cookeville
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Denise Hobbs Shelbyville	Dwight Stokes Sevierville
Marti Herndon Martin	Nancy Williams Memphis
Barbara Holden Memphis	Joetta Yarbro Dyersburg
Trudy Hughes Maryville	JoAnn Yates Lookout Mt.
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Evidence-Based Programs/Practices

Goal: To implement more evidence-based practices to ensure maximum benefit in improving outcomes for children receiving services provided or supported by the State of Tennessee.

Evidence-based practices have been explicitly proven successful by appropriately rigorous research and replication. Promising practices objectively appear to have the potential to become evidence-based, but to date, are not sufficiently researched to validate if they actually produce desired results and can be successfully replicated.



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Goals

Reduce Infant Mortality

Goal: Implement proven and effective strategies to reduce infant mortality.

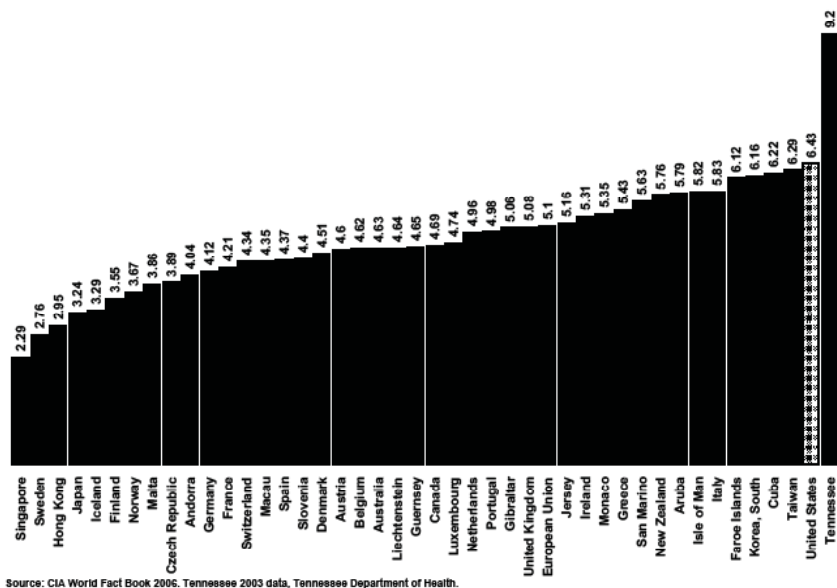
Our tiniest citizens face the largest challenges to their health and survival.

When a child loses the struggle to survive, the family, the community and society as a whole lose.

The following programs have been proven to reduce infant mortality:

- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) prevention through the “Baby Back to Sleep” program, which highlights the importance laying an infant on his or her back while sleeping;
- Adequate prenatal care and Nurse Home Visiting Programs;
- Shaken baby syndrome (SBS) information and prevention programs;
- Folic acid campaign that strives to prevent serious birth defects by ensuring expectant mothers get appropriate daily intake of the vitamin;
- Reducing teen pregnancy.

Comparison of National Infant Mortality Rates
2006 Deaths Per 1,000 Live Births



Source: CIA World Fact Book 2006. Tennessee 2003 data, Tennessee Department of Health.

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, sign up on the website at www.state.tn.us/tccy/listserv.html or 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: (615) 741-5956. E-mail: fay.delk@state.tn.us.

One of the more effective, evidence-based strategies for reducing infant mortality is the implementation of nurse/ professional home visiting programs. The Healthy Start Initiative is an evidence-based practice with marked results.

Child Maltreatment Prevention and Intervention

Goal: Provide quality programs to prevent child maltreatment and intervene effectively when child maltreatment does occur.

Tennessee needs nurse/professional home visiting programs, child advocacy centers and other comprehensive strategies to prevent child maltreatment and the accompanying negative outcomes for children and for society. In addition to positively impacting infant mortality, nurse/professional home visiting programs also have been shown to have an effect on reducing child abuse and maltreatment within the home.

Child Protective Services multi-level response system legislation enacted by the Tennessee General Assembly in 2005 is designed to create a statewide response to prevent and reduce child maltreatment and increase community partnerships for more timely and accessible services for referral, assessment or investigation.

Child Advocacy Centers (CAC) offer children and families a friendly place where young victims can receive counseling and treatment and contact law enforcement personnel, attorneys and case managers who investigate alleged incidents of sexual and severe abuse.

