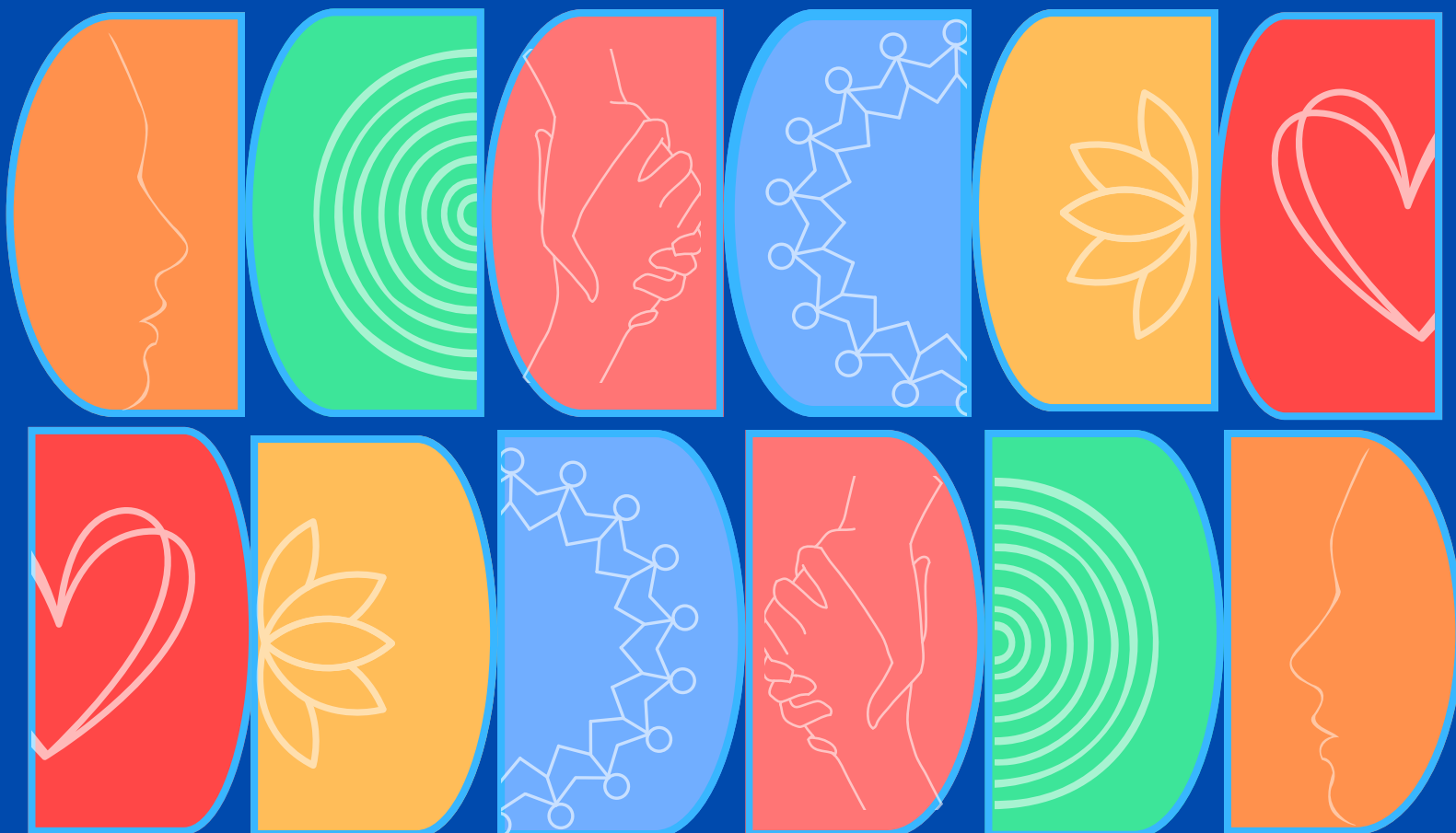




FEDERAL CHANGES, COMMUNITY CONSEQUENCES: THE STATE OF HUMAN SERVICES IN ILLINOIS

TRENDS • IMPACTS • PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

Profiles in Perseverance




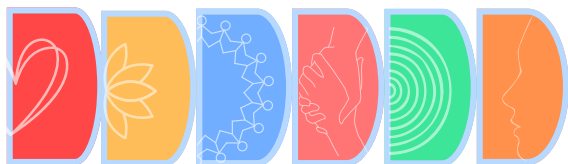


Federal Changes, Community Consequences: Profiles in Perseverance



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Letter from Our Executive Director

Dear Readers,

We are excited to share our next report in the *Federal Changes, Community Consequences* series: **Profiles in Perseverance**. For this report, we made a deliberate pivot. After two quarters of data, trends, and topline indicators, we created space to do something different: to share the stories we have been hearing every day from coalition partners across Illinois. There will always be a place for data, but what we have learned again and again is that hearing directly from community leaders on the ground is how we understand the true depth of what our neighbors are experiencing.

This report lifts up six organizations navigating this moment in real time. Their work, communities, and challenges may differ, but the throughline is unmistakable: instability, pressure, and the need for constant adaptation in the face of disruptive federal decisions. These stories make painfully clear that the harm is real, the pressure is relentless, and the consequences are landing exactly where so many of us knew they would: on providers, on workers, and on the communities they serve.

These stories are full of resilience. They are also a reminder that this level of resilience should not be required of anyone after all that providers, staff, and communities have already had to carry. And yet, these perspectives in perseverance offer a powerful snapshot of a sector that continues to meet this moment again and again with courage, conviction, and an unparalleled commitment to community.

One leader in this report puts it plainly: “We should use our imaginations and this time to build the thing we want to be.” That line has stayed with me because it captures something essential about this moment. Yes, these organizations are persevering. But they are also refusing to surrender their vision, their values, or their belief that something better is still possible.

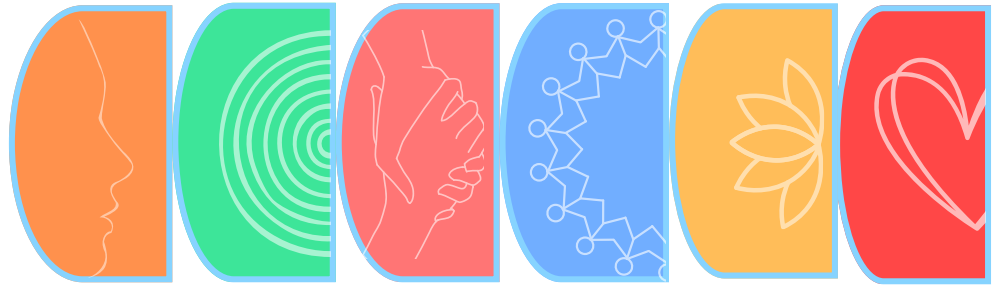
That is where the rest of us come in - as advocates, as leaders at every level of government, and as partners in philanthropy. We have a responsibility not just to bear witness to these stories, but to act on them. We have a responsibility to keep pushing back against a federal government that is attacking the very infrastructure our communities depend on and that so many people have spent decades building.

Our partners are not giving up. And neither are we.

