

The Privilege Of Caring:

A Community's Response to Needy Children



Making a difference...
one child at a time.



CHILDREN'S
FRIEND

The Privilege of Caring: A Community's Response to Needy Children

As the oldest child welfare organization in the state, the roots of Children's Friend reach back to the 1830s. With this long history comes an unusually rich treasure of historical documents and materials that tell the story of how this agency and others have cared for children over the course of three centuries.

The agency's archives include handwritten intake ledgers where the cases were presented to the Society's Board of Managers to evaluate whether a child should be admitted to the Society's Home. Annual reports chronicling the activities and challenges faced by the organization have been published since 1836. Agency archives also include board minutes, correspondence with children, rules and regulations enforced in the orphanage managed by Children's Friend, and other materials.

In 1949, the agency merged with Rhode Island Child Service, founded as the Rhode Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in 1882, to become Children's Friend & Service. A private agency, RISPCCC was responsible for investigating complaints of abuse and neglect, and employed agents to determine whether children were being exploited,

employed for ill purposes, starved, abandoned, or beaten.

RISPCCC's annual reports provide detailed information on the work of the agents as they performed their legally mandated duties, including prosecuting parents and collecting fines from lawbreakers. The photographs presented here became part of the Children's Friend archives.

These photographs are taken from the agency's collection, as well as other resources. Together, these materials - agency records, annual reports, photographs, and other documents - begin to tell the story of how our community has cared for its children.



Early Efforts to Care for Dependent Children...

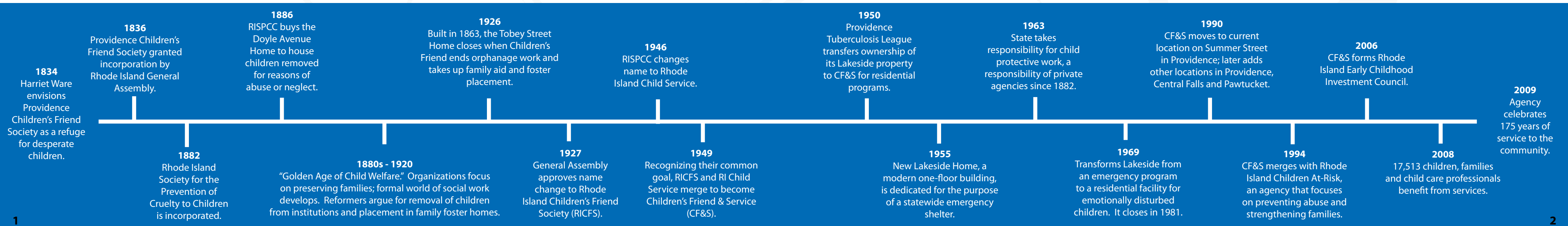
Harriet Ware, founder of the Providence Children's Friend Society, was born in 1799 in Paxton, Massachusetts. She started her career as a schoolteacher and was called in 1834 by a ladies' church society in Providence to assist in its work in India Point. Miss Ware established a Sunday School for the children and a night school for the adults.

In 1835, she turned her attention to providing residential care for the children and with the assistance of a small group of women and Reverend Francis Wayland, the fourth president of Brown University, she established the Providence Children's Friend Society.

The organization's charter, granted in 1836, stated the purpose of the Society to be "for the support and education of indigent children of both sexes, not otherwise provided for, and who, for want of paternal care, are in a suffering and dangerous condition." The Children's Friend Home provided children with a much better alternative than being placed at city and town poor farms. Children were educated in the Home and when old enough were placed with private families. Miss Ware served as superintendent of the Society's home for children until illness forced her to assign those duties to others. She died on June 26, 1847.



Harriet Ware - Founder of The Providence Children's Friend Society





Doyle Avenue Home



The Official Seal of the American Humane Association adopted by RISPC

Private Citizens Organize to Protect Children: The Creation of RISPC

In 1882, a petition was submitted to the Rhode Island General Assembly to incorporate the Rhode Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. This document stated: "It would seem to be one of the primary obligations of every community as far as may be in its power, to protect those of its children who suffer cruelty, starvation, and all the wrongs and evils of abandonment...and to rescue such children, as early as may be from their sufferings as from the paths leading to our almshouses, reformatory institutions and prisons where they may become expensive burdens upon the state." Later that year, a charter was issued to establish the agency.

