



PRESS ADVISORY

WHAT?

In celebration of National Foster Care Month,
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to release new *Issue Brief*,

Grandparents and Other Relative Caregivers in Rhode Island

WHEN?

Monday, May 23, 2005, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

The *Issue Brief* is enclosed and is embargoed
until 12:01 a.m., Monday, May 23, 2005.

WHERE?

Crowne Plaza at the Crossing Hotel
801 Greenwich Avenue
Warwick, RI

WHO?

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, *Rhode Island KIDS COUNT*

Patricia Martinez, *RI Department of Children, Youth and Families*

Frederick & Shirley Price
*Relative caregivers and winners of the
John H. Chafee Award for Excellence*

Maureen Robbins
RI Department of Children, Youth & Families

Lisa Guillette
RI Foster Parents Association

Jennifer Miller
Cornerstone Consulting Group

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT 401-351-9400
Kat Keenan (ext. 11) or Raymonde Charles (ext. 22)

*The Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Issue Brief Series is made possible
by a grant from CVS Charitable Trust.*



Embargoed for Release
Until 12:01 a.m., May 23, 2005

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**In celebration of National Foster Care Month,
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Releases Latest *Issue Brief*:**

***Grandparents and Other Relative Caregivers
in Rhode Island***

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*In Rhode Island, one in four grandparents living with their grandchildren is financially responsible for meeting the child's basic needs. Of these grandparents, 51% cared for their grandchildren for three or more years.*

*Grandparent and other relative caregivers care for 39% of Rhode Island children in foster care.*

*Issue Brief calls for more support to relative caregivers including better access to financial resources through Food Stamps, health insurance, and legal assistance; respite for caregivers; affordable intergenerational housing; and the creation of a subsidized guardianship program.*

PROVIDENCE, RI, May 23, 2005 – In celebration of National Foster Care Month, today Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release its latest *Issue Brief* entitled *Grandparent and Other Relative Caregivers in Rhode Island*, at a policy forum with advocates, relative caregivers, and political and community leaders to be held at **The Crowne Plaza Hotel, 801 Greenwich Avenue Warwick, RI from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on Monday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>**. The Rhode Island KIDS COUNT *Issue Brief* series is made possible through the support of CVS Charitable Trust.

The forum discussion reflected themes from the *Issue Brief*, including data on the grandparents and other relative caregivers in Rhode Island, the challenges faced by grandparents and other relative caregivers, and permanency options through subsidized guardianship. In addition, Frederick and Shirley Price, relative caregivers and winner of the John H. Chafee Award for Excellence will share their perspectives on supporting relative caregivers.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT opened the release event by highlighting the increasing role that grandparents and other relatives play in caring for children who are not able to be cared for by their parents. Research indicates that placing a child with a relative caregiver can provide safety, security and nurturing within the extended family support system.

Federal and state policies encourage state child welfare agencies to give preference to relatives when placing a child in foster care. In addition, many relatives care for children on a temporary or permanent basis without the involvement of public systems. These families also need social and financial support.

Kat Keenan, Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT introduced the findings of the Issue Brief, noting, "Extended families often play a pivotal role in caring for children whose parents are unable to do so. When families are experiencing trauma, it can be helpful to children to live with relatives who are known to them, care about them and with whom they feel safe. Yet, it is critical that relative caregivers have the training and support they need to appropriately care for children in times of stress." Grandparents and other relative caregivers often take on the role of caregiver very suddenly, with little or no warning. Relative caregivers often assume responsibility for children because of death, parental unemployment, substance abuse, mental health issues, physical disabilities, child abuse and neglect, divorce, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, or poverty.

Over the last fifteen years, public child welfare agencies have increasingly relied on grandparent and other relatives to act as caregivers and foster parents for children in the care of the state child welfare system. This reliance stems in part from the recognition that children can benefit from stable connections within their community and family of origin. In addition, child welfare agencies have a difficult time recruiting foster parents to care for children who can not live with their parents. As of April 2005, 1,199 children lived in foster care homes, of these 465 children (39%) were in 395 relative foster homes. Nearly three quarters (72%) of the relative foster parents were between the ages of 30 and 59.

