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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
DCYF Department of Children, Youth & Families

Annual Report



our children



our families

our communities



our commitment



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About DCYF

The Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) was created in 1980 and is statutorily designated as the “principal agency of the state to mobilize the human, physical, and financial resources available to plan, develop, and evaluate a comprehensive and integrated statewide program of services designed to ensure the opportunity for children to reach their full potential (Rhode Island General Law 42-72-5).”

DCYF has more than 600 staff and three major operational divisions: Children’s Behavioral Health Services, Child Welfare (including Child Protective Services, Family Services, and Permanency Support), and Juvenile Justice (including the Rhode Island Training School and Juvenile Probation). The Department supports more than 2,500 children and their families both in the community and in DCYF care, and indirectly serves thousands more through community-based programs.



A Message from the Director

“Our prime purpose in life is to help others” – Dalai Lama



DCYF Director, Ashley Deckert

For the first time in many years, the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) is publishing an annual report. In 2023, DCYF continued to make progress toward an improved child and family well-being system, helping us to achieve the vision of healthy children and youth, strong families, and diverse caring communities. DCYF is led by a strong set of guiding principles that are used to assist in making everyday decisions not only at the executive level, but also at the direct service level. Every decision I make in my role as Director for DCYF is through the lens of how it will benefit the children and families we serve and how I can support our amazing staff who are called to do this work.

In 2023, DCYF focused on implementing, to fidelity, initiatives such as the Safety Assessment and Family Evaluation (SAFE) Model. The SAFE Model required our staff to engage in a significant paradigm shift around assessing child safety through a family-centered, least intrusive lens. The number of children open to DCYF, children in-home and out-of-home, decreased from 2,658 in December 2022 to 2,503 in December 2023 as part of the Department efforts toward prevention to opening to the Department and removal from home. These efforts include ongoing support of the Family Care Community Partnerships, the implementation of DCYF Support and Response Unit and the implementation of the SAFE model. At DCYF, we are committed to partnering with families to help them overcome the challenges they are facing and safely return children home to their parents, who we believe love their children and want what is best for them.

Under the direction of Governor Dan McKee, DCYF is committed to the continuous improvement of the services we offer, and we work hand in hand with the Administration to help fulfil Governor McKee’s RI2030 plan in the areas of technology, human capital, cost savings and efficiency, and community engagement. Examples of these initiatives are noted later in the report. Additionally, as one of the agencies managed by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), DCYF works collaboratively with other agencies to align and provide a continuum of services and supports for children and families. We also include examples of these collaborations in the report.

A Message from the Director

“Our prime purpose in life is to help others” – Dalai Lama

DCYF has continued to place a special focus on working collaboratively with our community-based partners, youth, families and communities, other child and family service systems, advocates, legislators, and the family court. The success of DCYF is dependent on the strength of these collaborative efforts. As you read this annual report and our key activities for the year, you will see examples of our commitment to working collaboratively on behalf of children and families.

Special appreciation is extended to all DCYF staff for their continued sacrifice and dedication to this work. You all carry out this work with passion and commitment and for that, I appreciate you. We are also deeply indebted to our numerous partners whose resources, support, and expertise assisted in helping us with our movement toward success.

Finally, as a special point of privilege, I want to thank our kinship and resource families for your commitment and support to the children, adolescents, and young adults who enter our system. Without you, this work could not be done, and we would not meet the goals and outcomes we set forth for our families. Together, we are impacting their lives and communities throughout Rhode Island now, and for generations to come.

On behalf of the DCYF Executive Leadership team, I am proud to submit our annual report on the highlights of our work in 2023.

Sincerely,





A **community** is like a quilt—many pieces, all different, but **working together** to create **something beautiful**.

Vision, Mission & Guiding Principles

Vision

Healthy Children and Youth,
Strong Families,
Diverse Caring Communities.

Mission

To partner with families and communities to raise safe and healthy children and youth in a caring environment and to engage respectfully and effectively with people of all races, ethnicities, cultures, classes, genders, sexual orientations, and faiths in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of all individuals, families, tribes, and communities, and protects and preserves the dignity of each.

www.dcyf.ri.gov

Guiding Principles

To fulfill our mission, we believe that:

- Family, community, and government share responsibility for the safety, protection, and well-being of children.
- When the natural family is unable to care for a child/youth, it is our responsibility, in as timely a manner as possible, to ensure the child/youth is provided permanency in their life in a safe, stable, and nurturing environment.
- Staff, foster parents, and service providers are partners in the provision of timely and appropriate high-quality care.
- An integrated continuum of care should emphasize prevention over intervention, reflects a partnership between family, community, and government and be culturally relevant.
- Partnership requires open, honest, and respectful communication fostering an awareness of the quality of services and clear and agreed-upon authorities and responsibilities.
- Staff at all levels should be held accountable to a professional code of conduct.
- As an invaluable resource, staff are entitled to a safe, supportive work environment that fosters professional development.
- Quality improvement is an on-going process, utilizing external and internal performance standards

Welcoming a New Director

DCYF Director Ashley Deckert, who was appointed by Governor Dan McKee, joined DCYF in May of 2023. She brings over 16 years of experience in various sectors of child welfare. She began her career as a Foster Care Child Welfare Specialist in Illinois and spent 13 years at the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services in roles ranging from child protection to licensing and eventually as Deputy Director of Child Services. From 2021-2023 Director Deckert served as Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs with the Illinois Collaboration on Youth, where her responsibilities included oversight of proposed legislation for improving the child welfare system. She also served as an Adjunct Instructor for the University of Illinois School of Social Work and has guest lectured at Illinois State University.

In 2024, DCYF will focus on broad goals to help us move our system forward. The following is a summary of the five categories the Department will work on as we look to the future (further details for each are provided starting on page 37).

Well-Being: Establish a proactive child and family well-being system for all Rhode Island children and families by centering youth and family voice, expanding preventative and in-home supports, and improving outcomes.

Transition: Focus on transitioning foster youth into adulthood, with special concentration on marginalized youth in foster care.

Workforce: Engage workforce by building a well-resourced, well-trained, and supportive organizational culture.

Racial Justice: Advance race equity by identifying and working to eliminate systemic racist practices in our child and family well-being system.

Continuum of Care: Develop a strong continuum of care to include improved access to an array of therapeutic supports and services.

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Executive Leadership Team

In July 2023 Director Deckert began the process of realigning DCYF resources and released the below Executive Leadership organization structure on December 28, 2023.




Ashley Deckert
Director



Misty Delgado
Chief of Staff



Adrian (Chris) Hageman
EOHHS
Chief Financial Officer



Brandi DiDino
Deputy Director



Deborah Palumbo
EOHHS
Administrative & Legal Support
Services Administrator



Anjali Sridhar
DOA/ETSS - Acting Agency IT
Manager



Damaris Teixeira
Public Information Officer



Larome Myrick
Executive Director, Youth
Development Juvenile Justice



Lindsey Callahan
Administrator, Management &
Budget



Lori D'Alessio
Administrator,
Resource Families / Licensing



Colleen Caron
Chief of Strategic Planning,
Monitoring and Evaluation



Lisa Nelson
Legislative Director



Mike Burk
Administrator, Family and
Childrens' Services




Deborah Buffi
Associate Director, Contracts
and Compliance



Winsome Stone
Assistant Director,
Division of Family Services



Lori Geiselman
Development and Training
Director



Sarah St. Jacques
Policy Director



Melissa Aguiar-Rivard
Chief of Strategic Planning,
Monitoring and Evaluation



Domenic Lancellotta
Assistant Director, Child
Protective Services



Christopher Strnad
Associate Director, Community
Services & Behavioral Health



Colleen Walters
Staff Onboarding and
Support



Pamela Leary
Programming Services Officer,
Facilities



The Work of DCYF Divisions

DCYF's work is operationalized by five core practice divisions:

- Child Protective Services
- Division of Family Services
- Community Services and Behavioral Health
- Licensing and Resource Families
- Youth Development (Juvenile Justice)

The other divisions at DCYF are housed under Central Management and support practice and service delivery.



