Since 1834, our mission has been to serve children and families in need. Thanks to the generous support of our community partners, corporate sponsors, grantors, and donors, Children’s Friend is able to help nurture healthy and vibrant futures for Rhode Island’s most vulnerable children.

Growing resilient children is what we do here at Children’s Friend. Nourishing our children and families by providing the necessary support that they need to succeed helps to ensure that our children have a foundation for success. Through this important work, we’ve found that even the tiniest seedling can grow into a tall and strong tree with the proper care and support.

**ABOUT CHILDREN’S FRIEND**

Children’s Friend, a non-profit organization founded in 1834, is Rhode Island’s oldest child welfare organization and a leading provider of child welfare, family support, mental health, and child development services.

**MISSION**

Children’s Friend is the innovative leader in improving the well-being and healthy development of Rhode Island’s most vulnerable young children.

Children’s Friend is a member of the Child Welfare League of America and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation.

*The names of the children and families we serve have been changed to protect privacy and confidentiality.*

**DEAR FRIENDS**

My office window looks out on the play yard of our Berkshire Center. Over the last year, I’ve watched that yard change. What started as a “just” a play space for children has turned into a lush garden. Children and teachers learn about growing plants and wait to see or taste the fruits of their labors. They learn that a garden requires fertile soil, water, and hard work to grow.

Here at Children’s Friend, just as if we were tending a garden, we take time and care to ensure the correct elements are available to our children, families, and staff so that every student can thrive.

Thanks to our families, staff, and funders we’ve continued to grow our services to meet the needs of the community and make our services more accessible. The Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership program built on successes and lessons learned in its first year, improving opportunities for infants and toddlers across Rhode Island.

We expanded the number of full day Head Start classrooms, matching the public school schedule to better support families with children in Head Start and Elementary school, and to better prepare students for entering Kindergarten.

We also drew on internal collaborations. The gardens planted at three of our sites were a catalyst for a health education partnership between Head Start, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) where children created healthy, affordable, and appetizing recipes in the classroom and brought home ingredients to make them at home.

In response to increased neighborhood violence at one of our sites, programs came together to launch the We CARE initiative, providing classroom supports and take-home materials for children exposed to trauma. We also implemented strategies, based in our commitment to reflective supervision and practice, to coordinate care between our mental health, teaching and family development teams.

Finally, we continue to support children with disabilities and those learning multiple languages. Children with disabilities are provided with individualized care and support through expanded relationships with school departments and the Kids Connect Program in our classrooms.

We grew our Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Classroom initiatives to promote educational success for dual language learners. And of course, we have been grateful for the ongoing engagement of our parents, families, and caregivers through Policy Council, Parent Committees, and community events.

I am eternally grateful to the Children’s Friend community. For the commitment and dedication of all to the growth and enrichment of our programs, and through them the children and their families. Our programs thrive and grow because of your involvement.

Thank you for nurturing our work!

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

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**Planting Seeds GROWING FUTURES**

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Growing resilient children is what we do here at Children’s Friend. Nourishing our children and families by providing the necessary support that they need to succeed helps to ensure that our children have a foundation for success. Through this important work, we’ve found that even the tiniest seedling can grow into a tall and strong tree with the proper care and support.
Children’s Friend provided essential services to many of Rhode Island’s most vulnerable children through the Head Start and Early Head Start Programs.

**LET’S DO THE NUMBERS...**

- **1,387** children received services from Head Start and Early Head Start.
- Head Start provided **1,116** children and their families with quality child care and education, health, nutrition, and social supports.
- With support from a partnership promoting dental health, **90%** of Head Start and **55%** of Early Head Start children received a dental exam.
- **99%** Funded enrollment: Head Start served an average of **973** students monthly, with a funded capacity of **980**.
- Early Head Start served **19** pregnant women and **271** children and their families through home visiting and center based services that support positive parent-child relationships, and promote positive growth and development in children.
- **101%** Funded Enrollment: Early Head Start exceeded its funded capacity of **160**, serving an average of **162** students monthly.
- Head Start and Early Head Start served **34** homeless families, successfully supporting **24** of them to obtain housing ensuring a more stable environment for children and enhancing their capacity to learn and develop.
- **99%** of Head Start children and **100%** of Early Head Start children received a medical exam in the course of the year.
- **143** children with disabilities received services in Head Start (162) and Early Head Start (41) including counseling for children and families, one-to-one classroom support, and coordination with other service providers.
Hi, my name is Sharleene Owusu and I have been with Children's Friend for the past four years.