In Rhode Island in 2003, there were 15,952 grandparents living with their grandchildren. Of these, 4,176 (26%) were financially responsible for the children's needs. In Rhode Island in 2003 there were 10,225 children living in 15,952 households with their grandparents (NOTE: this is not necessarily financially responsible). This represents 4% of all children in Rhode Island. More than half of these grandparents had been caring for the children for more than three years. While other relatives, including aunts, uncles, cousins and siblings care for related children, grandparent caregivers make up the largest percentage of relative caregivers nationally.

### **Relative Caregiver Arrangements**

Relative care can be categorized into private care arrangements and relative foster care. The former are defined as such because they lack a legal relationship, such as guardianship or adoption for the children in their care. Children in this arrangement are being cared for informally by relatives without the involvement of a public child welfare agency. This group of caregivers is less likely to be involved with public systems and less likely to receive support services for themselves or the children in their care.

Relative foster care involves children who live with relatives as a result of being removed from their parent's home by the Department of Children, Youth and Families and taken into state custody. Rhode Island foster care regulations require DCYF to give priority to relatives when placing children in out-of-home care.

### **Recommendations to Better Meet the Needs of Children in Relative Care**

The needs and challenges of relative caregiver families may vary depending on the reason for the living arrangement, the level of preparation for the child in the home and types of supports that the caregiver can access for the child. Some of the challenges detailed in the *Issue Brief* include: poverty and access to income supports, access to health care, legal services, housing and access to timely and accurate information. Relative caregivers often receive less information about government

programs, benefits and supportive community agencies than non-relative caregivers. National studies indicate that relative foster parents receive less supervision from their caseworkers in the form of home visits, calls and information. The *Issue Brief* offers a list of resources for relative caregivers and details the services and financial support available to children living with relative caregivers, including those in private, informal arrangements and those providing relative foster care for children involved with DCYF.

The *Issue Brief* also offers a range of specific recommendations to better meet the needs of children in relative care. Included in these recommendations are the following:

- Provide sufficient support, information and resources to foster parents and to relative caregivers so that they can adequately address the needs of children in their care.
- Ensure that DCYF has the systems in place to license an adequate supply of foster care homes – both relative and non-relative – to safely provide care for children who are not able to live with their parents.
- Create an automated statewide clearinghouse of information for relative caregivers, building on the resources available through the Rhode Island Department of Elderly Affairs.
- Increase support groups and respite services for relative caregivers.
- Appropriate the federal funds necessary to implement a federal program that is designed to developing affordable intergenerational housing for grandparent caregivers.
- Increase training for state employees so that they can help relative caregivers access programs and services for which they are eligible, including Food Stamps, health insurance, cash assistance and other support services.
- Increase access to legal assistance for relative caregivers.
- Expand health care coverage to spouses of eligible relative caregivers as well as to income-eligible non-relative foster parents.
- Create a formal subsidized guardianship program in Rhode Island as another permanency option for children who would benefit from remaining with relative caregivers. Currently 35 states have subsidized guardianship programs.

Jennifer Miller, a senior associate with Cornerstone Consulting Group and the coordinator of the National Collaboration for Permanency through Subsidized Guardianship, said, “Grandparents and other relatives across the country are making incredible sacrifices by stepping in to ensure that children have a safe and secure place to live when they can’t live safely with their own parents. Whether they assume responsibility for children who are in state custody or not, we have an obligation to ensure that they have access to the information, services, financial help, legal advice and emotional support needed for the children in their care.”

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, education, safety and development of Rhode Island children. The Rhode Island KIDS COUNT *Issue Brief Series* is supported through a grant from CVS Charitable Trust.