

Early Childhood

“Springfield-Greene County was chosen as one of America’s 100 Best Communities for Youth because we are doing great things for kids. Every community has its problems, but we are not afraid to acknowledge ours and work towards effective solutions.”

— Melissa Haddow,
Executive Director, Community Partnership of the Ozarks

BLUE RIBBONS (2004 – 2007)

- Isabel’s House Crisis Nursery
- Increased Community Awareness and Attention on Early Childhood Needs
- Participation on State Early Childhood Coordinating Board
- Early Childhood Centers (Logan-Rogersville, Shady Dell, OTC)
- Mayor’s Commission for Children
- Early Learning Opportunities Act Grant

CURRENT STATUS OF 2004 – 2007 RED FLAGS

Effect of Poverty on Children

The 2005 *Community Focus* report articulated the interconnected role poverty plays for all early childhood indicators (i.e., homelessness, outcomes of methamphetamine use, lack of health care, dropout rates, child abuse and neglect, single-parent families). The Springfield-Greene County community has continued to help children affected by poverty through many new initiatives and programs such as the Light House Child Development Center, Care to Learn Fund, Backpack Program (Ozarks Food Harvest, United Way, Care to Learn), OACAC Head Start, Kids Closet, We Brush, Too!, Child Care Subsidy Increases, Ready 2 Learn Project, Events for Children in Poverty, and area food drives. To date, more than 4,100 children have been served, 1.6 million tons of food collected, 22,400 backpacks distributed, and over \$2.55 million dollars invested to address poverty issues for children.

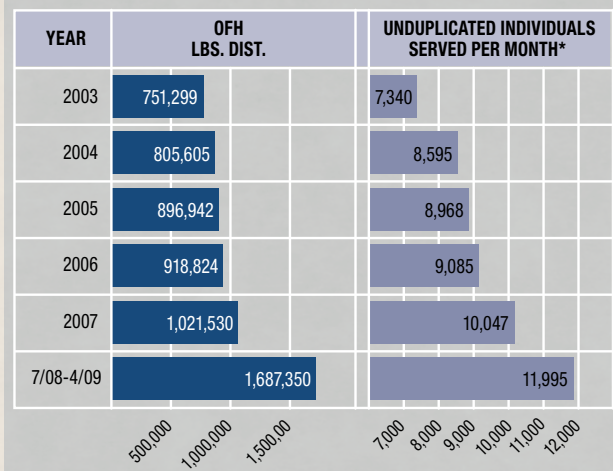
Official data regarding the number of children younger than 6 years of age in poverty will not be presented until the 2010 census. However, based on estimates from the Office of Social and Economic Analysis (OSED) and skyrocketing demand at food banks, this number is most certainly increasing (see Community Health report). Now, more than ever, Greene County must leverage efforts to help those in need.

INDICATOR	2003	2005	2008
Number of Children (0-6 years) on Medicaid	10,513	9,464	9,253*

* Note: Eligibility requirements changed.

Source: Office of Social and Economic Analysis (OSED)

OZARKS FOOD HARVEST DISTRIBUTION AND INDIVIDUALS SERVED PER MONTH



*NOTE: Monthly average individuals served in Greene County at OFH Member food pantries and congregate feeding sites

Child Abuse and Neglect

All previous *Community Focus* reports have identified higher substantiated child abuse and neglect rates in Greene County versus state averages. To date, substantiated rates continue to decrease slightly, yet the number of hotline calls/reports remains high. The rate of child deaths due to child abuse/neglect has continued to decrease from 5 deaths in 2005 to 1 death in 2007.

INDICATOR		2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Child abuse/neglect (Substantiated cases 0-18 years/1000 children)	Greene Co	10.9	9.07	8.5	7.9	6.3
	Missouri	6.8	6.49	5.7	5.0	4.6
Hotline Reports/Calls	Greene Co		5660	5801	3335	3338
	Missouri		56,111	54,108	51,383	52,979
Children removed from home	Greene Co		819	766	353	327
Child fatalities due to abuse/neglect	Greene Co	2	4	5	2	1

Various educational programs and initiatives have been developed to address child abuse and neglect concerns in Springfield-Greene County. Specifically, over 8,600 individuals have been trained or educated by these programs/initiatives and more than 3,670 children served. Child abuse and neglect continues to be an area of concern that warrants the community’s full attention and resources to ensure that the indicators move in the right direction.