Quality Child Care and Early Childhood Education

Goal: Provide children with the opportunity to receive high-quality early childhood education and childcare in order to improve educational, economic and life outcomes.

The long-term benefits of early childhood education are substantial and include increases in test scores, decreased special education placement, increases in high school graduation rates, increases in college attendance, decreases in crime and delinquency, and improved employment and earnings (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2003). All children should have equal opportunities to experience quality child care, and adequate state child care reimbursement rates improve access to quality child care for low income families with children.

The quality of their early life experiences has a significant impact on children’s future growth and development. Children need an environment of supportive, positive relationships to build sturdy brain architecture.

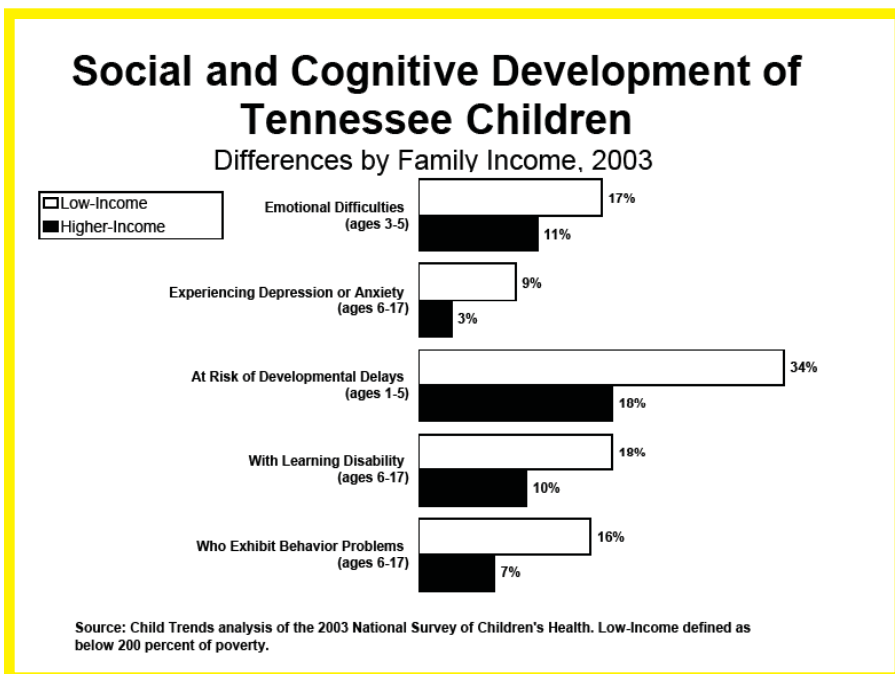
K-12 Education and Beyond

Goal: That every Tennessee student will graduate prepared to function in the workplace and the family.

Our education system may be the most important public structure we have created in our state and nation. This system benefits us all; it is the foundation of our democracy and the engine of our economy. It is our

collective responsibility to ensure public education is adequately supported and has the resources it needs to meet the challenges of a global century. The expansion of quality early childhood education strengthens the foundation for educational success, but other supports are also needed to shore up the education system in Tennessee. As a result of lawsuits, the state has moved to equity in funding across Tennessee counties.

Laws and policies in Tennessee are often high quality and should provide a foundation for educational success, but funding gaps limit their effectiveness. Tennessee ranks 50th in both per capita and percent of personal income spending on K-12 education, and 47th in per capita and 42nd in percent of personal income spending on higher education (Governing, 2006). Analysis from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy indicated **Tennessee’s level of public investments in libraries, pre-K, K-12 and public colleges and universities lags a staggering \$2.1 billion behind the regional average in funding for education** (The Real Budget Deficit, 2006).



