

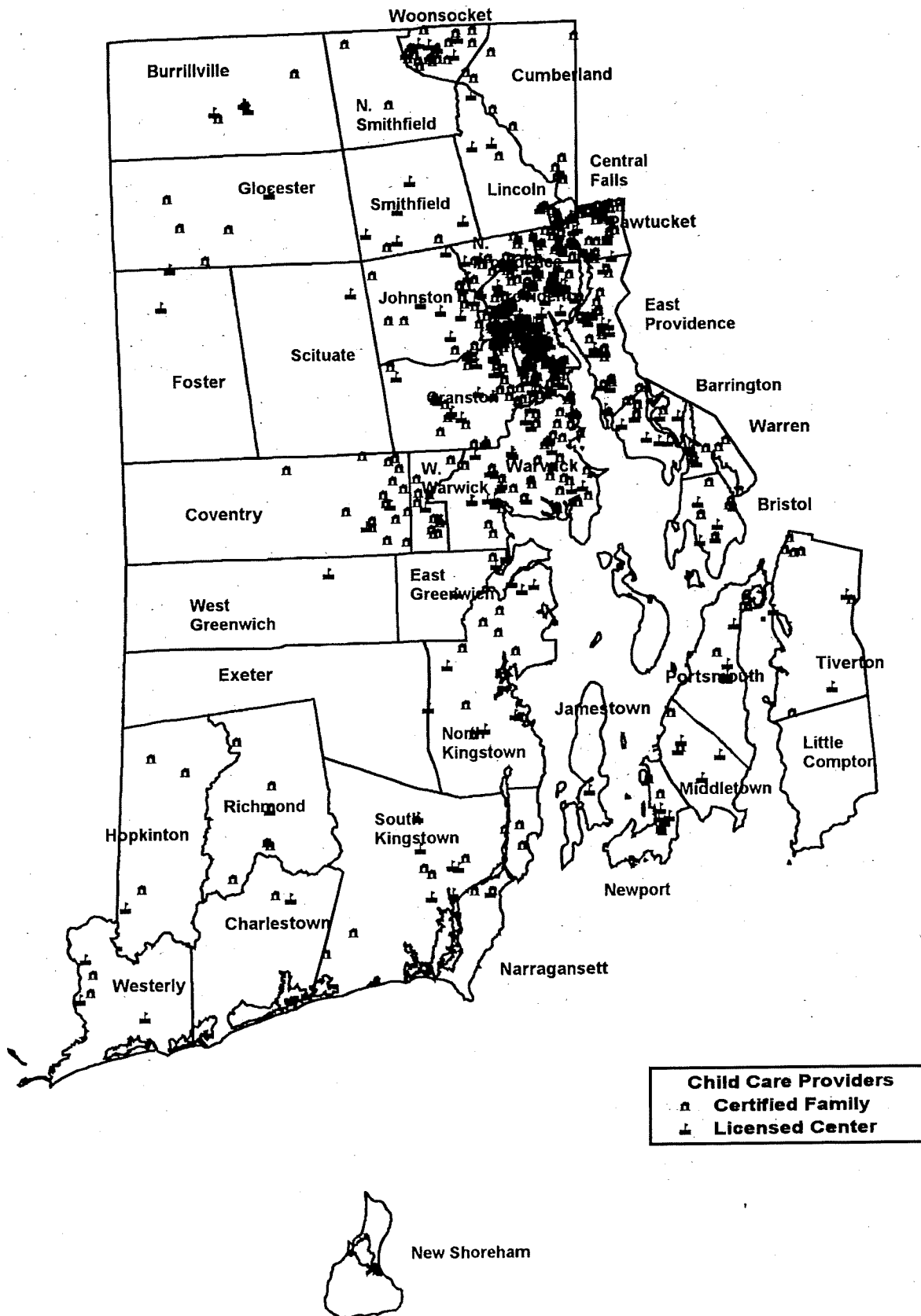
STARTING RIGHT

**QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION
AND CHILD CARE FOR
RHODE ISLAND'S
CHILDREN
AND
YOUTH**



A Report by:
The Rhode Island Department of Human Services
JULY, 2000

RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES CERTIFIED FAMILY & LICENSED CENTER PROVIDERS



Message from the Director

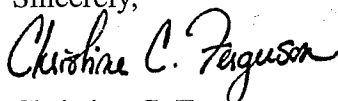
At the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS), we believe that Rhode Island's children are the key to our state's future. As we strive to make Rhode Island an ideal environment in which to live and work and raise our families, we need to make critical investments in young children as their well-being and education is critical to our state's future economic and social strength. The children of today, given the supports they need to grow and thrive, will be successful as tomorrow's workforce, leaders, and parents. Our vision is that all children can reach their full potential if we work together to assure that families are supported by every component of the community, including government. Parents must be able to get and keep jobs that can support their families and lift them out of poverty. While working, parents need to feel confident that their children are well cared for in appropriate environments which support developing physical, cognitive, and social skills children need to prosper in a rapidly changing and complex society.

This vision for children and families is captured in the four overarching goals adopted by the Rhode Island Children's Cabinet, an interagency forum created to foster cooperative state efforts to address the needs of children and families in an integrated and effective way. These goals express a consensus on the positive outcomes that should guide the development and implementation of programs and services for children and families. They are:

- All children enter school ready to learn.
- All youth leave school prepared to lead productive lives.
- All children and youth are safe in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods.
- All children live in families that are self-sufficient, yet interdependent.

Recently, through our Starting Right initiative, we began the process of assuring that all children are given an opportunity to benefit from quality early care and education and before- and after-school services. And this year, the start of a new millennium, we have seen real progress in our efforts to make our programs more affordable and accessible for working families. This, our first Early Education and Child Care Report, highlights the gains made under Starting Right to date. We hope you enjoy reading about our accomplishments, new initiatives, and challenges for the future and find the report informative and useful.

Sincerely,

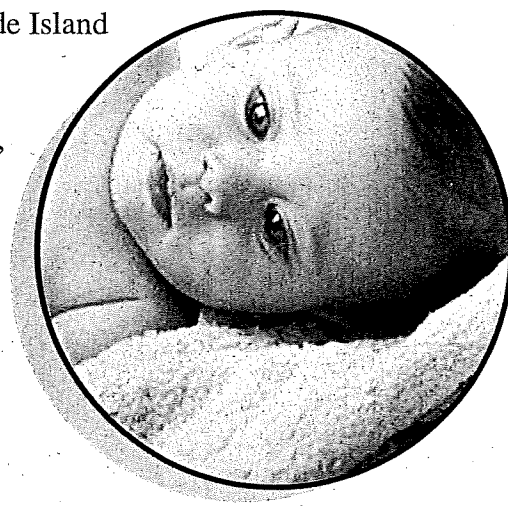


Christine C. Ferguson
Director

STARTING RIGHT

Rhode Island's Quality Early Education and Child-Care Initiative

Proving itself one of the nation's most pro-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. By assuring that all children get the educational start they need to succeed in school, we will develop a future workforce that can guarantee Rhode Island's ability to compete in the economy of the 21st century. Building upon the DHS Child Care Subsidy Program that has been in existence for some time, Starting Right, Rhode Island's Early Education and Child-Care Initiative, is a major investment in the creation of a comprehensive, inclusive and high-quality approach to providing care and education for all Rhode Island's young people.



