



Office of Child Care  
**Starting RIGht**  
Rhode Island's Early Care and Education Initiative

## Starting RIGht Progress Improving Outcomes for Children and Families

Proving itself one of the nation's most active and innovative states in addressing the critical needs of children and their families, Rhode Island has taken bold steps to create a dynamic system for improving outcomes for children from birth to age 16. Building on the DHS Child Care Assistance Program [CCAP], Starting RIGht, RI's comprehensive early care and education, school age and youth out-of-school time initiative, is a significant investment designed to increase affordability, accessibility and availability of high quality child care and early education services for all of Rhode Island's children, particularly for those in families improving themselves through the Family Independence Program.

Successful implementation of Starting RIGht supports important progress toward Rhode Island's overarching goals for the future leaders of our state and nation, namely that:

**All children enter school ready to learn**

**All children leave school ready to lead productive lives**

**All children are safe in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods**

**All children live in families that are self-sufficient yet inter-dependent**

Rhode Island uses Federal Child Care Development Fund dollars in combination with state resources to fund the service system we are enhancing and developing to achieve these outcomes.

In state fiscal year [SFY] 2003, RI anticipates \$18,129,478 in CCDF funds - this will constitute 23.9% of total expenditures for child care subsidies and Starting RIGht quality, affordability, and accessibility initiatives. [An additional \$789,793 is anticipated in Federal SSBG funds - approximately 1%]. Overall, in SFY2003, DHS proposes to spend \$75,963,047 on child care, early education and related quality initiatives. This represents a very small increase of approximately 1% in child care spending over what is currently projected for SFY2002.

\$68,469,205 (90%) of the total fiscal year's expenditures will be for direct care subsidies for working families or families receiving cash through the Family Independence Program who are also in education or training. Federal funds support 21% of the child care assistance subsidies provided to families through the DHS CCAP.

In SFY it is proposed that \$1,951,488 in federal CCDF funds will support Starting RIGht quality initiatives which encompass: professional development for providers and accreditation for programs; monitoring and technical assistance; start up, innovation and expansion; resource and referral services; and research. This will be complemented by \$1,650,000 in state funds to support the Health Care for Child Care Providers Program - a Rhode Island innovation that helps to attract and retain qualified professionals in the child care work force. In order to strengthen and increase Rhode Island's early care and education opportunities for pre-school children, it is proposed that \$1,558,550 be spent to continue the development and delivery of comprehensive, "Head Start like" services to low income preschoolers and their families in the Comprehensive Child Care Services Program. These quality focused initiatives and programs comprise 7% of total spending on child care and early education in the proposed SFY2003 DHS budget. 71% of quality expenditures will be drawn from federal CCDF funds.

Expectations for expending funds on administration in SFY2003 remain very modest. Administrative costs are projected at \$2,333,804 or 3% of total expenditures. This amount will be comprised of 57% state funds and 43% federal funds.

### The ongoing achievements of Starting Right include:

❖ **Supporting ~~the~~ child care assistance for all income eligible working families**

Between January and July of 1999 family income guidelines for child care assistance were expanded from 185% of the federal poverty level to 225% (\$32,918 gross annual income for a family of three) allowing more low income families access to affordable child care through the DHS CCAP. Approximately 13% of all families using child care assistance fall into this expanded eligibility range

Access to dependable child care supports low-income families in their struggle toward self-sufficiency. Parents with dependable, affordable child care are more likely to be successful in their jobs, to advance themselves or to move from training and education into work.

❖ **Supporting an expansion of out-of-school time opportunities for school age children and youth**

From January - July of 1999 entitlement for the Child Care Assistance Program was expanded to include 13 - 15 year olds in licensed out-of-school time programs. Encouraged by the availability of tuition assistance, new programs serving youth after school are becoming licensed by DCYF. Expansion of the entitlement has helped to focus concern about middle school children and youth in out-of-school time. DHS partners with the United Way and other funding partners in a state wide Community Schools Initiative to support a coordinated expansion of out-of-school time programming and participates with other state agencies of the Children's Cabinet on the Youth Success Cluster.

The availability of high quality out-of-school time programs for youth will support school success and positive youth development and reduce incidents of delinquency and teen pregnancy. For parents this means the security of knowing that children are supervised in out-of-school hours, that homework is being done in a supportive environment and that youth are engaged in productive activity in a safe environment.

