

A Children's Services Plan For the City of St. Louis

In spring 2003, a group of policymakers, researchers, and children's services providers began analyzing a Missouri law that allows any county in the state, including the City of St. Louis, to develop and fund a Community Children's Services Plan.

Operating as part of the *St. Louis Leaders Advancing the Agenda for Children*, a broad-based civic coalition, the Children's Services Plan Development Committee focused on determining how a plan addressing the needs of children, youth and families in the City of St. Louis might look. Two primary questions were explored. First, what are the priority problems and needs facing children in the City of St. Louis? Second, what services and programs might be put in place to effectively address these needs?

In addressing these two questions, the committee collected and analyzed information on the following issues:

- What do existing data and studies tell us about the needs of children in the City of St. Louis?

- What do city residents see as the primary problems facing children, youth and families, and what should be done about those problems?
- Are there adequate funds currently committed to addressing the needs of the city's children?
- What do other cities do to promote the well-being of children and youth?

There were two purposes for exploring these questions. First was to develop both a general vision and specific goals regarding what a Community Children's Services Plan for the City of St. Louis might accomplish. The second purpose was to identify specific strategies, services, and programs that could be effective in achieving the vision and goals outlined below.



Vision and Goals

Developing Youth:

St. Louis will support its children and youth with constructive activities and opportunities to develop life skills. More settings will be available to engage in safe recreational activities.



Keeping Kids Safe:

Children and youth who engage in problem behaviors will have access to the services they need. Intervention and treatment services will be available to high-risk, high-need youth.

Supporting Families:

More parents will have the skills to raise healthy, well-adjusted, successful children. Supports will be in place to assist families and communities raise children effectively.

Connecting Families With Services:

There will be increased knowledge about available services. Services will be easier to access and better coordinated.

The St. Louis Children's Services Plan

To design the specifics of an effective Community Children's Services Plan for the City of St. Louis, the St. Louis Leaders Advancing the Agenda for Children collected information from a wide range of sources. The goal was to answer four critical questions related to what a Children's Services Plan for the City of St. Louis might look like. The questions explored by the Plan Development Committee and their findings are outlined in summary form below.

What Does the Data Tell Us About the Needs of St. Louis City's Children?

Children in the City of St. Louis fare worse than in any other community in the State of Missouri.

The findings here are compelling and indisputable. Children in the City of St. Louis fare worse than any other group of children in the State of Missouri.

This situation is long-standing and unchanging. Each year the *Kids Count* report of Citizens for Missouri's Children assesses the well-being of the state's children to see how children are doing on key measures of health, education and safety. Every year the City of St. Louis ranks dead last out of Missouri's 115 counties.

The *Children of Metropolitan St. Louis* report, produced by Vision for Children at Risk, looks at similar measures of child well-being within the bi-state St. Louis region. That report shows vast disparities in the status of young people within the metropolitan area, with problems concentrated at the urban core.

Children in the City of St. Louis have the most severe problems and greatest needs of any jurisdiction in the region, but they have been left behind without adequate resources to effectively address their needs.

What Do City Residents Tell Us About the Needs of Children?

The purpose of the citywide, public meetings was to ask residents about their views on the problems that face children, youth and families, as well as to gather their recommendations to address them.

In summer 2004, a series of 19 community meetings was held across the City of St. Louis. The purpose of the meetings was to ask city residents about their views on the problems that face children, youth and families, as well as to gather recommendations about what should be done to address those problems.

The consensus that emerged from the meetings identified four primary areas of public concern related to children and their families:

1. Insufficient opportunities for children to engage in constructive activities and a lack of safe recreational settings.
2. Inadequate services to help young people get out of trouble when they become involved in problem behaviors such as delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, gang involvement and teen pregnancy.

3. Too many parents who do not have the knowledge and skills to effectively nurture and discipline their children and raise them to be well-behaved and successful.
4. Lack of public awareness about social services available within the community and how to access those services.

Citizens also identified three other needs for helping children, youth and families in the City of St. Louis: (1) improving the public schools; (2) providing jobs programs for adults; and (3) increasing police patrols and improving police-community relations. Under Missouri state law, those services cannot, however, be funded under the legislation enabling establishment of Community Children's Services Funds.

What Do We Spend Now to Address the Needs of Children?

