

May 2026

Papitto
Opportunity
Connection



\$1 Million Investment In Central Falls' SMART® Clinics To Expand Healthcare Access And Offer First In-School Dental Care

[Learn More](#)

At Ella Risk Elementary School in Central Falls, Dr. Emily Thomas, SMART® Clinic Founder Melanie Ginn, POC Managing Trustee John Tarantino, POC Founder Barbara Papitto, Central Falls Mayor Maria Rivera, and Central Falls Deputy School Superintendent Ann Lynch.

For families across Rhode Island, a trip to the doctor, dentist, or counselor has too often meant time off work, long waits, and difficult choices. For many families in Central Falls, it's now a different story.

Papitto Opportunity Connection (POC) is investing \$1 million to expand comprehensive health care for students and families served by SMART® Health Clinics in Central Falls Public Schools, deepening a program already making a data-proven difference and breaking new ground in school-based health care nationwide.

The funding will be awarded to SMART® FAITH works Health and Wellness Institute, building on the nonprofit's SMART® Clinic program already operating in three Central Falls schools: Calcutt Middle School, Ella Risk Elementary School, and Veterans Elementary School. The investment will support planning for a brand-new SMART® Clinic in the Raíces Dual Language Academy and will, for the first time in any SMART® Clinic in the United States, make full-service dental care available to every student in the district alongside primary care and mental health services in school during the school day.



2026 Transform Rhode Island Scholarship (TRIS)

Top 10 Finalists Announced

[Learn More](#)

POC Officials surprised the Top 10 Transform RI Scholarship Finalists during recent visits to schools across the state.

Waving a Transform Rhode Island Golden Ticket, POC recently traveled to high schools across the state. At each stop, the team surprised students during classroom visits, lunch periods and assemblies with exciting news: one student - and in some cases, two - from each school had been named a Top 10 finalist for the 2026 Transform RI Scholarship.

For the fifth straight year, POC offered high school students an opportunity to use their voice and be heard by asking for unique ideas on how they would strengthen Rhode Island's communities with the greatest need.

This year, more than 550 students representing 57 public, private, charter and parochial schools from across Rhode Island responded, sharing personal essays, thoughtful research, dynamic videos and multimedia presentations showcasing how excited they are about creating real change in their communities.

Addressing students' food insecurity during the summer months, introducing a mobile unit that delivers health and wellness resources to underserved communities, and creating a statewide music mentorship network that provides free instruments and music lessons to elementary and middle school students in communities in the most need, were among the innovative and impactful initiatives selected by a panel of judges for their potential to drive meaningful change in Rhode Island.

The 2026 Transform RI Scholarship Top 10 Finalists:

- Tristan Boyns, Hope, Bishop Hendricken High School
- Hope Carlson, Cranston, St. Mary's Academy - Bay View
- Ella Kauffman, East Greenwich, East Greenwich High School
- Snigdha Kethineni, Lincoln, Lincoln High School
- Abigale King, Cumberland, Cumberland High School
- Gabriela Neves, Cumberland, Cumberland High School
- Evan Perez, Warwick, The MET High School
- Leydi Maritza Ramos Sam, Providence, Nowell Leadership Academy
- Rio VieraSpears, Jamestown, The MET High School
- Mateo Ullaguari, Pawtucket, Blackstone Valley Prep

The 2026 Transform RI Winner will be revealed during a celebration on Wednesday, May 27 at the Graduate Hotel in Providence. POC will invest \$1 million to make the winning student's big idea become a reality. All TRIS Top 10 finalists will receive scholarships ranging from \$5,000_-\$25,000.

Since TRIS was established in 2022, POC has invested more than \$4.1 million in Rhode Island high school students through this scholarship.



New Majority Capital Foundation Helps Entrepreneurs Become Small Business Owners

[Learn More](#)

Members of NMCF's recent bETA Accelerator class.

New Majority Capital Foundation is tackling the U.S. wealth gap by helping entrepreneurs become small business owners. Its bETA (Bridging Entrepreneurship Through Acquisition) Accelerator equips aspiring entrepreneurs with the training, financing support, mentorship, and coaching they need to successfully acquire a business.

bETA offers a unique robust curriculum, skills training, technical resources and hands-on support through transition. Upon completion of the course work, the participants will have the knowledge and confidence to navigate the next steps of acquiring a small business.

With support from POC, since its launch just three years ago, NMC has supported more than 360 entrepreneurs across 8 cities, resulting in over 30 business acquisitions, protecting over 300 jobs, and generating an estimated \$90 million in new wealth potential.

