



a newsletter for child advocates

summer 2010

## Hundreds of Virginians Urge Improvements in Child Mental Health System

Many of the more than four hundred parents and providers participating in a statewide listening tour held by Voices' Campaign for Children's Mental Health expressed frustration at the challenges they face accessing and providing children's mental health services. The Campaign, launched in December 2009, hosted the forums this spring to learn more about shortcomings in the child mental health system and to bring them to the attention of McDonnell administration officials. Ray Ratke, Special Advisor for Children's Services to the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, served as the administration's official "listener" on the tour.

Parents expressed how confusing it is to find services for their children because the system is so uncoordinated. In addition, many services are available only to children who have Medicaid; out-of-pocket costs for parents with private insurance can be so high as to make services inaccessible. Parents also expressed frustration that services are limited to the child with the mental health diagnosis when the whole family

is affected by that diagnosis and needs support.

Providers attending the forums also expressed frustration with the complexity and fragmentation of the system. They noted that the fragmentation starts at the state level, where state agencies often issue contradictory regulations and policies. Despite recent increases in inter-agency collaboration at the local level in many jurisdictions, providers cited the

**We champion public policies that improve the lives of Virginia's children.**

# 1 in 5 kids.org

## The Campaign for Children's Mental Health

need for even more coordination and planning to meet the needs of children and families. The funding of the system is geared toward children in crisis, providers believe, making it difficult for them to wrap services around a child and family to prevent a crisis. Gaps in services were also cited at every forum, ranging from psychiatric services to early intervention

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to crisis stabilization. These gaps have only become more glaring as a result of recent budget cuts, according to providers,

“The message from forum participants could not have been clearer,” stated Campaign Coordinator Margaret Nimmo Crowe. “They are frustrated that it is



so difficult to access the services they desperately need until the problems reach crisis level. They believe it is high time policy makers invested in preventing and treating mental health disorders in children.”

Providers noted that a positive development in many areas of the state during the last two years has been a shift from serving children in residential care to providing more community-based care. They credited their participation in the Children’s Services System Transformation, an initiative begun during the Kaine administration, as the impetus for this positive change. Many communities have also worked to increase family involvement in treatment planning, although all acknowledged more needs to be done to include families as equal partners.

The Campaign will disseminate listening tour findings to policy makers, highlighting the urgent need for the state to focus on improving the children’s mental health system.

*The Campaign for Children’s Mental Health has more than 60 organizational partners and 500 individuals enrolled in its email listserv. **Have you joined the Campaign yet?** Log onto [www.1in5kids.org](http://www.1in5kids.org) and sign up to receive emails today. We need your voice!*

**New Statewide  
Report Coming Fall 2010**

This fall, Voices will release its first-ever **Status Report on the Well-being of Virginia’s Children.**

Voices is preparing a comprehensive summary of Kids Count data which for the first time will provide a full picture of the well-being of children in the Commonwealth. The report will present a demographic profile of Virginia’s children and then pull together state-level data on multiple indicators in the domains of family economic success and poverty,

child health/mental health, youth safety and risk-taking, child welfare, school readiness, and educational achievement. For each domain, results will be organized to answer two key questions: is child well-being in Virginia improving over time, and is it stronger in Virginia than elsewhere? The report will outline broad policy implications and conclude with potential policy solutions. Watch for pre-release publicity coming soon.

## From the Executive Director

John Morgan



### Making Kids the Priority: What's Next?

Voices and many partners have advocated for policy and budget items in the past few years that have clearly improved the well-being of children. Advances in pre-k, foster care, school readiness, health coverage, infant mortality, educational achievement – to name a few – are cause for celebration. Moreover, these advances are evidence that we have persuaded a greater number of Virginia's leaders to make kids a public policy priority.

We may want to keep the celebration short, however, for that was then, this is now, and tomorrow may not be a bright new day for Virginia's children if these advances are undone.

