Facing

CHALLENGES

Dear Friend,

In the 2012-2013 Head Start year, we faced challenges unlike any other. It was the year the sequestration law went into effect, reducing Head Start federal funding significantly. The original goal of this law was to create motivation: to help those from “opposite sides of the aisle” negotiate a balanced federal budget. The rationale was that if each side had something at stake, they would feel more motivated to find common ground. While a shared sense of threat can bring people together, it also tends to bring animosity. As we watched the debate unfold, it seemed the slow-moving train was finally crashing.

The challenge began in early fall as we proactively considered the worst-case scenario while planning our Fiscal Year agency budget. The Policy Council and the Head Start team watched together as estimated cuts to spending were determined. We managed the crisis as a team. I am not sure where we would be without the talented and passionate Policy Council overseeing the program.

We watched in dismay when the air traffic controllers were spared from the sequester, and we wondered where the national outrage was for Head Start. We raised visibility of the issue locally. We joined our partners and other social service agencies with letter campaigns and trips to the Rhode Island State House asking legislators to buffer the federal cuts.

Families were interviewed and classrooms were visited by journalists. Every few weeks, we responded to requests for radio and newspaper interviews. Our message remained the same: The sequester hurts families in multiple ways. For a family living in poverty, not only would it decrease access to Head Start, but it could impact other subsidies that families rely on to make it through each month.

Despite our attempts, we were unable to get the State House to buffer the federal cuts. In June, we announced the closing of the Pawtucket Day Head Start site and the reduction of 126 slots for vulnerable children for the 2013-14 school year. While incredibly saddening, we felt fortunate that our proactive budget decisions allowed us to serve our students to the end of the 2012-13 Head Start year.

The federal funding environment will always be a hurdle when so many of the services we provide for children and families are dependent upon the political climate in Washington D.C. It creates an atmosphere of instability for everyone involved.

Regardless of what happens next, I am confident we will face it together with our staff, families, and community partnerships. And we will continue to put our children and families first, just as we have done for nearly 180 years.

Aimee Mitchell, MSW, LICSW
Senior Vice President, Programs and Operations
Director of Head Start

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Policy Council
GET INVOLVED!

This year has personally been one full of smiles, success and happiness. I received a nomination to be a member of the Children’s Friend Board of Directors in November 2012, and I gave birth to my baby boy, Pedro.

It has also been a year full of challenges and worries for our families due to the roller coaster of the federal budget process. It was a situation that worried us, but, at the same time, it made us realize how much of an impact our voices have if we come together in support of our programs.

Throughout this year, our families and friends worked together to support Early Head Start and Head Start. We signed over 800 letters and delivered them to the Rhode Island State House. We met with our senators and congressional offices and even shared personal stories about the impact of these programs on our children and in our life.

“It was amazing to see how a negative situation made us stronger as an organization, and I would like to thank all the people who represent and raise their voices for our families. It is sad to see how government—those who represent us—can put a price on education so easily.

I want to share with you what I’ve learned from this experience. Parents: get engaged in the education of your children, because we are the ones who know what’s best for them. What they are learning today leads to what they will learn in the future.

We, as parents, are the models for our children. We need to get up and take a step forward in educating ourselves. We need to discover the passion that makes us get up in the morning. Look in your community to see what programs are offered that will help you succeed. Our children deserve a better future, and this is the time to move forward.

Whether your child is enrolled in Head Start or if they are entering kindergarten, find time to talk to your child’s teacher and see how you can help at each step. Get involved, and you will quickly see how it makes a difference.

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We also have open seats for those who would like to join the Children’s Friend Parent Policy Council. If you are interested in getting involved, let your child’s teacher or your family worker know, and feel free to ask questions.

Nayrobi Almonte is the chair of the Policy Council and is the mother of three beautiful children: Diosía, age seven; Zaida, age five; and baby Pedro, who is nine months old.

O PPOSITE P A GE: Nayrobi Almonte’s son, Pedro. LEFT: In an effort to ward off federal budget cuts, Nayrobi Almonte (far left), Children’s Friend staff and supporters delivered over 800 letters and shared their personal stories with representatives at the Rhode Island State House.
Family ENGAGEMENT

One of the most important ways children can achieve even greater success in Head Start is through engaging families in the program. Children’s Friend offers many opportunities for families to participate in Head Start classrooms, policy-making and activities, all of which encourage a deeper appreciation for the value of education.

Classroom Volunteers: Whether helping out in the classroom or chaperoning the kids on a field trip, many of our families choose to participate in the place where their kids spend their time — much to the delight of their children.