In solidarity,

Lauren Wright,
Executive Director
Illinois Partners for Human Service





Introduction

Illinois Partners for Human Service is gathering vital data from our coalition partners for a series of reports aimed at illuminating the impact of changes in federal funding and policies on community-based health and human service providers in Illinois. [The first report](#), released in September 2025, established our baseline for the series by capturing information from January to June 2025. [The second report](#) includes data from July through September 2025. In this third report, we take a different approach, diverting from anonymized and financially focused surveys and data collection, to delve deeper into narratives. These real-life, real-time profiles of six diverse organizations serving very different populations and purposes highlight the challenges and triumphs happening in the sector while celebrating each organization's unwavering commitment to support and uplift their clients, communities, and employees. This report underscores resilience in the midst of adversity as these providers adapt and innovate in response to an ever-changing landscape, demonstrating the essential role they play within their communities regardless of external threats and uncertainties.

What we found was revelatory, but not surprising. The complexities of federal policy changes have profoundly impacted human service organizations across Illinois, often leading to operational disruptions and increased challenges for the communities they serve. Through interviews conducted with leaders from these organizations, overarching themes emerged that shed light on the vulnerabilities inherent in the federal landscape, as well as a determination to overcome them. These organizations, each serving a unique and often marginalized population, shared experiences from the last year marked by uncertainty, fear, and frustration. They also all expressed the value and importance of adaptability and innovation in surviving and thriving in the current climate. Collectively, these interviews revealed a common thread of navigating instability while striving to fulfill their missions with community needs and staff well-being squarely centered in the work.

Each of these organizations grapples with the effects of federal volatility that has resulted in funding freezes, compliance burdens, and shifting priorities without many resources to address them. The State of Illinois, though outspoken in its opposition to federal actions, has not done as much as these providers need to alleviate the pressure they feel; rather, in some cases, it has compounded them through delayed payments and bureaucratic challenges that hinder capacity. Even so, sector leaders express a commitment to innovation and advocacy, actively seeking to redefine their approaches to create more sustainable futures for their organizations, the clients they serve, and the people delivering services. Their stories reveal a powerful narrative of resilience, showcasing how they can adapt, reimagine their purpose, and remain steadfast in their dedication to supporting their communities. Their stories prove that even in the face of systemic challenges, hope and determination can and will foster transformative change.



Interviewee:
Edwin Martinez,
Executive
Director

Services:

Mental & Behavioral Health,
Violence Prevention &
Recovery, Adult & Family
Services

Location:

Southwest Side of
Chicago. IL (Brighton Park,
Gage Park, Back of the
Yards, & South Lawndale)

FY25 Budget:

Up to \$2M

Federal Funding:

25%

Staff:

16

**# Clients Served
Per Year:**

700

Centro Sanar

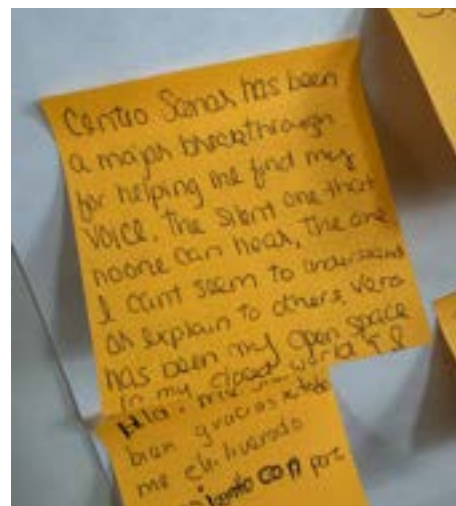
Centro Sanar aims to empower community members and promote holistic well-being while addressing barriers to accessing mental health services, especially for those from historically marginalized backgrounds. Founded and led by a corps of mental health professionals with over 45 years of collective healing experience, what began as a grassroots organization during the pandemic with an all volunteer staff operating out of cars and on phones, is now a trusted community mental health organization dedicated to providing accessible, high-quality mental health services. Their mission is to support individuals and families in their journey to heal and thrive, particularly addressing the impacts of trauma and violence. They offer a range of services, including therapy, counseling, support groups, and educational resources, and emphasize a strengths-based, trauma-informed approach to care. They are based in Gage Park in Chicago and serve Brighton Park, Little Village, and Back of the Yards, as well.

Centro Sanar has felt the impacts of the shifting federal landscape in multiple ways. There have been financial ramifications with funding freezes, canceled grants, and ongoing payment delays from the state that have forced them to consider new avenues of earned income to sustain and stabilize their operations. As an organization operating on the southwest side of Chicago with a Latine focus, there have also been the chilling effects of immigration enforcement on their community. This new and frightening reality has forced them to not only rethink what services their clients need and how to deliver them, but how to address the trauma their staff is experiencing as they navigate the same harsh realities. Co-founder and Executive Director, Edwin Martinez, offered insight into how Centro Sanar is managing these challenges and what it has been like for them over the course of the last, difficult year. He also shares what they have learned, including the importance of leading and working within an organizational culture so fully rooted in the power of healing.

in his words...

We're tired of being tired.

The last year has been tiring for us as an organization, but now we're tired of being tired. That's the common language our team uses here. It has felt like multiple years condensed into a few months. We are BIPOC-led, and the majority of our staff and 100% of our front-level staff are BIPOC, children of immigrants. Our mental health clinicians are Latine, Latino. For all of us it's like: yes, I'm supporting my clients, yes, I'm supporting my parents, yes, I'm supporting my family, and the different dynamics of my identity, plus, I am providing mental health services in communities. This is highlighting the need to be able to provide the support, but also the existing systemic issues around community mental health: it's underpaid, undervalued, and at the same time, we have a federal government that's attacking and doing things that affect the well-being of our staff.



A client's message of gratitude

The biggest area of need was for us to diversify our funding in light of the current administration. We are actively looking at increasing our earned revenue. As we've built our reputation in our community, we're seeing an increasing number of clients with private insurance. For us, it's about pursuing opportunities with private insurance versus public insurance, just given the population that is walking through our doors, the data that's being shown, and our strategic plan. We need to continue to pursue these things while also keeping in mind the current attacks of this administration. It's hard to hold that balance around making sure that we're able to grow strategically in terms of our own revenue, and we have made decisions to not pursue other areas, like buying our building, as to not jeopardize or undermine the financial flexibility that we currently have.



Streetview of the Centro Sanar Office

We know we can't rely overly on billing for insurance. We've seen other organizations build their programming on billing for insurance, and they were the first organizations to close their doors. We see a similar kind of pattern now with providers either reducing their staff or limiting their services. We strive to balance our moral dilemma of how much we embrace a medicalized model, knowing that earned revenue is a strategy that could be beneficial, but could also distance us from the core values of our mission.

Being less dependent on all government funding and more self-sustaining is a priority.

We're at a point where we are usually owed \$300,000 in state payments on a regular basis. State funding—especially federal pass-through funding—is viewed as a huge liability and something we should stay away from. Given the competition for state funding and Illinois' limited budget for human services, everyone's budget is being reduced. Being less dependent on all government funding and more self-sustaining is a priority. We are also considering what it would mean for Centro Sanar to create a community philanthropic approach. In our first year under fiscal sponsorship, our community raised \$8,000 for our organization, by themselves, without relying on corporate funding. That's inspiring to me. Now, how can we bring our community in so they can help us connect to folks who can help raise our earned revenue and individual giving?