Here are four threats that could reverse our progress:

**The recession:** Child poverty in Virginia has risen by as much as 30% since 2008. Poverty is harmful - it drastically reduces the chances that children will develop to their full potential.

**Safety net demands:** The demands on Virginia's child and family safety net have increased dramatically (e.g. an 80% increase in TANF caseloads). More than ever before, families in need may not find help. Additional state or local cuts would further weaken the safety net.

**Reduced K-12 spending:** The severe cuts to public education may cause prolonged harm, especially to those students who struggle academically and now may not get the extra help they need. These students are now less likely to graduate and become productive citizens. More generally, a weakened education system is less likely to produce the highly competent workforce required to maintain Virginia's economic prosperity.

**Government reform:** State funding of services to children is anything but generous. Child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health and other systems are under-funded, yet these may be shrunk in the name of "efficiency" or privatized in the dubious prospect of saving money. Reforms that make things smaller but fail to produce better results will merely reduce Virginia's overall investment in children and create long-term costs that will outweigh promised savings.

Our challenge is to convince even more legislators and leaders that kids are the priority, that expenditures to enhance child well-being are sound investments in Virginia's human capital and future economic success, and that failing to make such proven investments is a costly, short-sighted public policy course. So, how will we know if kids are the priority?

- No additional budget cuts to child-serving programs. These services have never been so critically needed by so many; further cuts will prolong the recession's harmful impact on kids.
- Full and rapid restoration of cuts to public education – Virginia schools can't produce the workforce of the future with 2006 funding levels.
- Increased investment in pre-k and other school readiness initiatives for disadvantaged kids – the most powerful way to reduce Virginia's educational achievement gap is to attack the "school readiness gap" so all kids start school with equal opportunity for success.
- Health coverage for all kids – how can the 9th most prosperous state allow 10% of its children to remain uninsured? More than many states, we have the capacity to do better.
- A child mental health system that is less fragmented and more accountable, with each community having a full array of accessible and effective services. Untreated child mental health problems weaken Virginia's families and rob children, and Virginia, of their full potential.
- No rollback of foster care reforms. Virginia has begun to reverse its over-reliance on group care and reduce the number of children served inappropriately or unnecessarily in such settings.

Making Kids The Priority – that continues to be Voices' cause. Thanks for joining us.

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## 2009 Annual Report Summary

### Voices Stayed Strong in 2009

2009, the second year of the deepest recession since the Depression, brought monumental challenges to Virginia's economy, to state and local budgets and the safety-net services they support, and ultimately to Virginia's nearly two million children. To protect the well-being of children during the recession, we called on our supporters to "keep Voices strong at the very moment kids need us the most."

Proudly and gratefully we can report that you responded to the call! As a result, **Voices stayed strong and led the way in urging Virginia's leaders to MAKE KIDS THE PRIORITY during tough times.** Along with our many partners and stakeholders, we persuaded Virginia's leaders to avoid drastic cuts to child-serving programs and to preserve the hard-fought policy gains made on behalf of kids during the previous few years. Here's a sample of our 2009 policy and advocacy achievements to help vulnerable children and families endure these trying times:

- Preserved funding for the Virginia Preschool Initiative serving low-income 4 yr. olds
- Reversed the decision to close the state's acute care psychiatric hospital for children and adolescents,

preserving the inpatient safety net for 800 vulnerable children

- Extended earlier reforms in the foster care system to ensure that older foster youth can establish permanent family ties and transition to productive adulthood

We began the year by sounding the alarm, warning in a joint report with the Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis of a possible 30% increase in the number of children living in poverty. We made the case that recession-induced



Artwork by Daniel from the "Voices for Change Project."

risks to child well-being were urgent and that safety-net programs were already experiencing unprecedented demands. Simultaneously, we were confronted with

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**Voices stayed strong and led the way in urging Virginia's leaders to MAKE KIDS THE PRIORITY during tough times.**

**“Voices stayed” continued...**

our own fiscal challenge – the prospect of reduced support from foundations and corporations whose giving capacity had shrunk during the downturn. A perfect storm had formed – prolonged financial distress for families, especially those most vulnerable; government revenue shortfalls threatening to shred the safety net at the moment of greatest need; and potential weakening of organizations like Voices who fight for public policies that protect child well-being.

