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National Kids Count Data release shows children in confirmed cases of abuse and neglect rising.

OTTAWA COUNTY, MI – April is Child Abuse Prevention (CAP) Awareness Month, and annually this month-long focus on prevention wraps up with the release of the [National Kids Count Data](#). This data looks at the health, safety and well-being of children throughout the State of Michigan. A unique aspect of this data is it provides a [county specific](#) look at how children are doing in our local communities.

In Ottawa County, less children are in living in poverty since 2010 (baseline year), with the data showing a 56% decrease in children 0-17 living in poverty, and households qualifying under the federal poverty guideline and ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained but Employed) guideline decreasing by 15% since 2010. While families are doing better economically, the number of children who are confirmed victims of abuse and neglect has been on the rise. In Ottawa County, there has been a 160% increase in cases since 2010. Children placed in out of home placements has also been on the rise, with an increase of 69%. Child Abuse and Neglect comprise 5 out of the 10 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), situations that cause traumatic stress for children and have long term impacts on health, economic and social wellbeing. Increasing the health of our community requires that we address this trauma and build community resilience.

What do these increases mean for our community? From the Stop Child Abuse and Neglect Council's perspective, this points to two things 1. We as a community are doing a better job of recognizing the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect and ensuring children get the help they need, and 2. We need to invest in prevention. Mandated reporters are critical to the health and safety of children. Ensuring everyone who works with kids can recognize the signs a family might need additional support ensures that traumatic stress is reduced, that families get the resources they need to thrive and ensures the safety of children.

But, the best way to mitigate trauma; especially child abuse and neglect is to prevent it from ever happening in the first place. Effective Prevention means ensuring all families have what they need to thrive and be strong. The Ottawa County SCAN Council conducts its coordinated efforts in conjunction with the Strengthening Families Protective Factor Framework, an evidence-based community framework for preventing Child Abuse and Neglect. Individuals and families can also help to prevent child abuse and neglect by using this framework. The 5 protective factors are:

- Concrete Supports: Help yourself or a family you know is struggling find the resources they need to thrive by calling [211](tel:211). In Ottawa County, you can also connect to CareOttawaCounty.com during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development: know of a family struggling with a behavior they just don't know how to handle? There are many parenting resources available including [Arbor Circle's Virtual Parenting Series](#).
- Social Connections: Check in on your friends and family. Due to COVID-19 we can't share babysitting nights right now, but we can talk to our friends on the phone or other social apps, we can have virtual game nights.
- Parental Resilience: How do you make sure you have hope in tough situations? How can you help friends and family see that there's hope? It might be a listening ear, driving by so they see you or making sure they have enough food for the week.
- Social and emotional competence of children: Connect to [Help Me Grow-Ottawa](#) for a list of virtual play groups, story times and other resources to help your child learn the words to understand their emotions.

Other things you can do:

- Let your representatives know you support family-friendly policies, such as paid sick and family leave, investment in prevention or other child friendly policies you believe in
- Post photos of your family participating in the [Appreciate Your Child Calendar](#) of activities and tag Arbor Circle.

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About Arbor Circle: Through more than 50 programs and services, Arbor Circle provides mental health counseling, substance use treatment, family development, adoption and foster care, advocacy, prevention and quality child care resource and referral services. With a variety of services in 11 West Michigan counties, Arbor Circle serves over 15,000 individuals and families annually. Learn more at www.arborcircle.org.

About Ottawa County Stop Child Abuse and Neglect: Stop Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) is a community-based effort to prevent child abuse and neglect in Ottawa County through the Michigan Children's Trust Fund. SCAN helps to coordinate child abuse prevention efforts and to raise awareness in Ottawa County. We work together to strengthen families and communities, so every child is raised in a happy and nurturing home. SCAN is convened by Arbor Circle, and includes representatives from the following organizations: Arbor Circle, Bethany Christian Services/ Safe Families for Children, Resilience: advocates for ending violence, Children's Advocacy Center, Developmental Enhancement Behavior Health, Great Start Collaborative, Great Start Parent Coalition, Great Start to Quality, InterCare Community Health Network / WIC Program, Lakeshore Regional Entity, Maternal Infant Health, Michigan Department of Health & Human Services, Ottawa Area Intermediate School District, Ottawa County Community Mental Health, and Ottawa County Department of Public Health.