

ANNUAL REPORT 2017



2017 AACF PUBLICATIONS

What About the Children? How ACA Repeal Will Affect Kids

Talk, Read, Sing: Helping Our Littlest Learners Become School-Ready

Kids at the Capitol

Child Poverty in Northeast Arkansas: A Snapshot

Brief: Rural Areas Hit Hard by Senate Health Plan

Getting the Best Teachers Where They Are Needed Most

Childhood Screenings: Improving Access to Early Identification, Referrals, and Linkages to Services

Unemployment Insurance Pays Off

State of Working Arkansas 2017

Consistent Coverage Helps Kids Thrive: 20 Years of CHIP

The Effect of Juvenile Justice Reform

Getting Children the Early Screenings They Need



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The year 2017 was an eventful one for AACF! We celebrated 40 years of working to improve the lives of Arkansas kids and families. AACF observed the occasion in October with our first-ever gala, held at Little Rock's Statehouse Convention Center. During the event, we uplifted outstanding moments in AACF's four-decade history. We also celebrated our 10 original founders: Betty Bumpers, the late Dr. Bettye Caldwell, the Honorable Hillary Clinton, Mary Sue Jacobs, Pat Lile, the late Dr. Betty Lowe, Jim Miles, Dorothy Nayles, Judge Olly Neal, and the late Sharon Pallone. As we move forward into the next decade, we'll continue to be the organization our founders intended. We'll keep providing the leadership, research, and advocacy to promote systemic reforms that improve the lives of all Arkansas kids. Read more about AACF's history and see a full timeline of our major victories at Aradvocates.org/timeline.

Another notable event in 2017 was the retirement of our long-time senior policy analyst Paul Kelly, who spent 22 years of his career at AACF. Paul has been a steadfast advocate for children, particularly those in the juvenile justice system. We are thankful for the work Paul has done at AACF and for his passion and dedication to helping the children and families of this state. He will be missed.

This year was also the Regular Session of the 91st General Assembly. While we were concerned about legislation that punishes poor people, there were some good wins for families. The session began with the adoption of Governor Asa Hutchinson's \$50 million low-income tax cut. AACF advocated for a state Earned Income Tax Credit as the cheaper and more effective way to provide tax relief for low-income working families. Yet, we appreciate the Governor's effort to provide relief for low-income Arkansans.

Other wins during the Regular Session included paid maternity leave for state employees; Medicaid expansion approved for another year; a school discipline law designed to keep our youngest kids in the classroom; passage of the Fair Sentencing of Minors Act, which prohibits sentencing youth to life without parole; and an additional \$3 million in the budget for our Arkansas Better Chance pre-K program.

On the national level, we continue to see one of the most divisive political environments in recent history. This is coupled with a continued attack on the programs that many Arkansans depend on. The new tax law passed by Congress mostly benefits the wealthy and corporations, at the expense of low- and middle-income families. It also increases the deficit and sets the stage for future federal budget cuts. These cuts will hit vulnerable Arkansans even harder. We worked most of the year to ensure that our state's delegation understood the importance of renewing the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). This is a major source of funding for the state's ARKids First program.

As we move into the next decade, we will continue to advocate on behalf of Arkansas's most vulnerable children. We have a great staff, a dedicated board, hardworking advocates, and strong partners. Together, we can make kids a top priority in Arkansas.

Sincerely,

Rich Huddleston

Rich Huddleston



2017 HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

AACF'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY

AACF was founded in 1977 by 10 Arkansans who were deeply concerned about the status of children in our state. They believed that Arkansas's children needed an "independent force to provide information and education to parents and citizens about our state's policies toward children and families." Forty years later, we honored their vision with anniversary events in Northwest Arkansas and Little Rock.

On September 28, in Northwest Arkansas, we honored former AACF board member Lynn Donald Carver for her lifetime commitment as a Champion of Children. Over 200 people joined us to celebrate Lynn and her legacy of child advocacy and activism. Held at Mermaids Seafood Restaurant in Fayetteville, the event raised over \$30,000 to support AACF's advocacy work.

