



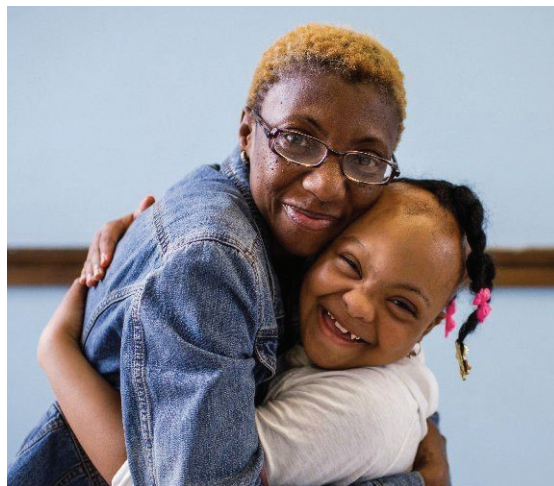
Shining a Light

How Parent-Led Solutions Can Heal Our Communities and Address Trauma



COFI
Community
Organizing and
Family Issues







Dear Friends,

We believe all families have a right to mental health support, services, and information. Like families everywhere, Illinois Black and Brown families are struggling post-COVID, with the added stresses of poverty, racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, struggles to meet basic needs, and community violence.

We've felt **frustration, sadness, anger, and many more emotions** as we navigate the mental healthcare system for ourselves and our children. We've been on waiting lists for months without getting a callback. We've had to navigate forms and information that is not available in our language. We've watched our loved ones struggle and harm themselves.

But we are COFI, so we're on the move! We held over **1,000 conversations with parents, neighbors, and community members across Illinois**. Half of those we spoke with said there were no services in their community to support their families' mental health needs. Almost half were "struggling, having a hard time, or in a dark place," and more than a third had a child or grandchild in the same boat.

These stories and data are alarming, **but we know a better system of mental healthcare is possible.**

We are modeling and testing parent-to-parent projects with partners like **Rush University Medical Center, Kane County Health Department, and others** to improve access for families seeking help. These programs are already making a difference—and can grow.

Parents can play a critical role in creating a better system of care. We can ensure that everyone, especially providers, families, schools, and others in the community, have a healing-centered approach and are trained to help build resilience in our homes and communities.

We want Illinois to develop a "no wrong door approach" to navigating mental healthcare. Instead of facing roadblocks and barriers, we could create a whole new system of care that connects people to a variety of services. **Imagine...a partner who can help families get clear and concise information on mental health resources and services available to them.**

Please join our big vision of families and communities building strength and well-being. We are making it a priority, and we hope you will, too.

Thank you for your interest, and we would love to hear from you. Let's get to work!

In partnership,

Donna Carpenter & Susana Salgado

POWER-PAC IL Co-Presidents

Shining a Light on *What We've Learned*

Parent-to-Parent Research Findings

We held over 1,000 conversations with parents and community members across Illinois, and two things became clear—Black and Brown families are struggling with trauma and families feel like they have no or little access to mental health services.



The Pandemic Effect

82% said the pandemic had a negative effect on their family's emotional well-being

- 49%** faced challenges with their child's remote learning.
- 44%** experienced financial challenges and struggled to meet their basic needs.
- 43%** were stressed by violence in the community.
- 36%** endured the death of a loved one.



Emotional Health

50% have no services that support their family's emotional health needs

- 37%** name affordability as a barrier to seeking services.
- 29%** face long waiting lists and limited appointments or slots.
- 23%** cite challenges with transportation and services being too far away.
- 19%** said there is a lack of information about available resources and how to find them.



Mental Health Services

Only **5%** of parents said they participate in therapy or counseling, while **30%** said they would like mental health services but haven't been able to access them.



What we heard, though alarming and devastating, also showed us what is working for families.



Parents emphasized the importance of peer support from family and friends in navigating their trauma and mental health challenges. Many people told us they wanted safe places to get together to talk about mental health issues and overcome the stigma. Parents want workshops to support addressing their children's and their own mental health.

