

# THE SOUTHERN INSTITUTE on Children and Families

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## 2002 ANNUAL REPORT

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⚙ Knowledge ⚙ Health Care Coverage ⚙ Quality, Affordable Child Care ⚙  
Family Friendly Eligibility Services ⚙ Leadership ⚙ Public Policy Research  
Process Improvement ⚙ Workforce ⚙ Breakthrough Series Collaborative  
⚙ Income Support ⚙ Information Outreach ⚙ Transportation ⚙ Action ⚙

# Southern Institute on Children and Families

The Southern Institute on Children and Families is an independent, non-profit public policy organization founded in 1990. It endeavors to improve opportunities for children and families in the South with a focus on disadvantaged children. Through special projects and surveys, the Southern Institute on Children and Families spotlights health, social and economic issues of regional significance. It works to encourage public/private-sector collaboration on behalf of children and families and seeks to remove bureaucratic and other barriers that restrict access to needed services.

The Southern Institute on Children and Families is funded through grants and contributions. The southern states included in the work of the Southern Institute on Children and Families are:

Alabama  
Arkansas  
Delaware  
District of Columbia  
Florida  
Georgia  
Kentucky  
Louisiana  
Maryland  
Mississippi  
Missouri  
North Carolina  
Oklahoma  
South Carolina  
Tennessee  
Texas  
Virginia  
West Virginia

While the primary focus of the Southern Institute on Children and Families is on the South, the Southern Institute directs national programs related to its mission.

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## Letter from the Chairman



**T**he Southern Institute on Children and Families was created 12 years ago with a mission to open doors to opportunity for children and families in the southern region of the United States. We continue to be passionate about the critical need for leadership across our region to address longstanding issues that place far too many of our children and families at a disadvantage.

Early on, the Southern Institute identified lack of access to health coverage, child care and transportation as key issues that limit opportunities for low-income children and families. We have worked diligently to expand access through improved public policies and practices and in doing so have helped countless numbers of families in their quest to provide for their children. We are gratified our leadership has reached beyond the southern region, especially on issues related to health coverage for low-income children and adults.

**O**ur ability to achieve results is based on our earnest efforts to conduct solid, credible research on key issues, frame the issues so the complexity is minimized, bring leaders together to deliberate solutions and develop strategies grounded in reality. I am honored to be part of an organization respected by private and public organizations both regionally and nationally, but I am more honored that the respect and trust placed in us by so many have translated into positive action for children and families.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I express sincere gratitude to the foundations, groups and individuals who support our work and the staff and field experts who work diligently behind the scenes. As in years passed, we pledge our continued commitment to improving knowledge and building leadership that will result in action on behalf of children and families in the years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Urita Blackwell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Urita" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Blackwell".

Urita Blackwell  
Chairman

## Letter from the President and CEO



Perhaps the one word best describing 2002 for the Southern Institute on Children and Families is Action. We witnessed a weakened economy and discouraging state and federal budget cuts that made it even more important to focus attention on low-income children and families. Rather than retracting our efforts, we moved forward with unfailing commitment to address issues affecting the well-being of low-income children and families.

In 2002, the Southern Institute continued to conduct research and disseminate information on health coverage, child care and improved government eligibility services. The Southern Institute fostered leadership by assembling public and private representatives to address these and other critical issues. Promoting action, the Southern Institute encouraged positive change and sustainability of gains made.

The Southern Institute is known for convening diverse groups and collaborating on issues of common interest and this leadership strategy is embraced by public and private officials faced with complex public policy issues. The process improvement focus of our Supporting Families After Welfare Reform initiative enables action. The Covering Kids & Families initiative is led by state and local coalitions intent on achieving needed eligibility reforms. The Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care is a collaborative involving southern leaders focused on results and accountability.

Our most recent initiative, the Southern Business Leadership Council (SBLC), is based on the Southern Institute strategy of building knowledge and collaborative leadership that results in action. Established in 2002, the SBLC involves business leaders in addressing issues that restrict opportunities for low-income children and families in the southern region. The Southern Institute recognizes that having the involvement and support of the business community will enhance our ability to thoroughly examine issues and develop comprehensive solutions. We also believe that business leaders willing to deliberate on issues and help promote solutions will have a significant impact on how children and family issues are perceived by public decision makers at all levels.

As each year passes, the reputation of the Southern Institute grows and our work benefits from a wider range of collaborators. While our primary focus remains on the South, we direct national programs related to our mission. The 2002 Annual Report provides summary information on current and proposed initiatives of the Southern Institute and indicates how additional information can be accessed. The Southern Institute staff is connected by a passion for our mission, and I am proud to be associated with such a dedicated team of individuals. We stand poised and ready to continue our work of improving opportunities for children and families in the South and nationwide.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Shuptrine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sarah C. Shuptrine  
President and CEO

# Background and Introduction

The Southern Institute on Children and Families is an independent non-profit organization that improves the well-being of children and families through knowledge, leadership and action. We educate through research of policies, systems and practices and work to generate greater awareness and equip community and business leaders and policymakers with knowledge to make informed decisions. Since our establishment in 1990 as a 501(c)(3) public policy organization, we have aggressively pursued our mission to improve opportunities for children and families in the South and have provided direction and leadership on national programs consistent with our mission.

The Southern Institute uses a comprehensive approach in examining issues and involves key players in the development and implementation of effective solutions. The methods and strategies we apply to issues affecting low-income children and families in the South have consistently led to greater awareness of critical public policy issues, development of promising strategies to address those issues, strong collaborative partnerships poised for action and, most importantly, achievement of action on behalf of children and families.

The Southern Institute believes collaboration with the business community is essential to achieve significant progress on behalf of low-income children and families across our region. Through the Southern Business Leadership Council (SBLC), established in 2002, we are working to achieve bold action beneficial to families, employers and communities as a whole. The participation of business leaders elevates awareness of the goal of improving the well-being of children and establishes a connection to the strategic growth and development of the southern region.

The Southern Institute's cutting edge research on access to public child health coverage programs in the 1990s led to the establishment of more progressive health coverage policies for low-income children and families in the South and across the nation. Through our direction of the Covering Kids & Families national initiative, we work to reduce the number of uninsured children and adults who are eligible for but not enrolled in Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

The Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care has completed three years of substantive work under the guidance of the Southern Institute resulting in the development and implementation of actions to improve access to quality, affordable child care throughout the South. Two regional action plans provide a blueprint for the southern states, and implementation of the plans is tracked annually to identify areas of progress and areas requiring further attention.

Through the Supporting Families After Welfare Reform national program, Southern Institute initiatives to achieve needed policy and program changes through process improvement strategies are encouraging public and private entities to function more effectively and efficiently. By promoting awareness of the benefits of small scale testing, the Southern Institute helps improve both the knowledge base and comfort level of organizations responsible for complex policies and systems, ultimately leading to program reforms and positive results.

