

Decade of Decline

*The 2011 Community Status Report on
Children and Youth in Monroe County*

TheChildren'sAgenda



A Decade of Decline

Rochestarians proudly – and rightly – celebrate the many reasons to live in our community. We are among the smartest, most innovative, most giving cities in the United States. We are among the best in housing affordability, easy commutes, and overall livability. In 2010, *Forbes* magazine rated Rochester the third-best metropolitan region in the country for raising a family based on cost of living, prevalence of homeownership, median household income, crime rate, and high school graduation rates.

Unfortunately, these national rankings don't show the whole picture. The statistics highlighted in this document, the 2011 Community Status Report on Children and Youth in Monroe County, provide insight into the other side of the story – a story that is all too painful for thousands of children and parents in our community.

The Other Side of the Story

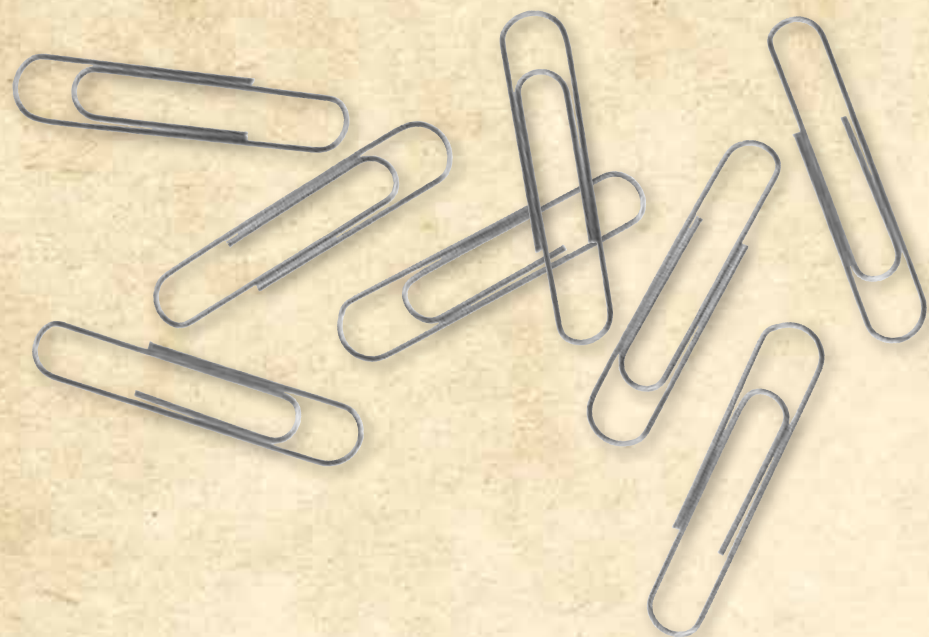
There's no doubt that many of us enjoy the affordable housing prices, social and cultural offerings, educational opportunities, and growing technology industry in our community. But these benefits belie the preventable problems that many children and families living in Greater Rochester face, especially in light of a weak national economy.

To be sure, there are some important bright spots:

- More 4-year-olds are participating in Pre-Kindergarten programs than ever before.
- The number of children with elevated levels of lead in their blood dropped 80% between 2000 and 2008.
- More than 96% of our children now have health insurance.

But a further look at the numbers shows a chilling reality: children and families across Monroe County are struggling with preventable problems. And in many areas, instead of getting better, things have stagnated or actually gotten worse over the past decade. Some of the most troubling statistics:

- 22.2% of Monroe County's children live in poverty.
- Reports of child abuse and neglect have increased by 47% since 2003.
- Monroe County's infant mortality rate is behind that of most industrialized nations and the U.S. national rate.
- The percentage of 3rd graders in Monroe County's public schools meeting or exceeding grade-level expectations in math is only 56.2%, and only 53.7% are meeting or exceeding expectations in English Language Arts.



Our Children Need Us Now More Than Ever

As a whole, our community's statistics show a decade of decline in the health, safety, and well-being of the most vulnerable children and families in Monroe County.

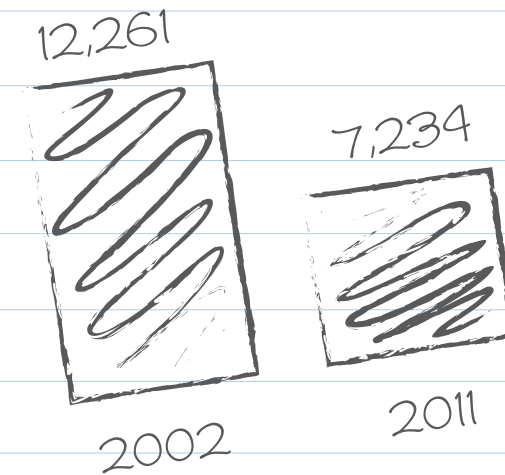
Any community would want better results than these. Children, lacking any political and economic power themselves, require much more from all of us if we are to change the statistics on their current situations and expected life outcomes. They require more from the field of services, programs and organizations they encounter, from our community's leadership, from our community as a whole, and from us here at The Children's Agenda.