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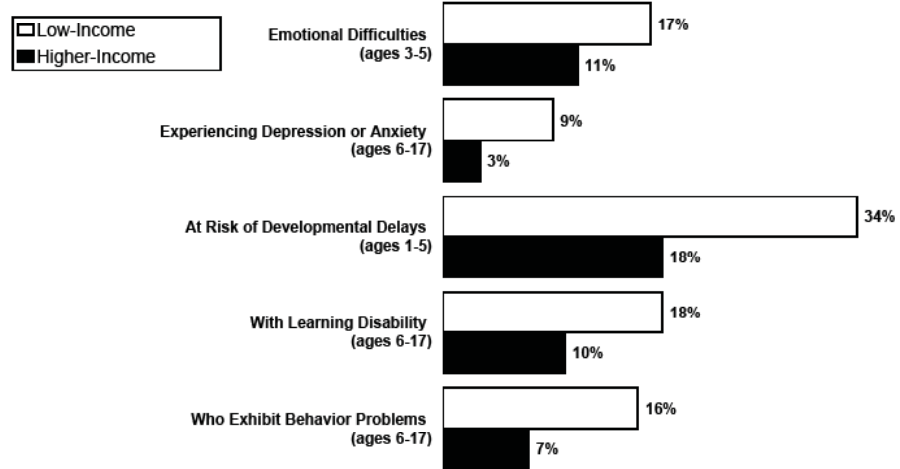
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Social and Cognitive Development of Tennessee Children

Differences by Family Income, 2003



Source: Child Trends analysis of the 2003 National Survey of Children's Health. Low-Income defined as below 200 percent of poverty.

Strategies to help children stay in and graduate from high school include:

- Improving teaching and curricula to make school more relevant and engaging and enhance connection between school and work;
- Improving instruction, and access to supports for struggling students;
- Building a school climate that fosters academics;
- Ensuring that students have a strong relationship with at least one adult in the school;
- Improving the communication between parents and schools (The Silent Epidemic, 2006).

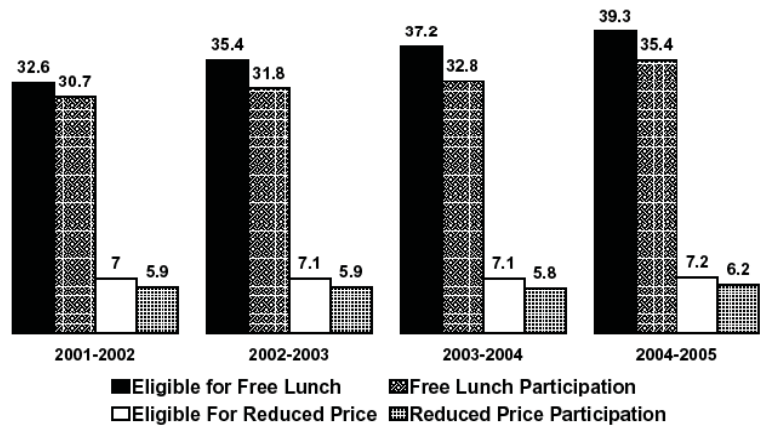
Tennessee schools must redouble their efforts to keep children in school and learning. Among the strategies that should be considered are efforts to reduce the number of children who are suspended or expelled.

Family Resource Centers. The community has opportunities to strengthen and support families, especially those experiencing crisis or dealing with challenges through Family Resource Centers (FRC). Family Resource Centers are an effective model to provide diverse services to families in need, and expansion would allow FRC to serve more of these families. Currently, 104 family resource centers serve school communities in 79 school systems in 65 of Tennessee's 95 counties. In an evaluation by REACH of Louisville of Kentucky Family Resource Centers, findings showed a positive change in achievement and academic proficiency at the elementary level, students' perception of improvement regarding the completion of their class work and homework, following directions, obeying rules, staying on task and improving peer.

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Bullying Prevention Programs. Positive school environments are safe and encourage healthy growth and development. The absence of evidence-based bullying prevention programs in some Tennessee schools is a missed opportunity to help young people develop into productive citizens who know how to interact appropriately with one another and respect differences. In 2005, the Tennessee General Assembly recognized the importance of bullying prevention programs with the passage of Public Chapter 202 requiring each school district to adopt a policy “prohibiting harassment, intimidation or bullying.”

Percent Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Students
Eligible Students and Average Daily Participation Rates 2001-05



Source: Tennessee Department of Education

Youth Development Programs

Goal: Provide youth development opportunities that improve overall outcomes for Tennessee children, including after-school programs and mentoring programs.

Only an informed citizenry can make the choices needed to support and sustain our nation. While the formal education system, beginning with quality child care and early childhood education, is a critical part of developing an informed citizenry, youth development programs are also needed to buttress this system. Youth development is also community development.

Quality After-School Programs

After-school programs provide opportunities for educational enrichments and positive interactions that prepare children and youth for their roles as productive citizens. But 23 percent of Tennessee’s K-12 youth are left alone at some point each week, spending an average of nearly nine hours per week unsupervised after school. Adolescents who spend a significant amount of time unsupervised miss out on important youth development opportunities while they are in situations that are more likely to lead to more risky behaviors.



