

DCYF ANNUAL REPORT

Reflecting on 2024



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A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues, Partners, and Community Members,

As we close 2024, I am both proud and inspired by the incredible work we have accomplished together at the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families. This year has been marked by transformative change, steadfast collaboration, and unwavering commitment to the children and families we serve. I want to take this opportunity to celebrate our successes, reflect on the progress we have made, and share our vision for the future.

Our Focus on Prevention and Family Preservation

One of our most significant achievements this year was the safe reduction in the number of children removed from their homes. By utilizing our structured decision-making tool and prioritizing early intervention through our Support and Response Unit (SRU), we've seen a 12.1% decrease in removals from FFY2022 to FFY2023—part of an impressive 26.7% reduction since FFY2019. These numbers represent more than statistics; they reflect lives kept together, trauma avoided, and our commitment to family preservation.

Enhancing Community-Based Supports

A cornerstone of our progress has been the \$21 million investment in expanding our home- and community-based service array. This includes intensive wrap-around supports that allow children to remain safely in their homes and communities. Our work with the Mobile Response and Stabilization Service (MRSS) has been particularly impactful, responding to over 1,000 children in crisis this year and preventing 92% of cases from escalating to psychiatric hospitalization.

Strengthening Foster Care and Kinship Support

This year, we also overhauled the foster care payment structure to better support resource families, ensuring they have the tools and resources needed to provide high-quality care. With 52 new foster families licensed in 2024, we are making strides toward our goal of 85 new families by mid-2025. Rhode Island continues to lead the nation in kinship care, with 73% of children placed with relatives or close family friends, far exceeding the national average of 35%.

Promoting Permanency and Youth Empowerment

Our commitment to achieving timely permanency for youth has yielded significant results. Through innovative initiatives like the SOUL Family Partnership and the Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC) program, we are empowering young people to transition successfully into adulthood. The inspiring achievements of youth enrolled in VEC—from earning degrees to securing meaningful employment—remind us of the limitless potential that exists when we invest in their futures.



A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR (continued)

Driving Systemic Change

In 2024, we laid the foundation for lasting systemic transformation. By reducing caseloads for front-line workers and reaching the final stages of compliance with the Children's Rights Settlement—set for full resolution in April 2025—we have created a more sustainable and equitable environment for both staff and families. Our ongoing efforts to modernize through the implementation of the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) and achieving accreditation from the Council on Accreditation (COA) - a service of Social Current underscore our commitment to excellence and accountability.

Looking Ahead

As we move into 2025, our vision remains bold: reducing reliance on congregate care, expanding family-based solutions, and addressing systemic inequities to ensure every child and family has the opportunity to thrive. These goals will require our collective resolve and the continued support of our community partners.

To every staff member, resource family, advocate, and partner, thank you for your dedication, compassion, and tireless efforts. Together, we are not just responding to challenges—we are transforming lives and building a brighter future for Rhode Island's children and families.

With deepest gratitude and optimism for what lies ahead,



Ashley Deckert, MSW, MA

Director

Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families



ABOUT DCYF

The Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) has served as the primary agency for child welfare, children's behavioral health, and juvenile justice since its establishment in 1980, guided by Rhode Island General Law § 42-72-5. Our mission is clear: mobilize resources to create an integrated statewide program that ensures children and families can reach their full potential.

As of today, DCYF serves under **2,300** children and families, empowered by a dedicated workforce of over **600** employees who operate across five main practice divisions: **Child Protective Services, Division of Family Services, Community Services & Behavioral Health, Licensing & Resource Families, and Division of Youth Development**. These practice areas are supported by our **Central Management Team**, which oversees critical support functions, including budget management, human resources, legal services, and performance improvement.

MISSION

Build a system of care where every child grows up in a safe and loving family environment that supports the development of strong, resilient families throughout the state of Rhode Island.

