

# HEAD START

2024 - 2025 ANNUAL REPORT



# From the Director

Dear Friends,

This year, Children's Friend delivered strong, wraparound support for children, parents, families, and our staff. Our programs focus on whole well-being and real results.

Our centers and classrooms are caring, high-quality places where children grow, gain skills for kindergarten, and feel ready for what's next. We welcome parents, families, and community partners to learn alongside us.

This year, we opened a new Early Learning Center, our second based within a mixed-use building that includes affordable housing.

Thank you for championing Head Start at Children's Friend. Together, we're opening doors for Rhode Island's children.

Sincerely,

**Dana Mullen**

Chief of Programs, Head Start Director



# 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.



## **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 ourselves against national benchmarks.



## **STEWARDS**

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



## **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.



## **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.



# Mission

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

# 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 founding member of the Child Welfare League of America and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation and the National Head Start Association Program of Excellence.*

# From the Policy Council Chair

Hello,

My daughter was part of the Head Start program for 2 years at the Dexter site in Central Falls. The teachers and my Family Advocate always encouraged me to participate in the monthly Parent Committee meeting and other Family Engagement activities in the classroom. When I was invited to be part of the monthly Policy Council meeting, I was reluctant and afraid. However, once I started going to the meetings, I learned more about the program and my role as a parent.

The program helped my daughter to develop her social skills. She did not listen to the rules and was very hyper all the time. She learned to control herself and learned how to follow the rules, keep a routine and to be more disciplined.

For me, Head Start was a life saver. It helped me to believe in myself and be more confident. I am very thankful to the Program and its staff – they have been a great support and believed in my capacities and potential. Right now, I am a volunteer at my children’s school, and I am better able to advocate for me and my children.

Thank you to the Head Start program and Children’s Friend. I always recommend them to any family with young children. They are always there to help, support and guide you in whatever life throws at you!

Lilian Flores

## Head Start Policy Council

Lilian Flores, **Chair**

Neftali Capellan, **Vice Chair**

Jessica Ferrara, **Treasurer**

Johanna Dirinott, **Secretary**

Marvin Abdalah

Samantha Aguilar

Genesis Gomez

Patricia Janvier

Ludmila Lima

Tatiana Liriano

Sarah Luna

Nicaury Martinez

Zila Wells

### **Community Representatives**

Yuric Ardon

Erica Cante

Sokpha Chea

Angie Cordoba

Ana Echevarria de Saquic

*Children's Friend Board Member*

Yackelyn Noriega

Bianca Sanchez

Maria Vernaza

# Early Head Start Promotes Generational Healing

When Elizabeth and Drake first realized their daughter Izzy might need extra support, everything felt overwhelming. They received a referral to Early Intervention at Children’s Friend, and things started to shift. Izzy was diagnosed with autism, and the family gained language and resources to better support her development. They finally started to feel like they weren’t alone. From there, Izzy was enrolled in Early Head Start home-based services.



In the beginning, the home was loud, chaotic, and stressful. Children’s Friend didn’t just support Izzy; they supported the whole family. When Izzy experienced meltdowns, staff modeled calm, compassionate responses: sitting with her, breathing together to help her regulate. They helped the family find appropriate sensory tools like teething chews instead of a binky, a weighted blanket, and a trampoline to release energy.

Through weekly home visits, the family learned practical tools that made everyday life safer and calmer. Children’s Friend Early Head Start services reach the whole family. This means that as soon as the family advocate arrived, they were able to help identify developmental challenges for Izzy’s younger brother, Elias. As a result, he began receiving occupational and physical therapy much earlier than he may have otherwise. Eventually, he was enrolled in the Children’s Friend Early Head Start Child Care Partnership program at the Heritage Park YMCA, further expanding and strengthening the family’s support network.

**“ Now, I am going to go in and fight for what my child needs. [Because] I have people in my life who have given me strength and advocated for me. ”**  
– Elizabeth, EHS Parent

