



# the power to prevent

PREVENT CHILD ABUSE ILLINOIS  
NEWS AND EVENTS

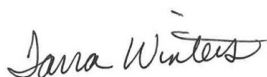
## a note from our Executive Director



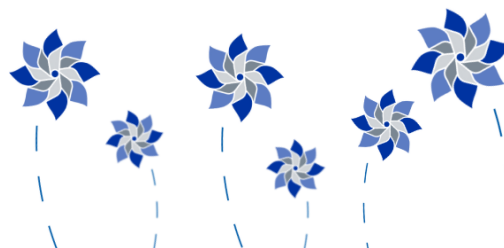
Dear Friends,

PCA Illinois has been very busy over the past few months **delivering trainings, facilitating prevention activities, and participating in events** taking place across the state. We are grateful for the opportunity to connect with professionals, partners, parents, and communities who share a commitment to strengthening families and supporting children.

Thank you for being part of this work alongside us. Whether you attended a training, partnered on an event, supported a family, or helped raise awareness in your community, your efforts make a difference. **We appreciate your continued support of PCA Illinois** and look forward to continuing this work together.



Tarra Winters  
Executive Director  
Prevent Child Abuse Illinois



# news at PCA Illinois

## Child Safety Foundation Trainings!



Several PCA Illinois staff are now trained in Darkness to Light's **Child Safety Foundation** trainings. Our Southern Region Prevention Specialist, **Rachel Chruszczyk** and our Cook County Region Prevention Specialist, **Belinda Farr**, recently became trained facilitators to provide these additional trainings. Our Northern Region Prevention Specialist, **Jennifer Samartano**, is also available to provide these trainings. Our Central Region Prevention Specialist, **Abby Behrens** will be certified in June!



**Child Safety Foundations** is Darkness to Light's newly updated curriculum series designed to equip adults with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to protect children from harm. Rooted in the trusted principles of *Stewards of Children*® and grounded in the latest research, this refreshed series includes expanded content, modernized tools, and actionable strategies for real-world prevention.

The trainings are: From Bystander to Upstander; Preventing Child Sex Trafficking; Consent, Healthy Touch and Boundaries; Conversations About Safety from Abuse.

For more information about these trainings or to **schedule a training**, please contact Jennifer Samartano, [jsamartano@pcaillinois.org](mailto:jsamartano@pcaillinois.org) or reach out to the Prevention Specialist in your region, <https://www.preventchildabuseillinois.org/staff-contacts>

# knowledge is power

# May is Perinatal Mental Health Awareness Month: You Are Not Alone



Becoming a parent is often portrayed as a time of pure joy, but for many families, the journey can also be filled with anxiety, sadness, and overwhelming stress. This May, we observe **Perinatal Mental Health Awareness Month** to shine a light on the mental health of parents during pregnancy and the first year after childbirth.

Perinatal mental health conditions (like postpartum depression and anxiety) are the **most common complication of pregnancy and childbirth**. They are treatable, temporary, and, most importantly, not your fault. If you or someone you love is struggling, know that help is available, and you are not alone.



## Immediate Support Resources

If you need to talk to someone right now, these **free, confidential resources are available 24/7**:

**Postpartum Support International (PSI):** Call or text **1-800-944-4773** for immediate support and resources. (Spanish and English available).  
**988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** **Call or text 988** for free, confidential support for any mental health distress.

## The National Maternal Mental Health

**Hotline:** Call **1-833-943-5746**. This service provides free, confidential support 24/7 before, during, and after pregnancy.



Rachel Chrusczyk  
PSI107113  
Issued: January 28, 2025  
Expires: January 28, 2027

## Learn More with Prevent Child Abuse Illinois

Understanding what you or a loved one is going through is the first step toward healing. To schedule a **Perinatal Mood Disorder training**, please contact **Rachel Chrusczyk** at [rchrusczyk@pcaillinois.org](mailto:rchrusczyk@pcaillinois.org).

# a call to action

## May is National Foster Parent Appreciation Month



May is **National Foster Parent Appreciation Month**, a time to recognize and celebrate the incredible dedication of foster parents who open their hearts and homes to children and youth in need. Foster parents play a vital role in providing safety, stability, and support during some of the most challenging times in a child's life. This month, we honor their compassion, resilience, and **commitment to helping children and families heal, grow, and thrive**.

In Illinois, **thousands of children are in foster care each year**, and while reunification remains the primary goal, many children are still waiting for permanent, loving homes. Illinois Department of Children and Family Services reports that nearly half of foster children are reunified with their families within 12 months, but as of 2024, more than **2,200 children statewide had an adoption goal without a committed caregiver willing to adopt them**. An additional 527 children were already in adoptive placements with signed commitments, highlighting both the ongoing need and the life-changing impact foster and adoptive families make every day.

This month, **we celebrate foster parents for their compassion, resilience, and unwavering commitment** to helping children and families heal, grow, and thrive. To learn more about becoming a foster or adoptive parent in Illinois, please visit **[Become a Foster or Adoptive Parent](#)**.

