

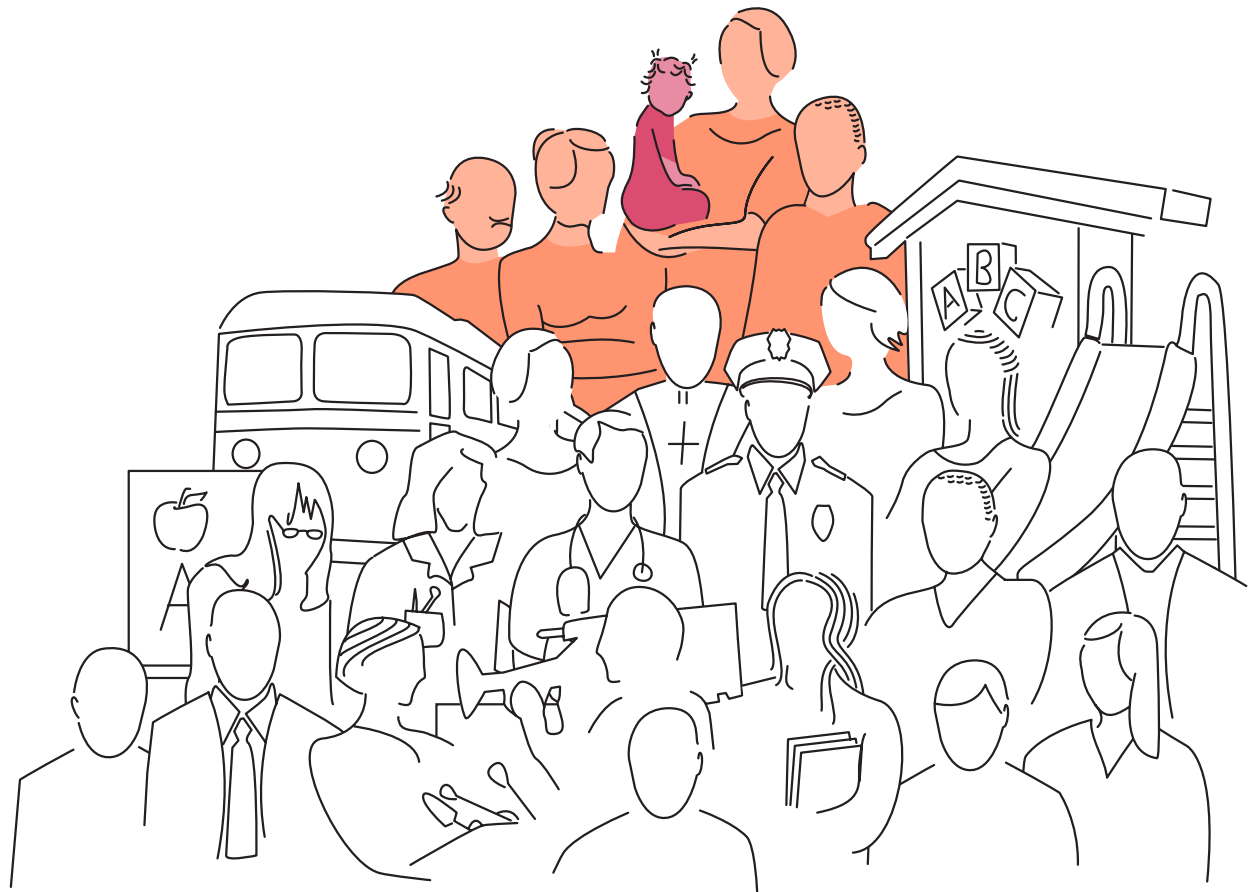
# Center for Urban Child Policy

Advancing Public Policy to Improve the Well-Being of Children

## CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING IN MEMPHIS

There are two realities for families in Memphis. Many communities in the city and county are safe, and their residents are well-educated and well-paid. These communities enhance the life chances of children and families. Too many families—however—live in neighborhoods where poverty and crime are the norm; where there are few decent jobs, and where there is little confidence in schools and other community institutions.

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**Children have the greatest chance to thrive in strong families and supportive communities. Across the city and county, families need the same things to survive— decent wages, wellfunctioning institutions, and safe communities. Do working people in our community earn enough to support their families? Do they feel safe where they live and work, and where their children play? Do schools and other community institutions support and enrich the lives of children and families?**

### **DECENT JOBS**

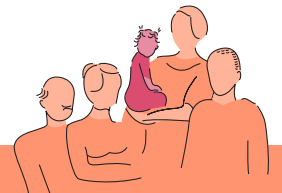
- » In Memphis, 60% of all children live in economically vulnerable families (below 200% of the poverty line). In cities across the United States, income levels depend on levels of education (CEOs for Cities 2006)
- » 14% of adults in Memphis have completed college. This college graduation rate places Memphis 37th out of the 50 largest American cities.
- » In Memphis, nearly 40% of adults in poverty have less than a high school degree. Another 35% of adults in poverty have completed high school and gone no further. Only 4% of adults in poverty have a college degree (American Community Survey 2005).
- » Memphis is the most economically-segregated of the 50 largest American cities, measured in terms of the distance between low-income and high-income neighborhoods (CEOs for Cities 2006).
- » Economic segregation also means low-income families have a difficult time reaching employment opportunities.

### **GOOD SCHOOLS**

- » 27% of Tennessee students are at grade level in reading and math, consistent with trends across the country (NAEP—National Assessment of Educational Progress 2005).
- » Scores for students in Memphis are comparable to state-wide averages, and scores for students in Shelby County are above state averages (TCAP—Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program 2006).
- » In both Memphis and Shelby County, middle-income students are twice as likely to be reading above grade-level (earning advanced scores on the TCAP) as are low-income students (TCAP 2006; NAEP 2005).
- » There is a strong and direct relationship between academic success and the economic background of a student's family (V. Lee 2002).
- » In Memphis, 71% of students are from low income families. In Shelby County, 20% of students are from low-income families.
- » In Memphis, 97% of Black children and 62% of white children attend public school.
- » In 94% of Memphis City Schools, a majority of students are from low-income families (Memphis City Schools 2006).
- » In Memphis and Shelby County students attend schools that are isolated by race and income.

### **SAFE STREETS**

- » For the first time in 14 years, overall violent crime in the United States increased in 2005. In Memphis, violent crime increased 26%
- » between 2004 and early 2006 (FBI Uniform Crime Report 2006).
- » Crime is trending downward in the fourth quarter of 2006 (R. Janikowski 2006).
- » One of every six households in Shelby County is in a neighborhood where social disorder—public



drinking and drug use, prostitution, panhandling and loitering, for example—present special challenges for parents (Urban Child Institute 2006).

- » Where bonds of trust in a community break down, a vicious cycle is established: neighbors are less likely to work together to solve shared problems, and are more likely to face crime, vacant property, and out-migration.
- » According to the DDB Needham Lifestyle Survey Memphis ranks 39th out of the 50 largest American cities in terms of community involvement and volunteering.

