

LISC
RHODE ISLAND

Opioid Overdose Prevention
Community Needs Assessment
and Strategic Plan

PAWTUCKET | CENTRAL FALLS
HEALTH EQUITY ZONE

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Contents

Introduction3

**State of the Problem: The Opioid Epidemic
in Pawtucket and Central Falls4**

Key Challenges Facing the Community5

Community Strengths and Resources6

Recommendations and Action Plan8

Stakeholder List 14

“ This public health crisis requires multi-disciplinary solutions to come together to really address the problem. This needs to be a team effort – an ‘all hands on deck’ approach. ”



Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott
State Health Department Director

Introduction

In recent years, opioid misuse and overdose has impacted the lives of many Rhode Islanders, though some communities have been affected more than others. Pawtucket and Central Falls, two adjacent cities in the northern part of the state, have been hit particularly hard.

Here, Opioid Use Disorder has torn apart families and taxed the community's social services, educational institutions, emergency responders, law enforcement personnel and local government. In short, virtually no one in the community has escaped the impact of the opioid epidemic.

Opioid overdose death rates here are among the highest in Rhode Island. From 2014-2018, Pawtucket's overdose death rate was 33.2 (per 100,000 persons), and the rate in Central Falls was 37.2. Only Woonsocket, Providence and West Warwick had higher rates for that time period. From 2011 to 2018, 184 community residents died from an opioid overdose. It is staggering statistics like these that motivated the Pawtucket Central Falls Health Equity Zone (PCF HEZ) to carry out a community needs assessment and create a plan to address this public health epidemic. The overarching goals of the project were to:

- Engage community residents and key stakeholders, including Young Adults age 18-24. This population was selected because the PCF HEZ believed they are at risk for developing an Opioid Use Disorder;
- Engage pregnant women and young mothers who have an Opioid Use Disorder and may or may not be in recovery or receiving Methadone treatment or suboxone. The Department of Health required that families of Substance Exposed Newborns (SEN's) be a focus of the needs assessment;



- Understand the extent of opioid misuse and overdose in the community;
- Engage community partners and residents in identifying the central challenges that opioid misuse and overdose poses to the community, and the resources that can be leveraged to meet those challenges;
- Identify the strengths and weakness of the community that can help or hinder efforts to address opioid misuse and overdose;
- Engage community partners and residents in a transparent and participatory process to prioritize needs, set goals, and develop a plan of action to prevent opioid misuse and overdose in Pawtucket and Central Falls.

To its advantage, the community already possesses ample resources to confront the opioid epidemic: police departments, public officials, and an abundance of non-profit organizations, many of which already belong to the PCF HEZ and are eager to address this crisis. At the same time, the community's high poverty rate, lower levels of formal education, and high linguistic and cultural diversity pose a challenge to implementing any public health intervention. The data collection phase of the Community Needs Assessment took place from early February through May, 2019. Quantitative, archival and qualitative types of data were collected. Quantitative data on opioid overdoses, emergency room visits for overdoses, and births of substance-exposed newborns was obtained from the Department of Health. Qualitative data collected includes data from key informant interviews, focus groups with community residents, and an online survey that was distributed to all project stakeholders, defined as a person or organization whose work is directly or indirectly impacted by the opioid epidemic.

The Key Goals

The PCF HEZ gathered the project stakeholders, HEZ members, and concerned community residents in a series of public forums to set priorities, and develop an action plan around those priorities. To this end, the group developed the following five goals:

1. We will endeavor to change the perception of what it means to have an addiction in the Pawtucket and Central Falls community through education to eliminate barriers and overcome stigma.
2. Community residents, especially women, youth and young adults, will be educated about substance and opioid use and its consequences, and will be aware of resources available to help with Substance Use Disorder.
3. Youth and young adults in Pawtucket and Central Falls will have access to positive social opportunities and employment.
4. We will endeavor to make affordable and patient-centered mental health and trauma care more easily accessible to Pawtucket and Central Falls residents.
5. The Pawtucket and Central Falls community will provide 24-hour assistance, 7 days a week, to all residents experiencing Substance Use Disorder including men, women, youth, families, and those with mental health issues.

