



**ARKANSAS
ADVOCATES**
FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

ANNUAL REPORT 2016



2016 AACF PUBLICATIONS

2016 Voter's Guide

Arkansas Needs Paid Family Leave:
How to Create a Healthier Workforce
and Economy

Arkansas Works on Changes to Health Coverage

A Tax and Budget Blueprint for a Better Arkansas

Child Poverty in Arkansas:
Policy to Change Lives,
Build Stronger Communities

Clearing the Hurdles:
Kids' Health Coverage in 2016

Expanded Health Coverage Works
for Arkansas Families and Our Economy

From Good to Great in Arkansas:
Marvell-Elaine and Prescott

Funding Arkansas Highways (Updated)

Helping Arkansans Build Assets

Helping Your Child Succeed in School:
A Guide for Parents

Healthy for Life: A Guide to Using Your Health
Insurance

Let's Make it Better:

In-Person Assisters' Recommendations
for Improving Health Outreach and Enrollment

Make Every Day Count:

Strategies to Reduce Chronic Absence
in Arkansas Schools

Part 1 of 4: Why Personal Income Tax Cuts
are Bad News

Part 2 of 4: Why Personal Income Tax Cuts
are Bad (For Businesses)

Part 3 of 4: Personal Income Tax Cuts
Don't Lead to Broad Prosperity

Part 4 of 4: Personal Income Tax Cuts
are Bad for Arkansas Kids

Reinforcing the Bridge Out of Poverty:
An Arkansas EITC

Special Education in Arkansas:
Where We Are, Where We Need to Be,
How We Can Improve

The "Elements" of Quality Pre-K



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

What a year 2016 was for AACF! We had not one, but three legislative sessions during the first half of 2016, including the regular fiscal session and two special sessions on health care reform and funding for highways and roads. AACF staff worked diligently to ensure the voices of all children and families were heard on the big issues during those sessions.

It was also a year of great political change for our country, for Arkansas, and for AACF. The November 2016 elections were the most divisive in recent history and brought about political changes that will have major repercussions for our work, for public policy, and the well-being of children and families. At the state level, Republicans solidified their influence in the Arkansas legislature with supermajority margins in both chambers — a development that will dramatically change the dynamics of the legislature, especially on issues like tax cuts and health care. States will have more flexibility to set their own priorities in the years to come, but they will have fewer federal resources to do what needs to be done. This will create challenges for Arkansas, the state's legislature, and for AACF's advocacy work for all children.

In 2016, we positioned ourselves to be more effective advocates in the future. We improved our technology and made strategic changes in communications, outreach, and public

engagement to enhance our ability to educate and engage the public and policymakers. We also developed and deepened relationships with a new crop of legislators — across both sides of the political aisle.

As we enter 2017, we'll continue planning for the future while also celebrating the past. This year marks the 40th anniversary of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. We have big things planned to celebrate our work and to talk about the importance of advocacy in improving the lives of children and families.

We can make Arkansas a great place to live so that all children have what they need to thrive and succeed. But it will not happen unless we make Arkansas's children a top priority, and our state makes critical investments to improve child and family well-being. With your help and your advocacy, I know we can do it.

Sincerely,

Rich Huddleston

Rich Huddleston



(left): AACF Executive Director Rich Huddleston and guests attending one of AACF's 2016 house parties

2016 HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

HEALTH

We reached several important coverage milestones in Arkansas this year. We achieved 95 percent coverage for kids and continued to lead the nation by dropping the number of uninsured adults to 9 percent. AACF worked on several issues to protect these gains, like monitoring enrollment changes in the ARKids First program. We continued our Arkansans for Coverage (AFC) outreach campaign and reached thousands through the AFC website and social media to encourage enrollment. We also shared many family consumer stories through a video series that we released on Facebook and YouTube. Additionally, to help kids and their families navigate the health care system, we produced a guide for families with information on how to use health coverage once enrolled.

In April, Governor Asa Hutchinson convened a special legislative session to determine whether Arkansas would continue to insure low-income adults through our unique Medicaid expansion program. AACF actively lobbied to keep the expansion, providing evidence of the positive impact it has on families and the overall state economy. We also released a report examining the Governor's proposed changes to the program, which he and the Legislature renamed Arkansas Works. AACF called attention to changes that could have negative consequences on families, and some of the more detrimental proposals were left out of the final version. Lawmakers narrowly voted to continue funding the program, ensuring that more than 300,000 Arkansans maintained their health coverage for another year.

(clockwise from right): 2016 marked another record-breaking year for the Little Rock and Northwest Arkansas Soup Sunday events - we raised more than \$240,000! Shown here are Janie Huddleston and board member Tommy Roebuck; Matthew Lewis; and Bar Louie, one of our 2016 Little Rock Soup Sunday participating restaurants.



