

## RAISING THE VOLUME FOR CHILDREN

A MESSAGE FROM VOICES PRESIDENT,  
TAMARA LUCAS COPELAND



Tamara Lucas Copeland

**2004** was a difficult year for children and families. Social programs that have met the needs of the nation's most vulnerable were threatened. The programs in place across the country to ensure that children are ready to learn, ready to succeed, and able to thrive were jeopardized by the ballooning federal deficit, state fiscal crises and tax cuts. In this environment, voices for children were desperately needed.

Voices for America's Children equipped its members with critical tools to speak out for our youngest citizens. The country's investments in children were in danger of disappearing. Programs were saved by the work of Voices' members state by state, but these efforts – while laudatory – are only stopgaps if the country doesn't make a commitment to children.

This year, Voices for America's Children made a commitment to not only work at the state and national levels on behalf of children, but to lead a nationwide campaign to raise vital issues. We hope this campaign gives children's issues more visibility and therefore demands attention in a way that will change how our country's citizens view children. By using our collective power, we can empower citizen leaders from across our country to stand up and act on behalf of children. We are the only group poised to take this leadership role and capable of acting. Besides working for children on Capitol Hill, Voices is working in statehouses and city halls across the nation. We have an unparalleled breadth of membership. We are in 45 states, armed with a cadre of advocates that come from the networks that our members have established, nurtured and grown. We can amplify critical issues. We can turn an assembly of voices into a focused movement for children, and our voices can lead a choir for children. We can. We must and we will.

*"By using our collective power, we can empower citizen leaders from across our country to stand up and act on behalf of children."*

## VOICES' 2004 ACHIEVEMENTS

Voices for America's Children made significant strides in 2004. We turned up the volume on children's issues in this country by making gains in the following areas.

### AT THE STATE LEVEL: STRENGTHENING VOICES

Voices for America's Children continued in its role as the de facto "Child Advocacy Academy" for the child advocacy community, ensuring that advocates had the most current and reliable information and that the skills were honed to be strong voices for children.

### LEARNING TOOLS: DEVELOPED FOR OUR MEMBERS

**Child Advocacy 101** We launched the first online seminar to train individuals new to the child advocacy field. This eSeminar puts child advocacy tools at advocates' fingertips, reaching them where they are and when they need them.

**Advocacy/Policy Seminars** We created learning environments for Voices' members to learn from each other and to have discussions with the top thinkers on:

- Health
- Pre-kindergarten for all (a new term in place of universal pre-K)
- A wide-range of infant and toddler issues, from infant mental health to access to subsidized child care to extremely vulnerable infants

**Gun Policy Tools** – A series of five fact sheets were produced on consumer product safety issues relating to guns as was an Issue Brief entitled: *Gun Awareness Programs: Do They Really Protect Children?*

### PEER LEARNING: HARVEST IDEAS AND PLANT SEEDS

**Policy and Advocacy Priorities Guide** A state-by-state compendium of Voices' members' legislative priorities and legislative successes is a valuable resource for members to identify who is working on similar issues and discuss effective strategy for their upcoming legislative session.

**Listserve** Voices now hosts 11 such forums on topical and functional subjects, providing easy access for members to have dialogue and pose questions to their colleagues across the country.

**Teleconferencing** We use this audio tool to convey information, receive input, and to connect and exchange ideas with child advocates across the country.

### PUBLICATIONS: PURPOSEFUL PIECES TO AID ADVOCACY

**Child Advocates Making a Difference** This series documents wins for children that occurred because of the work of Voices' members, thereby chronicling the impact of child advocates and offering replicable strategy to other advocates.

**Great Idea** This monthly publication highlights successful efforts of a Voices member organization, and is designed to help others replicate the effort in communications, fundraising, community mobilization, technology, and organizational development.

**Early Learning Left Out** While 85 percent of brain development occurs in the first three years of life, less than 4 percent of public investments on education and development have occurred by that time. This was the primary finding of a Voices report, produced in conjunction with Voices' member The Child and Family Policy Center in Iowa, which provided the most comprehensive picture of the lack of early care investments.

### Foster Care Issue Briefs

Titles on this issue area include:

- *Effective Approaches to Supporting Youth Aging Out of Foster Care*
- *State Approaches to Supporting Kinship Caregivers*
- *Forming Families for Kids: States Act to Speed up Adoptions*
- *Child Welfare Cases with Substance Abuse Factors: A Review of Current Strategies*
- *Promising Practices in Child Welfare: Family Reunification*

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## AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL: ESTABLISHING OUR VOICE

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**Federal Agenda** An overwhelming majority of Voices' members endorsed our first federal agenda. Much of the year was spent developing the infrastructure and the relationships necessary for action.

**First Victory** Voices' federal policy work led to a victory for children nationwide. Because of Voices' advocacy, in collaboration with Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a potential revenue source for states to fund children's programs still exists – taxing Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP).

