

*Fall
October, 2007*

Maine Children's Alliance Newsletter

Special Interest

2007 Giraffe Awards to honor those who "Stick their necks out for Kids".

October 17th
8:00 – 10:30
Maple Hill Farm
Conference Center
Hallowell Maine

See article back
page

Stories

SCHIP 2
Education 3
KIDS COUNT 3

A WORD FROM ELLIE

Maine's children can't vote and need a strong voice to be heard. We need your help. At the Maine Children's Alliance, we are the voice for Maine's children. We are engaging in new efforts and reaching new constituencies in an effort to expand our focus on kids' lives, with the goal of nurturing their well-being in every aspect of their formative years.

Our **Annual Meeting** is coming up October 17th. Please join us at the Maple Hill Farm in Hallowell. Breakfast in this wonderful setting is on us! We will have our annual board election and Giraffe Awards. This meeting is important, because this is where we can hear from you! This helps us set our direction in making Maine a better place for children, youth and families. See article on back page.

In 2006, we embarked on a project based upon our report called, "A Case for Cooperation: Making Connections to Improve Education for All Maine Students," and in 2007, Maine began to listen. The biggest change in our educational system since the Sinclair Act of 1957 is underway. This is but a step in the effort to improve the quality of education for all Maine children and spend tax dollars more efficiently. Our role is to ensure that the focus is on improving educational outcomes for our children.

In 2006 and 2007, we took the case for universal kids' health coverage to Washington and Augusta to renew a pledge – that no child should have to go without adequate health care during their vital years of growing and developing. This is the best investment

we can make to take care of our kids now so they can achieve their full potential as adults. In 2008 we embark on getting the 11,000 children in Maine who do not have health insurance and are already eligible for MaineCare signed up for health insurance and access to quality health care.

Now in its fifth year, The Maine Children's Welfare Services Ombudsman program does yeoman's work to provide objective oversight to ensure protection of the most vulnerable children and to help reshape programs to effectively protect children and support families, while marshaling resources to prevent more serious problems later. This program has been successful in part due to the willingness of the child welfare program leaders and staff to work together to improve practice and the policies that drive their work.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Our slate for election to the board of directors at our annual meeting on October 17th includes:

John R. (Jack) Nicholas is the former Commissioner of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. Many know him as the Chief Operating Officer of Catholic Charities Maine. Jack also served as the State Budget Officer for Governors McKernan and King.

Jack is a graduate of the College of William and Mary, has earned a Master of Business Administration from Thomas College and is a graduate of Leadership Maine, Zeta class. He is recipient of the Governor's Distinguished

Service Award, twice recipient of the Governor's Teamwork Award, and Manager of the Year for the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services. Jack also is a member of the Board of Directors of Literacy Volunteers of Greater Augusta.

Mark R. Shibles is former Dean of the School of Education at the University of Connecticut where he was a professor for over 30 years.

Mark has also been Associate Director, University Council for Education Administration, located at Ohio State University; a high school teacher; and a United States Army Counterintelligence Special Agent. Since fall 2001

he has been Senior Advisor to the New England Educational Policy Center.

Mark Shibles brings experience as a leader in national professional organizations and consultant to national and state governments, universities, foundations, professional associations, regional educational agencies and many local school districts.

At the University of Connecticut he regularly taught graduate courses and seminars, and was an advisor for Ph.D. students; speaker about educational policy, leadership and management issues, and is an author of books and monographs. He has served as principal investigator for state, federal, and foundation grants.

Children need quality healthcare and it is available for more of Maine children

Health insurance coverage for children is vital to their health and well being, and to each child's ability to develop to full potential as an adult. A child with a toothache does not learn much, even in the best of classrooms. All children should have access to quality healthcare. Healthy children are better able to learn in school, participate in activities, and become productive adults.

Currently, 19,000 children in Maine have no public or private health insurance coverage and 11,000 of them qualify for MaineCare. What is the likelihood these kids are getting quality healthcare if they do not have health insurance?

"I don't know what I would do without MaineCare to cover doctor's appointments and needed prescriptions for my child," says Tania, a bank employee and a mother living in Portland. "My five year old daughter has asthma and other health issues. Without her medication, she has great difficulty breathing which is so scary for any parent. MaineCare

makes it possible for me to provide my child with the care and medicine she needs."

Our goal is the enrollment of these currently uninsured poor children who already are eligible for MaineCare. We want to ensure that children who now have health insurance continue to be covered. We plan to work with schools and early childhood education programs for disadvantaged children to find and help enroll children who are eligible but have not previously been covered.

A recent op-ed piece stated that "it is irresponsible to ask a child with cancer or a pregnant woman to wait for health coverage if they cannot afford health insurance. Children are one-quarter of our population, but all of our future. We should be working towards the goal of removing children from the ranks of the uninsured and assuring them of the future they deserve and that we all need."

