



2020-2022
**Annual
Report**

What is a parent?

Throughout this report, we are using the term “parents” to describe anyone who is a child’s primary caregiver. Moms, dads, aunts, uncles, grandparents, guardians, foster parents...we recognize and respect all of you. After all, it takes a village to build brighter futures for children and their families—and that’s what IAFC is all about.



Mission

Illinois Action for Children is a catalyst for organizing, developing, and supporting strong families and powerful communities where children matter most.



A time of tremendous challenges and amazing achievements.

Where to even begin? When I became CEO of Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) in 2020, after the untimely loss of Maria Whelan, the COVID-19 pandemic had turned the world upside down.

We had just finalized our new five-year strategic plan, a plan that never considered the possibility of a global crisis that would close schools and businesses for months. Through this pandemic and civic unrest, I discovered that even in the toughest times, the people in our community are incredibly resilient.

We quickly shifted and adapted our programs and operations and continued to be a vital resource to more than 150,000 children and families, more than 20,000 child care providers, and dozens of communities in Illinois. We also worked closely with local and national healthcare experts to make sure that every aspect of our work was conducted safely.

Our work continues.

As the pandemic slowly fades, the children of Illinois need us more than ever. With that in mind we are pursuing opportunities to expand our work, leadership, and partnerships to do even more to strengthen children, families, communities, and the early care and education field.

Your generosity is integral to our work. As our Annual Report shows, with your support we have made significant accomplishments since 2020—but it's clear there are endless opportunities before us and still much more work to be done.

Our children are counting on us. We're counting on you to partner with us to ensure our children—and the generations that follow—will have the resources needed to realize the thriving lives they deserve.

Together, we can create a better, brighter future for us all. Join us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "April Janney". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

April Janney
President & CEO
Illinois Action for Children



Our Early Learning Programs are giving our youngest learners the head start they need to succeed

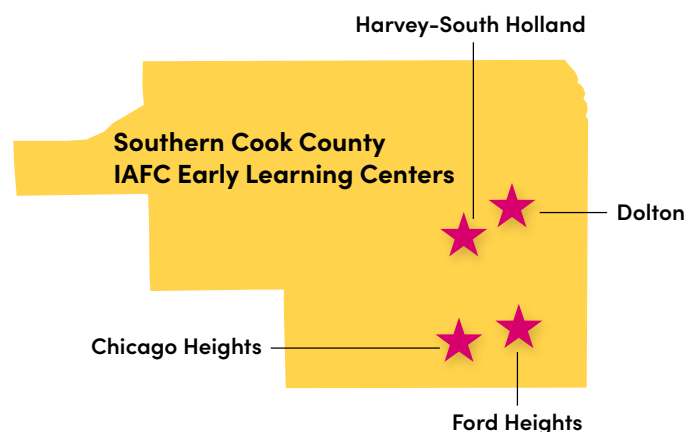
The need is obvious. For decades, children and families living in Cook County's south suburbs have struggled with inequitable living conditions. Parents face income and housing challenges. Food instability is an everyday reality. Quality child care and Pre-K programs have become more inaccessible and unaffordable.

Our Head Start locations apply an evidence-based approach to engage children and families with limited access to financial resources in its early care and education programs. Children with disabilities and their peers benefit from warm, nurturing, and effective interactions, and extra supports to help them to succeed. Our inclusive programming prepares children and their families for school at an earlier age.

Our “two-generation” approach supports children and parents

From experience, we know a key measure to ensure children succeed is to support their parents' goals of stability and self-sufficiency. This unique two-generation approach offers children (birth to five) a multidisciplinary, developmentally appropriate education based on cutting edge research. At the same time, this approach provides parents with individualized engagement opportunities and resources to help them break down the barriers to building a better life for their families.

We help children and their parents. It's working.



Lizzie's family is a true success story.

Lizzie, a single mom of two, enrolled her children, including her two-year-old son, Leonardo (Leo), in IAFCs South Holland-Harvey Early Learning Center. When Leo entered the program, he didn't talk, or make eye contact and cried in fear whenever his classroom was noisy with activity.

Even though his teachers expressed concern about his behavior, it wasn't until Leo failed the program's required developmental screening that Lizzie accepted that her son needed additional resources to flourish.

We helped Lizzie access vital resources for her toddler.

