



# Building Equity: Transforming Community Support Systems in Kane County

In Kane County, Illinois, community partners believe a more equitable and fair system benefits every child and family. A transformative initiative is underway to foster equity and efficiency across community support systems. This initiative has identified a crucial need for a more efficient referral and communication system to bolster a comprehensive approach to community support and data.

In their community, IRIS has become a catalyst for building the capacity of local partners to advance equity-building approaches. The initiative is led by a Leadership Team comprising staff from the Kane County Health Department, who spearhead efforts across various sectors. This collaborative approach is rooted in extensive community conversations regarding community needs, vision, data governance, strengths, and opportunities. These conversations have allowed partners to develop a shared language and understanding of practices and resources across sectors.

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## ADVANCING EQUITY THROUGH DATA AND COLLABORATION

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Collaboration is critical to reducing system barriers and ensuring equitable access to services and supports for children and families who experience marginalization based on their race, class, and other identities. The initiative builds upon current community engagement practices, such as parent ambassadors and advisory groups, to include community voice and inform the process.

The adoption of shared referral technology has transformed how nearly 200 organizations leverage data for practice improvements in public health and social services. These organizations represent a broad swath of services, with the primary sectors being Family Support (20%), Behavioral Health (17%), and Concrete Supports (14%). Each organization ensures that their data tells the story of what's happening in their community.

The impact of this work on local partner's practices has been profound. For instance, the Two Rivers Head Start-Community Service Block Grant Program in Aurora, IL, collaborated with Kane County IRIS Leaders to obtain federal funding by utilizing their IRIS data. After joining IRIS, they received an influx of referrals involving housing, utility, transportation, education, crisis/emergency services, and essentials – due to the increased need, their funding was exhausted earlier than expected. Using the de-identified referral reports available through IRIS, the program advocated for and received additional federal Community Service Block Grant funding.

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## IMPACT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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Three years after its launch in 2021, the Kane County IRIS network has made 9,320 referrals on behalf of 4,117 families. During this time, it has used community-led analysis of referral data to develop strategies that address implicit bias in referral processes and overcome barriers to equitable service access. Kane County continues to leverage de-identified community data to understand capacity limitations, identify underserved populations, and explore demographic factors influencing service access.

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This shared data exploration has led to system-wide practice changes, including implementing screening tools designed to remove the impact of implicit bias. The integration of screening tools has been pivotal in determining the types of services needed, ensuring fair access, and reassuring stakeholders about the initiative's ability to respond to changing needs. Additionally, IRIS has significantly improved data collection and analysis capabilities. Since data trends in Kane County align closely with state and national levels, their work provides valuable insights for policymakers and funders seeking to allocate resources more equitably.

As the initiative moves forward, the envisioned next steps include a continued focus on behavioral health services. The process remains iterative, with ongoing efforts to refine systems and ensure equitable access to services for all community members. By prioritizing equity and efficiency, Kane County is paving the way for more inclusive and effective support systems that meet the diverse needs of its community.

Contributors: Mary Orem & Natasha Welsh