



a newsletter for child advocates

summer 2008

VOICES FOR CHANGE

Foster Youth Express Themselves Through Art

Voices, in partnership with the Virginia Poverty Law Center, FACES for Virginia's Families (Virginia's foster, adoptive, and kinship parent association), and ART 180, is hosting "VOICES FOR CHANGE," an art-writing-photography initiative designed to engage foster youth and carry their VOICES to Virginia policymakers.

Foster youth ages 12 through 21 will be asked to submit an original essay, poem, painting, drawing, or photograph that shares their experiences in foster care and ideas for change. During the summer, participating youth will have the opportunity to take part in a one-day workshop with local writers, artists and photographers. The seminars will be held in Richmond, Lexington, Harrisonburg, Roanoke, Big Stone Gap, Fairfax and Norfolk and are designed to build the youths' confidence and encourage participation.

The contest will culminate in an awards ceremony in mid-November. The high-profile ceremony will be used to spread the message of the youth to

community leaders and policymakers and to highlight the generosity of our sponsors.

To extend the impact beyond the event itself, Voices and our partners will publish a compilation of some of the art, essays, and photographs, which will be utilized with policy makers to amplify the perspective of the foster youth.

For more information, contact Mary Dunne Stewart at mds@vakids.org or 804-649-0184 x24.

The Honorary Steering Committee for VOICES FOR CHANGE 2008 is listed on the back cover.

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



From the Executive Director

John Morgan



It is a great pleasure as Voices' new Executive Director to convey my personal greetings and appreciation to our many valued supporters and friends. I am deeply honored that our Board has entrusted me with this leadership opportunity. Our work is so significant, and so necessary to enhancing the well-being of children, that I can think of no more meaningful challenge than leading Voices into its next era.

And what's on the horizon in this new era? Simply put, here's our vision: With Voices leading the way, Virginia will make children a higher public policy priority. And here's how we will lead:

- Create coalitions and partner unselfishly with others to build a **unified child advocacy network that can speak with One Voice.**
- Improve our research and communication capacity so that we become the **indispensable, go-to source for objective data and policy analysis.**
- **Educate and inspire Virginia leaders and citizens** to speak up for children.

Voices has significant strengths, most notably an outstanding staff and a proud history of influential policy work. We have a fully engaged board of directors, dedicated supporters, and a tremendous reservoir of good will and credibility among our stakeholders. This is a solid platform from which to launch our new era.

To prepare for this new era, Voices will need to get better and stronger than ever before. We have just launched our exciting "New Voice" initiative to foster the improvements we need to make. Read about the initiative, and how you can help, elsewhere in the newsletter.

I look forward to working with you, to sharing the excitement and fulfillment of improving children's lives, and to celebrating with you when they have indeed become a public policy priority. Your input is most welcome – contact me anytime. And especially, thank you for all you have done and will do to support our cause and our children.

John R. Morgan, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Dr. Morgan was named Executive Director March 31. You can read a brief biography at www.vakids.org.

Learning a New Land: Arlington Youth Share Their Experiences

Earlier this spring, the Arlington County Public Library partnered with a number of organizations, including Voices for Virginia's Children, to host an Arlington READS community discussion about adapting to life in America, featuring a panel of immigrant youth from the Arlington community.

Dr. Carola Suarez-Orozco, Professor of Applied Psychology and Co-Director of Immigration Studies at New York University, framed the discussion based on her study of 400 newly arrived children in Boston and San Francisco. She highlighted her findings about the challenges immigrant children face in public schools and integrating into a new culture. The panel of youth who participated in the discussion brought her research to life with intimate stories about their own experiences.

The students spoke frequently about coaches, tutors, librarians and teachers who had impacted their lives in positive ways, reflecting Suarez-Orozco's finding that communities in which immigrant children are most likely to succeed offer connections to caring mentors.

Dr. Suarez-Orozco pointed out that her research indicated that the youth present at the discussion represent the minority of immigrant children – the “lucky ones” with positive community ties and savvy parents.

In her book, “Learning a New Land: Immigrant Students in

American Society,” Dr. Suarez-Orozco paints a discouraging picture in which many of today's immigrant children grow up to be under-educated workers who cannot meet the challenges of the nation's new economy. Since her research is not complete, Dr. Suarez-Orozco is not ready to make policy recommendations but she encourages all of us to focus energy on learning more about who immigrants are, why they are here, what their lives are like, and how the experience affects children. She argues that children in immigrant families are a valuable human resource that we cannot afford to let go to waste.

In Northern Virginia, where 39% of children under 18 live in immigrant families, this is important advice. Policymakers across Virginia, especially in communities with large numbers of immigrant families, are challenged to find effective ways to help these children become successful students and community members who can fully participate in Virginia's bright future.

Immigrant youth panel discusses adapting to life in the United States. Photo courtesy of The Arlington Connection newspaper.



Supporting Voices: The Robins Foundation

Since 1999, the Robins Foundation of Richmond has been a major benefactor of the early childhood policy work conducted by Voices for Virginia's Children. Its support has been instrumental in our long-standing efforts to inform policy makers and the public of the importance of the early childhood years, of the value of early childhood interventions, and of the policy decisions and best practices required to foster child development and school readiness. At various times the Foundation has generously supported our Kids Count initiative, the TEACH-VA program and other professional development initiatives, our collaborative work with other Richmond-area early childhood partners, and our ongoing policy research and development efforts in the early childhood/school readiness domain.

