



YOUTH COUNT

Exploring How KIDS COUNT Grantees Address Youth Issues

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The Forum for Youth Investment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are **Ready by 21: ready for college, work and life.**™ This goal requires that young people have the supports, opportunities and services needed to prosper and contribute where they live, learn, work, play and make a difference. The Forum provides youth and adult leaders with the information, technical assistance, training, network support and partnership opportunities needed to increase the quality and quantity of youth investment and youth involvement.

The Forum believes that all young people need and deserve intentional investments and opportunities for involvement through at least the first two decades of life. These investments must move beyond solving problems and promoting academic achievement to supporting a full range of positive outcomes — helping young people grow physically, socially, emotionally, personally, ethically, civically, vocationally and intellectually. Further, youth need more than just programs — they need a full range of basic services, formal and informal supports, and challenging opportunities. The various policies, systems, professionals and volunteers working for and with young people in the allied youth fields need support and encouragement in working together to improve the lives of the nation's young people. The Forum uses the term “allied youth fields” to refer to the complex space where people such as child welfare advocates, service/learning researchers, after-school practitioners, prevention specialists, youth development funders and education administrators intersect.

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The transition to adulthood is never an automatic or uncomplicated process. All kids, no matter what their background or financial status, need a set of basic connections to help them navigate the shoals of young adulthood... Unfortunately, lots of young people, through no fault of their own, do not make enough of these critical connections and do not garner enough of the resources and supports they need. By the time these kids reach their early 20s, they find themselves facing adulthood unprepared, unsupported, and dispirited.

— Moving Youth from Risk to Opportunity, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Introduction

In 2004, KIDS COUNT began its annual data book with a powerful essay — *Moving Youth from Risk to Opportunity* — sounding a call to action on behalf of vulnerable older youth.¹ The essay served as a rallying point for organizations focused on this population, one that is sometimes overlooked by advocates whose energies are often focused on younger children.

Many organizations, including the Forum for Youth Investment (the Forum), have been working to promote more effective youth policies and advocacy strategies. Over the last several years, the Forum has worked with a network of city and state officials and advocates — the Ready by 21™ State and Local Network — to identify and promote examples of effective youth policy, provide technical assistance to groups taking action, and help officials and advocates connect across city and state lines.²

Despite the relative dearth of advocacy efforts focused on older youth, many KIDS COUNT grantees have been on the forefront of efforts to promote youth advocacy in their respective states. Building on the heightened attention generated by the 2004 Data Book essay, the Forum was interested in learning more about what KIDS COUNT grantees are doing related to older youth in order to share promising strategies within the network and the child advocacy and youth development fields more broadly.

With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Forum took a close look at the work of twelve KIDS COUNT grantees that have focused a significant part of their policy research and advocacy work on older youth issues (*see Appendix A for a list of grantees*). We used an

informal process to identify grantees to profile, which included self-nominations and recommendations by the Casey Foundation of grantees known to be doing work on older youth issues.³ The twelve states were: Arizona, Georgia, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Utah.

Through interviews and document reviews, we explored the work of these grantees with an eye toward answering the following questions:

- **Issues: What is being addressed related to older youth?** The 2004 Data Book essay focused on four issues — foster care, juvenile justice, teen pregnancy and dropout prevention. To what extent are KIDS COUNT grantees focusing on these issues? What other youth issues are they addressing?
- **Strategies: How do KIDS COUNT grantees advocate on behalf of older youth?** What advocacy strategies, including data collection and dissemination, are grantees using to promote an older youth agenda?
- **Connecting the Dots: What could an overarching state youth agenda encompass?** Are any grantees promoting an overarching youth agenda that is designed to address a broad range of youth issues?
- **Next Steps in the Work: What is next on the horizon for KIDS COUNT grantees in advancing an agenda for older youth?**

What we found as we interviewed twelve of the grantees was a significant body of work that shows a history of attention to the specific issues that affect disconnected youth, including juvenile justice reform, education reform, transitions for youth aging out of foster care and teenage pregnancy. The strategies that grantees are employing vary from straight legislative

1. Annie E. Casey Foundation (2004). *2004 KIDS COUNT Data Book: Moving from Risk to Opportunity*. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved June 14, 2005, from www.aecf.org/kidscount/databook/pdfs_e/essay_e.pdf.

2. In addition to this work, the Forum recently launched a multi-year partnership with the National Conference of State Legislatures to provide state legislators and other policy makers the tools and supports necessary to strengthen their youth policies and programs.

3. For the purposes of this scan, we were interested in advocacy efforts targeting young people from middle school through young adulthood. While many grantees are focused on the specific populations the Casey Foundation described as “disconnected,” we cast a broader net for this paper and therefore use the term “older youth.”

advocacy to facilitating interagency cooperation among the state departments to forming public private partnerships to move an issue. One strategy that we did not find grantees employing to great depth was youth involvement in decision making, although a few expressed interest in this approach. We did find some grantees that are beginning to take a comprehensive approach to youth advocacy and are making strides working across systems with an emphasis on the needs of youth rather than the needs of a particular system.

A familiar challenge identified by the grantees relates to the deep fragmentation of programs and services that exists at the state level. This fragmentation has directly shaped the way advocates approach their work and several are making a conscious effort to integrate the policy agendas toward desired outcomes for youth rather than attacking issues siloed system by siloed system. Often however, advocacy efforts are reactive to crises within the youth population — if teen pregnancy or youth violence is on the rise that problem gets the attention and the other issues end up on the backburner.

The majority of KIDS COUNT grantees we interviewed have had experience in both the early childhood arena and the youth arena. Increasingly, they are applying lessons from successful efforts to frame and

advocate for a comprehensive early childhood agenda to the arguably more complex needs of youth in their second decade of life. However, while early childhood advocacy has benefited from a frame that focuses on wellness and preparedness, the available indicators to monitor development in the second decade are weak at best. The data is made up almost exclusively of negative indicators — teen birth rates, violent death, dropout measures — only a very small handful of states have pushed for or had access to positive indicators, and those positive indicators that do exist are primarily derived from existing school data.

A handful of states are taking a cross cutting approach and focusing on the full developmental continuum of children and youth. These groups are setting their agendas with long term goals in mind and using a developmental framework. They are working at the local level to improve indicators, working with state agencies to help them improve interdepartmental coordination, and seeking the public's input as they develop a comprehensive agenda. This paper serves as a sampling of the work of those KIDS COUNT grantees who are pushing the youth advocacy agenda forward around the country. It also has served as a rallying point for the advocates who work on the second decade of life to gather together and learn from one another.

