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Where you live makes a difference in escaping the impacts of poverty

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Utah children in intergenerational poverty face added challenges such as inadequate access to licensed child care, health care and limited employment among parents, a new report by Voices for Utah Children says. (Shutterstock.com)

SALT LAKE CITY – Location, location, location.

It's not just a factor in real estate. It's a significant factor in child well-being, a new report on intergenerational poverty concludes.

The report, *Intergenerational Poverty: Kids and Communities*, examines intergenerational poverty in six ZIP codes in Salt Lake, Davis and Weber counties. More than 1,000 children experiencing intergenerational poverty live in each of the selected ZIP codes.

Intergenerational poverty is the term given for poverty that strikes families generation after generation, making it difficult to escape its economic grip.

“Unfortunately, the data demonstrates that the communities in which high numbers of intergenerational poverty children are living place additional handicaps on them and limit their access to equal opportunities for success. As this report establishes, the educational outcomes and health outcomes for children with these ZIP codes are worse than the outcomes for all Utah children,” said the report’s author, Tracy Gruber, senior policy analyst with [Voices for Utah Children](#).

These Utah children face compounding challenges, including inadequate access to licensed child care centers, limited employment among their parents and a greater percentage of children growing up in single-parent households, compared to the general population of Utah children, Gruber said.

Most children who live in intergenerational poverty are white. Among the six areas, which include the communities of Clearfield, Kearns, West Valley City, Ogden and North Ogden, the majority of children live in married couple households, although that data apply to the entire population of children in the areas.

The report, which looked at several indicators of child well-being, noted that among the six areas with high intergenerational poverty among children, the poverty rate grew dramatically between 2000 and 2011.

"By 2011, child poverty rates were higher in the six ZIP codes than statewide and nearly one in five of Utah's children living in poverty reside within the high intergenerational poverty area," the report said.

The report also notes that children in the six areas have lower high school graduation rates than their peers statewide, score lower on standardized achievement tests and in some schools, and more than 10 percent of students are chronically absent, meaning they have missed 18 or more days of school each year.

Good attendance is a predictor of academic success, the report said.

"Sixty-four percent of children who regularly attend school in kindergarten and first grade read on grade level after third grade compared to only 43 percent of children who miss nine or more days of school both years. These negative academic outcomes tend to follow these children throughout their academic careers, making it difficult to make up academic ground that was lost in the early years," the report said.

Access to health care was another concern raised by the report.

According to 2012 figures, Utah children were uninsured at a rate of 11 percent while the percentage of uninsured adults was 15 percent "with higher rates in intergenerational poverty ZIP codes. The percentage of children lacking insurance is one of the highest rates in the nation," the report said.

Although Utah has a lower teen pregnancy rate than the national average, the report notes that the birth rate for girls ages 15-17 in five of the six communities was higher than the state figure. (The rate in the Clearfield area was lower than the state rate.)

That is another troubling indicator, Gruber said, because teen mothers have a higher likelihood of living in poverty. "They're more likely not to finish high school. If they don't marry or cohabitate with the father of the child, that limits the ability to be economically secure and that impacts the child," she said.

The report will be distributed to the state's Intergenerational Poverty Advisory Committee today.

Voices for Utah Children hopes the report will be a resource for committee members and the Intergenerational Poverty Commission, which comprises the directors of the departments of Health, Workforce Services, Human Services, the superintendent of Public Instruction, the state Juvenile Court administrator and the chairman of the advisory committee. The commission makes policy recommendations to legislative bodies such as the state school board and the Utah Legislature.

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