The Voters Speak: Make Kids #1

As CAA discussed proposed federal budget cuts and block grants with other advocates and researchers last spring, we wondered how best to communicate the impact of these proposals. An idea came up: let the voters talk. With financial support from the Valley of the Sun United Way, Honeywell, and CAA board members, Children's Action Alliance commissioned a public opinion poll to explore voters' opinions on children's issues. The telephone survey was conducted in June by nationally renowned Democratic pollster Celinda Lake and Republican pollster John Deardorff.

The pollsters, who survey public opinion and plan campaign and issue strategy around the nation, were surprised by the breadth and depth of support for children in Arizona. Deardorff commented, “while Arizona is a very Republican and fiscally conservative state, voters are remarkably supportive of efforts to help children.” Lake explains that “a solid majority of voters think the situation for Arizona’s children has gotten worse in the last five years (61%). This belief unites every subgroup, across party, gender, education and marital status. Furthermore, only 22% of voters predict the situation will improve over the next five years.” Lake and Deardorff report that voters disapprove of the priorities being set in the state legislature, and worry that children are not in the top tier of legislative priorities.

Voters are willing to put their money where their mouth is. When given an opportunity to tell state politicians how to spend their tax dollars, voters strongly indicate a preference for spending the money on children’s programs over lowering taxes or building more prisons. All kinds of voters in Arizona believe the state is not spending enough on children — Republicans and Democrats, women and men, young parents and seniors. Two thirds of voters polled agree the state is spending too little on children. Even 56% of voters who think their state taxes are too high agree that state government is not spending enough on kids.

It is also clear that promoting increased spending for children’s programs can be a real winner for Arizona candidates. The pollsters explain that voters are willing to translate their dissatisfaction with priorities for children’s programs into real votes. Candidates who support increased spending for children could win more votes than they lose in every single political and social group. Lake and Deardorff summarize: “This is a politically disgruntled electorate. On a bipartisan basis, voters believe their elected leaders are not doing a good job on children’s issues.”

The poll results loudly confirm that children are not a special interest, but everybody’s interest. Republicans and Democrats agree that conditions for many Arizona children are deteriorating. In addition, they believe conditions can be improved, and that government should do more to help strengthen Arizona’s families. They call upon their elected leaders to change their priorities, and invest the necessary resources to make children #1. For more information about the poll, please contact Dana Naimark at 266-0707.

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Commentary

In Pursuit of a Just Society

A friend of mine recently sent me a copy of an address given at the 2005 Aspen Institute's Society of Fellows Summer Symposium by Judge William Norris of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Judge Norris was expected to speak about revisiting the Constitution—about its limits, the balanced budget and flag desecration. Instead he talked about poverty, race, and children.

He began his speech from an excerpt from Franklin Roosevelt's State of the Union Message in 1944. In that address, Roosevelt acknowledged that the country had grown strong under our Constitution—rights to life and liberty, but went on to say that these political rights had proven inadequate to the pursuit of happiness because "true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence." Judge Norris writes that we seem to have lost sight of FDR's message of a just society that strives to reconcile the ideals of liberty and equality as we have transformed ourselves into the most economically stratified of all industrialized nations. I agree. Where are we in the pursuit of a just society when the wealthiest 1% of American households owns nearly 40% of the nation's wealth? (Even in Britain, a country with a legacy of inherited wealth, the wealthiest 1% owns only 18% of the country's wealth.) And what about our social fabric, not to mention our future competitive strength, can we justify our country's having a child poverty rate in 1993 more than double that of all other major industrialized countries?

Today Congress is debating how to address this widening gap between the haves and have-nots that threatens to tear apart our society. But rather than confronting the complex reasons for the historic decline in real wages for most Americans, international trade, the job market and the raining of the safety net, the "prevailing wisdom" in Congress today blames the problem on the poor themselves.

Yet, contrary to popular perception, most empirical evidence indicates that the growth in poverty today and the widening gap between the rich and poor is not due to the alarming increase in single-parent households (which has been mainly among the non-poor). Nor is it because American mothers and fathers are not prepared to sacrifice and work hard. Rather, the evidence shows that the growth in poverty is a consequence of far-reaching changes in the economy—changes that hurt both poor and rich families and which particularly hurt our children.

It doesn't have to be this way. A report from the Luxembourg Income Study, sponsored in part by the National Science Foundation, finds that child poverty can be sharply reduced. Indeed, child poverty has been reduced in most of the sixteen industrialized countries studied.

Without a children's safety net, most of these countries would have double-digit child poverty rates—like America's. Instead, countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and France, have managed to lift their children out of poverty through government supports guaranteeing, for example, day care, health care and child support when fathers cannot or will not pay.