This action plan outlines strategies for achieving each of the above goals, and addresses opioid misuse and overdose through four strategies: a) preventing opioid misuse before it occurs; b) rescuing people who are experiencing overdose; c) improving access to and awareness of effective treatment for people with Opioid Use Disorder; and d) supporting long-term recovery. Achieving the goals set forth in the action plan will require ongoing coordination among not only the PCF HEZ Collaborative, but of the entire community.



State of the Problem: The Opioid Epidemic in Pawtucket and Central Falls

Pawtucket and Central Falls are two adjacent urban municipalities that score lower than the Rhode Island state average on nearly every social and economic indicator.

This is a relatively young community with a large Hispanic population. The high poverty level, linguistic and cultural diversity, low level of formal education, and lack of health insurance, are all challenges specific to Central Falls and Pawtucket that must be considered when designing any kind of program to address opioid misuse and overdose. Likewise, many participants in the needs assessment indicated that poverty, inequality, and the diversity of the population were significant challenges that any prevention plan would need to overcome.

Key Challenges Facing the Community

Needs Assessment participants identified a number of challenges that should be addressed when designing any projects or programs to address opioid misuse and overdose in the community.

While some of these challenges are problems that could theoretically be addressed, the objective is to provide a full accounting of the social, economic and environmental context in which any program, intervention, or policy advocacy work must operate. Both the Central Falls and Pawtucket Police Departments see addressing the distribution of illicit drugs, including opioids, as a formidable challenge. Further, just as we see the increasing involvement of fentanyl in opioid overdose deaths, police departments find that the availability of fentanyl on the streets in both cities has increased dramatically in recent years.

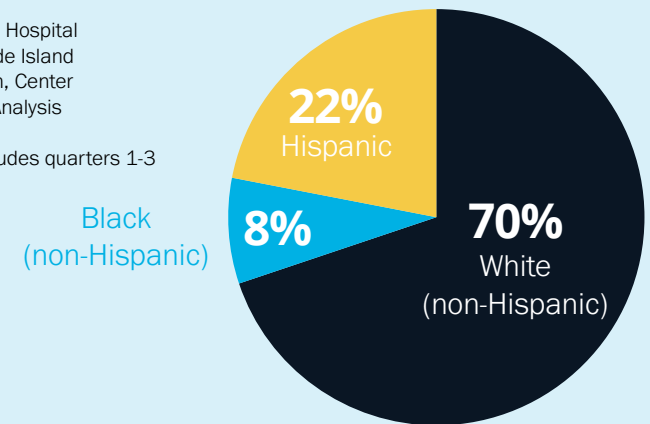
Poverty, Inequality, Education

When asked to discuss the most pressing challenges facing the community, a majority of Community Needs Assessment (CNA) participants mentioned some aspect of poverty and inequality. Poverty, lack of resources (formal education, money, and housing), weak English skills, low social capital (access to social networks that can link someone to jobs and resources), and undocumented immigrant status are key factors that distinguish this community from others that have been hit hard by the opioid epidemic. Poverty and inequality not only impact the path through which a person develops Opioid Use Disorder (OUD), but also how they can best be helped through public interventions.

Emergency Department Visits due to Opioid Overdose among Central Falls and Pawtucket Residents, by Ethnicity (2016-2018)*

Source: Rhode Island Hospital Discharge Data, Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis

*2018 data only includes quarters 1-3



Diversity of the Population

While diversity can in some ways be a strength, it is also an important challenge that must be addressed when designing an opioid prevention program. In the communities of Pawtucket and Central Falls, the presence of multiple immigrant populations means that there is a diversity of *languages* and *cultures* that must be accounted for in the design and implementation of all programs, interventions and activities.

