Public outcry stops lawmakers . . .
from turning back the clock on child care in Arizona

Finding quality, affordable child care is a growing problem for thousands of Arizona's families. Nearly two-thirds of Arizona's mothers are in the workforce now and over half have children under six years old. They repeatedly report that quality child care is hard to find and often beyond their financial means. And the children are the ones paying the real price.

The demand for quality child care will continue to grow as welfare reform urges parents now at home with their children to enter job training or employment. It is likely that thousands more children will be forced into substandard care.

**Quality Child Care Critical and Elusive**

Mounting research confirms that brain development in small children is dramatically affected by environmental factors — and that influence is long lasting.

Quality child care is focused on promoting the healthy development of the child. Several long-term studies have found that disadvantaged children who experience quality care mature with improved short-term IQs, have higher employment rates as adults, experience higher job satisfaction, have more positive feelings about themselves, require less remedial education, have substantially lower juvenile delinquency rates, have lower teen pregnancy rates, and depend less on public assistance.

But parents often have to settle for care which offers little more than a few hours of baby-sitting. Health, safety, and quality requirements in Arizona are minimal compared to other states, and state monitoring, enforcement, and assistance to child care providers is weak.

Establishing public policy to promote high quality, affordable child care for Arizona families is a priority that deserves greater attention. Yet lawmakers have been going in the opposite direction with proposals that threaten child care safety.

**Arizona Lawmakers Threaten Child Care Protections**

Persuading Arizona's policymakers of the critical importance of child care issues has been a difficult, uphill battle over the years. Although it didn't seem possible, things got worse during the 1996 legislative session.

In what amounted to a “sneak attack,” two pieces of legislation were introduced in the final days of the session, with little or no public input, that would have removed the most basic protections for children in child care.

One measure buried in the state budget slashed nearly $600,000 from the Department of Health Services' child care licensing budget. This would make it even harder for overworked child care specialists to identify and address problems such as poisons within reach of children, large groups of very young children being left unsupervised, and infants not changed or fed for hours. The budget also rolled back annual inspections of child care centers to “random sample” inspections, meaning that many centers could go years without inspections.

Another bill, dubbed the “child abuser protection act,” would have deleted unproven reports of child abuse or neglect in child care centers after 60 days. This would have removed the existing warning system that alerts parents and state officials to a pattern of problems. Experience

*Continued on page 4*
Commentary

Reflections on the 1996 legislative session

Health coverage for children of Arizona's working families; substantive reform of the child protective services and foster care systems; addressing the lack of alternatives to prevent kids from being locked up in our juvenile prisons; complying with a federal consent decree in which the state promised to make improvements to the Department of Juvenile (DJJ) programs; and addressing a state Supreme Court decision that declared the way our state funds education as unconstitutional all took a back seat this year at the legislature — all opportunities lost.

And had it not been for the outrage and hard work of thousands of Arizona citizens across the state, as well as focused media attention, the legislative attempt to reduce the ability of DJJ to license and monitor child care centers and to redefine child abuse making it more difficult to investigate would have happened.

What’s going on in Arizona?

Why at a time when the economy is expanding and state revenues rising is the condition of Arizona’s children worsening?

- Why at a time when Arizona ranks 41st worst in the nation on key indicators of child well-being does a state budget get passed and signed by the governor that actually reduces the chances for child care and juvenile crime prevention?

- Why at a time when Arizona’s births to teens are among the worst in the country do we stick our heads in the sand and do nothing but an ad campaign?

- Why at a time when, over a five-year period, there has been a 170% increase in deaths due to child abuse, a 44% increase in kids in our overwhelmed foster care system, and staffing is 25% below what is needed to help these kids, do our elected officials continue to underfund and tinker around the edges of a system in desperate need of resources and thoughtful long-term attention?

- Why at a time when over 160,000 children of working families have no health care coverage do our elected officials choose to hang onto over $50 million in tobacco tax revenues that were designated by the voters two years ago to be spent for Arizona families who could not afford health care coverage?

