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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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.

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
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.

**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.

**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.

"**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
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.

**OUR IMPACT:**

- Conducted and participated in 52 community events in 22 counties in 2015, reaching a total audience of over 4,500.

- 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.

- Secured a 74% increase in supporters on Facebook and added nearly 400 new followers on Twitter.

- Alabama Healthy Food Financing Campaign messaging reached over two million people through traditional and social media.

- Shared 1,324 messages through social media and email to mobilize advocates.

- VOICES team collaborated and served on more than 23 national and statewide boards, coalitions and councils throughout the year.
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.

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.
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 into 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 postcards 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.


- 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
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Voices for Healthy Kids
Vulcan Materials Foundation

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Alfred Saliba Family Services
Autism Society of Alabama Hager
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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

“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
INDIVIDUAL PARTNERS

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A LOOK INTO OUR 2015 FINANCIALS

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
Totals 859,672.00

EXPENSES

Advocacy 381,316.00
Research 100,423.00
Administration & General 92,259.00
Fundraising 9,226.00
Totals 583,224.00

BALANCE SHEET

ASSETS:
Cash & Equivalents 365,852.00
Prepaid Expenses & Other Assets 905.00
Property & Equipment Net of Accumulated Depreciation 21,836.00
Grants Received in 14 for 15 41,482.00
Total Assets 388,593.00

LIABILITIES:
Accounts Payable 7,346.00
Accrued Expenses 13,258.00
Capitalized Lease Obligation 11,411.00
Total Liabilities 32,015.00

NET ASSETS:
Unrestricted 231,829.00
Temporarily Restricted 124,749.00
Total Liabilities & Net Assets 388,593.00

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