Issues: What is Being Addressed Related to Older Youth?

Many KIDS COUNT grantees have squarely taken on the issues framed in the 2004 Data Book related to vulnerable, older youth — and many have been doing so for years. Dropouts, pregnant/parenting teens, foster care and juvenile justice represent four concrete populations that face significant risk in navigating the tasks of young adulthood. In addition, these risks often co-occur. Many of the young people who are transitioning out of foster care, for example, are also dealing with one or more of these other challenges. Without intervention, these youth often end up disconnected from the education system, the world of work, and consistent sources of support, especially in terms of health care and prevention services. Several KIDS COUNT grantees are at the forefront of addressing these issues as well.

Dropout Prevention

High school completion is now a necessary gateway for even modest economic and employment success as well as further education. With nearly one-third of all students not completing high school in four years and more shocking figures for specific sub-populations such as African American and Latino youth, state level advocates are sounding the alarm that more must be done to prevent students from dropping out (or, as some assert, from being pushed out).⁴ Specific issues KIDS COUNT grantees are working on in this area include:

Reducing suspensions and expulsions. The link between suspensions and expulsions and the likelihood of dropping out early is strong. In the aftermath of zero tolerance policies, associated in many cases with a rise in suspensions and expulsions, several state grantees are

4. Greene, J., Winters, M. (2005). *Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates*. Education Working Paper Number 8. New York, NY: The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research.

focusing on this issue and in particular how it disproportionately affects Latino and African American youth — with calls for better programming and reforms

If the toughest issues that youth are dealing with are not on our agenda, that’s a problem.

— Kelly Laflamme
Children’s Alliance of New Hampshire

to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions. Maryland’s Advocates for Children and Youth has advocated for requiring a

program called Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in schools where 18 percent or more of the population has been expelled. The PBIS initiative dates back to 1998, when the need to integrate mental health services into the public school system was acknowledged. The initiative targets schoolwide behavior, providing a framework for positive behavior expectations and rewards for students. For more information, see Appendix B: Web Links.⁵

Similarly, the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute (NCCAI) has worked to reduce suspensions and expulsions and to counter the negative consequences that suspended and expelled youth face. Through collaborations with state education and juvenile justice

There’s been real progress on early childhood. Now we are beginning to take a serious look at what other ages and populations need in terms of emphasis and exposure.

— Sharon Rodine
Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

agencies, NCCAI examined policy changes addressing educational alternatives for suspended and expelled students. NCCAI’s Juvenile Justice Advisory Group, comprised of statewide experts (public officials, judges, legal

advocates, academic experts and service providers), was instrumental in the development of a strategic plan to address the “education not suspension” issues. NCCAI provided necessary research and participation in the Education and Juvenile Justice committees of the Covenant with North Carolina’s Children (the state advocacy association). Through support of these efforts the Covenant was able to draft a full bill mandating that suspended and expelled students be offered the same education and related services as other students. For more information on this legislation, see Appendix B.

5. All Web URLs are noted in Appendix B: Web Links.

Dropout prevention targeting critical grades and transitions.

The Michigan League for Human Services and the South Carolina Budget and Control Board have both zoomed in on middle school and the transition between eighth and ninth grades, a critical period for dropout prevention. Both have focused on improving teaching and learning in the middle grades. The Michigan League for Human Services recognizes the critical gap in a state that, like many, has no specific training or certification for middle grades. For more information on the League's Middle Start Initiative, see Appendix B. Teacher preparation and professional development, though perhaps "less glamorous" than some other issues advocates work on according to Baron Holmes of South Carolina, are at the forefront of their efforts. This focus is based on data demonstrating that the middle school experience is a critical determinant of future participation and achievement in school.

Pregnancy Prevention

While teen pregnancy rates have dropped significantly in recent years, there were still more than 850,000 mothers under age 20 in the United States in 2002. The work of many advocates goes beyond reducing rates of pregnancies and births to include strategies for expanding innovative education and prevention programs and providing comprehensive services and supports to parenting teens. The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (OICA) has worked tirelessly on this issue for many years and has played a leadership role in a multi-year, community-based teen pregnancy initiative funded in 13 communities by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. OICA currently partners with a range of state and national organizations to coordinate and improve data collection related to teen births and to identify and initiate promising prevention messages and programs. They also work with the legislature to increase funding for community-based pregnancy prevention programs.

We've done a lot of media work around the dropout rate to get people to see what happens when we lose kids, and to think about what we do to create [educational] barriers for youth.

—Joe Drake, Steering Committee member
New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network

Becoming an adult can be trying for anyone. But children aging out of foster care face unique challenges. Many don't succeed because they don't have the typical support systems as they prepare for adult life...these young people are in situations where they may not return home, may not want to be adopted and need help planning their personal futures.

— *Moving Youth from Risk to Opportunity*
Annie E. Casey Foundation

Foster Care

Young people in the foster care system face the particularly daunting task of transitioning to adulthood with less than the full complement of supports. Many youth age out of the system with tenuous or no access to the familial, financial or emotional supports all young adults need at least through their early twenties. Over the last decade, many states have been working to smooth out the transitions, offering extended health benefits, financial assistance, job training and assistance with housing. Foster care is a traditional area of focus for KIDS COUNT grantees, and a focus on older youth who are aging out of the system is increasingly a part of the agenda.

Voices for Utah Children participates in the Governor's Transition to Adult Living state project. This initiative was created by Utah Governor Olene Walker to provide young people assistance in transitioning from foster care to adult living through a public/private network of support designed to promote their success. To learn more about the initiative, see Appendix B.

The Children's Action Alliance in Arizona has emphasized the transition out of foster care for older youth, advocating for a range of legislation designed to help foster youth successfully navigate the journey to adulthood. In May 2003, they released a report called *Transitions: Building Better Lives for Youth Leaving Foster Care* that examined critical issues in the lives of those youth aging out of foster care and provided recommendations to improve supports for youth.⁶ (See Appendix B for a link to the report.) Children's Action Alliance launched initiatives to maintain health insurance for foster youth over 18, allow youth to voluntarily remain in foster care

6. Children's Action Alliance. (2003, May). *Transitions: Building Better Lives for Youth Leaving Foster Care*. Phoenix, AZ: Children's Action Alliance. Retrieved June 30, 2005, from www.azchildren.org/caa/_mainpages/Publications/_CAA_Transitions_FosterCare_.pdf.

