State Report Highlights What's at Risk for Children of Young Parents

Published: Tuesday, 25 September 2018 11:00
Written by: Terry Haven



In its latest KIDS COUNT® policy report, the Annie E. Casey Foundation highlights the needs and challenges of the more than 6 million young adult parents and their children living in the United States. *Opening Doors for Young Parents* illustrates the challenges young parents encounter especially in a changing economy. For example, young parents (ages 18 - 24) are more likely to work full-time than nonparents, but their median annual family income is just $23,000 — only slightly above the federal poverty level for a family of three. Some 69 percent of the children of young parents live in low-income families.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's report offers key national and state data on young parents and their children and provides recommendations for action policymakers, states and communities who can help young parents and their children thrive.

The fifty-state report reveals that, at 11 percent, Utah is slightly above the national average (10 percent) of youth ages 18 to 24 who are also young parents.

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The report highlights the following statewide trends and areas of concern:

- 36,000 children in Utah have young parents ages 18 to 24.
- 60 percent of children of young parents in Utah live in low-income families.
- Only 17 percent of young parents ages 18 to 24 have completed an associate degree or higher.
- 35 percent of Utah's young parents are people of color, facing challenges exacerbated by discrimination and systemic inequities, with their children standing to suffer the most.

Many of the policies Voices supports are those which aid young families. Policies such as a state earned income tax credit, Medicaid expansion, and quality child care have important implications for struggling families. These policies help alleviate the most common obstacles young adult parents face, including incomplete education, lack of family-sustaining employment opportunities, lack of access to quality child care, inadequate and unstable housing and financial insecurity. Voices for Utah Children further stresses the importance of helping the state's young parents access educational and employment opportunities. In an increasingly competitive workforce landscape, education can make a significant difference in earning power for families. However, as the data demonstrate, young adult parents here in Utah, like young parents nationwide, do not have the post-secondary education or specialized skills to obtain family-sustaining jobs.

These barriers threaten not only these young adults, but also their young children, setting off a chain of diminished opportunities for two of our nation's future

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generations. The Casey Foundation stresses the importance of a two-generation approach to equip young parents for success. We must help young adult parents develop the skills they need to raise their children, contribute to their communities, and drive our national economy forward.

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