

Testimony of Deb Gass, Executive Director of Early Education Services

Good Morning! Thank-you for the opportunity to testify today as you look at the state's approach to ACES and determine your recommendations. For those of you who don't know

me.....Executive

Director of Early Ed Services, one of Vermont's 15 Parent-Child Centers and one of 7 Vermont Head Start/Early Head Start programs.

We are operating with a new Master Grant that was created through a collaborative effort between PCC's and DCF to bring disparate funding streams together, bring consistency in delivery of state services across the state, have all the PCC's collecting the same data and agreeing to work toward the same RBA population outcomes. I have included a handout in your packet that highlights our outcomes for the Master Grant. I want to start my presentation with you by reading the story in your packets that was provided to us by a previous EES client, Hilary.

(in packet)

As you might imagine, this is just one of a great many success stories most anyone of our program participants might share. EES happens to be one of the lowest funded PCC's in our state, with only 150K/year, to meet our 8 core services requirements, and yet we do, and we do it well. However, we do it on the backs of and from the pockets of our employees. We are able to deliver high quality services because we are trained in and embody Vermont's Strengthening Families framework, Dr. Brazelton's Touchpoints approach to building on family strengths, operating with classroom top rated 5 STAR programs, a dedicated staff team, and with funds from our Head Start federal grant. All of this work addresses and mitigates the impacts of ACES. In order to

continue this work we must be able to continue with the support of the legislature. I commend your committee for understanding, and working to implement statewide systems that embrace the ACES research findings that supports the work that we have been doing for over 30 years. It will be a great day when we our common language and work all comes from a very basic understanding that every Vermonter can have ACES, but also that every Vermonter can have access to quality programs that will ameliorate the effects of ACES during the early years of their life.

I am here today for two reasons:

1. To thank-you for the work this committee is doing to support the ACES perspective in Vermont
2. To tell you that, at EES and all of the other PCC's around the state, we are doing this important work on the backs of and from the pockets of our staff.
 - a. At EES, we are supplementing the work of our PCC state mandates with federal dollars, which does not allow for a fuller implementation and offering of services to many families other than those who are the poorest of the poor. Most likely, every Windham County family could benefit from the services EES provides. We can only serve about 300 families a year at this time, again because we are using our meager state PCC funds and augmenting them with Head Start dollars.
 - b. EES salaries are not comparable to those in public schools, at DCF, HCRS, or many other social services agencies who are drawing from our same employee recruitment pool. We are a fertile training ground for our staff, mostly with federal

Head Start training dollars, and then we lose staff to better paying jobs. We currently are at a critical juncture, where we are considering the need to close a classroom in our Westminster site because we do not have 3 of 6 teacher positions filled and cannot find more. We have operated with another 6 teacher vacancies for over a year for which we could not find candidates for. In addition to those unfilled positions, last year we experienced a 7% turnover rate. We even created new “Assistant Teacher” positions with lower qualification requirements, to no avail.

- c. Our work is not getting easier, it is only more challenging as we interface with families and children who are experiencing a great many ACES, and we grab every training opportunity possible to increase our skills to help those individuals build resiliency in order to be self-sufficient and productive Vermont citizens.
- d. We cannot continue to provide these essential services at our current level, which is less than adequate, without support of more Vermont state dollars. In order to carry out the intentions of your committee in order to make a notable impact in Vermont, we must have increased funding for our Parent-Child Centers.

In closing, I wish to thank your committee for this critical work and the opportunity to speak for it. I ask that you include, in your report, a specific recommendation to fully fund the Parent Child Center Master Grant, in order that we can carry out to the fullest intent of your work and ours, toward the goal of addressing and ACES in Vermont.