That "more" means changing policies and programs to consistently and fully support and fund those evidence-based programs proven to work on their behalf. And it means much more than just a few of the 'right' programs: what we need is transformative change. For The Children's Agenda, doing more means first establishing wider and deeper ownership of these problems and solutions: working with leaders from government, business, faith communities, schools, non-profit agencies, and health care to convene discussions that lead to change.

Rochester has a history of creating social change. From Susan B. Anthony's crusade for women's rights to recent community successes reducing childhood lead poisoning, improving child immunizations, and delivering landmark services to children in foster care. When we have joined together for policy change and smart allocations of scarce resources, we have made our community a safer, healthier, better place. We can apply these lessons from where we have succeeded to the areas where we are falling behind, and it's in that spirit that we offer this report.



Eligible Children
Utilizing Child Care Subsidies



Tasks for Immediate Impact

Two years ago, The Children's Agenda released our Community Action Plan, calling for investment in four proven solutions that, if implemented fully and with fidelity, will make the numbers in this report look much different in the years to come:

- 1 Expand the Nurse-Family Partnership to meet Monroe County's need: 1,000 families per year.
- 2 Increase the number of children in quality child care and early learning settings by 20% by 2015 through achieving three long-term policy changes; for example, setting minimum education requirements for child care providers.
- 3 Provide high-quality, effective after-school programming for 25% of Rochester's children by 2015.
- 4 Take the Coping Power Program to full capacity for all children who need it in the Rochester City School District by 2015.

Healthy babies: Helping moms create safe, nurturing homes

Elena Minter of Rochester didn't feel ready to become a parent when she discovered she was pregnant about 2 1/2 years ago. She was in an emotionally abusive relationship. She smoked cigarettes and used drugs. She was overcome by anxiety, stress and depression.

"Most of my life, I've been taken advantage of," says Minter, now 25. She doesn't want her daughter to follow in her footsteps. "I want so bad for her to be well-adjusted," the first-time mother says.

Her doctor's office told her of the Monroe County Department of Public Health's Nurse-Family Partnership program, which pairs new moms-to-be with a nurse who makes home visits.

"Deb came and shined a light in a dark place," says Minter. "She really cared."

Registered nurse Deborah Dachille has visited Minter every one to two weeks for more than two years. Dachille shared information about how to have a healthy baby and about what to expect at each stage of infant development. She helped Minter clarify goals and list the steps to achieve them.

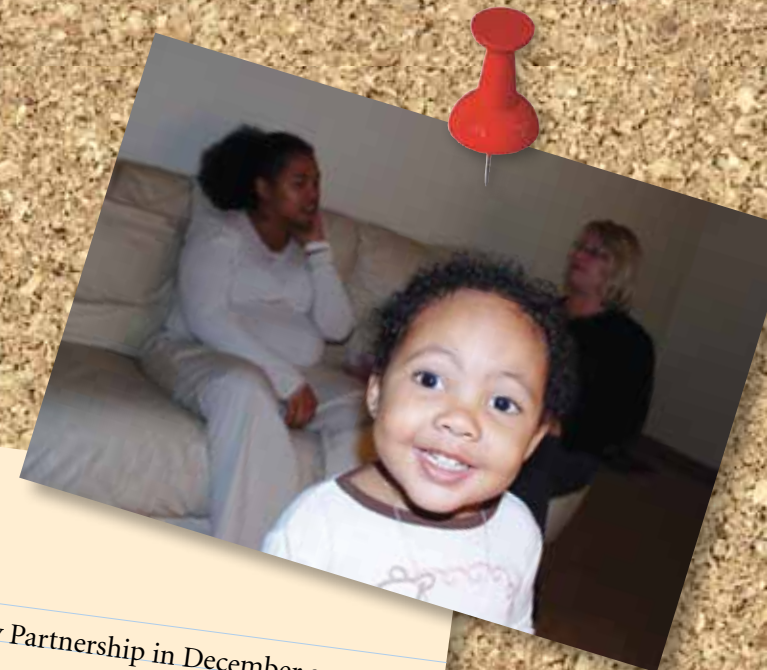
The mom has faced setbacks but has made significant steps forward, said Dachille, counting 22 effective nurse-family visits in a row.

