

Good evening,

My name is Grace Parks and I have been a Parent-Child Center Reach Up case manager since September of 2014. I believe that the services we provide are vital for a thriving community and are incredibly important to the people we serve. The flexibility of the Parent-child center allows us to tailor services to the specific needs of the clients and meet them where they're at—sometimes literally. I attend home and community visits frequently, as transportation is a huge problem in our area. I am also able to bring participants to financial management workshops, playgroup, doctor's appointments, job interviews, childcare visits, parent-support groups, etc.

I recently worked with a family who was behind on their rent, facing eviction and could not make ends meet with supplementary income they received. I referred them to the Financial Futures program and attended many meetings with them. Through this program they were able to learn financial management skills, improve their credit and earn incentives, which prevented them from losing their housing. They are now both working two jobs and have not had to come back on Reach Up.

Collaboration is a huge aspect of my job—I am constantly coordinating team meetings with client's and their other service providers. Being a part of the Parent-Child center keeps me connected and current on all available community resources, events and trainings. The Economic Services case managers love the PCC contract because not only do we share copious amounts of information and knowledge, but we're also able to give a lot more time and energy to younger participants. The other day I took a participant to the Humane Society to set up a Community Service Placement, and then to the DMV so she could get her learner's permit. I was able to transport her, which consequently saves money from being spent on taxi's and Ready to Go rides. This is a common occurrence thanks to the dynamic and unique nature of the Parent-Child center.

The extra concrete and emotional support I am able to give helps them feel valued and confident enough to take the first steps. All around Vermont, we are seeing extremely complex, and demanding cases. The need for extra support is forever growing, due in large part to the opioid crisis, and we know that parent-child centers help to reduce DCF custody rates and improve protective factors for at-risk families. The majority of our caseloads are experiencing severe mental health problems, such as social anxiety, depression, or PTSD. Many of our

participants may also be homeless, in need of quality childcare, or lacking stable, consistent transportation.

One particular success story came to mind when I was asked to think about why the Parent-Child center Reach Up case managers are so essential. When the young mother and her son came back to Reach Up, she had just experienced the tragic loss of a child, and found out that she was newly pregnant. On top of it all, she needed childcare and reliable transportation, had an open DCF case; and she found herself in precarious housing due to domestic violence. I referred her to an Early Childhood Support specialist from the Parent-Child center—which then led to a referral for housing case management. She knew that in order to move forward, she would need to secure part-time employment. She used her natural supports to make it work. After saving her paychecks, she became eligible and was awarded a vehicle through Good News Garage. Shortly after, she received a Vermont Rental Subsidy, found an apartment and was able to find affordable, quality childcare for her two children. She is now in the Post-Secondary Education program and attends Champlain college full time. We celebrate the small successes every day because we understand that sometimes small steps are required for achieving the bigger victories and this process is different for each individual.

If we lose the Parent-Child center Reach Up case manager contract it will be devastating to the young population that we serve. We see an overwhelming amount of mental health concerns in this field of work, so the flexibility and extra focus the Parent-Child center staff is able to provide is a critical component in the progression of our young people. The main objective for the Reach Up program is for everyone to become emotionally stable and financially independent. I believe that with the encouragement, education and empowerment we provide; our young citizens have the building blocks to create a flourishing future. In the last four years, I have been lucky enough to witness this happen first-hand.

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