The Early Learning team referred Lizzie to a local Early Intervention program to assess Leo and provide the services he needed. This included helping Lizzie understand Leo's special needs and assuring her that he would grow to reach his full potential.

When Leo turned three and entered IAFCs Head Start preschool program, the COVID-19 pandemic closed the doors of schools and child care centers across the nation. The team worked with Lizzie remotely through the transition to hybrid programming in the ensuing months. After a year of consistent support, Lizzie finally came to terms with Leo's diagnosis.

A brighter future for everyone.

Lizzie quickly became Leo's most ardent advocate. Taking the advice she learned from the Early Learning team, she applied for disability assistance and an Individual Education Plan—and independently researched other services to help her son. Leo is five now and thriving at his local school—he's potty trained, can say some words, and confidently attends field trips without Lizzie. A leader in our parent programming, Lizzie chairs IAFCs early learning parent meetings. In addition, she's been nominated for the Illinois Head Start Association's Parent of the Year Award and now shares her inspiring story at early childhood conferences across the country.



“

Illinois Action for Children's Early Learning Program helped my son do what the doctors said he could never do. I am forever grateful to the teachers for knowing Leo needed special attention and for helping me get the support he needs to live his best life.”

– Lizzie



When you're hungry, learning isn't a priority.

The critical connection between proper nutrition and healthy early development is well established. Without adequate sleep and the right foods, the ability to focus and function is compromised. Even if children attend the very best early childhood programs, learning is difficult if they lack proper nutrition.

Since 2006, IAFCs Healthy Food Program has countered the negative long-term impacts of food insecurity for children cared for by hundreds of home-based, Cook County child care providers--many of whom are license-exempt.

Often called Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care providers, they are primarily relatives or other trusted adults.

Healthy food helps builds brighter futures.

We know that children (birth to 12) and their FFN providers enrolled in our Healthy Food Program typically live in under-resourced communities with little to no access to affordable, nutrient-rich foods. Through our Healthy Food Program, providers receive vital meal and snack reimbursement to ensure children, in their care can reap the benefits of proper nutrition. Providers also receive training about the importance of early childhood nutrition and physical activity.

When you feed a child well, you fuel their education and help build a brighter future for everyone.

Angela's grandchildren are thriving in our Healthy Food Program.

When Angela took over full-time child care duties for her grandchildren, she found that feeding three growing kids stretched her budget too thin. “Kids like to eat!” she said. With two four-year-olds and a nine-year-old in her care five days a week, she began looking for food assistance programs.

At the start of the pandemic, when her nine-year-old granddaughter was home for remote learning, Angela struggled to feed her grandchildren breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks they needed to grow and thrive while in her care.

One call and help was on the way.

To help feed her grandchildren, Angela contacted Illinois Action for Children and was immediately connected to our Healthy Food Program. A big believer in the adage, “It takes a village to raise a child,” Angela considers her Nutrition Advocate to be an important part of her village.

Beyond gaining access to healthy food, during the worst of the pandemic, the Healthy Food Program team was “really there for me,” recalled Angela. The team provided a COVID-19 toolkit that included hand sanitizer, masks, and gloves. She also appreciated the Healthy Food Program helping her to receive a License-Exempt Health & Safety Improvement Grant, through which she secured a smoke detector, first aid kit, and other supplies for added safety in her home.



With the pandemic ending, Angela is happy to get back to her typical care routine—with the Healthy Food Program's added support. She smiles as she thinks about her grandsons, whose day includes outside play, a nap, learning their letters and numbers and recognizing their own names. Her granddaughter returns home from school hungry for a healthy snack of apples and peanut butter before she does her homework and plays with her brother and cousin.

Our Healthy Food Program is an important part of helping improve the wellness of families like Angela's in every community we serve.

A life and legacy of advocacy and leadership: Honoring Maria Whelan

(1950 – 2020)

Maria Whelan was a force of nature. For more than 50 years, she worked to build better, brighter lives for children and families—particularly those with the least opportunities and resources for success. A bold, impassioned advocate for equity and diversity, Maria fought for transformational change in the early care and education field. During her 20-year tenure as President and CEO of Illinois Action for Children, she never wavered in her conviction or her “vision for better”—a vision which she cultivated every day.

Maria was known and respected throughout the early childhood community in Illinois and beyond. To honor her, we created the Maria Whelan Leadership Institute (MWLI).