Addiction Crisis

CNA participants who work directly with those who have Substance Use Disorder (SUD) pointed out that we are facing an *addiction* crisis, not just an opioid crisis. Alcoholism impacts many more people in the community than do opioids, and crack cocaine is still a significant problem. Additionally, many opioid overdoses result from the dangerous mixture of multiple substances including opioids, alcohol, cocaine, crack and benzodiazepines. Counterfeit opioids and benzodiazepines are manufactured in or near the community and flood the streets. These pills are comprised of fentanyl.

For example, in Pawtucket from 2011-2018, alcohol was a contributing factor in 28% of deaths from opioid overdose among Pawtucket residents. In other cases, overdose victims did not have an OUD but were exposed to opioids through use of another drug that was laced with fentanyl. Even some people receiving methadone treatment are also using other drugs. The implication is that focusing prevention efforts only on opioids may not solve the community's problems.



Substance Use Among Young Adults

Young adults reported that the most popular substances used by people they know included alcohol, marijuana, and especially vaping. Young people vape both tobacco and marijuana (cigarettes were not mentioned as a popular substance). Some young people interviewed had heard others talk about taking Xanax.

Mistrust

CNA participants cited mistrust of the 'government' as a significant weakness in the community. Specifically, they saw that many community members fear and distrust the police and public officials. This is especially the case among undocumented immigrants. Fear and distrust can harm rescue and recovery efforts because it can hinder someone from calling 911 if a person needs medical attention for an overdose. Fear and distrust may also hinder some from engaging in activities that could benefit recovery.

Community Strengths and Resources

Strength of the Community

Many CNA participants believed the people of Pawtucket and Central Falls have a strong sense of community that will help them deal with the opioid epidemic. Additionally, while the linguistic diversity of the population can pose a challenge when it comes to designing programs and outreach activities, it can also be a strength:

Additional strengths mentioned include:

- The Central Falls Data Dashboard and Substance Use Task Force meets weekly to go over timely data on substance use from the perspectives of community health, Emergency Medical Services, prescriptions, and police.
- The Central Falls Substance Use Task Force developed a Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Prevention Plan, which was adopted by the Central Falls City Council.
- The Pawtucket and Central Falls Prevention Coalitions includes a group of dedicated individuals who can work on initiatives to address OUD in the community.

The communities of Central Falls and Pawtucket possess many resources that can help address opioid misuse and overdose. Some of these resources directly target individuals and families impacted by opioid and/or substance use disorder (SUD). Other resources address some of the underlying causes of SUD, such as mental health issues or the accessibility of positive experiences for youth.

Safe Drug Disposal

The community counts on at least five sites where people can safely dispose of unwanted medications.

Safe Drug Disposal Sites in Central Falls and Pawtucket

Location	Address	City	What they accept	Data source
Walgreens	100 Broad St.	Pawtucket	All prescription medicines, including controlled substances and over-the-counter medications	preventoverdoseri.com
CVS	835 Newport Ave.	Pawtucket	No info	preventoverdoseri.com
Simpson's Pharmacy	10 Newport Ave.	Pawtucket	Some prescription medicines and over-the-counter medications, but not controlled substances	preventoverdoseri.com
Police Department	121 Roosevelt Ave.	Pawtucket	Medication Drop Box	
Police Department	160 Illinois Ave.	Central Falls	Medication Drop Box	

Availability of Naloxone

Publicly available doses of Naloxone (Narcan) are placed strategically throughout the city

NaloxBox Locations in Central Falls and Pawtucket

Name of location	Type of location	Address (1)	Address (2)	City	How many?
House of Hope- HQ Desk	Housing, food, social service	Main bldg.	185 Dexter St.	Pawtucket	1
Pawtucket Housing	Public Housing	Galego	433 Weeden St.	Pawtucket	1
	Public Housing	St. Germain Manor	401 Mineral Spring Ave.	Pawtucket	5
	Public Housing	Kennedy Manor	175 Broad St.	Pawtucket	1
	Public Housing	Burns Manor	95 Park St.	Pawtucket	1
	Public Housing	Fogarty Manor	214 Roosevelt Ave.	Pawtucket	1
Central Falls Library	Library	1st floor between computers and racks	205 Central St.	Central Falls	1
Central Falls City Hall	Municipal Building	1st floor near Assessor's Office	580 Broad St.	Central Falls	1

