



PARENT CHILD CENTERS HELP ACHIEVE STATE GOALS

Parent Child Centers (PCCs) are a network of 15 community-based non-profit organizations, serving all of Vermont. PCCs were created through Vermont Statute, and the purpose of each PCC is to provide “prevention and early intervention services such as parenting, education, support training, referral and related services to prospective parents and families with young children, including those whose children are medically, socially, or educationally at risk.” PCCs are the hub of services for families with young children – an actual place in the local community where families are always welcome and can always get the support they need, regardless of economic status or family status.

The services that Parent Child Centers provide are critical to achieving Vermont’s stated outcomes for families. The bullets below are some of the goals that Vermont has prioritized. Below each bullet are examples of how PCCs help Vermont’s families achieve these goals..

Vermont families are safe, stable, nurturing, and supported.

- Parent Child Centers Coordinate Vermont’s Children’s Integrated Services Programs in their regions. Until the pandemic, visits to participating families’ homes was the primary setting in which services were delivered. This amounts to tens of thousands of visits to Vermont’s young families statewide.
- Through the Children’s Integrated Services Program, PCCs support children like Aydin at the PCC of Northwestern Counseling & Support Services, who face challenges in socializing and communicating with their peers.
- Parent Child Center Home Visitors help participating families access critical services like 3SquaresVT or WIC to meet their needs at home.
- Parent Child Centers help single mothers like Meghan Daigneault at Sunrise PCC permanently reunite with their children who have been in DCF custody.

Vermont’s children and young people achieve their potential.

- All Parent Child Center child care programs are 4 or 5 STARS, ensuring that all participating children are attending high quality early childhood programs.
- Parent Child Centers help children like Ayrton, at the Family Center of Washington County, achieve their potential by providing developmental services at no cost to the family and in the child’s most natural environment, in their childcare or home.
- Parent Child Centers offer children and young people a wide range of services, including providing children like Zoey at the Springfield Area PCC with occupational, physical, and speech therapy.
- Approximately 65% of families who have their children enrolled in Parent Child Center programs receive Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFAP).
- Parent Child Centers provide parenting education and coaching to parents like Sage and Jamie with the Family Center of Washington County, so they can continue to support their children at home.

PARENT CHILD CENTERS = RESULTS

The mission of the Vermont Parent Child Center Network is to provide children, youth and families with strength based, holistic and collaborative services across Vermont with a focus on early childhood education and prevention services. The Network provides leadership, support and advocacy on behalf of its membership and in collaboration with key partners to achieve the best outcomes for families.

Vermont provides learners with educational services of the scope and rigor needed for the attainment of a high school diploma.

- One-third of all Parent Child Centers offer formal education programs that are approved by the Vermont Agency of Education for high school completion, helping young women like Ashley at the RCPCC obtain a high school diploma outside of the traditional schooling system while pregnant.
- Parent Child Centers' Learning Together program helps mothers like Cher at The Family Place achieve academic credits towards a high school diploma.
- Parent Child Centers help mothers like Harmony at Addison County PCC, who has two young children, attain a high school diploma at the speed and rigor that is suited for her unique schedule.

Vermont provides decent, affordable housing, and builds strong communities.

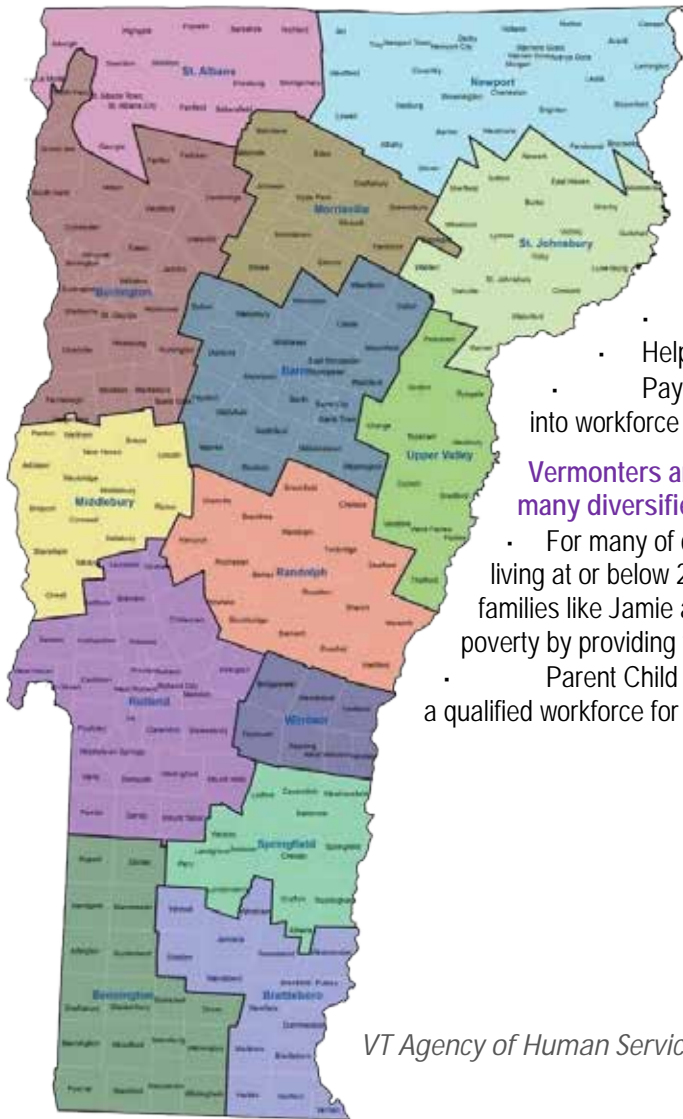
- Parent Child Center Housing Advocates help families like Jamie and Sage with the Family Center of Washington County, attain housing. Within 3 weeks of working with PCC staff, Jamie and Sage were able to secure a one-bedroom apartment in Montpelier after spending some time being homeless with their child.
- Parent Child Centers help mothers like Harmony at the Addison County PCC find safety from abusive relationships by helping them secure stable housing. Addison has a 10-unit first time renters program that provides perpetually affordable housing.
- Parent Child Centers build strong communities by hosting family events that connect participating families with the surrounding community. PCCs help families who are new to the area, like Sarah and her husband with the Orange County Parent Child Center, connect to other people and resources in their area.
- Since July 2020, the Northeast Kingdom PCC South has helped 113 housing insecure families find homes. The Washington County PCC has helped house another 31 previously homeless families.

