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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

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FORGING A FAIR START

Counties tackle childhood poverty



THE COST OF P

Poverty causes long-term negative health effects for children, economic impact for counties

By **Charlie Ban and Mary Ann Barton**
senior staff writers

By age 3, most children can walk and talk and recognize and name most of the objects they see on a regular basis. They should have the skills to do a scavenger hunt, tracking down what they need to complete their collections to win. It's fun, how life should be at that age. But if they live in poverty, chances are their parents have been doing their own scavenger hunt, trying to make a living to help their children have a better life someday.

This includes making use of human services programs that counties provide. Counties spend \$58 billion annually on human services, but county governments rarely package those programs for children in poverty the way they handle public works, health and land records.

But the resources are there, and counties have an opportunity to reach the youngest residents who stand to benefit the most.

And it makes sense to do it. Children who grow up in poverty are twice as likely to struggle with financial issues later in life, according to a Federal Reserve survey. The Urban Institute has found that growing up poor puts many kids on the path to being less successful in school performance and careers, and they are more likely to have a baby in their teenage years or be incarcerated, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Poverty can set them on a path to interactions with county departments ranging from social services to corrections, all among the most costly services counties provide. Breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty does not just improve people's lives, it affects a county's bottom line.

The scale of the problem

More than 21 percent of children in the United States, or 15 million, live below the federal poverty line. The National Center for Children in Poverty says families need twice the poverty line amount to

adequately meet expenses, which boosts the proportion of children living in poverty to 43 percent. They're largely in rural areas, where economic opportunities for their parents are harder to come by.

These children face long odds on escaping poverty. Polling by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that 70 percent of Americans raised in the bottom fifth of the income scale will remain in the lower 40 percent throughout their lives. Without help, their futures will be limited.

There's no way to measure exactly what they will miss out on in their lifetimes, but the Children's Defense Fund said they will be less likely to graduate from high school, which will have a long-range impact on their professional and economic futures.

Some counties are making efforts to reach out to families with children ages 3 and below, focusing on those first three years because of the rapid pace of brain development during that time. In that period, the human brain will grow to 80 percent of its adult size, and enough neural pathways are being built that children are riding tricycles, climbing, opening jars, drawing circles and empathizing with their peers, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

At the same time, the effects of stress and trauma endemic to poverty can interrupt that brain development when it is so vulnerable and cause lifelong health and behavioral problems.

In 1996, pediatric neurobiologist Harry Chugani told Newsweek's Sharon Begley that early experiences are so powerful, that "they can completely change the way a person turns out."

That's why the youngest children are so vulnerable.

Food insecurity, physical neglect, emotional neglect — all are traumas known as adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs. Although more subtle than physical abuse, sexual abuse or witnessing acts of violence, the constant stress a child experiences as a result can lead to social, emotional and cognitive impairment, causing the adoption of health risk-behaviors.

OVERTY

Imagine a day spent waiting for a healthy, balanced lunch to arrive, never certain when it's coming or if it will. Then imagine not having the ability to go out and pick it up yourself if you're tired of waiting. That's just one stress children in poverty experience daily.

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child found that early childhood trauma has been associated with reduced size of the brain cortex, the part of the brain responsible for complex functions including memory, attention, perceptual awareness, thinking, language and consciousness.

The 2016 National Survey of Children's Health found that at least 38 percent of children in every state has had at least one adverse childhood experience.

What counties can do

Sometimes poverty continues for generations because economic conditions in an area make it extremely difficult to move up. And living in the constraints of the culture becomes learned behavior.

It's not the traditional social problem counties are used to tackling. The closest thing to a Children's Well-Being Department is a school system, but school districts are often independent of counties and many times their boundaries don't overlap, and by the time they reach kindergarten most children are 5 years old.

Many counties participate in the federal Head Start program, which provides parent involvement services, health care, nutrition and early childhood education to families below the federal poverty line. Others have tailored their own programs. Mecklenburg County, N.C. charted a task force to figure out the best way to boost the chances for success for children in poverty when a report showed their children in poverty to be at a disadvantage to those in other urban counties.

Weber County, Utah is matching its children with intergenerational poverty navigators to help them work with mentors to get the most out of services in many departments and move them out of the cycle.

Five counties in Idaho do home visitation through their public

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CHILD BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

9 MONTHS

infants begin to evidence "trial-and-error problem-solving abilities;" beginning of social interactivity; play with caretakers



11 MONTHS

solitary play

12 MONTHS

object permanence, symbolic thinking, single word use, recognizes more language than used



15 MONTHS

imitating complex behaviors, understands objects used for purposes

18-36 MONTHS

beginning of empathy



24 MONTHS

imitation, parallel and symbolic play, two-word phrases, understands relationships between objects

Source: Institute for Human Services for the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program, October 2007

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health departments that starts before birth and lasts until children reach age 3. The department also provides parenting education and will perform nutritional training and assessments.

Early learning to fight poverty

One way to attack poverty is through early-learning programs. The Minnesota Model for Early Education, which provides scholarships to low-income families for prenatal care, childcare and preschool education, is aimed at reducing and preventing the achievement gap.

"If we prevent the achievement gap, we have a good chance of eliminating or reducing intergenerational poverty," said Art Rolnick, one of the architects of the program who previously served as a senior vice president and director of research at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

A 1996 Perry Preschool study examined cognitive and social outcomes and found a return to society that could be as high as \$16 for every tax dollar spent. That prompted Minnesota business leaders to create the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation. The foundation raised \$20 million to fund an early learning demonstration model, which included awarding scholarships to low-income families for prenatal care, childcare and preschool. From 2008 to 2011, 449 Ramsey County families were recruited to see if they could duplicate the Perry Preschool findings. Although it's too soon to have hard data on the outcomes for the 2008-2011 program, Rolnick said results show there are "significant savings right away" because fewer students are being held back a grade or being enrolled in special education classes.

"Preliminary results are very suggestive that we will get the same results as the Perry Preschool study," he said.

A quality rating system, dubbed Parent Aware, ranked the preschools in the area. Schools that scored three or four stars

received scholarship money awarded to the area families. "When they [parents] get the scholarship, they can't believe someone cared so much about their child," Rolnick said. "This is not simply Head Start. We empower parents, not programs." With the help of a paid parent mentor, they chose programs that worked best for the child and family. The scholarships cover five days a week, eight hours a day, year-round programs, which also helps parents go back to school and hold down jobs, he noted.

"Their income is going up and they feel better about themselves, it's a holistic approach." In December 2011, the federal government awarded Minnesota a "Race to the Top" grant of \$45 million to expand the program. The state kicked in \$50 million for scholarships as well.

Fast forward to today. "We're now up to 2,000 programs and licensed family providers," Rolnick said. Minnesota now invests \$70 million in scholarships, covering roughly 20 percent of eligible children. Proponents are hoping to increase that to \$400 million.

**Rolnick****"A better investment than Amazon headquarters"**

"These kids are the future workforce," Rolnick pointed out. "Scholarships also help the local economy, when preschools beef up to meet the demand. It's current jobs as well as future jobs."

Investing in early childhood programs is investing in your economy, Rolnick said. "I don't care how much money you give to the automobile industry, if kids don't graduate from high school, it's going to be a third-world economy."

"This is a better investment than Amazon headquarters," he said. "Many of these corporate welfare deals don't pan out, and they don't necessarily hire people in your community. Investing in our high-return children is a much better return than Amazon headquarters."

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Making Counties the Best Places for Babies to Grow

Dr. Joan Lombardi is a global leader on early childhood issues. She currently serves as senior advisor to the Bernard van Leer Foundation on global child development strategies and as an advisor to a range of foundations on domestic early childhood issues.

She has witnessed an increase in community-wide early childhood initiatives and believes that leadership at the county and city level can help knit services together to assure access to quality services and support for all families.

What do you think counties need to have in place to ensure healthy infants and toddlers, supported families, and quality childcare and early learning?

If we turn to those communities that are moving toward putting

these supports in place, we see a pattern in their process. First, leadership matters, so in other words it makes a big difference if the county executive or other prominent member in the community such as someone from the business sector steps forward to lead a process to improve conditions and outcomes for young children and families.

Once you have an engaged cross-sector group in a community, they often start by discussing what specific outcomes they want for children and then go on to map assets and issues facing families. This often leads to a specific plan to improve policies in core areas — health, family support and child care.

What should counties consider if they wish to impact health, family support and access to affordable, quality childcare?

First, we must assure that all families have access to quality health care — that is where it all begins for pregnant women and babies. What many communities are trying to do is put in place a set of connections and supports that can link families to core services and connect them to the social networks of support so critical to all of us. Breaking the sense of isolation for families, the sense that they have to go it alone all the time, is essential, particularly for families with young children. And of course, one of the biggest issues families face is quality child care. Communities and states are trying to find additional revenue to invest in the development of hubs of support for existing child care providers as well as building more supply. A community is just not viable anymore without an adequate child care system.

