



DBonnet Associates

evaluation for enlightened decision making

# *2007 Community Needs Assessment for Howard County, Indiana*

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*May 2007*

*Prepared for the  
4community Partners  
Howard County, Indiana*

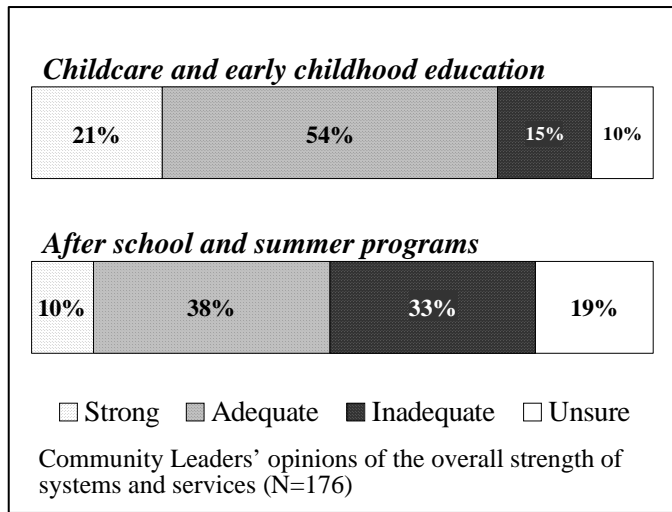
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- United Way of Howard County
- City of Kokomo
- Community Foundation of Howard County
- Howard County Health Department
- Howard Regional Hospital
- Ivy Tech Community College
- St. Joseph Hospital and Health Center

Deborah G. Bonnet

Robert E. Hoke

## Children and Youth



**The chief concern with childcare is affordability**, discussed later in this report under Health and Human Services. Some worry about the quality of early childhood education and children's kindergarten readiness.

**Summer and after school programming for children and youth is the one topic we recommend for further study.** Many community leaders applauded the quality and variety of out-of-school opportunities Howard County offers its young people, while a roughly equal number decried a scarcity of same.

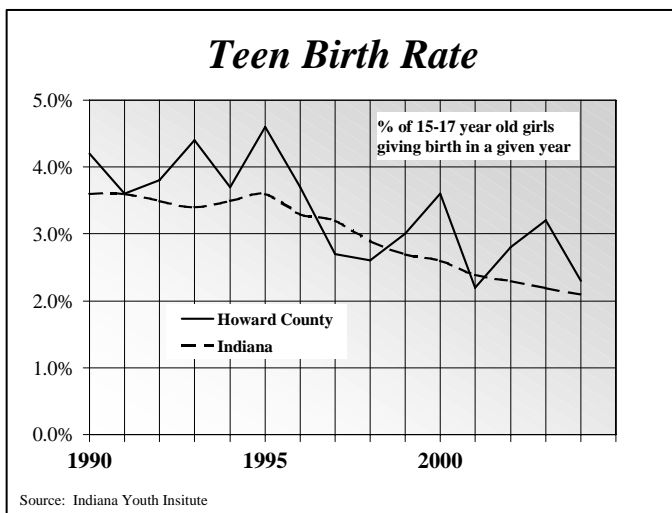
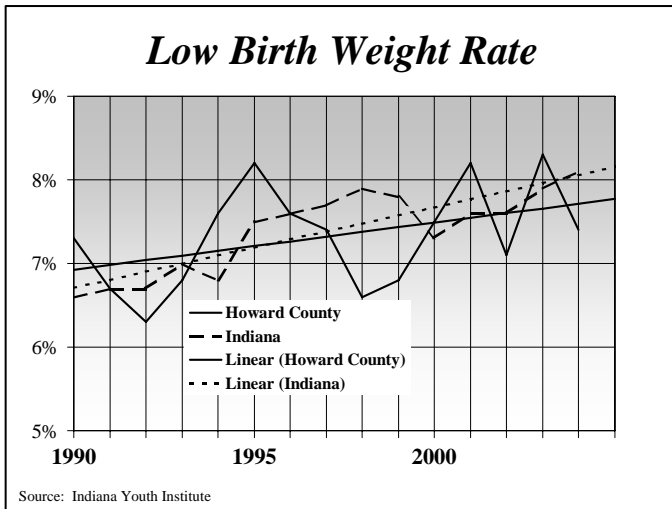
We discovered during focus groups that some sizable youth programs were unknown to people who should know, and that several new summer programs have been cancelled in recent years due to low enrollment. Awareness of existing programs seems to be an issue, and there is no question that program fees and transportation pose barriers to participation. We were advised more than once that if we want to know more about young people's needs, "Ask them!" We pass that advice along.

The Indiana Youth Institute maintains an excellent database of indicators of the well being of children and youth, available at the county level.<sup>1</sup> Combing through 15 years of Kids Count data on 73 measures in search of notable changes over time, or differences between Howard County and the State as a whole, revealed the following highlights:

- **Howard County's rate of child abuse and neglect exceeded Indiana's in every year from 1990 to 2005.**<sup>2</sup> In 2005 it was 42% higher than the State's rate; in earlier years the gap was even larger. Both rates have improved over the period, with Howard County's cut in half. Still, 2005 saw 257 substantiated cases of child neglect, 62 of physical abuse, and 92 of sexual abuse – 411 children in all.
- **The number of juvenile delinquency case filings leaped from a rolling average of 180 in 1990 to 480 in 2005**, a 167% increase over a period when the number of 13-17 year olds increased less than 2%. Indiana saw a 73% increase over the same period.
- **Howard County had less licensed childcare in 2005 than in 2000** (1,104 slots vs. 1,226)
- While **the number of childcare vouchers issued declined** from 1,357 in 2000 to 961 in 2005, the average monthly waiting list grew, from 195 to 254.

<sup>1</sup> For an up-to-date Howard County profile, go to [http://www.iyi.org/kids\\_count\\_data/pdf/datapdfs/howard.pdf](http://www.iyi.org/kids_count_data/pdf/datapdfs/howard.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The rate of substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect per 1,000 children younger than age 18.



- In 2005 **5,412 children and youth participated in Hoosier Healthwise**, a health insurance program for low-income children and youth ages 0-18 funded by Medicaid and the State of Indiana. This represented a 78% increase from 1998, the year the program began. Statewide, participation increased 73% in the same period.
- Howard County's low birth weight rate has crept upward since 1990, from a rolling average of 6.9% to 7.7%. The statewide picture is even worse on this score.
- Non-marital births have climbed from a rolling average of 30% in 1990 to 40% in 2005. Howard County's rate has consistently exceeded Indiana's by five percentage points.
- There is one piece of **good news: the teen birth rate**. Howard County's rolling average for births to 15-17 year olds fell from 4.3 to 2.5% in 2004.<sup>3</sup> (Indiana's rate is 2.1%.) Still, 84 babies were born in 2004 to mothers under age 20 without a high school diploma.

<sup>3</sup> The number of births to mothers ages 15 through 17 in any given year as a percentage of all females in this age group