"The program really is based on the therapeutic relationship that each family forms with each nurse," said Beverly Faro, the pediatric nurse practitioner who is the local program coordinator. Nurses are used because the public tends to trust them and because 25 years of research demonstrated their effectiveness in delivering the program.

On a recent visit, 21-month-old Lelena "Lele" Minter-Jackson watched TV and snuggled next to her mom on the couch as Minter and Dachille talked. The girl's temper tantrums are shorter since Minter learned how to help her daughter with frustrations, the mom says. Minter asked the nurse about her daughter not sharing toys well with other children. Dachille reassured her that's normal for her age. They also talked about how well Minter is doing saying no to the drug and alcohol use around her. "I'm good and I'm straight," says Minter. "I say it to people so they know I'm not interested in what they're offering."

Nurse-Family Partnership

The Nurse Family Partnership Program (NFP) is an evidence-based, proven program that fosters positive, healthy parenting. Though the program has grown since 2006 from 100 families to 300+ families served annually, 1,000 families are in need of the program.



Minter graduates from the Nurse-Family Partnership in December 2011, when her daughter turns 2.

"I feel more confident in who I am as an individual," says Minter. She says she has learned better ways to take care of her daughter.

Other new moms now come to her for advice. "They don't understand why their kids are doing what they're doing," says Minter. "They don't know how to handle it. All they know is what their family taught them." She challenges them: "Did it work for you?"

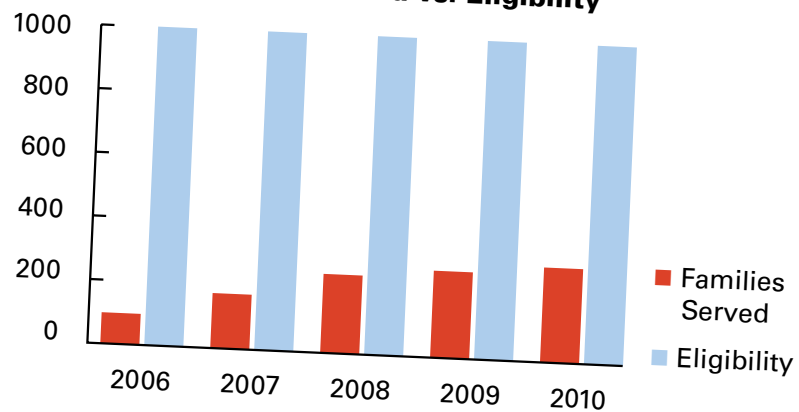
Minter says her own father hollered at her when he was angry and she makes a conscious effort to stay calm with her daughter.

Minter is seeking supportive housing through the YWCA that would support her commitment to be drug-free and provide child care so she can take steps to get back in the workforce – "so I can become self-sufficient and independent like I really want."

She was previously an office receptionist. She has thought of running her own business someday – maybe training others in good customer service skills, or running a day care program or a cleaning company.

"I could see myself being a teacher," says Minter. "I could see myself being a lot of things."

