



Celebrating 125 Years Serving Children and Families in Need

The Beginning of Children's Home + Aid

In the late 1800s, abandoned and homeless children were forced to live in almshouses. The hunger, homelessness and hopelessness that children endured did not go unnoticed. Reverend Martin Van Buren Van Arsdale witnessed the deplorable conditions to which they were subjected and made it his life's work to provide a better alternative.

It was his vision to find loving homes for abandoned and homeless children by engaging families who were willing to raise these children as their own. In 1883, Rev. Van Arsdale founded Children's Home + Aid in Illinois. It was the beginning of a movement that spread across the country and became known as the National Children's Home Society. By 1917, 36 states embraced Rev. Van Arsdale's vision each united by a common mission to "find homes for the homeless, protect children from harm, and help parents become better parents."

Reverend Van Arsdale organized community groups throughout Illinois, who were charged with finding homes for children in need and the supervision of their care. These community groups became the future Children's Home + Aid regional boards and auxiliaries that carry on Rev. Van Arsdale's legacy today.

Ten years later, Children's Home + Aid's first champion for children, Rev. Van Arsdale, died in 1893. His devoted wife, Isabella Van Arsdale, served as acting superintendent of Children's Home + Aid from 1894 to 1898.

1900s

The Development of National Child Welfare Legislation

Dr. Hastings S. Hart served as Children's Home + Aid superintendent from 1898 to 1909. His administration was marked by the progressive development of higher standards of care. As secretary of the committee to draft a juvenile court law, he assisted in writing the Juvenile Court Act, and worked to secure its passage in 1899. It was followed by the establishment of the Cook County Juvenile Court, the first juvenile court in the world.

In 1909, Dr. Hart was called upon by President Theodore Roosevelt to serve as chairman of the Committee on Resolutions for the first White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children. The committee was to prepare guidelines on the care of dependent children for child welfare organizations.

Pioneer in Adoption Standards

In 1914, Children's Home + Aid formulated a set of standards for child placement in adoptive homes. Two of the standards required that prospective adoptive parents be investigated and a six-month trial period take place before an adoption could be finalized. These adoption safeguards were not adopted into law until 1945 and remain in place to this day.

1920s

Appointment of the Guardian Ad Litem

Children's Home + Aid's pursuit of higher standards led Congress to pass the revised Adoption Act of 1925, which provided for the court appointment of a guardian ad litem. The guardian ad litem serves as an advocate to represent the best interests of the child in court. This provision remains in force today.

1930s

Keeping Families Together

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Children's Home + Aid helped with relief efforts to provide food, clothing, shelter and medical services. The agency also stressed the necessity of keeping families together taking a stand that removal of children from their families for the sole cause of poverty was doing more harm than good for the children.

1940s

A Holistic Approach to Care

In the 1940s, Children's Home + Aid recognized that in addition to meeting the basic needs of children — food, shelter and clothing — it was essential to provide for their physical, emotional, social and educational needs as well. During this time, child psychiatrist Dr. Margaret Gerard joined the staff to assist in developing a program to provide this type of care.

1950s

The Psychological Needs of Children

This period marked the development of more services to address the psychological needs of foster children. Increasing numbers of foster children suffered from emotional problems that required treatment by trained professionals. Children's Home + Aid clinical psychologists and consultant child psychiatrists helped staff to develop new skills and resources to address these needs. Special services were initiated for children suffering from more acute psychological problems that included residential treatment services.

1960s

Group Homes Provide Clinical and Emotional Support

In 1960, Children's Home + Aid began the development of group homes to serve teens in foster care who were having difficulty adjusting to a foster family setting. The group homes provided teens with the clinical and emotional support needed to bridge the difficult gap between childhood and adulthood.

1970s

Serving the Inner City

In 1971, Children's Home + Aid in partnership with the Black United Methodist Association developed the Mother's Enrichment Center. The center provided early intervention services for families at risk of child abuse and neglect, and was housed in St. James United Methodist Church located in the Kenwood-Oakwood community of Chicago. The Center was moved to Chicago's Englewood community in 1981 and became known as the Englewood Child + Family Center. The Center has served children and families with Head Start, Early Head Start, pregnancy prevention, parenting, computer literacy, and GED programs.