The goals of Starting Right are to assure available, accessible, affordable and high-quality child care to all Rhode Island families. Starting Right was specifically designed to expand Rhode Island's Child Care Subsidy Program to include more working families, address school-age care including after-school care for teens ages 13 through 15, to increase care options available to families, and to improve the quality of care provided to all of Rhode Island's children, the future leaders of our state.

DHS Receives National Recognition for Child-Care Program

During the summer of 1999, DHS was recognized by both *Parents* magazine and *Working Mother* magazine for its innovative programs benefiting children, working parents and child-care providers.

In the July 1999 issue of *Parents*, Rhode Island was named one of the five "Great States for Working Mothers" and was cited as the only state that offers free health insurance to family day-care providers and their children. Helen Blank, director of child care and development for the national Children's Defense Fund is also quoted in the article saying, "The Rhode Island plan takes a major step toward recognizing the contribution that caregivers make in helping parents work and children succeed, and it provides them with a benefit that they deserve."

Working Mother magazine, in its August 1999 issue, recognized Rhode Island as one of the "10 Best States" for child care, calling Rhode Island the state that "has led the way" in improving and expanding the quality of child care. *Working Mother* also highlighted Rhode Island's efforts to provide health benefits to child-care workers, "an innovation that keeps good caregivers in the field." The magazine continued to praise the state for its efforts to increase child-care subsidies for many working families and improve the rates paid to caregivers.

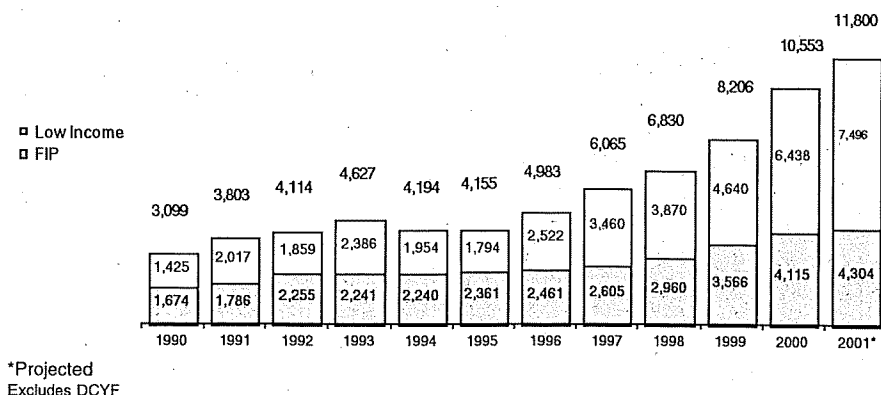
Growing a Child-Care System to Meet Children's and Families' Needs

Rhode Island has a long history, dating back to the 1970s, of providing financial assistance to low-income working families helping them pay for child care. As a part of the Family Independence Act, Rhode Island now guarantees financial assistance for child care for working low-income families through the DHS Child Care Subsidy Program. The DHS Child Care Program also offers

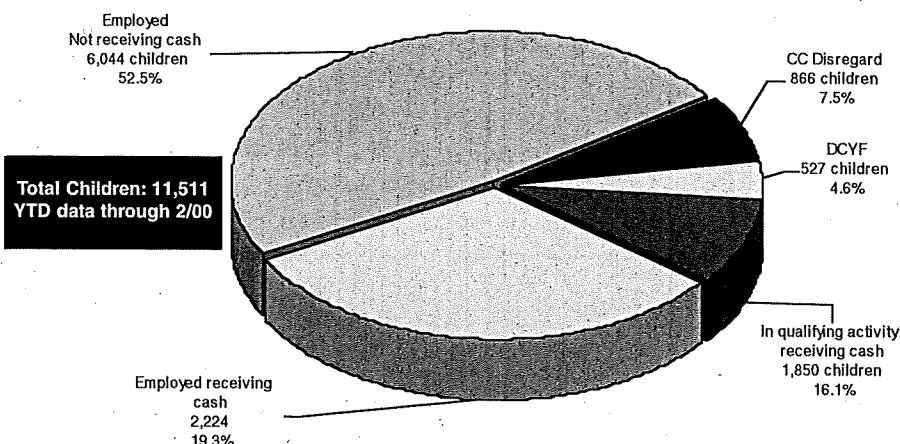
child care as an entitlement, free-of-charge, to families receiving Family Independence Program (FIP) cash assistance as long as the parents are working or in education or training programs preparing themselves to enter the workforce.

From the perspective of growth of the DHS Child Care Subsidy Program, it is clear that demand for child care is great, especially among working parents. Working families are the majority group, 79%, who use child-care subsidies. An additional 17% are FIP parents in education or training, preparing for work.

Average Number of Children in Subsidized Care

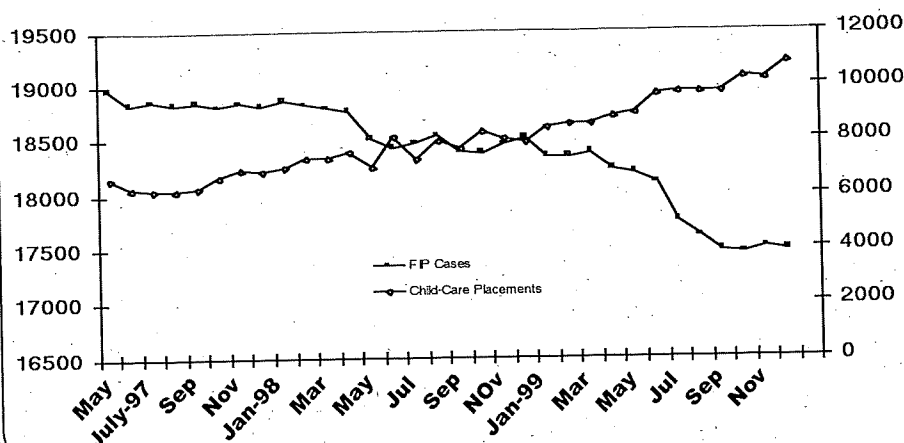


Distribution of Children by Program



It is also clear that our efforts to expand and develop child-care opportunities are a success. The number of children in subsidized care on average in state fiscal year 2000 has risen 53% (from 6,830 to 10,553) when compared to 1998, the year before passage of Starting Right.

