



A Head Start on Energy Cost Savings



Photos courtesy of BCMW Head Start/Early Head Start

Project Summary

BCMW Head Start/Early Head Start

is a non-profit comprehensive child development program that has engaged and prepared children and families for success in school since 1965. The organization offers two programs to income-eligible families in Bond, Clinton, Marion, Washington, and Franklin counties.

The Head Start program enrolls children ages 3 to 5 years old, including children with disabilities, and provides an individual learning plan for each child. Early Head Start serves pregnant women and families with children from birth to three years old and provides

weekly home visits focusing on child development and nutrition.

BCMW Head Start/Early Head Start installed a new roof in the summer of 2021 and planned to install a new HVAC system. Organization leaders had no initial plans to go solar, thinking it would be too expensive. The cost savings through Illinois Solar for All (ILSFA) made going solar possible.

BCMW Head Start/Early Head Start is part of **BCMW Community Services**, a Community Action Agency

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Project Details

- Solar Companies: **Central Road Energy, StraightUp Solar, and Balance Solar, LLC**
- Estimated savings on electricity costs:*
 - First year: **\$7,396 or 65.1%**
 - Total savings: **\$296,196 or 90.9%**
- Eligibility: **Income-Eligible Community**
- Critical Service Provider type:† **After-school provider**

* These savings are based on estimated electricity costs. Since electricity rates are expected to rise over time, BCMW Head Start/Early Head Start's estimated savings also increase over the course of their contract.

† Critical Service Providers are non-profit or public sector entities that offer essential services to income-eligible or environmental justice communities.



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dedicated to empowering people in the region by reducing poverty and strengthening communities.

BCMW Community Services became an ILSFA Grassroots Education organization in 2020. ILSFA Grassroots Education organizations are trusted members of their communities that provide information to income-eligible households on the basics of solar energy and the ILSFA program's benefits and eligibility requirements. BCMW Head Start/Early Head Start followed the standard project application process and did not receive special consideration because of BCMW Community Service's role as a Grassroots Education organization.

The Process

Leaders at BCMW Head Start/Early Head Start noted that the application process was pretty straight forward. BCMW Head Start/Early Head Start provided a year's worth of electric bills for the building.

The representative scheduled a one-hour site assessment to determine site suitability for solar installation and the solar array design process. After design was completed to determine the amount of offset possible, the organization signed a letter of intent, and real effort began to prepare the ILSFA application. To support its application, BCMW Head Start/Early Head Start wrote a Community Engagement Letter detailing its outreach efforts.

Organization leaders also obtained three Community-Based Organization Support Letters from local groups to demonstrate that the community



supported the solar project. Among the documents required, BCMW Head Start/Early Head Start signed the disclosure form and the Purchase Power Agreement. Central Road Energy submitted the application and supporting documents for review by the ILSFA team in July 2021. A month later, ILSFA approved the BCMW Head Start/Early Head Start project. Installation began in March 2022, and the array was activated in May 2022.

The Results

BCMW Head Start/Early Head Start plans to use its solar energy savings to increase current staff wages and hire more staff so it can better serve the children in its programs. "We are excited about the savings," said Sue Castleman, BCMW Community Services Executive Director.

While the savings through ILSFA prove beneficial, the education on solar is an added benefit for the children and families. "The children are learning how the sun can produce energy to turn lights on, fix food, and watch their favorite educational shows," said Maria Koehler, BCMW Head Start/Early Head Start Director.

"For children to grow their minds from such a young age understanding

"Even if one of these students grows up and works to make the environment a healthier place to live in, then it has been a successful endeavor."

- Maria Koehler, BCMW Head Start/Early Head Start Director

the value of what renewable energy can do is priceless. Even if one of these students grows up and works to make the environment a healthier place to live in, then it has been a successful endeavor."

As a result of the savings and the easy application process, BCMW Community Services said they would recommend ILSFA to other non-profit organizations and public facilities that are interested in accessing solar energy.

"The entire process has been such a blessing," Castleman said. "We believe solar is growing tremendously. We are grateful that ILSFA exists so that income-eligible individuals, families, non-profit organizations, and public facilities can access renewable energy."