

Rebecca Buck

From: laura evans <levansvt@yahoo.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 28, 2019 6:11 PM
To: Rebecca Buck
Subject: Fw: Personal testimony re H194 -- DRAFT -- Please let me know when you get this, Anna, even if you can't read it right away. Thanks! When you're able to, I love any feedback you can offer.. Thanks

A CAREGIVER'S VIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF H194

Dear members of the House Appropriations Committee,
I didn't make it on Monday to one of the budget hearings on H194, so I'm submitting this written testimony.

I am so glad to be able to weigh in on this historic bill, aimed at improving child care in Vermont, and making it more available and affordable for Vermont families. If it makes it into law, H194 will give a hefty boost to young children, families, businesses, and potentially to the whole social fabric and economic well-being of Vermont.

I was an early childhood teacher-caregiver for about 40 years, mostly in child care centers, working in turn as a teacher, lead teacher, and sometimes substitute. At times I also worked one-on-one, weekends or after school, with an individual boy or girl through Health Care and Rehabilitation Services.

It was easy to see that over time, good care and teaching -- with responsive attention and warm affection -- could perhaps impact a child's whole lifetime in positive ways. Young children need consistent adult caregivers who clearly like them and listen to them with interest and respect, and encourage them in their personal explorations and discoveries. Such caregivers have a huge effect on children's brain development, on their confidence, intelligence, and eagerness to discover and learn new things, their creativity in solving problems, and their ability to care about the needs of others.

All of this is especially true for babies. I used to think that a baby needed *someone* close by, ready to hold them, feed them, rock them, carry them around, and change them. It didn't matter who it might be, moment to moment, I thought. Anyone who was alert and responsive, with arms, a lap, and a kind voice, and who knew how to change a diaper would do. However, over the years it became increasingly clear to me that people are not interchangeable! Bonded, steady, long-term relationships -- ones that can be counted on -- matter immensely to babies, just as they do to toddlers and older young children. Such relationships are essential for creating the first building block of healthy human development: BASIC TRUST.

I want to share with you some experiences I had with a 4-year-old boy--Gary, I'll call him-- at a small child care center where I worked for 15 years. The day Gary's single-parent father brought him in to sign him up, Gary shocked us by punching a little girl standing nearby! (Looking back, I think that he

was feeling very tense and afraid about the situation, and her curiosity and intent way of watching him, freaked him out. He was maybe scared that someone was going to hurt him and (at least unconsciously) wanted to strike before being struck.

Gary became part of my small 4-year-old group and I became the primary teacher for this time-bomb of a kid with his tendency toward sudden acts of unpredictable violence-- like tearing up another child's painting or knocking over someone's block tower, if not the child himself. He once threw a heavy desk-top stapler through a window.

Those first days and weeks with Gary were hard for him and the rest of us. While he knew which of his behaviors were OK and which ones weren't, he seemed helpless in controlling his violent impulses. I'd wake up in the night thinking about him--in my group and also in his future. I pictured him later on in school, being seen, and seeing himself, as "the bad boy". I imagined him being disciplined, often isolated, feeling without much worth--lonely and discouraged. I even pictured him as an adult, locked in prison.

Gary didn't need to be punished, as a way to teach him what was acceptable and to get him to behave. He already felt bad enough about himself at those moments when he messed up. He didn't need to be blamed and shamed. He did need at times someone to take the reins (his) till he had his wits back. I would stop the hurtful or destructive behavior with as little force as possible, and without condemnation.

Gradually things got better. He came to feel more relaxed and safe; he learned with help to sense when he was about to lose it, and to take preventative action. For one, he would move, on his own, to a space where he felt less overwhelmed and safer. (One spot was his cubby where he'd sit hugging his stuffed kitty. Another was a bean bag chair in the Book Nook where he'd look at a favorite book.) He also learned to get out a big ball of clay that he could use to release emotional tension by poking, pinching, twisting and pounding. Sometimes others of us would join in! When he was mad at someone, he got so he would say something-- directly, clearly, strongly -- like "You took my truck and I'm mad! Don't take things that I'm using!" Or, "I want a turn on the swing! It's *my* turn now!" Then a teacher would help both children to express their wants and feelings, to listen to each other and to figure out, together, something they could both be content with.

Gary's successes over time were due, I think, in part to our overall belief in the basic goodness and loveableness of every child. We worked to hold in mind each one's abundant potential for cognitive, emotional, and social growth, no matter what their hard life situations might be, or might have been, and whatever surface behavior might be going on. Our small licensed center, with its shoestring budget, had about 25 children, ages 2-5, an excellent staff, underpaid but dedicated, and a good ratio of about 1 teacher for every 4 or 5 children.

So it was possible to spend a lot of one-on-one time with each one of them, listening with good attention, helping them know they were physically and emotionally safe, liked, and believed in. We saw them as whole, good, interesting people and we had a strengths-based approach to supporting their growth into their best, most competent, caring selves. We responded with interest to the things children talked about, or showed, were individually interesting to *them*, and we'd relaxedly set out relevant art/math/construction materials, toys or books they might like to use.

One more thing about Gary. He and his little sister lived with their father, "Bill", who must have felt overwhelmed at times, caring for a 4-year-old and a 2-year-old on his own. (The mother of the family lived very far away, in a shelter, and they hadn't seen her in a long time.) At a parent conference Bill told me that sometimes he would blow up and spank Gary, really hard. "But," Bill said, "I was really

shocked a while ago by something Gary said. At a time when I *wasn't* losing it, he looked me right in the eye, and he said "I don't want you to spank me *any more*, Daddy, cuz it *hurts*, and I don't *like* it! ""

Bill said that somehow those words really hit home and he thought about them a lot. He said "I don't know when I last hit him; it's been quite a while now." I was impressed that Gary was learning not only to use words to express to his peers what he wanted and didn't want, but that he'd been able to do it with his father too. He got positive feedback when his father listened, took him seriously, and changed his behavior.

I've tried to indicate, through talking about one child, the type of positive changes that can happen in children's lives, and by extension, in the lives of communities, through a substantial investment in quality child care. I do so hope that H194 is passed, and that children in Vermont will have greatly increased access to high quality, more available, and more affordable care.

Sincerely,
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PS The writing of child psychiatrist Bruce Perry (particularly in his book *The Boy Who Was Raised As A Dog*) is instructive regarding the needs of a developing young child's brain. He describes the actual developmental stunting of portions of the brain, and damage to a child's life, from the trauma of severely neglectful child care and its lack of consistent close relationships.