The work of our divisions is summarized in this section.

Child Protective Services

Child Protective Services (CPS) is responsible for receiving, screening and investigating reports of child abuse and neglect. The division ensures that each child and youth is protected from harm through the timely investigation of reports of child abuse and neglect as it receives, screens, and responds to reports of suspected child maltreatment. CPS operates 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year and is staffed with child protective investigators and supervisors. The division also refers families for community-based treatment and preventive services as needed in situations where there is no identified present danger or safety threat.

As a reminder, RIGL 40-11-3 requires all persons in Rhode Island who suspect child abuse or neglect to report it to DCYF within 24 hours of becoming aware of such abuse or neglect. Individuals can contact DCYF at our 24/7 hotline at 1-800-RI-CHILD or 1-800-742-4453. All calls to the hotline are confidential, and anyone can also make an anonymous report. When hotline staff receive calls, they ask callers questions to understand the concerns being reported and will try to be as helpful as possible to collect accurate information. Staff screening calls use the Structured Decision-Making tool which promotes consistency in decision-making when screening reports of alleged child maltreatment.

The Work of DCYF Divisions

Division of Family Services

The Division of Family Services (DFS) includes three units: Support and Response Unit (SRU), Family Services Unit (FSU), and the Voluntary Extension of Care Program (VEC).

Support and Response Unit (SRU) assists families seeking help with navigating community services through assessments where appropriate, community service referrals, and transfers from CPS to FSU and CSBH, with or without legal involvement, when ongoing case management is required. SRU performs the Department's screening, assessment, and referral function for child welfare matters involving families not active with the Department. A child welfare call regarding an active case (child or family) is directed to the assigned primary social caseworker in FSU. Most families are directed back to the community for services.

Family Services Unit (FSU) becomes involved with families after a CPS investigation has been conducted and a determination is made that services are needed to address abuse, neglect, or dependency within the family. The role of the unit is to engage with and assist families in accessing services and support needed to ensure the safety and well-being of children. Social caseworkers provide case management for families who are caring for their children in their home as well as families whose children have been placed in out-of-home care. If it is determined that a child cannot return safely to their family, FSU staff will pursue alternative permanency options, such as adoption or guardianship. Many of the families receiving case management from FSU are involved with the RI Family Court on related abuse or neglect petitions. The unit also supports families of youth involved with the RI Family Court on juvenile justice matters.

Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC) Program in July 2018, the State of Rhode Island passed legislation allowing older youth to voluntarily remain in DCYF care until they turn age 21. DCYF has a dedicated unit within DFS to support older youth in achieving permanency, stable housing, job training, and/or educational goals.



The Work of DCYF Divisions

Community Services and Behavioral Health

Community Services and Behavioral Health (CSBH) is responsible for developing a continuum of care for children's behavioral health services to support children within their family settings. CSBH reviews cases to ensure access to services and proper matching of services to the needs of children and families. The Division also monitors the quality of the Department's service array. Combining this work with DCYF's responsibility as the children's behavioral health authority, this division serves as the bridge between DCYF and other state agencies, providers, and advocates for behavioral health initiatives.

Licensing and Resource Families

Relative and kinship caregivers, traditional foster families, therapeutic foster families, and pre-adoptive families are collectively known as "resource families." Resource families are critical partners. They provide care for Rhode Island children and youth who cannot safely live with their parents, and they play a supportive role in reunification. The Division is responsible for the statewide recruitment, development/training, licensing, matching/placement, support, and additional permanency services for all resource families. This Division also licenses and monitors group homes, residential programs, and private foster care agencies. The Division publishes an annual recruitment and retention plan for resource families.



The Work of DCYF Divisions

Youth Development (Juvenile Justice)

The Division of Youth Development (DYD) provides programming to any youth who has been found to be either delinquent or wayward by the Rhode Island Family Court. The goal of the division is to promote the rehabilitation of youth through a continuum of flexible, innovative, and effective programs for youth. The Division strives to promote positive outcomes for youth and to reduce recidivism for youth within the juvenile and criminal justice systems. DCYF has promoted family engagement for youth and parents through the Building Bridges initiative.

The Division consists of the Rhode Island Training School and the Office of Juvenile Probation

The Rhode Island Training School (RITS) is a secure juvenile justice program for youth who are detained and/or sentenced to the facility by order of the Rhode Island Family Court. The RITS provides youth rehabilitation through a comprehensive continuum of services provided in partnership with families, the community, and DCYF. Supervision, security, education, behavioral health, health, and transition services are provided to all youth incarcerated at the RITS in an individualized, culturally and gender-sensitive manner. As of December 1, 2023, there were 43 youth receiving services at RITS.

The Office of Juvenile Probation provides supervision in the community for youth who have been adjudicated wayward or delinquent by the Rhode Island Family Court and are sentenced to a term of probation or who are sentenced to the RITS but can serve their sentence in a residential treatment program (temporary community placement). Probation Officers monitor the youth's progress and assist in coordinating needed services. Juvenile Probation seeks to promote positive youth outcomes such as educational attainment, meaningful employment, and stable housing. As of December 1, 2023, Juvenile Probation was actively working with 194 youth.

The Work of DCYF Divisions

Central Management

DCYF's Central Management includes several divisions and units that support our service operations:

- Contracts, Compliance, and Auditing
- Human Resources
- Legal Services, including staff who represent the Department at RI Family Court
- Management and Budget
- Management Information Systems
- Workforce Development

Office of the Director, including:

- Communications and Strategic Planning
- Policy and Legislative Affairs
- Facilities Management

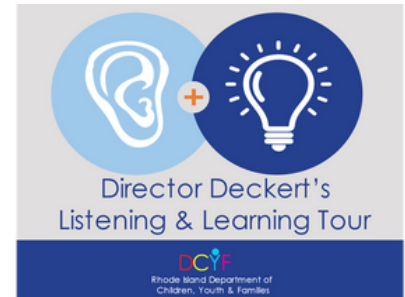
Performance Improvement, Research, and Data Analytics (DPI), comprised of three subunits:

- Research, Data Analytics and Evaluation
- Case Review System
- Council on Accreditation



Listening & Learning Tour

Authentic engagement is essential to cultivating an informed, supportive, family-centered child and family well-being system. As a result, in October 2023, Director Deckert began to facilitate a Listening & Learning Tour with our staff, formal and informal community providers, youth, and families we serve.



As is true in many states, DCYF experiences challenges in promoting positive relationships with the community and developing and maintaining its public image. This hinders our ability to effectively work with families and communities, creates employee retention challenges and draws criticism of government not doing enough to promote health, safety, and well-being.

To address these challenges strategically, in October of 2023, Director Deckert operationalized a Listening & Learning Tour. This series of structured, broad, and deep engagements serve to provide opportunities for community partners and individuals who touch our system to engage in meaningful discussions about our challenges, strengths, outcomes, mission, and goals. Listening & Learning will further allow us an opportunity to strengthen the department's vision, mission, and development of a youth, family, staff, and community-lead strategic plan.

Goals of this work

Reinforce DCYF's commitment to the children, youth, and families that we serve

Drive innovative best practice

Center youth and family voice to address challenges

Develop and implement a five-year strategic plan with actionable goals and benchmarks

Listening & Learning Tour

Listening & Learning Timeline and Next Steps

The tour will include five phases with a series of open forums with staff, youth, families, informal and formal stakeholders, and community partners.



