



## 2015 ANNUAL REPORT



[www.alavoices.org](http://www.alavoices.org)



To ensure the well-being of **Alabama's children** through research, public awareness, and advocacy.





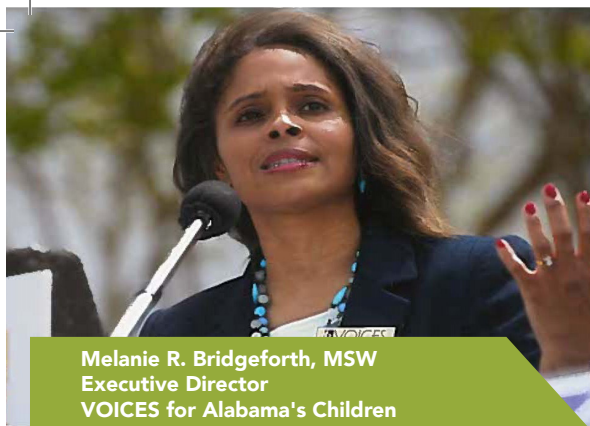




OUR MISSION THROUGH  
RESEARCH, PUBLIC AWARENESS  
AND ADVOCACY



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Melanie R. Bridgeforth, MSW  
Executive Director  
VOICES for Alabama's Children

## A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Supporters like you made it possible for us to positively impact the lives of children in Alabama by:**

- *Leading a 100-plus member coalition in successfully advocating passage of legislation to create a Healthy Food Financing program designed to bring fresh, healthy foods to more than half a million children across the state.*
- *Educating, mobilizing and empowering more than 1,200 new advocates in communities across the state.*
- *Fighting alongside core partners to secure an additional \$10 million in funding for Alabama's First Class Pre-K Program, which provided access to 3,600 more Alabama four-year-olds.*
- *Raising awareness on critical children's issues of approximately 2.5 million Alabamians through media outreach and community engagement.*
- *Maintaining a strong membership base of nearly 80 organizations from across the state working together to improve outcomes for children.*

**I'm impatient for change. Always have been. Luckily you are too.**

In 2015, because of your impatience for change and collaborative spirit, we nearly doubled the number of policy wins for Alabama's children from the previous year. Now that's moving the needle for children.

One of the landmark policy wins was leading a successful advocacy campaign creating Alabama's first statewide Healthy Food Financing program to incentivize fresh food retailers to locate in the communities that need them most. This unprecedented food access policy win was hard fought and set a strong foundation on which we can build subsequent policy wins targeting the childhood obesity epidemic.

But our success didn't end there. Because of your advocacy, lawmakers again increased state investments for Alabama's First Class Pre-K program by \$10 million. Again, moving the needle for children.

Certainly, missed opportunities were plentiful. The battle for adequate funding for crucial programs and services like Medicaid and child care lingered on. But together, we continued to chip away at the policy landscape which threatens the very core of our state—our children.

The year 2015 was a year of transformation for VOICES for Alabama's Children—not only in our advocacy—but also our research and public awareness efforts. From the 2.5 million Alabamians we reached through media campaigns raising awareness about the issues most impacting children to the evolution of the Alabama Kids Count project and the annual *Alabama Kids Count Data Book*—because of you we are stronger. Since its inception the *Alabama Kids Count Data Book*, the only one of its kind in the state, has been the impetus for policy change and thermometer for how well our state is meeting the needs of children. From expanding the sheer number of indicators to incorporating data visualization, our dynamic team is working to give every reader and user of the *Data Book* the tools needed to build the case for doing what matters for children in your community.

As you read our 2015 Annual Report and join me in reflecting on the successes of the year, let us also look ahead. We must complete the fight to expand food access in the communities that need it most. We must continue the fight for high-quality pre-k to ensure every four-year-old has access. We must address the growing issue of unregulated child care, putting our young children at risk each and every day. We must budget adequately so that children and families are not on the chopping block year after year.

We must remain impatient for change. We must remain united. We must remain voices for Alabama's children.

Yours in advocacy,

**Melanie R. Bridgeforth, MSW**  
Executive Director



# HOW WE APPROACH RESEARCH



To effectively drive change, research must move past mere insight and provide significant utility for the advocates, policymakers, educators and other stakeholders who rely on the data we publish to make decisions. Our commitment to research has established a solid foundation for our internal advocacy efforts and buttressed the efforts of our partner networks in the fight to improve child well-being in the state of Alabama.

For more than two decades, we have worked in partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to publish the *Alabama Kids Count Data Book*. This invaluable research tool highlights the needs of children, youth and families in Alabama, helping nonprofits, government agencies and other organizations make well-informed policy and programming decisions.