In addition to the programs mentioned above, the 2002 Annual Report provides information on the Chartbook of Major Indicators: Conditions Placing Children in the South at Risk, published in August 2002, and outlines planned initiatives

and goals of the Southern Institute. Included in our future plans is a regional initiative to identify and resolve transportation issues affecting low-income children and families in the South. ■

More detailed information on the Southern Institute can be accessed by visiting [www.kidsouth.org](http://www.kidsouth.org) or calling (803) 779-2607.

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## 2002 Chartbook of Major Indicators Conditions Placing Children in the South at Risk

The 2002 Chartbook of Major Indicators: Conditions Placing Children in the South at Risk is an information outreach tool illustrating the status of many children and families in the southern region of the United States. The Chartbook provides a graphical representation of state by state data from reputable sources and contrasts conditions in the South with those in other regions.

The southern region of the United States is challenged by some of the most difficult and entrenched economic, health and social problems, and these longstanding issues continue to place children at risk. The South is plagued by high rates of uninsured children, high rates of infant deaths and disabilities, unacceptable rates of students failing to graduate from high school and high rates of children whose low-income working parents cannot afford safe, quality child care.

Families unable to meet basic needs face tremendous obstacles in fostering the development of their children. Many low-income working families do not earn enough to afford safe, quality child care, adequate health coverage and reliable transportation. Taking action to improve opportunities is critical to the future of children in the South and is a key strategy in

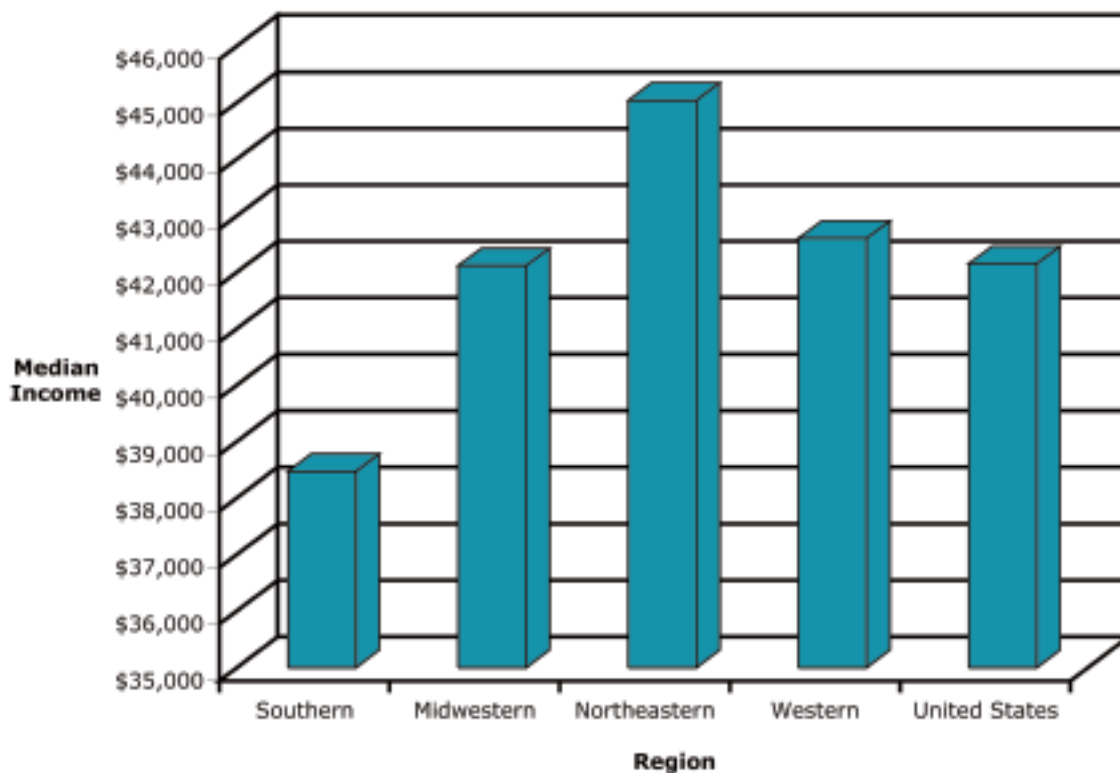
building the capacity of the current and future workforce in the southern states.

The 2002 Chartbook of Major Indicators is the first in what the Southern Institute plans to be an ongoing presentation of indicators that reflect conditions placing children and families in the South at risk. Indicators will be updated as information becomes available and new indicators will be added in the future. Examples from the Chartbook illustrating the condition of many children and families in terms of health, child care, income and education are provided in the following pages.

The Let's Invest In Families Today (LIFT) initiative supported publication of the 2002 Chartbook of Major Indicators: Conditions Placing Children in the South at Risk. The complete 2002 Chartbook, as well as strategies to address the issues, can be found on the Southern Institute's web site at [www.kidsouth.org](http://www.kidsouth.org). ■

# 2002 Chartbook of Major Indicators

## Median Household Income, 2000



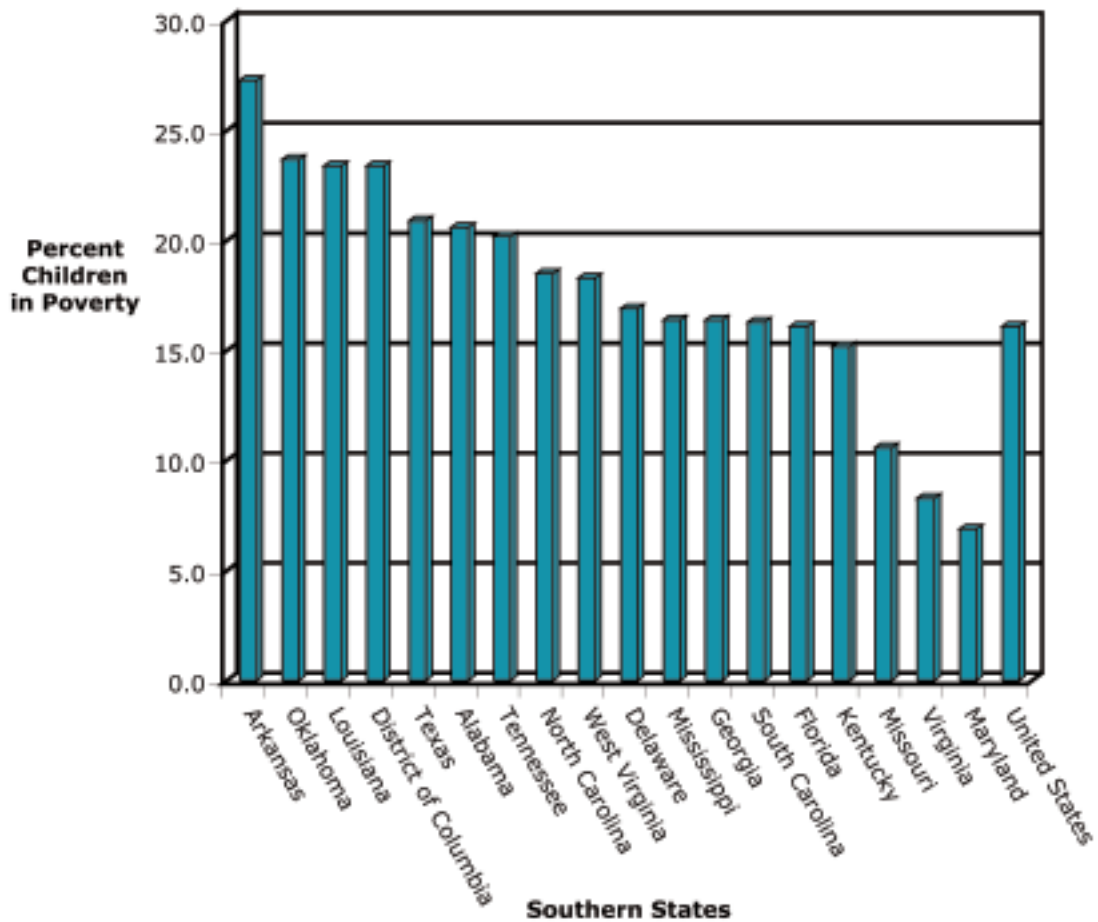
Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 1999, 2000, and 2001.

