



Annual Report 2003

The leading voice for Westchester's children since 1914



Every child healthy, safe and prepared for life's challenges: that is the goal the Westchester Children's Association has steadfastly pursued for 90 years. In 2003, we continued to respond to new challenges to the well-being of children, including the challenge of finding adequate financial resources to meet their needs. As lead agency of the Campaign for Kids coalition, WCA spear-headed the successful effort that *saved children and family services* threatened with cuts in the 2004 County budget. As states and counties continue to face rising costs, WCA's vigilance and advocacy for children will be increasingly important.

Healthy

WCA and its community partners have enrolled thousands of children in publicly funded health insurance programs over the past several years. Yet some areas of the County have remained underserved. To reach eligible families in Northern Westchester, WCA convened a wide range of community agencies, civic and business leaders to plan a targeted outreach effort. As a result, applications *increased by 36%*, assuring that many more of our children will get the health care they need.

Getting health insurance is only a first step. In many Westchester families *who have insurance*, children's oral health is shockingly poor. In response, WCA's Oral Health Committee has taken action. We surveyed hundreds of families to pinpoint the barriers to using available dental care. WCA trained several Head Start parents as peer educators on oral health. They, in turn, have presented information and tooth-care kits to Head Start families throughout the County. WCA has created and distributed thousands of copies of "*Your Child's Smile/La Sonrisa de su Niño*," a booklet explaining how and why to care for young children's teeth. In addition, we have worked with elected officials on legislation to increase the number of dentists participating in public insurance programs, and to improve utilization of existing dental care.

Safe

Protecting children and youth from gun violence is vital. Along with the Westchester County Youth Council, WCA helped teens carry out a summer public awareness event at White Plains' Thomas Slater Center. Using rap, rock and artistic creativity, nearly 50 young people called on politicians to block immunity for gun manufacturers and urged their peers to avoid the lure of firearms. WCA continues to advocate for sensible County, State and Federal laws that protect children from guns, extending Westchester's excellent record on gun safety legislation.

Prepared

Research shows that no group in the United States is more predictably headed for unhappy outcomes than young people who spend their adolescence in foster care. When they leave, they usually do not have family to support and guide them. WCA convened government officials, service providers, foster youth and parents to promote more effective ways to help these young people make a successful transition to independence.

Of course, most youngsters live *with* family, and it is vital that parents know how to advocate effectively for their own children. When parents are immigrants from another culture, don't speak English and don't know how to get involved, helping their child in school, for example, is daunting. WCA, along with Student Advocacy and the Westchester Hispanic Coalition, offered information, advocacy training and support to immigrant parents in Ossining, Port Chester and Tarrytown. Parents were then able to understand their children's educational rights, help their children get the most appropriate education, as well as understand and influence educational policies.

The highlight of the year was a trip to Albany where parents spoke with State legislators about their concerns. One parent commented, "*I learned that the education of our children is not only an issue for the family but for the whole community, and that as part of the community we must work together as a group with many common goals.*"

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Awareness into Action

Some of WCA's most effective work is accomplished by building and leading coalitions of organizations and individuals who care about children. Since 1991, WCA has led the Campaign for Kids, a coalition of service and civic organizations working to keep kids at the top of Westchester's public agenda and funding for children's services in the County budget. We also co-lead the Child Health Task Force along with the County Department of Health. The Task Force is the origination point for the County's project enrolling children in health insurance, and a vital locus for collaboration to improve children's health.

We believe that everyone can be a child advocate and that children need all the advocates they can get. Parents are often the most effective advocates for children's needs because they can speak from their own experience. In addition to the project with immigrant parents mentioned above, WCA has convened the Westchester Parent Council to inform, support and nurture parents as advocates and activists for kids.

Some of the best advocates for youth issues are young people themselves. In 2003, we trained dozens of youth on how to be an effective advocate. Along with the Westchester County Youth Council, we sponsored the Annual Youth Action Convention, bringing together more than 200 teens to discuss issues and learn from each other's successful advocacy efforts.

For the public-at-large, WCA presented programs about how governments pay for services. In March, we featured Frank Mauro of the Fiscal Policy Institute and later in May presented a talk by Congresswoman Nita Lowey. In the fall, WCA led the Campaign for Kids in hosting *Citizens for Kids Forums* to explore current children's issues.

The Westchester Children's Association remains the only independent, knowledgeable and effective watchdog for Westchester's children. As we enter our 90th year, we continue to identify the needs of children, educate the public about those needs, and mobilize governments and communities to meet them.

Westchester Children's Association Summary Financial Report Year Ending December 31, 2003

Income:		Expenses:	
Individual Contributions	\$ 38,270	Program Expenses:	
Bequests and Trusts Income	41,185	Personnel	\$ 153,697
Grants	173,134	Non-Personnel	73,431
Interest and Dividend Income	24,671	Total Program Expenses	\$ 227,128
Fund-Raising Activities (net)	42,658	Non-Program Expenses:	
Other Income	988	Personnel	\$ 84,040
Total Income	\$320,906	Non-Personnel	31,884
		Total Non-Program Expenses	\$ 115,924
		Total Expenses	\$343,052
Net Gain(Loss) from Operations			\$ (22,146)

A copy of the complete audited financial statement is available from WCA upon request, or from the New York State Attorney General, Office of Charities Registration, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.

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A Message from WCA's President

Dear Friends,

Margaret Mead famously wrote, "A *small group of thoughtful people can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*" As we look back on 2003, we are proud of the remarkable accomplishments of the Westchester Children's Association, a small, but growing, group of thoughtful people committed to changing the world for children. With the support of our friends and donors, and with the help of collaborators from government, business, social services, education and civic life, we steadily make gains toward our goal of ensuring that every child is healthy, safe and prepared for life's challenges.

2004 is WCA's 90th anniversary, and we have planned a year-long series of events and initiatives to celebrate this milestone and to engage many more people in our work on behalf of children. At a kick-off reception on January 29th, County Executive Andrew Spano declared 2004 the Year of the Child. We launched the Voices for Children Pledge, asking each of us to consider the impact on children of our everyday decisions. We will collect pledges from at least 900 people, or about 1% of Westchester's residents, promising to help keep children healthy, safe and prepared for life's challenges. A pledge form, along with a list of ways to take action for kids—at home, in neighborhoods, schools, business, and places of worship—is available from our office.

At our Annual Meeting on May 20th, keynoter Michael Petit, Director of *Every Child Matters*, will discuss how we can push children's needs to the top of the national political agenda. To promote broader discussion of children's issues, WCA's Board members are holding a series of Conversations about Children with local community, professional and civic groups throughout the County. We will learn *which* issues our neighbors think are most important and *what* they are doing to address them.

On September 27th, these and other groups, along with government and non-profit service providers, civic and religious leaders, parents, youth and community volunteers, will join us for *Westchester's Children Today: Building Communities for Their Tomorrows*. Panel presentations and workshops will offer concrete ideas about how we can create and promote positive changes in children's lives. We will develop a series of action items on which we can work together for the betterment of all Westchester's children.

Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton has been invited to address the conferees, and will be joined by Hugh Price, former President of the National Urban League and author, most recently, of *Achievement Matters: Getting Your Child the Best Education Possible*. Dr. Barry Zuckerman of Boston Medical Center will be our lunch speaker.

Finally, our 90th year will culminate in a gala event this winter. We hope you will join with us throughout this eventful and celebratory year. Be part of our "small group of thoughtful people" and help us change the world for kids.

Lisa Katz