(connected with a case manager) through young adulthood, and reversed a policy that dismissed the dependency status of those foster youth who were sent to juvenile corrections. This last action provided youth with continued access to the supports and services available through the child welfare system.

Juvenile Justice

Every year there are more than 600,000 admissions to secure juvenile detention facilities in the United States. Though less than one-third of these youth are charged with violent crimes, the political climate around criminal justice issues has led to increasingly punitive policies and systems in recent years.

Among KIDS COUNT grantees working to reverse some of the harshest policies, the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute is attacking the issue from several angles. They have worked to change the state’s plan to build large training schools for adjudicated youth by bringing a coalition of people to testify that smaller facilities better serve young people’s developmental interests and the state’s tacit goals for rehabilitation of young offenders. They have also explored the issue of increasing the age at which youth can be tried as adults to 18.⁷ Further, they have connected the juvenile justice issue to educational access, arguing that suspended and expelled youth, lacking educational supports, get “suspended to the streets” — a training ground for future criminal behavior. For more on the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute’s juvenile justice work, see Appendix B.

Beyond “Disconnected Youth” Issues

Many grantees work on older youth issues that do not fit neatly into any of the four categories highlighted in the 2004 Data Book. These areas include educational equity and college access, out-of-school time programming, workforce development, health and mental health, among others.

7. This issue, to date unsuccessful in North Carolina, will undoubtedly shift in the wake of the federal decision to eliminate the death penalty for individuals under age 18.

Educational Equity. The North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute has taken on the issue of equity between wealthy and poor school districts. In collaboration with the Center for Civil Rights at the University of North Carolina Law School, NCCAI is tracking the Leandro lawsuit. The Leandro case is a class action lawsuit filed by low-income districts (whom were later joined by wealthier districts) for equal educational opportunity and funding. The low-wealth counties charged that the current method of funding created significant differences in resources available across North Carolina’s school districts. The larger, wealthier counties alleged that because their districts are urban and include many disadvantaged children, they must educate large numbers of students who need specialized services. The North Carolina Supreme Court ruled that every child residing in North Carolina has the fundamental constitutional right to an “equal opportunity to receive a sound basic education.” NCCAI is advocating for a comprehensive interpretation and full implementation of Leandro and alignment of funding and other policies based on a 1997 decision and the recent 2004 decision. For a link to learn more on the history of the Leandro case and the work of the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute, see Appendix B.

Expanding College Access and Success. With rising college costs and tightening financial aid budgets, low-to-middle income families are experiencing greater difficulties than ever financing a college education. Young people in the foster care system have particular difficulty navigating the financial aid system and obtaining enough aid to enroll in and complete college. The Children’s Action Alliance in Arizona is working to reverse those barriers by advocating within the state college system on behalf of foster care youth. To date, the universities have established a liaison to work with foster care youth, particularly helping with the admissions process and financial aid.

Out-of-School Time Programming. During the last decade, attention to the out-of-school hours has increased dramatically. With new urgency, leaders at all levels of decision making are calling for safe spaces during the

No experience may be more predictive of future adult difficulty than having been confined in a secure juvenile facility.

— Moving Youth from Risk to Opportunity
Annie E. Casey Foundation

The tenor of the criminal justice system and the way laws are interpreted in our system has made it easier to push kids into the prison system rather than give treatment.

— Jane Zehnder-Merrell
Michigan League for Human Services

hours between 3 P.M. and 6 P.M., extended opportunities for academic learning, and improved supports for families with working parents. KIDS COUNT grantees in Oklahoma, Missouri, Maryland and Pennsylvania, among others, have out-of-school time on their agendas. Advocates for Children and Youth in Maryland achieved early success in its advocacy for state after-school funding, helping to craft legislation that would allocate \$10 million. Maryland's after-school advocacy is part of its youth investment agenda. For more information see Appendix B.

The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy is spearheading the creation of a statewide after-school network whose charge is to raise awareness, frame the issue with policy makers, and promote quality activities among the agencies. Executive Director Anne Roberts said, "We've been trying to blend the different folks who come at the issue — whether it be youth development, education, or child care so that after-school does not become just more school or child care." For more information on the Oklahoma Afterschool Network, see Appendix B. Many KIDS COUNT grantees are working in conjunction with the Mott Foundation's after-school initiative to build similar statewide out-of-school time networks.

Workforce Development. The Michigan League of Human Services is paying close attention to workforce development and youth employment issues.

The League focuses specifically on ensuring workforce opportunities for low-income youth and families, with an emphasis on the implementation of the federal Workforce Investment Act at the local level. Through this work the League has taken on a variety of workforce and living wage issues that affect young people and working families (for more information, see Appendix B). Similarly, the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire has advocated for an increase in the state minimum wage. While significant progress was made in building public will for this policy change in 2005 and a bill passed the House with a substantial majority, the increase was defeated along party lines in the Senate.

[When it comes to age,] the after-school agenda is, at best, about middle school, but mostly it's about elementary school... six years ago we decided to push the education piece of after-school more than the child care angle.

— Joan Benso
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

Health and Mental Health Services. Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children has a strong track record in securing expansions in health care coverage for low-income teens through the SCHIP program. In addition to expanding coverage, they have fought to broaden coverage for specific health issues relevant to adolescents, including drug and alcohol benefits. Pennsylvania's SCHIP program has become a national model. For more information, see Appendix B.

Arizona was among the first states to pass a transitional insurance program for youth aging out of foster care, thanks in part to the concerted efforts of the Children's Action Alliance. For more information, see Appendix B.

Organizational partners in the New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network, a project of the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire, were instrumental in producing a statewide protocol that communities can use to prevent youth suicide. Launched through their Communities That Care initiative, the intervention is being implemented at the community level to make sure that all agencies that come into contact with a particular youth do so in a coordinated fashion with the young person's needs at the center. For more information see Appendix B.

We have a lot of work to do on positioning kids' issues so they are seen as linked to the economy, the workforce. For a lot of folks it's not part of their frame of reference, especially with older youth. The task is framing it so policy makers will care.

— Sharon Rodine
Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

Substance Abuse Prevention and Services. New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network partners have also advocated for strategies to reduce smoking among youth and young adults. The Children's Alliance of New Hampshire recently published an issue brief highlighting the health benefits of increasing the state tobacco tax, and the Legislature has since approved a 28-cent increase. New Hampshire's rates of smoking among high school seniors, young adults and pregnant women are higher than the national averages. A link to the full brief, "Healthier State, Healthier Budget," can be found on Appendix B.