The median household income in the southern region was approximately \$3,700 less than the United States median income. Twelve (12) southern states and the District of Columbia had lower median household incomes than the United States median income.



# 2002 Chartbook of Major Indicators

## Percent of Children Under Age 18 in Poverty, 2000

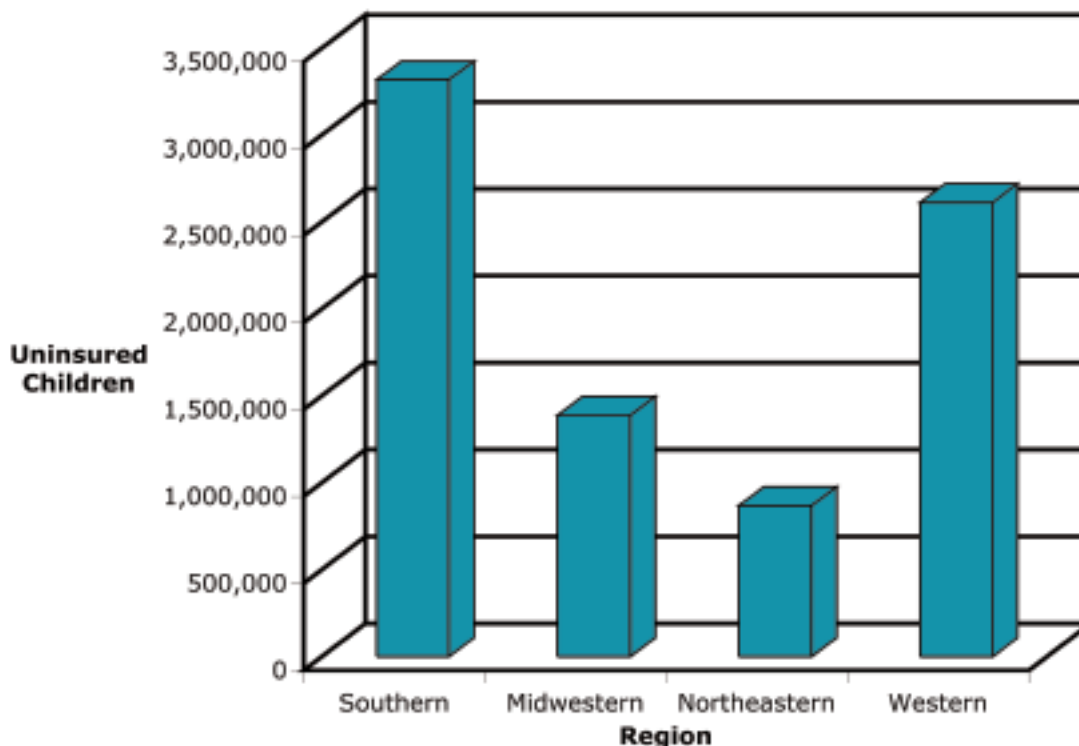


Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2001, Table 25. Poverty Status by State in 2000 (Based on a November 2001 weighted correction.)

Twelve (12) southern states and the District of Columbia exceeded the United States poverty rate for children living in poverty in 2000.

## 2002 Chartbook of Major Indicators

### Estimate of Uninsured Children Ages 0-18

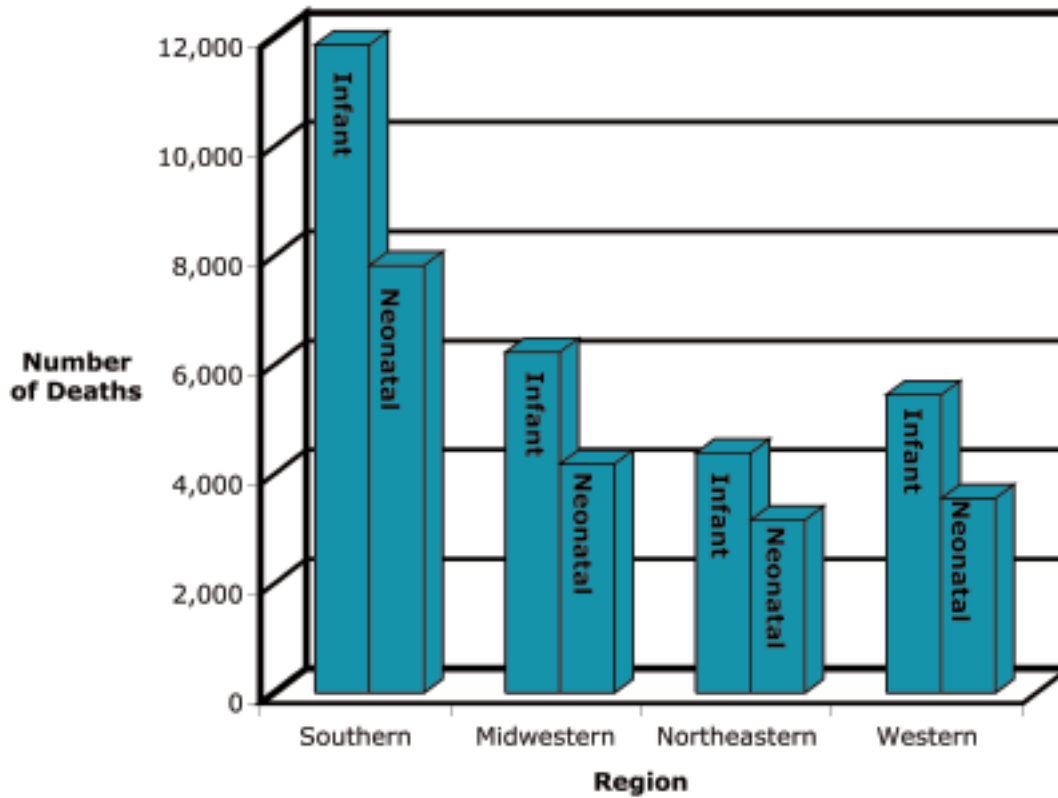


Source: The Urban Institute, 2002. Based on merged March 2000 and 2001 Current Population Survey Data, weighted to represent one (1) year, with adjustments for reported changes in Medicaid and SCHIP as of December 2001.