- Why at a time when school roofs are literally caving in and walls crumbling, and when the operating expenditures per school child are 26% below the national average, do our elected officials neglect to reform a school funding system that has been declared unconstitutional by the state Supreme Court and deny the need to increase operating funds to keep up with inflation?

- Why, over the past six years, has $800 million been taken out of the state budget for tax cuts whose benefits largely accrue to the state’s most prosperous individuals and businesses, while the foundation helping a growing number of Arizona’s kids and families is collapsing?

- And how come continued funding for Success By 6 required a back-breaking amount of work from so many of you, even then turning out to be a nail biter till the bitter end of session?

- So what is going on in Arizona?

If Arizonans want children to be the yardstick by which we measure the success of our neighborhoods and communities, and nonpartisan polls show they do, how come so many of our elected officials don’t act in accordance with that measure?

- Maybe it’s because as parents and concerned citizens, we need to do a better job making the connection between how our elected officials spend our tax dollars and what that means in the everyday lives of real Arizona kids and families. Maybe it’s because we’ve been worried about appearing “defensive of government” and have not declared clearly enough that government is us; it is not them, some unreachable, uncontrollable other.

- Maybe it’s because we have not demanded from candidates for public office thoughtful responses to critical questions and instead permitted sound bites and slogans as our only measure.

Children’s programs in our state have always relied on a partnership between private charities and state government (that’s us!). Now state government is trying to walk away from its responsibility, often in the name of lowering taxes and family values.

Yet in polls and focus groups, the majority of Arizonans continue to support helping kids grow up safe and healthy with parents and for the future, even over lower taxes. They understand that while property taxes may be lower, kids will not be safer in their neighborhoods and schools; they will not have anything better to do after school and during summers, they will not have a doctor to go to for an ear infection, and they will sit in classrooms with far too many kids.

- Parents are right to worry. Juvenile crime statistics show that the hours before and after school are the danger times for kids. Lonely, bored kids increasingly look to gangs for company and purpose. More and more kids with nothing to do roam our streets. The younger children feel frightened and vulnerable; the older ones are at risk for drugs and crime. There are no adults to supervise or provide guidance.

- Success by Six Children’s Campaign — Southern Arizona Committee has proposed that the Tucson City Council enact an ordinance that responds to this growing emergency. The 1% For Kids ordinance will set aside 1% of Tucson’s general fund — about $26 million — to provide about 4,000 children with a safe, stimulating, supervised environment before and after school and during vacations.

(Neal Kunn)

Neal Kunn brings to the CAA Board of Directors a strong commitment to his community and a long-time professional career. As an attorney, CPA, and certified tax specialist, Neal presently is a director at the law firm of Fenmore Craig.

Neal currently chairs the Arizona Community Foundation Board, where he has been one of the driving forces behind the Foundation’s growth since 1987. In 1994, Neal and his wife Bobbi were honored with The Free of Life Award from the Jewish National Fund. Neal has been instrumental in the growth and maturing of CAA’s development committee, and has lent his expertise to developing an investment policy that will contribute to the future growth of CAA.

He graduated with high honors from the University of Arizona and its law school, and in 1993 received U of A’s Outstanding Alumnus Award. His devotion to family, civic and religious responsibility and volunteerism made him an important force for Arizona’s kids.

Board Profiles

Patricia Montiell Overall

Patti, a native Arizonan, has extensive experience in the field of bilingual education and has been a long-time Tucson community activist. She has worked as an education consultant throughout Mexico as a teacher trainer and is founder of the Consortium for Second Language Instruction.

Patti is a member of the CAA Board of Directors and the Success by 6 Children’s Campaign - Southern Arizona Committee. She also chairs the Tucson “1% For Kids” Committee (see article below).

Since receiving her Ph.D. from Stanford University in 1978, she has dedicated her time and expertise to improving the quality of life for Arizonans. She has been a consultant to the State Board of Education on multicultural guidelines and has served as a consultant to the University of Arizona College of Education.