MCA plans to lead an effort to get the preponderance of these children enrolled in MaineCare and in refocusing policy

discussion around children. We continue to work for long-term policy advances for children, helping to focus understanding of the needs of these children and how their healthy development really shapes their future and our own.

As we continue to advocate for reauthorization of the Federal SCHIP program both now and in the future, we will work with schools and early child education programs across Maine and work to identify children who are eligible, but currently not enrolled in MaineCare, and to help their families get them enrolled. There can be no better investment than a healthy start for our children to ensure they develop into their full potential as adults.

Your support is vital to this work, both in financial support for MCA and in helping families in your communities understand that some of their neighbors are already eligible for MaineCare and assisting them to find an application and help to submit it.

"It is irresponsible to ask a child with cancer or a pregnant woman to wait for health coverage if they cannot afford it health insurance."

We Can Insure Children's Health for Decades to Come

The reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program, or SCHIP, is about to either be reauthorized or simply continued without adequate funding to ensure kids that are currently enrolled can continue to be covered. The current authorization for SCHIP programs in all 50 states, including Maine, expires on September 30, so time is of the essence.

Since its inception in 1997, SCHIP has worked to dramatically decrease the number of uninsured children – cutting the number in half in Maine – easing one of our most pressing health care problems. Conditions that can be easily cured in children can become lifelong and expensive problems if left untreated. Simply as a financial investment, health care for children produces an enormously favorable return. Yet the benefits are of course far greater – to parents, to communities, and to children themselves.

Now, the Congress and the president must collaborate to renew SCHIP, and there has been no lack of effort to do so. Fortunately, all four members of our Maine delegation

understand the need for prompt and responsible reauthorization and have signed on to the appropriate bills. In the Senate, Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins are co-sponsors of the major legislation to add \$50 billion to SCHIP over five years, and in the House Tom Allen and Mike Michaud are prepared to support similar gains. The delegation's unity on this issue is an important example to other states, and they need our firm support during crucial votes in the weeks ahead.

The Senate Finance Committee, of which Sen. Snowe is a member, took the lead through an overwhelming, 17-4 bipartisan vote in favor of reauthorizing SCHIP with an additional \$35 billion. The House voted to provide an additional \$50 billion in it's version of the reauthorization bill. We continue to wait for a conference committee to settle the difference and send a conference bill back to the House and Senate for final votes.

The bill does more than provide funding. It maintains important flexibility for states

to tailor their programs to individual needs, it builds on existing private coverage through premium assistance, reduces administrative barriers, and provides incentives for improved health care quality.

To date, the White House has not been supportive of this Congress' work, and has raised the possibility of a veto for any new funding beyond \$5 billion. Unfortunately, this funding level would not even preserve coverage for children currently served by SCHIP. With the number of uninsured Americans at a record high, this is no time to be cutting back on our commitment to kids. They do not have the luxury of waiting years for our help.

The best way to win over the president to a reasonable renewal of SCHIP is for Congress to demonstrate its renewed commitment, in both houses and in both parties, to the program. And by voicing support for our own delegation to speak out on behalf of children, we can all make a difference in the outcome, this year and for decades to come.

MCA Continues to Call for Cooperation in Education

When MCA published “A Case for Cooperation: Making Connections to Improve Education for All Maine Students” last August, we had no way of knowing how Maine would respond. Our report’s basic message was that greater regional cooperation was needed to improve education for all Maine students.

We continue to rally support for greater cooperative efforts to assure that no balls are dropped as Maine embarks on its mission to require 290 school districts to quickly reform into a number closer to 80. Our children’s educational futures are at stake.

The state’s plan is mandated by LD 499, which fixes 2,500 students as the target district size. This law is not the path advocated by MCA. The

numerical goals seem reasonable, but there is a great deal of work left undone in this plan which is more radical in nature than the more community friendly plan we had advocated. Nevertheless, MCA believes the process needs strong support and, where necessary, adjustments in the state plan to suit local needs. Most of all, we need to strive for improved quality of education for all Maine children.

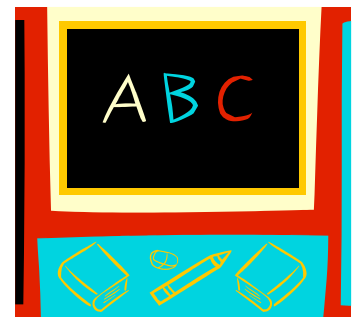
A model for fitting the state plan to local needs might be provided in LD 910, a successful piece of legislation which MCA helped mold for the communities of Bath, Arrowsic, Georgetown, Phippsburg, West Bath, and Woolwich with the opportunity to help form the first new regional district in Maine in nearly 40 years.