NFP: Families Served vs. Eligibility

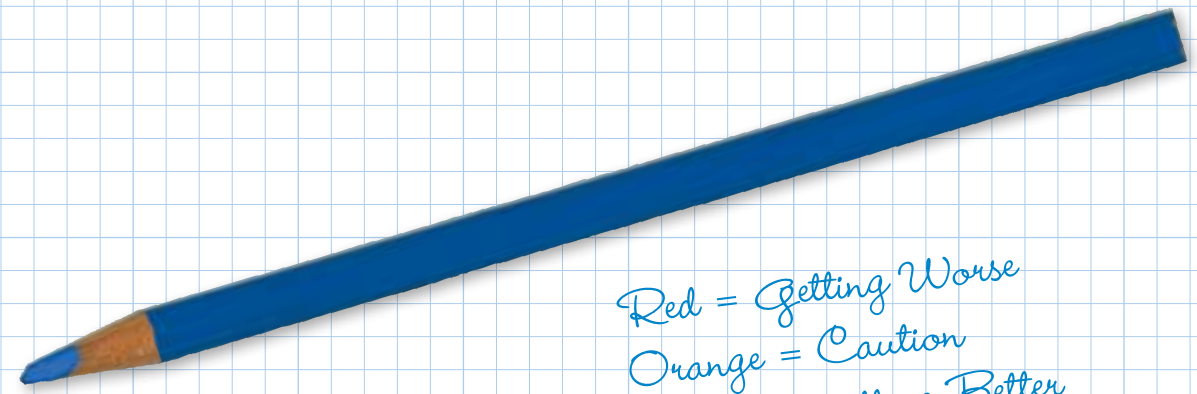


Progress Report: Kids in Monroe County

	Monroe County 1999	Monroe County 2009	Rochester 2009	New York 2009	United States 2009
Health and Safety					
Children without health insurance (2000 vs 2010)	6.2%	3.7%	NA	4.8%	8%
Proportion of all children under 6 with elevated lead levels in their blood (2000 vs 2008)	3.8%	1.5%	NA	0.8%	0.6%
Children who are overweight or obese	29%	30%	39%	32.9%	31.7%
Babies with low birth weight (Rate per 1,000)	7.5	8.6	10.8	8.2	8
All deaths of children 1 year and under (Rate per 1,000)	7.2	8.5	14.3	5.3	6.4
Children suspected of being victims of physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect (Rate per 1000, 2003 vs 2011 projected)	33.8	49.6	NA	50	41
Hospitalizations of 10–19 year olds as a result of assault (three-year average per 100,000)	47.7	48.5	NA	68.2	NA
Children living in poverty	15.5%	22.2%	43%	21%	22%
Economic Self-Sufficiency					
Children who don't regularly get 3 meals a day	NA	20.2%	NA	22.4%	23.2%
Children receiving free/reduced lunch in public schools, K–6	34.9%	44.8%	85%	51.7%	NA
Emergency placements in Monroe County-funded shelters for families who are homeless (Figures do not represent the total homeless population, 2000 vs 2010)	1,566	2,494	NA	NA	NA
Median income of families (in 2009 inflation-adjusted dollars)	\$71,984	\$65,011	\$36,173	\$67,040	\$62,363
Unemployment: Rate of 16 years and older who are in labor force but not employed (1999 vs 2010)	4%	8%	NA	8.6%	9.6%
Single-parent-headed households	33%	37.7%	68%	35%	34%

Please note: Some data that have begun to emerge in 2011 show encouraging signs of improvement in some areas; for example, crime appears to have decreased. When year-end data are available, The Children's Agenda will add it to this analysis.

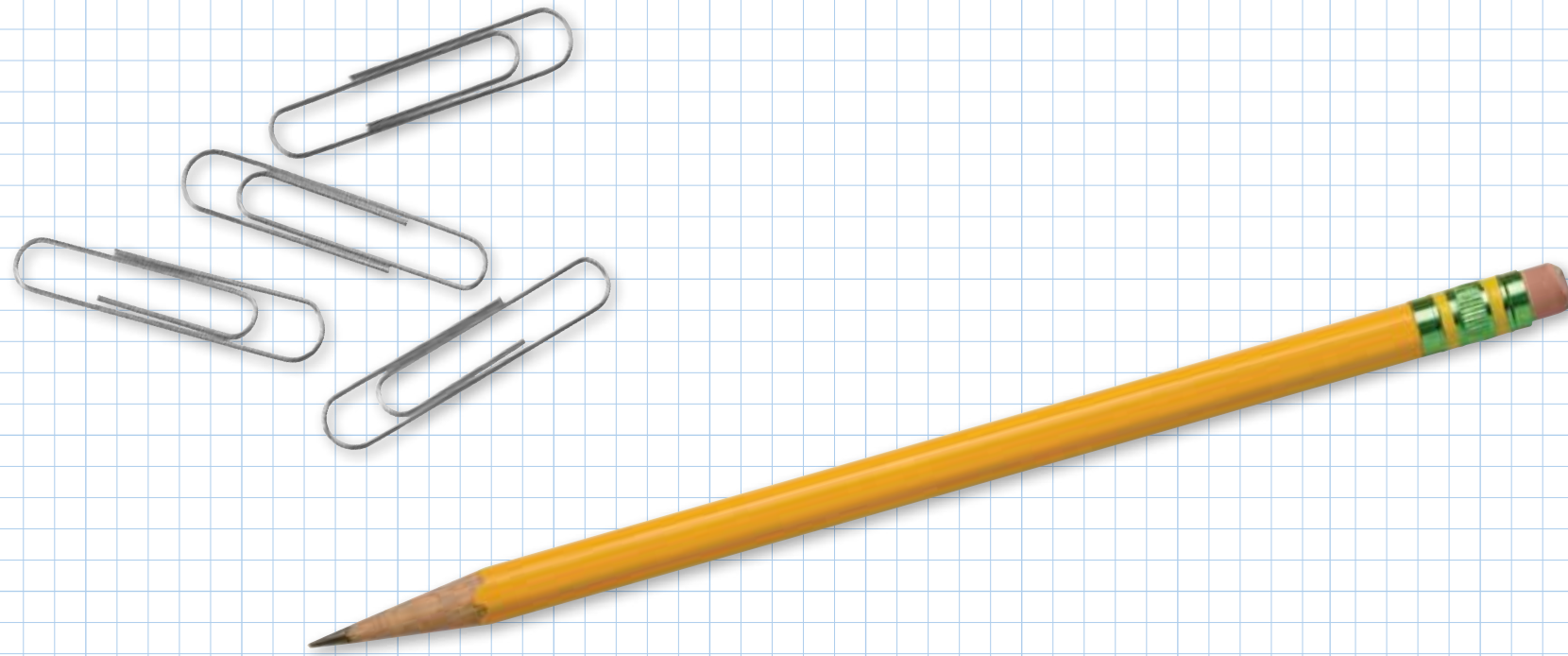
Sources include: ACT Rochester; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Feeding America, Kids Count, Kids Well-being Indicator Clearinghouse (KWIC), Monroe County Department of Health, New York State Education Department, Rochester City School District, U.S. Census Bureau.



