Shantaye Wonzer, 19, is a sophomore at Bradley University in Peoria. She says her former foster parents helped contribute to her success today.

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Join the Voices online advocacy network at [www.voices4kids.org](http://www.voices4kids.org)
In 1987, a group of civic, business, community, academic and philanthropic leaders came together to address the sobering conditions facing Illinois children. These visionary leaders understood the role we all must play in improving children's lives so that the future is better for everyone. They recommended a comprehensive list of initiatives that would be spearheaded by a new, statewide, independent organization: Voices for Illinois Children.

Since then, Voices for Illinois Children has worked tirelessly to help parents, business and community leaders, and policymakers understand and respond to the challenges facing children and families.

Voices for Illinois Children raises awareness of the needs facing children and families and builds broad support for practical approaches that make meaningful differences for children. We convene parents and community leaders to explore data, and generate public will for needed improvements. Our research and leadership development efforts guide our collaborative advocacy campaigns, enabling thousands of people across Illinois to take action.

We continue to focus on the pivotal conclusions reached by our founders: focus on prevention; commit resources to strengthen communities; employ comprehensive approaches; encourage institutional creativity; improve state government's impact; and broaden instruction on vital issues.

We are grateful for the support of so many caring and committed people. Without your passion and conviction, as well as your financial generosity, Voices for Illinois Children simply would not be the force we are today. Because so many people across Illinois have spoken out on behalf of children, we've made great progress on critical issues like early childhood education, health care and family economic security.

Unfortunately, we still face many of the same challenges that spurred the creation of Voices for Illinois Children. Society continues to change rapidly, leaving children more vulnerable. Parents, by and large, are less available. Schools, often lacking resources, still strain to instruct students who are ill equipped to learn. Child poverty is on the rise again.

We celebrate our 20th anniversary looking back on great successes and forward to new responsibilities. With careful thought and committed advocacy, we can continue to drive meaningful change for all Illinois children. We believe all of us have the opportunity and obligation to do our part in nurturing our state's children. Thank you for your support of Voices for Illinois Children, and I look forward to continuing our work together as we build better lives.

OUR MISSION

Voices for Illinois Children champions the full development of every child in Illinois to assure the future well-being of the people of the state. We work with families, communities and policymakers to ensure that all children grow up healthy, nurtured, safe and well-educated.
His year’s state budget will make history for more than the long and bitter debate that produced it. Bickering state leaders squandered a historic opportunity to repair Illinois’ broken systems of funding schools and raising revenues. Six rancorous weeks into the state’s new fiscal year, lawmakers finally approved a spending plan whose shortcomings largely counter its good news for kids and families:

**Education** – In addition to a significant increase in special education funding, schools’ general state aid will grow by a record amount of $400 per pupil. However, that’s still about $670 shy of the minimum mark recommended by experts. Early childhood education is seeing new and welcome resources totaling $29.6 million – a $25 million increase, plus some extra funding under the authority of the one-month temporary budget in July. Yet that amount still falls at least $15 million short of the level necessary for our next steps toward ensuring preschool access for all young children whose parents want it.

The spring 2007 legislative session opened with great potential for substantially relieving schools’ overreliance upon property taxes. Ultimately, however, state leaders sidestepped one of the biggest factors damning the quality of education available to students in low-income communities.

**Health and human services** – The new budget includes a small funding increase for state-assisted child care. Children’s mental health supports will grow by a total of $5.5 million in FY2008. There’s a $10.6 million increase to extend more Early Intervention services to young children with serious developmental disabilities or delays, and

EI providers will receive a long-overdue cost-of-living adjustment. Yet none of these increases is large enough to cover growing needs adequately, and too many other neglected programs for children, youth and families will see no extra help.

**Overall fiscal stability and tax fairness** – Beyond closing several corporate tax “loopholes” worth up to $300 million annually, state leaders approved no new revenue sources to balance Illinois’ deficit-ridden finances, cover existing pension obligations, or sustain progress in expanding health care access. Low-income, working families continue to bear an unfairly large responsibility in taxes. Although the Senate approved an increase in the state Earned Income Tax Credit to help such households, the measure received neither a House hearing nor gubernatorial support.