In Little Rock, we honored our 10 original founders with a 40th Anniversary Gala at the Statehouse Convention Center on October 12. Over 400 friends and supporters gathered to celebrate our organization, our work, and the founders who made it all possible. This event raised approximately \$120,000 for the organization.

Special thanks go to Arkansas Children's, our 40th Anniversary Year Sponsor. We appreciate their generous support of our events throughout this very exciting year!

HEALTH

Health care was a major concern for many families in 2017. We spent significant time advocating for children and families to keep their coverage at the state and federal levels. We spoke out against proposals from Congress to roll back affordable coverage by repealing the Affordable Care Act (ACA). To our relief, state lawmakers voted to continue to fund the Medicaid Expansion program, which allowed almost 300,000 low-income adults to keep their coverage. However, during a short special legislative session, they proposed new enrollment requirements that would reduce income eligibility to the poverty level and add work requirements.

Arkansas continued to make progress in improving access to coverage for children. For years, child health advocates in the state have sought to improve coverage for immigrant children in Arkansas. Overall, health care coverage rates for immigrant children living in Arkansas are

(from left): Cory Anderson, Executive Vice President of the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, and Jay Barth, Ph.D., AACF Board President, speaking at the 40th Anniversary Gala; Five of AACF's 10 original founders: Judge Oilly Neal, Dorothy Nayles, Pat Lile, Mary Sue Jacobs, and Jim Miles.



low. But coverage rates have been even lower for Marshallese children, who have never qualified for ARKids First, regardless of family income or how long they have lived in the state. After working for more than seven years on this issue, in 2017, we successfully advocated for the state to extend health coverage to children born in the Marshall Islands, along with other immigrant children who are lawfully residing in Arkansas.

We celebrated the 20th Anniversary of ARKids First this year. Because of the continued success of ARKids First, the rate of uninsured children in Arkansas is now at an all-time low of 4 percent. We worked hard to protect these gains by advocating for Congress to renew funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which helps fund ARKids First.

EDUCATION AND AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER PROGRAMS

During the 2017 legislative session, AACF and our partners helped increase funding for the Arkansas Better Chance pre-K program by \$3 million. This was ABC's first permanent increase since fiscal year 2008. But this \$3 million investment still falls far short of what we need to maintain high-quality and improve access for more working families.

AACF also has long advocated for investment in quality afterschool and summer opportunities. The Positive Youth Development Act (PYDA) helps expand these programs statewide. Although legislators approved PYDA in 2011, no funding has ever been appropriated to put the PYDA in place. Due in part to AACF's

continued efforts over the years, AACF and our partners were able to persuade the legislature to appropriate \$4.3 million in poverty funding for a new grant program. The grant will allow school districts to apply for funds for afterschool, pre-K, or tutoring programs.

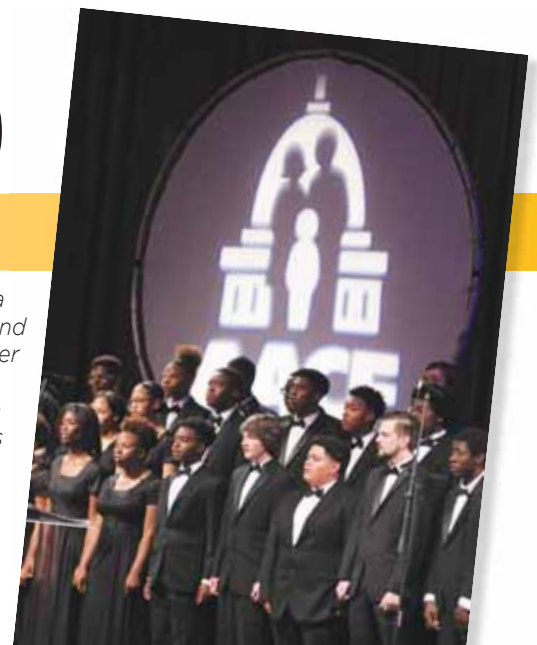
AACF continued our work with the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (AR-GLR). This partnership focuses on reducing chronic school absenteeism, emphasizing the need for early developmental screenings and treatment, and promoting other policies that affect students' ability to read by the end of the third grade. AACF and AR-GLR were excited to see the Right to Read Act and legislation to improve dyslexia screening and interventions signed into law. The Right to Read Act requires elementary and special education teachers to receive training and show competency in the science of teaching reading.

