Voices for Georgia’s Children (Voices) is an independent, non-partisan catalyst for systemic change. Voices advocates for all of Georgia’s 2.5 million children – particularly those whose location, family income, race, or family/community circumstances leave them most vulnerable. We advance laws, policies, and actions that improve their lives.

CULTIVATING ADVOCACY POWER ACROSS THE STATE THROUGH COALITION, CONVENING AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Georgia Child Advocacy Leadership Lab (GA-CALL) is a community of organizations and advocates contributing directly to policy development through investments in research and evaluation, advocacy and lobbying. The GA-CALL includes convening capitol-based and local-based public forums, as well as supporting local leaders across the state in advocacy initiatives.

Convening Capitol-based and Local-based Public Forums

- Atlanta-based policy forums are held at minimum, quarterly, cover timely topics or pressing issues, and are livestreamed statewide.
- Capitol-based legislative policy forums are held weekly during Legislative Session. Invited representatives from all sectors of child well-being speak candidly and confidentially about current legislation moving through the state house.
- Local-based policy forums are held in different quadrants of the state, ie. Albany, Dublin, Savannah, including our School-Based Mental Health forums, which are held in partnership with The Carter Center and Georgia Appleseed.

Supporting Local Leaders in Advocacy Initiatives

Voices’ Child Advocacy and Policy Fellowship (CAP Fellows) continues the feedback loop between Voices and communities in the state, and strengthens community champions’ ability to advocate for child well-being at multiple levels of government. Our inaugural Fellows came from Dougherty, Chatham (Effingham-adjacent), Lamar and Whitfield counties. Each of these counties was featured in Voices’ Barriers to Healthcare for Georgia’s Children report.

Our goal for the Fellowship is to build and fund a sustainable model program. In FY21, we will integrate our Fellows as alumni on our “phone-a-friend” network (see next page) and as members of the Board of Directors’ Policy and Advocacy Committee.

In 2015, Voices founded the Child and Adolescent Health Coalition (coalition members below) in partnership with the Georgia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The CAHC brings a greater focus to children’s health issues in our state and unite advocates in action to drive solutions. We share and coordinate legislative advocacy goals and strategies, as well as tackle specific strategy topics, such as the recent growing uninsured rate of Georgia’s kids under the age of 19, and challenges in accessing services to address developmental delays, such as the Babies Can’t Wait program.

Historically, we have leveraged the reach of our statewide CAHC partner organizations (ie AAP, Georgia Parent Support Network) to mobilize their constituency in advancing our work. In FY21, statewide engagement targets will leverage the relationships Voices’ has built over the past two years with community leaders and organizations, tapping into our network developed through our:

- Healthcare Barriers roundtable discussions in Whitfield, Effingham, Lamar and Dougherty counties (in collaboration with the Georgia Family Connection Partnership)
- Child Advocacy and Policy Fellowship Fellows
- Census Project partnerships (100 community leaders, including in Albany, Augusta, Columbus, Savannah, and Valdosta)
In 2017, we investigated why roughly more than 40% of Georgia’s children, ages 3 to 17, have trouble accessing the mental health treatment they need. Subsequently, we published “Georgia’s Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Workforce Analysis,” which focused on the deficiencies in the number and quality of professionals in the mental health field. Voices, along with the CAHC and the Interagency Directors Team, is leading the implementation of the recommendations outlined in that report.

Cultivating Trauma-Informed Universities
- Transforming the state’s behavioral health workforce into robust, trauma-informed providers through a multi-year initiative with universities across the state
- Piloting trauma training for Master of Social Work programs at Kennesaw State University, University of Georgia, Georgia State University, Clark Atlanta University, and Albany State University
- Expanding trauma training to counseling programs at Savannah State, University of West Georgia, and Mercer University

Creating awareness of the impact of trauma on children and youth among School Resource Officers
- Collaborating with Georgia Public Safety Training on improving positive school climates across Georgia
- Facilitating expert TED Talks on brain development, attribution of behaviors and the impact of biases, trauma, and other factors that impact student misbehavior

Coordinating major school-based health initiatives for the web-based Georgia School-Based Health Hub
- Collaborating with the Rural Health Innovation Center at Mercer University School of Medicine and PARTNERS for Equity in Child and Adolescent Health
- Connecting communities across Georgia (via “one stop shop” landing page) to resources on school-based health services, i.e. how to get support for planning and implementing a school-based health center or mental health program

Magnifying the challenges Georgia’s children and their communities experience
- Producing the “Challenges for Children” podcast series, in which the inaugural episodes featured Lamar and Dougherty counties to accompany the Barriers to Healthcare for Georgia’s Children report, and tackled topics such as implicit bias, racism, transportation access and poverty, and offered solutions to commonly cited challenges those communities are facing

Amplifying Youth Voice
- “This Child is Talking to You”: a series of four illuminating videos centered around the barriers that impact youth’s health, quality of life, and sense of social belonging. The stories, experiences, and perspectives described by youth in the videos raise complex issues about access to quality healthcare, but also present opportunities for new policy solutions that are within reach in Georgia: solutions that require new collaborations and engagement outside of the health sector.
- Suicide Prevention PSAs: a series of PSAs where youth speak directly to their peers about their experiences with depression, anxiety and other issues teenagers are facing today with the message: “you are not alone.”

BUILDING EVIDENCE FOR ACTION THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH AND POLICY ANALYSIS

Voices’ meticulous research is the foundation on which we are able to inform policy development and state investments.

Conducting Community-based Research
Voices is conducting in-depth reviews of programs all over the state to document successes, challenges, and the need for systems and policy change:

School-based Telehealth Implementation: Navigating Common Challenges to Increase Access to Care
This report studies two different school-based telehealth models in Georgia (one rural, one urban) and explores the challenges and barriers both providers and schools experience to implementation and utilization, as well as offer implementation steps that could significantly strengthen school-based telehealth programs.

Serving Children’s Behavioral Health in Georgia’s Schools
This report explores how three school-based behavioral health providers (two rural, one urban) serve their students’ needs, including how programs staff their clinics, where clinicians are placed in the schools, and how programs are funded.

Facilitating Demonstration Pilots
WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP) Project
The WIC FMNP collaboration between Voices, Georgia Family Connection Partnership, WIC Matters, and Head Start to develop a successful model for reaching more WIC participants. Voices is releasing a brief on the pilot of this model in two rural communities.

Leveraging Data and Network of Experts
“Phone a Friend” Expert Network
This network of experts statewide, including our CAP Fellows and Mercer School of Medicine, is available to consult on policy development, feedback on proposed legislation and administrative policies.