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National Data Show Generation Z Breaks Records in Education and Health Despite Challenging Economic Climate

Percentage of Virgin Islands high schoolers not graduating on time decreased by nearly 25 percent

ST. THOMAS, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – Across the nation, the teenagers of Generation Z – the rising cohort that follows the Millennials – broke records in education and health indicators despite growing up in the midst of the economic downturn, according to the 2016 *KIDS COUNT*[®] *Data Book* from the [Annie. E. Casey Foundation](#). The national *KIDS COUNT Data Book* is the annual ranking of states on 16 key measures of child well-being, referencing the best available data and statistics on the educational, social, economic and physical well-being of children. This year's release focuses on key trends in child well-being in the post-recession years.

Aided by advantageous federal, state and local policies and investments in prevention, U.S. teens in record numbers have seemingly avoided obstacles that could have derailed their future prospects. Comparing national data between 2008 and 2014, teen birth rates fell 40 percent, the percentage of teens abusing drugs and alcohol dropped by 38 percent, and the percentage of high schoolers not graduating on time decreased by 28 percent.

Data for the Virgin Islands is not included in the *Data Book* because the Territory is not included in most nation-wide surveys and datasets. A *Data Book* for the Virgin Islands is released annually, produced by the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, based on local data from the Virgin Islands Community Survey (VICS) and Virgin Island government agencies. This year's *Data Book* for the Virgin Islands is expected to be released during the summer.

Comparable data are available for the USVI for teen births, which fell 27 percent between 2008 and 2013 (the most recent year for which local data are available from the V.I. Department of Health). In addition, the percentage of USVI high schoolers not graduating on time for the improved by nearly 25 percent since 2007/2008.

Yet despite their increasingly responsible choices, Generation Z teens growing up in low- to moderate-income households have fewer opportunities for raising their standard of living compared to adults in the previous two generations. Rising employment numbers notwithstanding, 22 percent of America's children lived in poverty in 2014—the same rate as in 2013. Since 2008, the number of children living in high poverty areas skyrocketed to 14 percent and almost one in three children live in families where no member of the household has full-time, year-round employment.

Across the United States, the rates of children without health insurance have improved by 40 percent since 2008, with some states recording increases of more than 60 percent. In the Territory, coverage rates for children have remained largely stable, between 2008 (71 percent) and 2013 (73 percent), according to the Virgin Islands Community Survey.

Patrick McCarthy, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, highlights that “This generation of teenagers and young adults are coming of age in the wake of the worst economic climate in nearly 80 years, and yet they are achieving key milestones that are critical for future success.” He urged candidates in state and national campaigns “describe in depth their proposals to help these determined young people realize their full potential.”

The Casey Foundation proposes bipartisan solutions based on American values

In the *Data Book*, the Casey Foundation offers a number of recommendations for how policy makers can ensure all children are prepared for the future, based on this country’s shared values of opportunity, responsibility and security.

- **OPPORTUNITY:** Increase opportunity by expanding access to high-quality Pre-K and early childhood services so that all children are prepared to succeed in school. In addition, expand access to higher education and training so that every low-income child has a fair chance to develop his or her potential.
- **REPRESENTATION:** Increase the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income workers who do not have dependent children. This strategy will bolster workers, who may in fact be helping to support children who do not live with them and who are struggling to get by on low wages.
- **SECURITY:** Policies can ensure American families have a measure of security, particularly low-income parents of young children, by providing paid family leave that helps them balance their obligations at home and in the workplace.

The 2016 National Data Book will be available June 21 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data – including data for the Virgin Islands – on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. The Data Center allows users to create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and to view real-time information on mobile devices. The release of the *Virgin Islands Data Book* will be announced via local media channels upon its completion.

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For 25 years, the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands has been bringing positive changes in the Territory through programs committed to youth, learning, family support and the environment. With a professional staff and a volunteer Board of Directors composed of local community leaders, CFVI is a leading advocate and supporter of programs that give children the best starts possible while ensuring opportunity and sustainability for our community in the future. CFVI operates or funds close to 50 community programs including The Family Connection, Kids Count, scholarships, teacher grants, emergency grants to families and elderly residents of the USVI. CFVI is a registered non-profit entirely supported by individual donors, grants, trusts, corporate donations and estate planning.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.