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Call attention to child poverty

By Tribune editorial board

A family advocacy group is working with anti-poverty agencies and local governments for an ambitious goal: To end child poverty in Wisconsin by 2020.

The Madison-based Wisconsin Council on Children and Families is working with organizations like CouleeCap, a poverty agency, on the campaign designed to call attention to housing, health care, education and economic issues that affect low-income families.

There are four goals to the campaign:

- Ensuring access to health care, including dental and mental health care, which are much more difficult to get because of insurance caps on mental health care and reimbursement for dentists that is so low most dentists don't provide care for patients on state medical assistance.
- Ensuring quality early childhood education, including child care and after-school programs.
- Expanding access to affordable and safe housing, including the creation of a statewide housing trust to support initiatives throughout the state to expand the amount of affordable housing available.
- Promoting worker skills and creating jobs that support families.

Vicky Selkove of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families said the 2020 campaign has produced a report card showing that Wisconsin ranks only a C-plus in family-supporting wages, a C for affordable housing, and a B-minus on health and education issues.

Books could be written on each of the four target areas. The largely governmental responses recommended in all these areas would be positive — but we can't forget about long-term responses that involve private-sector job growth strategies — including the encouragement of more early investment in entrepreneurial activities.

Nor can we neglect to engage low-income populations to try to change dysfunctional behavior that promotes inter-generational poverty. In that regard, entire communities —

including educators, business leaders, and faith leaders and organizations — could help address these issues.

In the long run, the answers to poverty-related issues will be education and job growth. But much of the effort must also come from individuals.

It's one thing for schools to provide more early childhood education, but if there are no books in the house, and if parents don't read or model other behavior conducive to education, efforts by schools and government agencies to improve the situation will be uphill efforts.

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