"I'm incredibly proud of the rapid success we're seeing from bETA and the broader work of New Majority Capital. What started in Rhode Island has now grown to eight cities across the country - but the Ocean State will always be home base," said Daryl Lindie of NMC. "Rhode Island is where we proved that acquisition

entrepreneurship can be a powerful tool for preserving small businesses, protecting local jobs, and creating generational wealth."

"From our inaugural cohort alone, 10 entrepreneurs have already acquired businesses," he said. "Seeing these acquisitions happen here in Rhode Island, strengthening local companies and keeping ownership rooted in the community, reinforces why we started this work in the first place. The impact in the Ocean State has been real, measurable, and deeply personal, and it's exciting to now expand that model nationally."

Brendan Baba, owner of [Epic Renewal](#), was part of NMC's first cohort.

"NMC and the bETA Accelerator are a gift and an asset to the community. Standard educational pathways don't often expose underrepresented and historically marginalized communities to these opportunities and their benefits," said Baba. "I have recommended their program to my friends and colleagues. If you are drawn towards entrepreneurship, the bETA Accelerator will give you tools and outlook on what is possible to achieve in your lifetime. It is worth taking and making the time for if you want to create a pathway to financial independence and wealth."

Adoption Rhode Island: Giving Every Child a Chance to Belong

[Learn More](#)

More than 300 children in Rhode Island are waiting for a permanent family. According to Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, roughly 1,200 young people are in the state's foster care system at any given time, many of them older teens, sibling groups, or youth who have experienced complex trauma. Adoption Rhode Island is working to make sure none of them face the future alone.

What sets Adoption RI apart from other agencies isn't just the act of adoption - it's an unwavering commitment to lifelong belonging. "We strive to ensure that young people do not leave foster care to homelessness, loneliness, or hopelessness," says Jennifer Foster, Chief Advancement Officer of Adoption RI. That mission is backed by trauma-responsive clinical services, family finding, and post-permanency support that continues well after a placement is finalized.

Central to Adoption Rhode Island's work is its behavioral health and wellness program. Licensed clinicians with deep expertise in foster care trauma offer individual and family counseling, support groups, and holistic, individualized care.

In one case, a young girl placed suddenly in her grandparent's care after family tragedy - received years of play therapy and wraparound support that ultimately helped her and her family achieve stability. ARI stayed with them through every twist and change, because that's what the organization does: it stays.

For older youth aging out of the system, Adoption Rhode Island's Youth and Young Adult Services offer housing navigation, life skills coaching, and educational support through programs like Copley Chambers - a supportive housing initiative where ARI staff are on-site to help residents build toward independence.

ARI also recently launched the Center for Advanced Practice, a training hub that extends its impact nationally by equipping child welfare professionals with trauma-responsive tools.

One more thing prospective families should know: adopting from foster care costs nothing and the support doesn't stop at the signing.



2026 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Adds Newport To List Of Core Cities, Citing Childhood Poverty Rate

Learn More

When many people think of Newport, gilded mansions, sailing, fine dining and vacation come to mind. But for many of the people living in Newport, there is a big disconnect between the image many have of the City by the Sea, with the reality they live and experience.

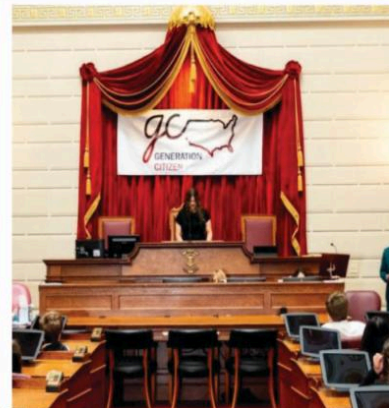
According to new data released in the 2026 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook, Newport has the second highest childhood poverty rate in the state at 32 percent, only Central Falls is higher. As a result, Newport is now categorized as one of Rhode Island's core cities by KIDS COUNT, along with Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence and Woonsocket. This isn't the first time Newport has been listed as a core city by KIDS COUNT. It was previously designated as a core city from 1998 through 2011.

"While not in the traditional urban core, Newport was added to the core city list because its child poverty rate was the same or higher than Pawtucket's for the past few years, showing a change in where child poverty is concentrated," writes Rhode Island KIDS COUNT in the overview of the 2026 Factbook. "Poverty is linked to every KIDS COUNT indicator. Between 2020 and 2024, more than two-thirds (69%) of Rhode Island's children living in poverty live in those five cities."

