

N.M. shows increase in concentrated poverty

Written by By Sharon Kayne NM Voices for Children
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Progress on the way

ALBUQUERQUE – Despite a fairly strong economy nationally, ten states – including New Mexico – have seen an increase in the share of children living in areas of concentrated poverty. This information comes from the latest KIDS COUNT report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The report also shows that children of color are more likely to live in high-poverty, low-opportunity neighborhoods than white children.

“While children do best when their family is economically secure, the well-being of the larger community is also important. Children need to grow up in neighborhoods with high-quality schools, safe places to play, good job opportunities, and reliable transportation,” James Jimenez said. Jimenez is the executive director of New Mexico Voices for Children.

“Neighborhoods that are under--resourced and have high levels of poverty not only fail to provide opportunities, but can even put our kids at risk because there is less access to healthy food and more exposure to environmental hazards, such as poor air quality, and toxins such as lead,” he added.

Concentrated poverty is defined as a Census tract where at least 30% of the residents live at or below the poverty level, which is currently \$21,330 for a family of three. Early in the great recession, from 2008 to 2012, 22 percent of New Mexico’s children lived in concentrated poverty. Toward the end of the recession, that had jumped to 24 percent – an increase of 6,000 children.

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Though 28 states saw decreases in the share of children in concentrated poverty during that time frame, 11 states experienced no progress, and 10 states saw poverty increase. Across the nation, African American and Native American children are seven times more likely to live in poor neighborhoods than are white children – and Hispanic children are nearly five times more likely.

“These disparities in child well-being are especially distressing in a state like New Mexico, where 75 percent of our children are kids of color,” Amber Wallin stated. Wallin is the deputy director of Voices for Children, the KIDS COUNT affiliate for New Mexico.

“Equity isn’t something that just happens. It’s a product of systems, laws, and policies that work together to either support opportunities for families to thrive or – as the data show – to hinder their success. Since this is a systemic problem, it will require a systemic solution,” she continued.

The report includes several recommendations for revitalizing impoverished communities, transforming them into areas of opportunity, and removing oppressive practices and policies that hold back families of color.

“A couple of ways New Mexico can improve child well-being – for all children no matter where they live – is to continue to expand high-quality early childhood care and education services and to make college more affordable. Fortunately, we’re making progress in both of those areas,” Jimenez pointed out.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s data snapshot, *Children Living in High--Poverty, Low--Opportunity Neighborhoods*, **is available here:**

aecf.org/resources/children-living-in-high-poverty-low-opportunity-neighborhoods/

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