Family Independence Program Caseload and Child-Care Trends

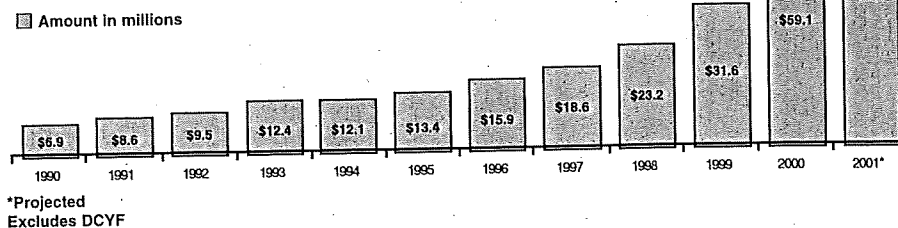


Projections for 2001 are expected to exceed 11,000 children in care. As more low-income parents, both on and off cash assistance, enter the workforce, the demand for accessible, affordable, and high-quality child care increases.

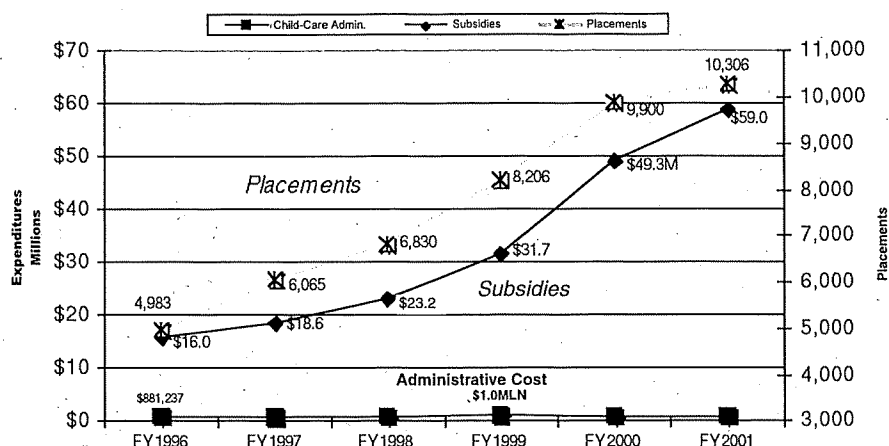
Governor Lincoln Almond and the legislature have remained strongly committed to making the

investment to create and maintain a quality child-care system to meet families' needs. The enacted 2001 child-care budget, at a total of \$70 million, fully funds the child-care entitlement for working families and includes substantial investment for Starting Right quality initiatives and for comprehensive early care and education services for 3- and 4-year-olds. The 2001 budget includes an increase in funding of 200% over the total that was spent in 1998 prior to Starting Right's enactment. The Governor's budget continues to emphasize using resources for services to families to the greatest degree possible.

Subsidy Expenditures by Fiscal Year



Child-Care Subsidies and Administration



Making Child Care More Accessible, Available, and Affordable to Families

Starting R_Ight was enacted in 1998; however, most of its major provisions were effective as of January 1, 1999. Starting R_Ight, which was still in its infancy as the new millennium began, has accomplished much so far. Major achievements to date include:

- **Expanding Family Income Eligibility for**

Child-Care Subsidies: Starting R_Ight raised the family income guidelines for child-care subsidies in January, 1999 from 185% to 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and from 200% to 225% of the FPL (\$31,838 for a family of three) in July of 1999. After just one year, families who were not previously income eligible for child-care assistance are enthusiastically embracing this benefit. There currently are 728 children in working families whose income is above 185% but below 225% who are receiving subsidized care.



Corporate Commitment Provider Professionalism

When GTECH, the West Greenwich, Rhode Island-based supplier of systems and services to the lottery and gaming industries, advertised for a director for its new on-site child-care center, Jennifer Faria applied for the job. She had entered the child-care field after graduating from Rhode Island College and knew the reputation of Bright Horizons, the Massachusetts-based child-care company that would be running GTECH's new on-site facility, and was enthusiastic about the possibility of working for them. Jennifer also knew how committed GTECH is to helping the local community and was certain she would fit in well with such a corporate philosophy.

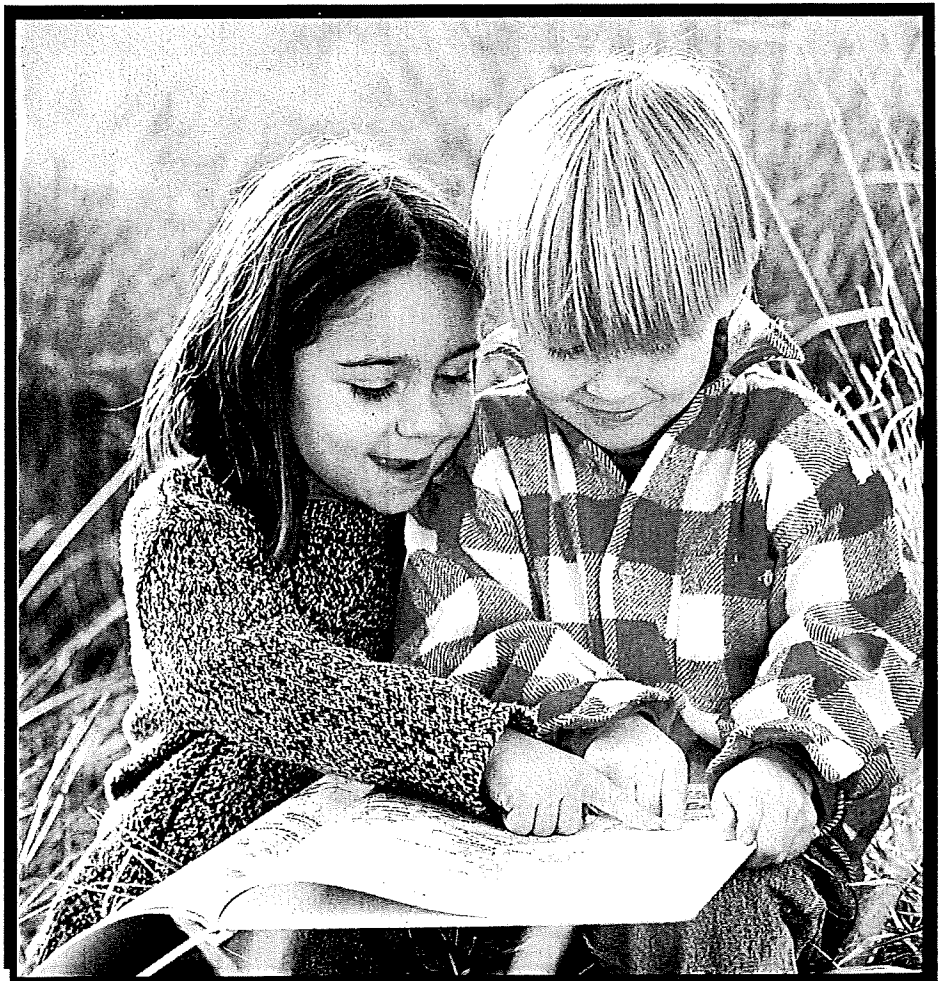
That was 1997 and Jennifer has been working for GTECH/Bright Horizons ever since. One of the things she loves about GTECH's center is that it has been open to the community, not just GTECH employees, from day one. She is also proud of the fact that GTECH has made visible contributions to the community by helping to subsidize the cost of child care for those low-to-moderate income families participating in the DHS Child Care Subsidy Program.

