



Rural poor kids need more help, report says

Wednesday, June 09, 2004

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Of The Patriot-News

Pennsylvania's poor children don't live only in cities and urban areas.

They are more likely to live in rural areas, including Juniata, Greene and Cambria counties, according to a report being released today by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children.

The biennial report shows one in two children who reside in rural or mostly rural counties is in a family earning an income below the federal poverty line of up to \$37,700 for a family of four.

In urban areas around the state and in many midstate counties, the childhood poverty rate is one in three.

The report, "The State of the Child in Pennsylvania -- 2004," shows the numbers hold true even when both parents in the home hold down a job.

"Most people recognize the challenges that children face in our cities, but this report clearly demonstrates that conditions can be even worse for children living in rural communities," said Joan Benso, the partnerships' president and CEO.

The report monitors the success of children by measuring indicators that include access to health care, early childhood education, state test scores, family income and mother's education. It is intended to provide a blueprint for state policy makers to address challenges that could stand in the way of children succeeding in life.

"Most people think in center city Harrisburg, the chances of being poor are higher than in urban areas," said Amy Gimbel, research analyst for the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. "They tend to forget rural areas are depressed in other ways. There are fewer job opportunities and they can have a tougher time getting to jobs."

Research shows children born in poverty, or to mothers without a high school diploma or who are young, tend to struggle in school, Benso said.

"They are more likely to attend schools that are small, that have weak tax bases and are really challenged to provide them with the kind of education they would like because they simply don't have the resources from their communities," she said.

The state should support programs that benefit children, as it has done with the Children's Health Insurance Program, she said. Pennsylvania has one of the lowest rates of uninsured children in the nation as a result of that program, Benso said.

Her group also supports home-based nurse visits, a more equitable and adequate funding system for public schools, earmarking funds for preschool, and quality after-school and summer school programs, Benso said.

"These are things that can work and really improve the lives of kids," she said.

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