

# For Gainesville's Children

## Rectifying the Disadvantages of Socio-Economic Disparities

### Executive Summary

The City Commission of Gainesville has set as a strategic initiative/goal to eliminate the impact on children's life outcomes of living in families of lower socio-economic conditions.

#### **TREND LINE DATA OF KEY CHILD WELL BEING INDICATORS PROVIDE STRONG SUPPORT FOR THIS INITIATIVE.**

The research clearly demonstrates that poverty poses risks for children of all races.<sup>i</sup> And, risks for poor outcomes disproportionately affect young children, low-income children and minority children.<sup>ii</sup> Gaps in the abilities and skills between disadvantaged and advantaged children occur early. Family environments are important predictors of a variety of child well being outcomes, yet a greater proportion of children are being born into disadvantaged families, including minorities and immigrant groups.<sup>iii</sup>

On almost every indicator of child well being, children and families of color are represented in numbers that far exceed their relative proportion of the population. However, it is important to note that outcomes for white children and families in Florida also are also less than desirable. According to the Southern Institute on Children and Families, "the South is plagued by high rates of children and individuals in poverty, a high percent of children unprepared to succeed in school, adults unprepared for the workforce and high rates of children whose lower income working parents cannot afford safe, quality child care."<sup>iv</sup> Research supports the belief that when outcomes are improved for those who are currently most disadvantaged, they will be improved for all children.<sup>v</sup> Ultimately, poverty puts children at risk for poor life outcomes in health, education, future employment and productivity, family health and community involvement and support. These factors also place the communities in which children in poverty live at risk.

The factors that contribute to poor life outcomes and that are closely linked to poverty are inadequate or no access to health care; families whose own educational experiences result in poor support for education in general; poor education and experience for employment; few models for family integrity and support; and little opportunity to experience a healthy, productive community.

**IN GAINESVILLE AND IN ALACHUA COUNTY, THE POVERTY PROFILE DEMONSTRATES SPECIFIC AREAS OF NEED.** Young children are more likely than older children to live in economically insecure families. Of Alachua children ages under age 5, 22.7% are below poverty, and another

23% of 5-year-olds are below poverty. Slightly more than half of Alachua children under 5 in single-mother families are below poverty. Black or African-American children represent more than half of the children in poverty in Alachua County.<sup>vi</sup> Nearly a third of Alachua's children live in single-parent households, and Black and African-American children in Alachua are almost twice as likely to live in a single-parent home as any other race.<sup>vii</sup>

Being young, poor and minority means a greater probability of low birth weight babies, poor dental care, obesity, health problems, maternal depression, high developmental and behavioral needs, exposure to violence within the family, inadequate home safety, poor parenting practices, and low school readiness. In neighborhoods where poverty is concentrated, resident children's risks are concentrated, too.

**RECTIFYING THE DISADVANTAGES OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISPARITIES IN GAINESVILLE WILL REQUIRE A MIX OF SOLUTIONS SHOWN BY RESEARCH TO BE EFFECTIVE.** These include full access to:

- High quality, convenient and affordable early care and education for all children
- Family planning education
- Prenatal care beginning in the first trimester
- Health care (including dental) and insurance
- Parenting support and education
- Community support and safety resources
- Job and employability skills training

Efforts to rectify disadvantages of socio-economic disparities in Gainesville (and for that matter, anywhere) will work best when the City and its partners:

- Start with ends and work backward to the means. Based on the data in this report, the City should specify what it wants, how it will recognize it and what it will take to get there.
- Commit to working on cross-community conditions of well being as opposed to individual programs or services. Keep accountability for populations separate from accountability for programs and agencies.
- Use the data to drive a disciplined, business-like decision-making process to get better, and to gauge success or failure against a baseline.
- Involve a broad set of partners and get from talk to action as quickly as possible.
- Track performance measures and population results to refine/redirect efforts.
- Commit to the long-term. Changing the effects of socio-economic disparities is not done quickly or impatiently. The City and all partners must agree that

disciplined and informed actions with measured results over time will provide the guidance necessary for enduring change.

This executive summary is based on the full report, *For Gainesville's Children: Rectifying the Disadvantages of Socio-Economic Disparities*, written by J. Kate Stowell, Ed.D, on behalf of the Office of Equal Opportunity Employment, City of Gainesville, FL.

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- <sup>i</sup> House, J. S. & Williams, D. R. (2000). Understanding and reducing socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disparities in health. In B.D. Smedley & S. L. Syme (Eds.), *Promoting Health: Intervention Strategies from Social and Behavioral Research* (pp. 81-124). Washington, DC: National Academy Press. As cited in "Reducing Disparities Beginning in Early Childhood," Short Take No. 4, by Project Thrive, National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health.
- <sup>ii</sup> Douglas-Hall, A.; Chau, M.; & Koball, H. (2006). *Basic facts about low-income children: Birth to age 18*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. [Online] Available at [www.nccp.org/pub\\_lic06b.html](http://www.nccp.org/pub_lic06b.html). As cited in "Reducing Disparities Beginning in Early Childhood," Short Take No. 4, by Project Thrive, National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health.
- <sup>iii</sup> Heckman, J. *The Case for Investing in Disadvantaged Children*. [Online] Available at [www.heckmanequation.org/system/files/Heckman%20Investing%20in%20Young%20Children.pdf](http://www.heckmanequation.org/system/files/Heckman%20Investing%20in%20Young%20Children.pdf)] Retrieved 8/20/10
- <sup>iv</sup> Southern Institute on Children and Families. (2004). *Chartbook of major indicators: Conditions placing children in the South at risk*. Columbia, SC: Author. [Online] Available at [www.thesoutherninstitute.org/docs/publications/2004%20Chartbook%20of%20Major%20Indicators.pdf](http://www.thesoutherninstitute.org/docs/publications/2004%20Chartbook%20of%20Major%20Indicators.pdf)
- <sup>v</sup> Project THRIVE. (2007). *Short take No. 4: Reducing disparities beginning in early childhood*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health.
- <sup>vi</sup> [www.kidscount.org/cgi-bin/aecensus.cgi?action=profileresults&area=12001C&areaparent=12S&printerfriendly=0&section=5](http://www.kidscount.org/cgi-bin/aecensus.cgi?action=profileresults&area=12001C&areaparent=12S&printerfriendly=0&section=5)
- <sup>vii</sup> Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, for The Annie E. Casey Foundation