When the DHS program first began, reimbursement rates paid to providers caring for DHS children were below market rates, in some instances making it difficult for a provider to afford to care for DHS-subsidized

These families, some of whom were former welfare recipients and currently still have relatively low incomes, are receiving the financial assistance they need to assure that their children are well cared for while they are able to maintain and advance themselves in the workforce.

• Establishing Start-Up and Innovation Grants:

Starting Right recognized that, in order to expand to meet the needs of welfare reform and a good economy characterized by both mothers and fathers in the workforce, the child-care industry in Rhode Island, long under-funded and short on capital, would need funds for expansion and quality improvements. Funding priorities for Starting Right and Article 31, education reform development funding, encouraged schools to collaborate with community care providers to create programs and services which will meet working families' after-school and early care needs.



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In calendar year 1999, 43 grants totaling \$1,339,000 were awarded to licensed centers and family home providers. The grant funds were used for such things as educational materials and classroom equipment, computer hardware and software, ramp construction to allow wheelchair accessibility, and renovations of new space and initial staff salaries for expansions of infant care and after-school facilities in all geographical areas of the state including Providence, Newport, Warren, West Warwick, Coventry, Woonsocket, Pawtucket, Bristol, North Kingstown, Lincoln, East Providence, and Warwick.

As a measure of the impact of infusing more money into Rhode Island's child-care system through grant funding, child-care provider health insurance subsidies, and reimbursement rate increases, we note the data regarding the numbers of licensed providers and child-care placements available in the state:

- From June, 1998 through December, 1999, the number of certified family homes has increased from 692 to 883, reflecting a 28% increase in capacity or 1,170 additional family home placements for children who need them.
- Also during that period, the number of licensed child-care centers has increased from 228 to 250 reflecting a child placement capacity increase of 11% (from 13,597 to 15,088). This represents a total of 1,491 additional child-care center placements for children up to the age of six.



(GTECH continued)

children. GTECH decided to provide funding to Bright Horizons to help make up the difference between the subsidized child-care rate DHS paid for the children whose families participated in the DHS program and the actual cost of care. This way, Bright Horizons' operating costs were fully covered and children who needed care got it. Today, with DHS paying market rates, Jennifer is able to accept even more low-to-moderate income families.

"It's a wonderful program. Lower-income families in the community are able to provide their children with high-quality care and have peace of mind when they go off to work," says Jennifer. "This program not only benefits the working parent and the child, but it has also really helped us have a better, more well-rounded facility."

Jennifer is very proud of the fact that 20% of the children enrolled in the center are receiving assistance from the Department of Human Services. "I love showing our facility to parents from the community. Of course, most of them fall in love with the place immediately and are usually convinced that they could never afford to send their children here. It's heartwarming to see their faces when I explain that they may qualify to have some or all of their children's care paid for through the Department of Human Services Child Care Subsidy Program."



- School-age programs have increased from 176 to 232 and the school-age placements including before- and after-school programs for children and youth up to age 16 have increased from 9,646 to 12,262 or by 27%. This amounts to 2,616 additional placements for school-age children and youths. There are

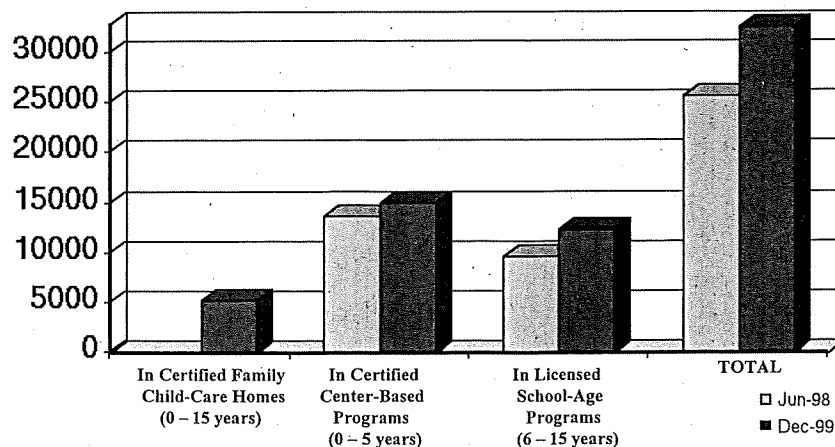
1,349 placements available geared to the middle school population in the communities of Providence, Woonsocket, Newport, Pawtucket, Central Falls, and East Providence. These communities were designated by the General Assembly to receive targeted additional resources for before- and after-school programs through Article 31, Rhode Island's education reform legislation of 1998.

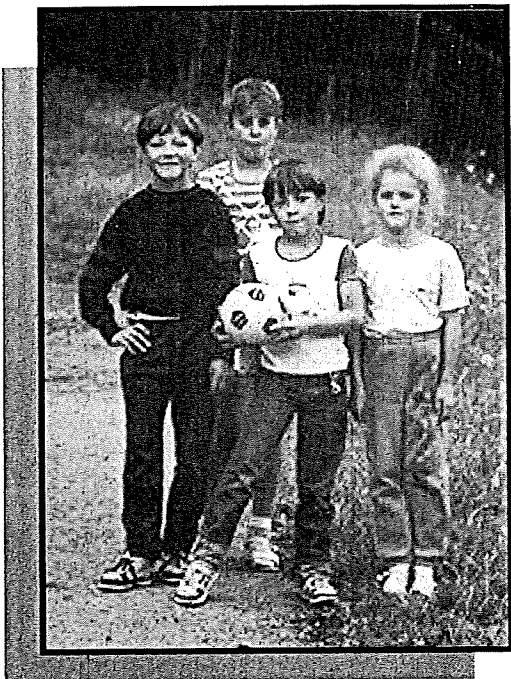
Statewide, the total numbers of licensed and certified child-care placements have increased by a total of 6,873 or 27% since Starting Right began. Currently, 71% of family homes and 78% of centers/school-age providers statewide accept DHS subsidized children.