VISION

The Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families leads excellence in service delivery by strengthening **PREVENTION**, ensuring **ACCOUNTABILITY**, and respecting the dignity and diversity of every individual and family. Through **COLLABORATION**, we effectively **ENGAGE** with families and communities, working together to ensure the safety and well-being of the children and youth we serve.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Family, community, and government share responsibility for the safety, protection, and well-being of children, emphasizing prevention over intervention through an integrated continuum of care that reflects a partnership between all parties and is culturally relevant.
- When a natural family cannot care for a child or youth, it is our responsibility to ensure timely placement in a safe, stable, and nurturing environment.
- Staff, families, resource caregivers, and service providers are partners in providing timely and appropriate high-quality care.
- Partnership requires open, honest, and respectful communication fostering an awareness of the quality of services and clear and agreed-upon responsibilities.
- Staff is held accountable to a professional code of conduct.
- As an invaluable resource, staff is entitled to a safe, supportive work environment that fosters professional development.
- Quality improvement is an ongoing process that utilizes external and internal performance standards.

2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Furthering Our Goal of Safely Keeping Families Together

DCYF continues to demonstrate success in prioritizing family preservation and placing children in least restrictive family-based settings.

Number of Children in Out-of-Home Placements Continues to Decline



Data Source: DCYF Strategic Dashboard. RICHIIST Rpt. 776 (point in time data)

Children Supported by DCYF

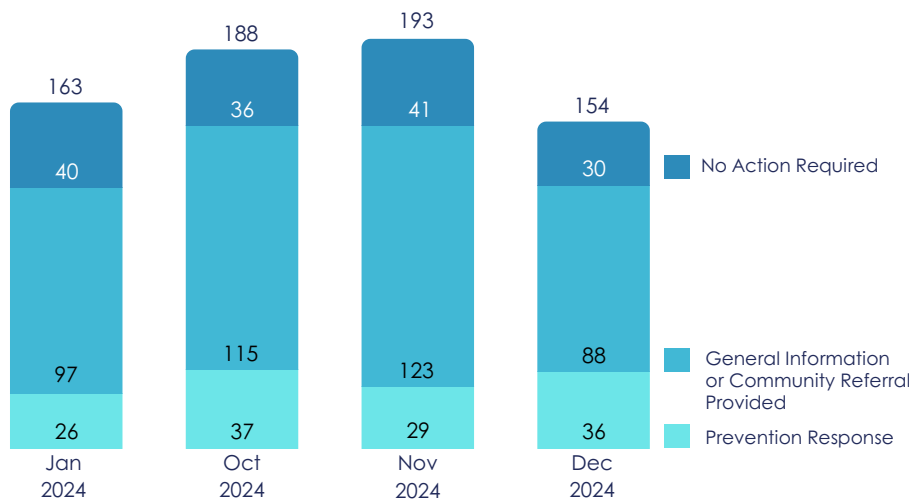


Support and Response Unit (SRU)

DCYF is focusing on proactive measures to strengthen families, prevent out-of-home placements, and address underlying challenges before crises occur. Inquiries to the DCYF “Warm Line” are handled by SCWIs in SRU. Families working with these caseworkers are not considered “active” with DCYF in the traditional sense that there has been no confirmed child maltreatment. This unit connects families with services to get the support they need to prevent maltreatment from occurring, which may cause children to formally enter the system.

Families in need of support are encouraged to contact the DCYF Warm Line at 1-888-RI-FAMILY(1-888-743-2659).

Calls and Call Outcomes to the Support and Response Unit (SRU)



Data Source: DCYF Strategic Dashboard. RICHIIST Rpt. 813 (point in time data)

“Supporting the well-being of children and families in Rhode Island remains an area of focus for our administration. Director Deckert and the team at DCYF have envisioned a child well-being system that emphasizes family-centered services and supports and invests in keeping families together and connected to their community. I’m encouraged by the work this agency is doing to improve the safety and well-being of families across the state and look forward to supporting their efforts in the new year.”



Dan McKee,
Governor of Rhode Island

2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS (continued)

DCYF Becomes First Child Welfare Agency in New England to Achieve National Accreditation

We are pleased to share the exciting news that DCYF has achieved successful accreditation through the Council on Accreditation (COA) a service of Social Current. Following a comprehensive Site Review conducted in November 2024, we received formal confirmation of our accreditation on February 14, 2025. We take great pride in being the only agency in New England to have received this significant recognition.



This accreditation underscores our commitment to excellence in service delivery and continuous improvement. In the upcoming weeks, COA will release a Final Accreditation Report, which will provide detailed ratings for all assessed standards. This report will be publicly available and will highlight our dedication to effective service delivery and our commitment to enhancing the well-being of those we serve.

