



# 2016 ANNUAL REPORT



[www.alvoices.org](http://www.alvoices.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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# A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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

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

- Creating the Alabama Healthy Food Financing Study Commission to further address implementation of the state's Healthy Food Financing program and next steps of bringing healthy food closer to home for the 1.8 million Alabamians living in communities with limited access to fresh, healthy food.
- Enhancing protections for child victims of human trafficking by enacting the Alabama Human Trafficking Safe Harbor Act.
- Fighting alongside core partners to secure an additional \$16 million increase in funding for Alabama's First Class Pre-K Program, which provided access to 2,800 more four-year-olds.
- Educating, mobilizing and empowering more than 1,000 new advocates in communities across the state.
- Maintaining a strong organizational membership base of nearly 60 organizations from across the state working to improve outcomes for children.

**For nearly 25 years, you have allowed VOICES for Alabama's Children to be the trusted voice on policy and data for children—and for that I sincerely thank you.**

Your voice made the difference. In 2016, because of your support VOICES for Alabama's Children successfully moved the needle on food access with the creation of the Alabama Healthy Food Financing Study Commission, engaged the voices of hundreds of parents in a collaborative advocacy effort resulting in a \$16 million increase in funding for First Class Pre-K and advocated alongside 20-plus partner organizations to restore and protect Medicaid funding.

I am extremely proud of the legislative victories, but perhaps our breakthrough work in community engagement is what invokes the most pride as I reflect on our work in 2016. You—the people—are the heartbeat of our state and the lifeline of this great organization. Together, in 2016, we raised awareness on critical children's issues, reaching more than 3.2 million Alabamians through media outreach and community engagement. In addition to that, advocates made 300 direct contacts to their lawmakers and took more than 57,000 grassroots actions!

It is my hope that you enjoy the 2016 Annual Report because you in part helped shaped the work detailed inside! Take great pride in the critical role you played in every victory for Alabama's children.

As we look to the year ahead, the road is indeed a little steeper from action on unregulated child care to the very future of the Medicaid and CHIP programs; but together we can and will win those battles too.

In 2017, VOICES for Alabama's Children will celebrate 25 years of advocating for Alabama's children. The road hasn't always been smooth or predictable, but here's what I know—there is no better group of advocates to travel that road with than you.

Yours in advocacy,

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

# HOW WE APPROACH RESEARCH



VOICES for Alabama's Children was the first, and remains the only, statewide child advocacy organization to research and document the conditions of children in each of Alabama's 67 counties through the *Alabama Kids Count Data Book*.

For almost 25 years, we have worked in partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to publish the *Alabama Kids Count Data Book*. It serves as the most trusted source of research on child well-being for nonprofits, government agencies and other organizations in Alabama – allowing them to make well-informed policy and programming decisions. Serving as both a benchmark and road map for how children are faring, the *Alabama Kids Count Data Book* is used to raise visibility of children's issues, identify areas of need, set priorities in child well-being and inform decision-making at the state and local levels.

## Making Kids Count Through Research

We are committed to ensuring that every need of children in Alabama counts when important policy decisions are being made. Our *2016 Alabama Kids Count Data Book* allowed us to measure our successes and areas of improvement for the well-being of Alabama's children. The *Data Book* allows us to set and define our advocacy efforts and resources.

The *Data Book* is the foundation 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 depict the needs and possible solutions for Alabama's Children.

The *2016 Data Book* uses four well-being domains—health, education, safety and economic security. Starting last year, we added five additional measures that have

broadened the data available to stakeholders and the public. State and county profiles, made available online through VOICES for Alabama's Children's website and data uploaded to the national KIDS COUNT Data Center, provide unprecedented access to historical data from every county in Alabama.

The *Data Book* served as the framework for the success and work we have accomplished over the past year. Through the *Data Book*, we were able to observe some significant successes in health care with 96 percent of all children in Alabama having some type of health coverage. However, the *Data Book* also revealed our state's health care network relies heavily on Medicaid, which led to advocacy efforts to secure Medicaid funding.