Parents also told us that they help their children deal with stress and trauma by listening to them, involving them in family activities, going to the park, and engaging them in art, sports, and exercise.

Expanding the funding and infrastructure for programs like these is essential to building a mental health services system that will meet the needs of Black and Brown families.

Shining a Light on *What We Know*

“As parent leaders, we have been trained to understand the *Three Realms of ACEs*. It makes sense to us because it acknowledges so many things that affect a person’s stress and coping mechanisms. By understanding and sharing this graphic, we are helping more families and communities heal and thrive.”

The *Three Realms of ACEs* (adverse childhood and community experiences) tie together community, household, and environmental factors that are interconnected and result in trauma and distress. This tool provides a more holistic way to recognize and address trauma. Old models of care might suggest that a child in school is struggling only because of a personal situation in the home, but this model acknowledges larger forces like poverty, racism, and unsafe neighborhoods must be understood to develop solutions and responses to trauma and related behaviors.

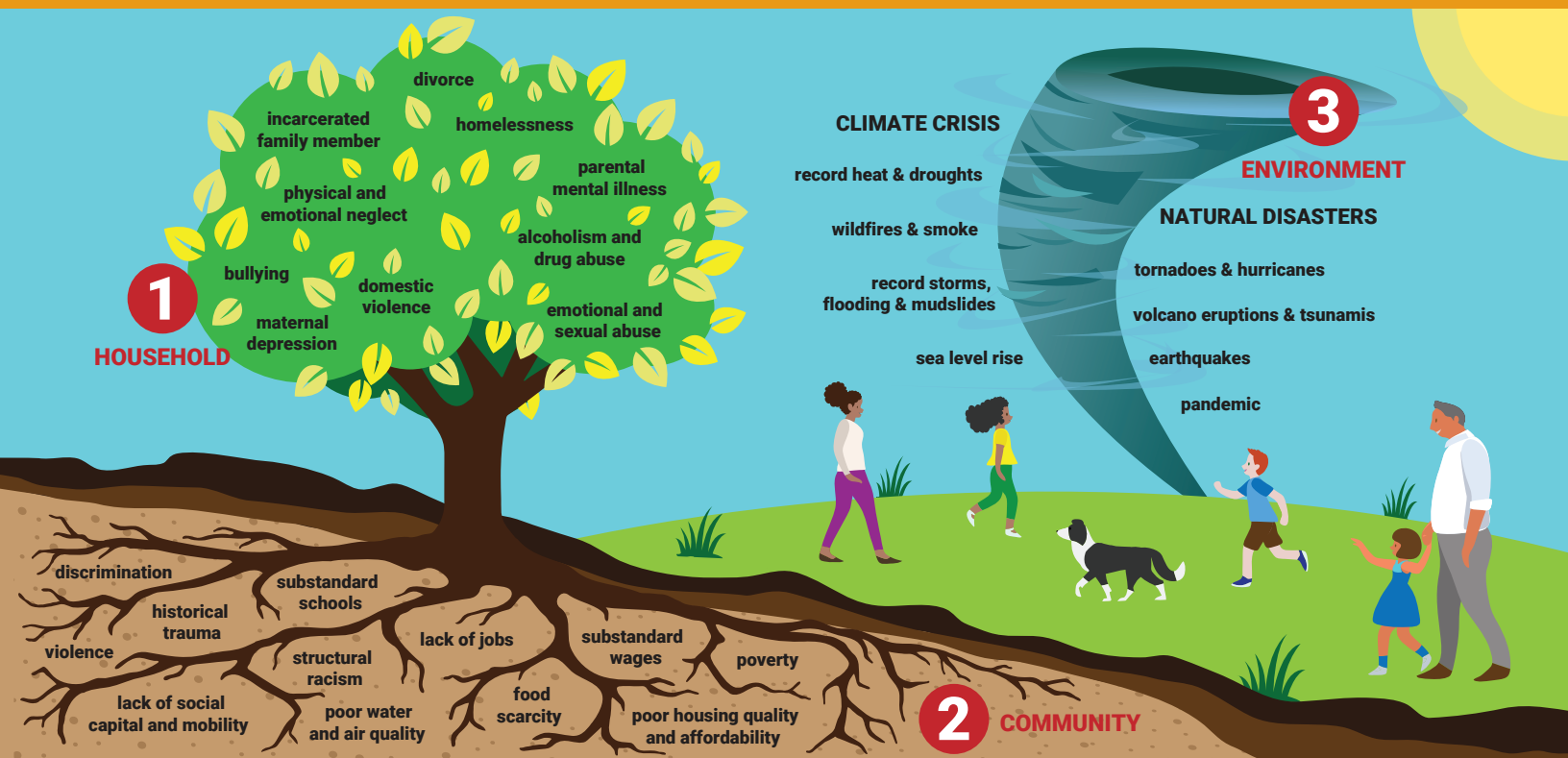
Parents recognize that stress and trauma don’t exist in a vacuum; racism and inequities that society has long ignored impact our families. This model allows us to devise strategies

