



Alaska Children's Trust

LIFETIME CHAMPION FOR KIDS

Alaska Children's Trust's Lifetime Champions for Kids are individuals who have dedicated much of their life to the well-being of children, youth, and families. These individuals have demonstrated continued dedication and commitment in working toward preventing child abuse and neglect. Get to know our Lifetime Champions for Kids in the next few pages to see who we've celebrated for their contributions to Alaska's children, youth, and families!



ABBE HENSLEY

(Anchorage, AK)

Abbe Hensley has been an advocate for early learning, education, and family engagement for 45 years. Since 2006, she has served as the founding executive director of Best Beginnings, a statewide early childhood nonprofit focused on growing readers, building strong families, and engaging community. She serves on the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC), the Alaska Early Childhood Advocacy Group (AECAG), and the Anchorage Cradle to Career Core and Leadership Teams. Abbe was selected for the first class of Alaska Women of Achievement and has been inducted into the Anchorage ATHENA Society, Oroville High School Hall of Fame, and the Alaska Women's Hall of Fame. She is an honorary lifetime member of 17 state PTAs and the National PTA and received an Alaska legislative citation for her Alaska PTA work. Prior to joining Best Beginnings in 2006, Abbe spent five years as the director of outreach services for the PBS Ready To Learn Service, funded by the US Department of Education. This was a nationwide effort proven to help parents and early childhood educators increase young children's early literacy skills and prepare them for success in school.



She began her work with educational children's television and community outreach at KAKM-TV in Anchorage in 1993, and spent two years running Ready To Learn at WETA, Washington DC's public television station, before moving to PBS.

Abbe worked for several legislators and taught childbirth classes in Anchorage and Kotzebue. She served on the State Board of Education, State Medical Board, as president of the Alaska PTA, and as National PTA leadership vice president, and with other Alaska volunteer activities.

Like her mother, Abbe was born in Anchorage. She and her husband, Willie Hensley from Kotzebue, are the parents of seven children and 16 grandchildren. Learn more about Abbe in [our video here](#).

RAMONA BARNES

(Anchorage, AK)

Ramona and her family moved to Alaska in 1972 and she quickly became actively involved in politics with a focus on children. She served in the Alaska House of Representatives from 1979 to 1984 and from 1987 to 2001. She was the first woman to hold every legislative leadership position, from Majority Leader to Minority Whip, and became Speaker of the House in 1993.



Barnes was an old-style politician in an era when running roughshod over an opponent was standard. While a committed Republican who was known for her work on Resource issues—she continually worked across the aisle – especially when it came to children’s issues. Prior to joining the Alaska legislator, Ramona served on the Elmendorf Air Force Base School Board.

Prior to the Trust’s enabling legislation passing in 1988, there was a lot of work to be done to get the legislation passed. Ramona recognized that the future of Alaska was directly connect to the future of our children. She recognized that prevention was key to preventing child abuse and neglect and would help children and families thrive. Ramona was instrumental to gaining the support necessary for the Trust legislation to pass.

Later, she partnered with Governor Knowles, the Children’s Cabinet and advocates to support the transfer of ACT’s first--and only--state deposit of \$6 million into the endowment. This became the foundation on which today’s Alaska Children’s Trust was built.

Ramona passed away in 2003, but her legacy continues on in the legislature.

CAROL BRICE

(Fairbanks, AK)

Carol moved to Alaska in 1959 and since then, her message was simple; every child in Alaska should be raised in safe and healthy families and communities.

Her long history of community service in Alaska includes:

- Public Health Nurse
- Co-Founder of RCPC, the Resource Center for Parents and Children
- Co -Founder of the Fairbanks Head Start program.
- Associate Professor for UAF Early Childhood Education Program
- Owner of Family Training Associates, providing Parent Education Classes

Carol recognized the societal impacts of child abuse and neglect is lifelong. She knew the lives of our children and the prosperity of our state depended on our recognition that primary prevention is the key to eliminating child abuse and neglect. With this vision, Carol set out to inspire and empower people across the state.

One of those legacies is the Alaska Children's Trust. In 1988, the Alaska Children's Trust was born. However, for eight years it laid dormant and forgotten by all but its most devoted supporters, like Carol. In the mid-1990s, passionate advocates convinced the new governor to resurrect the trust. With supporters like Carol, Governor Knowles was able to restructure the Trust, so it could start achieving its mission.

One of the first acts of the Governor was to appoint Carol to the board of trustees. She served from 1996 to 2003 and chaired the board the entire time. As a founding member, Carol established the infrastructure and guiding principles that still guide and support ACT today.



DEBORAH BONITO

(Anchorage, AK)

In 1996 when Governor Knowles restructured the Alaska Children's Trust and helped get the Trust endowed with its first and only state deposit of \$6 million, he recognized the Trust could not do this work alone. It takes a community to raise a child and it takes a community to grow an organization like the Alaska Children's Trust.

