



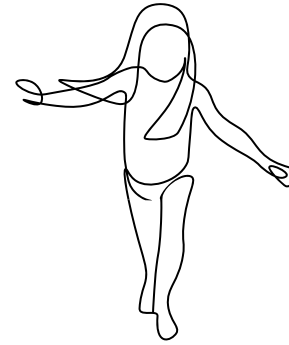
Children's  
FRIEND

2020 - 2021

Head Start  
Annual Report



**Transitions** was the theme of the (virtual! and successfully so!) 2021 Rhode Island Head Start Association's Conference, but it would be fair to say that transitions have been the theme of the past year in Head Start, too. We transitioned from the pre-vaccine season of the COVID-19 pandemic to the widespread availability of COVID-19 vaccines, from mostly-virtual visits back to the beginnings of normalcy where we're able to actually see our families at home or out and about in the community, and from the beginning to the end of another year which required extraordinary flexibility, teamwork, and dedication from all at Children's Friend. Head Start also welcomed another exciting transition: the hiring and introduction of Tiana Ochoa, as Children's Friend's new Head Start Director, in May. With this exciting news comes a hearty THANK YOU to Stacy Del Vicario for her continuing and endless hard work as Vice President of Programs and now as Deputy Director of Head Start, especially during the challenges of COVID-19.





# DEAR FRIENDS

The past year has been an exciting one at Children's Friend, despite many transitions and challenges.

We have pressed on with our mission to improve the wellbeing and healthy development of Rhode Island's most vulnerable young children in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our COVID-19 Task Force ably handled the many questions, concerns, and uncertainties, and as part of a larger team dedicated to keeping Rhode Islanders safe and healthy, presented us with a plan to make sure every site and every family was kept safe. We're proud to share that during the year, we saw no evidence of site-based spread of COVID-19.

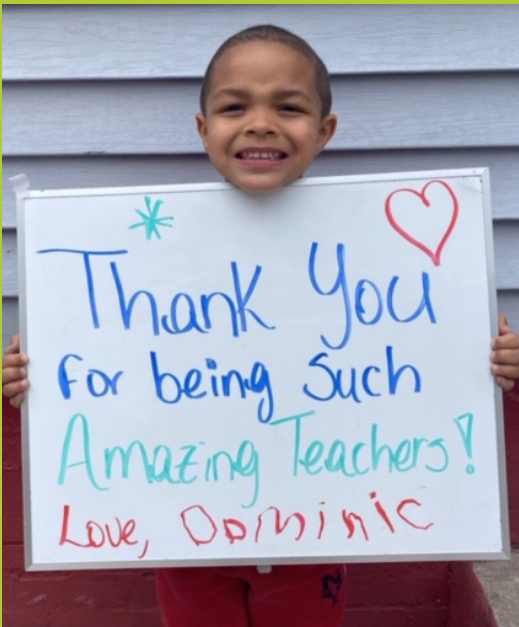
Though things looked a little different, we were thrilled to see children onsite and in the classroom during the year, learning in a high-quality environment focused on their preparation for kindergarten and beyond! We were also thrilled that we found safe ways to connect with our families through our family advocacy and development work.

We are also proud of the work done in our Early Head Start program: we continued to serve expecting families, infants, and toddlers during COVID-19 Task Force-approved home visits or through virtual visits when necessary. We heard of some great visits and socialization groups in local parks and playgrounds when the weather allowed!

Even in the midst of transitions and challenges, we are committed to our principles of being family-centered, seamless, outcome-driven, advocates for the youngest and most vulnerable children in Rhode Island, and stewards of the resources entrusted to us.

It wouldn't be possible to serve our families and uphold those principles without a fantastic team and community: we are beholden and thankful to all who have supported Children's Friend throughout the past year. We couldn't do it without you!

Sincerely,  
*Stacy Del Vicario and Tiana Ochoa*



# OUR PRINCIPLES



## **FAMILY-CENTERED:**

Discovering child and family needs and working with families to best meet them. Providing opportunities for families to be meaningfully engaged in the design of services. Being committed to serving families of diverse cultures and lifestyles in a non-biased and non-judgmental way.



## **SEAMLESS:**

Coordinating and integrating our services to ensure that families receive the support they need, regardless of point of entry to the agency. When our families face challenges outside our expertise, we partner with other high-quality organizations.



