



HEAD START

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025





This report will be made available to the public on Illinois Action for Children's Early Learning website: earlylearning.actforchildren.org.

LETTER FROM THE CEO

Parents want their children to have every chance to learn, grow, and feel confident in the world. Yet rising child care costs and challenges to accessing high-quality early learning programs can limit these opportunities for many families.

We at Illinois Action for Children (IACF) understand what programs like Head Start and Early Head Start mean to communities, and what is at stake when support for them wavers. It's why we remain deeply committed to our partnership with Head Start. .

Together, our work ensures that every young child—regardless of ZIP code, income, or circumstance— can have a strong start in life. A strong start means more than early education. It means a safe home, nutritious food, caring adults, and access to meaningful learning experiences. That's why IACF's programs are designed not only for children, but also for the adults who nurture, guide, and advocate for them every day.

We support parents and caregivers by offering:

- ★ Engaging at-home learning activities, workshops, and family events
- ★ Opportunities for parents to lead through our Policy Council, Parent Committees, IACF Board (governing body), and participation in Head Start conferences
- ★ Virtual social-emotional learning (SEL) Parent Cafés that offer tools, connection, and support

These resources matter. They strengthen families, stabilize communities, and help children build the confidence and curiosity that will carry them into kindergarten and beyond.

We are proud to share stories and data that reflect the impact of this work—and the importance of ensuring programs like Head Start remain strong and accessible for those who depend on them.



Sincerely,
April Janney
CEO, Illinois Action for Children

ABOUT ILLINOIS ACTION FOR CHILDREN

Our History

“What about the children?” When Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) founder Sylvia Cotton raised this question in 1969, Illinois was in a child care crisis. As increasing numbers of women joined the workforce, limited child care availability, conflicting licensing requirements for providers, and scant government funding put children at risk for widespread abuse and neglect. Over the years, IAFC has evolved from a grassroots advocacy organization to a nonprofit leader with a range of vital programs, focused on ensuring every child and community has the care, education, and resources they need to thrive.

Our Approach

Families need access to high-quality, safe, and affordable child care and early education. This allows parents to go to work with confidence, knowing that their children are in good hands. In addition to increasing access to child care through our own early learning programs, IAFC works to improve the early childhood system at all levels. We strengthen communities facing barriers to essential resources—promoting the well-being of children and serving parents as they work toward family stability. We also invest in professional development for early childhood educators to help them become the best possible teachers and leaders for the next generation. And we advocate for equitable, supportive early childhood policies.

Our mission is to *uplift children and all who care for them, advancing strong families and prosperous communities*. That is why IAFC advances the highest quality early childhood education and care for all children.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 5 About Head Start
- 6 Site Locations
- 8 Curriculum & Program Model
- 11 Family Engagement & Volunteer Participation
- 12 Impact Stories
- 16 Early Learning Program Data
- 18 Populations Served
- 19 Financial Position



ABOUT HEAD START

Federally funded, Head Start and Early Head Start programs prepare children to succeed in school and in life through learning experiences tailored to their changing needs and abilities. These programs support children's social and emotional development from birth to age five. They also provide families with health and nutrition resources alongside additional services.

Head Start and Early Head Start champion children and families who might not otherwise have access to early education. They promote the highest standards of quality by delivering evidence-based and comprehensive early care and education.

Early Head Start programs provide educational, socialization, and supportive opportunities for expectant parents and children up to three years old. Through both home- and center-based programs, families experience weekly home visits with Parent-Infant Educators, center-based biweekly socialization groups, opportunities to develop relationships with other children and families, prenatal support, other resources for parents and families, and a seamless transition from Early Head Start to Head Start programs.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Grantee

