

**MICHIGAN LEAGUE FOR HUMAN SERVICES
And MICHIGAN'S CHILDREN- KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK RELEASED**

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Child poverty, abuse and neglect cloud future

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From: The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

Kids Count in Michigan also finds declines in child deaths, teen births

Childhood poverty, abuse and neglect continue to rise in Michigan, but child deaths are down dramatically, the latest Kids Count report finds. These are the primary trends identified in the Kids Count in Michigan 2009 Data Book being released today. The 2009 Kids Count report also examines county level trends in child well-being with a focus on Place Matters – looking at trends in rural, mid-sized and urban counties (Branch County is a Mid-sized county by definition in this report, between 20,000 and 65,000 population). The report ranks the 83 counties on 15 measures of child well-being with No. 1 ranking being the best in the state. So how did Branch County fare? Let's take a look at the numbers this time around.

In terms of economics, Branch County's indicators were worse. Children who are living in poverty is on the rise as well as children receiving either free or reduced price school lunch. However, with an unemployment rate of 13.6 (preliminary data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for November 2009) increases in these numbers would be expected, however, Branch County fared worse than counties in Michigan with similar population.

For child and adolescent health issues, the data is mixed. Branch County still continues to struggle with pre-natal care, but improved in the area of infant mortality. Teen births are still a major problem and Branch County ranks 78th out of 83 in teen birth rate in Michigan.

A significant area of improvement was with high school drop outs and MEAP math scores. Branch County improved significantly combating high school drop outs (better than counties of similar population) and has a dropout rate 23% less than the State of Michigan. Additionally, Branch county kids improved significantly in MEAP math proficiency. Kids *not* proficient in math in 4th grade fell 66% and dropped 54% for eighth graders.

The worst indicator and where efforts need to be concentrated the most is in the area of abuse and neglect of our children. Rates of children in investigated families rose 70% from 2000 to 2008 and confirmed victims of abuse and neglect rose 143% over the same period. Branch County now ranks 82nd out of 83 Counties, a ranking that we cannot accept. Efforts need to be re-doubled in educating parents about the risk factors of abuse and in providing skills and education to combat this unacceptable situation. We can and must do better and community groups, faith based organizations, schools, social service providers and parents need to come together to identify strategies to reduce these levels. If you need to put a face with a statistic, know that more than 390 children in Branch County were confirmed to have been abused or neglected in 2008; that's 390 too many.

See the data at www.bhsj.org