

Voices

For Virginia's
Children

A Newsletter For Child Advocates Summer 2011

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

How Do You Like Our New Look?

Here at Voices, we have a lot to celebrate this summer! We enjoyed some big successes in this year's General Assembly session, we are continuing to build momentum around the Campaign for Children's Mental Health, we have some major publications in the works for 2011, and to cap it all off, we released our new logo and look this spring!

The world we live and work in is constantly evolving and we thought it was time for Voices to change a little bit too. But don't worry. We are still the same effective and reliable kids' advocates that we have always been. Our new look visually reflects the dual role we play as advocates - to speak up as a voice for Virginia's most vulnerable children and to organize child advocates like you

in articulating your support for kids. The new imagery evokes the power that we have when we raise our voices together to make a difference in the lives of Virginia kids and their families.

We are excited about our updated look and are shouting it from the virtual rooftops! Please take a moment to visit us at www.vakids.org, look for us on all your favorite social media sites, and join the conversation - let us know what you think!



The Campaign for Children's Mental Health

In May we released a new report, *Children's Mental Health in Virginia: System Deficiencies and Unknown Outcomes*. The report generated a huge amount of media attention from national, state and local media outlets and included an op-ed in the *Virginian-Pilot* by Campaign Coordinator Margaret Nimmo Crowe.

The report was followed in June by the release of the Campaign's Action Agenda for 2011-2012, which calls on state policymakers to make children's mental health a priority in the upcoming legislative session. Specifically, the agenda calls for our leaders to:

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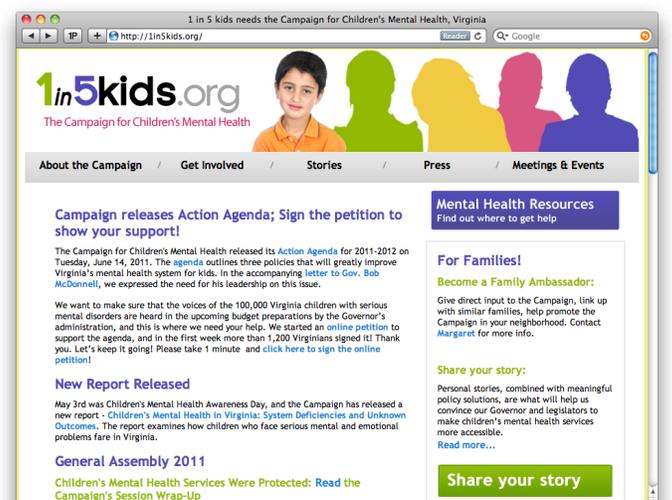
1. Invest in children's mental health so that all young Virginians can get four basic mental health treatment services in their own communities: psychiatric services, case management, crisis response services and high quality in-home services.
2. Develop a comprehensive plan for our child mental health system that includes all Virginia kids who receive services through the public sector. Our fragmented system is confusing to families and costly to taxpayers.
3. Listen to children and families. All professionals working with children need to recognize that patients and their families need to be an integral part of the treatment team. Our state must put in place strategies that acknowledge that kids and families are experts on their own treatment needs.



The development of this agenda included input from many partner organizations and from our Family Ambassadors, parents who have committed to help the Campaign based on their personal experiences seeking care for a child with a mental health disorder. You can find the new report, the Agenda, and all the media coverage of the Campaign on the website, www.1in5kids.org.

It's not too late for you to make your voice heard about children's mental health issues! Go to www.1in5kids.org and sign up to receive our emails. While you're there, you can also sign our petition to let Governor McDonnell and our legislators know that this is the year to make children's mental health a priority.

Thanks for speaking up!



DID YOU KNOW?

The KIDS COUNT Data Center is designed to be interactive—not only can you view data online, you can also download raw data, create and export custom charts and graphs, and even upload a Virginia KIDS COUNT Data Center “widget” on your agency’s website that provides one-click access to your city’s or county’s data. Check it out at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/va> today!