An analysis conducted by the Public Policy Research Centers at the University of Missouri - St. Louis reveals that, aside from the operations of the public schools, the City of St. Louis spends only a very small amount to promote the well-being of children.

The total annual budget for the city is in the range of \$800 million, with about half that amount, or \$400 million, coming from General Revenue. While the structure of the city budget makes it difficult to precisely calculate the amount spent to address the needs of children and youth, it is only a minute fraction of total city expenditures.

In 2003 the city spent about \$10 million to address the needs of children, or about 1.25 percent of the total budget. Expenditures from General Revenue were lower, with about \$3.5 million, or less than one percent, allocated to children's needs.

Children make up more than 25 percent of the population of the City of St. Louis. With nearly 90,000 children in the city, current annual expenditures are only in the range of \$100 per child.

Low expenditures by the city on the needs of children and youth occur even as state and federal expenditures have been reduced. Failing to invest in the well-being of children is a national trend. A recent study by The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia shows that, when compared to spending on the elderly, public expenditures to address the needs of children have fallen by 20 percent in the past two decades.

Spending to address the needs of children and youth has fallen even though three times as many children as seniors live in poverty. We do not invest much to address the needs of children. In fact, we spend less than we used to - despite the fact that many of the problems facing children have become more severe.

In 2003, of its \$800-million budget, the City spent a total of only about \$10 million to address the needs of children, or about 1.25 percent of its total budget.

What Do Other Cities Do to Address Children's Needs?

There are cities and counties across the country with publicly funded Children's Services Plans. Notably, it was found that such plans are often used in cities where children are doing well and where there is a high level of community and economic development.

San Francisco sets aside a fixed percentage of the city's general revenues to address the needs of children. A similar arrangement in Oakland, California directs \$6.5 million annually to addressing the needs of children. Kansas

City employs a tax levy to provide services for drug treatment and related problems.

Seattle uses its Families and Education Levy to provide health services and out-of-school programs. It is currently working to increase that investment to \$14 million annually. In Palm Beach County, Florida an *ad valorem* tax generates \$75 million a year to fund a children's services plan administered by the Children's Services Council.

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The St. Louis Children's Services Plan

What Types of Services Will Be Provided To Meet Our Children's Needs?

Promoting positive development of children and youth

**- 35% of available funds
\$1,600,000***

- Afterschool programs and programs for out-of-school youth
- Opportunities for supervised recreation
- Employment skills training and job opportunities for youth



Supporting families in raising their children

**- 20% of available funds
\$920,000***

- Training in parenting skills and child development
- Life skills training
- Home visitation services
- Respite services for parents
- Mentoring and tutoring services

Preventing/treating substance abuse, violence and crime

**- 35% of available funds
\$1,600,000***

- Comprehensive mental health services
- Treatment for drug/alcohol abuse
- Training in coping and social skills
- Temporary shelter for homeless youth
- Outreach services to identify and serve youth engaged in problem behaviors

Connecting families with services

**- 10% of available funds
\$460,000***

- Catalog of available services for children and youth
- Resource and referral to connect those in need to services
- Public awareness campaigns to make children and families aware of available services and how to access and use them

* Dollar amounts are estimates based on applying the recommended percentages to projected annual revenues of \$4.6 million.

Leadership

St. Louis Children's Services Plan Development Committee

Jama Dodson, St. Louis for Kids, *Co-Chair*
Richard Patton, Vision for Children at Risk, *Co-Chair*
Elizabeth Corman, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern Missouri
Hassie Davis, Community Health in Partnership Services
Peter Franzen, Mentor St. Louis
Nesa Joseph, Deaconess Foundation
Mike Lamping, Community Alternatives
Elizabeth Makulec, Kids Under Twenty One
Betty Marver, Grace Hill Head Start
Sharon McDevitt, Family Resource Center
Corinne Patton, Mo. Child Care Resource & Referral Network
Laura Perkins, Judevine Center for Autism

James Richardson, Community Volunteer
Jamala Rogers, Youth Council for Positive Development
Andi Schleicher, Child Day Care Association
Barbara Searight, St. Louis Office of MRDD Resources
Kristi Sobbe, Covenant House Missouri

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Scott Hummel, Our Little Haven
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