



2020 Annual Report



A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The year of 2020 brought with it many new and unexpected challenges that impacted our families and our staff. From an unprecedented pandemic to a national reckoning with systemic racial inequity, we found ourselves in a position where we had to be creative to meet our community's increased needs for support while also adapting all our usual strategies and techniques to work at a safe distance. It has been a difficult time, but the VCR team managed to maintain all our initiatives at the standard we expect from ourselves. We even managed to achieve some new levels of success.

Throughout the transition to virtual work, our team remained committed to promoting the well-being of children and families. Like all organizations this year, VCR has had to think innovatively about the best way to continue serving our community at a safe distance. This was especially challenging because so much of our work is built around face-to-face engagement within communities. The VCR team adapted our usual methods for virtual spaces. We started calling all our families, checking on them, connecting them to resources, and engaging them in virtual Parent Cafés. We realized that by calling all our families, listening to their concerns, and adapting our longstanding engagement models, we could provide them with much-needed support in otherwise isolating times. Our parent engagement work now includes offering Parent Advisory Councils, Parent Support Network, Parent Cafés, and Community Cafés completely virtually. These Cafés offer an avenue for parents and community members to connect in a safe way, while actively working to strengthen their families and community. In addition, we provided access to behavioral health support for both our families and our staff, in an

effort to care for the mental health of our entire community during times of great distress.

This year we have also remained committed to hiring from within the communities we serve, despite the challenges of hiring during a pandemic. VCR has hired 10 new staff members in the last year, and each new team member has enriched our practice with their unique contributions. Our commitment to true inclusion is something we reaffirm every day. We believe that the lived experiences of the members of our team are incredibly valuable to the work of supporting families. Each of our staff members brings unique life experiences that are helping them connect with and serve families. Some began their engagement with VCR as parents and have since become part of our team as family support partners and mentors. It has been so inspiring to watch this team coming together, even amidst the struggles of this year, and to see the steadfast commitment we all have to being there for families and promoting child well-being.

This year also saw the launch of our new logo, branding and website. Our work now more than ever explicitly centers around families and children. We are working in both family and system spaces because we believe that family and community well-being are crucial to the future of children.

Sincerely,

Sanaria Sulaiman

Sanaria Sulaiman
Executive Director



ABOUT US

WHO We Are

Vision for Children at Risk is a nonprofit dedicated to promoting the well-being of children, families, and the community. Over the past two decades, we have advocated tirelessly to change the relentless inequities that persist in our region's systems. The work of building a better future for children at risk has never been easy, but it has always been rewarding. We do it by sticking to what we know works: engaging with the experience, passion, and creative voices of our community members. Our team is committed to empowering families and uplifting communities. We cultivate active collaborations to develop new ideas and methods for protecting our community's youngest and most vulnerable members.

WHAT We Do

Vision for Children at Risk (VCR) promotes the well-being of children, youth, and their families, with a primary focus on those impacted by socioeconomic risk and racial inequity. We do this by:

- **Informing** the community with data and research,
- Promoting **collaborative** action,
- **Engaging** and supporting families, and
- **Advocating** for child well-being through policy and community investment.

WHY We Do It

We believe that the neighborhood in which a child lives should not determine the limits of their future. We know that change is possible when you empower parents and engage with communities as partners in the work of protecting our region's children.

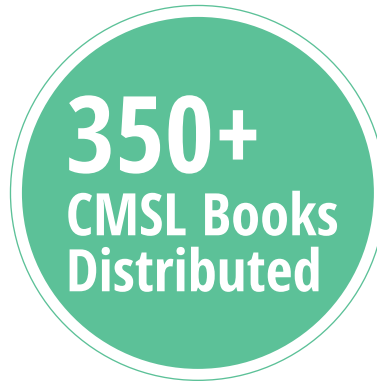
OUR CORE VALUES



HIGHLIGHTS OF 2020



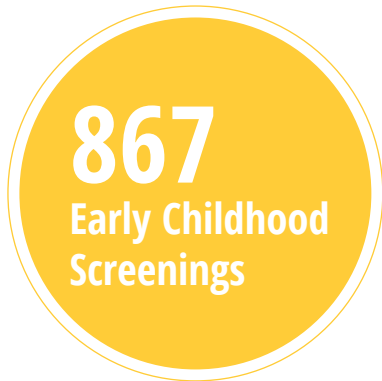
Parent Cafés are hosted **BY PARENTS FOR PARENTS**. By centering on the 5 Protective Factors they have kept families connected and growing stronger together.



