

Chicago Department of Family and Support Services

WORKFORCE SERVICES DIVISION

2024 Program Portfolio and Strategies



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BACKGROUND



Figure 1 | Attendees of the 2024 Second Chance Summit speak with employers

The Workforce Services Division (WSD) of the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) is committed to enhancing employment outcomes for Chicago’s most vulnerable populations – returning residents, system-impacted residents with arrest and conviction records, individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, and residents with limited English proficiency. WSD prioritizes services to individuals facing economic hardship who have limited work skills and significant barriers to employment. The division also prioritizes services programs for U.S. Veterans and New Arrivals. To address these challenges, WSD provides tailored support through three primary program models: Employment Preparation and Placement, Transitional Jobs (Work-Based Learning) programs, and Industry-Specific Training programs. By collaborating with community-based organizations and public entities, WSD ensures that essential resources and support are effectively delivered to those in need. Through comprehensive programs and strategic partnerships, WSD creates meaningful pathways to employment and self-sufficiency, promoting resilience, empowerment, and community development.

COLLABORATION

The Workforce Services Division (WSD) is committed to strengthening collaborative efforts to ensure the effective delivery of resources and services to Chicago residents. Key components of the approach include:

- **Collaboration with Mayor's Office:** By closely working with the Mayor's Office and key stakeholders, WSD creates impactful pathways to employment and self-sufficiency. Our partnership with the Mayor's Office of Reentry focuses on enhancing reentry services and resources, supporting stable employment for returning residents.
- **Office of Equity and Racial Justice:** DFSS cohort members have transitioned key objectives from the DFSS Racial Equity Action Plan into implementation, with a focus on reentry and workforce needs. This collaboration will continue into 2025, informing the Office of Budget and Management (OBM) on how each department aims to enhance equitable outcomes.
- **Chicago Commission on Human Relations:** WSD is advancing fair chance hiring practices by promoting the updated Hiring Ordinance and educating returning residents on the complaint process for hiring discrimination. Partnering with CCHR and Community Reentry Support Centers, we aim to raise awareness and support those impacted.
- **Youth Employment Working Group:** The division supervisor leads efforts to support youth, especially those aged 18-24, ensuring equitable access to workforce development resources and career pathways. Upcoming initiatives include career informational sessions and exploratory conversations to enhance youth access to impactful opportunities.
- **Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership:** Monthly meetings with the Partnership provide a forum for aligning resources and refining a collaborative strategy to meet the evolving needs of residents.
- **Chicago Workforce Funder Alliance:** DFSS is collaborating with the Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance to expand fair chance hiring practices, supporting delegates in increasing their hiring of program participants and strengthening the workforce ecosystem.

CURRENT STATE OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN CHICAGO

Recent years have seen a rapid rise in use of technology at work. Technological advancements have shaken up historically stable roles and resulted in high turnover rates, as well as a shift in necessary skill sets. A lack of workforce development not only impacts widespread economic development but also the growth of individual organizations. According to McKinsey almost 40% of US employers struggle to find people with the necessary skills, even for entry-level job opportunities. (<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/closing-the-skills-gap-creating-workforce-development-programs-that-work-for-everyone>)

This "skills gap" represents a massive pool of untapped talent in the labor market and has dire consequences on economic growth, skilled employees, healthcare and mental health, community development, and more. The skills gap exists because many students lack the guidance needed to finish high school, much less transition into a community college or apprenticeship program to launch them into a viable career. Other times, employees lose jobs due to advancing technology or are phased out of the workforce, leading to a gap between what they know and what they need to know to adapt. Workforce development is a priority for state and local governments as they support training programs and higher education opportunities with funding and policy.

REASONS PEOPLE EXPERIENCE EMPLOYMENT GAPS AND BARRIERS

A multitude of factors, including skills gaps, educational disparities, health setbacks, criminal records, economic downturns, discrimination, geographical constraints, caregiving responsibilities, workplace injuries, technological shifts, mental health issues, language barriers, ageism, gender biases, economic disadvantages, and homelessness, can contribute to employment gaps and barriers. These interconnected challenges emphasize the importance of developing comprehensive support systems and policies to address the unique needs of job seekers. Effective strategies must encompass a broad spectrum of solutions to empower individuals, providing them with the tools and opportunities needed to break free from these multifaceted obstacles and access meaningful, sustainable employment.

FEDERAL AND STATE PRIORITIES

Recent events have shaped how federal and state governments approach workforce development. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,

“The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how people work, receive healthcare, and shop, and these changes will drive more demand for computer occupations. A growing digital economy, consumers and businesses demanding more connectivity to and services from the internet, and an overall increased focus on data security are all expected to contribute to robust long-run demand for these workers.”

Unfortunately, many Black and Latinx job seekers are trained for low paying jobs in other sectors with limited options for economic advancement. The data highlights the need for more investments in technology-focused apprenticeships and work-based learning programs that create opportunities for Black and Latinx residents. Workforce development programs need to help these populations obtain the skills to access these growing industry sectors, which offer quality employment opportunities and career pathways at living wages.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for workforce development services, particularly for expanded opportunities for COVID-impacted individuals. To address this need, the DFSS WSD sought and received Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and Road to Recovery Plan (RRP) funding to increase capacity for both workforce training programs and reentry services for those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Federal action to increase workforce development nationwide requires each state to have a 4-year workforce plan. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), signed into law on July 22, 2014, is landmark legislation designed to strengthen and improve the nation’s public workforce system. Congress passed the Act with a wide bipartisan majority; it was the first legislative reform of the public workforce system since 1998. WIOA aims to help residents, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment, access high-quality jobs and to help employers hire and retain skilled workers. It is designed to link job seekers to employment, education, training, and support services and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy.

The State of Illinois is currently under a WIOA plan that spans 2024-2028. The 2022 Unified State Plan modification was prepared under the leadership of the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board with representation of the required partners of the Unified State Plan. The unified state plan consists of six core programs: the Adult Program (Title I of WIOA), the Dislocated Worker Program (Title I), the Youth Program (Title I), the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program (Title II), the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service Program (authorized under the Wagner Peyser Act, as amended by Title III), and the Vocational Rehabilitation

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Program (authorized under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV). A new, Unified State Plan for 2024 is forthcoming.

State goals under the current WIOA plan call for charting a new course for Illinois' economic future based on what we have learned from the past. This includes scaling up practices that have proven effective, re-engineering those that have not delivered on promised success, and abandoning those with little to no return. Currently, there is room for growth in the city-state partnership to support workforce development, particularly when it comes to identifying employment opportunities.

