

Twelve Ways to Improve Learning

Prevent, Protect and Support Abused Children

Definition and Source

Data include all indicated cases, those that the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services found evidence that abuse or neglect occurred. This number is smaller than reported cases, some of which eventually prove unfounded. In addition, some addresses are “missing” data and these cases are not included in the data. Data presented are for unduplicated counts, meaning that a child was only counted once during the year, regardless of the number of times a report was made. Data are for calendar years and are displayed as a rate per 1,000 children, not as a percentage. Rates were calculated by dividing the number of children in foster care each year by the child population and multiplying the result by 1,000. Data are from the Children and Family Research Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Trends and Key Findings

Both the rate and number of Illinois children who are found to be abused or neglected have fallen 26.6 percent from 1997 to 2003. In 2003, 25,257 children were found to be abused or neglected, a rate of 7.5 out of every 1,000 children. That’s down significantly from 1997, when the abuse and neglect rate was 10.2 per 1,000 children, but up slightly from 2002’s rate of 7.0.

Abuse and neglect rates for all but four counties fluctuated throughout the period. Those four counties – Cook, Madison, McHenry and Woodford – reported a steady decline in child abuse and neglect. In 2003, six counties had child abuse rates that were at least twice the state average: Cass, Jefferson, Marion, Saline, Union and White. Two counties – Hardin and Pope – reported no indicated cases of abuse or neglect in 2003.

Action Steps

Child maltreatment is often the symptom of problems in a child’s life that may include poverty, parental substance abuse, mental health problems, stress or other violence. Enhancing

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT (RATE PER 1,000 CHILDREN)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	% change
Illinois	10.2	9.3	8.7	8.3	7.5	7.0	7.5	-26.6
Adams	14.6	16.5	12.0	13.6	14.2	11.5	12.3	-15.7
Alexander	22.2	22.2	23.0	14.9	9.3	13.5	11.6	-47.8