**Tax and Budget Successes** Voices worked tirelessly to prevent tax cuts from becoming permanent. Although the administration pushed the tax cuts through Congress, Voices made strides on the issue in key swing states: Utah, Arizona, Virginia, and Maine.

**State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) Reauthorization** Voices began to build its strategy to collaborate with other national organizations to ensure the reauthorization of a sound SCHIP program. As this work continues into 2006, we will use the power of our network on this critical issue.

**Champion for Children Awards** – Senator Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) and Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-Arkansas) were the first recipients of Voices' annual award given to national-level leaders who work tirelessly on behalf of America's children.



Senator Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) and Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-Arkansas) accept the 2004 Champion for Children Award from Voices' President Tamara Lucas Copeland.



*"You [Voices for America's Children] have been on the vanguard of every effort to ensure that all children have a chance to reach their fullest potential."*

*Senator Olympia Snowe (R-Maine)  
on accepting the Champion for Children Award  
June 2004*

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## AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL: DEVELOPING OUR VOICES

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**Essential Elements** After completing this Voices-developed organizational development tool, Michigan's Children and Voices for Children of Greater Cleveland sang its praises – citing a tremendous boost to policy and advocacy work by having a smoothly-running organization. A new promotional brochure is available.

**ePractice Series** We launched a series of best practice, online briefings on organizational development issues, including one on the key fundraising issue of "tipping".

**Nonprofit Management** Voices' website has a new home for its nonprofit management information, including the ePractice series and other tools to assist organizations in building their capacity.

*"Essential Elements told us that we are effectively progressing toward our goal. But we still have a lot to do — we learned about the areas we need to focus on to improve our organization."*

*Gina Torielli, Board Chair,  
Michigan's Children*

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**AT THE NATIONAL OFFICE LEVEL:**

**MAKING OUR VOICES HEARD**

**First Communications Director**

In April, we hired our communications director, who has completed a communication audit, developed a strategic communication plan and is building the communication function in preparation for active media relations in 2005.

**Media Outreach** Voices was quoted in publications including: *The New York Times* and *Family Circle* magazine.

**Poverty Data Release** Voices joined with Connect for Kids and the Coalition on Human Needs to respond to the latest Census Bureau poverty statistics, which showed an increase in child poverty for the third consecutive year.

**Merchandising** Voices launched a web-based merchandising program.

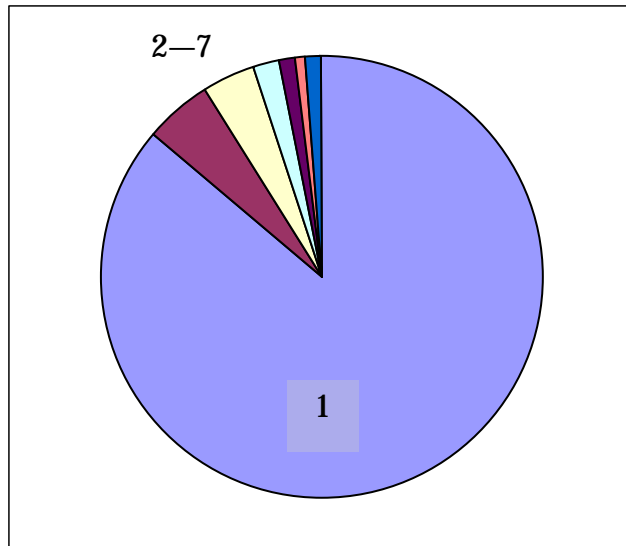
**Report on Congress for GCYF** Voices writes a quarterly column on how Congress is dealing with children’s issues for the Grantmakers for Children, Youth, and Families’ newsletter, which gives its readers a much-needed eye on Congress from a child advocacy perspective.

**Speaking Engagements** Voices staff presented in the following forums: Voter Education Forum in Cleveland; Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments targeted to the national foster care community; National Head Start Association conference; BUILD conference in Chicago; National League of Cities; Kansas Legislative Forum; Georgetown Law School, Healthy Start conference; Voices Children of Greater Cleveland launch; Board and Funders of the Children’s Action Alliance in Arizona; and the Pennsylvania Partnership for Children /Philadelphia Citizens for Youth and Children Better Baby Care seminar.

**Media Room** Reporters now have a place to go for resources on our website.

**Post-Election Analysis** Voices responded within 48 hours to the presidential election with analysis on what a second Bush administration means for children and on how key state ballot initiatives will have an impact on children.

**FUNDING SOURCES: SUPPORTING VOICES**



1	Foundation Grants	86%
2	Membership Fees	5%
3	Investment Income	4%
4	Contributions	2%
5	Conferences	1%
6	Contract Revenue	1%
7	Other	1%

**Financially Supporting Members:  
Health Pass-Through Grants**

Voices members in AZ, NH, NM, OH and TX (Texans Care for Children) received grants via Voices to pursue health policy work in their states.



We look back on 2004 and know we have made strides toward our mission of improving lives for America’s children. Much work remains. We are committed to turning up the volume on efforts to spur even greater action for children in 2005.