

# From Help to Hope

## Safe from the Start helped Stacey's family to heal and end the cycle of domestic violence



### Meet Stacey Walker

After emerging from a series of physically and emotionally abusive relationships, 37-year-old Stacey found her five children, ages 3 to 17, struggling to cope. Stacey's two oldest children often fought with each other, sometimes violently, and both lacked motivation to work or do well in school. Stacey's middle daughter faced anger issues and was quick to manipulate others, while her two youngest children mimicked the violent behavior of their older siblings.

As a single, working mother, Stacey recognized that her children needed help and sought counseling through McLean County, who referred her to Children's

Home + Aid's Safe from the Start Program. The program provides therapeutic services to Stacey and her children to help them process the dynamics of abuse and build healthy relationships.

Since starting the program in December 2015, Stacey and her children are now closer as a family unit, and she has seen dramatic improvements in each of her children's behavior and emotional well-being. Stacey's oldest son quit smoking, began earning straight A's and contributes to the family income. The anger outbursts that her middle daughter faced are gone, and she now genuinely cares about others without expecting something in return. The two youngest children have improved their behavior and now emulate the positive habits of their older siblings.

Despite how far her family has come, Stacey worries about maintaining the peace and stability her family has enjoyed if they are no longer able to receive Safe from the Start services. Specifically, Stacey fears that, without continued counseling, her middle daughter will revert to her old behavior as she enters high school next year.

#### SAFE FROM THE START

Staff Contact: Jeannie Higdon, [jhigdon@childrenshomeandaid.org](mailto:jhigdon@childrenshomeandaid.org)

Safe from the Start provides children ages zero to five and their families individual and family therapy to recover from the exposure to violence. Safe from the Start programs also create community coalitions to devise strategies to reduce family and domestic violence in the community.

Safe from the Start is the only state-funded program designed to specifically address the impact of exposure to violence on very young children, ages zero to five. The program has not received any public funding since July 1, 2015. Three of the nine programs have completely eliminated services, resulting in 85 families no longer served. Children's Home + Aid has been forced to reduce staff and is now only able to see half of the families it did before 2015. The agency no longer staffs community outreach initiatives to promote awareness of the impact of childhood exposure to violence, which was an essential piece of the Safe from the Start model. Children's Home + Aid is only able to provide counseling to children and families with Medicaid. As a result, many families living in or near McLean County no longer have access to specialized counseling for children who have been exposed to domestic violence. However, we know that exposure to domestic violence transcends socioeconomic status, affecting all levels of income.

Already other families are being denied the life-transforming services Stacey and her children have received. Without a state budget and enough new revenue, even fewer success stories like Stacey's will be possible and, in the long-term, it will cost the people of Illinois more, in both dollars and wasted human potential

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**The Responsible Budget Coalition is made up of more than 300 organizations** throughout Illinois representing human services, health care, education, labor unions, civic organizations and faith communities. **Together, we are calling on Governor Rauner and Illinois lawmakers to pass a responsible budget NOW that raises adequate revenue to fully fund vital services.**