• Expanding Services to Youth:

It is believed that accessibility to high-quality after-school programs for youths ages 13 through 15 will support school success and potentially reduce incidents of delinquency and teen pregnancy. With increased availability of after-school programs, parents will have the security of knowing that their teenagers are safe and supervised during after-school hours, and that homework is being done and help is available should they need it. Starting Right extended Rhode Island's entitlement to child care for income-eligible families to children between the ages of 13 and 15 effective July, 1999. This provision has allowed FIP

Child-Care Availability for Rhode Island's Children
Number of DCYF Licensed Placements





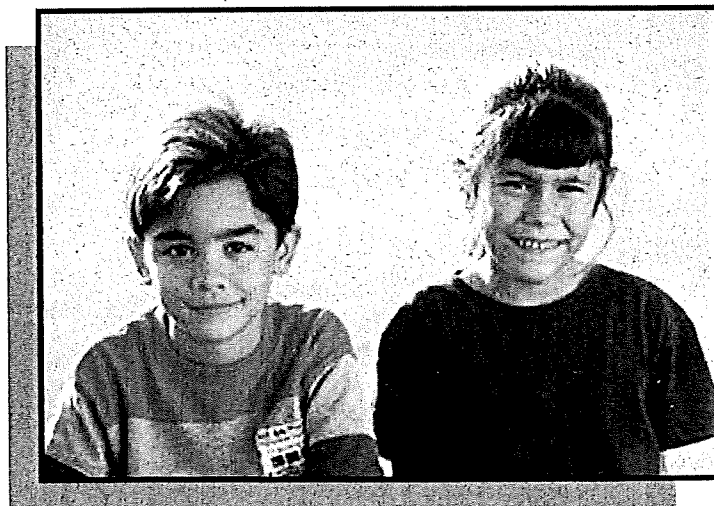
families and income-eligible working families to use a voucher to purchase after-school care from licensed programs for their teenagers. Starting RIGht also provided start-up funds to create new after-school programs and strongly encouraged targeted low-income schools to leverage their Article 31 education reform development dollars by creating community partnerships to develop convenient options for after-school care for working families.

In fiscal year 1999, approximately 31% of funds available for Starting RIGht Start-Up and Innovation grants totaling \$419,343 have been awarded to organizations and schools to build or expand after-school programs for youth. Since that time, as previously noted, school-age

child-care placements, including those for youth up to age 16, have been licensed. Nevertheless, so far the take-up rate for use of the voucher has been disappointing. As of December, 1999, only 70 youths were receiving a voucher subsidy to attend a youth program.

Analysis of the reasons for the lack of participation is ongoing with the community, school personnel and youth services providers. A likely barrier is ineligibility because some parents whose truant teenagers could benefit from youth services are not out of the home during after-school hours. Truancy is one of the strongest predictors of juvenile delinquency and adult criminal activity. Philosophically, our child-care programs have always been based on the assumption that out-of-home care or youth activities were needed because parents had to work. In our development of the youth services entitlement, we have discovered that some teens are at risk for delinquency and teen pregnancy irrespective of the availability of their parents during the after-school hours. The

Department of Human Services is working with a community advisory group, the Starting RIGht Implementation Committee, to identify and refine implementation of this provision to serve more of Rhode Island's youth.



Striving for the Highest Quality Early Education and Care System for Rhode Island's Growing Children

Assuring That All Children Leave School Ready to Lead Productive Lives

Brother Michael Reis has made a career out of working with troubled teens. For years he worked with the youth of New York City. So, it seemed fitting that when he moved to Rhode Island in 1975 he would pursue similar work. Soon after arriving here, he began working for TIDES Family Services, a nonprofit counseling center for children who are at risk, specifically troubled teens who have left school and have no plans for the future.

Soon after arriving at TIDES, it became clear to Brother Michael that these youths needed after-school programs and someone to show an active interest in them. He recognized immediately that Rhode Island's school and legal systems cannot respond quickly enough to keep these "at-risk" children in school. By the time some of these young people are brought to the attention of school officials, it is often too late and very difficult to get them back into school and even harder to get them motivated to succeed. With this in mind, TIDES tries to reach out to these teens within weeks, not months, and its approach seems to be working.

Although it started off small, with Brother Michael's help and that of the Department of Human Services (DHS), TIDES is now on the verge of

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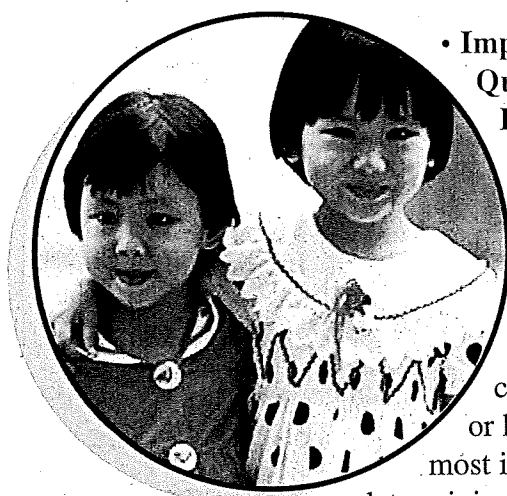
In Rhode Island, as we build a bigger child-care system, we must be sure to balance our efforts to expand with an equal determination to sustain and improve the quality of the care provided to our children. Starting RIGHT outlines a comprehensive approach to assuring that child-care systems development efforts include substantial, intensive and ongoing activities designed to achieve high-quality services. Specific elements include:

- **Increasing the Capacity to Provide Comprehensive Services to Low-Income Preschool Children:** The Starting RIGHT Initiative contains an ambitious plan to define and fund comprehensive child-care services (similar to Head Start) that include high-quality early education and critical child development programming, social services, health, mental health, nutrition services, parental involvement and transition services for children entering kindergarten. Rhode Island's commitment to parental choice of providers and inclusion of diverse participants in the community such as family providers and mental health centers in the process of crafting a quality early care and education system is a distinctive feature that adds value to the measure of our success as a family-centered state.

Under the guidance and advice of a select panel of the RI Children's Cabinet, DHS developed Certification and Performance Standards for Comprehensive Child Care Services Networks (CCCSN) based on the Head Start Performance Standards. These standards were published in January, 2000 and they define a distinctively "Rhode Island" solution to expand and enhance the Head Start model through collaborative partnerships.



In February, 2000 DHS offered approximately \$750,000 in network development grants to encourage formation of the desired collaborative relationships. Four potential networks received development grants of \$200,000 each to get started. By January 2001, it is anticipated that several networks will have become certified and begun to serve children. By the end of state fiscal year 2001, an additional 355 previously unserved and under-served 3- and 4-year-olds in the poorest families will have access to high-quality, comprehensive, early care and education services that will enable them to do their very best when they enter school.



