

# More About ACT's History

Thirty years ago, Alaska joined a movement to ensure our children would thrive. In the late 1970s, Dr. Ray Helfer saw trust funds being established to care for our nation's highways and wildlife and thought, "Why not our nation's children ... our most precious resource?" By 1980, Dr. Helfer created the first children's trust in Kansas. Nearly every state followed, including Alaska.

In 1988, Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) was created with the mission of preventing child abuse and neglect throughout the state. Unfortunately, ACT existed only in writing until 1996 when the Trust received its first investment – a \$6 million legislative appropriation – with the help of Gov. Tony Knowles, the Alaska Legislature and community leaders across the state. This investment began a new and significant chapter for ACT.

ACT was initially formed under the state umbrella. A group of community leaders created ACT's sister organization, the Friends of Alaska Children's Trust (FACT), to support ACT's efforts. FACT's mission was to increase awareness among Alaskans about the high rate of child abuse and neglect in our state, and to raise funds to support ACT's efforts to invest in organizations across Alaska that were working to prevent child abuse and neglect. Investments supported parenting classes, statewide awareness campaign, cultural camps, professional development, strengthening families protective factors framework, and the list goes on.

Despite a high level of investment of nearly \$5 million to organizations across Alaska, ACT's board of trustees and many stakeholders were concerned that ACT's ability to be flexible and innovative was limited under the state umbrella. With support of the governor and legislators, ACT trustees and FACT board members formed a committee to negotiate ACT's privatization. By 2012, ACT's financial assets were transferred to The Alaska Community Foundation, and FACT and ACT merged to become one organization – Alaska Children's Trust, an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

With the privatization, ACT entered a new era offering unlimited potential to ensure children and families live in safe, stable and nurturing environments. Through the leadership of the board of directors and staff, ACT built upon the strong foundation created over the years to expand beyond just being a grant maker. ACT restructured and took on three key roles to establish itself as a statewide leader in

the prevention of child abuse and neglect: (1) advocate, (2) convener, and (3) catalyst.

- **Advocate.** As an advocate, ACT works hard to ensure the spotlight on child abuse and neglect remains strong and bright. ACT strives to actively influence public policy within political, economic and social systems and institutions that help us build a state dedicated to ensuring the safety of Alaskan children.
- **Convener.** Large-scale social change requires a broad cross-section of community members working collectively. No one organization or program will reverse the rising trend alone. Greater progress can be made if nonprofits, governments, businesses and the public are brought together around a common agenda to create a collective impact. As a convener, ACT fosters these relationships across the state and within specific communities, resulting in forward momentum.
- **Catalyst.** ACT believes change is the only thing that can bring about progress. If we really want better health outcomes, then we must apply not only the science of early childhood and early brain development to a broader range of policies and programs – we must also be willing to take risks and try new strategies. It has taken us decades to reach these staggering numbers of Alaskan children who are abused or neglected. We recognize without new and innovative ideas, we will continue to see our numbers rise. As a catalyst, ACT challenges current values, methodology and ideas in fighting an epidemic that has plagued Alaska for decades.

The past 30 years has been filled with countless challenges, changes and even some successes. But one thing has never wavered: ACT's dedication and passion toward our children. With each passing year, ACT's commitment grows stronger. As we honor the 30 years behind us, we also look ahead at the years to come and challenge ourselves to do more and to do it better so we can one day achieve our mission.

We thank all of those who came before us and supported and helped ACT become the statewide lead organization focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect. And we look forward to building future relationships that will help us continue our work. Together – past, present and future – we can prevent child abuse and neglect.