My oldest son was born in 2010 and started preschool with Children's Friend in 2013. When we first started coming here most of the teachers and family workers encouraged me to join Policy Council, but I could never find the time because I had a new born and a one year old at home! Last year, when my youngest started Head Start at the Dean Center, I finally joined the Policy Council.

One of the most fulfilling things for me is sitting in on interviews and seeing the people we hire in the classroom. Getting to ask a potential teacher all the questions that are important to me as a parent is such a huge deal. When I see them in the classroom, I'm confident my child will be in good hands and knowing I was a part of the process makes me feel that I'm doing something wonderful for my child. It's great to think, "Wow, I was a part of all this?" And it's helped my personal growth, too. I have learned do's and don'ts of interviewing because I have sat in many here. I've seen first-hand what employers are looking for and that is something that I will always carry with me.

Knowing what I know now I wish I had joined years ago. I am very grateful for this experience. I am a shy person so I was never a big fan of speaking in public; but being the vice chair, I often lead the meetings. In the beginning I was terrified, but as time went on I became more confident and it wasn't as scary anymore. I've also been lucky enough to go to a conference in New Hampshire. It was an awesome experience. There were so many workshops and they were all amazing our biggest challenge was choosing which to go to! I learned many things that I am still using at home with my kids.

I want to say to all parents: You have a voice and a responsibility. Policy Council is your voice. It is best place to talk about concerns or what we like. And when you talk about it at Policy Council, things change. But we also have a responsibility. We can make this a better program by being involved and by talking to other parents who can't be involved, about their children's needs. Policy Council has been an amazing experience for me. I have grown and learned so much, and I've made positive changes that help my kids and others. I'm so glad to have had the opportunity.

Sincerely,

Sharleene Owusu
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education is a necessary component in modern school programs. Increasingly, experts are recognizing the importance of embedding STEM skills in early education programs to jump start children’s engagement in such learning. But what does STEM look like for three and four year olds? At Children’s Friend, it took flight last year as we engaged outside partners and funders to support multiple initiatives.

At one site, a partnership with The Cornell Lab of Ornithology had children learning about birds and behavior. After learning to identifying birds and about using bird feeders, students participated in the nation-wide Celebrate Urban Birds Initiative. Over the course of three days they counted birds and were exposed to scientific methods as they tracked the birds and the time they viewed them to ensure their counts were valid.

It also looks like a partnership between teachers and nutritionists to teach about both biology and nutrition! Children at three sites planted vegetable gardens in their playgrounds, and an additional 550 children brought home their own tomato plant! The fresh vegetables that sprouted taught children about more than just growing flowers and vegetables.

In partnership with our Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) offices and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), we highlighted the importance (and deliciousness!) of fresh fruits and vegetables, teaching children and families about healthy eating.

The CACFP team created recipes for teachers to make with children and send home, while the WIC team reinforced the message of healthy eating. “We really tried to make sure that recipes were accessible, affordable, and delicious!” Ligia Diaz, CACFP Supervisor said of creating the recipes.

Finally, for two weeks in April, it looked like a full blown Science Fair, complete with exhibits, posters, and dioramas. Parents and community members joined their children to learn about a wide array of topics including animal habitats, geology, and light. Children organized displays and worked with teachers to create activities that informed and enlightened. Jenise Harrison, Child Development Supervisor, talked about enthusiasm and engagement from children, parents and staff.

“After the first week, which the teachers and family visitors organized, the families were so excited they wanted it to continue. They jumped in and facilitated a second week of activities, asking open ended and scientific questions to their children. At the end of the fair, parents had with a variety of STEM activity ideas to use at home. Everyone wants to do it again!”

1 University of Chicago Early STEM Working Group. Early STEM Matters: Providing High-Quality STEM Experiences for All Young Learners. http://d3lwefg3pyezlb.cloudfront.net/docs/Early_STEM_Matters_FINAL.pdf
CULTIVATING STRONG MINDS

CLASSROOM COACHING

For years, Children’s Friend has recognized that training alone does not result in long term improvement in teaching strategies. Sustained improvement and real change requires a range of activities, from effective supervision to ongoing, customized support. That support has, for many years, been implemented using a coaching model in our Head Start classes. In 2016, we expanded that support to our Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships programs as well.

Using a Practice Based Coaching Model, twenty-four teachers and assistants in Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms received coaching. The Practice Based Coaching model is built around the relationship between coach and teacher.

Coaches and teachers identify strengths and challenges, finding areas for improvement, after which the coach will engage in focused observation of the classroom. The teacher and coach reflect on the observation and identify strategies to support the classroom, engaging in ongoing conversations throughout the year to support the teacher as new challenges arise. Coaching sessions also identify shared opportunities to support teaching staff as a group.

