Share Your Story…
Illinois Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Development Home Visiting Program

Home visiting has a demonstrated track record of improving infant and maternal health outcomes. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, it is providing a critical way to engage children and families who are especially vulnerable during this time. Home visitors are on the front lines in supporting families by going above and beyond to quickly adapt and find creative ways to meet the basic needs of children and families.

Through its "Share Your Story" initiative, the Illinois Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program in the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development has provided an opportunity for home visitors to share on-the-ground stories of their experiences, including the bright spots as well as challenges. The focus of these stories is to bring attention to the amazing work they do, to share what has been working in serving families, and to illustrate how home visitors can be supported to continue carrying out their work.

Primo Center for Women and Children

From house calls to drive-thru visits, the COVID-19 crisis has come with significant challenges for the home visiting team at Primo Center for Women and Children. For many of the Center's families experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder, the significant changes related to COVID-19, such as staying six feet apart from one another and washing hands regularly, create additional challenges and stresses. This in turn creates additional pressure for the Center's home visitors in adequately supporting and protecting families during this time.

For example, providing necessities for families has become a nerve-wracking task for home visitors. Ensuring that children and families as well as themselves are wearing a mask every time they step out of the house can be challenging even in the best of circumstances. Many parents are also afraid to take their younger children out to do essential grocery shopping.

Still, the Primo Center is more than dedicated in supporting their families during this time. "As Home Visitors, we are proud to be on the front lines supporting our families in their times of need," said Dana Benn, Senior Director of Early Learning, Primo Center for Women and Children. "Finding creative ways to meet basic needs, providing activity packs for the children to do during the stay-at-home order and cleaning supplies, and groceries to ensure families are staying safe."

Staying in contact has primarily been the focus of the Primo Center team. Team members are also encouraged in their work by the families that utilize the resources at the Primo Center shelter—like their Early Learning Center. Dana said, "Although the visits for the children as well as our staff are slightly different than usual, we work together as a team to make it possible for our families to utilize them." She added that they are working to continue to find innovative ways to tackle the frustrations their families are dealing with daily.

> "With a positive approach we will get though the COVID-19 crisis together!"

> Agency Mission

PRIMO CENTER

The mission of the Primo Center for Women and Children is to empower families to become productive, responsible, and independent members of their community.

Primo Center is a leader in providing family shelter and permanent supportive housing, integrated physical, dental, and mental health care, early childhood development, and supportive services to homeless families in Chicago.

The organization has considerable capacity and experience as a provider of services to families affected by extreme poverty and homelessness, assisting more than 1,000 people each year with the aid of more than 100 volunteers, 70 staff members, and an annual operating budget of nearly $6 million.

Primo Center works in high-need communities across Chicago, operating facilities in North Lawndale and West Humboldt Park on Chicago's west side, in Auburn Gresham and Englewood on the south side, and in Hermosa on the northwest side.