

**PRIORITIES, CHALLENGES, AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES
FOR CHILDREN:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE CHILDREN’S AGENDA’S
ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSED 2010 MONROE COUNTY
BUDGET**

In what could have been a difficult year, there is some ‘good news’ in the proposed 2010 Monroe County Budget:

- **Overall, there are increases in spending for children’s services, albeit a few important areas that have been decreased or level funded.**
- **There are increases to the individual grants received through Financial Assistance and Safety Net, critical to vulnerable citizens during this poor economy.**
- **The total allocation for day care is increased by \$5.4M, as a result of successful community-wide advocacy to New York State to reinstate the Child Care Block Grant allocation.**
- **The County has broken ground on the Foster Care Pediatrics and Visitation Clinic which will deliver services more seamlessly to children living in foster care, and there is a new Center for Disease Control-funded “Healthy Futures for Children in Foster Care” grant to develop and integrate evidence-based, effective assessments and services for Foster Care children and families.**
- **There is continuation of six County-supported evidence-based programs serving children in Monroe County.**
- **The District Attorney’s Office, with Administration and Legislative approval, continues to financially support prevention by funding Project Step Up, an after-school reading program at the Boys and Girls Club.**
- **There is an on-going trend of decreased group and institutional placements for youth, which we know are often not as effective as other community-based programs.**

This is important good news. But, unfortunately, there is also ‘bad news’. Data regarding children that are tracked in the budget document show that children in our community face tremendous challenges. Further, to a significant degree, **these challenges are preventable**. By preventing these problems, children do better in life and taxpayers save money.

Unfortunately, overall, the proposed 2010 Monroe County budget is weak in terms of preventive programs and policies. Monroe County isn’t alone in this. New York State’s funded programs and policies are weak in terms of prevention, as is the case for many Counties and States across the Country. Most ‘mandated’ spending is designed around fixing problems, and, as a result, most local and State governments continue to focus on the costly work of trying, yet frequently failing, to fix problems down the road after the scars have been formed. **We need a different, broader approach: one that begins to address the root causes of problems while maintaining effective programs for children who are already in trouble, who may be living in abusive or neglectful**

families, who may not be ready for school because of where they are spending their preschool years, or who may be getting into trouble after-school. Monroe County has the leadership and the knowledge to be a model among its peers by incorporating upstream, comprehensive prevention into the every-day important work of the County, and we must do this because our children are facing too many preventable problems.

The Children’s Agenda has four recommendations regarding spending on children in this year’s budget.

Recommendation One: Reduce Child Abuse

The 2010 budget confirms the concern that too many of Monroe County’s children are being neglected and abused. This is a continuing problem with devastating results for children. And we are not paying enough attention to it.

Number of Reports Made Regarding Maltreatment and Abuse of Children in Monroe County				
	2006	2007	2008	October 31, 2009
Sexual Abuse	468	506	476	482
Physical Abuse	30	67	62	75
Fatalities (subset of Physical Abuse)¹	9	8	13	11
Maltreatment	6240	6375	6921	7300

By the end of October 2009 the County received more reports of physical abuse and maltreatment than ever before. This is a critical problem for our community that must be addressed. The first step is prevention.

If we can get a family off to the right start at the very beginning there is a good chance that their children will not be abused or neglected. *There is strong evidence that certain programs that are preventive in nature actually reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect and save taxpayer dollars at the same time.* The Nurse Family Partnership program (NFP) reduces incidents of abuse and neglect by 50% in vulnerable, high-risk families and has a long-term return on investment of \$5 for every \$1 invested in the program.

The County has started this important work by using State-provided Community Optional Preventive Service dollars (COPS), matched with private community donations, to fund the Nurse Family Partnership program. Unfortunately this year the program shows no expansion despite large numbers of families who need but do not receive the program.

¹ Fatalities are a subset of Physical Abuse numbers. The fatalities represented here are of children from families living in Monroe County. ‘Secondaries’ (children who live in other Counties but come to Monroe County for medical help prior to their death or are brought to the Monroe County Medical Examiner’s Office upon their death) are not included in these numbers. Number of ‘Secondaries’ were not available for 2007 at the time of printing. 2009 number is as of Dec 1, 2009.