Mentoring Programs

Relationships are important in all aspects of life, and never more so than during a child’s growth and development. Effective mentoring programs can help children develop into successful adults, especially children at risk. In January 2007, Governor Bredesen’s Children’s Cabinet announced the Lead, Inspire, Fulfill and Teach (LIFT) initiative to recruit and train mentors for all youth in state custody. This is an important effort to provide mentors for these especially vulnerable children.

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Blueprint

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Health, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Programs. CoverKids will provide important expansions to bridge the gaps existing in service provision, but our health, mental health and substance abuse systems still provide too fragile a web. Their gaps are compounded by continued inequity in the way health insurance coverage of all types responds with limits on mental health and substance abuse treatment.

Coordinated School Health Programs

Goal: Implement comprehensive Coordinated School Health programs incorporating all components of this evidence-based program model in school districts statewide.

Provision of **Coordinated School Health (CSH)** programs in all Tennessee schools could go a long way toward supporting the healthy growth and development of Tennessee children. Coordinated School Health programs have demonstrated success in positively impacting outcomes for children. Implementation of CSH programs is an evidence-based strategy for increasing physical activity and improving nutrition and medical services and reducing obesity. Coordinated School Health programs, coupled with quality after-school programs, are also effective strategies to reduce teen pregnancy and teen birth rates in Tennessee.

Full Continuum of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

Goal: Create a complete continuum of care, especially focusing on family and community-based services, for children and youth with mental health and substance abuse treatment needs.

A full continuum of services begins with appropriate screening to identify potential needs, and as appropriate, assessment and more thorough evaluation to clearly identify treatment requirements, and includes services of varying levels of intensity and intrusiveness, ranging from family-based and community-based services to more intensive settings. The Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities has received federal funding to establish two projects, Tennessee Voices' Nashville Connection and Centerstone's Mule Town Project in Columbia, to provide a continuum of mental health services utilizing a System of Care approach. Results from the Nashville Connection indicate the use of mental health liaisons in schools may be a promising practice that enables children with serious emotional disturbance to remain in their home, school and community and avoid state custody or residential placement, including psychiatric.

In 2006 the Tennessee General Assembly passed a joint resolution calling for a study of the children's mental health system in Tennessee and recommendations for its improvement. This study process provides a critical opportunity to develop a comprehensive plan to provide the mental health and substance abuse services needed by Tennessee children and their families.

