



CONNECTICUT
VOICES
FOR CHILDREN

2012 First for Kids Celebration

Honoring individuals and organizations for effective advocacy and public leadership on behalf of all of Connecticut's children, youth and families.

October 17, 2012
5:00 p.m.- 7:00 p.m.

Pond House Café
1555 Asylum Avenue
West Hartford, Connecticut

About Connecticut Voices for Children

Connecticut Voices for Children is a statewide, research and policy organization that works at the state and federal levels to advance strategic public investment and wise public policies to benefit our state's children, youth and families. We believe that all of Connecticut's young people should grow up healthy and safe, have opportunities for successful learning from birth through adulthood, live free from the limiting effects of poverty, prosper under the loving guidance of caring adults, and have the opportunity to give something back to their communities along the way.

Connecticut Voices works on a variety of issues, including early care, K-12 and higher education, children's health and mental health, foster care, juvenile justice, and state and federal tax and budget topics. Our research and policy reports are widely cited by the media and other organizations and are published on our website at www.ctvoices.org. Our communications initiatives include sending E-Notes, an electronic newsletter, to more than 2,000 residents of Connecticut and beyond, as well as maintaining listservs on health and federal budget issues. We host many informational forums that bring Connecticut and national leaders together to share "best practice" thinking on a variety of policy and budget issues.

A strong supporter of working through coalitions, Connecticut Voices for Children is a founding member of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, and Better Choices for Connecticut. We also coordinate the Covering Connecticut's Kids and Families Coalition. Connecticut Voices continues to be very proud of our role as a founding partner in Camp

Totokett, the widely-honored Greater New Haven area summer experience for children whose families are living with HIV/AIDS. At the national level, Connecticut Voices is a state partner in the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities' State Fiscal Analysis Initiative, the Economic Policy Institute's Economic Analysis and Research Network, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, the New England Collaborative, the New England Alliance for Children's Health, and Voices for America's Children. We also serve on the steering committees of a number of these groups.

Connecticut Voices for Children's internship program attracts talented college and graduate students who desire a range of experiences in policy analysis and advocacy, while our policy fellowships offer full-time positions to exceptional recent college graduates with a strong interest in advancing public policy to benefit children and youth. Our innovative partnership with Yale Law School's Legislative Advocacy Clinic provides Connecticut Voices with the able assistance of law students each year. Connecticut Voices, in turn, provides these students with hands-on experience in the legislative process. We celebrate the accomplishment and service of state and local leaders through our First for Kids Awards.

And because policy change is often possible only through legislation, Connecticut Voices works to advance — through the Connecticut General Assembly and state agencies — the sound policy and budget choices necessary for the health and well-being of our youngest residents and their families, and Connecticut's future.

2012
**First for Kids
Ceremony**

Musical entertainment provided by the Doug Maher Trio

Welcome

Legislative Leadership Award

State Senator Martin Looney

Citizen Advocacy Award

Merva Jackson (posthumously) and
African Caribbean American Parents of
Children with Disabilities (AFCAMP)

Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award

Peter Arakas

Community Advocacy Award

Barbara Edinberg

Media Award

Connecticut Mirror

Closing Remarks



LEGISLATIVE LEADERSHIP AWARD

State Senator Martin Looney

Senator Martin M. Looney's reputation among his legislative colleagues, constituents, advocates and the broader community is as a persistent,

responsive, compassionate and hard-working collaborator.

Senator Looney is in his fifth term as Senate Majority Leader of the General Assembly, having first been elected to that leadership post in 2003. He has served as Senate Chair of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee, as well as Chair of the Banks Committee. During his tenure as State Representative, Looney was appointed an Assistant Majority Leader.

Senator Looney is equally active in his community outside the legislature. He has served as a Public Information Aide to the Mayor of New Haven, and on the Board of Directors of the Fair Haven Community Health Center and of Community Mediation, Inc. Much of his non-legislative work has involved teaching or otherwise supporting education. He has taught English Literature and Composition as an adjunct faculty member at Quinnipiac College and the University of New Haven.

Since his admission to the Connecticut Bar in 1985, he has been engaged in the general practice of law. He is a partner in the law firm of Keyes, Looney, and Murphy in New Haven.

