

## 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.

#### The Ounce Institute

As the COVID-19 health crisis continues, the Ounce Institute has adapted swiftly to the changing needs of programs. The Ounce Institute rapidly transitioned existing face-to-face trainings to virtual ones and created opportunities for home-visitors, as well as supervisors, to connect and share expertise.

“Working in a virtual space and navigating new platforms has not been without challenges,” commented Matt Sulzen, Director, Ounce Institute. “As part of a parallel process, Technical Assistance Providers support the emotional needs of home visitors and supervisors, as programs directly support the emotional needs of families.” However, Matt advised that despite the initial stages of discomfort, the Ounce has seen programs thrive in these ever changing and uncertain times.

A theme that continues to arise time and time again is *adaptability and creativity in the face of a challenge*.

For example, Training and Technical Assistance Providers have held time and space for supervisors to reflect through weekly calls. A recent Supervisors Call was focused on self-care and creating healthy at-home work environments for staff. One supervisor shared her incredible resilience and flexibility during the pandemic. She has been making sure her team’s mental health is strong by beginning each day with a message of motivation and encouragement. She encourages her staff to take time for self-care each day and focuses reflective supervision on well-being before discussion of caseload families.

“Because of this intentional time and space given, Parent Educators have been able to do incredible work supporting families virtually and the Ounce’s Technical Assistance Providers are able to pivot discussions back to the heart of home-visiting—the parent-child relationship,” stated Matt.



As the work continues to shift and change, the Ounce Institute continues to shift with it in order to best support programs and in turn support children and families.

The Ounce Institute acknowledges the difficulties that have come with navigating new challenges but are proud to highlight the creative and innovative work done by programs as they continue to adapt.