A two-year journey leads to new opportunities for Illinois’ early childhood workforce.

To develop the first program, we brought together a Core Committee and a Design Team comprised of Maria’s friends and colleagues from child care and early education, state government, and our Board of Directors.

The inaugural cohort of the MWLI Early Childhood Emerging Leaders Fellowship kicked-off on June 10, 2022—the second anniversary of Maria’s sudden passing. The Fellowship expands IAFCs workforce development initiatives, carrying forward Maria’s steadfast focus to improve child and family outcomes by investing in the state’s vital early care and education workforce.

Maria believed wholeheartedly in our collective power to make positive, lasting change for this and future generations. Thanks to the Maria Whelan Leadership Institute, her commitment will live on for generations to come.





The Early Childhood Emerging Leaders Fellowship puts advocacy in the spotlight.

In 2018, IAFC established a workforce development initiative to help address the teacher shortage in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) field and to increase the number and quality of ECE professionals.

In 2020, this effort became a key component of our five-year strategic plan and today the work continues through the Maria Whelan Leadership Institute's Early Childhood Emerging Leaders Fellowship.

This nine-month intensive learning and skill-building fellowship unites mid-level ECE professionals from across the state in leadership development through the unique lens of advocacy. The goal is to create a group of early childhood advocacy leaders who will use their powerful voices to fight for an early childhood system that benefits all children and families.

The Fellowship Program offers participants the opportunity to engage in experiential IAFC advocacy projects with policymakers and other field experts to grow in their careers, strengthen the ECEC workforce and advance systematic change for the families they serve.

It's a difference maker and it's just getting started.

Goals of the Fellowship:

- Develop leaders and advocates to help redefine excellence in the field
- Advance racial, gender, and economic equity for child care providers, families, and children
- Grow the pipeline of highly-skilled professionals and advocates to ensure the stability of the early childhood sector

“

This is the first program I've heard of that provides instructions on how to become a successful advocate, so more voices can be heard by legislators about the importance of attaining quality child care”

– Pattee Goodman Baker



It takes a “community” to raise a child.

We have an in-depth understanding of the importance of kindergarten readiness to future school success, and the need for strong, equitable, well-coordinated community engagement in supporting families’ early educational and developmental goals for their children.

Many months of remote and hybrid learning took a toll on students of all ages, races, and economic circumstances. However, for our youngest learners and their families, especially those living in under-resourced communities—making-up for missed or delayed early milestones before reaching kindergarten—can seem insurmountable.

In 2020 we launched the Community Parenting Support Saturation pilot program.

The goal is simple—to significantly and measurably increase the number and percentage of children who arrive at kindergarten ready to thrive.

The Community Parenting Support Saturation Program (CPSS) was conceived by a group of foundations that share our unwavering commitment to improving the lives of Illinois’ children and families. Launched during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, CPSS is a pilot program testing the theory that when supported by the full array of community resources and interventions,

parents can develop the knowledge, skills, and beliefs necessary to optimize their children’s growth and learning. After a rigorous application process, the selection committee chose North Lawndale, Aurora, and Rockford as the pilot communities.

It is our practice to help communities achieve their goals, instead of telling them what we think their goals should be. We ask the people who will be using the program to share their insights and experiences, which are essential to developing these goals. For the CPSS program, we implemented an equity focused Human Centered Design approach, which ensures parents’ perspectives are included in all steps of the communities’ problem-solving processes. The CPSS program uses three key levels of strategies, ranging from broad, communitywide resources to intensive, individualized interventions and activities that help pilot communities plan and create a menu of offerings for parents and their young children.

Each community began at a different level of readiness and embraced the Human Centered Design framework to implement different kindergarten readiness strategies. As we enter the second year of the pilot, all the communities are engaging families through their own individualized community plans, which include the use of customized text messaging around early childhood development and evidenced-based programs proven to facilitate children’s healthy growth and development.

Together, we’re making progress, and our littlest learners are on the road to school readiness.

North Lawndale: The impact of community investment.

With support from the Steans Family Foundation and other funding partners, IAFC has been leading the North Lawndale Early Learning Collaboration (NLELC) for nearly a decade. Our team builds school capacity and provides case management services for families to improve student outcomes for children Pre-K through third grade by reducing chronic absenteeism. Directly supporting parents is paramount in our efforts to remove the barriers that prevent children from attending school consistently, *“Our success is largely due to the trusting, mutually respectful relationships we build with schools and parents,”* said Razail Jones, Community Connections Manager.

