

Introduction

You Can Make a Difference You Can Make an Impact

Kids in Kansas can do better. But for kids in Kansas to do better, we have to do better for our kids.

All of us have the power to make a difference for Kansas children. As parents we have the power to teach and model values, establish boundaries, and create moral and achievement expectations. As neighbors we have the power to become personally involved with children and work with others to create communities that support families and nourish children. As owners and managers of businesses, we have the power to make the workplace family- and child-friendly. As policymakers, we have the power to make children a priority. As citizens, we have the power to ensure elected officials understand that children *must* be a priority.

Policymakers at the national, state, and community levels need to hear from you to make good policy decisions. Sometimes lobbying or advocating is carried out by experts or professional lobbyists. However, you don't need to be an expert; you just need some passion and a clear understanding of the process to implement changes.

Whether you are new to the child advocacy arena or a skilled professional, this publication can help you understand not only the process, but also the keys to becoming an effective citizen advocate. You can make a difference.

The most effective advocacy comes from a groundswell of public support. As a citizen advocate, you play a vital role in generating support for your particular cause. Milestones that mark the development of community advocacy and its impact on policymakers are:

- ◆ **Presence:** You and your issue must be visible. Multiple indirect and direct contacts with decision makers are critical to establishing your presence.
- ◆ **Knowledge:** You must know your issue, the policymaking process, and the players involved.
- ◆ **Respect:** Your engagement with the policymaking process should be conducted with integrity.

To be successful in your advocacy efforts, you need a core set of tools. This toolkit will provide you with the basics of knowing the legislative process, knowing the players, and knowing how to effectively engage in the process and keep informed.