Our Mission
Voices for Illinois Children champions the full development of every child in Illinois to assure the future well-being of everyone in the state. We work with families, communities and policymakers on all issues to help children grow up healthy, happy, safe, loved and well educated.

Our Values
We are committed to the well-being of every child. All children, regardless of circumstances, are vital to the preservation of a vigorous democracy. We believe children do well when they grow up in strong, supportive families, and that families do well in supportive communities. We believe in focusing on preventing problems by employing comprehensive, well-researched strategies to improve children’s education and health care and to strengthen their families’ economic security and the social services on which they depend.

What We Do
Founded in 1987, Voices is a statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that bridges ideological and political boundaries. We mobilize individuals, groups and communities to make informed policy choices, promote proven quality programs and motivate positive changes in the lives of all Illinois children and their families. Our work falls into five action areas. Voices for Illinois Children:

- Initiates public policy solutions and fosters cultural changes that support Illinois children and their families;
- Conducts policy research and analysis;
- Builds coalitions and supports community empowerment;
- Communicates and deliberates with legislators and policymakers;
- Builds public awareness – and public will – that is necessary to create culture change.
Letter from the Interim President and Board Chair

In light of the very grave circumstances surrounding our state’s finances and economy and the political gridlock we face as this annual report goes to print, it is with mixed emotions that we look back on the many achievements made on behalf of Illinois children and their families in 2008.

The environment compels all of us – Voices for Illinois Children, working in tandem with every citizen and advocate group who cares about children – to combine a focused, long-term strategy with a nimble, opportunistic approach. While keeping our eye on our ultimate goals, we must respond strategically to changing circumstances.

The promises we made are the promises we must keep. So we must recall the legislative and policy victories of spring 2008 in order to ensure that we honor those pledges made to Illinois children and their families. Victories such as increases in funding for Preschool for All and child care assistance, support for children with developmental delays, and more, are all currently at risk as the economy and our state government continue to swirl in an unproductive and unpredictable spiral.

It is in this spirit of strong and passionate advocacy that we present our annual report for 2008. In each section of this report you will find a word that we believe embodies the spirit of advocacy. Words have power, and these words in particular reflect the qualities that produce results. Together with dedicated individuals and impassioned advocates, raising our voices for children, we all live and breathe the spirit of these words.

Though we face daunting challenges, our work will continue with even greater commitment. The changes in Illinois’ political climate, perilous fiscal and economic instability for our state and its citizens, and egregious inequalities in our educational system make our work more important than ever in Voices’ 22-year history. Our focus on education, health, family economic security and state fiscal integrity, with the goal of ultimately improving the broad environment for children throughout the state, is now more critical than ever.

Join us in our efforts to make sure Illinois honors all the promises we make to ensure the health and well-being of every child in our state.

Craig R. Culbertson
Chair, Board of Directors

Gaylord Gieseke
Interim President
TENACIOUS

Daring and innovative . . . Goal-driven . . . Dissatisfied with the status quo.

That’s the spirit behind the policy analysis and advocacy that is improving the lives of Illinois children and their families.
2008 Policy Highlights

Preschool for All: Young children scored a victory in spring 2008 when House Bill 4705 passed, extending Illinois’ landmark Preschool for All program until 2010. This important legislation gave tens of thousands of additional at-risk children access to early learning opportunities, holding out the future goal of securing access for all young children whose parents want it.

Early childhood resources: Funding increased for the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) by $32.4 million for fiscal year 2009. Every year, more children benefit from preschool and birth-to-3 services as a result of steadily increasing funding for the ECBG. The increase brings the total funding for the block grant to approximately $380.3 million.

Education funding: Students gained from an additional $325 million in classroom funding for elementary and secondary education, marking yet another year of important, increased resources for children’s learning.

Child care: Tens of thousands of working families in Illinois continued to have access to affordable child care thanks in large part to the Child Care Assistance Program. In 2008, the program received a $45.2 million increase. In addition, state leaders demonstrated widespread agreement with a legislative proposal to reduce the unfairly high co-payment fees charged to families for participation in state-support child care programs. This would have significantly bolstered program access and quality, had it ultimately passed.