What are some of the challenges communities face implementing policies and practices that ensure support for early childhood development?

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Joan Lombardi, PhD

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Without a doubt, the biggest issue is finding additional resources for improving and expanding services, especially at a time when resources may be tightening at the federal level. Communities around the country are exploring new revenue sources, including local levies particularly targeted to helping families with young children. For example, King County, Washington initiated a county-wide levy, Best Starts for Kids, to invest in early intervention and prevention for children and families. King County voters approved the initiative in November 2015, resulting in a six-year levy, which raises about \$65 million per year.

More and more policymakers across the political spectrum are realizing that money spent early in life pays off later in better health, learning and behavior.

Along with resources, counties are challenged to work across sectors to address the holistic needs of children. They need to promote better partnerships between pediatricians and child care providers, hospitals and other community services, and early childhood teachers and elementary teachers. This is the only way we can meet the comprehensive needs of children and assure continuity so important to assuring impacts.

Communities often struggle to collect data. What recommendations do you have for counties that want to implement strategies and track progress, but aren't sure where to start?

Developing a “data dashboard” or key facts about the children and families in the community is a core building block of community efforts to understand how to improve the wellbeing of children. As you know, one of the challenges is that there is limited population-level data on young children between the time they are born and when they enter school. This makes it difficult to know what issues children are facing — particularly children under 3 — and what services families need. Every community should put together a cross-sector group, particularly across health and education, to pull together all the facts they have and to plan to develop more integrated data systems.

Are there data indicators or metrics counties should track?


They need data on the status of prenatal care and birth; if children are developmentally on track throughout the early years; if families have the supports they need; the demographics of the

community by age of child, and those are just the basics. Data should be disaggregated by income and ethnic characteristics, so we can uncover disparities and work toward more equity.

Are there considerations for rural counties you might suggest?

We need to pay much more attention to the needs of rural areas in the country. I would start with the local public school, which is often such an important resource and gathering place for children and families in rural areas. To address 0-3, if we start with the families in the school and connect with child care providers and health providers in the surrounding community, you begin to build a hub of support. And again, don't assume you know what is needed, go out and ask the families, it is their community.

What do you think are the opportunities counties have in the coming years to impact early childhood development?

In so many ways this is up to each one of us. To those working in counties, you have the opportunity to look closer at the status of young children and families in your communities, to take all the evidence that has piled up in the past several years and put it to work, to develop a plan. In the early days of the country, people used to talk about coming together to help “build the barn.” It is that same spirit that we have to capture to revitalize the country. But it will take everyone coming together, from the federal and state level as well as from the community level, from the local business person to the church elder, from the librarian to the county commissioner, supervisor or county executive. We know what to do, we just have to pick up the pace, increase investments and create a quilt of support for young children and families county by county. 

*Joan Lombardi Ph.D. served in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as the first deputy assistant secretary for early childhood development (2009–2011) and as the deputy assistant secretary for policy and external affairs in HHS's Administration for Children and Families and the first commissioner of the Child Care Bureau (1993–1998). She is the author of numerous publications including *Time to Care: Redesigning Child Care to Promote Education, Support Families and Build Communities* and co-author of *Beacon of Hope: The Promise of Early Head Start for America's Youngest Children*.*

ZEROING IN ON ZERO-TO-THREE

By Roy Charles Brooks
NACo president
commissioner, Tarrant County, Texas

For more than 30 years, I have worked in my community as a volunteer, city official and a county commissioner. I have made it my life's work to improve Tarrant County residents' health and well-being, and I know this is a value and commitment shared by county elected officials in their communities across this country. Despite all of our efforts, people continue to struggle and generations of families cycle through poverty, seeing little way out. Although counties put people first, poverty can push them to the end of the line. Sadly, it is children who are impacted more than any other age group.

Research shows that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including poverty, can impact infants for the rest of their lives. Early trauma can lead to a life of poverty, violence, health issues and lack of the developmental skills necessary for success in school and in life.

When I became president of NACo last year, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to focus on multi-generational poverty, with an emphasis on children ages 0 to 3. This is where I believe counties can make the most difference and where we can move the needle on addressing poverty in the United States. We're calling it "Serving the Underserved" with an intent to raise awareness about the county role in addressing poverty, and advocating for federal policies and support to provide the resources and programs needed to help those most in need.



As the ultimate safety net, county investment in early childhood development does not just help children who are suffering now, but it will also lower future costs in county health, child welfare, safety and justice and other systems. But we know we cannot do it alone. Counties need partnerships with the public, private and non-profit sectors at the federal, state and local levels to remove barriers, build opportunities and address the many faces of poverty in America.

Poverty is not just a suburban, urban or rural problem. One in five children lives in poverty in a majority of our counties.

You'll find even in our most affluent areas there are pockets of poverty where children's basic needs are not being met.

Children and their families need to live in safe, stable and nurturing communities with access to healthcare, quality childcare and family support. Childhood experiences, both positive and negative, have a tremendous impact on the future health, well-being and success of young people. We must do everything we can to get children on the path to success. By providing the services and support that families need, all children can break the cycle of poverty and reach their full potential.

While a year is not a long time, NACo is committed to this initiative long-term. NACo is building awareness and providing tools to help counties create thriving communities which support all families. This presidential initiative won't be able to solve the problem, but it's a start. It's going to take all of us, but I know we can make a difference – and we must, our children are counting on us! 🇺🇸



FOCUSING ON BETTER BEGINNINGS

Students at Sand Gap Elementary School in Jackson County, Ky., develop reading skills. Photo courtesy of Berea College

By Maeghan Gilmore
program director

Counties provide a myriad of services that affect early childhood development. The roles of counties may vary because of state or local statutory requirements and structural differences in service delivery, but all counties impact children and families in ways that span geographic and demographic differences.

County responsibilities and opportunities related to early childhood development often fall into the following areas:

- **Early development stage (0-3) services:** Many counties have responsibility for services and support delivered before children enter school. This provides a limited window to provide early learning, nutrition and other forms of infant and toddler care services to support early development.

- **Family and community support:** All counties have some level of responsibility for programs and services that affect families and the community. Recognizing that family and the surrounding community has a significant impact on a child's development can help drive county investment in economic development, job

training, supplemental child care and other services that help strengthen a child's environment and family unit.

- **County-administered public education system:** In limited cases, counties administer the public-school system. These counties have the opportunity to engage children in services and supports through the public-school system, including pre-K, supplemental nutrition programs, after-school programs and other early learning programs. Counties that run their public-school systems can maintain the continuity of supports through the early development stage (0-3) and throughout adolescence with direct services and programs.

The featured jurisdictions here show that counties are focusing on children and families. Poverty and family opportunity are common themes in many counties that initiate early childhood development efforts. The featured counties, and many others, leverage existing resources and implement innovative programs and services to make upstream investments in the well-being and opportunity for children and families.

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The opportunity for change

Hoping to ensure good outcomes for children by kindergarten, address intergenerational poverty, create environments for positive role models and understanding how brain development in early childhood is critical, Dane County, Wis. established Early Childhood Initiative sites. The sites were located in high-risk neighborhoods to provide an array of services for pregnant women or families with a child or children under 1-year old. The county saw an opportunity to build upon an established home visiting program and its role in administering the Birth to 3 Program, a partially-funded state program.

Dane County's model

To serve more families and young children, the county established the Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) sites and followed up with an intensive Early Childhood Zones (ECZ) program that provides a home visitation program along with prenatal and kindergarten services, and acts as a hub around which other services are accessed and provided including housing, employment and training. These sites are also associated with the Joining Forces for Families initiative that brings together numerous community stakeholders.

These efforts have also provided an opportunity in one zone to enhance services at a single location shared by service providers within the neighborhood. Additionally, the county is implementing neighborhood navigators with assistance from a community foundation, to help community members access services and supports. Mental health services have also been enhanced in the ECZs for children and families.

Dane County has invested over \$1.5 million in the ECI and ECZ efforts. The county has also been successful in blending funding from federal, state, philanthropy and other community partners to expand services, and reach more children and families.

Though school districts are engaged, and a new community school pilot implemented

in two ECZs has been initiated, there is inadequate funding to deepen engagement. The county continues to identify new partnerships and there is some promise to new opportunities with the faith community and businesses.

Other Dane County programs

■ **Birth to 3** — An early intervention program for infants and toddlers who have developmental delays and disabilities, and their families. Dane County supports parents as they work toward the developmental outcomes parents want for their children. This program is a state program administered by counties in Wisconsin.

■ **Joining Forces for Families** — This is a county-run initiative that brings together core teams comprising law enforcement and school personnel, a public health nurse, county social worker, and a community support specialist to support safer and healthier places to live. The community-based support team engages

families to identify needed services and links them to services that maintain family stability and avoid costly system interventions.