EDUCATION

Ensuring that children and working families have access to quality pre-K has been one of AACF's top priorities for nearly 20 years. During the 2016 fiscal session, we continued to push for a much-needed funding increase for the state-funded Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program, which has been flat-funded since 2008. While Governor Hutchinson agreed to include a \$3 million increase in his budget this fall, this amount still falls short of the program's urgent needs. AACF has secured a multi-year grant from the Alliance for Early Success to help us lead a bolder, long-term advocacy campaign for quality pre-K with ForwARd Arkansas and the Arkansas Association for Educational Administrators (AAEA) in the 2017 legislative session and beyond.

Meanwhile, AACF completed our work on the Good 2 Great (G2G) Initiative, which aimed to improve access to quality pre-K and outcomes for children from birth to age eight in Marvell, Elaine, and Prescott. While our grant-funded work on G2G may have come to an end in 2016, AACF and our partners hope to provide a model for statewide pre-K policy change.

We continued our work with the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (AR-GLR) to reduce chronic absenteeism in schools and support early literacy through the Talk, Read, Sing Campaign. We presented our "Make Every Day Count" study of chronic absence to the State Board of Education and will continue to work with the state on policies that affect students' ability to read by the end of the third grade.

Our work with the Opportunity to Learn (OTL) campaign focused on ways to increase

parent engagement and improve school discipline. AACF released a parents' guide about practical ways they can become more involved in their own children's education. Our staff will soon release a report on positive alternatives to school discipline that can keep more kids in school and on track to graduate. AACF also concluded its service on the Special Education Legislative Task Force and contributed much of the research and recommendations included in the Task Force's final report and the Joint Education Committee's adequacy study. AACF will continue to champion students with special needs, students from lower-income families, and students who deserve a better opportunity to learn, so that all families and communities can thrive.

AFTER-SCHOOL

AACF also has long advocated for investment in quality after-school and summer opportunities. Although legislators overwhelmingly approved the Positive Youth Development Act (PYDA) in 2011 to help expand these programs statewide, no funding has ever been appropriated to implement the PYDA. In part due to AACF's continued efforts to push for funding over the years, members of the Joint Education Committee recommended adding an additional \$4 million to categorical poverty funding in the state's biennial "adequacy" study, which could be used for matching grants for districts' after-school and summer programs. AACF will continue to work closely with allies such as the Arkansas Out of School Network (AOSN) to secure a permanent stream of funding for these evidence-based programs.



(from left): We had another successful Arkansas Gives Day, too, as AACF raised more than \$100,000; Our Friends of Children Annual Luncheon honored Dr. Chad Rodgers and C.J. Duvall, Jr.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

This year the Governor's Youth Justice Reform Board was the primary venue for all efforts to create meaningful reform in the state's juvenile justice system. AACF was an active member of the board and served as a passionate advocate for reducing the incarceration of youthful offenders who do not pose a serious risk to public safety. Thus, the final recommendations of the board included measures to reduce institutional placement as well as the use of detention centers, and to increase funding for community-based alternatives. The work to implement and fund these recommendations is still ongoing.

CHILD WELFARE

The number of children in the Arkansas foster care system reached an all-time high of 5,200 in 2016. During the fiscal session, AACF helped push for a \$20 million increase in the budget of the Arkansas Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) through blog posts and fact sheets. The \$20 million increase kept Arkansas at the status quo, meaning each caseworker still has 29 cases on average (double the recommended standard). DCFS released a special report in November that included a plan to stabilize the Arkansas child welfare system. AACF continues to make the case for the additional funding requested in that report to hire new caseworkers and fund efforts to keep more children safely at home instead of in foster care.



(clockwise from above): Former Friends of Children honoree Tjuana Byrd and AACF board President Jay Barth; Rich Huddleston, Bailey Perkins, Tamika Edwards, Nancy Dockter, Paul Kelly, Kerri Michael Sernel, and Marquita Little at the Dragon Slayer awards, honoring longtime child advocate Paul Kelly; Two of AACF's founders, Pat Lile and Jim Miles; Hannah Vogler and Melanie Mueller

TAX AND BUDGET + ECONOMIC SECURITY

AACF continues to educate legislators, community leaders, and advocates about the importance of cleaning up our tax code so that we can grow our middle class and afford to make investments that nurture thriving communities. This year we maintained the momentum of a shifting public dialogue around taxes with a steady drumbeat of blogs, publications, and presentations. These efforts were informed by real outcomes from nearby states and a host of empirical economic studies. Carrying this momentum into 2017 set us up for stronger, broader support for family-friendly tax and budget legislation, especially among the business community. Our most significant victory in 2016 was blocking the redirection of billions of future state general revenue dollars away from programs for children and families and toward highways and roads.