for addressing real issues. For example, remote learning was a big stressor during the pandemic, and when we dug deeper, we saw it was very complicated for our families. Essential workers were stressed for time and often not available to help their students. Many families were not given resources in their native language. Schools didn’t have enough computers for kids who needed them. Clearly, blaming parents or even schools isn’t the correct response. We need to work together to unpack the toxic stress that harms families, organizations, and systems.

We urge you to spend some time understanding this model. It’s a tool that can inform parents, practitioners, school officials, government officials, and others to build a better system of care.

3 Realms of ACEs

Adverse childhood and community experiences (ACEs) can occur in the household, the community, or in the environment and cause toxic stress. Left unaddressed, toxic stress from ACEs harms children and families, organizations, systems and communities, and reduces the ability of individuals and entities to respond to stressful events with resiliency. Research has shown that there are many ways to reduce and heal from toxic stress and build healthy, caring communities.



Shining a Light on *What Needs to Change*

We know what needs to change because we are living it.

We face the same traumas in the community that our children do:

The traumas of deportation and incarceration; poverty, racism, and anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies; guns and domestic violence; and, of course, the trauma of loss and disconnection from the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past few years, we have found the courage to confront our trauma, support one another, and take our experiences into our communities.

We have conducted parent-to-parent research on mental health and trauma.

We have also partnered with a range of healthcare providers and advocates to test new ideas and dig deeper into what change is needed.

What we are doing:

We piloted a **drop-in peer support center** in Aurora, which has already engaged over 100 predominantly immigrant mothers in its first few months. We found that families want to better understand their emotional health and be there for their children.

We tested out **mother-to-mother trauma-awareness coaching** with pregnant and newly parenting mothers on the West Side of Chicago to stop generational trauma.

In Elgin, we found a community partner ready to plug into the power of parents. We collaborated on the vision of a **culturally relevant arts program for the whole family** to help kids strengthen their social-emotional skills post-COVID and have a healing arts space for parents, too!

We successfully advocated to remove police from Chicago Public Schools and shift those resources to a **"Whole School Safety" framework** where funds support physical, social, AND emotional safety for all students.

We are becoming **community healers** through training from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in Mental Health First Aid. We are committed to sharing these skills with community members across Chicago and Illinois.

We are bringing our voices and recommendations to **statewide policy** tables by serving on the statewide working group of the ACEs Response Collaborative, informing the release of the 2021 Action Plan to Address Childhood Trauma in Illinois, shaping the state's Blueprint for Transformation: Improved Behavioral Healthcare for Illinois' Children in 2023, and now serving on Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton's Healing-Centered Illinois Task Force to align healing-centered services across the state.

It is through grassroots experience, organizing, and leadership that we have identified and prioritized real-world solutions to addressing trauma.



Peer support and parent-to-parent programs must be part of the mental health infrastructure.

We are already demonstrating the powerful impact of peer support and parent-to-parent programs that, with adequate resources, can and are filling the gaps in underserved communities.

