

Witnessing Illinois families struggle in the face of the state's economic crisis and embracing her lifelong conviction to impact the lives of children and families compelled Kathy Ryg to join Voices as president beginning Sept. 1, 2009. Service to the many, varied needs of children and families has long marked her work in the public service sector.

Ms. Ryg has devoted two decades of her life to public service at the municipal, county and state levels, capped by seven years as a state legislator from the 59th Representative District. She is widely regarded in the Illinois General Assembly as a leader on many issues of great importance to children and families. Members of both parties and both legislative chambers praise her bipartisan, consensus-building approach to identifying and tackling public-policy challenges.

Ms. Ryg was a member of the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership and a forceful proponent of its work to strengthen prevention, early intervention and treatment for youngsters' social and emotional needs. She has worked tirelessly to improve early learning opportunities for young children, bolster after-school programs and services for youths in need and increase schools' quality and accountability. Ms. Ryg chaired the House Disabilities Services Committee and was a consistent voice for greater support of underfunded health and human services.

Before her election to the General Assembly, Ms. Ryg served Vernon Hills as village trustee and clerk and spent six years as chief deputy recorder of deeds in Lake County. Prior to that, she worked as a counselor and administrator in programs serving the developmentally disabled and the mentally ill in the northwest suburbs of Chicago.

Ms. Ryg has served as co-president of the Lake County After-School Coalition and co-chair of the Lake County YMCA Healthy Lake County initiative, among her many affiliations with community and business organizations. Her dozens of honors have included "legislator of the year" awards from the Arc of Illinois, National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Health Care Association, Illinois Association of County Board Members and Commissioners, Illinois Association of School Social Workers and the National Alliance on Mental Illness. In 2007, the Early Learning Illinois campaign partners – including Voices for Illinois Children – named her an "Early Learning Leader" for her commitment to young children's learning.