In our fight for a better tax code, AACF remained a primary resource for legislators and advocates pushing for a state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Our research and reports on the benefits of EITCs in Arkansas steered the tax conversation toward helping those low-income families who were completely left out of the last two rounds of major tax cuts.



(clockwise from top left): Nicola Edge and Marquita Little; Rich Huddleston speaking at a press conference at the Arkansas State Capitol; Ellie Wheeler and Anna Strong; AACF board member Jim Argue with his granddaughter, Charlotte Stotts

OUTREACH

AACF staff traveled the state this year, bringing advocates together to discuss the policy issues most important to children and families. Nearly 200 advocates in central, west, northeast, and northwest Arkansas participated in Policy Café events. Policy Cafés are participatory mini-conferences featuring small table discussions, each facilitated by a policy expert, about a range of issues, including quality pre-K, juvenile justice, access to after-school and summer programs, child hunger, tax and budget policy, and family economic security. In an effort to more deeply engage women in AACF's advocacy efforts, we co-hosted a Women's Economic Policy Summit in Fayetteville and two house parties – one in Little Rock and one in Fayetteville – to discuss policies that promote not only child well-being, but **greater economic participation and security for women**. These events were tremendously successful, drawing over 150 participants.

In partnership with the Arkansas Kids Count Coalition, the Center for Collaborative Care, and Enroll the Ridge, we held three Pre-Legislative Conferences across the state. Nearly 200 participants took part in the conferences, which featured policy discussions, lively bi-partisan legislative panels, issue-specific breakout sessions, and advocacy skills training. This year, we focused heavily on tax and budget policy, and were fortunate to have been joined by three highly experienced and well-informed keynote speakers: Bernie Koch, Executive Director of the Kansas

Economic Progress Council, in Little Rock; David Blatt, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Policy Institute, in Bentonville; and George Jared of Talk Business and Politics, in Jonesboro.

PROGRESS IN NWA

With population and the economy growing quickly again in Northwest Arkansas, along with the region's political clout, it's more important than ever to have a strong voice for sound public policy in that corner of the state. That's especially true for AACF's work on behalf of the lowest-income children and families, who often are left out of the region's economic prosperity. We worked in 2016 to strengthen our presence in the region, starting with a new Northwest Arkansas Regional Advisory Committee. This group, including members of AACF's statewide board and a diverse group of volunteers from the business and nonprofit community, advises our Northwest Arkansas staff and suggests priorities and strategies that could be beneficial to the organization's work statewide.

While our work in Northwest Arkansas covers a wide range of AACF's issues, the Springdale-based office continues to place a special emphasis on **improving the public's understanding of the benefits of public investment**. We're working in particular to raise regional awareness of the need for high-quality pre-K, immigrant children's access to health care, and the growing need for critical support of our state's foster care system.

(below, from left): AACF board member Lynn Carver, Katy and Wes Garner with their son, Jack, AACF board member Denise Garner with her husband, Dr. Hershey Garner, and AACF board member Rev. Lowell Grisham attending Northwest Arkansas Soup Sunday; Tamika Edwards with her husband, Quincy Edwards II, and children, Quincy Edwards III and Abigail Edwards



(right): Ellie Wheeler giving a presentation on tax and budget at one of our many Policy Café events