Bond	13.7	12.4	10.1	15.3	7.3	9.2	6.9	-49.7
Boone	7.6	8.8	7.0	5.4	5.9	4.5	4.0	-47.0
Brown	11.3	8.1	12.2	8.1	5.7	13.9	5.7	-49.8
Bureau	11.4	7.1	7.2	8.3	9.8	9.5	5.6	-50.8
Calhoun	6.9	1.7	0.9	14.6	16.3	9.6	3.5	-49.0
Carroll	14.1	16.3	14.1	17.5	16.8	16.0	8.8	-37.5
Cass	17.0	15.0	11.5	8.6	20.2	11.8	15.3	-9.9
Champaign	15.7	12.4	12.2	16.6	14.1	14.2	10.0	-36.2
Christian	21.8	10.6	9.4	8.0	11.1	11.6	10.9	-50.1
Clark	12.3	9.0	12.5	10.6	10.2	15.8	11.1	-9.6
Clay	12.3	12.6	13.8	16.7	17.2	22.0	14.0	13.4
Clinton	11.2	7.0	8.5	9.5	6.3	5.2	7.1	-36.6
Coles	18.0	16.6	12.1	12.1	12.5	16.9	11.3	-37.4
Cook	9.8	8.6	7.3	6.7	6.1	5.7	4.9	-50.1
Crawford	14.4	15.7	15.0	13.5	13.9	13.4	8.9	-38.0
Cumberland	12.1	12.1	7.1	9.4	7.4	9.1	2.7	-77.7
De Kalb	12.3	12.0	6.7	8.4	8.6	6.2	6.9	-44.1
De Witt	18.4	20.6	20.1	15.8	11.9	9.8	8.6	-53.3
Douglas	5.4	6.9	13.5	6.1	6.5	5.4	3.0	-44.3
Du Page	2.7	2.4	2.3	1.7	1.9	1.9	1.6	-41.8
Edgar	13.8	13.6	15.7	10.2	11.7	14.2	9.7	-29.8
Edwards	13.1	10.0	12.4	13.7	15.6	9.6	11.6	-11.2
Effingham	9.4	13.7	10.3	8.7	5.6	7.4	3.5	-62.8
Fayette	22.2	18.3	14.6	12.1	15.6	10.8	5.6	-74.7
Ford	18.5	7.6	9.5	11.4	16.9	11.2	10.3	-44.4
Franklin	15.4	16.2	12.5	21.3	9.8	10.7	11.7	-24.1
Fulton	19.6	20.1	14.4	17.2	13.0	14.8	10.2	-48.0
Gallatin	17.5	14.7	18.9	24.5	26.6	32.2	10.9	-37.6
Greene	18.4	12.5	13.6	12.5	16.8	19.7	9.2	-49.9
Grundy	5.7	4.4	2.1	4.5	5.6	5.1	3.5	-38.6
Hamilton	12.6	8.2	13.1	19.4	15.0	13.5	3.8	-69.8
Hancock	15.2	13.1	11.7	12.9	16.4	9.3	2.5	-83.5
Hardin	17.3	22.4	11.2	14.3	11.2	7.5	0.0	-100.0
Henderson	13.2	8.4	7.4	9.5	10.0	7.5	0.5	-96.2
Henry	11.2	13.3	11.2	9.0	7.7	10.9	7.6	-32.3
Iroquois	11.8	9.8	10.2	7.1	6.9	6.7	5.2	-55.9
Jackson	18.4	14.7	16.1	15.3	14.9	14.6	9.8	-46.7
Jasper	10.7	8.8	11.1	5.3	6.5	3.5	6.0	-43.9
Jefferson	19.6	11.3	16.0	16.8	19.8	16.0	15.1	-22.9
Jersey	9.4	8.9	9.1	12.7	10.9	9.5	7.1	-24.8
Jo Daviess	8.1	9.3	8.3	8.9	11.2	10.3	4.6	-43.5
Johnson	9.3	11.0	5.5	9.3	10.6	7.5	8.3	-10.9
Kane	7.9	8.3	7.9	6.6	5.6	4.9	4.3	-45.5
Kankakee	16.5	14.3	13.8	15.2	12.5	13.3	7.5	-54.7
Kendall	6.1	6.2	4.5	5.5	3.8	3.2	3.3	-45.8
Knox	21.2	26.2	19.4	20.5	17.1	15.6	12.0	-43.4
Lake	5.8	5.6	5.8	5.2	4.8	5.4	4.4	-24.0
LaSalle	19.2	19.9	16.9	16.1	15.5	13.8	10.7	-44.2
Lawrence	16.8	13.4	15.7	13.4	18.2	10.7	10.8	-35.7