Also disheartening was the way the Governor’s veto actions rolled back many increases that legislators had approved for a range of education, health care and other family services. Among the $463 million vetoed from the budget was funding for growth in:

- Health care for low-income families – $40 million was cut from an increase to improve chronically delayed payments to hospitals that care for Medicaid patients.
- School-based health care centers – $3 million was erased from plans to help new facilities open in about 20 schools.
- Legal assistance for low-income families – $1.5 million was trimmed, leaving no new help for indigent families who cannot afford their own lawyers in civil actions.

**continued on page 08**
BEYOND PRE-K: RETHINKING THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM ON EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION

By James J. Heckman

One of the best investments government can make to raise academic achievement and reduce welfare dependency and crime is the provision of quality preschool programs. Yet popular support for early intervention has a more pessimistic if less publicized corollary among both parents and policy analysts: Namely, that not much can be done to alter the paths of children once they hit the rebellious teenage years.

I, too, once subscribed to this split view of how best to aid disadvantaged youths. Yet research that I recently undertook with a fellow economist at the University of Chicago has forced me to rethink the conventional wisdom. I now believe that early interventions with children are not so productive if they are not followed up with ongoing investments in children during their elementary and secondary school years. Instead, we need to invest early in children—and not stop. And by “invest” I do not simply mean that government should be pumping money into new social programs for disadvantaged youths.

The America’s Promise Alliance approached us to do a novel assessment of five essential building blocks that children need to flourish, including having a caring adult in a child’s life, offering an effective education, and providing access to health care and proper nutrition. We then asked what would happen if government, the private sector, and families continued to invest in children throughout their childhood. But we did not limit our analysis of skill-building investment to government dollars spent on schools and educational initiatives.

We examined, as well, the skill-building investments families make in their children, such as reading to kids, providing encouragement with schoolwork, and setting good examples through community service and healthy lifestyle choices. These nongovernmental investments foster persistence, reliability, and self-discipline—all important predictors of school performance and subsequent success on the job. Government policy does not create, but can help sustain these “noncognitive” skills—our analysis assumed, for example, that policymakers would expand effective mentoring programs, adolescent-literacy initiatives, and college-tuition programs during the teenage years.

Our results were striking—and surprising. Our study looked at the impact of investing in boys born to low-achieving white mothers. We found that without additional skill-building investments, most at-risk boys will falter. Only about two in five would graduate from high school, fewer than 5 percent would enroll in college, and more than 40 percent would wind up convicted of crimes or on probation. Boys who had the benefit of a comprehensive preschool program fared better. But the unexpected finding was that at-risk boys were most successful when investment was sustained into the teenage years. Under that scenario, more than nine in 10 boys graduated from high school, and nearly 40 percent attended college. Only about 10 percent would be convicted of crimes—and just 2 percent would end up on welfare.

To put these numbers in perspective, sustained skill-building investments would go a long way toward shrinking, and in some cases eliminating, the nation’s worrisome racial disparities in academic achievement, drug use, and college attendance. And while ongoing investment in children is expensive, the country would ultimately save tens of billions of dollars each year in reduced welfare payments and increased productivity.

Too often, government officials design programs for children as if they lived their lives in silos, as if each stage of a child’s life were independent of the other, unconnected to what came before or what lies ahead. It’s time for policymakers now to look beyond the silos, to begin recognizing that consistent, cost-effective investment in children and youths can pay for itself. Providing young people with the resources they need to compete in today’s global economy is not just a moral imperative. It is an economic necessity, too.

James J. Heckman, a 2000 Nobel laureate in economics, is a professor of economics at the University of Chicago. This is an excerpt of an article that first appeared in Education Week, March 2007. Reprinted with permission from James Heckman. To read the entire article, visit www.edweek.org.
It's important to reduce the stigma. The first step was . . . being open.

Kim and Mike struggled to understand what was going on with their adopted daughter ever since she first entered their Peoria home. Jenny was 3 months old before she made eye contact or cried, and her toddler years were marked by destructive rages.

Things worsened when Jenny was 10 and coping with the loss of several family members to illness. She was diagnosed with depression and Tourette syndrome, and began medication and visits with a psychiatrist. Despite making progress, Jenny still worried a lot, cried and didn’t want to leave the house. She was teased because her classmates didn’t understand her, and she fell behind in her schoolwork.

