

December 8, 2016

To the Parent/Child Center Board of Directors,

We are writing to all of you in hopes of initiating a dialogue. We write this letter with a profound sense of respect for the efforts of the PCC board. Your contributions in time and energy, financial support, organizing and problem solving have helped guide the Center over the years. We deeply appreciate what you do to support our amazing community.

Given the centrality of the board in helping to make financial decisions, we feel it is important to share with you that there is a growing sense of urgency among staff about low and stagnant staff salaries and that many of us have concerns about what this will mean for the Center. We have decided to take this step after much dialogue, careful reflection and, importantly, conversations with Donna and Sue. We write in hopes of starting a larger dialogue and generating creative solutions together.

We feel fortunate to be a part of an organization whose philosophy and values empower us to write such a letter. Our desire to bring our concerns to light comes from a place of deep commitment and gratitude for the work we all do together. We know how magnificent and also how unusual it is to work in an organization that creates a home for our families, for our community and for us as individuals. We treasure the creativity and flexibility that we experience in our work and the support we receive from board members, co-directors and colleagues as we navigate our day to day. We know that this model works because we see it work everyday; we see it in the hopefulness that develops with our families and we see it because so many of us have chosen this place as our work home for so many years!

We are also fully aware that our compensation at the Center goes beyond our salaries. The Center has always honored its commitment to employee health insurance coverage, flex funds and -- most unusual and treasured of all -- our time off. These benefits have always played heavily in people's choices to work at the Center and there is no doubt that increased time and flexibility around personal days and vacations allows us to do our work more effectively and for longer.

We understand and expect that these benefits will be reflected in slightly lower salaries than the salaries of peers in our field. We also know that, especially in light of these benefits, our compensation is comparable to other PCC's across the state. But, in comparison to public school teachers, hospital or state social workers and some other non-profits in Addison County, our compensation is remarkably low. These benefits hold great worth but they do not make up for the financial discrepancy many of us experience compared to other professionals in our fields. This is especially true for outreach but we would argue this applies to childcare staff as well given that childcare staff's role here, (therapeutic childcare, job supervisor, parent educator etc.), is far more extensive than the expectations of childcare workers more generally.

While our salaries have stayed the same for years, costs of living have increased. At the same time, our staff has gained training, experience and expertise. We have lost high quality staff to jobs with incomes that better meet their financial needs. We have also struggled to hire high quality new staff because our wages are simply not comparable to what's available elsewhere. For so many staff that don't have other, much higher incomes coming into their households, our low wages bring real hardship. There is a bounty of personal stories to choose from within our staff, which we hope we can share with you in future conversations.

Our jobs are rewarding but they are also really tough. Our work with families can be hard and carries with it an emotional toll. It is easy sometimes to get caught in a spiral of feeling demoralized about our hard work coupled with low wages and to begin to look elsewhere. But the truth is that we love our jobs and we love the Center. We have chosen this work and this place because it feeds our hearts and because it is truly a place of growth and of hope. We want so much for the legacy of this place to continue to be one that speaks of care and compassion and we want to be a part of that. But as we look toward the future in our own lives, we know that many of us cannot afford to continue to be a part of the Center without a fundamental organizational shift towards prioritizing staff salaries.

We are well aware that there are no easy answers and that this is not a new predicament. None of us are very familiar with the daily financials of the Center and we are (thankfully) mostly shielded from the complexities of annual grants and the ebbs and flows of different state and federal administrations. In considering writing this letter, we have brainstormed some possible avenues to explore, and look forward to doing so further with you.

We feel that now, more than ever, we need to voice our concerns. We do so with huge confidence in this board's commitment to the Center and to its employees. We also do so with open ears, and minds willing and ready to help create a sustainable solution.

Thank you so much for your time and commitment to all of us,

Read by Steve Alexander at the Vermont State Budget Hearing, Room 11, Vermont State House, February 16 2017, on the behalf of Addison County Parent/Child Center Staff.