We released the 11th Edition of the Children of Metropolitan St. Louis Data Book featuring **40+ indicators** on child well-being.



PACT-STL is using the Community Café Model to better the Child Protection System. Impacted families and service providers are **coming together for change**.



LEAP Ahead STL cohort members logged 867 screenings, about half of which were for **social and emotional development**.



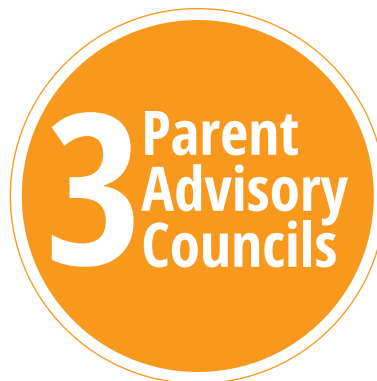
Our VCR Family has grown in the past two years, and we are proud that nearly half of our staff works directly **with families**.



We **co-hosted** this year's Legislative Wrap-Up alongside Generate Health and St. Louis Child Abuse and Neglect Network (STLCANN).



Parents, Community Members, and Organizational Partners participated in the **Enhanced Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services Training (CLAS)**.



We are driving the implementation of Parent Advisory Councils, ensuring **parents and families are at the center** of decisions that impact them.



Parents are **positively impacting systems** meant to help by sharing their lived experiences, working alongside providers, and advocating for change.



PROJECT LAUNCH

Our work through Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health) began in October 2019 after we received five years of funding from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). We are fostering the health development and wellness of young children in the City of St. Louis by working alongside the community.

The community came together for a launch of the work in January, full of anticipation for the work to come. We did not know then what the year had in store, but the strong Project LAUNCH community has proved itself to be quite resilient, one of the five protective factors of strong families we promote through Parent Cafés.

Project LAUNCH is guided by the Young Child Wellness Council (YCWC) and the Project LAUNCH Parent Advisory Council (PL-PAC). Although all meetings had to switch to virtual platforms, they both grew throughout the year.

The PL-PAC is a space where parents can meet separately from providers to connect, learn from each other, and guide the work. They also have four representatives that sit on the YCWC, ensuring that family voice is always at the table.

In June, the YCWC joined the St. Louis Region System of Care Council (SOC) as a way to leverage and utilize existing collaborations and partnerships, and share regional resources.

I became involved with VCR by attending a parent café training in the beginning of 2020. That was my 1st Café experience. I really enjoyed it. I became aware of protective factors and it's stuck with me ever since. I believe this has helped me to become more patient with my toddler. Being a toddler mom can be very challenging. The knowledge of her development and social/emotional competence has helped me out as a 1st time mom. During the Covid-19 crisis, I felt my mood was lifted from participating in groups and discussions about parenting. I value the stories shared from others.

The connection felt good in a time of isolation. My family is well.

-Expecting Mother with a Toddler



Project LAUNCH Goals:

- 1. Improve coordination and collaboration across family and child serving systems.**
- 2. Increase knowledge and behaviors of parents of children 0-8 on topics of early childhood development and community resources.**
- 3. Increase capacity of childcare and early childhood providers on topics of early childhood development.**

Towards these efforts in 2020, we have:

- Hosted 16 Parent Cafés (including 5 Fathers' Cafés).
- Continued the work of LEAP Ahead STL, an early childhood screening initiative. The cohort tracked 876 screenings in 2020, part of the 3000+ that have now been entered since the start in 2018.
- Provided Enhanced Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services Training to 60+ participants, including parents and service providers.
- Trained parents and providers in the Parent Café model.
- Offered four trainings on the Ages and Stages Questionnaire Enterprise System-Data Hub.



**PROJECT
LAUNCH**

PACT-STL

Parents & Children Together-St. Louis (PACT-STL) is a five-year grant from the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families. We are working to prevent child maltreatment, reduce entry into the child welfare system, and enhance the overall well-being of families.

Vision for Children at Risk is leading this five-year initiative in St. Louis City and County alongside many key partners.



LEADERSHIP & OVERSIGHT

PACT-STL has three core groups that guide and drive the work, including: an Executive Committee, Collaborative, and Parent Advisory Council (PAC). Parents are engaged in the Parent Advisory Council and representatives serve on the Collaborative.

2020 HIGHLIGHTS

Throughout 2020, the PACT-STL team has built a strong foundation through trainings on the Five Protective Factors of Strong Families, Strengths-Based Case Management, and Virtual Parent Cafés. Our Family Support Partners (FSPs) and Family Mentor have adapted their family engagement strategies due to the pandemic. They utilize phone outreach to build relationships with parents in high needs neighborhoods, check in on families, better understand family needs during the pandemic and link families to resources. Through all of this they have identified 19 parent partners to serve on the PAC (beginning in 2021) and have built a strong following for the Virtual Parent Cafés with 32 parents/caregivers attending the first café in December.

