



**ARKANSAS  
ADVOCATES  
FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

# ANNUAL REPORT

# 2006



# Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families

## 2006 Board of Directors

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Director of Community Health, Baptist Health  
Little Rock

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Owner, J.A. Riggs Tractor Co.  
Little Rock

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Retired Pediatrician  
Little Rock

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Little Rock

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Springdale School District  
Springdale

## Letter from the Executive Director...

The past year was an exciting one for the staff and board of AACF. Our work led to an important victory for low income families -- raising the state minimum wage to \$6.25 an hour. Our work also helped set the stage for increasing funding by \$40 million for quality pre-k for at-risk children during the 2007 legislative session and launching a new initiative to reform the children's mental health system.

AACF continued to conduct important research and advocacy work in a number of policy areas, including afterschool and summer programs, children's health care, quality pre-school education, predatory payday lending, federal budget and tax issues, and state tax issues. In addition to our ongoing priorities, we launched new initiatives such as researching the impact of substance abuse on the child welfare system and conducting outreach to promote greater utilization of the federal earned income tax credit. Internally, we began new initiatives in outreach/communications and fundraising/development.

The staff and board of AACF want to thank you for all the confidence and trust you have shown in our efforts to improve the lives of Arkansas children and their families. The progress we have made would not be possible without your support. We are especially thankful for our many coalition and community partners who work together to improve public policy, national partners who help provide research and technical assistance, volunteers who give so freely of their time, and foundations, corporations, and individuals who provide financial support. We were fortunate to have Sandra Brown serve as our 2006 Board President. Ms. Brown has been a strong advocate of children's health care, child obesity, and nutrition.

While major progress was made on several fronts, much more needs to be done to improve the lives of children and families in Arkansas. We need to make greater progress in our efforts to reduce the high cost of being poor through tax reform and the elimination of predatory payday lending practices, and three major overlapping systems of children's services – child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice – are in dire need of major reform. Access to children's health care coverage also needs to be expanded to cover more children, and we must continue our efforts to fight child obesity and improve coordinated school health services.

Working together, we can make a difference in the lives of current and future generations by ensuring that every child and family has the resources and opportunities to lead healthy and productive lives and realize their full potential.



Rich Huddleston, Executive Director  
Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families

# 2006 Highlights & Accomplishments

## Helping Families Achieve Economic Self-Sufficiency

No one who works full time should live in poverty, and AACF worked with the Give Arkansas a Raise Now Coalition to help lead to the passage of landmark legislation raising the state minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.25 an hour, a major victory for low-income families. This will provide low-income families more money to help meet basic needs. The legislation was adopted during a specially called legislative session on education reform. Arkansas became the first state among our southern neighbors to adopt a state minimum wage higher than the federal standard. Our research on economic self-sufficiency was used to make the case for raising the minimum wage.



Gov. Huckabee signs minimum wage legislation.

## Reducing the High Cost of Being Poor

Payday lenders take advantage of low-income working families by loaning them money with triple digit interest rates. AACF continued its work with Arkansans Against Abusive Payday Lending to end such predatory lending practices. AACF released several publications in 2006 that

identified alternatives to payday loans, exposed the lack of regulatory oversight, and documented the millions of dollars being drained from the state economy by these illegal practices. Court hearings, regulatory oversight, and a multitude of media work laid the groundwork for a legitimate chance of ending this practice during the 2007 legislative session.

## Expanding Quality Pre-School Education for At-Risk Children

Quality pre-kindergarten helps prepare low-income children for school and increases their changes for success later in life. AACF and the Invest Early Coalition continued its campaign to expand quality pre-k for all at-risk three and four-year olds. During 2004, the Arkansas General Assembly adopted a \$100 million plan to expand quality pre-k for all at-risk three and four year old children. The first \$60 million of that expansion plan was funded during 2004 and 2005. AACF and its partners worked to build public and legislative support to fund the remaining \$40 million of the expansion plan for the 2007 legislative session.