“These parent spaces are spaces that let me cry. Having conversations and time for one-on-ones makes a huge difference.”

–Sandy Vazquez, Aurora



We need sensible reforms of Medicaid.

One of the biggest obstacles to accessing mental healthcare is cost, and many families don't qualify for

Medicaid due to their immigration status. Medicaid reforms can help support the emotional well-being of residents who need it most.

“When you call, they say they don't accept Medicaid. We can't afford to pay out-of-pocket expenses.”

–Susana Salgado, Chicago



Expand community sports and arts programs in the communities that need it most.

In our parent-to-parent research, we asked parents what they do to help their children deal with stress and trauma, and like most families, they know that sports, arts, and other activities offer one of the best ways to keep kids healthy.

“In our area, it is hard to find a good quality, reasonably priced or free after-school or summer program for my daughter.”

–Chanelle Brown, Evanston



Support and invest in community mental health services.

Communities on the West and South Sides of Chicago and East St. Louis lack adequate mental health services. These communities have the highest need and are currently in dire need of more mental health professionals.

“Most support services don't stay in the community long enough to help out. We need affordable services that will stay in our community long term.”

–Mamie Cosey, East St. Louis



Everyone involved in education, government, and healthcare systems can use a healing-centered framework.

Many people have had some history of trauma. To address trauma responsively, everyone needs to know the signs and the best responses, not just formally trained professionals.

“It can make a big difference in a school to have all staff—including custodial and lunchroom staff or recess attendants understand trauma and mental health.”

–Rosalia Salgado, Chicago



Peer Support and Parent-To-Parent Programs

Well-resourced projects help fill dire gaps in underserved communities.

Black and Brown communities have a rich tradition of providing peer support through informal networks within families, neighborhoods, and community-based organizations. COFI's parent-to-parent programs build off this history and know-how.

What needs to happen?

Develop parent-friendly training and certification programs.

Programs need to be designed to respect and appeal to us. That means offering programs in Spanish and other languages and promoting work permits regardless of immigration status. Training and certification systems that help supervisors guide parent support workers are also needed. Training and certification programs should build on the power of parent-to-parent relationships.

Compensate peer-to-peer mental health workers.

Our work is real. We need dedicated funding for peer-led mental health worker programs, and standards for peer-support pay scales. We must also remove administrative barriers and make it easier to bill Medicaid for peer support services.

Meet parents where they are.

It makes sense to invest in integrating parent-led programming into spaces where we already spend time: clinics, schools, community centers, libraries, and other settings. These are the best places to reach parents who might not know what services and resources are available.



Pilot Projects

We have piloted several models of peer-based support. Here are projects that are bearing fruit:

Narrative Exposure Therapy

With Rush Medical Center, we are trained by therapists to help parents understand and share their life stories, including traumatic experiences. Using techniques from NET, we teach parents about trauma and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and give them space to reflect on their best and hardest moments. The goal is to establish a strong and positive sense of personal identity.

Parent Cafés

With the Kane County Health Department, we are creating emotionally safe spaces for parents and caregivers to discuss the ups and downs of parenting. They are free, in Spanish, and we provide childcare.

Community Healers

We are trained to understand trauma and mental health issues, and we are trusted as peers. We talk with people seeking support and respond in days rather than months. We use our relationship-building skills and can sidestep the hurdles parents experience, such as language barriers and where to find help.

Expanding the funding and infrastructure for programs like these is essential – and cost effective. It's a tested way to help meet the needs of our Black and Brown families.





Shining a Light on **Parent-to-Parent Action in Aurora**

Sendy Vazquez’s first interaction with navigating the mental health system was during the pandemic. She got a call from school regarding some incidents with her daughter. At Sendy’s request, she received a list of mental health resources, but wait lists were at least six weeks long, and she knew her daughter needed immediate help.

She turned to Liliana Olayo, another parent leader, who urged and supported Sendy to advocate for an urgent meeting with her daughter’s principal. The principal was able to get her daughter into therapy within a week.

