

# Overview

## She will Gather Roses

This little girl  
only born to  
gather wild roses.  
Only born to  
shake the wild rice loose  
with her little fingers  
Only to collect the sap  
of young hemlocks  
in spring. This woman-  
child was only born  
to pick strawberries,  
fill baskets with  
blueberries, soapberries,  
elderberries. This  
little girl was  
only born to  
gather wild roses.

Anonymous Native American

The *2003 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* is the ninth annual profile of the well-being of children in Rhode Island. The annual Factbook is an important tool for planning and action by community leaders, policy makers, advocates, and others working toward changes that will improve the quality of life for all children.

The annual Factbook tracks progress across five areas of child well-being. All areas of child well-being are interrelated and critical throughout a child's development. A child's safety in his family and community affects his school performance; a child's economic security affects her health and education. The *2003 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* reflects these interrelationships and builds a framework to guide policy, programs for children, and individual service on behalf of children.

The *2003 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* provides a statistical portrait of the status of Rhode Island's children. Information is presented for the state of Rhode Island, each city and town, and an aggregate of the six cities in which more than 15% of the children live in poverty. These cities — referred to as the core cities in the Factbook — are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

The Factbook provides community-level information on each indicator in order to emphasize the significance of the surrounding physical, social, and economic environment in shaping outcomes for children. Communities and neighborhoods do matter - the actions of community leaders, parents, individuals, businesses, government leaders, and elected officials greatly influence children's chances for success and the challenges they will face.

By examining the best available data statewide and in Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT provides an information base that can result in more effective policy and community action on behalf of children. Tracking changes in selected indicators can help communities to set priorities, identify strategies to reverse negative trends, and monitor progress.

The *2003 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* examines fifty-two indicators in five areas that affect the lives of children: Family and Community, Economic Well-Being, Health, Safety, and Education. Three new indicators are included in this edition of the Factbook. The most current and reliable data available are presented for each indicator.



## Family Economic Security

Children most at risk of not achieving their full potential are children in poverty. Despite overall economic growth in the past decade, many Rhode Island families have experienced income losses since the late 1980s. The child poverty rate has increased from 14% in 1990 to 17% in 2000. Nearly half of Rhode Island's 40,177 poor children live in extreme poverty - with a family income less than \$9,122 (half of the federal poverty level of \$18,244 for a family of four). Even those with incomes above the official poverty level have a difficult time meeting the high costs of housing, utilities, child care, and health care. Child care subsidies, health insurance, affordable housing, and tax policies that support working families are critical tools to ensure the economic well-being of Rhode Island families.



## Educational Attainment

Improving student achievement and high school graduation rates in Rhode Island requires that all sectors work together to provide opportunities for infants, young children, and teens in the state's high poverty neighborhoods. Children who participate in high-quality preschool programs and read on grade level by fourth grade are more likely to complete high school. Student achievement can be improved when schools have high expectations for all students, effective curricula and teaching methods, adequate accountability methods, and prepared and sufficiently supported teachers. Young people who complete high school prepared to go on to higher education or to enter the workforce are more likely to be capable, self-sufficient adults who contribute to the community.



## Results for All Children

Significant racial and ethnic disparities in child outcomes continue to exist in Rhode Island. Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American children are three times more likely than White, non-Hispanic children to be poor and more likely to live in Rhode Island's poorest urban neighborhoods. Strategic efforts that engage diverse leadership can ensure that all Rhode Island children have the resources they need to thrive, including economic security, effective schools, quality child care, quality health care, affordable housing, and caring communities.