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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT releases new Issue Brief:
Safety, Permanency and Well-being for Children in the
Care of DCYF**

RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Providence, RI (November 3, 2011) – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released a new Issue Brief – *Safety, Permanency and Well-being for Children in the Care of DCYF* – at a policy roundtable attended by policy makers, child welfare leaders and community members. The event was held on **Thursday, November 3, 2011 from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station in Providence**. Speakers included Dr. Janice DeFrances, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst John Neubauer presented the findings.

According to the Issue Brief, DCYF had open cases for 6,989 Rhode Island children as of August 31, 2011. Of those children, 2,230 children were living at home under DCYF supervision, 2,086 children were in out-of-home placements, 35 children were in out-of-state placements, 20 children were in other placements and 2,618 children were living in subsidized adoption placements.

Over the past decade, child welfare agencies have recognized that they can better serve children at risk of abuse and neglect by enhancing family support services and improving practices for assessing safety within the home. Agencies across the nation and in Rhode Island have begun to increase prevention, early intervention and stabilization services that give parents the skills and resources they need to raise their children safely. Doing so often allows children who would have once been placed in foster care in the past to remain at home. For children who need to be removed for their safety, practice has shifted toward placing them with relatives and family foster care homes, rather than institutional settings.

“Ensuring that children who have been abused or neglected are safe is the primary responsibility of our state’s child welfare entities,” stated Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS Count. “The Department of Children, Youth and Families, the Family Court and the many partner agencies that provide services have come a long way in recent years. Continuing to increase access to support services, decreasing the amount of time children are in care and providing the least restrictive environment possible will help our state’s most vulnerable children to maximize their potential.”

Promoting Family Placements for Children

The federal *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* promotes kinship care and family connections by requiring states to notify relatives when a child is placed in foster care and providing funding for states offering kinship guardianship assistance payments. In Rhode Island, kin is defined broadly and includes any adult who has a close and caring relationship with the child, including godparents, caretakers, close family friends, neighbors and clergy. Since this law was enacted, the number of children who entered foster care decreased nationally and in Rhode Island. In the United States, the number of children who entered foster care decreased 17% between 2006 and 2010, from 304,872 to 254,375. In Rhode Island, the number of children entering foster care fell by 28% during the same period, from 2,032 in 2006 to 1,465 in 2010.

Out-of-Home Placements Decreasing in RI and Nationwide

Foster care includes many types “out-of-home placements,” including foster care homes, non-relative foster care homes, group homes, residential facilities, shelter care and medical facilities. Out-of-home placement is meant to be a temporary situation, used for as short a time as possible when children have been removed from their families and are in the care of DCYF while awaiting permanent placement. Permanent placements include reuniting with the family, adoption or guardianship.

Over the last several years, the number of children in out-of-home placements in Rhode Island has been on the decline.

- As of August 31, 2011, there were 2,086 children under age 21 in the care of DCYF who were in out-of-home placements, a 37% decrease from December 31, 2006.
- Between December 31, 2010 and August 31, 2011, the number of children in out-of-home placement fell 9% from 2,293 to 2,086.
- Between December 31, 2010 and August 31, 2011, there was a 21% decrease in the number of children in residential facilities.

- On August 31, 2011, there were 71 Rhode Island youth in an independent living arrangement or supervised apartment setting, a decline of 65% from 203 youth on December 31, 2006.

Placement Stability Helps Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Placements

John Neubauer, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst noted, “Children in out-of-home care for long time periods are often at risk for emotional, behavioral or educational problems that can negatively impact their long-term success and well-being. They are more likely to change schools, be suspended, qualify for special education, repeat a grade and drop out of school.”

In Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2010 in Rhode Island, 14.1% of the 1,694 children who had been in out-of-home care for less than one year had experienced three or more placements. This percentage is an increase from 11.6% in FFY 2009 and is higher than the national standard of 13.3%. Of the 731 children who were in care between 12 and 24 months, 35.4% experienced three or more placements, a decrease from 38% in FFY 2009. Almost two-thirds (65.6%) of the 1,022 children who had been in care for 24 months or more experienced three or more placements, compared to 65.3% in FFY 2009.

“Studies have found that increasing placement stability can help children in foster care establish stronger networks of support and relationships with caring adults. This can improve mental health, educational success and employment outcomes, which results in decreased mental health care and administrative costs long-term,” added Bryant.

Increased Monitoring of Children in Out-of-Home Placement is Needed

Monitoring indicators of child well-being for children who are being cared for at home is critical, as the rates of out-of-home placement decrease nationally and in Rhode Island. States should ensure that children are not being repeatedly maltreated or re-entering foster care after being reunified with their families.

In Rhode Island, the percentage of repeat maltreatment (the substantiation of another report of child abuse or neglect within six months of an initial substantiated report) was 9.8% in 2010. This is a decrease from 12.7% in 2006, but higher than the national standard of 6.1%. Rhode Island’s percentage of re-entries to foster care (the percentage of children who re-enter foster care less than 12 months after the date of discharge) was 23.4% in 2010. This is a slight decrease from 24.3% in 2006, but is higher than the national standard of 15%.

Permanency for Children and Youth in the Child Welfare System

The ways in which a child can leave the foster care system include reunification, guardianship, adoption and aging out. In FFY 2010, 1,241 children exited the Rhode Island foster care system. Of those children, 63% were reunited with their family, 8% exited care to guardianship, 15% were adopted, and 9% aged out of the system.

Recommendations to Improve Well-being of Children in the Care of DCYF

There are several strategies that can help reduce the number of children who enter Rhode Island's child welfare system and improve the health and well-being of the children already in DCYF care.

- Reduce the need for out-of-home placements by providing evidence-based, intensive family support programs to strengthen and stabilize at-risk families.
- Prevent the occurrence and recurrence of child abuse and neglect by improving access to high-quality childhood education, parenting education, education and training programs to help families increase economic security, and provide treatment services for substance abuse and mental health problems.
- Improvement placement stability by supporting foster parents, relative caregivers, agency providers and others who provide care for youth in out-of-home settings.
- Ensure that DCYF has the resources and supports it needs to recruit and license an adequate supply of foster care homes.
- Ensure that all child welfare professionals are provided initial and ongoing training to better understand and work towards supporting children in the least restrictive setting and towards more timely permanency.
- Identify a set of child safety, permanency, and well-being indicators to monitor the System of Care Phase II and publicly report on these indicators in order to inform child welfare policy and financing decisions.

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.