

Cunningham Children's Home

For the completion of my group's Legacy Project as part of N422 Population and Global Health, we chose the Cunningham Children's Home located at 1301 N. Cunningham Ave, Urbana, Illinois. This organization was founded by Joseph and Mary Cunningham in 1895 and has continued to be a vital resource for the Champaign-Urbana area for the last 130 years (Cunningham Children's Home, 2025). The Cunningham's had a deep commitment to helping children so at its start, they kindly gave the women of the local Methodist Episcopal Church, who are now known as the United Women in Faith, their second home and fifteen acres of land to help care for children in need in Urbana (Cunningham Children's Home, 2025). Initially, the Cunningham Home was used as a safe and reliable place for children to stay who had lost their parents or whose parents were not able to provide for them (Cunningham Children's Home, 2025). However, as the needs of children in the local community evolved over time so did Cunningham; they now not only continue to provide residential housing for children in need but a wide array of additional supports such as individualized education programs like their Gerber School and Circle Academy, youth shelters, family counseling such as their Families Stronger Together program, employment support and more (Cunningham Children's Home, 2025).

This particular organization was selected because of its connection to the nursing field and more specifically, community health. Cunningham Children's Home offers essential care and support to over 900 children and their families in the Champaign-Urbana region, assisting children in reaching their full potential (Cunningham Children's Home, 2025). Research shows that children who endure adverse childhood experiences, such as physical, sexual, or emotional

abuse, homelessness, or living with family members struggling with substance abuse, are significantly more likely to face mental health challenges and poorer overall health outcomes compared to those without such experiences. As a result, Cunningham Children's Home plays a crucial role in enhancing children's health and well-being and contributes to the development of healthier adults and is therefore extremely relevant to the nursing profession.

The organization employs full-time nursing staff who are available around the clock to care for the children. These nurses offer comprehensive care by addressing both the physical and mental health needs of the children. Cunningham particularly values hiring nurses with experience in mental health and they take pride in providing trauma-informed care and counseling. The organization also provides health screenings, immunizations, and education on healthy living, medication management, coping strategies, and more. Overall, Cunningham is dedicated to fostering a therapeutic environment that identifies signs of trauma and offers the necessary support to help children cope and build resilience so that they may reach their fullest potential.

My group spent 8 hours volunteering to help Cunningham Children's Home and while there, we prepared pre-portioned bags of Epsom salt for the children in the Camino's program. This program helps unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in the U.S. transition to a new life. Many of these children arrive with physical pain from their difficult journey and the Epsom salt baths help relieve their discomfort. By preparing the bags in advance, we saved staff time and also gave the children more independence as they can access the supplies on their own, which provided a sense of control in an unfamiliar situation. Additionally, we assisted with hanging, photographing, and organizing quilts for Cunningham's annual Festival of Quilts. This event is a major fundraiser for the organization and honors the tradition of handmade quilts, which have

been gifted to children since its founding in 1895, symbolizing wrapping the children in warmth, safety, and love.

Overall, I had a really wonderful time at Cunningham Children's Home and had no idea how many children they are able to assist annually. This organization truly opened my eyes to the importance of early interventions to address the physical, social, and emotional needs of children because when children receive holistic care and support like that which Cunningham provides, they are more likely to grow into resilient and healthier adults. This not only improves a person's individual well-being but helps foster healthier communities. Being proactive and creating organizations such as Cunningham's Children Home that provide primary, secondary, and tertiary interventional supports to a community are vital in helping to break cycles of generational trauma, abuse, and other challenges, and offers children a chance to build better, healthier futures.

Reference

Cunningham Children's Home. (2025). *About Us*. Cunningham Children's Home.

<https://cunningham.org/>