



For Virginia's Children

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2013

VOICES AND PARTNERS ACHIEVE WINS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Once again, bringing together children's organizations to speak with a unified voice on issues affecting young children proved a successful strategy in the 2013 General Assembly session.

The Voices-led Early Childhood Policy Action Network successfully advocated for two key budget issues:

- 1) restoration of funds for evidence-based home visiting programs to vulnerable families, and
- 2) additional funds to make up a devastating shortfall in the state's early intervention services to babies and toddlers with delays and disabilities.

The General Assembly restored \$1.15 million in FY14 to home visiting programs Healthy Families and CHIP of Virginia/Parents as Teachers. Budget cuts since 2009 had reduced state funding for these programs by more than one-third and caused the closure or downsizing of programs in many communities; more than 1,000 families per year no longer had access to services. Participation in home visiting is linked to higher high school graduation rates as well as increased parental employment.



Caption: Hank from Henrico and Anna from Springfield are two of the young children whose development has advanced through participation in these services.

A tremendous outpouring of support from families for early intervention (Part C) services for babies and toddlers helped to secure \$2.3 million in funding in the current fiscal year and \$6 million to meet the shortfall next fiscal year, a combination of Gov. McDonnell's budget amendments and General Assembly action. Since 2007, the number of children needing early intervention services has increased 52 percent, but state and federal funding has remained flat. Early intervention has proven results: one out of five children completes services by age three because he or she no longer has a developmental delay.

Voices worked with the ARC of Virginia and the Virginia Association of Community Services Boards to reach out to families served by early intervention in an advocacy blitz: dozens of families sent pictures of their children, and many more families and therapists wrote letters to key legislators. Thank you to all who made your voices heard!



CHILD ADVOCATES PUSH LEGISLATORS TO FUND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Despite bitterly cold temperatures and snow on the ground, a dedicated group of advocates came to Richmond Jan. 24 for the second annual Children's Mental Health Advocacy Day.

Family members and mental health providers talked to legislators about the importance of expanding state funding for children's crisis response services and child psychiatry to all five health planning regions of Virginia. The day began with a briefing for advocates, followed by a Legislative Breakfast at the General Assembly Building for legislators and their aides.

As a result of these advocacy efforts, the Campaign secured \$1.9 million in FY14 for children's crisis response services and child psychiatry; this total includes the \$1 million added by Gov. McDonnell and the \$900,000 added by the General Assembly. The funding goes to the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, which then awards it to the regional consortia of community services boards. Each region has a unique plan for serving children that meets the most urgent needs in its communities.

Due to the collective efforts of Voices for Virginia's Children and its many partners in the Campaign for Children's Mental Health, Virginia has appropriated \$5.15 million in new funding for children's mental health services in this two-year state budget cycle. This means that the estimated 100,000 children with serious mental health disorders in Virginia now have better access to child psychiatry and community-based crisis response services to help avoid hospitalizations and other out-of-home placements. For more information about the session and the use of the funds, visit the Campaign website www.1in5kids.org.



Roanoke advocates Dr. Lisa Rochford, Marcia Obenshain, Sandra Pratt, Dr. Stephanie Pratola, and the Rev. Melissa Hays-Smith traveled to Richmond to share their expertise with legislators.



Sen. Emmett Hanger, R-Mt. Solon, listens as Commissioner of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Jim Stewart explains the importance of funding regional projects in Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads at the Advocacy Day Legislative Breakfast. Sen. Hanger and Sen. Janet Howell, D-Fairfax, championed the children's mental health budget amendments in the Senate again in the 2013 session.



Del. Bob Brink, D-Arlington (2nd from right), helped secure support for additional children's mental health funding in the House of Delegates, along with Del. John O'Bannon, R-Henrico. Here he joins Voices' Executive Director John Morgan, Policy Director Margaret Nimmo Crowe, and Executive Director of the Virginia Association of Community Services Boards Mary Ann Bergeron at the Advocacy Day Legislative Breakfast.



LEGISLATORS CHAMPION CHILD WELFARE IMPROVEMENTS

Partnering with legislators who are working to improve Virginia's child welfare system, Voices and fellow advocates achieved significant advances for at-risk youth during the 2013 legislative session.