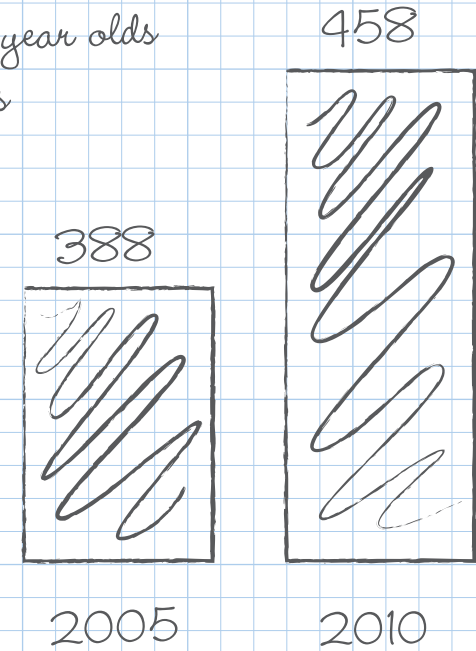
Red = Getting Worse
Orange = Caution
Green = Getting Better
NA = Not available at time of printing

Progress Report: Kids in Monroe County continued

	Monroe County 1999	Monroe County 2009	Rochester 2009	New York 2009	United States 2009
School Readiness & School Success					
Children attending child care with public-funded subsidy (2003 vs 2010)	7.2%	5.4%	NA	3.5%	17%
Children participating in Pre-Kindergarten (2000 vs 2010)	33%	50%	85%	65%	25.4%
3rd graders meeting or exceeding grade-level expectations in English Language Arts	NA	53.7%	23%	55%	68%
3rd graders meeting or exceeding grade-level expectations in math	NA	56.2%	28%	59%	62%
Youth Outcomes					
Young adult arrests for violent crimes (rate per 10,000 16–21 year olds, 2005 vs 2010)	54	61.8	NA	87.6	NA
Teen birth rate (per 1,000 15–19-year-old girls)	36	33	84	26	42
Graduation rate (9th graders who graduate 4 years later)	73%	79%	46.2%	70.8%	74.9%



Arrests of 16–21 year olds for violent crimes



To download a reproducible PDF of this table, visit thechildrensagenda.org.

Early Childhood Education

Too many children are starting school ill-prepared to learn, with behavioral problems already in place, putting them at risk for failures down the road.

Vulnerable children can get on the right track for school and life by spending the first five years of life in high-quality early care and education (HQECE). In addition to ensuring children a safe place to go while their parents work, HQECE readies them for school by laying a foundation of early literacy and social and emotional well-being. Thirty years of research have shown that the likelihood of high-school graduation and college attendance increases, while teen pregnancy, convictions, and welfare use decrease for participants.

Unfortunately, our community is serving far fewer children in subsidized child care than in the past. In 2009, NYS restored \$8 million to Monroe County's allocation for child care subsidies, allowing the community to put more than 1,000 children back into child care. However, part of this increase was funded with Recovery Act dollars, which are being phased out in 2011. As a result, numbers in the system have decreased again.

Low-income parents struggle to afford high-quality child care

Kashina Amons is a child care provider who can't afford to send her infant son to the center where she works – even with an employee discount.

After housing, child care is one of the biggest costs for many working-poor families. High-quality care at accredited centers like the one where Amons works is out of reach for many parents like her. That leaves families to make do in ways that may not help their children be ready for Kindergarten.

One cause of the problem is a hole in the public safety net. The welfare overhaul in the mid-1990s promised that low-income parents could get child care subsidies so they could afford to work. But funding has gone up and down in recent years for subsidies, which are paid mostly with federal and state dollars.

Monroe County's child care subsidy program – which averages \$534 per child in help per month – was frozen to new applicants in October 2010 because of budget cuts. That's the same month that Amons became a mom.