The changing workforce landscape has shifted federal and state priorities toward equity in hiring processes, equitable procurement to ensure funding is allocated where it is most needed, defining what a quality job is, and helping to close the benefits gap. There has been an increase in the focus on apprenticeship and skills-based training that complement the constantly changing workforce development landscape. The current workforce demand has shifted the Illinois economy away from manufacturing, which in turn has translated to a loss of middle wage jobs. The state continues to see gaps in postsecondary access and completion for Black, Latinx, low-income, and rural students.

LOCAL LANDSCAPE: Chicago's Vulnerable Workforce

Chicagoans throughout the city struggle with unemployment and underemployment. The highest need for employment and workforce services is found in high unemployment areas like Auburn Gresham, Austin, Back of the Yards, Bronzeville, Calumet Heights, Chatham, Englewood, Fuller Park, Grand Crossing, Humboldt Park, Little Village, North Lawndale, Pullman, Roseland, South Chicago, South Shore, West Englewood, and West Garfield Park. These communities need interventions to address barriers such as a lack of stable housing, transportation inequities, and criminal backgrounds that can prevent access to gainful employment. It is important to note that Chicago received over 46,000 migrants from the southern border between August 2022 and August 2024. The majority of these individuals are parolees and asylum seekers, and many of them are seeking employment. The ability to work legally and to generate income is essential in order for migrant families to become self-sufficient. For this reason, City government and stakeholders are focusing on efforts to expand supports for this population that will be detailed in a later section.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

Illinois' statewide unemployment rate increased by 0.7% over the past year, rising from 4.3% in June 2023 to 5.0% in June 2024. The Chicago area saw an even sharper rise, with unemployment jumping from 4.7% to 6.2% during the same period, reflecting a significant increase in the number of unemployed individuals within the city.

Nationally, the unemployment rate in July 2024 was 4.3%, up from the 2023 average of 3.6%. This rise was marked by a substantial increase in both the number of unemployed individuals (+352,000) and the civilian labor force (+420,000).

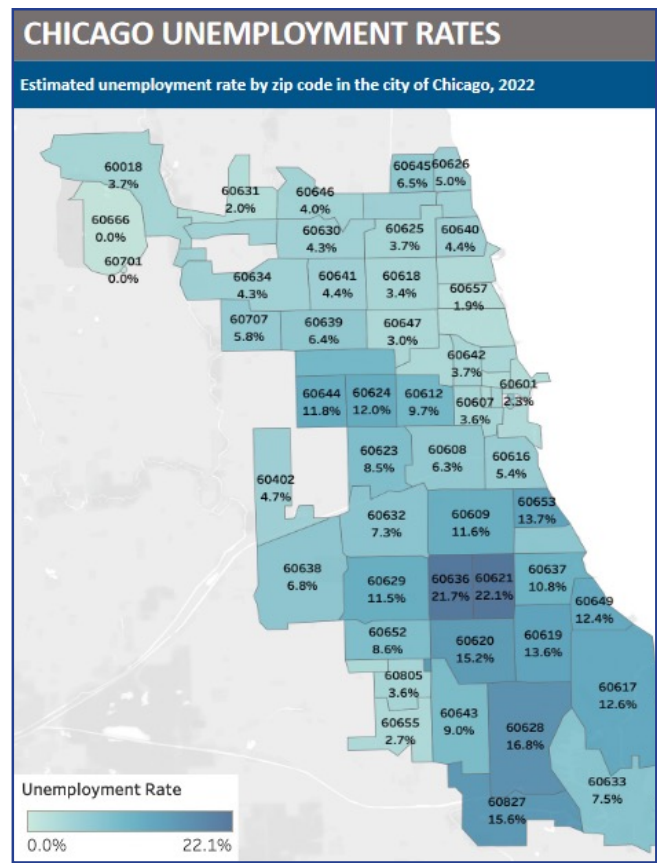
In Chicago, certain neighborhoods face much higher unemployment rates than the city average. For example, Englewood (60636) has a 20.9% unemployment rate, Austin (60644) is at 19.4%, and Roseland (60628) stands at 18.4%, highlighting significant economic disparities within the city.

These figures, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), underscore the concerning trend of rising unemployment in Illinois, Chicago, and nationwide. Chicago's challenges are particularly pronounced in cer-

tain neighborhoods where unemployment far exceeds city and that of New York City. The overall Illinois unemployment rate is still higher than other states, such as Florida, but remains slightly better than New York, California, and several others with large metropolitan cities (<https://www.chicagobusiness.com/employment/chicago-area-unemployment-nears-record-low>).

Despite a relatively low overall unemployment rate in the city, certain Community Area unemployment rates are up to three times higher than the national average. That trend has remained relatively consistent for years and requires investment and action to correct.

The table below highlights the unemployment rates for Illinois, Chicago, and the United States in June 2024 and June 2023, as well as the 12-month change.



Region	June 2024 Unemployment Rate	June 2023 Unemployment Rate	12 – Month Change
National	4.3% (July 2024)	3.6% (Annual 2023)	+0.7%
Illinois	5.0%	4.3%	+0.7%
Chicago	6.2%	4.7%	+1.5%

The table below shows the top ten ZIP codes in Chicago with the highest unemployment rates as of 2024:

Rank	ZIP Code	Neighborhood	Unemployment Rate
1	60636	Englewood	20.9%
2	60644	Austin	19.4%
3	60628	Roseland	18.4%
4	60621	Englewood	18.2%
5	60624	West Garfield Park	17.9%
6	60620	Auburn Gresham	16.7%
7	60649	South Shore	16.3%
8	60653	Bronzeville	15.7%
9	60637	Woodlawn	14.7%
10	60619	Chatham	14.3%

Addressing these disparities through targeted economic support and job creation programs will be crucial to fostering stability and reducing unemployment in these communities.

WORKFORCE SERVICES DIVISION'S COMMITMENT TO QUALITY JOBS AND EQUITY

Defining a Quality Job: The Workforce Services Division (WSD) defines a quality job as one that offers fair compensation, benefits, and opportunities for career growth and advancement. Beyond a paycheck, it includes factors such as workplace safety, work-life balance, and a supportive work environment. A quality job provides stability, promotes employee well-being, and contributes to the economic security and prosperity of individuals and their families.

Supporting Equity and Good Jobs: WSD is actively involved in promoting equity and quality employment through initiatives like The Good Jobs and Equity Project. Utilizing ARP funding, we've launched programs focused on reentry, apprenticeships, and adult learning, specifically targeting Black and Latinx communities in Chicago's 15 high-risk areas. We address disparities by examining root causes, partnering with equity-focused organizations, and advocating for policy changes that tackle issues like occupational segregation and ensure equitable opportunities for all, particularly Black Americans.

