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Report to the Community

Assuring a Sturdy Foundation:

The Status of Young Children in Marquette and Alger Counties 2009

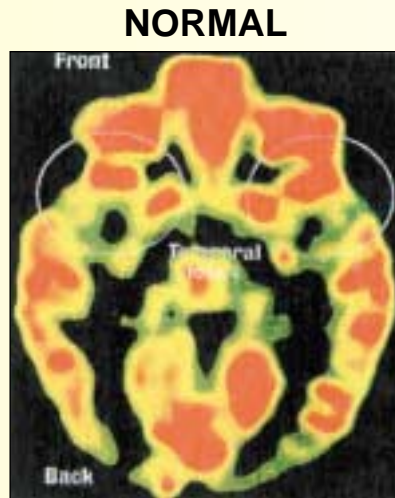


Assuring a Sturdy Foundation: The Status of Young Children in Marquette and Alger Counties

Brain Development
(85% of brain development occurs during first five years)

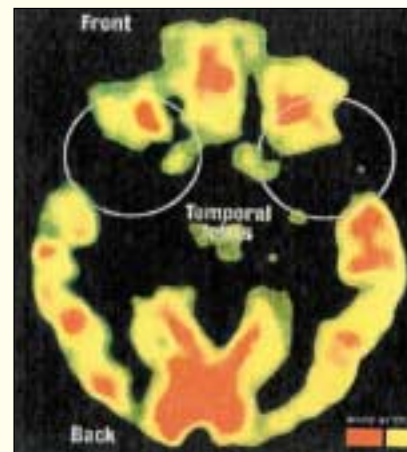
Healthy Child

This Pet scan of the brain of a normal child shows regions of high (red) and low (black) activity. In regions like the temporal lobes (top), early childhood experiences wire the circuits.



NORMAL

AT-RISK



Effect of Extreme Deprivation

This Pet scan of the brain of a child who was institutionalized shortly after birth shows the effect of extreme deprivation in infancy. Deprivation can damage developing brain architecture which can lead to life-long problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health.

Source: *Newsweek* Special Edition, 1997

Early experiences affect the quality of basic architecture of the brain by establishing either a sturdy foundation or fragile foundation for all of the learning, health and behavior that follows. In the first few years of life, 700 new neural connections are formed each and every second. The interactive influences of genes and experiences shape the developing brain. Source: *Center on the Developing Child*, Harvard University

The first five years of a child's life are a time of great opportunity. The young child's early experiences and environments directly impact the developing architecture of his or her brain. Everything children see, every word they hear, everything they do...from their first breath, shapes the rapid development of their brains. We now know that by age five, 85 percent of the brain's structure will be built and the foundation for language, social behavior, problem solving ability and emotional health will be mostly created...or not....by the time they enter kindergarten.

To be successful in school and in life, Michigan's young children must grow up in an environment that develops self-confidence, positive social emotional skills and a love for learning. Much can be done to ensure that every young child has this foundation. Leaders in communities across our state are working together so that every infant, toddler and preschooler has the opportunity to

achieve their full potential.

People who understand the vital importance of investing in young children in our two-county area have come together to form our Great Start Collaborative. The Marquette-Alger Great Start Collaborative is funded by, and works in partnership with, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation to prepare and implement the *Marquette-Alger Early Childhood Action Agenda*. Our *Early Childhood Action Agenda* will lay out actions we need to take to ensure that every child enters kindergarten healthy and eager to learn.

We need to know what the current status of young children is in Marquette and Alger Counties in order to make wise decisions about the future of our youngest citizens. This report presents current community data in five component areas which make critical contributions to optimal brain development, health and early learning of young children.