Illinois Action for Children

Program Number

05CH011751: Illinois Action for Children

Address

4753 N. Broadway, Chicago, IL 60640

Telephone

(312) 823-1285

Fax

(773) 561-2256

Head Start Director

Carisa Hurley Davis

Agency Website

www.actforchildren.org

Early Learning Website

earlylearning.actforchildren.org

SITE LOCATIONS

Directly-Operated Sites

Chicago Heights**Early Learning Center**

202 S. Halsted St., Lot C1
Chicago Heights, IL 60411

Ford Heights**Early Learning Center**

1055 Berkeley Ave.
Ford Heights, IL 60411

Dolton Early**Learning Center**

729 Engle St.
Dolton, IL 60419

Harvey South Holland**Early Learning Center**

16515 S. Park Ave.
South Holland, IL 60473

Partner Sites

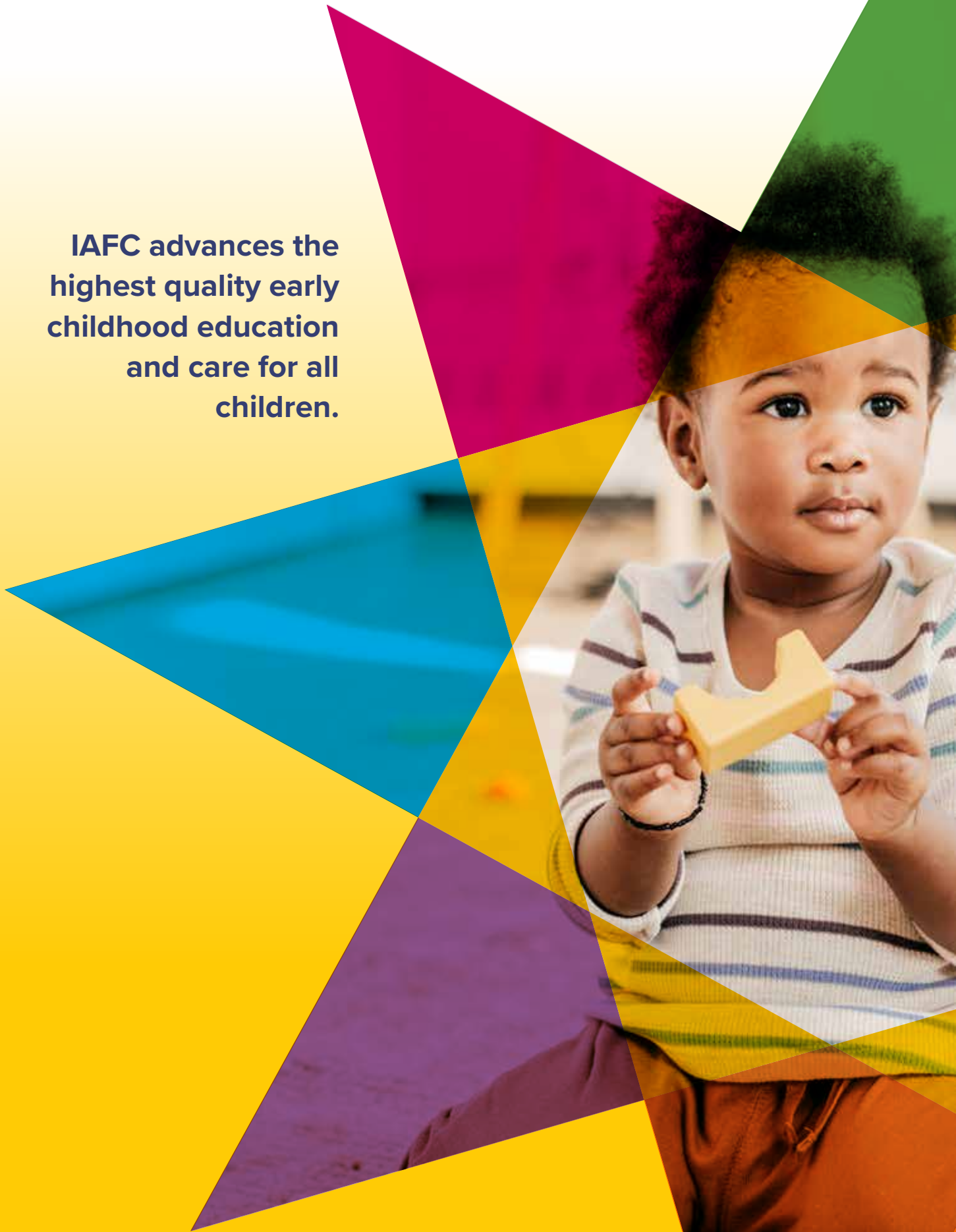
A Step Up Career**Academy Center Inc.**

2745 Bernice Rd.
Lansing, IL 60438

First Step Child Care Inc.

22025 Governors Hwy
Richton Park, IL 60471

**IAFC advances the
highest quality early
childhood education
and care for all
children.**





CURRICULUM & PROGRAM MODEL

IAFC's Early Learning department uses practice-based coaching, an approach that supports effective teaching and promotes positive outcomes for children. The method includes focused observations, reflections, and feedback on teaching practices, actions, goal setting, and planning.

