Kids are different. Everyone who has ever lived with a teenager knows it. Medical and brain research increasingly reveals that adolescents’ brains are immature – their capacity to make decisions is still developing. And studies of justice programs around the country are showing that children who make wrong decisions respond very well to clear consequences, rehabilitation, and treatment that are designed for youth.

Parts of Arizona’s justice system are still catching up to these realities. SB 1628, which passed this year under the leadership of Senators Karen Johnson and Linda Gray, is a strong step in the right direction for youth who are charged with sex offenses. Thanks to the tireless involvement of many parents and grandparents who saw first-hand the horrible consequences of some of Arizona’s laws – and thanks to statewide support of CAA’s juvenile justice research and advocacy – this new legislation was adopted without a single no vote in the Arizona House or Senate. It improves state policies to give youth cases the individual consideration they need, rather than lumping them into the adult corrections process.

Since 1997, state law has given county attorneys the sole discretion to prosecute many children as adults – children as young as 14 accused of a wide variety of crimes, including non-violent crimes. This has meant that youth who were prosecuted for sexually inappropriate behavior have been thrown into adult jails and put in treatment programs with long-time adult sexual predators. Due to the restrictions on sex offenders, these youth have been cut off from their families, forced to live in homeless shelters, and barred from the very community activities that would help them live a normal, law-abiding life.

SB 1628 will strengthen the justice process to enhance both community safety and youth rehabilitation. The new law requires that youth sex offenders be placed in treatment programs that meet national professional ethics standards and include youth of a similar age and maturity level. The legislation allows the defense to ask the judge in adult criminal court to review certain cases to see whether that case would be better handled in the juvenile justice system. And it allows youth who are on adult probation to ask the court to review their case once a year, bringing together all the parties – prosecutor, victim, offender, probation officer and treatment providers – to determine the best next step for that particular case.

This change adopted by the state legislature and approved by Governor Napolitano will shape our justice system to better lead young offenders to live a normal, law-abiding and productive life.
JUVENILE JUSTICE IS SERVED

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Covering Kids Key to Arizona’s Future

There are countless important issues affecting children in Arizona—everything from AIMs testing to air quality to violence on TV. Of all these issues, children’s health insurance remains a top priority for Children’s Action Alliance. That’s because without health care, children can’t reach any of their dreams—dreams for learning and earning degrees, dreams for teamwork and victory in sports, dreams for creativity in the arts, dreams for preparing for their future careers and families.

The priority of health care was brought home to me a few years ago when Children’s Action Alliance conducted a survey of kindergarten teachers throughout Arizona. The purpose of the survey was to find out from teachers whether students were ready for Kindergarten. Our survey asked a lot of questions about kids knowing the alphabet, knowing how to use a crayon, and being able to get along with other kids. But the number one issue teachers named that prepared children for kindergarten was coming to school healthy and well-nourished.

Thanks to bipartisan leadership at the state and national levels and to the participation of many community partners, Arizona has made some real progress in children’s health. Our KidsCare health insurance now covers more than 60,000 children in working families throughout our state. KidsCare has helped increase our rate of children with health insurance from 75% in 1998 to 85% today. The downside in children’s health care is that 250,000 children remain uninsured. That is more than 3,500 school buses full of kids and one of the highest rates of uninsured kids in the nation. Those kids without insurance can’t get the care they need when they need it to stay healthy, to stay focused in school, and to strive for their future success and ours.

In February, Children’s Action Alliance joined with an energetic group of educators, business leaders, faith-based organizations, health care providers, civic organizations, and seniors to ask our state legislature to make stronger children’s health coverage a priority.

Indeed, during the 2007 legislative session, our lawmakers wrestled with several key decisions that shape children’s health coverage: how much funding was needed for KidsCare and who should qualify; how to reach out to inform more parents about KidsCare and help them enroll; whether to change the funding and policies for Health Care Group—the state-administered health plan for small businesses that covers more than 5,800 children; and how to link more pregnant women with the prenatal care they need for healthy babies. Tough challenges remain in all of these areas.

And these challenges matter for Arizona families at all income levels. Our health care system has gaping holes that any of us could fall through. Today, only half of Arizona’s employers offer health insurance coverage. We all know someone who can’t get insurance through their job. We all know someone who has been slammed by overwhelming medical bills when their health insurance didn’t cover services they needed. We all know someone who faces sky-high health insurance premiums because someone in their family has a chronic illness, like asthma. And we all know someone who can’t get health insurance at all because they already have an illness.

These challenges are tough. But I did a lot of good work with KidsCare, Arizona can step up to fill in the health care holes. Children’s Action Alliance pledges our resources and effort to work together with policymakers and community partners to move toward the day when every child in Arizona has access to health insurance. I hope you will join us.

