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November 14 in Little Rock

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Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families

Union Station
1400 W. Markham St., Suite 306
Little Rock, AR 72201
(501) 371-9678
www.aradvocates.org



♥ 🔍 🗒

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aradvocates AACF's Val Habrock got "Dolled up" in support of SB416, which would create the #ImaginationLibrary of Arkansas. The bill passed the Senate Education Committee this morning. We know Arkansas struggles with literacy, and research shows the number of books in the home correlates significantly with kids' reading scores. Dolly Parton's @imaginationlibrary will get more books into little Arkansans' hands. We're sure @dollyparton would approve! #arleg

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Advocacy Matters



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AACF Welcomes Keesa Smith as Executive Director



In February, the staff and board of directors at AACF welcomed Keesa Smith as our new executive director.

In this role, Keesa will help create and execute a vision for our organization that embodies our

legacy of groundbreaking change and improving the lives and well-being of Arkansas's children and families, and reducing racial disparities across the state.

Keesa is only the fifth Executive Director in AACF's 45-year history. The previous directors were Jo Luck, 1978-1979; Don Crary, 1979-1988; Amy Rossi, 1988-2003; and Rich Huddleston, 2004-2022.

Keesa worked for the Arkansas Department of Human Services from 2013 until 2023 as the Deputy Director of Youth and Families. In that role, she oversaw the divisions responsible for the state's child welfare, juvenile justice and early education programs during a time of significant transformation.

Before serving at DHS, she led the Department of Workforce Services' Board of Review, served in various roles for Gov. Mike Beebe, and was a staff attorney for the Centers for Arkansas Legal Services.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Keesa to our team!

A Heartfelt Thanks to our Leadership

The AACF staff offer special thanks to Jennifer Ferguson and Laura Kellams who served as interim co-executive directors between the departure of Rich Huddleston and the beginning tenure of Keesa Smith. Now that Keesa is on board, Jennifer will return as Deputy Director and Laura will return as Northwest Arkansas Director, respectively, though Laura continued to provide legislative advocacy leadership through the 2023 legislative session. We are fortunate to have strong executive staff who are willing and able to step up when necessary.



Jennifer Ferguson, Laura Kellams, Keesa Smith, and Loretta Alexander at Northwest Arkansas Soup Sunday.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

AACF Issue Areas

AACF focuses on key issue areas to help improve child well-being in Arkansas.

Child welfare

Economic security

Early childhood and K-12 education

Health care

Hunger

Immigrant children and families

Juvenile justice

Racial equity

Tax and budget

AACF 2023 Board of Directors

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Maricella Garcia

Race Equity Director for Advocacy

Maricella Garcia joined AACF as the Race Equity Director for Advocacy in April 2021. A graduate of the joint program at the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service and the William H. Bowen School of Law, she holds both Juris Doctorate and Master of Public Service degrees.



Maricella was the inaugural Multicultural Liaison for the City of Little Rock, overseeing the implementation of the City's Municipal ID card program. She previously worked for five years with an advocacy program for Latino families as a program coordinator and for nine years as Director of Catholic Immigration Services – Little Rock. In 2020, due to her work helping residents of Little Rock facing an unprecedented hunger crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Maricella was awarded the Hunger Hero Award from the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance.

The AACF team has been working with Maricella to ensure our work, from communications to policy advocacy, is always done through a racial equity lens.

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DEVELOPMENT NEWS

A Souper way to Support our Work

AACF's Soup Sunday events in Central Arkansas and Northwest Arkansas were both great successes. We had close to 1,000 attendees at each event and lots of new and returning restaurants. If you were able to join us, we hope you enjoyed it. And if we missed you this year, we hope to see you next year.

Congratulations to our Golden Ladle and People's Choice Winners! At Northwest Arkansas Soup Sunday, Atlas won both the Golden Ladle and People's Choice awards. At Central Arkansas Soup Sunday, Trio's won the Golden Ladle award. We appreciate everyone's support of AACF's mission and work, and the restaurants who help us to make these two events so special.



Visit www.flickr.com/photos/aacf to see photos from both 2023 Soup Sunday events.

You Don't Have to be a King to Leave a Legacy



Jill and Tom King know that public policy matters. The Kings have included a generous financial gift to AACF in their estate. Their planned gift ensures that AACF will have resources to continue the work we do on behalf of kids and low-income working families.

neighbors across the state from health care to education to economic security – but there is much more work to be done.”

“We are so grateful for Jill and Tom's gift to Arkansas Advocates,” says Missy Darwin Kincaid, Northwest Arkansas Development Director. “Since they arrived in Northwest Arkansas, they have engaged in our community and found ways to serve from the arts to education and now public policy. They know changing policies takes time and commitment, and this gift ensures our efforts will continue as we work for all Arkansans.”

Thank you to the Kings for their investment!

The Kings shared this about their gift: “We are proud to support Arkansas Advocates, a strategic organization with leaders who are committed to improving the rights, opportunity and well-being of others, especially the most vulnerable. Their track record of providing research and policy solutions for kids and families has led to transformational change improving the lives of our

Help us plan for the future by including a bequest to AACF in your estate plans.

If you would like to add AACF to your estate plan or make a gift through a Donor Advised Fund, please contact Fran or Missy today.

fcarter@aradvocates.org
or mkincaid@aradvocates.org

Donations of all amounts are greatly appreciated!

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