

SPARC YEAR IN REVIEW

2018



FIRST FOCUS



STATE POLICY ADVOCACY
& REFORM CENTER



INTRODUCTION TO SPARC

The State Policy Advocacy and Reform Center (SPARC) an initiative funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and housed at First Focus, aims to improve outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system by building the capacity of and connections between state child welfare advocates. SPARC is managed by First Focus, with support from a policy and communications team, and a Leadership Advisory Council made up of state advocates to set SPARC's agenda. Today there are 51 SPARC partners from 40 states (including the District of Columbia), and the network continues to grow and adapt to respond to the ever-changing political landscape. In 2018, we gained partners from Illinois and Georgia.

At its core, SPARC serves as a hub and technical assistance center for state child welfare advocates working to reform policies at the state level. In 2018 SPARC sought to expand and amplify the depth and scope of technical assistance provided to partners on a range of issues, most notably through assisting partners in advocating for the quality implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act.

SPARC also facilitates a robust listserv and holds regular network calls for partners to share strategies, ask questions of one another, and contribute to resources that benefit the entire network. The network also has a number of workgroups that focus on topics that network partners identify as being areas that they are interested in working collectively on. This year we had workgroups that delved into Medicaid access for foster youth and former foster youth, the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act and prevention strategies to reduce the number of children and youth entering foster care due to the opioid crisis. Many of the priorities that SPARC focused on were determined by regularly surveying the network, as well as from receiving input from our five state network members who serve on the SPARC Leadership Council.

Each year, we hold a two-day convening to bring our advocates together. In 2018, our convening was held in Baltimore, MD at the offices of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. It was a great opportunity for partners to meet face to face, learn about initiatives at the federal level, and strategize on issues to work on in the next year. This year our convening included an additional day for regional groups to gather for strategic planning sessions with regional partners and child welfare consultants.

Looking to 2019, we hope to expand our membership into more states and into new sectors of advocacy to

deepen SPARC's capacity to advocate for the full range of children and families involved in child welfare systems, such as children with special health care needs, Native American children and families, LGBTQ youth, children and youth involved in juvenile justice programs, and others. We also want to continue to be a thought-leader on behalf of children and families involved with child welfare and a resource on policy solutions that drive better outcomes in health, education, housing, nutrition, and early childhood. Together, we can work towards a child welfare system that gives families and youth the tools they need to succeed and prosper!

MEET THE 2018 SPARC COUNCIL

The Leadership Council's function is to provide strategic direction and decision-making about SPARC's policy priorities and activities. The Council holds monthly conference calls to discuss SPARC's agenda and to weigh in on various SPARC activities. We know that issues and strategies can vary depending on the size, demographics, and regional location of a state. That's why in October of 2017, SPARC states were divided into 5 regions so that discussions can occur amongst states similarly situated. Each region is represented on the Leadership Council with the hope of making SPARC's priorities more inclusive of all the members.

SPARC partners vote on Leadership Council members at the Annual Convening. In 2018, SPARC leadership made the decision to extend the SPARC Council membership to 2 years to give incoming council members more time to establish a relationship with each of their partners. SPARC will elect new Council members in October of 2019.

Northeast Region Chair: Susan Elsen, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

Susan Elsen is a full-time child welfare advocate at the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute in Boston, an anti-poverty organization that advocates to promote best policies for low-income and marginalized residents of Massachusetts. She currently focuses on children and family issues including child custody and child welfare issues.

Southern Region Chair: Shannon Moody, Kentucky Youth Advocates

Shannon Moody is the child welfare policy director for the only independent statewide advocacy organization in Kentucky. She has a background in mental health and working in clinical settings with youth. Shannon holds a B.S.W. from Michigan State University and a M.S.W. from the University of Tennessee- Knoxville.

Western Region Chair: Arika Sanchez, NMCAN (New Mexico)

Arika Sanchez is the Director of Policy and Advocacy for NMCAN in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Arika holds a Juris Doctor from New York Law School, Master of Public Administration from the University of New Mexico, and Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She has previously worked for United Way of Central New Mexico, The Legal Aid Society in New York City, and Volunteer Legal Services Hawaii.

Midwest Region Chair: Angelica Cardenas-Chaisson, Child and Family Policy Center (Iowa)

Angelica received her B.A. in sociology from the University of California, Santa Cruz and a Master's of Social Work with an emphasis in children and families from the University of California, Berkeley. She currently works on health equity and young children and advocating for children involved in the child welfare system.

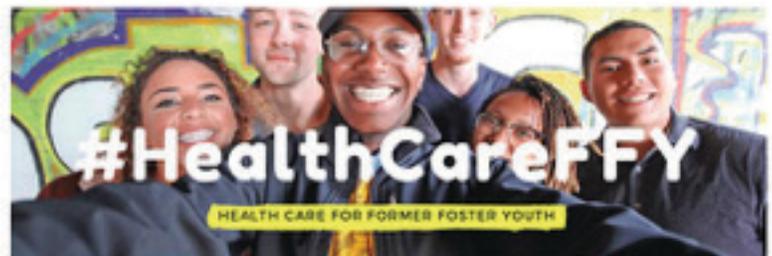
Mid-Atlantic Region Chair: Allison Gilbreath, Voices for Virginia's Children

Allison Gilbreath is Voices' Policy Analyst for Foster Care and Juvenile Justice. She began her career at Prevent Child Abuse Virginia, then with the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), and most recently with the Lt. Governor's office where she worked on the Commonwealth Council for Childhood Success. Allison is a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) and has been appointed to the CASA/Children's Justice Act Advisory Board for DCJS. Allison was a Governor's fellow in 2011 and selected for the 2016 Emerging Leaders Program at University of Virginia's Sorenson Institute.