❖ **Increasing rates of reimbursement to providers approved by the Child Care Assistance Program**

Child care rates in Rhode Island have increased steadily over the past 5 years. An increase of 71% was seen between 1997 - 2000 as state subsidy rates were brought up to par with current market rates. In January of 2002, rates of reimbursement to child care providers serving children through the DHS Child Care Assistance Program were increased to the 75th percentile of a market rate survey conducted by the RI Department of Labor and Training in 2000 this was about a 2% increase over 2000 rates. Rhode Island law requires that a market rate survey be conducted biannually with rate adjustments to maintain DHS CCAP rates at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the child care market. Since 1997, the number of certified and licensed providers in RI has increased by 66%. Approximately 87% of the 1562 certified family child care homes and licensed center based providers in RI currently accept DHS assisted children.

Addressing the need for increased rates of reimbursement allows child care providers caring for children through the DHS Child Care Assistance Program to implement quality enhancements needed to provide children with environments and caregivers that support optimal development in the early years. Research clearly indicates that children participating in high quality child care programs demonstrate a stronger commitment to school, have better relationships with peers, and exhibit better classroom behavior in kindergarten and the early grades. Competitive rates of reimbursement are critical to supporting an early care and education system that helps all of Rhode Island's children enter school ready to learn. Competitive rates of reimbursement also

expand our capacity to serve income eligible children through the CCAP - as programs are expanded, more current providers agree to accept assisted families and the number of licensed programs increases.

❖ **Providing critical benefits to support a stable and capable care and early education work force**

Rhode Island continues to lead the nation in providing health insurance benefits to certified family child care providers - the program supports insurance for over 303 providers who care for children in the DHS CC Assistance Program and 276 of those providers' dependent children. Starting RIght expanded this benefit to providers working in licensed child care centers -the program reimburses 50% of health care insurance costs for over 569 child care professionals in 145 centers where at least 40% of enrolled children are supported by the DHS CC Subsidy Program.

In the midst of a national crisis in the child care work force, providing access to health care for providers ensures that over 872 child care professionals in RI have a vested interest in remaining at their jobs and are able to report to their jobs in good health. Support for caregiver benefits helps maintain stability in the child care work force in RI and encourages providers to accept children in the DHS CC Assistance Program thus expanding capacity and supporting parental choice of providers.

❖ **Increasing capacity to provide comprehensive child care services to low-income preschool children**

As part of Starting RIght, Rhode Island embarked upon an ambitious plan to define and fund comprehensive child care services (similar to Head Start) that include high quality early education/child development programming, social services, health, nutrition services, mental health, parental involvement and transition services for children from age 3 until entry to kindergarten. In it's first year of full implementation, the RI Comprehensive Child Care Services Program has become a national model for high quality early care and education collaboration. Monitored and supported by the DHS Office of Child Care, the program now encompasses 42 providers in 4 certified CCCSP Networks providing much needed services to 245 preschool children in very low income families.

Expanding access to comprehensive preschool and child care services for children in vulnerable low income families increases the likelihood that more of these children will overcome the risk factors associated with poverty and enter school ready to achieve success. Rhode Island's commitment to parental choice of providers and inclusion of diverse participants in the community in the process of crafting this program is a distinctive feature that adds value to the measure of our continued success as a family centered state.

❖ **Improving early care and education quality through on-site technical assistance, professional development for providers and program accreditation in centers and family child care homes**

Starting RIght continues and expands our capacity to provide well coordinated, engaging professional development to Rhode Island's early care and education professionals through a variety of projects. Rhode Island's HOPE : A Harbor of Opportunities for Professional Excellence is an intrepid plan to advance a state of the art professional development system which will support high quality experiences for children and youth by supporting excellence in the knowledge, skills and expertise of those who staff programs in child care and early education settings. CHILDSPAN, Rhode Island's Child Development and Education Training System, (funded by DHS with additional grants from DOE and DOH) disseminates information about training and professional development opportunities, supports training programs, provides professional resources, and facilitates national accreditation for family child care homes, child care centers, and public school preschool and kindergarten programs. The Child Care Support Network (funded by DOH and expanded by DHS) provides on-site technical assistance and resources on guiding behavior and emotional wellness to child care centers and family child care homes. In each of these efforts, interdepartmental collaboration and community involvement come together in powerful ways to maximize the use of our resources to support quality services for children and families.

The quality of a child's relationship with his or her caregiver is the single most important factor determining the quality of a child's experiences in child care. Recognizing this, and realizing that high quality child care experiences benefit children's growth and development while poor quality experiences disadvantage children, Rhode Island's commitment to professional development of the child care professional work force supports an overall commitment to children, families, and the future.