Community investment is paying off for Jayden!

During the 2018-2019 school year, first-grader Jayden missed 14 days of school. As a result, he was referred to North Lawndale Community Connections (NLCC) and connected with an IAFC case manager.

“School attendance is key to the development of many learning and life skills, so it’s critical that good attendance habits are established in early childhood,” said Jones, who has been leading this work for nearly a decade.

The IAFC case manager worked closely with Jayden and his mom. She shared NLCCs numerous community resources to help her family persevere during the pandemic and ensure her son attended school consistently. With daily attendance, Jayden’s engagement and skill development was so impressive that the family no longer need extra assistance.

With IAFCs individualized support, Jayden’s mom addressed the obstacles causing her son’s chronic absenteeism: Jayden had a triumphant school year and is now on a path toward achieving his future dreams and goals!



Making Access, Equity, and Choice in Child Care a reality for Illinois families.

In 2019, Governor J.B. Pritzker established the Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding (Early Childhood Funding Commission), seeking funding recommendations that would provide equitable access to high-quality early childhood programs for all children birth to age five.

Since our founding, we have been at the forefront of the fight for this vision. As a result, we had a seat on the commission and began building a coalition that would help advance the commission's recommendations. A few months later, the pandemic swept the country. As early childhood programs closed their doors and parents had to stay home with their children, high-quality child care became a national priority.

For the first time, people across the nation and here at home were talking about the importance of child care. The timing coincided with the launch of our 10-year proactive policy agenda, **All Children, All Families**.

This agenda is designed to restore Illinois to its former status as a national model for child care and early

education. Complementary to our agenda is our work as a leading convener and the manager of the *We, the Village Coalition*, which has grown to more than 150 individual and organization advocates over the past two years. Last year, we launched the coalition's *Right to Care IL!* campaign to bring forward parent, provider, and public voice into our efforts to reform the state's early childhood system.

With *All Children, All Families* as our roadmap, we will continue advancing our advocacy and policy agendas to ensure the new system is equity centered to meet the diverse choices and needs of all families and their children.

All Children, All Families: 4 Key Objectives

- 1 Strengthen governance and funding** to lay the foundation of systemic equity
- 2 Support early childhood teachers and caregivers** to support children
- 3 Achieve program excellence** for Black, Latinx, low-income, and rural children
- 4 Expand family access and choice** to excellent services

Change IS Happening! Reforming Illinois' Early Childhood System:





One parent's journey.

How Abby became a powerful advocate for children.

Like many parents, Abby enrolled her infant son, Harris, in a child care program to nurture his growth and development while she and her husband worked. Leaving her only child in the care of others was emotionally difficult, but Harris's teacher, Miss V, was kind and reassuring. Listening to Miss V talk about her years of experience and devotion to "her children," Abby said, "*There was no doubt in my mind that she loved what she was doing, and that Harris was in caring hands.*"

Limited budgets take a toll.

One day, several weeks later, when Abby picked-up Harris from the program Miss V was absent and her little boy wasn't his usual happy self. Abby was surprised to find her son still wearing soiled clothes instead of the back-up outfit she had provided for

emergencies. After a few days of inconsistent care, Abby questioned the program's director.

The Director explained that because of limited funding, she was forced to reduce Miss V's hours. Unable to support her family with the pay-cut Miss V accepted a full-time position elsewhere.

Abby was motivated to take action.

Abby began volunteering for the coalition and joined the *Right to Care IL! Campaign* before dealing with the troubling experience at Harris' child care program. However, as her knowledge of the issue grew and she heard similar stories from other parents, Abby was inspired to become more deeply involved. She is now a Core Coalition member and co-chair of the Coalition's communications committee. More importantly, she is sharing her story and amplifying the parent's perspective as she advocates for all Illinois' families to have access to the quality early education and care of their choosing.

The Sylvia Cotton Center for Research and Policy Innovation continues to drive our work.



Named for our founder and children's, education, and civil rights advocate Sylvia Cotton, the Sylvia Cotton Center for Research and Policy Innovation (SCCRPI) is IAFCs hub for research, policy analysis, and innovation in child care and early education program design.