Serving the Latino Community

The Viva Center was merged into Children's Home + Aid in 1977. The Center originally was located in a church basement in the West Town community of Chicago. Serving at-risk children and families, bilingual services were provided for the many Spanish speaking families living in the area. In 1981, the Center moved to a newly renovated building in the same community in order to accommodate the increasing numbers of children and families who required services.

1980s

A Leader in the Development of Youth Services Programs

In 1982, Senate Bill 1500 led to the development of the Comprehensive Community Based Youth Services. Children's Home + Aid's Southern Region led community agencies to develop effective youth service programs.

The legislation, also known as Minor Requiring Authoritative Intervention (MRAI), gave children the right to community-based and home-based intervention services before involvement in Juvenile Court. Children's Home + Aid's MRAI programs were successful in keeping youth out of the Juvenile Justice System. These programs achieve a 95% success rate.

Northern Region Develops Counseling Program for School Age Children

In 1984, Children's Home + Aid's Northern Region developed the Early Prevention in the Community (EPIC) program to address the mental health needs of school-age children. This ground-breaking school-based program reached out to children at risk of school failure. Case workers counseled students and worked with parents on parenting education, tutoring, and socialization activities. EPIC consistently has been effective in helping at-risk children improve school performance.

Community Child Care Centers Serve Single Mothers and Low-Income Families

As the number of single mothers increased and as more women entered the work force, there was an increased need for quality child care services for low-income families. In 1985 Children's Home + Aid merged with the Community Child Care Center of Palatine Township. Initially started by Palatine Township, this Center not only brought early childhood services into Children's Home + Aid, but served as a model for program development. These programs promoted healthy child development and strong and stable families. Because of its development of quality care programs, Children's Home + Aid was asked to open the Community Child Care Center of Schaumburg and operate the Tom Thumb Community Child Care Center in Carpentersville.

Serving Foster Teen Mothers

Adolescent Mothers Resource Homes, a pioneering project introduced in 1989, addressed the special needs of pregnant and parenting foster teens. The program placed adolescent mothers and their children with specially trained foster families who helped young foster mothers develop parenting and independent living skills.

Foster Children Placed into the Care of Relatives

In 1989, Children's Home + Aid was one of the first private agencies in Illinois to provide Home of Relative Foster Care, or Kinship Care, which gave foster children the opportunity to stay with their family of origin. Relatives were able to receive support services and financial help to care for a child without termination of the parents' rights. Kinship Care helps to sustain extended family relationships and reduce the trauma caused by the child's removal from the home.

First to Develop Policy on HIV Testing

Children's Home + Aid was one of the first private Illinois agencies in 1989 to develop a policy on the HIV testing of infants entering foster care. Although controversial at the time, the policy ensured that children affected by HIV received early treatment.

1990s

Keeping Children and Families Together

In response to the high number of children entering foster care, Congress passed the Family Preservation and Support Act in 1993 providing resources to help keep families together.

Viewed as a new approach to child welfare, families were given intensive in-home counseling, taught homemaking, given financial counseling and taught budgeting skills. Children's Home + Aid achieved 80 to 90 percent success rates in keeping families together. Today, success rates are at 90 percent and higher.

Growth in Southern Region Youth Services

In 1990, because of the leadership role taken in developing community-based youth services, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services requested that Children's Home + Aid provide Unified Delinquency Intervention Services (UDIS) to serve delinquent youth in the Southern Region.

The Southern Region's outstanding performance in Youth Services led to the launch of the Advocacy Services program to reintegrate youth into the community after being discharged from the Department of Corrections. Both programs have had positive results in reducing teen delinquency and teens going to the Department of Corrections with a 75 to 85 percent success rate.

In 1995, Children's Home + Aid's Southern Region began the Homeless Youth program as a result of legislation that provided state funded support for homeless families. Children's Home + Aid was chosen as the lead provider of Youth Services by the Local Area Network (LAN).

New Residential Treatment Center is Completed

The project to rebuild the Evanston Children's Center as a state-of-the-art residential treatment center was completed in 1993. The new facility, located in Evanston, was named the Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Child + Family Center. The Rice Foundation donated \$1 million for the construction of the Center. The Center provides intensive round-the-clock therapy and care for deeply troubled children.

