

Many years ago, the State asked communities to devise a plan to move the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) out of the State and into community partner organizations. The goal was to save the State money. The State called this *The Invitation to Communities*.

In Bennington:

- there were numerous meetings and committees with representation from Sunrise Family Resource Center (the local Parent Child Center), the local Director of The Dept. of Children and Families (DCF), Head Start, Building Bright Futures (BBF) and many others.
- the unanimous decision in Bennington County was to move CCFAP into the Community Child Care Support Services where Child Care Referral (CCR) was housed at Sunrise to further support wrap-around services for families.

Salaries and benefits of State employees are more costly than in community organizations and so this move was to, again, save the State money.

Both the Child Care Financial Assistance Program Specialist and the Child Care Referral Specialist have supportive and close relationships with local families and local early childhood professionals:

- Families receive support from these staff in ways that go far beyond the services they provide. Through these connections' families access concrete supports such as food, baby formula, diapers, and school supplies as well as community resources and referrals -all from their one PCC location.
- Families often learn about and access other PCC services through the doors of CCFAP and CCR.
- Families feel welcome and comfortable in the down town "home-like" setting where they can easily access wrap-around services/support with no stigma attached, with easy parking, and in an environment that welcomes children.
- If these services were moved to our local State office complex, families would be challenged in many ways including parking and bringing children through metal detectors. Their diaper bags would be security scanned by on-duty armed sheriffs and they would have to maneuver their way up flights of stairs.
- CCFAP serves a wide range of families. Some of these families would find accessing services through the local Reach Up office stigmatizing and therefore might not access the support they need to work or to attend school.
- The CCFAP and CCR staff at Sunrise have built strong long-lasting relationships with the families coming through the door where "Strengthening Families" is the motto. As well, area early childhood professionals have good connections and communication with this staff. This has helped a complicated system run smoothly and efficiently for almost 20 years. *"Its all about relationships."*

Child Care Financial Assistance, Child Care Referral and CIS Specialized Child Care staff are co-located at agencies across the state as their work is seriously intertwined. It is imperative that these services continue to be co-located to offer consistent cohesive services, cross training, and to minimize lost communication for Vermont's children and families.

On behalf of these children and families, this is not the time to make serious changes to these crucial well-established community-valued services. This change would further challenge parents/caregivers, children, and early childhood professionals at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has already presented so much stress and uncertainty.

It is curious that the State moved CCFAP out of the State to *save money* but now feels moving it back into the State will save money.

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