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Collaborative on Child Homelessness Illinois
An ICAAP Program



Collaborative on Child Homelessness - IL (COCHI) Fall Newsletter

October 2026

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Housing Insecurity and Child Welfare Involvement

Families facing housing insecurity are already under tremendous stress, and conditions tied to poverty may be mistaken for neglect. Providers who understand this link can help families get connected to housing support early, before a crisis leads to separation.

26,295
of child removal cases in 2019 included inadequate housing as a factor

4,759
Illinois families received Norman Services to assist with housing stability in 2025

46%
lower chance of reunification for caregivers who reported recent homelessness

The Link Between Youth in Care and Housing Insecurity

Young people who leave foster care are more likely to experience homelessness than their peers. Those who age out leave with limited family support, income, or rental history. Housing advocacy, cash assistance, and housing vouchers are designed to bridge that gap, and navigating these resources early can make a difference.

47%
of interviewed youth in foster care first experienced homelessness with their birth family

3x
higher likelihood of homelessness for youth who left foster care before 19

44%
of interviewed youth identified placement in foster care as the beginning of their experience with homelessness

Note: All data points shared above are clickable with linked sources

Fall Highlights

Supporting Youth and Families in Housing Crisis: A Conversation with DCFS
COCHI's Quarterly Meeting on September 23 featured Dr. Margi Scotellaro and John Cheney Egan, who spoke about Mandated Reporting and DCFS Housing Support Services.

View Slides and Notes

Applying a Trauma-Informed Lens to Housing and Child Welfare
Housing is one of the most important factors in a family's stability. Help by:

- Asking families about housing during intake and visits, including doubled-up living, eviction or utility concerns, and unsafe conditions.
- Reassuring families that you are asking about needs because you want to help, not because you want to take their children away.
- **Understanding** the difference between neglect and the effects of poverty, and avoiding reports that stem from lack of resources alone.
- Connecting families early to emergency cash assistance and housing locator services to prevent removal or support reunification.
- Referring youth in care to housing advocacy before case closure, ideally well ahead of their 21st birthday.
- Coordinating with caseworkers, housing providers, and schools so families are not navigating multiple systems alone.

National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week | October 25-31
National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week (NLPPW) is the perfect time to help raise awareness about healthy housing. Lead is most often found in the home and is included as a contaminant in the Eight Principles of a Healthy Home. This NLPPW, join us in affirming that everyone deserves a safe, stable, and *healthy* home to grow in.

- Healthy Homes Resources
- NLPPW Social Media Toolkit in English and Spanish
- ICAAP Lead Webpage for additional resources and education

Don't Forget! Complete this 5-minute COCHI survey to help us ensure our COCHI programming is the best it can be and we can continue working to improve the lives of children and families expeirencing housing insecurity.

Resources for Housing and Family Support



Illinois DCFS does not remove children from their families for poverty alone. Services to support housing stability for families and youth in care are available, but families and youth are not always aware of them. The information below may be helpful to share with your clients, colleagues, and community partners.

Norman Services: Housing and Cash Assistance for Families
Helps families who are at risk of losing their children to DCFS care, or whose children can't return home because of a lack of food, clothing, or housing. Services include emergency cash assistance, help finding housing, and a waiver that lets families apply for TANF so children in care can return home sooner. Families can ask their DCFS caseworker about eligibility, and if a request is denied, reduced, or delayed, they have the right to appeal. Brochure available in English and Spanish.

DCFS Youth Housing Advocacy Program
This program helps young people who are in or have aged out of DCFS care find and keep stable housing. Housing advocates provide support with securing affordable housing, budgeting, consumer education, and connections to community resources. They also follow up for at least three months after a youth is housed. Brochure available in English and Spanish.

Note: This program does not include direct funds, but DCFS offers a separate Youth Housing Assistance Program and the Foster Youth to Independence Housing Choice Voucher Program for eligible youth.

Policy Update

Medicaid Work Requirements
Starting in January 2027, new federal rules may affect some Medicaid customers. Some adults may need to work, go to school, engage in community service, or participate in training to get or to keep Medicaid coverage. Requirements vary by individual circumstances, and many will be exempt. Stay updated here.

Proposed Head Start Rule Would Eliminate Protections for Children Experiencing Homelessness
HHS has proposed rescinding and replacing the Head Start Program Performance Standards, which would repeal the regulations that remove barriers to enrollment for children experiencing homelessness. These protections include that programs identify and prioritize these children for enrollment, let families enroll while gathering documents like birth certificates and immunization records, and coordinate with local McKinney-Vento liaisons. Head Start and Early Head Start served more than 60,000 children experiencing homelessness in 2024-25, the highest number on record. Find out more here.

Upcoming Events and Announcements

A Season of Giving and Action: Ways to Make a Difference this Winter with COCHI
December 9, 1- 2 p.m | Virtual

Join us for our final quarterly meeting of the year. Bring your hot cocoa, wear your favorite holiday sweater, and join us for a virtual holiday celebration! We will highlight COCHI member organizations with holiday volunteer opportunities, unveil our shopping guide for holiday gifts that give back, and review COCHI's 2026 accomplishments while looking ahead to 2027 goals and activities.



Register Here!

COCHI Leader Spotlight

Each newsletter, a different COCHI Leadership Team Member and their organization will be featured.

LaChania Conwell is a Case Manager for The Night Ministry Interim Emergency Shelter Program as well as the Parenting with Purpose Maternity Group Home, where she has been employed for nine years. LaChania holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Argosy University and a master's degree in public administration: Nonprofit Leadership and Management from Walden University.



The Night Ministry Interim shelter program supports up to 16 youth ages 14 to 20 years with shelter for 120 days, where they are supported by case management and are taught life skills to help with self-sufficiency.

The Parenting with Purpose program supports up to 8 pregnant and parenting mothers ages 16 to 22 in a congregated 18-month to two-year transitional housing program. Through the TNM family-centered approach, young mothers have a safe, stable place to live as well as resources, life skills, and support so that they can be independent. Both programs are located in the West Town neighborhood.

For more information, email lachania@thenightministry.org or call 773.506.4100.

Contact and More Information

COCHI Resources
Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Stay Connected
Join the COCHI mailing list for updates on COCHI meetings, trainings, and advocacy.
Email Abby Creek

Together, we can ensure every Illinois child has the stable home they deserve.

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