After a number of teachers expressed challenges with some students, a partnership with the Mental Health and Disabilities team resulted in trainings to, as Maryann Finamore, Early Childhood Manager of Mentor Coaching explains, “help teachers provide a meaningful, individualized experience for children based on their development”.

Data on individual students, classroom environment, and teacher/student interactions is all used routinely to assess the classroom and identify challenges that may be going unnoticed by the teacher. The observational assessments conducted by Maryann Finamore and other trained staff conduct focus on all aspects of the teacher’s practice such as curriculum content, the classroom environment, and most importantly, the interactions between children and teachers. Maryann notes that “the relationships between the teachers and students in the classroom are the basis for all learning. These relationships help teachers to understand and respond to the child’s academic and emotional needs and promote the delivery of individualized instruction for each child. Relationship between teacher and child are absolutely critical to success.”

The impact of coaching, and ongoing support in particular, appears evident in the ITERS scores for the EHS-CCP sites. For the six sites with teachers who remained consistent – and received ongoing coaching in 2016 and 2017, scores improved in 2016, and substantially in 2017. Whereas the three sites that had teacher changes in 2017 all saw a drop in their scores between 2016 and 2017.

Classroom Environment: The Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ITERS-R) is used to assess group programs for children from birth to 2 ½ years of age. The scales consists of items focusing on environment, activities, interactions and program structure.2

[Graph: ITERS Scores for EHS-CCP Classrooms 2015-2017 comparing classrooms with consistent teachers and coaching to those with teaching changes]

GROWING STRONGER FAMILIES

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IMPROVES RELATIONSHIPS

Infant/early childhood mental health is a cornerstone of healthy development, providing a foundation upon which all future development rests. At Children’s Friend, the Early Head Start team works to promote physical and mental health, and to prevent poor outcomes. The key to success involves strengthening relationships that exist between the young child and his/her parents and family; relationships among family members; and relationships between the family and their community providers.

In recognition of this, Children’s Friend launched an effort in 2016 to promote Reflective Practice at all levels of the Early Head Start program.

Reflective Practice is a strategy that helps staff to appreciate the role of family and caregivers in the development, mental health, and wellbeing of infants and young children; collaborate with families as “experts”; identify early signs of stress in relationships; and understand that health, development, and learning are intertwined with the relationships between parents, children, and providers.

Through a partnership with Susan Dickstein, PhD, IMH-E, Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant (Brown Medical School/Bradley Hospital), Early Head Start staff receive education and ongoing consultation to implement reflective practices. Family workers received access to a course on Infant/Toddler Social Emotional Development and group meetings to help move from principles to practice.

The Leadership team participates in ongoing consultation to integrate reflective practices into all aspects of their work; this includes support to utilize reflective skills in supervision and to run reflective practice groups of their own.

These activities help staff and supervisors to be aware of their own emotional reactions, cultural experiences, and relationship expectations that serve to facilitate (or get in the way of) their own ability to engage with the child/family.

“Reflective supervision helps us get out of our ‘problem solving’ mindset”, says supervisor Mina Interiano. “As a supervisor, I was reluctant at first, but I saw how it changed my relationship with staff. Instead of monitoring them, we were discussing and thinking through things together.

I think it validates your ability to come up with solutions. It’s a parallel process. When I hear my team talk about ‘being reflective’ with a parent, and how it helps them to come up with their own plans, it builds everyone’s confidence and self-worth!”

Mina explains that the real key is that “we think more about the situation and explore the experiences of the parents and children, instead of jumping to conclusions. It’s about meeting families where they are and understanding them.”
We often think of children’s learning as happening in the classroom alone. But Head Start, from the outset, was designed differently. Inherent in the model is the recognition that safety, health, and financial stability are major factors in children’s school and life outcomes. Recently, the Office of Head Start has emphasized the impact positive fathering has on children’s cognitive, social-emotional, and linguistic outcomes.

At Children’s Friend, we take these two principles to heart. For over ten years, Children’s Friend has worked to support fathers and father figures to be positively involved in their children’s lives. Braiding federal, state, and private funding we have committed to support fathers to be positive factors in their children’s lives through parenting education and support, job training, and partnerships.

Our existing Dad’s Program is comprised of two components. First, an ongoing fatherhood support and education group (Dads Make A Difference) group meets weekly using the Responsive Fathering curriculum to support and learn from one another and outside experts.