AACF co-released a report with its national partner Pre-K Now entitled “An Economic Analysis of Pre-K in Arkansas,” which showed how quality pre-k is an investment that produces significant savings to the state’s education, child-welfare, and criminal justice systems. An annual publication by the National Institute on Early Education Research (NIERR) that assesses the quality standards of state pre-k programs found Arkansas to have one of the best pre-k programs in our nation. AACF and its pre-k partners conducted numerous public education activities including candidate forums, presentations at

numerous meetings and conferences, local events held by partners, legislative briefings, and the publication of op-eds and letters to the editor. Together, our work has helped build support among the media, general public, and policy-makers to make pre-k available to all families.



Congressman Vic Snyder (D-AR) presents the National Pre-K Champion award to AACF staff in Washington, DC.

## Expanding Afterschool and Summer Programs

Afterschool and summer programs keep children safe while their parents are at work, provide additional learning opportunities, and decrease juvenile crime. Through the Arkansas Out-of-School Network, staffed by AACF, a campaign has been launched for the expansion of quality after school and summer programs. A multitude of organizations, including providers, businesses, parents, educators, and churches, are working together to expand these services in Arkansas. AACF released a report entitled “After School Programs in Arkansas: A Solution Whose Time Has Come” to show the need for such programs. A Governor’s Summit, regional meetings, presentations at conferences, and working with

the Network to define quality standards have been done this year to build momentum for the expansion. Newly-elected Governor Mike Beebe included the issue in his State of the State address and also promised to establish a task force to explore this emerging policy objective.

## Improving the Child Welfare System for Abused and Neglected Children

Children who have been neglected or abused deserve the opportunity to grow-up in a loving, safe, and permanent home so that they can reach their full potential. The majority of maltreatment allegations found to be true involve cases of neglect and can be remedied with the right services. AACF continued to monitor the Arkansas child welfare system and released its second annual report entitled “A Long Road Ahead: An Update on the Child Welfare System.” This report showed that many of the child safety indicators and performance measurements were still poor from the staffing crisis DHHS experienced for family service workers in 2004. Significant improvements still need to be made and the study called for an independent comprehensive assessment of the system. The project resulted in a report entitled “Children Left Behind: A Study of the Arkansas Child Welfare System.”

AACF finished the first year of a two year project studying the impact of crystal methamphetamine on the child welfare system. During the first year AACF compiled data from a variety of sources, conducted focus groups with family service workers and foster parents, and interviewed national experts and local leaders to determine if the impact could be quantified. Even though there were shortcomings in the

data available, it clearly showed the impact of substance abuse on the system and how few services there are available to families for treatment. The project resulted in the report, "Poison, Problem, and Perspective: The Impact of Methamphetamine on Arkansas Child Welfare System."

AACF completed a year long study of 2005 child welfare data to identify disparities in the system based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, and geographic location. The study found children who lived in certain parts of the state were more likely to receive inadequate care than other parts of the state.



AACF's Paul Kelly speaks at a press conference on afterschool programs at Innerscity Futurenet.

## Improving Health Care for Children

Every child should have access to quality and accessible health care. AACF continued to move forward with children's health issues by participating in several health initiatives. AACF's Director of Health Policy chaired the state Child Health Advisory Committee established by the legislature. This committee adopted the Coordinated School Health Model as the best method

for providing access to quality health care and wellness education for children. Through this model, schools are encouraged to provide an environment where organizations can work together to maintain the well-being of children. AACF worked with the Department of Education and Division of Health to implement this model in ten school districts across the state and has sought adoption of the model across the state. AACF has participated in a Pfizer Health Solutions project to reach overweight children and their families and to provide them with intense education and assistance to change behaviors. This project has been incorporated into the Coordinated School Health effort in three school districts in the state.

AACF released a report titled "EPSDT in Arkansas" that examined the Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment program in Arkansas. The report not only pointed out areas of weaknesses, but also suggested activities that could help children access EPSDT screens and treatment. A second report was released concerning the effects of citizenship verification on children and families accessing Medicaid. The report analyzed the requirements of the new federal law and highlighted the potential impacts it may have on access to Medicaid for Arkansas families. AACF was the lead author of a new report, "The State of Children's Health Report." The report was part of a collaborative effort with Arkansas Children's Hospital and several other organizations.