Forty-one (41) percent of all uninsured children in the United States live in the southern region.

# 2002 Chartbook of Major Indicators

## Infant Mortality, 1999

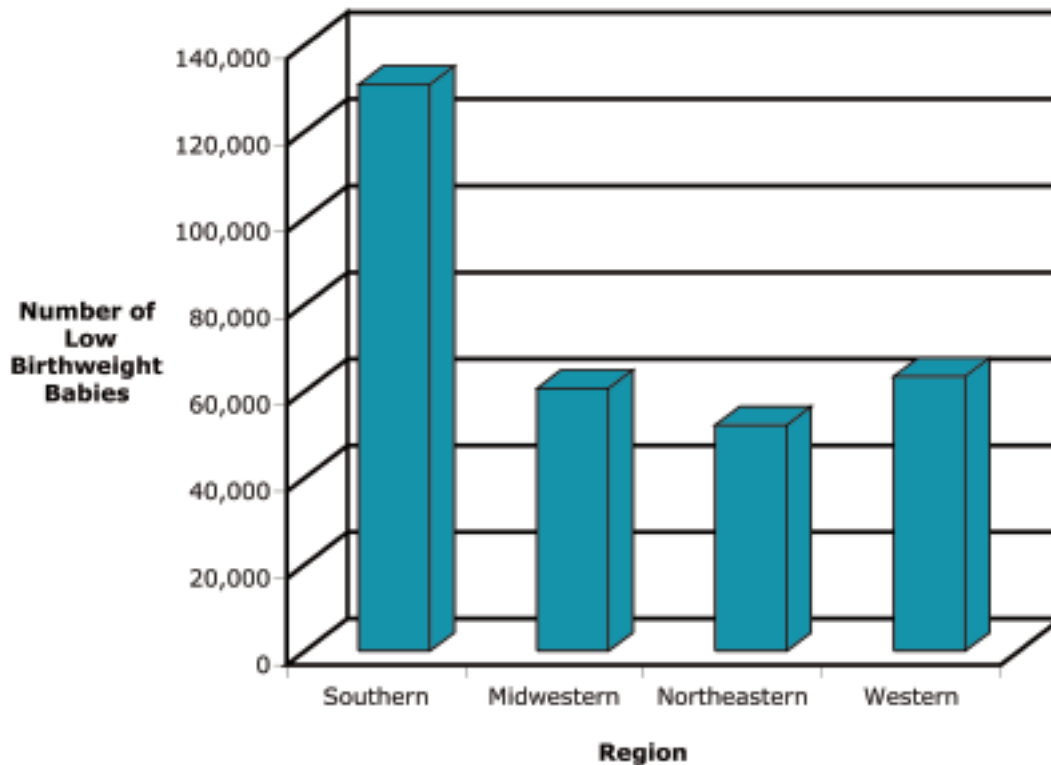


Source: National Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 49, No. 8, September 21, 2001, Table 29. Infant deaths are children under 1 year and neonatal deaths occur to infants ages 0 - 27 days.

Forty-two (42) percent of all infant deaths in 1999 were in the southern region.

## 2002 Chartbook of Major Indicators

### Number of Low Birthweight Babies, 2000

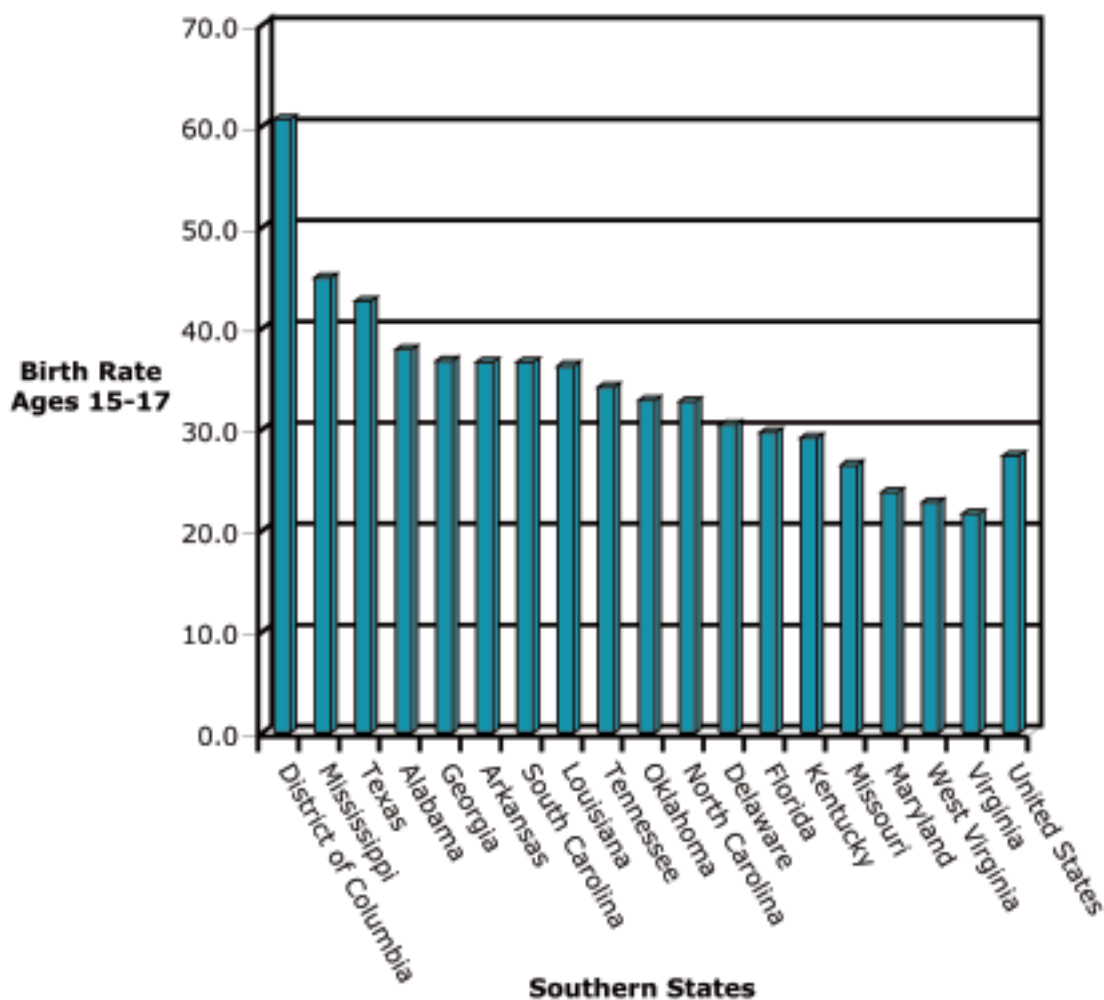


Source: National Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 50, No. 5, February 12, 2002, Table 10.

In 2000, forty-three (43) percent of all low birthweight babies (weight less than 5.5 pounds) were born in the southern region.