Physical Health Care

Definition: Comprehensive physical health and child development services-including screenings, assessments, interventions, and timely and appropriate referrals

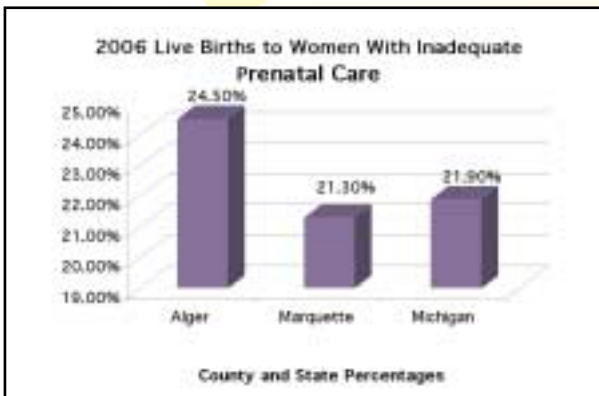
Result: Infants, young children and their families are physically healthy.

Healthy children are more able to engage in the full range of life experiences that promote early learning. A lack of health care or delays in treating children's health problems can negatively affect their development, sometimes with lifelong consequences.

Young children and families with health insurance are more likely to go to the doctor and get help for health conditions, before they become

emergencies. Young children who have a regular health care provider, or medical home, are more likely to get the high quality preventative care they need to identify and address the common health needs and concerns of early childhood, like immunizations, and screenings for developmental hearing and vision problems.

FACT: According to the Medical Care Access Coalition in 2006, 34,172 people in the Upper Peninsula had no health insurance. This is approximately 11% of our U.P. population.

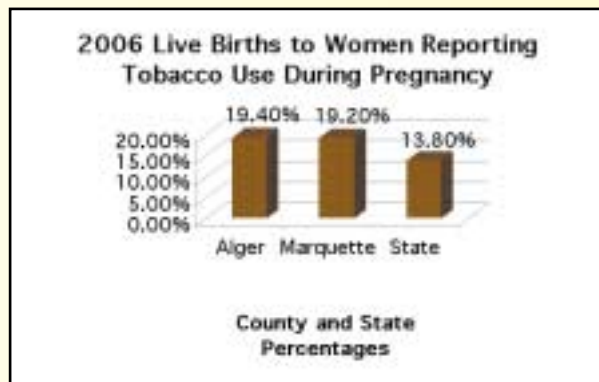


Adequate prenatal care is critical to the overall health of the community. Consistent and timely prenatal care decreases the incidence of negative birth outcomes. Note that Alger County had a higher percent of live births to women with inadequate prenatal care than Marquette County and Michigan as a whole. Source: Kids Count 2008

FACT: More than one in five Marquette and Alger babies were born to a mother with less than adequate prenatal care.

FACT: Maternal smoking during pregnancy is more prevalent in Michigan than in the nation.

Smoking increases the risk of unhealthy births. Note the higher rate of births to women who smoked during pregnancy for both Marquette and Alger Counties compared to the Michigan rate. Source: Kids Count 2008



Babies born to mothers with inadequate prenatal care, and/or who smoked during pregnancy, have a higher than normal risk of developmental delay, disease, and problems with vision and hearing. Maternal health and well-being is vitally connected to healthy pregnancy and birth.

Prenatal substance abuse of any kind, including use of alcohol and drugs (prescription and recreational), has the potential to cause life-long problems for the baby including developmental delays,

cognitive impairments, as well as physical, social, and emotional difficulties.

The "Binge Drinking Rate" (5 or more drinks on one occasion at least once in the last month) was 27.6% in Marquette County compared to the state's rate of 17.4%. It is unknown how many of these were pregnant women. Source: State Prevention Framework/State Incentive Grant (SPF/SIG) Data report of 2007.



"Our children are our most valuable resource, and it is everyone's job to see that they receive the care and nurturing necessary to thrive and become productive members of our community. Early childhood programs and services help to make this happen."

Fred J. Benzie, MPH, RS
Health Officer
Marquette County Health Department



"Vaccines can save a child's life and protect him/her against permanent disabilities. Vaccine-preventable diseases are very serious and still circulate world wide, posing a threat to children. Vaccines are safe and effective and save millions of health care dollars."