Vermonters are prepared for good paying jobs available from Vermont's many diversified employers and work in a variety of sectors.

- Vermonters are prepared for good paying jobs available from Vermont's many diversified employers and work in a variety of sectors.
- Employment support and job coaching
- Help to achieve good paying jobs
- Clients referred from Reach Up
- Accessing affordable, quality childcare
- Helping parents pay for childcare - get them through CCFAP eligibility
- Pay back bills or pay upfront fees to get into childcare so they can get into workforce

Vermonters are prepared for good paying jobs available from Vermont's many diversified employers and work in a variety of sectors.

- For many of our programming, nearly all families come to Parent Child Centers living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. Parent Child Centers help pull families like Jamie and Sage with the Family Center of Washington County out of poverty by providing them with wrap-around services that meet all of their needs.
- Parent Child Centers provide life skills training and job coaching, helping to build a qualified workforce for a prosperous economy.



VT Agency of Human Services Health Districts

We first met Harmony (not her real name) in Spring 2020 when she was referred to the Addison County Parent Child Center (ACPCC) by the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Harmony and Clara, her Outreach worker, bonded well during their first two-hour meeting, where Clara gained an understanding of Harmony's circumstances. It was clear that Harmony had experienced some extremely dark times and several bouts of homelessness over the past few years. Harmony had been in a very unstable and violent relationship with the father of her two young children, and her primary concern was their safety. She had recently placed them both with foster families to ensure their wellbeing, and she knew she needed help.

Harmony knew she had found a safe place when Clara told her about the Addison County Parent Child Center's programs. Harmony had almost lost hope of finishing school, so when Clara mentioned that the ACPCC team could help her finish her high school diploma, her eyes lit up. Clara told her about the Learning Together Program, where participants can work on their individual academic requirements alongside other young people, who for a myriad of reasons, including unstable homes, addiction and homelessness, can work towards their own personal goals.

Harmony joined the Learning Together program at the start of the Fall semester in 2020 and has been guided by the whole ACPCC team. One of the most urgent aspects to secure Harmony's stability was helping her find secure and safe housing, and she is now the proud tenant of a beautiful apartment that she takes great care of, enjoying the space and tranquility of the area. Harmony's words are testimony to her growth and learning on the program:

"Clara (my Outreach worker) helped me think about how I could make healthy choices for my daughters and get my own housing. I was homeless for about six months and was so tired of moving from one shelter to a motel room and back to a shelter. It was exhausting and no way to live. In a few months, Clara helped me get my own new apartment in Vergennes. It's just an amazing feeling when I walk into my apartment at the end of each day. I actually have a place to call home that is safe and beautiful... I have control of what happens in my place."

Harmony's youngest child attends the ACPCC fulltime in the therapeutic childcare program, where she receives outstanding childcare with our knowledgeable team. The ACPCC provides daily transport for Harmony and her youngest child. A member of the ACPCC team has attended every court appearance with her. The ACPCC provides childcare, parent education and training as well as support and guidance. The ACPCC is a wrap-around team for her and her children, helping her with a long-term planning for her children's safety and well-being.

For so long, Harmony had been forced to be self-reliant, and the ACPCC Learning Together program has provided a space to feel safe and open herself to acquiring new skills. As part of her two-year program at ACPCC, Harmony is working towards her high school diploma, and currently, she is about to enter her senior year. Some of Harmony's highlights over the last year include discovering a love of poetry and registering to vote for the first-time last November!

Harmony has some learning challenges, so has benefited enormously from the one-on-one Learning Together sessions. She has thrived in her small peer group, where she has been able to practice her social skills and develop close relationships. Harmony has found a safe and supportive space where she has been able to practice reading the room, take appropriate turns in a conversation, listen carefully, and regulate her emotions under the caring and watchful eye of the whole team. Harmony has made firm friends at the center and has had the opportunity to engage in simple and fun outdoor activities including bike rides, 'hide-and-go-seek', and spend time at the Snow Bowl during the early spring.

The wrap-around services offered by the ACPCC have meant that Harmony could learn alongside the professional and highly qualified childcare providers as part of part of her school credits. Over the last year, Harmony has had full attendance, which over COVID has proved a challenge for many, yet Harmony has been undeterred! As part of the support provided, Harmony gets to see her daughter everyday within the safe confines of the childcare program, where she is gaining parenting skill and learning alongside the childcare team, who model and support her learning. *"I've spent a lot of time in childcare this year learning patience. I love spending time with my daughter in the PCC childcare. I love watching my daughter play with her friends... I love to play with her but I'm also learning to give*



her time when she wants to be left alone. I'm working on taking care of my emotions, so my daughter doesn't feel my upset feelings." The emphasis on social and emotional development of the therapeutic program has been of particular benefit to Harmony; as a child her home life at times was chaotic, and she had spent several years in foster care herself. She has gained an understanding of how to model language effectively with children, learning about children's social and emotional development, with an emphasis on kind voices and safe choices.

In addition to finishing her high school diploma and working in childcare, The LT program offers additional work experience in-house, where Harmony has been able to learn alongside our excellent kitchen coordinator, helping prepare healthy and delicious meals and snacks that are made available all day to participants, children, families and staff. Additionally, she has been involved in clerical work at our reception, where with team guidance, she gets to greet visitors, help answer the phones, and prepare non-confidential documents.

Harmony has blossomed over the last year with the guidance of the whole ACPCCC team, and today she is a lively, fun, and animated young woman, with a ready smile and an infectious laugh. She has been supported every step of the way, guided by a team who care about every aspect of her wellbeing. She is a wonderful addition to the program, and her warm and exuberant presence brings a ray of sunshine to the center.



