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Data Show Well-Being of Wyoming's Kids a Mixed Bag

2016 KIDS COUNT Data Book finds WY's kids rank highest in economic well-being, but near the bottom in health

LARAMIE, Wyo. –The Annie E. Casey Foundation has released its 2016 *KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, which compares data between 2008 and 2014. The *Data Book* reveals that the Cowboy State's overall ranking for child well-being improved by four spots, up from 16th to 12th—one of the biggest improvements in the nation. But further data suggests Wyoming's youth are facing hardships as well.

The state's high overall position is partly because it ranks number one in economic well-being. In the last five years, Wyoming was largely insulated from the economic downturn experienced by the rest of the nation. The state's prosperity allowed funding of crucial government programs and most families felt a strong sense of economic security.

According to the *KIDS COUNT* data, Wyoming also saw improvement in education, moving from a rank of 21st in the 2015 *Data Book* to a rank of 18th in 2016. However, 59 percent of Wyoming fourth graders scored below proficient in reading and 65 percent of eighth graders scored below proficient in math. Additionally, 9,000 three and four-year-olds did not attend preschool, which often puts kids at a disadvantage upon entering kindergarten.

Perhaps most concerning, Wyoming remains near the bottom of the rankings for child health at 48th in the nation, down from 45th in 2015. The data evaluated includes:

- Child and teen deaths ages 1-19: Rank 42
- Low birthweight babies: Rank 45
- Kids without health insurance: Rank 30
- Teens ages 12 to 17 who abuse alcohol or drugs: Rank 35

Wyoming youth's struggle with suicide is made apparent by its disturbing rank of 42nd in child and teen deaths, which includes suicide; these numbers are unchanged from 2013, but have decreased since 2008. This improvement may be partly attributed to the state's suicide prevention plan and because, since 2008, teen drug and alcohol abuse has declined 40 percent. Even with these improvements, it is clear there is still much work to be done.

The family and community domain is a mixed bag – Wyoming ranks seventh. One positive piece of data shows that just seven percent of children live in families where the head of the household lacks a high school diploma; a 17 percent improvement since 2008. On the flip side, Wyoming’s teen birth rate is 30 girls in 1,000 – 11th worst in the nation.

As most of the nation regains a feeling of economic prosperity, many Wyoming citizens are experiencing job losses and budget cuts in their home towns. “While the findings from the data book appear incredibly positive at first glance, Wyoming’s results are not so cut and dried. We will face hard choices this year and in the coming years,” says Craig Showalter, President of the Wyoming Community Foundation, whose organization is the Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT state network partner. “But if we make the decision to put children first, as often as possible, we will be able to keep these trend lines moving in a positive direction.”

National and State Rankings for the 2016 *Data Book*

The 2016 *Data Book*, which focuses on key trends in child well-being in the post-recession years, measures child well-being in four domains: economic well-being, education, health, and family and community.

For the second year in a row, a non-New England state ranks number one for overall child well-being. Minnesota holds the top spot, followed by Massachusetts, Iowa, New Hampshire and Connecticut, a newcomer to the top five. Mississippi remains the lowest ranked, with New Mexico, Louisiana, Nevada and newcomer Alabama rounding out the bottom five. Other state highlights:

- The top five states in economic well-being are in the heartland and Plains States regions — Wyoming, North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa and Nebraska.
- The biggest improvements in overall rankings compared to last year’s *Data Book* are in Montana, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Washington, West Virginia and Wyoming.
- The biggest drops in overall rankings are in Alaska, Maine, Maryland and Kansas.
- Arkansas, Florida and Wyoming fell to the lowest five rankings in health, accompanying Mississippi and Louisiana.

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.

RESPONSIBILITY: 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 *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 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.

Wyoming Community Foundation is the KIDS COUNT grantee for the state of Wyoming. KIDS COUNT® is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation designed to track the well-being of children by providing high quality data and trend analysis. For more information contact Samin Dadelahi, Chief Operating Officer, samin@wycf.org, 307-721-8300

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.