IAFC Research Director, Dr. David Alexander said, *"The Sylvia Cotton Center for Research and Policy Innovation provides an energetic space where three powerful Illinois Action for Children teams – our very experienced program, policy, and advocacy teams and researchers partner to explore, incubate, and advocate for innovative public policy and programming for families, caregivers, educators, and communities."*

The Unstoppable Sylvia Cotton!
More than fifty years ago, IAFCs founder Sylvia Cotton recognized that child care was an economic necessity for achieving gender and racial equity.

"What does Sylvia Cotton do when she is outraged and sees a crisis? She organizes," said her son Steve during an interview for IAFCs 50th anniversary..."It's clear to me that once she herself had examined the facts on something that was so 'near and dear' to her heart and inflamed her sense of unfairness, inequality and injustice, there would be no stopping her."

Today, Sylvia's indelible spirit, bold leadership, and deep sense of justice lives on through SCCPRIs continued work to answer the question that drives everything we do at IAFC...

"What about the Children?"

The more we know, the greater our impact.

Since it was established 20 years ago, IAFCs Research Department has been providing valuable information about Illinois' Early Childhood landscape.

Most recently, the team has shed light on the impact of COVID-19 on child care, documenting first-hand experiences of parents and providers. This research led to recommendations that will improve quality supports for Family Friend and Neighbor Care providers. Our Research Department has also co-authored a report on lead in the drinking water of Illinois child care centers and homes that will inform local and national efforts to address the issue.

2020-2022 IAFC Research Department Publications

- Report on Child Care in Cook County during the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2021
- In the Voices of Parents: Mothers Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic (3-Part Series)
- Searching for Child Care: Stories of Cook County Mothers
- A Lead-Free Future Report
- New Research on Subsidized Family, Friend and Neighbor Providers: Implications for Investing in Quality

To access these and other IAFC research and data visit

<https://www.actforchildren.org/devsite/about/research-data/reports>

Your generosity is vital.

Our focus is on making sure children and families furthest from educational opportunities and other crucial family and community resources have access to high-quality programs and services.

FY21 Service Numbers and Demographic Information:



Families
54,945

Children
101,66

Providers
20,817

Total
180,065

Single Mothers
51,986

Single Fathers
3,639

Living at/or Below
Federal Poverty Level*
26,048

Homeless
416

Children with
Special Needs
631

Race/Ethnicity



Hispanic
12,832
22%

African American
28,752
50%

White
5,149
9%

Asian
1,378
2%

Other/Unknown
9,475
16%

Why Our Families Need Child Care:



Work
96%



TANF
Education/Training
2%



Non TANF
Education/Training
1%



Work & Education
2%

Note: Total is 101%
due to rounding

Your impact is real.

The transformational impact of your generosity is expansive and profound, spanning more than 23 unique programs, advocacy, and research—and fostering children’s learning and growth during the most formative years in their development.

Early Learning Programs

“ I am proud to be an Early Learning parent volunteer. I am on the Early Learning Policy Council and represent the council as a member of IAFC’s Board. I was also a Parent Leader for our Parent Cafés. In these roles I can share my perspective and gain other parents’ trust, leading to suggestions that may help IAFC to provide greater support for parents and children.”

– Sonia Lopez-Tavares,
Early Learning Parent

IAFC Early Learning Centers Only

Service Numbers:

- ✓ **269** Families Enrolled
- ✓ **368** Children Attending
- ✓ **208** Single Parent Families
- ✓ **61** Father Figures are Engaged
- ✓ **95** Parent Volunteers Involved

Note: We are steadily rebuilding overall program enrollment following a 27% drop in enrollment due to COVID-19

Healthy Food Program (HFP)

“ The Healthy Food Program is more than just a program, its people caring about people. I always get a friendly voice on the other end of the phone, whether it’s my representative or the office. For child care providers, this program is invaluable.”

– Lashawnda Price,
FFN Child Care Owner/ Director

Healthy Meals and Snacks provided
2,780,679

Educational Home Visits (remote)
to HFP Providers
1,851

Children (birth to 12) participating in HFP
6,520

Children who are
English Language Learners
1,161

Community Parenting Support Saturation Program

The pilot communities have been making steady progress on engaging families and their children in their individualized plans. Here is one key improvement among the many steps forward each community has taken since beginning implementation in October 2021:



North Lawndale

299

families enrolled to receive text messages on child development, parent-child interactions, and local community events.