# prevention in partnership

## From Reporting to Supporting: Building Strong Families Through a Culture of Support.

# From Reporting to Supporting

Building Strong Families  
Through a Culture of Support



PCA Illinois was proud to partner with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services to host a **2-part** webinar series ***From Reporting to Supporting: Building Strong Families Through a Culture of Support*** and ***The SAFE Model at DCFS: Transformation through Policy and Practice***. This two-part virtual training series focused on strengthening families by building supportive systems, shared responsibility, and effective practice that explores the shift from a reporting-focused approach to one rooted in support and prevention. Over 700 of you joined us to learn more about how to support families and how you can connect them with support programs!

Check out our [YouTube channel](#) to watch the recording of the webinar [From Reporting to Supporting: Building Strong Families Through a Culture of Support](#).

## expanding our impact

### February was Parent Leadership Month

## Celebrating Parent Leadership

Stronger Families. Stronger Communities.



During **Parent Leadership Month in February**, we were proud to celebrate and elevate the vital role parents play in strengthening families and communities.

Throughout the month, we focused on building awareness, skills, and opportunities that help programs more intentionally partner with parents as leaders.

We launched a [new parent leadership training](#), designed to help professionals and organizations better understand how to meaningfully engage parents as partners and decision-makers. We also hosted a [weekly Lunch & Learn series](#), bringing together participants from across the state to explore practical strategies for supporting and elevating parent voice. In total, [more than 500 people participated in these learning opportunities](#), reflecting a strong commitment across Illinois to advancing authentic parent leadership. Check out our [YouTube page](#) to watch the recordings of each webinar!

In partnership with [Raising Illinois](#), we also facilitated important conversations about how programs can embed parent leadership into their work and advocate for parents to have meaningful roles in shaping policies, programs, and services. To support ongoing learning and connection, we launched a [new Parent Leadership webpage](#) that provides resources, tools, and ideas for organizations looking to strengthen this work.

While February provided a dedicated time to highlight these efforts, honoring and supporting parent leadership should happen all year long. We encourage communities, organizations, and systems across Illinois to continue finding meaningful ways to [recognize parents as experts in their own lives and essential leaders in building stronger families and communities](#).

pause to recharge

## Taking Time to Recharge

The work of supporting children and families is meaningful—but it can also be demanding. This space will share simple tips and resources to help promote well-being for ourselves and our peers. Taking time to recharge, check in with colleagues, and support one another helps create healthier workplaces and stronger communities. ❤️



## Check out the Mind-Body Wellness Toolkit from Pillars Community Health

Use this toolkit to access mindbody tips that can help you improve both your physical and mental health, recognizing they are interlinked.

[Mind-Body Wellness Toolkit: Free Printables and Videos | Pillars Community Health](#)

# staff spotlight

## Ash Hamilton

Since joining [Prevent Child Abuse Illinois](#) just a short time ago, [Ash Hamilton](#) has already made a noticeable impact through his creativity, innovation, and passion for outreach. [Serving in a communications and digital media role](#), Ash has helped bring a fresh new energy to the organization's online presence and public engagement efforts.



One of Ash's most visible contributions has been [helping lead the refreshed look and feel of the PCA Illinois website](#). Through updated visuals, cleaner design elements, and a stronger focus on accessibility and storytelling, the website has become a more engaging and user-friendly hub for families, professionals, and community partners across Illinois.

In addition to the website redesign, Ash has played a key role in [expanding the organization's social media reach and engagement](#). From creating dynamic graphics and campaigns to highlighting events, trainings, and community partnerships, his work has helped increase visibility for prevention efforts and strengthen connections with audiences statewide. Whether promoting Child Abuse Prevention Month activities, webinars, or local partner initiatives, Ash's creative approach has [helped bring important conversations about prevention to a broader audience](#).

Though still new to the organization, Ash's impact is already being felt across multiple areas of communication and outreach. [His commitment to creative storytelling and meaningful engagement continues to help amplify the mission of strengthening families and preventing child abuse throughout Illinois](#).

# Centering families through every turn.



## *Our Mission:*

The mission of Prevent Child Abuse Illinois is to prevent child abuse by providing statewide leadership through education, public awareness, support for community initiatives, and advocacy.

## *Our Vision:*

Prevent Child Abuse Illinois envisions an Illinois where all children grow in healthy, nurturing homes and communities free of abuse, neglect, violence, or endangerment of any kind.

## *Our History:*

For more than 35 years, Prevent Child Abuse Illinois has worked to strengthen families by promoting positive childhood experiences and advocating for policies that ensure all children grow up safe.

## SAVE THE DATE!

### Shaken Baby Syndrome

**May 21, 2026**

**10:00am-11:30am**

Via Zoom

Register [HERE](#)

### Family Sex Trafficking and Drugs: What is Happening Behind Closed Doors

**June 9, 2026**

**10:00am-11:30am**

Via Zoom

Register [HERE](#)

### Supporting LGBTQ Youth (The Why and How)

**June 11, 2026**

**12:00pm-1:00pm**

Via Zoom

Register [HERE](#)

### Downtown Springfield Family Funfest

**September 12, 2026**

**11am-3:00pm**

Downtown Springfield, IL

Click [here](#) for more info!

### 2026 Statewide Annual Prevent Child Abuse Conference

**October 22-23, 2026**

BOS Center - Springfield, IL

Click [here](#) for more info!



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