



Vision in Action

Creating a better future for children through research, collaboration and advocacy

Summer 2014

Child Advocates' Legislative Presence Helps Earn Victories for Children

The 2014 Missouri Legislature was a good one for children, say child advocates speaking to a June 11 legislative review forum at the Engineers' Club. While the state budget and tax cuts remain major obstacles for funding children's services, several major wins for children were achieved:

- State formula funding for school districts and charter schools is expanded to include pre-kindergarten children ages 3 and 4 eligible for free/reduced lunch. After stepped implementation over three years, an estimated 18,000 children will be eligible for pre-K program funding. Funding is dependent on full funding of the foundation formula which has been severely under-funded. (HB 1689)
- Measure passed to protect \$142 million of federal Child Care Development Block funds serving 39,000 Missouri children and families with child-care subsidies. The bill requires the state to establish a transparent system of quality indicators for centers.
- Criminal code was strengthened regarding sex crimes against children.
- In the budget, funding for pre-school programs was increased by \$4 million, Parents as Teachers was increased by \$1 million (though still below pre-recession funding), First Steps raised by \$8.5 million, and nearly \$5 million was provided to the Children's Division for technology, a staff career ladder and salary increases.

Speakers at the forum were: **Judy Dungan** of the Missouri Children's Leadership Council, **Erin Brower** of the Alliance for Childhood Education in Kansas City, **Emily van Schenkhof** of Missouri KidsFirst in Jefferson City, and **Amy Blouin** of the Missouri Budget Project.



The presence of these advocates in the Capitol contributed to these legislative successes. Judy's position representing the VCR-staffed Children's Leadership Council was established this year with funding from the Deaconess Foundation and the Missouri Foundation for Health.

The forum was sponsored by VCR, the St. Louis Family & Community Partnership, the St. Louis Regional Early Childhood Council, the St. Louis Area Council on Child Abuse and Neglect, and the Maternal Child & Family Health Coalition.



Top, Erin Brower (left) and Judy Dungan; bottom, Emily van Schenkhof (left) and Amy Blouin.

Families Connect with Children's Mental Health Resources

Northside families learned about children's mental health resources available from over 40 local agencies at the Project LAUNCH Children's Mental Health Day Celebration on May 8 at the YMCA O'Fallon Rec Complex. Hundreds of parents and children attended the fair. Exhibitors included Parents as Teachers, Hopewell Center, Great Circle, United 4 Children, Child-Care Aware of Eastern Missouri, Saint Louis Mental Health Board, NCADA and many more. There was plenty of fun, too. Children enjoyed face and hand painting along with storytelling and other activities.



Children enjoy face and hand painting.

Special guest David Kisor, an award-winning composer and performer of children's music, entertained children for almost an hour with his special mix of affirming songs covering such topics as creativity, curiosity, hope, self-control, confidence and more, accompanied by movement and participation by the children. Project LAUNCH is a five-year federally funded program through the State of Missouri to help improve wellness among young children in high-need areas. For more information, contact VCR at 314-534-6015.



David Kisor entertains at Children's Mental Health Day.

Rallying for Child Abuse Prevention

Nearly 200 community leaders and child advocates recommitted to keeping children safe and families strong during the annual Child Abuse Prevention Month observance on April 11 at the Dennis & Judith Jones Visitor & Education Center in Forest Park. The rally was organized by the St. Louis Family & Community Partnership and the St. Louis Area Council on Child Abuse and Neglect. Community agencies and organizations were recognized for posting 250 "We Support Strong Families and Safe Children" yard signs around the area in conjunction with the St. Louis 250th Birthday celebration. Speaker Michael McLaughlin shared his story of how he was severely abused as a child, then left home and was homeless, only to go on to earn a college degree along with master's degrees in accounting and business. St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay, in presenting his proclamation on behalf of the city, emphasized the importance of keeping children safe and praised the work of child-serving agencies. A proclamation also was presented from St. Louis County Executive Charlie Dooley, along with resolutions from the Missouri House of Representatives and the St. Louis Board of Aldermen.

The St. Louis Family & Community Partnership, staffed by VCR, is a coalition of over 60 child-serving agencies and government community leaders, dedicated to promoting safe children and strong families.



Missouri Children's Division staff at the Wainwright building show their "Strong Families and Safe Children" yard sign along with an STL250 birthday cake.

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Children's Division Director Discusses Goals



Missouri Children's Division Director Tim Decker discussed his goals for the Division in his presentation to the July 9 Annual Meeting of the St. Louis Family & Community Partnership. He told the meeting he seeks to expand beyond enforcement to increase focus on child well-being and supporting families, and helping both children and families deal with trauma. Taking over as CD director in November 2013, Decker previously was director of the Missouri Division of Youth Services.

Awards Luncheon Oct. 10

Mark your calendar for Friday, Oct. 10, when the St. Louis Family & Community Partnership will hold its *Stepping Up for Kids* Awards Luncheon. Awards will be presented to foster and adoptive families and resource staff for outstanding achievement. Nominations are now open for the awards. For information, contact Ruth Ehresman, 314-534-6015, rehresman@visionforchildren.org.

Parent Cafés Offer Support

Raising children is not easy. The Parent Café is designed to bring together small groups of parents to form a support network. Parent Cafés are an outgrowth of the national Strengthening Families program which advocates five key protective factors that keep families strong and protect children from abuse and neglect. Project LAUNCH is implementing the Parent Café concept in its service area focusing on the 63106 and 63107 ZIP codes. Parent Cafés are being held monthly, consisting of three-hour sessions preceded by lunch. About 50 parents have been attending so far; parents typically attend at least three sessions "We are very pleased that so many parents from the community have gotten involved," said Sanaria Sulaiman, Project LAUNCH coordinator. "The cafés enable parents to build a support network based on the principles of Strengthening Families." For more information about Parent Cafés, contact Sam Blue, 314-534-6015, sblue@visionforchildren.org.