## Improving the Children's Mental Health System

A report by a national consultant firm hired by the state showed Arkansas institutionalizes its children at a much higher rate than other states, spends a tremendous amount of money on men-

tal health services with little accountability, and has no family network to advocate and support families within the system. AACF became a major player in a new Mental Health System of Care Initiative led by the Department of Health and Human Services. As part of this initiative, AACF helped lead an effort to develop a state-wide network to support families with children in the mental health system. This included holding focus groups, bringing together a coalition and working to hold a Children's Mental Health Summit in the state.

## Making the Tax System Fairer for Arkansas Families

AACF continued its efforts to promote a more informed public debate about the need for a more progressive state tax system in which everyone pays their fair share and a heavier burden is not placed upon the backs of low-income working families. We provided timely analysis of state fiscal issues impacting children and families to policymakers, the media, and the public. Our research covered a wide range of state fiscal issues impacting children and families, including: low-income tax relief, state rainy day funds, severance tax, income inequality, and the taxation of internet purchases via the streamlined sales tax agreement. AACF's work on the need for a state earned income tax credit (EITC) received extensive media coverage and helped build public and legislative momentum for low-income tax relief during the 2007 legislative session, such as exempting low-income families from state income taxes.

## Protecting Critical Federal Programs for Families

Federal programs such as Medicaid and food stamps are critical to help meet the basic needs

of low-income families. Our federal work has focused on conducting analysis and educating the public and policymakers about: how federal tax choices would impact the long-term revenue stream for programs in the federal budget; and the potential impacts of federal budget changes on the broad array of programs that serve vulnerable children and families, including the Earned Income Tax Credit, Food Stamps and nutrition program, health care (including Medicaid and SCHIP), child care, and early childhood education programs.



AACF's Ron White (standing right) speaks with volunteers at a tax filing assistance site.

AACF's federal budget work included: the impact of the President's proposed budget on the long-term federal budget and children and families; the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, which was legislation adopted by Congress that has the potential of impacting immigrants in a wide range of areas and also imposing new health care costs on low-income families; the Tax Reconciliation Conference Agreement, which was legislation that provided tax relief to upper-income individuals by extending tax cuts for

capital gains, dividends, and Roth IRA conversions; proposals to cut/eliminate the estate tax; and proposals to give the President line item veto power (which stalled in Congress).

AACF launched an outreach campaign to assist three communities in the Delta to open a tax filing assistance site so that more low-income families would take advantage of the federal earned income tax credit. Working with the IRS and local partners, we launched two new sites in Jefferson and St. Francis counties, and started work on a third site in Ashley County for 2008.

## Shaping Rural Policy through Rural Communities

AACF joined the W.K. Kellogg Foundation national initiative that seeks to engage the grassroots community in rural Arkansas to define the challenges they face, choose the issues important to them, and develop their skills to preserve the unique heritage and the economic viability of rural communities. This is the start of a long term effort that has just begun to shape rural public policy to address the critical challenges facing Arkansas in the years ahead.

## Educating the Public Through Kids Count

AACF once again participated in the release of the National Kids Count Data Book by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, an annual report that tracks changes in the well-being of children in Arkansas and other states. AACF continued effort to use data to educate the public about child well-being by updating the CLIKS data system on AACF's website, which provides downloadable state and local-level data.

The Arkansas Kids Count Coalition, staffed by AACF, continued to be a strong voice for children. In preparation for the 2007 legislative session the coalition produced a candidate's guide defining key children's issues and solutions that could be used when interacting with candidates during their campaigns and after the election. AACF and our Kids Count Coalition partners also continued our efforts to help educate the public and future public officials about the importance of public policies impacting children by holding two advocacy training academies, two regional conferences, and a candidates' forum. The final capstone activity for the year was the Pre-legislative Conference. The newly elected Governor Mike Beebe spoke at the conference.



