

Wisconsin Council on Children and Families 2014 Annual Report

Introduction

In 2014 we continued to carry our research and advocacy forward on a number of issues to promote greater well-being of Wisconsin's children and families. In many ways we continue to face an uphill battle in achieving our mission. As Wisconsin lagged behind our neighboring states in recovering from the economic downturn late in the last decade, we have seen declining investments at the state level in education and decreases and/or limitations in social safety net programs. Some Wisconsin children and families better are off than they were four years ago, but for too many of our children and families the promise of greater opportunity and economic stability has not been fulfilled. The challenges of poverty and racial/ethnic inequity are evident in some of the basic statistics about child well-being, including:

- Nearly a quarter of a million Wisconsin children live in poverty, a 37% increase since 2008.
- More than four of ten Wisconsin schoolchildren come from families with low incomes and receive free or reduced-price school lunch.
- There are enormous disparities in the economic well-being of Wisconsin children, particularly between children of different races - with one of every two black children in poverty compared to just one of every nine white non-Hispanic children.
- School classrooms are becoming crowded, as schools lost over 3,000 teachers since 2009.

Fortunately, there is some good news, for example:

- More children than ever have access to public 4-year-old kindergarten with 93% of Wisconsin's school districts offering this opportunity.
- Fewer teens are getting into trouble with the law as the number of juvenile arrests in Wisconsin continued to fall, over 42% since 2003.
- Fewer teenagers are having babies in Wisconsin, falling by 25% over the last ten years.

We can celebrate the positive, but as always WCCF remains an important voice on behalf of our most vulnerable children and families as we work to enhance our research and analysis, our collaboration with others, and reach out to new audiences who can become active partners in achieving our mission. As we enter our 134th year, we look forward to raising all of our voices to make every kid count.

WCCF's Mission & Vision

The mission of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) is to ensure that every child in Wisconsin grows up in a just and nurturing family and community.

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families was established in 1881 as the Wisconsin Conference on Charities and Corrections. For well over a century, the organization has focused on improving conditions for families and children through policy change, expanded public investments and public education that lead to improvements in outcomes and practices in the delivery of publicly-funded health care, education, workforce development and social services. WCCF is a private, non-profit, non-partisan statewide organization with offices in Madison Wisconsin. We have a 12-member staff and operate under the strategic guidance of a statewide board of directors made up of representatives of schools, business, local government, health care, and social service organizations.

WCCF is a multi-issue child and family advocacy organization, providing research, policy analysis, public education and advocacy that lead to improved outcomes for children in the areas of health, economic security, safety and education. We believe that children need strong voices representing them, and so we are committed to using research, policy analysis, and public education to raise voices to make every kid count.

Key Issue Areas

Budget and Taxes – The Wisconsin Budget Project

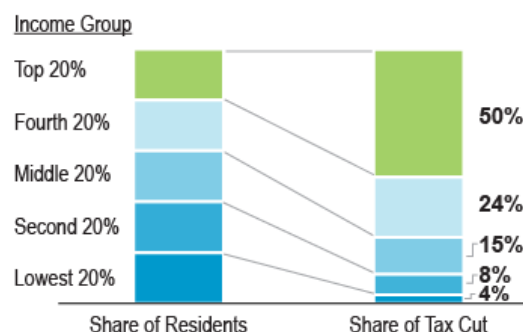


The [Wisconsin Budget Project](#) is an initiative of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families to engage in analysis and education on state budget and tax issues, particularly those relating to low- and moderate-income families. The Budget Project seeks to broaden the debate on budget and tax policy through public education and by encouraging civic engagement on these issues. The Wisconsin Budget Project works to make sense of complex budget-related issues and explain how decisions made by lawmakers help or harm people in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin has a longstanding commitment to opportunity, responsibility, and community for all. However, since 2011, lawmakers have given large tax cuts primarily to the highest-earning taxpayers, while raising taxes for working families and low-income seniors. The result is that low-income taxpayers have a harder time meeting their basic needs, and Wisconsin has fewer resources to support investments in the state's public schools, university system, and education for our youngest residents – investments that help create the building blocks for broad prosperity and a strong economy. We believe that those who least can afford it too often devote a bigger share of their income to pay for public services.

