



# IMPACT REPORT 2025



PLAYWORKS  
ILLINOIS

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



LETTER FROM  
THE CEO

3

PLAYWORKS  
OVERVIEW

4

IMPACT  
HIGHLIGHTS

5

IMPACT STORY

6

PARTNERSHIP  
STORY

7

PARTNER THANK  
YOU

8

***“Our children are in need of strategies to cooperate and play. Playworks provides opportunities for them to cooperate and transfer skills to classroom and outdoor activities.” ~Playworks Principal***



# LETTER FROM THE CEO

## Reclaiming Joy, Building Community Through Play

Dear Friends,

This year reminded us just how essential play is to the health and development of America's children. Play isn't a break from learning; it's how children connect, grow, and thrive. In a world where our youngest generation is challenged every day by the conditions around them, play remains one of the most effective strategies we have to provide them with joy and fun and positive relationships with each other and adults who care about them.

Schools across the country have been asking big questions: How do we support every child--and adult--with becoming their best selves? How do we help them navigate the world? How do we inspire their academic motivation and community engagement? We know one critical response is that we play together.

Thanks to you, our community of play champions, we brought the power of play to hundreds of thousands of students this year. We saw kids step up as Junior Coaches, conflict on the playground resolved with high-fives and rock-paper-scissors, and teachers breathing easier as recess became a time of joy, not stress.

We trained thousands of educators to create engaging play spaces where every child knows how to get in the game. And we worked hard to ensure that students in our communities had access to safe, meaningful play every day, no matter what.

Research continues to show what we've always known; play strengthens academic performance, peer relationships, mental health, and resilience. Play gives kids the tools they need to navigate life with confidence and compassion.

There's still so much more to do. Too many children still lack access to safe, engaging play. That's why we're not slowing down. We're committed to ensuring every child experiences the joy and power of play, every day.

Thank you for believing in this mission and in the children we serve. You are making a difference by being a member of the Playworks community and advocate for play.

With deep gratitude,



**ELIZABETH CUSHING**

CEO Playworks





## REGION OVERVIEW

### MISSION

Playworks' mission is to improve the health and well-being of children by increasing opportunities for physical activity and safe, meaningful play.

### VISION

Playworks' vision is that one day every child in America will have access to safe, fun, healthy play every day.

### GEOGRAPHIC REACH

Playworks Illinois is proud to provide our programs and services throughout the state of Illinois. We provide our direct service programming to schools primarily in the Chicago metro area, where we are deeply embedded in the school communities and work hands-on with students and educators throughout the academic year. Beyond the metro region, our capacity-building services extend across the entire state, equipping schools, districts, and youth-serving organizations with the tools and training they need to foster safe, engaging play for every child, regardless of location.

### PLAYWORKS ADVISORY BOARD

James Buckley, PricewaterhouseCoopers

Andrew DuVoison, Lyft

Traci Gibbs, Level Agency

Alex Persha, West Monroe Partners

Yasir Safdar, PricewaterhouseCoopers

Giovanni Schelfi, Roland Berger

# IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

## MESSAGE FROM PHASHA SPENCER, OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



As we wrap up an incredible school year, I want to take a joyful pause to say thank you. Because of you, students across our region experienced the magic of play in ways that will stick with them for years to come.

As Executive Director of Playworks Illinois, I'm filled with gratitude for the incredible community of play champions, like you, who made this joyful impact possible. You helped transform recess into a place where high-fives were plentiful, conflicts were solved with rock-paper-scissors, and kids learned how to lead with kindness and confidence. From the cheers

of a Junior Coach leading their first game to the smile of a kindergartener tagging in a new friend, your support made it all possible.

Together, we created inclusive playgrounds where every child felt seen, safe, and ready to play. You've helped build more than games, you've helped build resilient communities where joy is the norm and every student has a chance to shine. This summer, the ripple effect of your support continues. Our team is already hard at work training adults and preparing for next school year so that the power of play never skips a beat.

From all of us at Playworks Illinois, thank you for being part of this joyful movement. The games, growth, and giggles you've helped make happen are changing lives, one high-five at a time.

With boundless gratitude,

Phasha Spencer

Executive Director, Playworks IL



12,343 Students  
Experiencing the  
Power of Play



150 Youth Leaders,  
Junior Coaches in  
the State



28 Schools &  
Community Based  
Organizations

# PLAYING IT FORWARD

## Our Partners Report that Playworks:

- 97%** Increases the number of students that are physically active
- 98%** Helps create an engaging learning environment
- 93%** Helps students manage their own emotions
- 100%** Helps create opportunities for students to play together

## SADLOWSKI'S ALL-STAR PARTNERSHIP

For the past two years, Edward E. Sadlowski Elementary has been an exemplary TeamUp partner with Playworks Illinois, consistently demonstrating what it means to build a culture of safe, healthy, and engaging play.

From the start, Sadlowski's leadership has shown unwavering commitment to the Playworks approach. Their administration has championed the program, fostering strong communication and collaboration between school staff and the Playworks team. Teachers have embraced the model wholeheartedly, filling every Class Game Time slot and bringing full energy and engagement to each session.

A key factor in the success of the partnership has been the school's support for its recess team. By

dedicating weekly time for training and collaboration, Sadlowski has built a strong foundation that helps sustain Playworks systems throughout the year.

There have been many standout moments, but two highlight the school's commitment and culture. At the beginning of the 2023–24 school year, the staff participated in an all-staff Playworks session that brought learning and laughter to life through play. And at the end of each year, the school hosted a Junior Coach Recess Takeover, an event filled with joy and celebration, where Junior Coaches led recess for peers, families, and faculty alike.

We're thrilled to share that Sadlowski will be returning for a third year and we can't wait to see what more we'll accomplish together!



# CELEBRATING A LONGSTANDING CHAMPION OF PLAY: WEST MONROE PARTNERS



Playworks Illinois is proud to recognize West Monroe Partners for nearly a decade of steadfast support and partnership. Since 2016, West Monroe employees have consistently shown up for students—bringing the power of play to life through hands-on volunteerism and financial generosity.

Whether organizing Play Days at schools, assembling Recess Kits, or writing encouraging notes to Junior Coaches, West Monroe's spirit of service has brought joy and inspiration to countless children. Their ongoing commitment helps ensure that all students—regardless of zip code—have access to safe, meaningful play every day.

Looking ahead to the 2025–2026 school year, West Monroe is deepening its investment by sponsoring the Junior Coach Leadership Program, which empowers 4th–8th grade student leaders to build skills like teamwork, empathy, and conflict resolution. West Monroe employees will have three opportunities throughout the year to engage directly with these student leaders during Junior Coach meetings. These dynamic sessions are filled with skill-building, reflection, and of course, play!

The year will culminate with a joyful Recess Takeover, a field day style celebration showcasing the growth, confidence, and leadership of our Junior Coaches. West Monroe volunteers will get a front-row seat to the impact their support has made possible.

Thank you, West Monroe, for your continued partnership and belief in the power of play!





**THANK YOU  
TO OUR  
PARTNERS IN PLAY!**

### **Hive Five Club Members**

James Buckley

Yasir Safdar

### **Our Foundation and Corporate Partners**

ArentFox Schiff

BDO

Dr. Scholl Foundation

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois

Cornerstone Bank

IMC Financial

Roland Berger

Polk Bros. Foundation

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (Chicago)

US Bank Foundation

West Monroe Partners

### **Kickball Teams**

Adler University

ArentFox Schiff

BDO

Buyer's Edge

Cornerstone Bank

E1levation (Chicago Urban League IMPACT Leadership Development Program)

West Monroe Partners