Exiting the Children's Rights Settlement (CRI)

DCYF has successfully satisfied all elements of the CRI requirements, with only two final reports remaining before full resolution in April 2025. We reached our goals in six and a half years, demonstrating our strong commitment to best practices and high standards of care. This achievement reflects not only our adherence to regulations but also the significant systemic improvements we have made to prioritize the well-being of children and families.

Comprehensive Child Welfare System

DCYF has received critical federal approval to begin implementation of a new Comprehensive Child Welfare System (CCWIS). This system will replace the current legacy client-server RICHIST application that has been operational for over 27 years.

Strengthening Families: A Guide for Mandated Reporters as Supporters

DCYF has released the 2025 Mandated Reporter Guide. This manual is more than a guide for mandated reporting; It outlines not only the legal obligations to report suspected child abuse and neglect but also emphasizes the vital role each of us plays in supporting families with care, compassion, and informed action.



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES: A GUIDE FOR MANDATED REPORTERS AS SUPPORTERS
FIRST EDITION



Key topics covered include:

- Legal responsibilities for reporting suspected child abuse and neglect.
- The process for making reports to the DCYF Child Abuse Hotline.
- Recognizing the difference between poverty and neglect.
- Understanding implicit and explicit biases and their impact on families.
- Guidance on what to do if a report is not screened in.
- The role of the Support and Response Unit (SRU) for cases that do not meet the criteria for abuse/neglect but still need support.



2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS (continued)

Effort to Reduce Caseloads

One of DCYF's most transformative achievements has been the reduction in the average caseloads for FSU workers—from **12.5 cases per worker to 11**. This reduction, while seemingly small on the surface, had a profound impact on each worker's ability to deeply engage with children and families. With fewer cases to manage, workers are spending more time building relationships with families, understanding their unique needs, and tailoring services to support them effectively.

Staff Retention and Recruitment

DCYF's Civil Service Exam pilot has had a positive effect on our hiring and retention goals. This streamlined process has helped us fill important positions quickly, ensuring that children and families get the timely support they need. DCYF has hired **42 Child Protection Investigators** and **61 Social Caseworker IIs** through this initiative, reducing vacancies and enhancing our team's ability to serve the community.

AlertMedia

DCYF has launched AlertMedia, an employee safety and emergency communication system designed to enhance front-line staff protections as they work to support children and families across Rhode Island communities.

The AlertMedia threat intelligence system will allow staff to monitor and evaluate personal, child and family safety before traveling to areas impacted by emergency events like adverse weather. Additionally, the software offers hands-free, timed safety monitoring while working in the community and emergency panic buttons, both of which are available to staff, directly via their mobile devices, allowing for instant communications when immediate assistance is needed.

Wellness Committee: Supporting the Whole Employee

The DCYF Wellness Committee, made up of over 25 volunteers, continued their work boosting staff morale and promoting self-care. In 2024, the Committee hosted our first All-Staff Appreciation Day in September at Goddard Park to celebrate and show how much we value every team member. With food trucks, wellness vendors, and a focus on relaxation, it provided an opportunity for staff and their families to recharge and feel appreciated.

The Committee is also working on creative ways to build a supportive work environment, including recognition programs, stress management resources, and team-building activities.

2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS (continued)

Director's Listening & Learning Tour Focuses DCYF Priorities for 2025 and Beyond

DCYF Director, Ashley Deckert, concluded her Listening & Learning Tour among communities working within and supported by the state's child well-being system. Director Deckert hosted **78** tour "stops" over nine months, meeting with community partners and providers, the Rhode Island Family Court, school districts and childcare providers, parents and legal guardians, current and former foster youth, traditional and kinship resource caregivers, DCYF staff, and state government partners. Director Deckert received feedback from over **600** individuals on the strengths and challenges within the current system and the desires for improving the system and outcomes for children and families. Key findings from the Listening & Learning Tour directly contributed to the goals and objectives within DCYF's five-year strategic plan.

Expanded Service Array Improves Access for Children and Families

In 2024, DCYF completed the re-procurement process for its service array increasing available programs by **82%** to a total of **62 programs** under contract. DCYF's service array continues to be open to children and families with system involvement and as preventative supports for children and families working in the community to stay connected and empowered.

