

Every child is full of possibility.



**FR1ENDS of the
CH1LDREN**

Generational Change,
One Child at a Time

Chicago

We find the children facing the greatest obstacles.

We help them reach their dreams.

**Every child has hopes and dreams. Every child is full of promise.
Every child needs support to reach their potential.**

We pair kindergartners with paid, professional mentors—called “Friends.” We walk beside them for 12.5 years. No matter what.

There are many children living in Chicago whose ability to thrive is threatened by the trauma they experience due to poverty and violence. Their communities have suffered generations of systemic racism and lack of economic opportunity.

These children are loved. But they often have parents or caregivers who are too overwhelmed – and too disenfranchised from schools and institutions – to provide the supports their children need to achieve their full potential.

We know what happens when trauma goes untreated. Survivors of trauma are at increased risk of dropping out of high school, early parenting, involvement in the juvenile justice system, and poor mental and physical health.

The good news is that trauma is not destiny. Survivors of trauma can heal.

Research shows that a supportive relationship with at least one stable, nurturing, and caring adult can help a child stay on a positive trajectory.

A Friend’s full-time job is to support the social, emotional, and academic development of their youth.

The children in our program learn that they can trust their Friend because Friends are there for them—four hours a week, week after week—from kindergarten through high school graduation. A Friend is a safe and secure relationship, a child’s personal cheerleader, encouraging them when things are going well and supporting them through hardship. A Friend works in all facets of a child’s life, building bridges between home, school, and community.



Friends of the Children offers wrap-around support to children and families.

Social service agencies and schools often don’t communicate with each other. And caregivers, often also victims of trauma, can be distrustful of the systems that are intended to help them.

Our highly-trained, professional mentors place the child at the very center, offering trauma-informed support and building a network of caring adults and services around them.

Friends of the Children is about more than prevention. It’s about possibility.



92% of our youth go on to enroll in post-secondary education, serve our country, or enter the workforce.

Our model works because we make a long-term, in-depth commitment to every child.

Our program is unique because:

ONE | We select the children facing the greatest obstacles.

We partner with schools and referring agencies to identify kindergartners facing the greatest obstacles. This might include families impacted by gun or gang violence, involvement in the criminal justice system, foster care, interpersonal violence in the home, the death of a caregiver, or other traumatizing experiences.

TWO | We employ and train salaried, professional mentors called Friends.

Moving mentorship out of the volunteer realm is key to getting the quality, consistency, and commitment that our children need. Our Friends go through intensive training, both up front and ongoing, to stay on top of the latest practices that are proven to mitigate trauma and build resilience.

THREE | We commit for the long term.

Life is unpredictable and we all need support at different times. This is especially true for people living in unstable circumstances with poverty and violence. We commit to every child from kindergarten through high school graduation to help them through each phase of their development, and to ensure we are there when obstacles arise.

FOUR | We focus on the individual journey of each child.

We work with children and caregivers to create a road map for each child. In addition to promoting healthy relationships and academic success, we help children develop self-awareness and self-love, appreciate their cultural heritage, explore the world, identify their interests, and learn how to set and achieve goals.

FIVE | We work in all facets of a child's life.

Friends spend, on average, 16 one-on-one hours per month (four hours per week) with each child. Friends provide continuity and serve as a link between classroom, home, and community. We advocate for children at school and become someone their family trusts in emergencies.

SIX | We evaluate, measure, and improve.

The presence of a Friend in our children's lives has a ripple effect on their parents, caregivers, siblings, and communities. Independent research funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation recently validated this, and early results from a long-term, randomized control trial funded by the National Institutes of Health, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation support this as well.



We are part of a national network with proven results.



Friends of the Children has been breaking the cycle of poverty for almost 30 years.

We are part of a national network of chapters that started in Portland and are now in 29 cities. Featured in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* and the *Harvard Business Review*, our success and scalability are based on careful strategy, performance management, data, planning, investment, and a relentless commitment to improve.

The Friends of the Children model is founded on the belief that hardship can be overcome as we build protective factors around a child. This includes helping them build nine Core Assets:



Growth Mindset

I love learning and know that my abilities will improve through dedication and effort.



Belonging

I understand who I am, have a place where I feel accepted, and know that my contributions count.



Hope

When I have tough times, I believe it can get better.



Problem Solving

I know how to weigh the pros and cons and make a decision.



Perseverance & Grit

I work hard through challenges and finish what I start.



Self Management

I know how to manage my feelings and take care of myself in a healthy way.



Self Determination

I believe in myself and am able to set goals and achieve them.



Find Your Spark

I use creativity to explore my passions.



Positive Relationship Building

I get along well with others and am able to find people to support me.

Intermediate outcomes pave the way to long-term success.

Friends help youth develop four developmentally appropriate skills in the early elementary years:

Prosocial Development

Help a child develop positive relationships with adults and peers

Friends create opportunities for their youth to interact with new people. They help children practice conflict resolutions skills and they celebrate when youth show concern for others. Friend Aaron plays the board game *Emotional Bingo* with Colson to help him identify his own feelings and those of others.



Building Independence

Empower a child to act, speak, and advocate for themselves

Friends play an important role in helping children develop the habits and skills to be strong, independent individuals. In these early years, this can be as simple as encouraging a child to prepare their own backpack for school, learn how to tell time, and ask for help when they need it. Here's Friend Felix teaching Sam how to tie his shoes.