Phase I Planning

- September 1, 2023 - September 30, 2023

Phase II Implementation

- Phase II a - Internal Tour: October 1, 2023-December 31, 2023
- Phase II b - Community Tour: January 1, 2024- May 31, 2024
- Phase II c - Open Forums: June 1, 2023-July 31, 2024

Phase III Evaluation & Reporting

- August 1, 2024 - September 30, 2024

Phase IV Strategic Plan

- October 1, 2024 - December 31, 2024

Phase V Maintenance

- January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2030

Feedback received from these forums will support the framework necessary for DCYF to develop and implement a five-year strategic plan that includes actionable goals and benchmarks.

To achieve goals identified through the Listening & Learning Tour, DCYF will develop a Child Well-being Advisory council to include a diverse membership of invested individuals who can reflect on key themes and develop opportunities to address each theme. Strategies will be developed through a collaborative, public, and private partnership approach with a lens to building on system strengths and addressing system challenges and gaps.

Youth and Family Engagement



Improving youth and family engagement is a priority for DCYF, one that is also included in Governor McKee's RI2030 plan. The Department and its partners committed to creating new pathways to consistently gather input from critical groups, including parents, youth, natural supports, resource families, community organizations, Rhode Island Family Court, and DCYF staff. In the next few pages, you'll read about the important progress the Department made in 2023 with youth and family engagement.

Rhode Island Birth Parent Advisory Board

DCYF established a Birth Parent Advisory Board in 2021. A primary goal of the board is the parents' desire for DCYF to improve empathy when engaging with parents. Some of the successes of the birth parents advisory group this year include participation in a focus group training in partnership with Brown University, birth parents assisting Workforce Development with onboarding training of new staff, and a proclamation created by the group, and signed by the Governor, that designated June as Reunification Month.

The advocacy of the Rhode Island Birth Parent Advisory Board paved the way to Rhode Island's first Annual Reunification Month. To celebrate this important month, DCYF and Governor Dan McKee issued a proclamation recognizing June as Reunification Month in Rhode Island. DCYF and the Birth Parent Advisory board marked the occasion with an event on Saturday, June 24, 2023.

A press release issued to commemorate this special celebration. included the following statements:

"Family Reunification Month recognizes the families and ongoing efforts in our state to help families stay together and promote their resilience," said Governor Dan McKee. "It's also a time for all of us to recommit strengthening, improving, and increasing those efforts all year long. Family unity provides stability, and keeping families together without sacrificing child safety is our goal".

Director Deckert stated, "Preserving families is a strong value of DCYF. However, there are some situations where removal is imminent for the health, safety, and well-being of children. If a child has to be removed, DCYF is committed to working hard with the mom, dad, and child to be returned home. When a child returns home, it is something to be celebrated!"

Youth and Family Engagement

SPEAK

Youth between the ages of 16-24 can participate in the statewide Youth Advisory Board, SPEAK. This is an opportunity for youth to express themselves regarding their lived experiences in the foster care system. This feedback helps promote system and policy changes within DCYF and impacts decisions regarding the current child well-being system. SPEAK meetings are held every other week in the Providence area, and transportation is provided when needed. Participating youth receive payment for their time and expertise. Participation not only allows youth to have a say in programs that have a real impact on their lives, it also helps participants develop advocacy, public speaking and other social skills they can use indefinitely, providing them with opportunities to grow professionally and emotionally.

Some of SPEAK's achievements are attending the Foster Club of America All-Star Internship, reinstating the Teen Grant, participating in the New England Youth Coalition (NEYC), hosting a statewide graduation celebration, attending various workshops and training programs for youth, hosting a career fair, and hosting the Administration for Children & Families (ACF) Commissioner of the Biden Administration. The 2024 goals of SPEAK are to initiate a statewide Youth Summit, host the third annual graduation celebration and create a resource guide for all youth in care.



Youth and Family Engagement



Rhode Island Foster Parent Advisory Council

This council consists of Private Agency Partners, DCYF staff, and all Resource Families. Resource Families is an inclusive term for kinship, traditional and private agency foster families who support RI's children in need of out of home placement. The RIFPAC meets every other month for a full council meeting and holds planning meetings in between each council with a small group of families considered council leaders. The council's goal is to empower families through lifting their voices to create meaningful and family-driven impacts to the child well-being system. Since the council's initial meeting in 2021, accomplishments have included the development of a co-facilitated DCYF Division of Licensing and Resource Families new hire curriculum, presentation by the RI Family Court with the goal of supporting system education and mutual understanding, family-led discussions with the Court Appointed Special Advocate's office on family perspective, feedback discussions with the department's family services unit, and the implementation of traditional family peer-to-peer mentor program.

Rhode Island Kinship Advisory Council

The council consist of community partners, DCYF leaders, and kinship resource families. The council meets quarterly with the goal of establishing and maintaining equitable kinship resource for both formal and informal kinship families. The council has a membership of approximately 25 members. Each member contributes a unique perspective with both personal and professional experiences supporting a comprehensive dialogue regarding system navigation and concrete supports. Since the start of the council in 2019, accomplishments have included the development of a one-page resource guide, a "warm contact line" for resource families with the department of health, national recognition for the state's peer-to-peer mentor program and the inclusion of kinship families in agency leadership trainings.



Youth Highlight, Sylvia Parrott

Sylvia Parrott is a youth advocate who works at Foster Forward. At Foster Forward, she works with youth who are experiencing homelessness. In addition to that, she does some advocacy work regarding the foster care system. She has local, regional, and national experience. Sylvia is also a professional speaker and frequently speaks at conferences and panels. She has gained a lot of skills on her advocacy journey so far. Her goal is to make a real impact on the child welfare system big or small.



DCYF Director Deckert
pictured with Sylvia Parrott

On Friday, December 1, 2023, DCYF leadership team members had the honor of hosting Sylvia Parrott for a special presentation about her lived experiences under the care of RI DCYF. After her talk, Christian Miller, in the name of DCYF, presented Sylvia with a certificate of special recognition from Governor Dan McKee, praising her dedication and commitment to advocating for youth while promoting positive changes to the child well-being system.

Congratulations to Sylvia
and thank you for
stopping by to share your
story with us!



DCYF Chief Implementation Aide Christian Miller
pictured with Sylvia Parrott



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Strengthened Partnerships with DCYF and Family

In 2023, program expansion of three community initiatives highlighted the foundation of collaboration with our RI Family Court.

Safe and Secure Baby Court

Safe and Secure Baby Court was launched in 2017. The program entered its seventh year in April 2023. Safe and Secure Baby Court (SSBC) seeks to serve parents of new babies (0 -18 mos.) who may have been in the system themselves as juveniles, have mental health issues, housing insecurity, domestic violence exposure, a substance use history without present active use and/or lack of parenting skills and natural supports. Anyone can refer a parent for an intake as long as the DCYF petition has a case plan goal of reunification including Judges, attorneys, DCYF, services providers, hospital personnel and even the parent themselves.

Caring Dads Program

This 17-week pilot in the Providence Region launched October 1, 2023. The Caring Dads program has the goal of helping Fathers value their children. The program seeks to support a total of 10-12 fathers who have experienced challenges with abusive behavior or who are at high risk for this behavior. There are three facilitators – Family Services of Rhode Island (FSRI), a private clinician, and a volunteer facilitator – who support implementation and referral process of the Caring Dads program.



