



Rural Kids Count!

Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

It is important to remember that just because poor kids in rural America are less visible, doesn't mean rural poverty has disappeared.

Dr. William P. O'Hare
The Annie E. Casey Foundation



What is the Rural Kids Count Project?

The ten counties with the highest poverty rates for children in Oklahoma are all rural counties. The impact of poverty on children living in urban areas has been the subject of extensive studies. Though rural children in poverty experience many of the same hardships – hunger, poor housing, limited education options, lack of access to health services — their basic needs have not received the same amount of attention.

The **Rural Kids Count** project is a partnership between the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy and the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, designed to explore the challenges faced by families and children living in poverty in rural areas. The purpose of the project is to conduct research on the circumstances affecting Family Economic Success in the rural communities of Oklahoma and Arkansas. The long-term goal of the project is to help shape programs and policies that will improve the lives of rural poor children and youth and strengthen rural families.

An important part of the project will be gathering information from rural parents and youth about their health, education, economic, and social service needs. Information will be collected through focus group discussions with parents and youth in diverse rural areas of Oklahoma and by collecting census and other data. A report highlighting the issues affecting rural children and youth will be released at the end of the year-long project. The report will summarize program and service priorities that were identified as important for improving the health and educational outcomes of impoverished children and youth. The report will be shared with community and state leaders and policy-makers.

For More Information

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Antique railroad engine in rural Oklahoma



Public library in rural Oklahoma

Although the nation has made considerable progress in the last three decades, about 7 million people in rural America still live in poverty.

- Rural Policy Research Institute

Where It's Happening!

An Oklahoma - Arkansas collaboration was selected to be part of the Strengthening Rural Families initiative by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Working through the Kids Count organizations in each state - the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy and the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families serve as the project sites.

Making It Happen

The Rural Kids Count project is designed to reflect the principles of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's new investment strategy: Neighborhood Transformation and Family Development. This strategy is based on the conviction that more creative responses must be directed to the tough and isolated neighborhoods in which many vulnerable kids and families are trying to survive. Children do well when their families do well, and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods.

Families can be strengthened when they are connected to opportunities and much needed resources. In turn, the chances of their children being healthy and successful are increased.

Critical Connections

Economic Opportunity

- Connecting young people and adults to information and networks
- Increasing their access to affordable goods and services
- Increasing their likelihood for finding good and useful employment

Social Networks

- Connecting families to networks of friends, neighbors, and community organizations
- Connecting families to positive social relationships that provide support

Services and Supports

- Connecting people in need to accessible, affordable, and family-centered help that provides preventive and ongoing support

Special Thanks

We would like to thank the people of Harper, Choctaw, Harmon, and Seminole counties for their wonderful cooperation with this project. Their information and insight provided a genuine picture of rural Oklahoma. Their time and willingness to share their lives as part of this important project is deeply appreciated.

Quick Facts

Urban poverty declined between 1997 and 2000, meanwhile rural poverty remained unchanged.

Two-thirds of the rural poor live in families where at least one adult works full time.

Rural children are more likely to live in poverty than their urban counterparts -- 27% compared to 19.2%.

— Karl Stauber, Economic Review, 2001