“Residents of Central Falls, by virtue of its small size and rich immigrant tradition, have a strong sense of shared community. I believe this is also true of some communities within Pawtucket.” - CNA participant

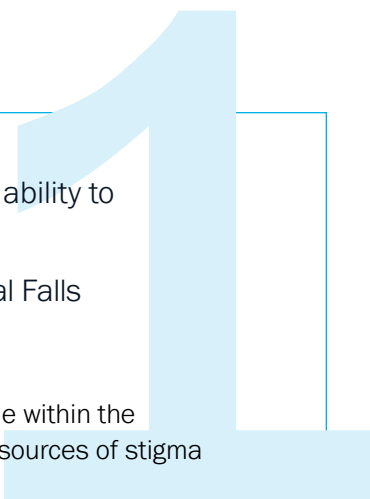
Recommendations and Action Plan

After the needs assessment was completed, project stakeholders, PCF HEZ partners, and community residents engaged in a participatory process to develop a plan.

Recognizing that the communities' resources are limited, the participants identified five strategic issues (or 'needs') that were the most important to address, which could reasonably be implemented with available resources, and that would have the greatest positive impact on the community. From there, participants set goals, objectives, and drafted potential strategies for achieving each objective. The objectives and strategies recommended in this action plan can be categorized by one or more underlying goals:

- 1. Prevention:** Measures to prevent opioid misuse before it occurs, such as educational campaigns or steps to improve economic and social well-being in the community.
- 2. Rescue:** Actions to rescue individuals from overdose and educate others on how to do so.
- 3. Treatment:** Initiatives that will improve access to effective treatment for Opioid and Substance Use Disorder by helping connect people with SUD and mental health services.
- 4. Recovery:** Supporting long-term recovery by expanding support services, utilizing peer recovery coaches, expanding access to medication assisted therapy, and improving the overall quality of life for people in active recovery.





Strategic Issue #1: People with Opioid Use Disorder, especially women, experience stigma that hinders their ability to seek treatment and stay in recovery.

Goal: We will endeavor to change the perception of what it means to have an addiction in the Pawtucket and Central Falls communities through education to eliminate barriers and overcome stigma.

Objective #1:

Provide training on Substance Use Disorder and stigma for health professionals working in Pawtucket and Central Falls by 2022.

Type of Objective: Prevention and Recovery

Potential Tactics:

- Develop and implement training program for health professionals.
- Ensure that training includes special attention to the SUD-related problems faced by pregnant women and young mothers.
- Develop a strategy for reaching out to health professionals and obtaining their participation.

Objective #2:

Address stigma that exists among people in recovery from Opioid Use Disorder by strengthening organization-level partnerships within the recovery community by 2021.

Type of Objective: Prevention and Recovery

Potential Tactics:

- Identify key partners closely connected to the recovery community and brainstorm best practices for addressing stigma.

- Create opportunities (e.g. events/forums) for people within the recovery community to come together and identify sources of stigma and possible strategies for addressing it.
- Develop peer recovery specialists who can work with people using Medicated-Assisted Treatment (MAT) and are networked with the two MAT centers in Pawtucket.

Objective #3:

Integrate training on addiction and stigma into the curricula of 80% of Rhode Island's health profession schools by 2022.

Type of Objective: Prevention and Recovery (via policy change)

Potential Tactics:

- Identify and target key stakeholders to obtain buy-in and support.
- Identify space in curricula.
- Ensure that training includes special attention to the SUD-related problems faced by pregnant women and young mothers.

Strategic Issue #2: Community residents, especially women, youth and young adults, are largely uneducated about opioid and substance use disorder, its consequences, and resources to help people with SUD and their loved ones.

Goal: Community residents, especially women, youth and young adults, will be educated about substance and opioid use and its consequences, and will be aware of resources available to help with Substance Use Disorder.

Objective #1:

Expand community outreach to increase residents' understanding of Substance and Opioid Use Disorder and its consequences by 2022.

