



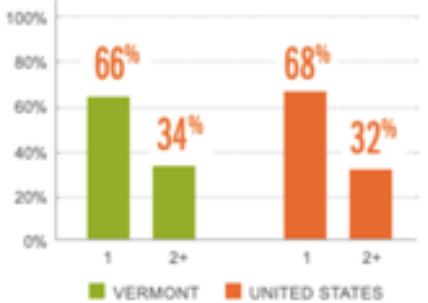
Seeking radical results - we can meet the needs of the children and youth in Vermont's care.

How are we doing?

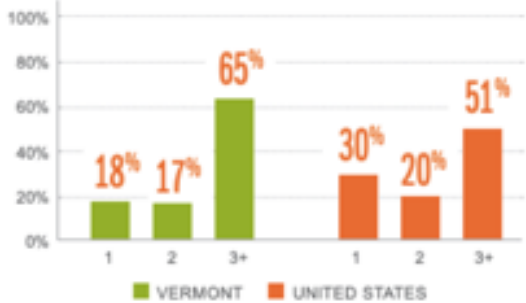


Data

Episodes in the Foster Care System



Number of Placements During Most Recent Foster Care Episode



VERMONT 2+ Foster Care Episodes



VERMONT 3+ Foster Care Placements



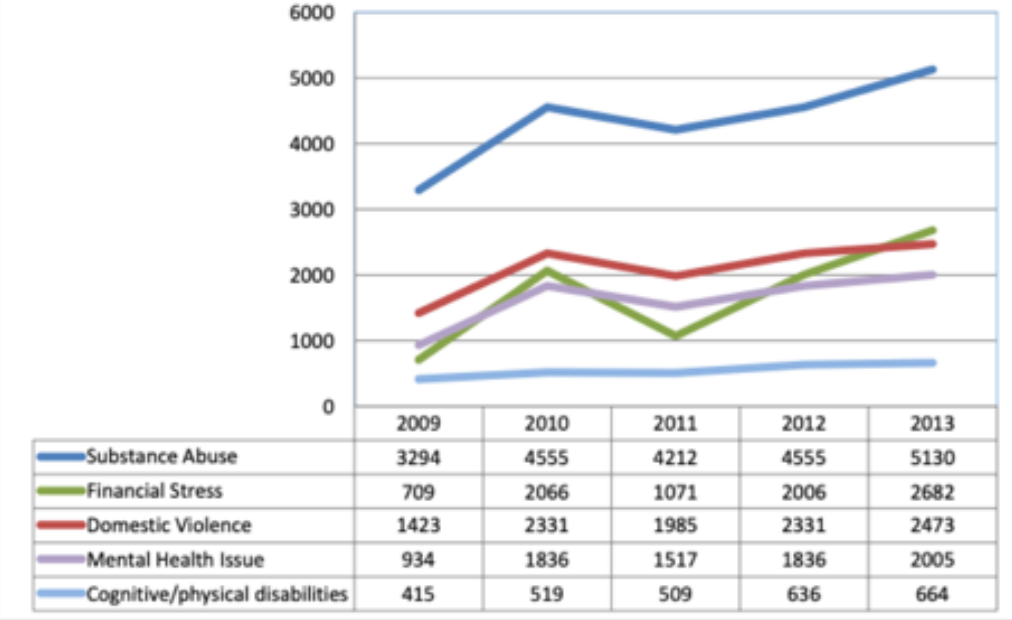
UNITED STATES 2+ Foster Care Episodes



UNITED STATES 3+ Foster Care Placements



Family Factors Identified by Reporters, 2009-2013



Stories – Qualitative Data



Foster Parent:

“Well, the Honeymoon Period’s over. My new foster child is starting to really act out. This is so hard.”

Foster Child:

“Well, the Hell Period is over. I’m starting to feel a bit safer and trust these strangers who call themselves my ‘foster parents.’ I think I can start letting them see how I really feel. This is so hard.”

Even at its very best, the interventions we impose are traumatic.



"I'm getting a call saying, 'Don't freak out, but your daughter was mistaken for another Aria,'" McCullough said.

Although KinderCare said McCullough's daughter was returned within the hour, the child's grandmother, Lana Leonard, said the damage had already been done.