■ **Nurse Family Partnerships** — Though this program has a narrow eligibility window, it provides home visitation services during pregnancy until the child is 2 years old. Referrals are often made for families in the ECI or ECZ programs to enhance access to services.

■ **Born Learning** — This partnership between Dane County and United Way provides educational resources to families, caregivers, community leaders and policymakers. Educational materials provide insight into childhood development and how to use “everyday moments” to help children start school ready to succeed.

The future of early childhood development in Dane County

The county has partnered with the University of Wisconsin to collect and analyze data, and will establish performance standards and agreed upon developmental



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milestones. They will also identify indicators that impact families such as stable housing and employment. As with many data-driven approaches, the county has identified challenges in collecting and utilizing data for decision-making and performance.

Privacy issues, engagement with the appropriate community stakeholders, data-sharing agreements and a data platform are all pieces critical in setting up data processes yet pose challenges in moving forward. The county understands that incorporating this into their work will provide opportunities to demonstrate models as best practices along with decision – making on where resources may be best allocated.

Dane County has made strides in enhancing their early childhood development efforts, they continue to grapple with enough resources to scale these efforts, there continues to be a chronic housing shortage and a large undocumented population. However, they continue to move toward their goals of breaking the cycle of poverty and transitioning from data collection to evaluation. They are dedicated to ensuring children are entering school ready to learn and demonstrating family economic stability has improved.

Quick tips for other counties

- Communities looking for collective impact may approach other government and private agencies engaged in early childhood services to see how to best put families at the center of services through coordinated efforts.
- Look for evidence-based models for delivering services to families.
- Look for obvious ways to bring together professionals from various agencies to support each other in practice and to explore best practice theories and innovations. Dane County and partners have a quarterly Community of Practice for all home visitors.

Berea College Appalachia, Kentucky

Berea College, located 35 miles south of Lexington, Ky., is home to Partners for Education (Partners) an organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes throughout Appalachia. As part of that work, Partners for Education advises 10 counties on their efforts in the Promise Neighborhood and Promise Zone programs. While Partners uses a cradle-to-career model, its early childhood education work focuses on ensuring that all children enter kindergarten ready to learn.

To achieve this result, Partners engages children and fami-

lies to: 1) increase participation in Head Start and early Head Start; 2) strengthen families and reduce home stress; and 3) improve early childhood education methods. The 10 counties participating in the initiative are: Bell, Clay, Hardin, Jackson, Knox, Leslie, Letcher, Owsley, Perry and Whitley.

The 10-county area faces many challenges including high rates of unemployment, teenage pregnancy and homelessness among the 0–5 age group and among parents under age 24 who have young children. Family instability is further increased by substance abuse which has led to grandparents' raising young children. Participation in two federal programs, the U.S. Department of Education Promise Neighborhoods and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Promise Zones provided a platform to focus on kindergarten readiness and engage families and community stakeholders.

Although the region struggles with a tax base not adequate to support programs, this rural region has the capacity to develop strategies and find partners willing to work together to utilize resources appropriately. The multi-county effort also has strong engagement from community partners, the faith community, the business sector and philanthropy.

Multi-county initiative

The multi-county effort includes activities aimed at enhancing cradle-to-career opportunities. The early childhood education focus has been on supporting children to become kindergarten ready. Partners uses a variety of programs and activities to meet this need. In some areas, it works to enhance teacher effectiveness by funding the technology needed to provide supportive supervision, while in other areas the focus is on bringing services to the family. That can mean working with the utility company to insert childhood development messages in monthly billing statements, or using the Vroom program also to get technology into the hands of parents and families. In Clay County, Partners was able to use private dollars to fund two Readiness Buses, “Sunny” and “Rosie,” which provide age-appropriate learning opportunities for children while also assisting with the needs of parents.

A typical readiness bus visit will include guided reading for the child and the chance for the parent to work on obtaining a GED or receiving career counseling. The effort aims to help two generations: grandparents raising children and high-school students with children.

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Kentucky also has early childhood councils in each county. This provides partnership opportunities across various sectors to assess current efforts and to reach early childcare providers and social service agencies.

Home visiting

Home visiting is a key component of engaging children and their families in the Partners for Education model and the foundation of the cradle to career pipeline. A key partner in this work is Save the Children, a national nonprofit focused on healthy children. Early Steps to School Success (ESSS), Save the Children's home visiting program, serves the "neediest and the

youngest" members of the community.

Partners for Education helped scale up this work to serve more families and created a program to transition those students from the home environment into kindergarten. Each early childhood specialist had a caseload of children who they transitioned from Save the Children's home visiting program to kindergarten by providing in-class instruction and home visits.

The program ensured the children exiting ESSS sustained the gains in language development made during the first three years and, as a result, were able to increase readiness in other developmental domains.

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FEDERAL FUNDING FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Counties spent **\$130 billion** in federal funding between 2013-2015 on early childhood development.

Here's a breakdown on some of the programs that the funding comes from:

\$85 BILLION
Medicaid

\$17 BILLION
Temporary Assistance
for Needy Families (TANF)

\$6.5 BILLION
Title IV-E Foster program

\$5 BILLION
Supplemental Nutrition
Assistance Program (SNAP)

\$3.6 BILLION
Child Care and Development
Block Grant

\$2.7 BILLION
Special Supplemental
Nutrition Program for Women,
Infants and Children (WIC)

\$120 MILLION
Maternal, Infant and Early
Childhood Home Visiting
Program

Source: NACo Counties Futures Lab

Social Services Grants

Bedrock for Many Counties

The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1981 (P.L. 97-35) and is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families. The program is an entitlement to states and falls into the category of "non-defense mandatory spending." SSBG, a flexible funding source that can be used for nearly 30 different types of services, allows states and local jurisdictions to tailor social service programming to their populations' needs. The flexibility of SSBG is crucial to its recipients as it helps fill the gaps in and between other human services programs receiving insufficient federal funding.

Each year, the federal government allocates funds to states to support social services for vulnerable children, adults and families through SSBG. Because of SSBG, states and local jurisdictions are able to provide essential services that help achieve a number of goals: to reduce dependency and promote self-sufficiency; protect children and adults from neglect, abuse and exploitation; and help individuals who are unable to take care of themselves.

Although the focus on Capitol Hill is the total dollar amount of SSBG, it is important to acknowledge the impact SSBG has on individuals across the country. This report brings a more personal perspective to SSBG as offers anecdotes on the vital role the block grant has played in helping individuals overcome obstacles in their lives.

CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

Across the country, millions of children receive child welfare services each year, improving their health and well-being. SSBG funding provides critical front-end child welfare services that oth-

Status SSBG

Since the beginning of the 115th Congress, SSBG's future remained uncertain as the program continued to be targeted for further cuts or even elimination. Although SSBG has champions on both sides of the aisle, the current unpredictability around the federal budget and efforts to reduce spending threatens the future of the block grant. Without this block grant, counties would be hard pressed to replace lost SSBG funds that are critical to providing services to the most vulnerable populations including young children.

er funding streams cannot. In FY 2014, 49 states reported using \$47 million in SSBG expenditures for child welfare services. The absence of SSBG funding to identify risks, provide immediate support and refer children and their families to services, can put children at risk of out-of-home placement or delay reunification.

In California, child welfare services played a critical role in helping Patricia reunite with her children. Because of struggles with substance abuse, Patricia gave up her first seven children to adoption. She was sober when her next two children were born, but her third child tested positive for drug exposure. As a result, all three children were taken into custody and placed into foster homes.

With nowhere to turn, Patricia visited Los Angeles County's Department of Children and Families Services (DCFS). DCFS referred her to a large non-profit organization that connected her with the substance abuse treatment and other family-focused services that Patricia needed.

Both Patricia and her husband started going to therapy and attending parenting courses. They learned about child development, anger management and relapse prevention. Additionally, a community advocate went with Patricia to court appointments, helping her understand the ins and outs of dependency court and what it would take to get her children back. After three years, and the help of child welfare services, Patricia's children could return home.

With the help of SSBG funding, Los Angeles County's DCFS and the non-profit organization were able to provide services to Patricia that allowed her to overcome her substance abuse and be reunited with her children. In Los Angeles County, SSBG funding has made it possible for vulnerable families like Patricia's to receive these services and start a new future.

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES


Child protective services (CPS) are intended to protect and safeguard children who face abuse, neglect and exploitation. SSBG is a critical federal funding source for vulnerable children who are unable to protect their own interests. In FY 2014, 39 states reported spending a total of \$329 million of SSBG funds for CPS.