PCC SERVICES PROVIDED

- Help to finish high school diploma with Learning Together program
- Found safe and secure housing
- Early childhood services
- Concrete supports
- Transportation
- Parent education
- Information and referral
- Community development
- Work experience



Early Education
SERVICES

One Parent's Story

Parent Child Centers are the Answer

In the summer of 2019, I had three children and was pregnant with my fourth. With the help of Early Education Services and the Parent Child Center I was able to get my youngest in the PreSchool Program EES has in Westminster. I was also able to work with an Early Head Start Home Visitor during my pregnancy and after my son was born. My Home Visitor was able to support me and my family in so many ways. First, my home visitor helped us to receive SNAP and Reach Up. At the time my husband and I were unable to work. Our Home Visitor helped us fill out the paperwork for SNAP and Reach Up, and she also was able to join us for the appointments for Reach Up. This made it so that we had a team around us. It was wonderful to feel so supported.

My home visitor also was able to hear me and support me on a level that I needed. Everything she recommended was based on my wants or needs. The support from my home visitor is something I can never speak highly enough of. I often call her my "Home Visiting Angel" because that's what she felt like to me.

After we were able to feel supported, we were able to make major changes as a family. My husband was able to get a job that pays so well we no longer need the support of Reach Up. We are currently in the process of buying our own home, and I am working on starting my own business. Through my home Visitor, I was also able to work on volunteer opportunities such as The Basics Parenting education class, help run the Breastfeeding month activities, and much more.

I remember telling my home visitor when I first met with her how it felt scary asking for help and receiving services such as Reach Up and SNAP. Looking back now, I am so glad I did ask for help, because I know I would not be where I am today without asking for support.





Cher's Story

Parent Child Centers are the Answer

I started as a new mom struggling to be a successful mom while trying to overcome obstacles that come from being disabled.

Before I started receiving services from The Family Place, I was struggling and frustrated almost daily. I was a new mom and disabled and I had almost no break from caring for my child, for myself let alone squeezing in treatments I needed for my disability- bipolar disorder. Add that to being alone most of the day with my child and my lack of knowledge and confidence in parenting. I see now I did not just need help "staying afloat", I was barely keeping my head above water.

Receiving help in obtaining childcare gave me time for myself, for receiving therapy, health and mental health care. Programs such as CIS-EI and Family Support, Brain Lab, Music Together, FLT [Families Learning Together] Childcare worksite enriched my knowledge of parenting. From terrified to confident as a parent, my relationship with my son greatly improved.



I developed confidence and self-worth in FLT and case management.



With a lot of help from FLT, I've made a lot of progress toward stability and self-sufficiency. My original goal in FLT was to start a career in something I could manage to do and enjoy. FLT staff immediately went over with me not only the steps I needed to take to get there, but they also either provided me with or helped me obtain EVERYTHING I needed- not only to reach that goal, but for my family's needs as well til I could get there- everything from diapers to food to learning how to cook easy healthy meals to helping me to get into CCV to self-advocacy (asking for a help is strength, not weakness!) to life skills and health classes so I can better take care of myself and my family, etc. etc. etc.

Practice and lots of help rising above health problems.

It's hard to overcome something that is still invisible to most people. I didn't fully understand that inequality before I joined FLT, and I believe that may be one of the most important truths I came across while attending the program. There's something about attending a program like this that serves women of many different ages facing a variety of adversities; it gives us a safe space to talk about the issues we face. It becomes obvious that a lot of those issues are shared on some level by all of us female participants. FLT also has a connection with WISE, who regularly stops in to teach a class about gender-based violence. I personally, throughout my time as an FLT participant, came to understand that things that were "normal" to me were actually unsafe, contributing to problems I could already identify, and experienced disproportionately by women. I'm talking about psychological abuse from my son's father, and I have since separated from him.



Got support in leaving unhealthy relationship with my son's father, navigating co-parenting.

I may not have reached my original goal for FLT yet, but I'm closer to reaching it than I was before I started. I'm pursuing a dream opportunity despite health problems, taking risks, huge effort from more growth. Meanwhile, I've identified a lot more of the barriers that stand in my way including the fact that some are experienced disproportionately by women, I've overcome a large one and am empowered in overcoming the next ones. I've also created a safe home for my son where he'll grow up witnessing a mom that fights back against sexism and misogyny. At the same time I'm watching my peers in FLT obtain high school and college educations, find causes they're passionate about fighting for, find their voices, obtain their driver's licenses, first cars- their independence.

PCC SERVICES PROVIDED

- Home visits: including CIS Early Intervention and Family Support
- Parenting/Caregiver
- Education: Families Learning Together (FLT)
- Parent/Caregiver Support Groups: Families Learning Together
- Playgroups: Brain Lab facilitated playgroup
- Concrete Supports
- Information and Referral
- Early Childhood Services: son has attended Early Care and Education Program since 18 months

Krysta is the mother of three young children: Aydin-5, Aleks-2, and Arik-11 months. As a mother of three, Krysta has struggled with balancing her needs with the needs of her children. We have worked with her over the years to help her create a balance, help with stress management, and support the unique needs of her three children.

When we first met Krysta she was parenting her first child, Aydin. Aydin had begun to exhibit defiant and aggressive behaviors and Krysta was referred to the PCC's Early Intervention (EI) program for support. It was through her EI developmental educator that she learned the behaviors were rooted in Aydin's communication struggles. The family's developmental educator made a referral to an early childhood specialist on the CIS Family Support team and the team worked in tandem to support Aydin with social-emotional identification and regulation skills and social skill with peers in school settings and with his siblings. The skills aided in regulating Aydin's behaviors and supported the parent/child relationship. The team also brought in dad to support co-parenting strategies across multiple homes and helped Krysta connect to a PCC's skill-building workshop. Aydin was supported by the team through his diagnosis of ADHD and ODD and successfully transitioned to Part B services. Krysta's early childhood specialist and developmental educator helped her to feel confident in her parenting skills and enhanced her parental resilience.

