



The Benefits and Challenges of a Large and Diverse Population

Eighteen months ago, Voices launched its first regional office in Northern Virginia. During the first six months the Director of the office, Kathy May, met with many different partners across northern Virginia to listen and discover how Voices could add value without duplicating what other organizations were already doing.

From Alexandria to Prince William, she heard a recurrent theme: Northern Virginia's large, diverse population, while giving children many unique opportunities, also puts stress on community resources, particularly on the public and private organizations trying to meet the varied and complex needs of children.

In order to delve deeper into this issue, this past spring Voices hosted a conference entitled "Defining the Unmet Needs of Children in Northern Virginia: The Opportunities and Challenges of a Diverse Community," in partnership with George Mason University's Project on Immigration and sponsored by the Freddie Mac Foundation.

The forum gave participants the opportunity to critically examine the benefits and challenges of a large and diverse population, with particular emphasis on issues affecting the development, health, and stability of children and their families.

Our mission

is to improve the lives of children in Virginia by advancing effective public policies.

A Snapshot of Immigrant Families

The demographics of Virginia are changing, making the needs of children in the Commonwealth more varied and complex than ever before. Across Virginia 16% of children reside in immigrant families and that number continues to grow. In Northern Virginia, the number is significantly larger. Although newcomers frequently enter the state in job-rich Northern Virginia, they are quickly spreading out to other communities.

Northern Virginia is distinctive for

having one of the most educated immigrant populations in the nation. Desperate for professionals like computer programmers, scientists and economists, companies recruit aggressively overseas. At the same time, the booming economy increases demand for construction workers, landscapers, hospitality staff and other service employees. Employers looking to fill these jobs in Northern Virginia are able to draw on a large base of lower-skilled

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immigrants and refugees.

How ready are Virginia's communities to meet the widely diverse needs of children in immigrant families? Northern Virginia can serve as a lens for viewing Virginia's transformation and can give policymakers around the state some idea of what to expect and how to meet the needs.

Typically with a strong work ethic, parents come to America eager to work hard and expect their children to do the same. Children in immigrant families tend to do well in school, at least through middle school. Interestingly, compared with children of U.S.-born parents, they are more likely to be born healthy and to live with both parents. Some families may also benefit from the presence of at least one grandparent in the home who can provide child care or help with household routines.

There are certainly challenges as well. Many immigrant and refugee families today settle in the suburbs and experience a sense of community isolation as well as resistance from communities that are struggling to accommodate large numbers of newcomers with limited resources and inadequate infrastructure. Despite being home to some of the most affluent counties in the nation, a minority (but still a significant number) of children in racial and ethnically diverse

families in Northern Virginia live below the poverty line and experience the related disadvantages. Poverty poses a significant social problem because it is linked to a number of long-lasting developmental and schooling problems that often translate into poor socioeconomic outcomes in adulthood.

While communities in Virginia are struggling with the question of how to serve the diverse needs of all children, around the nation there are good examples of communities that have implemented initiatives that provide the tools that help immigrants become full members of their new communities.

Over the next months, Voices for Virginia's Children will be working with partners to ensure that Northern Virginia newcomers and members of established communities work together to build secure, vibrant and cohesive communities for all children.

To learn more about children in immigrant families and Voices work on this issue, please check our website at www.vakids.org.



President's Message – Fall 2007

Investing in Children – Suzanne Clark Johnson, Ph.D.



Voices had been preparing our agenda for the 2008 General Assembly with optimism. Our priorities—expanding and improving early learning opportunities, addressing the needs of older youth in foster care, expanding community-based mental health services for children and youth, and ensuring that low-income working families have access to affordable, safe child care—have many influential champions.

Virginia seemed poised to make significant policy advances.

Then came a superb but unwelcome report from The Commonwealth Institute, the new program that provides credible, independent, and accessible information and analyses of state fiscal issues. (Voices was one of several organizations that helped bring this terrific asset to Virginia.) Tracing the fast path for Virginia's state budget "from surplus to bust", Commonwealth Institute's director Michael Cassidy builds the case that Virginia faces an estimated \$1.2 billion shortfall for the coming 2008-2010 biennium without including spending on any new initiatives. (For the full report, visit www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org.)

Since the state budget must be balanced, cutting spending may be the first recourse. Yet some systems, especially in human services, are already seriously underfunded. Further reductions may cut Virginia's children and families to the quick.

Virginia's 10th place ranking in per capita income indicates that we are fortunate enough to have the capacity to invest in our priorities. Yet, in per capita spending, Virginia ranks as a very low-

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Identifying equitable, smart, and sustainable ways to fund critical services and supports for children and families is a difficult task that will confront Governor Kaine and the 2008 General Assembly. Failing to invest in critical areas for our children and youth now will result in poor outcomes that will have a much bigger impact on future state budgets.

We must ask ourselves and our legislators what meeting the critical needs of vulnerable children and families is worth. Since every seat in the General Assembly is up for election this November, now is the ideal time for voters to pose that question.

I urge you to ask candidates how we can make investments to better serve all Virginians. And be sure to tell them what you believe should be our most important priorities.