Mental health: Under the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership, efforts to reshape the state’s children’s mental health system continued to move forward. Twelve different initiatives, including the launch of the “Say It Out Loud” public awareness campaign, benefited from secured funding and served children of all ages.

Home visiting: As co-chair of the Healthy Families Illinois home-visiting initiative, we worked to expand access to high-quality, evidence-based, home-visitation programs for at-risk children under age 3. These programs provide critical family support using a “parent coaching” approach. In 2008, these programs realized $1.8 million in increased funding.
The challenges facing Illinois’ education system are complex and varied, such as inadequate funding levels, achievement disparities and the changing composition of student enrollment. Throughout 2008, much of our advocacy on education policy centered on a statewide collaborative campaign to reform school funding and improve educational quality, goals which are more important than ever considering Illinois’ ongoing fiscal crisis. Funding for General State Aid to local school districts increased 3 percent in the fiscal year 2009 budget, which raised the per-pupil foundation level from $5,734 to $5,959. Voices continues to advocate for an increase in the foundation level as recommended by the Education Funding Advisory Board.

Illinois’ disparities in funding help fuel equally intolerable disparities in student achievement. That’s why Voices supports a policy agenda that would improve the learning of all students by ensuring that every school, regardless of location, has the resources necessary to help kids succeed. Our policy agenda for education includes:

- Raising the state’s school resources
- Increasing state support for school districts with high concentrations of low-income students
- Targeting resources more effectively to improve student learning
- Increasing schools’ capacity to support students’ social and emotional learning
- Ensuring training and support to improve teacher quality

With the highest-quality teachers and attention to children’s physical and social-emotional skills and development, all students can compete and succeed in a global economy. Illinois’ future depends on meeting that challenge.
Early Childhood

Our policy analysis and advocacy have succeeded in making high-quality early care and learning opportunities a reality for more than 140,000 young children participating in Illinois’ Preschool for All efforts (preKindergarten, preschool special education and Head Start programs). Our state was the first in the nation to set the policy goal of serving every 3- as well as 4-year-old whose parents want access to high-quality preschool – a goal we’re working toward, over time, as resources are brought to bear.

The next rung on that ladder of incremental progress formed one of Voices’ major policy priorities for 2008: expanded funding for the state’s Early Childhood Block Grant, to help support this crucial work of improving programs’ quality and access. Funding for the grant was increased by about 9 percent in both fiscal years 2008 and 2009.

Our early childhood efforts continue to be recognized on a national level. Illinois policymakers’ commitment to invest in early childhood programs helped rank Illinois fourth in a 2008 national rating by Pre-K Now of “best chance” states for parents seeking a high-quality, state-funded preschool program for their children. In 2008, Preschool for All met nine of the National Institute for Early Education’s 10 benchmarks for quality, including teacher training and preparation.

Although these appropriations and recognitions are important, additional funding and commitment to expansion and quality are needed for Preschool for All to reach the goal of “for all.” Getting a great start toward a good education is vital, if our children are to build successful careers in a competitive and unstable global economy.

INQUSITIVE

Pursuing opening the window of possibility... Eager and curious.
We search for every opportunity to enhance a child’s learning and development, particularly during the critically important, formative years from birth to age 5.
Healthcare

Because healthy children play better, learn better and live better, Voices for Illinois Children advocates for health policies that are broad and inclusive in scope. We believe a healthy child is not only physically healthy, but also well-prepared socially and emotionally to handle the intricacies of individual, family and community life.

Physical Health

Since the early part of this decade, Illinois has made significant progress in expanding health care coverage for low-income children through both Medicaid and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Voices for Illinois Children helped pave the way for the state’s All Kids health insurance program, which has contributed to a significant increase in the number of low-income children with health insurance.

