

I first went to the Janet S. Munt Family Room in 2011, when I had four children under the age of six. I had family that had recently been involved with the court system. I had family involved with the State mental health system. My father had been in a debilitating car accident and required my mother's near constant care. My husband worked full time at a local tech company, but we remained eligible for WIC and 3SquaresVT programs. I was stretched thin, with little family support, when a friend invited me to meet for a playdate at the VNA Family Room. I instantly fell in love with the space and the people there, and my family regularly used Family Room services two or three times each week for about two years, while my husband got the experience he needed to find a higher paying job, and I earned a bachelor's degree in Computer Science from the University of Vermont. My family was saved by the people and programming at the Family Room. Family Room didn't only prevent negative outcomes for my kids; my family thrived because of the care we were given.

Many families like mine find the support, friendship, and education they need at the Family Room:

“The first time I came to the Family Room I was overwhelmed as a new mom and caregiver of another baby. I was welcomed warmly and have learned so much about caring for little ones and managing my stress.” -Jamie

“The Family Room has helped me and my family by meeting other families, preventing isolation, creating a safe space for my baby to socialize and explore, emotional support.” -Heather

“The Family Room has helped my family with communication skills, temperance, patience, remembering my child is golden, being supportive of our difficult transitions— challenges that could have torn our family apart were made manageable.” -Emily

These sentiments are just a glimpse into over forty stories from staff, volunteers, and a sampling of 400 diverse families who benefit each year from the Family Room, collected at <http://familyroomfamily.org>, where I invite you to read more about the impact one Parent Child Center is having on real individuals in our community.

Parent Child Centers in Vermont, like the Janet S. Munt Family Room, are important to DCF because they reduce the need for DCF intervention when families get preventative care they need, and because they are a valuable resource for social workers involved in DCF cases. Since losing substantial Federal funding in October, the Parent Child Center in my community has cut

three of its nine staff members and closed the doors to a weekly Family Play program that DCF workers frequently used for supervised visits.

“We need more Parent Child Centers as we use them all the time to facilitate positive and healthy contact.” Sharon Hulburd, a DCF case manager of 23 years, tells me. She says DCF workers use Family Room as a place to help parents learn “how to meet their children’s physical, mental, developmental and educational needs.”

My friend Maggie Turner Van Duyn, a DCF social worker whose previous work at the Burlington District Office brought her to the Family Room, says, “DCF can rely on the Family Room as a safe, easily accessible place to allow parents and children to visit together when children are in DCF custody. Additionally, it's a resource for family preservation and for reunification when that makes sense.”

I’m afraid that if the State doesn’t find a way to increase funding to the Parent Child Centers from the base level set in 1995, these vital programs will fail to run sustainably for those who need them now and in the future. I understand that your priority now is to close the State’s budget gap, and I request you favor the efficient allocation of the state’s limited resources into prevention programs as a mechanism to cut growing costs. While you evaluate the budget adjustment needed to fund the immediate staffing needs of DCF, I ask that you also consider their partners in the community– the Parent Child Centers, which Vermont families and DCF workers rely on to have their doors open.

Thank you for allowing me this time to share my story with you.

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