Dana Wolfe Naimark is President/CEO of Children’s Action Alliance

People Who Care

Jack Gibson is the Director and General Manager of the KUAT Communications Group. During his award-winning career in public broadcasting at stations in Gainesville, New York, Miami, and now Tucson, Jack has succeeded in delivering quality education programs for children of all ages.

"The work that CAA does in our state for children is a perfect complement to the work my colleagues and I do at KUAT. Children are the most important constituents in public broadcasting and, given the role the media plays in the shaping of young minds, we in public broadcasting take our responsibility to young viewers very seriously."

In addition to quality on-air programming, KUAT works to prepare pre-school children for the transition to the classroom through the Ready to Learn preschool initiative, which provides programs and service for pre-schools, parents and caregivers.

Jack’s professional experience in using media to educate and to compel people to move to action is a tremendous asset to CAA and for children throughout the state.

Karen Novachek Receives the Champion for Children Award

Children’s Action Alliance held our Annual Meeting in March at the University Club in Phoenix. This special event is our opportunity to thank our generous supporters and advocates, to provide updates on the organizational health of CAA and the status of our priority issues, and to recognize an outstanding leader as our Champion for Children. This year’s honoree was Karen Novachek, a well-known local advocate who accepted the award with her usual humor, grace and determination for a better future for all Arizonans.

Ms. Novachek closed her acceptance speech with an expression that left a lasting impression on the audience: "When I’m not in my house accepting the things I cannot change, I’m out of my house changing the things I cannot accept.”

As the Director of the Lutheran Advocacy Ministry for nine years, she was a strong presence at the Arizona Legislature, advocating on behalf of social justice issues. Her steadfast advocacy work extended to her service as the Chair of the Arizona Ecumenical Council Commission on Public Policy and the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness.
HOW DID CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FARE IN THE 2007 LEGISLATURE?

The 2007 Legislative Session was marked by a heated divide between the Senate and House leadership over budget proposals and tax cuts. After many closed-door discussions, a final budget was approved by the Legislature and received the Governor's signature in late June. Special thanks to Senate President Tim Bee, Senate Minority Leader Marsha Arberry, and Senate budget negotiators for a bipartisan process that considered children and families. Here are highlights of how the budget helps Arizona kids:

- **Links many more children to health insurance** - Legislators made it clear that they support outreach to help families enroll in KidsCare and Medicaid. The budget includes state funding to complement private dollars to advertise the availability of low-cost health insurance and to work with schools and community groups to help families apply and enroll.

- **Helps foster youth transition to independence** - After 21 years with no change, $1 million was provided to increase the financial support to help children who grow up in foster care transition to independent living. Young people rely on this support to help them pay for rent, utilities, and groceries while they are learning to be independent.

- **Remembers families need child care** - The budget included a 5% increase ($9 million) in child care subsidy funding to help low-income, working parents find affordable care; the budget also continues the three-year phase-in to increase the number of staff to inspect child care centers for health and safety standards.

- **Replaces federal cuts to foster care and child support** - The US Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 cut federal funding to Arizona for foster care and child support enforcement. The Arizona budget added $23 million in state funds to cover these lost federal dollars and keep kids and families protected.

- **Strengthens efforts to keep children safely with their own families** - CPS is working to give families the help they need so that more children can stay safely in their own homes rather than moving to foster care. The new budget fills a $6.9 million shortfall for these efforts.

- **TARO threatens rejected again.** Efforts were launched in the early days of session to pass "Son of TARO" legislation, threatening legislative discretion and vote priorities for education and health care. This effort failed to gain any momentum and never made it beyond one committee vote.

Arizona has the fastest growing child population in the country. This means we face growing expectations on state funds to build and repair schools, pay for more teachers, link more working families with child care and health care, improve air quality, enhance transportation and strengthen families. Where are the resources to invest in these voter priorities? Arizona needs your voice in our budget debates so that kids and families come out winners.

Another Legislative Note

No Action on Payday Loans

Despite competing bills and lots of media attention, the Legislature failed to take action on any of the payday loan bills. Children's Action Alliance advocated for stronger regulation of this booming industry and reductions to the excessive interest rates that can trap families in even greater debt. Many of the stakeholders in this issue are planning to continue discussions throughout the summer so legislation with broad support can be introduced in the future and community partners can do more to link families with alternatives to payday loans.

Children's Action Alliance in the Community...

Helping Border Communities Find Their Strengths

CAA has been traveling the southern part of Arizona to present critical information on the health and well-being of children and families living in communities near the Mexican border. The interactive presentations provide local data on a range of important areas, such as education, home ownership and economic development, and offer an open forum to discuss community challenges and opportunities.

CAA staff Matt Jewett and Jonathon Gonzales gave well-received presentations in Yuma and Somerton to community groups such as Chicanos Por La Causa, United Way, and Yuma Department of Public Health. Jonathon teamed up with CAA staffer Penelope Jacks in Sierra Vista, Douglas and Nogales where they engaged in challenging discussions around border issues. Future workshops will be announced in the CAA Weekly Email - please join us when we visit your community!