# 2002 Chartbook of Major Indicators

## Teen Birth Rates, Ages 15-17, 2000

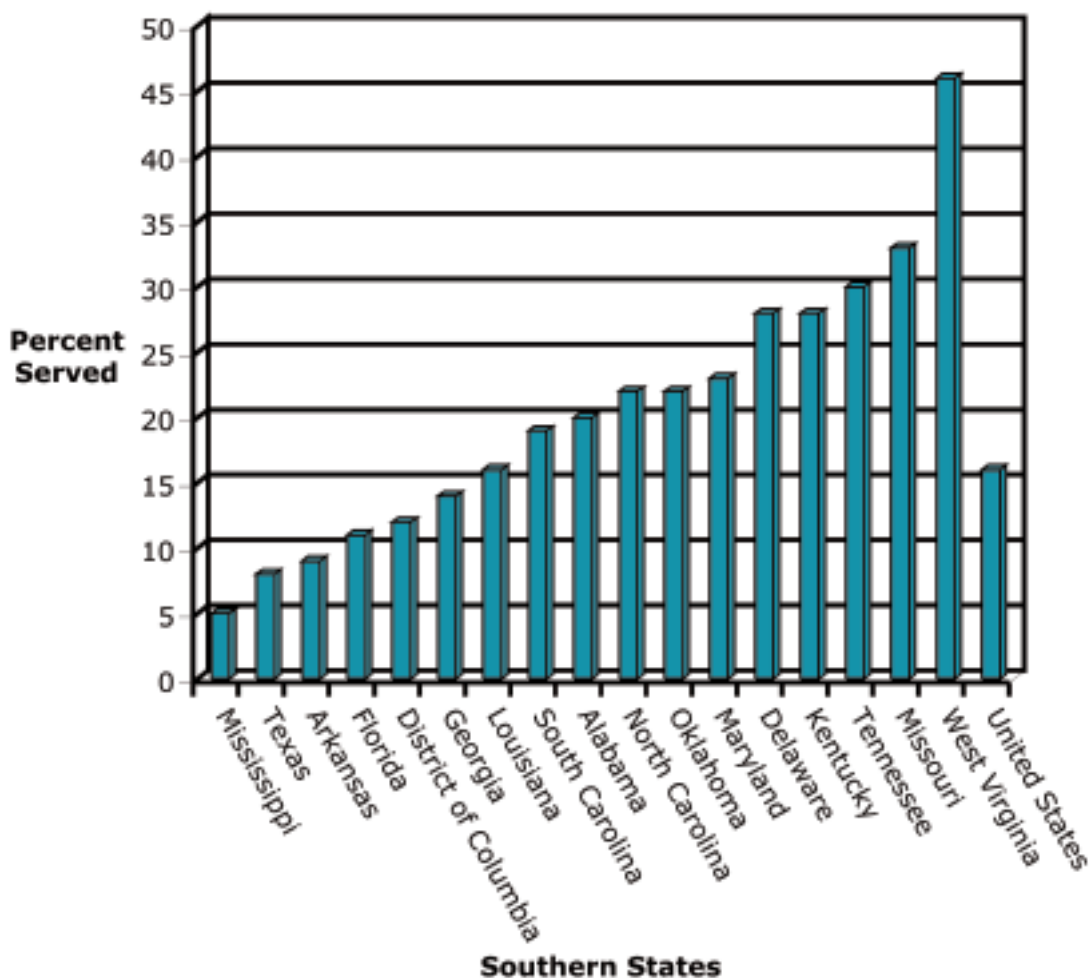


Source: National Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 50, No. 5, Tables 10 and 10W, Revised, May 15, 2002. Birth rates are live births per 1,000 women ages 15-17 in each area.

Thirteen (13) southern states and the District of Columbia exceeded the 2000 United States birth rate for teens ages 15-17.

## 2002 Chartbook of Major Indicators

### State/Federal Child Care Subsidies: Percent of Eligible Children Served

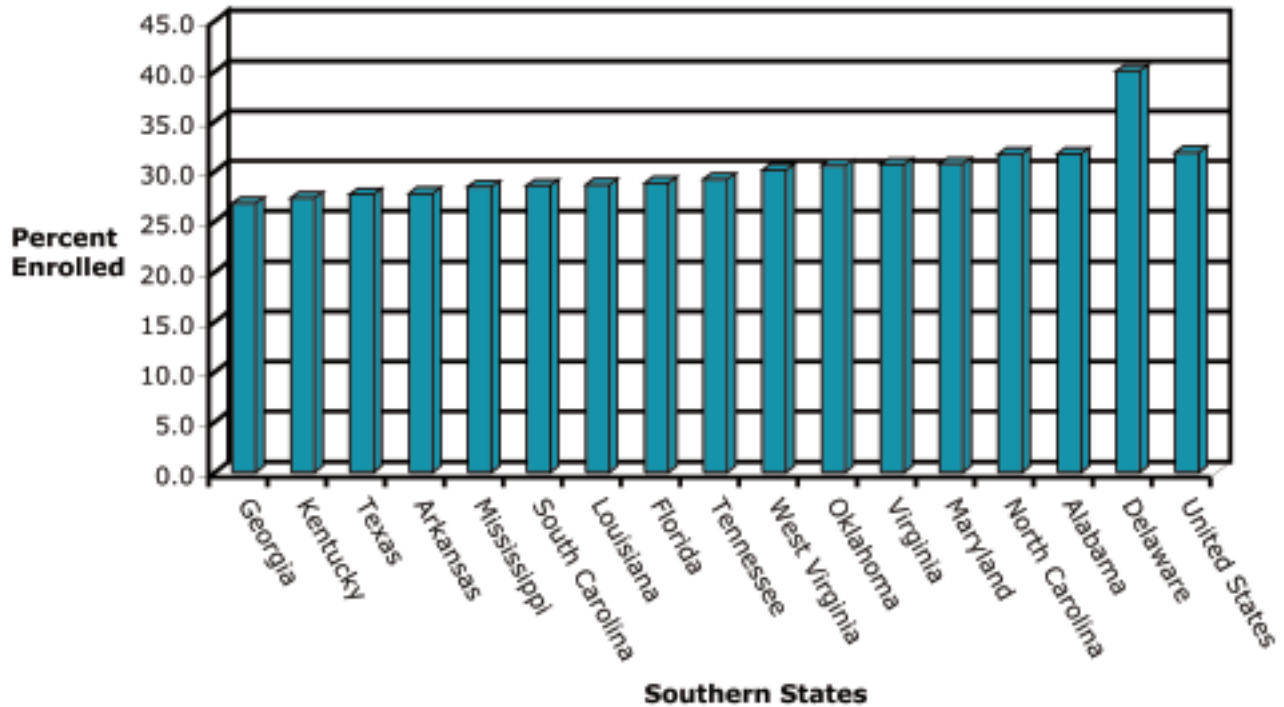


Source: Southern Institute on Children and Families, December 2000, derived from data in Access to Child Care for Low-Income Working Families, US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, October 1999. Estimates are based on average monthly number of children served.