“If I hadn’t opened up to Liliana my daughter would have missed out on the support she needed,” says Sendy.

Sendy joined Liliana and other parents in a project to survey community members and determine their most important issues. After talking with hundreds of parents and others across Kane County, the answer was clear: **mental health was the biggest concern.**

Parents quickly mobilized and began meeting with their legislators, community, and health groups to share these findings. Their efforts paid off—they opened the Aurora Parent Power Center to offer the community free, parent-to-parent mental health programming!

“Peer groups are a way to support parents and strengthen families,” she said.

Sendy also became one of 19 mothers from Aurora and Elgin trained by NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) to facilitate peer-to-peer mental health support in a partnership between COFI and Kane County.

With long wait lists and services that aren’t always culturally relevant, parent-to-parent support is helping fill service gaps in Aurora. As a native Spanish speaker, Sendy is proud to offer support in Spanish in a community that’s growing more diverse (over 40% Latina/o).

“Listening and talking to someone—that’s my therapy,” she said. *“Listening to someone else and having them listen to me helps me get the things off my chest that I had buried. I may need additional support to overcome my trauma, but I know that here I have a group of people who are here to support me.”*

***“It’s so important
to break the stigma
around mental health.”
—Sendy Vazquez***





Sensible Reforms of Medicaid

Small changes make a big impact!

Many families don't qualify for Medicaid due to their immigration status, and many families who do have Medicaid struggle to find mental health providers who accept it. Providers face low reimbursement rates, payment delays, billing process challenges, and other costly obstacles that limit their Medicaid participation. Paying for out-of-pocket therapy can cost \$600 per month, which is out of reach for low-income families.

Just like we played a pivotal role in expanding Medicaid in Illinois to undocumented immigrants aged 42+ in 2022, we are now at the forefront of a similar movement. We are collaborating with the Healthy Illinois Campaign to advocate for healthcare for all and the expansion of Medicaid coverage to all adults ages 19-41. Illinois has already set a precedent with the first-in-the-nation Health Benefits for Immigrant Seniors program. However, for Illinois to maintain its position as a leader in health equity and access, it is crucial to ensure that every Illinoisan, regardless of their immigration status, has access to mental healthcare.

What needs to happen?

Expand access to healthcare coverage.

The Governor should support the Healthy Illinois Campaign in expanding health insurance coverage to all adults ages 19-41, regardless of immigration status, and Illinois could expand the eligibility for "All Kids Coverage" from 18 to 26 years old to help young adults stay insured. The state should increase the Medicaid income limit for families and create affordable insurance options for families that just miss the Medicaid income limit.

Help more providers accept Medicaid.

Remove administrative burdens that make it challenging for providers to accept Medicaid. We should increase reimbursement rates, expand reimbursement to include work outside direct patient care, streamline insurance billing, and expedite payment processes.

Expand Medicaid coverage to include a broader range of holistic mental health services.

Facilitate Medicaid billing and reimbursement for peer support workers by including peer-delivered mental health services as part of Illinois' new Community Health Worker certification and training program.

Provide a larger network of mental healthcare.

Illinois needs to evaluate the impact of a recent increase in Medicaid reimbursement rates and whether it's helped increase the number of providers. The state needs to require insurers (including Medicaid) to provide timely access to mental health treatment and maintain an adequate network of providers.

Shining a Light on Medicaid Challenges in Chicago

When Susana Salgado's husband passed away, she knew her youngest children needed extra support. She started searching for therapists, but finding one who accepted Medicaid wasn't easy.

She asked for help at her children's school. They recommended four clinics, and Susana called them. Some told her there would be a wait between six and eight months, and others were not accepting new patients. She had four meetings with the school counselor, who tried to help, but she wasn't any closer to finding a therapist. She also asked her children's health clinic, and they said they would call her back.

"After a year, I am still waiting for the call," she said.

The most significant barrier for Susana? Finding mental healthcare support that accepted Medicaid. Many mental healthcare providers kept asking if she had insurance. For private services, she was told they don't accept Medicaid and would charge her \$300 per session. The cost for weekly sessions for two children would easily be more than her rent.