Jean Lussman RN/BSN
LMAS District Health Nurse

Social and Emotional Health Care

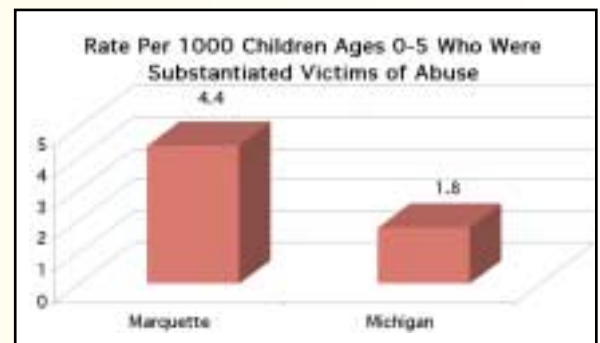
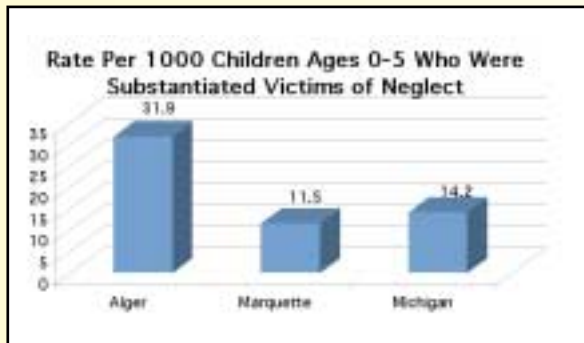
Definition: *Comprehensive social and emotional health care services, including specialized screenings, assessments and intervention services, promote the social-emotional well-being of all infants, young children, and their families.*

Result: *Infants, young children and their families are socially and emotionally healthy.*

Every child needs a warm, nurturing and stable relationship with loving caregivers in order to grow to be trusting, curious and confident.

Young children need support to cope with their emotions, control impulses and form relationships. Children who get along with peers, listen and respond to adults, and demonstrate eagerness for learning are more likely to have success in school.

Children, like adults, can develop mental health problems like depression or traumatic stress disorder which may adversely impact their overall development. Early diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems are vital.



In 2007, Alger County's victims of neglect were over double the state's rate per 1000 children. Although Marquette County's rate appears low compared to the state's rate, all committee members agreed, "even one victim is too many." Source: *Kids Count 2008*

Marquette's number of children who were substantiated victims of abuse doubled between 2006 and 2007. For 2007, Marquette County's rate per 1000 abused children was well above double Michigan's rate. Alger County's rate was unavailable due to low incidence data. Source: *Kids Count 2008*.

The number and rate of children 0-5 who were victims of abuse/neglect steadily increased over the five year period examined. Although Kid's Count Data does not specifically address the issue of child abuse/neglect that is substance abuse related, anecdotal data presented from local county experiences indicates a substantial increase in these

types of cases. In particular, it was reported that in the four months prior to this report, a total of nine children were known to have been born in Marquette County who tested positive for the presence of illegal drugs at the time of their birth.



"We must reduce the harmful effects of toxic stress that inundate children's lives. Strengthening their capacity to cope with minor, major, or chronic stress will allow children and families to overcome obstacles which impede or prevent the development of their inherent potential. Through collaboration, we will develop and expand comprehensive, synchronized supports and services aimed at protecting children, strengthening families and promoting the health and well-being of our community."

Chris Zenti, MARESA Educational Consultant

According to Pam Schiller, Ph.D., 1/3 of our children are now diagnosed with some significant mental or physical disorder.

"The social and emotional health of our young children can be comprised of many factors. Collaborative efforts in the community can provide access to basic supports which help families to deal with these issues. Providing a safe, healthy and nurturing environment is critical to a child's social and emotional development."

Gail J. Hall, LMSW, ACSW Chief Executive Officer, Pathways Community Mental Health



The rate of children ages birth to 5 in foster care in Marquette County increased from 4.4 per 1000 in 2004 to 7.1 per 1000 in 2007, according to Kids Count Data. Alger County's rate was unavailable due to low incidence data. Children removed from their homes suffer several levels of loss - their sense of security, the physical space they knew as "home", and regular contact with their family. Although most of these children will eventually return home to their birth families, this disruption has been shown to have a lasting impact on the child.

