



Vermont Parent Representation Center, Inc.

Dear Friends,

In my line of work I am reminded daily of the crucial need for VPRC's combination of services. Not only is the support we provide parents critical for their success, our advocacy for effective change in our state's child welfare and court systems is also essential for Vermont's most vulnerable families. Here are a few highlights of our recent efforts.

IT'S A CELEBRATION!

Sarah Lowell, our volunteer peer navigator, and I are in preparation mode for the 2nd Annual Vermont Family Reunification Celebration in Battery Park in Burlington on August 17. There will be games, music, food and fun for all. Please visit us online for more information at www.vtprc.org.

Inspired by the American Bar Association's Children and the Law, the event's purpose is twofold:

- To celebrate the many families who have had the strength necessary to be able to overcome their challenges and reunify successfully and safely;
- To inspire other parents to confront and resolve issues that have led to separation from their children.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

How much did we do?

- VPRC served 26 families with 55 children.
- 100% had VPRC service in their home/community;

How well did we do it?

- 100% of parents believe the service in home/community created a trusting relationship;

Is Anyone Better off?

- Pre-petition:
 - 78% (14 of 18) families had no child going into any out-of-home care.
 - 81.4 % (35 of 43) children did not enter any out of home care.
 - 62.5% (5 of 8) children reunified from out of home care.
- Guardianship Diversion:
 - 67.5% of families (4 of 6) with children in guardianship at beginning of VPRC service had all children reunified.
 - 50% of children (5 of 10) in guardianship were reunified while served by VPRC. (One family not reunified had 4 children).

WHAT'S NEXT

With two years worth of results-based-accountability (RBA) data, and the support of more and more legislators and professionals who have begun to recognize the invaluable outcomes of VPRC's work with some of Vermont's most vulnerable families, VPRC's efforts are leaving good impressions.

DCF believes that our program model works. So much so that DCF's Commissioner Dave Yacovone recently proposed matching funds for the establishment of a three-year pilot program for VPRC's services in Chittenden County.

Needless to say, the "matching" part of this partnership is necessary for this worthy plan to come to fruition. VPRC currently relies solely on foundation grants and private donors. We would be very grateful for, and happy to accept, your tax deductible donation, either on our website (through Paypal) or by mail.

Sincerely,
Trine Bech

Executive Director, Vermont Parent Representation Center, Inc.

MISSION:

To ensure through advocacy and support that children who can live safely with their parents are afforded a real opportunity to do so.

ADDRESS

PO Box 4087
Burlington, VT 05406-4087

TEL

(802)540 -0200

EMAIL

info@vtprc.org

WEBSITE

www.vtprc.org

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Trine Bech

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Sara Kobylenski, Chair
Jude Dolan
Lane Dunn
Susan Flynn
Steve Habif
Willa Nohl
Lynda Schoenbeck
Kirstin Schoonover
Maryann Zavez

ADVISORY BOARD

Robert Luce
Katherine Stamper

VLS FELLOWS

Brooke Jenkins
Jonathan Hernandez

ONE FAMILY' STORY

Tiffany returned to her job six weeks after the birth of her first child. She and her husband, Juan, were having a hard time making ends meet. Juan's mother offered to help on the weekends, when both parents had to work, and this lasted for a couple of years. When Tiffany and Juan's second child was born, Tiffany returned to work three weeks after giving birth. Juan's mother agreed to continue to care for the children on the weekends.

When Juan developed mental health issues he stopped working. Tiffany took on a full-time job, which she holds to this day. But by then the couple had difficulties even putting food on the table for their children. So Juan's mother decided to petition probate court for guardianship of her older grandchild. The toddler's parents agreed to the idea with the understanding that this would be short-term, just until their financial situation improved.

A few months after this arrangement was made, Juan was hospitalized as a result of a panic attack. After he was discharged, he went to stay with his mother for a few days, to spend time with his young child. His mother started talking about petitioning the court for guardianship of the younger child. She pressured Juan about his mental health, even though it had improved and his plan was to go back to school. Quite simply, Juan's mother convinced him that he was unfit to parent.

Juan was intimidated by his mother such that he told Tiffany he would have to leave her unless she agreed to his mother's demands. Tiffany did not agree but she did not contest the decision in court. Neither she nor Juan attended the court hearing, and so guardianship was awarded to Juan's mother based solely on her testimony.

Two more tumultuous years elapsed during which Juan and Tiffany were granted little time to spend with their children. Finally, Juan and Tiffany decided to petition the probate court for visitation, but Juan's mother hired a lawyer, while Juan and Tiffany had no opportunity for legal representation. The formal system totally



After eight months of court actions and hearings, thanks to the legal representation, the social work assistance, and the invaluable peer encouragement they received, experts prepared to testify that Juan and Tiffany were perfectly able to care for all three of their children. The result: the children were gradually transitioned back to their parents' care.

failed these parents, providing no support while spewing only shame and blame.

Meanwhile, Juan and Tiffany's third child was born. By then Juan was getting disability support and, with Tiffany working fulltime, was doing a terrific job as primary caretaker for the baby. The family's situation had improved greatly, and so Juan and

Tiffany again petitioned the court for visitation with their two older children. With the helpful guidance of a peer supporter knowledgeable about kinship care, regular visitation began. Then Juan's mother falsely accused Juan and Tiffany of exposing their children to a pedophile. That is when Juan heard about our services and called.

After eight months of court actions and hearings, thanks to the legal representation, the social work assistance, and the invaluable peer encouragement they received, experts prepared to testify that Juan and Tiffany were perfectly able to care for all three of their children. The result: the children were gradually transitioned back to their parents' care. On Christmas Day, the children were reunified, and they have been safely and happily living with their parents ever since—a testimony to what social justice can accomplish.

HOUSE BILL WOULD EXPAND PARENT LEGAL REPRESENTATION

On Monday March 11th, Rep. Gwen Moore (D-WI) reintroduced the Quality of Parent Legal Representation Act (HR 1096), which would provide an additional funding stream through the Court Improvement Program to enhance parental legal representation. Moore notes that quality counsel that can help parents access services that prevent a child's removal, advocate for appropriate reunification services, and provide the parent with another advocate to keep the family together. The bill builds on the success in several states to provide quality legal parent representation. One is the Washington State Office of Public Defense (OPD) representation model, which focuses on caseload limits; professional attorney standards; access to expert services and program social work-

ers; and ongoing oversight, training, and support for attorneys. An evaluation of the program showed an 11 percent increase in the rate of reunification in OPD counties compared to counties without OPD, and an 83 percent increase in the rate of guardianship.

In New York City, the Center for Family Representation (CFR) showed that in one year, over a third of CFR's cases were dismissed, often permitting the court to rule that the family no longer needed child welfare services.

In New York City, the Center for Family Representation (CFR) showed that in one year, over a third of CFR's cases were dismissed, often permitting the

court to rule that the family no longer needed child welfare services. According to Moore, these pilots and others across the country reinforce her belief that "child outcomes improve and courts function more effectively when all parties have quality legal representation."

Calling all Reunified Families!

You are invited

To Vermont's Second Annual
National Reunification Day Celebration!

FREE!!
❖ CHILDREN'S
GAMES,
AND
ACTIVITIES
❖ MUSIC
FOOD
AND FUN



FREE!!
❖ FACE
PAINTING
❖ BRING
YOUR
WHOLE
FAMILY!

Celebrate the reunification of parents and their children!

Planned and hosted by Reunified Parents!

August 17th 2013

10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Battery Park, Burlington (Rain or shine)

To learn more please visit us online at www.vtprc.org