Our biggest financial loss we had over the last year was a JAC (Justice Advisory Council) grant we lost for a collaboration with multiple Chicago-based organizations and it was mostly due to a decrease in federal funding. That was a big loss to our collective ability to provide wraparound mental health services.



Staff posing with a new mural created by artist Kane One for the Centro Sanar Offices

Centro Sanar doesn't bill for insurance. Most of our funding is grants, either through philanthropy or through the state. Because we don't have a medicalized model where we bill for insurance and have to manage the related administration of that billing, we are able to maintain a high level of productivity. We have that to lean on, knowing that we do the work, we provide the support, and we're able to meet our grant deliverables.

Our federal pass-through awards are multi-year, so we couldn't do any language scrubbing for what was already submitted to the state for our grant. That was a main concern because we wrote them for the undocumented population that have been impacted by violence. We have in the back of mind that it's low-hanging fruit for the DOJ to find us. They could come knocking.

DOJ funding was frozen for a month and then unfrozen. We have a \$1.6 million annual budget and DOJ accounted for around a quarter of our funding. We flow between 50% and 60% state funding, which is where we've experienced a delay of payments. We subcontract with other organizations that have been impacted by the federal cuts where we also have been receiving later payments. We now radically accept that we must look at different opportunities and look at what sustainability means for us as an organization. It's about tapping into our board development, increasing the number of board members we have, and also increasing their capacity to support us in individual giving and earned revenue strategies.

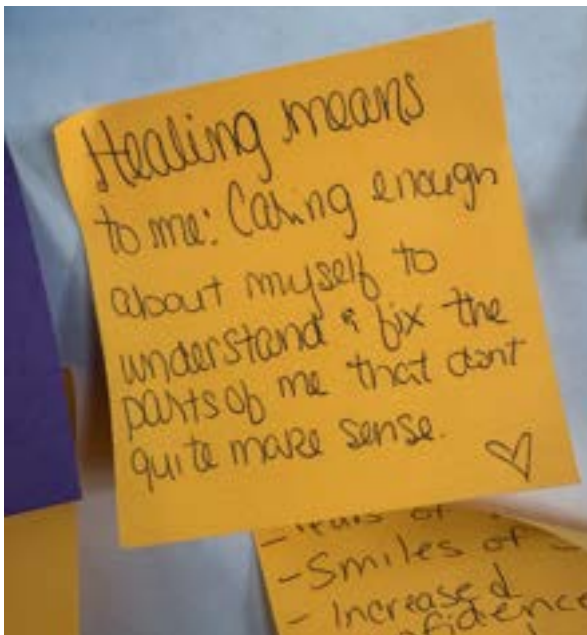
Bracing for a human service field that is going to start withering away.

As for immigration enforcement, I'm worried about our partners. I'm bracing for a human service field that is going to start withering away, and we've already seen that in Little Village. For context, we received a mental health expansion grant from the City of Chicago. It came in time for us to shift funding to sustain our work. However, that didn't mean bringing new staff members on to serve Little Village; it meant stretching our already stretched team across communities to establish our Little Village site. We're walking into an area that already has an exaggerated need around mental health services and an existing waitlist. We are now bracing for the amount of work that we will have with a limited social service safety net. That is what keeps me up at night.



Centro Sanar Team

SNAP changes are also having multiple impacts on our clients, in a practical sense, but also in terms of the exacerbated need for food. With food being a human right, the additional economic impact this has on families is large. This is increasing the amount of need for food at pantries. The local food pantries are already lined up around the block. And given the SNAP cuts, not all food pantries have culturally identified food, and that's what SNAP was beneficial for. It's easy to talk about SNAP cuts from just a financial perspective, but it's important to understand this impact from a layered perspective. It also increases vulnerability and dependency, especially for women of color.



A client's message on healing

We're maintaining a 9-month waitlist now, which means around 800 clients are waiting for individual therapy. We are a grassroots organization providing mental health services on the southwest side of Chicago with a Latine focus for uninsured and underinsured folks. So, it's friends referring friends, it's family referring family. It's neighbors referring neighbors versus people going on our website. Even as we've grown, the majority of our clients find out about us through word of mouth. Imagine what our waitlist would be if we had a strong marketing presence.

I met with a funder yesterday. He asked, "what can we do?" And I said, "Money." I don't want to do a white paper, I don't want to do all these things, we just need money. I could have done the political thing and said we can do this, but I'm just tired of saying "yes," I'm gonna say "no" more. Money. That's it. Bring on the money.

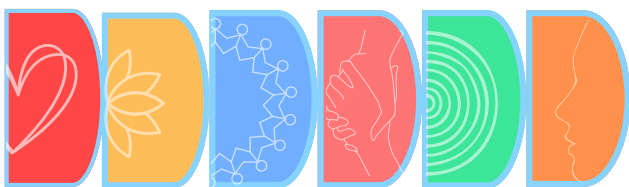
We practice what we preach.

We lean into our culture around collective decision-making, and we operate in a restorative justice framework, so as much as we're treating our clients with a complex trauma-informed lens, we do that with our team too. We support our staff more heavily now, given the circumstances, whether they needed to be home more, whether they needed to provide services at home for their clients who are more at risk coming to the office, and things of that nature. We also made a decision to increase our operational costs specifically for our staff self-care budget. We now have self-preservation time. When ICE was heavily involved in our community, our team members were given two hours each week for any activity that they define as self-care. That time could be spent for their own self-care or for navigating case management for their families. We now have quarterly gatherings to *not* talk about work. We do active group or collective self-healing. We do sound baths, we do somatic-based work. We have culturally attuned limpias. We offer that to practice what we preach about self-care, with our organization modeling that for our team.

If you had asked me three months ago how I was, I'd probably have said I'm doing terribly. What I should have done then was lean more into our culture as an organization, ask for support for our staff, for our board, and for us as the co-founders. And also to be intentional in how we let our staff know the context of our situation, as well. It's a balancing act of how much information we provide because it can be overwhelming.



Collective self healing



NEW MOMS

STRONG FAMILIES. BRIGHT FUTURES.



Interviewee:
 Laura Zumdahl,
 President
 & CEO

Services:

Advocacy, Housing,
 Mental & Behavioral
 Health, Workforce
 Development, Youth
 Services

Location:

Chicago, IL

FY25 Budget:

\$10M - \$20M

Federal Funding:

50%

Staff:

75

**# Clients Served
 Per Year:**

400 Households;
 900 Individuals

New Moms

New Moms is an organization focused on one very unique population: young moms, age 24 and under, and their children. Located citywide in Chicago and in eight communities in the near west suburbs, the organization provides a range of supports and programming and offers a menu of services for young families, including housing, doula services, home visits, parent education and support groups, intergenerational mental and behavioral health resources, and a very intensive workforce development program. Their approach is rooted in a coaching model that centers the young families they serve to help them reach their goals. New Moms also operates a social enterprise candle and home fragrance company with nationwide sales. The company, Bright Endeavors, contributes to their annual revenue streams and employs 75 young moms annually with transitional jobs as part of the organization's workforce program. New Moms proudly engages with and supports many sectors and multiple communities. In recent years, they have bolstered their staff and capacity to engage more deeply in advocacy with a focus on housing stability, economic mobility, family well-being, and a strong human service workforce.