Playful Parenting Program

This one-year pilot launched October 1, 2023 with our DFS division. The program structures parent-and-child play activities to guide and coach families during scheduled visits. Sessions are 9-12 weeks with the goal that visits will transition into the family home. These sessions take place at the Providence Children's Museum.

Strengthened Partnerships, Combating Housing Inequity

Housing Partnership - Interagency Work Group

This year, DCYF partnered with state agencies and community programming to combat housing inequities for Rhode Island families.

Since the start of the interagency workgroup, the census for the DCYF/Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCPs) emergency shelter program is down roughly 32%.

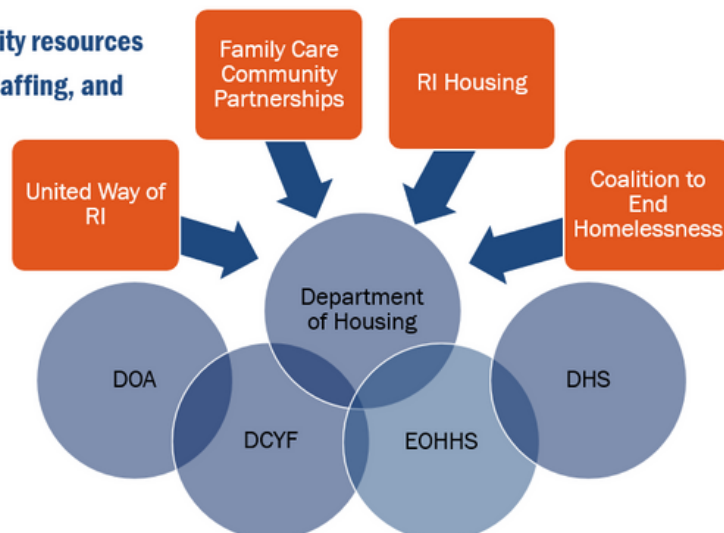
Some of the contributing factors:

1. The Coordinated Entry System (CES) call center no longer “diverts” families to the FCCPs but enrolls households in the Coordinated Entry System and prioritizes based on acuity.
2. State-initiated Tri-County Community Action Family Shelter and Amos House Family Shelter came online with housing-specific resources and case management.
3. The State has connected FCCPs staff with housing resources such as Crossroads Housing Problem Solving, which seeks to improve capacity of families to self-resolve homelessness, and Amos House Landlord Incentive Program, which identifies and incentivizes housing units and landlords to lease to the families.

Interagency Work Group

We are leveraging both state and community resources through formal partnerships, dedicated staffing, and ongoing collaboration.

Work Group Goal: Knit together programming, workflows, and funding from the worlds of child welfare and housing supports.



Program Highlights

The following are program expansions and highlights for 2023.

Licensing & Resource Families Peer-to-Peer Mentoring

Using federal grant funds, DCYF expanded the array of programming to support kinship, and traditional caregivers, including two Peer-to-Peer Mentoring programs (Kinship Connections and Supporting Our Anchors), Support Groups, and the Rhode Island Foster Parent Advisory Council as well as Foster Parent College, a free online training portal for resource families.

Caring Connections

In 2021, DCYF began the steps towards the Caring Connections framework to build stronger connections and partnerships with families throughout our work. DCYF uses Caring Connections Calls to support birth parents, resource parents, and kinship caregivers in building caring relationships so they can collaborate and share responsibilities for children/youth temporarily separated from their parents. DCYF's goal is to help all the caring adults involved in a child's life work together to best support the child and each other. Caring Connections kicked off August 1, 2023.

Caring Connections Calls

Goals of a Caring Connections Call

- ✓ Sets the stage for creating a positive relationship between the birth parent and resource parents or kinship caregivers
- ✓ Creates an opportunity for birth parents and resource parents or kinship caregivers to share information and ask questions to support the child/youth during the initial separation from their parents
- ✓ Offers support to the child/youth, parents and caregivers
- ✓ Offers reassurance and relief to the birth parents during this very difficult time

Benefits of a Caring Connections Call

- ✓ Reassures birth parents that their children are safe, and the system is supporting them in maintaining connections with their children
- ✓ Provides the opportunity for the birth parent to share their perspectives and information that they feel is important for the care of their child/youth
- ✓ Provides the caregiver with the opportunity to learn more from the birth parent about the home environment and routines of the child/youth
- ✓ Encourages immediate communication between the caregivers and the birth parents
- ✓ Helps the child/youth experience the love, support and care of two families

The Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) embraces a *Caring Connections* framework to build stronger connections and partnerships with families throughout our work. DCYF uses *Caring Connections Calls* to support birth parents, resource parents and kinship caregivers in building caring relationships so they can collaborate and share responsibilities for children/youth temporarily separated from their parents.

DCYF's goal is to help all the caring adults involved in a child's life work together to best support the child and each other.

What is a Caring Connections Call?

A *Caring Connection Call* is a telephone or video call that connects birth parents and caregivers so they can share valuable information about the care of the child/youth. DCYF is committed to making the *Caring Connection Call* as soon as possible after the child/youth is placed into care.

DCYF's goal is to ensure that children/youth know they are loved and cared for, and that you as a parent, resource parent, kinship caregiver or social worker know you are an important part of making that happen. DCYF believes that these *Caring Connection Calls* can help facilitate children/youth going back home to their families as soon as possible.

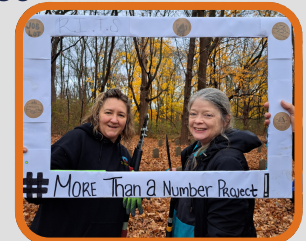
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DCYF Department of Children, Youth & Families dcyf.ri.gov

Program Highlights

The following are program expansions and highlights for 2023.

Rhode Island Training School State Farm Cemetery & Urban Garden Project

Rhode Island Training School (RITS) staff and volunteers began a project to clean up the **State Farm Cemetery Annex grounds**, located on the RITS property, as a way to honor the memory of the people buried on the site. Community sponsors and more than 40 volunteers began the initial clean-up efforts. Goals of this project include restoring the cemetery to its original condition and enhancing the educational curriculum at the RITS.



DCYF Sr. Case Work Supervisor,
Christine Jackson pictured with
Associate Director - Juvenile Justice,
Jessica Nash

In 2018, DCYF and the RITS built raised garden beds to grow vegetables, and the **Urban Garden Project** was born. The Urban Garden Project is an outdoor classroom and after-school program that includes vocational learning, healthy-choices, and work-based experiences in gardening and farming. Through the support of grants, the Urban Garden now includes a memorial garden area with a bench, bird bath, and a variety of flowers, fruits, and vegetables.

The next phase of the Urban Garden Project is to bring in solar panels to harness the energy of the sun and to expand learning and employment opportunities for the residents of the RITS.



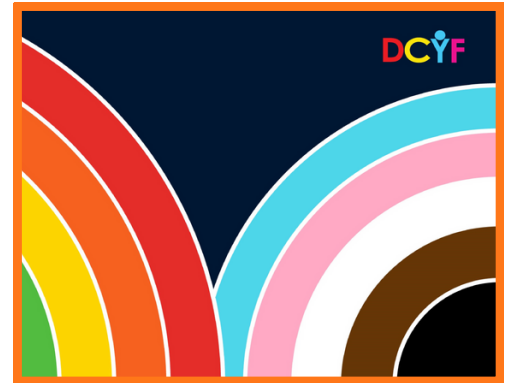
Images are from the Urban Garden Project.

Year in Review

The following are important milestones DCYF accomplished in 2023.