BEARS (Behavioral Emotional and Resiliency Skills) is an early childhood prevention program targeting children ages 0-5 who are experiencing challenges in child care settings. BEARS consultants work with children in these settings to support social and emotional development and reduce child care expulsion. From 2006-2008 the number of children served by this program doubled from 6-13 children served. Source: 4C of the Upper Peninsula

Parenting Education and Family Support/Parent Leadership

Definition: Services that provide support for parents in the critical role they play in the healthy development of their infants and young children; these services and supports also address the stressors impairing the ability of families to nurture the well-being, safety and overall healthy development of their infants and young children.

Result: Families support and guide the early learning of their infants and toddlers.

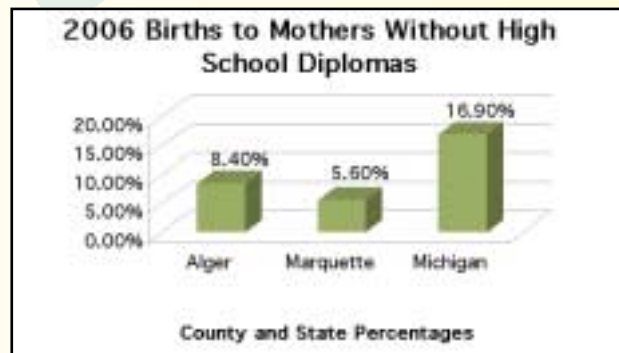
Raising young children is challenging for every family, regardless of education or income. Parents have so many roles that they are called on to play in the lives of their young children. Parents must be caregivers, educators, playmates, role models, providers, and protectors.

Parents greatly benefit from easily accessible information on parenting, community resources, and supports.

Families are the key influence on their children. Their early development depends on the knowledge and skills of their parents.

Parents must be able to realize their role as parents, their strengths, and their responsibility in providing valuable decisions for their children. Parents must have support to help address the issues that complicate the task of raising children. There is a need for multiple ways of communicating the available resources, family events, and supports available for families in our two-county area.

Children exposed to books and reading during preschool years enter kindergarten with a listening vocabulary of 20,000 words versus 3,000 words for those that don't have this exposure. Source: Dorothy Johnson, Special to Viewpoint 2009 on ECIC website



Limited education of a parent is related to differences in early exposure to a varied vocabulary that enhances school achievement. "Each additional year of parental schooling is linked to modest increases in a child's educational test scores", according to Kids Count 2008.

Research has shown that reading aloud to children is the number one factor that consistently has a positive impact on children learning to read. 55.4% of parents in Michigan reported reading aloud to their children six -seven days per week in 2003. Although the information was not available for our two counties, there has been a community-wide emphasis to increase reading to young children. Some programs that stress early reading to young children currently exist such as Head Start, Great Start Readiness Program, Parent Involvement in

Education, Great Parents/Great Start, and Parent Newborn/Rock and Read, which gave out 2500-2700 books to parents of preschoolers this year. According to Sean O'Donnell, Rock and Read Coordinator, "It's amazing that parents, no matter their income level, still are unaware of the importance of reading to babies." "Reach Out and Read" is a new program in Marquette and Alger Counties where books are given out at doctor's offices during well-baby checks. **These proven programs are currently in jeopardy due to state budget constraints.**

"It is very important for all children to have access to quality early childhood development programs. As a parent, I want to make sure that my children have as many opportunities as possible to succeed and reach their full potential. Therefore, it is essential for me to assist in building public support for early childhood as an investment in our future. We want to strengthen the commitment of all parents in the community on behalf of young children."

Stacey Masters, Alger County Parent



"As a parent in Marquette County I know the importance of community support when raising young children. Having friends, family and neighbors to turn to with questions, as well as the formal agencies and programs that help educate parents, was so helpful when my daughter was young! Now that she's in elementary school she is confident, socially active and outgoing, and ready to face life's challenges as they come. Without the support of our community, her outlook would have been very different."

Shawn Olson, Marquette County Parent Liaison

Early Care and Education

Definition: Early care (child care) and education services that support the early learning, health and social-emotional well-being of infants and young children.

Result: Families have access to high quality early care and education and children are ready to succeed in their education and in life.

As their primary caregiver, a parent is their child’s first teacher. With the demands of today’s work world, many young children are cared for by someone other than one of their parents prior to entering kindergarten. The quality of early care and education matters, whether it is provided by a grandparent, a neighbor, or a childcare center. High quality early care and education provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for all children.