It is what Senator Looney has done, for children and their families, with his labor, experience and credentials that gives rise to our honoring him today. In the legislature, he has helped pass far-reaching laws on such fundamental issues as access to early care, ensuring children's health, and protecting communities through gun control.

Following his first term as a state representative in 1982, he was honored by the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women for his successful work as sponsor of legislation to provide tax credit incentives to employers who create on-site day care for their employees' children. In 1993, the Connecticut Coalition Against Gun Violence honored Senator Looney for his efforts in helping to gain passage of Connecticut's historic assault weapon ban. In recent years, he helped to ensure that health insurers cover services related to autism, and that those services are high quality. He also increased protections for children suffering sports-related head injuries.

Most recently, Senator Looney carried the banner during the years-long effort to enact a state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which finally came to pass in 2011. The EITC is widely regarded as one of the most effective anti-poverty measures available, putting cash back into the hands of working families who need it to meet their basic needs. He was dogged on the issue, year-in and year-out, providing leadership within and outside the legislature. He collaborated with advocates on research and strategies to achieve the EITC's passage, and consistently promoted the federal and the proposed state EITC in the community, including attending openings of the VITA (volunteer income tax assistance) program sites each and every year in New Haven. As one human services advocate put it, he worked diligently to get his legislative colleagues and the broader community solidly on board, so that at some point "creating a state EITC became inevitable—not a question of 'if' but 'when'".

For his commitment to supporting children and families in meeting their basic needs and promoting education and opportunity for all, we present Senator Martin Looney with our *Legislative Leadership Award*.



CITIZEN ADVOCACY AWARD

Merva Jackson (posthumously) and African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities (AFCAMP)

Merva Jackson
founded African
Caribbean
American Parents
of Children with

Disabilities, Inc. (AFCAMP), an organization that has successfully empowered hundreds of parents to advocate for the rights and well-being of their children with disabilities. AFCAMP began in search of an answer to a difficult issue: many children with disabilities were not being served well; and their parents, particularly those of color, from different cultural backgrounds, or whose primary language was not English, often felt intimidated by school officials, doctors, and lawyers, or did not have knowledge of the decision-making process for providing special education services. By providing peer support, training, and advocacy, AFCAMP is a model of grassroots advocacy for children with disabilities in our schools, child welfare programs, and juvenile justice system.

AFCAMP's work prepares parents to be knowledgeable and effective advocates for their children where it counts most: at planning and placement team meetings in schools and at advisory and decision-making tables in the child welfare, children's behavioral health and juvenile justice systems. Because of AFCAMP's training and assistance to parents, children with disabilities are able to obtain the services and help they need to be successful in school and life, such as speech therapy, classroom assistance and accommodations.

A particular emphasis of AFCAMP's work has been to assist all children, particularly those with disabilities, in the juvenile justice system. Merva Jackson and AFCAMP highlighted the disproportionate representation of underserved children with disabilities in the juvenile justice system. Along with other partners, AFCAMP

worked to re-establish a Juvenile Review Board to reduce inappropriate youth involvement in the formal justice system.

AFCAMP's history is intertwined with Merva Jackson's life. Born in Jamaica, Merva settled in Hartford. She worked at Hartford and Mt. Sinai Hospitals and at Oak Hill School, where she developed a passion to advocate for people with disabilities. At the state Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, Merva conducted a survey of the needs of parents of children with disabilities. She found that institutions did not always have the resources, knowledge, or skills necessary to assist parents that needed help for their children with disabilities. In 1999, Merva graduated from her program in social work at Central Connecticut State University, and she founded AFCAMP the same year. Merva served as AFCAMP's Executive Director until March 2012. Sadly, Merva passed away in April 2012. AFCAMP and its work for children with disabilities is her lasting gift to all of us.

Since March 2012, Ann Smith has been AFCAMP's Interim Executive Director. Ms. Smith is an attorney and was a member of the AFCAMP Board of Directors for over a decade, most recently as President. She worked in public sector behavioral health care law, management and policy for many years.