Aurora

1,245

families combined attended Parent Cafés and playgroups, creating a supportive peer network for parents and children as they participated in early learning activities.



Rockford

126

parents using a comprehensive mobile app that encourages positive, developmentally appropriate caregiver/child interactions.

Family Engagement in North Lawndale



182

Students pre-k to 3rd grade supported



151

Families received direct services and resources

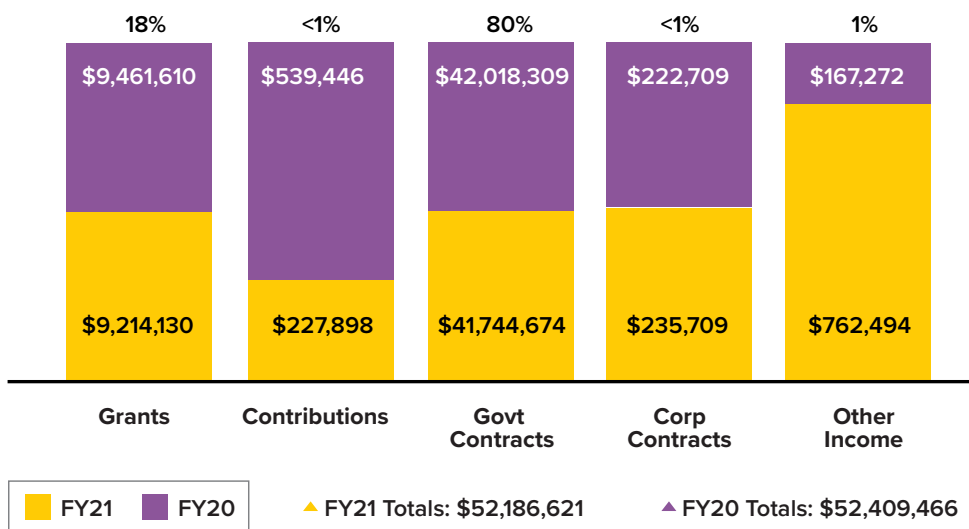
“For five consecutive years, our Community Connections team increased attendance for more than **70%** of the families on their caseload. During the height of the pandemic, students were absent an average of **28** days, double prepandemic years. Now that students have returned to the classroom, attendance has improved for the families IAFC supports through the program.”

– Rarzail Jones,
Community Connections Manager

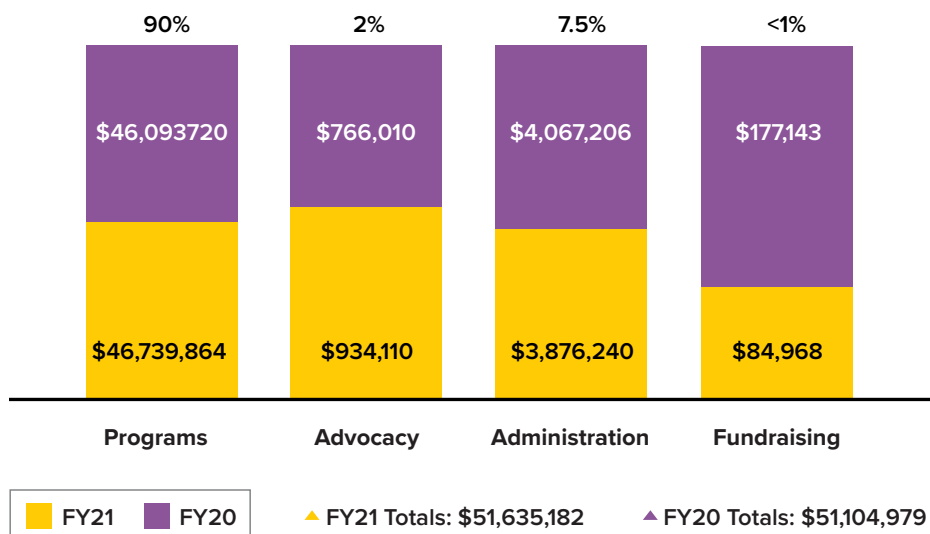
Integrity, perseverance, and stability are the hallmarks that have made us a trusted resource for 53 years.