Type of Objective: Prevention

Potential Tactics:

- Develop and implement culturally- and developmentally- appropriate programming for the public schools.
- Develop and implement educational and support programming directed at parents of school-age youth.
- Develop and implement an outreach campaign directed at young adults aged 18-24.
- Develop and implement a community-wide public outreach campaign that is culturally and linguistically relevant and that reaches residents through different media including radio, social media, email, print, and public signage.

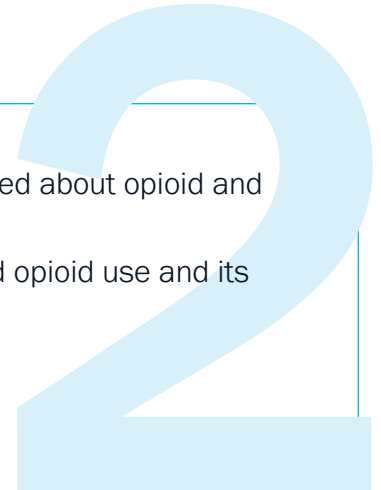
Objective #2:

Expand community outreach to increase residents' awareness about resources available to support people with SUD and their loved ones by 2022.

Type of Objective: Prevention

Potential Tactics:

- Incorporate information about SUD resources into school programming, as appropriate.
- Develop a strategy to better reach young women with SUD who are young mothers or are pregnant to assist them in accessing treatment services.
- Develop a set of culturally appropriate strategies to reach out to family members of individuals with SUD.



Strategic Issue #3: Youth and young adults lack positive social opportunities.

Goal: Youth and young adults in Pawtucket and Central Falls will have access to positive social opportunities and employment.

Objective #1:

By the end of 2020, increase positive social opportunities for youth during the hours and times of year they are not in school.

Type of Objective: Prevention

Potential Tactics:

- Create summertime out-of-school programs that focus on high-risk youth with a mentoring base for ages 10-15.
- Promote youth programming through schools via an ambassador representative.
- Hold an annual youth development event.
- Engage youth of color, all abilities, sexual identities, and socio-economic statuses.

Objective #2:

Develop the leadership capacity of youth and young adults through programming to commence in 2020.

Type of Objective: Prevention

Potential Tactics:

- Create a youth leadership advisory council for the Pawtucket / Central Falls HEZ focused on developing youth leadership skills (involve 10 youth members, ages 14-24).
- Identify existing programs in the community that engage youth and

work to further develop programs, improve youth access and create partnerships among organizations through the HEZ.

- Identify sources to sustainably fund stipends and other incentives to provide to youth leaders.
- Train youth as peer mentors and create a mentoring pipeline.
- Engage youth of color, all abilities, sexual identities, and socio-economic statuses.

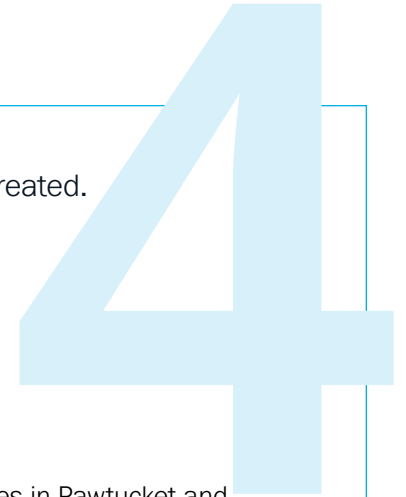
Objective #3:

Identify and, to the extent possible, create employment opportunities for youth in Pawtucket and Central Falls by 2020.

Type of Objective: Prevention

Potential Tactics:

- Create a list of employers in the community that are willing to hire youth at the age of 14-15.
- Lobby existing employers to lower their age requirements or create separate opportunities for youth employment.
- Collaborate with local businesses and non-profit organizations to create internships to build resumes and employment skills of youth ages 16-18.
- Engage youth of color, all abilities, sexual identities, and socio-economic status.



Strategic Issue #4: People with Opioid Use Disorder often suffer from mental illness or trauma that is untreated.