• **Improving Child-Care Quality Through Professional Development and Technical Assistance for Providers and Accreditation of Centers and Family Homes:** The quality of a child's relationship with his or her caregiver is the single most important factor in determining the quality of a child's

experiences in child care. Recognizing that high-quality child care benefits children's growth and development while poor quality puts children at a disadvantage, Starting Right expands our capacity to provide well-coordinated and engaging professional development to Rhode Island's child-care professionals in three significant ways. 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.

I. HOPE: Rhode Island's Harbor of Opportunities for Professional Excellence. With the philosophical and financial foundation set forth by Starting Right, a group of community providers, advocates, and state children's agency personnel in partnership with DHS, have developed an intrepid plan to advance a state-of-the-art professional development system. This system will support high-quality experiences for children and youth by supporting excellence in the knowledge, skills and expertise of those who work in child-care settings.

(Tides continued)

becoming much larger. With the help of a grant from DHS, TIDES has been able to develop what it feels is a much-needed cooperative program between local police departments and school systems within the Hispanic community in the Pawtucket and Central Falls areas.

These collaborations will become a vital network of support for the area's troubled youths and will make it a priority to keep them in school, while addressing many of the problems facing them during their teenage years. As Brother Michael said, "The DHS money is doing what it's intended to do. It's helping us get this demonstration project off the ground. This is an under-served population in both cities, so the funds are being used for outreach as well as program development. The partnership between the police, the schools and TIDES is critical to the success of the program, and the DHS funding is allowing us to demonstrate this."

In keeping with the state's Starting Right initiative and the goal of building Rhode Island's economic and social future by investing in early care and education for children, including programs targeting 13- through 15-year-olds, addressing the problems of teen dropouts and delinquency will continue to be a priority. And with help from Brother Michael and DHS, TIDES is doing just that with an innovative and successful program that aggressively reaches out to troubled teens and helps get them back on track, on the road to leading productive lives.

Helping Those Who Care for Our Children

For the last 14 years, Celeste Thomason has owned and operated the *Today's Child Care* facility which is located in the Pocasset section of Providence. Celeste began her child-care career as a way of making a living while she was caring for her own children. She had worked for eight years in the banking industry, but when her children were born (Celeste has two biological children and one adopted child), she knew she wanted to stay home and care for them. A child-care business was the perfect solution to her employment dilemma.

Celeste began her business caring for eight children, some of whom were family members. Her niece and nephew were among the first enrollees. She also cared for several children who were participating in the DHS Child Care Subsidy Program. This was Celeste's first introduction to DHS and the Department's efforts to make the child-care industry a better one for both the provider and the children who are served.

One such effort - Rhode Island's health care program for certified, family child-care providers - is one that Celeste is very enthusiastic about. There were times, when her children were small, that her family had no health insurance because her husband was either in between jobs or health care wasn't an employee benefit. For Celeste, DHS's health-care program for child-care providers is a blessing.

DHS has also offered Celeste an opportunity to improve her skills as a child-care provider by furthering her training. Celeste became involved with CHILDSPAN, the DHS-sponsored program that is the expansion and enhancement of the former training system designed to maintain comprehensive child development and educational services for all child-care providers, assist in developing a professional career and development structure for providers and encourage and mentor providers towards

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II. CHILDSPAN: Rhode Island's Child Development and Training System. The investment in Starting Right has nearly doubled the statewide effort to support training programs, provide professional resources, disseminate information about training and professional development opportunities, and facilitate national accreditation of all types of child-care providers and public pre-school and kindergarten programs through the Keys to Quality Initiative, a DHS and Department of Education (DOE) collaborative venture.

III. Child Care Support Network. Supported both by DHS and by the Department of Health (DOH), and expanded through Starting Right, the Child Care Support Network provides licensed child-care centers and family, home-based providers with on-site technical assistance and resources to help them guide behavior and advance the mental wellness of children in their care, better serve children with disabilities, and meet state licensing standards. Specifically, the Network assists providers by assessing their programs, helping them set goals to improve their programs, and providing on-site observation and mentoring so that providers can learn first hand from others in the field.

• **Increasing Rates of Reimbursement to Child-Care Providers:** Addressing the need for increased rates of reimbursement for subsidized care allows providers to hire more highly-qualified staff and to provide environments that support optimal development for young children. Competitive market rates for subsidized care assure that low-income families have access to high-quality care and are able to choose and pay for the care that meets their family's needs. More kids can access care because more providers will be willing to care for kids who are subsidized if rates of reimbursement are competitive.



In January and July of 1999, rates of reimbursement to child-care providers serving children through the DHS Child Care Subsidy Program were increased in stages to the 75th percentile based on a market survey conducted in 1993. In 1998, the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, in conjunction with DHS, conducted a new study of child-care rates in Rhode Island. Rates which were keyed to the 75th percentile of this more recent survey, and which more realistically reflect the marketplace facing families who need subsidies for care, were implemented in January, 2000. These three market-based rate changes combined to increase child-care rates by an average of 49% since January 1, 1999.

• **Providing Health-Care Benefits for Child-Care Providers in Licensed Centers and Family Child-Care Homes:** Rhode Island remains in the vanguard nationally by providing health insurance benefits to both home-based and center-based child-care facilities. Currently 193 certified, family child-care providers and their 170 children are receiving benefits. These family providers represent 22% of the total licensed family provider workforce in the state. Starting Right expanded this benefit to workers in licensed child-care centers by reimbursing 50% of health insurance costs in those centers where at least 40% of enrolled children receive DHS child-care subsidies. As of December, 1999, 76 centers with 427 employees were covered. In the midst of a national hiring crisis in the child-care industry, this means that 620 child-care professionals in Rhode Island have a vested interest

in remaining in their jobs. Support for caregiver benefits helps maintain stability in the child-care workforce in a booming RI employment market and encourages providers to accept children who receive subsidies.



(Today's Child Care continued)

accreditation. Celeste committed to complete the requirement for full accreditation as a certified, family child-care provider and it is through the accreditation process that she has become connected with more resources in the child-care field that have helped her enhance her education and the quality of the care she provides.

Through CHILDSpan, Celeste also met Linda McCarthy from Meeting Street Center who opened the door for Celeste to learning about working with children who have special needs. Celeste currently has two children in her care who have special needs and her training and education are being put to good use.