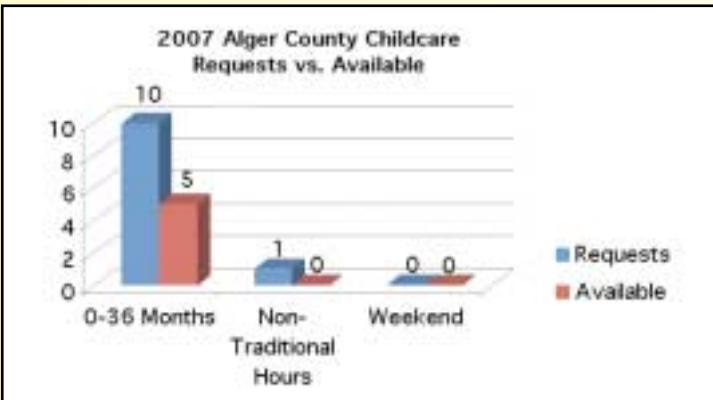
Children who attend a high quality preschool program in the year or two before kindergarten are better prepared-academically, socially and emotionally. High quality preschool programs have well-trained staff, small group sizes, language rich environments, and actively engage parents in their children’s learning. Parents who are involved in their children’s early care and education programs benefit by meeting other parents, sharing experiences, and being able to bring many activities into the home.

Census data for 2005-2007 showed an average of 2996 children 0-5 in Marquette County. For 2008-2009 a total of 847 children were enrolled

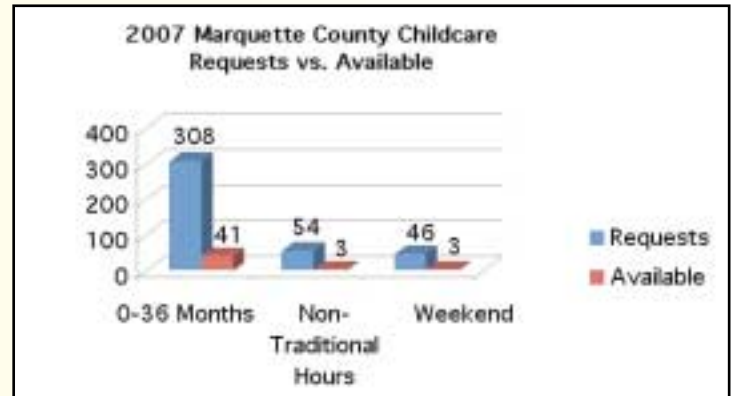
in preschool programs including Early Head Start, Head Start, private preschools, Great Start Readiness programs, and Early-On. This data indicates that only a little over 25% of children ages 0-5 in MQT County had the opportunity to participate in high quality preschool programming to help prepare them for success in kindergarten.

AMCAB provides Head Start classroom-based programming for 284 three and four-year-old children in Marquette and Alger Counties. They provide Early Head Start home-based programming for 40 children 0-3 years-old and their families in the two-county area. They also provide Great Start Readiness programming for 100 children. Additionally there are private organizations providing preschool programs.

Children with established medical conditions or developmental delays often have special health and learning needs. Early On is an early intervention system for children birth to three years of age. Locally, Early On has collaborative agreements with Department of Human Services, Pathways, Community Mental Health, the Public Health Departments, Marquette Alger Regional Educational Service Agency, and Early Head Start to provide evaluation, determine eligibility, identify community resources and to coordinate services. The total number of referrals to Early On from 2001 to 2008 was 1057 children. Individualized early intervention services provide crucial developmental guidance for parents and are designed to help every child reach his or her full potential.



For both Alger and Marquette Counties, there are far fewer slots for 0 - 36 month olds, nontraditional hour needs and weekend care



needs than number of inquiries. The demand far exceeds the supply for licensed childcare. Source: 4C of the Upper Peninsula

One in three Michigan children is not ready to succeed in school when they enter Kindergarten. Source: Lake Research Partners 2009 Kindergarten Teacher Survey

Michigan kindergarten teachers rank “not participating in a preschool program at age 4” as a main factor contributing to students starting school academically behind. Source: Lake Research Partners 2009 Kindergarten Teacher Survey



“Whether you are a child or an adult, building positive relationships is the foundation of all of life’s work.”