The southern states serve only fifteen (15) percent of children eligible for the state/federal child care subsidy program.

# 2002 Chartbook of Major Indicators

## Percent of Age Group 18-24 Years Enrolled in College Full Time or Part Time, 1997



Source: Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Fact Book 2001.

All but one southern state had a lower percentage than the United States of young adults ages 18-24 enrolled in college full time or part time.

# Southern Business Leadership Council

The Southern Institute established the Southern Business Leadership Council (SBLC) in August 2002. Comprised of business, philanthropic and public policy leaders, the SBLC is designed to foster a deeper understanding and joint purpose in achieving public and private actions to better support today's workforce of low-income parents and enhance the potential of tomorrow's workforce through expanded opportunities for child development.

Participation and support from business leaders elevates the likelihood of improving the well-being of children and significantly changes the manner in which public decision makers perceive issues related to low-income children and families. Effectively linking work supports and child development issues to economic development and asset-building initiatives establishes a strong connection to strategic growth and development strategies in communities, states and the entire southern region. A network of business leaders will, in turn, garner more broad-based support to bring about action on behalf of low-income children and families.

Workforce issues faced by low-income families, especially single parents, are reflected in high absenteeism, high turnover and low morale. Many low-income, working parents experience difficulty in accessing affordable, quality child care. These issues are not only stressful and disruptive for families, but also can contribute to higher training costs and lost productivity for businesses due to continual turnover and excessive employee absences.

The SBLC initiative will actively engage business and community leaders to promote more profound relationships to advance the development and implementation of comprehensive workforce and child development strategies.

The Southern Institute is uniquely qualified to facilitate collaboration among business and community leaders and public policy experts in examining issues and developing practical, reality based action plans to bring about positive change. This type of results-oriented initiative is a hallmark of our organization.

Support in 2002 for the Southern Business Leadership Council was provided by The David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Let's Invest in Families Today (LIFT) initiative. ■

The Southern Institute has enlisted an impressive group of leaders to serve on the SBLC, as outlined below.

## Southern Business Leadership Council Membership

John E. Davis  
Owner, Oates Industries, Inc.; Member, Texas House of Representatives

Paula Fraher  
Director of National Initiatives, Bank of America Foundation

Stephen Jordan  
Director of the Center for Corporate Citizenship at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Donna M. Klein  
President/CEO, Corporate Voices for Working Families; Vice President, Workforce Effectiveness and Diversity, Marriott International



Ray Marshall  
Rapoport Centennial Chair in Economics and  
Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin;  
Member, Southern Institute Board of Directors;  
former Secretary of the U.S. Department of  
Labor

Donald G. (Ike) McLeese  
President, Greater Columbia Chamber of  
Commerce

Penelope McPhee  
Vice President & Chief Program Officer, John S.  
& James L. Knight Foundation

Elaine Mendoza  
President, Conceptual MindWorks, Inc.

Paul Montgomery  
Director, Corporate Relations, Eastman  
Chemical Company

William F. O'Connor, Jr.  
Managing Director, Campaign for Alabama

George Penick  
President, Foundation for the Mid-South

Diane D. Rath  
Chair, Texas Workforce Commission

Richard W. Riley, Esq.  
Nelson Mullins Riley and Scarborough, LLP;  
Member, Southern Institute Board of Directors;  
former Governor of South Carolina; former  
Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education

Kevin C. Sass  
FACHE, Vice President, Professional Services,  
The Medical Center, Inc.

Sharon Smart  
Senior Vice President, Wachovia/First Union

John Tully  
Director, Community Relations, Michelin North  
America, Inc.

[More information on the SBLC can be found on the  
Southern Institute web site at www.kidsouth.org.](http://www.kidsouth.org)

## From Covering Kids to Covering Kids & Families

For more than a decade, the Southern Institute has been a driving force for state, regional and national eligibility reforms and these reforms have resulted in government sponsored child health coverage programs becoming more available and accessible. Early research conducted by the Southern Institute provided a roadmap for simplifying Medicaid eligibility policies and procedures and has greatly facilitated more recent efforts to increase the number of low-income uninsured children who could benefit from Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

Recognizing the Southern Institute's leadership in the area of eligibility reform, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation designated the Southern Institute in 1997 as the National Program Office to direct Covering Kids: A National Health Access Initiative for Low-Income, Uninsured Children. From 1998-2001, under the direction of the Southern Institute, the Covering Kids initiative created a national network of committed and informed individuals focused on achieving action on behalf of uninsured children eligible for Medicaid and SCHIP. With coalitions in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, Covering Kids comprised the nation's largest single effort aimed at enrolling and retaining eligible children in Medicaid and SCHIP.

When Covering Kids was envisioned in 1997, an estimated 11 million children in America were uninsured and 8 million of these children were eligible for Medicaid. In 2002, an estimated 7.8 million children in America are uninsured, a significant decline, but the data shows that 4 million of these uninsured children are estimated to be eligible for Medicaid or SCHIP and thus are needlessly uninsured. The decrease between

1997 and 2000 in uninsured children is largely attributed to increased enrollment in Medicaid and SCHIP, and the decline occurred at a time when the overall number of uninsured individuals increased.

Covering Kids played a significant role in the decline of the number of uninsured children by contributing to a national movement that increased awareness of coverage opportunities and reduced barriers to the enrollment and retention of Medicaid and SCHIP eligible children. Today there is significant support to see that the outreach, simplification and coordination gains of recent years are not reversed.

Expressing its steadfast commitment to reducing the number of uninsured in the United States, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation transitioned into the next phase of its health coverage efforts in 2001 when it announced the creation of Covering Kids & Families (CKF). Once again, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation selected the Southern Institute to direct the national effort.

Covering Kids & Families is a four-year, \$55 million initiative focused on three goals:

- ❖ Reduce the number of children who are eligible for Medicaid or SCHIP coverage but remain uninsured;
- ❖ Reduce the number of uninsured adults who are eligible for Medicaid or SCHIP coverage but remain uninsured; and
- ❖ Build knowledge, experience and capacity to achieve an enduring national and regional commitment to sustain the enrollment and retention of children and adults beyond the grant period.

Like its predecessor, *Covering Kids*, the CKF initiative employs the critical strategies of outreach, simplification and coordination of existing health care coverage programs toward accomplishing the three CKF goals.

Armed with research suggesting that offering coverage to parents helps identify and enroll more eligible children, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation included a focus on adults as a part of the CKF initiative. While all applicants for CKF grants could submit application proposals for Part 1 (children) grants, only selected states that had expanded coverage for adults could apply for Part 2 (adult) grants. At the end of 2002, the Southern Institute assisted The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in awarding 44 state grants for CKF Part 1 and 12 state grants for CKF Part 2.

During 2002, the Southern Institute conducted the first of two CKF Orientation and Training Seminars for new grantees and published *Covering Kids & Families Primer: Understanding Policy and Improving Eligibility Systems*. Southern Institute policy experts wrote the CKF Primer to inform grantees of effective methods to design and implement outreach, simplification and coordination strategies and to help them measure their accomplishments related to decreasing the number of eligible, uninsured children and adults while addressing the three strategies of CKF. A second report, *Improving Coverage for Adults Through Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program*, also was published in 2002 to address the issue of adult health coverage through Medicaid and SCHIP and describe steps that can be taken to promote participation of eligible adults and families in these programs.

