



## A State Profile

## Overview & Findings

Most picking up this book want to lessen the difficulties faced by many of Oklahoma's children — child abuse and neglect, poverty, violence, crime, teen pregnancy. For many of us public debates and private soul searching have not provided clear answers about where to begin. There are few clear distinctions between causes and consequences. In the pages which follow you will find much to suggest that causes and consequences are inextricably linked. Children born to teen mothers are more likely to repeat the cycle of teen childbearing. Child abuse victims later become abusers. Poor children are more likely to quit high school without graduating, and youth not graduating from high school face lives of poverty.

Oklahoma's very young — infants, toddlers and preschool children — are the focus of this edition of the Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook. With all the issues facing children today, why concentrate on early childhood? Precisely because of the difficulties faced by many of Oklahoma's children — child abuse and neglect, poverty, violence, crime, teen pregnancy. Attending to Oklahoma's youngest holds the promise of Oklahoma's future. A hope of breaking the cycle. A promise of less abuse and neglect, less poverty, less violence, less crime, fewer children having children.

The time is now. There is not one more child to waste. First, we must marshal a serious effort to reduce teen pregnancy, lessen poverty and eliminate child abuse. The rewards will include better care and education for Oklahoma's infants, toddlers and preschool children. Second, we must marshal a serious effort to improve the

care and education of Oklahoma's infants, toddlers and preschool children. The rewards will include fewer Oklahoma children having children, living in poverty or suffering abuse. The problems are complex, but not without promising solutions. Community understanding, *combined with action*, will improve the well-being of today's children and secure a safe, healthy and happy future for tomorrow's.

The Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Partnership, a project of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (OICA), uses key strategies to achieve its goal. *First*, KIDS COUNT "counts kids," providing accurate and up-to-date data on the status of Oklahoma's children and youth. *Second*, KIDS COUNT cultivates leadership on behalf of children and youth, giving voice to their needs at the local level. *Third*, KIDS COUNT communicates the needs of children and youth, using extensive public awareness activities.

The Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook uses benchmarks to profile the status of children and youth in our state. Benchmarks are quantifiable measures that, when taken together, help determine child, family and community well-being. The seven benchmarks in this KIDS COUNT Factbook are **low birthweight infants, infant mortality, births to young teens, child abuse & neglect, child death, high school dropouts and juvenile violent crime arrests**. This book, the sixth Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook, shows the interrelatedness of these benchmarks and how they impact each other.



The time is now. There is not one more child to waste. First, we must marshal a serious effort to reduce teen pregnancy, lessen poverty and eliminate child abuse. . . . Second, we must marshal a serious effort to improve the care and education of Oklahoma's infants, toddlers and preschool children.

From an established baseline, OICA is tracking progress, or the lack of progress, for each benchmark over time. Progress requires action. Progress requires using all of this information — and more — to make good decisions about state and community budgets and programs that affect children and youth. Effective programs and policies work together with strong communities and families to improve the benchmarks.

More than one in every four Oklahomans (26.3%) is a child. One in four (23.7%) of those children live in poverty. Today, almost eight hundred eighty thousand (879,367) children live, play and go to school in Oklahoma communities. Most young people in Oklahoma are doing well most of the time.

**There is good news.** Oklahoma KIDS COUNT reveals that only two of the seven benchmarks tracked worsened when compared to data from a dozen years ago:

- **Low birthweight infants**
- **Child abuse & neglect**

Five benchmarks improved over the comparable older data:

- **Infant mortality**
- **Births to young teens**
- **Child death**
- **High school dropouts**
- **Juvenile violent crime arrests**

**There is bad news.** The improved rates obscure the challenges faced by large numbers of young Oklahomans each year. More than two hundred thousand (210,470) Oklahoma children live in poverty. More than fifteen thousand (15,518) are abused or neglected. Almost ten thousand (9,289) quit high school. More than one thousand (1,089) are arrested for murder, rape, aggravated assault or robbery.

## Oklahoma

Number of Children (1998): 879,367

Children are 26.3% of the state population

Child Poverty Rate (1997): 23.7%

Indicator	Base Data	-	Worsened	Improved	+	Recent Data	Recent Data
Low Birthweight	6.4% of live births 1984-86	-12.7%				7.2% of live births 1996-98	3,457 average annual 1996-1998
Infant Mortality	10.5/1000 live births 1984-86				22.7%	8.1/1000 live births 1996-98	389 average annual 1996-1998
Births to Young Teens	43.9/1000 girls 15-17 1984-86				18.2%	35.9/1000 girls 15-17 1996-98	2,760 average annual 1996-1998
Child Abuse & Neglect	9.0 confirmed/1000 children FY 1984-86	-95.8%				17.7 confirmed/1000 children FY 1997-99	15,518 average annual FY 1997-1999
Child Deaths	41.5/100,000 children 1-14 1984-86				24.7%	31.3/100,000 children 1-14 1996-98	211 average annual 1996-1998
High School Dropouts	5.5% of grades 9-12 SY 94/95 - 96/97				2.1%	5.4% of grades 9-12 SY 96/97 - 97/98	9,289 average annual school year 1996/97-1998/99
Juvenile Violent Crime Arrests	334.1/100,000 youth 10-17 1990/92				18.8%	271.4/100,000 youth 10-17 1997-99	1,089 average annual 1997-1999