Our commitment extends to securing increased funding for Transitional Jobs Programs to align with the upcoming minimum wage increase in Chicago, ensuring fair and sustainable employment for all participants.

Ensuring Equitable Access to Quality Jobs: WSD is dedicated to removing systemic barriers and promoting inclusive hiring practices to ensure equitable access to quality jobs for all individuals, particularly underrepresented populations.

- **Workforce Partnerships:** WSD collaborates with employers to educate them on the benefits of hiring individuals from target populations, such as returning residents or those with limited English proficiency.
- **Mitigating Hiring Biases:** WSD works to reduce biases in hiring by promoting practices like blind recruitment, ensuring fair candidate selection.
- **Ongoing Support:** Delegates provide post-placement mentoring and workplace integration support to ensure participants receive continued assistance.
- **Systemic Barrier Removal:** WSD advocates for policy changes to eliminate legal barriers to employment for individuals with arrest and conviction records.
- **Inclusive Hiring:** WSD emphasizes inclusive hiring practices, including creating internship programs for underrepresented populations.
- **Targeted Support:** WSD offers resources and training, including language and cultural competency programs, to help individuals with limited English proficiency access job opportunities.

This overview captures WSD's strategic efforts to define and promote quality jobs, ensure equity, and provide targeted support to underrepresented communities, fostering a more inclusive and prosperous workforce.

MINIMUM WAGE

The WSD is committed to continually increasing funding for all Transitional Jobs Programs to ensure the subsidized wage component meets the requirements set by the Chicago Office of Labor Relations. Beginning on July 1, 2024, the minimum wage in Chicago increased to \$16.20 per hour for employers with four or more employees. WSD is dedicated to securing the necessary resources to support this wage increase, reflecting the ongoing commitment to providing fair and sustainable employment opportunities for all participants.



Figure 2 | DFSS staff and volunteers conduct the Point-In-Time Count.

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

As of January 2024, according to the U.S. Census 2021 American Community Survey's 5-year estimate, approximately 4.2% of households in the United States are limited English-speaking households. In contrast, 8,928,131 households in Chicago, or 7% of households, are limited English-speaking according to the data. This number may even be higher, considering the over 12,000 migrants staying in Chicago shelters as of February 2024.

To better deliver services to Limited English Proficiency (LEP) residents, DFSS prioritizes resources to delegate agencies that are able to meet the needs of individuals whose limited English proficiency restricts their access to opportunity. DFSS delegate agencies provide bilingual staff, interpreters, written and verbal language services, and English language courses for this population.

The DFSS Workforce Services Division is working closely with the New Arrivals Division to connect new arrivals who have recently received work permits with employment and job training. At the same time the WSD is working with its delegate agency network to address some of the primary barriers to employment for new arrivals, including language and transportation barriers.

FUNDING

The WSD delivers vital programs and services to over 2,400 residents on average annually. The WSD currently funds a total of 50 agencies for workforce development, including the operation of 5 Community Re-entry Support Centers. The WSD current base funding, as shown in the table below, stands at \$14.2 million, comprising CDBG, CSBG, Title XX, and Corporate funding.

Funding Source	Total Funding (FY24)
Community Development Block Grant	\$6,785,903
Community Service Block Grant	\$1,116,433
Corporate	\$4,664,338
Title XX Grant	\$1,675,498
Total	\$14,242,172

In addition, DFSS received \$19,054,503 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding towards WSD programming, with \$1.2 million allocated for staffing and \$17.8 million designated for programming, to be encumbered by December 2024. You can see the funding allocation in the table below.

Funding Source	Total Funding (FY22-FY24)
American Rescue Plan – Programming	\$17,775,290
American Rescue Plan – Staffing	\$1,279,213
Total	\$19,054,503



Figure 3 | Workforce Division 2023 All Delegate Quarterly Meeting

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The WSD is a leading funder of workforce service programs in Chicago. In 2023, the division served 2,466. Common barriers to employment that participants experience are lack of state identification or driver's license, income, or transportation; limited work history, employment skills, education, or limited English proficiency; homelessness and housing insecurity; substance use disorders; and mental health issues.

Each program prioritizes services to residents from communities and geographies with high unemployment rates and provides specialized services tailored to an individual's specific barriers to employment.

The Department of Family and Support Services' WSD seeks to improve employment outcomes for Chicago's most vulnerable residents: low-income individuals with limited work skills. Our programs prioritize services to U.S. Veterans, returning residents and system-impacted individuals with arrest and conviction records, residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and residents with limited English proficiency. These residents face significant barriers to securing a job and advancing along their chosen career pathway and often require intensive career navigation and case management support.

These services vary by individual and are delivered through three primary models: Employment Preparation and Placement, Transitional Jobs/Work-based Learning programs, and Industry-Specific Training programs. Working in coordination with a network of community-based organizations and other public partners, the WSD provides Chicago's most vulnerable residents with the resources and supportive services they need to find and retain quality employment that will stabilize them with a source of income, connect them to resources that support their well-being, and empower them to thrive. The division is increasingly applying an equitable, trauma-informed approach to delivering workforce services at the neighborhood level to advance healthy and supportive communities.

Residents may enroll at any one of the fifty-one DFSS Workforce Services delegate agencies who provide these in-person, direct services. Visit www.cityofchicago.org/fss for a complete list. Residents may also enroll online at <https://www.risekit.com/dfss>, and learn more about city-wide Reentry Resources at <https://www.chicago.gov/reentry>.



Figure 4 | Briana Brewer, a Career Grow Chicago participant, at the PepsiCo Headquarters.

WORKFORCE PROGRAMS MODELS

CORE PROGRAMS

Employment Preparation and Placement

The Employment Preparation and Placement (EPP) programs are intended to ensure that participants are ready to enter the workplace and have the skillset they need to stay employed. Agencies implementing these programs recruit clients that are out of work or under-employed, provide them with the necessary job readiness training to help them to obtain and retain a job, and then provide on-going support as needed through at least 180 days of employment. EPP services include intake of eligible participants, comprehensive assessment, case planning and case management services, job readiness training, job placement services, and follow-up retention services. In 2023, over 1,350 individuals engaged in the Employment Preparation and Placement program. This turnout was just below our anticipated outcomes, demonstrating the program's considerable reach and impact in serving our community.