## OUR IMPACT:

- Partnered with Children's of Alabama to provide more than 200 copies of the *2016 Alabama Kids Count Data Book* to members of the Alabama Legislature, state agency heads, agency administrators and local elected officials.
- Alabama data included in the Annie E. Casey Foundation national KIDS COUNT Data Center received 288,907 page views with 12,263 new visits during 2016.
- Conducted and participated in 62 events/exhibits in 15 counties (three out of state) to a combined audience of 9,427. Compared to 2015, this is an increase of 19 percent in the number of events/exhibits and an increase of 108 percent in a combined audience.

## "Why I Use Kids Count"

"VOICES for Alabama's Children's *Kids Count Data Book* is instrumental to telling the story of vulnerable children and families. We at Childcare Resources regularly cite data from the book in grants and other reports. In fact in our 2014 Status of Child Care Report, VOICES for Alabama's Children is listed numerous times as a resource for much of the data including data from *Kids Count*. We value the report immensely."

—Joan Wright, Executive Director, Childcare Resources



Rhonda Mann, Policy and Research Director, presents the State of the Child to 400 attendees at the 2016 Doing What Matters Conference in Tuscaloosa.



## HOW WE APPROACH PUBLIC AWARENESS

Research is the critical foundation for building a case for any needed program or policy, but research alone does not inspire change. Public awareness is key in building public will and support for change. In order to build political will to create, strengthen and otherwise improve policies affecting children and families, VOICES for Alabama's Children works to implement strategic communications strategies that balance messages, media and audiences.



**Rhonda Mann**, Policy and Research Director, discusses the release of the *2016 Alabama Kids Count Data Book* with Don Dailey at Capitol Journal.

Throughout the years, VOICES for Alabama's Children has built, and continues to build, a solid foundation of public awareness through nurturing existing relationships with print and electronic media, as well as building new ones.

VOICES for Alabama's Children also uses social media extensively to create awareness around key children's issues. Through targeted social media campaigns, action alerts and newsletters we are able to successfully influence the conversation around children's issues by reaching thousands of advocates from across the state to publicize our messages.

All of our public awareness efforts help build understanding and support for changes needed in our state to improve child well-being and with it the vitality of our state as a whole.

### OUR IMPACT:

- VOICES for Alabama's Children's core priorities were mentioned in a total of 121 media articles with an audience of more than 3 million people in communities throughout the state.
- Secured 314 new Facebook likes, added nearly 121 new followers on Twitter and 192 new followers on Instagram.
- Partnered with more than 20 organizations from across the state to facilitate five press conferences in five days to encourage state leaders to find a long-term, sustainable solution for Medicaid, as well as funding to fill the FY2017 hole. This resulted in 27 media placements.
- The VOICES for Alabama's Children's team collaborated and served on more than 24 national and statewide boards, coalitions and councils throughout the year.
- Hosted and participated in 168 activities to build public will around policy priorities. This resulted in an audience reach of more than five million people.



## HOW WE APPROACH ADVOCACY

Lifting up the voice of children to promote sound policy decisions is the heart and soul of what we do. Research and public awareness directly correlate with the core of our efforts—advocacy. At VOICES for Alabama’s Children, we advance research-backed policy solutions to give our children the Alabama they deserve.

In 2016, we continued our focus on grassroots advocacy by educating and training more than 1,000 new advocates, individuals dedicated to improving child well-being in the state who made an impact by generating 300 direct contacts with lawmakers. Our advocates engaged in more than 57,000 online and offline actions on potentially life changing bills for children and their families.

This year was also our Third Annual Child Advocacy Day. More than 200 advocates, business leaders, educators, parents and children joined forces with us urging lawmakers to keep children’s issues a top priority in Alabama.

### Investing in Pre-K

For 10 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 20 percent during the 2015-2016 school year, to 25 percent during the 2016-2017 school year. VOICES for Alabama’s Children, as part of the Pre-K Task Force, is working to ensure all four-year-olds have access.

Because of the 1,354 pre-k and parent pre-k advocates, lawmakers again increased state investments for Alabama’s First Class Pre-K program by \$16 million!

### Protect Funding, Protect Kids

Alabama’s Medicaid program is a critical economic driver and backbone of the state’s healthcare infrastructure.

On August 1, 2016, cuts to the state’s Medicaid program went into place that had the potential to directly impact more than 570,000 Alabama children aged zero to 18

years who rely on this critical service to meet a diverse slate of health care needs.