KIDS COUNT grantees and their counterparts in other state advocacy organizations have advanced an impressive range of specific issues facing older youth. From school suspensions and foster care transitions to college access and improved secondary teacher preparation, advocates are concerned with ensuring that youth have the supports and opportunities necessary to be prepared for young adulthood and to avoid risks that can derail positive development. For a snapshot of these issues, see Table 1 below.

Table 1:

Beyond Indicators:
*A Map of Select Youth Advocacy Efforts among KIDS COUNT Grantees**

	After-school	College Access	School Dropout	School Reform	Employment	Foster Care	Health	Juvenile Justice	Pregnancy Prevention
AZ		✓				✓	✓	✓	
GA		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓
IN		✓					✓	✓	✓
MD	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
MI		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
NH	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
MO	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
NC			✓	✓			✓	✓	
OK	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
PA	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
SC				✓			✓		✓
UT			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓

This table is a selection of issues being addressed by grantees as they relate to the “second decade of life.”

Strategies: How Do KIDS COUNT Grantees Advocate on Behalf of Older Youth?

The common denominator among KIDS COUNT grantees is data collection and the creation of yearly indicator reports. But beyond that work, the agencies and their advocacy efforts vary significantly. Grantees are using a range of creative strategies to address older youth issues, including policy research and design, educating and lobbying policy makers, public/private partnerships, engaging youth as advocates, and coalition building. Often, in order to effect change, grantees intentionally use multiple strategies concurrently.

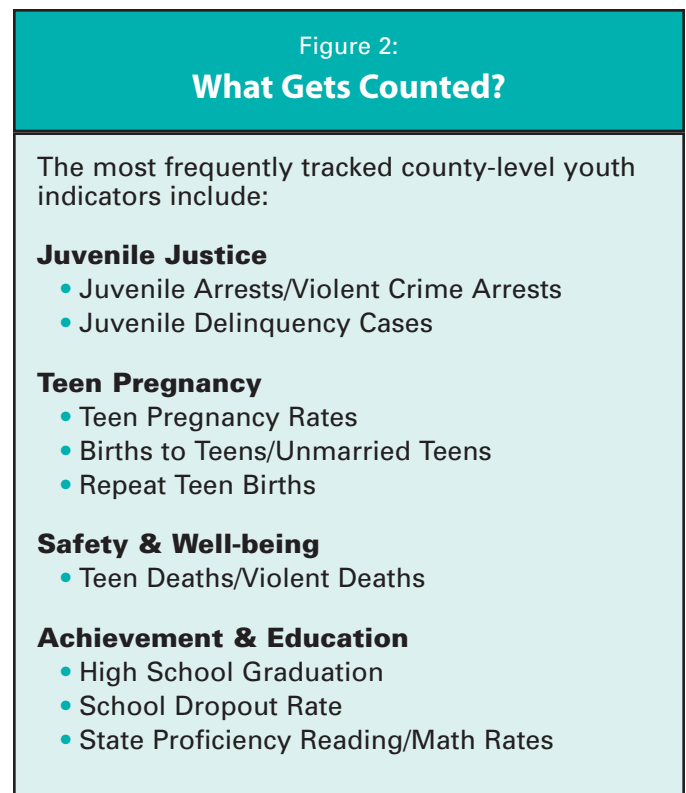
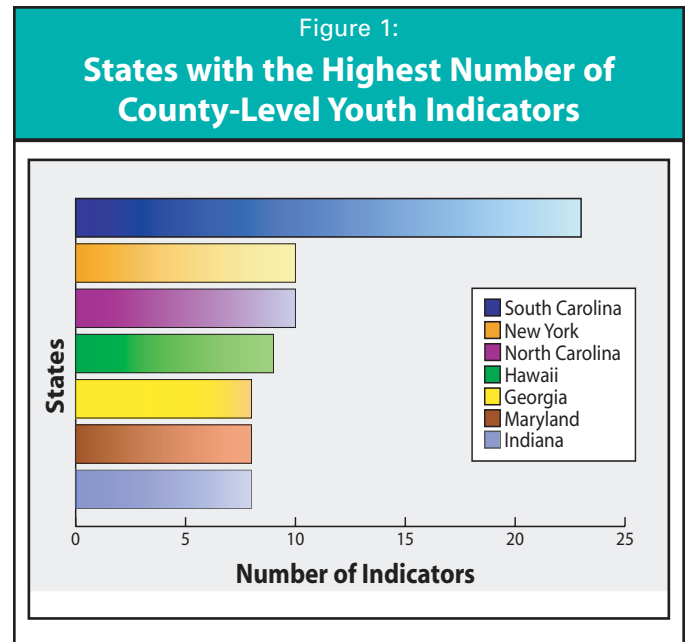
Collecting Indicator Data

All KIDS COUNT grantees track some indicators focused specifically on older youth. For example, youth data related to education, juvenile delinquency, foster care and health are typically included in state KIDS COUNT reports. New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Indiana, Georgia, Hawaii and Maryland are states that appear to track the most county-level indicators related to youth ages 12 and up (see Figure 1).⁸

The majority of indicators focused on older youth speak to deficits or risk behaviors (see Figure 2 for a sample of frequently collected indicators). However, a few states have added one or more indicators that speak to positive development (most frequently this is high school graduation rates). Additionally, many of the newer indicators being collected turn a timely eye toward how well youth are faring at various points along the educational pipeline (see Figure 3 for a sample of indicators that have recently emerged among collected data, page 10).

KIDS COUNT grantees typically collect data on youth through age 18, though a notable minority does track indicators up through ages 21 or even 24. South Carolina’s Budget & Control Board tracks youth data up to age 29, since they consider young adult issues and transitions “part of the full story,” according to Director Baron Holmes (see Spotlight on South Carolina, page 11).

8. We searched all states for indicators tracked for youth aged 12 and up at the county level. While all states have some statewide data on older youth, here we included states that collect county level data on these indicators and have done so over a period of five or more years.



