

To whom it may concern,

My name is Dallas Welch and for as long as I can remember I have been a Mother. At the age of 15 I had my first son. It was scary and at the time I had no idea what to do. I was living in Laconia, NH at the time and there were no supports other than planned parenthood to get me through the initial shock of the situation. Back in 1999 when I became pregnant the stigma surrounding teen pregnancy was overwhelming. I heard things like, “your life is over”, “you will never amount to anything” and “you have a long road ahead of you”. My mother moved me to Bellows Falls when I was 4 months pregnant and I felt alone, lost and consumed with all the negatives that were told to me, because at 15, you want to believe that adults know more than you in this situation. I started seeing an OB/GYN in VT. It was unlike anything I had encountered in NH they were kind and helpful. I was very sick the last 3 months of my pregnancy and had to be on complete bed rest.

Upon the birth of my 1st child, I felt helpless. I remember telling my mother I didn’t know how I was going to make it until he was year old. I am not sure why 1 year old was my goal. Maybe because at 15 a year can seem like a lifetime. I started seeking out opportunities to interact with my peers, making friends at 15 when you have a newborn was near impossible. I can remember vividly telling my sons pediatrician how alone I felt as a mother and as a young teen. The office manager suggested a playgroup, I would be able to let my son play and interact with other mothers. This sounded FANTASTIC!

After attending multiple playgroups, I met another young mom who had a daughter the same age as my son. I finally felt like I belonged somewhere. Without access to this playgroup my outcome may have been totally different with my son, because up until that point I was contemplating adoption.

Without organizations like the Springfield Area Parent Child Center I would not have been able to accomplish the goals I knew I was able too. The playgroup was just the beginning, over the years the PCC has helped me with childcare financial assistance, childcare placement education materials and emotional support. My son is now 19, and a healthy well-rounded young man thanks to these programs. I am now 34 and have 5 children. My youngest, a set of twins and my daughter attended Playworks at the Springfield Area Parent Child Center for years. During this time my daughter was able to get EEE services while in the daycare setting. She had an IEP at that age of 3 for speech issues, she had some emotional deficits due to a very tumultuous relationship between her father and I, and just simply needed some extra support to get her ready for Kindergarten. She got all the services needed and by the end of kindergarten was able to have the IEP completely removed and was caught up with children her own age. Again., without the Parent Child Center this situation would have had a totally different outcome.

Most recently, I have had the opportunity to be employed by the Springfield Area Parent Child Center as their Financial Controller. It wasn’t until I held this position that I realized how hard everyone works to keep the wheels spinning. How little funding is available to the organizations to provide these services to the community. The work that is done here is invaluable!

As a member of this community, an employee of the Springfield Area Parent Child Center and someone who has benefited from the services provided, I am asking that the funding to the area Parent Child Centers be increased. The PCC increase of \$8 Million starting this year would be a boost that these centers desperately need to continue providing these services. The wrap around services such as Children’s Integrated Services and Reach Up Case management are integral to meeting the vast variety

of parent that walk through these doors. Reach Up workers in the PCC network can connect with Parents on a level unlike the Economic Services offices. The Case managers here can meet parents in the center after they drop their kids off or travel to their homes. They are familiar with all the programs offered here as they are involved in the trainings and afforded the opportunity to hear information first hand that can then be passed onto clients. Without Reach Up the wrap around services and concrete supports would be missing a huge link. So, I ask that the Reach Up position continue to be funded.

Thank you for taking the time to read my story, I know it's a short snippet of my overall life experiences. This proposed increased funding request would allow for more outcomes like mine, it would allow more families to obtain goals that may otherwise be impossible.

Thank you,

Dallas Welch