In an effort to enhance the impact of CKF throughout the nation, the Southern Institute established four CKF regional offices in 2002 to facilitate its direction of the four-year national initiative. Regional offices in the South, Midwest, Northeast and West enable the Southern Institute to provide more targeted technical assistance and strengthen efforts to build regional capacity among CKF grantees and their partners.

Also intended to enhance the overall impact of CKF was the creation of the CKF Eligibility Policy Group. Composed of state and national health coverage policy experts, the CKF Eligibility Policy Group held its first meeting in 2002. The meeting was led by the Southern Institute and provided a forum for dialogue and information sharing on issues related to CKF goals and strategies. The meetings also provided an opportunity for policy experts to address concerns, surface research and policy issues and identify future collaborative opportunities.

In 2003, the Southern Institute will continue to administer the CKF grant making process. We will provide guidance and on-site technical assistance during state site visits and conference calls, conduct the second CKF Orientation and Training Seminar and convene the 2003 CKF Annual Meeting in September. The Southern Institute also will continue building partnerships through the work of the CKF Eligibility Policy Group and by enlisting national and regional based organizations in the implementation of effective outreach, simplification and coordination of Medicaid and SCHIP coverage. ■

A complete list of reports published under *Covering Kids* and *Covering Kids & Families* appears at the end of the annual report. More information on the CKF initiative can be found at [www.kidsouth.org](http://www.kidsouth.org) or [www.coveringkidsandfamilies.org](http://www.coveringkidsandfamilies.org).

# Supporting Families After Welfare Reform

Families with low incomes face many challenges. Studies have shown participation in Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and Food Stamp programs can increase a family's ability to make and sustain a transition toward economic self-sufficiency and provide important benefits for the health of each family member, particularly children. Unfortunately, many families eligible for these programs are not being enrolled or their health coverage is stopped due to procedural issues unrelated to their economic circumstances.

Even when families are eligible to receive public assistance, uncoordinated state computer systems and administrative procedures can result in erroneous eligibility decisions. Eligible families may be denied for, or mistakenly dropped from, programs, or ineligible families may be wrongfully enrolled in programs. The opportunity to increase accuracy and efficiency of eligibility and retention processes led to the creation of Supporting Families After Welfare Reform, a program of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Since 2000, the Southern Institute on Children and Families has served as the National Program Office for Supporting Families. The goal of Supporting Families is to increase the likelihood that eligible families will enroll and remain enrolled in public health care coverage programs such as Medicaid or SCHIP. The goal is pursued through a series of intense technical assistance activities designed to diagnose and solve problems in eligibility systems in states and large counties.

In 2002, Supporting Families operated through seven state grants in Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Maine, Minnesota and New Jersey and four county grants in Cuyahoga

County in Ohio, Nassau County in New York and Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties in California. Major strategies of the Supporting Families program include:

- ❖ Develop and utilize eligibility process performance measures as feedback to managers and staff; and
- ❖ Reduce the number of case closures and denials due to non-economic reasons or reasons unrelated to program eligibility requirements.

During 2002, Southern Institute staff attended the Breakthrough Series College sponsored by the Institute on Healthcare Improvement. Based on skills obtained through this experience, the Southern Institute enhanced its role as the National Program Office. In addition to providing one-on-one technical assistance to grantees on policy and systems issues, the Southern Institute designed and conducted an intensive collaborative series for grantees on quality improvement issues. State and county grantee teams representing both Supporting Families and Covering Kids & Families programs attended two learning sessions of the Breakthrough Series Collaborative in 2002. The goal of the collaborative is to participate in a true shared learning experience where grantees equip themselves with knowledge and strategies to improve Medicaid and SCHIP enrollment and retention systems in their county or state. Though technical phrases describe activities performed by Supporting Families grantees, sharing knowledge and experiences based on small scale testing is where the impact of the collaborative is realized.

The Southern Institute created an interactive web site with a fully functional extranet to support the Supporting Families Breakthrough Series

Collaborative. The site allows collaborative members to upload reports and share information with the Southern Institute and other collaborative teams.

The third learning session of the collaborative is scheduled for spring 2003. Following completion of the Breakthrough Series Collaborative, the Southern Institute will continue to provide extensive technical assistance to grantees.

Equipped with improvement strategies, developed through strong collaborative partnerships, the Supporting Families program will move forward and pursue procedural improvements in the way families access public health coverage. ■

Additional information about Supporting Families After Welfare Reform may be found at [www.kidsouth.org](http://www.kidsouth.org) or [www.supportingfamilies.org](http://www.supportingfamilies.org).

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## Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care

The Southern Institute on Children and Families established the Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care in January 2000 with support from The David and Lucile Packard Foundation. The Initiative is guided by a 24-member Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care composed of representatives appointed by the Southern Institute, a representative of the Southern Growth Policies Board, a mayoral appointee representing the District of Columbia, and gubernatorial representatives from Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.

The Southern Institute recruited a Staff Work Group of child care experts and policy staff from regional organizations to provide expertise on

issues addressed by the Task Force. The Southern Institute also commissioned consultants to conduct surveys and additional research needed to assist with the deliberations of the Task Force and provide information on issues identified during state site visits.

The initial charge to the Task Force was to collaborate in the development of a plan of action to address the need to improve access to child care financial aid. Upon completion of the financial aid action plan, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation provided additional funding to the Task Force to develop a southern regional action plan to improve child care quality.

## Improving Access to Child Care Financial Aid

In December 2000, the Task Force released its first report and action plan, titled *Sound Investments: Financial Support for Child Care Builds Workforce Capacity and Promotes School Readiness*. The report contained 10 goals and 52 action steps designed to improve access to child care financial aid.

In 2001 and 2002, Task Force members took action to implement many of the state level goals included in the Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South. Task Force members hosted Southern Institute site visits in 12 southern states to brief public and private officials on the action plan. The Southern Institute conducted annual surveys to document state implementation efforts. Survey reports published in 2001 and 2002 showed more than half the southern states reported either completing state action steps or taking action to complete them.

In February 2002, the Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care sponsored the “Forum on Child Care Financial Aid Issues” in Washington, DC. The Forum was designed to address issues related to Goal 1 in the Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South, which calls for adequate funding to meet 100 percent of the need for direct child care assistance based on the federal eligibility policy of 85 percent of the state median income. The Forum focused on reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) block grant and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant and reauthorization impact on the child care subsidy system. Forum participants examined legal issues related to implementing goals of the financial aid action

plan and held a stimulating dialogue on federal and state roles in supporting affordable child care for working families.

