



## 15 Years of Making Kids Count

A bipartisan group of influential Virginians, including two former First Ladies, gathered in 1993 to address their shared concern about the future of Virginia's children. Their objective: to create the first-ever Virginia organization giving children a strong, independent, non-partisan voice in public policy. Their deliberations led to the 1994 creation of the Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth, later re-named Voices for Virginia's Children.

Our history includes many successful policy initiatives. The credit for these successes is shared by the many individuals and organizations who have partnered with us along the way.

### The Next 15 Years?

As our visionary founders hoped, Voices' efforts have stimulated progress for Virginia's children. This progress has contributed to the state's recent reputation as a good place to raise children. Our kids measure up fairly well on many indicators – our overall national rank is 16th. Yet enormous challenges remain if we are to ensure the well-being and life success of all children, especially those who are disadvantaged or otherwise vulnerable.

Here's the rallying cry for the next

15 years: **Make Kids A Higher Priority.** Our second annual Step Up For Kids rally on Oct. 8th in Capitol Square was great evidence of the urgency of this message and the tremendous readiness of citizens to support public investments that enhance the well-being of children.

By continuing to speak with one voice, we will ensure that Virginia's leaders make kids the priority and address unmet needs like the following:

- Thousands of children remain uninsured. "Cover All Kids" is a public policy imperative.
- The child mental health/developmental services system is under-funded, fragmented and ineffective. Thousands of children and their families are unable to access the services they desperately need.
- Quality early childhood programs are not available to many disadvantaged children, the very ones who are most likely to start school already behind and unlikely to catch up.

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



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"15 years" continued from front page...

- Wide and persistent racial, ethnic and socio-economic disparities exist on almost all measures of child well-being. The progress of the past 15 years is spread unevenly and unfairly, leaving some groups behind.
- Rates of severe child poverty, the most serious risk to the well-being and future success of children, have not improved to match progress in other domains. The recession will push thousands of additional children into poverty and complicate efforts to reduce persistent poverty.

Over the past 15 years, Voices for Virginia's Children has made tangible progress benefiting thousands of children, yet so much remains to be done. We'll continue working with you to Make Kids

Count. And here's what you, and Virginia's children, can count on in our next 15 years

- We will partner unselfishly with those who share our mission.
- We will continue to rely on objective data to drive policy change. KIDS COUNT data and research will remain the foundation of our efforts to improve child well-being.
- We will continue to speak out strongly on behalf of disadvantaged or otherwise vulnerable children – those who often have no voice.
- And especially we will strive to honor our proud legacy as leaders and champions in improving the well-being of all children.

We invite you to join us in honoring 15 years of progress for kids, and in the next 15 years of Making Kids Count.

## Voices Policy Director Honored

It is with great pleasure and pride that we announce that Voices' Policy Director Mary Dunne Stewart has been selected by **Style Weekly** magazine as one of Richmond's **TOP 40 UNDER 40** community leaders for 2009. This year's awardees were featured in the Tuesday October 13th edition with accompanying story and photo. Check out the online version to read more about the great work that Mary and her Top 40 Under 40 peers are doing in Richmond and across the state. Mary is truly an influential and

inspiring leader in our field and among her generation. Please join us in congratulating her for this prestigious recognition.



Photo by Jay Paul

## Virginia's 2009 Heroes in the Fight

More than 100 guests gathered at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond on September 15 to honor Virginia's Heroes in the Fight<sup>SM</sup> against mental illness. The awards program, sponsored by Eli Lilly and Company, was hosted by Voices for Virginia's Children and its partners: National Alliance on Mental Illness - Virginia, Psychiatric Society of Virginia, Mental Health America - Virginia, and Virginia Association of Community Services Boards.

### Individual Psychiatrist:

**Dr. Lynne Foreman** has been a child psychiatrist for Henrico Area Mental Health & Retardation Services for the past nine years. Dr. Foreman was recognized for going the extra mile in serving her clients, spending her time making sure they understand their medicine regimens and advocating with insurance companies on their behalf.