Hilary's Story

Parent Child Centers are the Answer

HILARY'S STORY

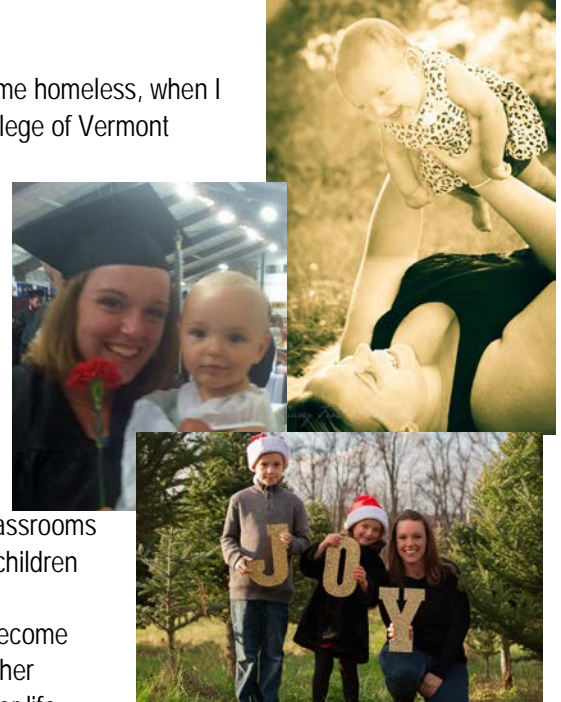
In 2009 as a young mother of two children, ages 5 years and 6 months, I became homeless, when I fled from an abusive relationship. I had to drop out of college at Community College of Vermont where I was studying to become a nurse. I was unemployed, unstable and had no money when I arrived at Early Education's Services (EES) Parent-Child Center in Brattleboro.

Immediately, I was enrolled in the Home Base program at EES and was assigned a home visitor who provided the supports I needed to stabilize my living situation, and education about child development. The knowledge I gained from my home visitor taught me about my son's development and helped me to develop a strong bond with my infant daughter. The home visitor also helped me secure a Section 8 subsidized apartment in town, and get on the Reach Up Program. Soon after, my children enrolled in EES full day classrooms, where they received quality early care education experiences in classrooms that were top rated at the 5 STAR level. As part of their enrollment at EES, my children received health and nutrition services.

I then worked with a Family Support Specialist from EES who helped me become self-sufficient, stable, and get back on track. During that time, my daughter's father actively pursued his claim to our child and indicated his wish to be involved in her life. The EES home visitor, classroom teachers and administrative staff worked to create a safe environment for me and my children, while supporting his desire to participate in our daughter's school experiences. The EES staff worked to establish mutually positive and respectful relationships with the father, and setting boundaries for him. He was encouraged to participate in EES' Dedicated Dads Program in order to strengthen his relationship with our daughter, and learn how to communicate respectfully.

Once stabilized, I was able to go on to earn my Nursing degree at Vermont Technical College in 2013. I passed the state boards to receive my Licensed Practical Nursing certification, and landed a job at Vermont Technical College as a tutor. In 2014 I completed my education at Vermont Technical College to meet the requirements to become a Registered Nurse. Now, I work at Brattleboro Cardiology and the Southern State Correctional Facility in Springfield, Vermont as a nurse. My children attend Academy Elementary School, and the three of us are doing well.

The work I have done over the past few years to rebuild my life has been difficult, but possible because of the support and great relationships EES gave to me. I would not be where I am today without the help of EES, for which I am incredibly grateful. I grew so much through my experience with EES. Not only as a person, woman, but most importantly as a mother. I learned how to advocate for my children, ask for help and guidance and to not be afraid to make mistakes.



PARENT CHILD CENTERS = RESULTS

The mission of the Vermont Parent Child Center Network is to provide children, youth and families with strength based, holistic and collaborative services across Vermont with a focus on early childhood education and prevention services. The Network provides leadership, support and advocacy on behalf of its membership and in collaboration with key partners to achieve the best outcomes for families.



RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The services Hilary received relate directly to outcomes that drive our decision making as a state under Act 186. *Hilary's story shows how supporting Vermont's Parent Child Centers moves us closer to achieving at least six of the eight quality of life outcomes we have identified as essential to our state and local communities.*

ECC provided home visiting services for Hilary and her children

- Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable, and supported
- Vermont's communities are safe and supportive
- Vermonters are healthy
- Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential, including
 - Pregnant women and young people thrive
 - Children are ready for school
 - Children succeed in school

ECC helped Hilary stabilize her living situation, which allowed her to go back to school, get her nursing degree & begin working as an RN.

- Vermont has a prosperous economy
- Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable, and supported
- Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential, including
 - Pregnant women and young people thrive
 - Youths successfully transition to adulthood.

ECC helped Hilary's children maintain a mutually positive and respectful relationship with their father

- Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable, and supported
- Vermont's communities are safe and supportive

ECC helped Hilary secure affordable Section 8 housing

- Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable, and supported
- Vermonters are healthy

ECC helped Hilary enroll her children in high quality early care programs

- Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential, including
 - Children are ready for school
 - Children succeed in school

The support Hilary received positively impacts 11 indicators tracked by the State of Vermont to measure positive population outcomes.

