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1/26/12

Report shows increase in child abuse, neglect over decade

Higher percentage of children in poverty, receiving free, reduced lunch

By Tim Barnum
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OGEMAW COUNTY — The recently released Kids Count in Michigan report shows that confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect in Ogemaw County increased during the past decade.

The Michigan League For Human Services (MLHS) and Michigan's Children compile the Kids Count report annually. The report ranks counties annually on 16 indicators of child well being, with number one being the best.

Figures in this year's report show in 2000, there were 103 confirmed victims of child abuse or neglect out of 5,073 children in the county. The number rose to 118 victims out of 4,419 children in 2010.

The report shows the neglect and abuse rate equaled 28.9 confirmed cases per 1,000 children in Ogemaw County, compared to 13.8 children per 1,000 statewide. The county ranked 70th out of all counties included, meaning its abuse and neglect rate was lower than only a handful of Michigan counties.

Much of the neglect and abuse is due to poverty, according to Kids Count in Michigan director Jane Zehnder-Merrell.

"The findings show that kids in Ogemaw County and across Michigan are still suffering the fallout from our long recession," she said. "Poverty in Michigan is as big a threat to our children today as polio was to a previous generation. Fortunately, we can do something about this. We know that public policy can improve children's social and economic environment."

The percentage of children aged 0-17 in poverty rose from 27.6 in 2005 to 30.5 in 2009, according to the Kids Count report. Although the percentage was higher, the actual number of children dropped from 1,244 to 1,224 over those years.

"With fewer kids in Michigan there could be fewer victims but the rate per 1,000 kids is still up," said MLHS communications director Judy Putnam.

Ogemaw County's 30.5 percent poverty rate was 72nd-worst in the state of Michigan, according to the report. The state average was 22.2 percent.

Poverty can bring about other issues, said Michelle Corey, vice president at Michigan's Children.

"Children in poverty often experience hunger, abuse or neglect, extreme stress, depression or anxiety, and other issues impacting their overall health, as well as their ability to learn and grow into successful adults," she said.

In addition to more children being victims of abuse and neglect, and the poverty rate being higher than many, more Ogemaw County students received free or reduced school lunch, the report says.

According to Kids Count, 1,079 children, or 42.8 percent, received free or reduced school lunches in 2006. The numbers rose to 1,299 children, or 57.4 percent in 2010.

Not all news for Ogemaw County in the report was negative. Kids Count showed Ogemaw County was second best out of 81 counties ranked for low-birthweight babies.

Only 4.7 percent of Ogemaw babies were born weighing less than 5.5 pounds, compared to 8.5 percent statewide.

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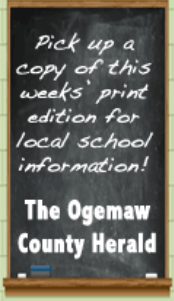
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