Industry-Specific Training

The Industry Specific Training (IST) program focuses on specific industries that offer employment opportunities with clear pathways to progressively higher skill and wage levels within the industry. Programs are developed in tandem with employers or groups of employers, to address their specific workforce needs. IST programs offer job seekers a unique training experience in various high-growth industries, like hospitality, transportation, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and information technology. In 2023, our Industry-Specific program demonstrated substantial participation, with over 340 individuals actively involved. This achievement surpassed expectations, further underscoring the program's success in providing targeted training and employment opportunities within specific industries.

Transitional Jobs Program

Transitional Jobs are also known as work-based learning programs. These are time-limited, subsidized employment opportunities coupled with intensive wraparound services and skills development, designed to support jobseekers who lack a competitive work history and/or knowledge of the workplace necessary to obtain employment. These programs allow participants to earn an income, gain real-world work experience, develop new job skills, and access the support services they need to overcome their specific barriers to employment. In 2023, the Transitional Jobs Program continued to perform well, with over 766 individuals actively participating. This level of engagement was on trend with our expected outcomes, indicating the program's consistent effectiveness in providing valuable opportunities for community members.

Neighborhood Clean-up Program

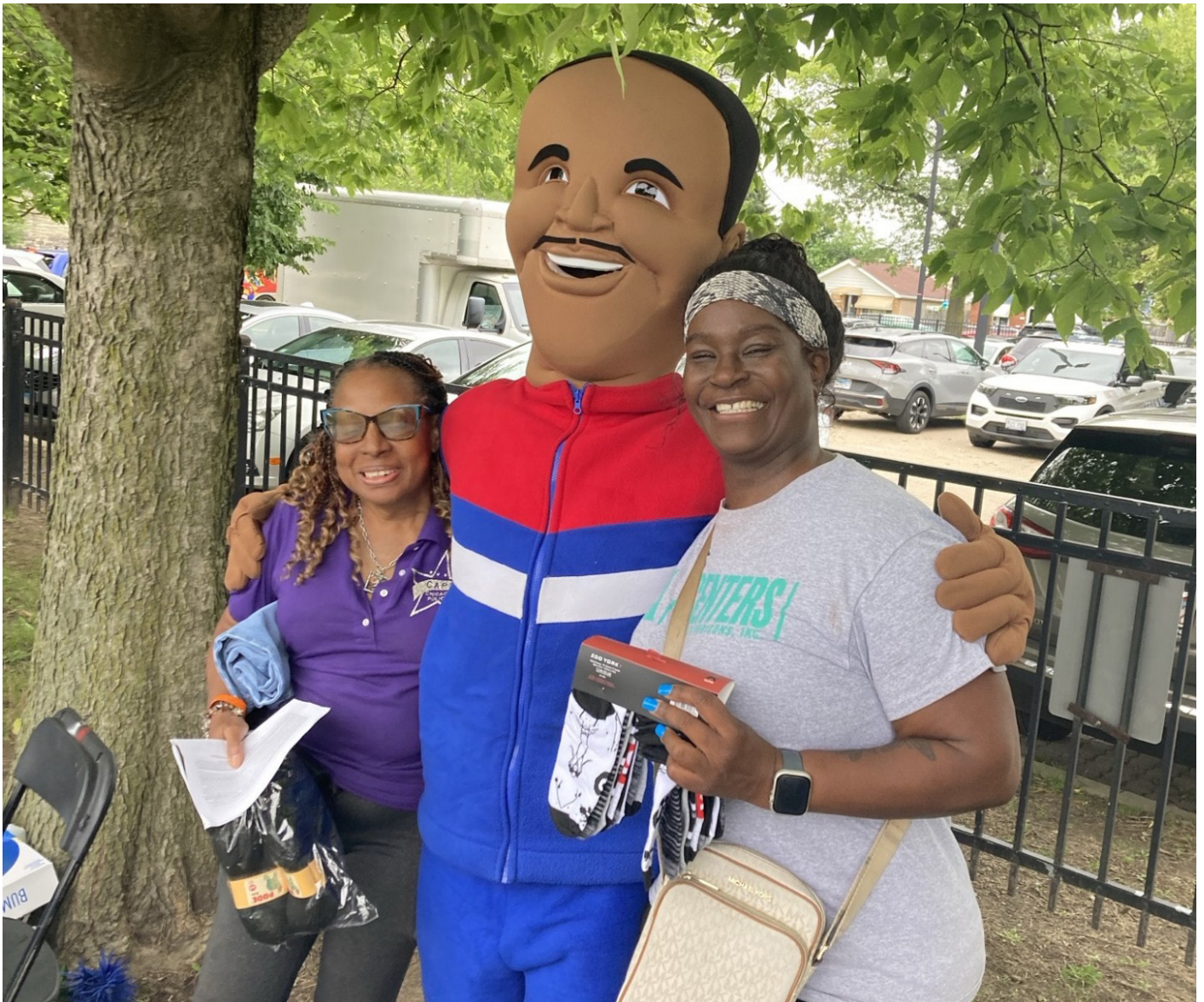
Collaborating with the Department of Streets and Sanitation, DFSS delegate the Safer Foundation spearheads the Neighborhood Clean-up program. This initiative places a strong emphasis on managing alley vegetation, clearing debris from alleys and vacant lots, and facilitating snow removal. The program has been allocated a total budget of \$2,103,032 with an initial enrollment target of 112 individuals and an actual participation rate of 77 in 2023. Additionally, 75% of the planned job placements have been successfully completed as of August 2024.

Transitional Jobs Program with Chicago Animal Care & Control (CACC)

The Workforce Services Division joined forces with CACC to launch a transformative jobs program catering to returning residents. This initiative empowers participants to both earn income and hone new job skills. Leveraging a budget of \$450,108, the program has placed 85% of the targeted number of participants.

Title XX Programs

The Workforce Services Division leverages Title XX funds, totaling \$1,675,498, to support two pivotal programs: Social Adjustment, Rehabilitation, and Employability Development, led by the Safer Foundation, and the Alternative Schools Network. These initiatives offer comprehensive assistance to adult returning residents, including case management, access to substance abuse counseling, tailored treatment plans, and a suite of supportive services. The primary goal is to establish stability in their lives and facilitate their smooth transition into employment programs. There has been remarkable success in the DARE program, as 735 participants have been enrolled out of a planned 564, with 436 successful placements out of an anticipated 408. Meanwhile, the Challenge program has enrolled 307 enrollees out of an anticipated 300, with 385 individuals linked to additional needed services.



