



Because powerless children need powerful voices



# 2008 Annual Report

VOICES is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.



## Our Mission

VOICES for Alabama's Children seeks to ensure the well-being of Alabama's children through research, public awareness and advocacy. Our vision is that all Alabama children will be safe, healthy, educated and secure in order to reach their potential.

To accomplish this mission, VOICES:

- ▶ Researches current child well-being. VOICES' research becomes the template for knowing what we need to address to help our children.
- ▶ Creates public awareness that helps citizens understand how important the well-being of all Alabama children is to our state and what's at stake if we don't ensure it.
- ▶ Represents children at the Alabama Legislature. VOICES works for child-friendly public policy that will result in safer, healthier, better educated and more economically secure children. These children will be our work force, consumers, and community leaders of the future.

## VOICES 2008 Board of Directors

### Officers:

#### President,

**Dr. Marsha Raulerson**

Pediatrician

Lower Alabama Pediatrics  
Brewton, AL

#### Vice-President,

**Ed Gentle, III**

Attorney

Gentle, Pickens & Turner  
Birmingham, AL

#### Secretary,

**Torrey Smitherman**

Executive Director

EyeSight Foundation of Alabama  
Birmingham, AL

#### Treasurer, Blake Brazeal

President

Summit Asset Management  
Montgomery, AL

### Board Members:

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Community Volunteer

Hampton Cove, AL

#### H. Hampton Boles

Attorney

Balch & Bingham  
Birmingham, AL

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Chairman of the Board

Mayer Electric Supply, Inc.  
Birmingham, AL

#### Kelvin Howard

Attorney

Thomas, Means, Gillis, Seay, P.C.  
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Vice President Public Relations

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#### Wendy McEarchern

Executive Director

Early Childhood Directions

Mobile, AL

#### Dr. Cheryl Outland

Pediatrician

Partners in Pediatrics  
Montgomery, AL

#### Bernard Sewell

Head Tennis Coach

Alabama State University  
Montgomery, AL

#### Mary Dixon Torbert

Attorney

Montgomery, AL

#### Rev. Lawrence Wofford

President

The Democracy Project  
Selma, AL

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## A Powerful VOICE for Powerless Children

VOICES for Alabama's Children is the only statewide multi-issue child advocacy organization in Alabama researching, communicating, and advocating for the needs of Alabama's children. Increasingly, legislators, the Governor's administration and others have looked to VOICES on various policy issues including early education and child health and safety.

Over the course of 2008, VOICES engaged in advocacy work that influenced and shaped key policies for our state's children. These activities included the following:

- ▶ Providing leadership in the Alabama School Readiness Alliance (ASRA). The only partner with a lobbying expertise, VOICES moved the organization forward and took the lead in an effort to increase the state appropriation to the Office of School Readiness, and doubled funding to increase the number of children who have access to state supported voluntary high-quality pre-k. During the effort to increase funding, VOICES demonstrated its ability to work with organizations of differing political views by garnering assistance from both the Alabama Education Association and the Business Council of Alabama.
- ▶ Working alongside child advocates, law enforcement, educators and members of the judicial system to pass the new juvenile code. The code will provide more appropriate treatment for non-violent youth and will identify and address underlying root causes of the delinquent behavior that may exist, make better use of limited state and local funds, and ultimately make our communities safer.
- ▶ Joining a national effort to co-host a southeast regional meeting of the National Equal Voice initiative to develop and unveil a national platform for America's families, crafted by families across the country through participation in local townhall meetings. Participants were inspired to improve the lives of families and children by increasing opportunities to succeed by changing community, state and national policies.
- ▶ Organizing a listening session in rural Wilcox county as an extension of the Equal Voice initiative. The event provided an opportunity for local families to develop an agenda to address priorities in their community. VOICES assisted the families by connecting them with resources they may not have otherwise had access to or of which they were unaware.



*Executive Director Linda Tilly speaks at 2008 Step Up for Kids rally on the steps of the State Capitol.*

- ▶ Stepping up for kids by coordinating an October rally on the steps of the Alabama Capitol to call attention to children's issues during the 2008 campaign season. The national non-profit organization Every Child Matters envisioned the rally to be hosted concurrently in each state to ensure that political leaders remembered the importance of taking care of our children today. VOICES organized the Alabama event which brought together over 30 organizations to highlight critical children's issues.
- ▶ Co-hosting a workshop with Greater Birmingham Ministries presented by the Washington, DC based organization, Alliance for Justice. Representatives of 16 Alabama organizations attended the session designed to help advocates and non-profits better understand regulations for lobbying. The workshop taught lobbying for 501(c)(3) organizations with an emphasis on lobbying at the Alabama State Legislature. Advocates were empowered by understanding how non-profits can lobby without affecting their tax-exempt status.



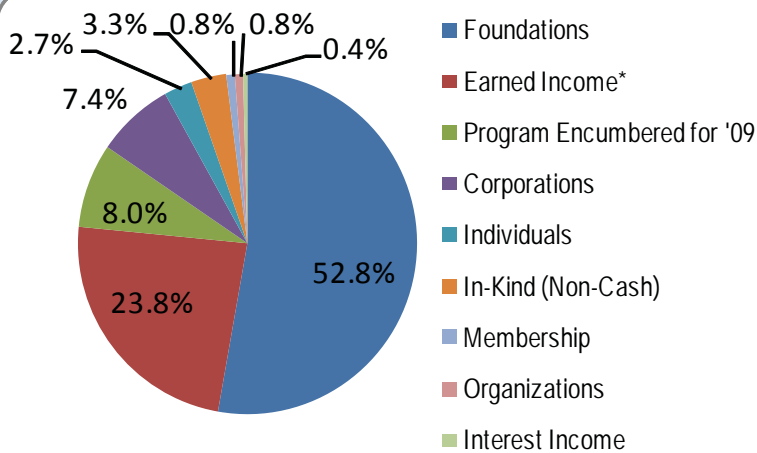
## 2008 Financial Information

### Revenue

Foundations	\$490,820.00	52.8%
Earned Income*	\$221,201.71	23.8%
Program Encumbered for '09	\$74,633.30	8.0%
Corporations	\$68,850.00	7.4%
Individuals	\$24,888.00	2.7%
In-Kind (Non-Cash)	\$31,000.00	3.3%
Membership	\$7,575.00	0.8%
Organizations	\$7,290.00	0.8%
Interest Income	\$3,807.81	0.4%

