



Illinois Early Learning Systems Fact Sheet Child Welfare Early Childhood Services

Program Overview

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) provides different early care and education programs as part of the child welfare service system. In general, DCFS, through the Intact Family Services program, provides support to families that have come to the attention of DCFS and have a substantiated finding of child abuse/or neglect. The Intact Family Services program works with families to address the circumstances, which led to DCFS involvement, address issues of safety, and enable families to stay together in their own home. In addition, DCFS provides additional support for children ages 0-5 years old through three main programs: The Early Childhood project, the School Readiness Unit, and the Teen Parenting Service Network. While DCFS may administer these programs, the actual services are delivered through social service agencies and not through DCFS.

The Early Childhood Project is a collaborative effort between DCFS and the Erikson Institute. The program serves the needs of young children who are in the care of DCFS or being closely monitored by the child welfare system. The program components include the Early Childhood Placement Family Services Program and Early Childhood Intact Family Services Program. The Early Childhood Project also provides developmental screenings and offers consultations and referrals to Early Intervention and other early childhood services for children up to age 5 years old. For children who are in care of the state, program staff participates in each child's Clinical Intervention for Placement Preservation (CIPP) process to offer consultation on early childhood issues.

Within the School Readiness Unit, DCFS policy requires that all children for whom the DCFS is legally responsible should be enrolled in an early childhood education program. DCFS caseworkers should enroll children in the care of the state and children in intact families aged 3-5 years old in Head Start, Preschool for All, or an accredited/Gold Circle of Quality child care program.

The Teen Parenting Service Network is responsible for monitoring and ensuring client rights of all pregnant and parenting teen wards of the state of Illinois and their children. The Teen Parenting Service Network offers supportive services to DCFS case management agencies, such as staff training and linkages to community services. In Cook County and the collar counties, the Teen Parenting Service Network offers direct services to clients, including educational mentoring, clinical therapy, and family support services.

What information is needed to apply?

The information that is needed to apply for each program will vary, and the service providers should be able to provide that information directly to the families.

What documents are needed?

The documents needed for each program will vary, and the service providers should be able to help the families with the documentation needed.



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Enrollment Process

The enrollment process differs for each program.

Early Childhood Project: For children that are part of the Intact Family Service program, the project offers initial screenings for all newly opened cases. For children who are in care of the state, Integrated Assessment offers initial screening within first 45 days after custody. For individuals that are part of the Teen Parenting Service Network, the project provides two screening days per month in each region.

School Readiness: All children under DCFS guardianship are eligible for enrollment in an early childhood programs, such as Preschool for All and Head Start/Early Head Start.

Teen Parenting Services Network: Participants are strongly encouraged to participate in the DCFS Early Childhood Project, which includes developmental screening for children 0-3 years old.

Where can I find my local office?

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services website provides information on how to contact a local office: <https://www.illinois.gov/dcfs/aboutus/Pages/phoneDirectory.aspx> or call 1-800-232-3798.

Resources for Families and Providers

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services provides resources and information available to families. Visit the website at: www.illinois.gov/dcfs

- The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services also offers several newsletters that anyone can sign up for to receive updates on child welfare issues, such as the African American Advisory Council, Illinois Families Now and Forever, Noticias, and Partnering with Parents. To sign up for a newsletter, visit the website: <http://www.illinois.gov/dcfs/getinvolved/Pages/Stay-Informed.aspx>