A Leader in Moving Children to Permanency

In 1996, President Clinton declared adoption to be a national priority. The 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act provided incentives for adoption and family preservation.

In 1997, the Title IV-E waiver provided authority for subsidized guardianship in Illinois. This innovation enabled foster children to become part of a permanent family and exit the child welfare system. Illinois is one of only a few states receiving the waiver and has resulted in more than 40,000 children having "forever families."

Responding to President Clinton's initiative to double the number of adoptions of children, Children's Home + Aid once again proved to be a top performer. In 1999, the Department of Children and Family Services honored Children's Home + Aid with a Champion in Adoption award for its increased performance in adoption during 1998 and 1999 and contributing to the state's overall adoption success.

"I have the honor of presenting the first round of these (adoption) awards, worth \$20 million, to 35 of our 50 states. The good news is that these states did this, using creative new approaches and exceeding their own high goals. Illinois, for example — listen to this — the state of Illinois increased its adoptions by 112 percent — 112 — yes, you can clap for Illinois."

— President Bill Clinton

2000

Serving Children and Families in Mid-Central Illinois

In 2002, the Children's Foundation in Bloomington became the Mid-Central Region headquarters of Children's Home + Aid. The Children's Foundation extended Children's Home + Aid's services to central Illinois with unique programs such as the Family Visit Center, Crisis Nursery, and Kids Turn. These programs work to prevent child abuse by providing help to families in crisis, victims of domestic violence, and children caught in the turmoil of divorce.

Children's Home + Aid Launches Community Schools Programs

The Community Schools Initiative established a strong partnership with Chicago Public Schools to promote the educational success of children and youth at risk. In 2003, Children's Home + Aid's first Community Schools program began at Salmon P. Chase Elementary in the Logan Square neighborhood of Chicago. Children's Home + Aid has added Community Schools programs at Coolidge, Lowell, Cameron, Copernicus, and Earle Elementary schools in the Chicago area.

Southern Region Redeploy Illinois Program Saves State \$3.8 Million

In 2003, Children's Home + Aid's advocacy efforts helped to pass Redeploy Illinois. The law's intent is to reduce the number of juveniles committed to the Illinois Department of Corrections. Children's Home + Aid was chosen to be one of four pilot sites providing the Redeploy Illinois program. During the first two years of the program, there was a 44 percent reduction of teens committed to the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice. The Children's Home + Aid pilot program produced a cost savings of \$3.8 million for the state.

The Southern Region is respected and recognized by the community, police departments, the courts, and schools for the important role it plays in helping youth and families. It has repeatedly been one of a very few agencies to receive a top rating from the United Way of Greater St. Louis.

MotherHouse — A Safe Haven for Children

MotherHouse Crisis Nursery in Rockford became a part of Children's Home + Aid's Northern Region in 2004. MotherHouse provides emergency care for children in times of family crisis. Families in need of immediate help receive services ranging from emergency care for their child to food, diapers, children's equipment, counseling, housing, employment, medical treatment, parenting education, etc. The families are predominantly high-risk families.

Rockford has high unemployment, substance abuse, and high crime rates. During the last ten years, the city has lost 12,000 manufacturing jobs. The incidence of child abuse and neglect is high, as well as the number of children entering foster care. It is an area of great need and Children's Home + Aid's Northern Region is working with these at-risk families providing family support programs to keep children safe and families intact.

Mitzi Freidheim Englewood Child + Family Center Opens

Children's Home + Aid broke ground for a new Center in the Englewood community on the South Side of Chicago in the fall of 2005. The Center was dedicated in February 2007 and named in honor of Mitzi Freidheim, trustee and past chairman of the board. The Freidheims generously donated \$1 million for the new Center. The Center provides an expanded array of programs that help children and families to achieve educational and developmental success.

Rice Child + Family Center Serves Deeply Troubled Children

The population of children in residential care has changed over time, comprised of an increasing concentration of deeply troubled and traumatized children. Underlying trauma and abuse result in severe behavioral and emotional problems. The children in care have experienced multiple foster care placements prior to their arrival at the Rice Child + Family Center.

The average child served at the Rice Center has been through six failed foster placements (20 percent of residents have been in ten or more failed foster placements). Most residents (75 percent) have experienced at least one psychiatric hospitalization prior to entering the Rice Center.