Policy Research and Design

In some cases, KIDS COUNT grantees use their data to delve deeper into a particular issue, which often leads to policy crafting as they become experts in their states. Taking raw data, analyzing it and identifying indicators and benchmarks that can tell a story about the well-being of youth are important components of the work that KIDS COUNT grantees do. Here are some examples of how states have been able to leverage data:

Advocating for New Indicators. The issue of teen pregnancy has been an ongoing concern for the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (OICA). As they reviewed overall outcomes for youth it became evident that, far too often, the focus on data collection and teen birth rates was limited to teens ages 15–17. This failed to present the full scope of the issue, as two-thirds of all births to teens are to older teens, ages 18–19. OICA felt it was critical to present a more complete and accurate picture of the teen birth issue to policy makers and state leaders, thus they encouraged the Casey Foundation to expand

Births to 18- to 19-year-olds comprise over two-thirds of all births to teens in Oklahoma — over 5,000 births each year. This number is roughly equivalent to the total number of students in the freshman classes at Oklahoma State University and the University of Central Oklahoma, combined.

— *Older Teens and Teen Pregnancy Prevention: The Forgotten Age*
Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

their teen birth indicator to ages 15–19 in the National KIDS COUNT Databook. OICA has focused on births to older teens for several years through their CDC-funded HEART of OKC (Healthy, Empowered and Responsible Teens of Oklahoma City) project, which sponsored a statewide issue forum, “Older Teens and Teen Pregnancy Prevention: The Forgotten Age.”

Designing Policy. In some cases, examining and understanding the complex state statutes that affect youth is a critical first step. Grantees in Michigan, Missouri and North Carolina have linked policy research and design in their work on the “age of majority” issue that plagues so many states. State statutes are written over time and by a

diversity of legislators each with their own agenda, resulting in inconsistencies. With different ages for education requirements, criminal prosecution and access to services it is often difficult to know what young people’s rights and responsibilities are. While this issue has been written off by many “as too politically difficult

at the national level, several states are taking it on. In Missouri, the juvenile death penalty issue provided an opportunity for Citizens for Missouri’s Children to convince a bipartisan group of legislators to address inconsistencies in the statute and introduce legislation to raise the age of majority to 18. See Appendix B for a link to Missouri’s legislation on the age of majority.

Synthesizing and Presenting Research. The Indiana Youth Institute (IYI) has built a reputation of neutrality in its presentation of data on a range of issues affecting children and youth. Among the older youth-related issues they have focused on, IYI recently published a juvenile justice Issue Alert demonstrating the rising rates and costs associated with juvenile delinquency. Their county-level research on strategies to reduce juvenile delinquency highlights the common components of what works. Their approach to neutrality in presenting data has earned them respect and recognition among state level policy makers. For a link to the report “Less Crime for Less Money — Solutions for Working with Juvenile Offenders,” see Appendix B.

Figure 3:

Emerging Indicators in the Field

- Teens Not Attending School and Not Working
- High School Seniors with Further Training Plans
- High School Seniors with College Plans
- 18- to 24-year-olds with Less Than 9th Grade Education
- 18- to 24-year-olds with 9th to 12th Grade Education (No Diploma)
- 18- to 24-year-olds High School Graduate or Equivalent
- 18- to 24-year-olds with Some College (No Degree)
- 18- to 24-year-olds with Associate Degree
- 18- to 24-year-olds with Bachelor’s Degree
- 18- to 24-year-olds with Graduate or Professional Degree

Spotlight on South Carolina

“The Young Adult Story is Part of the Children’s Story”

It is hard to quantify exactly how and how much society invests in young adults (defined by the South Carolina Budget and Control Board as individuals between 18 and 29 years old). For most young people, there is a clear need for ongoing support during this period as they navigate their way through becoming financially independent, obtaining their own housing, becoming socially interdependent with other adults, and forming families of their own. Baron Holmes, Director of the South Carolina Budget & Control Board, believes the social investments made during this time are extremely important.

Holmes explains, “People understand this [as a transition period] in their own personal lives, when their own children reach 18 and above. They need supports to continue their education, they will probably ask for a loan to finance a car or a home, they need to stay on your insurance while in school because they don’t have any of their own. You may even find yourself deciding whether to bail them out of debt they’ve racked up due to inexperience or immaturity.”

Yet policies designed to address this developmental period are, at best, ambiguous and spotty. Non-college going young adults in particular have few formal and easily accessible opportunities for educational, vocational and life supports. To begin to address this, Holmes has undertaken an ambitious effort to collect a range of data and use it to attract public attention to policy issues related to financial security, community engagement, family outcomes, health and mental health, and risk behaviors for young adults. At this stage, Baron notes, “Young adults are still carrying the vestiges of childhood and youth. It’s a transition period.”

To view South Carolina’s Young Adult survey, go to www.scyoungadults.org/yac-mainpage.html.

Educating and Lobbying Policy Makers

The AARP is one of the most powerful lobbying groups in the nation. While the political power of their constituency and the depth of their resources dwarfs the capacity of the child advocacy field, there are some powerful examples of child advocates making a difference by educating policy makers and lobbying for, and in some cases with, youth in their states.

Many changes have taken place in state capitols over the past four years — budgets have shrunk, devolution has given states more responsibilities, term limits have kicked in, and new administrations have taken over. It is more important than ever for youth advocates to present clear and articulate messages about the importance of ensuring young people receive a range of necessary supports and opportunities. Some states have active lobbying efforts in place and are initiating legislation or reforms related to older youth:

Educating the Public. Recent legislative actions in the Missouri General Assembly and in some local governments including potential losses of crucial funding for education and health care, have underscored the need for coordinated grassroots action to impact the electoral and legislative discourse on children and youth. A joint effort between Citizens for Missouri’s Children and the Partnership for Children called the #1 Question Campaign, “Is it good for the children?” gives child and youth advocates a common starting point to build dialogue with elected officials and other policy makers. They train advocates across the state to lobby and act as spokespersons for young people in their communities. The common message is that the state should provide an opportunity for youth to develop into successful students, successful workers, good citizens and nurturing parents.

Budget Advocacy. Maryland’s Advocates for Children and Youth was among the first to fight for a line item in the state budget specifically for out-of-school time programming. The Maryland Afterschool Opportunity Act allocated an initial \$10 million for after-school programs in the state. Since then, they have struggled to maintain the funding in the budget. A link to the bill can be found in Appendix B.

Legislative Advocacy. Bringing attention to specific legislation is a difficult process; when that legislation is targeted at disconnected youth it can be even more difficult. However, the Arizona Children’s Action Alliance did help pass homeless youth intervention legislation and Arizona was one of the first states to pass the transitional insurance program for youth aging out of foster care. Though these provisions are in state statute, Beth Rosenberg, Child Welfare Director of CAA, notes that they are continually on the chopping block and therefore they have to actively protect this population each year during budget deliberations.