We are proud of our sound, ethical fiscal management, which has carried us through many difficult times. The early months of the COVID-19 pandemic presented us with financial challenges. However, we swiftly regained our footing and have come out even stronger. Below is an overarching financial picture of revenues and expenses.

Financial Overview FY20 & FY21 Revenue & Support



Financial Overview Expenses FY20 & FY21

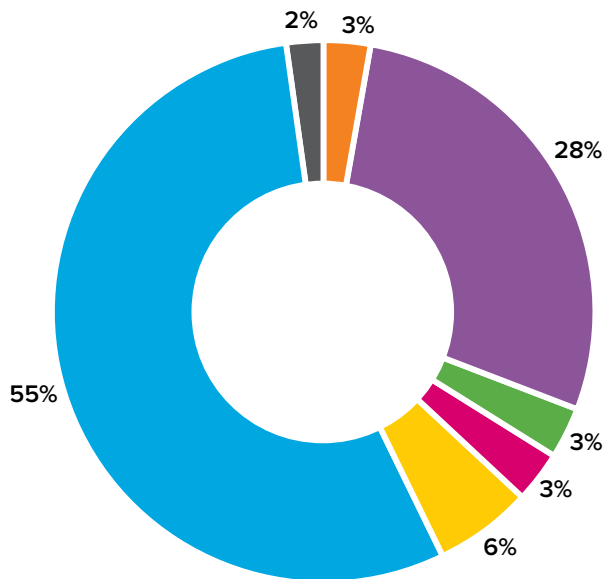


Note: The percentages indicated on each chart are the same for both fiscal years

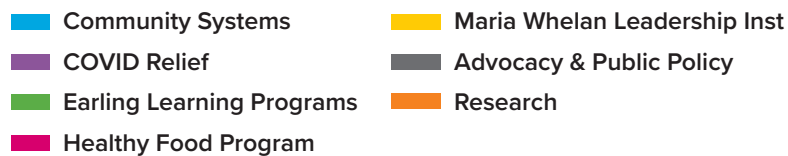
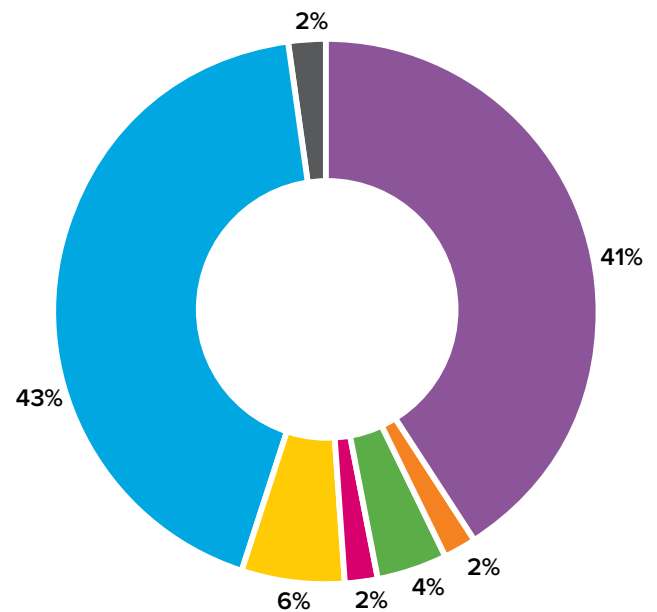
Philanthropy is key in building bright futures for our children.

Philanthropic support is essential for IAFC to go beyond the limits of restrictive public funding and continue providing the resources and opportunities children need to achieve their greatest potential. Below is a representation of how your generous gifts support our programs and advocacy initiatives.

Allocation of FY20 Gifts & Grants



Allocation of FY21 Gifts & Grants



For questions about this Annual Report or any of our programs, or to request a copy of our most recent 990, please contact us at developmentoffice@actforchildren.org and write Annual Report Inquiry in the subject line.

You are making a life-changing impact.