She has chaired or founded several Hispanic community organizations and authored award-winning Spanish language programs for children. We are fortunate to have Patti working on behalf of Arizona’s children, keeping children at the forefront of the public policy agenda in southern Arizona.

(Tucson Considers Move To Make Kids #1)

It’s 3:00 P.M. Do you know where your children are? The calls of parents cannot answer that question. They work, and cannot find or afford safe child care. Too many children come home from school to empty houses, and parents worry.

Parents are right to worry. Juvenile crime statistics show that the hours before and after school are the danger times for kids. Lonely, bored kids increasingly look to gangs for company and purpose. More and more kids with nothing to do roam our streets. The younger children feel frightened and vulnerable; the older ones are at risk for drugs and crime. There are no adults to supervise or provide guidance.

Without raising taxes, the ordinance will nearly double existing city programs. 1% For Kids will pay for or partly pay for privately operated programs — shaped to the needs of each community and age group.

Can Tucson afford to set aside 1% of the budget for children? Taking care of children is an investment in our quality of life and the city budget. Money invested in supervising youth shows up as savings to the city when demands for juvenile law enforcement and services for pregnant teens go down. Less graffiti means less graffiti abatement. Cutting crime means lower costs and less misery for the entire community.

Children’s Action Alliance believes that 1% For Kids is precisely the kind of public/private partnership that our cities and communities need most. It is based on the financial and social wisdom of prevention practices. Tucson is considering this proposal for the next few weeks. Please add your voice to this effort by calling the City Council Comment Line at (520) 791-4700.

Carol Keenan, Executive Director
Children’s Action Alliance
Stand for Children

Thanks to the many organizations and more than 200 people who participated with us in the “Arizona Stand For Children Rally” at the State Capitol last month. We participated in the national “Stand For Children Day” in Washington, D.C., June 1, representing the commitment of thousands of Arizonans. We are standing together to affirm our collective responsibility to help Arizona’s children grow up healthy, educated, and ready to fulfill their potential. Our voices make a difference.

Public Outcry Continued from Cover

has shown that it often takes multiple reports and investigations of abuse or neglect before an offender is identified and accusations can be proven.

The bill also would have changed the definition of abuse to “wrongful infliction of harm. As a result, injuries to children that are called “accidental” could go uninvestigated. This means that there would be no response to problems resulting from poorly trained workers or unsafe practices.

Public Outcry Causes Legislative Reversals

When legislative reporters, child advocates, and informed citizens got wind of this 11th hour attempt to dismantle basic child care protections, the legislation was catapulted out of secrecy and into full view of the public. Thanks to a series of in-depth articles appearing in the Arizona Republic and other media sources, parents, business and religious leaders, and child care providers deluged state lawmakers with calls and letters voicing their concerns.

On the last day of the session, amendments were sponsored which reinstated approximately $205,000 of the child care licensing budget. Annual inspections of child care centers were saved. But the funds to inspect an additional 500 child care centers in public schools that must be licensed beginning July 1 were eliminated.

Lawmakers also narrowed the language of the “child abuse protection act” to return it to its original purpose: to give private agencies caring for abused or delinquent children the opportunity for due process when their employees are accused of abuse or neglect. Child care centers were dropped from the measure.

Lawmakers Will Revive Dangerous Proposals

Arizona citizens made it clear that they expect lawmakers to provide guarantees for their children’s safety, and that attempts to remove them will not be tolerated. It is likely, though, that the parents’ message will have to be repeated with greater resolve in the near future.

Senator Huppenthal, who sponsored the “random sample” inspections proposal, has stated that he plans to convene a committee this summer to further study the issue. And Representative Bob Burns has stated his intention to revive his proposal to purge records of complaints against child care centers next legislative session.

It is up to us to confront the dogged determination of some lawmakers to turn back the clock on child care in Arizona. The events of this legislative session show that together we can make quality child care a top priority on Arizona’s legislative agenda.

For more information, please contact Irene Jacobs at 266-0707.