In recognition of Merva Jackson's founding and leadership of AFCAMP; and of AFCAMP for its continued dedication to and effectiveness at empowering parents to understand and advocate for their children with disabilities, and for their role in advocating for services designed to divert children from inappropriate involvement in the juvenile justice system, we present the *Citizen Advocacy Award* to the late Merva Jackson and to AFCAMP.



CONNECTICUT VOICES FOR CHILDREN FOUNDERS' AWARD

Peter Arakas

In addition to having what was arguably one of the coolest lawyer jobs ever -- General Counsel in the Americas for LEGO Systems, Inc. -- Peter Arakas also makes his mark on the larger community with a truly remarkable array and degree of child-focused, transformative volunteer activities.

Peter received his Masters in Social Work from the University of Connecticut. After eight years of practice as a social worker, he received his law degree with highest honors from the UCONN School of Law. He has spent his life, so far, combining his training—law and social work—with his passion—kids at risk, and thereby making an enormous difference to the world we all live in.

Peter is a member and immediate past Chair of the Board of Directors of Connecticut Voices for Children. His four years as chair coincided with Connecticut Voices' transition from direction by co-founder and President Shelley Geballe to Jamey Bell's leadership. Here he helped to maintain Connecticut Voices' high standards, reputation and profile, even while the organization continued to grow and evolve.

Over the last 25 years, he has volunteered with a number of non-profit legal service providers, including Lawyers for Children America, Statewide Legal Services and the Connecticut Children's Law Center, where he accepts case appointments for children and parents involved with the child protection system due to allegations of abuse or neglect.

But as if that was not enough, Peter also had inspiration and energy enough to develop a brand new program to meet a critical unfilled need. In 2006 Peter founded the state's first Truancy Intervention Project at New Britain's Roosevelt Middle School. The Project works with students whose level of truancy could result in involvement

with the juvenile court. A volunteer attorney acts as a problem-solver, in partnership with the parent/guardian, school, community organizations and human services, to mobilize the appropriate agencies that can help ameliorate underlying problems that contribute to the truancy. Perhaps most importantly, the volunteer serves as an advocate and role model for the student.

The program was piloted with eight children in the fifth grade. Peter worked with the very first student in the program. This student graduated from New Britain High School, with very good attendance after his involvement with the Project. He and Peter are still in touch with each other.

Since 2006, the New Britain Truancy Intervention Project has worked with 93 children and has trained 80 volunteer attorneys. But the proof is in the pudding: in the six years of the Project's operation, even though all 93 students referred to the Project met the criteria for court referral, only two students in the Project have been referred. And the improvement in attendance was remarkable-- 80% of the students increased their attendance by 62%.

But because there was a spare moment in his week, in 2010 Peter approached New Haven about starting a Truancy Intervention Project there. The New Haven Truancy Intervention Project began in 2010 as a pilot in one school, and has now expanded to three schools. The Project has worked with 8 students whose attendance records made them at risk of juvenile court involvement, but not one student has needed to be referred.

For his service and commitment to children as a member and Chair of the Connecticut Voices Board, and as a visionary and energetic volunteer in the community, we present Peter Arakas with the *Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award*.

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY AWARD

Barbara Edinberg



Barbara Edinberg is Director of Research at the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC). BCAC, founded in 1985, is a unique coalition of

organizations, parents and other concerned individuals working together to address critical children's issues through a program combining research, advocacy, community education and mobilization.

Barbara has been with the agency since 1987, and is retiring at the end of 2012. She has over 30 years of experience in health and human services planning and program design, with a particular focus on education and health care access for underserved populations. She heads BCAC's research and community education efforts in advocating for social change to address critical needs of children at both the local and state level.

Barbara coordinates a project to mobilize support for state health reform in Lower Fairfield County through the healthcare4every1 campaign. She also directs "Covering Bridgeport Kids and Families," which addresses policy and practice changes to increase access to health insurance coverage. For example, through this initiative, BCAC identifies barriers to enrollment in HUSKY and provides community education and training, application assistance and follow-up to ensure that all eligible children and their parents are enrolled in HUSKY.

