

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

Embargoed until 12:01 a.m. Jan. 12, 2010

Child poverty, abuse and neglect cloud future

Date: 1/12/2010

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 (Hillsdale 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 Hillsdale County fare? Let's take a look at the numbers this time around.

In terms of economics, Hillsdale County has held its own in comparison to other mid-sized counties in the State. Kids Count 2009 shows that, as of 2007, Hillsdale was 48th out of 83 counties in economic security for children under 18. However, nearly half of all Hillsdale County school kids received either free or reduced price school lunches.

For child and adolescent health issues, the data for Hillsdale is better than our peers. We still struggle with this issue of pre-natal care; Hillsdale is 77th out of 82 counties in adequacy of prenatal care, most likely an issue of limited providers in this area and a shortage of physicians who will accept new Medicaid patients. However, Hillsdale showed improvement in the number of low-birth-weight babies and infant mortality (with rates lower than the State in both categories). Additionally, Hillsdale improved beyond our peer counties in the area of birth to teens, and the rate for Hillsdale is nearly that of the State rate. In the last 10 years, Hillsdale's percent of births to teens has fallen 17%, compared to 13.7% for Michigan.

Unfortunately, our worst indicator, and where efforts need to be concentrated the most, is in the area of abuse and neglect. Hillsdale is last, yes last, of all 83 counties in Michigan in the rate of abuse and neglect of children. We rank last in the rate of investigated families and near the bottom (78/83) in confirmed cases of abuse and neglect. This represents nearly 300 children in 2008 who were victims of abuse and neglect in our county. No child should have to be raised in this environment and as a county we need to step up to the plate and figure out how to reduce or eliminate these numbers. This should be at the top of our priority list in 2010.

Our best indicator in the 2009 Kids Count Data is in the area of MEAP. Hillsdale County 4th and 8th grade kids showed a 63% and 47% increase in math proficiency from 2003 to 2008. While these numbers don't appear to translate to the same increase in National Testing, they are significant improvements none the less and we should applaud our schools for this progress.