The only new enrollees accepted have been families receiving welfare, so they can look for and secure work, and families in the foster-care-placement preventive program.

The full price of infant care at Jefferson Avenue Child Development Center, where Amons works full-time, is \$1,000 a month. Employees are charged half price. But that's still out of reach for Amons, whose take-home pay is only \$800 a month.

In the first half of 2011, an average of 8,076 children received subsidies per month in Monroe County, down from an average of 9,022 per month in 2010.

When Amons, now 21, returned to work caring for 2-year-olds in late November, her son, Nazir McCloud, started at the center. She and the center's director assumed a subsidy would be granted, because Amons' income is well within the eligibility guidelines. But she was among more than 700 families turned away in the first few months of the freeze. It's unclear when the freeze will end.

Amons tried half-day care to save money and relied on her sisters to trade off watching their nephew in the afternoons. But the aunts, ages 18 and 19, weren't available long-term, and Amons says Nazir was regressing – wanting to be held a lot and wanting to drink from a baby bottle instead



of a cup. Then Amons turned to a friend to watch Nazir all day. The friend does a good job, said Amons, but he's not always available and Nazir has lost the benefits of being around other children.

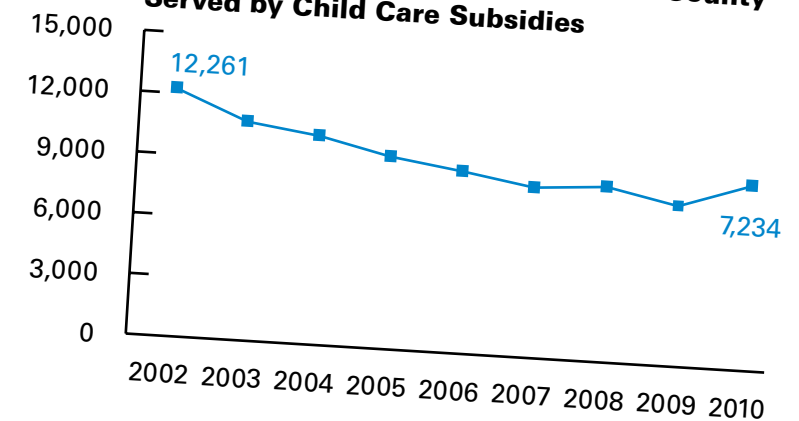
Studies find that care from people trained in early childhood work tends to be better than informal, unlicensed care arrangements. Lacking reliable care leaves some parents unable to hold a job.

Amons was recently in tears at work over her personal child care problems. In September 2011, she took a second job to earn more, toward her goal of returning Nazir to the center.

"He needs to have the interaction with children so he could understand how to share," she says. But working more hours gives her less time with her son.

"I have to do what I have to do," Amons says. "His birthday is coming up." Then Christmas. "I really don't have any extra money."

Total Number of Children in Monroe County Served by Child Care Subsidies



The Next Decade

Long-Term Strategies for a Better 2021

What will 2021 look like? Will we have had another decade of decline or a decade of progress for kids? Will these statistics look the same? The answer lies in the policy choices we make now and our allocation of scarce resources. Many problems that children and youth face today are preventable – their futures are based in our choices, not an insurmountable or random fate.

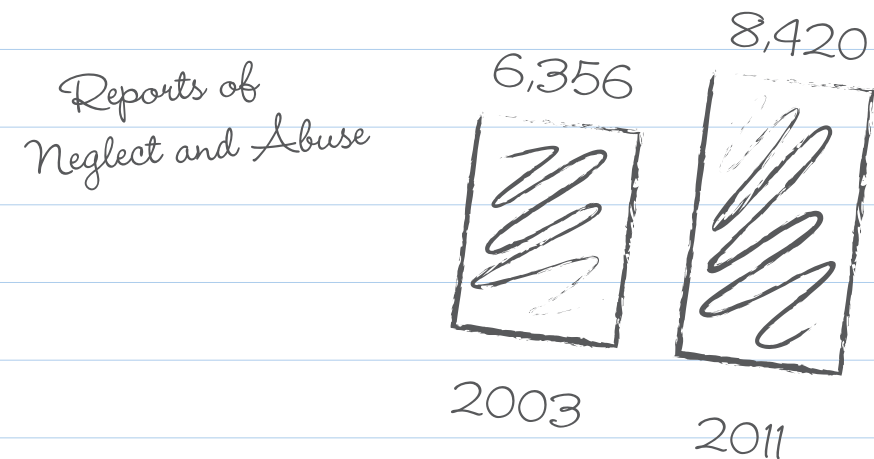
To effect a "game-changer" for Monroe County's children and youth, we must collaborate even more across individual areas of responsibility and programs and we must use data to drive decision-making. The Strive Initiative, a national approach to improve educational outcomes of children that is being spearheaded locally by Monroe Community College, is a recent example of an effort with the potential to do this – incorporating the aspects of systemic, integrated, and transformative change that our children need from us. Organizations like The Community Place are already researching data and starting conversations around how to use data to improve service delivery.