"I said, 'What did you do?' [Aria] said, 'They took me and gave me toys to play with,'" Leonard said. "I said, 'Were you scared? You didn't know this lady!' She said, 'Yeah, Nana. I was very scared.'"

Leonard said the whole situation was "unacceptable" and was left looking for answers.

"There's no excuse," Leonard said. "There's no excuse at all."

>> [On Boston25News.com: Missing & Forgotten: DCF head shares changes, pilot program to protect kids](#)

KinderCare said it is taking the matter seriously, and is working with the DCF to prevent any further misunderstandings in the future.

"I don't want to see another kid go through what she had to go through," McCullough said.

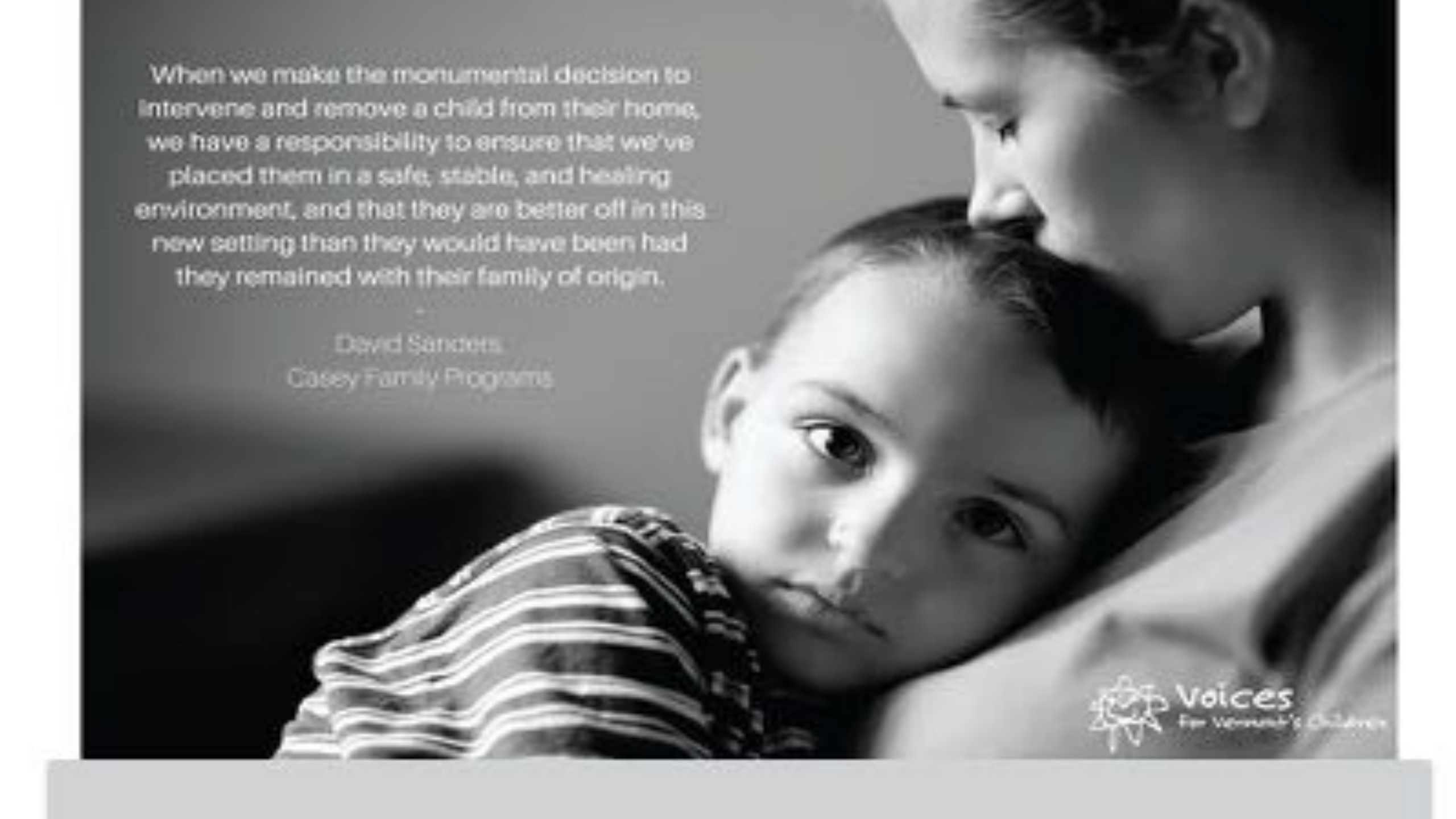
The Department of Children and Families said it "received a report and is investigating."

