

Early Learning Builds Strong Families with Thriving Children

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MADISON COUNTY - Early childhood should be a joyful time filled with curiosity, creativity, play, and innocence where opportunities abound for children to increase their vocabulary and learn important skills like how to problem-solve, manage emotions, and build empathy for others. Healthy relationships and happy memories during this period set the stage for school readiness and a healthy, productive life. Unfortunately, not all families have the same access to resources and support while raising their children. This is preventable with the right tools in place.

In April, we recognize Child Abuse Prevention Month and The Week of the Young Child® (April 1 – 7), providing time for reflection and opportunities to advocate for innovative policies that transform systems, so all children and families have what they need to thrive.

Every child should have the same access and opportunities to learn, grow, and reach their full potential. Organizations like Children's Home & Aid meet families where they are, help them identify what they need to thrive, and then partner with them to build a strong foundation for their children in their critical early years. Part of this work includes advocating for equal access to affordable, high-quality early childhood education and care for all families.





Children's Home & Aid is a statewide child and family service agency with a range of services from child welfare to behavioral health to early care and education programs. With the help of partnering agencies, volunteers, and donors, Children's Home & Aid is strengthening the early learning options available to Illinois families and advancing the conversation about the root causes of child abuse and neglect.

The families we partner with are often impacted by generational poverty; many have endured generational or vicarious trauma. Financial stressors and limited support networks compound these problems. Some family budgets are stretched so thin that parents are forced to make impossible choices, which adds to their mental stress and makes it harder for them to be the parents they want to be.

In Metro East, our Stronger Beginnings for Families Home Visiting program, Child Care Resource & Referral services, and Child Care Assistance Program help families reduce parenting stress, improve economic self-sufficiency, and successfully navigate parenting a young child. We are focused every day on increasing the percentage of children who begin kindergarten safe and healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed, with a focus on reducing disparities.

Our Southern Region Board Chair, Dan Lewis, a parent of twins, understands firsthand how much it takes to nurture a family. “Parenting, under ideal circumstances, is one of life’s greatest challenges. Parenting when dealing with trauma, financial and social instability, and other obstacles not of a parent’s own creation only magnifies the difficulties. In partnering with Children’s Home & Aid in their prevention work and efforts to enhance child and family well-being, I’ve been fortunate to be a small part of a solution to a massive problem, but there is still much more to do.”



naeyc[®]
**Week of the
Young Child[®]**

April 1 – April 7, 2023

Thank you, Early Childhood Care and Education Professionals,
for your role in supporting child and family well-being.

High quality early childhood care and education provides
important benefits to children, families, and the local economy.

**Birth to Five IL,
Region 41**

**Madison County Alliance
for Children & Families**

**Children's Home & Aid
Child Care Assistance Program
and Child Care Resource & Referral**

For more information about Week of The Young Child visit:
www.naeyc.org/events/woyc

Just like highways and roads, early childhood education and care provide critical infrastructure for our communities and act as a strong protective factor against child abuse and neglect. We applaud Governor Pritzker for investing in early learning through his Smart Start Illinois plan. While this historic investment is a fantastic first step in

developing the infrastructure needed for families to thrive, we still need additional funding and legislation that protects families from the start because parents are their child's first and most important teachers.

We know the stress of parenting, limited resources, and lack of a support system can lead to feelings of isolation. No one should have to navigate parenthood alone. But we can go further – we must ensure families have access to basic needs, that is why we are supporting and leading on policies such as a diaper allowance for families and creating a State Child Tax Credit so they can be in the best position to thrive.

You can also get involved in family strengthening and prevention work this April by joining Children's Home & Aid at these events: [Family Fun Fest](#) (4/1), [Illinois Early Childhood Advocacy Day](#) (4/18), [Kids & Cops Doughnut 5K Run](#) (4/29/23). For questions and more information, contact Sandra Irish at 800-467-9200, Ext. 390. You can also visit our website at: www.childrenshomeandaid.org to donate and learn about our work throughout the state.