You can learn more by visiting [RI Kids Count](#), or by reading more at [Newport This Week](#).

WOMEN'S fund

R H O D E I S L A N D



News & Notes

POC June Grant Cycle Coming Up

We're excited to announce that POC's unsolicited grant portal will open June 1–15 for organizations that have either never received a POC grant or received one during last June's grant cycle.

As we shared in our March newsletter, the December 2025 portal made a meaningful impact — bringing \$2.75 million to Rhode Island communities. As we work to be thoughtful stewards of POC's 2026 budget, we've made the difficult decision to pause the Innovation Challenge for the June portal. We look forward to bringing it back in December.

In the meantime, we're thrilled to share that \$1.25 million will be available through [the Small Grant Program](#) — and we wholeheartedly encourage every eligible organization to apply. The portal opens June 1 and closes June 15, so mark your calendars!



Empowering Rhode Island Youth Through Civics Education

Join Generation Citizen for [Rhode Island Civics Day](#) on May 22 at the Rhode Island State House. The voices of young civic leaders presenting their community-based research projects will come alive in our state capitol. These students have been working hard all year, tackling real issues like climate policy, transit equity, and school mental health. Register here: [Rhode Island Civics Day 2026](#).



Help Create Policy On Behalf Of Women And Girls

[Women's Fund of Rhode Island](#) is currently accepting applications for its 2026-27 class of the Women's Policy Institute. [The Women's Policy Institute](#) (WPI) is designed to increase the number of leaders in Rhode Island who are actively involved in crafting feminist public policy on behalf of women and girls. WPI is open to people from all sectors - for-profit, nonprofit, public/social service, academia, and stay-at-home parents. Here's a link to apply and learn more.

For WPI application, click [here](#).



Barbara Papitto Recognized With FLY Initiative Changemaker Award

Barbara Papitto. Dr. Dennis Littky founder of The MET School. General Treasurer James Diossa. Each was recognized for their contributions to the [Financial Literacy for Youth](#) Initiative (FLY) during the organization's annual celebration recently.

Recognizing the impact FLY could have, led POC to make it among the first organizations that POC invested in five years ago. As Barbara noted during her remarks; "POC has always believed that financial literacy isn't a luxury — it's a foundation. It is the difference between a young person who feels helpless in the face of economic hardship and one who understands how money works, how to

save, how to invest, and how to build a future. FLY understood that too, and that shared conviction is what made this partnership feel less like a collaboration and more like a calling.”

Since FLY’s first program in 2018, more than 9,000 participants have received financial literacy education.

From photo collage above, image lower left: RI General Treasurer James Diossa, FLY Founder Marcy Reyes, POC Founder Barbara Papitto and RI KIDS Count Executive Director Paige Parks.



Lights & Sirens International Hosts Badges & Beanbags Community Outreach

Through mentorship, wellness activities, and positive interactions, [Lights & Sirens International](#) aims to strengthen relationships between public safety professionals and the communities they serve.

Lights & Sirens is hosting *Badges & Beanbags Community Outreach*, a youth-focused program bringing middle and high school students together with local law enforcement for games, conversation, mentorship, and community connection. Scheduled for Saturday, May 23, 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM at Roger Williams Park, the event will feature cornhole games, team activities, food, and meaningful conversations focused on trust, communication, and positive youth engagement.

This year’s program also includes local high school senior Anthony Rivera, who is partnering with Lights & Sirens International through his senior project focused on strengthening relationships between law enforcement and the community.



Brotherhood In Wellness, June 27 At The MET School

We are proud to spotlight Brotherhood in Wellness, a community summit on men's health hosted by POC grantee [Jammat Housing and Community Development](#). Taking place on June 27, 10 AM to 2 PM at the Black Box Theatre at The Met High School in Providence, this event aims to create an affirming space for men to engage honestly with their health and leave with practical tools and community connection.

The program features a keynote from Dr. Malik Yoba, actor, community advocate, and Founder/CEO of Yoba Development, who has spent over four decades working with young people across schools, prisons, and community organizations. Following the keynote, there will be a panel led by mental health professionals and community leaders. The morning concludes with a Lunch & Barbershop Talk: an intentionally relaxed space for real conversation.

For men, particularly men of color, culturally responsive programming like this is too rare. Jammat is changing that and we are proud to support them. Tickets and sponsorship opportunities are available now.

[Secure your spot](#) or contact Doug Bell for sponsorships at d.bell@jhcdc.org.

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