This plan is so appealing that other mid-coast communities, including Wiscasset are considering joining the new district.

MCA learned a great deal through working with the Transition Team for Bath/Union 47 in terms of what brings communities together for education, and what helps keep them apart. We are indebted to this group of communities for asking for our help and support and for reinforcing for us the need for looking at local priorities and issues as well as regional needs for which we need to provide flexibility in other parts of the state.

It is worth noting that all of the present School Administrative Districts, or SADs, were formed through private and special laws under a process initiated by the Sinclair Act of 1957.

Fifty years after that landmark of educational cooperation, Maine has undertaken another ambitious and promising initiative to create greater educational opportunity for all its children. Reaching this goal will require lots of hard work from everyone. We were privileged and honored to assist Bath-Union 47 in its formative process. We look forward to continued involvement in this process statewide to help ensure a better educational future for our children.



Maine KIDS COUNT Update

On July 25, the Annie E. Casey Foundation released its 18th annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. The data book tracks the well-being of children in this country to provide benchmarks of child well-being that policymakers and other stakeholders can use to inform local, state, and national discussions on how best to improve the lives of all children.

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* includes 10 key indicators of children’s well-being. The data book ranks each state based on the 10 key indicators. In 2007, Maine ranks 15th in overall well-being, and in the top 10 in three of the indicators: percentage of low-birth weight babies, teen birth rate, and percentage of teens not in school and working.

The essay for this year’s data book is entitled, “Lifelong Family Connections: Supporting Permanence for Children in Foster Care.” In the essay, Maine’s child welfare program is recognized for its leadership, policy changes, organizational restructuring and its many initiatives that have helped more Maine children and

youth find permanent homes and placement with their families or relatives. “Overall, this work has had significant impacts,” writes Douglas Nelson, president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore. “Maine has seen reductions in the number of youth in both congregate care and out-of-home care.”

From June 2004 to December 2006, the number of children in congregate care dropped from 761 to 400. “This is particularly significant since it had been assumed that group care was the only option for many of these youth. Those who left congregate care either went home to their own families, to relatives or to foster homes, with flexible services to meet their needs,” writes Nelson.

During that same timeframe, the total number of youth in out-of-home care decreased to 2,262 – a 27 percent reduction and the lowest number in a decade. The state saved more than \$7.4 million implementing this new process and has re-invested \$4 million to

programs that will further successful permanency outcomes.

The KIDS COUNT initiative also provides access to a number of online databases through the Foundation’s website including State Level Data Online, Census Data Online, Right Start Data Online, and CLIKS: Community-Level Information on Kids. The Foundation maintains the first three databases, while the grantees maintain the CLIKS database. We update the Maine CLIKS database just after the release of the annual *Maine KIDS COUNT Data Book*.

For more information on these databases as well as other KIDSCOUNT products visit our website at www.mekids.org, and choose the Maine KIDS COUNT tab.

If you have any questions about KIDS COUNT or any data needs we may be able to assist you with, please contact Mary Milam, director of the Maine KIDS COUNT Project at 623-1868 x206 or mmilam@mekids.org.

**Maine
Children's
Alliance**



303 State Street
Augusta, ME 04330

PHONE:
207-623-1868

FAX:
207-626-3302

E-MAIL:
mainekids@mekids.org

Visit us on the
Web!
www.mekids.org

2007 GIRAFFE AWARD CEREMONY

Since 1995, MCA has been recognizing those who "stick out their necks for kids" in communities all over Maine. The annual awards program has been so successful in calling attention to the achievements of dedicated volunteers, professionals and organizations that MCA has now adopted the giraffe as its symbol, and an inspiration for its ongoing work.

At the start, we were concerned that too many important advocates for children were going unrecognized and unrewarded. The Giraffe Awards have brought that recognition to dozens of hardworking individuals, groups and businesses in all parts of Maine."

Each year we hear about new people and programs that make a difference in the

lives of our children. By recognizing their achievements, we encourage others to follow their example. Each nomination is important and makes a difference in the work we're able to do on behalf of kids.

Join us for breakfast on October 17th for this year's ceremony at Maple Hill Farm Conference Center in Hallowell. Please RSVP to: Jennifer 623-1868 ext 202

These are exciting initiatives, and we have assembled a highly capable staff to help carry them out. To continue and expand our efforts, we need your support. If you have an issue you want to help with, or one which you want MCA to support, please call Ellie at 612-1868, extension 203. We would love to hear from you.

About Our Organization...

The Maine Children's Alliance advocates for sound public policies to improve the lives of all Maine's Children, Youth and Families.

Every Child _ Every Issue _ Every Day

Voices for Maine's Children
Member, Voices for America's Children

Maine Children's Alliance
303 State Street
Augusta, ME 04330

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