Similarly, The Children's Agenda will work with these partners and others to convene key community leaders this fall and winter to think together about what innovative, transformational ideas could be implemented here to dramatically improve our children's lives over the next 10 years. We have a list of ideas from which to start, but our community cannot succeed if they end up as The Children Agenda's ideas alone. The Greater Rochester area truly needs a community-generated action plan for our children, one that is owned and actualized by the key decision-makers in our community. A process similar to the Finger Lakes Health System Agency's convening of the Sage Commission, which developed a strategic vision and long-range plan through 2020 to address the health and health-related services necessary for the aging population and their caregivers, is exactly what's needed on behalf of the children in our community. Following is a list of ideas with which to start the conversation.

Transforming the Next Decade

- **Children's Impact Statement:** Require public statements assessing the impact of budget changes on measures of children's health, education, and success in each County, City, and School District annual budget (similar to environmental impact statements).
- **Youth Master Plan:** Create a plan across all sectors and programs to identify gaps and share information that better leverages already-invested resources to improve kids' outcomes, pre-natal to age 21.
- **State of the Children Report Card and Address:** Conduct an annual inter-governmental check-up and public address by the City, County, and School District, using the same measuring stick, and highlighting progress, challenges, and action steps.
- **Evidence-Based Contract Review:** Require that agencies who contract with local government and RCSD to provide services on behalf of children, youth, and families supply evidence to a team of reviewers, including independent outside entities, on their effectiveness in outcomes for those served.
- **Restructuring Financing of Children's Services:** Most proven, preventive services for kids save far more taxpayer money in the long run than they cost upfront, but the upfront investment cost still remains the biggest barrier. Explore innovative financing mechanisms such as social impact bonds or dedicating a new "penny for children" sales tax, rebating the money to taxpayers once the savings are achieved.

The Children's Agenda is committed to furthering this conversation and we're here to help support collaborative community efforts. We want to hear from you about what ideas you can bring to the table.



After-School Programs

Too many children with working parents don't have safe, quality places to spend time during the after-school hours. Youth unsupervised after school are four times more likely to have committed a crime and used illegal drugs. The Center for Governmental Research and The Children's Agenda have estimated that 2,505 children were served by programs meeting minimal quality standards in 2009.

Community leaders in Monroe County have banded together in recent years to raise the importance of after-school programming at the state level. In 2010 and 2011, the Community Coalition, which includes the Rochester Business Alliance, Monroe County, the City of Rochester, and the Rochester Area Community Foundation, made after-school funding one of their top New York State legislative priorities. In addition, downtown businesses under the leadership of the Rochester Downtown Development Corporation have recently banded together to promote productive after-school alternatives for City youth.

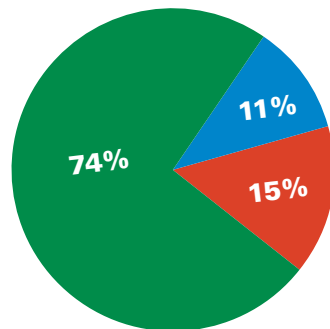
Despite these significant efforts, thousands of kids remain unserved.

Violence Prevention

Too many children don't have skills they need to cope with stressful situations. If youth are taught alternative coping skills and mechanisms at the right age, aggressive incidents and violence can be dramatically reduced. Coping Power is an evidence-based program delivered to children in Grades 4-5 that teaches these critical skills. The Children's Agenda estimates that 20% of RCSD 4th and 5th graders, or approximately 1,000 children, could benefit from this program. This fall, Coping Power is serving about 10% of those who could benefit: the program is in place in four RCSD schools as well as Wilson Commencement Park.

Rochester School-Aged Children by Status of After-School Enrollment, 2009

Children in need but not served



Children served by programs that meet minimum quality standards

Children served by programs that DO NOT meet minimum quality standards



A supportive push helps teen get her life together

In Teilyn Walker's early teens, she hung out with friends who were mostly bad influences. She can see that now.

Those other teens haven't changed. They're still stuck in habits that they can't see are a waste of time, says Teilyn, who's now 17 and lives in northeast Rochester.

"They just hustle. They chill out in the streets, fight, sell drugs," she says. "That lifestyle is not for me."

Change for her started four years ago, when a friend introduced her to The Community Place at 145 Parsells Ave., a place with "good energy," says Teilyn. The center's after-school Student "Sankofa" Leadership Academy is held for four hours each weekday for about 50 youth ages 12 to 21.