Laura Zumdahl has been President and CEO of New Moms since 2013, and though she and many longtime staff members have weathered their share of storms - including budget crises and the pandemic - nothing prepared them for the federal volatility and unpredictability of the past year. Particularly difficult have been all the ups and downs that constantly undermine their efforts to plan, coupled with the fact that what's coming next is never clear. They can't use lessons learned from previous struggles because, in the current environment, the past is not a reliable indicator of the future or the direction things are likely to go. Though it has been hard to keep everyone's spirits up and keep going, they have pushed through and remained whole. They are preparing for the dark skies they see ahead with a "phoenix out of the fire" perspective. Rather than focusing on systems failures and disappointments, what if they seized the horrible moment and created something better than before? What would that look like and what could they achieve? Laura shared her thoughts on facing the current federal climate and how New Moms remains committed to moving forward to fortify their organization and fulfill their mission no matter the challenges ahead.

in her words...

We are on an involuntary roller coaster ride in the dark.

I can describe the last year in six words: an involuntary rollercoaster ride in the dark. I didn't want to be on this ride, but here we are no matter what. We're strapped in.

The overall posture of the federal government attacking human services has been the largest challenge. It's overarching and far-reaching, and it threatens so many things. It has real implications in terms of how our funding may play out or what new restrictions could be placed on the families we serve that are incomprehensible and unachievable. How do you strategically evolve in the midst of a landscape that has such wild changes happening?



New Moms Team

We have not lost significant funding, but it's coming.

There are so many things that have gotten put on the back burner for me, priorities that I've had to put off, because I am spending easily another 10 hours a week focused on extra meetings and emergency gatherings of people. The amount of extra time it takes is added on top of what is already a lot of work to navigate things. And then... the changes are held up in court waiting on a decision or struck down. So maybe we're okay but we just spent four months in high activation mode not knowing.

We have one direct federal grant, and it's through HUD [US Department of Housing and Urban Development]. We have a lot of federal pass-through money that goes to the state and city that we also receive. There are threats to all of our programs, but the HUD funding has been directly threatened, and the amount of time that this Continuum of Care Notice of Funding Opportunity has taken, and the number of meetings trying to figure out: well, if this happened, what would we do? And how would we change this? Could we even do this, and what would be the gap in funding, and how would we navigate that? Or take, for example, the [proposed rule](#) to add 40 hours a week of work or service requirements for those who are in federally subsidized housing or supportive housing. We have many families who are working, and it may not be exactly 40 hours a week, but now we need to piece it together and there's no clarity on what that means, or how to implement. So there is constant pivoting and there are constant threats to what we will be able to do as an organization.

There is a human price that is being paid.

Going into this moment, we had some financial stability. We're very diversely funded, with about half of our funding from government contracts. Even within that, it's probably 20 different contracts because we do work in different sectors. Half of our funding comes from foundations, individuals, and earned income from our social enterprise. So we have a lot of flexibility, which allows us to do the work well and to be innovative in how we're thinking about things. That helped us buffer some of the immediate fear and impact. This is not an existential crisis for us.

We haven't had to make any large shifts overnight where we've had to cut programs. We've not yet lost significant funding, but it is coming. All of our major funding sources for contracts are under immense pressure, and we will lose funding, and it will have to remake us. It's going to shift how many people we can serve, and what programs, and how, and what that will look like. As a leader, watching all these things that have been built and have worked to help families, and then are dismantled because of a political whim is demoralizing. And it's not because of evidence, not because of reality. There is a human price that is being paid for that. It is disheartening.

There is no one who wants government efficiency more than me and my team. We want taxpayer dollars to be used well, and we operate within these systems all the time. The majority of providers are underpaid, underfunded, and are not able to put the funds they do have entirely towards the work because they're spent from having to deal within these systems. The overarching focus on waste, fraud, and abuse takes away from actually achieving the intent of what those funds are for. The targeted nature of these attacks to dismantle and take away services creates this sense of constantly being on high alert. You're having to repurpose so much of your organizational capacity to anticipate, respond to, and contort yourself in different ways to address the changing priorities, the lack of messaging, the lack of clarity, the sudden pronouncements, all without following any sort of system to expedite the expected changes.



Play time

Our staff are already overloaded when they come in from living in this reality. It is a lot to carry. Everybody feels it. And they come into a workspace that requires that they deal with folks who are also feeling it. They're dealing with systems that seem to work against them, and they're worried about their own safety in the organization, financially, physically, and so on. It is a huge amount. We're losing some really great talents and great leadership in the sector because people are like, nope, not doing that. This is the most important work in the world. And we need the best folks doing it, and if people feel like this is unsustainable, or not possible to begin with for their lives financially, emotionally, and mentally, we're doomed.

I think navigating through any moment like this, where I've had to hold being both reactive and strategic, is a real learning process for me. It pushes me out of my comfort zone, because I'm pretty good at the strategic thinking part, but I really don't like being reactive.

We're going to find a way through this.

The question I've wrestled with is how do I hold other people's anxiety around these circumstances and not let that get to mine? This work is never easy, and we're helping families who are also feeling the distress of the world around them. There's this amount of anxiety and grief in the system as a whole, that can feel so depressing. I have to recognize that, and also not project that for the team. I have to be in a space where I can be stable and focused and help, and to be able to say we are dealing with reality, and we're going to find a way through this.

I think the attacks will get more insidious and more difficult to navigate, because the federal administration is learning where to push the boundaries and what the limits are in court and other places, and they're finding other ways to get their way. In a worst-case scenario, I think they will get better at doing this. And that's really painful, but we are clearly focused on families and being true to our values and what is needed in the world. At least that's my goal, what I'm working for every day.

I have confidence ultimately in our broader New Moms team, the community, the board, our donors, to help us, and our ability to navigate things and still achieve the goal we want, which is, the impact for families. We have a real commitment to excellence for the families who we serve. I am super grateful to have a vice president of policy and government relations. I'm super grateful for the coalitions we're involved in. I'm super grateful for a team that is really smart and can spot things coming. And that just heightens our sense of responsibility and investment in this, because we realize we have to act not just for ourselves, but for the broader coalition of folks who also need that right now.



Story time

We will be remade.

All of us need to spend some time thinking about what we want to be remade into because we will be remade. We focus a lot on innovation and learning at New Moms, because we think there are a lot of things in human services that are pretty antiquated, and that we can do better. If this crisis is going to happen, how do we find some pieces of good in it and an opportunity to try something different? If the funding isn't there anymore, and we don't have constraints, what would we do? We know what the evidence and research shows; we know what our experience shows; we know what families are telling us they want and need. If we take off the bureaucratic harnesses, how would we create something new that is the best thing for families and the right way to do our work? What would that look like? That's the question we have to ask ourselves in this moment.



Interviewees:
Jayne Vellinga,
Executive
Director



&
Beth
Berendsen,
Policy
Director

Services:
Workforce Development

Location:
Chicago, IL

FY25 Budget:
\$2M - \$6M

Federal Funding:
40%

Staff:
26

**# Clients Served
Per Year:**
175

Chicago Women In Trades

If not for the historic and systemic discrimination against women, Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT) would not exist. Established in 1981, CWIT has been the leading advocate for women seeking to enter and thrive in nontraditional occupations, leading the charge for equal opportunity and advancement in industries historically dominated by men. Visionary tradeswomen founded the organization, resolute in their determination to challenge discriminatory hiring practices, dismantle barriers, and advocate for safe, inclusive, and abundant workplaces for women to succeed and flourish in the skilled trades. Over its more than 40 year history and with training programs, strategic policy initiatives, and industry support, CWIT has built a diverse coalition of tradeswomen, industry allies, and advocates who share a common vision to fundamentally reshape the landscape of skilled labor.

