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Preventing Abuse and Neglect: The Michigan Children's Trust Fund CAN Councils

When children and youth are exposed to unsafe environments and trauma through abuse or neglect, their well-being is compromised with measurable, long-term consequences. The effects of trauma on physical and mental health are costly – in 2002, the last time Michigan took a good look, child maltreatment alone cost the state \$1.8 billion.¹ According to the latest Kids Count Data Book, abuse and neglect are creeping into the lives of more children in Michigan: from 2009 to 2015, the state's child abuse and neglect rate rose from 12.9% to 16.8%, a 30% increase. Of those children who experienced maltreatment, over 80% experienced neglect. In 69 of 83 counties, child abuse and neglect rates either remained the same or increased, in some areas by more than 50%.

Public investments must be directed to help prevent these issues by supporting programs that connect children, youth, and families with an array of services and caring individuals to ensure their needs are met and that children and youth have positive experiences at home, in school, at work, and in the community.

Coordination and Services: Michigan's Two-Pronged Prevention Strategy

Local programs around the state already work to prevent child abuse and neglect, and Michigan publicly funding those programs through The Children's Trust Fund (CTF). In 2016, CTF funded 73 local councils, whose prevention work varies with local population need, convening stakeholders, conducting needs assessments, organizing other public awareness campaigns, acting as a community liaison with interagency networks, and providing technical assistance related to preventing child abuse and neglect. That same year, local councils led 361 community collaborative activities, connecting 58,000 adults and 112,000 children to services that are proven to prevent abuse and neglect.

CTF also funds 24 direct-service programs around the state. These programs take an evidence-based, multidisciplinary approach to preventing child abuse and neglect, visiting families in their own homes, providing classes, counseling, child care, referrals, transportation, and prenatal services, among other programs. In 2016, these direct service programs served 2,408 children and 2,395 parents and caregivers in 1,878 families. The programs serve Michigan's most challenged families – 73% reported an income of \$20,000 or less and nearly 8 in 10 received Medicaid or food stamps. Based on the needs of each community as identified by local councils, the programs target a number of groups at higher risk of abuse and neglect, including

¹ Noor, A., & Caldwell, R. (2005). The cost of child abuse vs. child abuse prevention: a multi-year follow-up in Michigan. Children's Trust Fund. Retrieved from: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/ctf/cost2005_528033_7.pdf

young and first-time parents, parents with substance abuse, and children with behavioral needs.

A Moderate Investment That Works

The CTF resources provided to Michigan's various local prevention networks vary with grants from \$5,000 to over \$60,000, averaging \$10,000. Allocations are based mostly on population, with rural councils often receiving less than \$10,000 annually. Most CTF direct service grants, totaling \$791,000, fund services at \$50,000 per year for four years.

Local efforts are working. Direct service program enrollees improved their families' abilities to handle everyday stressors and recover from occasional crises; families left programs with greater access to concrete supports such as food, housing, clothing, and transportation, and other care needs; and parents improved their ability to provide socio-emotional support, constructive discipline, and praise for their children. These programs cost but a fraction of what the state already spends on treating the effects of abuse and neglect, making prevention programs a sound state investment.

The local CTF councils are incredibly effective at leveraging local support. In total in 2016, the programs leveraged \$5.3 million as cash and in-kind match against the funding provided by CTF. On average, each council raised \$29,700 and Direct Services Grantees averaged \$113,200. While these match amounts demonstrate the commitment to this work in communities throughout Michigan, they are not adequate to fully support the state's growing child abuse and prevention needs, and the inequity of matching funds between local councils means that some families will have far less access to essential services than they would otherwise.

Rising Need, Declining Revenues

Demand for prevention services is rising, and current prevention efforts can't keep up. While council efforts reached over 100,000 children in 2016, more than twice that number live in families that are investigated for cases of abuse and neglect and those rates are growing – Kids Count showed a 51% increase in investigated families just since 2009. Furthermore, about half of qualified direct service applicants for funding were turned away due to lack of CTF resources, and few receive enough resources to reach the full need of the populations they serve.

The CTF was established to provide consistent funding for the coordination and services offered by CAN councils and service providers, however some of its major revenue sources, including tax check-off donations and license plate purchase fees, have lost significant value in recent years. For example, tax form check-off donations have fallen from \$938,349 in 2000 to \$57,385 in 2016, largely due to many individuals' transition to electronic tax filing.

While the CTF also receives some of Michigan's federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act grant and holds an annual fundraising auction, these sources cannot provide enough support long-term to meet CTF's current grant obligations, leaving the program in a bind. Michigan has an effective localized strategy for preventing abuse and neglect, but these efforts need a recommitment of state funds to meet the rising need.