

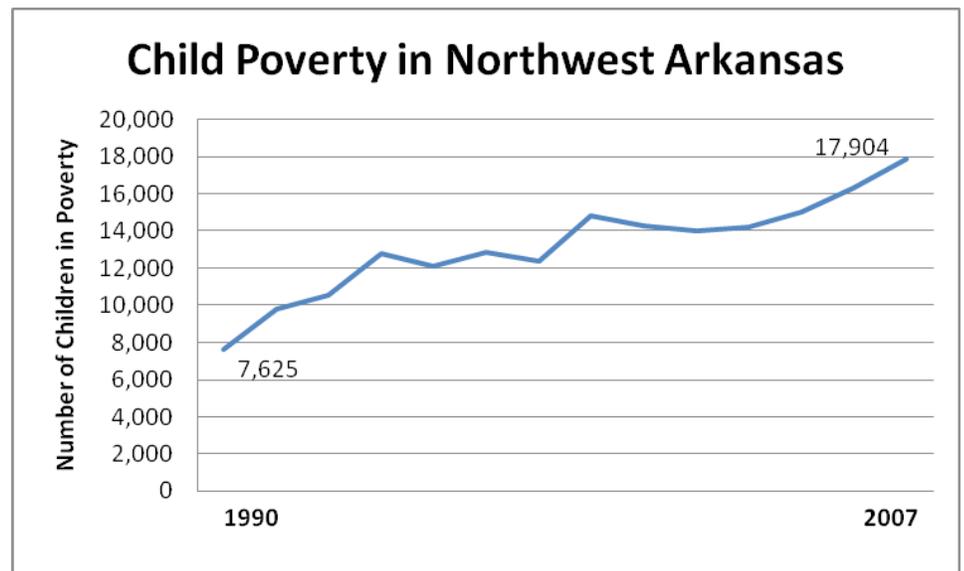
Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families: A profile of Northwest Arkansas Children



Rising prosperity, rising child poverty

In the last two decades, during a time when Northwest Arkansas has grown more prosperous and gained a national reputation for its booming economy and quality of life, poverty has taken a stronger foothold.

In Northwest Arkansas, the number of people in poverty is growing faster than the population, and the number of children in poverty is growing even faster. As our region has grown more successful, our children have fallen further behind.



Source: Kids Count Data Center

In Benton County, which has one of the highest median incomes in the state, the number of children in poverty grew 161 percent since 1990. During that same time, the overall population grew 116 percent.

Washington County's population grew 73 percent during that time period, while the number of children in poverty grew 116 percent.

The region's poverty percentage is lower than that of most of the state, but the number of children in poverty in both Washington and Benton counties is higher than any county in the Arkansas Delta. Poverty is no less real for a child in Northwest Arkansas.

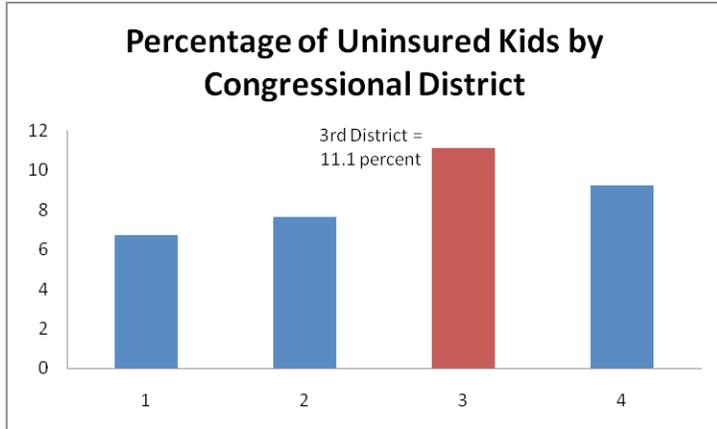
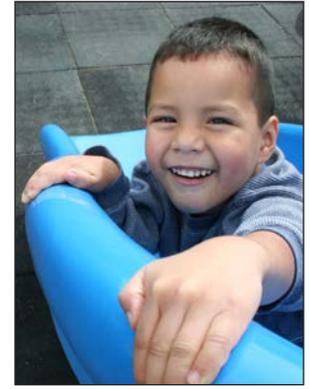
"People think of Northwest Arkansas as an area where people have a high level of income, but as we know, that is not the case," U.S. Rep. John Boozman. Dec. 2008, *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*



Children at work at the Springdale Airport Head Start.
All photos by Tara Manthey/AACF

ARKids First enrollment lags in Northwest Arkansas

Arkansas was a leader in covering uninsured children with the creation of the ARKids First health insurance program for working families. Statewide, the numbers of uninsured children have been cut in half. But in Northwest Arkansas' 3rd Congressional District, more children are uninsured than in other parts of the state. AACF and its partners here are working to reach more children who may be eligible for ARKids but who haven't signed up yet.



An estimated 6,900 children in Northwest Arkansas are enrolled in ARKids First but don't have a primary care physician, Oct. 2009, Arkansas Dept. Human Services.

Statewide, there's an assumption that children and families are well taken-care of in Northwest Arkansas. "We thought we wouldn't see that many people in Northwest Arkansas, that they'd be pretty well taken care of up there, but the need was just overwhelming," Dr. Tommy Roebuck, an Arkadelphia dentist, after turning away hundreds of people who needed dental care at the May 2009 "Mission of Mercy" in Springdale.

NWA children by the numbers

- In Northwest Arkansas, the number of children who are eligible for free and reduced lunch rates has more than tripled since 1990.
- More than half the children in the two-county area are eligible for free or reduced lunch prices, which means their family income isn't more than 185 percent of the federal poverty level, or about \$44,000 for a family of four.
- In individual schools within larger districts, the number is far higher. At Jones Elementary School in Springdale, eligibility exceeds 95 percent.
- School-age populations are increasingly diverse. In the four larger school districts in Washington and Benton counties, 53 different home languages are represented, from Arabic to Mandarin, Spanish and Swahili.
- In a 2008 study published by the Clinton School of Public Service, Northwest Arkansas demonstrated the greatest unmet demand for after-school programs.

Arkansas has a regressive tax system.

Low-income Arkansas workers pay 12 cents in taxes on every dollar they earn, twice as much as the richest 1 percent of workers.

The health and well-being of Arkansas children and families is directly linked to the tax and budget policies of our state and federal governments.



What can you do?

Promote economic security. Helps us as we build public support for a more balanced and fair tax and budget system.

Improve children's health. Join the Arkansas Finish Line Coalition, which is working to obtain health coverage for every child in the state.

Fight for early childhood education and after-school care. These are investments that pay off for children, our communities, and our economy.

Protect children. In Washington and Benton counties, more than 500 children were in foster care in 2008.

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