Policy Council: Children’s Friend Head Start also maintains a Policy Council that meets monthly and includes dedicated parents who play a critical role in guiding and making policy and practice decisions regarding the program. They even take an active role in interviewing and hiring new staff members as vacancies occur. This year, Council participants also advocated for maintaining the current funding of the Head Start and Early Head Start programs through letters, petitions, and trips to the State House.

Activities: Parents have the opportunity to participate in a variety of educational and social activities at their centers. This year, Children’s Friend Head Start offered Parent Education Workshops on topics like Child Development, Lead Safety and Health and Nutrition, while other events, such as Reading is Fundamental and Jungle Safari, promoted language and literacy skills and gave families an opportunity to socialize and read to their children. These workshops and events were highly successful and well attended. Many parents also accompanied their children on field trips to the State House, Providence Children’s Museum, and Roger Williams Park and Zoo, just to name a few.

Parent Committees: Formed at every one of our Head Start centers and facilitated by the Family Development, Child Development and Family Engagement teams, parents enjoy greater involvement in their children’s education through participation.

National Head Start Association Regional Conference: Held in December 2012, parents from our Early Head Start and Head Start had the opportunity to participate in a variety of training programs and workshops around their roles as parents, teachers, and advocates.

We Use Two Curriculums to Guide our Everyday Work

In Early Head Start, we use the Born to Learn Curriculum, also known as Parents as Teachers. It recognizes parents as the primary educators of their child. The program is flexible and dynamic, supports parents in their roles and provides information and resources about child development, parenting, health, mental health, and nutrition.

In Head Start, we use the Creative Curriculum for preschool. It guides teaching teams in addressing all aspects of development: social/emotional, physical, cognitive and language. Our staff build lesson plans for each week that promote literacy, math, science, social studies, art, and technology.

Services Provided

(August 1, 2012 - July 31, 2013)

Children served (percentage of eligible children served):
Early Head Start - 264 (69%)
Head Start - 1,772 (42%)
TOTAL - 1,436

Pregnant women served: 12

Funded enrollment:
Early Head Start - 160
Head Start - 1,776
TOTAL - 1,936

Children who received dental exams:
Early Head Start - 97%
Head Start - 100%

Children who received medical exams:
Early Head Start - 93%
Head Start - 100%

Homeless families served: 73

Homeless families who obtained housing during the year: 48

Children with disabilities:
Early Head Start - 33
Head Start - 123

Children whose fathers/father figures participated in activities:
Early Head Start - 176
Head Start - 98

The average monthly enrollment for Early Head Start was 166 or 100% of the funded enrollment. The average monthly enrollment for Head Start was 1,216 or 100% of the funded enrollment.

Total:
Funded enrollment: 1,436

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Partner Spotlight: McAuley Village

McAuley Village is a two-year transitional housing program for homeless single parents and children. The Village has 23 apartments and an on-site child care center that provide shelter, child care, supportive services, advocacy, and guidance to homeless families seeking help. Children’s Friend partners with McAuley Village to provide Early Head Start and Head Start to children from newborn to age five.

2013 was a special year for the McAuley Village Child Care Center that has worked so hard to improve classroom quality and raise the skill sets of their teachers.

We caught up with the Reverend Michele Matott, Administrator of McAuley Village, to ask about their journey:

Q: What hurdles have you faced in improving your program and classroom quality?
A: The first hurdle was our physical plant. Walls limit the way we configure our space. We were too cluttered. The windows are too few, and there is not enough natural light. To address these issues, we painted walls a brighter color, added plants, replaced light bulbs, reconfigured the room, and had a massive “spring” cleaning. We still struggle with natural light and are exploring ways to address this issue.

The second biggest hurdle was our teaching staff. While they are committed and caring folk, they lagged behind in keeping current with innovations in the classroom. In response to this, we implemented weekly teacher teaching sessions. We poured over assessment measures, including EORS, and familiarized ourselves with ACCESS.

Q: What made you decide to address the issue of quality in the classroom?
A: As the new administrator and someone dedicated to quality education, I came with a pair of fresh eyes. The staff was loving and caring, but something was missing. After researching and studying best practices, it became clear that our center was ripe for growth. And so began our quest to provide the very best in education to our children.

The Board of McAuley Ministries is committed to the same goal and stands 100% behind our efforts, and, in fact, has made strengthening our early childhood program a priority in their strategic plan.