We continued to work with Krysta as she welcomed her second child into the world. In addition to supporting balancing care of two children and the sibling relationship, Aleks was referred for Early Intervention supports due to communication challenges. PCC staff focused on Aleks' speech development and reducing his frustrations. By introducing the family to baby sign language it helped to bridge the gap for Aleks to communicate. Aleks also had a difficult time sleeping at night. Collaborative team meetings supported the family in incorporating sensory and movement activities into their everyday practice; caregiver time with Aleks' older sibling and father and post-dinner bedtime routines. The team approach and the family's willingness to change their routine supported Aleks with his communication and sleep which, in turn supported Krysta's mental health and stress management and Aydin's behaviors and regulation.

During her third pregnancy Krysta struggled with her mental health. She was connected to HEART, the PCC's perinatal support program. She was connected to a postpartum doula as well as a perinatal mental health clinician, whom she had worked with during her first and second pregnancies. HEART staff began working with Krysta during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic as she was reporting an increase in stress, an inability to regulate her emotions, and stress over navigating the dynamics of three young children in the home. The PCC team was able to implement regular team meetings that included Krysta's partner to support shifting the dynamics of the household by establishing routines and division of responsibilities that allowed for Krysta to take time for self-care. As a collaborative effort with PCC childcare referral and eligibility she was able to enroll her then four-year old in Preschool and he has flourished there.

Krysta and her partner recently bought a house and the PCC team helped them to find resources to support the moving process and helped them to get settled. The family continues to be supported by PCC team visits. The children are thriving in their new home and Krysta is feeling empowered and is shaping the home into a place for her children to learn and grow. She continues to strive to be healthy and well and provide love and support to her three children.

Krysta let her PCC staff know, "Without the PCC's supports, I would be so much more stressed than I am now. I wouldn't know how to handle many of my children's challenging behaviors if it wasn't for their support."



Jamie & Sage's Story

Parent Child Centers are the Answer

After the birth of their son, Ayrton, Jamie and Sage spent some time being homeless. They were forced at times to separate from each other, staying with friends, family, and later in a motel. They began working with the Family Center and were assigned a Housing Case Manager and Employment Advisor. Within 3 weeks of working with Family Center staff, they were able to secure a one-bedroom apartment in Montpelier. Jamie also was placed on a work experience site, allowing him to gain on-the-job experience and enhance his resume. The family soon outgrew the one-bedroom apartment and the Family Center assisted them in securing a two-bedroom apartment. Sage obtained her High School Diploma and after that accomplishment, both Sage and Jamie are now attending Community College of Vermont.

Family Supportive Housing supports provided by the Family Center helped Jamie, Sage and Ayrton go from being homeless to being housed. We helped provide Jamie and Sage with the needed tools to start them on the path to employment and education. We provide families with the resources needed to help their children grow, learn and thrive by providing case management, job coaching, life skill building, parenting education and support. "Jamie and Sage are tenacious and resilient. They are really proud of the good grades they are getting. They managed to open a savings account with their stimulus funds and are adding to it whenever they can...their strong family bond keeps them forging forward." Gwen Schuyler, Family Center Staff.

Children's Integrated Services/Early Intervention, another service provided through the Family Center, has been supporting Ayrton's development since October 2020. EI services are at no cost to families and are provided in the child's most natural environment, for example, in childcare or at home. EI has had the opportunity to perform services with Ayrton at child care as well as provide parent coaching to Sage and Jamie so they can continue to support Ayrton while he is at home. Early Intervention's involvement with the family has led to growth within Ayrton as well as growth for Sage and Jamie as parents. They continue to grow together as a family and are thriving.



"The Family Center helps you build resilience. Family Center staff are very reliable and supportive and made my third attempt at college successful. The Family Center has helped our family to form connections to gain permanent housing and to maintain our education goals."

Jamie, Sage & Ayrton

At the Family Center, we are making a difference one family at a time. We work with children with a variety of needs and challenges. We help parents increase resiliency, increase skills, and gain confidence in parenting and advocating for their child's needs. While Jamie has been attending school, he is continually supported by Family Center Staff. Through in person and phone check-ins Jamie is receiving constant guidance and support. The relationships that have been built with Jamie and his family have empowered them to reach out for support and resource information. What is important to note is the growth we have seen in Jamie in regards problem solving and his self-confidence. When communicating with Jamie he no longer asks for assistance or answers, he asks for input. Many times, our discussions are around viable plans, solutions, and goals he has in mind for his family.

The Family Center helps support homeless families in Central Vermont, just like Jamie, Sage and Ayrton. We can continue to have a lasting positive impact by working with parents and children in our community thanks to ongoing community support. In partnership with families, we are helping make a better future for Ayrton and others just like him children and families can have the tools they need for a better life.



One Family Among Many **Parent Child Centers are the Answer**

There are numerous stories that could be told here, but this is one that had an impact on both the individual family and the LFC staff person who is providing services.

One of the values that underlies LFC's Children's Integrated Services Program is that parents, regardless of education, training and/or experience, are experts when it comes to their children. Until the pandemic, visits to participating families' homes had been the primary setting in which services were delivered. Some families thrived in this arrangement. Others, as in the case at hand, used the occasion of a home visit as an opportunity to have the LFC case manager care for their child while they did other things. As such, the impact of the home visit was diminished by the parent(s) absence from the room when their child accomplished milestones or demonstrably learned from a particular activity. The impact of the home visit on the child was demonstrable in this case, but not on the family or the parents' effectiveness with their child.

The case manager in question is one of LFC's longest-standing employees. Suffice it to say that she was with LFC before computers found their way into the LFC offices, not to mention participants' homes. As such, when the pandemic hit, the home visit – her primary means to be effective – was either severely compromised or altogether gone. It was after an LFC parking lot staff party – another innovation brought about by the pandemic (all staff masked and 10 feet apart) – that the case manager in question took this writer aside and told this story:

*"As you well know, I am not one to sing the praises of technology. I saw the pandemic as a serious threat to how effective I could be with these families. As if to confirm this, it is clear that for some families, technology is just not helpful. It is in the way, something that comes between the family and me. I hesitate to admit, however, that for other families, technology actually *improved* their ability to focus on their child and to apply the interventions I was trying to teach them. Because I am removed from them, it is they who have to listen to the instructions and implement the lesson with their child, who is in the room with them. For those families, technology has proved to them that they are, indeed, the experts and that it is their attention – not mine – that will be most helpful to their child's development." While this is only one of the surprises brought about by the changes made necessary by the pandemic, it is illustrative. What is clear to this case manager and the entire Early Childhood team at LFC is that technology will continue to be one of the tools in the case managers' toolbox. When being in the home isn't effective, it now makes sense to try a virtual visit.*



Anna's Story

Parent Child Centers are the Answer

Anna had to grow up fast. Her parents had her at a young age and both her parents struggled throughout her childhood with substance misuse and housing instability. Her mother left the family when Anna was 3 years old and her father gained full custody. He did the best he could as a single parent but struggled at times with the responsibilities of raising a child. The chaos and instability of her parents' lives required Anna to adapt quickly and parent herself in many ways. Many of her emotional needs were unmet and she felt abandoned at times. She struggled to trust adults and learned that you can only rely on yourself in this world.