Tobacco Tax Proposals Fail

Children’s Action Alliance renewed its efforts in 1996 to secure comprehensive, quality health care coverage for Arizona’s 160,000 uninsured children through House Bill 2047, the “Children First Fund.” The Children First Fund is modeled after a bill introduced in Congress by Senator John McCain in 1992, as well as a successful program operating in Florida which is now providing comprehensive health insurance coverage to 17,000 school children who would otherwise be uninsured. The program in Florida has realized a 50% improvement in coverage of uninsured children in the participating counties, and inappropriate visits to emergency rooms have decreased by 70%.

House Bill 2047 was designed to allow working families, who turn too much to be eligible for AHCCCS and whose employers do not provide dependent coverage, to purchase private health care coverage for their children. Information about the health insurance would be distributed through participating schools, primary care programs, and community health centers.

The Children First Fund exemplifies the spirit and substance of the tobacco tax initiative passed by the voters of Arizona in 1994. That initiative specifically states that 70% of the revenues generated by the tax must be used to provide health care services for low-income people who do not otherwise have health coverage.

Child Health Policy With A Winning Track Record

Throughout the legislative session, the details of Children First were refined to meet the concerns of various legislators and health care providers, and the proposal became stronger and gained more support as it moved through the House of Representatives. In its final form, The Children First Fund was:

- A three-year pilot program to be conducted in Pima County and one rural school district. A total of $20 million in tobacco tax revenues were to be annually allocated to cover approximately 40,000 children.
- Available to children in kindergarten through 12th grade, up to the age of 21.
- A premium-sharing program. Low-income families were to pay part of the cost of the premium ($318 per month per child, depending on income), and the remainder was to be paid with revenues from the tobacco tax.
- Health care coverage for children by contract with private insurance providers. Authorized health maintenance organizations and insurers and AHCCCS plans were to be able to bid to provide coverage.

Bill Falls Victim to Political Maneuvering

The Children First Fund fell to political wrangling. House Bill 2047 received very strong support in the House of Representatives and unprecedented formal endorsement by a diverse group of powerful public and private health care providers, who left behind their traditional competitive relationships to come together in support of this legislation. However, such support was ignored and the bill was never allowed to emerge from the Republican Caucus in the Senate, even after passing out of the Senate Health Committee. Children First became politically tangled with another bill allocating tobacco tax funds. Like Children First, House Bill 2508 proposed a premium sharing pilot program that would give more working families access to health care.

Uninsured Children Left Waiting One More Time

In the final days of the session, all proposals of substance which addressed the needs of the uninsured died. House Bill 2508 was resurrected and passed. However, it was no real victory. The bill had been changed radically and diminished to a study committee. While $20 million of the tobacco tax revenues are temporarily set aside for a premium-sharing plan for uninsured families, a legislative study committee must go back to the legislature in 1997 with another bill in order to receive approval of their plan. If no plan is approved by the legislature in 1997, the entire act is repealed, the tobacco funds remain unspent, and families remain with unmet health insurance needs.

Two worthwhile plans to address the needs of uninsured children and families were presented to the legislature. The available tobacco tax funds could at last have been put to the use approved by the voters. But the legislature chose to do no more than study it for another year, and $55-75 million sits idle while 160,000 children still have no access to health care.

For more information, please contact Susan McCraw Helms at 266-0707.
Success By 6 Survives Close Call

Two years ago children's issues finally made it to the forefront of Arizona's legislative agenda. The 1994 Success By 6 bill, which expanded programs proven to work for children and families, made it through a dramatic maze of political land mines -- thanks to the thousands of businesses, organizations, citizens, and media leaders who took a loud and relentless stand for the most vulnerable of Arizona's children. Although the 1994 legislation mandated a four-year project, it was only funded for two years at the time it was passed. With preliminary positive evaluations by the State Auditor General and outcome evaluations designed for the next two years, it would have made sense to allocate the funds for the next two years of Success By 6 without argument. This was not the case.

Despite the fact that the Governor requested continued funding in the budget he submitted to the legislature, the initial legislative budget proposal eliminated funding for all three Success By 6 programs.