### Community Supporters:

**Tommy Cubine**, a current board member of NAMI-Virginia and NAMI-Virginia Beach, retired in 2006 after working 35 years in the mental health field. Among her many accomplishments, she co-authored the MESA (Mutual Education Support and Advocacy) training program for family members of those with mental illness.

**Attorney General Bill Mims** has improved policies for children and adults with mental illness throughout his tenure in the General Assembly, as well as at the Attorney General's office. His accomplishments include co-sponsoring legislation to develop a state youth suicide prevention plan and authoring an opinion that effectively abolished the practice of

parents having to give up custody of their children solely to access mental health treatment.

### Allied Health Care Professionals:

**Beth Rafferty, LCSW**, is the mental health director at the Richmond Behavioral Health Authority, the second largest public mental health services agency in Virginia. She has served individuals with mental illness for the past 27 years. She is a dedicated advocate and a valuable member of state public policy workgroups.

**Sandy Bryant, RN, LPC, LMFT**, has worked tirelessly for 28 years to build child and family services at Central Virginia Community Services in Lynchburg and the surrounding localities into a system of care, the most comprehensive array of CSB services in the state. Sandy and her team are highly responsive to community needs, and she has made use of every possible funding source available to CSBs to expand children's services and implement best practices.

### Media Professional:

**Amy Biegelsen**, formerly a writer for Style Magazine who has recently moved to Philadelphia, was honored for her articles on mental health and her ability to explain complex policy issues while also being sensitive to the families whose lives she described.

### Treatment Team:

**Gateway Homes** is the only nonprofit organization in Virginia providing comprehensive mental health care focusing on helping individuals living with serious mental illness recover, return to school and work and move into affordable housing in the community. More than 85% of Gateway's residents successfully complete the program and return to independent living.



## Federal Health Care Reform - What's in it for Kids?

For health care reform to be viewed as a success it must ensure that everyone has access to high-quality, affordable coverage -- including the millions of children who remain uninsured or aren't getting the care they need to grow and thrive.

In Virginia, we have made huge gains for children through the successful Children's Health Insurance Program (known as FAMIS in VA) and Medicaid, which together cover nearly 650,000 children in the Commonwealth. More than 185,000 Virginia children remain uninsured because their families cannot afford coverage or because of red-tape barriers. Health care reform provides the opportunity to build on the progress we've made and finish the job of providing coverage to all children.

Together with child advocates from across the country, Voices is committed to the following principles:

- Insure All Children.** Nationally six million children are eligible but not enrolled in public health coverage. Simplifying enrollment would be the cheapest, quickest and smartest first step toward ensuring that the lowest-income kids are covered. Parents should have a hassle-free way to secure coverage for their children through a "No Wrong Door" system that links them to Medicaid, CHIP, or another insurance program, depending on their eligibility criteria.
- Cover Kids from Head to Toe.** All children need coverage that meets their unique developmental needs, and provides them with the preventive services, medical care, and oral and mental health benefits needed to launch them on a better trajectory in life.
- Help Low-income Families Afford Health Coverage.** Low- and moderate-income families who are not eligible for Medicaid and do not have coverage through their employers need coverage. Experience confirms that when parents have health coverage, their children are more likely to have coverage and stay healthy.
- Do No Harm to Children.** Health reform should not turn back the clock on the progress our nation has achieved for children's health coverage. One-third of our nation's children receive their health care through Medicaid and CHIP. Before moving children out of these successful programs, Congress should ensure that children will receive comparable or better benefits, cost-sharing protections, and access to care under any new and untested program.
- Preserve Medicaid.** Medicaid offers a broad benefits package to our most vulnerable children. By providing comprehensive services, Medicaid and FAMIS go beyond commercial plans in meeting the unique needs of low-income children and children with special health needs.