All of this, of course, brings us to the great debate of the 90's which is the role of government in helping children and struggling families. As Judge Norris writes, "one way to cast this great debate is to ask whether the New Deal was an object lesson that started this country on a downhill slide to being a social welfare state, or whether it was a historic break with Social Darwinism and the beginning of a new age of social justice."

This past summer Arizonans answered this question in a public opinion poll described in the cover article of this newsletter. Contrary to current political discourse, all voters—Republicans and Democrats, women and men, young parents and seniors—believe the state is not spending enough on the needs of children.

According to the poll, Arizona voters said loud and clear that they are deeply concerned about the condition of our state's children; they recognize government has a responsibility for providing them a safety net; they understand that tomorrow's criminal is today's forgotten child; and they want their elected officials to change their priorities and make the well-being of Arizona's children a top priority even if it means higher taxes or foregoing a tax cut.

Let us all work together in the difficult months ahead to inform our elected officials that Arizonans do not want to return to the days before the New Deal— to a time when hungry children stood in charity and soup lines; when abused and neglected children were treated worse than stray dogs; and when families were broken up and children placed in orphanages, not because they weren't loved, but because their parents were poor.

Change will happen. We must re-examine our values and priorities. However, in the final analysis, if we wish to pursue the ideal of a just society, we must encourage elected officials guided by political ideology and the policies of false choices. Instead, we must embrace the kind of change that is guided by empirical evidence and, most important, by a commitment to nurture children as an investment in the development of caring and economically independent families.

Board Profiles

Mark DeMichelle has made a tremendous contribution to Arizona, both professionally and through extensive community involvement. He is President and Chief Executive Officer of Arizona Public Service Company (APS). Under his leadership in 1993, the utility was awarded its industry's highest honor. The Edison Award, an annual national award recognizing the electric company whose accomplishments contributed the most to the growth and development of the industry. Mark's breadth and depth of community involvement is impressive. The father of five, Mark's passion for children led him to be one of the founding board members of Children's Action Alliance and President of our Board of Directors (1992-93). Mark serves as chairman of the Morrison Institute of Public Policy at ASU, Arizona Arts Stabilization Project, the Governor's Advisory Committee on the Central Arizona Project, as well as leadership positions with the Greater Phoenix Economic Council, Phoenix Community Alliance, and Kids Voting. Mark received the prestigious Phoenix Man of the Year Award in 1992, the 1991 Torch of Liberty Award from the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and the 1995 Humaniitarian Award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

Kay Ekstrom has an impressive history of helping Arizona's children. Twelve years ago, Kay founded Christian Family Care Agency and serves as President/ Director. Before that, she served as Executive Director of Arizona Foundation for Children, a child advocacy organization. In that role she worked with legislators and state agencies on a variety of children's issues and published On Behalf of Arizona's Children, a book identifying areas of need in the delivery of services to Arizona's children.

Kay's commitment to children stemmed from her involvement as a foster parent to children awaiting adoption for the Evangelical Child and Family Agency in Chicago. When she moved to Phoenix 24 years ago, she and her husband Chuck became foster parents for the role of the Secure Economic Security. Out of a concern with the level of services available to foster children, they formed the Arizona Committee of National Action for Foster Children (NAFC).

In that capacity, Kay began lobbying on behalf of children's issues. Kay also helped develop the curriculum for the first foster parent training in Arizona and served as a trainer for many years.

Farewell to a Good Friend, from the staff of CAA

Bill Jamieson, fourth generation Arizonian, is moving with his wife Kenon to North Carolina. He will work for the nonprofit Institute of Servant Leadership helping to provide an alternative to the current extremist, divisive and sometimes vicious debate over how to lift people out of poverty and strengthen struggling families.

As most of our readers know, Bill has been a member of the Board of Directors of Children's Action Alliance since our inception. Most of you also know that for decades he has been one of Arizona's most outspoken activists on behalf of kids, the disadvantaged and the elderly.

We will miss him. Some of us met Bill when he returned to Arizona from Washington, D.C. in the late 1970's as Director of the Department of Economic Security. We remember his optimism, his vision, and his leadership toward improving the lives of Arizona's most vulnerable kids and families.

Some of us remember Bill's struggles with his thriving political consulting firm, balancing the role of the successful business lobbyist with his desire to influence social justice.

And some of us know Bill today, the Archdeacon of the Episcopal Diocese of Arizona, with a passion to do right and the willingness to tell the truth as he sees it.