Working with the Technical Assistance Group from the UIC Department of Psychiatry's Institute for Juvenile Research, new program techniques have been developed to care for this more demanding population of children. Children and youth learn coping mechanisms, heal from trauma, and prepare to live successfully with their families.

Foster Care Excellence Academy Serves Emotional Needs of Abused Teenagers

Children's Home + Aid developed the Excellence Academy on the South Side of Chicago to meet the emotional needs of foster teens. The academy helps the teenager learn life skills and receive positive peer support. The teens receive clinical counseling and participate in recreational activities. The Excellence Academy has achieved an 88 percent stability rate for this population.

Supporting Adoption and Guardianship Families

In September 2007, Children's Home + Aid and Family Focus developed the HomeFocus post-permanency program to support the emerging needs of the 43,000 children who achieved permanency through subsidized adoption and guardianship in Illinois. As these children grow older, some boys and girls have exhibited increased emotional and behavioral needs and many of their families require support. Dr. Mark Testa, director of the Children and Family Research Center at the University of Illinois, presented data to the Children's Home + Aid Board of Trustees calling for a reshaping of child welfare practice to support guardianship families. As a result, the HomeFocus program was created to help the children and families who are facing these new challenges and to keep them from breaking apart.

International Adoption

To help families who want to adopt children internationally, Children's Home + Aid's Northern and Metropolitan regions are providing home study services. The adoption staff works with four direct placement international adoption agencies in assisting families through the home study process.

2008 and Beyond

Meeting Future Needs

For 125 years, Children's Home + Aid's commitment to quality programs and services has earned a reputation of leadership, ingenuity and responsiveness. The Board of Trustees, staff and volunteers are dedicated to meeting the future needs of children and families.

Ramey Initiative Providing Critical Steps in Early Learning

Most recently, Children's Home + Aid engaged Drs. Sharon and Craig Ramey to enhance early childhood practice drawing upon more than thirty years of groundbreaking research in early childhood development. Their research has revealed that there are certain critical criteria necessary for the promotion of a child's increased brain function and healthy child development, particularly for children in high-risk environments.

Children's Home + Aid is implementing these new approaches in all of its Early Childhood Care & Education programs. Its professional staff is trained and bringing the new curriculum into the classroom. The Ramey Initiative promises educational success for children, as well as new opportunities in Early Childhood Care & Education for Children's Home + Aid.

A New Center for Schaumburg Families

The construction of a new Schaumburg Child & Family Center has begun. The new Center will accommodate up to 110 children from low-income families more than doubling the number of children and families served.

Center for Child Welfare Training

As a founding member of the Child Welfare Training Consortium, Children's Home + Aid and other partnering agencies are creating a training program for staff caring for children with extremely complex needs. The program will ensure consistent and high-quality training for staff caring for children in residential settings. A key long-term goal is to establish a licensure or certification process as a way to professionalize and expand the child welfare workforce in Illinois.

Bringing Children to the Forefront

Today, Children's Home + Aid is calling for another White House conference on children to be convened. A century has passed since the first White House conference was held in 1909 in which Children's Home + Aid's superintendent, Hastings S. Hart, served as chairman. Children's Home + Aid is working closely with top child advocates and partners — Children's Home Society of America, Child Welfare League of America, the Alliance for Children and Families, and the Children's Defense Fund — so that all children can realize the full promise of America's opportunities. With a new White House administration soon in place, these groups will push for children and families to be placed at the top of the national agenda.

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Throughout its history, Children's Home + Aid has emerged as a leader in setting best practices and shaping child welfare laws. This could not have been possible without the guidance and support of its chairmen, board members, and auxiliaries. The expertise of notable business, civic, and philanthropic volunteers have also contributed to the advancement and success of Children's Home + Aid. Since 1883, the dedicated leadership and professional staff have built a strong legacy for Children's Home + Aid that remains committed to responding to the changing needs of disadvantaged children and families.

“As the needs of the dependent children in the state grow more varied, and as public opinion relating to the best ways of caring for these children changes and advances, the work of the Society must be changed and adapted to meet frankly and fully these new needs and these new interpretations of needs.”

– Dr. Henry Thurston, Superintendent, 1909-1912