“We need to educate our teachers on what children’s behavior means and how to address them,” Kim said. “Don’t automatically think it’s a bad kid. Try to get them help. When Jenny had meltdowns, no one tried to figure out why she was doing this.”

Mental health difficulties can make every aspect of a child’s life suffer. Families often struggle to get a diagnosis because of a lack of mental health providers. And without a diagnosis, insurance companies won’t cover treatment until the problem becomes more severe.

For years, Voices for Illinois Children has helped lead an effort to create a comprehensive, coordinated children’s mental health system that will provide prevention, early intervention and treatment for all children and support for their families. A key segment of this work has focused on schools establishing policies and practices that promote social and emotional well-being, resulting in Illinois being the first state to establish social and emotional learning standards.

Jenny started to improve when she switched schools. Her parents worked with school officials to create an education plan to address her needs, like a private setting for tests to reduce anxiety and allowing her to type assignments because her tics caused bad handwriting. An Easter Seals evaluation coordinator joined Jenny and Kim for a meeting with all students and teachers to talk about disabilities and explain Jenny’s tics and behaviors.

“It’s important to reduce the stigma,” Kim said. “The first step was educating the kids and teachers, and being open.”

Now 17 and a high school junior, Jenny has good friends and is in the fine arts program. Kim is optimistic about Jenny’s future.

“I don’t know what would have happened to her. I think Jenny would have spiraled so down she might have committed suicide. She was so low at points that she said she hated her life,” Kim said. “Now I’m very hopeful. She’s talking college.”

Julie Parente is Voices’ Director of Communications. For more information, contact Senior Policy Associate Dawn Melchiorre at 312.516.5557.

ADDRESSING THE MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF CHILDREN

By Julie Parente

Kim and Mike enjoy the day with daughters Breanna (left) and Jenny.
Shantaye Wonzer has been a part of the foster care system for most of her life. Now 19, she believes she is doing well in part because of the support she received from people in her community. Shantaye grew up in 12 foster homes and two group homes. “All I was looking for was someone to be one-on-one with, someone to take an actual interest in me,” she said. “That was not something I could have gotten from the state.”

Shantaye’s mom was young, unmarried and had drug and alcohol problems, resulting in the children being removed from her home. Shantaye, at the age of 3, and her little sister bounced around foster homes. By the time her mother got sober, her little sister had been adopted and Shantaye had been placed at a children’s home in Oak Park. But five months after she was reunited with her mother the drinking started again, and despite the care she received from her grandmother, Shantaye was back in foster care, with no expectations of returning home again.

Her next home – although temporary – turned out to be the only place Shantaye ever felt like she had a family. Judy Chrisman and Bill Crozier were the only people she could ever call Mom and Dad.

Judy was Shantaye’s first-grade teacher and saw something special in that child who, at 8 years old, had already lived in eight foster homes and one group home. When she learned Shantaye was being removed from her mother’s home again, Judy called up the Hephzibah Children’s Association foster care agency and said, “This is ridiculous; let her come home with me.”

Judy took Shantaye to museums and cultural events, pushing her to the potential she knew she had. “She was very bright, not easy, but very bright if you kept her busy. I liked the challenge,” Judy said. Shantaye remembers being read to at night, and not being able to get away with anything. “They took an active interest in me,” she said. “I felt myself loved like I had never been loved before.”

But Shantaye’s need for change led to behavioral problems, and she pushed Judy and Bill away. The foster placement ended after three years. Despite the difficulties of their relationship, Shantaye feels she is the person she is today due to her relationship with Judy and Bill. “They taught me so much,” she said.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT IS CRITICAL IN THE

By Laura Winn
LIVES OF FOSTER CHILDREN

Though Judy and Bill haven’t had any other foster children, Bill remembers the experience as being emotional and rewarding. Community involvement is so important to the lives of foster children because it makes up for the family support they’ve lost. A recent study by James Doyle of MIT found children whose families were investigated for abuse did better in many areas than children who were placed in foster care. It showed the kids who stayed with their families had less occurrences of juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, and were more likely to hold jobs as young adults.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 2007 KIDS COUNT Data Book is devoted to the topic of supporting youth who transition out of the foster care system. “Research indicates that kids who spend time in foster care fare poorly on virtually every predictor of making a successful transition to adulthood when they exit the system without a permanent family,” the report said. The report found that in Illinois, more than 1,000 children aged out of foster care without having a permanent family in 2004.

