Theory of CHANGE
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OVERVIEW

Voices for Ohio’s Children (Voices) was created to give the children of Ohio a voice and to fill a void in advocacy and research for children’s issues within the state of Ohio. Voices speaks on behalf of kids and the issues that affect them. Often times, decision-makers do not hear the voices of children in Ohio and make policies/decisions that do not help them to thrive. Voices is a comprehensive and hands-on advocacy organization, focused on educating, influencing, and improving policies that impact children in our state. Voices is viewed as one of Ohio’s most effective children’s advocacy organization.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Through the THEORY OF CHANGE process, Voices board members and staff identified the ultimate goal as: By 2030, Ohio implements policies that make the State the best place in the country for children to grow into adulthood. While this goal is an ambitious one, we believe it is critical to the future of our state and country, at large. It is also clear that, based on current data, we are currently failing many of our young people in preparing them for this transition. The ultimate goal is in line with Voices mission and vision.

Voices wants to advance and defend effective policies that support Ohio’s children by educating lawmakers and service providers across the state on what is best for our youth. To accomplish this, Voices will strengthen its relationships with policy makers, children’s advocates, and stakeholders. Ultimately, Voices wants to improve the chances for Ohio’s children to grow up safe, healthy, educated, connected, and employable.

This theory of change is developed through facilitated conversations with key leaders, stakeholders and staff. Participants were asked to share their best thinking and identify conditions that will lead to the results that are desired, the resources that will be required, and who will be responsible for establishing the sequenced pre-conditions. Together, they represent a pathway that should promote the achievement of the initiatives long-term outcomes. Additionally, Voices employed a methodology to articulate an advocacy theory of change crafted by the Center for Evaluation Innovation.

Following is a review of the Voices Theory of Change as it is currently constructed.

ULTIMATE OUTCOME:

BY 2030, OHIO IMPLEMENTS POLICIES THAT MAKE THE STATE THE BEST PLACE IN THE COUNTRY FOR CHILDREN TO GROW INTO ADULTHOOD.
By 2030, Ohio will implement policies that make the State the best place in the country for children to grow into adulthood. The developmental milestones of early adulthood serve as indicators that young people are successfully completing the journey from early childhood to early adulthood. They include:

- Prenatal care
- Healthy children, youth and young adults
- Early learning and kindergarten readiness
- Early grade reading and math skills
- Exposure to different activities including experiential learning, recreation, employment, arts, leadership and civic engagement
- High school graduation
- Post-secondary enrollment and meaningful employment

Achieving the ultimate outcome is beyond the scope of Voices. Thus, while Voices will work hard to contribute to this outcome, it cannot assume sole accountability for its achievement. However, Voices can use its’ expertise and strength to educate and work directly with decision-makers, influencers, and young people and their families.

The Theory of Change begins with a set of assumptions. If any of these assumptions change, Voices will need to re-evaluate the theory as these assumptions are the foundation of the theory.

- Staff is knowledgeable and competent.
- Board members are fully engaged.
- Policies and programs for children and youth are fragmented, uncoordinated and unequal across the state of Ohio and in local communities.
- Ohio’s vulnerable children/youth need additional supports and services to be ready to compete with other states’ and countries’ children/youth in school and work.
- Many vulnerable children often have parents that are not always present, i.e. working multiple jobs, incarcerated, ill, and/or behavioral health issues, therefore children/youth need quality child care and afterschool programs, as well as other services and support found in public systems and non-profits.
- Children/youth have been exposed to violence and trauma.
- Children/youth have conditions in which they are born, grow, live, work and age that play a role in being safe, healthy, educated connected and employable.
- There are many research-based theories about the policy process and about the actors that play a role in it that can form the conceptual underpinning of an advocacy. These theories can come from diverse disciplines such as political science, sociology, psychology, social; psychology, or communications and maybe about how the policy process works, the actors that participate in it or different advocacy strategies. They may draw on for example, theories about networks, coalitions, civil society or community organizing and mobilization.
There are a number of core beliefs that undergird Voices theory of change. They include:

- **Meaningful Collaborations**: Voices has a strong tradition of building relationships, strategic alliances, and partnerships. Voices uses the expertise of its staff, consultants, and more than 60 statewide collaborating organizations to educate lawmakers, community leaders, interested individuals, and the media about public policy that is cost-effective and results-oriented – thus maximizing the economic advantages of investing in children.