The cost of inaction is high....



“We start out recognizing them as victims; then fail to help them heal; and eventually punish them for expressing their pain.”

~ Citizens for Juvenile Justice



When we make the monumental decision to intervene and remove a child from their home, we have a responsibility to ensure that we've placed them in a safe, stable, and healing environment, and that they are better off in this new setting than they would have been had they remained with their family of origin.

— David Sanders,
Casey Family Programs

 **Voices**
For Vermont's Children

Do we know what it will take to improve?



Human Services



Do we know if we need different policies, different practice, more funding, or a combination of all three?



An OCA is a critical component of a functioning system. If designed properly, it will:

- instill trust when the system is operating as intended;
- Intervene/advise on behalf of children causing a reduction in harm;
- give the state an independent view of where to invest its time and resources.



The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) is not an administrator of programs. Rather, the OCA monitors and evaluates public and private agencies that are charged with the protection of children, and reviews state agency policies and procedures to ensure they protect children's rights and promote their best interest.

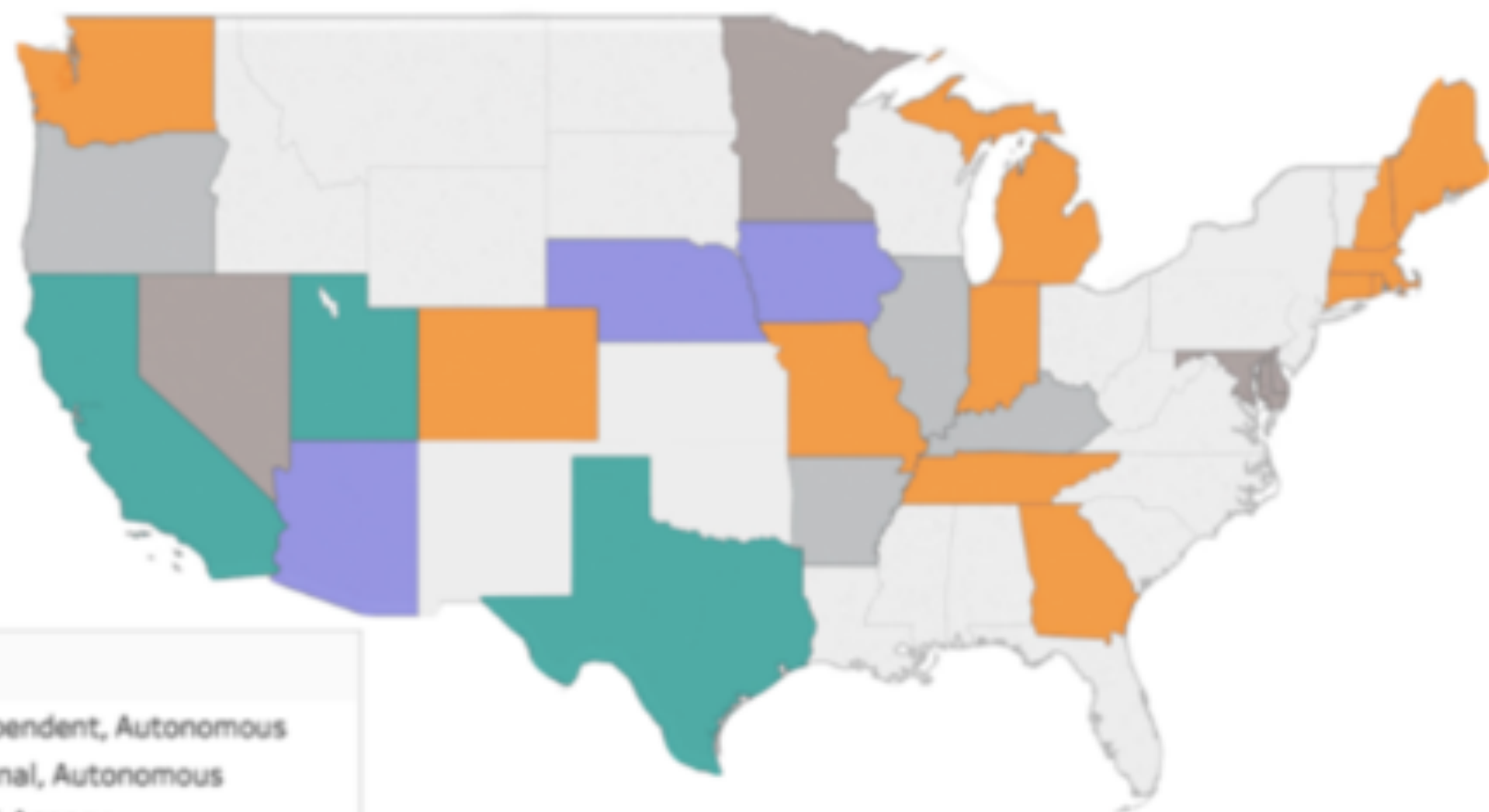


Child Advocate –



- Turns complaints into building blocks for better outcomes
- Performs random and targeting case review to better understand trends
- Makes recommendations to DCF, policy makers, and the public
- Responds to complaints with a credible review process
- Builds collaborative relationships for reform
- Maintains independence and impartiality
- **Listens and informs**

States with Independent Oversight of Child Protection



Type

- Independent, Autonomous
- Internal, Autonomous
- Multi-Agency
- Focused Constituency
- Non-Independent

Note: AK + HI are multi-agency

OCA helps to:

- advocate for children at risk;
- address public policy issues concerning juvenile justice, child care, foster care, and treatment
