

## Annual Kids Count Report Guides Priorities for Tennessee's Children

Children may be our best return on investment, according to the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth (TCCY), which recently released its annual report, KIDS COUNT: The State of the Child in Tennessee. The data focuses on the state's most vulnerable children, those in state custody, and outlines the services of the TCCY along with recommendations for best practices in child welfare.

With this information state lawmakers can better prepare when establishing a budget. These statistics help guide priorities for children by identifying critical issues and strategic solutions. Using this data, communities have designed high-quality programs to solve problems, resulting in long-term improvements for children in state custody.

"The Department of Children's Services' implementation of multiple responses in child protective services and evidence-based juvenile justice services are examples of effective strategies to improve these systems," commented Linda O'Neal, executive director of the TCCY. "We need to strengthen community partnerships to better meet the needs of children and families and provide services that work throughout the system. Prevention of child abuse is a community responsibility, not something the Department of Children's Services can do alone."

In Knox County the Metropolitan Drug Commission collaborates with city and county government, law enforcement, the school system and other organizations to facilitate conversations to improve our coordinated community response.

Kids Count data shows that over a two-year period, Knox County reported a decrease in the number of school expulsions from 67 in 2006 to 31 in 2008. The Metropolitan Drug Commission has spent time working with students at the Richard Yoakley Alternative School who have been expelled due to zero tolerance offenses. Our outreach efforts at Richard Yoakley have included implementing a career readiness program, partnering with the FBI to mentor and tutor students, establishing the Accelerated Reader program, helping to furnish books and computers for the library and creating a system of reward for reading improvement. As a result, students have increased their reading proficiency by 1.2 grade levels per semester on average. "It is critical that we increase literacy levels for these students so that when they leave school, they can fill out a job application and apply the skills necessary to obtain and retain employment," according to Metropolitan Drug Commission Executive Director Catherine Brunson. "Otherwise, they will likely continue on a path of detrimental behaviors."

Many substance abuse treatment and mental health providers are already struggling to keep up with the demand for services, so the findings of the Kids Count report provide critical information for lawmakers as they consider budget cuts. The report

recommends an expansion of availability for substance abuse treatment and mental health services for children and their families. This recommendation comes after drastic reductions to mental health services went into effect July 1, and the Governor is asking departments to make additional suggestions for further reductions in order to balance the budget. Commissioner of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Virginia Betts is proposing cutbacks that would completely eliminate children and youth inpatient services and an additional reduction of \$5.9 million in community mental health and alcohol and drug program funding.

With the need for help so great, the Metropolitan Drug Commission tries to provide the community with as many free resources as possible by offering an on-line directory at metrodrug.org, which lists mental health and substance abuse treatment providers, support groups and other services. Through phone referrals, the Metropolitan Drug Commission helps direct families in our area to the facilities or other organizations which can best address their issues.

"It is imperative that people can access treatment readily, and we need to make sure that the appropriate services and support are in place for children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems to receive the assistance they need, or the cycle will continue once they reach adulthood," stated Director Brunson.

The Kids Count report, which includes raw numbers and rates, lists 40 indicators of health, education, child welfare, economics and demographics on Tennessee children and may be accessed at metrodrug.org. Users can compare indicators at the state and county level and create their own graphs and maps.

### Where Knox County Ranks— Highlights and Lowlights from the TCCY KIDS COUNT Report

<i>Lowlights</i>	KNOX	TN	<i>Highlights</i>	KNOX	TN
Teen violent deaths (rate per 100,000)	75.5	69.2	Adequate prenatal care (rate per 100 live births)	74.6	62.2
Cohort school dropouts (rate per 100)	13.5	9.6	Teen pregnancy (rate per 1,000)	32.5	35.0
School suspensions (rate per 100)	9.2	7.5	Infant mortality (rate per 1,000)	6.5	8.7
Teens with STDs (rate per 1,000)	28.0	21.2			

Knox County KIDS COUNT Data  
\*Data represent 2006 figures and are provided by the National KIDS COUNT Program and the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth (State of the Child 2008)

## New Year Can Bring New Hope in Recovery from Addictions A Knoxville Couple's Story of Renewal

Craig Billingsley's left wrist bears a tattoo with a date—May 14, 2007. Craig says that date will serve forever as a reminder of his sobriety. If he reaches to open a beer cooler, he will see that tattoo. People notice the tattoo and ask about it, and that gives him a chance to tell his story. Craig's story is not unlike many stories of addiction, but unlike some that end in devastation, his story has a "miraculous" ending... thanks to recovery.

