

Overview

NJFC visualizes an energized and involved community where all people, young and old, are valued, nurtured and supported as we work together to build and sustain communities that are purposeful in ensuring that the environmental, political, cultural, recreational, educational, economic, and spiritual needs of its citizens are actualized and preserved.

Mission

NJFC's mission is to empower the African American citizens of the community by developing and supporting grassroots leaders, community organizers, parents, students, as well as community-based organizations so that they have the necessary tools/skills of community organizing, advocacy, and activism to increase family engagement, build for meaningful social change, effectively impact local and state policy, family and governance structures; and build stronger/sustainable organizations and communities.



Constituency

- African Americans (all ages)
- LGBTQ+ youth & young adults
- Homeless
- Disabled
- Formerly incarcerated
- Court-involved youth
- Black & brown girls/women
- Families exposed to domestic & family violence

Local Conditions & Critical Issues Impacting 0-5 Childhood Health in Durant

Access to Quality Education for their Children

“The Mississippi Delta is identified as a critical teacher shortage area. Meaning that 10% or more of the teachers are ready for retirement and/or most teachers are teaching out of their content area, and/or we do not have teachers who are licensed and certified in the critical content areas for example, science, math, and serving children with disabilities.” Only twice in the history of Mississippi Adequate Education Fund (MAEP) has public education been fully funded. – Ellen Reddy, Executive Director

Early Childhood Development Programs

“One of our challenges is ensuring that schools are adequately prepared to provide services for [children from birth to five that are in need] ...[because] most of our children do not have access to quality childcare...African-American children already start, for the most part, a step behind others. So, if you don't have those fundamental services at that birth to five-year age, then children are already behind when they start school...the Durant community is an Excel by 5 community [meaning] that they provide referral and resources for children birth to five and a lending library to parents of young children. Of course, we live in a rural small city that does not have a public transportation system, nor sidewalks so parents must walk almost a mile to get to that network.” More recently, Excel by 5 has partnered with the Families First Resource Center which provides GED services to parents and high school students who have not completed their high school diploma.

Policies that Work Against Poor Families

“Child care is expensive so parents must be working and eligible to receive a child care certificate. For those families who may not be able to afford child care because they're ineligible for a child care certificate and/or because they're not working, often other family members are taking care of those children. The parents are dropping off the children at the grandmother's house at ridiculous hours, the grandmother gets the children prepared to go to school, ensure they get onto the school bus and/or child care. Frequently, these parents must travel an hour or two away from home to work at Nissan, or chicken and catfish factories, [leaving] the parent usually tired after working that shift, so children may be with that parent but they also may not be supervised. Therefore, parents are having to do creative childcare—a sister will hold onto the other sister's children while the grandmother will hold onto some of the children. Families are working together to the degree that they can to ensure that children are supervised and safe.”

Homelessness

“Homelessness in Holmes County looks very different than homelessness in large cities. Homelessness here may mean that there's 3 or 4 families living in a trailer that may not have running water, may not have electricity...a teenager may be put out of their home [and] may go and live with their buddy's parents. So, you can imagine the impact on children when they're not sure where they're going to sleep from one night to the next night.”

Local Conditions, Cont'd

Limited Economic Opportunities

"Unemployment in Holmes County is probably 20-25%...we have one manufacturing company in the entire county. We use to have Fleetwood, a manufacturing home facility, a few years back... when workers tried to establish a union and when that union failed, Fleetwood, left the county. Now there is another smaller manufacturing company called Lexington Homes, but they're only able to employ a few people because again this is a private family-owned business. Workers have no protection because Mississippi is a Right to Work State."

Violence

"There is an increased level of verbal, emotional, and physical violence inside of homes, schools, and communities...particularly between parents and children in public spaces...the increasing incidences of violence inside the community, as it relates to very young children this is very concerning, and we still have corporal punishment inside our schools and we have a very high percentage of intimate partner violence (IPV) throughout the community." Some childcare centers use physical violence against children.

Lack of Recreational Opportunities

"We do not have recreational opportunities for young people birth to five... we do not have significant numbers of playgrounds in this community where children birth to five can be in a safe play area...we just don't offer that to children...we have limited recreational opportunities for school-aged children, unless they are involved in extra-curricular activities at the school. So, there are limited opportunities I think for young people to have spaces inside a community where they can just gather to be with each other, together for skating, those kind of recreational activities."