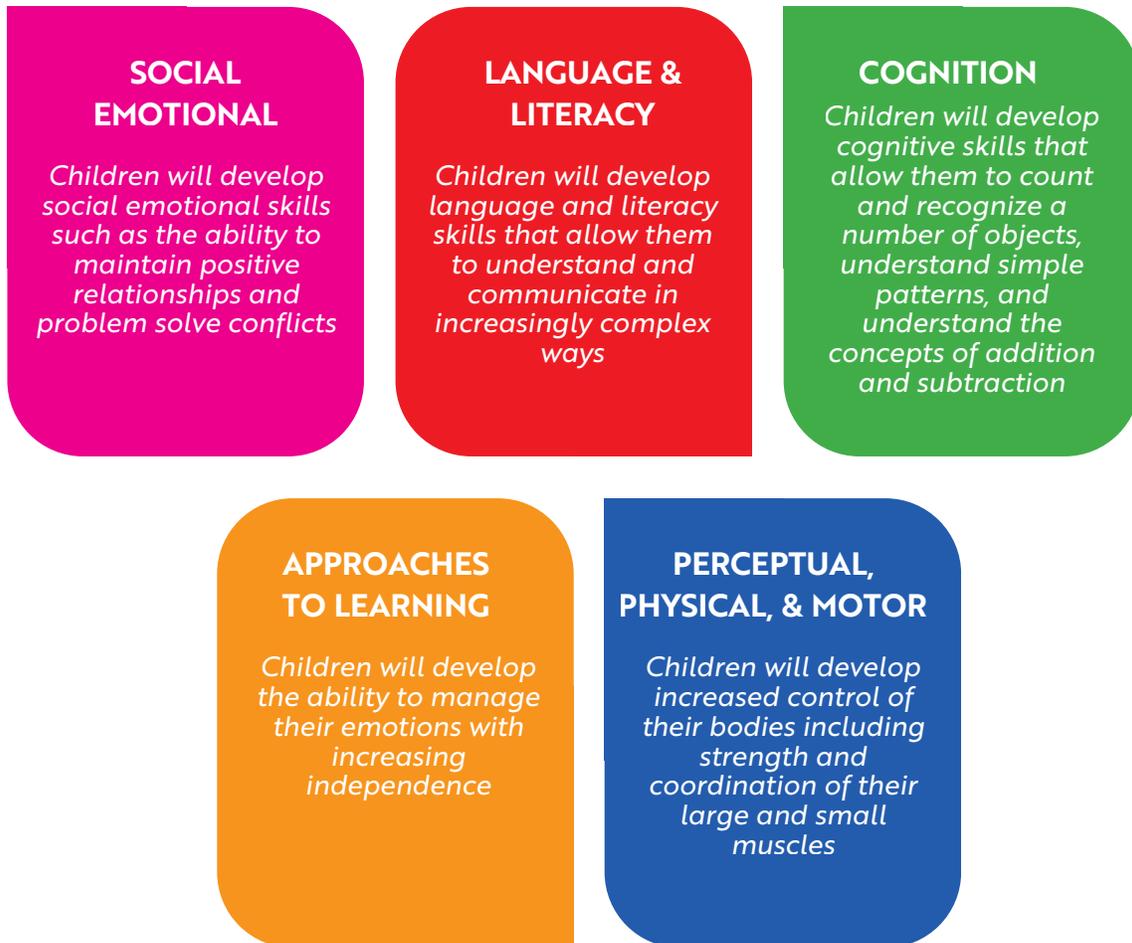
As their children gained new skills and reached new milestones, Elizabeth and Drake grew, too. Early Head Start taught them more effective parenting strategies rooted in choice, connection, and understanding. Children’s Friend also helped the parents communicate better with each other during a demanding time, reducing stress and strengthening their partnership.

For Elizabeth, the experience was especially transformative. She gained the confidence to seek therapy, heal from her own past, and find her voice as an advocate. Today, she is determined to speak up not only for her children, but for other families who are navigating autism and early childhood challenges. She also found a job after years out of the labor force.

Elias is thriving in preschool, and Izzy is receiving the autism support services she needs to successfully transition to kindergarten next year. The wraparound design of Head Start, strong partnerships between Children’s Friend Early Intervention and Early Head Start services, and the trusting relationships that have been built with child care partnership sites, like Heritage Park YMCA, were essential to empowering this family and many others to help their children and family thrive.