What seems to be lacking in foster care can be made up with strong community support like that Shantaye received. Judy Chrisman knows not everyone can do what she did for Shantaye, but there are other ways to support foster children. “You can still mentor a foster child,” she said. “Teach them what a family could be.” Other options include volunteering at a foster care agency, donating money or helping with fundraising or even joining the board of a local agency.

Shantaye is now in her second year at Bradley University in Peoria, where she is pursuing a degree in organizational communications. She hopes to earn a graduate degree in social work so she can use the experiences she has had to make the foster care system better, and she hopes to be the first in her family to ever own a home. Surely that drive has come from people like Judy Chrisman and Bill Crozier, people who took the initiative to care.

Shantaye thinks her outcome is so different from many other foster kids because she learned early on that it was better to take advantage of all the foster system had to offer instead of fighting the system. “I saw kids throw those things away,” she said. “I wanted to do better for myself.”

HOW YOU CAN HELP MAKE FOSTER CARE BETTER

- Mentor a foster child
- Be a foster parent
- Volunteer at an agency
- Donate or help with fundraising
- Take foster children on an outing
- Visit www.fosterkidsareourkids.org

FOSTER KIDS ARE OUR KIDS Campaign Expands

By Laura Winn

Voices for Illinois Children, with over 60 child welfare agencies across the state, has launched the second phase of the “Foster Kids are Our Kids” campaign. The campaign strives to change negative perceptions and encourage the public to support children in foster care.

Last year’s campaign launch highlighted the message “Don’t write me off” in a television ad aired on WGN-TV as well as print materials, a website and training support for child welfare agencies. The second phase, “Help make foster care better,” launched this summer with a new television ad on WGN. This message emphasizes the need for community involvement in the lives of foster children.

“All Illinois children — especially those in foster care — need strong families and lasting family connections,” said Jerry Stermer, president of Voices for Illinois Children. “We all share the responsibility of helping every child achieve his or her full potential. We need to ensure that foster children have the supports they need to succeed in life.”

Since the campaign began in April 2006, WGN aired the first ad more than 1,300 times, a value of over $800,000 of air time. The ad also ran on 22 television stations and over 200 radio stations statewide through the Illinois Broadcasters Association.

The campaign, anchored by these media outlets and a website (www.fosterkidsareourkids.org), reaches out to its audience and promises to be a powerful tool in changing how people look at foster children, and in turn, improving the lives of foster kids.

Laura Winn is Voices’ Communications Intern.
Families’ health and economic security should benefit from several new laws pursued by Voices for Illinois Children this year.

• Tax relief for low-income, working families – Senate Bill 338 fixes a glitch in the Illinois Earned Income Tax Credit and extends about $4 million more of its assistance to foster parents, parents of disabled adult children and several other groups of taxpayers. Previously, state officials had withheld this funding because of confusing legal language in the EITC statute. The new law also eliminates some paperwork for applicants and ensures that everyone who qualifies for the credit can receive the full amount.

The EITC helps to offset the unfairly large tax responsibility borne by low-income families. But it is limited to $230 or less for a qualifying household, and should be increased significantly to provide families with much greater assistance. SB338 was sponsored by Sen. Jacqueline Collins and House Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie.

• Maternal depression – The Perinatal Mental Health Disorders Prevention and Treatment Act (Senate Bill 15) will help to better inform women and their families about the importance of tending to new moms’ emotional well-being. The new law calls for the development of procedures to aid health care providers in spotting signs of depression during mothers’ regularly scheduled doctor visits, so that early care and treatment can be offered.

Up to 15 percent of women will experience serious postpartum depression within the first year of a child’s life, and up to 20 percent of pregnant women will experience prenatal depression symptoms. Providing such women with more help should also help strengthen their young children’s healthy development, which hinges heavily upon the well-being of their mothers. SB15 was sponsored by Sen. Don Harmon and Rep. Deborah Graham.