Hence our urgent call to keep Voices strong when we were needed most, so we could lead the fight to make children the priority during tough times. Indeed we did endure some funding cuts from foundations. Yet thanks to the hard work of Voices board, staff and friends, we were able to more than offset this lost revenue by increasing gifts from individuals and by gaining support from new corporate and foundation sources. As a result, we finished 2009 financially stronger than the previous year and with a more balanced mix of funding to carry us into the future.

That future brings continuing challenges. State and local revenues will lag behind

the recovery in other sectors, putting added strain on safety net services and the growing number of children and families in need. The drastic cuts to public education voted by the 2010 General Assembly are stark indication that even fundamental core government services are under intense strain. The education cuts will have far-reaching consequences on Virginia’s schools, students, the future workforce, and ultimately on Virginia’s economy. As we predicted at the start of 2009, the poverty-related harm caused by the recession will persist well beyond the start of the economic recovery. With lots of help, Voices effectively stood up for kids in 2009 and is ready to do so again in 2010 and beyond. In tough times, kids need Voices more than ever. Thanks for being there for us so we could be there for them.

John R. Morgan  
Executive Director

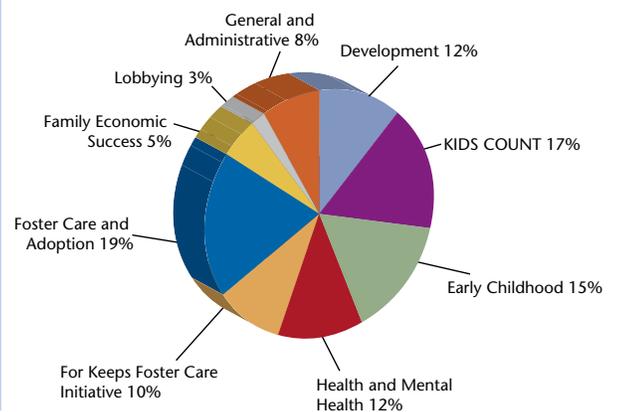
James V. Duty  
Board Chairman, 2009

**2009 Financial Information**

**Summarized Information**

Total Assets	\$620,680
Total Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses	\$ 2,960
Total Amounts Held For Others	\$ 13,264
Total Support and Revenue	\$ 1,052,266
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$607,632</b>

**Operating Expenses By Program**



## 2009 Grantor & Donor List

We are grateful to the following,  
whose generous contributions strengthen our voice for the children of Virginia.

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## Voices Releases Report Spotlighting Children in Northern Virginia

This May, Voices for Virginia's Children and The Community Foundation for Northern Virginia jointly released "A Portrait of Children in Northern Virginia", a first-ever snapshot of the status of the region's children. The report highlights demographic, economic, and social trends that impact children and youth in Northern Virginia.

Some interesting facts revealed in the report include:

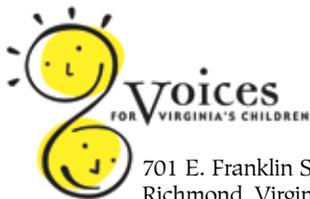
- More than 30,000 children in Northern Virginia live in poverty.
- More than 62,000 students in Northern Virginia have limited English proficiency.

- Approximately 90% of adults in all jurisdictions have completed high school.
- Between 2000 and 2007, the regional rate of infant mortality increased by more than 20%.



We hope that the data offered in the report will inform a meaningful dialogue about the real needs of the region's children and grow philanthropic and public investments to meet those needs.

To read the Executive Summary and the full report, please visit Voices website at [www.vakids.org/work/northernva.htm](http://www.vakids.org/work/northernva.htm).



701 E. Franklin Street, Suite 807  
Richmond, Virginia 23219  
804-649-0184

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