Foundational to this purpose and mission was the 1965 passage of an executive order (EO) signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Executive Order 11246 was issued to prohibit employment discrimination by federal contractors and subcontractors based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin and to promote equal employment opportunity through affirmative action programs. It essentially set the stage for pioneer tradeswomen to band together to create organizations like CWIT, as it provided a framework for their rightful place in the trades workforce. However, Congress never codified this EO into law, and in 2025, as part of the anti-DEI agenda of the Trump administration, it was rescinded. With the anti-DEI EOs issued, in an instant all government grants and contracts associated with it were immediately under threat, and for CWIT that meant almost 40% of their funding. The broader anti-DEI executive orders threatened these contracts specifically because CWIT proudly and intentionally does DEI work and the overturning of the EO fundamentally weakened their efforts, potentially reversing the progress they were making. Though some staff feared this was coming with the change in administration, Jayne Vellinga, with CWIT since 2000 and Executive Director since 2009, just never believed it would happen. CWIT had really been booming under the previous administration, which made the abrupt shift even harder to fathom. Jayne and Policy Director, Beth Berendsen, shared what the last year has been like for them and how they are navigating the uncertainty, particularly as the battle over the fate of their funding is being waged in court.

in their words...

What we experienced was whiplash, 100%.

Before, things were looking promising for equity and diversity, specifically in the construction workforce, and we had great infrastructure built at the federal level. We had very strong language and commitments from multiple federal agencies under the Biden administration. There was real momentum towards ensuring that all people have access to the jobs created by that federal infrastructure. Funding was really strong, and we could see it in our local partnerships. People were coming to the table really wanting to work with us in ways that hadn't happened before. The percentage of women in the trades jumped during those four years. So, we pushed our partners to do even more. We had leadership and demand in the construction trades. We had it all, **except laws.**

So, the biggest challenge we faced was revocation of Executive Order 11246 (11246), which is the only federal goal for women in construction jobs. It requires that any contractor that receives \$10,000 or more in federal funding has to attempt to have a workforce with 6.9% women on all of their projects, not just the federal ones. The impact of the revocation goes beyond federal contracts. Illinois does not have similar state goals for women and people of color; what the state has is a requirement that all contracts meet or are in good faith compliance with 11246. So, without 11246 there are no goals at the state level either. In addition, we received notification that if we were found to be out of compliance with the anti-DEI EOs that our federal grants would be cancelled—40% of our direct funding, right there, including all of our Department of Labor (DOL) originating grants.



Tradeswomen Group



We Build Illinois Class Group

and is preventing all sorts of organizations from having to certify. The decision has been appealed and we are waiting for a decision from the Circuit Court on whether or not the preliminary injunction will stay in force. We still have yet to go to court on the merits of the case, but we hope it will be decided that all these anti-DEI orders are unconstitutional.

We can't hide what we are trying to do here. We cannot obey in advance.

Our whole reason for being is putting women into the construction trades, so we were not in a position, nor were we inclined because of our mission, to consider changing our language to comply with anti-DEI EOs. We are all about DEI —we are called Chicago Women in Trades. It's in our name. We can't hide what we're trying to do here. Perhaps not surprising, but certainly wonderful: our entire management team and our entire board decided unanimously to file the lawsuit. An awful lot of our sister organizations did not go this route. We hoped they would join us and we're not sure why that didn't happen. It might just be that some organizations are taking a "keeping their head down" approach. We feel like we have to use this as a platform for talking about the value of DEI and its importance in the world. This was about principles and it stopped just being about Chicago Women in Trades a long time ago. Our initial motivations were existential; we've got to save ourselves. But that quickly morphed into "we need to be a roadblock for this crazy policy" and we cannot obey in advance.

It's been overwhelming. There have been some financial impacts. We were expecting a no-cost extension on one of our Women's Bureau grants, but it expired in July and, of course, we were not actually given that extension, so money was unspent on that grant that we had budgeted to use. We had two grants that we were a subcontractor on, one went to term and the other was cancelled early because the main contractor wanted to appear to be in compliance with the anti-DEI orders. So, we've lost three grants so far: two of them remain in force for now with



Advocacy Day in Springfield



United Association Class Group

one of them ending as expected on June 30th and the other ending September 30th. For the grant ending in the fall, specifically the Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations (WANTO) grant, CWIT was the only grantee who did not have their contract canceled in April 2025 because our lawsuit protected us from termination. Many of these grants we would have expected to have had the opportunity to reapply and have our application considered favorably, but no longer. We are making progress in either cutting costs or replacing some of those lost funds, but we're going into our new year, starting July 1st, projecting about a \$700,000 deficit from losing those grants.

It's an entire effort to change the culture around how people are treated and how diversity is valued.

We have also seen the atmosphere around worker protections, worker safety, worker rights, really be dismantled. Communication to contractors and work sites has been anti-diversity, anti-worker protections, and quite frankly pro-toxic behavior. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is no longer providing support around sexual harassment. So it's not just a reversal of the single EO; it's an entire effort to change the culture around how people are treated at work and how diversity is valued.



May Day March 2025

We also have a desire to be responsive to attacks on communities that are tangentially related to our work but not directly our community. We might be called "Chicago Women in Trades" but we serve a lot of gender minorities who don't call themselves women. So how do we show up for that community? We also have to talk about the attacks on our immigrant community. What do we do when people come into our space and what do we do if we have a student who has these issues?

After losing federal grants, our next largest funder is the state, but we can't wait months and months for payments the way we have been able to when we had multiple government funding streams. I'm sure everyone would like for the state to really step up with greater workforce protections as well, but the Illinois Department of Labor is very poorly funded, and under this current budget and with what we are threatened to lose in federal funding, there's no way they can. So not only are they taking things away from us at the federal level, but we're in a situation at the state with the budget—which again is largely due to the federal situation—where state departments can't fill the gaps, even though I think the desire and intentionality is there. Even so, we are really grateful to be in Illinois, where we have strong partnerships with the city and the state, at this critical moment on the policy front.



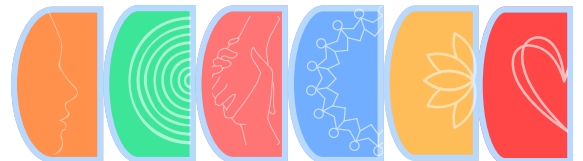
Training Classes

We should use our imaginations and this time to build the thing we want to be.

So many of our systems have failed us, so we need to be innovative and think outside of the status quo, because the status quo has not served us. Even 11246, which we are fighting to get back, was not effective enough—women remain about 5% of the construction workforce decades after it was enacted—so why settle on just going back to it? Now is a moment when, having seen the failings of our systems, we should use our imaginations and this time to build the thing we want to be and not the thing we all just are used to always having. The hope is that in a year's time we are having more conversations around that. We must stop being reactive and start imagining a new kind of world.



Strong Women Mural





Clove
ALLIANCE



Interviewees:
Tracey Noe Slach,
CEO

&



Shlinda Trudeau,
Director of
Administration

Services:

Violence Prevention & Recovery

Location:

Kankakee, IL (Iroquois,
Kankakee & Ford Counties)

FY25 Budget:

Up to \$2M

Federal Funding:

30%

Staff:

20

Clients Served Per Year:

627 survivors and their loved ones through advocacy, counseling, legal services, and crisis support, ensuring that they were not alone on their path to healing. Raised awareness and spread prevention by reaching 153,597 people

Clove Alliance

Clove Alliance is a Kankakee County human service organization providing advocacy, mental health services, and violence prevention programming for survivors of sexual violence across central and Midwestern Illinois. Their mission is to ensure survivors not only have access to healing services, but also the stability and resources they need to rebuild their lives safely. Their work exists at the intersection of trauma and the systemic barriers that perpetuate housing instability, food insecurity, and gaps in healthcare. They recognize that every healing journey is different and offer a holistic approach in the services they provide, taking the individual needs of every client into consideration while offering supports and services tailored to fit their unique needs.

Over the past year, the organization has been navigating rising demand for services amidst ongoing instability, delays in federal funding, and challenges that have placed significant strains on both operations and the clients who rely on these critical support systems. As if these federal disruptions were not overwhelming enough, an EF3 tornado recently struck Kankakee County, delivering an additional devastating blow. The tornado displaced families, damaged homes, and intensified already urgent needs, not only for their clients, but for some of their staff as well. It also exposed the harsh reality that when crisis hits communities already living on the margins, the impact is not temporary, and existing inequities are deepened. Even while bearing the emotional weight of the losses experienced by themselves and their community, their staff demonstrated remarkable resilience and a renewed sense of purpose. Clove Alliance CEO, Tracey Noe Slach, and Director of Administration, Shlinda Trudeau discussed the challenges they have experienced in the face of these two catastrophic events, the impacts on their community and staff, and the lessons they will take away from a difficult year.

in their words...

Federal policy decisions have immediate human consequences.

The last year has been uncertain, strained, adaptive, urgent, and deeply human. We've experienced increased demand for services alongside growing instability in the systems our clients rely on. Federal policy decisions are not abstract. They show up immediately in the lives of our clients, and our most significant challenges have been tied to federal funding instability and delays. We have seen a ripple effect from Kankakee County Community Services losing their funding, particularly for programs like LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy



Clove Alliance Leadership Team

Assistance Program), Meals on Wheels, and Medicaid. Federal policy decisions have immediate human consequences. When systems break down, survivors carry the burden, and organizations like ours step in to bridge the gap the best we can.

In addition, our community was recently impacted by an EF3 tornado that devastated parts of Kankakee County, including Hopkins Park, one of the poorest areas we serve. The tornado impacted a third of our staff, including totaled cars and significant damage to their homes. This disaster compounded existing vulnerabilities on multiple levels. Families already facing housing instability lost homes or were displaced; survivors navigating trauma were forced into crisis mode again; access to basic needs such as shelter, food, and utilities became even more urgent. At the exact moment when survivors and families needed immediate, coordinated support, we were already navigating delayed or uncertain federal resources and increased demand. This created a situation where community-based organizations had to respond rapidly without the level of support that should exist in moments of crisis.



Clove Alliance Team

When large-scale events hit under-resourced communities, the recovery gap is wider and longer-lasting.

What we saw very clearly is that disasters do not affect communities equally. The areas hit hardest were those already under-resourced. Survivors in these areas are facing cascading crises—eviction notices, loss of utilities, food insecurity—often before they can even begin healing. Delays and uncertainty in funding compound these stressors and make it difficult to plan services or sustain consistent support systems for those most in need.

When large-scale events hit under-resourced communities, the recovery gap is wider and longer-lasting. In the wake of both federal changes and the tornado, we have expanded support to address emergency needs tied to the associated displacement and loss. Our staff has stepped up in extraordinary ways, and our team cohesion is stronger than ever before. In response, we have added self care time for staff to use as they wish, as well as designated time for departments to meet and relax. Even with all the chaos, challenges, and changes we have faced, we have not seen much turnover. What we have seen is our team navigating increased emotional strain and pressure together. They are trying to fill the widening gaps with resilience and a deep sense of shared purpose and urgency. They do this work because they want to make a difference even if they sometimes end up needing the same resources and services they offer to clients.

Our mission has not changed, but the scope of what it takes to fulfill it has expanded.

Community partnerships have become even more critical, as we create a network of essential supports that operate as concentric circles of care to address the most critical needs. This has been essential and often determines whether a survivor can remain safe or is forced to return to an unsafe situation. We expanded our support to include more direct assistance for basic needs, housing, food, utilities, despite limited resources. Our community and the public sector have stepped up to support us where federal funding has not. We have also compiled a list of services and providers to share with clients with issues beyond our capacity, including assistance with possible eviction or other financial challenges.



Tabling for Clove Alliance

Our mission has not changed, but the scope of what it takes to fulfill it has expanded. Anything that isn't "mission critical" isn't a priority. It is sad that we aren't able to look to the future and see where we can grow and expand, but there isn't enough time and we do not have the resources to do so. We have adapted to the increased demand for services and the growing number of crisis calls we are receiving by increasing our crisis response capacity. We continue to center survivor needs, even when doing so stretches resources and despite an uncertain funding environment.

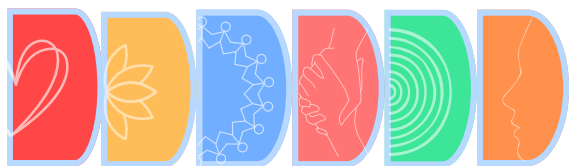
Moving forward into fiscal years 27 and 28, we are bracing for continued instability with federal funding. We also expect to see an increase in demand for services, and community-based organizations will be expected to fill systemic gaps without the financial support or resources to do the work. Right now, our staff is carrying the emotional weight of seeing clients in worsening conditions while also navigating uncertainty in resources and for themselves personally.



Buckeye, Clove Alliance Therapy Dog, with students and staff

You cannot separate healing from stability.

The lesson we take away from the upheaval and grief we have experienced is that you cannot separate healing from stability. Even with the systemic funding challenges we face, in the coming year I would like to see Clove Alliance expand our survivor supports even more to meet the moment and the growing needs of our clients. Emotional support alone is not enough. Survivors must have their basic needs met first. Then they are better equipped to navigate the loss, stress, and strain of their surroundings and circumstances. Our work is about more than recovery from violence. It is about ensuring survivors have the stability to move forward, and we know that prioritizing basic needs is an important part of it.





Of Color, Inc.



Interviewee:
Renita White,
Executive
Director

Services:
Housing, Workforce
Development

Location:
Chicago, IL

FY25 Budget:
\$4.8M

Federal Funding:
70%

Staff:
25

**# Clients Served
Per Year:**
415

Of Color, Inc.

Of Color, Inc. (Of Color) was founded on the belief that people “Of All Colors” can grow economically and together, and contribute to the larger society—if they have access to resources that help them thrive. Executive Director Renita White started the organization six years ago with an intention to lead a small community-based organization in the community where she was raised on the South side of Chicago and a belief that employment programs save lives. The agency began as a sustainable workforce development and employment service provider, and now includes supportive housing stability services, as well. Of Color serves youth in care, opportunity youth, returning citizens, individuals experiencing homelessness, veterans, and dislocated workers. Every service delivered focuses on the whole individual and offers a myriad of resources and supports. They work with employment agencies in Chicago and beyond and with other partners to provide entry-level and felon-friendly jobs. They also help veterans and underserved residents have a place to call home. Their youth program is training the next generation of leaders with the ultimate goal of seeing all of these groups thrive.

Over the past year, funding freezes and federal policy uncertainties have been unsettling for the leadership and staff at Of Color, Inc. However, Renita White is not just an experienced and pragmatic nonprofit professional, she is also a consummate planner who believes you must always be thinking three steps ahead. That approach and her leadership, in many ways, have been guideposts in an otherwise volatile and, at times, confounding year. She shared the details of the challenges they have faced, including how state administrative practices and funding delays often make it harder for nonprofits to navigate the federal upheaval.

in her words...

It is fear of the unknown.

To describe the last year, the words that come to mind for me are scary and unpredictable because you don't know what's going to happen tomorrow; it's like you're dealing with today but tomorrow it will be something else. In the past year, our challenges have been the government holds and funding freezes. When the government holds off on funding, it freezes intakes. As a result, we had less intake this year than the year before. That's entirely due to the funding freezes and intake holds when government payments stopped. That hurts communities because they can't get the services, so that's been really impactful in a negative way.



Of Color, Inc Board of Directors

Always prepare for the future and the rainy days.

Because I was taught and mentored to always prepare for the future and the rainy days, when the new administration came in, we started doing things a little bit differently based on what we were told was going to happen. Some people didn't believe it or didn't pay attention to it, but we did. One day, we woke up and all of the federal funding in some areas had been stopped. We couldn't access portals for money for housing. However, because we started pulling about three months worth of funding at a time from those portals, we were okay when other providers didn't know how they were going to make payroll in a week or two. A lot of my colleagues asked me how did you know to do that? I think leaders have to be in that mindset whether we are in bad times or not and we have to prepare ourselves to be in good shape financially because sometimes you don't know how long it's going to last and that is the scary piece. That time, it was illegal and the lawyers jumped on it and turned it around fairly quickly, especially with the national membership trade organizations involved, but even so, I was listening to my colleagues, from some large, established agencies and they were more worried.



Off-Base Transition Training Program



A visit from Julian Purdy, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service

I have seen other organizations, including some that have been around a while, have to shut their doors or they have had 50% attrition or just had to lay people off or cut services. Good people, and it's sad that this has happened. I am often asked how a new organization, like us, is not getting any of the worst impacts. I tell them I am not getting these impacts now and hope to avoid them because as a small community-based organization, we have to be more strategic in our thinking and not try to do too much. We can help our communities without being massive. I think you should do what you're good at and use your partners for the other stuff, so that's what we do. We build a lot of partnerships and have a whole set of mental health providers, educators, and more that we work with, but our main focus is housing and workforce development.

One adjustment we made to prioritize our mission to address these challenges was to utilize some funds for supports that may technically fall outside of what you typically would provide to your clients. For example, you may have a homeless program and the funder says you can't provide food. We will then use some of our own dollars to buy food cards and healthy food for the refrigerator and freezer and to give to our clients. We really wanted to do that to help.

The slow payment process has probably hurt us more than anything.

When you're getting program services, it's point in time, so even during the time of the freeze, four to six weeks, contracts still go on within their time frame and this means we have less time in our contract period to serve the same number of people. A lot of our clients are veterans. When the VA shut down, the impact was that clients did not receive crucial services. We had veterans coming to us because they didn't have transportation cards to get to medical appointments or other essential supports. We had to make sure we had enough to help those veterans who came in with those needs. Those were the residual effects on us and the clients because of the federal shutdown.

I would spend a lot of my own personal money to make sure that my state programs were paid because I was not going to allow my staff or the young adults to work and not get paid. Today I don't have to worry about that because I was able to get my foundation and corporate partners to support us.

Delays in funding lead to distrust in the provider that is serving the community.

We need to fix the issues at the state level. That would help a lot for the people who haven't been paid. Payments should not be stuck in the bureaucratic structure, sitting there while we suffer. The state gets a certain amount of money from the federal government, so why not make sure that it's pushed down in a timely manner so more people can be served? Delays in funding lead to distrust in the provider that is serving the community. It is important for us to always advocate at the federal level, but it is equally important to advocate at the state level. That was my frustration when I started Of Color, and it's still my frustration as I sit here today. We had to go into our reserves to pull down \$150,000 over the past two months just for the state because they are so slow in paying their vouchers. We did not stop the work program because we would never do that to the kids that depend on us.



Onboarding for Employment



A holiday hug



Supplies for Veterans

If agencies have been around, have proven themselves, and have great financial audits, we should get our money up front. What is there to lose? You only have to deal with us once or twice a year, and if we don't pay it back we can never do the program again. I wish people understood the impact of what happens when contracts aren't paid on time. Worst of all is that we could never pay the expenses for the programs that are there to help, and you don't want to re-traumatize your clients by their loss of services. I will never do that. So I try to plan one to two steps ahead of the state and think strategically about how to make sure everybody is taken care of.

Everybody will have a story about what this era is doing to their people and communities,

Recently, we've hired people because we needed to really centralize the things that we do internally with our quality improvement and business services to be stronger externally. Now, the directors and myself can spend more time doing the things we need to do to keep us strong. I think getting the right staff is key, getting those who clearly demonstrate that they are passionate about our clients and our mission in the right seats in our programs. We have very high standards in terms of the people that we hire because our clients need us to be our best in order for us to help them to be their best.

We didn't think we were going to survive COVID. I mean, why would you start your organization during COVID of all times? But I think that there was a reason for that. If that's when you started, nothing looks very daunting to you because it's not like you started when things were simple and easy. That was a lesson in and of itself and also proof of life, proof that we could make it in any environment, including what we are going through now. And I know everybody will have a story about what this era is doing to their people and communities, too.



Interviewee:
Ashley Harms,
Executive
Director of
The Amity
Learning
Center

Services:
Child Care

Location:
Freeport, IL

FY25 Budget:
\$2-6M

Federal Funding:
50%

Staff:
32

**# Clients Served
Per Year:**
125

The Amity Learning Center of Freeport

The Amity Society of Freeport was founded in 1880 to provide direct, person-to-person services for the families most in need in their community. As one of the oldest children's charities in the United States, it began as an entity dedicated to providing food and general assistance to the area's poorest residents and then grew to include comprehensive child welfare and health services, which they continue to deliver today. In 1960, they opened Amity Day Care and Learning Center. The Learning Center provides skillful and loving care enacted with a developmentally appropriate educational model to ensure that all children can reach their full potential with healthy minds and bodies. The staff is dedicated to meeting families where they are, working with parents to understand the unique needs of every child, and fostering an environment where parents and teachers alike are working to advocate for and nurture the children they are caring for together.