Joy Strasser
Early-On Coordinator
Marquette-Alger RESA



“Families need access to information on the many early childhood services that Marquette and Alger Counties provide to children. All children in Marquette and Alger counties deserve the right to quality licensed child care programs. These child care options must be safe, nurturing, helpful to families, and allow many experiences for children to grow and learn so they are ready for school and life.”

Marianne Saarivirta-Kolpack
4C of the Upper Peninsula

Basic Needs, Economic Security and Child Safety/Family Support

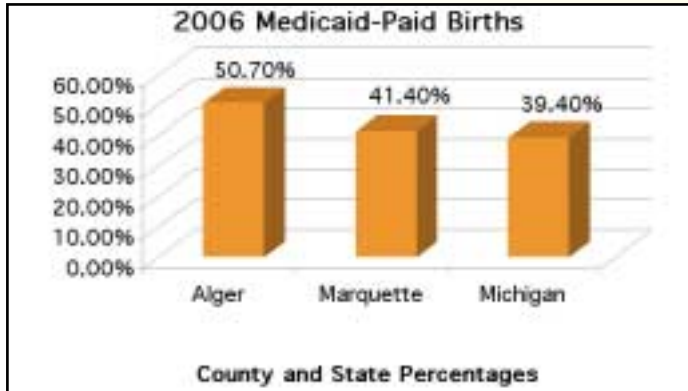
Definition: Services and supports that address the basic, daily living needs of families as well as child and family safety.

Result: Families of infants and young children are economically stable. Infants and young children live in safe families.

Young children need a stable, safe and secure family environment in order to flourish. A lack of sufficient family economic resources can place young children's health and development at risk. When parents have to focus their full attention on just meeting their family's

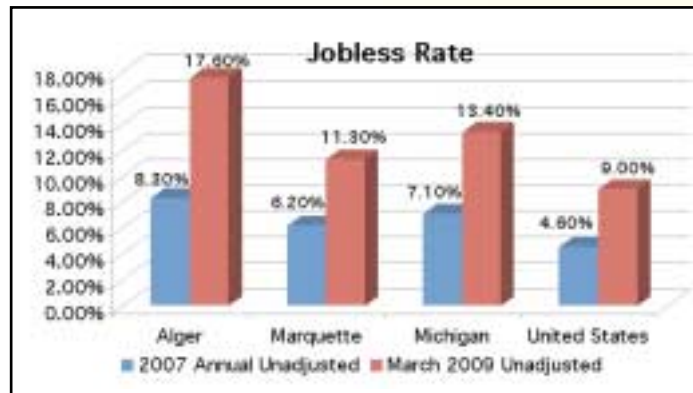
basic needs, daily reading or play can take a backseat to keeping a roof over the family's heads and food on the table.

According to Child Trends Data Bank, "Very young children living in poverty are much less likely to be able to recognize letters of the alphabet, count to 20 or higher, write their name, read or pretend to read". Research shows that once a child falls behind in these basic skills, it is difficult or even impossible, to catch up.

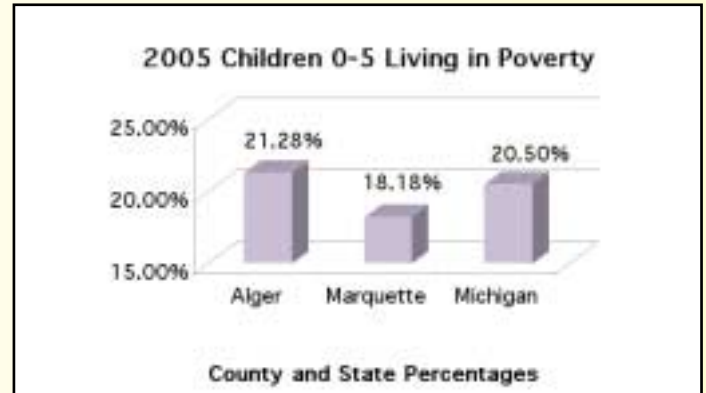


Both Marquette and Alger Counties show a higher percentage of births paid for by Medicaid than the average percent for Michigan. Source: Kids Count 2008.