Expansion of Virginia’s KIDS COUNT Data Center continues

Voices for Virginia’s Children is proud to announce a wealth of new data available on the KIDS COUNT Data Center. With topics ranging from infant mortality to foster care to high school graduation rates, the Virginia KIDS COUNT Data Center is the Commonwealth’s largest and most comprehensive one-stop shop for data on Virginia children’s well-being. Last year, 21 new indicators were added to the data center and more than thirty others were updated with the most recent data available. Here’s a sample of the Data Center’s new offerings:

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation**
- **Foster Care Discharges to Permanency**
- **Child Population by Age Group**
- **7th-12th Grade Students who Dropped Out of High School**

In addition to continually seeking out new data topics and sources, Voices is actively engaged in improving the Data Center’s utility by disaggregating data wherever possible. It is important to examine disaggregated data to fully understand how policies and practices may impact children differently. A number of our indicators are now available by race/ethnicity, including:

- **Infant Mortality**
- **Births to Teen Girls**
- **Low Birthweight Babies**
- **Children in Foster Care**

Voices has been using these new KIDS COUNT indicators to produce several exciting new reports on contemporary issues in children’s well-being. For example, we used new childhood poverty data from the American Community Survey released in late 2010 to create Child Poverty Factsheets for each of Virginia’s 11 federal Congressional districts. Voices distributed copies of the factsheets to our Virginia legislators. They are also available on the Voices website (www.vakids.org).

Visit the KIDS COUNT Data Center at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/va>. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter to receive notification when new indicators are added or existing indicators are updated with new data. If you’re interested in learning more about KIDS COUNT, contact Hayley Cleary at hayley@vakids.org.

IT’S HERE!

Voices is excited to announce the release of *A Guide to Understanding and Using Data for Effective Advocacy*, a resource for citizens, legislators, professionals, and others who are interested in learning how to understand and use data accurately and effectively to advance their policy goals. Visit Voices’ website vakids.org to download a copy.



Voices Issues New Child Welfare Report

Voices has released *A Portrait of Virginia's Child Welfare System*, a new report that highlights the latest Virginia data on child maltreatment and foster care, including data on children with disabilities as well as racial disparities in Virginia's foster care system. The report also discusses the Children's Services System Transformation and the federal Fostering Connections Act. Finally, the report outlines domains where more and better data are needed to fully understand Virginia's foster care population and to offer data-driven policy recommendations for improvement.

The report is available at www.vakids.org. A limited number of paper copies are available. Please contact Mary at mds@vakids.org if you would like paper copies.

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May 2011

A Portrait of Virginia's Child Welfare System

Children need a safe, supportive, stable family life to grow up socially capable and emotionally secure. Children must be protected from all forms of abuse or neglect. Vulnerable families should have access to supports that bolster family strengths, promote positive child-rearing and reduce the likelihood of abuse and neglect. When children must be removed from their homes, public systems must perform the dual roles of ensuring that children have living situations as family-like and stable as possible while simultaneously striving to promote family reunification or, if needed, to find an alternative permanent family for the child.

Child Maltreatment

Every 90 minutes, there is a substantiated ("founded") incident of child abuse and neglect in Virginia. In SFY 2010, more than 6,200 Virginia children were involved in founded investigations, an increase of 5% from SFY 2009. Tragically, every eight days a child dies from maltreatment.¹ Annually more than three out of every 1,000 children in Virginia are involved in documented cases of abuse and/or neglect (Table 1).²

Child abuse and neglect is an area affected by a lack of uniformity in documentation and reporting that is exacerbated by differing community standards that affect whether maltreatment is considered abuse. This lack of uniformity is exhibited in the varying rates of cases of child abuse and neglect reported by localities within Virginia, which range from 0 to 23.5 per thousand children.³

In 2003, Virginia implemented a Differential Response System, which gives local departments of social services the flexibility to investigate reports (the traditional response) or conduct a family assessment. When a local department of social services (LDSS) receives a report of child abuse or neglect, the report is first assessed for urgency and validity. Then LDSS staff must consider the potential immediate danger to the child and the severity of the allegation to determine whether a family assessment or investigation is most appropriate. Family assessments may be used in low to moderate-risk cases that have no immediate safety concerns and are intended to engage families, tap into strengths, reduce the adversarial tension that accompanies a traditional investigation, and utilize community resources and the family's natural support network.⁴ Supportive services that may be offered during a family assessment include: counseling, day care, parent support groups, and substance abuse services. If an investigation is conducted, then a finding of either founded or unfounded must be made based on information collected by LDSS staff. If the case is "founded," the responsible caretaker's name is entered into Virginia's Central Registry, which is used when individuals are applying to be foster or adoptive parents or are applying for jobs with close contact with children including child care worker in a licensed center, worker in a children's residential facility, and teacher.

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