This seal was issued by the American Humane Association whose jurisdiction included the protection of animals and children. The Rhode Island chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was part of a large international movement. In 1885, the Society reported that there were

271 similar humane societies in the United States and abroad, 57 chapters being added in one year alone. In the first decades of its existence, RISPC petitioned the Rhode Island General Assembly nearly every year for greater powers and jurisdiction in matters related to child protection.

Given its police powers, the Governor and other elected officials sat as ex-officio members of the Board. RISPC established the Doyle Avenue Home in 1886 to house children who were removed from their parents and guardians for reasons of abuse or neglect. It should be noted that it was not until 1963 that the State of Rhode Island took on the responsibility for the investigation and prosecution of abuse and neglect complaints.

Children And Child Welfare: Private And Public Agencies

In Rhode Island as well as in other states, children came into institutional care by referral from the Overseers of the Poor, by complaints from neighbors about children in need, upon petitions filed in the Probate Court, and by requests from parents and guardians who could not afford to care for children due to poverty, death, illness, or other reason.

In a special study of benevolent institutions in 1904, the Census Bureau found over 111,000 living in orphanages and children's homes. In some communities, one in ten children was residing in orphanages, asylums, reformatories, and other institutions. Reformers mounted campaigns to remove children from institutions, which they believed left children unprepared for life in mainstream society.

Charles Loring Brace, a controversial child welfare reformer, and others were instrumental in developing programs of placing out,

which meant removing children from urban institutions and relocating them to rural homes. Better known today as the "orphan train" movement, these reforms set off great debates about what was the best course of action for needy children.

In Rhode Island, this census found over 1,000 children in care, with the great majority in orphanages, asylums, and children's homes operated by private agencies, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Providence, and the Episcopal Diocese. Fewer than 200 of the children in care were housed in the publicly run State Home and School, the orphanage founded in 1884 and closed in 1979, the remnants of which remain on the East Campus of Rhode Island College.



Edgar and Loretta: two attractive children that the agency has in its care.

Adoption: A “Perfect” Solution for Dependent Children and Childless Couples

Rhode Island was an early pioneer in adoption with the passage of a law in 1866 that allowed residents to petition probate court to adopt a child with the consent of his guardian. If the child was dependent or deserted, a “next friend” was appointed by the court to review the facts of the case and consult with the court on the advisability of the adoption.

At the close of the 19th century, adoption emerged as the “ideal” solution for children in care. Child welfare reformers believed that finding loving homes for needy children was the best of all possible worlds. Part of the so-called golden age of childhood (and child welfare), this movement embraced the sentimentalization of children, seeing them as innocents, not as burdens.

Particularly championed by the middle classes, the idea that it was

children who made a household a home placed a high value on adoption. Childless couples eagerly sought young children in the care of child welfare agencies.

Here, we see two cases of this work done by RISPC. In 1926, the General Assembly required home studies, court hearings and trial visits for prospective adoptive placements and authorized RISPC to conduct these.



Adopted



Jolly Little Fellow

Finding Homes For Children In Care

With the power to investigate complaints of abuse and neglect, to prosecute parents, and to remove children from their homes, the Rhode Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children served as the gateway for children into child welfare.

The agency provided emergency shelter for children until plans could be made to return them to their parents; to place them with a private agency; to send them to state institutions, such as the State Home and School, Sockanossett, the Oaklawn School for Girls, or the School for the Feebleminded (later known as the Ladd School); or to place them with private foster families.

Because of a lack of resources in the community, children sometimes remained in the agency’s Doyle Avenue Home, the only emergency shelter

in the state, for months or years. The agency also made use of the many private children’s institutions in the state, including the Tobey Street Home (run by Children’s Friend), Catholic Orphan Asylum (later known as St. Aloysius), the Bristol Home for Destitute Children, the Home for Friendless Children in Newport, St. Francis Orphanage in Woonsocket, and other locations.

