



Proposal:

Continue Child Care Referral Service Locally and Realize Significant Savings for the FY16 Budget

Background:

Local Child Care Referral Services are:

- Aligned with the 12 AHS districts
- Universally provided to families;
 - Including those who are struggling with poverty and perhaps other challenges such as homelessness and domestic violence.
- Highly responsive to families facing child care challenges such as expulsion from child care;

Vermont's families successfully find child care using local child care referral services so that they can go to work:

- About 3,000 child care searches are completed for families each year.
- At least 75% of those families live in low-income households.
- Our network's service performance exceeds State defined goals.
- With local services, families get help finding child care and accessing State funding to pay for it at the same place in their local community throughout their child care years.

From Child Care Resource: "In FY14, 70% Referral Service families who contacted the programs we referred to them reported finding child care within two weeks of the initial search".

Families access the service by phone and in person (12%-35%):

- In-person service is important.
 - This has not been a performance measure and has not been tracked statewide.
 - Four agencies have indicated that 12% - 35% of their referral searches are for clients seen in person (Bennington County Child Care Association, Mary Johnson Children's Center, The Family Center in St. Albans, and Windham Child Care Association).

Sharon Halnon from Child Care Resource says: "An average of 3 families walk in every day. We see this as a valuable opportunity to build relationships and can immediately offer all of the child care related support they might need. They may need a child care search right away and even if not, they have made a connection with us for the future."

- The vast majority of clients indicate that a Referral Specialist has contacted them within 2 business days – the expectation in our contract with CDD:
 - In FY14, roughly half (48%) of Child Care Resource clients reported talking with a specialist immediately and an additional 32% reported talking with a specialist that day.

As at many of the smaller agencies, Director Barbara Saunders from Mary Johnson Children’s Center in Addison County says, “There is virtually no delay in referral requests. If the Referral Specialist is not available, the Eligibility Specialist and the Resource Specialist have been cross trained”.

Referral Specialists inform clients about range of other services and assist them in connecting with:

- Child Care Financial Assistance;
 - Other Economic Benefit Programs such as Reach-up, Fuel Assistance, Medicaid, WIC;
 - Children’s Integrated Services, Head Start, qualified Pre-K programs, and Early Essential Education;
 - Local opportunities such as playgroups, summer camps, and family-centered activities.
- In FY14, 70% of Child Care Resource Child Care Referral clients were offered information about economic benefits in particular (which we track).

Our experienced Referral Specialists know how to work with people, data, and their community:

In providing high quality Child Care Referral Services, Referral Specialists:

- Must have the skills to listen empathically to families about their child care needs;
- Have the knowledge to advise families about the emotional and practical aspects of choosing child care including indicators of quality and basic child development.
- Have the knowledge to provide information to connect families with other related services and resources.

In addition to working with families, Specialists:

- Maintain detailed program data subject to frequent change for about 1500 regulated child care programs across the State of Vermont and local unregulated options.
- Maintain resources about other State and community programs.
- Are well connected to local service systems and programs.
- Do local outreach in their community so that families know who to call for their child care needs.

From Kim Kiniry at Springfield Area Parent Child Center: “Our staff are cross trained in the Child Care Financial Assistance Program and Child Care Referral which allows the specialists to develop deeper relationships with families. This bond deepens over time and we find that they are “on speed dial” to answer questions on a variety of child topics. Frequently they are also the ones to share resources with families, not just those provided by our agency, but throughout the community.”

Local Vermont Child Care Referral Service is well established, effective and efficient.

Centralized services will not effectively replace local service.

Proposal:

Funding:

Currently, \$480,000 is distributed among the Referral Service agencies.

- This amount and its distribution are history-based, not formula-based.
- As a result, CDD dollars per child care search ranges widely among agencies.
- Distribution of CDD dollars is not consistent with service demand and is not equitable.
- Based upon current agency grant amounts and service demand, the average amount of CDD grant dollars per search is currently \$173.

We propose:

- Reducing the per search amount to \$119 to provide \$150,000 in savings to the State of Vermont.
- Distributing the remaining \$330,000 to agencies in an equitable manner allowing them to continue to do the work in their community with resources scaled to meet the current demand for services.

Services:

- CDD will continue to work with VACCRRRA agencies to keep the system that is working in place which will ensure continuity and accessible co-located services for families and providers.
- VACCRRRA will work together as a coalition and with CDD to make modifications that will support the continuation of high quality local services in compliance with CDD requirements. Potential low and no cost modifications may include:
 - An affordable (under \$2,400 per year) cloud-based statewide phone number and routing system that directs clients to the agency in their community.
 - Further development of shared coverage arrangements within and across agencies to assure responsiveness to callers.
 - A collaborative, intentional training and staff development plan to assure a consistency of knowledge and service across the state.
 - A plan for increasing up-to-date database information which identifies challenges and new ideas (e.g. awarding providers points in STARs for participating).
- VACCRRRA will work with CDD to continue to develop our Results Based Accountability framework and use the framework to evaluate our success including:
 - “How much” indicators such as the number of searches completed and the number and characteristics of families, and children served.
 - “How well” indicators such as customer satisfaction related to response time and service quality and up-to-date program data.
 - “Better off” indicators such as the percent of families who find child care within 2 weeks of receiving referrals.
- We will report the results of these efforts to the administration on a quarterly basis and to the legislature in 2016.