# School Readiness

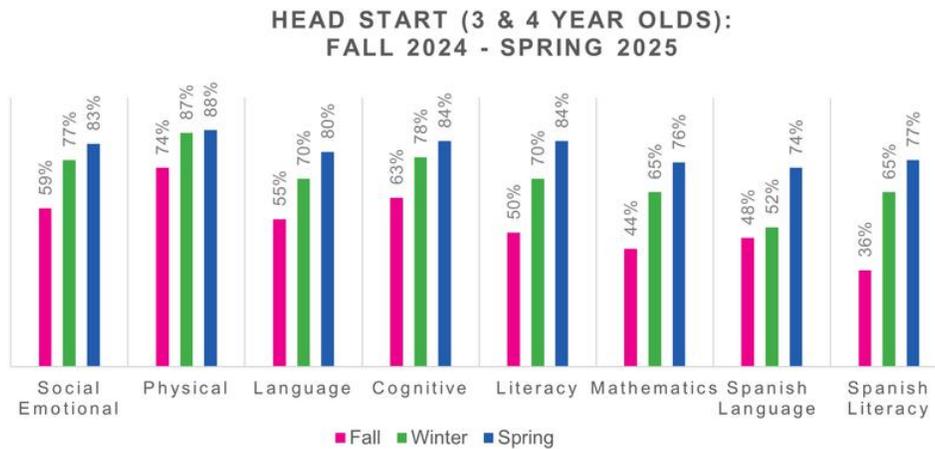
Children's Friend works in partnership with parents and families to make progress toward each child's school readiness. We provide developmentally appropriate services so that children are ready to learn with the academic and social skills needed in Kindergarten. Children's Friend has five school readiness goals that we strive for our children to achieve by the time they enter Kindergarten:



Children's Friend uses Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG), a birth to kindergarten assessment system, to monitor children's progress and inform planning throughout the school year. All children are assessed in six areas of development: Social Emotional, Physical, Language, Cognitive, Literacy, and Mathematics. Children who are identified as Spanish speaking through a home language survey are also assessed on Spanish language and Spanish literacy. There are three checkpoints during the school year which allow teachers to identify children's strengths and areas for growth. After each checkpoint, the teachers meet with families for conferences where they plan the next steps for supporting children's progress in school and at home.

# School Readiness cont.

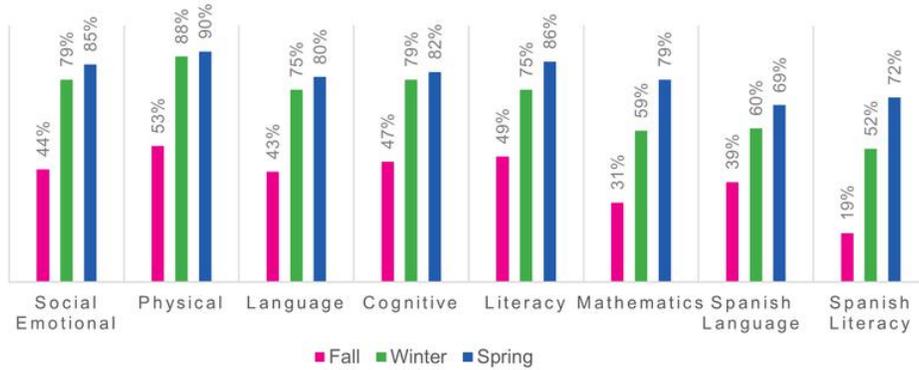
The following graphs show the percentages of children who met or exceeded the Widely Held Expectations (WHE) for what children should know and be able to do by the end of the year at each of our three checkpoints.



“  
These assessments help improve child outcomes because that is the overarching goal: get these children ready for kindergarten and beyond. Without assessment, goal refinements, and instructional supports, we cannot say if these children are ready for the next steps in their academic careers.  
”  
– Jenn Jarvis, Lead Teacher

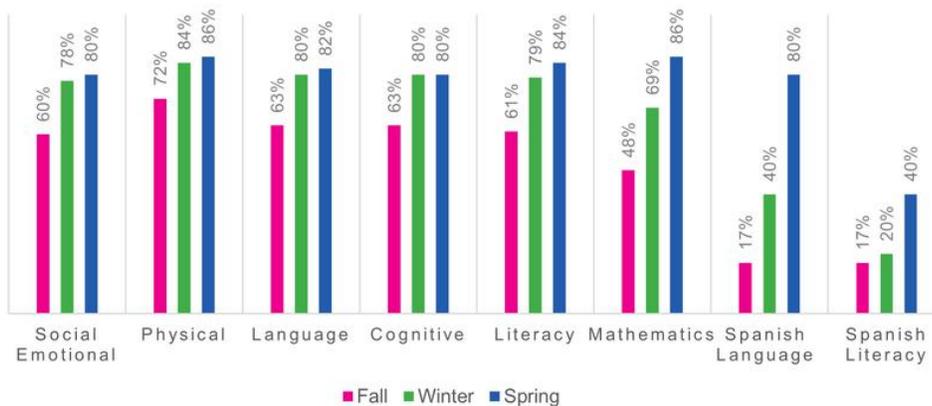
# School Readiness cont.