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	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	% change
Lee	17.2	13.9	17.2	14.6	14.8	13.5	8.0	-53.5
Livingston	17.5	14.8	21.3	18.7	11.8	14.4	8.4	-52.1
Logan	9.8	11.7	13.3	14.2	10.1	12.5	10.5	6.9
Macon	11.7	11.5	11.1	11.9	12.0	10.0	9.7	-16.9
Macoupin	12.7	13.0	12.6	10.9	9.5	13.2	9.4	-25.9
Madison	15.7	15.3	14.1	13.0	12.9	12.8	8.1	-48.3
Marion	20.0	21.3	25.9	23.9	22.2	18.1	15.6	-21.8
Marshall	9.7	8.1	6.1	8.7	8.4	8.5	2.9	-70.1
Mason	14.6	13.6	11.5	15.3	15.6	19.0	12.6	-13.6
Massac	10.3	11.7	12.9	21.5	10.0	14.6	13.5	31.0
McDonough	19.1	20.1	16.3	12.9	12.5	9.0	10.3	-46.0
McHenry	8.5	6.9	6.4	6.1	4.5	4.3	3.7	-56.7
McLean	14.4	16.9	18.8	16.8	11.1	11.1	9.7	-32.5
Menard	3.9	7.5	8.8	7.2	17.5	10.4	3.2	-18.4
Mercer	11.7	9.5	9.3	6.4	11.2	8.0	10.7	-8.2
Monroe	4.2	3.8	3.4	5.2	4.1	2.9	2.7	-36.4
Montgomery	10.9	13.9	8.8	12.1	11.1	10.3	11.0	1.3
Morgan	16.8	15.6	12.3	9.1	13.1	16.1	14.5	-13.6
Moultrie	10.6	4.4	8.4	7.9	6.8	10.6	2.7	-74.6
Ogle	11.4	13.8	7.3	7.3	6.0	7.7	6.6	-42.2
Peoria	18.8	18.4	19.6	18.1	13.0	13.5	9.8	-47.9
Perry	9.4	13.0	12.2	13.0	9.6	8.4	7.9	-16.3
Piatt	4.6	3.2	5.1	3.9	7.3	5.3	3.1	-32.9
Pike	11.2	18.9	11.7	4.3	4.5	11.5	2.4	-78.6
Pope	6.3	16.9	12.6	21.1	9.5	6.4	0.0	-100.0
Pulaski	7.0	19.5	29.6	16.0	13.0	16.3	4.6	-34.4
Putnam	10.5	10.5	4.6	3.9	7.9	15.1	2.6	-75.2
Randolph	15.7	13.3	13.7	12.5	14.3	9.8	6.3	-59.9
Richland	20.2	23.2	21.9	21.7	19.7	24.6	12.4	-38.6
Rock Island	19.5	16.4	17.7	18.6	14.0	13.6	13.8	-29.1
St. Clair	17.1	13.8	14.7	13.0	10.1	8.4	7.1	-58.6
Saline	18.7	23.7	20.4	20.4	24.2	19.5	16.9	-9.7
Sangamon	12.7	14.5	14.6	14.0	14.4	11.9	11.7	-8.2
Schuyler	9.0	4.8	7.2	12.1	4.8	14.9	5.0	-44.7
Scott	11.5	12.9	4.3	5.0	4.3	3.6	4.4	-61.7
Shelby	12.0	6.1	6.5	8.6	8.2	8.6	4.6	-61.8
Stark	10.7	10.7	6.9	13.2	10.1	7.6	3.2	-70.1
Stephenson	13.0	9.3	12.7	9.3	8.5	5.8	6.1	-53.2
Tazewell	12.4	11.4	13.1	12.0	12.3	11.1	10.0	-19.4
Union	10.9	10.1	11.3	10.9	16.5	12.0	19.2	76.8
Vermilion	20.5	18.9	15.8	16.3	16.5	13.4	14.8	-27.8
Wabash	17.9	15.6	17.9	11.8	15.3	8.4	6.5	-63.6
Warren	23.3	23.0	19.3	17.5	20.0	14.0	11.3	-51.4
Washington	5.2	5.2	9.1	5.2	4.7	8.9	7.1	36.2
Wayne	9.3	9.3	13.3	10.8	9.3	9.9	5.2	-44.3
White	18.7	18.4	13.3	14.2	14.5	18.8	16.9	-9.7
Whiteside	11.0	15.1	15.2	15.1	13.0	12.3	12.0	9.1
Will	3.5	2.9	3.7	4.5	4.0	3.8	2.7	-23.1
Williamson	13.4	11.9	14.0	21.6	12.6	12.9	12.8	-4.3
Winnebago	13.2	12.4	12.6	12.4	11.7	10.4	10.8	-18.2
Woodford	9.2	8.8	7.8	7.7	5.7	4.7	4.7	-48.8
Chicago	14.3	12.5	10.4	9.0	8.0	4.4	6.5	-54.4