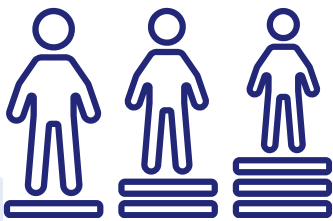
Advancement of Race Equity at DCYF

The Race Equity Advisory Committee, in collaboration with all DCYF Divisions, continues working to examine, identify, and advise on racial and ethnic disproportionalities that may exist; to monitor and report on DCYF progress; and suggest sustainable solutions toward achieving race, equity, and diversity goals. We continue to make strides toward improving disparity outcomes in our system so we can be a model for other State agencies, as well as regionally and nationally. Additionally, DCYF is partnering with the RI Coalition for Children and Families (RICCF) to coordinate efforts and resources for anti-racism and race equity efforts. The goal is to collaborate and foster a coordinated approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

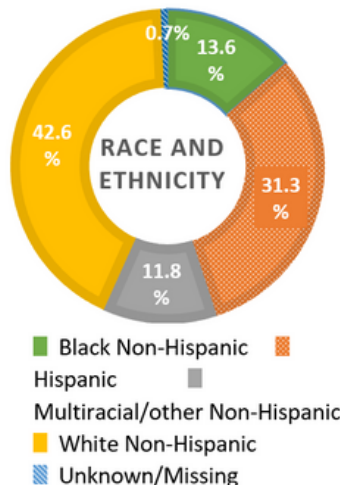


Race and ethnicity of children entering out-of-home placement, FFY21, FFY22, FFY23, entry cohorts

Race and Ethnicity	White Non-H		Black Non-H		Multiracial/Other		Hispanic	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
FFY21 (N=780)	373	47.8%	96	12.3%	120	15.4%	188	24.1%
FFY22 (N=839)	386	46.0%	88	10.5%	127	15.1%	233	27.8%
FFY23 (N=737)	314	42.6%	100	13.6%	87	11.8%	231	31.3%



Race and ethnicity of children entering out-of-home placement, FFY23 entry cohort (N=737)



Data source: RIC HIST report 460; data are current as of 10/10/2023. Multiracial/other includes Multiracial Non-Hispanic, Asian, American Indian and Pacific Islander

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Year in Review



The following are important milestones the Department accomplished in 2023.

Youth in Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC) Program Participate in CNA Pilot Program

In 2023, four VEC youth enrolled and completed a certified nursing assistant (CNAs) program through a partnership pilot program with the RI VETS, DCYF, and CCRI. Additional cohorts will be enrolled in 2024.

Decrease in Number of Children Open to DCYF Over 12 Months

As of December of 2023, the number of children open to DCYF was 2,503, down from 2,658 in December of 2022.

Support and Response Unit

In September 2020, a new Support & Response Unit (SRU) was launched within the Family Services Unit division. The SRU's objective is to connect families with support services that are aimed at prevention and child wellbeing. The staff maintains a toll-free family support line and since September has served over 2,300 families.

Educational Achievements of Youth at the Rhode Island Training School

During the 2022-2023 school year, the Rhode Island Department of Education facilitated the graduation of 10 youth, five earning their high school diploma through their respective LEAs (local education authorities), and five earning their GED.

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Year in Review



The following are important milestones DCYF accomplished in 2023.

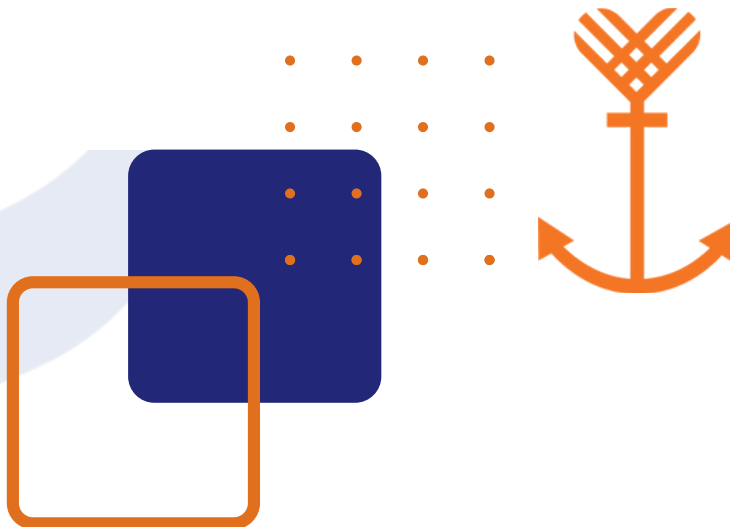
One-Year Pilot to Strengthen DCYF Civil Service Exams and Hiring Process

On June 21, 2023, the General Assembly signed into law a one-year pilot process for DCYF with the intent of expediting the hiring process for Social Caseworker II and Child Protective Investigator positions at DCYF. DCYF has completed the protocol and has already begun onboarding new staff.

As of December 2023, DCYF has hired 13 Child Protective Investigators and 16 Social Caseworker II's since the pilot program started.

Re-procuring DCYF's Service Array

DCYF has begun a new round of procurements for their entire service array – last completed in 2016. Through new contracts with providers, DCYF will update its comprehensive service array to best meet the evolving needs of the families it serves.



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Year in Review

The following are important milestones DCYF accomplished in 2023.



Resource Family Recruitment and Retention & Support

The Department is committed to the goal that all children and youth should be cared for in a safe, supportive family setting. To support this goal, DCYF is focused on partnering with the community, its leaders, and organizations who can “Be An Anchor” for children and families involved in Rhode Island’s child well-being system. DCYF and its partners work collaboratively to recruit a diverse pool of individuals who can “Be An Anchor,” and to ensure our Anchors are well prepared and supported to care for children. In 2023 DCYF, collectively with our Private Agency Foster Care providers, licensed a total of 87 non-kinship foster homes. Of the 87 homes, 33 were licensed to support youth 12 years of age or older, 56 families were open to placement of siblings, and 81 families were open to placement of children with mental health or physical disability. Of the 87 newly licensed homes, 92% were retained as of June 30, 2023.



Be An Anchor

Be An Anchor is Rhode Island’s community engagement campaign to support foster care recruitment and retention. Our kinship caregivers, traditional and therapeutic foster families, and pre-adoptive families are “Anchors” for children in DCYF care. DCYF staff, community agencies, and the natural supports of our foster families are all Anchors, as they support the RI Foster Care System.

In addition to non-kinship foster homes, Licensing and Resource families have increased DCYF capacity and utilization of licensed relative/kinship families. The number of licensed kinship families has stayed relatively consistent, with 356 families as of May 1, 2021; 319 families as of May 1, 2022; and 371 families as of May 1, 2023.

Year in Review



The following are important milestones DCYF accomplished in 2023.

Expansion of In-State Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities and High-End Residential Care

DCYF continues to make progress toward the expansion of in-state psychiatric and high-end residential care to meet the needs of children and adolescents. For Fiscal Year 2023, the Rhode Island General Assembly allocated the necessary dollars to design and build a 12-bed psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF) for female adolescents, and federal Pandemic Relief Funds were specifically identified to support this expansion. Additionally, the Rhode Island legislature approved a total of \$45 million appropriated across Fiscal Years 2024 to 2026 to construct a new 16-bed behavioral health residential treatment facility for female adolescents with emotional and behavioral challenges.

Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs)

DCYF has worked closely with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH) to support the implementation of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) across the state. CCBHCs represent a critical improvement to the delivery of behavioral health services for children, families and adults. CCBHCs provide coordinated and comprehensive case management, outpatient mental health and substance use services, person and family-centered treatment planning, peer and family support, and crisis services. CCBHCs are being implemented to greatly expand access to innovative and effective behavioral health services, advance equity through community-integrated supports and increase available federal Medicaid reimbursement and overall funding for mental health.