1. Percent or rate per 1,000 jobs of nonpublic sector employment
2. Median household income
3. Rate of resident unemployment per 1,000 residents
4. Percent of high school grads entering postsecondary education, work, or training
5. Percent of completion of postsecondary education
6. # of persons who are homeless (adults and children)
7. percent of residents living in affordable housing;
8. Percent of adults age 18-64 with health insurance
9. Percent of children age 17 and younger with health insurance
10. Rate of children and youth in out-of-home care per 1,000 children and youth
11. Percent of children receiving child care subsidy attending high quality early childhood programs

PCC CORE SERVICES PROVIDED TO HILARY

Home Visiting

Families with young children have access to home-based support. Family goals and interests determine the frequency and content of the visits.

Concrete Supports

Families have access to financial assistance to maintain transportation or meet other basic needs when crisis hits.

Information and Referral

Home visitors, parent educators, reception staff and others help parents find resources available to families in their communities.

Early Childhood Services

Developmental, inclusive child care on-site is offered to ensure that families have quality options to meet full-time and part-time child care needs and children have group experiences with their peers.

Parent Education and Support

Parent education opportunities are offered in a variety of formats and on a range of topics and themes responding to family issues. Education opportunities are supportive, practically-oriented, and empowering. Information to assist families in understanding and coping with transition issues is included in education services and are also embedded in other services. Opportunities are facilitated for families with common experiences and interests to gain mutual support in a peer group setting.

Related language from the PCC Master Grant: (Outcomes)

- C. iii. Parent Child Centers provide eight core services which contribute to Vermont population-level quality of life indicators identified in 3 V.S.A. § 2311 (b) (5) Vermont families are safe, nurturing, stable and supported. (6) Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential. (A) Pregnant women and young people thrive. (B) Children are ready for school. (C) Children succeed in school.

Parent Child Centers are the Answer Legislative Platform 2018 Increase Master Grant Funding for PCCs



Parent Child Centers (PCCs) are a network of 15 community-based non-profit organizations, serving all of Vermont. The purpose of each PCC is to provide support and education to families with young children. We use the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework with the goal to help all Vermont families get off to a healthy start, promote well-being and build on family strengths.

Critical Need: Increased funding for Parent Child Centers

The PCCs deliver critical & essential state services to families with young children.

Parent Child Center staff wages and benefits are continually 30% below market rates to comparable positions in education and state government. If PCCs are expected to continue to provide high quality state services, PCC wages and benefits must sustain the highly skilled people who do the work.

PCCs now have a Master grant that adheres to the Sec. E.300.4 of the 2015 Budget Bill: *Human Services; Improving Grants Management for Results-Based Programs*. The Master Grant increases efficiency and clearly identifies Results Based Accountability population outcomes and program performance measures. However, the Master Grant *does not adequately fund* the state services that it requires the PCCs to deliver.

**Parent Child Centers
Core Services**

- Home Visits
- Early Childhood Services
- Parent Education
- Playgroups
- Parent Support Groups
- Concrete Supports
- Community Development
- Information & Referral

**Master Grant funding must increase by \$8,000,000
to close the salary and funding gap.
Total PCC Master Grant funding must be \$10,000,000.**



Research has proven that prevention services targeted at reducing and treating ACEs can dramatically reduce long term health care costs. The PCCs use a family-centered, multi-generational, strength-based approach that both treats and prevents ACEs in families.

PARENT CHILD CENTERS = RESULTS

The mission of the Vermont Parent Child Center Network is to provide children, youth and families with strength based, holistic and collaborative services across Vermont with a focus on early childhood education and prevention services. The Network provides leadership, support and advocacy on behalf of its membership and in collaboration with key partners to achieve the best outcomes for families.

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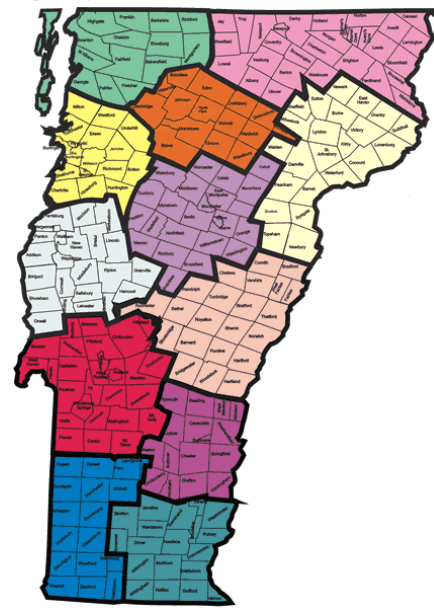
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Parent Child Centers are the Answer

The Parent Child Centers Master Grant uses Results Based Accountability Population Level Outcomes.