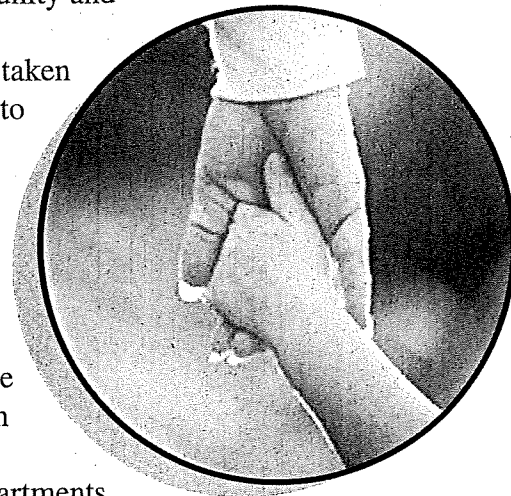
Through her experiences so far with DHS and the programs the Department sponsors, Celeste has learned the importance of staying in touch with other providers, state agencies that deal with child care and the other resources offered for providers. To that end, she is currently a Board Member of the Day Care Justice Co-op. The Co-Op, which is relatively new and still growing, offers members use of a toy lending library, use of its mentoring program, and an opportunity to profit from bulk purchasing of child-care supplies. The Co-Op also coordinates a substitute provider program, with support from DHS, that allows members to take advantage of some well-deserved vacation time without closing their facility to providing care.

Celeste believes that the quality of her child care has been enhanced immeasurably by the opportunities presented to her through the DHS and the network of providers and resources that have been made available to her. She is more confident about her methods of providing care and the children in her care are benefitting from her enhanced knowledge and strong commitment to the industry.

Joining Forces to Create the Highest Quality System for Children and Youth

Just as Rhode Island has been unique in the high level of community and public involvement which has characterized the implementation of its welfare reform policies, the state has also taken maximum advantage of the wisdom of all its citizens who want to participate in building a system of child care and education which assures that all children enter school ready to learn and all children leave school ready to lead productive lives.

Patterned after a similar group that guided the implementation of welfare reform, the Starting RIGHT Implementation Committee was formed just after passage of the Starting RIGHT legislation in 1998 to help the Department of Human Services and its sister departments in the Rhode Island Children's Cabinet — the Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education; Children, Youth, and Families; and Health - implement the many and complex aspects of that law. A practical and flexible structure and the expertise, energy and commitment of its membership mark one of the major reasons for the successes of Starting RIGHT to date.



The Starting RIGHT Implementation Committee (SRIC) began and has remained an open-membership body led by community co-chairs dedicated to Rhode Island's vision for its children. All state departments concerned with children's issues are active and represented on the committee as are child-care providers and youth services providers, Head Start grantees, academics, children's advocates, juvenile justice system and federal children's agency representatives, parents, and school personnel.

Early on in its formation, the SRIC established four standing subcommittees, each headed by volunteer community co-chairs. Subcommittee groups were formed around the major provisions of Starting RIGHT to advise DHS on the following issues:

- the creation of a high-quality, comprehensive, early care and education service system for all low-income children in Rhode Island.
- the development of a youth services system focused on prevention of at-risk behaviors.
- professional development, training and accreditation of child-care providers.
- the enhancement of administrative policies, procedures, and systems for service providers, to make them more effective and user-friendly.

For nearly 18 months, the Starting RIGHT Implementation Committee, which has nearly 200 individuals on its mailing list, has held monthly meetings, either of the full membership or of the Starting RIGHT Steering Committee comprised of the co-chairs of each of the standing subcommittees.

The lion's share of the work of the group so far has been accomplished by the subcommittees who produced at the end of the first year of Starting RIGht, a 64-page Starting RIGht Implementation Guide for DHS to use to shape the second and subsequent years of this ongoing initiative. Additionally, subcommittee work and focus group work has formed the basis for the following:

- a 60-page document outlining standards for high-quality, comprehensive early care and education services.
- a principles and strategic plan document which directs Rhode Island's professional development initiative, HOPE.
- the development of a state-of-the-art computer system to simplify family eligibility, child enrollment, and payment for services offering "state-of-the-art" technology for parents, and timely reimbursement and a management information system for providers.
- the creative problem-solving necessary to create a preventive youth services system where none existed before.

The work of the Starting Right Implementation Committee is ongoing and continues to be distinguished by an unparalleled investment of volunteer time and by the singular devotion of its members to making Rhode Island a state in which all children grow, learn and flourish.

The American Way - Creativity and Entrepreneurship

The Day Care Justice Co-op, Inc. is the only organization of its kind in Rhode Island and may even be unique in the country in its origins and purpose. The Co-op, formerly the Day Care Justice Committee of Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE), is a very new non-profit child-care provider network comprised of 76 certified, family providers, 99% of whom are located in three of the state's five core, inner cities where the majority of the state's low-income children reside — Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Providence. Ninety-four percent of Co-op members are from minority populations and 80% speak Spanish or are bilingual in English and Spanish.

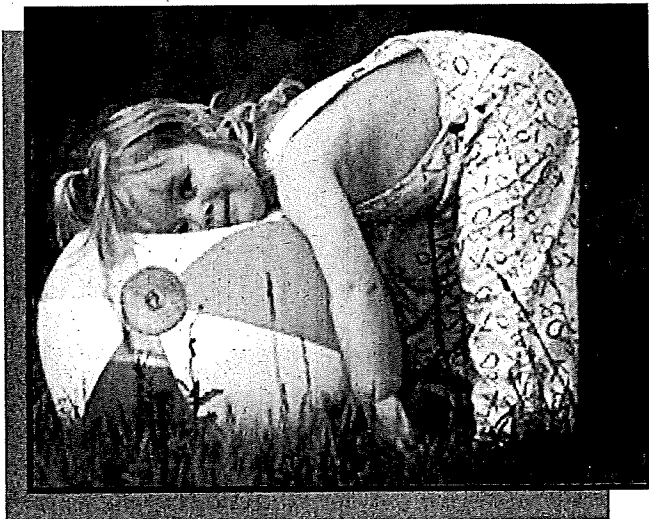
The Co-op advocates for better working conditions for its members and works to increase the quality of family-based child care for low-income families in Rhode Island. Co-op members and DARE, its parent organization, were instrumental in the passage of legislation in 1996 to make state-paid health insurance available to eligible, certified family providers. The Co-op also represents an activist and "self-help" approach to providing services to its members by offering bulk purchasing, training and technical assistance to improve care quality through professional development, and assistance with licensing, payment problems and development of good business practices.

Knowing it is often difficult, if not impossible, for parents to find substitute care on short notice and that families need dependable, stable, high-quality child care every day in order to maintain employment, the Co-op providers created a new concept which combines the positive benefit of support and respite for providers with a guarantee of stable, quality care for working families. The new idea is to develop a capacity to provide for qualified, pre-screened, substitute care providers to be available on a daily basis in the event of the illness or planned absence of a Co-op family provider member.