Programs are inclusive. Children of all abilities learn alongside one another, which helps them and their families prepare for school at an earlier age.

During the 2024-25 program year, IAFC's Early Learning department continued participation in *Lead, Learn, Excel*, which Start Early, a partner early childhood organization, facilitates. Through this work, IAFC is enhancing classroom environments, fostering positive teacher-child interactions, and equipping educators with systems and routines for continuous learning and quality improvement. Elements of *Lead, Learn, Excel* include data dialogues, team lesson planning, professional development, and peer learning communities, which support teachers as they work one-on-one with families to improve specific outcomes for each child.

Additionally, IAFC aligns our programming with the Illinois Early Learning and Development standards, incorporating:

★ **The Pyramid Model**

This framework's tiered approach provides universal support to promote children's wellness and includes targeted supports and intensive services for those who need them, cultivating healthy social-emotional development.

★ **Creative Curriculum**

Through this research-based curriculum, educators use observations, pictures, videos, audio recordings, and children's work to assess their competency in learning domains that are essential for school readiness. Each year, following completion of three checkpoints, the team analyzes results, guides classroom and individual instruction, and plans for teachers' future professional development.

★ **Teaching Strategies GOLD®**

This assessment system helps teachers monitor children's development. It is based on observation and performance tasks. GOLD collects data on children's development and learning, which is used to develop lesson plans and address individual needs.

★ **Parents as Teachers**

This research-based curriculum is employed in IAFC's Home Visiting program. It increases parents' knowledge of early childhood development and improves parenting practices to prepare children for school. Home Visiting supports children younger than age three and their parents.

Early Learning department staff partner with families to support each child's success.

Regular screenings of children's hearing, vision, and overall social-emotional development help the team to determine each child's needs, and to refer families to appropriate services when necessary. During parent-teacher conferences in fall and spring, teachers share Teaching Strategies' GOLD® Development and Learning Reports with parents, discuss each child's strengths, and help plan for a smooth transition for children starting kindergarten.



**Early Learning staff
partner with families
to support each
child's success.**

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT & VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION

IAFC promotes leadership development among parents and caregivers. Likewise, volunteers, many of whom are parents, are a great asset to the Head Start Program. **Out of 400 volunteers, 244 were parents** who gave their time to work with children in the classroom and at home, in activities that support children’s early learning and development.

Community members also volunteer in IAFC’s early learning programs in various ways. Professional providers bring education to families during Parent Committee meetings, some volunteers assist in classrooms, and some participate and assist in special family-child events. We encourage participation in Parent Committees, Policy Council, and governing body meetings. Some parents also attended the Illinois Head Start and National Head Start Association conferences.

IAFC’s Family Engagement staff are deeply committed to providing resources to all families. We work in partnership to help address their needs and achieve their goals.

Family Engagement Data

374

Families served

311

Single-parent families

63

Two-parent families

192

Employed families

182

Not-in-workforce families

124

Father figures engaged

244

Parent volunteers

368

Families receiving at least one service



IMPACT STORIES

Children grow and learn through every experience, and the environments and people around them play a powerful role in shaping who they become.

These stories reflect what families across our programs experience every day: children gaining confidence, developing essential skills, and becoming joyful, capable learners. We are honored to partner with parents to build healthy beginnings and brighter futures for every child.

Irene has had several children participate in our early learning programs. Her adult children attended years ago, and today, she continues to see the same positive results in her younger children. Irene's daughter gained confidence, established daily routines, and developed the social-emotional skills that helped her transition smoothly into kindergarten.

Irene especially values the program's intentional focus on the whole child. Teachers and staff work collaboratively to strengthen social skills, language development, emotional regulation, and tools for healthy relationships with both peers and adults. She also appreciates being a part of a supportive community with other families learning alongside one another. It is this combination of care, skill building, and connection that keeps her family engaged—and why she encourages other parents in her community to participate, as well.

Maria Guadalupe experienced the transformative impact of IAFC's programs after her family moved from Mexico to Chicago. Her four-year-old son experienced separation anxiety, shyness, and the challenges of adjusting to a new home and language. During a home visit, our Early Learning staff observed that he was extremely attached to his mother and had difficulty expressing his emotions. Entering a classroom where no one initially spoke his primary language added to his stress.

During the first month of school, he experienced high anxiety and challenges with emotional regulation. However, staff responded with patience, compassion, and a plan tailored to his needs. The site director arranged for at least one Spanish-speaking staff member to be present in his classroom each day so he could feel secure and understood. Teachers worked gently with him to build trust as he learned classroom routines and began participating at his own pace.

