

County listed among best for children

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A national children's advocacy group has named Indiana County to its third yearly list of the 100 best places in the nation for young people. The list, compiled by America's Promise Alliance, a group founded by former Secretary of State Colin Powell, announced its selections Thursday.

Indiana was named to the list "because of its commitment to provide different opportunities for its young people to grow and succeed," according to the group. Roughly 350 communities from across the country applied to be on the list. The alliance said 101 were accepted - there was a tie between two communities. And, according to Marguerite Kondracke, the alliance's president and chief executive officer, this year was the most competitive so far. "The 100 Best competition is more important than ever because it's become harder for cities and towns to focus on the needs of their children with all the challenges facing them, and we see the impact of this in our dismal high school graduation rates," she said in a statement. Abington, near Philadelphia, was the only other Pennsylvania community selected to be on the list. This was the second time the county had applied, but the first time it was named to the list. Indiana community leaders said they are thrilled by the designation. At a press conference held yesterday to announce that the county had been placed on the list, Patti Simmons, executive director of the Indiana County United Way, one of the groups that helped prepare the county's application, said she remembers a time when children would come home on the last day of school and immediately complain to their parents that there was nothing to do. She said it's simply not that way anymore. "There are just so many activities for our children," she said. Communities were rated on how well they were working toward the five goals of the alliance - to provide volunteer opportunities, to make sure children are not going hungry and are receiving a good education, to ensure there are safe places for children in need to turn to and to ensure there are caring adults around who will help them. Indiana officials cited a long list of county organizations and programs that are working to meet those goals. The county, along with all the other communities that had applied to be on the list, is now eligible to apply for \$300,000 grants through the alliance.