

My name is Trisha Scharf. I live in Essex and own a 4 STAR early childhood center in Williston; my center serves children and families from all over Chittenden County. I and the teachers of my center are committed each and every day to giving every child the strong start in life he or she deserves. We know that 90% of brain development happens in the first five years and that positive early experiences, particularly positive interactions with adults, sets the foundation for future success. I am dedicated to providing those positive experiences. Yet, as a citizen, an early educator, a parent, and a small business owner, I struggle.

It breaks my heart when I have to turn families away because I don't have any space available for their children. This is an every day occurrence. I have parents who currently have one child enrolled in my program come to me and ask me when they should start to try to get pregnant with a second child because they know infant spaces are almost non-existent. Almost half of Vermont infants and toddlers likely to need care don't have access to any regulated child care, and nearly 80% don't have access to high quality programs like mine. My program's next available full-time infant opening is June of 2018. I struggle when I must tell families I can't help them because I don't have any availability.

The costs associated with providing quality early experiences are high. We know that better educated professionals provide higher quality care. Yet the average annual income for child care teachers in Vermont is less than \$25,000, and often without benefits. In my center, all of our teachers are paid more than that average, receive paid time off for sickness, holidays, and vacations, and are eligible for a 50% child care tuition benefit. Our center also contributes up to \$300 per year for each employee's continuing professional development. Even with these limited benefits we offer, I am losing qualified, experienced teachers to other professions because they can't earn a livable wage in child care. And parents can't pay more. Middle income families with two parents and two young children are spending as much as 38% of their income on child care. I struggle with being able to compensate my teachers as they deserve.

What I do each and every day with the children entrusted to me makes a difference in their lives and in the lives of their families. Parents can go to work knowing that their children are in a healthy and safe environment with a teacher who truly cares about them and is providing opportunities to enhance their growth and development. Not only is the early education profession important to me, it is important to children and families, to the employers of those families, and to Vermont's economy. Numerous national studies have shown that investments in early childhood yield strong returns. A recent study from the Vermont Business Roundtable Research and Education Foundation finds that every

additional dollar Vermont invests to expand high-quality early care and learning programs would yield a return of \$3.08. Economic benefits include increased parent participation in the workforce, increased workforce stability and supply for businesses, and decreased spending on special education services for children as they move from high-quality early care and learning programs into the public school system.

Every child deserves a strong start in life. High quality child care is fundamental to that strong start. Vermont needs to invest in its children; it's the best investment we can make as a state. Please find a way to increase investments in high quality, affordable child care. I would be happy to discuss this with you further at your convenience. Please feel free to contact me at this email or at 802-878-5899 if you have any questions, comments, or concerns. Thank you for your time.

Trisha Scharf
4 Suffolk Lane
Essex Junction, VT 05452