As the agency continued its work, it developed a placing out program, putting children in the homes of private families. At one point, the social worker hired to administer this program had responsibility for over 500 children placed in the community.



Children and staff at the Doyle Avenue Home.



Children and staff at the piano in the Doyle Avenue Home.

Reaching Into Outlying Communities

The Rhode Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children had statewide jurisdiction. As transportation allowed agents to travel more extensively in rural areas, they discovered true indications of rural poverty.

An excerpt from the 1919 Annual Report notes that the conditions in the rural areas were more distressing than those in the cities. "During the year 1919, we have found the most revolting and inhumane conditions, in the rural communities... There is very great need of welfare organizations in every city and town in our State, who will not only find and report to us existing conditions which interfere with proper treatment and happiness of the children but [who]... will also stand with us shoulder to shoulder in our endeavor to enforce the laws... to safeguard our children. There is greater need of our

agency there than in the cities or more thickly settled villages... In rural communities, there is no police officer under salary... [R]espectable and law abiding persons do not dare to make complaint of a law breaker for fear that their barns... will be burned down. For these reasons... very serious wrongs have been allowed to continue for a long time." In rural areas, agents found cases of sexual abuse and incest, extreme poverty, abandoned children, and other alarming conditions.



Does this answer for a home?



Where gifts to the Children's Fund can be used for good purpose by the RISPCC.



Dinner at the Lakeside Home.



Children praying before meals at the Lakeside Home.

Residential Life

The homes operated by the private agencies, Children's Friend and the Rhode Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, were quite small compared to other institutions of their time. Under the direction of Children's Friend & Service, the Lakeside Home operated the state's emergency shelter for children and later ran a facility that served children and adolescents with mental health problems. Private institutions, like the Catholic Orphan Asylum and St. Vincent's Infant Asylum, housed hundreds of children, as did Rhode Island's state institution for dependent and neglected children, called The State Home and School.

Populations in orphanages, asylums, and shelters would fluctuate depending on the needs of parents and children,

as well as economic conditions, and the availability of other options for children. Depending on the size, design, philosophy, and management of these facilities, the lives of the children could be regimented and isolating or more fully integrated into the community. In some cases, children would attend school in these institutions; and in other instances, they would attend community schools.

Often, children found themselves wearing hand-me-downs and eating the same meals over and over. Some children would spend the majority of their childhoods in these homes; others would be "boarded out" and later placed in foster homes; still others would be returned to their parents.

Changes In Services Rendered To Children In Need

In 1950, as the merger of Children's Friend and Rhode Island Child Service was underway, the Providence Tuberculosis League, later known as the Rhode Island Lung Association, proposed to transfer to Children's Friend a 16-acre site at Lakeside in Warwick, along with an endowment proposed "on the condition that Children's Friend & Service assume responsibility for the children under the care of Lakeside and for subsequent referrals for care."

Established in 1912 under the leadership of industrialists Henry Sharpe and William Viall, the Lakeside Home and Preventorium served three populations: children convalescing from tuberculosis, children exposed to the disease, and vacationers, the latter category referred to children whom its founders felt could benefit from time away from the city.

The Preventorium served children exposed to tuberculosis in "their homes and whose removal meant their salvation," as well as "children with anemia, rickets, and spinal and glandular troubles," and held children throughout the school year until a doctor would judge that they had gained sufficient strength and health to return to their homes.

The original purpose of the Lakeside Home eventually changed as tuberculosis ceased to be a major health concern. Accordingly, Lakeside turned its attention to serving the needs of children with other medical problems.

A community study suggested that the Lakeside property be converted into an emergency shelter or study home. A few years after the transfer, it became apparent that the facility was in serious disrepair. A new state-of-the-art facility was constructed in the mid-1950s.



One of the buildings from the old Lakeside Home and Preventorium.



Beds with children at the Lakeside Home.

Work With Other Agencies

During the 1940s, the offices for Children's Friend were located at 20 Olive Street, in the building that formerly housed the Providence Association for the Benefit of Colored Children, founded in 1838 and closing its doors in 1940. The two agencies shared founders and supporters in common, as well as missions. In 1881, Elizabeth Buffum Chace, who championed the abolitionist movement and was the key force in establishing the State Home and School as a refuge for the state's dependent and neglected children, criticized the racial segregation of children in the city's private institutions in a letter to one of Providence's newspapers.