- review individual cases and investigate complaints;
- educate and inform the public of laws and services affecting families and children who are placed under state supervision;
- coach families, concerned citizens, and agencies to "navigate" public service and information systems and advocate for children effectively;
- review facilities and procedures of public or private institutions or residences where juveniles are placed; and
- facilitate change by bringing different agencies together to find creative solutions to difficult problems.

Structure

- Washington (appointed by the Governor, confirmed by the Senate, three year terms)
- Colorado (within judiciary - public board meetings, Board Members - Chief Justice Appointments (x3), Governor Appointments (x4), Senate President Appointment, Senate Minority Appointment, Speaker of the House Appointment, House Minority Leader Appointment)
- New Hampshire (executive branch)

Oversight Commission on Children's Services

- Recommend qualified candidates to the governor for appointment as Director of the Office of the Child Advocate
- Provide oversight of the Office of the Child Advocate
- Collaborate with the Office of the Child Advocate to identify and promote best practices
- Receive the Child Advocate's Annual Report and ensure its dissemination
- The Oversight Commission is made up of a wide variety of experts in policy, children's services, child advocacy, the courts and public safety who each serve a three-year term. Current members include:
- Senator Sharon Carson
- Senator Bette Lasky
- Representative Daniel Itse
- Representative Skip Berrien
- David Boutin (Chair)
- Joanne Ruel
- Representative Debra Altschiller, HAVEN NH
- Nancy Phillips, Nancy Phillips Associates, Inc.
- Honorable Susan Ashley, Rochester District Court
- Michelle Wangerin, JD, New Hampshire Legal Services
- Chief Enoch Willard, New Hampshire Association of Chiefs of Police
- Chief Robert Browne, New Hampshire Association of Chiefs of Police
- Nancy Rollins, Easter Seals
- Marty Sink, CASA
- Keryn Bernard-Kriegel, New Hampshire Children's Trust
- Joy Barrett, Granite State Alliance

Structure

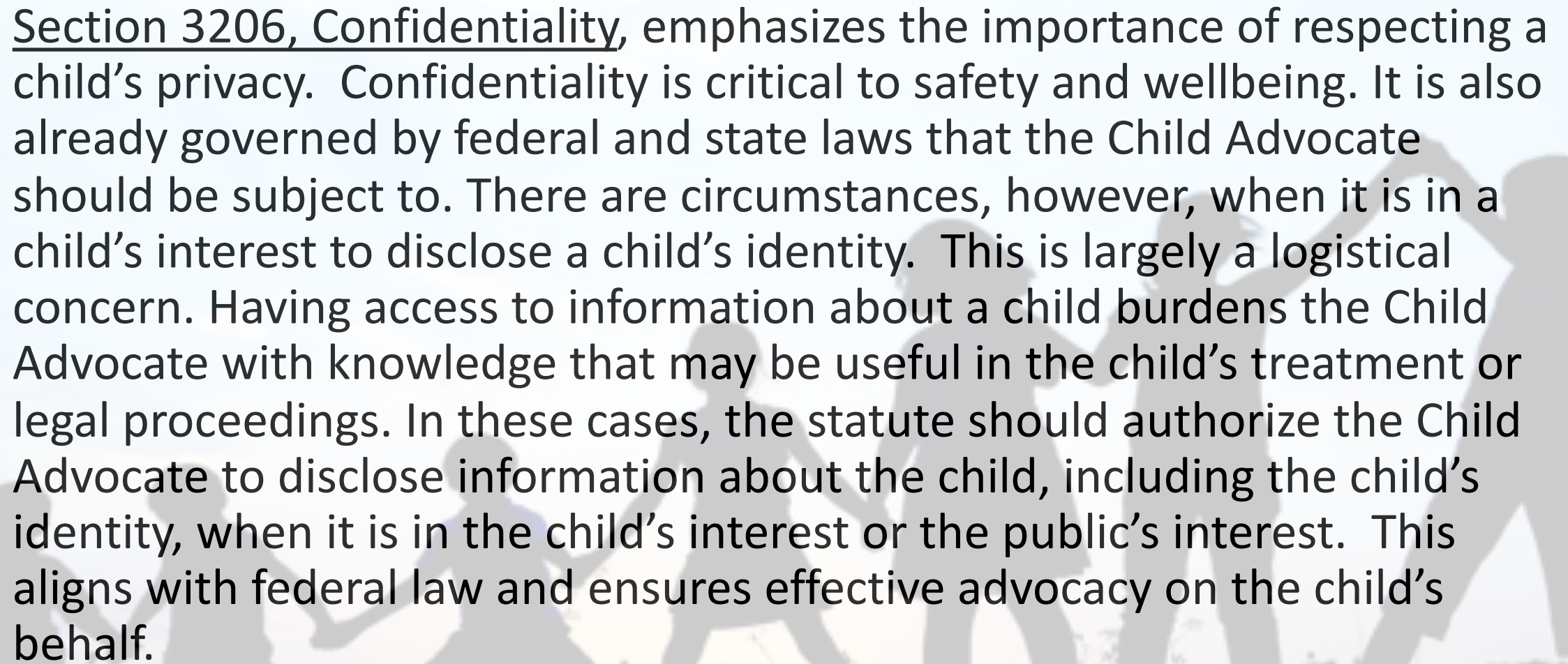
- VCAB
- Interaction with other existing complaint/appeals processes
- GALs

Scope

(4) Pursue administrative, judicial, or other remedies on behalf of a child or family receiving services from the Agency, including access orders from a District or Superior Court judge when access under subdivision (3) of this section has been unreasonably denied and all other reasonable attempts to gain access have failed.

(5) Represent the interests of a child or family receiving services from the Agency before the Human Services Board pursuant to 3 V.S.A. §§ 3090.8 and 3091.

Section 3206, Confidentiality, emphasizes the importance of respecting a child's privacy. Confidentiality is critical to safety and wellbeing. It is also already governed by federal and state laws that the Child Advocate should be subject to. There are circumstances, however, when it is in a child's interest to disclose a child's identity. This is largely a logistical concern. Having access to information about a child burdens the Child Advocate with knowledge that may be useful in the child's treatment or legal proceedings. In these cases, the statute should authorize the Child Advocate to disclose information about the child, including the child's identity, when it is in the child's interest or the public's interest. This aligns with federal law and ensures effective advocacy on the child's behalf.

A background image showing the silhouettes of several children holding hands in a circle, standing on a grassy field. The scene is set against a bright, low sun, creating a warm, golden glow. The children are of various heights and are positioned in a way that suggests they are participating in a group activity or game.

