

Public Budget Hearing: Testimony - Amy Johnson (Parent Child Center of NCSS)
February 25, 2019 – St. Albans, Vermont

My name is Amy Johnson and I'm the director of the Parent Child Center of Northwestern Counseling and Support Services. I am here today in support of increasing state funding for Parent Child Centers providing essential state services. Master grant funding must increase by \$8,000,000 to close the funding and salary gap. Furthermore it is critically important for our most vulnerable families that the Parent Child Center Reach Up case management contract remain intact. *young*

PCCs provide upstream prevention and early intervention services to all children and families and especially to those at risk. PCCs build communities where children and families thrive; communities that support children in having a healthy childhood. When a family becomes part of the PCC, they are naturally and automatically brought into the full scope of services and programming we offer. This seamless service delivery system allows us to support families holistically with programming that has a positive impact on everyone.

For this reason, among many others, we see positive gains for our Reach Up families – Co-location of Reach Up case management and early childhood services ensures that parents are supported to access resources, information, guidance, and community supports that are critical to their children's well-being during the early years in their development

The services that PCCs provide are strong in their ability to mitigate the risk and effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). PCCs have a two-generation approach that helps parents navigate and deal with their own ACEs and to change the game for their child, to decrease the chance of them experiencing ACEs and toxic stress.

The great upstream services of PCCs highlights the critical importance of investing in front end work. PCC programs and services build protective factors in a family that improves their overall well-being, strengthens the child's environment, and reduces the likelihood of abuse and neglect.

The impact isn't always immediate but what is gained, in the long run, by providing upstream services is cost effective and only makes our state stronger and healthier. Prevention has a long term ripple effect on the life of a child and their family that is profound. Our system is powerful and we are making a difference - I'm often reminded of this when I reflect on the words of our families:

"Without the PCC, I would not be where I am today. I would not be sober. I would not have my child. I would not know how to be a parent. I would not have a safe place to live. I wouldn't have anything. I chose the PCC because I knew it had the ability to help me change my life. And it did." - ~~REDACTED~~ Reach Up family

Despite chronic underfunding, we move forward in our pursuits to support children and families. If we want families to get the services they need then we need to invest in services and organizations that provide these to families; specifically programs we know and trust to provide services that work for families. To support healthy family systems, we need both an increase in the PCC master contract funding as well as our Reach Up contract to remain in place. For our families, Parent Child Centers are the answer.