Governor Knowles reached out to a close friend and advisor to help create a non-governmental entity that would further promote and support the work of the Alaska Children's Trust. That person was Deborah Bonito.

Under her leadership, and the support of other community leaders, the Friends of the Alaska Children's Trust was born. It quickly became known as FACT and their role was to help build the ACT endowment and raise awareness about the challenges Alaska's children and families face every day.

Attracting significant private donations to grow the Trust proved nearly impossible during the first few years, but this did not deter Deborah. Through her creative energy, commitment, and flair for all that is possible, Deborah and a group of highly motivated activists, FACT developed successful community fundraisers over the years, that set the endowment to grow significantly. They created both the license plate and birth certificate programs which continue to this day.

Deborah was instrumental in starting a new movement – a movement to improve the lives of Alaska's children. This movement strengthened the partnership between ACT and FACT, which led to the merger of the two organizations in 2012.



DIANE KAPLAN

(Anchorage, AK)

Diane sees children as one of Alaska's most valuable resources. How we invest in them today, determines who they will be tomorrow. She has committed to ensuring Alaska is a great place for everyone to live, especially those raising children. This is demonstrated in her work at President and CEO of the Rasmuson Foundation or her involvement in community organizations like The Alaska Community Foundation or The Foraker Group. She donates countless hours and resources to a variety programs that support children and families.



In 1996, Diane began a twenty-year journey with the Alaska Children's Trust. She was a founding board member of FACT. In partnership with Deborah Bonito and other community leaders, they built an organization that helped strengthen ACT's corpus and increase community awareness of the impacts of child abuse and neglect in Alaska. By 2004, Governor Murkowski appointed her as a Trustee to ACT's board.

As Chair of ACT's Board of Trustees, she teamed up with the Carley Lawrence, Board Chair of FACT to merge the two organizations. Diane worked the halls of Juneau to educate legislators about the value of moving ACT away from its position in government to the nonprofit sector where she knew it could grow in ways not possible in government.

ACT became a private and independent organization and moved its endowment to The Alaska Community Foundation. In doing so it opened new opportunities that made ACT better equipped to respond to a very complex and ever-changing issue. By 2012, the merger was completed, but Diane remained on the board for another three years.

GOV. TONY KNOWLES

(Anchorage, AK)

The Trust entered state statute in 1988, approved by Alaska Lawmakers after a fight over how to fund it. The original bill gave Alaska residents who received an annual PFD the option of donating part of their Dividends to ACT. Realizing a vote on the Trust would not be allowed as long as it contained the dividend check-off, its sponsors removed it and the legislation passed with little opposition but with no funding either.



The Trust became law but with no funding it was not functional. Advocates from across the state tried several times and with different ideas to fund the Trust, with no success.

By 1994, Knowles became Alaska's seventh Governor and it was soon after he made children a key focus of his administration. In spring of 1995, he appointed five state commissioners, the Attorney General and the Lieutenant Governor to serve on his cabinet for children. Their mission - "In partnership with families, ensure children have opportunities for happy, healthy and productive lives."

Leadership from the Children's Cabinet, Knowles chief of staff Jim Ayers, who was a former head of Kid Pact - a statewide coalition of nonprofits that originally pushed for creation of the Trust and legislators worked together to breathe new life into the Alaska Children's Trust.

Governor Knowles, issued an Executive Order that streamlined ACT's structure and made it part of the governor's office. He appointed the first board of trustees, which included Carol Brice, our first chair, and transferred \$6 million to the Trust from the surplus in an unrelated account.

By the first year, ACT distributed nearly \$300,000 in grants to support statewide efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect. Today, the Trust has over \$12 million and has invested over \$5 million dollars in the community's effort to prevent child abuse and neglect.

LT. GOV. FRAN ULMER

(Anchorage, AK)

Partnerships are a powerful and effective tool to achieving success and nowhere is that more true than for Lieutenant Governor Fran Ulmer.

The partnership between Fran and Governor Knowles and their shared commitment to children, made them a dynamic duo. Prior to becoming Lt. Governor, Fran made children a key legislative issue when she was in the Alaska legislature. As a member of the Alaska Women's Commission, she

supported, assisted in the creation of, and was an original member of the Interim Children's Commission. The number one recommendation of this Commission was the creation of the Children's Trust. Through the support of a key staff member, Karla Timpone, and other members of the Children's Commission, they drafted legislation modeled after the Texas' Children's Trust. As a legislator, Fran shepherded this legislation to passage in 1988.

In 1991, Fran co-sponsored the first legislation to fund the Trust. The House of Representatives approved the legislation, but as sometime happens it died in the Senate.

But this set back did not sway her from continuing to support children and give life to the Children's Trust. As Lt. Governor, she was a member of the Children's Cabinet that breathed new life into the Children's Trust. In partnership with Governor Knowles, legislators like Romana Barnes, and advocates like Carol Brice, the Children's Trust was restructured and funded with the first and only state deposit.

With her support and vision, the Trust had given out over a million dollars by 1999.