In addition, AACF helped pass legislation to ban out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for K-5 students, unless a student poses harm to himself or others and all other disciplinary measures have failed. This will keep our most vulnerable children in the classroom where they can learn. And it will encourage schools to use more effective, research-based disciplinary methods. AACF also worked with the Arkansas Department of Education to enact legislation that will improve data collection and transparency on how school discipline is administered, as well as disparities in disciplinary actions for racial or ethnic subgroups, low-income students, or students with disabilities.



aacf40

(from left): AACF commissioned a special piece of art to represent and honor its 10 founders. Each founder or family representative received a signed and numbered print; The Parkview High School Lab Singers and Madrigals performing at the Gala.



JUVENILE JUSTICE

We continued to work toward a better juvenile justice system in Arkansas. A better system would reduce incarceration by expanding proven-effective, community-based alternatives. Gov. Hutchinson's Arkansas Youth Justice Reform Board, which AACF serves on, recommended changes to the state's juvenile justice system during the legislative session. Some, but not enough, of the recommendations became law.

Several pieces of legislation should reduce the state's reliance on youth detention. One new law will expand an effective program that provides judges with a risk assessment tool to determine where youthful offenders should be placed, what interventions may be needed, and the risk of re-offending. This tool provides judges the information they need to make better-informed decisions before they impose sentences on delinquent youth. The new legislation also provides funds to improve training and support for juvenile probation officers. Additionally, the DHS Division of Youth Services received an increase of \$1.3 million to potentially expand access to community-based alternatives.

We made some improvements in sentencing minors as well. The Fair Sentencing of Minors Act eliminates life without parole for Arkansas minors. It also creates a process for resentencing people who are currently serving life without parole for crimes they committed as minors.

CHILD WELFARE

The foster care system continues to struggle with the record number of children in its care. During the legislative session, AACF focused its child welfare work on advocating for a much-needed increase in the Division of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) budget. The number of children in the Arkansas foster care system reached an all-time high of 5,200 in 2016. The legislature approved an increase of \$26.7 million for the DCFS budget.

TAX AND BUDGET + ECONOMIC SECURITY

2017 was a big year for tax change in Arkansas. With the passage of the Tax Reform and Relief Act of 2017, the legislature created a Tax Reform and Relief Task Force. The Task Force's end goal is to recommend the next major tax changes in our state. This year's general session was a remarkable one. Even though the push for a state EITC was unsuccessful, it proceeded farther than ever before. It also steered the tax change discussion toward what is best for low-income families in Arkansas. We've simultaneously advocated to protect the state budget and our ability to invest in programs like pre-K that are essential to ensuring the long-term success of all kids and families.



(from left): State Representatives Vivian Flowers (D-Pine Bluff) and Jack Fortner (R-Yellville) reading to pre-K children during the Arkansas Grade-Level Reading Day at the Capitol; Governor Asa Hutchinson signing the resolution to extend ARKids First to Arkansas's lawfully residing immigrant children. Also pictured, from left, are Representatives Robin Lundstrum (R-Springdale) and Clint Penzo (R-Springdale), Senator Lance Eads (R-Springdale), Representative Jeff Williams (R-Springdale), and Ambassador Gerald M. Zackios of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

There were also several highlights for family economic security policy in 2017. AACF helped advocate against, and defeat, many bills that would have made it more difficult to access SNAP benefits (food stamps). Also, our research and advocacy on the importance of paid family leave led to a success. Our hard work on this issue helped get a bill passed that allows state employees to access maternity leave for the first time. This change makes Arkansas a leader in the region. Plus, it is an important first step toward expanding paid leave to more Arkansas families.

FEDERAL ADVOCACY

In 2017, we found ourselves spending a lot more time on federal advocacy. Federal lawmakers faced reauthorizing the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), repealing the Affordable Care Act, overhauling the tax code, and proposing cuts to safety net programs. AACF worked with partners and other advocates to educate members of our congressional delegation about the impact their decisions

would have on Arkansans, especially our children. We held tele-townhall meetings, presented at community events, and met with members of the delegation. With continued talks by congressional leaders to cut safety net programs for individuals who earn low wages and Congress' failure to reauthorize CHIP, our current pace on federal advocacy may become the new normal.

