

## Guest Column: Foundation targets Delco's neediest citizens - kids



By Frances M. Sheehan and Joanne D. Craig, Times Guest Columnists

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The new Crozer-Keystone Community Foundation is committed to addressing the health, education and social issues and concerns faced by Delaware County's 550,000 residents, including the nearly 17,400 children who are growing up poor. Despite the fact that Delaware County is one of the richest counties in the state, too many of our families still live paycheck to paycheck or struggle with the effects of long-term unemployment.

The economic recovery has been slower to reach children than any other age group in Delaware County, including seniors. In 2015, the poverty rate for children was 14.1 percent, which is over twice the comparable rate for seniors of 5.6 percent. This is not a one-year fluke. Kids were more likely to be living in poverty than seniors every year since 2008 and the gap is getting wider.

In a perfect world neither our youngest nor our oldest citizens would have to contend with poverty and the associated risks to health, hunger and housing. Fewer seniors live in poverty because of effective public policy interventions like Social Security, Medicare and property tax relief. Our goal must be to advance similar solutions for kids, and to make sure we don't reverse the gains that have been made by gold standard programs like Healthy Start, the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) nutrition program, Medicaid and CHIP.

Many parents may think that they don't need to worry about child poverty because they have been good providers and did all the right things for their kids. The reality is that every single Delaware County school district has more poor students enrolled today than in 2008. In fact, the percent of students qualifying for the school meals program more than doubled in the Haverford, Marple-Newtown and Radnor school districts.

It goes without saying that we all want to take action so that children don't have to struggle with hunger while they are struggling to do their homework. If we put smart policies in place to help reduce child poverty, then teachers will be able to spend less time on remediation and accelerate learning for all.

As the principal provider for maternal and child home-visiting services and WIC program in Delaware County, we're proud to partner with Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY), the leading child advocacy organization in southeastern Pennsylvania. This year, they released a new report called *Left Out: The Status of Children in Delaware County*, which sheds light on the facts and offers up some solutions like these:

- Feed hungry children by expanding school district participation in the school meals program and adopting strategies to reduce the stigma of participating in the subsidized meals program.
- Reduce infant mortality by increasing the oversight of Medicaid and CHIP providers so that they adopt strategies to boost pre- and postnatal care utilization among black women.
- Eliminate child lead poisoning by ensuring children under age 3 who get their health care through CHIP or Medicaid are tested for exposure to lead. We should also pre-empt future generations of children from being poisoned by testing and remediating the homes of pregnant women who are at high risk for lead hazards.
- Improve health-care access by expanding public health insurance to all children including children who are undocumented.

It's not right that kids have to pay the price of their family's economic troubles. Just as we brought down the poverty rate for seniors, we can take steps to improve the lives of vulnerable Delaware County children.

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*Frances Sheehan is the president of the new Crozer-Keystone Community Foundation, the largest health philanthropy serving all of Delaware County. Joanne Craig is the program director for the foundation's Women's and Children's Services, which includes the gold standard Healthy Start and Nurse-Family Partnership programs.*