Public/Private Partnerships

Ensuring youth are ready for adulthood is no longer considered the responsibility of the public sector alone. Many KIDS COUNT grantees are using private sector resources and local expertise to advance an older youth agenda:

Local Involvement. Georgia’s Family Connection Partnership (FCP), is a public/private partnership that operates as an intermediary supporting advocates and leaders at the community level focused on improving outcomes for children in Georgia. Family Connection Partnership works directly with Family Connection, a statewide network of 159 county collaboratives to measure and improve outcomes for children and families. Each county collaborative is a different organization with common goals. Some are nonprofits, some are informal groups, and some were created by legislative action. The collaborative brings people in each county together to look at data, identify the most pressing issues, and use data to set benchmarks and establish strategies to improve outcomes for children and families. The Family Connection Partnership is the link between communities and state agencies. The Partnership often identifies the priorities and needs of communities and links them with state and national resources. In this model, advocacy is out of the hands of

It’s more practical to go through and leverage the systems than to dead lift the legislation by myself. If you open yourself up to that, you won’t get anything else done. One time, I got advice, “Swim with the current, don’t go against the current of disinterest.”

— Baron Holmes
South Carolina Budget & Control Board

the state organization and rooted at the local level where it is often most effective. Family Connection Partnership is the glue that holds all of the county work together and represents a collective voice to state policy makers and elected officials about the priorities and needs of children at the state and local levels.

Business Involvement. Advocates for Children and Youth in Maryland has convened a Business Roundtable on after-school to build interest and support within the private sector. They would like to find ways to help the business community see the link between after-school programming and employment training. As one local business leader said, “The skills we want to see off the bat are being a good citizen, coming to work on time, knowing how to get along with others, and being able to read and calculate. If a candidate has all of those things we can train them for any job.”

Engaging Youth as Advocates

Many KIDS COUNT grantees approach their work from a traditional child advocacy perspective, where advocates must speak for vulnerable populations who cannot speak for themselves (i.e., young children). As these organizations move more into advocating for older youth, strategies will also need to shift. In fact, the Indiana Youth Institute has young people on their Board of Directors even

The skills we want to see off the bat are being a good citizen, coming to work on time, knowing how to get along with others, and being able to read and calculate. If a candidate has all of those things we can train them for any job.

— Local business leader, Maryland

while state law prohibits youth from serving as actual voting members. Other grantees are beginning to find ways to engage young people in advocating on their own behalf.

Governor’s Youth Cabinet. In 2002, Citizens for Missouri’s Children partnered with Missouri 4-H Youth Development to hold “Conversations on Youth Development.” Two thousand youth and adults participated in agenda setting at the local level and then at the state level. The resulting agenda was pursued by Citizens for Missouri’s Children and their youth development network, and some agenda items were even adopted by the then Governor and Legislature. The

Governor created a Youth Cabinet, the first of its kind, which paired 45 youth ages 17–22 with adult cabinet members to develop policy recommendations for each state agency.

Youth Focus Groups. The ten poorest counties in Oklahoma are rural. As one of several states recently profiled in a Rural KIDS COUNT report, the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy conducted a series of focus groups in poor rural communities. Some of the most interesting information came from a group composed entirely of youth, which provided valuable insights into the realities of growing up poor in rural communities.

Coalition Building

One challenge facing the child advocacy field is that child and youth advocates know they are small fish in a big pond. There are many special interests operating in state legislatures. If advocates are truly going to work for the well-being of all children and youth they must not allow themselves to be compartmentalized into narrow age segments, issue areas, regional interests or levels of need. Viewing all children and youth on a developmental continuum has been critical to forming coalitions that lead to comprehensive children’s agendas.

KIDS COUNT grantees in North Carolina, New Hampshire, Maryland, Missouri and Oklahoma all work in coalitions with many organizations to create a common policy agenda for children and youth in their states. In many cases it is this holistic, unified approach that allows the particular needs of older, disconnected youth to remain a priority.

The Covenant with North Carolina’s Children (the Covenant). The North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute was a founding member and the main underwriter of the Covenant, which began in early 1995 out of a concern that children’s issues were not getting a thorough hearing by the state legislature. The Covenant is a coalition of organizations from across the state that has led the state’s efforts to improve education and juvenile justice, among other issues. Since then the Covenant has become a

powerful legislative advocate lobbying for its interests as determined by the 150 civic, professional and advocacy organizations that are its members. For more information see Appendix B.

New Hampshire Children’s Advocacy Network (NH-CAN). The Children’s Alliance of New Hampshire heads up NH CAN, a coalition of over 170 organizations that creates, then advocates for, a statewide Children’s Agenda. NH CAN uses a group agenda-setting process and weekly emails to keep organizations connected with one another’s issues. Over the past six years, the network has successfully come together to advocate for a variety of issues in the areas of health, economic security, education, and child safety and protection. Among these are raising the age of majority to 18, increasing the state minimum wage, improving resources and funding for the state child protective system and increasing physical activity and improving nutritional choices in schools. For more information see Appendix B.

Maryland Children’s Action Network (MD-CAN). Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) operates MD-CAN, a large coalition of child and youth advocacy organizations that maintains issue groups including education, juvenile justice and youth investment, all

focused on the needs of older youth. ACY was the first state advocacy group to adopt comprehensive youth agenda using a ready by 21 framework. Through their coalition work they have made progress on school based mental health and after-school funding initiatives. For more information, see Appendix B.

The work we did to research and produce Missouri’s Youth Development Policy Handbook was instrumental in not only sharing data and budget information about youth with the public, it was equally important in getting a dialogue started between state agencies and youth advocates. We have made great strides in those relationships since then.

— Beth Griffin
Citizens for Missouri’s Children

Missouri Youth Development Network. A few years ago, Citizens for Missouri’s Children saw clear citizen demand for organizing around youth development. The Invest in Missouri’s Children Campaign, a coalition of 150 organizations targeted at securing tobacco settlement dollars for early childhood and youth development, eventually grew into the Youth Development Network. This network provided for the first time a policy research and advocacy partner for youth advocates in the state. One product requested by the network was the Youth Development Policy Handbook, a comprehensive

analysis of the state’s investment in youth programs and services with recommendations for how to improve youth policy in the state. See Appendix B for a link to learn more and to view the Handbook.

The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (OICA) tries to stay flexible in its formation of coalitions, collaborations and partnerships. OICA has effectively used coalitions to advance their work on teen pregnancy prevention and after-school programming. “Too often coalitions end when a grant ends because there is no ‘there’ there. It is like the scene in the *Wizard of Oz* when the curtain is pulled back to find the great and powerful wizard is only an illusion. In Oklahoma we spend a lot of time building coalitions that are real and based on substance and action. The key to their success is all about relationships,” said Sharon Rodine.