When she first went to The Community Place, Teilyn wasn't doing her homework. She didn't think about the consequences of her choices. She didn't know how to handle her emotions. She cursed and was hot-headed.

"In 8th grade, I didn't even think I was going to make it to the 12th grade," Teilyn says.

The center's staff use discussions, community service projects and other activities to inspire and encourage teens to aim higher. The students wrote a successful grant application to buy compact video cameras, which they've used to make documentaries. Teilyn created one about being fatherless and one about how what people wear expresses who they are.

A "love and forgiveness" curriculum helped Teilyn forgive her father for his absence and move on.

She also gained a new perspective on the times that her mother was getting after her about little things. Perhaps the root of the problem was her mother being hard on herself for whatever she thought she might have done wrong, Teilyn decided. So one day about a year ago she sat down

with her and suggested, "Mom, you need to forgive yourself. You did the best you could do." They both cried and felt better, Teilyn says.

Cyndie Walker says she appreciated that discussion and the emotional maturity her eldest daughter has gained.

Help with homework at the center led to better grades for Teilyn. But when she wasn't getting to school on time last year, her mother alerted the youth program's coordinator, Maurice Haskins, and together they held her accountable. Haskins says his message to Teilyn was simple: "There is no reason for you to not succeed."

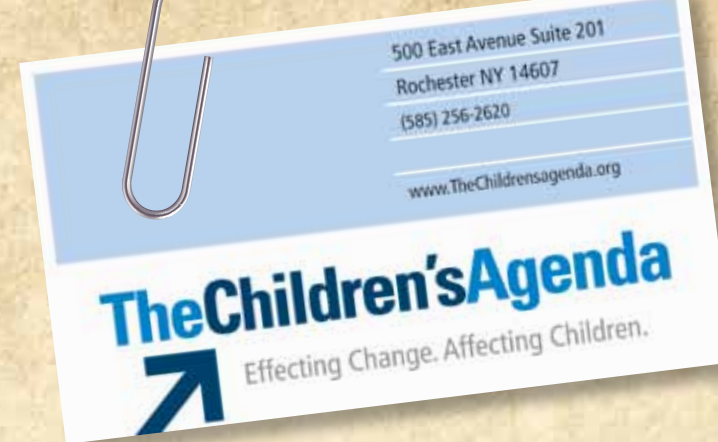
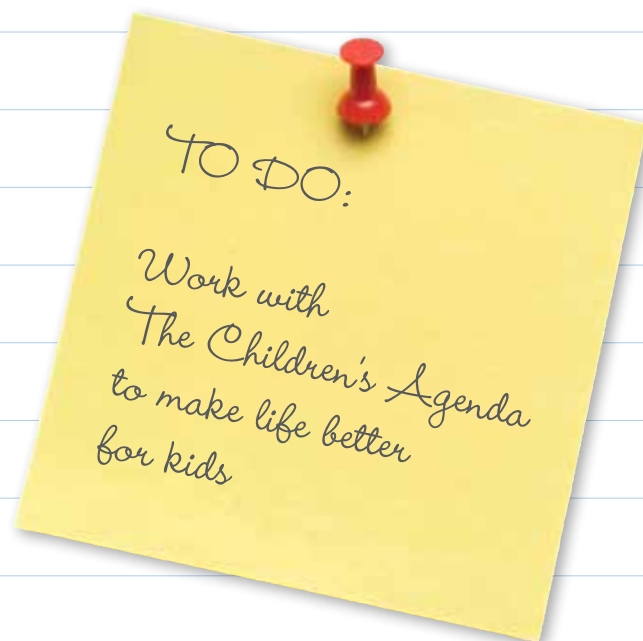
As a senior, Teilyn says she loves school and she is on track to graduate in June 2012 from Franklin High School. She is looking ahead to community college and a bachelor's degree.

"I'm proud of the young woman she's definitely coming full circle to," Cyndie Walker says. "I know she's going to do great things."

Doing Things Differently, Together

One thing is clear: the statistics are staggering, showing the situation for our children declining in many areas. Coping Power, after-school programs, quality early childhood education, and the Nurse-Family Partnership can help stem the decline, but they alone are not enough to turn Monroe County into a safe, healthy place for all children. A few proven programs are a start – but they are not enough.

NFP, for example, can dramatically reduce abuse and neglect, but it is designed to serve only low-income, first-time mothers. What can our community do to reach other vulnerable populations? We need to do things differently if we want different results. A broader, more intensive, more proactive community approach is critical for our community's future and our children's well-being. The Rochester community, when committed, has moved mountains. Our kids need us to do that now.



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