Highest Earners Receive Largest Share of Tax Cuts

Share of tax cuts by income group for Wisconsin residents, from the combination of three major income and property tax cut packages passed in 2013 and 2014. Based on 2014 income levels.



Source: Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy
WISCONSIN BUDGET PROJECT

Decisions about taxes, investment in programs, and managing the budget have a direct impact on essential programs and services for children and families. The Wisconsin Budget Project researched and published policy briefs and blogs highlighting the impact on many programs important to our economic future, including:

- Economic Security (unemployment benefits, subsidized child care, and Temporary Aid to Needy Families);
- Education (early care and education, K-12 education, colleges/universities);
- Federal budget and tax policies (EITC, tax credits);
- Health and Human Services (child care, health care reform, Medicaid, BadgerCare);
- Jobs and the economy (workforce development, transportation, public safety).

The Wisconsin Budget Project has continued to grow as a “go to” source for media, our organizational partners, and community members for information on the impact of the state’s fiscal decisions on children and families. The Budget Project also supports the Better Choices for Wisconsin Collaborative, a group of diverse organizations advocating for investments and tax policies that help support our most vulnerable children and families.

Child Safety

All children deserve the opportunity to grow up in a safe and nurturing home and community. Of course families play the key role in raising children, but we believe the obligation also extends to the community, with individuals, organizations, and our governmental institutions. Our work around child safety in 2014 focused on analyzing and disseminating data and advocating for policies that would:

- Improve child welfare services by, particularly focusing on issues related to promoting supports for families and promoting strategies that provide greater permanency for children placed in out of home care.;
- Reduce the need for foster care, through prevention of maltreatment, and early intervention services; and
- Improve services and outcomes for youth aging-out of foster care.
- Elevate awareness of [issues facing dual-status youth](#) – those youth involved in both the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

In addition, WCCF staff played a lead role in co-chairing the Department of Children and Families Secretary’s Child Advisory Council, focusing on providing guidance on significant policy and practice issues related to child welfare.

Early Care and Education



Research confirms what every parent knows, that the first five years of a child’s life play a formative role in a child’s ongoing development and future success. Most children spend a substantial amount of their time in a child care or preschool setting while their parents are at work. In 2014, WCCF continued to analyze and disseminate data related to the quality of child care programs, with a focus on the state’s child subsidy program,

YoungStar. WCCF also worked with high-level policy makers to develop strategies to improve the overall early learning infrastructure in Wisconsin. Work in 2014 included:

- The [fifth release/publication](#) in our YoungStar series tracking the progress of the rating system and its impact on programs. YoungStar rates the quality of child care programs on a 5-Star scale and is administered in six regions of the state. Among other things, the report highlights that:
 - Nearly three quarters children funded by Wisconsin Shares were in programs rated from three to five stars;

- A total of 4,257 programs had been rated on a scale of 1 to 5 Stars, based either on an assessment of quality (including accreditation). Wisconsin is ranked 4th in the nation for the number of child care programs participating in a Quality Rating Improvement System; and
- All regions of the state are serving a higher percent of children in 3-5 Star programs compared to 2013, although there are some regional variations.

Some of this data is encouraging, but WCCF also tracked the overall decline in the number of children being served through the YoungStar program and challenges related to the stagnant reimbursement rate for providers.

- Analyzing the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program which was underspent by \$20 million in the first year of the 2013-2015 biennial budget, according to the Department of Children and Families (DCF), and advocated for increases in both the rates of provider reimbursement and support for training of child care staff.
- Analyzing and reporting on Department of Public Instruction data that shows nearly every public school elementary district in Wisconsin is now offering 4-year-old pre-Kindergarten. Nearly 50,000 children were enrolled in 4K in the 2013-14 school year, and only 22 of the 413 districts were not offering 4K.
- Serving in a leadership role on the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council and providing needed guidance for policy initiatives that will impact children's lives across a number of domains and providing key support for the Early Child Learning Collaborative, a group of statewide and regional organizations involved in delivering quality early learning and care for all children in Wisconsin.
- Collaborating with other agencies and organizations in the Wisconsin Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Initiative (WECOPI), taking information about how child care providers can promote healthy exercise and diet habits in their programs.

