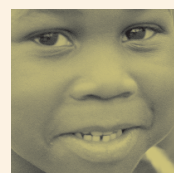
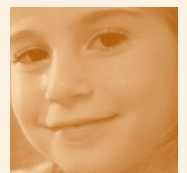




Rural Kids Count!

Sharing the
Stories and
Statistics from
Oklahoma
and
Arkansas

A project of the
Oklahoma
Institute for
Child Advocacy
and
Arkansas
Advocates for
Children and
Families



August 2004

Funded by The Annie E. Casey Foundation

This report is dedicated to people living in rural
Oklahoma and Arkansas, because rural kids
and their families **do count!**

rural kids count!

sharing stories and statistics from Oklahoma and Arkansas

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acknowledgments

rural kids count project

The *Rural Kids Count* Project is especially grateful to the families in Oklahoma and Arkansas who opened their hearts and shared their thoughts about living and raising families in rural areas and to the legislators and key leaders who graciously shared their time to discuss rural issues. Their comments allowed us to develop a portrait of what it is like to live in rural communities today.

The project would like to thank the many individuals and agencies that provided technical assistance, data, food, childcare and meeting sites: Glenwood Early Childhood Program, Marshall Head

Start, East Central Arkansas Economic Development Corporation, Oklahoma Turning Point Initiative, Choctaw Nation Health Services, Choctaw Nation Chi Hullo Li, Choctaw Nation CARES Program, Cedar Shed, Seminole County Oklahoma State University Extension Service, Sunshine Workers OHCE Group of Seminole County, Seminole County Health Department, Harmon County Health Department, YES Corp. and Northwestern Electric Cooperative, Inc. Thanks, also, to Becky Williams, Heather Duvall and Cami Leal who helped facilitate the focus groups and conduct key informant interviews.

Layout and Design of the Report

Rob Gorstein Graphic Design, Inc., Louisville, Kentucky

Publication Funding Assistance

First United Bank, Durant, Oklahoma; Union Pacific Foundation



BUILDING AMERICASM

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introduction

Imagine a place where you know your neighbors, where others care about your children, where family matters. Imagine a place where the futures of young people are limited by substance abuse, pregnancy and prejudice. Imagine

the heartbreak of poverty surrounded by the beauty of nature. Imagine a place you love that you might leave if you could find a way. Imagine rural Oklahoma and Arkansas ... communities of contradictions.

background

KIDS COUNT is a project of The Annie E. Casey Foundation that presents an annual state-by-state picture of the status of children in the United States. Along with the national report, the Foundation funds a network of state KIDS COUNT projects, which provides a comparison of the same child health and well-being indicators on a county-by-county basis. In Oklahoma and Arkansas, the KIDS COUNT affiliates are the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy and the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, non-profit child advocacy organizations that serve as catalysts for

programs and policies to improve the lives of children and youth in their states. These two agencies form the collaborative partnership for the *Rural Kids Count* Project.

In 2000, The Annie E. Casey Foundation launched the *Making Connections* Initiative with the goal of helping urban neighborhoods become better places for children and families. It provided a guiding principle that is equally relevant for rural families and communities: “Children do well when their families do well, and families do better when they



“All kids have needs. Doesn't matter where you live, you still need love, the necessities of life and an education.”

live in supportive communities.” The three kinds of connections the Foundation identified as most critical include: Economic Opportunity, Social Networks and Services and Supports. Following that guide and the Foundation’s Family Economic Success model, the Oklahoma–Arkansas partnership addressed the particular challenges experienced in rural areas related to the following:

■ **Economics**

Employment, Retail Services, Transportation, Housing

■ **Rural Society**

Quality of Life, Community Leadership, Churches-Faith, Recreation and Entertainment, Parental Involvement and Social Concerns

■ **Education**

■ **Services and Supports**

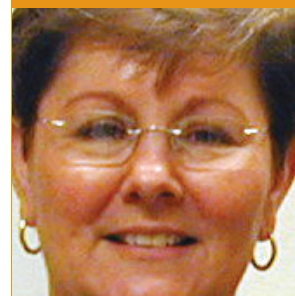
Child Care, Medical and Health, Community Services

The purpose of the *Rural Kids Count* project was to highlight the needs of rural families in poverty in Oklahoma and Arkansas, to deepen the understanding of the issues and circumstances that are barriers to their self-sufficiency and to increase the attention paid to rural poor families in policy discussions. This report presents a picture of daily life in impover-

ished rural areas, blending the stories gathered from focus groups and interviews with the data and statistics. The findings of this report represent an in-depth analysis of the data, issues and life experiences of rural families in poverty and identify recommendations to help rural families and communities improve their economic status.

It is not possible to fully convey the intensity felt by participants in the rural communities we visited to gather information for this report. We found a strong and sincere desire among rural Oklahomans and Arkansans to see their communities stable and thriving—and to be part of that process. Rural residents are resilient and resourceful, characteristics vital to economic and family success. In Oklahoma and Arkansas, it is clear that as families suffer or prosper, their children suffer or prosper. Our goal is to enable more rural families — thus their children — to prosper.

