

Little Rock's Youth: Demographics, Indicators,
and Areas of the City

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Status of Youth in Little Rock. Little Rock's population in 2000 was about 183,000, an increase of about 7,000 from 1990. About 47,000 of this 2000 population were young people age 0 through 17 years. Considering various age groups, this population figure breaks down as follows: In 2000, about 13,000 children in Little Rock were age 0 through four years; another 13,000 were ages five through nine; about 13,000 were age 10 through 14, and about 8,000 were age 15 through 17. About 53% of the youth age 0 through 17 in Little Rock are African-American, 40% are White and 7% are Hispanic, Asian or of other racial background.

Within the City of Little Rock, approximately 22% of children ages 0-17 live in poverty. Poverty numbers vary substantially across specific groups of children in Little Rock. Considering differences among racial groups, approximately 6% of white children live in poverty while about 35% of African-American children live in poverty.

The economic burden faced by single parent families in Little Rock continues to be an issue. The total number of single parent families with children under 18 years of age increased from 6,705 in 1990 to 7,582 in 2000. Income based on family composition differs considerably. The median income for two parent families is 1.75 times that of the income for households headed by a single parent father and is more than 2 ½ times that of a household headed by a single mother.

Births to teen mothers is an often used measure that is related to many adverse outcomes for adolescents including sexual maltreatment, substance use, school dropout, poverty, suicide, and violence. There were 2,314 births to Little Rock teens during the five-year period from 1994 to 1998. During this five year period in Little Rock, almost eight of every nine of these births were to unmarried teen mothers; four of ten were to teen mothers less than 18 years of age; and one of every four births was to a teen mother who had previously given birth to a child. Three of four births were to black teen mothers, and almost one of

four births was to a white teen mother. Births to non-white and non-black teen mothers accounted for about two percent of the totals.

During the last decade, juvenile crime was a major concern for citizens throughout the country. Gangs migrated from major U.S. cities to other communities bringing along associated drugs and violence. This phenomenon along with other social and demographic factors caused a significant increase in youth violence nationwide. Additionally, several highly publicized school shootings contributed to a fixation on youth violence. Little Rock, like the rest of the country, experienced a decrease in juvenile crime from 1995 through 2000. When compared to 2000, however, data from 2001 and 2002 suggest a slight increase in juvenile arrests.

For Little Rock in 2000 there were 86 juvenile arrests for violent crimes—murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault—compared to 140 in 1995. This is a 39 percent decrease in juvenile arrests for violent crimes. In 2001, juvenile arrests for violent crimes increased to 92, and in 2002 the total for juvenile violent crime arrests was 111. It is important to remember that youth are not only the perpetrators of violent crimes. They are also the victims of these crimes. During 2000, there were 109 incidents involving youth as the victims of violent crimes.

In Little Rock, juvenile arrests for drug and alcohol related crimes decreased significantly from 1996 to 2000. Juvenile arrests for drug possession decreased 51 percent during those five years. In 1996, 160 juveniles were arrested for drug possession charges compared to 77 by the end of 2000. Juvenile arrests for drug sales and alcohol related crimes were lower in 2000 than any other time during the five-year period from 1996 to 2000.

Considering academic achievement, many youth in Little Rock continue to face challenges. Data from the 1995-96 school year demonstrated that more than one-third of the children and youth attending the Little Rock School District were reading in the bottom quartile when compared to youth from across America. In 2002, according to Arkansas State Benchmark Exams, only about one of five sixth graders

and one of three eighth graders was reading proficiently. Based on these same exams, only about 16 percent of sixth graders and about 15 percent of eighth graders were proficient in mathematics.

Clearly, considering information from several different sources, the status of substantial numbers of Little Rock youth is precarious. Serious risk factors exist in the lives of large proportions of the youth living in this community. Economic, family, crime, violence, and academic indicators substantiate the need for maintaining and enhancing resources available to young people and their families (The information described in the previous section was obtained from analysis of data from the U. S. Census, the Little Rock Police Department, the Arkansas Crime Information Center, and the Little Rock School District).