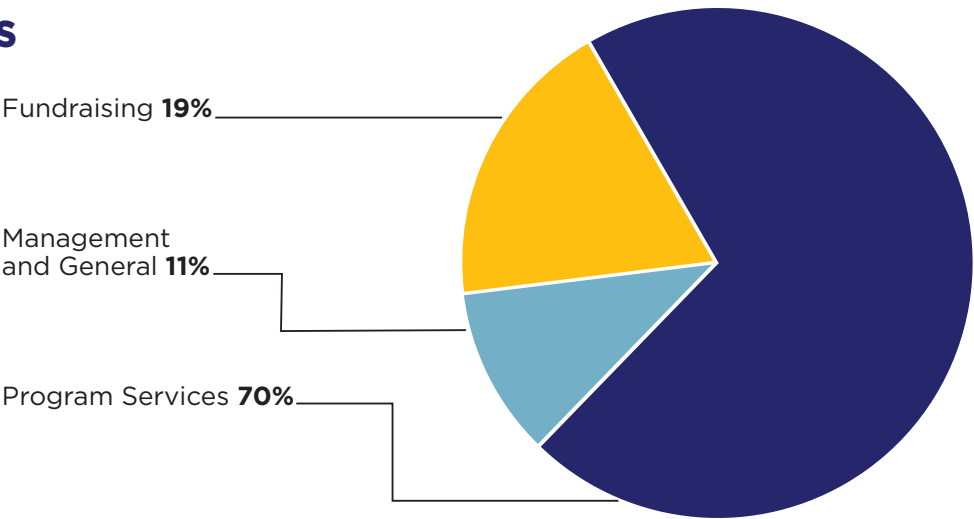


2016 AACF FINANCIAL INFORMATION

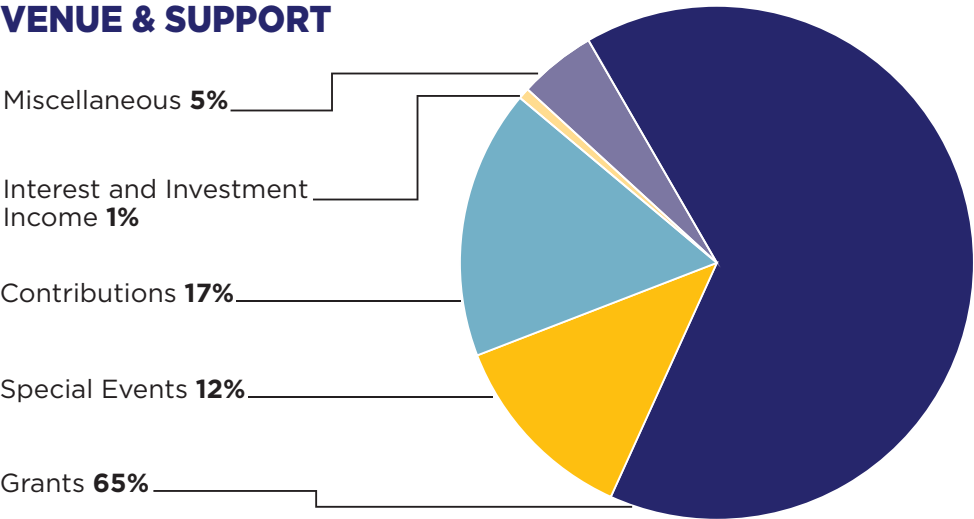
Total Revenue & Support	1,824,779
Total Expenses	1,664,235
Increase in Unrestricted Net Assets.....	160,544
Increase in Temporarily Restricted Net Assets.....	93,114
Change in Net Assets.....	253,658
Net Assets, Beginning of Year	1,113,728
Net Assets, End of Year	1,367,386

For the Year Ended December 31, 2016
 From audited financials prepared by Thomas and Thomas LLP

EXPENSES



TOTAL REVENUE & SUPPORT



2016 FUNDERS

Grant Funders (\$5,000 and more)

Alliance for Early Success
Annie E. Casey Foundation
Arkansas Public Policy Panel
Center on Budget & Policy Priorities
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
David and Lucile Packard Foundation
Fred Darragh Foundation
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Hannah Vogler
Mary Ellen Vogler
Becky and Gary Wheeler
Emily and Jeremiah Wood
Geoffrey Yamauchi

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 Hank Bates, J.D., *Treasurer*
 Gary Wheeler, M.D., *Secretary*
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 Martie North
 Martine Downs Pollard
 Sandra Prater, R.N.
 Tommy Roebuck, D.D.S.
 Aaron Strong, M.D.
 Pastor Dwight Townsend
 Danyelle Walker, J.D.
 Freddy Webb Petett



(standing, from left): Aaron Strong, Tommy Roebuck, Natasha Murray-Norman, Jay Barth, Maricella Garcia, Gary Wheeler, Lowell Grisham, John Miller, Jr. (seated, from left): Shannon Collier-Tenison, Hank Bates, Danyelle Walker, Lynn Donald Carver

AACF 2016 STAFF

Rich Huddleston,
Executive Director
 Jennifer Ferguson,
Deputy Director
 Ginny Blankenship,
Education Policy Director
 Stephen Carnes,
Master of Social Work Intern
 Deanna Clark,
Administrative Director
 Grace Crifasi,
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Laura Kellams,
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 Marquita Little,
Health Policy Director
 Kerri Michael Sernel,
Outreach Director
 Kirsten Sharp,
Master of Social Work Intern
 Mallory Van Dover,
Development Director
 Eleanor Wheeler,
Senior Policy Analyst



(standing, from left): Kirsten Sharp, Christine Hartman, Laura Kellams, Paul Kelly, Eleanor Wheeler, Kerri Michael Sernel, Marquita Little, Tamika Edwards, Ginny Blankenship, Grace Crifasi (seated, from left): Rich Huddleston, Jennifer Ferguson, Deanna Clark, Amanda Hoelzeman

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Learn more at www.aradvocates.org

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*(from left): Antwan Phillips and
Kathy Webb; kids playing limbo
at Little Rock Soup Sunday;
Jennifer Ferguson, AACF board
member Dr. Aaron Strong, and
Mallory Van Dover*