Q: What does the partnership with Children’s Friend mean to McAuley Village?
A: In a word: relationship. Aimee Mitchell, Senior Vice President, Programs and Operations and Director of Head Start, has gone above and beyond in providing support and encouragement. Aimee’s commitment to helping those in the trenches is what education is all about. Bertha Dischert’s enthusiasm and love of education is contagious. Not only does she offer professional development. She is a role model for what is best in teaching. Both Aimee and Bertha provide access to all the tools we need to move forward. The relationship forged by these two individuals provides a supportive network and the caring incentives to be the best we can be. They truly are children’s friends.

Q: How will the new certifications help you in the future?
A: In our journey to become a site that offers the very best education to the children in South Providence, we will be pursuing Bright Stars certification and NAEYC accreditation. We are committed to our quest and will not settle for less.

Q: What was the greatest lesson learned during this process?
A: Taking an honest, hard look at oneself can be painful. Without support, paralysis may creep in. Having the caring partners of Children’s Friend has taught us that while the goal may be a long way off, progress and achievement of that goal is possible. Nothing is too big to accomplish when you have a cheering squad.

Q: What are your goals for the future?
A: We will be offering the very best in child care. Our teachers will be trained in best practices and will convey their love for teaching in all they do. We will be a flagship center in South Providence, offering quality education and exceptional care. We will be a center where our grandchildren will come.

Top: Bertha Dischert, Child Development Manager at Children’s Friend, with Reverend Michele Matott, Administrator of McAuley Village.

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Success Stories

A Child Blossoms

Brian came to Children’s Friend in September as a small three-year-old who had never been to school. He had no English language skills and barely spoke any of his native Spanish. Sad, nervous, upset and scared, he cried and screamed to his mother as she left him in the unfamiliar classroom on that first day.

For three weeks, Brian would not walk into the classroom without being nudged in by his Mom. Once in, he would not venture past the door, take his jacket off or sit down to participate in any activities. He had frequent, long episodes of crying during which he was unable to communicate and unwilling to be comforted. However, our teachers had hope and worked every day to build a relationship. They welcomed Brian, increasing his comfort level and helping him to communicate.

By the beginning of October, Brian was walking into the classroom himself, still crying, but at least willing to sit in a chair and play with some toys. He slowly began to trust his teachers, as well as his classmates. These small steps were huge victories for Brian, and each one was celebrated as a class.

As the months passed, Brian finally came into the classroom smiling; he left his Mom’s side with a simple kiss. All of the other children greeted him, as they too recognized this wonderful change that had taken place. They accepted the fact that Brian may approach things differently than other children. He gained enough confidence to “read” a story to the class after lunch each day and “do” the calendar for the students. This became a part of the daily routine.

Walking down the hallways, Brian would greet all adults with a big “hi” and a wave. He communicated in English as much as possible, showing off his abilities and personality. What a remarkable change from the scared little boy who first entered the classroom! Others happily noticed how this young child had blossomed to become, in a sense, the class success story—one in which the whole class played a role.

A Fresh Start for a Family

Daniel has been a Head Start student for the past two years, during which time his life has been filled with uncertainty and change while his mother battled an addiction. As a result, Daniel was placed in multiple foster homes.

Through our integrated system of care, Daniel also participates in our Kids Connect program, where he and his Mom both receive additional support and counseling services. With much help from Children’s Friend teachers, family workers and other staff, Daniel’s mother worked hard to become clean, rebuild her life and learn the skills needed to provide a stable home for her son. We are proud to say that recently she was granted custody of Daniel.

Daniel has grown and changed so much over the past two years. He has become a big brother and, come September, will be starting kindergarten. He is thriving academically and has developed many skills to help manage his behavior. While Daniel will be missed greatly, we are thrilled to watch him start a new chapter in his life.

Additional Support for Families

Thanks to a wonderful program with LensCrafters® this year, Children’s Friend was able to offer gift certificates to children in need of glasses. While families are normally able to receive one pair of glasses annually through their health coverage, we all know how often children break or lose their glasses. When this happens, there is often no safety net for replacement, and children go without. However, through this partnership, we have been able to replace broken and lost glasses and give these families the extra support they need. Now we are all seeing “CLEARLY”!