"I have been led to these reflections by reading the Forty-Second annual report of the Providence Association for the Benefit of Colored Children, the second article of whose constitution declares that its 'object shall be to place in the Shelter orphan children of color, and to have them suitably educated for their spheres in life...' I would have the color line removed. I would open the doors of the 'Shelter' to any children who need its protecting, fostering care; and then I should hope that the Children's Friend Society and all other benevolent and educational institutions would

do the same; that henceforth it might not be only the almshouses and the penal institutions in which the all-embracing lesson of humanity should be taught, that 'God hath made of one blood all nations of men.'"

In 1939, the Association asked Children's Friend to take the responsibility for finding homes for its children, and in 1940, Children's Friend employed a trained social worker to "study the needs of the Negro race" in Providence. In its annual report of 1941, the Board of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Children stated that members of the community - "three colored and three white members" - were appointed to the Case Committee, "this being the first time that any colored persons had actively participated in the work of the Shelter." In 1944, five African American members were elected to this Board.



Children at the former Shelter for Colored Children.





Children featured in a news article about the Red Feather Campaign.



Fund raising float for the Red Feather Campaign.



The new Lakeside Home.



Moving day at the old Lakeside Home.

Raising Funds For Agency Work

The Rhode Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was renamed Rhode Island Child Service in 1946 when the Board felt that the name no longer reflected the broad services in which the agency was involved. For decades, the agency had been engaged in child welfare casework, child placement, and family preservation, along with its mandate to conduct child protective investigations on behalf of the state.

Taken in downtown Providence, this photograph showcases a fund-raising event to kick off the annual appeal of the Red Feather Society, a forerunner of the United Way. It can be assumed that other Red Feather agencies also took part in this parade. At the side of the float, the services offered by the agency - protective service, the Doyle Avenue Home, and emergency services - are shown, along with the total number of children served, over 3,300 in the past year. At the back of the float, the sponsorship of Coca-

Cola Bottling is evident. It is not known whether the children on the float are clients, children of agency staff, or other children.

Agencies like the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Children's Friend relied on private fund-raising, income from endowments, and other sources to support their work. Until the latter half of the twentieth century, few funds were provided by the state to support child welfare. Private agencies bore most of the burden for supporting child welfare programs. It wasn't until the early 1960s that the state assumed responsibility for investigating abuse and neglect cases, following a nationwide movement to centralize and coordinate the processing of protective complaints.

Building A New Emergency Shelter For Children

In 1949, after many reports had been issued arguing for the merger of Children's Friend Society and Rhode Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, by this time known as Rhode Island Child Service, the agencies merged into a new organization called Children's Friend & Service.

The Lakeside property, which housed children as an emergency shelter, was in poor condition and within a few years, the buildings failed inspections by fire and health agencies. In November 1953, a capital campaign was organized to raise \$349,500 to construct a state-of-the-art one story building that could accommodate modern social work practice.

A little over a year after the campaign was announced, the new Lakeside Home was dedicated on February 28, 1955. Twenty-eight children, the

superintendent, eight housemothers, and one cook occupied the new building constructed adjacent to old facilities.

In May 1955, as children and staff left the old Lakeside building, an article in the [Providence Journal](#) reported: "They [the children and staff] were evacuated lest the roof collapse, the boiler blow up, or the stove expire in the two story wreck of a building before the winter's end." In 1969, the Home was transformed into a facility to serve the needs of emotionally disturbed youth and in 1981, Children's Friend closed the Lakeside Home. Lack of funding from the state, a move away from residential treatment, and the increased reliance upon agency capital funds and endowments to support the expenses of operating the Home all contributed to the end of the agency's work in institutional care.

Institutions For Children

The Tobey Street Home was constructed in 1863 and served as the Home for Children's Friend until 1926. Here, children would be educated and trained until the age of 12 when they were placed in private homes. In the 20th century, reformers argued for the removal of children from institutions and their placement in family foster homes.

