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FROM THE STREETS

PUTTING KIDS AND FAMILIES FIRST IN ILLINOIS: A CALL TO ACTION

Illinois ranks 24th in child well-being, according to the 2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book, a 50-state report of recent data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how kids are faring in post-pandemic America. The data show Illinois leaders must do more to prepare children to learn so they are ready to earn when they reach adulthood.

As the 2024 elections approach, crucial decisions that impact families and children across the state are at stake. From childcare affordability to educational equity and healthcare access, these issues shape the landscape for generations to come. In this pivotal moment, it's imperative to prioritize child and family well-being, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs addressed.

"The 2024 Data Book highlights the importance of lawmakers focusing on equity in policies and programs to assure all Illinois children and families have the resources they need to thrive," said Loukisha Pennix, chief youth and family potential officer of YWCA Metropolitan Chicago, Illinois member of the KIDS COUNT network. Illinois ranks in the bottom half of states for 3 out of the 4 economic security indicators, illustrating how poverty affects educational outcomes and opportunities.

Here are some key points the report called out:

DEMOGRAPHICS

Illinois boasts a diverse population of over 2.7 million children, highlighting the importance of responsive policies tailored to meet the unique needs of each child. Data reveals significant racial and ethnic disparities, emphasizing the necessity of equitable solutions to bridge these gaps.

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Despite strides in economic recovery, child poverty remains a pressing concern, affecting approximately 1 in 6 Illinois children. Racial disparities persist, reflecting systemic barriers to economic opportunity. Policy interventions, such as the expanded Child Tax Credit, offer tangible solutions to alleviate poverty and promote economic stability.

HOUSING

Access to safe and stable housing is fundamental to a child's well-being. However, rising housing costs and shortages exacerbate housing insecurity, disproportionately impacting communities of color. Urgent action is needed to address these disparities and ensure every child has a place to call home.

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago provides financial education and housing services, including one-on-one coaching and training on credit repair, budgeting, home-buying, foreclosure prevention, rental counseling, and homelessness prevention. Our housing and urban development certified housing counselors can provide trustworthy financial advice for those experiencing hardship, homelessness, for those on the verge of foreclosure or eviction to hopefully keep them in their homes.



FOOD ACCESS

Food insecurity poses a significant threat to child health and development, with thousands of Illinois families struggling to put food on the table. Expanding programs like SNAP and prioritizing food assistance initiatives are essential steps to combatting hunger and promoting nutritional well-being.

YWCA serves as the administrator of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), which provides reimbursement to home-based and center-based (licensed and non-licensed) childcare providers for serving nutritious snacks and meals to the children in their care. Through enrollment assistance, monitoring, claims processing, and training/technical assistance, the program serves 224 providers that provide more than 36,000 meals and snacks annually across Cook, DuPage, and Lake Counties.

EDUCATION

High-quality education lays the foundation for a child's future success. However, disparities in access to childcare, preschool, and K-12 education persist, particularly for children from low-income and marginalized communities. Increased investment in early childhood education and equitable funding for schools are critical to closing achievement gaps and ensuring every child reaches their full potential.

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago is one of the largest Child-care Resource and Referral programs in the state of Illinois, helping hundreds of low-income families get connected with quality and affordable childcare each year. Moreover, the YWCA partners with childcare providers to help them build stronger and more resilient practices, providing them with the latest research, training and tools so they can provide the highest quality of care and early education for children in our communities.

HEALTH

Access to affordable and comprehensive healthcare is essential for a child's well-being. While Illinois boasts relatively low rates of uninsured children, racial disparities in health coverage persist. Improving access to prenatal care and addressing systemic barriers to healthcare are essential steps to promoting maternal and child health.

As Illinoisans prepare to cast their votes, it's essential to prioritize the needs of children and families. By advocating for policies that promote equity, opportunity, and well-being, we can create a brighter future for all Illinois children. Together, let's ensure that every child can thrive and succeed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, SCAN HERE:



FROM THE STREETS

YWCA METROPOLITAN CHICAGO & UNION PACIFIC: DRIVING ECONOMIC EQUITY

While women make up only about 5% of welders across the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics), YWCA Metropolitan Chicago is working to create opportunities for them in this high-demand, high-growth industry. One of YWCA Metropolitan Chicago's key pillars of work, "Driving Economic Equity", focuses on providing women of color with job skills training, financial stability, and asset acquisition to help close the racial wealth gap. Thanks to a new program with the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership and Union Pacific Railroad, women, ages 18-25, who are interested in the railroad industry, are being trained in welding, manufacturing, and information technology and receiving the training they need to start careers.

The Union Pacific Welding program is driving economic equity through skill-building and workforce development opportunities. Through this partnership, YWCA Metropolitan Chicago works closely with Opportunity Works to find internships – and eventually viable careers – and training and resources for women. This partnership will help create more opportunities and career pathways to increase the percentage of females in the welding industry.

The first cohort launched in 2024 and placed women in welding internships with Industrial Fence Inc. which specializes in metal fabrication for security barrier fencing, roadway railings, chain link, and palisade fencing. Some of Industrial Fence's work includes pedestrian bridges from the iconic River Walk, the railing on the lakefront for the bike paths, and the 41st Street Bridge that was installed by Industrial. Through this partnership, YWCA Metropolitan Chicago participants received internships, engaged in career exploration, and worked alongside welders to develop foundational skills training.

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago's workforce development team, consisting of Business Engagement Specialist Kamilah Hobson, Client Engagement Specialist Daniel Tovar, and Workforce Empowerment Specialist Dana Howard, facilitates the start-to-finish process. The team supports women throughout their entire journey from helping them apply to the program, complete their internships, and providing career coaching and job readiness skills.

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago's second UP Welding cohort is now accepting applications! This all-female cohort includes:

- Open to young adults who are female aged 18-25 who face barriers to employment, which may include being justice-involved, unemployed, or low-income;



- 16-week internship; 4 of which are paid.
- 2 weeks: Soft skills training, employability skills, computer training, financial literacy, barrier reduction, individual employment plan, career goals established.
- 10-weeks technical skills: Skills include welding, obtaining a CDL credential, OSHA certification
- 4 weeks: Paid internship (30 hours per week at \$15 an hour)

Women seeking employment and between the ages 18-25 residing in Cook County are encouraged to apply. For more information, please contact Kamilah Hobson at kamilah.hobson@ywcachicago.org.