healthy development for abused children requires paying attention to these other factors, providing opportunities for positive family interactions and reducing exposure to violence. Recommended action steps include:

- Increase funding for Healthy Families Illinois, which “coaches” new, at-risk parents with voluntary home visits that teach how to foster healthy relationships with children and avoid abuse and neglect. The program serves about 4,000 families in over 50 locations, but the demand is not being met.
- Screen very young children for developmental disabilities and ensure those who need services are fully served by the Early Intervention system.

The Peril and Promise for Illinois Children

By Nancy Ronquillo, President and CEO
Children's Home and Aid Society of Illinois



Two images captured in a single day's news stories depict the peril and promise for Illinois' most vulnerable children. The first, a front-page heartbreaker, shows a group of law enforcement personnel in a funeral procession, carrying a baby's casket. An infant had been left to die in a dumpster. The tragedy of this loss of precious life shook this suburban community to its core. This image portrays the horrible price our children pay for failing to build the most comprehensive prevention, protection and support systems for vulnerable children.

The second image also tugs at the heart-strings, but in a joyful way. Two sisters are hugging, reunited for the first time since they were adopted decades ago. The story reveals a poignant journey, a search to reconnect with family and the importance of expanding the notion of family to include adoptive parents, foster parents, biological parents.

What can we learn from these lives, one tragically short, the others full yet shaped by a social system that is incomplete? First, we must start at the beginning. Kids don't come from the cabbage patch, they come from families, and families live within communities. Far too many individuals who are bringing forth children are not equipped for the demands and responsibilities. Tens of thousands of Illinois families are surrounded by poverty or violence, many are saddled

with addictions, unable to access treatment. Some parents are children themselves. Neglect is another word for the absence of the most basic items needed to support human life (food, shelter, clothing, medical care).

Children who suffer extremes of abuse and neglect enter the child welfare system. They come from families where support systems are woefully inadequate or nonexistent. A support system conveys the role of community. The law enforcement personnel who buried the infant stepped forward out of a sense of community. The tears of joy shared by sisters reconnecting across miles and years were shared by a community of people who helped to nurture, shape and celebrate their lives. Family, community—the two most essential ingredients needed to improve the odds and life circumstances of thousands of Illinois children.

Neglect is another word for the absence of the most basic items needed to support human life (food, shelter, clothing, medical care). Children who suffer extremes of abuse and neglect enter the child welfare system. They come from families where support systems are woefully inadequate or nonexistent.

How do we prevent child abuse and neglect? Fortunately, there are many program models and opportunities that make a difference:

- Crisis nurseries offer a safe haven and a way for families to regroup in the midst of crises, reducing parental stressors that can lead to tragedy.
- Family self-help and peer-support groups like Parents Care and Share tap the wisdom of people in the crucible of parenting.
- Family preservation programs build upon the strengths of family members, thus reducing the risks of harm and preventing the needs for placing children outside of their homes.
- Quality, affordable child care promotes healthy development for children and provides an anchor to families bootstrapping their way out of poverty.
- Substance abuse treatment programs ameliorate one of the deepest causes of abuse and neglect.
- Home-visiting programs give new, at-risk parents the skills and support they need to foster healthy child development.

How do we protect and support the children who enter the child welfare system? First and foremost, children need caring, strong families. When their biological families cannot meet the most basic needs, there must be “extended” families to protect and nurture these boys and girls:

Kids don't come from the cabbage patch, they come from families, and families live within communities. Far too many individuals who are bringing forth children are not equipped for the demands and responsibilities.

- Foster parents provide great care for children at a crucial time. Illinois needs many more families to open their hearts and homes as foster and adoptive parents, especially for older children and children with medical or emotional needs.
- Communities—that is, people within communities—must step forward as volunteers, mentors, tutors and in creative, new roles that enrich and nurture the lives of children in foster care. Advocates, educators, judges and professionals, must reach out to new partners to engage and mobilize community assets on their behalf.

We can eradicate the blight of child abuse and neglect. We can protect and nurture all of our children. We need only summon sufficient will. The will is manifested in the individual acts and the collective efforts that reach out to more boys and girls and their families. As a society, we can

and must make sufficient and sustained commitment. It is time to mobilize our personal and public resources of time, talent and treasure so that we can assure that the promise of our children's potential will be fulfilled.

Nancy Ronquillo, pictured at left with children, is president and CEO of Children's Home & Aid Society of Illinois, a position she has held since 1991. The Children's Home & Aid Society is a statewide, voluntary agency that serves nearly 40,000 children and their families across 40 counties. Program services include the entire continuum of care, from primary prevention/family support and development, to early intervention, child welfare, educational and comprehensive intervention, treatment and care. Ronquillo is co-founder of Children's Home Society of America, Illinois Crisis Nursery Coalition and Illinois Respite Coalition. She serves on many boards and committees for state and national organizations, including Voices for Illinois Children's Board of Directors.

As a society, we can and must make sufficient and sustained commitment. It is time to mobilize our personal and public resources of time, talent and treasure so that we can assure that the promise of our children's potential will be fulfilled.