

Dear Members of the Vermont State Legislature,

I have no money to invest. I work at a Parent Child Center. Lacking money, I contribute what I can: my time and energy. Why? I want children and families in Vermont to have what I was blessed with as I was growing up; a sense of belonging in my community, a strong and supportive family, and access to education to develop, the skills and resources needed to address the many challenges of life:

- Access to early medical care so that a mild case of cerebral palsy could be diagnosed and addressed before fulfilling its crippling potential;
- Organizations like the Shriners who paid for my leg braces when my father's 99 dollar weekly salary could not.
- Educators who shared their expertise with us and taught my parents skills and strategies they needed to support me from a place of strength,
- Advocates who empowered and enabled us to understand that bullies could not define the person I was or limit our powerful family.

Yes, I was truly blessed. Despite growing up in a time of limited resources and money, I had a strong and supportive family that made sure I had what I needed to grow and thrive to be the adult I am today. My story began in the early 1960's when it was extremely rare for a child who was born three and a half months premature; weighing in at a pound and a half and measuring twelve inches to survive let alone walk and grow to adulthood. Thankfully, society has come a long way since then.

I am a family support worker and I work with many children and families who do not have what I had growing up. I choose this work because I believe in the power of the Parent Child Center approach to strengthen families. I do not make a lot of money, and I could make much more if I went to work somewhere else, but I choose to stay because I see the difference our combined Parent Child Center work does to improve the lives of children. Its multi-generational approach to support gives parents the opportunity to address their adverse childhood experiences while learning skills and techniques to enrich the lives of their children.

Children and families in Vermont should not have to rely on luck to access the services and supports they need to be strong. They should not have to worry that they may not be able to afford these vital services. I believe that families are more successful when they are able to access services within their own community in an environment that is welcoming and open to all families; strengths based, holistic and comprehensive. Thanks to parent/child centers and their ever

increasing partnerships families in Vermont can access services, resources, and referral to necessary supports in their own community and under one roof.

In order for these quality vital services to continue to be available to Vermont families, Parent Child Centers and their partners need the financial support of the Vermont Legislature in the form of :

- Increased funding for Parent Child Centers,
- Increased financial supports for families to access affordable, quality childcare,
- Available case management supports within Parent Child Centers to ensure strong wrap around family supports.

I have been a proud Vermonter for over 30 years. I have remained secure in the knowledge that thanks to Parent Child centers, their partners, and support from state and federal government, children and families here will have the benefit of services my family needed luck to find. Yes, everything comes at a cost and I am sure that deciding how to allocate limited funds is difficult. I suggest an investment in prevention using the Parent Child Center model. Research shows that investing in prevention is a more effective use of resources to ensure children reach their full potential than treating the effects of abuse after it has occurred. As it considers this years' budget, I humbly ask the Vermont State Legislature to expand its financial investment where I invest my time and energy; in children, families, and Parent Child Centers. Vermont's future walks through their doors daily.

Sincerely,

Kelly Ann Hughes
Milton Family Community Center