Voices initiated and led the effort to grant eligibility for Independent Living services to former foster youth involved with the juvenile justice system who are released from that system between the ages of 18 and 21. Sen. Favola (D-Arlington) and Del. Brink (D-Arlington) championed these bills (SB 863/HB 1743), which were passed and funded.

Before this effort, these especially at-risk youth had few, if any, re-entry resources to help them make a successful transition back to their home communities. Independent Living services can include help finding housing and employment, counseling, and educational mentoring. Voices is proud to have generated this effort, which included assembling a highly respected coalition of education, child welfare, juvenile justice and anti-homelessness advocates, and securing new funding in a tight budget year.

Voices also successfully concluded a two-year campaign to remove educational barriers for children living in informal kinship care, with the passage and signing of SB 960 (Sen. Barker, D-Fairfax). The bill enables children living with relatives to be enrolled in the school where their relative caregiver lives without necessitating a legal change in custody. Voices worked with many dedicated partners on this issue, including the Virginia Poverty Law Center, FACES of Virginia Families, the Family Foundation of Virginia, JustChildren and the Virginia Education Association, among many others.

NEW KIDS COUNT REPORT TRACKS CHILD WELL-BEING

How are Virginia's children? Voices for Virginia's Children sought to answer this question in a KIDS COUNT report titled "Status Report: Child Well-Being in Virginia – January 2013." The report reviews changes in child well-being since the start of the recession (2007) or in some cases since the start of the decade. Data are presented on multiple indicators within five domains: economic security/poverty, health, early childhood, education, and child welfare and safety.



The data reveal two strong conclusions:

- 1) The well-being of teenagers, measured by a variety of indicators, has improved substantially in the past decade.
- 2) Child poverty has significantly worsened during the last five years. The recession and slow recovery have driven many more Virginia children into poverty – 65,300 more today than in 2006, a 28 percent increase. The child poverty rate has risen every year since the start of the recession, from 12.3 to 15.6 percent. Great regional variations exist, with some locales having child poverty rates as high as 35 to 44 percent.

What can explain the improved well-being of teens? What can policymakers and citizens do today to ensure that tomorrow's teens will be doing well? Today's youth spent their critical early years of development in relatively prosperous times, with fewer families living in poverty and faced with its multiple challenges. In contrast, more young children today are growing up in the midst of poverty and severe family distress caused by the recession and its prolonged aftermath.

The harmful effects of child poverty are cumulative: the longer they stay in poverty, the greater the risk of negative outcomes. The large numbers of children living in poverty today are at-risk of negative outcomes, threatening to reverse the progress of the last decade. Yet unlike some other states with weaker economies, Virginia has the capacity to make even greater public investments to strengthen families and enhance child development. Policymakers can and should choose to do so, and citizens should insist that children become a higher priority. Their future, and Virginia's, are at stake.

OUR VOICES IN THE MEDIA

As an advocacy organization, Voices relies on strong relationships with the media to share its expertise on key children's issues with decision-makers and the general public. Here is a sample of media Voices helped generate or for which reporters sought out Voices staff for comment in the last few months. Find the full array of media coverage, with web links, on the Voices website: www.vakids.org/news/media. For media specific to the Campaign for Children's Mental Health, please visit: www.1in5kids.org/media.

Martinsville Bulletin: 03/05/2013

"Area Near Bottom in Child Poverty, New Reports State" – Article utilizing findings of Voices' latest brief on child poverty in Virginia

Public News Service: 02/28/2013

"Youth Lock-Ups in Virginia Drop" – Article highlighting Annie E. Casey report on youth incarceration and impact on Virginia's youth in justice system

News Leader: 01/27/2013

"An Early Need" – Series of articles on importance of early intervention services to babies and toddlers

Richmond Times-Dispatch: 01/02/2013

"New Crisis-Stabilization Unit for Children Fills Gap" – Article profiling child who recently was treated at new mental health crisis stabilization program, funded through Voices-led advocacy efforts

Richmond Times-Dispatch: 12/23/2012

"How Sequestration Might Affect Virginia's Children" – Op-ed co-authored by Voices' executive director John Morgan on effects of federal funding cuts on Virginia's children



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