Connecting the Dots: What Could an Overarching State Youth Agenda Encompass?

It is easy for children and youth agendas to turn into laundry lists from which one can pick the easiest or most opportunistic issue to tackle. While it is important to have a targeted enough focus to achieve legislative and other victories, it is also important to keep the big picture — a comprehensive youth agenda — in mind.

Many of the highlighted KIDS COUNT grantees have a history of early childhood advocacy efforts. While the supports and opportunities needed by younger and older children are distinct, early childhood and older youth issues are two pieces of a common movement. As one advocate reflects, “It’s the same kids you worked on quality day care for; those same quality experiences need to be there when they are young teenagers.” The idea of early and sustained supports is a cornerstone of a broad agenda, with full coverage across time and a support for a range of outcomes rounding out the core of an overarching agenda.

Many KIDS COUNT grantees have gone through the process of securing attention and support for children in their early childhood years, and are now applying lessons from that experience as they advocate for young people throughout their developmental years. KIDS COUNT grantees are translating those lessons, not only to advance an older youth agenda, but to build coordinated, rather than fragmented, approaches to advocacy for children and youth across the developmental span.

About 40 years ago, the needs of young children were poorly understood by both policy makers and many in the general public. Since that time, and particularly in the last two decades, a concerted effort by researchers, advocates, practitioners and foundations has essentially led to a national consensus that young children need services and supports throughout their waking hours that address the full range of their developmental needs. Several broad lessons from the gains made in the collective understanding of the needs of young children are showing up in the strategies of various KIDS COUNT grantees as they push for supporting the full continuum of young people’s development including:

Capitalizing on Compelling Research. Two areas of research that have helped advance the early childhood agenda have been studies about early brain development and longitudinal research on the long-term positive effects of high-quality early childhood educational programs. Evidence pointing to the importance of brain development during the first three years of life is widely accepted, and according to many advocates, has been critical in securing long-term policy commitments. Recent research suggests another surge in brain development activity during adolescence.

Early childhood advocates have also effectively pointed to the long-term positive effects of early support and high-quality early childhood educational programs. Similarly promising research focusing on what works for supporting positive short-term and long-range outcomes for older youth is growing. The National Research Council’s *Community Programs to Support Youth Development* is a prominent example of the recent growth in knowledge in this area.⁸

Use of Cross-Cutting Coalitions and Recruitment of Unlikely Partners. Supporting the positive development of young children has been championed by a full range of advocates including partners from the private sector. Among advocates, whether their primary focus is in the area of health, education or poverty reduction, there appears to be a coordinated understanding of the other pieces of the puzzle. Additionally, business people are emerging as partners in promoting early supports for young children precisely because of the links between early investments and long-term economic development. While there have been gains in garnering the support of a diverse range of advocates and the business community for youth development and education reform in middle and high schools, these relationships and connections still need further nurturing.

We were founded 12 years ago because there wasn’t a voice for an investment strategy for kids until they failed.

— Joan Benso
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

8. National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2001). *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer A. Gootman, eds. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. Retrieved June 30, 2005, from www.nap.edu/catalog/10022.html.

One key strategy toward advancing an overarching agenda for children and youth is developing a comprehensive framework that demonstrates the connections between and across issues. Several of the KIDS COUNT grantees have been working with the Center for the Study of Social Policy to create a framework for Engaging Youth in Positive and Productive Roles using their tool *Policy Matters: Setting and Measuring Benchmarks for State Policies*.⁹ Beginning with a comprehensive framework helps advocates prioritize issues each year, track accomplishments and identify gaps or areas in need of increased focus. It also helps educate public officials, so they understand that while you may be talking to them about one issue this year, it is part of a bigger agenda and you will come back to them about other related pieces in the future. It also helps hold government accountable, so they can not claim success for moving forward in one area (i.e., increased funding for mentoring) while simultaneously cutting funding for others.

The National Center for Children in Poverty developed a policy framework focused on the nexus between family economic security and child development — a comprehensive agenda and set of tested messages and policy options (*see* Table 2, *next page*). A number of states are calling for a similar overarching agenda and set of messages for youth.

Moving beyond advocating for individual issues within distinct policy areas — education, child welfare and safety, juvenile justice — state KIDS COUNT grantees are increasingly advancing discussions in which individual issues are bundled together to paint a complete picture of the developmental trajectory. Development is connected and additive, and policy discussions and decisions are best advanced with these connections and additive impacts in mind.

9. Center for the Study of Social Policy. (2003, February). *Policy Matters: Setting and Measuring Benchmarks for State Policies, Engaging Youth in Positive and Productive Roles: Recommendations for State Policy*. Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy. Retrieved June 30, 2005, from www.cssp.org/major_initiatives/policy_publications.html.

We created the Fall Forum because various groups would come up and go “rah rah” for their particular children’s issue and then go away. So we created a Forum where advocates for health are in the same voting block with advocates for juvenile justice.

— Anne Roberts
Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

We worked on our Healthy Families [child safety] initiative from the perspective that if we invest across the age span, we’ll have better outcomes for kids.

— Beth Rosenberg
Children’s Action Alliance (AZ)

Five of the KIDS COUNT grantees we interviewed are working to promote comprehensive readiness agendas that inch up the developmental continuum. An older youth agenda can complete the picture and remind policy makers and the public that today’s children and youth need supports from the time they are little to the time they are big in order to meet the demands of school, work and life as they enter adulthood.

Maryland’s Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) has developed a policy framework designed to ensure all youth are ready by age 21 — educationally, economically, civically and with good health and health behaviors. Their framework conveys the critical need to move policies together toward that overarching goal, and adopting it has strengthened their ability to advance conversations among and between various state-level agencies and communicate to legislators priorities that benefit older youth.

ACY has also developed a communications tool called *Who Will be Ready by 21?*, based on the concept of the game *Chutes and Ladders*, to demonstrate the impacts of assets and risks associated with the second decade of life. In the game, poverty during the teen years or lack of health care set youth back several spaces or result in a lost turn, while graduation and job training offer “ladders” that enable youth to leap ahead.

Other KIDS COUNT grantees have adopted similar comprehensive approaches:

- **Agenda Setting Within a Framework.**

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children aligns its specific yearly legislative agenda with its broad framework to advance research-based, positive developmental investment strategies. This approach has helped them to emerge as a clear leader in promoting issues like comprehensive health coverage across the age spectrum and strong community youth development programming and outreach.