## **OUTCOME-DRIVEN:**

Thoughtfully measuring the impact and effectiveness of our services. Engaging in ongoing learning and innovation to ensure we are offering effective services to children and families. Consistently identifying what we can improve, doing what we can do best, and measuring our self against national benchmarks.



## **ADVOCATES:**

Taking a leadership role in educating policymakers and the public on the needs of the youngest and most vulnerable children, even when it means taking risks for the benefit of children.



## **STEWARDS:**

Taking responsibility for growing and sustaining our human and financial capital. Demonstrating respect and cultural sensitivity for our community, staff, and Board.

## **ABOUT CHILDREN'S FRIEND**

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

## **OUR MISSION**

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

## **OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITY**

Too many of the youngest and most vulnerable children in Rhode Island are experiencing devastating outcomes, including death, as a result of abuse and neglect. As stewards of the resources entrusted to us, Children's Friend is realigning itself to proactively respond to this crisis.

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



# MEET RUT, POLICY COUNCIL CHAIR:

Queridos amigos/as,

Mi experiencia durante estos últimos cuatro años en Children's Friend ha sido un camino de aprendizaje. Con su ayuda, fue más fácil educar a mis hijos; aprendí a entenderlos e involucrarme aún más con ellos. En el Dean Center, todo el personal fue muy amable y atento a sus necesidades. Siempre estuvieron al tanto de cada detalle. El cuidado y la seguridad de los niños eran su principal prioridad, y por eso me encantó. El maestro está realmente preparado para hacer este gran trabajo. Realmente creo que Children's Friend es un gran complemento y tiene un gran Sistema de apoyo para las familias. Si eliges Children's Friend como un lugar para educar a tus hijos, ¡hiciste un gran trabajo! También formé parte del Consejo de Políticas y en el último año fui el Presidente. Este también fue un camino de aprendizaje. Me tomó un tiempo sentirme cómoda y segura de mí misma para tomar un papel más activo en la educación de mis hijos; pero una vez que lo decidí, fue maravilloso. El equipo de compromiso familiar me hizo sentir bienvenido y me dio las herramientas y la confianza de creer en mí misma. Yo aprendí mucho solo por estar en las reuniones y me dio la oportunidad de tener una voz y de ver como el programa trabaja para beneficiar a los niños y las familias.



Gracias a todos en Children's Friend por unos maravillosos cuatro años para mí y para mis hijos. ¡Todos hemos aprendido mucho! Estoy muy orgullosa de haber sido el Presidente del Consejo de Póliza; también, estoy agradecida por el trabajo en equipo y el espíritu del Consejo de Póliza y Children's Friend, incluso durante los desafíos del año pasado.

Atentamente,  
*Rut Albornoz*  
Presidenta del Consejo de Póliza.

Dear Friends,

My experience during the past four years at Children's Friend has been a journey filled with learning and growth. With the help of Children's Friend, it was easier to educate my children; I learned to understand and be involved with my children's learning in a more meaningful way. At the Dean Center, everyone was very kind and attentive to their needs. They were always on top of every detail. The care and safety of the children were their top priority, and that's one of the reasons that I love the center. The teachers are always prepared to do this great job. Children's Friend is a great complement to families and a great support system. If you choose Children's Friend as a place to educate your children like my family did, you did a great job! I was also part of the Policy Council, and in the last year I was the Chair. This was also a learning opportunity. It took me a while to feel comfortable and confident about myself so that I could take a more active role in my children's education; but once I decided to go for it, it has been wonderful. The Family Engagement team made me feel welcome and gave me the tools and the confidence to believe in myself. I learned so much attending and helping at Policy Council meetings, and it gave me the opportunity to have a voice and see how the program works for the benefit of the children and the families.

Thank you all of Children's Friend for a wonderful four years for me and for my children. We have all learned so much! I am so proud to have been the Chair of Policy Council, too, and am thankful for the teamwork and spirit of Policy Council and Children's Friend even during the challenges of the past year.

