2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book Shows Some Progress for Wisconsin’s Children
But Post-Recession Economic Bounceback Remains Elusive

Conditions are slowly improving in some regards for Wisconsin’s children, but they remain considerably worse-off economically than they were before the recession. The 2013 National KIDS COUNT Data Book, published each year by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, paints a mixed picture both nationally and in Wisconsin—encouraging gains mixed in among signs of an agonizingly slow recovery.

“It’s always nice to see Wisconsin go up in state rankings, but when you look a little deeper, there’s a lot of cause for concern,” said Jim Moeser, deputy director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families.

The good news for Wisconsin is that the state’s overall ranking improved from 15th last year to 12th in 2013. The state’s rank in two of the four broad categories—Health and Economic Well-being—improved. Wisconsin held steady at number 18 in the Family & Community category, but fell from 10th to 12th in Education. Of the 16 indicators that make up those broad categories, Wisconsin’s rank improved in 11, dropped in four, and stayed the same in one. Most of the data used in the 2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book are from 2011, which in many cases is the most recent available.

But while the state’s Economic Well-Being rank improved relative to other states, Wisconsin is actually doing worse in component indicators (related to poverty and employment) than it was before the recession. Wisconsin’s 2011 child poverty of 18.2 percent was 29 percent higher than the 2005 rate.

“The increasing number of children growing up in poverty will impact all of us, not just as small, lingering aftereffects, but in ways that impact the quality of life in our state.”

In the Health category, Wisconsin’s ranked jumped from 18th to 3rd. While the state did indeed improve on most of the indicators that make up the Health category, that huge jump in rank is largely a statistical shift. It reflects a small improvement in drug and alcohol abuse among
teens. Because many states are bunched together statistically on that statistic, Wisconsin’s small improvement resulted in a jump from 30th to a 15-way tie for 1st.

The 2013 Data Book also examines how America’s youngest children are faring, noting that our youngest citizens are disproportionately affected by the lingering effects of the recession.

“Wisconsin has been a national leader on investing in early care and education in the past, but we’re seeing signs that our state’s commitment to young children is weakening,” Moeser said. “Our leaders need to understand how important it is to Wisconsin’s future that our kids get a great start in life. That foundation is crucial for success in school, in the workplace, and in life.”

All of the data used in the Data Book, along with hundreds of additional measures, are available online via the KIDS COUNT Data Center.

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