In Alabama, CPS became involved with 4-year-old Chelsea after her neighbors filed a neglect report about an unsupervised child in the street. When local authorities returned Chelsea to her home, the officer noticed deplorable living conditions. After CPS' initial visit and assessment, it determined that the three children living in the home did not meet their proper developmental milestones — they were neither toilet trained nor verbal. Because of severe neglect, the children were removed from their home and connected to a mental health agency for psychological diagnosis and evaluations.

Each child's separate needs were addressed: one sibling was

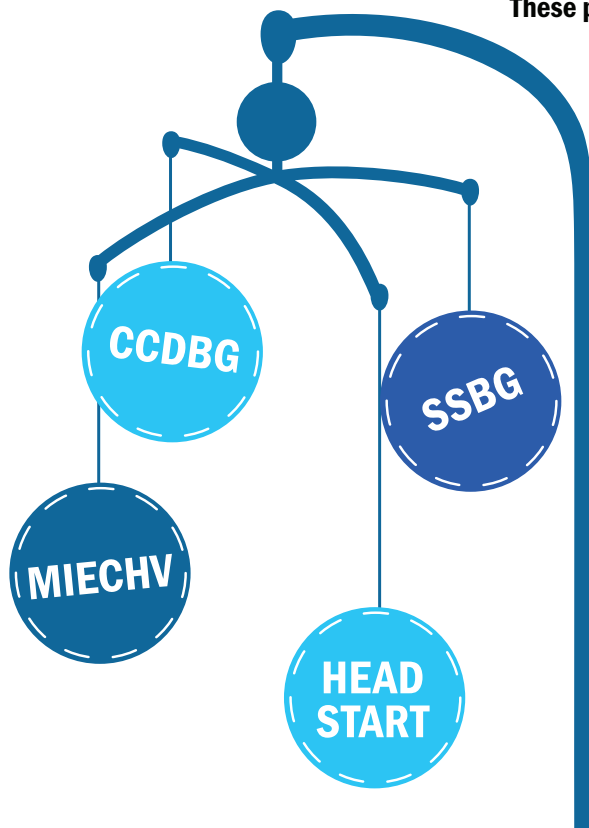
referred to the local Head Start, the second sibling received residential care and the last sibling received inpatient treatment. Within a year's time, each child thrived in their respective treatments and could return home.

In addition to these health services, CPS also made sure the family received outpatient services from the community mental health agency. The agency taught the parents about each child's diagnosis and how to reinforce skills the children were taught in their treatment. SSBG funding can be used for a variety of critical services, including those Chelsea's family used.

In Alabama, CPS is one of the main beneficiaries of SSBG funding. In 2014, the state used \$9 million, or about 40 percent, of its SSBG funds for CPS. Although there are other national funding sources for CPS, including the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), SSBG funding for CPS far outpaces CAPTA funding. In fact, in 2014, Alabama used \$18 million of SSBG funds, while receiving only \$389,796 from CAPTA. 

THE FEDERAL ORBIT

Most of these programs are operated through the Department of Health and Human Services and many are accessible to local governments. These programs target a wide variety of individuals and include:



The Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is the primary source of federal funding for child care subsidies for low-income families and works to improve child care quality for all children.

The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) is a flexible funding source that supports services directed towards achieving economic self-sufficiency and preventing or remedying neglect, abuse or exploitation of children and adults, and is a major funder for state and local child abuse prevention services and child protective services.

The Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program is a federal and state partnership supporting family and child home visiting programs to enhance early childhood development.


The Head Start and Early Head Start Program provides comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families that help foster stable family relationships and enhance children's physical and emotional well-being.

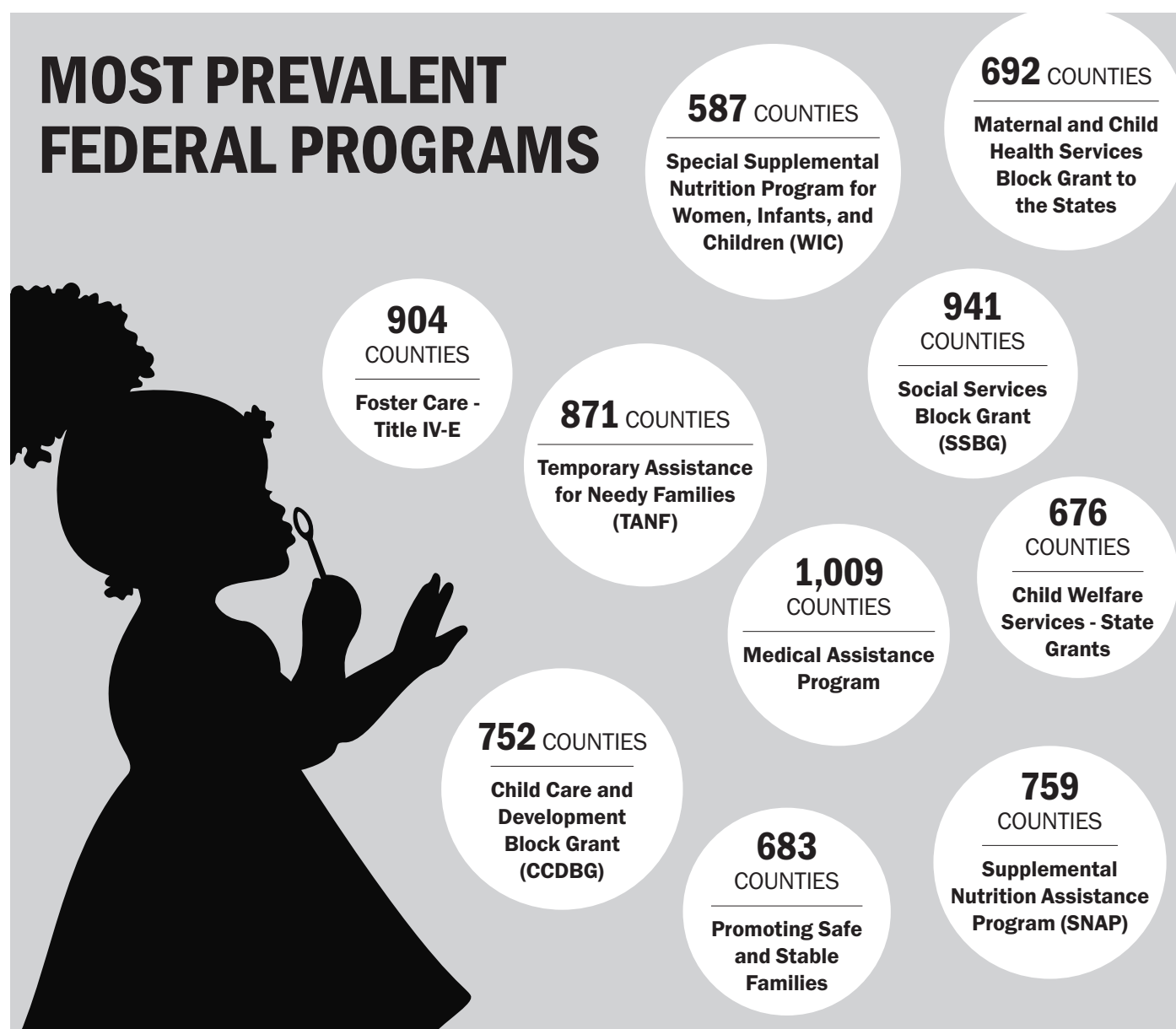
OPPOSING BILLS PUT KEY PROGRAM AT RISK

The Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, a federal and state partnership supporting family and child home-visiting programs to enhance early childhood development expired Sept. 30. Congressional lawmakers have struggled to reach a consensus on key program provisions, but are expected to continue debate during committee markups.

Currently, there are two bills circulating on Capitol Hill that would reauthorize the program for five years. Though the bills

share certain provisions, the Senate bill does not contain a provision included in the House bill that would implement a state match. This would require states to match the grant dollar for dollar to remain eligible for program funding. The matching funds requirement in the House bill could be risky for tribal communities and many other states that are already under tight budgetary restraints.

Looking forward, it seems likely that reauthorization will be revisited once the Continuing Resolution expires in December. 



Standing by: Bills to prop up childcare, early learning, reduce childhood poverty

By Valerie Brankovic
legislative assistant

Sens. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Bob Casey (D-Pa.), and Reps. Bobby Scott (D-Va.) and Jared Polis (D-Colo.) recently introduced legislation that would broaden working families' access to high-quality, affordable childcare and early learning programs if enacted.

The Childcare for Working Families Act, introduced Sept. 14, would amend the Childcare and Development Block Grant Act of 1990 to address three overarching issues in the nation's childcare system: affordability; availability for disabled children and those in underserved areas; and economic supports for childcare workers.

To address these issues, the Childcare for Working Families Act would provide funding incentives to states to establish high-quality preschool programs for low-income children and increase children's eligibility for those programs, create a new federal-state partnership to provide children with quality care from birth through age 13, and increase childcare workers' compensation and professional development opportunities. The legislation would also increase funding for early childhood education programs.

