



The Urban Child Institute

A philanthropic organization that focuses on children

The institute is a coalition of community researchers, strategists and interventionists dedicated to the improvement of well-being of children, especially from conception to age 3.

We will improve the lives of children and increase the social capital of Memphis by accelerating the infusion of meaningful knowledge and intervention that will change existing policies. We will work to connect research and knowledge with action.

Other individuals and organizations who also want to improve the lives of children will find the institute to be a trustworthy partner and resource for expertise, advice and collaboration.

The State of Children in Memphis & Shelby County was initiated and funded by the institute and published first in 2006. The initial purpose was to collect in one document all existing, important research data on children in Memphis and Shelby County. Many individuals and organizations had benefited from pieces of that data, but the 2006 “children’s databook” was the first time that the data all had been assembled in a single document and with professional analysis.

The 2007 volume and now this 2008 volume have continued to track and update the data. This volume also provides a compilation of “best practices” that might be expected to have a positive impact on the problems faced by local children that are documented herein.

The data have been organized in seven segments plus a glossary. The segments are:

1. *Demographics Domain* is a necessary prelude of important statistics.
2. *Health Domain* is an overall physical exam of the city’s children.
3. *Education Domain* is a community report card.
4. *Family Home Environment Domain* reports the impact of family and home.
5. *Building the Brain* explains the permanent impact of factors during life from conception to age 3.
6. *The Economic Burden of Low Birth-Weight Infants* reports the cost to society of pre-term and underweight babies.
7. *Best Practices for Solutions* quantifies for the first time the benefits of applying in Memphis and Shelby County strategies that have been successful elsewhere.

The institute’s objective and hope continue to be that this document will encourage and rally others into action for positive change. The data contained herein are targeted at government leaders, education and medical professionals, religious organizations and community stakeholders of all types. They should provide clear direction for more steps to identify objectives and strategies to improve the state of our children.

It is not the institute’s intention to imply that these are the only areas of importance on the topic of children in Shelby County. Opportunities exist for professionals in all fields to identify additional important domains and sub-domains. The potential for such extensions of this work are highlighted throughout.

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Economics continue devastating assault on Shelby County children.



The Urban Child Institute (TUCI) publishes The State of Children in Memphis and Shelby County annually to help us understand the well-being of our youngest children, their families and their communities. We intend for this publication to do three things.

1. Establish baseline measures of child, family and community well-being.
2. Point to significant trends in child well-being.
3. Suggest possible alternative futures for our community – considering both current trends and the promise of research-supported intervention strategies.

Much of the information contained in this year's "databook" reflects the maxim that the best predictor of where we will be tomorrow is where we are today. As the following chapters attest, in many respects the condition of children in Memphis mirrors their condition in the recent past, and is consistent with measures of child well-being in too many other large American cities:

- One third (29%) of the children in Shelby County is in poverty and another quarter (24%) is low income. Almost all (89%) of the children in poverty in Shelby County reside in the city of Memphis and most (84%) of the county's children who are low-income live in Memphis as well.

- Many families face multiple threats to their well-being. Such threats include:
 - * solo-parenting
 - * tentative connections to decent jobs
 - * unreliable transportation
 - * residential and family insecurity
 - * instability
- For too many of our young children, this configuration of family and community vulnerability leads to poor emotional, social and cognitive development. This leaves many children ill prepared when it comes time to enter school.
- As our children grow, the range of impoverishments they experienced early in life translates into a wide variety of adverse outcomes. These include:
 - * academic achievement gaps
 - * higher drop-out rates
 - * higher incarceration rates
 - * higher rates of risky behavior among children and teens
 - * parenting at an early age

Since the publication of last year's "databook," there have been several changes in the well-being of children in our community.

On the positive side:

- The number of low birth-weight infants born in Shelby County decreased.
- The percentage of pregnant women who received adequate prenatal care increased slightly.
- The percentage of women who smoked during pregnancy decreased.
- In both the City of Memphis and Shelby County, the number of households with children increased.
- Per-pupil spending for public education increased in both Memphis City Schools and Shelby County Schools.

On the negative side:

- Deaths increased among infants in Shelby County.
- The birth rate increased among teenagers in Shelby County.
- More women in Shelby County gained more than 50 pounds during pregnancy.
- Sexually transmitted disease rates are rising.
- In Memphis the percentage of children living below poverty increased.
- In Shelby County the percentage of children living below 50 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) increased.
- In both Memphis and Shelby County the median incomes of families with children decreased.
- The percentage of three-star-rated child-care centers in Shelby County decreased.
- The recession has created threats of funding cuts for public education.
- A rising number of home foreclosures has created more family financial crises and residential vulnerability and has added to school transience.

We anticipate that these trends will continue for the foreseeable future.

This 2008 “databook” includes an overview on the development of the human brain from conception to age three. It documents problems that arise for educators resulting from inadequate brain stimulation early in children’s lives. A child who enters school with exposure to only one-third as many words as other children and whose brain has had only a fraction of the stimulation of other children’s brains will likely fall behind other students.

New in this volume is research documenting the economic burden on society of pre-term and low-weight births. It attempts to measure the extent and cost of the problem in our community. Consistent with most other urban areas, Memphis and Shelby County must make difficult decisions about how best to invest in our future. For the first time since the Yellow Fever epidemics of the 19th Century, Memphis and Shelby County have lost population, and our tax base is shrinking.

“The ability of Memphis to serve as an economic magnet for people of this region ... is clearly in question,” according to Dr. Gnuschke, director of the Sparks Bureau of Business and Economic Development.

Almost three out of four students in Tennessee are performing below grade level, according to the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Moreover, one quarter of adults in Memphis fail to complete high school. As a result, much of the public is uneasy about the performance of our public schools.

New concepts and new strategies are being employed in other cities. Communities are making bold, new commitments to programs that bolster opportunities for children. We urge you to read the segment in this volume entitled *Best Practices for Solutions*.

Language acquisition and pre-reading skills are cornerstones in the foundation for learning, and pre-kindergarten is a pathway to success in school. Careful evaluations of high-quality pre-kindergarten programs, backed by more than four decades of evidence, indicate that there is a \$17 return to a community for every dollar it invests in programs for very young children. Read “The Memphis Matrix.”

In order to reach the future we prefer for all our children and families, Memphis and Shelby County must make the important decisions to invest more of our resources in early childhood well-being. This is the smartest development dollar a municipality can spend to place the next generation on the best path to adult success.