Goal: We will endeavor to make affordable and patient-centered mental health and trauma care more easily accessible to Pawtucket and Central Falls residents.

Objective #1:

Raise awareness of local mental health and support resources to make it easier for healthcare and SUD providers to assist residents suffering from mental illness or trauma by 2021.

Type of Objective: Prevention, Treatment, Recovery

Potential Tactics:

- Establish a working group to inventory all current, relevant resources.
- Identify a mental health “point person” to work with the PCF HEZ Collaborative and lead the process of coordinating communication and resource sharing among partners.

Objective #2:

Increase the accessibility of mental health services in Pawtucket and Central Falls by 2025.

Type of Objective: Prevention, Treatment, Recovery; Policy

Potential Tactics:

- Train and develop a peer navigator workforce (i.e. community health workers with mental health training) that can serve as patient-centered advocates, connecting people who seek mental health services with service providers.
- Engage community leaders to assemble a work group dedicated to advocating for accessible mental health services.
- Identify youth, residents, and members of the HEZ stakeholder team who can commit to serve as a liaison for the HEZ in statewide discussions on mental health.
- Identify indicators and data sources to track progress on this objective.

Strategic Issue #5: The communities of Pawtucket and Central Falls lacks a 24-hour Substance Use Disorder walk-in center.

Goal: The Pawtucket and Central Falls communities will provide 24-hour assistance, 7 days a week, to all residents experiencing Substance Use Disorder including men, women, youth, families, and those with mental health issues.

Objective #1:

Establish a full-service SUD walk-in center that is easily accessible to Pawtucket and Central Falls residents by 2022.

Type of Objective: Rescue, Treatment and Recovery

Potential Tactics:

- Develop a plan to open an alternative SUD walk-in center that would be financially and politically sustainable.
- Engage residents near the proposed site, in order to address potential resistance.

Objective #2:

Create three small-scale walk-in centers to assist people with SUD, located in different areas of the community by 2022.

Type of Objective: Rescue, Treatment and Recovery

Potential Tactics:

- Identify existing organizations that serve the SUD population and could host a walk-in office. For example: homeless shelters, soup kitchens, employment assistance, places that have WIC offices.
- Secure sustainable funding for staffing the additional walk-in offices.

Objective #3:

Increase mobile outreach in the community by two more units by the end of 2020.

Type of Objective: Rescue, Treatment and Recovery

Potential Tactics:

- Identify organizations that can carry out mobile outreach.
- Determine the ideal hours, days and locations/routes of operation.
- Develop a budget and research appropriate funding opportunities to sustain units.
- Identify necessary sources of sustainable funding.
- Identify sources of donated supplies for the mobile units.

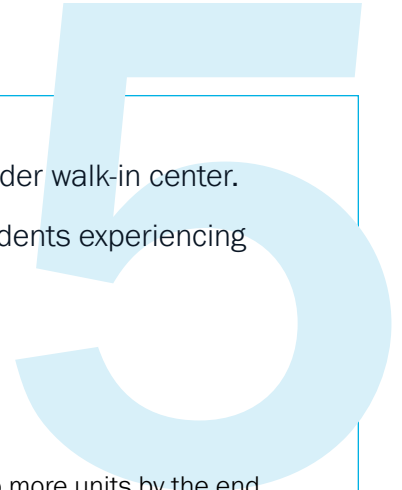
Objective #4:

Increase the hours of operation at the Project Weber Renew walk-in center in Pawtucket by 2021.

Type of Objective: Rescue, Treatment and Recovery

Potential Tactics:

- In discussion with Weber Renew, identify how many additional days/ hours the office should be open in order to best serve its client population.
- Based on hours/days needed, develop a budget and a plan for establishing a sustainable funding stream.