In addition to preventive medical care, growing children require nutritious food to build strong bodies and nourish brain development. However, many children live in “food deserts” – communities with little or no access to fresh, affordable, healthy food. In 2008, Voices played a key role in creating the Illinois Food Marketing Task Force with the charge of creating policy changes to bring fresh food to underserved areas and, ultimately, improve health in low-income communities.

Social and Emotional Health

Voices’ commitment to “the whole child” is reflected in our work to ensure that the social and emotional needs of all growing children are a top priority for policymakers. Through our participation in the leadership of the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership, we seek to improve the state’s mental health system across a number of state agencies by focusing on children’s healthy development beginning at birth. In 2008, state funding supported 12 initiatives that are the building blocks of such a comprehensive approach.

Through our work leading public education campaigns, we partner with numerous agencies and groups to change public perceptions. In 2008, we again focused on foster care. The Foster Kids Are Our Kids campaign entered its third year with the theme “I’m doing good,” which challenges negative attitudes and encourages public support of children in foster care.
Unrestricted forward thinking . . . Creative . . . Inclusive.

That's the kind of barrier-free, outside-the-box thinking that leads to real-world policies, programs and services that ensure the health and well-being of all Illinois children.
INVESTED

An impassioned dedication of time, energy and emotion . . .
Financial management with an eye toward future economic health.
Voices is invested in economic security for every family in Illinois.
**Family Economic Security**

A family’s economic security supports its overall well-being. When families are under economic stress, they are much less likely to provide a secure and supportive environment for their growing children. When we invest in Illinois families, we invest in the future. The returns on our investment are exponential, as individual children and families thrive and contribute to their communities’ successes.

**Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)**

The Illinois Earned Income Tax Credit helps working families keep hard-earned dollars in their own pockets and adds a measure of fairness to our inequitable tax system. Voices is a leader and convener of the “Make Work Pay” coalition, which was instrumental in creating the EITC in Illinois and now includes 43 organizational members. In 2008, EITC expansion efforts were impeded by prolonged struggles over the state budget. Our policy analysis and advocacy work on the EITC has continued on two tracks: (1) standalone legislation to at least double the size of the state credit and (2) EITC expansion as part of a larger income tax reform strategy.

**Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**

In July 2008, Illinois increased monthly benefits under Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits for the first time in six years. TANF can protect children from falling into deep poverty, and with the economic hardship caused by the recession, this safety net for families is critically important.

**Family Asset-Building**

Voices belongs to the Illinois Asset Building Group (IABG), a diverse coalition working to develop and promote a children’s savings account program in Illinois. The goals of such a program include improving levels of financial literacy and savings and increasing the number of children who attend post-secondary education or training. As a result of IABG’s efforts, the Illinois General Assembly enacted legislation to create a task force that will review policy options and develop a strategic implementation plan for a children’s savings account program.
Creating a better tomorrow requires responsible planning today. In the face of economic turmoil, it is more important than ever that we make smart and fiscally responsible choices that will keep our communities strong and our children healthy and educated.

Illinois’ budget must put children and families first. That’s why the Budget & Tax Policy Initiative at Voices for Illinois Children worked throughout 2008 to educate policymakers and advocates about the impact of their budget decisions. Dialogue with key legislative leaders helped us take major steps forward in advancing our policy proposals.

Our 2008 strategy for fiscal reform linked a higher state income tax to a reform package with three components: a larger personal exemption, which would benefit all households but would have the greatest impact on low-income families; a more generous state EITC targeted at the working poor; and a state version of the federal Child Tax Credit to provide additional relief for low- and middle-income families. This fiscal reform strategy would both generate new revenue for critical state programs and improve tax fairness for working families.

Unfortunately, the national economic crisis struck Illinois in 2008 and has grown worse with each passing month. Illinois’ massive budget shortfall continues to threaten our state’s network of schools and community-based services, including programs that help communities handle the rising tide of unemployment, malnutrition and homelessness, as well as efforts to protect the public’s health and safety and enhance children’s learning.

We all have a shared responsibility and a shared interest in promoting the common good, and we can be most successful if we work together and speak with one voice. We must continue to improve the integrity of the state budget process so that children are not left behind.
Advancing a shared mission . . . Forging meaningful connections with like-minded individuals.