Voices staff will be your eyes and ears in the health reform debate and keep you informed about how the proposals will affect children. Join our email list at [www.vakids.org](http://www.vakids.org) to receive updates. The status quo should not be an option. We must move forward and provide affordable, comprehensive coverage to all children.

## Counting What Counts

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2009 Kids Count Data Book essay, "Counting What Counts", asserts that data-driven decision-making offers a powerful tool to improve results for children. At Voices for Virginia's Children we use Virginia KIDS COUNT and other data to bring key issues impacting children and families in Virginia to the attention of the public and our leaders.

Here are three recent publications highlighting Voices' data-driven policy work:

- *Achieving Excellence in Early Care for Virginia's Infants and Toddlers* (July 2009) – This brief, written by Voices for Virginia's Children for the Virginia Infant & Toddler Specialist Network, presents

evidence on the importance of high quality infant and toddler care, reports data showing the availability of care in Virginia, and summarizes efforts to improve quality. This data and

analysis form a sound foundation for the Network's initiatives to expand and improve infant and toddler care.

- *A Self Portrait of Youth in Northern Virginia* (July 2009) - This report

summarizes data from youth health risk surveys administered in four Northern Virginia localities, highlights the strengths and challenges of the region's youth, and calls on local officials to expand efforts to collect and use sound data to plan and evaluate services for youth.

- *Predicting Poverty in the Commonwealth* (February 2009) – Voices and Virginia's state fiscal analysis institute, The Commonwealth Center For Fiscal Analysis, released this report sounding the alarm about a sharp rise in recession-induced poverty; highlighting the potential long-term negative consequences for children, and urging steps to mitigate the impact on children and families. The brief helped bolster the successful effort to convince lawmakers, in dealing with the budget crisis, to avoid cuts to critical children's programs.

In addition, Voices' staff is currently preparing two reports for release in the next several months. The first, a "Status Report on Virginia's Children", will summarize data on numerous indicators of child health, safety, educational progress, and family and economic stability, to afford policy makers and citizens a first-ever, comprehensive picture of child well-being in Virginia. The second is a look at a number of selected indicators of health and well-being of children in the Northern Virginia region, in partnership with the Northern Virginia Community Foundation.

Both reports will collect and analyze the best available data on child well-being; pinpoint strengths and disturbing trends; and bring emerging policy issues to the attention of Virginia's leaders and citizens. Our KIDS COUNT project will track these indicators over time to monitor changes in child well-being and guide future policy initiatives.



## Voices to Launch Child Mental Health Campaign

The cause of improving mental health services for children, long a Voices policy priority, is about to get a huge boost. On Dec. 1, a Voices-led coalition will launch The Campaign for Children's Mental Health at a 10:00 AM press briefing at the Capitol.

"We know from numerous studies and from the compelling testimony of many families that Virginia's child mental health system has glaring inadequacies", according to Voices' Margaret Nimmo Crowe, the campaign coordinator. "The system is fragmented, under-funded and often ineffective. Change is long overdue – now is the time to transform the system so children and families can access the services they so desperately need."

Voices has recruited numerous partners, assembled a Steering Group (see below), and secured significant financial support. "Supporters include Bon Secours Health System, Consumer Health Foundation, Carilion Foundation, Inova Health System and HCA who all have

pledged three years of support so we can keep this campaign going long enough to make a real difference", says John Morgan, Voices Executive Director.

"One hallmark of the effort is our intention to work closely with the new administration, state and local mental health officials and our many allies in the General Assembly", says Nimmo Crowe. "We'll take a consensus approach and work alongside government as much as possible." The campaign will also place a high priority on parent and family input – they will be full partners and have a strong voice in recommendations about how to improve the system.

### Campaign Steering Group

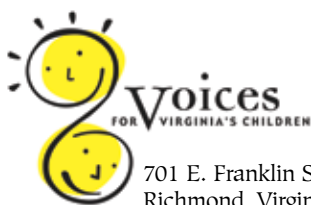
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Voices for Virginia's Children



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