Craig's story of recovery began when his wife Ginger left him, just a couple of months before their 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. On April 24, 2007 she came home and realized that Craig had been drinking again and decided she didn't want to live like that any longer. Earlier that year, Craig had attended an Intensive Outpatient Program or IOP (20 actual meetings), and even back in the mid-80s had undergone counseling for his drinking. Because those things hadn't turned him around, she felt hopeless. "I felt very alone. I thought, if I'm going to be this way, I might as well be alone." So, Ginger asked Craig to leave, but he refused, so she left.

That night she went on to Cokesbury United Methodist Church (where the Billingsleys have been members for around 13 years) and attended Celebrate Recovery. She met with the church's clinical administrator, Vicky Carlton, who holds a master's degree in counseling. With the help of Gil Smith, Celebrate Recovery director, Ginger drafted a letter to Craig outlining the terms under which she would agree to consider

reconciliation. "Had Craig not taken active steps towards recovery by the end of May, I planned to serve him with divorce papers on our 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in June," explained Ginger.

During the couple's separation, Ginger sought counseling from people who had her and her family's best interests at heart. She communicated with Craig's family, who fully supported her along with the Celebrate Recovery community. She also leaned on her church friends at Cokesbury, many of whom were unaware of Craig's alcoholism, because they "functioned well in public". She studied as much as she could about alcoholism as a disease and the effect of alcoholism on her life and the life of her family. She also learned about co-dependency, her part in Craig's addiction. Ginger soon discovered that it was not her responsibility to fix Craig or his alcoholism. "When the time came for healing to begin, I felt God telling me to get out of His way," said Ginger. Ginger's recovery involved working on herself and her own issues.



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"When Ginger started getting well, I started getting well," observed Craig. At age 53, he checked himself into a halfway house known as the STEPS House, where he had to earn his privileges, including the opportunity to leave to attend Celebrate Recovery at Cokesbury. The STEPS House implemented rules and discipline, requiring Craig and the other residents to help clean the house, do the dishes and participate in groups. During his stay, he attended counseling, either one Narcotics Anonymous (NA) or Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting daily. He began consuming as much information about the health and mental impact of addiction and also the family dynamics involved. He also began reading the Bible straight through like a book, instead of simply cherry-picking the verses.

A turning point for Craig came one night at the STEPS House when a counselor asked him to go back in his mind to the two worst moments in his life: the night Ginger left and the night he drove up to the halfway house and asked himself, "What am I doing here?". "It was at this low spot that I 'broke'," explained Craig, who found himself sitting in AA meetings "crying at everything". After three days, Craig decided, "OK. I'm going to be the best patient they have ever had." He completed 110 meetings in 90 days.

A slow progression of 30 years of drinking brought Craig to this point in his life. "It was very insidious and just crept up on me," he remembered, "no real trauma in my life" to spark the onset of drinking. He first encountered alcohol as a teenager, sneaking drinks out in the car at high school football games. "At that time, you could buy beer at age 18, so I was just playing around with it." In college he didn't have much money, but beer was cheap. He would drink a beer or two to relax, and over time, two led to three. During the last five years he consumed three or four, and that amount continued to grow until he could drink a gallon or two and it wouldn't affect him. He thought no one noticed. "I thought I could stop if I wanted to stop, but I just didn't want to stop."

A 1977 graduate of UT, Craig doesn't remember watching a football game without alcohol until 2007. Now he can actually have a conversation about what happened in the game. "It doesn't bother me at all now to be around other people having a drink." He physically cannot drink anymore, though, and says some people have to avoid alcohol completely and cannot even be around the smell of it.

Craig worked steadily for years in spite of his drinking. "I was good to wait until after business hours to start (drinking)." He enjoyed woodworking as a hobby, but often ran the power saws with a beer buzz. The quality of work started falling off, and when he cut corners, the corners would not meet.