• Savings accounts for children – Obtaining a college degree, buying a home and starting a new business are important yet costly goals that elude too many Illinois families – especially when only 57 percent of them have a savings account. But under House Bill 1662, Illinois will explore more avenues for helping families achieve such dreams.

The Illinois Children’s Savings Account Act establishes a task force to study families’ fiscal struggles and develop recommendations to address them. The plan will key on ideas for creating special savings accounts, opened with an initial deposit at a child’s birth and intended for future use toward higher education or other specific “asset-building” purposes. Improvement of families’ financial literacy is another major goal of the act and the plan it authorizes. HB1662 was sponsored by Rep. Marlow Colvin and Sen. Jacqueline Collins.

• Child care for low-income, working families – House Bill 1009 switches the basis for determining families’ child care assistance from the state median income to the federal poverty level, which is a steadier and better measure of the annual cost of living. This should help more parents in need to retain their assistance for longer periods of time.

In addition, the new law authorizes a study of parent co-pays and recommendations for improvement. Illinois’ co-pays are the second highest in the Midwest, and should be reformed to treat families more fairly and realistically. HB1009 was sponsored by Rep. Lisa Hernandez and Sen. Martin Sandoval.

Sean Noble is Voices’ Director of Government Relations
Mary Howorth knew little about postpartum mood disorders, even after the birth of her first child. She had signs of postpartum depression at the end of her second pregnancy, but those signs were never addressed by a health care professional. Following the birth of her daughter, Mary knew something was wrong. “I tried to find help, but it wasn’t easily available,” she said.

Mary is one of a very small number of women, one in 1,000, who develop postpartum psychosis. She felt disconnected from her children and was unable to read their cues. One day she would be short tempered, and the next would find her weeping. While she didn’t feel she would harm her children, Mary couldn’t take care of them, either. Mary’s mother could tell something was wrong, so the suburban Chicago family moved in with relatives so Mary could get the help she needed. After medication, hospitalization and private treatment, Mary recovered. “If I had been screened (earlier) and had appropriate treatment, who knows how things would have been,” she said.

The birth of a child is the beginning of a special bond between mother and baby. This nurturing relationship provides essential support for the child’s early development. Yet, for many mothers, the birth of a child is followed by sadness and anxiety. These new moms struggle to find joy in their new role and have difficulty finding the energy to take care of themselves and their children.

Now there is new hope in Illinois to help women identify their depression sooner and seek treatment under the Perinatal Mental Health Disorders Prevention and Treatment Act. Under the law, signed by the Governor this summer, procedures will be developed to aid health care providers in reviewing a mother’s mental health during regularly scheduled doctor visits. This will promote early detection of postpartum depression, allowing care and treatment to be offered right away.

Many women struggle with postpartum depression. About 50 to 80 percent of all moms will experience postpartum “blues” lasting a week to 10 days after the birth of their child. However, about 15 to 20 percent of pregnant women will experience prenatal depression symptoms and 10 to 15 percent will experience more serious postpartum depression, requiring medical attention, within the first year of a child’s life. Some women, like Mary, will experience the extreme form, postpartum psychosis, which is characterized by extreme confusion, hopelessness, a distrust of other people, and thoughts of hurting your baby.

Sen. Don Harmon of Oak Park introduced the legislation after a constituent, Mary Howorth, asked him to help other women facing challenges with postpartum depression. “Because of my constituent’s willingness to share her story and have her voice heard, many other families throughout Illinois will begin to have the resources and attention they need,” Harmon said.

“It was a horrible time for my family and I knew something positive, besides my daughter, had to come out of it,” Mary said. “That is why I chose to speak out.” Mary hopes the law will raise awareness so mothers can give themselves a break about going through difficult times during motherhood. She also hopes it will help newborns and kids in the long run. “It’s not just about mothers – it’s about families and children,” she said.

Since getting treatment, Mary feels like her old self again. Her daughter, now 2, along with her 7-year-old son and husband have gotten past that difficult time. “I had the support of my family and of my relatives,” she said. “If I can offer any advice for women, it would be to find someone to talk to.”

Laura Winn is Voices’ Communications Intern.
Sheri had worked hard to get to where she was. The Springfield resident held low-paying jobs, but managed to save some money and bought a modest house a few years before her son was born. A single mother, Sheri tried hard to make sure Jacob could do fun things like go to summer camp. Despite her efforts, they were just getting by.