Sincerely,  
*Rut Albornoz*  
Chair of the Policy Council

# NOTES FROM THE YEAR:

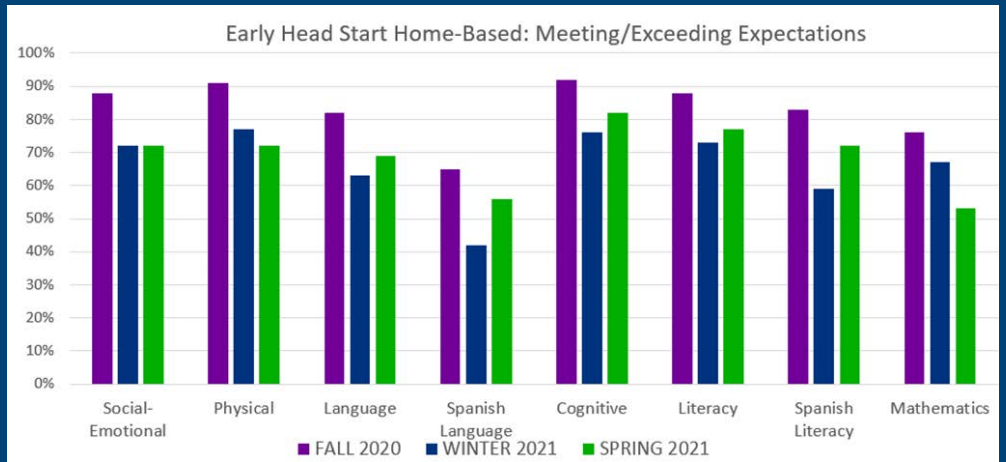
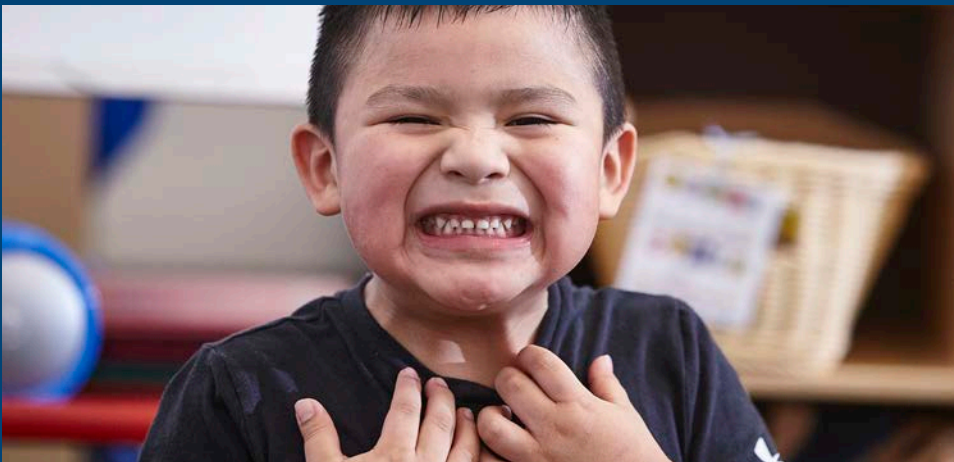
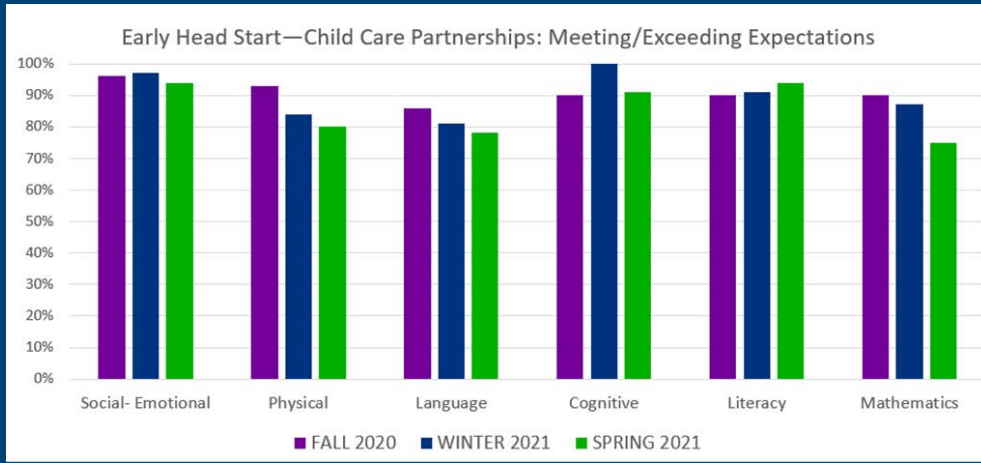
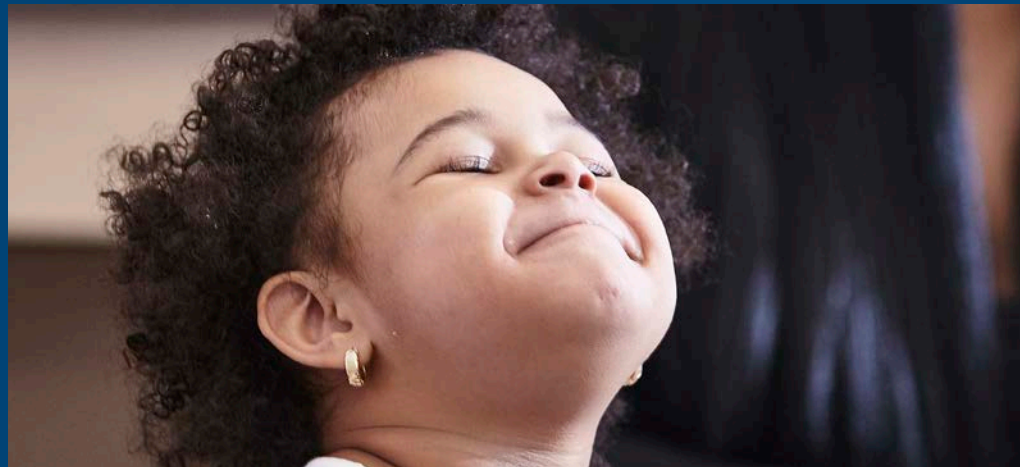
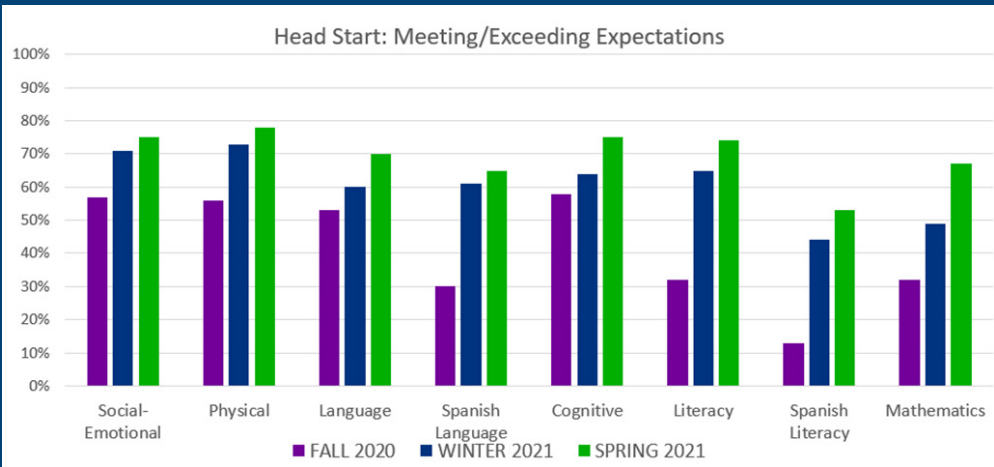
- During FY2021, Head Start underwent a virtual Focus Area 1 monitoring review. Focus Area 1 reviews provide programs with an opportunity to discuss their design, management, and structure, and services: through these reviews, the Office of Head Start gains an understanding of the program's design and plans for implementing high-quality services that meet the needs of children and families. All areas of Head Start and Early Head Start services were found to be in full compliance with Head Start Program Performance Standards. No areas of concern were noted in the review.
- Children's Friend Head Start staff have begun work as partners with the Rhode Island Department of Education and local school districts on a new federal initiative dedicated to the transition from early childhood education to public school kindergarten classes. This will help children and families be ready for kindergarten, and kindergarten teachers and their schools be ready for children coming from Head Start. This exciting new initiative is currently in the planning phase, and will kick-off in the spring of 2022.