After work, Craig didn't want to participate in other activities, not even on weekends. He wanted to get back to his beer. Ginger had agreed that Craig could have two beers, but he would keep a travel mug in his truck. He'd buy beer in quarts and would drive along with it, where it looked like he was just drinking a cup of coffee. He'd drink the quart in his mug, and then would come home with two beers. He would use any excuse to run to the store "for milk", etc., but would stay gone 45 minutes. The family knew that the trip to buy milk was taking too long. On Saturday mornings, he'd get the day rolling with a beer during trips to take trash to the dump. He would stay out for an hour or more, drinking the whole time he was gone, and finish by the time he returned home.

Ginger had first become concerned about Craig's drinking with the birth of their first daughter, but lived with the drinking through the birth of a second daughter and 29 years of marriage. For years the couple engaged in a "dance of avoidance," never talking about or addressing his drinking.

Craig was a "functional alcoholic" for many years, but at the time didn't recognize the impact that drinking was having on the family unit. Ginger recalled, "He was not emotionally available—not abusive—just not there for us." The family is still learning about the effects of Craig's drinking on their lives.

The children felt the pain of their father's addiction as well—embarrassment, anger and some confrontations. "I didn't go to some of their high school activities. The things I went to, I probably shouldn't have, because I'd had too much to drink and embarrassed them," Craig stated regretfully. At times, Ginger would not let Craig drive the children places because she knew he'd been drinking.

With a beer budget averaging \$10-\$12 a day, Craig's drinking also affected his wallet. "I didn't realize the financial impact that my habit and addiction had. I may have missed out on the opportunity to make better money at work, also." Looking back, he noted his daily beer expenditure would have been enough to make a monthly payment on a new truck, instead of driving his old one.

Fortunately for Craig, his habit didn't lead to a DUI or court or worse, but he nearly paid the price in another precious way. As he observed, "**It was extremely costly... It almost cost me my family.**"

Craig also bore the cost of his own treatment, since the STEPS House did not take insurance, and Ginger did not help him. Although Ginger believes addiction treatment should be covered under health insurance, she noted, "One of the things that made STEPS House work for Craig was that he had to pay for it himself, and he was expected to work while there. In the real world, people have to work. To go into a residential program where you don't have to work and the only focus is on recovery, people may not be exposed to the everyday

stressors that helped land them there. Not being an addict myself, I can't really speak from that perspective, but it's kind of like being on a retreat or away with friends. It is easy to be a good Christian when you are on a Christian retreat. It is easy to make it function if you don't have the stress of work, home, appointments, phone calls, bills, etc. But we all have to go back to the real world at some point in time. We have to learn how to live when we are in the valley, as well as on the mountain top."

In that valley, Craig's process of breaking the addiction came as a "hard break." He remarked, "Sometimes you can float through problems and come out the other side. It wasn't like that. It hit hard. I came to realize what was important. I haven't had the desire to have a beer. I do eat a lot of sugar to make up for the lost carbohydrates!" Craig found that the time he spent drinking needed to be filled in other ways also, so he got involved instead of sitting in front of the TV and drinking.

While addictive diseases are incurable, Craig noted, "You can make all of the symptoms go away. It's a very selfish disease. 'Me and I' have to do the work. I have to do the changing."

For Ginger, that change in Craig and his decision to stop drinking gave her the confidence she needed to reconcile the marriage. "When I saw his brokenness and his genuine effort to not drink again, we decided to go through the recovery together. I wanted to be married to him, but not if he was drinking."

Married 32 years in June, Ginger smiles, "We're like newlyweds now. We've learned how to talk, how to share, how to have fun together. We enjoy being together. It's been a wonderful adventure. We realize we're very, very blessed. We've both accepted our responsibility. We don't dwell on the past. I can't change any of that. All I can do is enjoy today and be thankful for what is happening in my life and our life as a couple."

For spouses suffering through a loved one's addiction, Craig added, "There is nothing a spouse can do. Do what is best for that person. Move out. Get a job. Do it, and do it now—the sooner the better. More than likely it will fall into place. Just take care of yourselves. Let the addict suffer the consequences of their own actions. Learn to say, 'I love you, but no'. Until I had to face consequences of my actions, I was great just as I was."

