

**Contacts:** Tara Grieshop-Goodwin  
502-895-8167

Debra Miller  
502-875-4865

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE: Tuesday, December 7, 2004, 12:01 AM**

**New Report on Kentucky Families:  
Fighting Long Odds to Raise Healthy Children**

*(December 7, Lexington, KY):* According to the 2004 Kentucky KIDS COUNT County Data Book, children in families with young householders face high hurdles to growing up healthy. The newly released County Data Book highlights the fact that many young parents under 25, after facing their own difficult teen years, are still struggling to maintain steady employment or finish their basic education. As a result, Kentucky's 54,004 families with a householder under 25, or so-called young families, are not faring as well as families with householders age 25 or older.

- Young families are three times as likely to live in poverty as families headed by parents 25 or older. Thirty-four percent of young families have incomes below the federal poverty line, while only 12 percent of older families live in poverty. In Jefferson County, for example, the poverty rates are 42 percent for young families and only 8 percent for older families. (See page 7 in the Essay section on the website for individual county data.)
- Young families often earn significantly less income than older families; the median income for young families in Kentucky is \$20,000, compared to \$35,000 for older families. In Jefferson County, the median incomes were \$19,793 for young families and \$41,107 for older families. (See page 7 in the Essay section on the website for individual county data.)

--more--

“While it’s normal for younger workers to earn less than workers that have been on the job for a while, we’ve got to support these young parents, especially as they struggle to raise their own children. How well young families are faring directly impacts many Kentucky children – the future of our state,” said Tara Grieshop-Goodwin, KIDS COUNT Coordinator.

In Kentucky, nearly half of all babies are born to young mothers 25 and under. Between 1998 and 2002, these babies whose futures are more uncertain because of their parents’ youth numbered 123,000. The babies are at increased risk of being born at low birthweight with related health risks.

Families who have children earlier in life are less likely to attain a high level of education, leading to poor positioning in the labor market. The impacts of lower educational attainment are clear. On average, a full-time, year round worker without a high school diploma earns \$7,000 less per year than a worker completing high school. Furthermore, a full-time, year round worker with a four-year college degree earns \$21,800 more per year on average than those workers with only a high school education. “In today’s economy a post-secondary degree is fast becoming the minimum credential for a living family wage,” said Grieshop-Goodwin.

Low wages lead to other family hardships. The report highlights the percent of young households without phones or cars, resulting in isolation from jobs, health care, and other essential services. Twelve percent of all young families reported not having access to a car according to the 2000 Census, compared to 9 percent for older families. Eleven percent of young families reported no phone access, compared to just 4 percent of older families.

The factors of early childbearing, low educational attainment, and low-wage jobs all contribute to the struggles faced by young families. All of these factors increase the risk that

--more--

young families may not be able to provide all that their children need to transition into successful adults and parents. “It is a test of our great society whether each generation of children is more successful than the last and whether each child has the same opportunities for success as the most fortunate child. Family values would seem to dictate that we support working parents by helping families to be the best parents possible. That includes assuring quality childcare, health care, and other services are available to all of Kentucky’s children,” said Debra Miller, Kentucky Youth Advocates’ Executive Director.

The fourteenth annual KIDS COUNT book was released today at the KIDS COUNT Symposium, co-sponsored by Kentucky Youth Advocates and the Kentucky School Boards Association. The report is the state’s premiere source of data, information, and trend analysis on children. Tara Grieshop-Goodwin, KIDS COUNT Coordinator, presented findings from this year’s report at the Symposium. Nancy Amidei, faculty member at the University of Washington School of Social Work and Director of the Civic Engagement Project, delivered the keynote luncheon speech.

The KIDS COUNT book is prepared by Kentucky Youth Advocates and the Urban Studies Institute at the University of Louisville. The Kentucky project is part of a national effort funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the well-being of children. Other local support is provided by the National Council of Jewish Women, Louisville Section.

**Kentucky and county profiles of the data in this report will be available on KYA’s web site by the end of the business day on Friday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>. To access the files, you must type the following address: <http://www.kyyouth.org/press.htm>. Only media have access to this page prior to Tuesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>. There is no direct link on our web site to this page. You must type in the address exactly as it appears on this page, with lower case letters.**

**If you cannot access the data pages via the web site address, please contact the Kentucky Youth Advocates’ Louisville office (502-895-8167) and we will fax the pages to you.**

###