The political outlook for the bill remains unclear. However, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have signaled interest in addressing rising childcare costs.

According to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, childcare costs have increased by more than 25 percent over the past

decade. In 33 states and the District of Columbia, the cost of infant care is more than the average cost of in-state college tuition at public schools.

NACo policy supports children's access to affordable and high-quality childcare services and early learning programs, and will continue to track this legislation in Congress.


Reduce childhood poverty

On July 24, Reps. Danny Davis (D-Ill.), Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), Lucile Roybal-Allard (D-Calif.), and Gerald Connolly (D-Va.) reintroduced legislation in the House of Representatives that would significantly reduce childhood poverty over the next decade if enacted. H.R. 3381, the Child Poverty Reduction Act of 2017, aims to coordinate evidence-based policies across the federal, state

and local levels to improve the well-being of children in low-income families. It would also create a federal task force to identify a national plan to address the country's high child poverty rate.

Sens. Bob Casey (D-Penn.), Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) and Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.) introduced a similar bill in the Senate on July 25, S. 1630, titled the Child Poverty Reduction Act of 2017.

Research shows that children growing up in poverty exhibit poorer behavioral and emotional health outcomes compared to their more affluent peers, and are less likely to succeed academically and economically later in life.

Data show that one in three black and Latino children in the United States live in poverty and one in five American children overall live in poverty. 





SPOTLIGHT ON

Head Start and Early Head Start Pioneers in Early Childhood Development

By Eryn Hurley
associate legislative director
and Valerie Brankovic
legislative assistant

One of the nation's most enduring early childhood programs for low-income families is Head Start, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2015. First established as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, Head Start and its program for pregnant women and infants, Early Head Start, have provided comprehensive early child care services for more than 34 million low-income children, with the goal of ensuring their overall developmental progress and preparedness for school.


The program operates under the Department of Health and Human Services and is delivered through 1,700 agencies in local communities. Though Head Start's program administration differs from county-to-county, each program focuses on four key components for children's developmental progress: education, social services, health care and parental involvement.

Some of the specific services offered through Head Start include children's immunizations; medical, dental and mental health checkups; outreach activities to families that help determine what their needs are; and opportunities for parents to take a hands-on role in their child's classroom. Head Start also works with low-income families to eliminate barriers to children's developmental progress and connects families to housing opportunities, job training and counseling services.

Early Head Start focuses on pregnant women, infants and toddlers up to age three, and provides services such as home visiting, transportation to daycare and assistance for parents to quit smoking, among other services.

Both programs consistently show positive results and, as a result, carry strong bipartisan support from Congress and the White House. According to data from 2016, Head Start was responsible for ensuring continuous health coverage for over 1 million children and helped identify nearly 134,000 children with special needs. Head Start programs are also shown to help children improve their vocabulary and avoid being held back a grade in school.

Since FY2008, Head Start and Early Head Start have generally received annual funding increases and federal support for program administration and research. Head Start programs are also shown to help children improve their vocabulary and avoid being held back a grade in school. However, going into FY2018, Congress will soon need to address the issue of sequestration, which could result in automatic budget cuts and service delays to the program. The Head Start community is also preparing for reauthorization of the program, which is expected to occur in FY2018 or FY2019.

NACo strongly supports two-generation programs like Head Start and Early Head Start that serve as proven pathways out of poverty for children and their parents. 

Since FY2008, Head Start and Early Head Start have generally received annual funding increases.

Mecklenburg County, N.C. maps path out of poverty

A 2013 study by researchers at Harvard University and UC Berkeley ranked the Charlotte-Mecklenburg County area 50th out of 50 cities for economic mobility. The probability that a child born into the bottom fifth of incomes in Mecklenburg County will rise to the top fifth in his or her lifetime is just 4.4 percent, the study said. Word of the study coincided with a speech that then-Mecklenburg County Chair Trevor Fuller was to give on the state of the county.

County News spoke with Fuller about how the study inspired him to take action.



Fuller

When did you hear about the study?

What was your reaction?

Fuller: I had just been elected the chair of the county commission a short time before that and I was preparing my state of the county address and I think in October of 2013 is when the study came out, but it didn't really hit us immediately. And so, after we started to hear about it, I said 'Wait a minute, I can't do this speech without talking about this.'

The speech I was planning to give was going to be extolling all the wonderful prosperity of Mecklenburg County, all over the seven municipalities, urban and rural settings. And I did do that, in the speech, I did do that, but I said, 'I can't finish this speech, without talking about this.' And so, I called for creating a task force, and it took us awhile to get the right mix of folks together and all the other things it takes to put a task force together.

Did the study surprise you?

Fuller: Well, I don't think so, if I'm honest. Thinking back to things that I'd seen and heard over the years. We kind of knew in the back of our minds, things would pop up we'd say 'Oh this is a problem.' And then we would go back to our regular...what the study did was it put it all together. 'This is not good.' So, it didn't surprise, but it did open a lot of people's eyes, putting it all together like that.

Was the reaction overall pretty positive when you said 'Let's put this task force together'?

Fuller: I think people understood immediately the challenge that was in front of us. In some ways, the fact that we were ranked 50 out of 50 of the top 50 cities was something that galvanized attention, because Charlotte doesn't like to be last in anything. So, people, really...it has gone much further than I expected it to go. People latched on from all different corners of the community to say 'Hey, look we want to be part of the solution to this problem.'

Can you talk about the purpose of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force made up of community leaders that you advised starting?

Fuller: One was to find out why we were ranked 50 out of 50. The first was what is going on in Charlotte-Mecklenburg County that causes us to be this low on this list? The second was we want real-world evidence based solutions to address these issues. And on that first question when you look at the map of the country across the southeast United States. Why are we worse than any other place in the southeast? I wanted them to find answers to those questions.

Tell us about the Leading on Opportunity Task Force — what is its goal?

Fuller: Once the first task force report was issued, someone needed to take that and move forward. I suspect what will happen is the county will set out its map and each entity will do the same thing.

The mission of Leading on Opportunity is to convene and connect sectors across the community to implement the recommendations of the first task force to improve economic mobility in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. As charged in the report, the organization will take a systemic approach to addressing the key determinants of early childhood education, college and career readiness, and family stability, while simultaneously focusing on the cross-cutting factors of segregation and social capital.

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What about the “On the Table” discussions? Can you talk about those a little bit — their purpose and what came out of that?

Fuller: That was...a community-building initiative to engage the community in ways we have not engaged them before. I think engagement is important and too often part of the reason why we got where we are is because we haven't had these conversations and decisions have been made over many decades that has led us where we are.

What does the timeframe to implement more of the goals look like?

Fuller: The Early Childhood Education Initiative I announced last year to make sure every child from birth to 5 has a quality education: It's going to take us six years to slowly implement this in the way we're thinking about. We think a large portion of it will be funded by tax revenue of some kind. In our state, we have a blue-ribbon commission that's been formed by N.C. State (University), and we're talking about local financing options for early childhood education.

Everybody needs to be in this conversation because we all need to contribute to this...it's not going to be cheap. But the other way I see this is, look we're paying for it anyway, right? We're paying for it when kids don't graduate from high school, we're paying for folks who end up in our criminal justice system, we're paying for it when people are repeating remedial courses in our community colleges. We're paying for it. So, let's pay it on the front side.

Will you be able to measure success with this endeavor to lift people up? Is there a way to measure what you're doing?

Fuller: That's what we're trying to develop now. 'What are the metrics? What do we need to see?' Maybe for example, our rate of poverty, if we see that going down. Maybe that will be some indication. Educational outcomes, although those are hard to quantify, but if we start to see some results there. I think we need to have a robust metric to figure out whether we're having success.

That really is the purpose of the Leading on Opportunity task force: to develop that set of metrics. What's it going to look like? What do we need to see? We need some early wins to motivate people. Our third-grade reading scores right now they're at 39 percent. We have an initiative to get that to 80 percent. Realistically that will take us about 10 years.

When you mentioned everybody has a role — the business community, the city, the county. Have you identified the role of the county?

Fuller: I'm about to present my proposal to the board on how Mecklenburg County would implement its part. We've gotten a report, and to cover all 4 year olds, we will need \$70 million to \$90 million. It sounds like a lot. and it is a lot, but if we can cut down on kids repeating grades, you save \$22 million a year. Maybe it's not so much.

The \$70 million to \$90 million — where would that come from?

Fuller: We've got two sources: Property taxes and we have the authority to raise the sales tax. Counties have a local option to increase the sales tax by one quarter of a penny through a county referendum. The ballot cannot stipulate specific uses for the sales tax, however, the Board of Commissioners could adopt a separate resolution stipulating how the revenue would be used. The Mecklenburg County Financial Services Department estimates that a 0.25 percent sales tax increase would yield about \$50 million per year. So, you can kind of see it come together. If we think about it in a way, get it from this pot, get it from that pot, you can actually make it work.