All of us at IAFC deeply appreciate you—the individual and organizational donors and partners for your gift of time, talent, and treasure in fiscal years 2020–2022*. It is only through your generosity and commitment to ensuring every child in Illinois and beyond receives the resources they need to achieve their highest potential that our work is possible:



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Based on their contributions, donors may appear more than once

* FY2022 donors through May 25, 2022 are listed ★ Indicates Board member during report timeframe



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Based on their contributions, donors may appear more than once

* FY2022 donors through May 25, 2022 are listed ★ Indicates Board member during report timeframe

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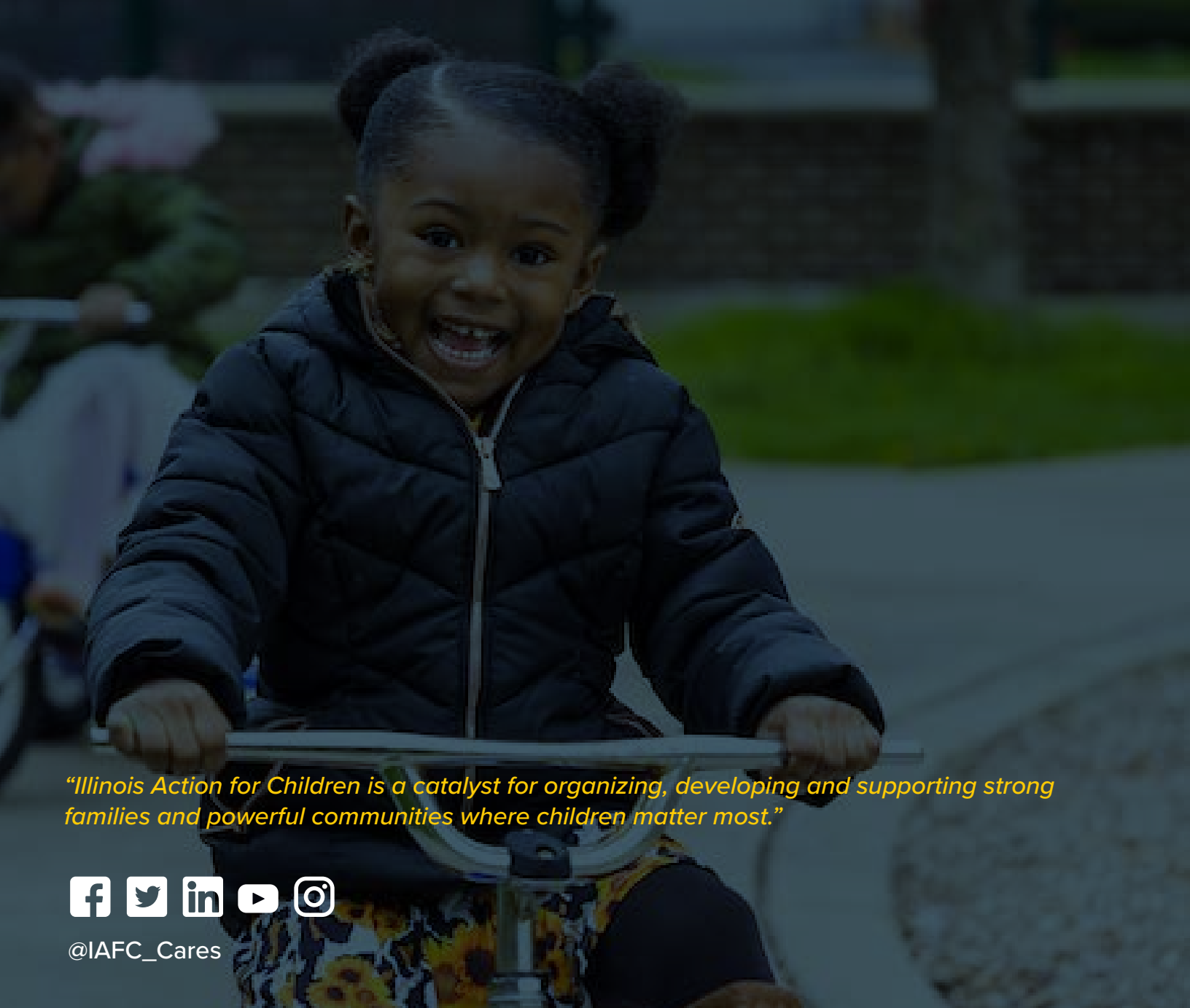
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Sam Kass (L), nutrition advocate & NBC News Sr. Food Analyst, spoke at our 2021 A Time to Shine about the importance of nutrition for children.

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“Illinois Action for Children is a catalyst for organizing, developing and supporting strong families and powerful communities where children matter most.”



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