TCA recommends that:

- 1. NFP should be expanded in 2010 by accessing available State Department of Health dollars and by taking full advantage of Medicaid reimbursement, which will be operational in 2010 for about 40% of program costs. We know that DHS and DPH want to take advantage of these dollars. We must pursue these dollars aggressively and use them to expand the program to more of the families who need it.**
- 2. Monroe County has an opportunity to invest additional local dollars in both NFP and in the Building Health Children program by reallocating tax dollar savings resulting from reduced local foster care costs. We recommend that the County reinvest a modest 10% of these savings, \$300,000 of the \$3M in savings, that, when combined with additional state matching funds, can expand evidence-based preventive services at no additional county cost while still providing substantial relief to the overall budget.**

Recommendation Two: Effective Contracted Services

When children enter the Child Protective Services system due to a report of abuse or neglect, they need to be taken care of well and quickly. DHS has taken some first important strides in improving the care received by our most vulnerable citizens – the children who are living in homes where there is abuse or neglect. As described in greater detail below, County staff who are working in the Child Protective Services division have a heavy responsibility: they must keep children safe. Since 2007, the County has begun to adequately staff these areas, which has reduced staff caseloads, moving children and families through the system with more timely attention.

Many of these families need additional services to repair the problems that exist. When there is a problem, families need to get good help quickly. The County invests over \$19M to this purpose each year by purchasing services (POS) from local agencies to prevent and protect children from child neglect and abuse and to provide intensive services for troubled adolescents (PINS and delinquents) and their families. The majority of these dollars are directed towards services for children who are in the system because abuse or neglect is suspected or indicated. This is an important investment.

Monroe County needs to continue to invest in preventive and protective services for County children and families. *We must invest in what is effective.* High numbers of child abuse and neglect reports, continued high use of residential Foster Care, and the worsening economy mandate that we spend these dollars on the most effective programs for children available.

The following currently funded programs are evidence-based. Their effectiveness is well-known:

- Child-Parent Psychotherapy**
- Family Functional Therapy**
- Incredible Years**
- Infant-Parent Psychotherapy**
- Multi-Systemic Therapy**

- **Nurse Family Partnership Program**

The evidence is clear, after randomized-controlled trials, that these programs work. Another program, Building Healthy Children, is founded on research, being implemented in Rochester, and will be evaluated by randomized-controlled trial this year.

DHS stated in 2008 and 2009 an intention to review the services purchased to ensure that they provide what children most need and that they are investing in programs that have been demonstrated to be effective. **We commend this commitment and the first steps taken to achieve it. We are concerned, however, over a lack of progress in this area.** There are no evaluations for public review and there is little change in the way these dollars are being spent or are projected to be spent in 2010. Programs which have shown few or no outcomes continue at the same or increased rates.

TCA recommends that:

3. **DHS should move quickly to take the next steps to implement a solid evaluation process that focuses on outcomes for participating families both during and after services have ended.**
4. **For programs that are not evidence-based², the County should make 2010 contracts for Purchase of Services for prevention contingent on review of the latest available evaluations, including (but not limited to) the two largest contracted programs, Hillside Work Scholarship Connection and Encompass, which account for ~3/4 of the funding for Community Optional Preventive Services (COPS) programs and nearly 40% of total funding for purchased services in DHS. Report and presentation of these evaluations should be made by the contracted evaluators to the Monroe County leadership and legislature, the Monroe County Children’s Advisory Committee, and the public in the first quarter of 2010.**
5. **In addition, the County should support evaluation by staffing a position for oversight of this objective process. To benefit children, as well as taxpayers and our community, we must stop deploying money to things that don’t work or have questionable outcomes.**

Recommendation 3: Bolster Quality Child Care

County-provided child care subsidies can be used by eligible families to purchase child care from child care centers, family/group child care providers, and legally-exempt child care providers (these are home-based providers who care for 1-2 children who aren’t their own). The budget shows an increased allocation for Day Care expenses of \$5.44M, from \$45.71M in 2009 to \$51.15 in 2010. This includes a hard-won reinstatement of the Child Care Block Grant allocation; this recovery of State dollars for Day Care has allowed the County to increase the eligibility rate, allowing over 800 additional children to re-enter the system in 2010.

