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**“Nothing you do for children is ever wasted.”**

Garrison Keillor (1987) from *Leaving Home*

The Family and Children Research Unit (FCRU), originated in 1998 as a division of MSU’s Social Science Research Center, conducts research on issues affecting the health, safety and well-being of children and their families.

Using an interdisciplinary approach and partnering with public and private agencies, and with support from the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station, the FCRU conducts research and does program planning and evaluation to build effective service systems.

In 2001, a collaborative agreement was reached with the American Academy of Pediatrics’ Center for Child Health Research. A major product of this collaboration is *About Children: An Authoritative Resource on the State of Childhood Today*. *About Children* contains input from more than 60 of the nation’s leading experts on children and is the focus of plans for a Public Broadcasting Service documentary series.

It is recognized that experiences in early childhood have long-term health consequences and that health-related behaviors are formed at very young ages. This, coupled with the fact that children are spending increasing amounts of time in non-parental care, has promoted the exploration of child-care centers as primary research venues for FCRU scientists. Their research studies include:

- *Building Research Infrastructure Capacity*, funded by the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality, was a five-year study focused on prevention and delayed onset of early-childhood caries, also known as tooth decay, among low-income children within a 12-county region of the Mississippi Delta. Refining risk-assessment items on screening tools has been a significant outcome of this project.
- *Clean Air, Rewarding Environments*, funded through the National Institutes of Health’s National Cancer Institute in concert with the University of Arizona, is a project examining the viability and practicality of training child-care workers to conduct brief interventions with parents and caregivers on the harmful effects of environmental tobacco smoke on children.
- *The Delta Child Health and Well-Being Research Program*, funded through the Delta Health Alliance from Health Services Resource Administration, conducted in spring 2007 an assessment of Mississippi Delta child-care directors and parents, focusing on the health and well-being of children enrolled in child-care centers.

Several continued and emerging FCRU partnerships hold promise for exploring factors related to children’s health and well being outside of the child-care setting:

- The FCRU continues to play a major role in the Child Health, Early Education Research consortium of the Provisional Section on Early Education and Child Care of the American Academy of Pediatrics, which emphasizes the importance of linking social and behavioral sciences with clinical pediatric intervention. An example is the recent survey of licensed child-care directors, conducted from a FCRU-compiled, first-ever database of 97,000 licensed child-care centers in the United States.
  - The FCRU has been named the evaluator of an exciting new endeavor: the North Mississippi Health Foundation’s HealthWorks! project, a children’s interactive health museum in Tupelo.
  - Another partnership is with the College of Veterinary Medicine. Research is planned to provide health messages to children using pets and to gauge and monitor the social climate of the animal-human bond.
  - The newest and potentially most visible initiative of the FCRU is the result of a January 2007 grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation for the MS KIDS COUNT program. Each year, the foundation publishes the national KIDS COUNT Data Book, and the MS KIDS COUNT program will serve as a major source of statistical data about the status of Mississippi’s children. The MS KIDS COUNT Web site is being developed and will be available online by mid-summer at [www.ssrc.msstate.edu/MSKidsCount](http://www.ssrc.msstate.edu/MSKidsCount).
- What began as an idea in 1998 has flourished with the dedicated work of numerous scientists and research associates and because of the support of the SSRC through MAFES. Most importantly, we strongly believe in staying true to the guiding force that propels our commitment to research and development activities: improving health, safety and well-being of children and their families, both in Mississippi and the nation.