## Making Kids Count Through Research

**We are committed to making sure the needs of every child in Alabama count when important policy decisions are made.** The 2015 *Alabama Kids Count Data Book* allowed us to thoroughly consider our successes and challenges in improving the well-being of children and provide a detailed framework for where we need to focus our advocacy efforts and resources.

The *Data Book* is the bedrock for child advocacy efforts across the state. Local and state decision makers, grassroots advocates, organizations and media outlets rely on the *Data Book* to accurately pinpoint the needs of Alabama's children and identify potential solutions.

The 2015 *Data Book* explores well-being indicators across four domains – health, education, safety and economic security. Last year, we added five additional measures that have broadened the data available to stakeholders. State and county data profiles, available online, provide unprecedented access to statistics from every county in Alabama.

## OUR IMPACT:

- Conducted 22 media interviews, resulting in 77 print and online articles, four of those being front page articles, and 14 broadcasts, with a total circulation of nearly 3 million.
- Partnered with Children's of Alabama to provide Alabama legislators and state agency heads with a copy of the Alabama Kids Count Data Book.
- There were more than 22,000 visitors to the National KIDS COUNT Data Center to view Alabama Kids Count data, resulting in nearly 420,000 page-views, a 10% increase over 2014.

## "Why I Use Kids Count"

*"Grant-making foundations know that Alabama Kids Count Data Book is the "go to" place for organizations attempting to better understand and verify the needs of children in their service area. I find it unusual to read a grant application without one or more references to what the latest Kids Count data shows. With over 20 years of consistent data, Alabama Kids Count Data Book has become a trusted and reliable source for understanding the needs in our state."*

**-Sue H. McInnish, Executive Director, Alabama Civil Justice Foundation**

*"I have found the Alabama Kids Count Data Book to be an invaluable tool to measure the effectiveness of the programs and interventions that we have implemented to improve the quality of life and well-being of our children and families. The Data Book has helped us to stay focused on our specific goal of reducing juvenile crime and set our strategy to accomplish this goal. We refer to it all the time. We are extremely grateful to have this valuable data available, and it has been a significant help for our entire community! Thanks Kids Count!"*

**-Judge Bob Armstrong, District Judge Dallas County, Alabama**



## HOW WE APPROACH PUBLIC AWARENESS

We have been able to raise public awareness around key child issues by influencing the conversation through an aggressive public relations campaign and broad network of partner organizations. By nurturing existing relationships and building new ones, we were able to reinforce the support of our key legislative priorities and seize traditional and new media opportunities to publicize our messages.

Targeted campaigns, partnerships and coalitions have helped VOICES for Alabama's Children successfully influence the conversation around children's issues – especially issues that present the biggest barriers to their success. Nurturing existing relationships and building new ones reinforces support of our key legislative priorities, while seizing traditional and new media opportunities to publicize our message expands Alabama's knowledge of where we stand on key children's issues.



**Rhonda Mann, Policy and Research Director**  
shares data highlights from the 2015 Alabama Kids Count Data Book.

### OUR IMPACT:

- Conducted and participated in 52 community events in 22 counties in 2015, reaching a total audience of over 4,500.
- Alabama Healthy Food Financing Campaign messaging reached over two million people through traditional and social media.
- VOICES' core priorities were mentioned in a total of 205 media articles carried by 43 media institutions with an unduplicated circulation of 1,442,270 for 2015.
- Shared 1,324 messages through social media and email to mobilize advocates.
- Secured a 74% increase in supporters on Facebook and added nearly 400 new followers on Twitter.
- VOICES team collaborated and served on more than 23 national and statewide boards, coalitions and councils throughout the year.





## HOW WE APPROACH ADVOCACY

Research and public awareness both contribute to the core of our work—advocacy. We advance research-based policy solutions that move our state toward the Alabama children deserve.

VOICES continued to focus on grassroots advocacy, educating and mobilizing more than 1,200 new advocates. Individuals dedicated to improving child well-being in Alabama provided a wave of support that generated over 600 actions through alerts and messages to lawmakers on potentially life changing policy for children and families.

We also hosted our second-annual Child Advocacy Day at the Alabama State House, bringing together more than 200 advocates to champion common sense policy solutions for Alabama's children.

### Expanding Pre-K for Alabama 4-Year-Olds

For nine consecutive years, Alabama's First Class Pre-K program has been nationally recognized as the top program in the country for quality. Access to First Class Pre-K has increased from 13 percent in 2014 to 19 percent in 2015. VOICES, as part of the Pre-K Task Force, is working to ensure all four-year-olds have access.