Additionally, DCYF procured congregate care and therapeutic foster care services with multiple programs, expanding the range of programs to support youth in need. These services provide housing and clinical care to stabilize youth with the goal of transitioning them to less restrictive settings and, whenever possible, reunifying them with their families.

Adoption Supports

DCYF procured specialized services to support youth and families seeking adoption or guardianship. These services include counseling and crisis management to address the unique challenges of achieving permanency within a new family structure.

Juvenile Probation Recidivism and Youth Incentives Program

We are pleased to report the recidivism rate for youth on probation alone decreased from **26% to 25%**. This downward trend demonstrates the effectiveness of our probation services and reinforces our commitment to supporting youth in achieving positive outcomes.

In addition, the division initiated a youth incentives program. This innovative program empowers youth to achieve their service plan goals by breaking down objectives into manageable steps, providing rewards for progress, and fostering a sense of accomplishment. The program allows each youth to set and work towards a personal goal such as securing employment, obtaining a driver's license, or advancing academically.



2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS (continued)

Rhode Island Training School (RITS) Sees Largest Graduating Class in Recent Years

In the 2023/2024 school year, the education department at the Rhode Island Training School (RITS) facilitated the graduation of its largest class in recent years with **7 high school diploma** recipients and **8 GED** recipients.

RITS Secures Partnership with Mystic Aquarium

The education department at RITS secured a first-ever partnership with Mystic Aquarium for the full school year expanding access to youth for hands-on, creative learning experiences beyond the classroom and through science kits and experimentation. Building on this partnership, **over 40 youth** successfully participated in Mystic Aquarium's STEM Mentoring summer program where they learned about climate change, renewable energy, biodiversity, and water conservation.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Grant

The Division of Youth Development (Juvenile Justice) was recently awarded the FY2024 Building Local Continuums of Care to Support Youth Success grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). This prestigious grant supports the planning and development of a

community-based continuum of care to prevent youth involvement in the juvenile justice system and reduce further involvement for those already engaged. DCYF is collaborating with Family Services of Rhode Island (FSRI) and Tides Family Services on this initiative, which is one of only seven grants awarded nationwide. Rhode Island received the highest funding amount among all recipients, marking a significant achievement for the state. This grant enhances DCYF's partnership with OJJDP, positions Rhode Island as a strong candidate for future Department of Justice funding, and furthers the state's priorities of preserving families, preventing juvenile justice system entry, and reducing the use of traumatic out-of-home care.



The RITS Cemetery Project

This annual project has gained national attention for engaging students in meaningful work like obituary write-ups, connecting them to history and community.

Urban Garden Project

The Urban Garden Project expanded with new farm animals, sustainable gardening equipment, and beautification efforts. The collaboration with the Harvest Kitchen Project, students created new products combining RITS-grown vegetables with culinary creations.

"The efforts demonstrated by the Division of Youth Development this year have been inspirational.

The innovative strategies to engage youth and families in a collaborative effort to enhance service capacity while addressing systemic inequities present in our justice system have been pivotal to our work.

By fostering a strong continuum of care and focusing on the unique challenges faced by our Juvenile Justice youth, we can create a safer, more supportive environment that encourages positive development and community integration."



Dr. Larome Myrick,
Executive Director Rhode Island
Division of Youth Development

EMPHASIS ON FAMILY-BASED SOLUTIONS



DCYF is committed to limiting the use of congregate care to critical cases that require short-term interventions to address specific clinical or medical needs. To support this approach, targeted case reviews are actively underway to transition youth ready for discharge to less restrictive, home-based settings.

