



April 11, 2009

Westchester kids help tweak new 'Children by the Numbers' Web site

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WHITE PLAINS - A local child advocacy group's new Web site will provide detailed data on issues facing local young people in the hopes of highlighting problems and shaping public policy.

The Westchester Children's Association in White Plains is putting the finishing touches on its "Westchester Children: By The Numbers" site.

The clearinghouse, based on the not-for-profit's similarly titled 2008 book, will provide searchable, community-level data on children in a variety of areas, including health, child abuse, education, income and violence.

"You'll be able to look up places where kids have specific problems and help them," said Semarley Jarrett, a 17-year-old Mount Vernon High School student, as she previewed the Web site. "It'll provide information on where to focus our attention and what needs to be fixed."

Jarrett and a dozen other children from the Westchester County Youth Council were recruited to comb the site, looking for inaccurate data and offering suggestions on making it more user friendly.

Once the site goes live in about a month, Limarie Cabrera, WCA's director of data analysis, said it will paint an up-to-date statistical portrait of the status of children in the county and help inform parents and policymakers. Visitors will be able to peruse everything from simple demographics to data on HIV/AIDS cases, foster-care placements and juvenile arrests.

New datasets will be added regularly, Cabrera said.

With data for every school district and municipality in Westchester County, she said the site can be used to identify local trends and produce reports.

The information, compiled from federal, state and county agencies, can also be broken down by race, age and gender, though some health and other information might not be available for small populations.

"We want to put information about children at the fingertips of residents, service providers and elected officials so that decisions made for children and youth are based on fact," said Allison Lake, WCA's deputy director.

"If you're counting it, you're paying attention to it," Cabrera said. "This empowers people because it gives them access to information that is not readily available."

The "By The Numbers" project is being funded with a four-year \$300,000 grant from the Westchester Community Foundation, Lake said.

WCA is in the last year of that funding and annual operating costs of the Web site are estimated to be \$30,000 to \$40,000, she said.