In 1913, at the Rhode Island Child Welfare Conference, this sentiment was articulated: "Modern charity believes in using every possible means to keep families together; when this fails, another home should be substituted... A normal child needs a normal family life. The slogan 'No Rhode Island home without a child... No Rhode Island child without a home' explains the aim of child placing work."

In 1925, after managing a children's home for 90 years, the Board changed its name from the Providence Children's Friend Society to the Rhode Island Children's Friend Society and adopted a new mission. "In spite of the splendid record established by the Providence Children's Friend Society, the Board has felt for a long time that children in an institution cannot be served as adequately as through some other field of child welfare work. Again the present building at Tobey Street is old and each year becomes a heavier expense... slowly the conviction was driven home that there was more to be done in taking one's part in a child welfare program in a city or state than the giving of even the best of care to a few children."

Closing its home on Tobey Street in 1926, the agency hired a staff trained in social work methods to undertake new directions in child welfare.



The Tobey Street Home, located in Federal Hill.

Changing Communities: Changing Organizations

Providence, like the surrounding urban core, is increasingly ethnically and racially diverse. In 2007, in the core cities of Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, Newport, West Warwick and Woonsocket, nearly 60% of the children were Hispanic, African American, Asian or other minority group and more than three-quarters of all minority children in Rhode Island live in these six cities. In 2000, 40% of the children living in Central Falls and Providence were living in poverty.

Today, more than ever, those whose mission it is to improve the lives of children are aware of the impact that poverty has on the life chances of a child. Research that examines the links between family income, family stability, parental education, and later success in life recognizes the critical importance of positive early childhood experiences.

The emphasis in contemporary child welfare practice is on the family, especially on preserving families under economic and other types of stress.

State and federal policies balance the need to protect children with the need to preserve families. Alarm about the growth in foster care caseloads set the course for the passage of landmark federal legislation in 1980 emphasizing permanency planning, court reviews of case plans, and adoption subsidies.

Despite this legislation, the number of children in foster care continued to grow in the following decades. In the 1990s and 2000s, additional legislation was passed to further support the goals of permanency for children and preservation of families.

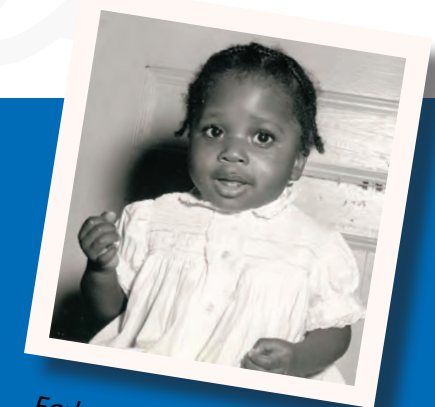
As well-documented research has demonstrated, efforts targeted at early childhood – providing at-risk children with enriched early education and their families with the support they need to enhance the success of their children – have lifelong benefits.

Children's Friend continues to put the needs of children and families first, making decisions based on what is proven to have the best outcomes. By continuing to focus on program outcomes and incorporating best practice, the Children's Friend system of care has evolved from residential care, to community placements, to community-based support and prevention services.

The journey continues. As poverty and other circumstances continue to place children at risk, high-quality and effective services, such as those provided by Children's Friend, are badly needed. A strong focus on prevention and advocacy will help to eliminate the societal factors that threaten the well-being and healthy development of our youngest and most vulnerable children.



The changing face of children's needs.



Early childhood education

Credits:

Research and writer: Sandra Enos, PhD

Editor: Mary Cram

Designer: Leila M. Hill

Project Director: Nicholas Costa

Materials cited in this document are taken from agency archives, newspaper files, secondary sources and literature in the field of the history of child welfare.

Generous contributions from Gilbane Inc., along with grants from the Rhode Island Foundation's ADDD fund and from the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities have supported the production of the exhibit catalog, the photographic exhibit, and "The Privilege of Caring: A Community's Response to Needy Children," a lecture series examining how communities have been organized and mobilized to care for children that will be presented in the Fall of 2009 at locations throughout the state.

supported by:



CHILDREN'S FRIEND

**153 Summer Street
Providence RI
02903
401.276.4300
childrensfriendri.org**

Special thanks to our 175th anniversary partners:

