Dear friend,

2014 was an incredible year for us, filled with so many accomplishments. It marked the 5th anniversary since we expanded our services to include Head Start preschool services. And it also marked the 180th anniversary of the agency. When our founder Harriet Ware opened a tiny one room school in India Point, I am not sure she could have imagined what we would be like all these years later with almost 70 classrooms throughout the Urban Core. We are who we are—because of what she did all those years ago.

One of the things I find so remarkable about this year is the idea that “together we can do anything.” The accomplishments of Children’s Friend are due to an amazing array of champions. People who share a similar vision for what it means to be the best that we can be and to create opportunities for parents to accomplish their goals and be leaders.

It is years like this when I wonder if Rhode Island truly knows the champion we have in Elizabeth Burke Bryant and KidsCount. She advocates tirelessly on behalf of the children and families in our state every day. And the restoration of the Head Start sequestration funds are due to her efforts in Washington, D.C. Elizabeth is an amazing advocate, and we all know her work in Rhode Island well. I am not as sure we all recognize that she is a rare national leader and a voice for children and families.

When I look back across these five years and see what we have accomplished, I see our teams of teachers, teacher assistants, family workers, nurses, nutritionists, supervisors, managers, receptionists, finance staff, grant writers and so many more. Together we have accomplished remarkable work. We have gone from an organization that tripled in size—and grappled to manage that growth—to one that is strong and made up of exceptional talent.

The families that we have the privilege of supporting are the true champions in this work. And I applaud them every day for their courage, determination and commitment.

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

The IMPROVING HEAD START READINESS Act of 2007 requires that all Head Start grantees submit an Annual Report to the public, providing an overview of the program. The following provides an overview of Children’s Friend Early Head Start and Head Start programs for the past program year.
My name is Robyn Giragosian. I am a mom to six children, five of which I have given birth to, and one step-daughter, who I have been raising full-time for the past four years. This past year was my third year with a child in Head Start, and I decided to get more involved. I had no idea how important a parent was in the world of Head Start. I had no idea the opportunities available to parents. I want to be able to educate more parents to understand that their voices matter.

I went to my first Policy Council meeting, and I felt welcomed. I felt like it was a perfect fit for me. I was then asked if I would run for a position and told them I would think about it. I never imagined that attending one meeting would change my life in a better direction. I than became vice-chairperson.

I was then asked to attend a conference in New Hampshire. At this point I was still very green, and was amazed with the knowledge and power that was handed to me. Being a parent in Head Start is like holding a very high political position when you become a member of the Policy Council.

The conference is something I will never forget; it opened my eyes to a whole new light. A light that made me begin my new path. I became the RI state representative for Head Start and, from there, now represent Rhode Island on the Regional Board.

Together with the Rhode Island Head Start Association, I was able to put together a conference here in RI for parents. The conference was held in May 2014, with a focus on Kindergarten Readiness. The title of the conference was “Ready, Set, Kindergarten.”

With this my first year and still being new to everything, I have to give lots of credit to the amazing staff at Children’s Friend and other agencies in the state that worked as a team to make this happen. I look up to all of them and hope to continue the relationships I have made.

I am now beginning my second year and hope to be chairperson. We had our second conference this past May for parents and staff. I will be co-presenting at the New England Head Start Association in December and April. This year I will also be attending my first NHSA conferences, and I am very excited about the knowledge and relationships I can build to strengthen the future.

I look at this journey as a road to a new beginning, and the road has just begun.

FEDERAL PROGRAM REVIEW

In April 2014, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducted an on-site review of our Early Head Start and Head Start programs. The following monitoring components were reviewed:

- Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, Attendance
- Program Governance
- Child Health and Safety
- Management Systems
- Fiscal Integrity
- Child Development and Education
- Family and Community Engagement

The reviewers spent time conducting observations in our classrooms, visiting our partnerships sites and reviewing staff and client files. As a result of the review, the agency was designated as an agency 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. The agency received an unqualified audit opinion for the most recent audit. A copy of the 2013 audit is available upon request.
2014 was a big year for family engagement. Parent committees formed at each Head Start center. Committees are facilitated by each center’s multi-disciplinary team.