Voices builds long-term partnerships.

Establishing strong leadership of advocates takes teamwork and commitment. Voices for Illinois Children’s reputation as a builder and leader of coalitions speaks to our team-oriented approach. We work with individuals, groups and communities to achieve a culture change that values all children in the state. With our big-picture, multi-issue vision, Voices is ideally suited to lead long-term collaborative efforts.

Voices’ 2008 partners included:

A+ Illinois*
Early Learning Illinois
The Economic Analysis and Research Network (EARN)
ELEV8 – Community Schools Initiative
Foster Kids Are Our Kids Campaign Agencies
Healthy Families America
Healthy Families Illinois Work Group
Illinois Asset Building Group
Illinois Childhood Trauma Coalition*
Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership*
Illinois Family Partnership Network*
Illinois Paid Leave Coalition
Kids Count Network
Make Work Pay Coalition
State Fiscal Analysis Initiative
Strengthening Families Illinois
Voices for America’s Children

*Voices housed these collaborations.
Fulfilling our mission and values means engaging all Illinois citizens and supporting their advocacy efforts to achieve an Illinois that embraces all its children and their families.

Be a voice for Illinois children. Here are a few ways you can get involved:

• Go to www.voices4kids.org to learn more about Voices for Illinois Children and all of our issue areas.
• While there, register to receive our e-alerts so you can stay up-to-date on policy developments and Voices’ latest research and advocacy activities.
• Join a Voices Leadership Committee to connect with advocates in your area who share your passion to make Illinois a better place for children.
• Host a parent “café” (a lively, interactive dialogue session) or community gathering, with our help if you need it, and invite a Voices speaker.
• Write or call your elected officials and insist they make children’s issues a top priority.
• Join our conference calls to learn more about specific issues and legislative actions important to children.
• Attend a rally or vigil to raise awareness of children’s needs; you can find events on our Web site.
• Volunteer in your neighborhood.

Visit www.voices4kids.org/getinvolved to learn more exciting ways you can make a difference.

LEADERSHIP

Taking a stand based on a shared value . . . Inspiring teamwork and commitment for a higher purpose.

Voices for Illinois Children is as strong as the people involved and speaking out.
Together our voices make a statement


### ASSETS

#### Current Assets
- Cash: $2,331,130
- Investments: $213,967
- Pledges and Accounts Receivable: $461,586
- Prepaid Expenses: $44,246

**Total Current Assets**: $3,050,929

#### Fixed Assets
- Furniture and Equipment: $284,848
- Less: Accumulated Depreciation: ($266,319)

**Net Fixed Assets**: $18,529

**Total Assets**: $3,069,458

### LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

#### Current Liabilities
- Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses: $142,062
- Amount Held for Others: $1,306,030
- Accrued Vacation: $46,405
- Deferred Lease Costs: $36,487

**Total Current Liabilities**: $1,530,984

#### Net Assets
- Unrestricted - Undesignated: $182,307
- Unrestricted - Designated: $206,992
- Unrestricted - Contingency: $300,000

**Total Unrestricted**: $689,299

#### Temporarily Restricted: $849,175

**Total Net Assets**: $1,538,474

**Total Liabilities and Net Assets**: $3,069,458

### REVENUES

- Foundations and Corporations: 54%
- Special Events: 28%
- Individuals: 12%
- Interest and Investment Income: 5%
- Miscellaneous: <1%

### EXPENSES

- Programs: 81%
- Development: 13%
- General and Administrative: 6%
Our Donors

We wish to thank the following individuals, organizations, foundations and corporations for their gifts made between January 1 and December 31, 2008. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of this list. If your name has been omitted or is incorrect, please accept our apologies and contact Shawn Gavin, Director of Development, at 312-516-5552. Corrections will appear in subsequent publications.

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Voices for Illinois Children works across all issue areas to improve the lives of children of all ages throughout our state so they grow up healthy, happy, safe, loved and well educated.