This would be money to hire more teachers?

Fuller: I think we're going to need about 200 more classrooms. We are also seeing this as economic development — pay the teachers, use some capital, do some upgrading. We're looking at this to be done, to encourage the private sector to do it. The consensus is the county won't be doing those services; we will make the money available to current schools, and provide the subsidy to existing preschools that would hire new teachers and bring on new children. The long and short of it is this is something we can absolutely get done.

What would you advise other counties looking to help children out of poverty?

Fuller: I do think it's important to galvanize community opinion about it, because I think that's what has allowed us to get to this point, that people say 'You know what? You're right, this is how we create a prosperous community.'

It has to be that we educate our children from the time they come out of the womb, we provide economic opportunity so

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people can actually support their families and raise their kids. Somebody has to drive the conversation, it doesn't happen by itself. You've got to keep pushing it, keep talking about it, keep people engaged.


The task force cited segregation as a major problem. What are your thoughts?

Fuller: I give the task force great credit for pointing that out. Face it, a lot of these issues are tied to race. We are a county, for example, that is segregated by income and by race. Just from the county perspective, when we deliver services, we have very defined concentrated areas, not the whole county. It is still a difficult topic for us to talk about. But I'm encouraged that we're talking about it — slowly, slowly but we are acknowledging it's something we have to address.

A lot of the locations of the discussions are in places where people wouldn't normally go. For example, in our community you could be working in uptown Charlotte and you go up and down Providence Road, one of our major arteries, get to your home in South Charlotte and never see, never see, the issues that are going on in West Charlotte. It's out of your mind, not just out of your sight, but out of your mind.

So, if you meet over in the church in West Charlotte, maybe that might open your eyes a little bit.

How would you characterize this endeavor, that started four years ago, after the study came out?

Fuller: I've come to think about it as, what we're talking about is reinvigorating the American Dream. That's really what we're talking about. If people are actually able to realize their potential because they've got an educational foundation and the ability to support themselves, it allows them to contribute. 

**IN 2015,
20 PERCENT
OF COUNTIES HAD
POVERTY RATES
ABOVE
20.8 PERCENT**



Financial Assistance for Child Care: Critical for early childhood development

By Eryn Hurley
associate legislative director

The first three years of life are a key time for a child's development, making high-quality child care an essential support. Since its passage by Congress in 1996, the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) has played an important role in ensuring parents have access to safe and high-quality child care that is vital to their child's development.

CCDBG offers states a framework to improve their current child care assistance programs and help families access safe and affordable programs. To date, CCDBG has provided financial assistance for child care for 1.4 million children throughout the country. Of those children, 27 percent are under 3 years old, allowing CCDBG to support early childhood education and care for hundreds of thousands of young children.

In 2014, Congress reauthorized block grant for the first time since it was passed in 1996. The new legislation included critical provisions to achieve four major goals: protect the health and safety of children in child care; help parents access information to support child development; support equal access to high quality child care for low-income children; and enhance the quality of child care and better support the child care workforce.

These four goals strengthen CCDBG's dual roles as both a major early childhood education program and a work support for low-income families. In addition, the revised law provided states with greater flexibility, which presented an opportunity for states to help families access safe, reliable and affordable child care.

CCDBG funding flows to states in formula block grants that can then be used to subsidize child care for low-income working families. CCDBG funds are controlled by a state's lead agency

(LA) or a joint interagency office established by the governor. Lead agency duties include administering the CCDBG program, developing the state plan and coordinating services with other state and local child care and early childhood development programs.

While CCDBG plans are developed and implemented at the state level, there are states with locally administered systems. In these states, counties play a major role in administering CCDBG funds, as well as coordinating with the state agency on current early childhood programs active in a county.

The reauthorized CCDBG program highlights the two-generation approach through its support of parents' work and the promotion of children's healthy development. In addition to financial assistance for child care, CCDBG provides parents with access to reliable child care, which supports employment efforts. The two goals of CCDBG as a two-generation program — helping parents work and promoting a child's well-being — address the child care needs of parents which in turn allows them to offer their children more stability, opportunities and resources.

While the reauthorized CCDBG contains necessary updates to ensure safe and stable child care, it also included provisions for states to fill new requirements. States are facing increased, and in some cases, significantly higher costs associated with the new requirements. In the FY2017 omnibus spending bill, CCDBG received \$2.85 billion, which was an increase of \$95 million from FY2016. While this increase provides states with essential funding to implement the new law, additional resources are needed to fulfill the new requirements and keep pace with the rising costs of child care.

Looking forward to FY2018, funding for CCDBG must be increased in order to support both low-income parents as they work toward economic security and the healthy development of their children. 

Weber County sees hope in child mentoring

By Charlie Ban
senior staff writer

Weber County, Utah sees swimming, not treading water, as the way to escape the undertow of intergenerational poverty. As the approach of the new year brings the county's anticipated launch of its Intergenerational Poverty Initiative programming, Commissioner James Ebert is hoping his county can give "swimming lessons" to thousands of children in poverty, not be just a lifeguard.

Though federal and state safety net programs provide for survival needs like food and shelter, staying alive is different from thriving and growing. With roughly 7,000 children in Weber County — 10 percent — in the second generation of reliance on government assistance, Ebert knows what has been done for their families hasn't been enough to make a difference.

"We've done an admirable job caring for children's physical and physiological needs, but to really affect change we have to work our way up the pyramid," he said. "The universal psychological needs are forgotten and not addressed."

That pyramid is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a theory of psychology that says when basic survival needs are met, a person can focus on realizing his or her full intellectual and psychological potential. It's a keystone for the Weber County Intergenerational Poverty Initiative, which Ebert has been sponsoring for the last two years and the top of the pyramid for children is self-determination.

Working on the concept that anti-poverty programs have evolved to form inadvertent barriers to prevent upward mobility, the state of Utah has targeted intergenerational poverty since 2012, providing counties with data to help them fashion their own plans to combat cyclical poverty. Weber County chose to focus on children.

Ebert became interested in poverty shortly after his term as commissioner started two years ago, when he reviewed the county's general fund and saw the large proportion of the budget that dealt with symptoms of poverty.

"I was tasked with stabilizing and strengthening the general fund, and the best path I saw toward doing that was reducing the population in long-term poverty," he said. "It will bring an effectual change and have the biggest impact on our expenditures."

Most of Weber County's progress on its initiative has come in the last few months, as participants homed in on how the county would "move the needle" for children.

Mentoring and behavioral change

Deploying mentors to help guide children's social development is a linchpin in Weber County's plan. When a child's immediate family is mired in the cycle of poverty, having guidance from an adult removed from that situation offers insight that family members cannot.

That's where mentors come in, both influencing the child and teaching parents how to recognize and react to developmental milestones and helping the family navigate the services available to them to capitalize on what is offered. In an environment where parents may be burdened with work and other household responsibilities on top of raising a child, a mentor has a clear focus on a child's development, both as a teacher and a role model.

"The mentor allows a child to understand that you can overcome equity issues," Ebert said. "Many programs have been built on the

family stabilization model, but we have really started more of a child-centric focus so the child doesn't grow up in a culture and create a paradigm where a continual need for assistance continues.

"It's a foundational shift, bringing in the model of the social science of behavioral change, that eventually will start strengthening these young men and young women as they grow older to start dealing with the issues within their environment."

It could be as simple as showing the child there are choices beyond what they see every day in their familiar environment and



Weber County Commissioner James Ebert

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as complicated as helping an overworked parent find the government program that will make the difference for their child.

Family resiliency coordinators will link services — including healthcare providers, school districts, housing agencies and other county departments — and guide children on individualized plans drawn from a common assessment.

“We believe every kid is one caring adult away from a success story,” said Melissa Freigang, a consultant who is working with Weber County on its initiative. “They should be treated with dignity, value self-worth and we believe that happens through adult mentors and belonging.”

The county is inventorying what mentoring services are provided by any department that interacts with children in poverty and signing memoranda of understanding among those agencies to coordinate mentoring.

“There are so many agencies doing fantastic work, but they’re all doing it in silos,” Freigang said. “We don’t know which part of the community is being serviced, we don’t know how much money is going here or there. We’re trying to wrap our arms and pull everything together, so we can leverage everything that’s currently going on, make sure the entire county can plug in. Linking those services and centering them on the child will be key to success.”

For example, some Weber County schools report chronic absenteeism rates exceeding 25 percent of their student body. In that case, a family resiliency coordinator will be a liaison between a contact at a school who reports a particular child has missed more than 40 days in a year and if the child’s absenteeism is health-related, will coordinate with the child’s mentor in the health care system.

