

Good morning. My name is Beth Miller and I am the Community Impact Director for Rutland County Parent Child Center (RCPCC), an organization [that serves roughly 80 children throughout Rutland County, and focuses](#) on the health and well-being of families. Thank you for welcoming me to into your committee.

Let's start with the problem. Food security and, hence, adequate nutrition are true challenges to many of the families in Rutland County and across the state. According to Hunger Free Vermont, 1 in 7 [Vermont children live in food insecure homes](#). Over 90% of the families served through the programs at Rutland County Parent Child Center are living at or below [the](#) poverty line and access to nutritious meals can be difficult for these families. Additionally, many families not in poverty struggle to have enough to eat and do not qualify for 3Squares or designated free or reduced lunch. These problems, food insecurity, inadequate nutrition, and hunger are all Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) which impact physical and emotional health, as well as behavioral and academic performance. These effects can stay with a child their entire life and continue generationally unless steps are taken to break the cycle. RCPCC is committed to breaking these cycles in all of its program areas.

To address the issues of inadequate nutrition, hunger, and food insecurity specifically, RCPCC has begun to implement a strong and multifaceted food program in our community, [enhancing](#) the 3,000 meals per month at [our two](#) Early Childhood Education (ECE) sites. This initiative is greatly enhanced through the Farm to School and Child Nutrition grant [we were granted by the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets](#).

Through [the state's growing Farm to School and Early Childhood efforts](#), RCPCC will have the opportunity to develop a well-structured, well planned, and well-integrated food program within ECE. The Farm to School [and Child Nutrition](#) grant will help RCPCC to dramatically transform the existing food service program at our sites from what has been mediocre to one that is exemplary by using more locally sourced fresh ingredients and by bringing food and nutrition directly into our young classrooms. It is here, and in the cafeteria that we can begin with the child to reset an expectation of healthy eating for themselves - and eventually within the family. All this requires a well-trained and enthusiastic staff and a team of professionals committed to helping them. The team built through the Farm to School [and Child Nutrition](#) grant provides these professional resources. Our own professional staff is excited to be a part of this team, helping the children they care for shift paradigms to make long lasting changes in their lives.

By bringing locally sourced fresh food and nutrition into the classroom, we can begin with the child to reset an expectation of healthy eating for themselves and within the family. Involving kids in hands-on, integrated food practices creates interest and acceptance of new foods and balanced meals. These ideas come home to the parents through the natural excitement and curiosity of children, causing transformation within the family meals at home. Vermont schools with Farm to School programs have reported two times the national average in vegetable consumption and we fully expect similar results!

With Farm to School [and Early Childhood](#) we will be growing our partnerships within the broader community by bringing the farm sector into our educational programming. It's exciting to think of our children knowing who is growing their apples, how their potatoes are grown, and where in the Rutland County community these farmers work and live to [grow](#) the salad on their plates. Knowing the farmer gives added import to the food, knowing the food gives added import to the farmer. Vermont is fortunate in that we have so many individuals committed to working the land and creating a healthful food system. Introducing children to this healthier, fresher food system through cafeteria, classroom, and community will help them to understand some of the strongest values held by Vermont in a comprehensive way.

The benefits of the Farm to School [and Early Childhood](#) program are having [positive](#) affect across a broad spectrum of needs in Vermont families. Introducing the program to Early Childhood [settings](#) is brilliant, catching children and their families at a time when crucial lifelong patterns can be remade.

I ask [for your support in funding this vital program at the same level of \\$231,000 as Fiscal Year 2019 so we can work towards fully funding the program's goals at \\$500,000/year. This investment](#) [builds](#) on the good work that is [already](#) having [a positive and lasting](#) impact on children and families throughout Vermont.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Beth Miller, Community Impact Director, Rutland County Parent Child Center