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# Colleen Bridger: Orange County kids need us more than ever

BY COLLEEN BRIDGER

We've heard the reports out over the last year. Orange County is the healthiest county in the state, Orange County's children have the longest life expectancy in the state, we have the lowest teen pregnancy rate in the state, etc ... etc... Yet another series of data has come out from the [KIDS COUNT Data Book](#) and for the most part, Orange County leads the state in most indicators of child health and well-being.

But here's the problem, Orange County has one of the highest income inequality rates in the state too.

That means we have a lot of people making a lot of money and we have a lot of people making very little money.

We don't know everything we need to about how to keep a community healthy, but one thing we know without question is that the more education you have and the more money you make the better your health. So, statistically what's happening is that the wealthy, well-educated people in Orange County are skewing the statistics for the entire county. Or, more explicitly these aggregate statistics are blinding us to the public health challenges we have in our communities.

This is important for two reasons, 1) the amount of federal and state funding we receive to address public health issues is allocated based on severity of need. Last year Orange

County, per capita, received the lowest state and federal public health funding of any county in North Carolina and 2) these “healthiest-in-the-state” statistics make it tempting to rest on our laurels and proclaim public health victory.

We know where these “pockets of poverty” are in our communities and we have a long-term solution to give children and families in these pockets every opportunity to succeed in spite of the additional poverty-related challenges they face. Working through the [Family Success Alliance](#) we are replicating an evidence-based, national model to strengthen or provide programs and services our children need to ensure they are born healthy, succeed in school and go to college and get a good paying job, thus improving their health and the health of their family.

The Orange County Health Department with financial support from the Board of County Commissioners and the Triangle United Way is sponsoring this work because we see it as a long-term investment in improving the county’s health for everybody.

How can you help? Is your favorite nonprofit working with the Family Success Alliance? If they are, show your support by doubling your annual charitable donation. They are taking on additional work and need additional financial support.

If not, you can make a donation directly by calling the Triangle Community Foundation at 919-474-8363 and ask to give to Orange County’s Family Success Alliance.

*Dr. Colleen Bridger is the Orange County health director.*

Read more here: <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/community/chapel-hill-news/chn-opinion/article32201172.html#storylink=cpy>