Ginger acknowledged that the first step toward recovery can be the hardest, but she urged, "Accept the fact that there is a problem. Don't be afraid to seek help, because there is a safe place out there where you can be helped, but YOU have to take the first step. Addiction impacts so many families. We don't want to talk about it, because we don't want to admit our weaknesses. But it isn't until you begin to talk that you can begin to get well. Craig was asked, 'Do you want to get well?' The answer was 'yes'. He was then asked, 'Are you willing to do whatever it takes?' Again, the answer was 'yes'. Recovery is a choice. It can happen for anyone, but they have to be willing to do the work. Knoxville has lots of resources. There are at least five Celebrate Recovery programs in this area (non-denominational and FREE)."

Craig also encourages others with addictions to seek help now. "Don't wait until tomorrow. Go this afternoon. Things can get squirrely if you wait. Don't think you can do it by yourself." Out of nearly 3000 people Craig has met, he knows of only 1 or 2 cases where someone was able to kick addiction alone.

Now empowered as a couple, the Billingsleys feel that this process has become their ministry and that their story and gifts can be used to help others. "Craig has tremendous talents... working with kids, Habitat for Humanity, Appalachian Service Project and Celebrate Recovery," remarked Ginger. In addition, the pair has become very involved in the Celebrate Recovery at Cokesbury, even helping to facilitate several of the classes. Ginger currently leads the "Boundaries" class, based on a book written by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. Last year, the couple co-facilitated a 12-step class, and Craig is starting to facilitate a men's-only 12-step class, which lasts around 6 months.

"If someone comes to Celebrate Recovery once, generally they will come back—maybe not the next week, but at some point. Celebrate is a safe place. We're not here to judge anyone. We're here to give them access to the tools they need for their own recovery. Where the getting better happens is in the small groups," Ginger mentioned. Cokesbury holds Celebrate Recovery meetings on Thursday evenings starting with dinner at 6:15, followed by worship at 7 p.m. Ginger joked, "If I have to miss a worship service, I'd miss Sunday before I'd miss Thursday. Thursday is so genuine, no pretense."

The Billingsleys give much credit to the STEPS House and the Celebrate Recovery programs for their recovery as a couple. The couple emphasizes the importance of seeking help before too much time is lost. "The fun in life that you are missing right now can't be made up," said Craig. "As it turns out, the party just started."

Among the many resources in Knoxville to assist those with recovery, the Metropolitan Drug Commission offers free phone referrals to people seeking alcohol and drug treatment programs or support groups. Currently, the nonprofit organization is updating and compiling a comprehensive list of treatment providers to better address the community's request for services. Established by a joint resolution of the City of Knoxville and Knox County, the Metropolitan Drug Commission unites policy makers and leaders to address community substance abuse issues and serves the community by educating; advocating for treatment and prevention services; and providing a forum in which members from all sectors of the community come together to address alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. For a complete listing of resources offered by the Metropolitan Drug Commission, go to [metrodrug.org](http://metrodrug.org).

## Black River Music Group Recording Artist Emma Jacob Inspires Fulton Teens with Self-Respect Message — “I Am Enough”

If there is anyone with a story to share and a voice to sing it, 18-year-old singer Emma Jacob is “ENOUGH”. Born to a cocaine-addicted mother and weighing just 3 pounds, Emma faced what everyone knew would be a huge uphill climb, as she struggled just to survive infancy. Today Emma is a healthy, happy teenager and highly-talented country singer, who has painstakingly earned her shot at national stardom. Inspiring everyone with her message, Emma performed during a special assembly coordinated by **WIVK and the Metropolitan Drug Commission** Thurs., October 29, at the Fulton High School auditorium.

During the assembly, Emma sang an acoustic set for the students, followed by a Q&A interview with WIVK personality Colleen. Emma also brought buttons that read “I Am Enough,” inspired by the song “Julianna” to hand out to the students, and she gave them a free music download as well. Additionally, representatives with the Knox Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (KAPPI) followed her performance with a discussion about the effects of drugs and alcohol on a developing baby.