STATE PRE-KINDERGARTEN: FALL 2024 - SPRING 2025

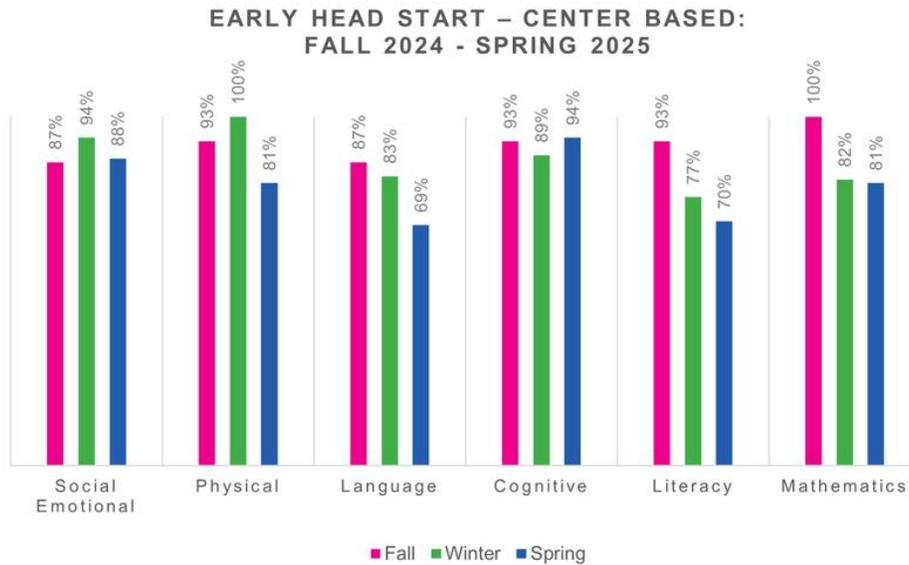


“ Child assessments help me measure children's progress and design activities that help them improve social skills, knowledge, and behaviors that help them meet their needs. – Georgina Rodriguez, Lead Teacher ”

CHILD CARE (ALL AGES): FALL 2024 –SPRING 2025



# School Readiness cont.



“

An assessment, for me, is a tool that we use as a team in the classroom to find out what each child's strength is and where a child can improve their learning development: social emotion, cognitive, language, fine and large motor skills. It is a very important tool for the classroom teaching team to use to get a base knowledge per child; to be able to set appropriate individualized goal.

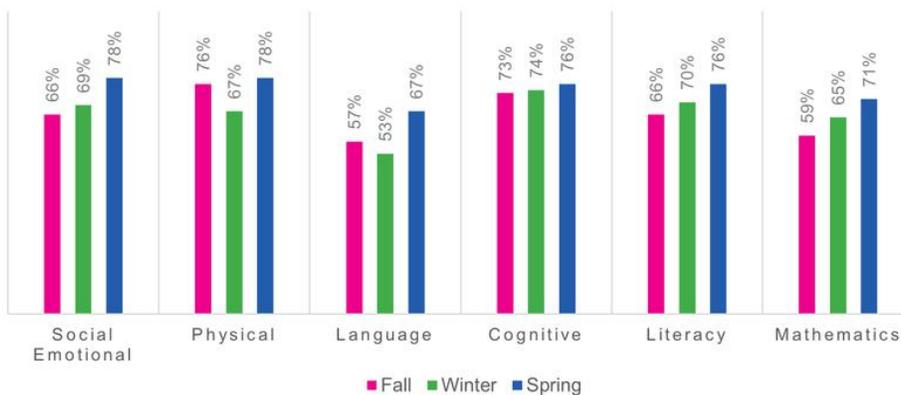
– Maria Colon, Lead Teacher

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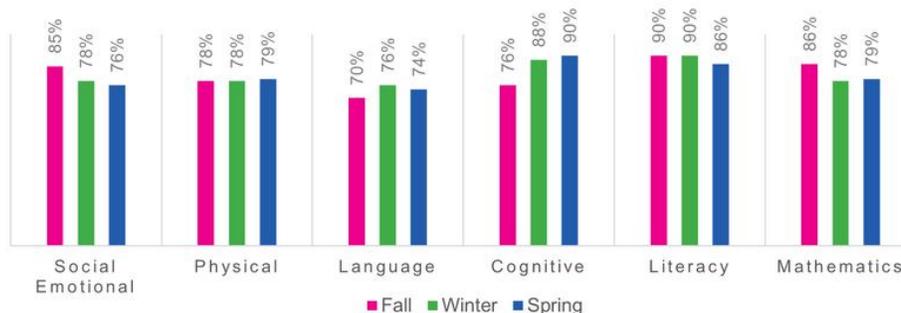