## Improving the Quality of Early Care and Education

During 2002, the Task Force embarked upon development of the Initiative’s second action plan. The Southern Regional Action Plan to Improve the Quality of Early Care and Education was published in October 2002 and set forth the “gold standard” for southern states to achieve on behalf of all children in early care and education. The action plan contains 7 goals and 39 action steps and was developed through Staff Work Group analysis and Task Force deliberations on survey results outlining the status of child care standards in the southern states, as compared with the quality standards set forth by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The “Second Annual Southern Regional Forum on Child Care” was held in October 2002 in Charleston, South Carolina, and served as the platform for release of the quality action plan. Public and private sector representatives attended the Forum from 16 southern states, the District of Columbia and regional policy organizations. The Forum agenda included presentations and dialogue on implementation of the Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South.

Collaboration across early care and education programs was identified as a goal in both the financial aid action plan and the quality action plan. Two reports addressing collaboration issues across CCDF, Head Start, pre-kindergarten and the TANF child care programs were published by the Southern Institute in 2002. The first report is titled *Analysis*

of Potential Barriers to Creating Coordinated Absence Policies for Collaborations Between Head Start and CCDF and TANF-Funded Programs, and the second report is titled Collaboration Among Child Care, Head Start and Pre-Kindergarten: A Telephone Survey of Selected Southern States.

Information on the Initiative, including action plans, reports and membership of the Task Force and Staff Work Group, can be found on the Southern Institute's website at [www.kidsouth.org](http://www.kidsouth.org).

The Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care will continue its action agenda during 2003. ■

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## Southern Regional Transportation Initiative

Transportation consistently shows up as a barrier to accessing health care and other services, especially in rural areas. It also has been identified as a major impediment to gaining and sustaining employment for families on welfare. And it is cited in community and state human service needs assessments on a regular basis. Despite its prominence as a recognized problem, comprehensive solutions have been elusive.... It appears that much of the problem can be resolved with effective leadership and collaboration among public and private agencies currently delivering transportation services. Without such leadership initiatives, however, it is likely to remain a problem that continues to be passed around with no one entity accepting ownership to resolve it.

Southern Institute on Children and Families, February 1998

**L**ow-income families who have participated in Southern Institute studies have consistently indicated that lack of transportation restricts their opportunities by limiting access to employment, education, job training, health care, health coverage and child care. Likewise, public agency officials also have indicated that lack of transportation impedes self sufficiency and restricts access to needed benefits and services.

During interviews in 1993 with families receiving Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in Charlotte, North Carolina and Nashville, Tennessee, 21 percent of participating families identified transportation as the most important benefit they needed to

accept a full-time job. Despite public transportation systems and multiple programs with transportation components available in these urban communities, families still cited lack of transportation as the major barrier to their employment.

On state site visits conducted in 17 southern states and the District of Columbia in 1997, health and human service officials and community organizations expressed frustration at their inability to resolve transportation issues and meet the needs of the families they served.

The Southern Institute gained insight into challenges faced by families in a rural

community during site visits to Mayersville, Mississippi, in the late 1990s. Transportation was cited by both families and community leaders as a major barrier to work, education and training, health care and child care. The Southern Institute Mayersville project resulted in collaboration among federal, state and local officials to address transportation issues in the rural Mississippi town. One of the actions taken was expansion of the use of Head Start buses. This action was initiated when federal clarification was obtained indicating that it was possible to use buses to help meet transportation needs of families who were at risk. Mayersville is a powerful example of knowledge creating leadership and action on issues affecting a community. It is a testimony to the achievement of positive outcomes attainable through collaboration.

In 2001, as part of the Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care, surveys on transportation were administered to public and private sector representatives in attendance at state site visit meetings in Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia. When asked to rate transportation issues in terms of the success of welfare reform, all respondents rated transportation as “highly important” or “important.” Several respondents took the opportunity to write personal notes on the surveys, including those provided in the next column.

“In our work on welfare reform, transportation surfaced again and again as a key barrier to work. As we worked more on transportation related to welfare reform, we began to make other connections – transportation as an environmental issue, as an elderly issue, as a health care issue. Since our work on welfare reform in 1997, transportation remains a priority issue for our organization – even in 2001.”

“This is a huge issue, especially in areas with inadequate public transportation systems – and that’s most communities in Alabama.”

“Recently we dealt with a situation where a single mother of an infant was very concerned about the care her child was receiving. Her concern and anxiety level grew by leaps and bounds when the licensing staff and a child abuse investigator interviewed her about the room where her infant spent 10 hours a day. She shared that since she did not have a car, she felt she was stuck with inadequate child care because her choices were restricted to places on the bus line. As she shared her issues, she was crying. So yes, transportation is important.”

The Southern Institute believes the need for improved transportation services for low-income individuals and families must be elevated on the public policy agenda. It is particularly critical for policymakers and business and community leaders to recognize that assisting low-income families with transportation is an essential work support service.

The Southern Institute is seeking funding of a southern regional transportation initiative to more aggressively address transportation issues and the impact of lack of transportation on family well-being and economic development in the southern region. The Southern Institute wishes to involve representatives of state and federal agencies and regional advocacy groups and experts from the fields of transportation and health and human services in a collaboration initiative that brings a sense of urgency to address these long-standing issues. The Southern Institute has a track record for providing leadership and facilitating collaboration among southern states and is well positioned to elevate the important issue of transportation to achieve



long awaited action on behalf of low-income families and children across the southern region. ■

Information on the Mayersville, Mississippi report and other publications of the Southern Institute is available at [www.kidsouth.org](http://www.kidsouth.org).

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## On the Horizon for 2003

A major focus for the Southern Institute in 2003 will be the direction of its two national programs, Covering Kids & Families and Supporting Families After Welfare Reform. Under Covering Kids & Families, the Southern Institute will work to conclude the Part 1 (children) grant making process and complete post award site visits to all funded states. In addition, we will conduct two CKF Eligibility Policy Group meetings, the second CKF Orientation and Training Seminar and the CKF Annual Meeting. The Southern Institute will guide Supporting Families grantees through the Breakthrough Series Collaborative and continue demonstrating the benefits of process improvements and small scale testing.

The Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care begins its fourth and final year under sponsorship of The David and Lucile Packard Foundation in 2003. The “Southern Regional Forum on Collaboration and Coordination Across Early Care and Education Programs” will be held in June 2003 and implementation efforts of the two action plans will continue to be promoted and tracked. The Southern Institute will pursue additional funding for continuation of this initiative beyond 2003.

The Southern Business Leadership Council (SBLC) will move forward with identification of specific objectives and development of proposals

to carry them out. The second meeting of the SBLC will be held in fall 2003.

The Chartbook of Major Indicators: Conditions Placing Children in the South at Risk will be updated in 2003. The 2003 Chartbook will provide an easy to understand depiction of the conditions affecting our region’s children and families and will be used to educate and increase awareness of issues requiring action.

The Southern Institute will seek to bring attention to the need for accessible, reliable transportation in 2003 and will lay the groundwork for a southern regional transportation initiative to address transportation challenges faced by low-income families.

We realize 2003 may present continued economic and other challenges to the efforts of the Southern Institute on Children and Families. At the same time, we know that steadfast commitment is needed now more than ever. We must protect the accomplishments we have worked so diligently to achieve and continue to build knowledge and leadership on critical issues that require action.

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