Self-Awareness

Child can identify who they are, including: their physical needs, emotions, cultural heritage, and interests

Self-love and self-awareness are closely connected and both are vital if our youth are to succeed in life. Friends arranged an outing for their girls to view the Obama portraits on display at the Art Institute of Chicago. Learning that the former President and First Lady are from their own city and of their own heritage helps the girls foster a sense of pride.



Literacy Development

Build a foundation of language and literacy to promote curiosity, learning, and self-esteem

Friends use every opportunity to infuse literacy in their 1:1 time with youth. Depending on the age of the child, they might read a book to a child and then discuss it, or they might have the child read their favorite story aloud. As the kids grow older they use literacy skills to follow their interests, like learning coding or reading about their favorite sports teams. Here's Kanisha reading her favorite book to her Friend.

We build bridges of trust between home, school, and community.



Family and Community Engagement

Every child needs a strong foundation to grow up with the best chance to thrive, including a safe home, good nutrition, and quality health care.

Our Family & Community Engagement Specialists work closely with parents and caregivers to:

- ▶ Empower them to advocate for themselves and their children
- ▶ Connect them to community resources
- ▶ Strengthen their positive parenting skills

Working with Schools and Teachers

Friends form strong relationships with schools and teachers. They advocate for our youth and provide context so that the teachers understand some of the challenges faced by students and their families.



“Three of my children are in the Friends Chicago program. Having these mentors has opened our hearts and changed our lives. They help my kids with school, offer them extracurricular activities, and teach them important values in life.

They’re always there when we need them. It’s more than a program, it’s like another family.”

Cierra

Mother of **Vanessa** (4th grade), **Violet** (2nd grade),
and **VaShaun** (Kindergarten)



“I wish everybody could have a Friend. It’s so important to have a person in your life who you know has your back—no matter what.

Whether you’re at home or school, you know they care about you—and not just you, but your parents, your siblings and your community.”

Melanie Adams

Program Director
Friends of the Children

You can help us harness the power of possibility.



"Friends encourage parents to view schools as partners interested in their child's education and development. We have many examples of parent/teacher conferences and IEP meetings that only happened because a Friend arranged for it. Because of their strong relationships with both the parents and the school administration, Friends are able to de-escalate tensions and keep the conversation focused on the student's well-being and education."

Mrs. Sherisse Freney

Principal, Joseph Kellman Corporate Community School

**We have a proven model, a strong team, and real momentum.
Now all we need is you.**

Friends of the Children-Chicago started in 2018 with just 24 youth. As of spring 2022, we have 72 children and families in our program. Our geographic service area has grown to include Chicago's South and West Sides and by June of 2023 we will be serving 128 children and their families.

There are no quick fixes to the depth of the struggles and barriers faced by the families we serve. We have built relationships and gained the trust of parents, caregivers, and children and we promise to stay by their side for the long term.

Our relationship-based approach has attracted the attention of discerning donors like MacKenzie Scott who recently made a \$1.4 million donation to Friends—Chicago. Government funders have also taken note and we recently received funding through the Cook County Justice Advisory Council, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, and Illinois' Restore, Reinvest, Renew program.

With your support, we can:



Reach More Children

In the next year, we plan to grow from:

- 72 youth and families → 128 youth and families
- 9 Friends → 16 Friends



Increase Our Impact

We will increase the power of our program by continuing to use evidence-based data to drive our efforts and assess our work.



Commit for the Long Haul, No Matter What

Our 12.5-year commitment to each child requires us to ensure our organizational capacity and sustainability for years to come.

**Imagine the possibilities!
Please consider a gift today.**

Together, we can break the generational cycle of poverty in Chicago.

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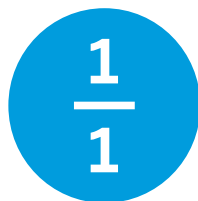
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OUR MISSION

Impacting generational change by empowering youth who are facing the greatest obstacles through relationships with professional mentors—12+ years, no matter what.

PROFESSIONAL MENTORS

Aaron Bolden

Jonathan James

Poshlyn Nicholson

Willie Reedus

Kianna Snow

A'Nesty Tucker

Bobby Vance

Daquana Warren

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SPECIALISTS

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Angel Johnson

LEADERSHIP TEAM

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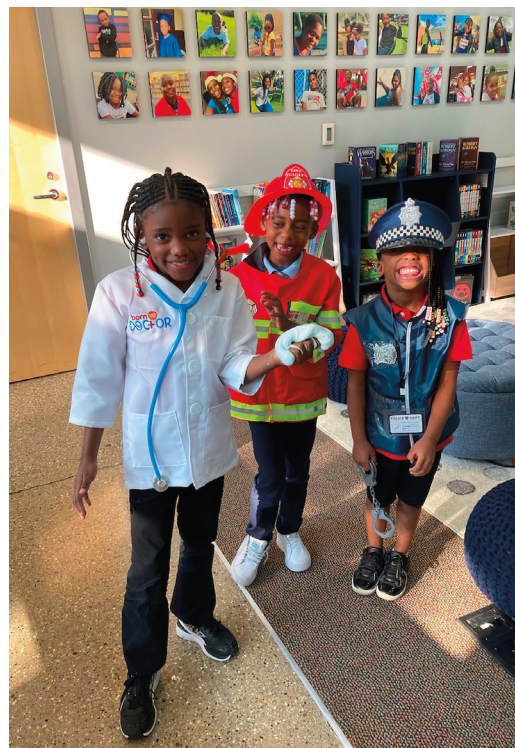
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