Population-level Quality of Life Outcomes – ACT 186 of 2014 - 3 V.S.A. § 2311:

1. Vermont has a prosperous economy.
2. Vermonters are healthy.
3. Vermont's environment is clean and sustainable.
4. Vermont's communities are safe and supportive.
5. Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable, and supported.
6. Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential, including:
 - a. Pregnant women and young people thrive
 - b. Children are ready for school
 - c. Children succeed in school
 - d. Youths choose healthy behaviors
 - e. Youths successfully transition to adulthood
7. Vermont's elders and people with disabilities and people with mental conditions live with dignity and independence in settings they prefer.
8. Vermont has open, effective, and inclusive government at the State and local levels.

Related language from the PCC Master Grant:

C. iii. Parent Child Centers provide eight core services which contribute to Vermont population-level quality of life indicators identified in 3 V.S.A. § 2311

(b) (5) Vermont families are safe, nurturing, stable and supported.

(6) Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential.

(A) Pregnant women and young people thrive.

(B) Children are ready for school.

(C) Children succeed in school.

Eight Core Services and Correlating Statutory Population-level Outcomes:

Home Visits - 2, 4, 5, 6

- Vermonters are healthy
- Vermont's communities are safe and supported
- Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable, and supported
- Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential

Early Childhood Services - 1, 6

- Vermont has a prosperous economy (adults able to work or find better jobs because of child enrollment)
- Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential

Parent Education - 5, 6

- Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable, and supported
- Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential

Playgroups - 6

- Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential

Parent Support Groups - 5, 6

- Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable, and supported
- Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential

Concrete Supports - 2, 5

- Vermonters are healthy
- Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable, and supported

Community Development &

Information & Referral - 1, 2, 5, 6

- Vermont has a prosperous economy
- Vermonters are healthy
- Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable, and supported
- Vermont's communities are safe and supported
- Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential

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What We Know: Families thrive when protective factors are robust in their lives and communities.

Using the Strengthening Families Approach, more than 30 states are shifting policy, funding and training to help programs working with children and families build protective factors with families. Many states and counties also use the Protective Factors Framework to align services for children and families, strengthen families in the child welfare system and work in partnership with families and communities to build protective factors. For more information and many tools and options for implementation, visit www.strengtheningfamilies.net.

Nationally, Strengthening Families is coordinated by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) and supported by national partner organizations including:

- Child Welfare Information Gateway
- The Finance Project
- FRIENDS National Resource Center
- The National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds
- Parents As Teachers
- United Way Worldwide
- ZERO TO THREE

The Protective Factors Framework

Five Protective Factors are the foundation of the Strengthening Families Approach: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children. Research studies support the common-sense notion that when these Protective Factors are well established in a family, the likelihood of child abuse and neglect diminishes. Research shows that these protective factors are also "promotive" factors that build family strengths and a family environment that promotes optimal child and youth development.

Parental Resilience

No one can eliminate stress from parenting, but a parent's capacity for resilience can affect how a parent deals with stress. Resilience is the ability to manage and bounce back from all types of challenges that emerge in every family's life. It means finding ways to solve problems, building and sustaining trusting relationships including relationships with your own child, and knowing how to seek help when necessary.

Social Connections

Friends, family members, neighbors and community members provide emotional support, help solve problems, offer parenting advice and give concrete assistance to parents. Networks of support are essential to parents and also offer opportunities for people to "give back", an important part of self-esteem as well as a benefit for the community. Isolated families may need extra help in reaching out to build positive relationships.

Concrete Support in Times of Need

Meeting basic economic needs like food, shelter, clothing and health care is essential for families to thrive. Likewise, when families encounter a crisis such as domestic violence, mental illness or substance abuse, adequate services and supports need to be in place to provide stability, treatment and help for family members to get through the crisis.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Accurate information about child development and appropriate expectations for children's behavior at every age help parents see their children and youth in a positive light and promote their healthy development. Information can come from many sources, including family members as well as parent education classes and surfing the internet. Studies show information is most effective when it comes at the precise time parents need it to understand their own children. Parents who experienced harsh discipline or other negative childhood experiences may need extra help to change the parenting patterns they learned as children.

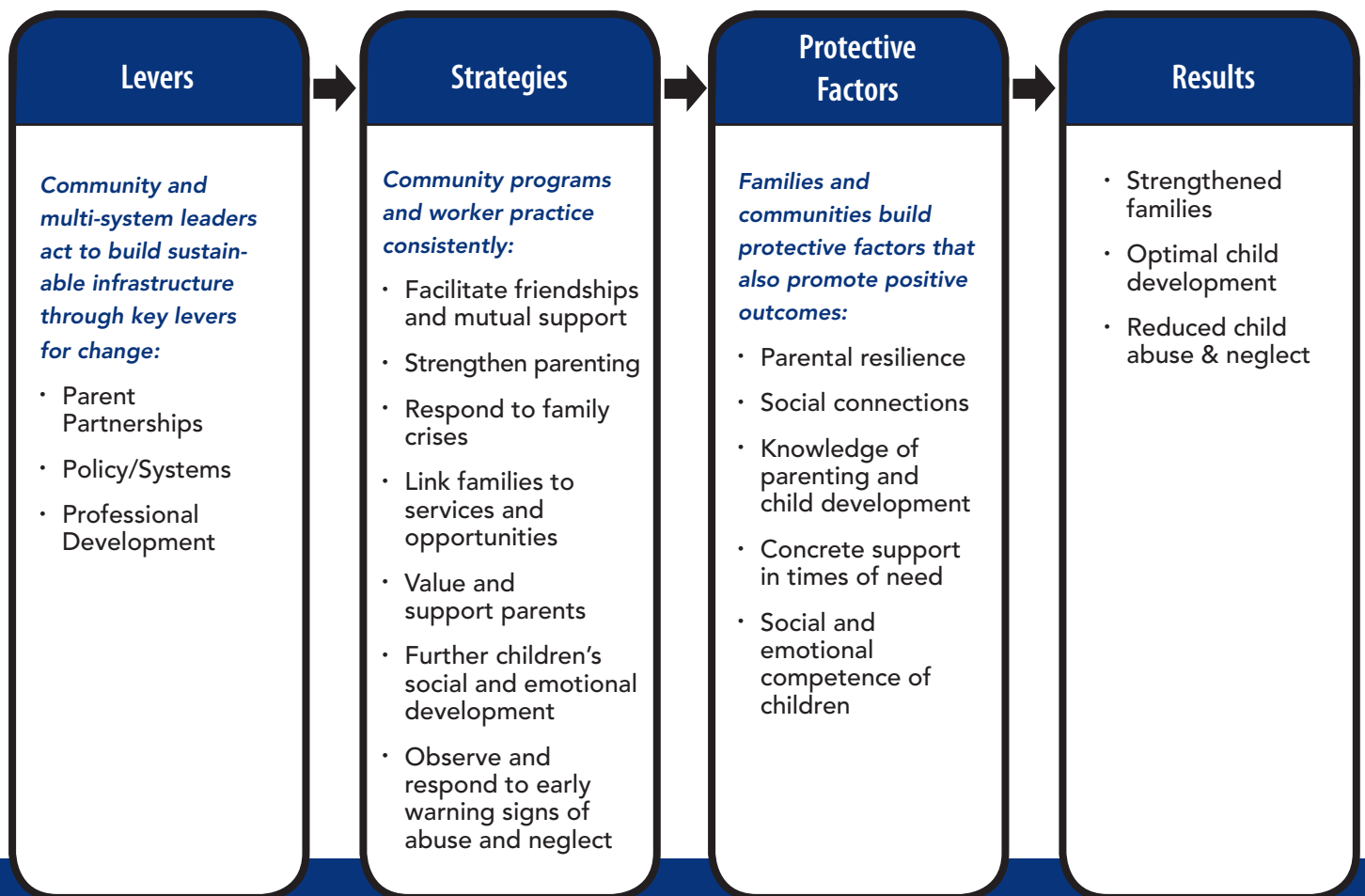
Social and Emotional Competence of Children

A child or youth's ability to interact positively with others, self-regulate their behavior and effectively communicate their feelings has a positive impact on their relationships with their family, other adults, and peers. Challenging behaviors or delayed development create extra stress for families, so early identification and assistance for both parents and children can head off negative results and keep development on track.

Mobilizing partners, communities and families
to build family strengths, promote optimal
development and reduce child abuse and neglect

The Strengthening Families Approach

- Benefits ALL families
- Builds on family strengths, buffers risk, and promotes better outcomes
- Can be implemented through small but significant changes in everyday actions
- Builds on and can become a part of existing programs, strategies, systems and community opportunities
- Is grounded in research, practice and implementation knowledge



A New Vision

Families and communities, service systems and organizations:

- Focus on building protective and promotive factors to reduce risk and create optimal outcomes for all children, youth and families
- Recognize and support parents as decision-makers and leaders
- Value the culture and unique assets of each family
- Are mutually responsible for better outcomes for children, youth and families