ARPA-FUNDED PROGRAMS

Career Grow Chicago Apprenticeship Program

The Career Grow Chicago (CGC) program, established by DFSS and City Colleges of Chicago, assists non-traditional adult learners to advance in their careers by providing a variety of short-term certificate programs with hands-on learning components as well as pathways to work-based learning opportunities and apprenticeships. Students earn certifications in job-specific industries and gain access to these industries through City Colleges' Transportation, Distribution, & Logistics (TDL) & Adult Education (AE) programming. The TDL program connects students to in-demand employment opportunities including Forklift Operations, CDL-A & B, and Supply Chain Management. The AE program connects students to Construction Masonry, Childhood Development, Culinary Arts & Basic Nurse Assistant opportunities, among others.

In addition to the hands-on learning and certifications, students receive a series of supportive services facilitated by an assigned Career Grow Chicago Success Coach.

Community Reentry Support Centers

The Division funds five Community Reentry Support Centers (CRSCs). CRSCs provide a central location for returning residents and system-impacted individuals with arrest and conviction records to call and receive the support services needed to transition back into their communities and the workforce. Services offered include education, training, mentoring, support groups, linkage to counseling for substance use and mental health treatment, linkage to housing assistance, emergency housing and food assistance, employment assistance, strategies for presenting criminal backgrounds to employers, information on sealing or expunging criminal records, family reunification and child-support assistance. In 2023 the CRSCs received 10,167 calls. We found that 3,859 of the total calls to the CRSCs were focused on employment assistance. Contact information for the five Community Re-Entry Support Centers is listed below.

Chicago Community Re-Entry Support Centers

Centers for New Horizons

945 W 69th St
Chicago, IL 60621
(773) 373-5700

Howard Area Community Center

7648 North Paulina St / 11200 South State St
Chicago, IL 60626 / 60628
(773) 332-6772

Safer Foundation Welcome Center

808 S. Kedzie Ave
Chicago, IL 60612
312-956-9612 or 312-953-7549

Community Assistance Programs

11717 S. Halsted St
Chicago, IL 60628
(773)846-6383

Teamwork Englewood

815 West 63rd St, 2nd Floor
Chicago, IL 60621
(773) 488-6600



Figure 5 | The Safer Foundation, a DFSS WSD delegate, tables at a Community Event

To speak with a reentry navigator or to schedule an appointment at one of our Community Reentry Support Centers, call 2-1-1, visit <https://211metrochicago.org/> or go in person to the nearest facility. Residents may also be referred via any one of the DFSS workforce partner agencies. Go to: www.cityofchicago.org/fss for a complete list. Online enrollment is available at <https://www.risekit.com/dfss>.

RiseKit

In 2021, DFSS piloted a partnership with RiseKit to help Chicago residents access DFSS workforce services and connect to job opportunities. RiseKit is an online platform linking job seekers to employers, workforce supports, and case management. Building on the best practices and lessons learned from the pilot, DFSS is currently partnering with RiseKit in fiscal year 2024 to continue helping Chicago residents from DFSS priority communities navigate their way through Chicago’s workforce service ecosystem to find quality job opportunities with living wage and family sustaining wage employment.

SPRING Forward (Selective Pre-Release for Intensive Navigation Support Going Forward) Reentry and Employment Navigation Pilot Program

The SPRING Forward re-entry and employment navigation program serves recently released returning residents with employment navigation services. This program will support up to 400 individuals through December 2025, returning to Chicago from Cook County Department of Corrections (CCDOC) and

IDOC (Illinois Department of Corrections) with wrap-around reentry and employment services that facilitate their access to quality employment opportunities to build their stability, support their well-being, and empower them to thrive. SPRING Forward integrates workforce training with 24 weeks of subsidized work-based learning experiences. Since its launch in August 2023 through June 2024, the SPRING Forward re-entry program, through our delegate agency partner Cara Collective, has helped to house nearly 200 individuals through this initiative. At least 229 participants have completed training with 51 clients currently enrolled in the transitional jobs component of the program. In addition, 101 participants have been hired for permanent jobs.



MEASURABLE GOALS

Data-Driven Strategic Framework and Goals

The DFSS Workforce Services Division employs a data-driven approach to enhance workforce services, focusing on three key outcomes: enrollment, job placement quality, and job retention. The strategy includes targeted outreach, personalized participant assessments, and building strong employer connections. Success is measured through Strategic Framework Goals that guide our planning, development, and execution.

Key Goals and Outcomes

- Job Placement and Retention:

Goal: Achieve a 60% placement and 30-day retention rate for participants in job readiness programs. The 2023 actual rate was 37%. To address this, we are providing targeted support to delegates, enhancing program components, and focusing on accurate data capturing to refine strategies and improve outcomes.

Goal: Achieve a 40% retention rate for participants employed for 90 days. The 2023 actual rate was 55%. This positive trend reflects effective support systems. We will analyze this data to identify best practices, continue supporting delegates, and maintain data accuracy.

- Targeted Populations:

Goal: Ensure 75% of participants in job readiness programs come from priority populations. The cumulative rate for 2023 was 61%. This figure, achieved through focused outreach and recruitment, will steer ongoing strategies, assist delegates in improving outreach, and underscore the need for accurate data capture.

Goal: Ensure 75% of participants placed into employment come from priority populations. The 2023 actual rate was 49%. This highlights the need for enhanced outreach. The WSD is supporting delegates in improving recruitment strategies to achieve better representation, with accurate data tracking to monitor progress and make necessary adjustments.

- Wage Goals:

Goal: Ensure 90% of participants receive wages at or above the City minimum wage. The 2023 actual rate was 99%. This surpasses WSD's goal, demonstrating the program's success in securing competitive wages for participants.

Continuous Improvement and Integration: The division is committed to growth and enhancement through effective data capture. WSD is integrating interview outcomes and experiences for specialized programs like CACC and Neighborhood Cleanup (NCU), which pipeline into city employment and support returning residents. The initial target for this integration is set at 30%, with potential refinement as more data is gathered. This approach will eventually expand across the larger portfolio.

Enhanced Measurable Goals: WSD is also enhancing the measurable goals by tracking the impact of outreach and recruitment efforts on enrollment, placement, and retention. Additionally, WSD will monitor how delegates support participants through case management and wraparound services, ensuring a comprehensive approach to workforce development.

This overview highlights the strategic use of data to drive program success, address challenges, and continuously improve our services for the benefit of participants and the community.