The last year at the Learning Center has run the gamut. There were exciting times and terrifying times, affirmations and upheaval, yet through it all, they persevered. With threats at the federal level looming, they saw no direct cuts, but both partners in their building did not fare as well. This instability undermined each organization's capacity to contribute to capital costs and maintenance, an expense Amity stepped up to shoulder on their own. They did this despite another year of level funding which, in essence, equated to a cut as the actual cost of delivering services continues to rise. In addition, the State of Illinois has done little to mitigate the federal volatility beyond issuing statements of condemnation. Day-to-day organizational management, unfunded mandates, and compliance requirements are no less onerous nor are any additional resources offered to help. Even so, the team at Amity Learning Center continues to provide quality care, focused on the well-being of their clients and their mission with concentric circles of care for their community. Executive Director Ashley Harms explained the challenges and opportunities of the last year, the pride she feels in how she and her team faced them, and the lessons she has learned in the process.

in her words...

Everything that happens at the federal level trickles down and impacts all of us.

The last year has been exciting, terrifying and beautiful. We've persevered through all the federal instability despite all of the things that were stacked against us with the funding. We're putting a new roof on, we provided quality care to hundreds of children, we continually followed our mission despite being faced with adversity, we had very low turnover at a very difficult time and I think that's huge. I can look at myself in the mirror, and so can my staff, and know that we did the right thing and that's beautiful.

I've been at Amity for 20 years, and what I've learned is that everything that happens at the federal level trickles down and impacts all of us. That's kind of how life works.



Story time with toddlers

Even when it's not direct cuts, just hearing about federal funding getting paused is scary. I get messages on weekends from my staff. People are worried, and honestly, I am too, but when my staff comes to me scared, I am honest with them and tell them how I really feel. I also remind them that Amity has been around since 1880. Even in hard times, we've made it through, and we'll make it through this too. We've always been able to pivot and figure it out, and we will again.

As for the federal funding, we haven't necessarily seen cuts, but we've seen a lot of level funding. But level funding doesn't work when costs keep going up. The funding stays the same and the federal pass-through dollars from the state are slow. And at the same time, they expect more out of us. More reporting, more requirements, more compliance—but you're not actually getting anything more to help you do that. That's hard.

Nobody exists in a silo. There are concentric circles of care.

It's not just about us either. We share a building with Head Start, so when federal funding was paused, that was a scary time because it impacts our partners. The town of Freeport recently talked about RIFing staff, which would lessen supports in the broader community especially for lower income families. We partner with them, we send kids who need services, so the impact isn't just us in our little corner. Even if it doesn't directly affect us, it affects the children and families we serve. Nobody exists in a silo. There are concentric circles of care. Boys and Girls Club, also in our building, very publicly lost a lot of funding. When programs like that lose funding, that impacts our kids too; less tutoring, less after-school care, fewer supports. It limits everything. What's hard is not knowing what each day is going to bring and what's going to happen on multiple levels, with education funding, with government policies, or with shifts happening in Illinois.



Big group story time



A special guest in the gym



Water table play

The building we share with the Boys and Girls Club and Head Start is over 30 years old and Amity is the majority owner. Our gym roof has been leaking like it's raining inside. 700 kids use that gym in a day, so that's a problem. Head Start, because of their funding instability, was unable to invest in capital improvements. So, we stepped in and are now in the process of purchasing the building and replacing the roof at a cost of \$700,000—an expense for which we got no money. I wrote to our congressman for assistance. \$0.00. The current climate impacted all of that, including the cost of all the materials, and due to federal funding uncertainty, Head Start could not contribute, so the risk is on our shoulders, 100%. Our mission is not to put a roof on the building. Our mission is to care for children, but since that is what this whole building does, we launched a capital campaign for the roof. However, when Boys and Girls Club's federal funding got dropped, I felt like the priority needed to be the Boys and Girls Club programming, not the roof. So, we stopped the capital campaign so that fundraising could go towards Boys and Girls Club, but we still had to cover the cost. Amity received a \$50,000 donation from the Community Foundation of Northwestern Illinois for capital improvements, as well as raised around \$6,500 from churches and local organizations for these capital improvements. Every dollar helps, and this is how we can survive.

It's exhausting when you're doing everything you can, but it never feels like enough.

When the federal government announced they were canceling funding, the State of Illinois fought it pretty hard. I do appreciate that. We've seen a heavy investment in early childhood education by the state in the past five years, and that's impressive. That's part of the reason why I'm still here, fighting for the future and what it could look like, and investing in our youngest citizens. But when the federal pass-through funding trickles down so slowly, it impacts everyone and sets things in motion, and then it shows up in our day-to-day through state systems, through requirements, through compliance. I understand that's how it works, but how many more times can we be told you're a needed service, you're in a childcare desert, we need more, but there are no dollars for more? There's nobody at the state willing to say they'll help you expand or they're going to create a bill for more funding. That's just not a thing.

And the state administrative burden also continues. When DCFS was under all that scrutiny, everybody underneath them was under higher scrutiny, too. If you have a question, no one can give you an answer, but the second you're not in compliance with something they never told you about or you've never seen, or isn't even written anywhere in black and white, then you're in trouble. It is very frustrating when so much is expected of you, yet you are given very little, and it's gotten worse in the last six months. We're expected to be perfect and in compliance with every new rule, every unfunded mandate. And it's exhausting when you're doing everything you can, but it never feels like enough. There is literally a Facebook page with posts almost every week, like "hey, did anybody know this about licensing" or "I have been here for 20 years and I have never heard of this" or "my rep just brought this up and I have never seen that." It's not just us. It's across the state and it's happening to everyone.

At the same time, we're in the middle of big changes in Illinois, with agencies coming together into one system and this new early childhood governing body. It sounds positive. It really does. It feels like our voices have been heard, and I love that. But it's new, and any new system is going to have glitches. So, I'm hopeful, but I'm also watching closely. I'm watching the federal stuff, too. I have a federally funded program in my building and if they shut down it impacts us. I'm paying attention just to see what happens. Exciting things can happen, scary things can happen, but we just have to go with it no matter what.



Fire safety presentation and puppet show

We let our mission and our heart drive our why because your why is what matters most.

The reason I do what I do is for the people and the legacy. I have a true love for my work and our mission and our community, but there can be a lot of pressure, too. We now have a food pantry. We've seen an increase in the amount of people who are utilizing it including our parents and families because everything is so expensive and people are struggling. Because I love what I do, especially meeting people where they are and helping them, it weighs very heavily on me sometimes, and there are absolutely some days where I don't want to do this anymore. That's the personal impact of it, so I've looked at transitioning into something different to be able to go to work, work a shift, leave, and not have to worry about the other pieces.

You don't have to be everything to everybody; focus on what you can control; slow down. it's going to be all right. I wish I had told myself that a year ago. People don't always have to like you and that's OK, but you have to be able to look yourself in the mirror at the end of the day and know you did the right thing. That's my focus. I'm not a regret person, I'm a reflection person. In the last year, there were definitely things I could have done differently, but I am proud of what we have accomplished, including using my voice to advocate and push for change. I have learned that you can panic all you want, but at the end of the day, you've got to focus on what you can control. We're doing everything in our power to raise our voices to advocate, to take care of people, to meet reporting requirements, and be in compliance. That's what we can do.

The highlight of the story of our last year is perseverance. We've persevered. We've provided quality care. We let our mission and our heart drive our why because your why is what matters most. There's a lot of whats and whos and whens, but without the why, those things don't matter.