SYSTEMS CHANGE

One of the key strategies PACT-STL is using to positively impact the child welfare system is by hosting a Community Café Series. Parents and service providers are actively working together to better understand the needs, gaps, and supports. We hosted four first sessions to build a base understanding of the situation and opportunities for growth, 62 people



participated in these. Then we hosted two second sessions in the summer to develop an action plan, and had 47 people participate in these. Through this, three work groups have developed to take the work to the next level. Work group focus areas are:

- Communication
- Public Awareness
- Prevention

STLCANN



The St. Louis Child Abuse and Neglect Network (STLCANN) is an initiative of VCR, and the work closely aligns with PACT-STL. STLCANN Leadership serves as a core part of the PACT-STL Collaborative, expanding opportunities for preventing child abuse and neglect in the St. Louis region by strengthening families as well as improving policy and practice in child welfare.

In addition to this, STLCANN has continued to offer quarterly training for professionals working with children and families. In 2020, 3 virtual trainings were offered:

- Understanding Suicide: Prevention, Assessment, and Response Training.
- Ethics of Supervision
- Preparing Foster Parents to Work with Trauma, Boundaries, and Expectations.





SYSTEM OF CARE | FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

System of Care St. Louis Region is working to improve the mental health outcomes for children and youth, birth through age 24, with Serious Emotional Disturbances (SED), and their families. The System of Care collaborates with family service providing organizations to help promote family voice & choice.

Vision for Children at Risk provides Family Support Services through our partnership with the System of Care. Our Family Support Partners (FSPs) bring their own lived experiences from navigating behavioral/mental health systems to build trusting rapport with families. FSPs are committed to being invited in to walk alongside families to help them become self-sufficient. VCR offers client-centered Family Support Services through the System of Care Expansion Project, partnerships with BJC and Hopewell, and for families throughout the community.

Through System of Care St. Louis Region Expansion, our Family Support Team is working to:

- **Strengthen and enhance current infrastructure to connect juvenile justice involved youth and families with mental health service providers;**
- **Connect juvenile justice involved youth and families with Family Support Partners; and**
- **Create an Integrated Family Treatment Model for juvenile justice involved youth and families.**



Support is all around you

SYSTEM OF CARE | ST. LOUIS REGION

The System of Care Expansion Project is a federally funded initiative through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) that the St. Louis Mental Health Board manages. This project focuses on juvenile justice involved youth ages 12-18 (and their families) with Serious Emotional Disturbances and those with early signs and symptoms of Serious Mental Illness who live in the St. Louis Promise Zone. VCR works collaboratively with the St. Louis City and St. Louis County Courts to provide Family Support Services in a client-centered manner.

Current families and families that have past experience navigating behavioral/mental health services are invited to be part of the System of Care Parent Advisory Council (PAC), which first met in November. This is a space for support, advocacy, and influencing the system for the better. Representatives from the PAC sit on the System of Care Council, which joined forces with the Project LAUNCH Young Child Wellness Council this year as a way to enhance coordination. In October we were excited to see 70+ nonprofit professionals and service providers attend.

Families will have an additional layer of support beginning in 2021 when we start our Family Support Network Group gatherings. This will be a support space for families currently working with a Family Support Partner and will also provide opportunities to enhance life skills and parenting skills.

2020 has been a year of growth for our Family Support Services. When isolation and mental health needs could have gone unchecked, we adapted our methods and found new ways to engage families and walk alongside them.



ADVOCACY

VCR approaches child well-being as a communal effort. Our Theory of Change provides us with a framework for understanding the ecosystem of influence around each child. Children need the support of strong families in order to be healthy and thrive as they transition into adulthood. In order to support their children in this way, families need to be able to draw strength and support from their communities. At the macrocosmic level, communities have to be able to trust that their society is an equitable one.

With this ecosystem framework for advancing the well-being of our children, VCR's advocacy work focuses on building more equitable systems at both the legislative and local level. Our families inform and drive this work. It is their experience and knowledge that guide our efforts, and we are committed to elevating their voices in our shared work towards a more just social tier in the ecosystem of children's health.

