

EVENT NEWS

Soup Sunday: So nice, we host it twice!

Ask anyone. Soup Sunday is one of THE MOST FUN events in Arkansas. The atmosphere is “souper” casual and family-friendly, the food is always delicious, and the cause most important – the future of Arkansas’s kids. We even won the Arkansas Times Best Charity Event, four years in a row!



Northwest Arkansas Soup Sunday is February 1 at the Rogers Convention Center from 4:30 – 7:00 p.m. Our committee is led by Honorary Event Chairs Kayln Chance and Lindsay Rabicoff and by Event Chair Channing Barker. They are creating an event that will include unBOWLievable soups, a rockin’ Kid Zone, and the nicest people in Northwest Arkansas. Soup’s On!

Central Arkansas Soup Sunday is March 1 at the Jack Stephens Center at UA Little Rock from 3:30 – 6:30 p.m. The Steliga family — our first-ever family event

RECOGNITION

National Philanthropy Day

Friends of AACF were recognized in November at National Philanthropy Day celebrations. In Little Rock, Kevin Shalin (of “The Mighty Rib”) was recognized as Outstanding Volunteer Fundraiser.

In Northwest Arkansas, AACF supporters were also recognized: Jody Dilday received the Ernie Lawrence Professional Advisor Award, Ann Rosso received the Outstanding Volunteer Fundraiser Award, and Bob and Becky Alexander were named Outstanding Philanthropists.

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chair — is leading an engaged volunteer committee making SOUPER plans for this year’s event. Our featured chefs will be Jill McDonald and Wendy Schay of The Croissanterie.

Sponsorships and tickets: aradvocates.org/events
Proceeds from both events support AACF’s mission to ensure that all Arkansas children and their families have the resources and opportunities to lead healthy and productive lives.

Want to support Soup Sunday using your Donor Advised Fund? We can help! Call and we’ll provide a quick summary of the tax deductible portion of your sponsorship and the fair market value of your tickets, no matter what level of sponsorship you’re considering.

Donate to Support Advocacy

Visit www.aradvocates.org/donate

Text ADVOCATES to 44834

Make a larger impact with a gift of stock or transfer from your IRA

Donate through a Donor Advised Fund

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

Fran Carter Esther Schroeder
501-454-5014 501-258-6836

DID YOU KNOW?

Although most gifts to Arkansas Advocates come in the form of cash and check, there are other ways to give. You can make a donation of stock or transfer from your IRA with beneficial tax implications. For more information, contact Fran or Esther or your financial advisor.

The year’s not over yet. Make your gift today to support Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families!

Advocacy Matters



IN THIS ISSUE:
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Celebrating Paid Leave for AR Teachers: Jami’s Story

For 12 years, Jami Reed has been a senior English teacher and assistant golf coach at Fayetteville High School. She loves her work — helping students navigate big decisions, watching athletes grow stronger in mind and body, and being part of a school community that prepares young people for life.

But for Jami, being a teacher has also meant making painful tradeoffs. As a mom of three boys — ages 6, 4, and 2 — she’s always had to plan her family life around the school calendar and her bank account. With each of her first three children, she exhausted sick days, relied on disability insurance, or returned to work before she was ready, just to avoid taking unpaid leave.

“It felt like an impossible choice,” she says. “My boys or my students.”

This year is different, thanks to a law advocated for by AACF and passed by the Arkansas Legislature this spring. Act 904 expanded paid maternity leave for public school employees. Jami, with her fourth baby due in

December, will finally be able to stay home, heal, and bond with her new baby without worrying about lost income or sacrificing her role as a teacher.

“For the first time, I won’t have to choose. I get to care for my family and return to my students as a better mother and teacher.”

Jami is proud to work in a district and a state that’s choosing to support teachers and families.

Because when we take care of mothers, we take care of kids.

And when we take care of teachers, we take care of students.



You can help us advocate during the Fiscal Session

Your year-end gift helps us advocate for spending our state’s money where it is most needed — helping Arkansas’s children and families have the resources and opportunities to lead healthy, happy lives and to realize their full potential. Arkansas’s Fiscal Legislative Session will begin in early 2026, and donations from supporters like you are critical to our success at the state Capitol.

Giving Tuesday is Dec. 2!



AACF Issue Areas

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

Child welfare

Democracy and voting rights

Food security

Early childhood and K-12 education

Economic security

Health care

Immigrant children and families

Juvenile justice

Racial equity

Tax and budget

FEDERAL ADVOCACY

Countdown to Cuts

HR1 (the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act”) increases costs for low-income Arkansans by taking away health care coverage and the SNAP benefits they use to buy food for their kids. With a recently launched Countdown to Cuts campaign, we aim to raise awareness about what’s taking place at the federal and state levels, when to expect major changes to go into effect, how to advocate for better policies, and to share important resources for individuals and families.



Go to aradvocates.org/countdown-to-cuts to learn more.

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STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Nicole Carey

Education Policy Director



After working in the child welfare field for close to a decade, Nicole joined AACF as Education Policy Director in November 2024. Her prior experience includes advocating for the best interest of the child through directly representing clients — both on the government agency side and with children and youth in foster care. Nicole’s work experiences confirmed for her that focusing on the child’s best interest requires valuing the family as a whole, and families do best when they have the supports they need to thrive.

Nicole earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville and a law degree from the William H. Bowen School of Law at UA Little Rock. She and her husband, Richard, live with their daughters and two rescue pups, Scooter and Peppadew, in Little Rock.

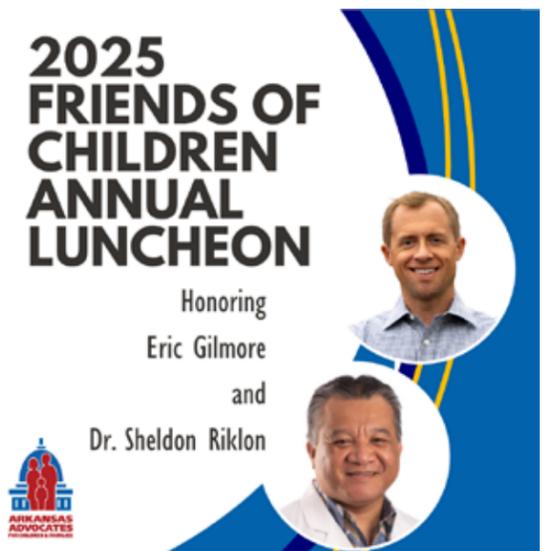
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2025 Friends of Children

Celebrating child advocates

Our 2025 Friends of Children Annual Luncheon was a wonderful success! We are always humbled by the show of support for our work. This year we honored Eric Gilmore and Dr. Sheldon Riklon for their work on behalf of our state’s children and families.

Eric Gilmore is the Founder and CEO of Immerse Arkansas, a nonprofit serving more than 500 youth each year, building a reliable pathway to healing available to youth from crisis across the state. Dr. Sheldon Riklon, a native Marshallese physician, is a Professor at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences and a family physician at Community Clinic, which works with a large patient population of Marshallese and other underserved populations in Northwest Arkansas.



Go to www.youtube.com/aradvocates to watch the honoree videos.

Luncheon Photos

For more AACF event photos, visit flickr.com/photos/aacf.



Top: AACF Staff; Right: Board president Xochitl Delgado Solorzano



Top: Executive Director Keesa Smith Brantley with Dr. Sheldon Riklon (left) and Eric Gilmore (right)



Past board member Danyelle Walker (center) with Rosalyn Middleton (left) and Brenda Stallings (right)



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