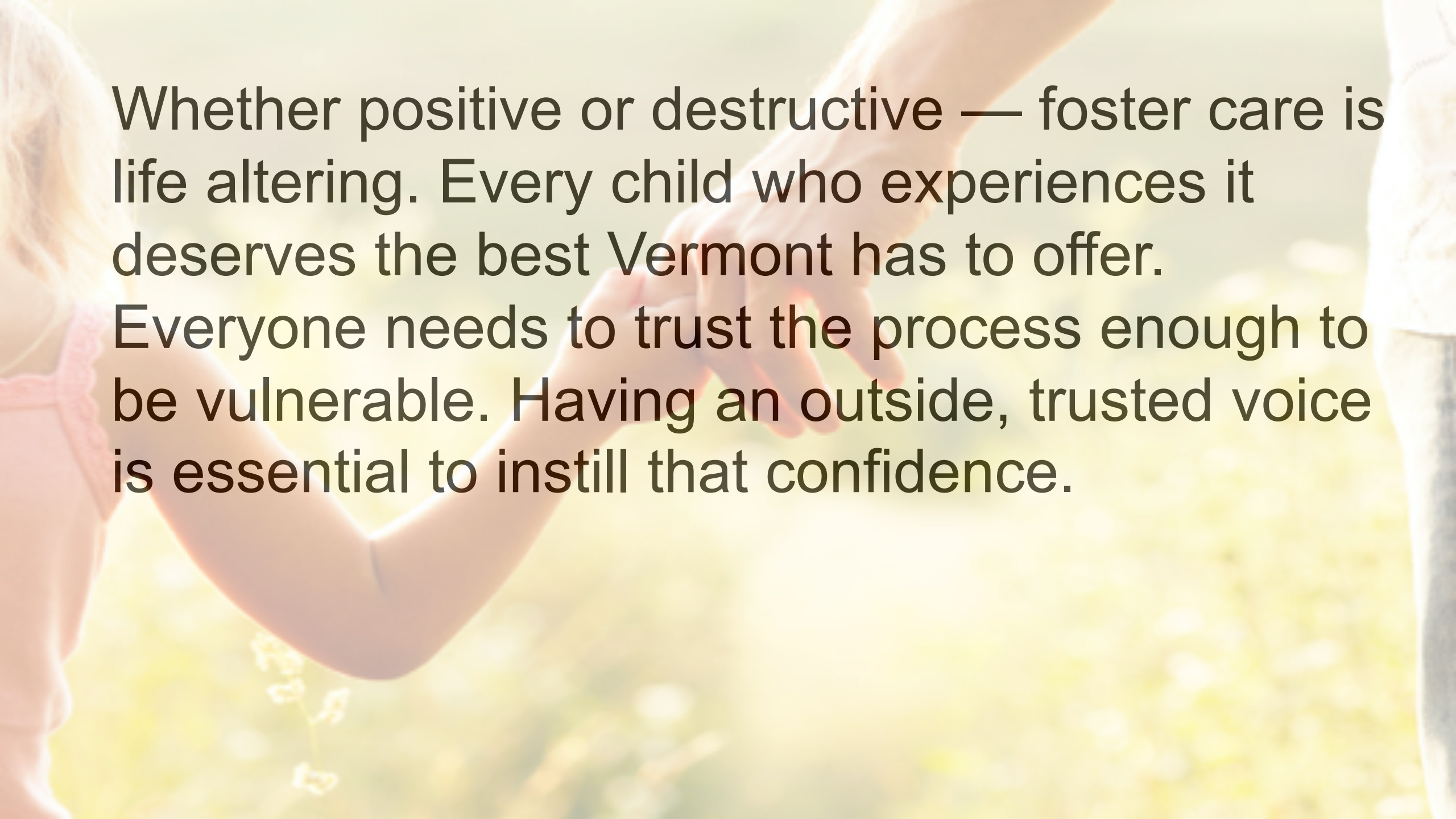


Voices from the field

While the model minimizes reliance on blame, it is not an excuse making process; there is a strong focus on accountability but the accountability is viewed as being owned by the broader, complex system rather than individuals within.

“[T]he OCA has brought a much needed spotlight to the work of the Division that has been missing for some time...I find the additional eyes and attention on the welfare of NH’s children only to be a positive change.”

-Kate LeBell Safety Program Specialist, Division for Children, Youth & Families, NH

A young girl with blonde hair, wearing a pink top, is holding hands with an adult whose hands are visible from the top right. They are outdoors, with a bright, sunlit background of green foliage. The text is overlaid on the image in a large, black, sans-serif font.

Whether positive or destructive — foster care is life altering. Every child who experiences it deserves the best Vermont has to offer. Everyone needs to trust the process enough to be vulnerable. Having an outside, trusted voice is essential to instill that confidence.

Useful resources:

