

My name is Wendy Pratt and I am 32 years old. I am a single mom, and I have one child living in my household with me. There are several factors that led to my need for Social Security Income. Physically, I have fibromyalgia and arthritis. I also struggle with PTSD, ADHD, and OCD and am a recovering addict. My learning challenges make it difficult to concentrate and understand situations. My physical challenges make it impossible for me to be able to fulfill the requirements of most entry-level jobs or access the transportation needed to get me to work. My mental health challenges can be equally limiting, as certain situations and people can be triggering for me. I constantly worry about getting hurt and how this would impact my ability to parent my child.

Currently, I am living in South Burlington in a subsidized apartment. I have a Section 8 voucher, however, it took a team of people and a lot of time to help get me where I am today. I have been working with Lund for the past 3 years. I lived in their residential program for 11 months, where I learned about recovery, parenting, coping skills, and how to live life in a healthy and safe way. I also started at Lund's high school program to begin working toward my diploma. Then I moved into their transitional living program, where I lived for 22 months. It was a stepping stone for me to learn how to live independently and prepare for the future. Next, I got involved with Burlington Housing Authority's Offender Reentry program, and with the support of their case manager and my Lund team, I was able to apply for and obtain a rental subsidy voucher, as well as Reach Up and SSI assistance. I know having such a team to help support me is rare for most people in my situation. I also know that I worked very hard to learn the skills that I need to be successful when living independently.

That said, living is still not easy for me—mainly because of finances. I operate on less than \$1300 a month, which needs to provide for both me and my son. Additionally, I have outstanding medical bills and court restitution that I have to factor into our already limited budget. Every month, I worry about my ability to consistently provide for my son's basic needs. I worry that I won't be able to send him to daycare with healthy food every day. I worry that, because I have to ration diapers, I might run out of them one month if he uses more than he normally does. I worry about copays if he gets sick and needs to go to the doctor's. I have no savings and no way to pay for emergencies that may come up. I am constantly anxious and scared that I won't be prepared to handle things that are not already budgeted. There have been several months where I could not pay my cell phone bill, and being a single mom, that makes me feel so unsafe. What if my child is sick and the daycare cannot reach me? What if there was an emergency and I can't call for help? And being in recovery, being able to stay in contact with your support team is crucial.

I am a member of one of the most vulnerable populations in Vermont. I have a fixed income, and because I am unable to work, I have no means to make up money when cuts are made to the programs that help me survive. I have to live day-to-day and I'm scared to think about the future. I wonder if there will ever be a day when I don't need to worry about how we are doing right now and how we will get by tomorrow. Reversal of the cuts to SSI participants would mean more stability for me and my child. It would help to avoid the constant sense of struggle, cutting corners, and uncertainty. It would mean more confidence and security. It would mean a better chance for me and my son to have a sense of the future that looks past just today.