

When I was 18 and a senior in high school, I became pregnant unexpectedly. I was very scared and had no idea what this meant for my life and my future. With the support of my baby's father I made the choice to keep my baby. One of the first things I did after making this choice was to go see my high school guidance counselor who I had a very good relationship with. Her response was "Oh No! You mean you're ruining your life?" She did not offer me education, support, or resources. After managing through very difficult pregnancy sickness, scary weight loss, upheaval in my life situation, and graduating from high school, I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. I was lucky to have loving support in the room with me while I gave birth. But I was terrified to ask for help. I didn't know who to ask or even what to ask for. Soon after the birth a woman came into my hospital room and asked if I knew how to nurse. I said no. After asking quick permission she grabbed on to my body and latched the baby on and told me this is what I needed to do to feed the baby. She then left the room and I never saw her again. She did not offer me education, support or resources. Two months later, though my baby was nursing well, we had a doctor's appointment and my daughter's weight wasn't as high as it should have been. The Nurse Practitioner in the room with me stated, while looking down at her clipboard and not making eye contact, "If you don't figure out how to feed that baby more I'm going to have to call the state." She did not offer me education, support or resources.

It was many months later before I discovered my local Parent Child Center and all that it offered. When I began bringing my daughter to playgroups I made connections to other moms and to people who were eager to offer me ideas or talk about the challenges of parenting. Though I became aware that the PCC had other programs and support I was still very scared to ask for help. However, the person I saw most often when coming in for playgroups was the woman at the front desk. I ended up accessing other supports (namely Child Care Financial Assistance) but it wasn't one of the formally trained assigned workers who I connected with most or who got me everything I needed. It was the woman behind the front desk. Every time I walked in she would say hi, remember my name, ooh and aah over my baby, and make sure I had whatever paperwork I needed to get the help I qualified for. Throughout this time and several years later after the birth of my second child, I continued to make connections within the organization and find people who offered me education, supported me, and brought out resources.

When we talk about building capacity within our Parent Child Centers in the state of Vermont, I think of this story. I think about how my life and my experience could have been different if my local Parent Child Center had had more capacity. What would it have looked like if they were there in that guidance counselor's office. Offering her the education needed so she could have helped me make connections. Being present so I could have started building a relationship with someone who wanted to support me from the very beginning. What would it have looked like if someone had been in that child birth center offering me lactation support I didn't even know I needed. How would it have been different if that Nurse Practitioner had supported me to connect with my Parent Child Center instead of threatening me with state involvement. I can tell you that I would have lived a life riddled with much less anxiety, fear and social isolation.

With additional capacity in our organizations we can be in those schools, those childbirth centers, those pediatric practices and beyond. We can be where the families are. We can ensure consistent staff throughout the organization because that person at the front desk is just as important when it comes to engaging with families as the master's level social worker trained in evidence-based practices. We can reach more people and we can reach them sooner to offer them education, support and resources and ensure every child has the best start possible.

By supporting the PCC bill S. 263 you will be supporting this capacity building for the entire state within all PCCs. Please also support the \$4million ask of the Parent Child Center Network for additional funding in the Master Grant in an effort to reach to the 3-year goal of \$10 million in additional funding.

Thank you

Margot Holmes

Executive Director

Springfield Area Parent Child Center