We are truly saddened by his leaving. Bill is distressed by the "meanness in the air that has become selfish." He longs for the days when conservatives and liberals at the state Capitol could honestly disagree on the array of issues that routinely confront the Legislature. He longs for the days when political adversaries did not demonize their opponents or question their right to exist.

It is hard for us to think of CAA without Bill. It is hard for us to imagine a board meeting without Bill pushing and prodiging us away from politically attractive strategies and instead toward ones that best reflect the values and history of CAA. We say good-bye with sorrow for our loss and joy for Bill and Kenon. We hope they will be back.
Success By 6Breathes New Life

As many CAA newsletter readers will vividly recall, the focal point of the 1994 state legislative session was a landmark bill for children and families called Success By 6. Adopted with a two-year funding commitment, 1996 marks a pivotal year when this policy maker's dream will decide the future of this legislation. Nearly 5,000 children and families will receive prevention programs as a result of this legislation enacted as the "Arizona Child and Family Stability Act" and the "School Improvement Act." More than $29 million will support four exemplary pilot programs for children and families: Health Start, Healthy Families, Family Literacy, and At-Risk Preschool. In the version which passed the legislature funding was only assured for two years.

State Lawmakers will determine fate of Success By 6

The Success By 6 interventions are just beginning to affect the lives of children and families. Funds are allocated by the state legislature to the Department of Health Services for Health Start, to the Department of Economic Security for Healthy Families, and to the Department of Education for Family Literacy and At-Risk Preschool.

It is important to note that state agencies do not deliver Success By 6 services. Rather, they provide funding to programs rooted in local communities, which then provide family-centered support. To achieve the long-term results intended by the original Success By 6 bill, the line items within state agency budgets which now provide funding to these community-based programs must be maintained.

As we stand on the eve of the 1996 legislative session policy makers may choose to make cuts in the bills in the program by helping parents be their child's first educator.

What About Those Kids?

The condition of Arizona's children has markedly worsened since 1985 and is already statewide alarm, a new study by The Annie E. Casey Foundation reveals. The Arizona Kids Count Data Book is a national and state-to-state effort to track the status of children in the United States based on indicators of child well-being, ranks Arizona 45th overall among the 50 States and the District of Columbia.

Among the key findings in the 1995 Data Book:

- Between 1985 and 1992 the rate of Arizona's 11 and 12-year-olds children rose 59% compared to a nationwide increase of 44%, ranking Arizona 50th in the nation in births to unmarried teens.
- Arizona ranks 49th in the high school dropout rate.
- Between 1985 and 1992 the poverty rate for children declined by 1%. In Arizona the poverty rate for children increased by 4% ranking Arizona 30th in the nation on the percentage of children living in poverty.
- Arizona ranks 42nd in the rate of child deaths.
- Nearly 15% of Arizona's children are growing up in homes without fathers. Many of Arizona's fathers do not earn enough money to support a family; more than a third (34%) of all men ages 25-34 earn annual incomes less than the poverty level for a family of four ($14,763).
- The indicator ranking Arizona 50th in the nation in births to unmarried teens is especially disturbing. Studies have shown that teen mothers and their children are much more likely to be poor, to drop out of school, to be victims of child abuse and neglect, and to receive welfare and other children who delay child-bearing.

Do Kids Count in Arizona?

Children's Action Alliance will release a report next month entitled Changing the Odds for Arizona's Youth. Changing the Odds for Arizona's Youth will show that while many of our children are achieving academic success, very well, an ever increasing number are growing up in neighborhoods abandoned by adults and society. They are neglected by parents, have no jobs, gym, libraries, or recreation opportunities, and are plagued with drugs, violence, and pressure to indulge in risky behavior. We have called the report Changing the Odds because we believe that we have no right to ask kids to overcome impossible odds that we adults have created.

As a result of administrative problems, the new allocation system dispenses funds to school districts which provide parents with purchase orders. Parents of eligible children purchase the use of a child abuse hotline at the time of birth. If parents choose to be a part of Healthy Families, a relationship is developed between a community worker and the family. Assistance provided over five years strengthens the family, thereby preventing child abuse or neglect.

The Success By 6 bill is built on three successful Healthy Families pilot programs. Today twelve new teams, a total of 13, are operating in 13 counties throughout Arizona. With the initial $1.1 million appropriation in fiscal year 1994/95, 607 families became part of Healthy Families.

FAMILY LITERACY

Although the Family Literacy program was not the original Success By 6 bill, it complements the other prevention program by helping parents be their child's first educator.

Previsou to the passage of the bill, Family Literacy consisted of two pilot programs in Mesa and Tucson. Since the bill's inception, 972,000 was allocated to the program in fiscal year 1994/95 and $1 million in fiscal year 1995/96.