Analyzing Youth Status by Areas. The status of youth in Little Rock varies substantially across differing neighborhoods and areas of the City. Recognizing this fact, New Futures works to analyze data at the neighborhood or area level to develop a more complete understanding of the circumstances many young people in Little Rock experience. For the data analyses and information described in the sections below, the following divisions were used to define areas of Little Rock:

- East: A few miles to the west of Arch Street Pike forms the western border of this area. State Highway 365 cuts north-south down the middle, with Highway 67-167 running down the western one-third. The Arkansas River borders the northeast side. Census tracts included in this area are: 40.01, 40.06, 40.07, and 2.
- Central: This area includes downtown Little Rock, is bordered on the north by the Arkansas River and on the west by Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive. Roosevelt Avenue runs through the southern half of this area. Census tracts included in this area are: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.
- Midtown: This area is bordered on the north by Markham Street and on the south by Fourche Creek. The eastern boundary is Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive. The western boundary is

approximately University Avenue Census tracks included in this area are: 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, and 21.02.

- Southwest: This area is bordered on the south and east by the Pulaski County line, and is surrounded by Fourche Creek on the west and north. Census tracks included in this area are: 20.01, 20.02, 41.03, 41.04, 41.05, 41.06, 41.07, and 41.08.
- West: This area is bordered on the west by Bowman Road and extends eastward to approximately University Avenue. It includes the Barrow Road area. Census tracks included in this area are: 22.05, 24.03, 24.04, 24.05, and 24.06.
- Northwest: This area is bordered on the north and east by the Arkansas River and on the south by 12th and Markham streets. Cantrell Road runs through this area, which is bordered on the west by Rodney Parham Road. Census tracks included in this area are: 15, 16, 21.01, 22.01, 22.03, and 22.04.
- Far West: This area stretches to the western most border of Pulaski County and is bordered on the north by the Arkansas River. Bowman, Napa Valley, and Rodney Parham roads form the eastern border. Census tracks included in this area are: 42.02, 42.05, 42.07, 42.08, 42.09, 42.10 and 42.11.

As previously stated, there was an increase of about 7,000 people in Little Rock's population from 1990 to 2000. In addition to this change in overall population, changes occurred in the proportions of Little Rock residents living in various areas of the city. Population proportions across city areas changed more dramatically for Little Rock youth. There was an increase of about 3,000 youth in Little Rock from 1990 to 2000. In 1990, about 12 of every 100 Little Rock children and youth lived in Far West and 20 of every 100 lived in Midtown. By 2000, 21 of every 100 city youth lived in Far West and about 15 of every 100 lived in Midtown. The number of adolescents age 10 through 14 living in Midtown in 1990 was more than twice the

number of 10 through 14 year-olds living in Far West. In 2000, more 10 through 14 year-olds lived in Far West than in Midtown.

Southwest is the area with the largest proportion of youth. In 2000, about 25% of Little Rock youth age 0 through 17 lived in the Southwest area. The Midtown area had the largest proportion of older teens. About one fourth of all Little Rock teens age 15 through 17 years lived in Midtown. Nearly half of all youth 15 through 17 in the City lived in Midtown or Southwest.

Little Rock's black and white youth also tend to reside in different areas of the city. Over one third of all black youth zero through 17 years-old lived in Southwest in 2000, and approximately six of every ten black youth in this age group lived in either Southwest or Midtown. Over four of every ten white youth zero through 17 lived in Far West and seven of ten white youth this age lived in either Far West or Northwest.

Economic resources are related to most, if not all, indicators of child well being. According to the 2000 census, it is clear that such resources are not evenly distributed across all areas of Little Rock. Median family income is the point at which half the families in an area have a higher income and half a lower income. When considering the entire City of Little Rock, the median income is \$44,108; however, Far West median family income (\$74,713) is more than twice the median family income for families living in the East (\$30,021) and Midtown (\$29,825) areas of the city and almost three times the median family income of the Central (\$25,928) area.