Coalition Launched to Support Child Care Assistance Funding

Voices for Virginia's Children, in partnership with Reston Interfaith and a number of other prominent advocacy organizations, has created the **Working Families Child Care Coalition** to generate support for increased child care assistance funding for low-income working parents. The coalition, officially launched on July 31, is an outgrowth of year-long efforts to highlight the emerging crisis in child care assistance funding.

A dozen organizations (see list below) form the initial membership, with new

organizations signing on as outreach efforts unfold. For more information, contact John Morgan (john@vakids.org., 804-649-0184).

Coalition Initial Members: Reston Interfaith/Voices for Virginia's Children/Virginia Poverty Law Center/Virginia Organizing Project/Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy/Virginia Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Networks (VACCRRN)/ Virginia Association of Early Childhood Education (VAECE)/Smart Beginnings South Hampton Roads/Virginia Head Start Association/Virginia Alliance of Family Day Care Associations/ League of Social Services Directors Child Care Committee/Albemarle County DSS Advisory Board

Spotlight on the Annie E. Casey Foundation and KIDS COUNT

Among the many large national foundations, The Annie E. Casey Foundation is known for its distinctive mark: the insistence that decisions at all policy levels which impact the lives of disadvantaged children must be based on current, accurate, comprehensive data and research.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) is well-known as one of the most generous foundations (based on assets-to-giving ratios) in the world. The Foundation's roots go back to 1907, when Jim Casey began a small messenger service in Seattle to help his family make ends meet. That business became the global, multi-billion dollar UPS. In 1948, Jim Casey and his siblings began the charitable foundation named for their mother, who had struggled as a young widow to raise them. The name reflected Jim's belief that the future chances of kids depends largely on what their parents — their families — are able to provide emotionally, ethically, and materially.

For about 20 years, AECF's funding was targeted in the Seattle area and funded direct service programs for children. By the 1980's, AECF began to focus on data as an essential foundation for sound decision-making. KIDS COUNT, the Foundation's well-known resource for national, state and local data on children, was born in 1989. The Foundation's interest in establishing a KIDS COUNT project in Virginia was a catalyst for the founding of Voices for Virginia's Children in 1994.

"We believe that accurate, reliable data should drive policy decisions," says Laura Beavers, Research Associate with the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Recently, the Casey Foundation has encouraged grantees to make a stronger connection between the available data and the policy work. Here in Virginia, Voices is leveraging data while working with First Lady Anne Holton to promote successful permanent family connections for young people in foster care. Research and data have shown that kids who exit the foster care system without a permanent family face extreme challenges.

AECF funds a KIDS COUNT grantee in every state, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Child well-being data for Virginia and 134 of its localities are available free on Voices' website, www.vakids.org. CLIKS (Community Level Information on Kids) provides a user-friendly way to produce maps, charts, and graphs to compare localities or to graphically represent changes over time on one or more indicators. Cindy Hetzel, Voices Director of Data and Research, is also available for individual technical assistance in accessing and understanding KIDS COUNT data. Often, even more detailed data is available and Cindy can help users "drill down" to explore the data in more depth.

To reach Cindy, email her at cindy@vakids.org or call 804-649-0184 x 23.



An Intern's Perspective

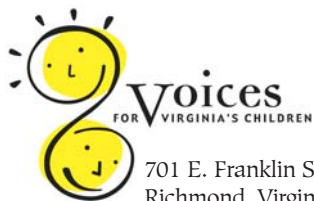
Anna Jo Bodurtha Smith, an Ashland native and graduate of St. Catherine's School in Richmond, completed her summer internship with Voices in August and recently began her sophomore year at Yale University.

Ada's daddy lives in a box. "A box with bars," she told me while drawing a picture of her family. Ada is one of the two million children in the United States with an incarcerated parent, one of the more than five million children of immigrants under the age of six, one of the thirteen million American children growing up in poverty, and one of five kids at the preschool where I work. Ada is four years old. She loves pointing out that we both have two A's in our name, yet she is part of this shaming statistic—a poor Hispanic kid from a poor community who, statistically, is not likely to succeed in school or go far in life.

I came to Voices for Virginia's Children as an intern because of a desire to do more than teach Ada, a desire to improve the systems that can change the statistics. Voices seemed the place to

go—a group of professionals dedicated to improving children's lives on early education, foster care, economic self sufficiency, and mental health issues. You cannot change the world in a summer, but Voices has taught me how to try. You gather and publish data to keep the public aware that issues like infant mortality are not solved. You meet with legislators, commissioners, and their aides to discuss the issues faced by the almost two million children in Virginia. You form and join coalitions working on the issues. You advocate, you advocate, and you advocate.

I may not have changed the world in a summer, but Voices has changed Virginia for the better. More children and families like Ada's are better off because of Voices' efforts, and I have had the privilege of being a part of the good work this summer. With the Virginia Preschool Initiative, the First Lady's "For Keeps" project, and other movements, the good work is happening all around Virginia. As one child advocate told me, "Maybe by the next time you are back in Virginia, we will have it all solved." For Ada and all American children, I hope we do. I'll be back in December.



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