This special *Rural Kids Count* Project was funded by The Annie E. Casey Foundation as part of their National KIDS COUNT Family Economic Success Initiative. A partnership between Oklahoma and Arkansas was natural for this effort, as the states share more than a common border. Among poor families struggling to raise





children in rural areas, the two states share similar challenges and opportunities. Though the beauty of their rural areas is striking, it masks changing demographics and an array of problems that negatively impact children and families, as well as the economic future of each state. Two-thirds of the 152 counties in Oklahoma and Arkansas are rural, with most experiencing significant levels of poverty. Beyond poverty lie

other threats to the vitality and survival of rural Oklahoma and Arkansas communities — loss of population, loss of businesses, lack of economic opportunities to attract and keep a strong workforce and lack of jobs that provide the wages and health coverage needed to support families.

defining “rural”

While no single definition of “rural” has achieved universal acceptance, most methods classify areas based on population and proximity to urban communities. The classification scheme presented throughout *Rural Kids Count* relies on the nine-part U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural-Urban Continuum Codes (Continuum), as defined in 2003.

Rural, as used in this analysis, includes Oklahoma and Arkansas counties with less than twenty thousand (20,000) residents living in its cities or towns. Rural counties are those with codes numbering 6 through 9 on the Continuum, with 9 being the most rural.

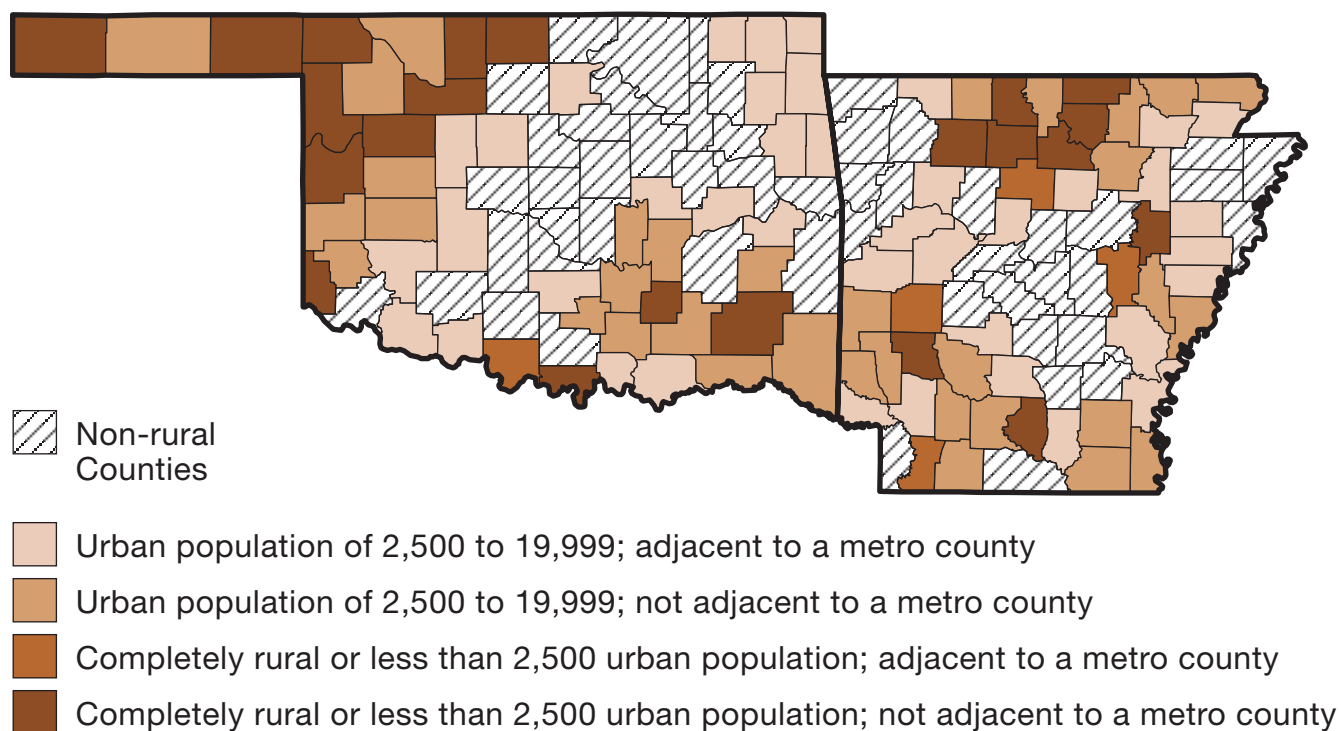
Non-rural, as used in this analysis, includes Oklahoma and Arkansas counties in metropolitan areas or with urban populations of twenty thousand (20,000) or more. Non-rural counties are those with codes numbering 1 through 5 on the Continuum, with 1 being the most urban. References throughout *Rural Kids Count* to “rural” include fifty (50) of Oklahoma’s seventy-seven (77) counties and fifty-one (51) of the seventy-five (75) counties in Arkansas. See following map for designation of rural counties in Oklahoma and Arkansas.



USDA RURAL-URBAN CONTINUUM CODES, 2003

Code	Description	USDA Classification
Rural for <i>Rural Kids Count</i> analysis:		
9	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro county	Non-metro County
8	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro county	Non-metro County
7	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro county	Non-metro County
6	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro county	Non-metro County
Non-rural for <i>Rural Kids Count</i> analysis:		
5	Urban population of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to a metro county	Non-metro County
4	Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro county	Non-metro County
3	Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population	Metro County
2	Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population	Metro County
1	Counties of metro areas of 1 million population or more	Metro County

2003 Rurality Index



Source: USDA Economic Research Service