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## KIDS COUNT Spreads the Word About Early Childhood Education

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**Organizations such as the West Virginia KIDS COUNT Fund are looking for ways to promote the importance of early education and searching for methods that are successful.**

Story by Jeff Pullin [Email](#) | [Bio](#)

With only a handful of West Virginia infants, toddlers and preschoolers enrolled in early childhood development programs, organizations such as the West Virginia KIDS COUNT Fund are looking for ways to promote the importance of early education and searching for methods that are successful.

Margie Hale, executive director of KIDS COUNT, said the organization, which was launched in 1991, is working with other non-profit organizations to pursue more early childhood development programs.

"We know from other studies that there are many benefits to early education for children," she said. "Through early education, we can greatly reduce many problems kids are facing in elementary, middle school and high school."

The organization's main promotion is called The Building Blocks of Literacy, which Hale said is the foundation to learning. The program details the five blocks of teaching children effective reading skills: love, talk, rhyme, read and play.

"These are essential tools parents and caregivers can use to teach children at an early age," Hale said. "Our goal is to make people more aware of the need for programs which teach children reading at an early age."

Based in Charleston, KIDS COUNT primarily focuses on the Kanawha Valley within a five-county region: Kanawha, Lincoln, Putnam, Mason and Roane. The organization is funded through donations and grants from foundations.

Earlier this year, KIDS COUNT, the United Way of Central West Virginia and Marshall University were awarded \$270,000 from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation to study the economic impact of early childhood education. KIDS COUNT's role was to launch a marketing campaign to address development needs to parents and communities.

"The first thing we have done is commission a telephone survey," Hale said. "We talked to 608 adults in our five-county area, and, based on the results of the survey, we felt it necessary to conduct

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focus groups."

The survey was conducted by Charleston-based research firm Don Richardson & Associates. The questions addressed participants' views on early childhood education and the frequency of teaching children to read.

"Most of those surveyed recognized the building blocks of literacy, which means we are making progress," Hale said. "But what is bad is only 15 percent of those interviewed believed this should be done by age 1. Early development needs to begin from birth, and that is one of the things we need to make more people aware of."

Hale said KIDS COUNT hopes to launch a pilot program called "Everyday, Everyway," which will address the importance of literacy to low-income families. The organization will develop a kit of literacy tools to be distributed through the Women Children and Infants (WIC) Program. KIDS COUNT plans to distribute those materials by early 2006 to the five-county area before going statewide before 2007.

"We are looking for ways to promote early childhood education to people face to face," Hale said. "Many of the people we interviewed say they would like help but do not respond well to toll-free hotlines. We want to look for ways to get out there and work with people in person. This should be an interactive program."

For information about KIDS COUNT, call (888) 543-7268.

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