OUTREACH

In partnership with the Arkansas Kids Count Coalition, we kicked off the year with our Kids Count Day at the Capitol. Two-hundred advocates from around the state convened at the General Assembly. The goal was to encourage legislators to consider how their decisions impact kids. We then co-hosted Arkansas Grade-Level Reading Day at the Capitol, along with the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. Experts spoke about the value of early childhood education for long-term educational success.

After a busy legislative session, we hosted post-legislative conferences around the state.



(clockwise, from far left): AACF Senior Policy Analyst Eleanor Wheeler and Executive Director Rich Huddleston presenting on the Earned Income Tax Credit before the Arkansas Tax Reform and Relief Task Force; Rich Huddleston, Director of Governmental Affairs Tamika Edwards, Governor Asa Hutchinson, Senator Joyce Elliott, and Education Policy Director Ginny Blankenship at the signing of the Right to Read Act; Senior Policy Analyst Paul Kelly at



his retirement party; Rich Huddleston, Amy Rossi, former Governor Mike Huckabee, and Ray Hanley at the filming of the ARKids First 20th Anniversary video.

During these events, experts from AACF and partner organizations updated 200 advocates on how the legislature voted on issues impacting kids. We discussed education, health care, child welfare, juvenile justice, and tax and budget policies.

AACF also launched two new programs aimed at better engaging people on issues affecting kids and families. In our monthly Speak-Up Arkansas! radio show on KABF 88.3, we had many local experts speak. Doctors, legislators, and community leaders discussed a wide range of issues. These included state tax reform, early brain development, and the opioid crisis. We also began a new event series called Action Academy. These events provide practical tips and knowledge on how to be an effective advocate.

With major health care and tax and budget legislation being considered at the federal level, our work took a more national angle this year. We worked with Citizens First Congress to host tele-town halls and in-person, health policy town halls. More than 185 Arkansans participated in these town hall events.

PROGRESS IN NWA

Our Northwest Arkansas office continues to stand up for the children and families who've been left out of the economic boom in the region. Child poverty remains quite high in many

communities. Free- and reduced-lunch rates at some schools are as high as they are in the most impoverished areas of the nation.

Arkansas's children in immigrant families face a tougher economic climb than their counterparts in any other state. Because of this, AACF's only regional office has focused on policy initiatives that could create opportunities for them. That includes advocating for immigrants who moved here as children and have temporary status through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy. It also includes working to ensure that children in immigrant families have health care access. There is a population of Marshallese families and children living in Northwest Arkansas. In 2017, we successfully advocated for the state to extend health coverage to children born in the Marshall Islands, along with other immigrant children who are lawfully residing in Arkansas. Marshallese children had been left out, and AACF had been working for more than seven years to remedy that.

Our work in Northwest Arkansas covers a wide range of AACF's issues. But the Springdale-based office continues to place a special emphasis on improving the public's understanding of the benefits of public investment. From early childhood education to a better foster care system, we're working to show decision makers in the region how sound public policy can create opportunities for all children.



(clockwise, from left): This year marked another record-breaking success for the Little Rock and Northwest Arkansas Soup Sunday events. We raised more than \$280,000! Shown here are Little Rock Soup Sunday co-chairs and sisters Jill Kamps and Jamie Brainard; Dr. Chad Rodgers limbos with the kids;



Rich Huddleston, long-time board member Lynn Carver, NWA Director Laura Kellams, and Jay Barth at an event honoring Carver as a Champion of Children.