Roundtable discussion at the Kids Count Pre-Legislative Conference

# Soup Sunday 2006



Pictured left to right: Rich Huddleston, AACF Executive Director; Sandra Brown, AACF Board President; and Marq Golden, AACF Board Member.

Pictured left to right: Anna Kay Williams, Soup Sunday Chair; Donna Cone; and Ellon Cockrill.



# Annual Meeting

John Riggs, AACF Board President- Elect presents Board President Sandra Brown with an award of appreciation.



# 2006 Publications

- The Federal Budget and Arkansas: Programs and Priorities

- Capturing Internet Revenue:

The Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement

- Candidate's Guide: Be Informed...Know what to ask

- The Estate Tax Debate: Truth and Consequences

- How the Federal Estate Tax Affects Arkansas

- Existing Options for Arkansas Consumers:

Avoiding the Payday Loan Debt Trap

- A Long Road Ahead:

An Update of the Arkansas Child Welfare System

- Afterschool Programs in Arkansas:

A Solution Whose Time Has Come

- EPSDT: An Assessment in Arkansas

- Income Inequality in Arkansas:

The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Poorer

- An Economic Analysis of Pre-K in Arkansas

- Saving for Arkansas's Future:

Establishing a State Rainy Day Fund

- The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005:

Effects of Citizenship Verification for Medicaid Eligibility in Arkansas

- Digging Deeper:

Reforming the Arkansas Severance Tax for Working Families

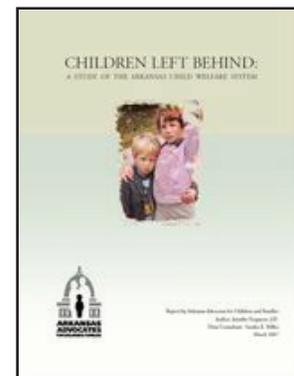
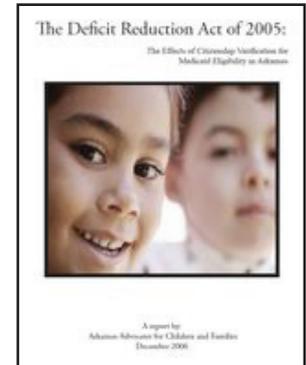
- Posion, Problem, and Perspective:

The Impact of Meth on Arkansas' Children Welfare System

- Children Left Behind:

A Study of the Arkansas Child Welfare System

- The State of Children's Health Report



# 2006 Funders

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Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Arkansas Children's Hospital  
Center on Budget & Policy Priorities  
Fred Darragh Foundation  
Enterprise Corporation of the Delta  
Harvey and Bernice Jones Charitable Trust  
W.K. Kellogg Foundation  
Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger  
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

Munro Foundation  
Pfizer Health Solutions  
Pre-K Now & Pew Charitable Trust  
Public Welfare Foundation  
Winrock Group, Inc.  
Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation  
Stoneman Family Foundation  
Voices for America's Children  
Nathan Dalton Whetstone Endowment

# 2006 AACF Staff

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AACF experienced major growth in 2006 with the addition of four new staff members. They are Nona French, Research and Fiscal Policy Director; Nancy Leonhardt, Development Director; Nathan Pittman, Communications Coordinator; and Ron White, Federal Budget and Tax Outreach Coordinator.

Staff pictured below from left to right are Rhonda Sanders, Director of Health Policy and Legislative Affairs; Jessica Allen, MSW Intern; Nona French; Jennifer Ferguson, Operations and Legal Director; Rich Huddleston, Executive Director; Malisa Morris, Administrative Assistant; Connie Whitfield, Parent and Community Liason; Paul Kelly, Senior Policy Analyst; Diana Stogner, Hendrix College Intern; Nancy Leonhardt; Nathan Pittman; and Ron White.



The mission of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families is to ensure that all children and their families have the resources and opportunities to lead healthy and productive lives and to realize their full potential.



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