DFSS EQUITY AND RACIAL JUSTICE ACTION PLAN

From 2022-2023, key DFSS staff members participated in the City of Chicago's Office of Equity and Racial Justice cohort with the goal to develop a Racial Equity Action Plan. The cohort utilized data to formulate a plan that focuses on Equitable Service Delivery for Returning Residents Citywide. Collected data highlighted the root cause and barriers that returning residents encounter to find, secure, and maintain entry level jobs. The Racial Equity Action Plan lays out a multi-year strategy, and DFSS will provide updates on this work.

As a part of the Racial Equity Action Plan, DFSS developed a priority around workforce and reentry services that emphasizes more in-depth collaboration internally and externally and evaluates how best to assist Chicago's most vulnerable returning residents through community engagement. As a part of this priority, staff conducted a reentry survey that helped inform the action items written into the plan, which the department is implementing over the next several years. The Racial Equity Action Plan is available online here: <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/office-of-equity-and-racial-justice/home/racial-equity-action-plans.html>.

In general, the WSD uses an equity lens in evaluating its programs and services by focusing on outputs designed to address economic mobility challenges and outcomes that indicate an improved quality of life. The division seeks to partner with community-based organizations and nonprofit service providers with experience in helping the City's most vulnerable residents develop the skills and access the resources required to build stability, support their well-being, and empower them to thrive economically. Our goal is to fund employment preparation services and job training programs that help participants holistically regardless of their race, ethnicity, arrest and conviction record, geography, or orientation.



Figure 6 | DFSS and delegate staff at the 2024 Howard Area Center Second Chance Month event

2024 AND BEYOND – OPPORTUNITIES

PARTNERSHIP WITH CCDOC AND IDOC

DFSS has solidified a formal partnership with both the Cook County Department of Corrections (CCDOC) and the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), marking a significant stride towards effective reentry initiatives. DFSS will maintain regular engagement with these partners, actively seeking out novel avenues to connect clients with vital services and workforce opportunities prior to or immediately after their release. This approach ensures a well-coordinated transition. This commitment involves monthly meetings, engaging delegates within correctional facilities and transitional housing sites, and fostering a seamless referral process directly from CCDOC and IDOC. In line with these efforts, DFSS will persist in collaborative ventures with the Mayor's Office Director of Reentry and other key local, county, and state reentry stakeholders, fostering a comprehensive and cohesive support network. DFSS looks forward to this new opportunity to provide a smoother transition into the workforce for returning residents.

STANDARDIZATION OF PROGRAM RATES

The Employment Placement and Preparation program currently operates on a performance-based structure, unlike the Industry-Specific Training Program and Transitional Jobs Program, which use line-item-based methods. This difference has led to inconsistencies in delegate-reported achievements, funding awards, reimbursements, and enrollment/placement goals, resulting in disparities in payment, commitment, and overall performance.

In preparation for the new 2026 contracting period, in 2025 the Workforce Services Division will refine its reimbursement structure. This change aims to optimize resource allocation and improve the ability to manage funding effectively. The focus is on positioning delegates for success and prioritizing client outcomes. WSD has conducted rigorous internal evaluations and gathered valuable feedback through an in-depth experience survey to ensure fair compensation and effective support.

Recognizing the importance of a broad view of the workforce landscape, DFSS is implementing strategic changes to strengthen the entire ecosystem and enhance overall system performance. The goal is to create positive impacts across the workforce sector, not to highlight distinctions among agencies.

These initiatives are carefully timed to align with the 2025 Request for Proposal (RFP) cycle, ensuring that organizations have the necessary information well in advance to position themselves for success in an evolving landscape.

In line with these objectives, the new recommendation entails setting a target of placing 60% of enrolled clients. This strategic approach allows agencies more flexibility and time for quality interactions, ultimately resulting in higher-quality placements and improved retention rates. The standardized rates are derived from a meticulous process, considering enrollment and placement standards, outcome data, and the imperative shift towards quality case management.

PARTNERING WITH THE MAYOR'S OFFICE DIRECTOR OF RE-ENTRY

The City of Chicago recently hired a new Director of Re-entry within the Mayor's Office. The Director of Re-entry will work in alignment with the county, state, and federal government and in partnership with other stakeholders to improve the lives of returning residents across Chicago. The Workforce Services Division will work in partnership with the Director of Re-entry to bring greater awareness to the needs of returning residents and build capacity for addressing those needs. Through their position within the Mayor's Office, they will support DFSS and returning residents through advocacy for policy changes, cultivating new funding opportunities, and bringing together stakeholders across the spectrum of supports to maximize our reach. They will also initiate conversations with city departments and sister agencies to create more pathways to employment with the City of Chicago for returning residents and establish more transitional job training programs in partnership with DFSS, similar to the Neighborhood Clean Up Program with the Department of Streets and Sanitation and the Kennel Cleaning Program with Animal Care and Control collaborations with DFSS.

Do You or Someone You Know Have an Arrest or Conviction Record? Are You Looking to Build a Career or Advance Your Skills?

SAFEER Foundation is one of the nation's largest providers of employment support services for people with arrest & conviction records, and we are a Community Reentry Support Center in partnership with DFSS.

Our Services

- Stabilization & Support
- Counseling & Wellness Services (substance use counseling/therapy)
- Job Readiness & Placement
- Industry Certification & Training
- GED Preparation & Testing

Contact Us

844.442.2227
808 S. Kedzie
Chicago, IL 60612

We're Open

Monday through Friday
8:30 am to 5:00 pm

DFSS
Department of Family & Social Services

"Working with community partners, we connect Chicago residents and families to resources that build stability, support their well-being, and empower them to thrive."

50 YEARS of experience around people with records
5,000 CLIENTS prepared for work each year
400+ employment partners

2024 AND BEYOND – CHALLENGES

PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY AND FEDERAL FUNDING EXPIRATION IN 2025

The WSD has successfully expanded services and programs using federal relief funding and CRP investments, set to last through 2025. However, once this funding expires, these expanded programs may sunset, potentially reducing the availability of services and workforce development opportunities for those in need.

To address this, the division is actively evaluating the impact of the funding expiration while standardizing practices for Community Reentry Support Centers traditionally funded by local dollars. Additionally, WSD is exploring alternative funding sources to sustain these centers and other reentry programs. DFSS will continue to seek new funding opportunities and advocate for sustainable support from state and federal sources to bridge the gap and maintain essential services.

INCREASING PARTICIPANT EMPLOYMENT RETENTION

The WSD recognizes that many program participants served by workforce delegates have challenges and needs that impact employment retention rates. Some of the main challenges and needs are low education attainment, limited work history and skillset, access to affordable childcare, and family/home dynamics. Compounding workers' skill problems, access to reliable transportation to employment located relatively far away from the geographic neighborhoods where most participants reside also impacts employment retention.