MEDICAID COVERAGE FOR FOSTER YOUTH AND FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

In 2018, SPARC's Medicaid working group partnered with Foster Club to raise awareness of the importance of Medicaid to children and youth in foster care, including youth who have aged out of care who are eligible to retain Medicaid coverage until age 26.

The Medicaid work group launched a campaign to highlight work that states can and should be doing to actively enroll more former foster youth. The Health Care for Former Foster Youth campaign or #HealthCareFFY is a collaborative campaign designed to assist states in effective implementation of health care for older foster youth. The campaign is focused on seven challenge areas including the youth application process, eligibility issues, data tracking, and youth outreach, and health care anywhere the youth resides. In 2018, the campaign hosted multiple webinars and produced multiple issue papers to reach a wide range of advocates, Medicaid stakeholders, and young leaders to establish a peer learning community to help ensure all former foster youth have health care coverage to age 26.



Seeing a legislative opportunity, SPARC successfully advocated that Congress clarify the law as part of a package of bills to address our nation's current opioid crisis. SPARC and Foster Club youth participated in a First Focus congressional briefing, sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, to highlight and educate Members of Congress on the importance of Medicaid to foster youth. The briefing highlighted the consequences of the glitch in this access to coverage on the lives of older foster youth and was one of the driving forces for the inclusion of this provision into the bipartisan legislation, H.R. 6 The SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act. This act was signed into law in September of 2018.

GOING PLACES CAMPAIGN

In 2017, SPARC launched the Going Places Campaign to bring national attention to the normalcy needs of foster youth, which include the rite of passage of obtaining a driver's license and vehicle insurance to be able to drive to work and school. SPARC continued this campaign effort through 2018 and facilitated regular network calls with partners.

As a part of the Going Places Campaign, SPARC launched a website titled "Youth Going Places" and has created social media toolkits to highlight



the importance of the campaign. The website serves as a landing page for resources and a place for states to find their current state policies as well as newly introduced legislation. Additionally, SPARC has created a model legislation document for advocates to utilize within their own districts. Through the exchange of information by state partners who have secured state policies or laws that facilitate foster youth in obtaining their licenses, two additional states were able to introduce driver's license legislation.

FAMILY FIRST IMPLEMENTATION

During this year, the implementation of Family First took center stage for SPARC advocates. SPARC engaged in a number of activities that prepared partners to engage in state outreach to influence state efforts to implement Family First, including conducting a series of webinars regarding the provisions of Family First, analyzing key issues with respect to evidence-based prevention programs, and conducting strategic planning to create state-tailored workplans regarding Family First's implementation. These activities empowered partners to join working groups and coalitions in their states to spearhead implementation efforts. In many instances, SPARC partners led or were primary participants in leading state convenings of child welfare administrators, advocates, foster parents and others to bring together key stakeholders around the implementation of Family First. For example, in New Jersey, Virginia, North Carolina, Nebraska, Oregon and other states, SPARC advocates played a central role in state convenings around Family First.

Coupled with these activities, SPARC was active in providing state-focused feedback to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regarding Family First rulemaking, including feedback regarding the establishment of the Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for prevention programs and model licensing rules of foster parents. Other child welfare stakeholders used SPARC's rulemaking comments as templates for their recommendations to HHS. SPARC partners' leadership roles within states as well as their recommendations to HHS positioned SPARC members as leaders within their states and communities on cutting edge child welfare issues.

2018 ANNUAL SPARC CONVENING

In 2018 we hosted the 6th consecutive SPARC Convening in Baltimore, MD. SPARC's convening featured a range of speakers and topics highlighting the implementation of Family First and other important child welfare issues, including strategic planning sessions that allowed partners to deeply assess the landscapes in their states and form plans to influence the implementation of Family First and other important issues.



Welcome to the 2018
SPARC Convening!



Convening topics included key issues such as the role of predictive analysis in Family First implementation, key strategies to address ethnic and racial disparities in child welfare, and effective communications strategies to address disproportionality. The convening also highlighted the work of other key players in child welfare, allowing partners to make connections with key stakeholders whose work is important to the work of state advocates.