In 2015, the Parent VOICES for Pre-K grassroots movement leveraged the influence of parent advocates and demonstrated the demand for high quality pre-k in Alabama. In one year, the number of advocates grew 391 percent — from 100 to 491. Parent VOICES for Pre-K grassroots advocates built and strengthened relationships with state lawmakers to advance advocacy for expanding Alabama's First Class Pre-K program.



**Jada Shaffer, Campaign Manager**  
addresses crowd at Montgomery City Hall.

## Increasing Food Access in Alabama through Healthy Food Financing

Approximately 1.8 million Alabamians, including nearly half a million children, live in areas with limited or no access to fresh, healthy food. Lack of access to healthy food impacts overall health and life expectancy of residents living in low access communities. A statewide public opinion poll commissioned by VOICES for Alabama's Children found overwhelming support to address healthy food access. **The poll showed 80% of Alabama voters support the state incentivizing food retail businesses to locate in communities with limited access to healthy foods.**

In partnership with the Healthy Food Access Task Force, a food desert mapping report was produced and distributed to over 500 advocates, media partners and state and local decision makers. *Food for Every Child: The Need for Healthy Food Financing in Alabama*, commissioned by VOICES for Alabama's Children and The Food Trust, reports that every county in the state of Alabama has at least one neighborhood with limited access to grocers and other fresh food retailers placing children and families at increased risk for diet-related illness.

In 2015, we led a 100-plus member coalition of state and local advocates in a successful advocacy campaign, resulting in the establishment of a statewide Healthy Food Financing program. The enabling legislation puts Alabama one step closer to addressing the growing issue of food access by incentivizing farmers markets, grocery stores and other fresh food retailers to locate in underserved communities across the state.

VOICES continued to work with partners to prepare a strategy to secure funding to fully operationalize Alabama's newly created Healthy Food Financing program. Our work moving forward will focus on implementation of the program in order to bring healthy food closer to home for the 1.8 million Alabama children and families who need it most.

## OUR IMPACT:

- Led a 100-plus member coalition in successfully advocating passage of Senate Bill 260 sponsored by Sen. Greg Reed and Rep. James Buskey. The bill established the Healthy Food Financing Act and was signed in to law by Gov. Robert Bentley on May 27, 2015. The law established a statewide revolving loan fund program to provide incentives to grocers and other fresh food retailers encouraging them to develop, renovate or expand in communities with limited access to fresh, healthy food.
- Fought alongside business and philanthropic partners to secure increased funding for the state's First Class Pre-K program by an additional \$10 million. These funds along with the competitive federal Preschool Development Grant awarded to the state in 2014 opened over 200 new classrooms and expanded access to 3,600 more Alabama four-year-olds.
- Partnered with Stand Tall Alabama to mobilize advocates in sending over 205,000 handwritten post cards to every Alabama lawmaker urging them to address the budget deficit.
- Collaborated with the Alabama Safe Teen Driving Coalition to strengthen the Graduated Driver's License Law by increasing the number of practice driving hours required for teens.
- Protected an estimated 10,000 children from losing childcare by fighting against funding cuts to the state child care subsidy program.
- Hosted four Regional Meetings across the state, drawing in approximately 200 child advocates to participate in conversations about child well-being, including what's working and challenges facing children and families in four regions of Alabama.
- Convened VOICES 2nd Annual Child Advocacy Day and Parent VOICES for Pre-K Rally, drawing in over 200 advocates. Notable speakers and supporters of the event included Senate Majority Leader Greg Reed, Rep. Jack D. Williams, Rep. Dario Melton, Commissioner Nancy Buckner and Secretary Jeana Ross, Sen. Quinton Ross, Rep. Bill Poole and Rep. Terri Collins.
- Facilitated over 4,500 actions by grassroots advocates in 2015 on our policy priorities.



# A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

## CORPORATE & FOUNDATION PARTNERS

Alabama Power Foundation  
Alabama State Dept. of Education (Supporting *Alabama Kids Count Data Book*)  
The Annie E. Casey Foundation  
The Caring Foundation of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama  
Children's of Alabama  
The Daniel Foundation of Alabama  
The Hobbs Foundation  
Independent Presbyterian Church Foundation  
James Rushton I Foundation  
Marguerite Casey Foundation  
Mayer Electric  
Mike and Gillian Goodrich Foundation  
Regions Bank  
Russell Brands, LLC  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Voices for Healthy Kids  
Vulcan Materials Foundation

*"The legislative victories for children described in this report - increased funding for pre-K, improved access to healthy food, graduated drivers license enhancements for teens - would not have been possible without the support of our funders and community partners."*