FACT: Families qualify for the Food Assistance Program with incomes below 130% of the poverty level (\$27,335 for a family of four with two children in 2007.)



This chart shows the jobless rates for 2007 and March of 2009. The rate is increasing across the board, but dramatically increasing in our two-county area. Source: Michigan Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth.



According to the Census Unemployment Rate for 2005, approximately 1 in 5 preschool children live in poverty in our two county area.

Children in the 0-5 age group are more likely to receive public assistance and are more likely to live in poverty than older children. There has been a steady increase in

the number of children relying on public assistance (FAP) and living in poverty over the five year period for which data was available.



"All children, regardless of their family's income, deserve to grow up in safe homes and communities, require good nutrition, and stable loving families in order to flourish. When we ensure that basic family needs are met, families are strengthened and we help make a brighter future for our young children and community."

Rich Miketinac – Department of Human Services Director
Marquette County



"Today's families are pulled in so many directions that it can be difficult to find the services and opportunities they need. Our community needs to work together to offer families of preschool children the guidance and supports that will enhance the educational and social experiences of their children."

Robin Loviska
Department of Human Services Director
Alger County

Next Steps

This report makes it clear that Marquette and Alger Counties have significant work to do on behalf of our young children! With your help and these data findings as a starting point, the Marquette-Alger Great Start Collaborative will lead the development of the Marquette-Alger Early Childhood Action Agenda.

Over the next few months, the Marquette-Alger Great Start Collaborative will be gathering together members of our communities, from all walks of life, to answer these questions:

- Are we as a community okay with the future that these data represent?
- Can we as a community do better for our youngest citizens?
- Why do these data look the way they do?

- What is causing these conditions?
- What assets in our community do we have that can help?
- What assets do we need that we do not currently have?

In other words, what do we need to do in Marquette and Alger Counties to assure that every young child is healthy, safe and eager to succeed in their education and in life?

We need YOU to be involved in helping to make sure we don't leave any of these questions unanswered. The future of our youngest citizens is in our hands; remember that early experiences last a lifetime. We urge you to become involved in making a real difference. Only by working together can we assure a sturdy foundation and a Great Start for every child in Marquette and Alger Counties.



"Gathering information for this community report has been enlightening. This report is the first step in the development of a comprehensive 3-5 year action plan. Together, we will lay the foundation for a collaboration of programs and services to meet the needs of our youngest community members. Please join us in this adventure and contact me today!"

**Kathy Lammi, Great Start Collaborative Director
Lake Superior Community Partnership**

GREAT START COLLABORATIVE MEMBERSHIP

4C of the Upper Peninsula	Marquette Community Foundation
Alger County Probate Court	Marquette County Circuit Court
AMCAB	Marquette County Commissioners
Big Brothers/Big Sisters	Marquette County Family Court
Child & Family Services of the Upper Peninsula, Inc.	Marquette County Health Dept.
Department of Human Services	Marquette County Wrap Around
Great Lakes Center for Youth Development	MGH-Women's and Children's Center
Gwinn Area Community Schools	MSU Extension-Alger
Head Start/Great Start Readiness Program	MSU Extension-Marquette Pathways
Lake Superior Community Partnership	Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians
Local Faith Based Organizations	Teaching Family Homes
Luce-Mackinac-Alger- Schoolcraft District Health Dept.	Thomson & Thomson PC
MARESA Early On	United Way
Marquette/Alger Parents	U.P. Health Plan
Marquette Alger Regional Educational Service Agency	U.P. Homeless Student Assistance

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Please call today or visit us at
www.greatstartma.org

Our Vision: A Great Start for every child in Alger and Marquette counties; safe, healthy and eager to succeed in their education and in life.

Our Mission: The purpose of the Great Start Collaborative is to assure a coordinated system of community resources and supports to assist all families in Marquette and Alger Counties in providing a "great start" for their children from pre-birth through age five.



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