Throughout Barbara's tenure at BCAC, she has used data-driven advocacy to promote improvements to child health and well-being at the community, state and national levels. For example, when Barbara discovered that Bridgeport had the highest rates of asthma among children as compared to other large

Connecticut cities, she and her colleagues decided to unearth the reasons for this alarming trend and propose solutions. Barbara engaged the local community in determining the major causes of such high asthma rates, including diesel exhaust from school buses, and presented the information to city officials. The city adopted BCAC's recommendation that school buses be prohibited from leaving their vehicles running for long periods of time. Research then showed that local asthma rates declined. In turn, state law now prohibits school buses from idling.

Barbara has been a longstanding steering committee member of Covering Connecticut's Kids and Families Coalition, a statewide coalition of Department of Social services staff, community-based social services organizations, health care providers, and others that work to reduce barriers to coverage and access to HUSKY for children, low-income parents and pregnant women. Her on-the-ground experience in Bridgeport has been invaluable to the broader Coalition. It is a testament to Barbara's effectiveness as both a researcher and advocate that she is equally comfortable talking data and advocating on behalf of particular families who are experiencing challenges obtaining health care or other basic services.

Barbara is also author of BCAC's annual *State of the Child in Bridgeport*, a report card on the status of Bridgeport's children.

Barbara received her undergraduate degree from Connecticut College, New London, CT and a Master of Science degree in Health Planning and Administration from the University of Cincinnati.

For her many years of effective research, coalition-building and advocacy on a wide array of children's and community issues, we honor Barbara Edinberg with our Community Advocacy Award.

If we hope to make better public policy choices for Connecticut children, then at a minimum, we need policymakers and an electorate that are informed about important developments in state, local, and federal governments. We need to understand how those public policies and the ways in which they are implemented are affecting children and families in the real world.

News media can play a central role in this public education, information sharing, and consensus building. Yet over the past decade, the journalistic infrastructure that can make a shared understanding of public policies possible has been rapidly collapsing.

The loss of news staff has been felt acutely where these policies are made – at state capitols. National surveys found that the number of state capitol reporters dropped by 32% between 2003 and 2009. Over 2008 and 2009, the Hartford Courant eliminated about half of its news staff. Across the state, other knowledgeable beat reporters became scarcer after cycles of layoffs and mergers.

It was into this gloomy environment that the Connecticut Mirror launched its nonprofit news operation in January 2010, with the expressed goal of “increasing the level of civic engagement among state’s residents” by reinvigorating coverage of Connecticut’s state government, public policy and politics.

It soon became difficult to imagine Capitol reporting without them. They have hired some of the most skilled talent from inside and outside the state. They have expanded their beats over the years to include education, health, politics, the state budget, human services, and the environment. Within a few months of their launch, they hired a Washington DC bureau reporter, the only one from a Connecticut news organization.

The staff, now totaling 10 full- and part-time journalists, have the room to give stories the

substance and depth they need for real understanding. They address important subjects like child welfare and juvenile justice that tend to get short shrift at other outlets. The staff has built up a library of over 4,500 stories and blog entries and a website audience of 60,000 unique visitors per month.

They view themselves as part of a news ecosystem that can thrive on both diversity and collaboration. They’ve developed partnerships with other news organizations, including Spanish language newspapers, syndicating their stories to 25 other outlets, broadening the reach of their work, and often restoring access to Capitol coverage to places to places where it had largely vanished. They’ve also brought their education and civic engagement work out “in the field,” sponsoring public forums on early care, the achievement gap, and green jobs.

The Connecticut Mirror is helping to build the next generation of journalists through a fellowship program in which reporters early in their careers work with the Mirror, the New Haven Independent, and WNPR to gain a breadth of experience. They’ve recently opened a Fairfield County office to expand coverage there and to create an internship program with Fairfield University.

No one knows what future of journalism holds. But the Connecticut Mirror presents a bold example of quality and public service that can be a model for journalists around the country. In the Mirror’s first year, the National Journal praised them for the “best coverage” of the 2010 election cycle, and credited their “talented policy and political reporters” for covering the year’s races with “unusual sophistication.”

For their high quality and thoughtful public policy journalism, we recognize the staff of the Connecticut Mirror with our Media Award.

