

PARENT CHILD CENTERS ARE THE ANSWER

By Debra Gass

Debra Gass is the Executive Director of Brattleboro Town School District's Education Services, a Vermont Parent Child Center, Head Start and Early Head Start program serving Windham County families.

Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACEs are a hand that nobody should ever be dealt. Yet, many Vermonters have experienced more than one of these harmful experiences. Parent Child Centers (PCCs) were a remarkable innovation when they were first created nearly 30 years ago, and they are still on the cutting edge of prevention work with vulnerable families. PCCs have a two-generation approach that helps parents to deal with their own ACEs and also to change the game for their children, so those children are not dealt the same hand. PCC prevention programs and services help to keep children with their families and safe, bend the curve on rising health care costs, and promote healthy child development and access to quality early care and education.

PCCs across the state are focused on an effort to secure more state funding for our new Master Grant. The Grant is currently funded at approximately \$2 million, and PCCs conducted an analysis about market rate pay scales and have discovered that to bring our current staff to market rate pay and benefits, we will need an additional \$8 million to our Master Grant. This increase will greatly impact our ability to retain staff and provide continuity of prevention programs and services for Vermont's vulnerable families. In the past year, the Early Education Services Parent-Child Center experienced 24% staff turnover. Our strength-based, relationship-focused framework is what research shows works best to bring positive life changes to vulnerable families. This approach saves Vermont taxpayers millions of dollars. We must be able to retain qualified and talented employees to work with families, by paying commensurate and competitive staff wages. Currently, our wages are thirty-percent below market rate and we cannot afford adequate wages with the funding levels we receive.

As policy makers make tough budget choices this year, we hope they will keep Parent Child Centers in the forefront. Please support our work to strengthen Windham County families by encouraging our legislators to honor our request for an additional \$10 million to be distributed amongst all 15 Parent Child Centers in our Master Grant.

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