Anna is a bright student, but struggled throughout elementary school and particularly during middle school, often feeling a lack of connection to peers and distracted by stressors at home. Truancy became the norm and school felt irrelevant, so she was shut down and disengaged. She became sexually active at a young age, usually with older men. She started experimenting with alcohol and drugs. Life was getting more and more out of control.

In 9th grade, at fifteen years old, Anna got pregnant. About this time in her life, Anna says, "Before I got pregnant, I was heading towards a wild teenager life. Getting pregnant made me wake up and realize I needed to get grounded quick and get on a different path." In many ways, she views her pregnancy as a real turning point. At this time Anna began to access Lund's Parent Child Center services through our onsite education program and then began to engage in other supports and resources to restructure her life in a way that did not repeat the patterns of her parents.

Anna heard about Lund's education program through a family member and began attending our school full time. Anna was a quiet, serious student at first, guarded and reluctant to engage. But over time, she began to feel safe here and let her guard down. She recognized that the PCC staff were adults who were committed to helping her family in every way possible. This was the first key step in supporting Anna's goal to build a healthier life for her and her family- ensuring she could continue her education in a setting designed to support her unique needs.

School was different at Lund. The classroom setting was small and the teachers were able to give attention to some of Anna's less developed academic skills. She gained confidence and she felt comfortable attending with other expectant mothers. She says, "I would never have felt comfortable walking the halls at the regular high school with my baby bump." She really began to thrive as a student as she prepared for motherhood. She especially enjoyed the hands-on projects, becoming a more confident reader and writer and the opportunities to attend the Women *Can Do* conference during which she climbed a fireman's ladder, used power tools, experienced life in the day of a game warden and had the opportunity to help inseminate a cow. "It was a day to try new things and think about possibilities I hadn't thought about before" She recalls, realizing her options were wider than she thought. Anna became a very engaged student, a leader in the classroom and discovered strengths she didn't know she had.

During her time at Lund's PCC we also connected Anna to Reach Up so that Anna would have access to the financial resources she needed to care for her baby while attending school. She also began attending parenting education and support groups. When her baby girl Amaya was born, she took a six week maternity leave and then was eager to resume school. She says, "Here at Lund, I was able to attend school with my baby which allowed me to have a deeper connection to her while also doing the work I needed to do to give us a better life." Anna attached to her daughter quickly and settled into motherhood with ease, though at times she still worried about her financial situation and outside stressors. She benefitted from the peer support she received attending school with other new moms who were also learning to balance the responsibilities of motherhood with their academic goals.

As her child approached 6 months, PCC staff helped Anna apply for a childcare subsidy and supported her with touring various early childhood centers to find the right environment for her daughter. Finding childcare was an important piece in allowing Anna to continue to focus on school. "I knew if I graduated from high school, I could get a better job and make a better life for myself and my daughter."

During her time here at Lund, we were able to support Anna to register and take Driver's Ed classes. She completed the training and got her driver's license when her baby was a year old.

Anna also participated in Lund's summer work study program. During one of her work study experiences, she worked in Lund's Early Childhood Education program. Not only was this a good experience in terms of job skills and training, but Anna was able to learn from and participate in the child care's focus on experiential and play based learning. The teachers here at Lund have always been

impressed with Anna's connection to her child's social and emotional needs, and this experience gave Anna even more knowledge about early child development.

During Anna's senior year, she participated in the Dual enrollment program in which she was able to take classes at CCV that counted as High school and college credit simultaneously. It was during the intros to Anna's college math class that Anna wrote, "I am feeling pretty confident and try to think positively about math because that is where I always went wrong in high school. I had that fixed mindset of "I suck at math" "I hate math" etc, but as I have grown into having the right attitude and growth mindset I feel ready to take on the challenge and get my brain growing. My hopes and dreams for my future are to successfully get an associate's degree in business, and do the required training to get a real estate license."

During her time here at Lund, Anna has learned so much about goal setting, maintaining a growth mindset and reaching out to use supports when she needs them in order to grow and move forward. Most recently, Anna was able to keep moving forward towards her goals during a global pandemic and the sudden and unexpected death of her baby's father in 2020. Lund was a stable place of comfort to anchor to and not lose focus on her goals, her development or her support network.

In June 2021, Anna graduated from high school and she is currently taking her third CCV course to work towards her goal of earning her Associate's degree in Business. She is the first in her family to attend college.

Lund PCC staff also recently helped her open a bank account and enroll in a Financial Futures class. She's on a waitlist for a housing voucher and hopes to have an apartment of her own for she and her daughter soon. Mothering her daughter continues to be her proudest accomplishment and she says, "I want my daughter to really get to be a child and know what it's like to have her needs taken care of." Anna reads to Amaya daily, as she wants her daughter to have positive literacy experiences, and she says she wants her daughter to have more stability and security than she did growing up. "She is my whole world," She says.