In response, VOICES for Alabama’s Children partnered with more than 20 organizations from across the state to facilitate five press conferences in five days encouraging state leaders to find a long-term, sustainable solution for Medicaid, as well as funding to fill the Fiscal Year 2017 hole. This resulted in 27 media placements throughout Mobile, Auburn, Dothan, Birmingham and Huntsville.

Because of your advocacy, together we were able to reach an audience of more than 12,000, which resulted in lawmakers approving a BP compromise bill that allocated \$85 million to Medicaid in 2017, \$105 million in 2018, and the cuts that took place on August 1st were reversed!



**Senator Arthur Orr** (R-Decatur) was one of eight legislators to address more than 200 child advocates at the 2016 Pre-K Rally!



**Kayla Farnon**, Communications Director, facilitates a discussion amongst panelist at the Montgomery Regional Meeting, which drew a crowd of more than 70 people.

## Bringing Healthy Foods Closer to Home

Approximately 1.8 million Alabamians, including nearly half a million children, live in areas with limited or no access to fresh, healthy food. Our research showed that a lack of access to healthy food impacts the overall health and life expectancy of residents living in low access communities. A statewide public opinion poll found overwhelming support from Alabama voters to address healthy food access. Eighty percent support the state incentivizing food retail businesses to locate in communities with limited access to healthy foods.

In 2016, the Alabama Healthy Food Financing Initiative Study Commission was created through Senate Joint Resolution 105.

As a result, three successful meetings of the Study Commission, facilitated by Melanie Bridgeforth, VOICES for Alabama's Children's Executive Director and Co-Chair, were held. The goal was to determine a best scan of practices for Alabama's Healthy Food Financing Program, consult with retailers and other experts to identify potential grocery store and food retail projects, develop a pipeline of projects and to report the findings and recommendations to the Alabama Legislature in 2017.



The Healthy Food Financing Initiative Study Commission met to discuss best practices to help bring healthy foods closer to home for 1.8 million Alabamians!

## OUR IMPACT:

- Under the leadership of VOICES for Alabama's Children, Senators Singleton, Reed and Ross, the Alabama Healthy Food Financing Initiative Study Commission was created through Senate Joint Resolution 105.
- Fought alongside business and philanthropic partners to secure an additional \$16 million in funding for Alabama's First Class Pre-K Program, which provided access to 2,800 more four-year-olds.
- Enhanced protections for child victims of human trafficking by enacting the Alabama Human Trafficking Safe Harbor Act.
- Hosted five Regional Meetings across the state, drawing more than 300 child advocates to participate in conversations about child well-being, including what's working and challenges facing children and families in five regions of Alabama.
- Convened VOICES for Alabama's Children's 3rd Annual Child Advocacy Day and Pre-K Rally, drawing in more than 200 advocates. Notable speakers and supporters of the event included Senate Majority Leader Greg Reed, Senator Arthur Orr, Senator Rusty Glover, Senator Vivian Figures, Senator Steve Clouse, Senator Quinton Ross, Representative Bill Poole, Representative Pebblin Warren and Representative James Buskey.
- Facilitated more than 57,000 actions by grassroots advocates in 2016 on our policy priorities.



Melanie R. Bridgeforth, VOICES for Alabama's Children's Executive Director, interviews with WAKA.



Pre-k students from a local classroom join VOICES for Alabama's Children at the 3rd Annual Pre-K Rally!



Gwen Hall, VOICES for Alabama's Children's Board President, welcomes hundreds of advocates to the 2016 Regional Meetings.



VOICES for Alabama's Children's staff celebrated National Farmers Market Week with local farmers at the Montgomery Curb Market!



