



For Immediate Release

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**Child Safety the Focus of 2009 Kentucky KIDS COUNT County Data Book
Formalized Collaboration Can Improve Outcomes for Vulnerable Youth**

Jeffersontown, KY – Kentucky Youth Advocates released the [2009 Kentucky KIDS COUNT County Data Book](#) today tracking the well-being of Kentucky's children. This 19th annual edition of the book provides state- and county-level data on child population, child poverty, and key indicators of safety, including child and teen deaths, child abuse and neglect, and juvenile justice. Updated data on indicators of economic well-being, education, and health can be found online on the new [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#).

In addition to state and county-level data, the book calls for increased collaboration between the systems responsible for child welfare and juvenile justice to improve services for youth with maltreatment and delinquency issues. Collaboration is essential as research shows that experiencing abuse or neglect increases the chance a child will be arrested and become involved in the juvenile justice system.

“We need to step up our game when a youth has been abused or neglected and is arrested – we know they're at risk and need to offer specialized services to prevent any future delinquent behavior,” says Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates.

Current collaboration efforts exist in Kentucky, yet they typically occur informally or when youth have reached a high level of involvement with both the Department of Juvenile Justice and the Department for Community Based Services. Youth would be best served by an integrated data system that would automatically notify the child welfare agency, the courts, or the Department of Juvenile Justice when a youth appears in another system, yet such a system would require significant changes to current data systems. Also, developing protocols for communication between systems would increase the involved agencies ability

to appropriately address the complex needs of these youth, thereby preventing victimized and troubled youth from engagement with the adult criminal justice system in the future.

Key findings from the 2009 book include the following:

- The rate of children victimized by abuse or neglect fell by 1 percent between 2003 and 2008, after showing increases in 2006 and 2007.
- The rate of youth placed in out-of-home care due to abuse or neglect increased by 9 percent between 2003 and 2008.
- The number of Kentucky youth held in secure detention facilities rose from 7,736 in 2003 to 9,834 in 2008, a 27 percent increase.
- From 2006 to 2008, the rate of youth charged with public offenses has gradually declined to 353 charges per 10,000 youth ages 10 to 19.
- Fewer children and teens died during 2005-2007 (the most recent time period for which data is available) compared to the baseline period of 1999-2001.

Proven strategies exist to improve the overall well-being of Kentucky's children. For example, family preservation programs work to keep children at risk of maltreatment safe in their homes by working with families to improve their skills in providing for their children. These programs have high success rates, eliminate the trauma of removal from the home, and also provide a significant cost savings to the state by avoiding out-of-home care costs.

"This is one of those instances where investing in expanding a service would actually provide immediate savings to the state coffers," says Brooks. "We can pay a smaller price now and avoid more expensive out-of-home care this year. We do not have to wait years to see the return on investment."

Furthermore, Kentucky can reduce its over-reliance on secure juvenile detention by placing youth charged with minor, non-violent offenses in community-based settings with an appropriate level of supervision. Secure confinement is not only the most expensive type of placement for youth involved with the juvenile justice system, research has shown that it is also the greatest predictor that a youth will engage in future delinquent behavior.

“Communities in Kentucky have successfully turned to effective community-based alternatives to detention. It makes sense from a fiscal and public safety standpoint to not place youth charged with minor offenses in facilities with youth who’ve committed real crimes when it is more expensive and youth can learn negative behavior from serious offenders,” says Tara Grieshop-Goodwin, Deputy Director and KIDS COUNT Coordinator.

The [2009 KIDS COUNT County Data Book](#) can now be found online at http://www.kyyouth.org/KIDS_COUNT/State/. Contact Preston Parsons at pparsons@kyyouth.org if you are interested in receiving a hard copy of the book free of charge.

For more data on the well-being of Kentucky’s children, visit the [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#). This new online resource provides information across states and for Kentucky counties and school districts. Users can easily rank and map data, graph trends over time, and add customized information to their own websites. Kentucky Youth Advocates has posted data for more than 90 measures of child well-being on the [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#) and will continually post updated data throughout the year. Visit the [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#) at: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/StateLanding.aspx?state=KY>.

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Kentucky Youth Advocates is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.