Health Care

Every family needs and deserves access to high-quality, affordable health care services. People covered by health insurance are healthier, make less use of expensive emergency room services, do better in school and at work, and are more economically stable. The Affordable Care Act, enacted by the federal government in 2010, brought dramatic changes to the health care landscape, including the launch of a health insurance marketplace in 2014.

In 2014, WCCF [monitored critical aspects of this change](#), including the large number of low-income people in Wisconsin who were forced by changes in BadgerCare eligibility rules to purchase insurance through the marketplace. Throughout 2014, WCCF [continued to advocate for the acceptance of federal Medicaid funds](#) that would provide greater coverage for low-income adults while at the same time allowing for the investment of state funds in other needed services.

Kids Count

[WisKids Count](#) tracks, analyzes, synthesizes, and communicates data about the health and well-being of children and families in Wisconsin. WisKids Count is a part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count project, which seeks to enrich local, state and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for all children.

The [Kids Count Data Center](#) provides access to a wide range on data on indicators of child well-being in Wisconsin. Using the tools in the Data Center, you can easily create a profile of your county or school district.

Juvenile Justice

Many of the positive trends related to Juvenile Justice continued into 2014, including a decline in juvenile arrests and the growth of effective community-based programs. WCCF, through advocacy of a [Second Chance](#) bill, continued to focus its advocacy work related to juvenile justice on raising the age of adult court jurisdiction back to 18 and reducing the disproportionality of minority youth in the justice system.

WCCF staff played a lead role on the Governor's Juvenile Justice Commission, directing federal resources to support system reforms and help build the capacity of local jurisdictions to deliver cost-effective youth and family services for at-risk youth and those already involved in the juvenile justice system. WCCF staff also played an important role in the development of the [Wisconsin Juvenile Justice Network](#) (WJJN) as well as a leadership role on the Federal Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice (FACJJ), a federally appointed committee that provides input and guidance to the Attorney General, Congress, and the President related to juvenile justice matters.

Race to Equity



There are profound and persistent racial disparities in health, education, child welfare, criminal justice, employment, and income in Wisconsin, and throughout the United States. These racial disparities compromise the life chances of many children and families to grow up healthy, safe and successful. The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families' [Race to Equity](#) (R2E) project aspires to galvanize communities to narrow, and ultimately eliminate, racial disparities in Wisconsin. R2E seeks to learn from and build on prior efforts to address disparities and relies upon the advice and guidance of leaders and residents of Dane County's communities of color. These efforts have had a significant impact on mobilizing policy-makers, the media, and other core social institutions to find and implement solutions to the growing disparities.

2014 was an important year for the Race to Equity Project. Building on the release of [the Race to Equity report](#) in 2013, the project expanded the scope and impact of its outreach into the community through the “Community Ambassadors”, engaging community members with a stake in the well-being of their neighborhoods to provide an authentic voice to the project and other equity initiatives. R2E project staff made countless presentations about equity issues throughout the community to a wide array of community organizations, policy makers, media, and faith-based groups.

The importance of this work was underscored with the Race for Results report released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in the spring of 2014. WCCF followed that national report with a state-focused report, [Race for Results: Wisconsin’s Need to Reduce Racial Disparities](#), which took a closer look at key indicators of well-being across groups in Wisconsin.

Summary and Closing

Information about these and other aspects of WCCF’s work is available through the WCCF website, www.wccf.org, and we encourage readers to go that site where you can also link into the Race to Equity and Wisconsin Budget Project sites.

We have much left to accomplish, and we know that we cannot do it alone. We are grateful to individuals and organizations throughout Wisconsin that help support our efforts but more importantly take up the cause of ensuring a bright future for all Wisconsin children through their own work, outreach, and advocacy. The challenges are great, and we know that overcoming those challenges will not come easily – the truly great things never do.

Thank you for your support,

Ken Taylor
Executive Director

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The WCCF partners with many foundations and organizations, as well as individual donors to accomplish its mission. The following supporters have made a difference in the lives of children and families throughout the year.

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**Wisconsin Council on Children and Families
2014 Budget in Brief**

Statement of Activities

Year Ended December 31, 2014

Income

Grant Income	774,757
Contributions	77,542
Projects, forums, and conferences	221,796
Other Earned Income	28,589
Total Income	1,102,684

Expense

Program Expense	820,272
Management & General	96,504
Development	41,756
Total Expense	958,532

Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets **144,152**