- All Head Start classrooms continue to be Culturally and Linguistically Responsive: this means we take dedicated steps to support our bilingual children and families. Research indicates that supporting bilingualism from early childhood on can have wide-ranging benefits, from cognitive and social growth to employment opportunities and competitiveness in the workplace. Our CLR classrooms are staffed by teachers who have developed sensitivity to multicultural families and their needs; they embrace and highlight the child and family's culture and language(s!) in the classroom. Parents are engaged in their child's education, and children are truly able to succeed as bilingual learners with bright futures.
- Children's Friend staff helped lead the Rhode Island Head Start Association Conference in May 2021. Due to the ongoing inability to meet in large groups due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Conference shifted to a virtual format, with wild success. Parents of children in Early Head Start, Head Start and Pre-K from across Rhode Island were invited, and an average of 50 people attended each session. The Conference's topic was Transitions (of any sort). Topics and speakers included "Navigating the Special Education System in Public Schools" from Lisa Alfonso-Lynes of Children's Friend, "Foster Positive Mental Health Outcomes" from Lindsay Huffhines, Ph.D., Bradley Hospital, and "Transitioning to Kindergarten" from Keynote Speaker Lisa Nugent of the Rhode Island Department of Education.
- Policy Council and site-specific Parent Committee meetings were held on schedule over Zoom to ensure that our entire community was able to participate safely.