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In the last year, our advocacy platform has focused particularly on elevating the voices of our community through voter support and engagement with the 2020 census. Voters in Missouri had the opportunity to make incredibly important decisions, such as expanding Medicaid, through the initiative petition and referendum process. We educated voters about critical issues through our newsletter, social media, and one on one conversations. We believe that families should have a voice in decisions that affect them. Our Family Support Partners helped families register to vote and encouraged their participation in elections. As an organization that has been working alongside this community for decades, we understand the importance of making sure each person, and the political will of the community as a whole, is heard and seen by the government agencies responsible for decisions that will impact our families and their children.

We believe that families should have a voice in decisions that affect them.

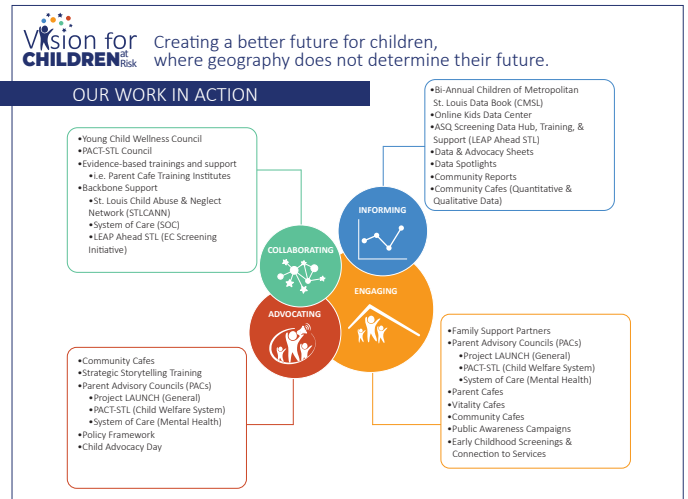
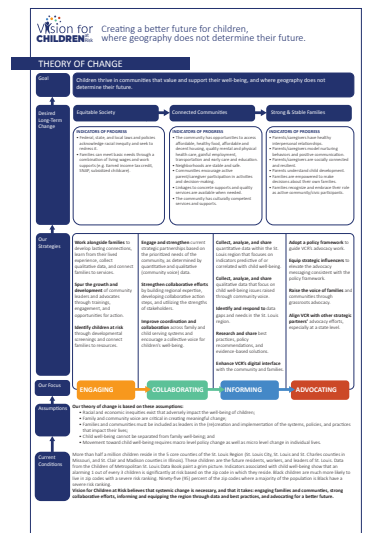
Advocates multiply their power by working with other advocates. VCR partnered with Generate Health and the St. Louis Child Abuse Network to offer a webinar that spotlighted the impact of the 2020 legislative session on children and their families. We are a member of the Social Policy Electoral Accountability Collaborative and began planning for Mayoral Forums that are happening now.

These forums help individuals make informed decisions about candidates in the Primary and General Elections. VCR co-sponsored and participated in planning the annual Child Advocacy Day in April and the Racial Summit facilitated by Empower Missouri. We are active participants in Kids Win Missouri and are part of their leadership team.

Download our theory of change and graphic highlighting our work in action below.

Theory of Change

Work in Action





DATA & RESEARCH

RESEARCH SERVICES

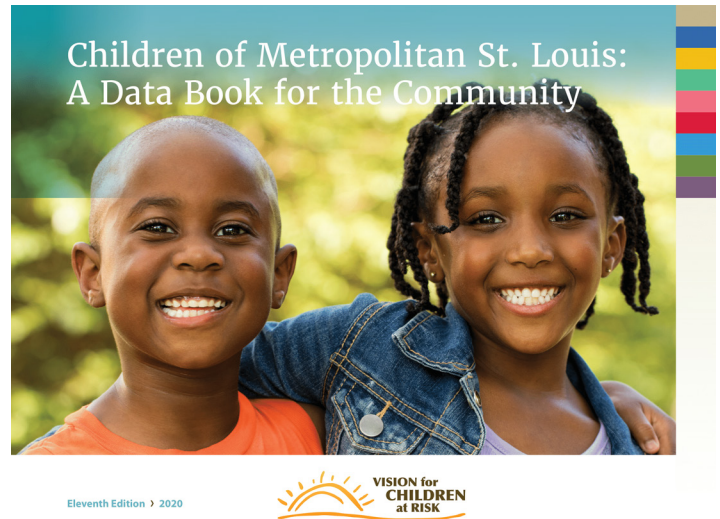
As a second step in our work of creating the first joint St. Louis Area Head Start Community Assessment (2019), we developed a Head Start and Early Head Start 2020 In-depth Program Assessment report for the YWCA. The assessment highlights the greatest needs identified by families; services they have used in the past year; and the barriers families identified to receiving needed services, in addition to actionable measures the YWCA can take with this information.