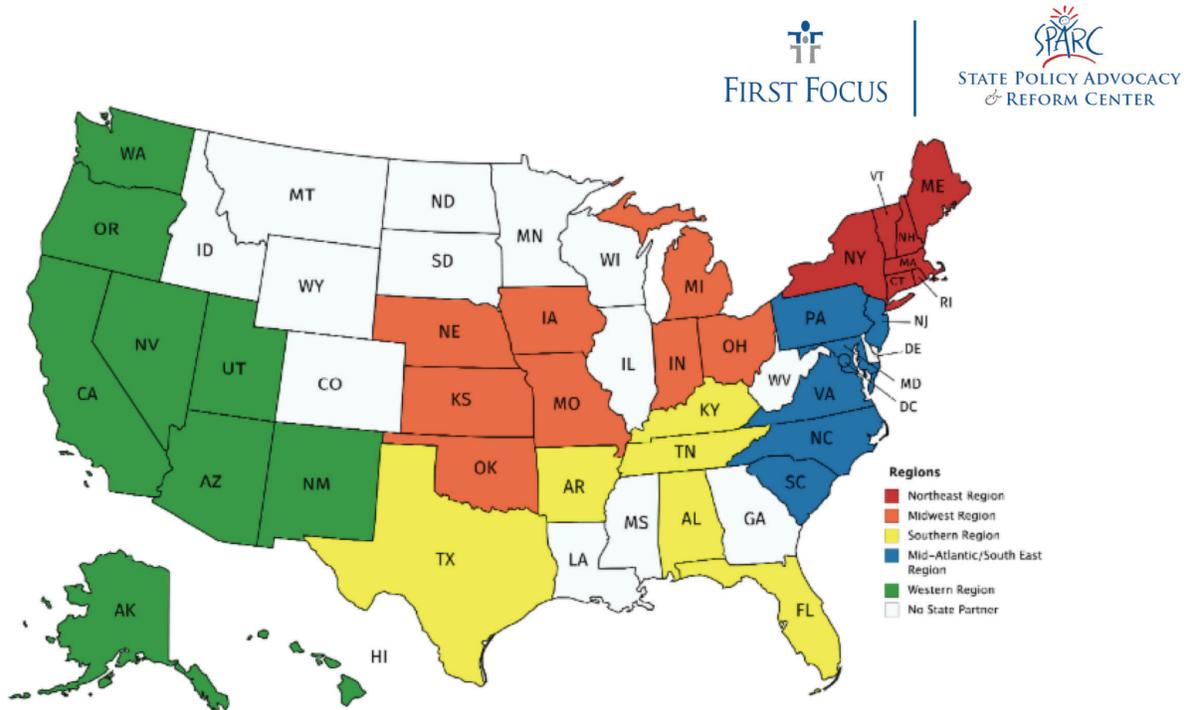
FOSTERING TRANSITIONS GRANT OPPORTUNITY

With the release of the Fostering Youth Transitions Data Report highlighting state data on key outcomes of older youth involved in child welfare, The Annie E. Casey Foundation offered grant funding to 11 SPARC partners to use the data report to inform efforts in their states to educate lawmakers regarding the challenges older youth in foster care experience, and fashion policy solutions that improve the well-being of older youth in foster care.

This grant opportunity is being extended in 2019 to additional grantees. These grant opportunities present

a unique opportunity for SPARC to use important data as a tool to bring about greater awareness among policymakers in states about older youth and develop comprehensive policies that allow them to successfully transition into adulthood.

2018 SPARC PARTNERS



Advocates for Children and Youth (Maryland)
 Advocates for Children of New Jersey
 American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois
 Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families
 Center for Children’s Justice (Pennsylvania)
 Child and Family Policy Center (Iowa)
 Children’s Action Alliance (Arizona)
 Children’s Advocacy Alliance (Nevada)
 Children’s Law Center (D.C.)
 Children Now (California)
 Children’s Trust of South Carolina
 Citizens’ Committee for Children (New York)
 Connecticut Voices for Children
 Cutler Institute for Health and Social Policy (Maine)
 Facing Foster Care in Alaska

Florida’s Children First, Inc.
 FosterAdopt Connect (Kansas)
 FosterAdopt Connect (Missouri)
 Good Beginnings Alliance (Hawaii)
 Juvenile Law Center (Pennsylvania)
 Kansas Appleseed
 Kentucky Youth Advocates
 Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center
 Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
 Michigan’s Children
 National Center for Youth Law (California)
 Nebraska Appleseed
 New Futures (New Hampshire)
 New Mexico Child Advocacy Networks
 New Mexico Voices for Children
 North Carolina Child
 Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy
 Oregon Foster Youth Connection
 Partners for Our Children (Washington)

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
 Prevent Child Abuse Indiana/The Villages
 Rhode Island Kids Count
 Tennessee Voices for Children
 TexProtects
 Texans Care for Children
 The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA) (New York)
 Voices for Alabama’s Children
 Voices for Children in Nebraska
 Voices for Georgia’s Children
 Voices for Illinois Children
 Voices for Ohio’s Children
 Voices for Utah Children
 Voices for Vermont’s Children
 Voices for Virginia’s Children
 Voices for Youth (California)
 Youth Law Center (California)

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Website: www.childwelfaresparc.org

Twitter: @childwelfarehub

SPARC is grateful for the generous support of philanthropy partners that invest in the critical work of the SPARC advocacy network. Foundation supporters include the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and the Walter S. Johnson Foundation.