"I saw my son getting frustrated, and I was getting disappointed with the system," she said.

She eventually found a very good therapist for her two children, but she knows she isn't alone in experiencing challenges with finding mental healthcare support.

"I don't think I'm the only one in my community who has gone through that. We need healthcare for all so that other parents don't go through what I went through."





Community Sports & Arts Programs

Expand programs in communities that need it most.

Community sports and arts programming have great potential to help families heal from trauma, lower symptoms of depression, and build resilience to stress. One study¹ suggests that children who start sports at a young age have better long-term mental health. Other research² has shown the effectiveness of art therapy in trauma treatment.

In our parent survey, over half the respondents noted physical activity as a way to support their own, and their children's mental health and well-being.

Additionally, second to therapy and other formal mental health support, respondents reported that they would like increased access to exercise classes and arts, dance, or music classes for their children and their emotional well-being.

What needs to happen?

Increase state, city, and school district funding for arts and sports programming.

With adequate funding, the state, city, and school districts can provide programs in low-income communities for free or on a sliding-scale fee basis.

Make sure school districts are complying with state physical education and recess requirements and increase breaks for older adolescents.

In 2021, we helped win a major legislative victory in Illinois that required all elementary schools in the state to give students a 30-minute recess. We need to monitor school districts for compliance with state regulations, and provide training and resources to ensure all children have access to opportunities for positive physical activity throughout the school day. We also need to increase lunch breaks and guaranteed breaks for older students.

Increase funding for community schools.

Provide funding for comprehensive arts and sports programming in school buildings using the community schools model, which parents helped create. It promotes partnerships between local schools, community-based organizations, and families.

Partner with parents to expand programming capacity.

Provide public funding, administrative support, and training to support the development of parent-run arts and sports programming in parks, community centers, and after-school programs. This model works (see Elgin story on right).

Shining a Light on Art Programming in Elgin

Elgin parents like Silvia Martinez were growing concerned about the pandemic's impact on their families. She said kids lost relatives and needed a way to heal and express their emotions.

Parents connected with Dr. Rise' Jones of Hamilton Wings, who talked to them about the importance of the arts and how school districts fund after-school programs. The Elgin parents built on this conversation, proposed a collaboration with Hamilton Wings, and started working on a vision for an arts program outside of school hours.

They met with their school principals to build support for the program. In 2022, Elgin parents and Hamilton Wings received a grant to launch their "CREATE!" program city-wide and provide healing arts enrichment for the whole family. Hamilton Wings also secured funding to provide stipends for parents they were training to co-facilitate the program.

In February 2023, they hosted their first community workshop, with over 80 people in attendance. Parent leaders and Hamilton Wings continue to host CREATE! workshops in Elgin and believe they can be amplified and expanded.

"I love seeing the unity between parents and their kids. Last year, my husband participated and did activities with my youngest daughter. They were laughing so much together and continued after they got home."
—Silvia Martinez

"It was really driven by parents' vision for what they wanted for our young people, and I love that it became a shared vision to serve our community together."
—Dr. Rise' Jones



¹ [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(23\)00376-2/fulltext](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(23)00376-2/fulltext)

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25403446/>



Community Mental Health Services

Support and invest in community mental health services.

All people deserve mental health resources in their community. Community mental health services are a critical piece of the puzzle.

Illinois has a shortage of mental health workers and services, and it's especially dire in Illinois' economically marginalized Black and Brown communities. Our research findings show that many people can't access services in their community, with nearly half (50%) reporting there are no services in their community that support their families' emotional health needs.

What needs to happen?

We need to reopen all the shuttered public mental health clinics on the West and South Sides of Chicago and open a hospital in East St. Louis.

We applaud the City of Chicago for committing to reopening a city-run mental health clinic in Roseland, however, five other clinics were closed in 2016. In East St. Louis, the main hospital closed in 2011. These communities have suffered greatly from disinvestment, and it has left Black and Brown families hurting the most.