Past
First for Kids
Honorees

2011

Legislative Leadership Award
State Senator Beth Bye

Statewide Child Advocacy Award
Abby Anderson

Transformational Philanthropy Award
Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

Youth Leadership Award
Sixto Cancel

2009

Congressional Leadership Award
Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro

Legislative Leadership Award
House Speaker Chris Donovan

Transformational Policy Leadership Award
New England Alliance for Children's Health

Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award
Dr. Nancy Meyer-Lustman

Media Award
WNPR's "Where We Live"

2008

State Policy Leader Award
Attorney General Richard Blumenthal

Legislative Leadership Award
Jonathan Harris

Transformational Philanthropy Award
Connecticut Health Foundation

Community Leadership Award
Center for Youth Leadership

Priscilla Canny Research Award
Walter S. Gilliam, Ph.D.

Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award
Shelley Geballe

2006

Transformational Policy Leadership Award
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Citizen Advocacy Award
Sherbie Worthen

Scholar Advocate Award
John L. Pottenger, Jr.

Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award
Ellen Scalettar

2005

Legislative Leadership Award
Senate President Pro Tempore
Donald E. Williams, Jr.

Transformational Philanthropy Award
Melville Charitable Trust

Media Award
Michele Jacklin

Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award
Dr. Janice Gruendel

Albert J. Solnit Leadership Award
Dr. Roslyn Meyer

2004

Albert J. Solnit Leadership Award
U.S. Senator Christopher Dodd

Legislative Leadership Award
State Representative Toni Walker

Public Service Award
George Coleman, Associate Commissioner,
Connecticut Department of Education

Transformational Philanthropy Award
William Casper Graustein Memorial Fund

Citizen Advocacy Awards
Courtney and Jane Bourns

Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award
Judith Solomon

Past
First for Kids
Honorees

2002

Albert J. Solnit Leadership Award
Representative Christel Truglia

Lifetime Achievement Award
Professor Edward Zigler, Yale University

Statewide Child Advocacy Award
Jeanne Milstein and the Office of the Child Advocate

Media Award
Ann Nyberg, Channel 8 News Anchor

Citizen Advocacy Award
Harry Orlick

Community Advocacy Award
Dr. Eric Cooper, President,
National Urban Alliance for Effective Education

Youth Mentor Award
Alan MacKenzie, Director, Our Piece of the Pie

2001

Albert J. Solnit Leadership Award
Senator Kevin B. Sullivan

Media Awards
The Hartford Courant's: Dave Altimari, Dwight Blint, Susan
Campbell, Beth Hamilton, Andrew Julien, Kathy Megan,
Daryl Perch, Colin Poitras, and Eric Weiss

Citizen Advocacy Award
Sheila Amdur

Community Advocacy Awards
Rev. Bonita Grubbs and Marilyn Ondrasik

Youth Mentor Awards
Michael Duggan, Will MacAdams,
and Richard Sugarman

2000

Policy Leadership Award
Lt. Governor M. Jodi Rell

Albert J. Solnit Leadership Award
Senator Toni Harp

Community Advocacy Award
Fernando Betancourt

Citizen Advocacy Awards
Eva Bunnell and Norma Schatz

Vision to Action Awards
Paula Armbruster, Anne Calabresi, Henry Fernandez, III,
Matthew Klein, Roslyn Meyer, and Jerome Meyer,
Founders of LEAP—Leadership, Education, and Athletics
in Partnership, Inc.

Connecticut Voices for Children Founders' Award
Priscilla "Penny" Canny

1999

A Special Tribute To
Albert J. Solnit, MD

Albert J. Solnit Leadership Award
Representative John Thompson

Volunteerism Awards
Barbara Colley and Rev. Gary Smith, Camp Totokett

Citizen Advocacy Awards
Marva and Willie Jones, Grandparents

Media Award
Stephen Winters, *Connecticut Post*

Note: There was no First for Kids award program held in 2003, 2007 or 2010.

Connecticut Voices for Children Staff

Jamey Bell, J.D. Executive Director
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Peter Arakas Connecticut Bar Foundation	Hector Glynn The Village for Families & Children, Inc.
Mike Bangser Bangser Consulting	Francine Goldstein Aviation Products Management, Inc.
Jamey Bell (ex-officio) Connecticut Voices for Children	Reverend Bonita Grubbs Christian Community Action
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*Independent research
and advocacy to improve the
lives of Connecticut's children*



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