House Speaker Mark Killian introduced House Bill 2277 to restore funding. It met some political roadblocks in committee, but the Speaker was able to obtain sufficient votes to subdue the opponents' tactics. After sailing through the House, the bill faced a major hurdle as Senators debated which bills deserved the remaining unallocated tax dollars.

After an enormous amount of effort required by thousands of supporters all across the state and a nail-biting finish, the following funds were allocated over the next two years:

- $3 million a year for Healthy Families, an intensive child abuse and neglect prevention program.
- $4.1 million a year for Health Start, a neighbor-to-neighbor approach to assist pregnant women to obtain prenatal care and help ensure that their babies are immunized.
- $1 million a year for Family Literacy, designed to provide basic skills to parents so they can be their child's first teacher.

As much as we hoped to make progress this year, our legislative challenge was to stand our ground and not lose anything that had been gained for children in previous years. It took hundreds of your letters and calls to persuade our lawmakers to continue just marching in place. For more information about Success By 6, please contact Irene Jacobs at 266-0707.

"State of Arizona's Children 1996" Reports on Threats to Kids

The State of Arizona's Children 1996 is hot off the press and available to anyone who wants to know more about Arizona's children. The third comprehensive look at indicators of child well-being in Arizona, it presents an informative picture of the trends which have been occurring since 1990.

Our efforts at prenatal care, infant immunizations, and comprehensive preschool programs for at-risk children are paying off. The rate of women receiving prenatal care was up 20%. The proportion of two-year-old children who were fully immunized against childhood diseases improved by 22%. And the number of children with the opportunity to attend preschool programs rose by 39%.

That's where the celebration stops however: the child death rate rose 10%, the high school dropout rate was up to 14%, the birth rate to girls younger than 18 was up 8%. The number of children 16 and younger without health insurance climbed to more than 160,000 and the buying power of state child care subsidies dropped 18% in the past 6 years.

The growing problem of violence is also particularly evident in the statistics. Arizona's children are increasingly both victims and perpetrators of violence. Guns injured and killed many more children in 1994 than in 1990. The rate of juvenile arrests for violent crimes was up 6%. The teen homicide rate soared by 147% and the teen suicide rate rose 40.7%.

Special Report on Child Abuse and Neglect

This year's State of Arizona's Children includes a special report on child protective services and foster care in Arizona, revealing research and analyses never before viewed as a whole. It is information that every citizen who cares about our children should know about.

The number of children living in foster care rose by 44% between 1990 and 1995 -- much faster than the increase in the child population. This dramatic growth in foster care (with no corresponding growth in resources) has had a crushing effect on the system. Shelter options, group homes, foster families, and DES staff workloads are all bursting at the seams.

To cope with the overwhelming workload, the CPS system screens out situations where families really need help. There are some striking examples of cases that would never have been investigated if the people reporting them didn't make repeated efforts with the intake office at DES. Even families who do get into the CPS system don't necessarily get help. In approximately two-thirds of the cases where investigators document abuse or neglect, the cases are closed immediately after investigation -- no foster care, no counseling, no continued monitoring of the family.

Thanks to the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the KIDS COUNT Initiative, Children's Action Alliance has been able to build a highly respected research and analysis capacity. It is our belief that the surest way we can turn things around for children in our state is to document the reality of their conditions so that eventually, successful efforts will be expanded and problems will be confronted. We invite you to use the State of Arizona's Children to find a positive way to act on your shock, fear, and hope for our children's future. For more information call Dana Nairnark at 266-0707.

Publications Available from Children's Action Alliance

State of Arizona's Children 1996
Arizona Stand For Children Campaign: A Voter's Guide
Changing the Odds for Arizona's Youth
Quiet Crisis: Early Care & Education in Arizona
A Citizen's Guide to Fact Finding and Action in the Juvenile Justice System
Handbook on Juvenile Justice in Arizona

To obtain these publications, please call CAA at (602) 266-0707.
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If you would like more information, call Children’s Action Alliance at 266-0707.

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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.

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