The Foundation was created in 1957 by E. Claiborne Robins of the A.H. Robins Company. Mr. Robins was well-known for his generous spirit and genuine desire to give back to the community that nurtured him, and for his major gifts to local organizations, most notably the University of Richmond. Upon his death in 1995, his gift to the foundation enabled it to continue his long tradition of generous support of local causes.

Early childhood programs and initiatives have been a major focus of the Foundation for some time; numerous early childhood

organizations in addition to Voices have benefited from this focus. One notable current example is the Partnership for Families Northside in Richmond. Robins was instrumental in creating this model community partnership which is testing a unique community development process to promote the school readiness of the entire prenatal-age five population in a section of the city. The partnership brings previously independent community organizations together and combines resources in a concerted effort to eliminate the risk factors that compromise early development and school readiness. This is a shining example of the depth of the Robins Foundation commitment to early childhood initiatives. Get more information at the Partnership's website, www.kidsreadytolearn.org.

The Robins Foundation Executive Director is William L. Roberts, Jr. More details about the foundation and its giving program are at www.robins-foundation.org. Voices for Virginia's Children is indebted to the Foundation for its leadership in recognizing the importance of the early childhood years and in supporting the research and education that are the basis for sound policy decisions in support of our youngest citizens.



2008 General Assembly Session: A Win for Kids!

The state budget approved during the 2008 legislative session marks a major step forward in enhancing the well-being of the Commonwealth's children. Even in tough fiscal times, the General Assembly and the Governor made the difficult decisions and invested in foster care, preschool, child care assistance, and health care.

Children's Budget at a Glance

- \$17 million to expand childcare subsidies for low-income working families
- \$22 million to expand preschool for at-risk children
- \$23 million for foster care reform including a 23% increase in financial support for foster and adoptive parents, increase in funding for child welfare worker training, and improved recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive families
- \$2 million to continue to exempt many psychiatric medications from "fail first" and prior authorization requirements that are imposed on many other medications
- Adoption of financial incentives to promote community-based services by increasing the state's contribution for community-based care and reducing the state's contribution for services provided in residential settings
- \$1 million to expand prenatal care to additional low-income women

The "New Voice" Campaign

The outcomes of the 2008 Virginia General Assembly prove that the leadership provided by Voices for Virginia's Children makes a huge difference – thousands of children will benefit from the achievements Voices helped to produce.

The "New Voice" Campaign is your chance to help us begin an exciting and even more effective era at Voices. Your gift will help us get stronger and ensure that children's issues and needs will have an even more prominent place on the public policy agenda.

A very generous donor has pledged \$20,000 to jumpstart the campaign. Your matching contributions will help us accomplish key priorities during our transition. In our new era, Voices pledges to...

- Create new coalitions, partner unselfishly with other organizations, and lead an effort to build a unified child advocacy network able to speak with ONE VOICE
- Build top-flight research and communications capacity so that we can be the trusted, go-to source for objective data and policy recommendations
- Educate and mobilize Virginia leaders and citizens to speak up for public policies that enhance the well-being of children

PLEASE SUPPORT THE "NEW VOICE" CAMPAIGN WITH YOUR GIFT TODAY!

Use the enclosed envelope or donate online at www.vakids.org.

An Honorary Steering Committee for VOICES FOR CHANGE, comprised of civic and government leaders, has been assembled to help plan and implement the event. The following is a list of the Honorary Steering Committee members:

Anne Holton, First Lady of Virginia, Steering Committee Chairwoman

Adriana Trigiani, Best-selling Author of the Big Stone Gap trilogy

The Hon. William H. Fralin, Jr., Virginia House of Delegates

The Hon. Phillip A. Hamilton, Virginia House of Delegates

The Hon. Janet D. Howell, Senate of Virginia

The Hon. Terry G. Kilgore, Virginia House of Delegates

The Hon. William C. Mims, Chief Deputy Attorney General

The Hon. Patricia S. Ticer, Senate of Virginia

The Hon. Jeion A. Ward, Virginia House of Delegates

Stacy Hawkins Adams, Author, Speaker and Freelance Journalist

Ralph F. Boyd, Jr., Chairman and CEO, Freddie Mac Foundation

Robin Foster, MD, Director of Pediatric Emergency Services, VCU Health Systems

George H. Hettrick, Esq., Hunton and Williams

Iris E. Holliday, Senior External Affairs Manager, Dominion

Jo Kennedy, President and CEO, Visual Arts Center of Richmond

Kyle Leftwich Banning, Esq., Marks and Harrison

Lisa Mathey, President, FACES of Virginia Families

Samantha Wheeler Marrs, Assistant Vice President and Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations, Virginia Commonwealth University

Patty Nicholas, Community Volunteer

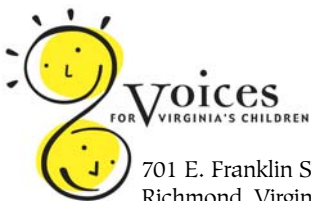
John Oakey, Esq., McGuireWoods

Renette Oklewicz, Senior Manager, Freddie Mac Foundation

Pamela J. Royal, MD, President, Royal Dermatology and Aesthetic Skin Care, Inc.

Ann Rust, Virginia Commission for the Arts and the Arts Council of Fairfax County

Rob Ukrop, Motivational Speaker and Soccer Coach



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