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To read the report: visit www.voices4kids.org/chicagokidscount.htm

Child Well-Being Improves in Chicago, But Work Remains, Report Says

“Chicago Kids Count” highlights education, family support, health data

CHICAGO – Chicago’s neighborhoods and the children who live in them have seen improvements in recent years. But far too many children do not have equal opportunities when it comes to education, safe and healthy environments and secure families with adequate incomes, according to the new “Chicago Kids Count 2004: Building Strong Communities” report released Tuesday, Jan. 20, by Voices for Illinois Children.

More than 150 people representing neighborhood organizations, service providers, advocacy groups, educators and state and local government attended the report’s release at National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago.

The report and companion web site at www.voices4kids.org/chicagokidscount.htm examine data in Chicago’s 77 community areas and highlight solutions and innovative programs that are making a difference. The web site features data profiles for each community area and a searchable database of statistics.

“While the quality of life for many Chicago children is improving, there are challenges ahead,” Voices’ President Jerry Stermer said. “Not all children are progressing at the same pace and accessing the same opportunities. There are disparities by race and ethnicity, income and geography that need to be addressed.”

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“Chicago Kids Count” highlights include:

- **Thousands of children struggle to finish school.** Communities that experienced the highest dropout rate – where more than 30 percent of the class did not graduate – are scattered through the southern half of the city. One way to help ensure academic success is to provide high-quality early childhood education for young children. Chicago’s under-5 population has shifted from 1996 to 2000, with growth in the Southeast, Southwest and Northwest sides.
- **Welfare dependence has fallen dramatically, but more families are relying on income supports such as Medicaid, food stamps and subsidized child care.** The number of children receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families has fallen 75 percent citywide, while use of subsidized child care increased 76 percent, with the biggest jumps on the South and West sides.
- **Shifts in child population have significant implications for service providers.** Communities on the Southwest and Northwest sides saw the biggest booms in child population from 1990 to 2000. Since 2000, three communities that have been most affected by the Chicago Housing Authority’s elimination of public housing high-rises – Douglas, Grand Boulevard and Washington Park – have seen a 30 percent decrease in the number of 6-year-olds.

“We have to be constantly mindful of shifts in community dynamics and how we respond,” said Reginald Jones, executive director of the Steans Family Foundation, which targets its funding to North Lawndale and is profiled in the report. “We look prospectively at future challenges and

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how we can create funding challenges that will be responsive.”

“Chicago Kids Count 2004” also examines childhood lead poisoning, exposure to violence, family poverty and the use of Medicaid and food stamps, among other statistics.

“We need to make our communities strong for kids,” Stermer said. “If we believe each child deserves to reach his or her full potential, then it will take all of us – parents, relatives, teachers, neighbors, doctors, coaches – working together to support families and their children. And that will bring a better future for us all.”

“Chicago Kids Count 2004” was funded by the Lloyd A. Fry Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. It is a companion to Voices for Illinois Children’s annual “Illinois Kids Count” report that examines data at the county level. Voices produced its first “Chicago Kids Count” report 10 years ago.

“Chicago Kids Count 2004” – featuring a searchable database of statistics and individual data pages for all 77 community areas – is available at www.voices4kids.org/chicagokidscount.htm. To receive a printed copy, contact Belia Ortega at 312-516-5567 or bortega@voices4kids.org.

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