Strengthening Rhode Island's Children's Behavioral Health System of Care

As of the beginning of November 2023, 464 children and youth experiencing a crisis were served by the Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) through a contract with EOHHS and ongoing oversight by EOHHS and DCYF. Very positively, 92% of these youth in crisis were stabilized in the community, and the need for psychiatric hospitalization was avoided, providing strong evidence of the efficacy and need for this service.

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Year in Review

The following are important milestones DCYF accomplished in 2023.

Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)

Family First gives DCYF the ability to enhance efforts with respect to prevention and early intervention services to keep children safe, strengthen families, and reduce the need for foster care whenever it is safe to do so. DCYF has developed a five-year Family First Prevention Services plan, giving the state the option to use federal Title IV-E funding for evidence-based prevention services and programs (EBPs). In Rhode Island, Family First will help with prevention services and increased family stability and well-being, investment in evidence-based interventions, applying a trauma-responsive lens to the continuum of prevention services, partnering across systems (mental health, substance use disorder, juvenile justice, early childhood, health, etc.) to align prevention efforts, and expanding evidence-based innovative practices. This initiative aligns with Governor McKee's RI2030 plan.

As our Family First workplan continues, DCYF anticipates:

- A reduction in the need for foster care by increasing the number of children and families safely sustained at home and in the community.
- Fewer children engaged with juvenile justice and a decrease in length of time for those involved.
- An increase in equity of services available for children/families ensuring culturally appropriate options are available.
- Improvement of parental capacity to care for and sustain their family by building their support networks.
- Increased array of prevention services.
- Faster reunification efforts by wrapping around children and their families.
- Greater collaboration and coordination across public and private departments/agencies in Rhode Island.

Year in Review

The following are important milestones the Department has accomplished in 2023.

Collaboration with Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCPs)

Consistent with a focus of prevention and community-based supports for children and families, the design and implementation of the Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCPs) places strong emphasis on the front-end of DCYF's service delivery system to identify families who are at risk for DCYF involvement. The FCCPs are DCYF's primary prevention resource for the state.

Collaboration with Indian Child Welfare

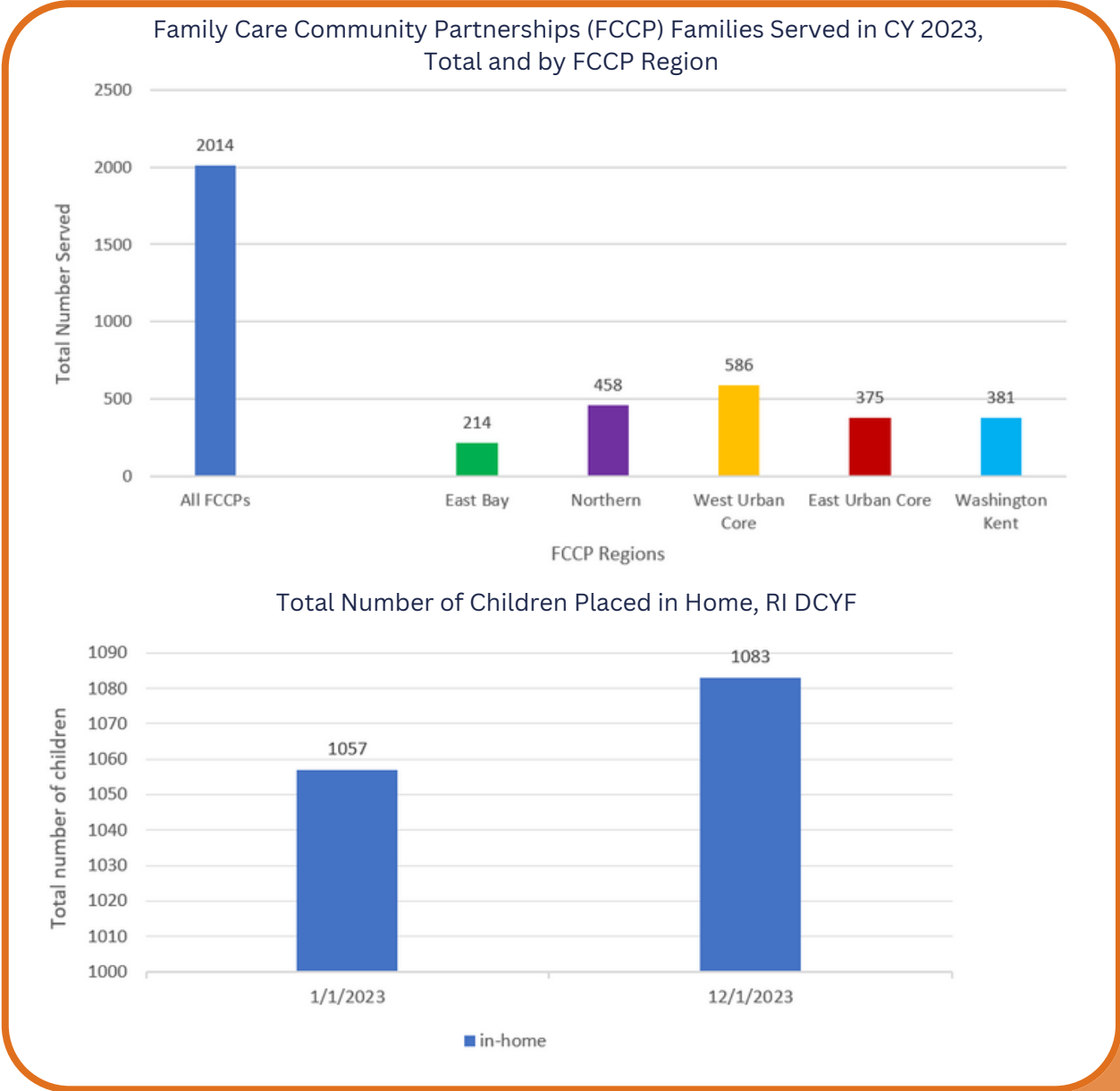
DCYF has a standardized process used to gather input from the Narragansett Indian Tribe that is based on the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), and In-Demand Training. DCYF continues to meet regularly with the Narragansett Indian Tribe to discuss systemic issues, including a team approach to specific families involved in ongoing services and those who identify as being registered members of a federally recognized Indian Tribe at the start of all child protective investigations.



Positive Outcomes for Children, Youth and Families

Systemic practice improvements drive many positive outcomes for the children, youth and families we serve. Listed below are recent DCYF achievements.

DCYF has seen success in children remaining in their homes with services. This is attributed to our partnerships with community-based prevention services, such as the Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCPs)