**The Metropolitan Drug Commission’s student organization at Fulton High School, “Youth Above the Influence” (YATI)** invited Emma to share with other teens that they are “Enough.” YATI coordinator Leanne Hawn said Emma’s message fit well with the YATI mission. “Her song ‘Julianna’ encourages young people to be who they are and not to worry about dressing a certain way or being pressured to do things to fit in— you are you; and, you are enough. As an alcohol and drug-free club at Fulton, our students want others to know that is what they are about— living life above the influence.”

From birth, and on more than one occasion in her life, Emma has surprised everyone with her tenacity and gusto to live. The story of her struggles and of the loving family who adopted her would give her a platform from which to launch her achievements. “They said she would be there in the hospital for a month, or until she weighed four pounds,” said her adoptive mother Cindy. “I think she came home in nine or ten days. We spent that time driving the 100 miles to the hospital to visit her... But she hit four pounds, we had a home study visit, and then we brought her home. She was a survivor right out of the gate.”

By the time Emma turned 2, she had returned to the hospital nearly two dozen times, often with septic shock. Bone problems also made walking difficult and required extensive physical therapy. She would walk on her toes, stutter-stepping to catch her balance, often falling and injuring herself. An allergic reaction in a grocery store made her stop breathing until she turned blue. A nerve-related inability to feel textures in her mouth made, and still makes, eating tricky. To this day she must exercise caution not to become too emotional, as she physiologically has difficulty calming down.

Laboring to achieve what comes naturally to most of us, Emma taught her adoptive family just how strong-willed she was. “Emma faced a lot of adversity,” observed Cindy. “So many things have happened where we’d ask, ‘Could it be from the cocaine?’ But at the end of the day, you just deal with it.”

And, deal with it Emma does with wisdom beyond her teenage years. “Day-to-day, I don’t sweat the small stuff. I pay attention to the big stuff, and I always reflect and remain grateful for all the good stuff,” she says.



Emma Jacob’s visit to Fulton coincided with Red Ribbon Week, a national prevention campaign that raises awareness of the need for alcohol and drug prevention, early intervention and treatment. YATI members (above right) partnered with Project Grad to distribute red wrist bands which read, “I’m Drug-Free” and hung “Above the Influence” posters throughout the school in an effort to encourage more students to become involved in YATI, which is sponsored by the East Tennessee Foundation and First Tennessee Foundation.

## New Report: Male Teens Who Participate in Team Sports May Be More Likely to Fight, Drink

When junior makes the team, he may be making drinking buddies as well, according to a new report based on data from the 2007 Youth Risk Behavioral Study. The analysis suggests that participation in team sports might correlate to increased fighting and drinking in male teens.

Presented at the American Public Health Association’s annual meeting in Philadelphia, the study polled over 13,000 high school students across the United States to examine the association between sports team participation and risky behavior. Over 60 percent of male respondents participated in team sports in the past year. For those young male athletes, sports team participation was associated with increased levels of self-reported fighting, drinking and binge-drinking. However, the results showed decreased levels of depression and smoking.

Forty-eight percent of females also reported involvement on a sports team, but the findings showed no association between their participation and drinking. Girls who took part in group athletics actually showed a decrease in fighting, depression, smoking, marijuana use and unhealthy weight loss practices.

These findings suggest that team sports may have both positive and negative effects on high school boys, but it is unknown which particular sports may have protective and risk-enhancing factors, according to Dr. Susan Connor, one of the lead researchers on the study. “I would imagine that the type of sport, the level of competitiveness, the social environment of a community all plays a role, said Connor. “I think when we break it down by sport, we will find some explanations for the observations we found.”

“Many parents involve their teens in team sports thinking that will keep them busy and away from drugs and alcohol, but this study shows that merely keeping them busy may not be a deterrent for young males,” remarked Catherine Brunson, executive director of the Metropolitan Drug Commission. “Parents and coaches should be vigilant together in tackling issues like drug and alcohol use.”

Karns Middle School Head Boys’ Basketball Coach Brian Selvage notes, “As a team we spend a lot of time talking about our health—diet and overeating, carbonated beverages and school lunches— and how in sports, unhealthy habits can destroy our bodies and wear them down. We talk about how one person can affect everyone else on the team with the decisions he makes. If one person makes a mistake, the whole team runs laps.”