Though not exhaustive, this list represents a few of the strategies that the WSD is using to improve retention across programs. The division will work with community partners in building a strategy that focuses on:

- **Pre- and post-employment case management:** This includes goal setting, career-planning, and help address personal issues that are affecting employment status.
- **Improving current work skills:** This includes upskilling and educational support, empowering participants to align their competencies with the evolving demands of the industry.
- **Utilization of labor market intermediaries:** This includes liaising with local businesses to connect participants to more job opportunities.
- **Creating employer designed career pathways:** This includes collaborating with local employers to identify gaps and training needs.

The WSD's goal is to improve less-skilled individuals' access to better employers and provide training to improve the quality of the "match" between employers and potential employees. Providing participants with comprehensive pre- and post-workforce supports and case management will prepare participants to seek employment opportunities that align with their interests, skillset, and personal circumstances. By addressing these challenges and leveraging the support and resources needed, we can enhance participant employment retention and empower individuals to achieve sustainable success in the workforce. In order to be able to continue this work, additional funding will be needed to fully support these programs.

ADDRESSING THE BENEFITS CLIFF

The term benefits cliff refers to an unanticipated decrease in public benefits that can result from a small increase in earnings. This issue can prevent people from achieving financial independence. Driven by the state of the economy and inflation many residents leverage dual income, including public benefits and work wages to support themselves and their families. Fear of losing benefits can force families to make hard decisions that impact their employment goals. This is detrimental to their long-term stability and to the employer's ability to hire and retain employees. The WSD understands the imbalance between public benefits and employment. WSD will continue to work with the Office of the Mayor and community partners to identify ways to better support participants that receive public benefits. An opportunity exists to narrow that gap between those that receive public benefits and their access to employment opportunities that do not impact the benefits they receive. This will be achieved by:

- Maximizing employment opportunities for low-income individuals.
- Creating extended program models that support growth over time versus short term employment goals and outcomes.
- Promoting and creating efficiencies in government systems through better intergovernmental communication.
- Aligning eligibility levels for public benefits and seeking exemptions when appropriate.



Figure 3 | DFSS staff at the 2024 Second Chance Summit

EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS



The Community Based Organization Collective (CBO) has organized 16 non-profit organizations that are working together to effect systems change and to increase employment of Chicago's South and West Side residents. The CBO Collective seeks to align corporate demand with a collective workforce development approach and provide employers with a central point of access for local talent that face barriers to employment.



The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (The Partnership) is a collaborative organization between the City of Chicago and Cook County, navigating the public workforce system through funding from both federal and philanthropic resources. The goal of The Partnership is to broaden the reach and impact of workforce development services for both employers and job seekers in a sector-based driven approach. The Partnership is one of the largest workforce development systems in the nation and supports those looking for demand driving job opportunities. The Partnership oversees a network of more than 90 community-based organizations, American Job Centers, satellite sites, and sector-driven centers. On average, The Partnership helps place 7,000 to 10,000 residents in permanent employment each year. Since its inception, The Partnership has helped place approximately 100,000 individuals in permanent employment; collaborated with more than 2,000 employers; and administered more than \$471 million in federal and philanthropic funds.



Chicago Jobs Council (CJC) is a coalition that focuses on advocating for policies that help shape the workforce to be more equitable for all Chicagoans. Pushing for the reduction of transportation barriers, enhancing alternative business models, and partnering with various organizations across the city, CJC is involved at all stages of the workplace. CJC also provides a resource exchange for workforce programs. Tools provided include workforce development funding, provider directory, publications catalog, and data regarding employment.



The Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance envisions an equitable and prosperous Chicagoland built by employer, worker and community collaborations. Its mission is to foster these efforts, and to help ensure their impacts reduce racial disparities in employment and earnings.



Cook County Department of Corrections (CCDOC) is one of the largest single-site jails in the country. The mission of the Cook County Department of Corrections is to ensure the safety of the residents, correctional staff, and individuals in custody of Cook County. They provide a central location for screening and classification of all defendants and a safe, secure, humane, positive, efficient and constitutionally operated corrections department with a highly qualified, well-trained and dedicated staff. The goal of this developing partnership is to take a proactive approach in assisting and connecting returning residents housed at CCJ to services pre-release to reduce recidivism and increase self-sustainability.



Chicago Continuum of Care: The WSD is a member of the Employment Task Force of the Chicago Continuum of Care. The primary goal of the Employment Task Force is increasing the numbers of individuals that exit the homeless services system with employment income. A main area of focus is improving the connections between housing-related services and workforce services. There is a critical need to improve and expand services to job seekers experiencing homelessness and housing instability.



**ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT
OF CORRECTIONS**

Illinois Department of Corrections has approximately 29,000 incarcerated individuals in 27 facilities across the state and 20,300 returning residents on community supervision. IDOC serves justice in Illinois and increases public safety by promoting positive change for those in custody, operating successful reentry programs, and reducing victimization. Currently, the WSD is in the ideation and collaboration phase with IDOC program staff to identify and develop a pre-release referral process and pathway to workforce programs and wraparound supports for those that transition from IDOC to CCJ to serve the remaining months of their sentence. The goal of this developing partnership is to take a proactive approach in assisting and connecting returning residents to services pre-release to reduce recidivism and increase self-sustainability.



Illinois Justice Project (ILJP) is a continuation of the Justice and Violence Group at Metropolitan Strategies and engages in criminal justice reform efforts that promote policies that will make our communities safer and reduce recidivism among youths and adults. ILJP advances policies and practices that reduce violence, decrease prison recidivism and make the justice system more equitable. Members of the Illinois Reentry Council provided input and recommendations for DFSS's new SPRING Forward pilot.



Northwestern Medicine is dedicated to employing staff that are as diverse as the patients we serve. Their inclusive employment recruitment system engages job seekers from all walks of life regardless of their background or circumstance(s). As a result, individuals seeking employment at Northwestern Medicine must be comfortable interacting respectfully with diverse populations.

City Partnerships

CITY PARTNERSHIPS

City agencies partner with DFSS's WSD to create job and training opportunities. These agencies provide valuable experience to clients that can lead to permanent employment.



Chicago Animal Care and Control protects public safety and ensures the humane care of animals through sheltering, pet placement, education and animal law enforcement.



The Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR) is charged with enforcing the Chicago Human Rights Ordinance and the Chicago Fair Housing Ordinance. The Commission investigates complaints to determine whether discrimination may have occurred and uses its enforcement powers to punish acts of discrimination. Under the City's Hate Crimes Law, the agency aids hate crime victims. CCHR also employs proactive programs of education, intervention, and constituency building to discourage bigotry and bring people from different groups together.



Chicago Department of Aviation (CDA) administers all aspects of Chicago's two major airports: O'Hare and Midway International Airports. In addition to managing world class airports in Chicago, the CDA is one of the regional leaders in business, employment and sustainability.



The Department of Streets and Sanitation has District and Ward Sanitation Offices throughout the city responsible for coordinating local garbage pick-up, sanitation code enforcement, snow removal operations and other services. District and ward superintendents monitor their sections of the city for any non-sanitation bureau services that might be needed, reporting these to the appropriate bureau or outside agency for attention. DSS also handles collections for the Blue Cart Recycling Program. More than one million tons of garbage and recyclables are collected annually. In addition to keeping Chicago's alleys clean, DSS is responsible for coordinating street sweeping efforts.



City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) provides workforce training and programming for students. Industry-specific training is a crucial part of CCC's mission, ensuring that students are prepared to enter the workforce in their designated field and will retain employment.



Chicago Transit Authority offers the Second Change program. This nationally recognized program that provides job skills and career opportunities to Chicago residents struggling with reentry into the workforce. The program tries to address barriers that non-violent ex-offenders often face when trying to enter the workforce through a wide range of training, education, mentoring, and networking. Since 2011, 1,830 have been hired and 517 Chicagoans have been hired permanently by the CTA.



The Interagency Reentry Council convenes City Departments, sister agencies, and community partners with the shared goal of promoting positive reentry outcomes for Chicago residents returning from incarceration and jail. This first-of-its-kind interagency Reentry Council was created in response to the recommendations made by the multi-sector Returning Residents Working Group made up of community leaders, advocates, and residents with lived experience, convened by Mayor Lightfoot in 2021 to shape the City's policy and programmatic agenda around healthcare, workforce development, and housing access to better support returning residents. The Council uses the recommendations made in the (<https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/mayor/PDFs/ReentryReport.pdf>) as the cornerstone for its work and is working to implement those recommendations throughout City Government and its sister agencies.

2024 WORKFORCE DELEGATE AGENCIES

A Safe Haven Foundation	Metropolitan Family Services
African American Christian Foundation	Midwest Asian Health Association (MAHA)
Association House of Chicago	National Latino Education Institute
Center For Changing Lives	New Moms, Inc.
Centers for New Horizons, Inc.	North Lawndale Employment Network
Chicago Commons Association	Phalanx Family Services
Chicago Horticultural Society dba Chicago Botanic Garden	Podar Learning Center
Chicago Urban League	Polish American Association
Chicago Women in Trades	Safer Foundation
Chinese American Service League, Inc.	Skills for Chicagoland's Future
Chinese Mutual Aid Association, Inc.	St. Leonard's Ministries
Community Assistance Programs	Teamwork Englewood
Covenant House Illinois, Inc	The CARA Program
Employment & Employer Services, Inc.	The Catholic Bishop of Chicago - St. Sabina Church
Erie Neighborhood House	The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who are Blind or Visually Impaired
Featherfist	The Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago, Inc.
Goodwill Industries of Metropolitan Chicago, Inc.	The Hana Center
Greater West Town Community Development Project	The Hope Center Foundation
Growing Home Inc.	The Inner Voice Incorporated
Heartland Human Care Services, Inc.	The Salvation Army
Howard Area Community Center	Travelers & Immigrants Aid's Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights
Inspiration Corporation, Chicago	Westside Health Authority
Jane Addams Resource Corporation	YWCA Metropolitan Chicago
Le Penseur Youth & Family Services, Inc.	
McDermott Center dba Haymarket Center	

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY NETWORK (ION)

Innovation and Opportunity Network (ION) is a national, regional, state, and local alliance that provides technical assistance, information sharing, and training to implement the vision of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The network is composed of a community of practitioners, industry leaders, partners, planners, program staff, and stakeholders that strive for system improvement, capacity building, and excellence in the public workforce system. <https://ion.workforcegps.org/>

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY LIVABLE WAGE CALCULATOR

DFSS is committed to advocating for meaningful increases in the minimum wage to ensure residents' thriving livelihoods. While acknowledging the positive step taken by the City of Chicago with its 2022 minimum wage hike, it's essential to consider the MIT Livable Wage Calculator for a more comprehensive perspective. As demonstrated by the chart, sustaining a life above the poverty line in Cook County in 2024 requires an hourly wage of at least \$23.69. This data underscores the importance of continued efforts to establish fair wages that truly enable individuals to prosper and enhance their overall well-being.

I Adult	I Adult, 1 Child	I Adult, 2 Child	I Adult, 3 Child
\$23.69/hour	\$41.29/hour	\$53.22/hour	\$67.75/hour

More information can be found here: <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/17031>.

OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES (OSERS)

The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) supports programs that help educate children and youth with disabilities and provides for the rehabilitation of youth and adults with disabilities. Programs that assist in workforce development include Transition Work-Based Learning Model Demonstrations (TWBLMD) and Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JDVRTAC). <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/index.html>

US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education administers and coordinates programs that are related to adult education and literacy, career and technical education, and community colleges. In Career and Technical Education, the department administers state formula and discretionary grant programs, provides assistance to states to improve program quality, and establishes national initiatives that help states implement rigorous career and technical education programs. <https://www.ed.gov/>

US DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

As an organization with diverse functions, the U.S. Department of Labor carries out its mission through a number of offices and agencies. These are organized into major program areas and headed by an Assistant Secretary or other official. The mission of The US Department of labor is to foster, promote, and develop the welfare of the wage earners, job seekers, and retirees of the United States; improve working conditions; advance opportunities for profitable employment; and assure work-related benefits and rights. <https://www.dol.gov/>



4 Staff from DFSS and delegate agencies participate in the 2023 Quarterly Meeting.



Brandie V. Knazze, Commissioner

Frankie Shipman-Amuwo, Managing Deputy Commissioner

Mark L. Sanders, II, Deputy Commissioner, Workforce and Human Services

Trenity K. Dobbey, Manager of Family and Support Programs

Kourtnee Palamore, Manager of Family and Support Programs

Brandon Castleberry, Project Manager, Career Grow Chicago

Cyndi Rivera, Project Manager, SPRING Forward

Juan Cruz, Project Coordinator

Rhonda Anderson, Project Coordinator

Jasmina Marquez, Project Coordinator