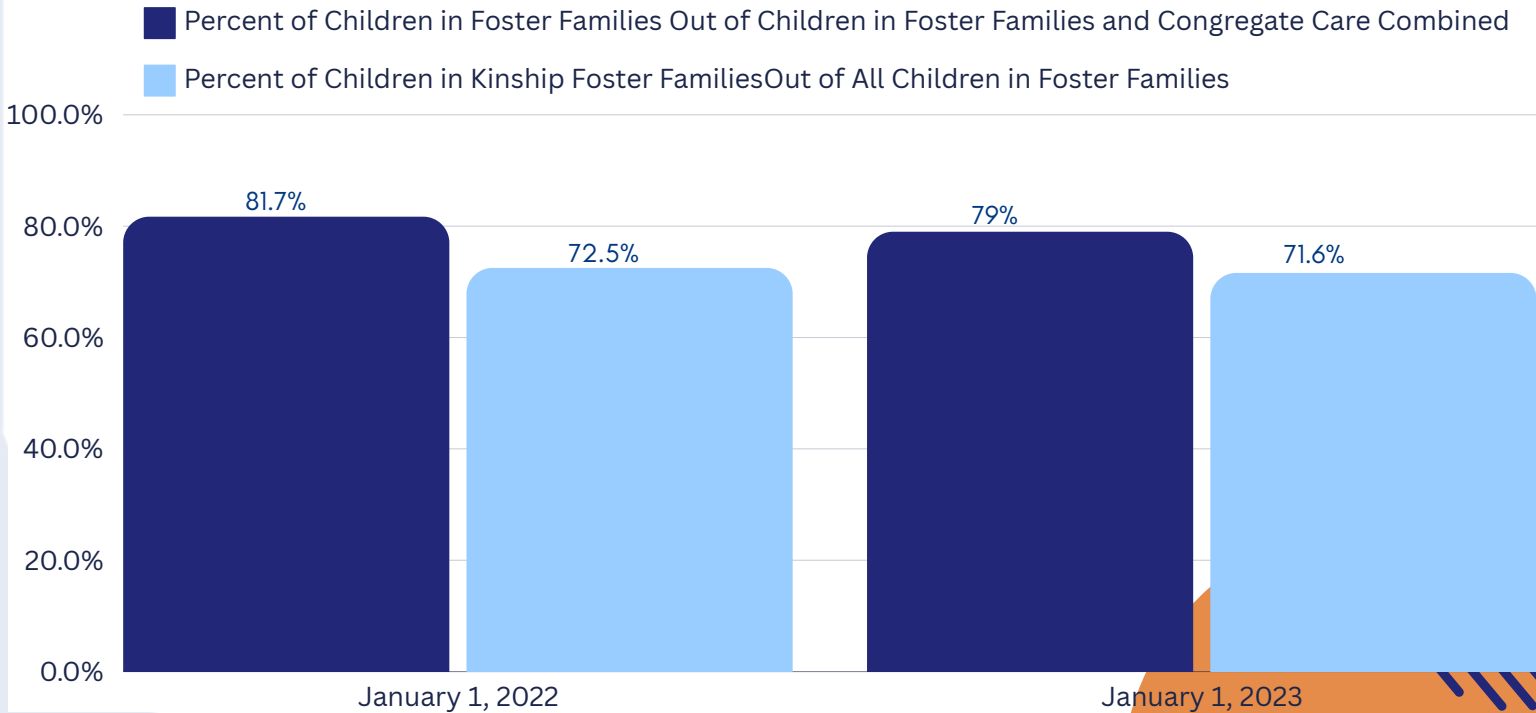
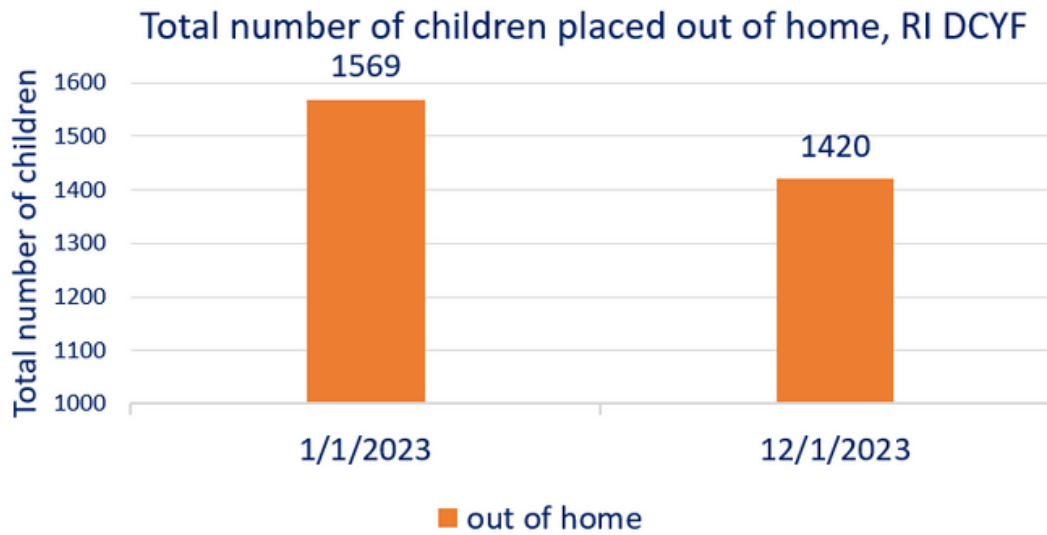
Data notes:
 Data source, RIFIS QA V2. Data as of 1/2/2024
 Duplicated by child, unduplicated by FCCP entry/event
 Served defined by open for at least 1 calendar day in 2023
 Data source RICHST RPT 776

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Positive Outcomes for Children, Youth and Families

Systemic practice improvements drive many positive outcomes for the children, youth and families we serve. Listed below are recent DCYF achievements.

DCYF has noted an impactful decrease in the number of children and youth placed out of home.



Data Source: RICHIST, RPT 776
Excludes adoption, guardianship, ICJ-outgoing, VEC and includes RITS

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Positive Outcomes for Children, Youth and Families

Systemic practice improvements drive many positive outcomes for the children, youth and families we serve. Listed below are recent DCYF achievements.

Screening Tool-structured decision making (SDM) on the call floor. The SDM prioritizes use of resources, ensures statutory compliance, provides data to inform policy and guide resource development, provides a framework for continuous quality improvement, ensures implementation fidelity, provides for supervision and coaching for CPS Staff, prioritizes information gathering, improves transparency in decision making, provides tools for talking with clients, and maintains service standards, ensures fair and equitable assessments, provides common language for conversations with child protective workers, and also improves consistency of decisions that affect them.

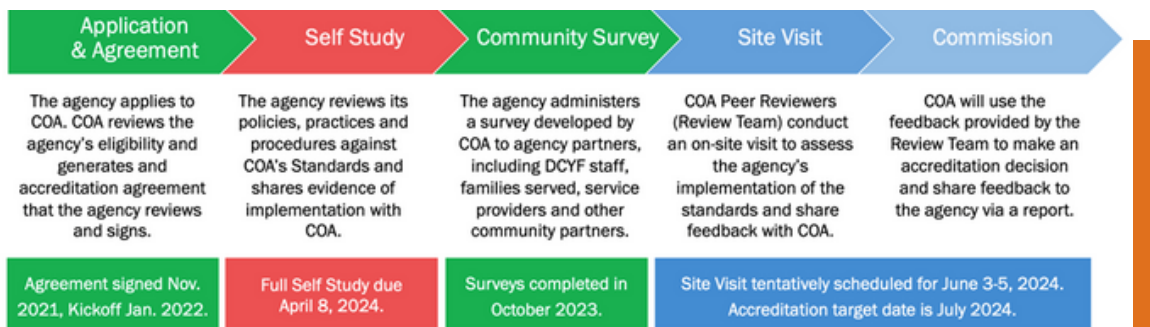
As outlined in Governor McKee's RI2030 plan, DCYF is set to renew its partnership with Rhode Island College (RIC) June 30, 2024. The Internship to Employment Program is a critical part of our learning partnership with RIC.

In 2023, DCYF is began exploring a paid internship program to support the needs of today's higher education population and to be poised to compete where paid internships are commonplace and necessary to support workplace equity and diversity goals. DCYF looks forward to ongoing collaboration with RIC on this initiative.