# A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO **OUR DONORS**

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Alabama Power Foundation  
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The Annie E. Casey Foundation  
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Voices for Healthy Kids  
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Alabama A&M University  
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and Family Studies  
Autism Society of Alabama Hager

Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Greater Alabama  
Boys & Girls Clubs of South Alabama  
CAJA of Marshall County  
Childcare Resources  
Children's Aid Society  
Christian Services for Children in Alabama, Inc.  
Escambia Regional Child Advocacy Center  
Family Success Center of Etowah County  
First United Methodist Church, Montgomery  
Heart Gallery Alabama  
Judson College  
Junior League of Birmingham  
Junior League of Huntsville  
Junior League of Mobile  
Lakeview United Methodist Men  
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  
Sawyer's Day Camp  
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The University of Alabama - College of Human  
Environmental Sciences  
Twin Cedars Child Advocacy Center  
YWCA of Central Alabama



## INDIVIDUAL PARTNERS

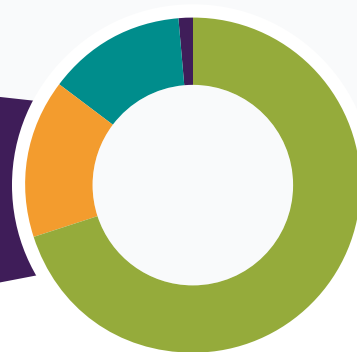
Francesca Adler  
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# A LOOK INTO OUR 2016 FINANCIALS

(UNAUDITED)



○ FUNDRAISING  
 ○ ADVOCACY

○ ADMINISTRATION & GENERAL  
 ○ RESEARCH

### Income

Corporate and Foundations	604,951
Individual	15,547
Organizational Support	13,935
Interest Income	186
In-Kind (Non-cash)	10,000
Other Income	9,231
<b>Totals</b>	<b>653,850</b>
Grants Recv'd in 15 for 16	270,690
<b>Totals</b>	<b>924,540</b>

### Expenses

Advocacy	465,290
Research	100,000
Administration	88,111
Fundraising	8,811
<b>Totals</b>	<b>662,212</b>

### Balance Sheet

#### Assets:

Cash and Cash Equivalents	338,813
Prepaid Expenses and Other Assets	32,535
Property and Equipment net of Accumulated Depreciation	21,140

**Total Assets** **392,488**

#### Liabilities:

Accounts Payable	35,761
Accrued Expenses	267
Capitalized Lease Obligation	8,294

**Total Liabilities** **44,322**

**Net Assets** **348,166**

**Total Liabilities and Net Assets** **392,488**

# 2016 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**Gwen Hall, President**

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama  
Birmingham, AL

**V. Ellen Jackson, Immediate Past President**

Community Volunteer  
Birmingham, AL

**Michael Lynch, Vice President**

Community Volunteer  
Greensboro, AL

**Jeremy Arthur, Treasurer**

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Montgomery, AL

**Nancy Young Fortner, Secretary**

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**Dr. B. Joyce Stallworth, Member at Large**

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Tuscaloosa, AL

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Montgomery, AL

## GENERAL MEMBERS

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Birmingham, AL

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Bradley Arant Boult Cummings, LLP  
Birmingham, AL

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Mobile, AL

**Deak Rushton**

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**Nathan A. Ryan**

Trousdale Ryan, P.C.  
Florence, AL

**Joanne Schrantz**

Community Volunteer  
Auburn, AL

**Michon Trent**

Office of the Mayor—City of Mobile  
Mobile, AL

**Carlton Wood, III**

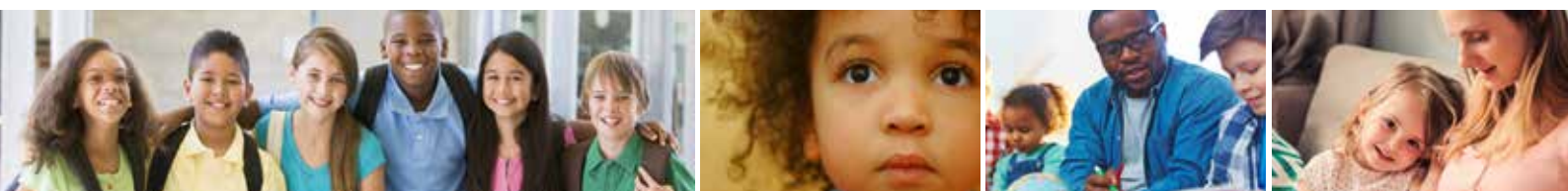
Lewis Communications  
Birmingham, AL

## Staff:

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

**Kayla Farnon**, Communications Director

**Rhonda Mann**, Policy and Research Director



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