TOTAL \$930,065.82 100%

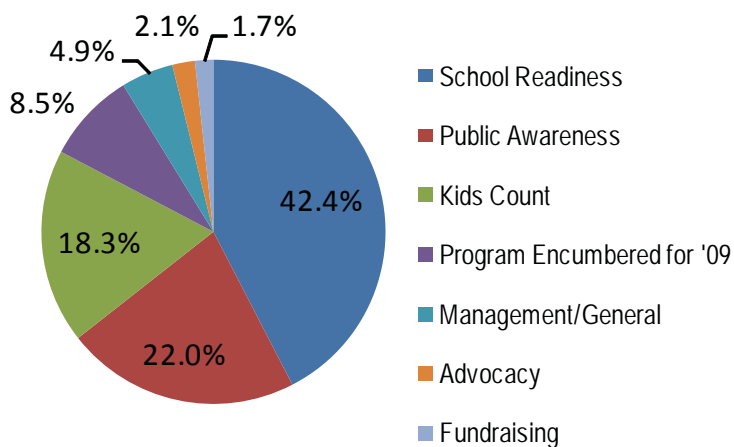
\*Fees for services, conferences, book sales, etc.



### Expenses

School Readiness	\$371,510.31	42.4%
Public Awareness	\$192,655.51	22.0%
Kids Count	\$160,209.85	18.3%
Program Encumbered for '09	\$74,633.30	8.5%
Management/General	\$43,161.56	4.9%
Advocacy	\$18,570.15	2.1%
Fundraising	\$15,157.02	1.7%

TOTAL \$875,897.70 100.0%



## Strengthening Our VOICE

VOICES works to improve child-well being in Alabama by increasing the public's knowledge about the conditions of children and communicating that research to those who can work for change.

Over the course of the year we accomplished the following:

- ▶ Launching a new website in June, after seeing an increased need for resources about Alabama's children. The site is more interactive, streamlined and has a fresh look. Usage of the site has dramatically increased since its launch due to the additional resources available for advocates, families and children in our state.

- ▶ Rolling out a new electronic communications program, Get Active. The software provides an opportunity for citizens from around the state to participate in advocacy campaigns by connecting directly with legislative members to voice their opinions on key issues.

- ▶ Continuing a series of articles from experts around the state, speaking about topics affecting children and families throughout Alabama. In 2008, VOICES produced two *From the Expert* pieces covering juvenile justice and secondhand smoke, increasing public awareness of these children's issues.

- ▶ Informing constituents with Legislative updates, action alerts and toolkits at critical points during the legislative session. This communication is designed to provide timely information on the impact of pending legislation for families and children.

- ▶ Hosting the 2008 Alabama Kids Count Conference bringing together advocates from across the state for education and networking. Mr. Gary G. Eagleton was the featured speaker at the event titled, "Bridges Out of Poverty." This day-long seminar gave both social service providers and community members key lessons in dealing with individuals living in poverty including developing a deeper understanding of the realities of poverty, increasing awareness of the differences in economic cultures, how those differences affect opportunities for success and developing an action plan to improve services to clients.

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## Research Beters the Lives of Children

- ▶ VOICES continued its annual publication of the *Alabama Kids Count Data Book*. The *Alabama Kids Count Data Book* remains a crucial publication for documenting the well-being of children throughout the state.

In 2008, VOICES made changes to the *Data Book* in an effort to provide the most valuable information to users. VOICES moved from reporting the high school dropout rate to reporting a high school graduation rate. This change reflects an effort to move to a universal tracking system agreed upon by the National Governors Association.

For the first time, *Kids Count* disaggregated child poverty by race to show how race impacts child well-being. Race is not the cause of poverty, but racist policies have contributed to the problems over the past 150 years for African American, Hispanic and other minority children.

This year the essay “2008: A Pivotal Year in Juvenile Justice for Alabama” focused on the changes being made to the juvenile justice system. VOICES made public the numbers of children committed to the Department of Youth Services (DYS) broken down by violent, weapons and non-violent crimes. Over 83% of children committed to DHS are non-violent offenders. Revision to the state’s juvenile code in 2008 will change this reality as communities look for more cost effective means of addressing the causes of the delinquent behavior rather than over using incarceration. The numbers reported in the *2008 Alabama Kids Count Data Book* can be used as a benchmark as progress is made.

- ▶ During 2008, VOICES continued work with researchers from a top strategic communications and messaging consulting group to test and refine messages to help citizens better understand Alabama’s tax system. The messages were developed based on earlier focus groups conducted throughout the state. VOICES’ use of “market research” and message testing on a public policy issue is garnering national attention. As this work progresses in 2009, foundations and advocacy groups across the country are hoping to benefit from VOICES’ efforts. In Alabama, the work will be critical to supporting progress in tax policy that will benefit many children and their families.
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