Everything changed the day Sheri arrived at work late after a doctor’s appointment. Her state government job was operating a camera that put books on microfilm, but moving the bulky machine aggravated a neck injury she suffered in a car accident years before. When Sheri gave her supervisor a letter from her doctor requesting she be transferred, she was sent home immediately and told to wait until an appropriate job was found.

The wait turned into four months of unpaid medical leave. She didn’t want Jacob to worry, so she tried to keep life as normal as possible.

“The thought of losing everything I worked so hard for scared me,” Sheri said. “I depleted all my savings. I had a CD in case of emergencies, and I spent all that.” She cashed out a life insurance policy, took out a loan on another policy and turned to her family and her church for financial support.

Things started to improve when Sheri started a new job. Her low earnings – she made less than $19,000 that year – meant Sheri qualified for the Illinois Earned Income Tax Credit. The tax credit boosted her refund, allowing her to pay off debt and send 10-year-old Jacob to summer camp again.

Voices for Illinois Children was a leader in the creation of the Illinois Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in 2000. The tax credit provides low-income families with a financial boost, either through a bigger refund or a reduction in the amount of taxes owed. For many families, it provides money to repair a car, save for a down payment on a home, or pay college or medical bills. Sheri is one of 750,000 parents who receive the tax credit. But the credit’s $220 maximum amount isn’t enough by itself to have a significant impact. That’s why Voices is working to expand the amount of the credit.

A year later, Sheri still isn’t on solid financial ground. She hasn’t saved as much money as she had before, but she got a promotion and a raise at work and is working on her bachelor’s degree. Sheri thinks she might be ineligible for the Illinois EITC next year.

“You know how many people look at me and say, ‘I don’t know how you do it?’” she asked. “You just do it.”

Julie Parente is Voices’ Director of Communications.
Betty L. Hutchison, PhD, has joined the Board of Directors. Her career has focused on early childhood education, starting as a kindergarten teacher and leading to her current position as Professor Emerita at National-Louis University. Dr. Hutchison developed preschools and administered early childhood, mental health and social welfare instructional programs as Dean of the Human Services Institute for the City Colleges of Chicago, and helped the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services develop training for foster parents. She has served on numerous boards and national panels, was president of the Chicago affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and served on its national governing board. Dr. Hutchison and her husband have traveled the world, and they enjoy spending summers on Mackinac Island in Michigan.

Jessica Anzaldua is Voices’ Administrative Assistant. Prior to joining Voices in 2007, she worked at a TV infomercial advertising agency in Evanston and also taught creative writing to 4th and 5th graders in Chicago Public Schools. Ms. Anzaldua has a bachelor’s degree in creative writing from Columbia College and is working on her master’s degree in non-profit management at North Park University.

Larry Joseph is Director of Voices’ Budget & Tax Policy Initiative, where he oversees research and analysis on state fiscal policies and their impact on the lives of children and families. He previously was senior research associate at the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. He also served as associate director of the University’s Center for Urban Research and Policy Studies in the School of Social Service Administration and in the Irving B. Harris Graduate School of Public Policy. Mr. Joseph has a doctorate in political science from the University of Wisconsin – Madison and a master’s degree in public policy studies from the University of Chicago.

Voices also welcomed several interns this year. Sam Fitzgerald, a Social Service Administration graduate student at the University of Chicago, is working on health and nutrition policy issues. Amy Timm, a graduate student at the Erickson Institute, is focusing on maternal depression. Laura Winn, an English student at DePaul University, is the communications intern. And Dania Franco, a University of Chicago student in the Harris Graduate School of Public Policy, and Francisca Penna, a recent Harris School graduate, worked on the “Illinois Kids Count” report.
Honoring people who make kids count

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CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF BUILDING BETTER LIVES

Voices for Illinois Children’s KIDS COUNT AWARDS DINNER

on Tuesday, October 30, 2007 honors people, corporations and organizations who are making a difference in children’s lives. This year’s honorees include

Corporate Award: BlueCross and BlueShield of Illinois

Foundation Award: Annie E. Casey Foundation

National City Children’s Champion Award: Children’s Home Association of Illinois, Peoria

Visit www.voices4kids.org for more information

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