Week by week, his confidence grew. He learned to regulate his emotions, engage with classmates, and actively participate in the classroom community. Today, Maria proudly shares that her son not only feels comfortable at school but communicates confidently with his friends and teachers in English.

For **Mariah**, enrolling in the Early Head Start home-based program marked an important turning point. When she first joined, Mariah felt isolated and overwhelmed by the demands of parenthood. She was uncertain about participating in the program and hesitant to engage fully. However, through consistent home visits and ongoing conversations with her home visitor, trust began to grow. Over time, the supportive relationship with the home visitor made Mariah feel heard, understood, and encouraged.

As her confidence grew, so did her willingness to engage in additional activities in her community. Mariah began attending parent socialization events and connecting with other families who were experiencing similar joys and challenges. These relationships helped her feel less alone and more empowered as a parent. She now speaks openly about how meaningful the program has been in her life—so much so that she has referred other mothers, encouraging them to seek the same support she once needed.

Tyanna had an equally powerful experience after recently relocating to Illinois with her family. Wanting stability and high-quality education for her daughter, she enrolled in an IAFC Early Learning program and immediately felt welcomed. From the very beginning, she described the enrollment process as smooth, respectful, and reassuring. During registration, Tyanna shared that she was unhoused, and staff connected her with community resources that could provide immediate assistance.

Through IAFC's partnership with Cradles to Crayons, an organization that provides children with the essentials they need to succeed, Tyanna received clothing for all of her children. She was also connected to local housing organizations that work directly with families experiencing housing instability. These resources offered more than material support—they provided hope during a challenging transition.

With her daughter in a safe, nurturing learning environment, Tyanna finally had the time and emotional space to focus on her own goals. She grew professionally, built momentum in her creative work, and began planning for her family's future.

IAFC's Early Learning programs do more than educate children—they strengthen families. By offering guidance, compassion, and access to vital resources, we help parents gain confidence, stability, and the support network they need to thrive.

We are honored to partner with parents to build healthy beginnings and brighter futures for every child.



PERCENT OF CHILDREN IN ATTENDANCE

(September 2024 - June 2025)

Month	Chicago Heights	Ford Heights	Dolton	Harvey/South Holland	A Step Up	First Step
September	87.45	79.49	83.92	86.86	90.48	82.23
October	86.55	79.64	80.48	79.89	87.43	80.81
November	77.89	61.09	66.28	75.39%	74.61	79.74
December	74.63	66.30	66.39	72.86	70.62	76.73
January	69.24	62.92	62.08	68.19	77.09	73.65
February	77.73	60.86	70.03	76.61	76.58	79.03
March	82.11	70.00	71.63	79.69	71.19	87.43
April	86.01	75.87	68.56	80.53	78.03	78.26
May	78.92	73.13	61.78	73.67	83.33	74.07
June	55.04	58.18	53.95	53.15	59.36	69.88

EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM DATA



374

Children and families served



100%

Eligible children served



59%

Average monthly attendance

Percentage of enrolled children that received medical and dental exams



100% Medical



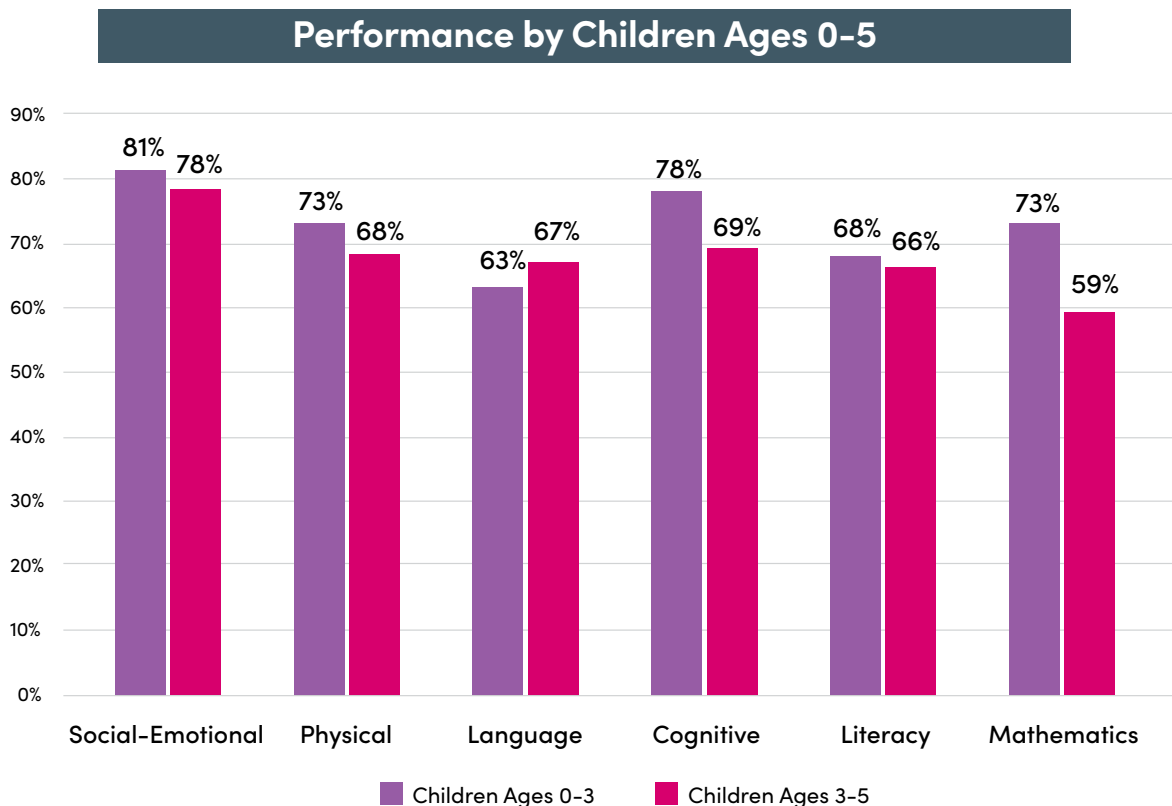
75% Dental



Teaching Strategies GOLD® provides the Early Learning department’s teachers and administrators with valuable data collected and reported three times a year to track each child’s performance. This data helps assess progress in each classroom and each site.

Teaching Strategies GOLD® covers all domains designed to assess school readiness in the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

The data table for Early Head Start and Head Start provides results for the 2024–2025 spring checkpoint. We have highlighted children’s performance level by age in each development area. The percentages below show how many children met the expectations outlined in Teaching Strategies GOLD®.



POPULATIONS SERVED

IAFC's Early Learning department emphasizes recruiting and enrolling children and families with limited access to the resources needed to thrive.

22 Unhoused children

26 Unhoused families

6 Children under the care of a guardian

311 Single parents

63 Two-parent families

6 Parents with disabilities

14 Children in foster care

160 Families receiving WIC

7 Families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

242 Families accessing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

24 Children with an Individualized Education Program (IEP)

4 Children with an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS

Current Assets	\$ 11,014,345
Noncurrent Assets	\$ 10,374,598
Total Assets	\$ 21,388,943

LIABILITIES

Total Liabilities	\$ 13,719,386
Total Net Assets	\$ 7,669,557
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 21,388,943



SUPPORT AND REVENUE

Government Contracts

IL Dept. of Human Services (IDHS)	\$ 31,109,792
Dept. of Family & Support Services (DFSS)	\$ 1,071,398
Chicago Public Schools (CPS)	\$ 956,000
Dept. of Children & Family Services (DCFS)	\$ 389,426
IL State Board of Education (ISBE)	\$ 16,091,431
U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services (DHHS)	\$ 7,738,796
Foundation/Corporate	\$ 2,888,392
Other Income	\$ 979,284
Total Support and Revenue	\$ 61,224,519

EXPENSES

Program Services

Parent Services	\$ 9,489,911
Provider Services	\$26,836,899
Certificate	\$ 19,171,754
Public Policy and Advocacy	\$ 1,225,091

Supporting Services

Fundraising/Marketing/Outreach	\$ 173,204
Management and General	\$ 4,372,897
Total Expenses	\$ 61,269,756
Change in Net Assets	\$ (45,237)

Results of the Most Recent Financial Audit – The FY25 Annual Financial Audit of Illinois Action for Children was conducted and presented to the Board of Directors (governing body) for review and approval by Crowe, LLP. The audit was conducted in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America (GAAS) and the standards applicable to financial audits contained in Government Auditing Standards, issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. The Independent Auditor’s Report resulted in an Unmodified Opinion, and indicated that there were no material weaknesses reported and no significant deficiencies.

**Every day, children
build confidence,
develop essential skills,
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