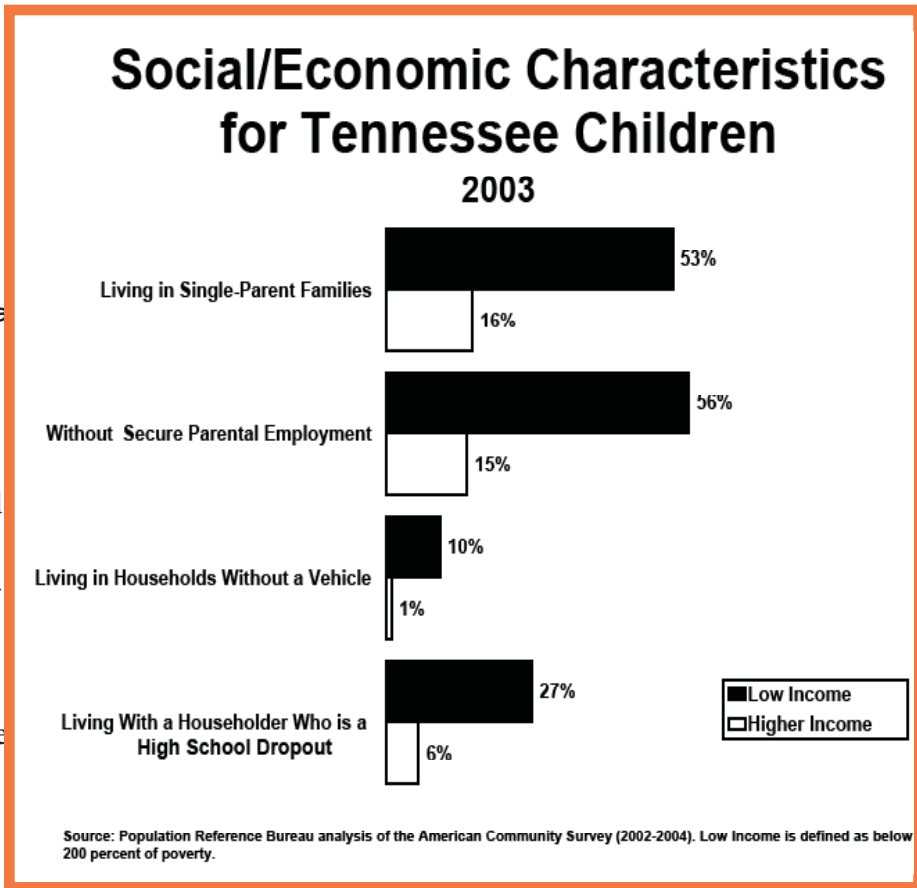


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When All Else Fails . . .

Goal: Implement evidence-based programs for children in state custody to provide them with opportunities for timely permanence, long-term connections with caring adults and the tools necessary for success in school and in life.

Unfortunately, not all families get the support they need to function, and for all too many children, the state is forced to become their parent. Sadly, the state is not, and can never be, the best family. Although we can do much to help provide safety and stability to children who have been neglected and abused, current research shows that a child, once damaged by abuse or loss, is likely to continue to be at risk throughout his or her life.



When children are at risk of state custody, **effective legal representation** for the children and their families is essential to ensure their rights are protected and they are treated fairly. Strategies – more public defenders and a “public guardian” program for children and families – should be implemented to ensure effective legal representation is available for all children in the juvenile court system.

When the child is in custody effective interventions are needed to facilitate speedy reunification with family, permanent guardianship or termination of parental rights and placement for adoption. The state should ensure these transitions are made as smoothly as possible by encouraging all case managers to thoroughly **review cases and offer comprehensive services**.

Child and Family Team meetings provide an opportunity for family members, professionals and informal resources to come together to develop meaningful, individualized permanency plans for the safety and well-being of children at risk and to meet the needs of their families. **Mental health and substance abuse treatment** are also needed for the child or a parent.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) are important resources in the provision of quality child welfare services. CASA volunteers are appointed by the courts to gather accurate and complete information about a child’s circumstances and to use this information to make informed, objective recommendations in the best interests of the child. Every child in custody should have the opportunity have a CASA.

Juvenile justice system improvements need to focus on evidence-based practices that make a difference in

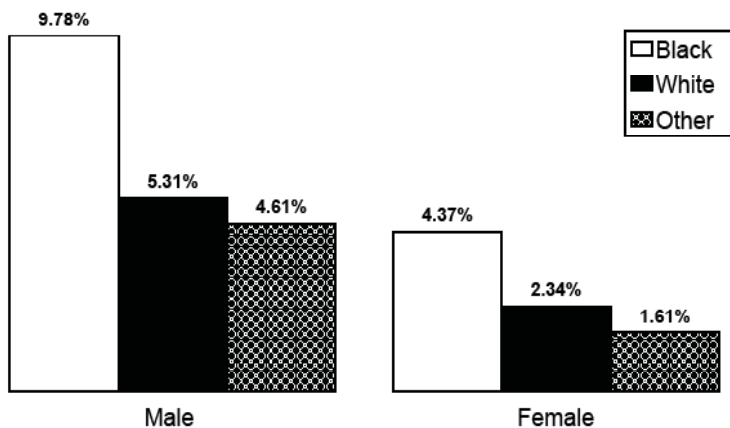
helping youth turn their lives around. The **Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI)** developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation is a systematic change to juvenile detention. It supports increased utilization of alternatives to detention, including increased prevention and intervention programming, home monitoring, intensive case management services and day-reporting programs. Implementation of JDAI has helped to reduce the number of youth in secure detention.

Objective Screening Tools and Alternatives to Detention. In response to 2005 legislation passed by the Tennessee General Assembly, the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth worked with a group of

stakeholders to develop a draft **detention assessment tool (DAT)** as a first to detention reform. Alternatives to detention, such as community-based programs for prevention and intervention, electronic home monitoring, intensive case management services and day-reporting programs for youth on probation, must accompany detention reform to further reduce the number of non-violent youth in detention centers.

Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) is an evidence-based program for violence prevention targeted towards children with mental health treatment needs and adjudicated dependent/neglected/abused or delinquent. It has been tested in eight scientific trials since 1986. Youth Villages in Memphis is the largest provider of Multi-Systemic Therapy in the United States. *Implementing evidence-based practices such as MST with fidelity to the essential elements of the programs/practices, improves outcomes for youth and increases community safety.*

Percent Tennessee Juvenile Court Referrals by Race and Sex Delinquent Offenses 2005



Source: Tennessee Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Annual Statistics Report 2005.



Five strategies identified by the Foster Care Work Group would **improve the transition to adulthood for the youth leaving state custody**. Components of a comprehensive approach to promoting economic success among youth aging out of foster care include:

- Advocating and supporting educational attainment;
- Facilitating access to workforce development opportunities;
- Providing financial literacy education;
- Encouraging savings and asset development; and
- Creating entrepreneurship opportunities.

Issues for All Systems

As we strive to shore up the foundations of the systems that are essential for Tennessee children to be healthy, educated, productive citizens, we also have to address underlying common issues that threaten to further erode the stability of these public structures. These are essential ingredients for the success of all Tennessee children.

Opportunity for All Tennessee Children

Goal: Provide professionals in all systems serving children in Tennessee (health, mental health, substance abuse, education, youth development, child welfare and juvenile justice) with tools and opportunities to assure all children have fair and just treatment and opportunities for success.

Professional Development/Continuing Education and Training

Goal: Promote educational and training opportunities for professionals in the child serving systems in Tennessee.

Sufficiently educated and trained employees are essential for all systems that support the health, education and development of Tennessee's children. An adequate higher education system producing well-trained staff is critical. The Department of Children's Services development of the Social Work Consortium involving public and private colleges with accredited social work programs is an important strategy for increasing the number of appropriately prepared staff for the public child welfare system. Other efforts to ensure the availability of quality staff in the systems that serve Tennessee children and families would also be beneficial.

Strategies are needed to help juvenile court judges keep abreast of current information, programs and initiatives and expand their knowledge and expertise about issues impacting the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

WE CAN DO BETTER THAN THIS!

One in five children in Tennessee lives in poverty (KIDS COUNT, 2006), making this an underlying concern and significant barrier to their success. "Poverty Is Not a Character Builder. Poverty is associated with negative outcomes for children. It can impede children's cognitive development and their ability to learn. It can contribute to behavioral, social and emotional problems. (it)...can lead to poor health...(the risks)...are greatest among children who experience poverty when they are young and among children who experience persistent and deep poverty" (National Center for Children in Poverty as quoted in Homeland Insecurity, 2006).

Failure to provide the public structures necessary to support Tennessee's health, education and youth development systems contribute to poverty in Tennessee. Implementation of the evidence-based strategies highlighted in this publication would provide opportunities for more Tennessee children to be healthy and successful in school and in life. The success of our children should result in a healthier, better educated workforce and improve overall economic conditions in the state.

The report, *Blueprint for the Success of Tennessee's Children: KIDS COUNT: The State of the Child in Tennessee*, provides a plan for improving child well-being. Working together, we can make it happen. 

Using the Blueprint to Build a Better Future

Advocates worked with the Tennessee General Assembly this year to begin implementing the *Blueprint*. As a result, the Legislature voted to invest more in services to children.

2007-08 Legislative Investments in the Success of Tennessee's Children

\$295 million in increased funding for **Basic Education Program (BEP)** formula for **K-12 Education**

- Includes **100 percent funding for education of at-risk students** in FY 2008
- **Increased funding for English language learners (ELL)** at a ratio of one to thirty (1:30) for teachers to students and one to three hundred (1:300) translators to students
- **70 percent state funding of instructional positions.**

\$25 million in new money to fund **250 additional Pre-K/Early Childhood Education classrooms**

\$490,000 to fund **14 forensic investigators at child advocacy centers.**

\$3,280,500 to provide **Cover Kids dental and vision services.**


\$100,000 to provide funds for grants to two additional child advocacy centers (CACs).

\$150,000 for funding **10 new Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs** in previously unserved counties.

\$100,000 to **Big Brothers Big Sisters for the Amachi Initiative**, a mentoring program for children of prisoners.

\$85,000 first year funding for legislation requiring evidence-based services for treatment or care of unruly and delinquent juveniles, including any service model or delivery system.

\$390,000 for the **Tennessee Nurse Home Visitor Program Act** to provide home visitation for mothers at or below 200 percent of poverty who are expecting their first child.

Much more work is needed to assure that children in Tennessee are truly prepared to face the future. 



Let's get going!