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Study Finds Many Michigan Kids Living in Poverty

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By AMY LANGE
WJBK | myFOXDetroit.com

SOUTHGATE, Mich. (WJBK) - Some unsettling statistics were released Tuesday regarding the well-being of children in Michigan. While fewer kids are dropping out of high school, child abuse cases are up 25-percent and the number of children living in poverty is on the rise.

"It's fun because you get to eat here, and you get to learn stuff," said Jaiden.

What does he get to learn? "Numbers and ABC's," he told FOX 2.

Jaiden is five years old and a student at **Southgate Head Start**. It's a program for low-income, preschool children that's making a positive impact during an economic downturn for so many Michigan families.

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On this day, lunch at the Southgate Head Start was barbecue chicken, tater tots, milk and fruit. For some of the children, it might be the most nutritious meal they eat all day.

Three-year-old **Niesha White** is one of 4,000 **Wayne County** children in head start. Her sister was also a head start student.

"She went a couple years back," said mother **Sharie White**. "I like the program, and it helped her a lot with her education."

"She's getting all A's now, and I wanted the same for my other, little daughter," she added.

It's this early education, not just for children, but for their parents, that experts say is key in combating a growing problem in Michigan.

According to the latest **Kids Count in Michigan** data, 20-percent of our children are living below the poverty level. That's a meager \$17,600 annual income for a family of three.

"I think the poverty rates are a lot higher than what is really being reported," said Great Start Parent Advocate **Fawn Kern**.

"This is very poisonous to their development. We know that kids who live in poverty have trouble coming to school ready to learn, have trouble staying in school," said **Jack Kresnak** with Michigan's Children.

The state has cut \$4-billion in the last ten years out of programs for vulnerable families. Poverty rates have grown tremendously since 2000 and are much higher for children of color. Nearly half of all African-American children and a third of Hispanic children are living in poverty.

"We can't continue to cut programs that help those kids and still see that number change for the better," Kresnak said.

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