Council on Accreditation

In 2021, the General Assembly dedicated funding to DCYF for 91 new staff and other resources to achieve human and social services accreditation through the Council on Accreditation (COA). Many public agencies across the country have used accreditation as a means of creating and sustaining organizational change, enhancing supervisory practices, and improving quality in both oversight and service delivery. The accreditation process involves a detailed review and analysis of an organization’s administrative, management, and service delivery functions against international standards of best practice that emphasize services that are coordinated, culturally competent, evidence-based, and outcomes-oriented, and that are provided by a skilled and supported workforce. Accreditation demonstrates accountability in the management of resources, sets standardized best practice thresholds for service and administration, and increases organizational capacity and accountability by creating a framework for ongoing quality improvement.



4-Year Cycle Beyond Initial Accreditation

- 2025: Annual Update to COA
- 2026: Annual Update to COA
- 2027: Annual Update to COA, Self-Study, Community Survey
- 2028: Re-Accreditation (Site Visit, Commission)

In 2024, DCYF will conclude a three-year review of its policies, programs, and practices to ensure Rhode Island is meeting more than 400 best practice standards. This will include more than 50 new and updated policies and procedures. DCYF will collect evidence of adherence to the standards and submit them to COA, who will review the work and come to Rhode Island for a site visit. Once COA is satisfied that DCYF has met all standards, DCYF will be accredited for the first time in its history. Along with the accreditation will come a report with detailed feedback that DCYF can use to make additional improvements moving forward. DCYF must be re-accredited every four years.

Technology

Comprehensive Child Welfare Information Systems (CCWIS)

The strategic planning vendor, Public Consulting Group (PCG), completed the strategic plan and recommendation for CCWIS implementation for DCYF. The Strategic Plan included a feasibility study, alternative and budget analyses, and a recommendation for the implementation approach for the new CCWIS system. PCG helped develop an RFP including detailed business requirements as an outcome of the Strategic Plan. The RFP was approved by the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) and published for bid in September 2023. This initiative aligns with Governor McKee’s RI2030 plan.



Below is a high-level project timeline which is subject to update based on the recommendations developed during the planning phase.

CCWIS RFP TIMELINE



Technology

Electronic Health Records (EHR)

DCYF implemented an Electronic Health Records system for youth at the Rhode Island Training School (RITS) in October 2023. The system allows for resident health charts to be maintained online and has replaced a paper-based tracking of medical records and medical treatment provided to youth at the facility. The system integrates with the prescribing pharmacy, allowing for scripts to be transmitted electronically 24/7 in a secure and expedient manner. Additionally, DCYF implemented an electronic exchange with the state immunization system and the state labs. These exchanges ensure that medical information for youth in care is current. Automated workflows, prebuilt templates, and user-specific roles specific to the RITS increases the integrity of information in the health records while maintaining the privacy of records.



Policy Management Software

DCYF implemented and launched PowerDMS, a policy management software, in November 2023. PowerDMS provides the DCYF with an electronic workflow to create, edit, approve, and publish policy and procedure documents. This eliminates the manual email process to track edits and chain of approvals for each policy and procedure. Additionally, the platform provides the ability to share and track policy and procedure reviews by DCYF staff and the public. More than 250 policies have been uploaded for staff to acknowledge, review, and track. PowerDMS allows DCYF to track updates to policies and procedures, administration of surveys, and knowledge checks on policies and procedures with the staff. The platform also provides easy access of the policies to the general public, as needed. Since its implementation, over 20 operating procedures have been updated and published.

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2024 Broad Goals & Priorities

In 2024, DCYF seeks to focus on broad goals that will move our system forward:



WELL-BEING

Establish a proactive child and family well-being system by centering youth and family voice, expanding preventative supports for children and families, and improving outcomes.

- Improve rates and support for kinship caregivers and traditional foster parents.
- Partner with children, youth, families, and others with lived experience to understand how existing policies and practices may be creating harm rather than strengthening families.
- Improve collaboration amongst community partners in all sectors – including those with lived experience.
- Focus on improving educational and physical well-being of youth in care.
- Integrate a well-funded system of care (SOC) that promotes innovative in-home supports.

2024 Broad Goals & Priorities

In 2024, DCYF seeks to focus on broad goals that will move our system forward:



RACIAL JUSTICE

Advance race equity by identifying and working to eliminate anti-systemic racist practices in our child and family well-being system.

- Continue developing services and materials translated in preferred language.
- Integrate race equity language in contracts, service provision, policies, and procedures.
- Eliminate racial and ethnic disproportionality at the five most critical decision points in our child and family well-being system.
- Initiate root-cause analysis to determine why disparate outcomes exist.
- Ensure workforce and the Department's executive leadership has, at minimum, proportionate representation by people of color as its workforce.

2024

2024 Broad Goals & Priorities

In 2024, DCYF seeks to focus on broad goals that will move our system forward:



TRANSITION

Focus on transitioning foster youth into adulthood, with special concentration on LGBTQI+, aging out youth in care, and other marginalized youth in foster care.

- Collect SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression) data in an effective and competent manner where all youth feel safe.
- Develop written policies, procedures, and trainings that protect marginalized (LBTQI+, BIPOC, pregnant & parenting, and those with intellectual and developmental delays) youth and adults from harassment and discrimination.
- Provide support to improve educational outcomes, workforce development and job placement opportunities; prevent transition into homelessness; and pathways to economic security.
- Address over-prescription and misuse of psychotropic medication.
- Incentivize the use and assist in coordination of mental health services.

2024 Broad Goals & Priorities

In 2024, DCYF seeks to focus on broad goals that will move our system forward:

CONTINUUM OF CARE

Develop a strong continuum of care to include improved access to an array of therapeutic supports and services.

- Initiate and implement a residential monitoring unit.
- Develop a strategic plan specific to timely access to residential treatment, evidence-based alternatives to residential treatment, therapeutic foster care, and specialized foster care and improve placement capacity.
- Create a continuum of care under the larger systems of care scope.
- Ensure procured services meet identified needs, assess gaps in services with intent to procure based on a rate-setting methodology, and increase accountability to service provision.
- Prioritize and invest in prevention, strategically reallocate resources, and deliver a continuum of community-based supports that meets families' unique needs and promotes efforts to help them thrive.



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2024 Broad Goals & Priorities

In 2024, DCYF seeks to focus on broad goals that will move our system forward:



WORKFORCE

Engage workforce by building a well-resourced, well-trained, and supportive organizational culture.

- Revamp and enhance training and continued education.
- Develop comprehensive workforce development strategies.
- Work to identify creative, actionable strategies that attract and retain a qualified workforce.
- Commit to establishing and maintaining manageable caseloads, through safely reducing the number of children in foster care.
- Building and maintaining a healthy, equitable work environment and culture.

Continued Efforts

DCYF is committed to our proposed 2024 goals and continuing the ongoing efforts of 2023.

Continued efforts include:

- Finalize the Service Array Procurement
- Achieve accreditation through the Council on Accreditation (COA).
- Fulfil the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) Procurement and Implementation.
- Proactively engage in the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHC) Expansion.
- Drive forward the Listening & Learning Tour and Strategic Plan Development.
- Continued Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) Assessment and Implementation.



DCYF intends to uplift staff, family, youth, and community voice through the strategic development of a child well-being advisory structure, beginning in May 2024. This group of individuals with lived experience and expertise will be asked to collaborate on the development of strategies focused on 2023 continued efforts and achieving 2024 priorities.

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DCYF remains committed to engaging our children, youth, families, and community in strategies to increase resources and supports for Rhode Island families.

Collectively, we learned a lot in 2023 from those who work in and experience child well-being in Rhode Island. Together, we are building a system that will strengthen positive outcomes for the children, youth, and families we serve.

DCYF would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to our staff, families, partners and, our community for your partnership and commitment to children, youth, and families!

ALONE we can
do so LITTLE;
TOGETHER we can
do so MUCH
-HELEN KELLER