Thanks to a wonderful partnership with Payless Gives Shoes 4 Kids®, students at Children’s Friend received new shoes and sneakers. Each year, the program distributes more than $1.5 million in merchandise certificates for new shoes to children in need. Payless ShoeSource hosted the shopping event locally—children even got to pick out their favorite. There’s nothing like a new pair of shoes!
Child OUTCOMES

Graduates Progress in our 0-5 System

In order to track the progress of our graduates over time, we are utilizing the core areas from HS School Readiness matrix. As evidenced in the charts on this page, our graduates continue to improve over time. We believe this is based on the overall improvement of the classrooms as well as ongoing work with families. While we saw evidence of plateau effect in average classroom quality, we continue to see improvement in the areas where we have seen a more highly correlated relationship. This likely contributes to some of these gains.

Our graduating classroom of 2013 exceeded the previous scores in all areas. Every year we have made progress in reducing the number of children entering kindergarten with significant needs, and we improved the number of children who are meeting and exceeding developmental expectations.

Math and Science are two areas that have received much attention over the past few years, based on our school readiness assessments. Specific training and attention to these areas continues to show that the program is making overall gains in supporting our kids. There were also notable gains in the area of literacy and approaches to learning. As we look at some of this year’s data and efforts, we will better articulate our efforts to impact these areas.

Comparison of Graduates: 2011-2013

Annual Progress on Child Outcomes

Each year we track progress on a quarterly basis. This informs us of the areas we need to focus on more intently and provides us with trend data of the amount of change we want to see during the course of an individual year. The data is examined in aggregate for themes and trends.

The MAP tool is divided into five ratings: (1) significant need/ risk for delay, (2) moderate need, (3) emerging/inconsistent, (4) adequate, and (5) strength. We track this data for end-of-year comparison of means average as well as changes in the overall distribution. As with the graduates, we pay specific attention to the number of children who are still at risk (1 or 2) and the number of children who solidly meet the milestone (4 or 5).

Overall, children made statistically significant progress in all domains of development measured from fall to spring. On average, children began the year at the “inconsistent/emerging” level in all developmental domains and ended the year at the solidly “emerging or adequate” level in all domains.
Early Childhood WELFARE SUMMIT

In 2013 Children’s Friend hosted LET’S GET IT RIGHT!, an early childhood welfare summit convened to discuss how to improve outcomes for infants and young children involved in the child welfare system. Summit partners and sponsors included Rhode Island’s Department of Children, Youth & Families; Foster Forward; Providence Children’s Museum; Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities; Bradley Hospital; Rhode Island Association for Infant Mental Health; American Academy of Pediatrics; Rhode Island KIDSCOUNT; Rhode Island Department of Health; Rhode Island Foundation; Prevent Child Abuse Rhode Island; the RI Head Start Association; and Citizens Bank.

Two nationally recognized keynote speakers helped to frame the day: Brenda Jones Harden, Ph.D., Associate Professor in the Department of Human Development at the University of Maryland College Park; and Sheryl Dicker, J.D., Assistant Clinical Professor of Pediatrics and Family and Social Medicine, Children’s Hospital at Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

Specific emphasis was placed on ensuring that young children in the child welfare system have access to high-quality early learning environments such as Head Start and Early Head Start. Throughout the presentations, the keynote speakers highlighted Head Start and Early Head Start as examples of programs and services that can change the trajectory of a child’s life.

The 300+ participants included Department of Children, Youth & Families staff; Head Start staff; clinicians and social workers from a variety of public and private agencies; foster parents; state officials; leaders of Rhode Island’s business community; and other key public and private stakeholders.

We’re pleased to report that the summit created a lot of excitement about the possibilities for improving the outcomes of our most vulnerable and at-risk young children.

Clockwise, from above: Governor Lincoln D. Chafee shakes the hand of Children’s Friend President and Chief Executive Officer, David Caprio; the 300+ Summit participants included social workers, foster parents, social service and business leaders. Dr. Brenda Jones Harden delivers one of the keynote speeches.

Federal Program Review

In November 2011, the Administration for Families and Children (ACF) conducted an on-site follow-up review of our Early Head Start and Head Start programs. As a result of the review, the agency was designated as a program in good standing and had no outstanding issues of compliance with the Federal Head Start Performance Standards.

The agency consistently receives high marks from its auditors for its internal controls and other accounting policies and procedures and received an unqualified audit opinion for the most recent audit. A copy of the 2012 audit is available upon request.
Mission: Children’s Friend is the innovative leader in improving the well-being and healthy development of Rhode Island’s most vulnerable young children. We accomplish this by providing flexible, effective, and culturally-relevant services, and advocating for programs and policies that support and strengthen these children and their families.

Vision: Our vision is that every child in Rhode Island grows and develops in a safe, healthy, loving, and stable family.