Schools can help fill gaps by providing students with comprehensive mental and behavioral health support.

- **Everyone in the school building can use a healing-centered framework.** Current student-to-school-counselor ratios statewide are 501:1 (on average). Counselors don't have the capacity to build relationships with every student. It's meaningful to our kids when schools have lunchroom staff and recess attendants trained to understand trauma and mental health. We recommend the Chicago Public Schools' Whole School Safety Framework (see box right) as a model for a healing-centered approach to school environments.
- **Implement Medicaid billing for school-based mental health services.** Under Illinois' new Medicaid plan amendment, school districts and organizations providing mental health services can bill Medicaid. Few have done it, but with parent input, we recommend schools utilize this reform.

Make public transportation reliable, safe, and affordable.

Many of us must travel outside of our communities for mental health services. Providing transportation reimbursement and bus cards to low-income people removes the burden of cost, and making public transportation more reliable eliminates another barrier to getting support.

Shining a Light on Whole School Safety in Chicago

In 2005, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) operated under a zero-tolerance policy, resulting in shockingly high rates of Black and Brown student suspensions and expulsions.

Parent leaders challenged the school district on the soaring rates, sharing their stories about their children getting suspended. They were worried about what pathway their children would be on. Would they end up expelled or in jail?

Parents knew early prevention and intervention for young children was vital to eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline. They led the way in ensuring policies focused on the whole safety of a student, such as replacing "zero tolerance" with "restorative justice" in the student code of conduct.

Now, parents are helping to implement one of the biggest changes in CPS history: expanding Whole School Safety to every district school. Parents are working with CPS Chief of Safety and Security, Jadine Chou (pictured below in the middle), and other community partners to create a framework where every elementary and high school will envision its own path to whole school safety—including physical, emotional, and social safety. Parents see this as a game-changer that will give every young child access to social-emotional resources early to address the root causes of their stress or trauma.

"When I arrived [at CPS], we were a zero-tolerance district, but that is not safety. Safety is when our young people can come to school and feel welcomed and safe. We could not have expanded Whole School Safety without parent organizers of COFI/POWER-PAC IL."

—Jadine Chou





Shining a Light on *East St. Louis*

A mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, Mamie Cosey has fought tirelessly on various family issues and has become a parent voice that elected officials trust.

East St. Louis has been her home for her whole life, but in 2011, the only hospital with trauma services closed, and nothing has replaced it. Families often have to travel across the river to Missouri to get care. Some urgent care clinics have opened, but with a population close to 20,000, more is needed to support the community of primarily Black and low-income residents.

"We're slapping a Band-Aid on something that is huge," she said. "While there are some health facilities and a recently built urgent care, the number of people they're able to serve is just a drop in the bucket."

Ms. Cosey says her school district has family centers, and some services are provided there, but there should be more.

"We only have three psychologists in our school system, and I think that it's so unfair," she said. "How can you even address kids' problems and issues?"

You can't address trauma if your caseload is too high, says Ms. Cosey. She points to her own grandchild who is a diverse learner and struggled to get the emotional and academic support they needed with limited resources in the area. But Ms. Cosey says the cycle can be broken—if you're willing to help break it.

In Chicago, for instance, COFI Parent Leaders have been leading the fight to ensure CPS implements more social-emotional learning and mental health practices by increasing access to mental health professionals. The Whole School Safety Steering Committee that COFI sits on emphasizes that students need school-wide support, which is what children in her school district need too.



***"It may be just one child in that family, but it impacts the entire family and community."
—Mamie Cosey***



Healing-Centered Approach

Everyone involved in education, government, and healthcare systems can use a healing-centered framework.

All systems—such as government, education, and healthcare—and people in those systems have important roles in recognizing and addressing trauma. Elected officials make healthcare decisions that impact us; teachers interact with children who have experienced trauma; and healthcare professionals need to dig deeper into how trauma affects mental and physical health. As our partners say, these critical people need to shift from asking, “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you and how can we help?”

