

Our Opinion: Saving children

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When it comes to enhancing the lives of children, Florida is making some progress, but there are many challenges ahead. That means that every chance that you can mentor a child, participate in a project on children's health and education, or donate money, please do so.

The annual Kids Count report conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation released Monday ranks Florida at 38 among the states in addressing the well-being of its children.

The comprehensive national study is based on data submitted from a wealth of sources involving health, education, economic conditions and more. The study focused on four main areas and ranked Florida accordingly: economic well-being (45th), education (35), health (37) and family and community (35). These figures mirror closely last year's rankings, which means that Florida continues to place in the lower rankings of states.

What's troubling is the fact that one in four of our state's children are living in poverty, according to the report. In addition, 34 percent of our children have parents with unstable employment, 48 percent are living in environments where most of the income goes to housing costs.

"It's a sad day when a family of four earning \$40,000 a year expend over 30 percent of their income on shelter alone," said Susan Weitzel, director of Florida's Kids Count.

The annual report is important because it helps to give educators, health administrators, children's advocates in cities like Tallahassee information on where efforts need to be focused when we start talking about improving the quality of life for everyone in this community, especially our children.

That's why we encourage you to get involved in the city of Tallahassee's Change for Change program (see www.tal.gov.com) that allows you to donate extra money through your utility bills.

There are 550 homeless children in this community and a portion of that money goes toward their needs. Other money is used to help those who need assistance with utility payments or in providing food for their families.

We also salute the work of Whole Child Leon which celebrated its 95210 program, an important community project that focused on educating children about healthier lifestyles, especially focusing on nutrition.

It might seem that we are often overwhelmed by the plethora of programs committed to improving the lives of children, but as the Casey report indicates, and from what we can see first-hand in Leon County, every effort counts.