Policy Council has met minimally once per month, often twice per month. The Council continues to take an active role in interviewing and hiring all new staff. The Council also took an active role in participating in the program’s self assessment and developing program goals. The Council reviews monitoring data and school readiness data on a regular basis and makes suggestions for program improvement.

Parents continue to volunteer in the classroom reading books to children and chauffeuring field trips. Centers hosted “Diversity Day” where parents came into their child’s classroom and participated in activities that allowed them to share their culture.

A variety of educational trainings and recreational activities took place. Parents participated in Lead Safety Training and training related to Health and Nutrition. Parents continued to participated in the Incredible Years educational workshops aimed at helping parents build skills to promote the social emotional health of their children.

A parent conference was held on May 12, 2014 titled “Ready Set Kindergarten!” Organized by the parents of children enrolled in Head Start and the RI Head Start Association, the conference’s goal was to make the transition to kindergarten easier for both children and parents.

Some of the topics that parents participated in were:

- The Individual Education Program: Strategies for Making It Work and Doing It Well
- Big Changes: Supporting Children's Social-Emotional Needs During Transitioning to Kindergarten
- Ready, Set, Kindergarten
- Beyond Head Start: Staying Involved in Your Child’s Education Through the PTA

Parents were able to share concerns and questions about their children transitioning to the public school system, and they were encouraged to advocate for their children beyond Head Start.

Parents participated in two regional conferences sponsored by the New England Head Start Association. In December 2013 parents attended the regional conference in Nashua, NH and participated in workshops related to advocacy and parent leadership. In April 2014 parents attended the regional conference in Westbrook, CT and participated in workshops related to health and wellness and preparing children for school readiness.

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.

The average monthly enrollment for Early Head Start was 160 or 100% of the funded enrollment. The average monthly enrollment for Head Start was 926 or 100% of the funded enrollment.
This past fall a young, single mother named Sarah enrolled her daughter Bella in Head Start, but was struggling to bring her in each day. Sarah’s part-time job conflicted with Bella’s pick-up time, and she could not afford to pay for childcare on her own. Her application for childcare assistance had been repeatedly denied, and Sarah was frustrated.

During a home visit, Bella’s teacher discovered that Sarah had been filling out the childcare application incorrectly, which had led to the denials. Together they filled out a new application for childcare assistance, and they developed an interim pick-up plan so that Bella could go to school every day.

Later that year, during a vision screening, Bella was found to have a severe vision loss. When Sarah received the news, she was scared, overwhelmed, and didn’t know what to do. Her teacher and family development worker helped Sarah find an eye doctor for Bella, who now wears special glasses.

Sarah eventually received full coverage for childcare and Bella’s regular attendance in class and her new, pink glasses have helped her tremendously. She is thriving. Bella loves going to school and Sarah has said that she feels like Head Start helped her to be a better mom.

When Aisha came to Head Start to enroll her daughter, Sanya, her family had just emigrated from the Middle East. The family spoke limited English, and they had no other family living in the area or ties in the community. They were alone in a new country and had no support. Aisha found the services her family desperately needed at Children’s Friend.

Sanya was a natural helper. Her teacher repeatedly found her helping other children in the class. She began to make friends through these interactions and her language skills continued to improve.

Sanya’s family development worker helped Aisha find an ESL class and invited her to join the Parent Committee. There, she learned important skills to support Sanya’s success. Parents who are actively involved in the education of their children build strong foundations for their child’s educational future.

Aisha is now enrolled part-time at the University of Rhode Island in an ESL program. She is proud that she is able to help her husband and her family with their English. Aisha has become an active member of the Parent Committee, and she is volunteering in the classroom whenever she can.

“The arrival in Rhode Island, we had no one, but Children’s Friend helped us build a home,” said Aisha. She has now enrolled her younger son in Head Start, and he has the same teacher that Sanya did when she started. The family is off to good start in their new home.