# SCHOOL READINESS:

School readiness measures whether children possess the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later in life, and the extent that children are ready for school, families are ready to support children's learning, and schools are ready for children.

Each year, we seek to improve School Readiness outcomes for the children in our Head Start, Early Head Start (center and home-based), and Early Head Start – Child Care Partnerships programs. We use the Teachings Strategies GOLD (GOLD)® to develop curricula and track child outcomes. GOLD® is a birth to kindergarten assessment system that assesses school readiness on a per-student level. It is completed three times throughout the school year and 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. The following graphs show the percentages of children in all Children's Friend sites who were meeting/exceeding expectations in the developmental areas of social-emotional, physical, language, Spanish language, cognitive, literacy, Spanish literacy, and mathematics.

Please note the following: In Early Head Start – Child Care Partnerships, we do not have any data on Spanish language or Spanish literacy as these are not components of the program or curriculum. In our Early Head Start programs, our staff received needed training on use of GOLD® for effective measurement in the population they serve, in part because Early Head Start uses a different curriculum. Our Early Head Start programs also operate based on rolling admissions and discharge, so the cohort measured in the fall might not be the same as the cohort measured in the spring. Early Head Start home visits were also conducted virtually during part of the year. Even given these factors, an acceptable percentage of children in Early Head Start met or exceeded school readiness goals during the 2020-2021 program year.



# THE COVID-19 RESPONSE TEAM AT CHILDREN'S FRIEND:

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Children's Friend has prioritized the safety of all staff members and families we serve. The COVID-19 Response Team was formed originally to track cases of COVID-19 throughout the agency and field the questions of staff members related to COVID-19. The COVID-19 Response Team is made up of one administrative member of the Programs team, one member of the Nursing Team, and one member of the Quality team. This three-person team has far surpassed the expectations of its' original design, expanding to provide policy and procedural recommendations for the agency, create easy-to-read bilingual communications for parents to keep their own families safe, and continue to manage COVID-19 cases within Children's Friend.

"I think we've handled the pandemic in a strategic way and with all of our different programs in mind," said Gabriella Florio, Programs Coordinator and senior member of the COVID-19 Response Team. "By interpreting the guidance put out by the Centers for Disease Control and the Rhode Island Department of Health and selecting the most stringent policies, we've been able to keep kids and families safe. I think our biggest accomplishment thus far is the ability to say we have had no evidence of center-based spread in any of the COVID-19 cases that have come up. We owe this to our careful policy choices, and our regular communications with hardworking staff to let them know about procedures that change. I'm proud to be a part of an organization that values science and data."

During the pandemic, the COVID-19 Response Team has managed over 3,000 emails from staff members, managed 52 instances of classroom closures due to positive cases, met as a team 67 times, held three open question and answer sessions for staff members, as well as a number of other achievements. The COVID-19 Response Team contributes greatly to the success of Children's Friend's management of the pandemic. The Response Team embodies the spirit of all Children's Friend staff members as thoughtful and collaborative stewards.





# FAMILY ADVOCACY IN A PANDEMIC

## MEET ERIN, KEILA AND YARELY:

Early Head Start at Children's Friend delivered crucial services and education to children and families, even in the face of continued challenges posed by COVID-19. Some home visits remained virtual, especially over the winter, with children and families connecting over Zoom. "Virtual visits were difficult, but we made it work successfully. Seeing children and families over Zoom is way better than not seeing them at all!" said Erin Combs, a Family Advocate. As health conditions allowed, virtual visits gave way to visits outdoors and in-person, in parks, and backyards, and corners of parking lots, then to indoor visits, with required masks and social distancing. "It's been wonderful to get back out and see families again: being one-on-one face-to-face, especially outdoors, is great," shared Erin, noting that Zoom fatigue affected everyone, including children. "Two-and-a-half-year-old Yarely even learned how to end a Zoom meeting, and would do so independently, to the surprise of her mom, when she didn't want to do it anymore!"