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT RECENT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

PROGRAM/INITIATIVE

Child Witness Protection Act
Children's Division Certification
Ambassadors for Children (Adopt-a-Caseworker)
Mandated Reporter Training
Isabel's House Crisis Nursery
Operation US
Good Touch, Bad Touch
MSU CA/N Curriculum
Strengthening Families Initiative

Strengthening Families



Community Awareness of the Early Years

Since the last *Community Focus* report, over 1,030 partners in the Springfield-Greene County community have responded to increase community awareness of early childhood issues. Recent initiatives and grants, such as America's Promise Award, Red Wagon Kids Community Plan, Burrell's Autism Center, Character Ed, Building Blocks, MO-PIRC Grant and Grantmakers' Challenge for Children, have served more than 1,223 children and collected approximately \$17 million. Payoff for community education and dialogue support successful projects like Isabel's House and the Child Witness Protection Act. Additional initiatives are needed until every citizen understands the critical role of the early years.

School Readiness/Early Literacy

According to the 2007 *Community Focus* report, a 2-year study by the School Readiness Work Group found social, emotional and cognitive skill development play a vital role in preparing children for kindergarten. Kindergarten readiness scores for Springfield Public Schools have increased from 59% to 63% over the past two years. In addition, early literacy development, which is a predictor of success in school, continues to receive strong support with several community groups providing over 30,000 books to children free of charge from 2007 to 2008. It is hoped that in 2013, the reading test scores of children who received these books will show significant gains.

Childcare

The 2007 *Community Focus* report described concerns regarding the major expense of childcare in Springfield and Greene County. Currently, total childcare capacity in Greene County has decreased by 5%, but accredited programs have increased by 10%. Head Start accounts for 41% of accredited programs in Greene County and provides high quality care for at-risk children. The Missouri Legislature continues to debate the need for a quality rating system for daycare centers. Hopefully by 2010, a system will be in place so Greene County parents have the necessary information to make good choices for their daycare needs. Nonetheless, childcare costs continue to be a major expense for families with a general increase of 7-10% occurring from 2007 to 2009, especially since the Springfield median income is approximately \$30,000.

HOUSING AND CHILDCARE EXPENSES FOR \$30,000 SALARY

Take Home Pay	\$25,500
Housing Costs (28%)	- 8,400
Childcare Costs	-14,092
Remaining money for year	\$3,008

Support for childcare subsidies has increased since 2007, yet Missouri still ranks 46th among all states in income eligibility. A new transitional childcare eligibility policy lets current subsidy recipients receive reduced benefits if they receive a

small increase in pay and helps protect them until they reach 140% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In 2008, the FPL was \$17,640 for a single parent with two children. This new stair stepping system for benefits resulted from initiatives to educate lawmakers about the negative impacts of reducing subsidies for low income wage earners after getting a raise which was evident in previous policies.



EMERGING ISSUES

Safe Housing

The importance of a healthy start is jeopardized when it is unsafe for a young child to crawl on the floor or practice writing his/her name. Specifically, children who lack safe housing conditions may struggle with appropriate growth and development. Unfortunately, the Springfield community is currently experiencing a shortage in its capacity to help the increasing population of homeless women and children. (see Housing report).

Kindergarten Readiness and DECA Training

The Kindergarten Readiness study indicates that social and emotional competency is at least as important as cognitive skills when determining if a child is ready for kindergarten. Recent DECA (Devereux Early Childhood Assessment) scores show that local pre-school children do, in fact, improve their readiness level when daily activities are used to reinforce developing social and emotional skills. Additional access and availability of this training is needed in addition to more early childhood teachers using the DECA tool.