# School Readiness cont.

**EARLY HEAD START – HOME BASED:  
FALL 2024 TO SPRING 2025**



**EARLY HEAD START-CHILD CARE PARTNERSHIP:  
FALL 2024 TO SPRING 2025**



## Data Trends:

- At least 80% of our center-based children are meeting or exceeding the Widely Held Expectations for social emotional, physical, and cognitive development at the Spring 2025 Checkpoint.
- At least 75% of children in our programs that serve infants and toddlers (EHS-CB, EHS-HB, EHS-CCP) are meeting or exceeding the Widely Held Expectations in social emotional, physical, cognitive development at the Spring 2025 Checkpoint.

*Note: Children aged 0-3 years are moved to the next age level in the child assessment system throughout the school year. Thus, children who were meeting the Widely Held Expectations may have been working towards the goals for the next age level at the next checkpoint if they had a birthday.*

# Parent and Family Engagement

Family Engagement is the cornerstone of the Head Start program. We work very closely with families to make sure that all families have the opportunity to participate in policy making or in other decisions about the Head Start program through a structure called Shared Governance, or shared decision-making. We do this by supporting each center with their Parent Committee meeting, recruiting and inviting families to Policy Council and electing officers annually.

## **Feedback**

We develop, distribute, collect and analyze data from two surveys every year (Interest and the Satisfaction Surveys). The results are shared with all managers and supervisors from the program. The data help us improve the program and plan for workshops, meetings and trainings for families.

## **Community Resources**

We connect with community resources to provide workshops for families monthly (SNAP – University of Rhode Island, Blackstone Valley Community Action Program; RI Legal Services; Lead Action Program; and local school districts).

## **Supporting Literacy**

Family Engagement also works very closely with the local libraries, to obtain a library card for every child in the Head Start and preschool classes. Library staff come to some Parent Committee meetings to explain the benefits and services that the library offers.

## **Policy Council**

Policy Council members have the opportunity to be part of the Interview process for new hires for the Head Start program as well as terminations.

Policy Council members can also take advantage of the training provided by the agency including:

- CPR/First Aid
- communication
- Ethics
- Professionalism
- Confidentiality
- Child Development
- child abuse and neglect
- Conflict of Interest.

## **Partnership with AmeriCorps**

Family Engagement works with the AmeriCorps grant program to recruit and train parents to become AmeriCorps members who support our early learning classrooms.

# Let's Do the Numbers!

Head Start	
# of slots	648
% of funded enrollment achieved	112
% of children with an ongoing source of accessible health care	98
% of children with access to comprehensive dental care	90
# of children with disabilities who received services and coordination with other service providers	106
# of homeless families served	13
# of families who were helped in obtaining stable housing	5
Early Head Start	
# of slots	176
% of funded enrollment achieved	173
% of children with an ongoing source of accessible health care	78
% of children with access to comprehensive dental care	54
# of children with disabilities who received services and coordination with other service providers	24
# of homeless families served	8
# of families who were helped in obtaining stable housing	8
# of pregnant mothers served	15
Early Head Start - Child Care Partnerships	
# of slots	64
% of funded enrollment achieved	172
% of children with an ongoing source of accessible health care	81
% of children with access to comprehensive dental care	45
# of children with disabilities who received services and coordination with other service providers	22
# of homeless families served	1
# of families who were helped in obtaining stable housing	1

# Financials

Income	
Rhode Island Department of Human Services	\$1,695,634.52
Rhode Island Department of Education	\$820,965.00
United States Department of Health and Human Services	\$15,688,225.60
In-Kind (match)	\$4,064,143.20
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$22,268,968.32</b>

Expenses	
Salaries and Fringe	\$14,230,404.06
Purchased Services	\$1,377,049.11
Occupancy	\$1,387,109.98
Client Benefits	\$822,542.19
Other	\$4,451,862.98
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$22,268,968.32</b>

ACF Budget	
Personnel	\$9,458,978.00
Fringe Benefits	\$4,020,064.00
Supplies	\$426,468.00
Contractual	\$1,240,845.00
Other	\$2,082,666.00
<b>Total Approved Budget</b>	<b>\$17,229,021.00</b>



children's friend

Nurturing Children. Empowering Families.