



Introduction

I'm Luanne Cantor from the Greater Burlington Y.

The Greater Burlington YMCA serves 2,000 children per year in licensed early child care and school age programs. We are the largest child care provider in Vermont.

All of the Y's child care programs are recognized as high quality by the Vermont STARS system.

Because roughly 500 of the children we serve qualify for tuition assistance through Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP), the Y is uniquely qualified to see the financial impact child care can have on struggling families - and the increasing pressure that an inadequately funded system places on child care providers.

Why high quality early childhood education is important

Access to high quality child care is essential for all children, particularly those who are eligible for state tuition assistance. It's one of the best investments we can make to ensure a successful future for the citizens of our State.

- It helps to ensure that they are prepared for kindergarten and do not fall behind academically.
- It connects their families with other needed services such as early intervention, food programs, and a medical/dental home.
- It provides structure and consistency to children whose families are often in flux and have unstable living situations.
- It makes it easier for parents to get job training, seek employment, and stay employed.

Why the situation is critical right now

Unfortunately, the funding for CCFAP has not kept pace with increasing child care costs, and the deficit is greatest for infants and toddler programs which is where I'd like to focus my comments.

- Infant/Toddler care is by far the most expensive care to provide, due to the lower staff to child ratios, yet the impact we can make at this early age is far greater than when issues are addressed later in life
- Act 166 has helped defray the cost of preschool for families and the after school rates are more in line with costs, leaving the greatest imbalance with infant/toddler programs

As an example: The maximum reimbursement rate from CCFAP is \$197.75 per week for an infant or toddler. Our tuition rate is \$300.00 per week, which is in-line with other high quality and providers and already below our cost.

Because the Y's goal is to keep our programs accessible to all, we currently cover the family "co-pay" of \$102.25 per week. During the next school year we estimate that this will cost us almost \$70,000.

Like any organization, our costs increase each year – and as we serve more and more children with special needs who require additional services, our staffing costs in particular are growing at a higher than historical rate.

Yet while our costs increase each year, the amount of tuition assistance that families receive from the state stays the same and the gap that we need to fund continues to grow.

While we are committed to keeping our programs accessible, it's getting harder and harder for us to sustain a growing need to internally subsidize our infant/toddler programs.

Additionally, we are not meeting the community need for infant/toddler care. We maintain a waiting list of 150 parents. Almost every day we turn away families who contact us about infant/toddler care because we do not have enough programs and we simply cannot afford to create more slots.

If the Y, a large non-profit, is struggling to keep programs accessible to all, small providers must be facing even greater challenges, and we believe that many of them already have capped the number of children they will accept who receive state financial assistance.

In Conclusion

The end result of an underfunded system is an uneven playing field.

Families who are eligible for state assistance may be turned away from high quality programs due to their inability to pay. Unfortunately, these are the families who are most likely to be at risk.

Providers will not open additional infant/toddler programs to meet the community demand because they cannot afford to do so.

We strongly support the \$1 million increase in funding for CCFAP that was included by the House. While \$1 million does not come close to making a full adjustment, which some have calculated to be \$9.1 million, the impact could be increased by targeting the infant/toddler population where the biggest funding gap exists.

Thank you.



THE IMPACT OF QUALITY CHILD CARE

We've included just a few of many stories that demonstrate the importance of high quality child care. Our ability to continue meeting the needs of children and families like these is at risk without additional state funding.

Four-year-old M came to the Y at a time when he, his mother and younger sister were living at Lund and had recently reunited as a family. M had experienced significant trauma in his young life - his father was incarcerated and his mother had been in a car accident where the children witnessed her suffering from extreme facial injuries. Over the course of 1 1/2 years, M had been in 5 different foster homes.

M was enrolled in our full-day preschool while his mother was hoping to gain some stability. M had many challenges controlling his emotions and couldn't stand it when anyone touched him. We realized he needed additional support and partnered with Howard Center to provide a behavior interventionist. Over just a few weeks, M's negative behaviors began to diminish. He developed close bonds with teachers and peers, and began asking for and giving hugs. He evolved from an angry, defiant child into a loving, caring boy. His mother worked tirelessly at improving her parenting skills and was recently approved for housing assistance. M's sister is now enrolled in the Y program. The network of support that we have been able to give this family has improved their circumstances immensely.

When K first joined the Y's part-time preschool program, he lived with his young father. His mother was incarcerated, so he rarely saw her.

K's grandparents did their best to help out by providing some financial support, but being elderly and retired, they had limited resources. Because they saw the positive impact of the Y program on K, they requested full-day care for him. They also felt this would give his father the opportunity to pull his life together and find consistent work. However, they struggled with how to pay for full-time care.

With support from the Y, K was enrolled in a full-time program and was able to benefit from the resulting structure and consistency, while having access to both support services and a high-quality early education.

In particular, K's social and emotional skills showed significant growth. He made lasting friendships with peers and developed strong, trusting relationships with adults. He also developed the ability to manage feelings and respond to emotional cues appropriately. This growth had a significant impact in his ability to make a smooth transition into kindergarten.

T is a single mother who, until recently, was homeless. After spending several months with the uncertainty of where she would be living, she was able to find an affordable apartment. Full-time care for her daughter C was essential so that T could continue to work and pay her bills.

T struggled to make ends meet on her waitress's income. The difference between the state subsidy amount and the Y's tuition would jeopardize her ability to pay other bills and, ultimately, she feared that she could end up homeless again.

Given the economic stress and uncertainty that T was facing, the Y knew we could make a difference in her and C's lives. We covered the full co-pay (the difference between her subsidy payment and our tuition) so that C could benefit from the structure and consistency of our program, while having access to high-quality early education, which we knew was so important, particularly in the crucial year before she started kindergarten.

And, lastly, from a school employee:

The Y After-School Program has made an amazing impact on our school and the families involved. One particular sixth grader who required a one-on-one during the school day because of bad behavior and poor grades was also suffering with a home life that had absent parents who set no boundaries. He was introduced to the Y program and immediately we saw improvement in his school day. He no longer requires a one-on-one and his grades have risen. He walks in the halls with confidence, replacing his scowl with a look of contentment.

There are brothers and sisters who come together to the after-school program because their home life is in disarray; parental illness and mental health concerns are heavy burdens at home. Staying at school has made a tremendous impact on their lives. They are given the chance to play, be happy and safe and enjoy the moments of childhood.