- **Non-Partisan Approach**: Voices operates independently, free from any political party affiliation. This approach allows us to work effectively with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to achieve meaningful policy wins for children.

- **Organizational Integrity**: Voices demonstrates authenticity and accountability in its practices. We educate policy makers and others throughout the state using resources that are fact-based and thoroughly researched.

- **Commitment to Diversity**: Voices always seeks, respects, and integrates a wide range of perspectives, people and ideas. We welcome and consider a variety of positions on the issues affecting Ohio’s children, both internally from our staff and board and externally from stakeholders.

- **Leadership Excellence**: Voices demonstrates best practices, utilizes innovative strategies, and mobilizes others to achieve measurable results.

- **Strategic Urgency**: Voices recognizes that the needs of children cannot wait. We monitor the current policy landscape so we can be poised to shift our focus if necessary to act on any immediate policy changes that could affect Ohio’s children.
**AUDIENCES**

*Voices has identified four groups that advocacy strategies target.* The first group is the Voices’ organization, itself. This includes both Board and staff. Then there is the public audience made up of segments of the public including parents and youth. There are policy influencers which include the media, community leaders, the business community, thought leaders, political advisors, other advocacy organizations, providers, etc. Often these folk are in touch the key decision makers. Lastly, and most importantly, are decision makers and they are the elected officials, administrators, judges, etc., that make policy. Below are the audiences identified by the Voices Board and staff.

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<tr>
<th>PUBLIC</th>
<th>INFLUENCERS</th>
<th>DECISION MAKERS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents of children birth through young adulthood</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Policy Makers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young people-middle and high schoolers</td>
<td>Businesses</td>
<td>Members of Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>Foundations</td>
<td>State Legislature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>Other Advocates</td>
<td>City Council Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>Donors</td>
<td>Agency administrators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>School Board members</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Foster parents</td>
<td>Superintendents</td>
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<td>Youth Providers</td>
<td>Juvenile Court Judges</td>
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<td>Behavioral Health Providers</td>
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<td>Hospitals</td>
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<td>Police</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Libraries</td>
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<td></td>
<td>City recreation departments</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Faith-based Institutions</td>
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Changes are the results of an advocacy effort aims for with audiences to progress toward a policy goal. The four points on this continuum differ in terms of how far an audience is expected to engage on a policy issue. The continuum starts with basic awareness or knowledge. The goal is to make the audience aware that a problem or potential policy solution exists. The next point is will. The goal is to raise the audiences’ willingness to take action on an issue. It convinces the audience to take action and that any action taken will make a difference. The final point is action. Policy efforts support or facilitate audience action on an issue. Advocacy strategies may pursue one change with one audience or more than one with multiple audiences simultaneously.
Outcomes: LONG TERM

To achieve this outcome by 2030, Voices will work to ensure today’s young people have good statewide policies that incorporate best practices and funding to meet these key developmental outcomes that represent important pre-conditions to their being prepared for a successful passage to young adulthood. Furthermore, for Voices to be successful in this endeavor they will need to have strong leadership, organizational capacity, strong relationships, funding and key partnerships in place. As a result of Voices efforts, success looks like the following within the State of Ohio.

• POLICY CHANGE — Proposed policies, legislative acts and/or programs that would positively impact children’s health and well-being are passed and/or implemented;

• MOBILIZATION AND COLLABORATIVE ACTION — Advance and defend effective policies that support Ohio’s children by educating lawmakers, key stakeholders, service providers, families and young people on what is best for our children.

• STRONG ORGANIZATION — Policies, funding and programs are currently in place are maintained.
POLICY CHANGE — Proposed policies, legislative acts and/or programs that would positively impact children’s health and well-being are passed and/or implemented. Good policies that help children and young people thrive crosses a range of areas. The policies should be consistent, coordinated and seamless to families and their children. This includes the transitions from becoming pregnant and receiving care, bringing a child home, from home or childcare to kindergarten, elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school, and transitions between school and afterschool and school and summer months. Voices will be prepared to propose policies, legislative acts/programs that help our youth and families thrive.

MOBILIZATION AND COLLABORATIVE ACTION — Advance and defend effective policies that support Ohio’s children by educating lawmakers and service providers across the State on what is best for our children. This requires Voices to position its work by awareness, policy, will and action across public, influencers and decision-makers. Educating lawmakers, service providers, key stakeholders, parents and youth across the State on what is best and how to access it for our children uses Voices strength as a convener.

STRONG ORGANIZATION — Policies, funding and programs are currently in place are maintained. vs Policies and programs that are currently in place are maintained and are not altered negatively or dissolved. Voices leadership and staff are knowledgeable and connected to content experts to understand the impact of certain positions and are able to message and articulate the importance of maintaining or improved policies and programs.

The Intermediate Outcomes are the pre-conditions to the Long-Term Outcomes.
Outcomes: INTERMEDIATE

If young people are accomplishing these developmental outcomes, cited above, they must have access to and be engaged in opportunities to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and relevant experiences. Voices will engage and work with legislators, state departments, local governments, key stakeholders, providers and families to ensure that they are educated and understand what is best for children and that good policies and legislative acts are passed and implemented. Voices will be seen as an influencer, a thought leader and partner, a researcher and analyzer of sound data.

- **VOICES IS SEEN AS THE GO TO PLACE** for decision-makers, influencers and the public to get information, best practices and good policy positions for children through young adults.
- **DECISION-MAKERS AND INFLUENCERS USE THE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS** provided by Voices to make decisions on legislation affecting Ohio’s kids.
- **ESTABLISH MEANINGFUL, REGULAR COMMUNICATIONS** with policymakers, stakeholders, other advocacy groups and the public especially youth and families to share information and gather input.
VOICES IS SEEN AS THE GO TO PLACE for decision-makers, influencers and the public to get information, best practices and good policy positions for children through young adults. Voices will strengthen its’ advocacy with public education and awareness for all. In addition, Voices will create public outreach campaigns and public polling. Furthermore, Voices will develop issue and program/policy campaigns. It is important to build a public will campaign in addition to community organizing. Lastly, having a strong community mobilization plan is key.

DECISION-MAKERS AND INFLUENCERS USE THE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS provided by Voices to make decisions on legislation affecting Ohio’s kids. Voices will strengthen advocacy with decision-makers and by providing policy-maker education, engage with decision-makers and in the analysis and research, incorporate decision-makers and into public forums, political will campaigns and champion development, and lastly engage the decision-makers and influencers in lobbying and litigation or regulatory feedback if necessary.

ESTABLISH MEANINGFUL, REGULAR COMMUNICATIONS with policymakers, stakeholders, other advocacy groups and the public especially youth and families to share information and gather input. Voices will strengthen advocacy through making influencers aware of the issues include influencers in the policy development and data translation, engage influencers in the community, messaging and media advocacy and have influencers engaged in coalition building. While these are key activities that Voices will work to achieve, there are other important Organizational Short-Term Outcomes that are pre-conditions.

VOICES WILL STRENGTHEN ITS’ ADVOCACY WITH PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS FOR ALL.
Outcomes: ORGANIZATIONAL SHORT TERM

The Intermediate and Long-Term Outcomes represent the results of Voices work. To achieve these results, Voices will work organizationally to align their work, build capacity and strengthen relationships and partnerships. Below are short-term outcomes/accomplishments that must be obtained over the next few years to establish the preconditions for Intermediate Outcomes.

- **INTEGRATED AND COORDINATED STRATEGY** for research, awareness and advocacy on priority issues.
- **SOUND AWARENESS, MARKETING, STORYTELLING AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES** increase both policy makers’ and other community members’ awareness of the issues affecting children.
- **STRONG COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION/COALITION BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS**
- **ADEQUATE ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY**

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<th>AWARENESS</th>
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<th>PUBLIC</th>
<th>INFLUENCERS</th>
<th>DECISION MAKERS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Increased Organizational and Board Capacity</td>
<td>Increased Knowledge</td>
<td>Changed Attitudes or Beliefs</td>
<td>Changed Attitudes or Beliefs</td>
<td>Changed Attitudes or Beliefs</td>
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<td>Increased Knowledge</td>
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**INTEGRATED AND COORDINATED STRATEGY** for research, awareness and advocacy on priority issues. Voices will learn and apply leading edge techniques and processes from across the nation to ensure that they are recognized by policymakers, providers, stakeholders, other advocacy groups and community members as an open minded, unbiased, reliable and consistent source for information. Voices will also be known for their staff expertise in health and children’s public systems. Combining both efforts will allow Voices to become place to go for health and children’s issues as well as an unbiased thought partner to help decision-makers, influencers and the community to understand the application of the legislation and policy being considered.

**SOUND AWARENESS, MARKETING, STORYTELLING AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES** increase both policy makers’ and other community members’ awareness of the issues affecting children. Voices will use its’ data and analysis and create key messages for key audiences. These messages will be used in awareness campaigns, issue campaigns, public will campaigns, and public outreach campaigns. In addition, Voices will use real life stories to illustrate the issue and use their network and partners to get the word out to different stakeholders, decision-makers, influencers, families and young people.
If Voices strategies are to be effective in improving youth outcomes, the Voices Leadership must achieve its own set of outcomes. These outcomes represent critical contributions throughout that support the work of the Voices and its partners. Voices Leadership outcomes includes an engaged and influential Board and CEO that:

• RAISES AWARENESS OF VOICES
• BUILDS STRONG POLITICAL, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SUPPORT
• SUSTAINS A LEVEL OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR VOICES

RAISES AWARENESS OF VOICES — Board members and CEO work together to raise awareness on the issue of good child policy and how Voices as an organization is critical in this support. Voices will work to develop a list of significant stakeholders and businesses to meet with and share key messages, stories, a list of significant accomplishments and important activities or events that can be shared for each board member and CEO to use.

BUILDS STRONG POLITICAL, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SUPPORT — Voices leadership will shore up its programs, services and expertise to be seen as the go to place in the space of children and families. Voices will establish key relationships and partnership to begin developing allies and joining coalitions to strengthen its base of support.

SUSTAINS A LEVEL OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR VOICES — Voices leadership will continue to identify public and private dollars and opportunities for Voices to lead the work and also look for new partnerships that would allow Voices to use its assets to support others causes.

STRONG COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION/COALITION BUILDING AND MAINTENANCE OF PARTNERSHIPS. Voices will continue to strengthen their relationships with policymakers, children’s advocates and stakeholders and keep them engaged by leveraging resources, expertise, and using the multiple groups’ effort to increase the level of impact. Voices will gain additional access to contacts, connections and relationships established by other groups which further strengthen Voices’ mobilization. Furthermore, Voices will engage with local and national organizations and corporations that support kid’s issues to help grow awareness, resources, and expertise.

GREAT ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE with effective staff and funding. Voices will continue to employ and grow staff with greater knowledge and expertise in children’s systems, however, additional staff will be needed to:

• Enhance data, research and analysis to produce the necessary metrics and reports
• Deepen relationships and partnerships with decision-makers and allies
• Enhance effective fundraising strategies to have the appropriate financial resources
• Enhance communications and events planning
• Assist the President/CEO and staff

Outcomes: LEADERSHIP SHORT TERM
This THEORY OF CHANGE builds a common understanding within both the board and staff of what is needed to strengthen the organization and is vital for effective advocacy. In addition, the theory of change helps Voices remain focused on organizational priorities, so that when the context changes, Voices’ priorities remain on track.

As Voices plans implementation of this theory of change, Voices will:

ENSURE the theory of change is embedded into a broader social and economic context, where other factors and risks might influence the desired results;

TEST the theory of change and make sure it is specific enough to measure its assumptions in credible and useful ways;

DETERMINE the theory of change’s feasibility with current organizational capacity;

ASSESS whether other advocates or partners that are complimenting, duplicating or opposing organizational efforts.

ENGAGE in scenario planning and/or contingency planning to examine sustainability of the Voices organization.

This theory of change is not a static document and will be reviewed periodically for continued relevance throughout the implementation of programming and organizational capacity-building.
Voices for Ohio’s Children is a registered 501 (c)3 nonprofit organization. All contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.