Teaching Advocacy Skills

Matt Jewett spoke to several gatherings of Presbyterian Women organizations this spring. He facilitated two workshops on how to be an effective advocate at the Presbyterian Women conference in Fountain Hills, and spoke recently to the women's group at the Valley Presbyterian Church.

Faith-based organizations have a unique and powerful voice as advocates for children and families. The CAA training provided an overview of the legislative process and specific advocacy tools, such as contacting elected officials, writing Letters to the Editor and staying informed on the latest information and research.

Protecting Children from Abuse

Beth Rosenbarg traveled to Flagstaff in May to participate in the Northern Arizona Collaborative Summit. The Summit brought together child welfare advocates, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and Foster Care Review Board volunteers for an intensive two-day workshop for about 150 people. Beth shared information and recommendations about the importance of youth participation in the court proceedings that make decisions about their lives.

Enrolling More Children in Health Care

On April 24th, Director of CAA Southern Arizona, Penelope Jacks, partnered with other community groups and businesses to hold a KidsCare Telethon. More than 30 volunteers from 15 organizations came together to answer phone calls from people wanting to learn if their children qualify for KidsCare health insurance. For 14 hours, volunteers provided an initial eligibility screening for 820 callers. Each caller has since been contacted by community volunteers to continue their application process. This one-day event could lead to almost 1,000 new children getting health care coverage.

Speaking Out for Health Care

CAA President and CEO, Dana Wolfe Naimark, joined AARP, the United Food and Commercial Workers, and the Arizona Rural Health Association to present at a public forum on health care sponsored by the District 17 Democrats. Voters ranging from college students to seniors participated in the lively forum to discuss gaps in Arizona's health care system and possible public policy steps to fill those gaps. Dana shared information about strategies to strengthen Arizona's successful KidsCare program, which provides health insurance to more than 60,000 children through a combination of state and federal funds.
With deep appreciation, Children's Action Alliance thanks all of the donors in 2006 who gave generously in support of our mission. We could not do the work without you.

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Nearing the Goal for Early Childhood Development

In the January newsletter, CAA introduced the Carol Kamin Early Childhood Endowment Fund to support a full-time Director of Early Childhood Policy. This permanent position will play an important role in raising awareness about issues affecting children from infancy to six years old, and will allow CAA to distill the breadth of scientific findings and academic research on early childhood development so our leaders can make sound policy decisions in this growing field.

Join the CAA Team
CAA is currently accepting resumes for a full-time Director of Early Childhood Policy. This position will lead CAA's early childhood efforts, including policy development, research, community education, administrative advocacy and legislative lobbying. For a complete position announcement and details on how to apply, go to the What's New section of the CAA website at www.archildren.org.

With a generous initial contribution of $500,000 from the Ellis Center for Educational Excellence, the Early Childhood Endowment goal is within reach. With subsequent donations of $25,000 from the Diamond Foundation, $10,000 from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona and many individual donations, CAA has more than $626,000 raised toward our $1 million goal.

Yes, add me to the Take Action network so I can get informed and stay active!

Name: 

* Home address: 

City, State, Zip: 

Email: 

*We need your home address so we can match you up to YOUR local elected officials.
Publications Available from Children’s Action Alliance

COMING IN AUGUST! Kids Count 2007 Data Book ranks Arizona compared to other states on ten indicators of conditions for children.

COMING THIS LABOR DAY! Lifting Arizona’s Workforce: A Homegrown Ingredient for Economic Success discusses findings and recommendations on raising the skills and education of Arizona’s workforce to fuel our 21st century economy.

NEW! Enriching Children, Enriching the Nation – by economist Robert Lynch and the Economic Policy Institute, projects state-funded pre-K program in Arizona would pay for itself in state budget savings in 16 years.

From Here to There: A Guide to the Dependency Court for Children and Youth in Foster Care provides easy-to-find answers for youth living in foster care about their rights and the court procedures that will determine their living arrangements.

UPDATED! Health Care Resources for Arizona’s Low Income and Uninsured Families is a resource manual with an easy-to-use index to low-cost health insurance and health services.

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Save the Date! Saturday, October 20, 2007 at 6pm

Don’t miss this year’s Through the Eyes of a Child Celebration of Children, which promises to be one of the best. Children’s Action Alliance is honoring Arizona Attorney General Terry Goddard and R. Thomas Browning, President and CEO of Greater Phoenix Leadership for their outstanding efforts on behalf of children.

This year’s event will feature many new highlights reflecting the theme, “When I Grow Up I Could Be…”

Saturday, October 20, 2007 from 6pm to 9:30pm Scottsdale Resort and Conference Center, 7700 E McCormick Parkway, Scottsdale