



## PARENTS SAY ...

“I’ve met other families with young kids in my community, and we help each other.”

“It’s great to have a friend who knows all about child development to come visit my baby and me.”

“I found the child care I needed through the AOK Family Yellow Pages.”

“I found out my child has special needs, and we got support so he could start preschool with no problem.”

“Now I know how to keep my family strong and healthy.”

## CONTACT US

AOK Early Childhood Networks  
Illinois Department of Human Services  
Division of Community Health and Prevention  
401 S. Clinton, 4th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60607  
Voice: 312-793-4644  
TTY: 877-765-3459  
www.aoknetworks.org

Adams County AOK Network  
217-222-8440 ext. 107

Greater Westside Project Launch  
an AOK Network  
312-415-0211

Kane County AOK Network  
630-232-5829

McLean County AOK Network  
309-888-5539

Rock Island County AOK Network  
309-798-0750

St. Clair County AOK Network  
800-467-9200

Stephenson and Carroll County AOK Networks  
815-599-8404

Tazewell County AOK Network  
309-477-2223 x 266

Town of Cicero AOK Network  
708-652-1202

Wabash / Edwards County AOK Network  
618-262-5968

Will County AOK Network  
815-774-7328

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**COMMUNITIES**  
build what they dream

**FAMILIES**  
get what they need

**CHILDREN**  
thrive



## Creating the Future

In order for kids to start off healthy in life, families need strong communities where everyone is working together toward common goals for young children.

Across Illinois, AOK Early Childhood Networks are forging powerful connections so that service providers, parents, and community members can create the future they want for their kids. These networks are breaking down barriers and building strong, effective relationships among:

- \* Health care
- \* Early intervention
- \* Recreation
- \* Faith communities
- \* Family support
- \* Education
- \* Advocates
- \* Parents/caregivers
- \* Child care/preschool
- \* Social services
- \* Local employers
- \* Mental health

## Taking Action Together

AOK Early Childhood Networks put practical, innovative strategies in place to make sure parents can keep their kids healthy and their families strong. Together, network members:

- \* Forge positive, productive relationships among providers

- \* Identify gaps in services
- \* Plan, strategize, and advocate for funding needed to fill those gaps
- \* Build excitement and interest in early childhood issues
- \* Improve opportunities for their communities' youngest kids and their families

This work is supported by the Illinois Department of Human Services, the Illinois State Board of Education, local health departments, the Ounce of Prevention Fund, and other local agencies.

## Reaching Common Goals

AOK Early Childhood Networks help communities ensure that:

- \* Babies are born healthy
- \* Children maintain physical and emotional health
- \* Children enter school ready to learn
- \* Families know about community resources and are connected to the services they need

If these goals speak to your concerns for young children and their families in your community, AOK Early Childhood Networks want to hear from you! See the back panel of this brochure to contact your network or our statewide office.

## AOK NETWORKS IN ACTION

In Stephenson County, we are embracing the "Parent Café" style of communication and strategically engaging in uncommon conversations about what matters most to the people in our community. Community members from all walks of life are coming together, connecting social service efforts with faith based organization efforts in hopes of ending fear, division and discrimination. These uncommon connections are meeting needs in ways we have never imagined, and we are forming partnerships we never thought possible.

The Adams County AOK Network began looking at the need to come together more intentionally around many issues/concerns families and communities in Adams County are facing by hosting Conversations That Matter. These conversations have led to strategic planning that have and will continue to help the community meet its needs. Current issues that conversations have centered on, along with trainings and new planning action are: responsible fatherhood, mental health, poverty and early childhood education. The AOK Network continues its work to build relationships and connectedness to continue to pull together and move together more intentionally and stronger than before we began the conversations.

This year the Chicago Westside AOK Network has grown to over 100 + members. The membership includes parents, providers, community residents and business leaders. As a Network we voted to address issues pertaining to infant, child and family safety; family and community violence and screening (infant, child and adult). Various providers have presented on such topics as autism, violence and combating obesity. Our Parent Board is working on a resource guide and the Screening Committee has voted to provide developmental screenings in family shelters located on the Westside of Chicago. The Network has also partnered with the State's Project Launch Initiative to address childhood mental health issues.

**“Communities build what they dream.”**

—Theresa Heaton, Kane County AOK Network