Melissa, a young mom, was referred to our Early Head Start program by the Department of Children, Youth & Families two years ago. Melissa grew up in foster homes and spent a few years homeless. Melissa and her 4-month old, Lily, were living in a group home for teen mothers. She was overwhelmed and having a hard time managing their daily needs.

During a home visit, Melissa’s family development worker recognized the warning signs of depression and brought in a mental health clinician to help Melissa. She was then referred to the WIC program for breastfeeding and nutrition support, and Lily received services through Early Intervention. Lily’s father, John, enrolled in the Dads Making a Difference program, where he gained parenting and nurturing skills, as well as help with education goals, job training, and employment.

Melissa’s family development worker helped her create goals to become self-sufficient and knowledgeable in child development, so she could enable her children’s growth and development. With help from the staff at Children’s Friend, Melissa is now back in school, Lily’s father is working full-time at a job he found through the Dads program, and DCYF has closed the case on the family.

Two years after Melissa came to Children’s Friend, her family is doing well. The family still needs a number of supportive services, but according to her family development worker, “they have beaten the odds and have turned their lives around completely.”

“SHE FEELS HEAD START HELPED HER TO BE A BETTER MOM.”

SUPPORT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

EDUCATION MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

LINKAGES MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

All of the names and some details have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the children and their families.

Success Stories continued on next page.
Three-year-old Christian needed a lot of support. During the academic year, he participated in a classroom-based special education program provided by his local school department in the morning, and in the afternoon, he participated in the Head Start program at Children’s Friend. When Christian’s parents learned that he would not be able to receive special education services over the summer, they were worried... Christian had significant developmental and behavioral needs, and he already showed extreme difficulty adjusting back to school during holiday breaks. This would only be worse after a long summer break. His parents were afraid Christian would lose all of the skills that he worked so hard to gain during the academic year since they could not afford to pay for a summer program on their own. For many parents, the summer often means an end to essential services families rely on throughout the school year.

Thanks to scholarship funding, Children’s Friend enrolled Christian in the Summer Learning and Enrichment Program (SLEP). In addition to the traditional SLEP program, Christian was given one-on-one support to help make each of his days a success. He thrived in this specialized setting. When the school year began, Christian started to attend his special education program and Head Start.

Christian’s parents reported that his transition back to his special education classroom went well. There were some small bumps in the road during the first few weeks, but they knew the bumps would have been much bigger if he had not been able to participate in the SLEP. Christian’s parents were very thankful that he could concentrate his efforts on learning versus re-acclimating to a classroom environment. Our Head Start staff is working with the school department to ensure that Christian continues to receive appropriate special education services during the academic year and for next summer.

FAMILIES OF GRADUATING CHILDREN MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS, PARTICULARLY ON SCALES ASSESSING CHILD WELL-BEING...
PARENTS LEARN AS THEIR CHILDREN LEARN

In the fall of 2013, Children’s Friend received a grant from the Walmart Foundation to support the employability skills of parents in our programs throughout the agency. When the project was presented to our Policy Council, their feedback indicated it was important to them for parents to have the opportunity to develop job skills that could lead to permanent employment. Our Policy Council believed that parents would jump at the chance to attend a training program at the same time that their children are in Head Start—and they were right!

The Child Development Associate credential (CDA) is seen in much of Rhode Island, as a stepping stone to advancing in the early childhood field. The CDA is based on a combination of verified training hours, objective testing, and direct observation of the candidate in the classroom environment. Our project targeted parents already involved in our programs, many who wanted an opportunity to develop skills that would lead to employment. Some were already volunteering in our Head Start classrooms and were eager to participate in a program that provided the training and support they needed, to elevate their interest in working with young children into a career pathway.

Participants in our CDA program spent four days a week for 15 weeks with a CDA instructor exploring and learning all that was necessary to take and pass the CDA exam. In addition they began to develop their professional portfolios to submit as part of the credentialing process; as well as spending countless hours gaining hands-on experience in Children’s Friend early childhood classrooms. A more secure and marketable future is on the way for those parents who completed all of the elements for their CDA.

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.