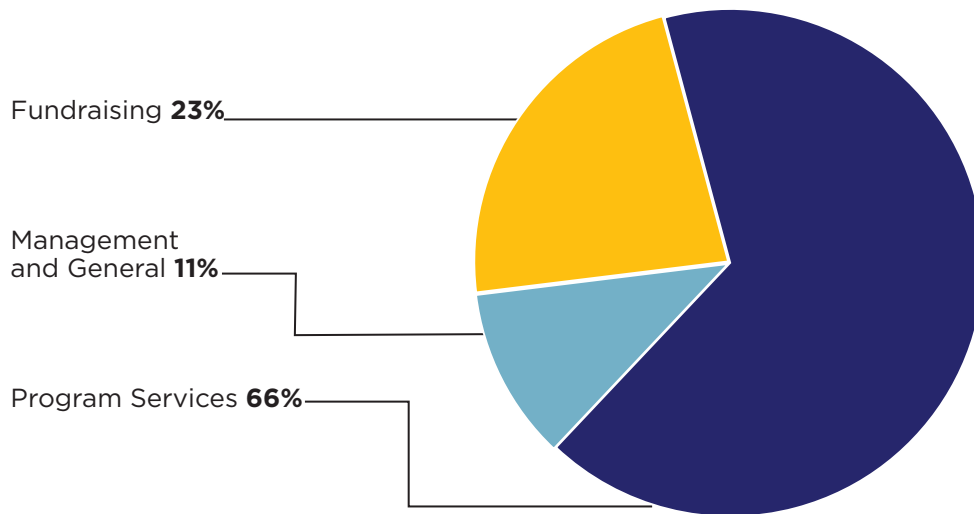


2017 AACF FINANCIAL INFORMATION

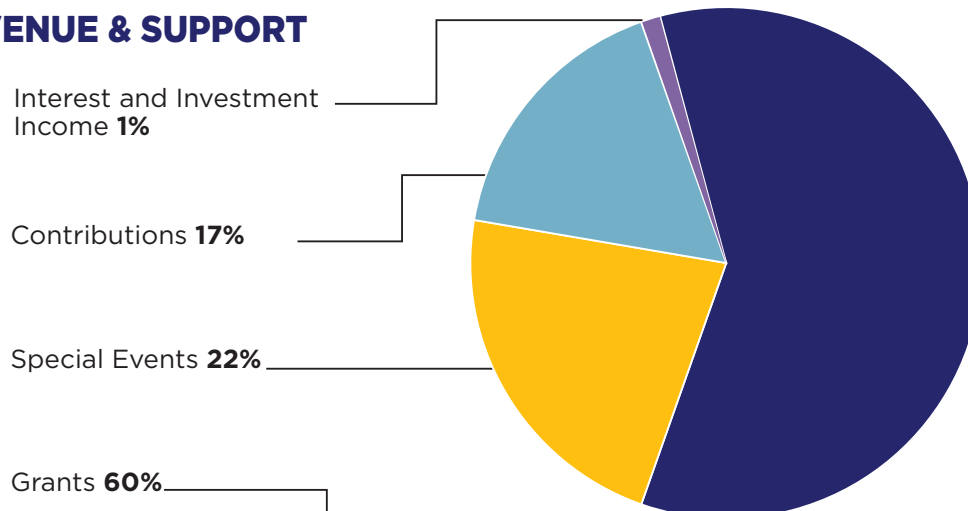
Total Revenue & Support	1,839,904
Total Expenses	1,647,726
Increase in Unrestricted Net Assets.....	192,178
Increase in Temporarily Restricted Net Assets.....	-75,385
Change in Net Assets.....	116,793
Net Assets, Beginning of Year	1,367,386
Net Assets, End of Year	1,484,179

*For the Year Ended December 31, 2017
From audited financials prepared by Thomas and Thomas LLP*

EXPENSES



TOTAL REVENUE & SUPPORT



2017 FUNDERS

Grant Funders (\$5,000 and more)

Alliance for Early Success
Annie E. Casey Foundation
Center on Budget & Policy Priorities
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
David and Lucile Packard Foundation
Earned Income Tax Credit Policy Development Fund
Fred Darragh Foundation
Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
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(from left): Rich Huddleston, Amanda Hoelzeman, Eleanor Wheeler, Kerri Sernel, Tamika Edwards, Marquita Little, Laura Kellams, Ginny Blankenship, Jennifer Ferguson, Rebecca Zimmermann, Christine Hartman, Jose Vazquez

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(from left): AACF Health Policy Director Marquita Little speaking at the ARKids First 20th Anniversary event at the Clinton School of Public Service; Soup Sunday attendees; Todd Ferguson and AACF Deputy Director Jennifer Ferguson at the 40th Anniversary Gala.