-V. Ellen Jackson, Board President

## ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS

Alabama Children First  
Alabama Dept. of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention  
Alabama Family Child Care Association  
Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers  
Alfred Saliba Family Services  
Autism Society of Alabama Hager  
Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Greater Birmingham  
Boys & Girls Clubs of South Alabama  
CAJA of Marshall County  
Childcare Resources  
Children's Aid Society  
Christian Services for Children in Alabama, Inc.  
Community Service Programs of West Alabama  
Escambia Regional Child Advocacy Center  
First United Methodist Church, Montgomery  
Heart Gallery Alabama  
Junior League of Birmingham  
Junior League of Huntsville  
Junior League of Mobile  
Mobile County DHR  
New Hope Children's Clinic  
Parents and Children Together (PACT)  
Riverbend Center for Mental Health  
S.A.F.E. Family Services Center  
Success by 6 of United Way of West Alabama  
The University of Alabama - College of Human Environmental Sciences  
The Literacy Council of Central Alabama  
Tuscaloosa One Place  
Twin Cedars Child Advocacy Center  
YWCA of Central Alabama



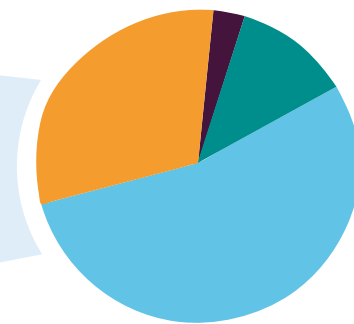
## INDIVIDUAL PARTNERS

Francesca Adler  
Jeremy Arthur  
Jessica Baeder  
Teumbay Barnes  
Melanie R. Bridgeforth  
Charles and Patsy Collat  
Brooke Coleman  
Tranum and Martha Fitzpatrick  
Nancy Young Fortner  
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Joyce Greathouse  
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Leigh Hancock  
Lila Hardin  
Penelope Hartline

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Patricia Siano  
Jada Shaffer  
Ken Spear  
Joyce Stallworth  
Linda O. Tilly  
Michon Trent  
Stephanie Walker  
Carlton Wood

## A LOOK INTO OUR 2015 FINANCIALS



○ FUNDRAISING  
○ ADVOCACY

○ ADMINISTRATION & GENERAL  
○ RESEARCH

### Income

Corporate & Foundations	760,501.00
Individuals	15,665.00
Organizational Support	5,143.00
In-Kind (Non-cash)	30,160.00
Other Income	6,535.00
Interest Income	186.00

Grants Received in 14 for 15	41,482.00
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<b>Totals</b>	<b>859,672.00</b>
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### Expenses

Advocacy	381,316.00
Research	100,423.00
Administration & General	92,259.00
Fundraising	9,226.00

<b>Totals</b>	<b>583,224.00</b>
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### Balance Sheet

#### ASSETS:

Cash & Equivalents	365,852.00
Prepaid Expenses & Other Assets	905.00
Property & Equipment Net of Accumulated Depreciation	21,836.00

<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>388,593.00</b>
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#### LIABILITIES:

Accounts Payable	7,346.00
Accrued Expenses	13,258.00
Capitalized Lease Obligation	11,411.00

<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>32,015.00</b>
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#### NET ASSETS:

Unrestricted	231,829.00
Temporarily Restricted	124,749.00

<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets</b>	<b>388,593.00</b>
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# 2015 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**V. Ellen Jackson - President**

Community Volunteer  
Birmingham, AL

**Penney P. Hartline**

Civic Volunteer  
Birmingham, AL

**Gwen Hall - Vice President**

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama  
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**Anitra Belle Henderson**

SMG & Associates  
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PNC Bank  
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**Deak Rushton**

James Rushton I Foundation  
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The University of Alabama  
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**Joanne Schrantz**

Community Volunteer  
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**Quentin P. Riggins - Member at Large**

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Montgomery, AL

**Ken L. Spear**

Montgomery Public Schools  
Montgomery, AL

## GENERAL MEMBERS

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Mobile Area Education Foundation  
Mobile, AL

**Jeremy Arthur**

Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama  
Montgomery, AL

**Carlton Wood, III**

Lewis Communications  
Birmingham, AL

### Staff:

**Melanie R. Bridgeforth**, MSW, Executive Director

**Don Bogie**, Ph.D., Senior Kids Count Research Fellow

**Apriell Hartsfield**, JD, Communications Director

**Rhonda Mann**, Policy & Research Director

**Jada Shaffer**, Campaign Manager



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