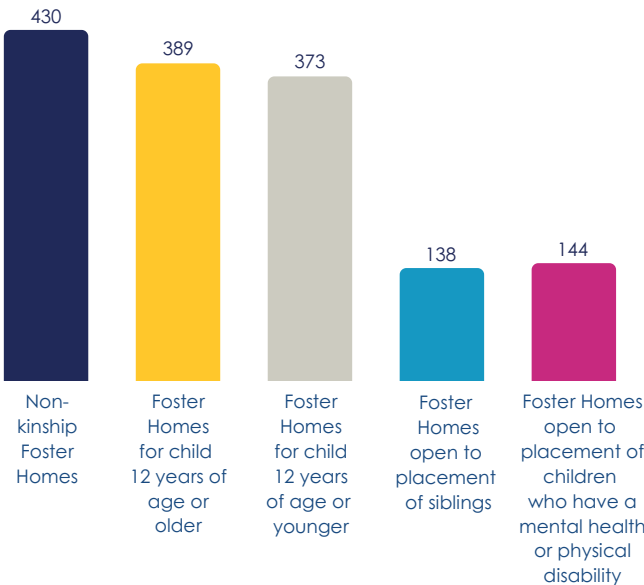
This philosophy aligns with a national effort that prioritizes ending the need for group placements and emphasizes the importance of family-based care for youth.

Foster Care

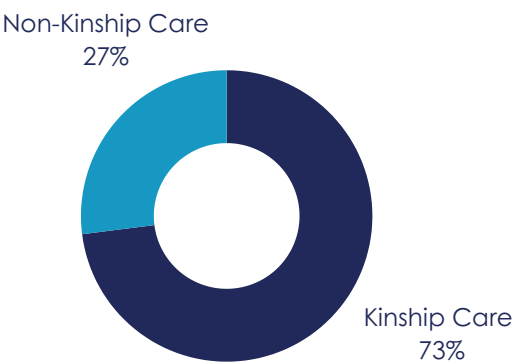
In Rhode Island, we place youth in kinship homes at a rate of 73%, far surpassing the national average of 35%. This means that a majority of the children in our care are placed with family members or close family friends, ensuring that children remain connected to their familial roots, culture, and support networks.

In 2024, we successfully licensed **52** new non-relative foster families. In 2025 we aim to license **85** new families by June 30.

Resource Family Matching Criteria



Breakdown of Resource Family Type



Children in out of home, family-based placements, by placement type as of December 3, 2024.

Increased Rates to Resource Families

DCYF values the commitment made by resource families and recognizes the significant resources and dedication required to care for children in need. Through the collective efforts of DCYF leadership, community-based providers, the Office of the Child Advocate, the legislature, and Governor's office, DCYF secured \$4.5 million to increase foster parent stipend rates for children at every level of need.

As of August 1, 2024, a new rate structure **ranging from \$35.00 - \$95.00 per day** provided increased compensation for resource families caring for children at all levels of need.

YOUTH & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Child Wellbeing Advisory Committee Improves Collaboration and Engagement

In July 2024, DCYF launched the Child Wellbeing Advisory Committee (CWAC), a direct result of the Listening & Learning Tour to further the objective of elevating youth and family voice. At its inaugural meeting, **over 100 participants** including parents and legal guardians, current and former foster youth, resource caregivers and leaders from private, community organizations convened to discuss the most pressing areas of opportunity for improving Rhode Island's system of care. In the coming year, subcommittees will address targeted areas of opportunity including Continuum of Care, Racial Justice, Youth Transitions, and Workforce with the goal of collecting data, informing policy, and improving service delivery across DCYF.

First Annual Youth Summit

In a momentous gathering on July 17, 2024, members of the SPEAK Advisory Board, DCYF Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC) and Communities for People's Youth Development Services celebrated their first youth summit. The summit's theme, "Embrace the Journey: Let Your Voice Be Heard, Empower the Future," reflected the importance of youth sharing their lived experiences within the foster care system. At DCYF, we believe these insights are crucial for driving policy and systemic changes that enhance supports for youth aging out of care. The event served as an important platform to raise community awareness and foster collaboration for better outcomes for Rhode Island's youth.

Third Annual Foster Care Awareness and Appreciation Event

Celebrated each May, Foster Care Awareness Month is a time to recognize the incredible resilience and strength of children and youth in foster care, as well as the dedicated individuals who support them. DCYF, in collaboration with The Village for Foster and Adoptive Families, Adoption Rhode Island, Foster Forward, and our many other valuable partners, hosted its annual Foster Care Awareness event at the Roger Williams Park Zoo.

This year's event welcomed over 300 Families and children to a fun night at the zoo. The event celebrates those who make a positive difference in the lives of these children, whether through fostering, adoption, or supporting foster care organizations.