Utilizing a demonstration grant from the Department of Human Services the Co-op began in January, 2000 to establish, operate, and evaluate the substitute care pool for its members. Serving as the administrative entity for its members by screening, hiring, scheduling, deploying and paying qualified substitutes, the Co-op is developing a new model of service to allow providers to have occasional respite from the rigors of running a small business while maintaining the income they depend on. At the same time, parents who choose Co-op network providers will be assured of dependable, quality care in a family-based setting. Over the course of the demonstration, the Co-op will develop the cost basis for providing substitute care as part of an enhanced package of services that potentially qualifies for an increased reimbursement rate so that substitute care can be available on an ongoing basis.

Energized by Our Shared Achievements, We Tackle the Issues Which Remain

As we move forward, and approach new milestones of progress and accomplishment, we must still recognize that the journey to reach our vision for Rhode Island's children is a long and difficult one. We are just beginning and there are many obstacles yet to be overcome. Most immediately, with the help of our community partners, we have identified the following priorities:



- reducing administrative and eligibility barriers to assure that at-risk youth who critically need after-school prevention programs can and will access them.
- conducting continuous assessment and evaluation of our children's programs using accepted research techniques.
- utilizing data and public and constituency involvement to strike the right balance between growth in services and maintaining the highest-quality child care and early education.
- seeking public and private partnerships to develop and sustain the capital investment in facilities that will be needed over the long term.
- assuring that the commitment to child care and early education and before- and after-school care remains high on Rhode Island's policy and fiscal agenda.
- developing and implementing state-of-the-art administrative systems to support families in their use of care resources and providers in the business of offering the best in developmental environments for Rhode Island's children and future citizens.



Our hope for the future is strengthened by noting our achievements so far in Starting Right. Even more importantly, the confidence we have in our state's ability to successfully implement Rhode Island's vision for its children is buoyed by the experiences we have had working with the community and other departments to create good policies born of a strong and unified desire to improve the lives of Rhode Island's children.



We Need to Know if It Works!

Has the guarantee of child-care assistance for working families increased the likelihood of parents maintaining employment and achieving economic well-being for their children? Do increases in child-care subsidy rates increase the likelihood of children being cared for in quality settings? These questions and many others need to be answered if we are to know whether or not the promise of Starting Right is being met.

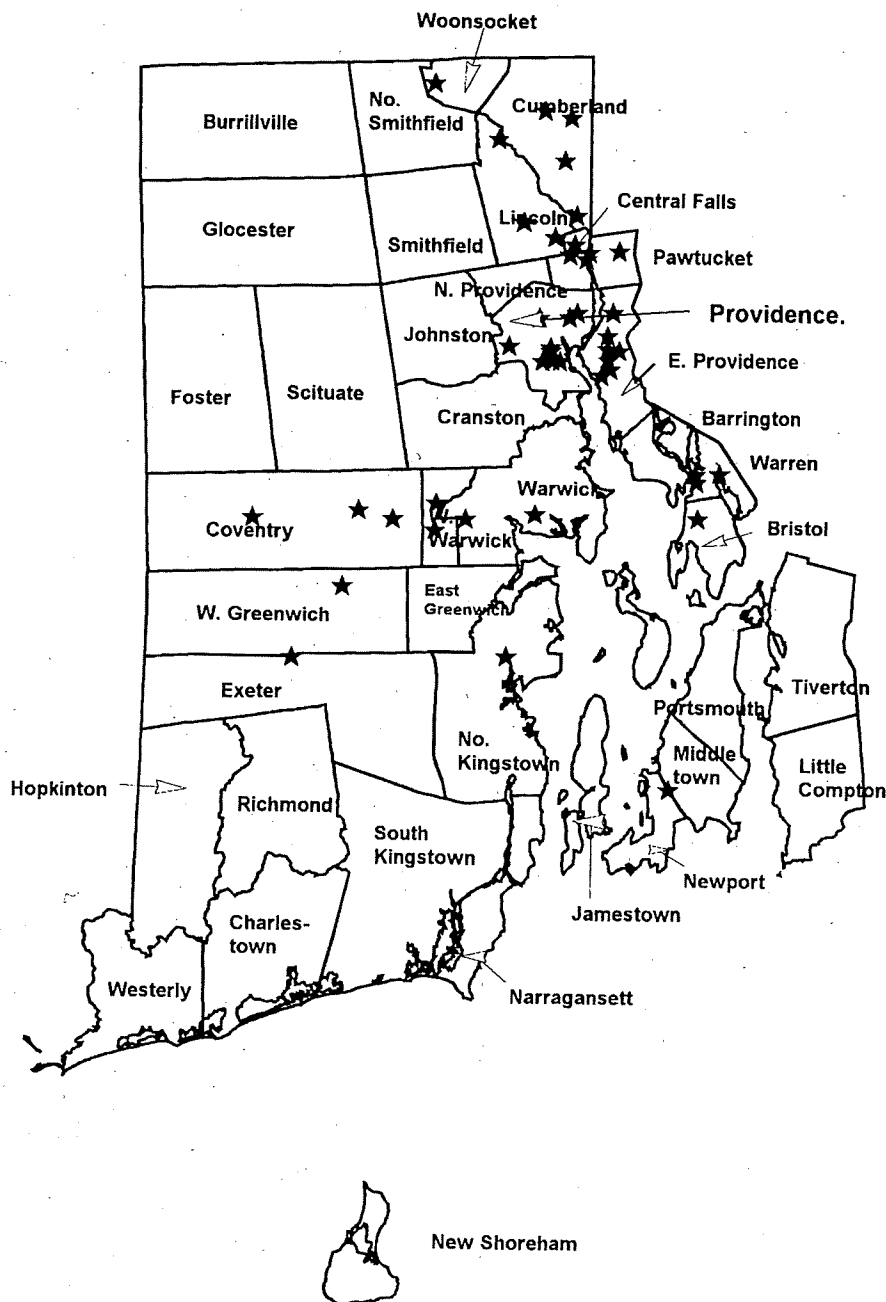
In recent years, Rhode Island has developed many bold, innovative, and hopeful policies designed to strengthen families and improve out-of-home care and education for children. Substantial resources are being invested to make sure that all of Rhode Island's children enter school ready to learn and leave school ready to work. It is of paramount importance that we measure the impacts of the programs that we create in a way that describes the real return on our investments.

In December, 1999, DHS joined the Wellesley Child Care Research Partnership at Wellesley College in Massachusetts. Through this partnership, DHS will receive the services of expert researchers to examine multiple federal and state administrative databases related to child care and family economic well-being as well as child care in quality settings. Use of these techniques to follow the progress of Starting Right and its many provisions will help us answer the questions we have about the effectiveness and impacts of our programs in achieving Rhode Island's vision for its children.

Additionally, DHS is a key partner, along with Rhode Island Kids Count and the Departments of Education and Health in the federal Child Indicators Project. Jointly, these Rhode Island partners are developing consensus indicators of child-care availability and quality, which are being used over the next several years to measure population-based changes in children's outcomes in Rhode Island.

STARTING RIGHT

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