What needs to happen?

Understand the *Three Realms of ACEs* (adverse childhood and community experiences).

We’ve learned to use this tool (p.3) to address interconnected community, household, and environmental issues. The model provides a holistic way to recognize trauma. Teachers, for example, might think a child is struggling because he is a “bad kid,” but this model acknowledges how larger forces like poverty, racism, and unsafe neighborhoods harm our children. We can develop solutions and responses to these issues.

Almost half of our survey respondents reported that financial stress, struggles to meet basic needs, or job loss were leading causes of stress. As the model notes, poverty can be traumatic if your community lacks grocery stores and adequate housing options. (Learn more about how POWER-PAC IL campaigns are linked and address the root causes of trauma on the back cover.)

Develop a “no wrong door” approach to mental healthcare.

Families are getting shut out and turned away when services are not available in different languages or when we’re told that Medicaid isn’t accepted. Imagine if everyone interacting with families knew how to guide us to a bilingual service or could easily pull up places that accept Medicaid. Our state and communities need navigators that can direct us to services. People working at government agencies, schools, clinics, and other community spaces can support our mental health by pointing us to services – but they need a roadmap.





Acknowledgements

To the parents

Thank you to the many parent leaders in POWER-PAC IL | COFI who conducted this research, developed the solutions, and courageously shared their stories about trauma and mental healthcare. Your work and experiences are critical to making a better system of care possible. We especially want to thank Katrina Falkner, Lettie Hicks, Esmeralda Martinez, and Liliana Olayo, who were the Health, Food, and Recess Co-Chairs during this process.

To our partners, staff, and consultants

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We note that this report is not just the work of POWER-PAC IL and COFI. It is informed by collaboration with advocates, public officials, social service agencies, and community organizations. We are grateful to all our partners and policymakers who believe in parent leaders and have spent time building alliances with them to address trauma and mental healthcare challenges in our communities. We especially want to express gratitude for Kate McCormack and Mayra Diaz of Health & Medicine Policy Research Group; Kane County Health Department; Amanda Seanior and Eve Escalante, who coached parents in trauma-informed surveying techniques; State Senator Karina Villa and Representative Barbara Hernandez who helped launch the Aurora Parent Power Center; Jadine Chou; Dr. Rise' Jones and Hamilton Wings; and Gina Lowell, Avelina Padin, and Karen Reyes-Rodriguez of Rush Medical Center.

To our generous funders

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Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)'s mission is to build the power and voice of parents, primarily mothers and grandmothers from Black and Brown communities, to shape the public decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their families.

Founded in 1995, COFI is driven by a deep commitment to social justice and grounded in the time-tested principles, strategies, accomplishments, and approaches of community organizing. COFI's innovative family-focused organizing model, *The COFI Way*, provides intensive and systematic leadership development and ongoing organizing expertise.

We organize low-income parents of color who fight for change around issues affecting all families. The parents then go on to improve their communities and enact policy and system changes on local, state, and federal levels.

Parents Organized to Win, Educate, and Renew—Policy Action Council (POWER-PAC IL)

is a cross-cultural, statewide membership organization of COFI-trained parents. Our mission is to build a strong voice for low-income, immigrant, and working families by uniting parents across races and communities around issues of importance to children and families.

Parent leaders organize around four issues: the *Early Learning Campaign*, the *Elementary Justice Campaign*, the *Health, Food, and Recess Campaign*, and the *Stepping Out of Poverty Campaign*. While each is different, they all aim to address the root causes of racial and economic inequities and improve life opportunities for Black and Brown communities.

That's why addressing trauma and improving mental health is part of all our campaigns: Mental wellness does not exist in a vacuum. The *Early Learning Campaign* lobbies for quality early intervention services that help children thrive emotionally and physically. The *Elementary Justice Campaign* has worked to eliminate punitive discipline policies that harm our children's well-being. And the *Stepping Out of Poverty Campaign* just won a state child tax credit that reduces parents' worries about paying for the rising costs of rent, groceries, and more.

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