Second Annual Family Reunification Day

On June 29, 2024, the Rhode Island Birth Family Advisory group hosted its Second Annual Family Reunification Day event, coinciding with National Reunification Day. The occasion highlights Reunification Month, a nationwide observance that recognizes the tireless efforts of individuals and organizations working to keep families together.

The event brought together esteemed guests from the General Assembly, the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF), the Rhode Island Family Court, and community providers. The gathering celebrated the inspiring stories of families who have overcome adversity and successfully reunited.



GROUNDBREAKING PARTERSHIPS

Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs)

Leading the nation Rhode Island has taken bold steps to position Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) at the core of its behavioral health strategy. Launched in October 2024, CCBHCs benefit from an 80/20 federal funding match, ensuring long-term sustainability and enabling the delivery of high-quality care without rising costs.

CCBHCs provide a comprehensive range of services, integrating mental health care, substance use treatment, primary care, and social services into one seamless system. This holistic approach ensures children receive the full spectrum of care needed to thrive.

FSRI and Tides Mobile Response and Stabilization Service

Mobile Response and Stabilization Service (MRSS), implemented through partnerships with CCBHCs, Family Service of Rhode Island (FSRI), and Tides Family Services has, proven to be a critical support for families we serve experiencing mental health crises. The goal is to intervene before crises escalate, ensuring children receive immediate care in the least restrictive setting possible—while keeping families together.

The MRSS has provided rapid response to over 1,000 children in crisis this year alone. Through this service, 92% of cases have been prevented from escalating to psychiatric hospitalization, keeping children out of institutional settings and in the comfort and support of their families.

Collaboration with Rhode Island Housing

DCYF, in partnership with the Department of Housing and RI Housing, successfully secured HUD Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers to support family reunification efforts. Working alongside Family Services of Rhode Island (FSRI), DCYF has implemented these vouchers to assist families in need. Additionally, DCYF has been proactively offering alternative housing supports to families experiencing housing insecurity, aiming to prevent child removal and promote family stability.

DCYF has continued to work closely with our Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCPs), advocates and stakeholders to identify families at risk of homelessness early, ensuring they have access to the resources and support needed before a crisis escalates.

DCYF Female Adolescent Residential Facility - opening in 2026

On August 14, 2024 DCYF leadership joined Governor Dan McKee, members of his cabinet, community and legislative leaders for a groundbreaking ceremony of a new female adolescent residential campus in Exeter. The new 16-bed facility, being constructed by Gilbane Construction Inc. and coordinated by the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM), will support the behavioral health needs of female adolescents aged 13 to 18 in the state.

This initiative is a crucial step in providing our youth with the support they need, fostering their well-being, and helping



2025 STRATEGIC PLAN



DCYF launched its 2025-2030 Strategic Plan which proposes a foundational shift in the state's system of care that prioritizes PACE (prevention, accountability, collaboration, and engagement), while providing excellence in service delivery.

Set PACE with DCYF in providing excellence in service delivery by investing in the Children, Youth & Families of Rhode Island.

1. **Prevention:** By prioritizing intervention before a crisis, we can significantly and safely reduce the need for out-of-home placements, enabling families to remain intact and thrive.
2. **Accountability:** We hold ourselves to the highest standards of service by continuously assessing and improving our programs to ensure effectiveness and quality.
3. **Collaboration:** Through building strong partnerships among families, DCYF staff, service providers, and community organizations, we can enhance resources that provide therapeutic environments for our children and youth.
4. **Engagement:** Involving children and families in the decision-making process is crucial. When families are actively engaged and invested, they are more likely to achieve success, leading to meaningful and lasting positive outcomes.

2025 PRIORITIES

We are dedicated to implementing innovative programs, providing personalized services, and creating inclusive environments that encourage engagement at all levels. We believe that real transformation requires a culture that embraces flexible solutions tailored to the needs of those we serve.

By emphasizing our foundational pillars of **PREVENTION**, **ACCOUNTABILITY**, **COLLABORATION**, and **ENGAGEMENT**, we intend to:

- Safely decrease the number of out-of-home removals.
- Expand family-based placements, including kinship care, non-relative foster care, and therapeutic foster care.
- Reduce reliance on in- and out-of-state congregate care.
- Provide excellence in service delivery by investing in the children, youth, and families of Rhode Island





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1-888-RI-FAMILY (Warm Line)