² A program is considered *evidence-based* if rigorous and repeated evaluation shows that the program produces positive results, the results can be attributed to the program itself, rather than to other extraneous factors or events, and the evaluation is peer-reviewed by experts in the field.

This was an important and necessary step for our community to take together. It is cause for celebration. Our work, however, is not done. The proposed 2010 Monroe County Budget shows a projected shift back towards legally-exempt care. In general, legally-exempt care is of lower quality than other forms of child care as it is not beholden to the laws and standards that govern the safety and quality of most child care settings. As a result the quality and cost is most often lower than regulated care. This shift is cause for concern, as use of legally-exempt care by subsidized families has been decreasing for several years. The research is clear that what is most vital for disadvantaged children and the taxpayers who foot the bill for this program is high quality child care. **High quality child care is prevention.** When children from disadvantaged families and neighborhoods attend high-quality child care they accomplish more in school and in life. And, taxpayers save money. Economists have conducted in-depth analyses of high quality child care and found that for every dollar invested, there is a return of between \$7 and \$17 in tax savings from reduced services needed for children as they grow.

The economic stability and well-being of families is essential to the vitality of our community. Support for access to appropriate and affordable child care for the children of low-income working families is a vital component of a strong and sustainable economy for Monroe County and New York State. **We must do all we can to ensure that this care is high quality. The Children’s Agenda continues to partner with the County and advocates in the community to work at the Federal, State, and Local levels to make continued improvements.**

TCA recommends that:

6. **The County designate funding for training to strengthen formal family care programs, and provides incentives to legally-exempt providers to provide higher quality care to the children they serve.**
7. **The Children’s Agenda will convene a community-wide panel on increasing access to quality care in 2010. We request that the County designate a key leader to be part of that panel.**

Recommendation 4: Enhance Positive Youth Development

Our community faces tremendous challenges in terms of our youth. The average age of entry into gangs is 13. Homicide is the leading cause of death for Rochester teens. Teen pregnancy is climbing. These are huge issues that affect children individually and our community at large.

While there are many roots to these problems, the research is clear that positive youth development delivered out-of-school can help deter juvenile delinquency and risky youth behavior. This is another area where prevention works and where investing in what is effective is critical.

A division within the Department of Human Services with relatively small dollars, the Youth Bureau’s budget has been further reduced the past few years. This year’s budget

shows a decrease of approximately \$370K, which is a 15% cut and includes a small decrease in the local County support. The Bureau works with many constituents across the community. In addition to offering oversight and coordination of crisis services for youth, the Bureau is voice for prevention in the community. This role is at risk as the Bureau's appropriation continues to decrease.

Our local trends match national research: 2:30-6:00 p.m. are when children and youth are most likely to be victims or perpetrators of a crime. Teens unsupervised after- school are four times more likely to have committed a crime and used illegal drugs than teens with after-school programs.³ The after- school hours present an opportunity to support our children and youth's learning and development by offering programming based on evidence and best practice. The Coping Power Program is an after-school program that was created to reduce violence and aggressive behavior in youth and it works primarily with students who have behavior issues in fourth and fifth grade, including aggressive tendencies. In a long-term study, it has been shown to reduce drug dependence, teen pregnancy, and criminal activity. Given that early aggressive behavior is a strong predictor of future aggressive behavior, Coping Power is an opportunity to catch and correct behavior before it snowballs into something graver: deadly behavior for the child and the community.

TCA Recommends:

- 8. The County should bolster the ability of the Youth Bureau to promote positive youth development in our community.**
- 9. TCA recommends that the County invest \$100,000 to partner with others in the community to expand evidence-based, effective after-school programs, particularly the Coping Power Program.**

³ Fight Crime Invest in Kids 2003