Whether in-person, on a front porch, or in a park, Early Head Start workers like Erin helped families like Keila and her daughter Yarely, through the past year. Families like Keila's struggled with food insecurity and with continuing to stay home (almost) all the time with their young children. Early Head Start workers continued to provide food donations from an array of community partners. Said Erin: "Even just seeing families for 5 minutes outside when dropping off food was great for them and for me." This sentiment—that any connection is meaningful—was particularly true of Keila and Yarely's experiences this year. Keila is in nursing school and works at a nursing home, and working while also keeping up with virtual classes and homework, and taking care of Yarely, has been exhausting and isolating. Erin shares that she's proud to report Keila stayed in school, but shared that she was so thankful she could connect with and support her. Yarely was born with a hearing impairment, and Erin also supported Keila in continuing to navigate Yarely's continued receipt of speech therapy through Early Intervention, and treatment from an audiologist. "Yarely and Keila struggled to get used to her new hearing aids, and struggled with seeing specialists during the pandemic. I'm happy to say that Yarely is wearing her hearing aids successfully now," said Erin about the struggles Yarely and Keila faced.

Through the Early Head Start Socialization Group Erin and Jasiel, another Family Advocate, ran in a local park, with families masked and on their own blankets to keep everyone safe, Keila and Yarely were able to find connection outside of Erin's services, too. Keila got to connect with other parents, and Yarely was able to run around and play with other children. Erin's group played educational games and got active, with physical games and bubbles aplenty.

Erin shares that she's so thankful Early Head Start at Children's Friend has persevered through the challenges of COVID-19 to deliver high-quality family support and child development services to families like Keila and Yarely's. Yarely is slated to attend Head Start at Children's Friend next fall, and she and Keila both feel ready for this big change. Erin said: "I can't imagine our families facing another winter with all of the COVID-19 related challenges and without connection to our programs and supports like food donations that we brought them. These are really needed services!"



# LET'S DO THE NUMBERS:

<b>Income: 8/1/20 - 7/31/21</b>	
RI Dept. of Human Services	\$879,426.51
RI Dept. of Education	\$319,495.00
U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services	\$15,806,303.89
In-kind	\$1,266,986.19
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$18,272,211.59</b>

<b>Expenses: 8/1/20 - 7/31/21</b>	
Salaries & Fringes	\$12,333,150.99
Purchased Services	\$1,525,356.44
Occupancy	\$1,834,186.34
Client Benefits	\$419,731.68
Other	\$2,159,786.14
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$18,272,211.59</b>

<b>ACF Budget: 5/1/21 - 4/30/22</b>	
Personnel	\$8,376,968
Fringe Benefits	\$3,560,232
Travel	\$5,475
Equipment	-
Supplies	\$271,688
Contractual	\$1,058,358
Facilities/Construction	-
Other	\$1,977,610
<b>Total Approved Budget</b>	<b>\$15,250,331</b>



<b>Early Head Start</b>	
# of slots	176
Total # of children & families served	232
% of eligible children served	7%
% of funded enrollment achieved	93%
% of children with an ongoing source of accessible health care	85%
% of enrolled children who received medical exams	54%
% of children with access to comprehensive dental care	50%
% of enrolled children who received dental exams	8%
# of children with disabilities who received services and coordination with other service providers	19
# of homeless families served	5
# of families who were helped in obtaining stable housing	1



Children's Friend provided essential services to many of Rhode Island's most vulnerable children living in Providence County through our Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships programs.

Cumulatively, 912 children received services from our Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships programs.

<b>Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships</b>	
# of slots	100
Total # of children & families served	93
% of eligible children served	4%
% of funded enrollment achieved	58%
% of children with an ongoing source of accessible health care	92%
% of enrolled children who received medical exams	74%
% of children who had access to comprehensive dental care	90%
% of enrolled children who received dental exams	11%
# of children with disabilities who received services and coordination with other service providers	14
# of homeless families served	8
# of families who were helped in obtaining stable housing	8
# of pregnant mothers served	0



<b>Head Start</b>	
# of slots	897
Total # of children & families served	587
% of eligible children served	17%
% of funded enrollment achieved	60%
% of children with an ongoing source of accessible health care	99%
% of enrolled children who received medical exams	57%
% of children with access to comprehensive dental care	75%
% of enrolled children who received dental exams	24%
# of children with disabilities who received services and coordination with other service providers	46
# of homeless families served	8
# of families who were helped in obtaining stable housing	2



# Children's FRIEND

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