- Coordinating Locally to Improve Indicators.** Working through a network of 159 counties, Georgia’s Family Connection Partnership coordinates comprehensive strategies across counties to move youth indicators in a positive direction. The Georgia grantee is working with other key partners toward a statewide comprehensive youth development system to combat the high costs and long-term negative effects of economic and social problems. This approach coordinates planning and resource allocation across systems in each county and develops common outcomes for youth.
- Improving Governmental Coordination.** The Oklahoma Child Advocacy Institute has worked to bring the various state government departments together to align budgets and priorities to improve the chances for children and youth. They have also continued to work through their Fall Forum, a democratic agenda setting process, to get health advocates and juvenile justice experts on the same page, supporting each others’ legislative efforts.
- Seeking Public Input to Create a Comprehensive Agenda.** Crafting the annual Children’s Policy Agenda with advocates from all parts of the state through things like listening sessions, candidate forums and surveys has helped Citizens for Missouri’s Children develop a comprehensive agenda that encompasses a range of issues. They have also worked to involve both the legislature and the Governor’s office in building a youth development agenda.

Next Steps in the Work: What is Next on the Horizon for KIDS COUNT Grantees in Advancing an Agenda for Older Youth?

Several grantees are delving deeper into the recent research on brain development during adolescence. Understanding the successful use of such research in early childhood advocacy provides a base for KIDS COUNT grantees to advance an agenda inclusive of a range of older youth issues. Recently, at the national level, advocates influenced the Supreme Court decision to raise the age at which a person can receive the death penalty (Roper v. Simmons, 2005). Brain research was important in informing the final decision. Voices for Utah Children is hosting a “Breakfast with the Experts” to present the latest on adolescent brain research and its implications for policy development related to older youth.

Others are continuing to advance their priority areas and refine the frameworks they are using to frame the issues affecting older youth. One of the key issues that several grantees are working on, including New Hampshire and North Carolina, is the idea that a sound basic education is a constitutional right. Others are working on strengthening the infrastructure of support for youth development programs across the state, securing funds from the tobacco settlement and other sources to advance this agenda. Still others are continuing to work

Table 2

A Sample Policy Framework from the National Center for Children in Poverty

Employment and Income Support	<i>Policy examples:</i> Earned income tax credits, minimum wage standards, unemployment insurance, child care subsidies, housing subsidies.
Asset Development and Protection	<i>Policy examples:</i> Protections against predatory lending, homeownership assistance, Individual Development Accounts (IDAs), debt management services.
Adult Education and Training	<i>Policy examples:</i> Workforce Investment Act (WIA), need-based grants and loans, treatment of education as a work activity (TANF, CCDF), two-generation family literacy, job training.
Early Care and Learning	<i>Policy examples:</i> Public pre-kindergarten, state supplements for Head Start and Early Head Start, quality improvements, family leave.
Health, Mental Health and Nutrition	<i>Policy examples:</i> Public health insurance, health/mental health parity, teen pregnancy prevention, family planning, state supplements for WIC.
Family Relationship Strengthening	<i>Policy examples:</i> Family support, fatherhood initiatives, support for parenting grandparents, child support enforcement, marriage promotion and divorce prevention.
Prevention, Risk Reduction and Crisis Intervention	<i>Policy examples:</i> Early intervention, family violence prevention and treatment; substance abuse prevention and treatment; mental illness prevention and treatment; child protective services; foster care, adoption, reunification; temporary and emergency assistance.

Source: National Center for Children in Poverty at http://nccp.org/policy_framework.html. Reprinted with permission.

on transitional issues for the most vulnerable youth, including youth who are aging out of systems of care (foster care, juvenile justice).

Additionally, many KIDS COUNT grantees are strengthening their emphasis on the continuum from early childhood to older youth, seeing this as an effective strategy for advancing specific policy pieces while maintaining awareness of the big picture. It is from this big picture foundation that KIDS COUNT grantees are launching their next generation of work.

Appendix A

KIDS COUNT Grantees Interviewed

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Appendix B

Web Links

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Maryland's Advocates for Children and Youth

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

www.acy.org/web_data/Final%20PBIS%20Issue%20Brief.doc

North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute

Juvenile Justice Advisory Group

www.ncga.state.nc.us/Sessions/2005/Bills/House/HTML/H1747v2.html

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Michigan League for Human Services

Middle Start Initiative

www.milhs.org

Voices for Utah Children

Governor's Transition to Adult Living state project

www.utah.gov/governorwalker/newsrels/2003/adult_livingE.doc

Children's Action Alliance in Arizona

Transitions: Building Better Lives for Youth

Leaving Foster Care

www.azchildren.org

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North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute

juvenile justice work

www.ncchild.org/jjdp.htm

North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute

Leandro case

www.ncchild.org/education.htm

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Advocates for Children and Youth in Maryland

www.acy.org/cgi/load.policy.pl?policy_number=6

Oklahoma Afterschool Network

www.okafterschool.org

Pennsylvania SCHIP Office

www.cms.hhs.gov/schip/stateplans/state.asp?state=PA

Michigan League for Human Services

Work and Wages

www.milhs.org

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Children's Action Alliance

www.azchildren.org/caa/_mainpages/Publications/_CAA_Transitions_FosterCare_.pdf

New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network

2004 Legislative Report

www.childrennh.org/Endofsessionreport2004FINAL.htm

New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network partners

The Children's Alliance of New Hampshire issue brief

"Healthier State, Healthier Budget"

www.childrennh.org/TobaccoTaxBrief.php

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Citizens for Missouri's Children

Legislation on the Age of Majority

www.house.state.mo.us/bills041/bills/sb1382.htm

Indiana Youth Institute

Report "Less Crime for Less Money — Solutions for Working with Juvenile Offenders"

www.iyi.org/pdf/issuealert_jo05.pdf

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Maryland's Advocates for Children and Youth,

Maryland After-school Opportunity Act

<http://mlis.state.md.us/1999rs/billfile/HB0006.htm>

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The Covenant with North Carolina's Children

www.nccovenant.org

New Hampshire Children's Advocacy Network

www.childrennh.org/nhcan.php

Maryland Children's Action Network

www.acy.org/cgi/load.policy.pl

Missouri Youth Development Network

Youth Development Policy Handbook

www.mokids.org/youthdevelopment.htm



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