

My name is Justine Mee and I have been a home visitor for the past 9 years. I am currently a Family support home visitor through Children's Integrated Services, or CIS, at Lund.

Family support Home visiting is one of the core services in the continuum of CIS. The prevention and early intervention services that comprise CIS have immediate and long-term benefits. They support children's social, emotional and cognitive development, family unification and stability, parents' contribution to Vermont's workforce, and enhance and improve outcomes of complementary services such as DCF Family and Economic Services. In an era of concern over the per-student costs of K-12 education, CIS supports children before they reach that system, providing effective interventions for developmental issues that are more costly to address as children age.

I have seen firsthand the benefits of these early childhood and family support interventions. I currently support a family that has struggled with parental addiction, mental illness, homelessness, and domestic violence. All issues that put young children at risk.

Last year, after completing intensive residential treatment this mother returned to her hometown and without the home based family support that CIS offers, she relapsed. DCF became involved and she was at risk of losing custody of her child. I began my work with this family as their family support home visitor. Her daughter was three years old at the time. When I met them, mom was struggling with severe depression, as she had not continued her medications or therapy after residential treatment. She was also struggling to parent her child appropriately and reported that she often felt overwhelmed and unsure how to manage her child's behavior. Throughout the course of our work together, this mom has stabilized her mental health which has allowed her to develop skills and capacity to better support her child. She has engaged meaningfully with me to learn how to support her child's development and I have been able to see firsthand, her relationship and bond with her daughter grow and strengthen. Mom has learned to understand her daughter's needs and has learned strategies around how to help her daughter when she is struggling. She has learned to lean on the supports they have available and to ask for help when she needs it. This has helped to keep both mom and her child safe. This past summer, the family was doing so well that DCF was able to close their case. This is not to say that this parent's life is without struggle because it is not. She has to work hard every day to remain sober, maintain her mental health, and practice healthy decision making when it comes to her relationships. The difference now is that this parent has supports to speak with, knows how to ask for support or help, and she will be the first to tell you that she would not be where she is today if it was not for the CIS family support home visiting services she received through Lund.

While the Governor's budget recommend's level funding for CIS, the current state plan would mean a cut to CIS services in Chittenden County. If funding is cut, I worry about this family as well as many others that are in similar situations. This is a common story among the families that we support, who often lack natural supports and rely on CIS to help develop protective factors and strengthen their family. This often includes helping them to build accountability and

keep on track for the life they truly want to live. Developing these skills and a healthy support system takes time, hard work, and trust. I know this mother loves her child and would do anything she could for her, and part of her being a healthy parent means having access to supports like CIS. With the planned cuts to CIS in our county, it is likely this family and others like them will not have what they need to be safe and to thrive. We have already seen what happened when this family did not have this support and now we have seen how they have flourished with it.

On behalf of Vermont families and children, I am asking that you ensure that CIS services are fully funded. This requires an increase of \$2.4 million in CIS funding in FY21.

Thank you.