❖ **Using modern technology to update and streamline the CCAP administrative system**

In June 2001, RI DHS implemented the first phase of an administrative redesign project for the Child Care Assistance Program initiated as part of Starting Right. The goal of the 3 year project is to create a more efficient, effective, user-friendly administrative system to assist eligible families in paying for quality child care services that meet their needs. The department has launched a secure web-site accessible to approved providers to automate the process by which families enroll children in care and inform DHS of their choices. New policy, revised application documents, improved communication and an intensive training program for DHS staff, child care providers, families, and community organizations surrounds implementation and supports a smooth transition.

Outdated systems of administration can impede a family's access to child care assistance and quality care programs and discourage providers from supporting the Child Care Assistance Program. Modernizing administrative systems will allow Rhode Island to improve the program for families and providers while increasing accountability and cost effective investments.

❖ **Improving quality and expanding access through the Rhode Island Child Care Facilities Fund**

In the initial implementation of Starting Right, RI DHS awarded \$1.4 million dollars in start up and innovation grants to increase the capacity and quality of Rhode Island's child care infrastructure. As a way to provide ongoing support targeted to improving and expanding child care facilities in all types of settings throughout the state, DHS has joined with Rhode Island Foundation and other philanthropic and business partners to create a permanent Child Care Facilities Fund. Operated by the Rhode Island affiliate of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and supported by the national LISC organization and its child care subsidiary, Community Investment Collaborative for Kids (CICK), the fund will provide technical assistance for facility enhancement and loan management in addition to very low interest loans for building, expanding, and improving child care facilities.

Rhode Island recognizes the critical relationship between child care spaces and child care quality. Creating a capacity to support technical assistance and loan capital targeted to improving the quantity and quality of child care facilities across the state indicates an ongoing commitment to all aspects of quality and access for children and families.

❖ **Setting standards for early learning**

Working collaboratively with the Department of Education, DHS supports and promotes an exciting Rhode Island Early Learning Standards Project. In 2001 this project convened a representative Task Force of early care and education professionals from community child care and preschool settings and public school settings to develop a set of universal early learning standards that define and describe what young children should know and be able to do if they are to arrive at school ready to succeed, and succeed once they arrive. A competitive bidding process was utilized to select four communities to pilot implementation of the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards in 2002. These communities will receive intensive professional support as well as grant money to plan for and implement practices which support children in achieving to their best potential using the Standards as a vehicle and guide.

Research and practice demonstrate that early childhood education is the foundation for school success and life long learning. High quality early learning experiences help all children get the strong and healthy start in life

that leads to success in school - providing these experiences is the shared responsibility of the whole community surrounding each child and family. Statewide standards, goals and expectations provide a focus on accountability that creates equity across programs for all children regardless of the family they are born into or the community in which they live. As part of education reform in RI, a standards based strategy extending to early learners holds all adults responsible for organizing resources and systems that will ensure success for all children.

❖ **Monitoring program quality**

DHS continues to work with DCYF, the state's child care licensing agency, to strengthen and support child care regulations and monitoring to ensure quality of care in more than 261 licensed child care centers, 240 licensed school age programs and 1061 certified family child care homes in Rhode Island. DHS contributes CCDF funds to increase DCYF's Licensing Unit capacity. These funds provide financial support for four of the seven licensing specialists in the state's child care licensing unit including a bilingual Spanish speaking specialist. A bilingual Licensing Unit clerical salary is also covered with CCDF dollars.

Rhode Island recognizes the need to increase licensing and compliance monitoring capacity in order to preserve accountability and quality in a child care system expanding to meet families' needs. DHS and DCYF work side by side to ensure that CCAP assisted families and all families in RI can count on safe, healthy, dependable child care in licensed and certified settings.

❖ **Helping families find the care they need**

Assuring that working parents have a user-friendly resource to provide assistance in choosing and locating quality, affordable, and convenient child care is a priority in Rhode Island. A partnership with the Providence Chamber of Commerce utilizing CCDF funds has made expert assistance easily accessible by phone to parents of all income levels on a statewide basis through Rhode Island's only resource and referral agency, Options for Working Parents. Options also offers technical assistance to businesses seeking to offer child care benefits or develop other family-friendly policies in the workplace and helps to engage the business community as partners in building a quality child care system in the state.

Maintaining vital information on child care capacity and connecting families to child care services that meet their needs are critical activities that contribute to the development of a well coordinated and responsive care and early education system. Rhode Island takes a unique approach to resource and referral services in forging a successful partnership with the business community which relies on a quality child care system to support families with children who comprise the majority of the modern work force.