According to Coach Selvage, team participation makes for a close-knit environment where problems may be more easily identified. “We travel with the families to tournaments and even learn about the family habits. Some of our kids have parents who drink, but I don’t have any (parents) who would say it is okay for their kids to drink. As a coach, I’ve developed good relationships with both the kids and their families. Because we are together a lot of the time, I’m better able to recognize and address things like that if there is a problem. Coaches can watch for things like attitude changes and physical changes.”

Coach Selvage says that kids who are on a team figure out what kind of commitment level it takes. “We are pretty tight-reined. One day a week, we have a 6:30 a.m. practice, so the kids have to learn discipline to be up that early. They learn responsibility and a concept of teamwork—about caring for other people. They learn to work hard, not just for themselves, but for the good of their team.”

The Metropolitan Drug Commission works in the schools and is an avid supporter of youth alternative activities to drug and alcohol use. “Involvement in any number of activities can be a deterrent to substance use and abuse. This study may raise a few additional questions and a few eyebrows about which activities have a positive effect on what gender,” said Brunson. “This information should be an eye-opener that team participation alone doesn’t get parents and coaches off the hook when it comes to prevention and education efforts.”

### MDC in Action

From October 1 to November 30, 2009, the MDC serviced the community by providing:

- 78 Treatment Referrals
- 1763 Prevention Materials & Resources

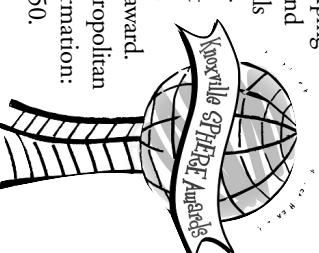
## Plans for Knoxville Youth Summit and SPHERE Awards “Come Together”



Area teenagers are joining forces for the single largest youth community service effort held in Knoxville. Coordinated by the Metropolitan Drug Commission and the Knoxville/Knox County Mayor's Youth Action Council, the 2010 Knoxville Youth Summit will pair groups of students with organizations needing volunteers. Hundreds of young people will participate in projects such as: creek cleanup in conjunction with Jans River Rescue, craft kit assembly for Children's Hospital patients and landscaping at Northaven Healthcare. Students will again have the opportunity to assist the Mobile Pantry with Second Harvest Food Bank, an effort that provided over 300 families with a week of groceries at the 2008 Youth Summit.

The event kicks off at 1 p.m. Saturday, April 10, at Fulton High School. Students, youth groups and other teen organizations are encouraged to take part in this celebration of service. If you'd like more information about registering a group, or if you have a community service project that needs volunteers (and those services can be performed at or near Fulton High School), contact Leah Adinolfi at the Metropolitan Drug Commission: [ladinolfi@bellsouth.net](mailto:ladinolfi@bellsouth.net) or call 588-5550.

Following the Summit, the teens will come back together for a special occasion honoring volunteers, the annual SPHERE Awards. SPHERE (or Special People Helping Everyone Reach Excellence) recognizes Knoxville's unsung heroes for outstanding leadership, diversity appreciation and community service efforts. A venture of the Metropolitan Drug Commission and the Knoxville/Knox County Mayor's Youth Action Council, the SPHERE Awards brings youngsters from across Knoxville together for a night of celebration and fun, while thanking those who have been instrumental in helping teens succeed. Students, teachers and others nominate outstanding individuals and groups to receive these honors for their contributions to the betterment of our community. Starting in January, you can nominate someone for an award. Contact Leah Adinolfi at the Metropolitan Drug Commission for more information: [ladinolfi@bellsouth.net](mailto:ladinolfi@bellsouth.net) or call 588-5550.



*Happy Holidays from the Metropolitan Drug Commission and Its Board of Directors*

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*To submit an announcement or article to the Metropolitan Drug Commission's ALERT, please call (865) 588-5550.*



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VISIT OUR WEBSITE for information about starting or maintaining a Drug-free Workplace Program; parent resources; treatment options; general drug descriptions, including warning signs and effects; and local and national research about drug use.

[www.metrodrug.org](http://www.metrodrug.org)

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