Second, building on partnerships with local organizations, we run a twelve week Dads Job Training Program that builds in-demand workforce skills including construction, welding, fabrication, and environmental services for fathers of children involved with Children’s Friend.

These two services change lives by supporting fathers who might not otherwise have a chance to build the interpersonal connections or parenting and employment skills that will give their children the opportunity they deserve.

Participants in the program come from a diversity of backgrounds: a refugee from the earthquakes in Haiti with a college degree learns welding next to a nineteen year-old helping to parent his one-year old brother; an army reservist from St. Lucia hangs sheetrock with a father who was in prison until a few years ago. All are seeking to support their families and expand opportunity for themselves and their children.

One father, Julian, spoke emotionally about his experience realizing how important he was to his older child. “I remember telling my son from jail once, ‘I’ll be there in a minute’. He told me, right back ‘Dad, you’ve used up all your minutes!’ He needed me there now… I was tired of jail, of losing people, of thinking about the cops.” Julian vowed to be there for his kids. So when he heard of the Dads program at his daughter’s Head Start, he jumped on the opportunity. Now, 5 months after completing the program, Julian is employed full time by a national building company.

In the 2016-2017 school year, the Dads Job Training Program served twelve fathers. Upon graduation, ten had received job offers or been accepted to additional training programs, while one had gone on to complete his GED. Some of the experienced group members of the Dads Make A Difference group have drawn on their experiences to develop their own sessions to present to the group. They also organized a presentation to be delivered at the New England Fatherhood Conference in 2018.

Visit our website at https://www.cfsri.org/videos/ to see a wonderful video about our Dads program!
SCHOOL READINESS

Each year we seek to improve School Readiness outcomes for children in Head Start and Early Head Start. This year was no different. We use the Teaching Standards Gold to develop curricula and track child outcomes.

Teaching Strategies Gold® (TSG) assesses School Readiness on a per-student level. TSG is a birth to kindergarten assessment system. Completed three times throughout the school year, it provides individualized assessment and feedback to teachers and parents to help identify children’s strengths and challenges, and to track student progress. It is also used to assess program efficacy and improvement on a classroom, center, and agency level.

### Early Head Start

Students in EHS improved in most domains from Fall 2016 to Spring 2017. There was a drop in the number of Home Based students meeting or exceeding expectations in the Cognitive domains and Center Based students meeting or exceeding expectations in the Mathematics domain.

Though we do recognize a challenge, we believe this drop is usually related to typical variability in early childhood development and to some degree to the emergence of disabilities. Approximately 18% of our Early Head Start children have an Individualized Family Service Plan with Early Intervention. Many of those students are identified as in need of additional services during their time in Early Head Start, and provision of those services results in them being more likely to meet expectations in later years and in Head Start or Kindergarten.

### Head Start

Both three and four year old students in Head Start made gains in all TSG domains last year. Both three and four year olds saw large gains in Literacy and Mathematics while four year olds also showed growth in Cognitive and Fine Motor domains. Though we are glad to see student improvement across all domains, we continually seek improvement, using TSG, classroom observation, training, and supervision.

We report two types of information from Teaching Strategies Gold:

1. The TSG Growth Summary shows the number of students who met or exceeded expected levels of growth. This answers the question: “Is this group of children demonstrating progress towards meeting expectations?”

2. TSG compares the number of students that started out the year meeting or exceeding expectations, and compares that to the number of students meeting or exceeding expectations at the end of the school year.
OUTCOME HIGHLIGHTS: Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Classrooms

Last year, we reported on our Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Classrooms (CLRC). The CLRC were developed as a pilot project in response to research indicating that students who are dual language learners (DLL) show improved school-readiness and strong foundations for language development when they receive early support in both English and their home language. Funded by grants from Collette Vacations, Episcopal Charities, and Bristol County Savings Charitable Foundation, the CLRC program serves both children who speak only one language, and those who are bilingual or multilingual, through:

- Culturally and Linguistically Responsive materials and curriculum
- Mentor coaching and training for teachers to support children in their home language and culture through bilingual interactions
- A multicultural approach to learning and family engagement.

The data speaks for itself. In both Language and Literacy, children in CLRC showed more than double the improvements in the 2016-2017 school year, when compared to students not in CLRC. Students in CLRC also showed impressive growth in both general and Spanish Language and Literacy scores. There is agency wide impact as well, as DLL students across the agency showed similar end-of-year outcomes in most learning domains to their English speaking counterparts.

Given the success of this program, we are looking forward to adding five new classrooms in the 2017-2018 school year, and providing Agency-wide training on the CLRC model.