As previously stated, approximately 22% of Little Rock's children ages 0 through 17 live in poverty. Poverty percentages vary substantially across the areas of Little Rock, however. In the Northwest area in 2000, only about 3% of the youth lived in poverty. In the Central and Midtown area the percentage of youth in poverty soars to 41%. Between those two extremes, 5% live in poverty in the Far West, 18% live in poverty in the West area, 27% live in poverty in Southwest and 34% of youth living in the East area are in poverty. Clearly, economic resources and economic distress are not spread evenly across Little Rock.

Factors related to poverty are also spread unevenly across the City. As stated previously, the total number of single-parent families with children under 18 years of age increased from 6,705 in 1990 to 7,852 in 2000. Most single parent families reside in the Midtown and Central areas of Little Rock. Two-parent families with children 0 through 17 years old have made a significant shift concerning the location in which they live in Little Rock. The 2000 census indicates that 29% of these families live in the Far West area of Little Rock and the smallest percentage of two-parent families with children live in the Central area (4%).

As with poverty, employment is not spread evenly across Little Rock. According to 2000 U. S. Census figures, African-Americans account for about 23% of the total labor force for the City, yet they make up nearly 57% of the total numbers of unemployed people within the city. The largest percentages of unemployed people reside in the Midtown and Southwest areas of Little Rock (27% and 20% respectively of the City's unemployed). Young people are also burdened with high rates of unemployment. Little Rock youth 16 through 19 years old in the labor force experience an unemployment rate of 22%. For this age group unemployment rates are 17% for males and 26% for females. For 20 through 24 year-olds the unemployment rates are lower but remain substantial. About 12% of all people in this age range in the City are unemployed. Unemployment rates are 11% for males and 13% for females 20 through 24 years.

Combining the Areas. Based on the information provided in the previous section, areas in the eastern, middle, and southwestern parts of Little Rock have large numbers of young people and disproportionate numbers of obstacles to healthy development and success. The following information combines demographic and indicator data for the East, Central, Midtown, Southwest and West areas of the City. This information provides clear support for the assertion that these areas are home to many people with substantial obstacles to life success. They also support focusing available resources on these areas to remove those obstacles.

The total population in the combined areas is about 112,000. The total youth in the areas are 31,304, or approximately 67% of the City's youth age 0 through 17. About 71% of these youth are African-American, about 24% are White, and about 4% are Hispanic.

There are approximately 28,000 married parent families throughout Little Rock and about 7,600 single parent families. In the combined areas there are about 5,600 single parent families or 74% of all single parent families in Little Rock. Forty-three percent (11,921) of Little Rock's married parent families with children 0-17 years of age live within the five areas.

In the city of Little Rock, approximately 10,285 young people age 0-17 years live in poverty compared to 37,210 children living above the poverty line. Of the City's 10,285 children living in poverty, about 91% or 9,382 live in the five areas. The poverty rate for youth in the areas is 30%. Approximately 13,600 or 79% of adults living below poverty in Little Rock live in the combined areas.

Each year there are about 450 births to Little Rock teens. Out of the twelve zip code areas in Little Rock, approximately 75% of these births are to teens living in three zip codes covering most of the five areas. About 68% of these births in the three zip code areas were to unmarried teens aged 10 – 19 years.

Approximately 7,661, or 9% of the households in Little Rock do not have a vehicle. About 80% or 6,160 of these households are in the five areas. In some neighborhoods in the combined areas, the percentage of households without vehicles is 24%. About 94% of Little Rock's African-American residents without a vehicle live in the five areas.

About 80% of the students attending the Little Rock School District live in the combined areas. Approximately 57% of the LRSD students living in the areas receive free and reduced-price lunches during the school year while only 18% of LRSD students living in other parts of Little Rock receive free and reduced lunches. Students in the five areas scored approximately 14 points lower on average than students outside the areas on SAT-9 reading scores and over 12 points lower on SAT-9 math scores.