Food Access and Hunger

"We are a rural community...we have issues around food [access]...families here [are] still hungry, children are hungry...when it comes to benefits in the state of Mississippi, the families may receive a significant amount of food stamps, but they receive very limited cash to support them. However, the flip side is, even though they may get food stamps, and can purchase food, they are limited because many families do not have transportation to leave and shop outside the county. This county has three supermarkets spread throughout; you can imagine that there are very limited opportunities for fresh food inside of these markets and/or corner stores and gas stations."

Environmental Hazards

"We still do not recycle; so often...we have what's called illegal dump sites, places on the road or inside communities, where families do not have facilities to throw away what we call "white goods", refrigerators, those large items. Therefore, if they needed to throw them out, they end up throwing them either in a ditch, on the side of the road, in their backyard...and that creates a health hazard for very young children and children who may suffer with asthma and other kinds of respiratory problems. Overall, conditions for children here in Holmes County should and could improve."

Key Indicators of Childhood Health in Mississippi

14.5% of WIC participants aged 2-4 are **obese**.¹

20.8% of children live in **food-insecure** households.²

The food environment score for Holmes County is 1.4 on a scale of 0-10.³



15% of babies born in Holmes County are **low birth weight**.³



The average daily density of fine particulate matter in micrograms per cubic meter is 9.6 in Holmes County, putting **air pollution** just above the US average.³

7.4

per 100,000 residents impacted by homicide. In 2012, Mississippi ranked 2nd in the country for murder, compared to the national average of 4.7.⁴

Allies/Partnerships Working on Children's Health

- Excel by 5 – Various communities, MS www.excelby5.com
- Community Students Learning Center – Lexington, MS www.communitystudentlearning.org/
- Wesley Youth Foundation Inc. – Tchula, MS wyfcommunityoutreach.org/
- Mississippi Low-Income Childcare Initiative – Biloxi, MS ms.childcare.org/
- Families First for Mississippi - www.FamiliesFirstforMS.org

Current Wellness & Safety Efforts

- **The use of an intergenerational model of community organizing** working with families who have children birth to five with childcare needs, including safe affordable childcare, transportation and advocacy.
- **LGBTQ campaign** to uplift the voice and increase the visibility of queer youth of color in rural communities through media messaging and advocacy services for the youth and their families.
- **Cross-cultural project** working closely with Latino American citizens through culture, food, and music to develop close relationships and to ensure that immigration policies do not negatively impact families.
- **The development of a documentary film about the importance of black farmers and land ownership** and their role in and support of the civil rights movement.
- **Ensuring that children and youth are exposed to African Americans in history and we are telling our own story.**
- **Peer Mediation Training Program** through our Scholars of Peace: From Mali 2 Mississippi, which grows out of a participatory action research model where youth learners documented and developed a campaign to end violence.
- **Provide advocacy and support services** to families with children who have physical, emotional, or mental disabilities, such as training around education laws (IDEIA, Every Student Succeeds Act, etc.) at the school, district, and state level. We continue our involvement in the Prevention of Schoolhouse 2 Jailhouse in derailing the train from the Schoolhouse 2 Jailhouse.



Community Defined “Best Practices” to Improve Childhood Health

Investment in young people to create a leadership pipeline:

“Young people don’t have the fears that we have. We want young people to be a part of the Organization very early on. By investment I mean, NJFC provide training of topics/themes relevant to young people, taking young people into different spaces so that they hear what other young people are doing so that they can be connected to the work. We’re showing and helping them to understand the power that they have by organizing, using their voice and ensuring that the Organization supports them beyond high school into college. Ensuring they have opportunities like MCF’s Warriors Against Poverty, attendance and participation at Roots & Remedies, and sitting on policy revision committees at the school-building level.”

NJFC Accomplishments in Wellness & Safety

- **Trainings for parents and students** to engage in policy development at the school and district levels
- **Prevention of Schoolhouse 2 Jailhouse** to derail the train that pushes students from school to jail
- **South by Southwest Experiment** –a regional cross-cultural project with the Latino communities in San Antonio, Texas and Albuquerque, New Mexico



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