Teaching resiliency

The state’s anti-poverty programming has focused on health determinants, but Weber County has added emphasis on resiliency, dignity and access to equity to its approach.

The county’s emphasis on resiliency aims to combat and overcome the harmful effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including abuse, neglect, hunger, illness and isolation.

“Children who break out of intergenerational poverty are children who have resiliency skills,” Freigang said. “Resiliency skills trumps ACEs.”

Resiliency means having adults who can listen to and support a child, being able to form meaningful social connections,

managing their emotions in a healthy way. Generally, helping the adjust well to the challenges of growing up and recognizing healthy environments and choices.

“If we can change their culture their behavior and their activities we know we’ve broken the cycle in some form or fashion,” Ebert said. “We have set the foundation for those children to be successful no matter what they’re face with in life.”

Implementation

Weber County plans to use seed money from a private philanthropist to begin the pilot program on a small scale in a few schools in early 2018, Freigang said. After demonstrating some progress, she said, the county will try to grow the program and use those results to secure state and social impact bond funding.

The initiative will be guided by two committees. The Welfare Reform Commission, which Ebert leads, includes all county departments that affect services provided to individuals in poverty and will lead the overall anti-poverty effort.


“We have all of the supervisors on board so we can make the policy changes we need to without starting from scratch every time,” Ebert said.

An Intergenerational Poverty Advisory Committee will include faith-based groups, nonprofits, advocacy groups and representatives from departments on the welfare reform commission. It will also include people who have lived or are currently living in the cycle of intergenerational poverty. The advisory committee will identify the root causes of the poverty cycle, collect and analyze data and seek funding.

The county will hold an intergenerational poverty lab Jan. 27-28, 2018 to convene experts from various disciplines in child development and poverty. In the meantime, Freigang and the advisory committee will continue securing funding and signing memoranda of understanding with different agencies to formalize the mentoring relationship.

“It’s daunting for some because usually in poverty, they’ll usually identify a focus like teenage pregnancy, not understanding that it’s a much more in-depth question; the resolution for that takes years and years,” Ebert said.

“This is a more holistic approach that really starts at the foundational issue. A lot of folks struggle with it because it’s so large.”

“As we have broken it down, it’s become easier and easier because what we’ve found is if we understand the social determinant side and the behavior modification side, we’re really just starting a process of collaborating, and mentoring. It really felt like something we could get our arms around.” 

BABY STEPS MAKE



Baby Steps program participants celebrate high school graduation. Photo courtesy of Wilson County, N.C.

GREAT STRIDES

By Candice Rountree
program manager
Wilson County, N.C.

Parenting is full of challenges. When a high school youth has a child, the challenges are magnified. The time-consuming focus on meeting a newborn's needs bumps right up against the teen's need and desire to become a responsible, self-sufficient adult, albeit perhaps sooner than they anticipated. Key to the economic future of their new family is staying in school while juggling the full-time job of being a mom or dad.

Given this dynamic and potential for poor family outcomes, Wilson County, N.C.'s Department of Social Services launched the Success in School Initiative. By providing intensive case management and concrete support services, Success in School works to improve Wilson County's graduation rate and strengthen the parenting ability of the teens receiving services. Teaching teens about early childhood development and focusing on academic achievement through varied learning opportunities is key to the program's success. In so doing, the county is confronting and working to break a cycle of poverty within families.

Historically, Wilson County had one of the higher teen pregnancy rates in North Carolina and was serving many teens through its child care subsidy program. Department leaders and employees recognized more was needed than child care to ensure that a teen parent successfully completed high school and graduated. Beginning in 2008, Wilson County implemented Success in School by using its child care subsidy social workers to link case management services with teen parents. Giving a much-needed child care subsidy along with other social service supports allowed the county to address teen pregnancy, high school dropout rates and the stresses of poverty in an expanded manner.


Just like the teens it works with, the Social Services Department knows it cannot do it alone. It has acquired several grants to support the initiative and works collaboratively with a host of key community partners, including the county school system, and health department and other non-county entities such as Eastpointe, a local managed care organization providing behavioral health, substance abuse and developmental disability services.

Also involved are the Wilson Family YMCA and Wesley Shelter, serving domestic violence victims. Through participation on a Community Advisory Council, the community partners provide specific supportive services as well as concrete guidance on program implementation. Programming has grown to include Baby Steps, a case management program funded by the Division of Public Health that places a social worker at Beddingfield High School to solicit referrals and build relationships with staff and students.

The Wilson County Department of Social Services understands the importance of attachment in the early childhood years and works to promote it among a vulnerable teen parent population. Baby Steps works side-by-side with the teen parent to support them as a parent and a student. Goals are set and incentives for goal completion are made, with supportive services such as transportation and child care underlying those efforts.

Through Baby Steps, the county's social work staff complete weekly face-to-face visits with the teen parents, including home visits. The visits use the nationally recognized, research-based Partners for a Healthy Baby curriculum used in many home visiting programs. Services can begin with an expectant parent and each weekly visit focuses on health and safety information.

County staff ensure that the parents are receiving prenatal care, that the infant has an established medical home and that all immunizations are up to date. A safety inspection is completed in the home and safe sleep is addressed with all parents and family members. The teens are also educated on the benefits of delaying a second pregnancy. Along with these evidence-based practices, Wilson County staff applies a continuous quality improvement framework in order to adjust the program as lessons are learned.

These efforts are demonstrating results. Since 2008, 133 teen parents have participated, 58 teen parents have graduated, and 34 are currently enrolled. Seventy percent of the teen parents enrolled have remained in school or graduated. And, most recently, the efforts of the county and its partners were recognized as a semi-finalist in the Innovations in American Government Award through the Harvard Kennedy School Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation. 

Investing in early learning programs pays off

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Starting from scratch

If you're a county that wants to create a similar program, and you don't know where to start? "You need somebody on the ground, in the community," Rolnick said.


"Start small, raise some money for the scholarships," he said. "There's usually an organization that has visiting nurses [for prenatal visits], for every scholarship you give out, let this organization know you need a mentor for the family. So, the idea is start small, create a non-profit, get some business leaders to raise money for scholarships. You get those people involved as leaders to say this is important to our community; that makes a big difference. That's how we did it here."

Scholarships should be based on what area quality pre-schools are charging for annual tuition. "You want to meet the market price," he said, "so parents can choose what works for them based on the existing market."

Collect data

At one of the first meetings with business leaders, the CEO of Best Buy told Rolnick that the company often donated to philanthropic efforts but was never sure if it was helping.

"In this case, you're going to know," Rolnick said. "We're going to track each child on school readiness, cognitive and social skills; when we get these kids school ready, this is an outcome we can show you. In Minnesota, roughly 70 percent of kids, on average, start school ready; 'poverty children' start at 30 percent; in our most at-risk area in north Minneapolis it's 18 percent."

Children who participate in the program are testing at 50 percent to 100 percent readiness. "In our most at-risk area, in north Minneapolis, where they've only been through one year or one-and-a-half years in the program, we're going from 18 percent to 55 percent," Rolnick said. "We will track them through high school. We are tracking them to show that indeed this works." 



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By Roxane Somerlot
president, NACHSA

The National Association of County Human Services Administrators (NACHSA) members manage a vast array of health and human services programs serving their communities. Ranging from child welfare to income assistance to meeting the challenges of homelessness, NACHSA members work with their elected county boards to target scarce federal, state and county resources to the needs of vulnerable families and individuals.

Over 270 dues-paying NACHSA members hail from 12 states, most of them county-administered. Working closely with NACo, including serving side-by-side with elected county officials on NACo policy committees, NACHSA members often draft NACo policy resolutions and platform language to advance county interests on Capitol Hill.

Using NACo's policies as guidance, NACHSA members and its Washington-based staff lobby to protect and promote federal programs administered in their counties. Through numerous NACHSA e-Alerts, members receive updates on the latest federal legislative and regulatory developments. This year, NACHSA worked closely with NACo and other advocacy groups to save from proposed termination the Social Services Block Grant used by many counties to address a variety of human needs.

NACHSA's members continue their individual and collective efforts to be current on the latest scientific findings on poverty's impact on families and a child's developing brain. From learning about how to understand and use the Adverse


Childhood Experiences model to understanding the lasting impact of trauma and toxic stress on a child when they are removed from an unsafe home, NACHSA members are keenly aware of the importance of evidence-based supports for struggling families.

NACHSA serves as a forum for county human services directors to share best practices and ask other colleagues for ideas to meet unique challenges in their counties. Professional development is advanced through the NACHSA

Networker newsletter highlighting efficient and effective program delivery and at the meetings held during NACo conferences. For a number of years, NACHSA has awarded scholarships to enable members to attend an annual county health and human services conference held in California.