PCC CORE SERVICES PROVIDED TO ANNA

- **Early Childhood Services**—Anna was able to bring her baby with her to our PCC to engage in our onsite education program and use that time early in her baby's life for bonding while also continuing to go to school. When it was the right time for Anna to explore early education programs, she was supported by PCC staff to explore her options and choose a center that she felt good about. Anna also volunteered in the Lund Early Childhood Ed program where she was able to observe and learn about high quality early education.
- **Parent Education**—Anna engaged in Lund parent education groups to learn about the developmental needs of her child and build skills to effectively care for her. Anna learned about
- **Playgroups**—Anna made connections with other young parents here in our program and participated in different family focused events and playgroups with peers.
- **Parent Support Groups**—Anna attended several parent support groups and obtained positive peer support leading to the development of a healthy natural support system.
- **Concrete Supports**- Anna received concrete supports to engage in career and post-secondary education exploration, case management services to support her engagement in external supports and transportation when needed. Anna was supported to open a bank account and take a financial futures class.
- **Community Development**- Anna engaged in a work study program at Lund and was supported in actively exploring non-traditional trades. Anna was also supported to attend CCV through the dual enrollment program and is the first in her family to attend college.
- **Information & Referral**—provided info and referral to Reach up, Child Care subsidy, choosing a childcare program and taking drivers education classes to obtain her license.



April's Story

Parent Child Centers are the Answer

Hello! My name is April and I would like to share with you my journey with the Milton Family Community Center. My journey began many years ago as a young teenager. MFCC had a teen space back then, which was a safe space to hang out after school.^[1] The teen space was more than just a hangout for me, though. I accessed programs like "Our Voices Exposed" and "Students Against Destructive Decisions" in that space to help me stay away from drugs. When I was a teenager I struggled with drug and alcohol use but I knew the teen space was a place I had that I could get help without judgment. The staff at MFCC helped me when I felt I had nowhere else to turn for support, and for that I will be forever grateful.

As a senior in high school I started working for MFCC as a closer and it was amazing. With my previous connection to the community center it felt like I was "home". Even though I was young everyone was so supportive and helped me grow. After high school I switched jobs several times, but was never really happy and none of the jobs gave me the feeling of connectedness that I had at MFCC.

In 2015 I applied to be the assistant teacher in the preschool program at MFCC and was extremely happy when they offered me the position. The staff welcomed me with open arms and helped me grow not only as a teacher but also as a person and parent. The staff at MFCC have been there to help me and my children through homelessness, my son's mental health issues, daily stresses and even deaths in the family. The staff of MFCC helped me by checking in on me and my family during my family leave and by connecting me with agencies that could help me with my son's special needs. MFCC helped me by paying for basic needs, supporting me as a single parent and connecting me with other resources in the area. At times I have had to take time off to manage some of the bigger obstacles. During my time off I accessed the food shelf, family support services, and even had help paying some of my bills. The staff would even reach out to me after hours to see how I was doing and ask how they could help.



After a few months of being at MFCC I decided to go to college to further my education. The directors were so supportive and helped me every step of the way. MFCC gave me a mentor and set time aside during my work week for any college work I was struggling with. I have felt nothing but support and encouragement with this adventure, and I am still taking college courses.

I know I'm a better parent because of MFCC.

^[1] MFCC no longer hosts a teen center, but that program later became the Milton Community Youth Coalition which is still going strong, just down the street from the center. MFCC does still include a Learning Together program which supports teens and young parents in reaching their education and career goals.



One Mom's Story

Parent Child Centers are the Answer

5 years ago, we met mom when she came to the Family Room with her 4 year old daughter seeking preschool. She told us she came to the Family Room when she was younger with her mom. We happened to have a spot where we were able to enroll her daughter in preschool at that time. When her 2 younger sons grew to be preschool aged, we got them enrolled in preschool as well. She made friends with other parents and volunteered to help in the classroom and come on field trips.

Through this time, mom was able to build a trusting relationship with staff. Staff supported her and her parents with guardianship paperwork with one of her children. She also told us that her son had experienced trauma when he was younger, and had challenging behaviors at home, so we got them connected to Howard Center for support for this child, and support for the adults in how to respond to and prevent his challenging behaviors. This mom found the Family Room to be quite helpful and was happy to speak at one of the legislative sessions about how the Family Room has helped her, and others.

During covid times, mom received food, diapers and wipes weekly from the Family Room as she is out of work. Additionally, she is pregnant and was able to get prenatal support, specifically around iron deficiency issues and getting foodcards for the supplements she needed, as well as iron-rich produce from the Family Room. More recently, Mom reached out to us for support in navigating the court system in regards to child support and claiming children as dependents on taxes. She has successfully gained full custody and rights to claim all of her children on her taxes as dependents. Just last week we got her youngest child enrolled with Early Head Start, signed her children up for swim lessons and a membership at the Winooski pool, and she is coming to the gardening playgroup with her children on a regular basis.



April's Story

Parent Child Centers are the Answer

My name is April Kelly, and I would like to ask for a moment of your time.

My story is but a common one here in the Northeast Kingdom, I come from a family that has struggled financially and housing stability was always a problem. By the time I was entering into high school I had attended 6 different elementary schools, not ideal when you're at such a young impressionable age! This of course led to my self-deprecating views and jaded viewpoint of the world.

Let's fast forward to 2008! I found myself at the age of 23, 8 months pregnant with a toddler on my hip and facing housing insecurity. I was recently divorced and left to fend for myself and children. I needed a home immediately. With all the chaos in my life, inner turmoil, and fear of what will happen next, I landed on the doorstep of the Northeast Kingdom Community Action agency (NEKCA). I was desperate and in need, but I was met with understanding, compassion and people who were "outside of the box thinkers," ones who seemed so Avant Garde, if you will. I was able to secure housing and what seemed like moments later I was on the Reach-Up program. I of course was angry and bitter; I had always been a hard worker and not one for "handouts." I did not want to be a part of the stigma that came attached to assistance; however, my children come first. I was rapidly placed on worksite, and it happened to be at NEKCA...what are the odds right?



Rapidly, I was tossed into a whirlwind of trainings that were in place to help me learn, not only about myself, but about the world I live in and what it has to offer if I so chose. I was thirsty with a desire to learn and quickly came to realize that maybe I have something to offer, maybe I can make a difference. After all, I had people in my corner betting on me and boosting my confidence, seeing in myself what I could not. By August of 2008 I knew what I needed to do, I knew I was meant for something great! I did my research, and I talked to my Reach-Up case worker and before long I was in front of an interview team explaining why I wanted to be enrolled in the Post-secondary Education program. I wanted to make a difference. Shortly after, I was enrolled at Lyndon State College embarking on my journey to earn a degree!

Four grueling years later, after a full-time class load and being a full-time single mother, I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Human Services. The hunt began, and I was eager to put what I had learned to the test. I found myself making an inquiry at none other than NEKCA, and I got the interview and was hired 2 months after I graduated. I really felt that I had succeeded. I had come full circle, but had I only known what lie ahead for me!

In 2021 I am in my 9th year with this organization! There have been many ups and downs, changes for the better and for the worst, but through it all here I am still as determined as day one to make a difference. I find myself to have been a recipient of services as a volunteer to Outreach Specialist, and now Director of Outreach services of NEKCA in Newport. I get to support a team with the same ideals and passion. We are not here just do a job, but to really make a difference and be a bigger part of solutions. We learn so much and teach so much, and that is what makes our organization so unique and what makes me proud to be a part of such a large and dynamic team. I have had so many opportunities and can only hope to inspire others to go for their dreams and think big. With our current management team all the hope, drive and willingness to learn the sky's the limit! Thank you.



AP's Story

Parent Child Centers are the Answer

When you hear of a parenting class you think that the parent must have done something wrong, but parenting classes are to help bring you knowledge, support and connection. I'm an aunt, but for people that are close to me, in my group, they see me as a parent. It's been a very long journey with Maddie, but I wouldn't change it. There's trial and tribulation. I've taken so much out of class and gotten close to the people in it. Our teacher is hands-on when she needs to be, meaning she lets us have our own voice and helps us when we need it. If I can give you any advice or guidance, it would be to take as much knowledge as you can from your class, find someone in your class that you trust, and let that be your person. Maddie and I are very thankful for the Parent Child Center.





Sarah's Story

Parent Child Centers are the Answer

Our family- my husband, myself, and my oldest daughter moved here to Orange County, Vermont nearly 3 years ago now while in a high-risk pregnancy with our first shared child. To say there were adjustments, culture shock, hurdles, and challenges would be an understatement when leaving our old life, the city, friends and network, and our jobs, for the rural life in a cabin in the mountains we had always dreamed of. We had quite literally bankrupted ourselves to chase a new life and give our children more opportunities. Shortly after getting established at DHMC for that pregnancy, we were referred to the Orange County Parent Child Center, where we were assigned to a Children Integrated Services Home Visitor (CIS) who continues to be one of the strongest supports we have had all this time. Our CIS worker got to know our unique story, how hard life had been for my husband leaving a highly dysfunctional and unsupportive family behind for a new start, and where she learned that I had no family outside of our new little cabin in the woods. We felt absolutely alone until we started to work with our CIS home visitor. She helped get us linked up to countless other services in the area as we finished out that pregnancy with a healthy baby, and by the time we ended up with a (surprise!!) follow-up baby she had connected us with a CIS Nurse and we participated in the Strong Families Program. While feeling completely isolated in this new world, and overwhelmed as all can be, we were even able to utilize family assistance funds for finally getting a home phone line and WIFI at our home, where we had spent over a year with no service or connection to the outside world. We were able to participate in OCPCC Playgroups online because of this financial help provided. Since becoming a sudden and unexpected family of 5, we also began graciously using their prepared meals, pantry, and vegetable resources provided by their collaboration with the Foodbank and Capstone Community Action, their diaper bank, and even on a few occasions when we found ourselves without transportation they helped by dropping necessities off, making a trip to the food banks as our proxy, or even helping find a way to the grocery store for us! I can't imagine what the past 3 years would have been like without the blessing that the OCPCC has been for us, but most importantly without their unending compassion and understanding! We found ourselves struggling even more with that follow-up baby on the way, and continued to face some significant income challenges that combined with all of the other pressures unleashed some past trauma we weren't expecting to boil over, right when the world was suddenly thrown into a pandemic on top of everything else... most of our resources stopped, work became unpredictable, I had health concerns, our home visits and medical assistance decreased, and we found ourselves losing control. The unfortunate reality is this all boiled over and sadly resulted in us even having to recently begin to utilize the supervised visitation program. However, as our CIS home visitor's role at the center changed too, I can say from the bottom of my heart that our experiences with that has kept us wrapped in support and never feeling judged or unworthy. Our little babies have come tenfold out of that same blanket of care and support as well!! I can honestly say that OCPCC makes leaps and bounds to understand the individuals and families they work with and OCPCC works tirelessly to put into action, real action, what they say they offer.

PCC CORE SERVICES PROVIDED TO SARAH

- Home visits
- Playgroups
- Concrete Supports
- Information and Referral
- Parenting/Caregiver Education



Ashleah's Story

Parent Child Centers are the Answer

My name is Ashley and I live here in Rutland with my boyfriend and our son, Jeremiah. I graduated from Rutland County Parent Child Center's Learning Together program in 2020 while being a parent and working full time. Since I graduated, I have worked for the Early Childhood Education program at the Parent Child Center, as well as holding down a part time Insta-Cart job.

Sometimes people ask me how I pulled it all together being pregnant, dealing with the pandemic, and graduating high school. I was able to do it because I knew what it was I wanted in life and I wasn't going to let anything stop me. The Parent Child Center in Rutland helped me to achieve these goals.

Going to school, working, and raising a family has been challenging, but I knew that I wanted to break out of poverty. It was important to me that my family was taken care of. I work hard to maintain my own housing, transportation, household necessities and provide a happy life for my son. Even though my boyfriend and I work hard to provide for our son, we have lots of struggles. Juggling bills like rent, electricity, car insurance, car payment, childcare costs, food, utilities, and all the needs for a 2-year-old can be overwhelming. It's important that I keep my second job so that I can meet our financial expectations. I don't want my son to feel the same struggle I felt growing up.



When I was younger, my mom was always hard working. We never had the help we needed - maybe food stamps and food shelves but other than that, we went without. I didn't want to be a teen mom stereotype -- not working, going nowhere. I learned my hard work ethic from my mom but growing up like that was stressful. It is important to me that my son Jeremiah never feels this kind of stress.

I always wanted to work with kids before I got pregnant. I used to do a program in high school where I learned to work with preschoolers. I also volunteered at RCPCC while I was in the Learning Together program. I just figured working with kids would be something down the road after my son was in school. Instead, I work in a rewarding field while my son is well taken care of. I was able to get a job at RCPCC because I knew the childcare licensing requirements and I had proven that I was reliable by coming to school every day while pregnant, working hard, and maintaining a good attitude.



Sometimes we have challenging parents at the PCC. I think because of my background -- having a tough childhood, I know what it feels like to be a young child dealing with that. I just know the look in the parents' eyes and little kids can sense that their parents are wondering where the next meal for their child is going to come from. So when I see that, I always know something's going on and I just talk to them more, trying to figure out what they need and how I can help them get it. That's how we do things here at the PCC.

My social worker asked me what would be some advice for any other young woman who is pregnant, looking for services, looking for an education, looking to graduated high school? What would you say to them about coming to the PCC in Rutland? I would say, definitely do it! Definitely. They helped me so much. They worked with my schedule around work when I was in high school. They helped me learn about child development, graduate from high school because my son attended classes with me until he was six months. They had a great food bank that provided diapers and wipes. And then I was able to get the best job I ever had! I'm looking forward to when One PCC Place opens -- the new 2Gen Center. I still want to go to college, get my BA and become a social worker. That is something I always wanted to do. And I will.



Patti's Story

Parent Child Centers are the Answer

My name is Patti Kemp and I'm the adoptive mother of a preschooler, Zoey, who currently attends PlayWorks Child Center at the Springfield Area Parent Child Center (SAPCC). I've been connected to SAPCC for about fifteen years in many unique ways. I had already raised my biological children when I started working for SAPCC, started my own daycare, became a foster parent, adopted Zoey and began to raise her - all with the support and guidance of this wonderful organization!

I loved working for SAPCC as a preschool teacher in their PlayWorks Child Center from 2007 until 2013. The people were so kind, I learned a ton, and I realized how important this work was - to support, not just the children, but their families. I knew that I wanted to start my own daycare, and with the help of the childcare referral coordinators at SAPCC, I opened my own licensed daycare center, Munchkin Land, in 2013.

I wanted to get into foster care, so I decided to close my daycare in 2016. Zoey was placed in my arms when she was 3 months old. We adopted her on April 11, 2018. What a wonderful heartfelt gift from her birth mom. Zoey had lots of developmental needs that I entrusted to the professionals of SAPCC's Children's Integrated Services (CIS) team. They worked with Zoey from 2016-2019 providing occupational, physical, and speech therapy. Once she aged out, she was referred to another agency, but because SAPCC had done such a wonderful job, Zoey was not in need of any more services. I will be forever thankful for the CIS team's dedication and understanding of my daughter's needs. They never gave up on Zoey!

Throughout the years, my family has also attended SAPCC playgroups, community events, and during the pandemic Zoey started their virtual preschool and was later able to attend in-person which she absolutely loves. The socialization from these programs has been wonderful! I hope parents know that the people who work at parent child centers are so friendly, open-armed and devoted! My daughter would not be where she is without them - she is thriving!



Meghan's Story

Parent Child Centers are the Answer

Meghan Daigneault is a single mother, who resides in Bennington, VT. Meghan has four children: three-year-old twins, Jaxon and Mackenzie, four-year-old Jordon, and five-year-old Jayce. Sunrise Family Resource Center has been working with Meghan, on and off, since 2019.

Meghan first became involved with Sunrise's Family Advocacy Program (FAP), through a referral from the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Her children were at risk of being removed from the home, and they were eventually taken into DCF custody.



Ashley Paquin, of our Child Care Financial Assistance Program, was able to procure child care subsidies for all four children, at the same child care center, while they were in DCF custody. Meghan worked with her Family Advocate, Lori Yunger, to receive a referral for therapy sessions for herself and her then partner (and father of her children), Jeremy.

Sunrise received a second referral from DCF, for Meghan, for reunification with her children. Lori supported Meghan in completing an application for a Rapid Rehousing Voucher and provided weekly developmental parenting strategies using the Parents as Teachers curriculum. After identifying needed services for her children, Lori referred Meghan to Sunrise's Children's Integrated Services Support Worker, Erin Reed, who was able to offer services for Early Childhood Family Mental Health (ECFMH). Erin facilitated Meghan's understanding of social, emotional, and behavioral health for the entire family. As time passed, Meghan found herself grappling with substance misuse and Lori helped Meghan enroll in rehab. Her case with Sunrise was closed while she was in treatment, as she was no longer in the community.

Meghan's third time coming to Sunrise was a self-referral. Meghan was healthy and ready to reunite with her children! Lori helped her attain housing and access COVID-19 relief funds, assisted her in accessing a Section 8 Family Unification Program, and provided age-appropriate books for her children. Sunrise worked with Meghan to set goals, attain children's therapy sessions, and referrals to a child development clinic. Meghan shared that "I am so grateful that I can pick up the phone, at any time, and call Lori, with whatever questions I may have. She has been so helpful in navigating EVERYTHING that I have gone through over the last few years. Between DCF, rehab, child care, lawyers, and doctors... I don't know how to do these things and I wouldn't be able to get it all done without Lori and Sunrise."

Over the years, Meghan has also participated in other programs that Sunrise has to offer, such as our 1234 Parents class, facilitated by our Parent Child Center Educator, Michelle Weyers. She has continued with her therapy sessions, so she has an addiction counselor to help steer her in the right direction. She has maintained her weekly in-home visits with Lori, and Erin continues to work with her and her children in ECFMH. Meghan currently has conditional custody of her children but with Sunrise working as a team with Meghan, she is hopeful that she will have sole custody soon. Meghan shared that "Everything positive in my life over the last three years, involved Sunrise in one way or another. Our systems are complicated, and I know I can call Lori and Sunrise will help me navigate things and make me feel like things will be okay for me and my kids." In the future, Sunrise plans to form a Parent Advisory Committee, to partner with our board members and the community, and Meghan said, "I would like to be a part of it, to share what I've learned and to help others, the way Sunrise helped me."