At Risk Preschool

In 1990, the Arizona Legislature implemented Arizona At-Risk Preschool to assure that children at risk of school failure participate in a high-quality, comprehensive early childhood program.

The Success By 6 bill appropriated $10 million to this program in addition to the existing preschool funding of $2.6 million for fiscal year 1994/95. The goal was to expand the program to at least 3,000 more four-year-old children. An additional $12.6 million was appropriated for fiscal year 1995/96.
CAAA to host "Helping Families Work"
A Forum that will explore strategies to strengthen families

- James J. Renier, Ph.D., is the Retired Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Honeywell, Inc. He currently chairs United Way of America's Mobilization for America's Children Campaign and is the founder of the national Success by 6 program.
- Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Ph.D., is Founder & President of the National Parenting Association and author of When the Rough Breaks: The Cost of Neglecting Our Children.
- Ron Mincy, Ph.D., is an Economist & Program Officer for the Urban Poverty Program of the Ford Foundation and a former analyst for U.S. Department of Labor.

From their unique perspectives as a former CEO of a Fortune 500 company, a noted economist, and a representative of one of our nation's leading philanthropic organizations, these speakers will present current research and address the implications of differing policy choices.

For more information about the conference, please call Children's Action Alliance at 266-0707. The cost of the one-day conference will be $65.

Do Kids Count in Arizona? (Continued from page 3)

Southern Arizona Events
We have all heard the question, "If you know where your children are?" But many working parents have another problem—3:00 P.M. when school is out, they do not know where their children are. They just hope the kids get home safely and do not get into trouble until they get home from work.

To address the need for children to be in safe, supervised and enriching environments, The Southern Arizona Committee has drafted an initiative that would set aside 1% of the general fund of the city of Tucson to provide care for school age children before school, after school, and during school breaks. Both formal polling and informal meetings indicate that more than three quarters of voters would support such a measure. At this writing, the Southern Arizona Committee is looking for a strategy to bring the initiative before the voters in November 1996.

The Southern Arizona Committee is also collaborating with the We Care Coalition, an organization that addresses the problems of the working poor and families in Tucson and Pima County. We Care promotes business leaders, members of city and county government, nonprofit for-profit agencies, and community activists who share a commitment to developing policies in government and in the private sector that will improve the future for our children. Working cooperatively, plans are underway to provide a complete picture of funding for children's programs in Tucson and Pima County, and to provide a clear and unequivocal statement about the community's highest priorities for children born through adolescence. The final product will be recommendations for policy and decision makers as to how to best utilize the resources we already have—and to identify new ones—to provide for our community's children and families.

New Publications Available from Children's Action Alliance
A Citizen's Guide to Fact-Finding and Action in the Juvenile Justice System

This publication empowers citizens to take an active role in shaping the policies that affect their communities.

Handbook on Juvenile Justice in Arizona
The Handbook provides a basic overview of the juvenile justice system, clarifies terminology, and explains current issues and trends in juvenile justice.

Making The Connection: Child Advocacy and Balanced Juvenile Justice Policy
This paper examines the larger context of juvenile justice and offers suggestions for advocating for sound juvenile justice policy.

Changing the Odds for Arizona's Youth
This is a documentary report on the state of Arizona's Adolescents (see review on page 5)

Other Available Publications
The State of Arizona's Children: Action Agenda 1994
Kids Count Factbook: Arizona's Children, 1994
Quiet Crisis: Early Care & Education in Arizona
To obtain these publications, please call CAAA at (602) 266-0707.
Get the fax about our children – Join CAA's Fax Communication Network

CAA has put together a fax communication system, whereby in a matter of minutes, we can deliver timely information on the latest developments which impact Arizona's children and families. By adding your fax number to our growing group of supporters, you will receive updates concerning state and federal policy issues, details on upcoming community forums, public hearings, and more. With this prompt information, you can truly make a difference in the lives of children and families.

If you are already on one of our fax networks, please do not fill out the form.

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Please return this form to:

Children's Action Alliance
4001 North Third Street, Suite 160
Phoenix, Arizona 85012

Questions? Please call Kate McCaffrey at 266-0707.

Children's Action Alliance (CAA), is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research, policy and advocacy organization dedicated to promoting the well-being of all of Arizona’s children and families. Through research, publications, media campaigns, and advocacy, we act as a strong and independent voice for children who cannot speak for themselves. Our goal is to educate Arizonans about the needs of children in order to promote a greater understanding of the high economic and social stake that all Arizonans have in the well-being of our youngest citizens.