Stakeholder List



Blackstone Valley Community Health Center



Center for Treatment and Recovery



Children's Friend & Service

Jennifer Costanza PhD, Consultant



LISC Rhode Island



Central Falls Police Department



Central Falls Prevention Coalition



Pawtucket Housing Authority



Pawtucket Police Department



Pawtucket Prevention Coalition



Project Weber Renew



Rhode Island Department of Health



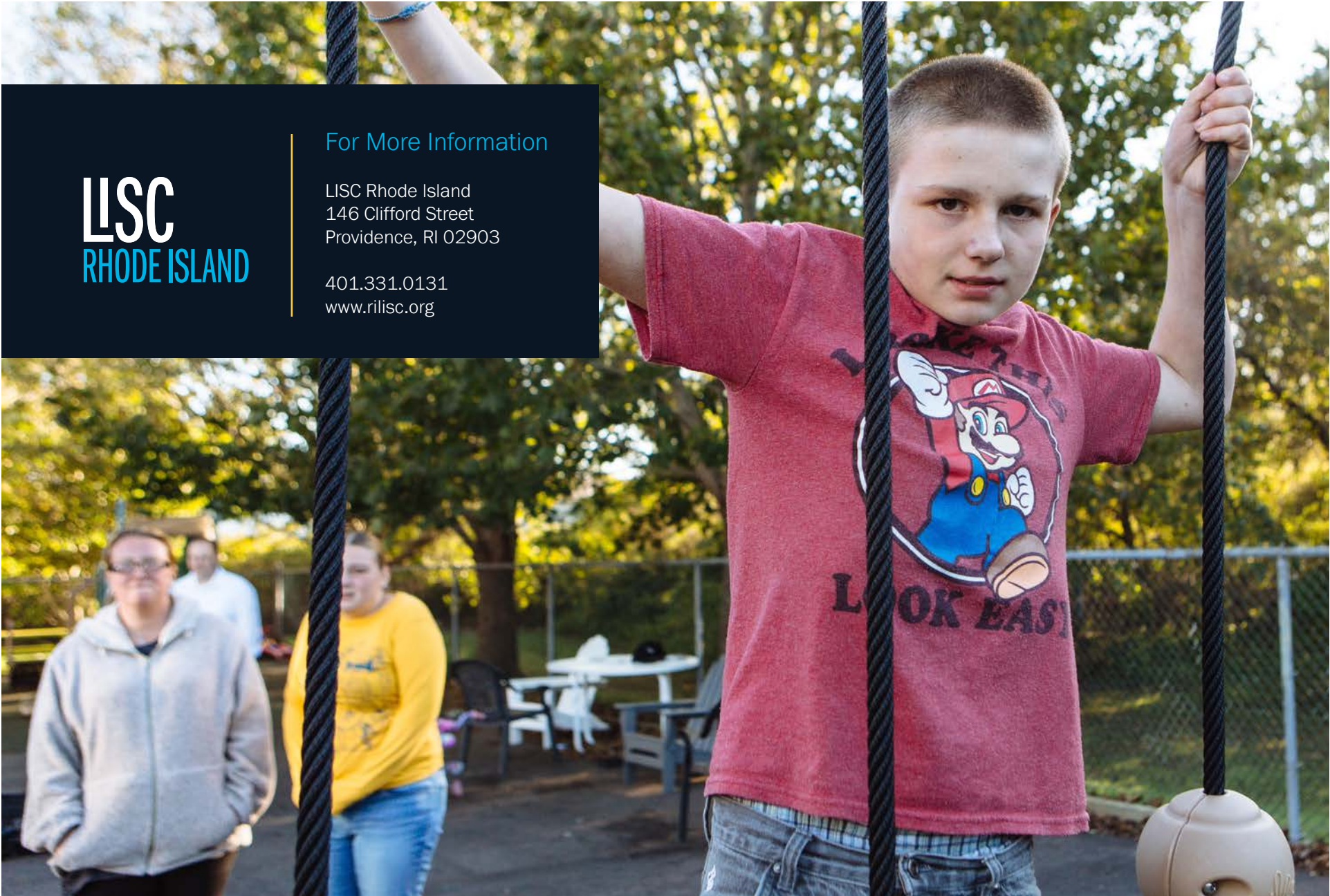
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