Giving Thanks for 2016

Dear friends and colleagues,

With the end of 2016 in sight, we at Advocacy & Communication Solutions, LLC (ACS) want to extend our heartfelt appreciation to you—our clients, partners, and friends—who inspire our work each day. Sometimes, especially during this busy time of the year, we get so focused on our day-to-day, we need a reminder of why we do the work that we do. We want to take a few minutes to reflect on and acknowledge the accomplishments of our colleagues—we are in awe of the energy and passion you bring to your work, and motivated by your commitment to the issues about which we all care deeply. We are grateful to play a part in your local, state, and national initiatives that transform the lives for children, youth, and families across the country. Highlighted below is just a snapshot of our 2016 achievements that made this year such a success and set the stage for 2017.

• A new master plan for children, youth, and families (Little Rock, Arkansas)—Through an 18-month community outreach and facilitation process, ACS worked with local partners to develop the city's first-ever Master Plan for Children, Youth, and Families to help guide funding and standards for programs. This comprehensive plan will have a profound impact on the city's boys and men of color by giving those who are in greatest need access to services. ACS is extremely proud of the work accomplished in Little Rock to develop the plan, and wish the city continued success in its implementation of such a critical effort. Read The Master Plan for Little Rock's Children, Youth and Families here.

In recent years, challenges regarding Little Rock’s children, youth, and families have come to bear on our community that cannot be tackled by one department—or the city—alone. Based on evidence and community feedback, the Master Plan is the guiding document for the Department of Community Programs, to serve as leaders, conveners, and partners to help children, youth, and families in Little Rock succeed.

--Bruce Moore, City Manager, City of Little Rock

• Community engagement guides foundation priorities (Lancaster, South Carolina)—For the first time in the J. Marion Sims Foundation’s history, the foundation launched a public engagement process to inform their grantmaking strategies, how they engage the community, and how they partner with other organizations. In 2016, the foundation increased staff and board capacity for engaging their community, and used the information gathered through the process to set themselves on a trajectory for the next 10 years. Their shared vision includes: supporting and building a healthy community, helping youth successfully transition...
to adulthood, and elevating philanthropy. Learn more about their effort in this Lancaster News article: Plotting the course toward a stronger community.

- A community effort to prevent and end youth homelessness (Cuyahoga County, Ohio)—In 2016, A Place 4 Me (AP4M) initiative was recognized nationally as one of three sites to embark on a 100-Day Challenge—to house 100 youth in 100 days and prevent all youth leaving foster care from entering into homelessness. AP4M received this honor based on a comprehensive plan including community partnership that harnesses the strengths and resources of more than 30 partners to prevent and end homelessness among young adults age 15 to 24 in Cleveland/Cuyahoga County. ACS is proud to be part of AP4M’s communication effort and we look forward to the annual Youth Homelessness Symposium in January 2017. AP4M’s efforts to house youth and provide supportive services attracted media coverage from several outlets, and the collaborative garnered attention across northeast Ohio. The community responded to this amazing work by raising nearly $12,000 to provide housing kits to help youth set up their own household. Media includes the following:
  - Fresh Water Cleveland: A Place 4 Me launches 100 Day Challenge to end youth homelessness
  - Cleveland Magazine: Youth goals: House 100 kids in 100 days
  - ideastream: Cleveland/Cuyahoga Co. participating in 100-Day Challenge to end youth homelessness
  - A unified approach for the early childhood workforce (Multiple States): In December 2016, ACS was selected by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to provide technical assistance to state affiliates for their Power to the Profession initiative which seeks to unify the early childhood field around a collective approach for developing and retaining a high-quality early childhood workforce. ACS will lead the technical assistance effort with AEYC organizations in Indiana, Iowa, New Mexico, New York, and Wisconsin to develop and implement community outreach and engagement strategies to better understand the needs and perspectives of the early childhood field with regard to workforce related issues. This will inform the work of the Power to the Profession Taskforce, a group of more than 50 stakeholders from across the country tasked with leading the effort on behalf of NAEYC. Ultimately, NAEYC seeks to unify the entire early childhood profession, leading to comprehensive policy and financing changes at the state and federal levels. We are looking forward to partnering with NAEYC on this critical project for the next several years.

“Once you begin community engagement, you open the door to new knowledge and intelligence.”
– Susan DeVenny, President & CEO, J. Marion Sims Foundation
• Increasing awareness and developing a regional strategy for two-generational approaches—(Detroit, Michigan)—In fall 2016, the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW) took a lead role in creating a collaborative approach between Detroit’s workforce development and early childhood systems. The purpose of this collaboration was to connect the two systems in order to help implement a “two-generational” approach to services and supports for both children and parents/caregivers to help reduce poverty and increase family stability. To help CSW and system stakeholders better communicate about the importance and significance of a two-generational approach, ACS interviewed stakeholders to inform the development of core messages and talking points, as well as opportunities to leverage and bridge systems. When implemented by system stakeholders, two-generational approaches have the potential to significantly affect multiple sectors and more effectively address the challenges of poverty. Two generational approaches are an emerging trend within the workforce and health and human services fields and one that ACS will track throughout 2017.

• Idaho early childhood leaders to build awareness and support for early childhood (Boise, Idaho) —In September 2016, the Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children (IAEYC) was awarded a three-year grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to engage communities across Idaho regarding the importance of high-quality early learning programs for children. In the last quarter of 2016, IAEYC selected ACS to design and implement a research-based, three-year statewide strategic communication and community outreach plan to build awareness, support, and demand within Idaho communities and among state leaders to invest in early childhood education. This is the largest grant that IAEYC has received for statewide communication work. ACS is excited to embark on yet another early childhood strategy and will provide updates on the progress of this unprecedented effort.

• The Health Foundation for Western and Central New York(Buffalo, NY): Beginning in December 2016 ACS started work to help advance the foundation’s Triggers of Decline framework. This framework is poised to elevate the national dialogue about gaps in care and information on older Americans. In 2017, ACS will develop strategies to communicate about and collaborate on new evidence-based-interventions for older adults to key audiences around the country.

We look forward to keeping this momentum going, and accomplishing great things with you in 2017. If you have any questions about these projects, our work or how we can help you in 2017 just email us here. We wish you a happy and healthy holiday season!