CHILDREN OF METROPOLITAN ST. LOUIS DATA BOOK | CMSL

This year we released our 11th Edition of the Children of Metropolitan St. Louis (CMSL) Data Book. We have provided updated zip code level data on over 40 indicators of child well-being and added a new “Focus on Equity” element that highlights disaggregated data, data broken down by race.

The CMSL is featured prominently on our new website with options to view, download, and request a copy. There is also an Equity Section displaying the disaggregated data, and we look forward to building out a Children’s Data Center in the coming year as a powerful tool for increasing accessibility of and interaction with child well-being data.

We have been able to distribute the CMSL for free thanks to funding from the Deaconess Foundation, and throughout



2020 we distributed over 350 copies. Distribution has been more challenging due to the pandemic, though we continue to ship copies and see that folks are downloading them.

“[I] really appreciate the level of care and detail to track outcomes not only by number but visually. Helps us also with our computer simulation models to have the data in one place.”

“...I know this publication is important to the work my organization does as part of the community.”

-CMSL Data Book Users

Data Use Snapshot

A local group, Child Care Entrepreneurs Partnership, is working in the North St. Louis City neighborhood of Hyde Park to strengthen the child care landscape for families that need it most. VCR has helped support these efforts through our CMSL and additional customized data reports to assist the group in making data-driven decisions.

[Read more here.](#)



OUR TEAM

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OFFICERS

Bryan Berry - *President*
Bob Buck - *Vice-President*
Thomas Nolan - *Secretary*
Michael Dozier - *Treasurer*

MEMBERS

Nanci A. Bobrow
Sylvester Bolden
Marga Fronmuller
Richard Harvey, Ph.D.
Robert Mai
Antonia Miceli, J.D., M.P.H.
Dennis O'Connor, M.D.
Michael O'Connor, M.D.
Jamala Rogers
Pastor Ron Stephens

STAFF

GENERAL VCR

Sanaria Sulaiman - *Executive Director*
Anita Blagajcevic - *Compliance Coordinator*
Ruth Ehresman - *Advocacy Coordinator*
Liz Hoester - *Data & Research Coordinator*
Breann Schubert - *Communications Coordinator*

DHSS

Delois Blue - *Community Liaison*

PACT-STL

Kate Kasper - *Project Director*
Gabriel Desince - *Family Support Partner*
Katina Johnson - *Parent Mentor*
Kayia Shelton - *Family Support Partner*

PROJECT LAUNCH

Nathan Ivy - *Director*
Alicia D. Hall - *Behavioral Health Coordinator*
Isaac McBride - *Education Coordinator*
Sam Blue - *Family Support Partner*
April Young - *Family Support Partner*

SYSTEM OF CARE & FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

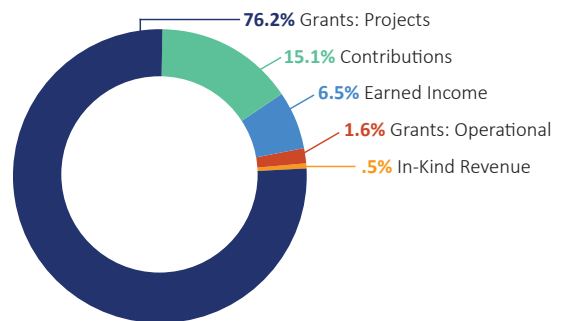
Jawana Hammonds - *Director*
LaShawn Colquitt - *Family Support Partner*
Mia Daugherty - *Family Support Partner*
Shelnise Ellis - *Intake Specialist*
Connie Rigas - *Family Support Partner*
Ronald York - *Family Support Partner*

OUR FUNDERS

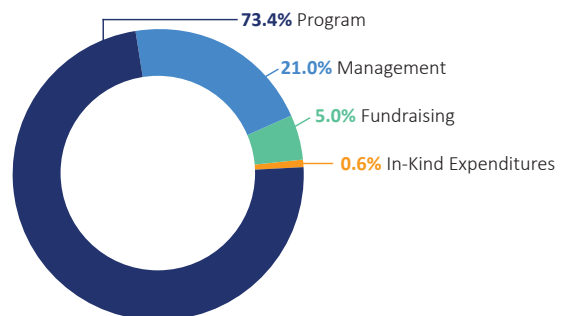
- Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF)
- AMEREN
- Deaconess Foundation
- The Mental Health Board
- Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS)
- STUPP Foundation
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

OUR FINANCES

REVENUE \$1,577,169



EXPENSES \$1,429,559



REVENUE GROWTH 2017 through 2020