As 2018 approaches, NACHSA will work with NACo to help shape federal policy to reform the welfare system. A federal review of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is long overdue. NACHSA will be advocating policies to change the TANF program to focus more on outcomes rather than

administrative processes and to target more TANF resources and incentives toward subsidized employment programs.

NACHSA is also planning to launch webcasts linking federal policy-makers and other experts with county directors on human services policies and how to improve agency administration. 



Somerlot

NACHSA is always interested in recruiting more members and supporting them professionally. To learn more, contact Tom Joseph, NACHSA's Washington representative at tj@wafed.com.

Counties tackle childhood poverty in a variety of ways

From **EXAMPLES** page 11

Outcomes

- Expanded the reach of Save the Children's home visiting program to 10 elementary schools serving 50 children each (500). Previously, only four schools were served.
- Approximately 400 children were impacted through the increase in the quality of preschool and Head Start classrooms (environmental enrichment and teacher coaching).
- Provided oral health training to 200 families increasing their knowledge and skills in nutrition and caring for children's teeth.

Future of early childhood development

As many of the grants that supported the work done by Partners for Education come to a close, there are opportunities to find new funding streams and to encourage local communities to develop sustainable sources funding.


The challenges facing rural areas include problems accessing services, a lack of data infrastructure, shortages of local person-

nel with the qualifications and skills to do this work and low pay.

However, the future of the region depends on supporting access to high-quality, center-based early childhood education for all children in the community.

Partners for Education seeks to build a coalition of county judge executives, mayors, superintendents and other local officials to spearhead this work. Some local officials have already indicated their support based on the realization that if no investments are made, then the future for their communities is bleak. Using data-driven solutions, these communities have the chance to "turn the curve" in a positive direction.

Quick tips for other counties

- Be aspirational when you think about the services that should be available to all children in the community.
- Be realistic about data and set measurable targets. Connect with other initiatives to share data.
- Assess what is already happening in the community and how can you leverage existing efforts instead of creating new infrastructure. 



Check out the NACo
Counties Futures Lab's new report
Counties Care
on how counties can provide
high-quality services to children
and families by sharing service
provisions with partners.

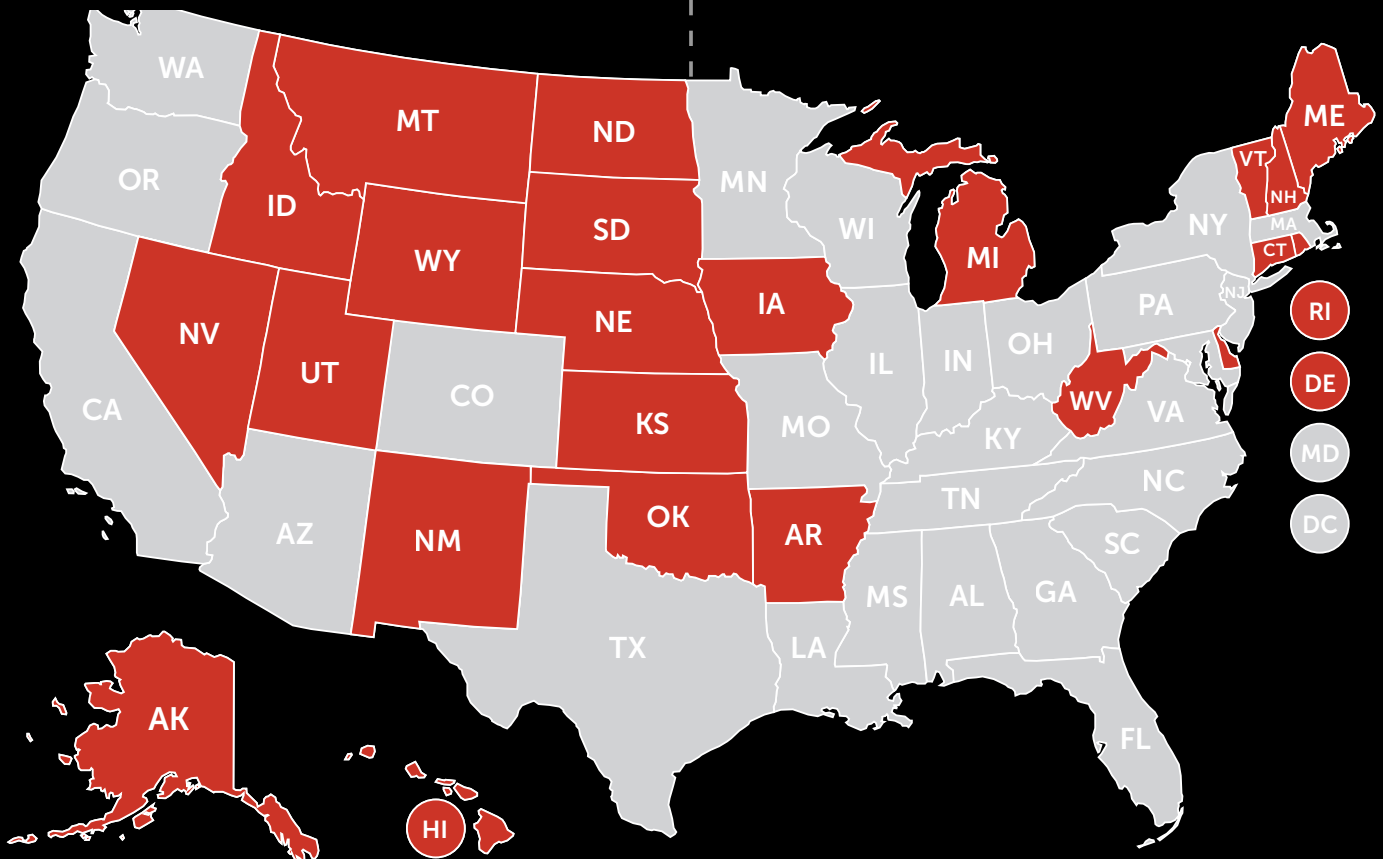
Visit www.NACo.org/CountiesCare for more information.

A black and white photograph of a woman with dark hair, smiling and reading a book to two young children. The woman is seated and holding the book open. The children are seated in front of her, looking at the book. The background is bright and out of focus, showing what appears to be a window or a bright outdoor area.

Counties invest
\$58 BILLION
in federal, state and local
funds in human services
while serving as the front-line
social safety net.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2015,
**13.5 percent of all Americans fell under the
federal poverty line.**

The number of people living in poverty
43.1 MILLION PEOPLE
is roughly equal to the entire population of the 23 least-
populated states combined.*



**total combined population estimate for 2016: 43.7 million*

Getting Started: Resources

Administration for Children & Families (ACF)

ACF is a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services promoting economic and social well-being of children and families. The early childhood development work includes the Office of Child Care and the Office of Head Start.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “Milestone Tracker”

A free app for tracking every child’s development in a fun and easy way. This app adds to the popular suite of free, family-friendly materials available through CDC’s *Learn the Signs. Act Early.*

Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) works to secure equal opportunities and better futures for all children and families, their young children and their families work, includes local examples and efforts aimed at cradle to community and strengthening families.

Department of Education

The Department of Education provides resources and publications addressing early learning and literacy. Resources from the National Research Council and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are also provided.

Heckman, The Economics of Human Potential

Dr. James Heckman is a professor of economics at the University of Chicago and a Nobel Memorial Prize winner in economics and an expert in the economics of human development. His work includes information about return on investment of early childhood development programs, review of nurse family partnerships, outcomes of birth-to-five early education, and child and dependent care tax credits to name a few.

National Institute for Children’s Health Quality (NICHQ)

A national organization that seeks better solutions to help children and families live healthier lives.

Nurse Family Partnership

Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) is an evidence-based model designed for first-time, low-income mothers and their children. It includes one-on-one home visits by a trained public health registered nurse to begin during pregnancy as early as possible and continues through the child’s second birthday. Nurses work with low-income pregnant mothers bearing their first child to improve the outcomes of pregnancy, improve infant health and development.

Pritzker Children’s Initiative

The Initiative is dedicated to investments in early childhood development and kindergarten readiness, focusing on birth to age three. The Initiative seeks to find public and private resources to increase evidence-based interventions and to accelerate innovation and knowledge sharing.

Save the Children

Save the Children is an international organization that works to give children a healthy start, an opportunity to learn and a safe place to live.

Strive Together

A national nonprofit that works to ensure that every child succeeds from cradle to career, regardless of race, income or ZIP code. The organization works with leaders in 70 communities across the country to improve education.

Urban Institute

The Urban Institute’s Pay for Success Initiative is a contracting and financing model used for implementing social programs. The initiative has been used for early childhood development projects. The institute has several resources that provide information about Pay for Success financing models for early childhood development.

Zero to Three

Zero to Three is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to ensure that all babies and toddlers have a strong start in life. Resources are developed to provide parents, professionals and policymakers the knowledge and know-how to nurture early development.



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