



Hello, my name is Jess Kell, and I'm here today representing Lund's Kids-A-Part Parenting Program. Kids-A-Part has been contracted by the Department of Corrections to provide parenting services in Vermont's women's facilities since 2003. I've been in this role since 2007, and in that time have worked in three facilities (Dale, Northwest, and the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility), have transitioned the program through two moves (Dale and Windsor to Northwest, then Northwest to CRCF), and have worked with approximately 11 superintendents. Each of these transitions has involved a shift in culture, balanced by the consistent policies and protocols of the Department of Corrections and Lund's commitment to meeting the needs of the children and families participating in our program.

As the KAP Parenting Program Coordinator, I'm based full time inside the facility, coordinating services for incarcerated mothers and their families. Our program services inside the facility include enhanced case management, creation and implementation of a Family Service Plan, groups and classes, and facilitation of in person and virtual visitation. In the community, our Community Case Manager provides enhanced case management for caregivers, and support for families as they deal with the impact of parental incarceration and navigate their evolving relationships. Our KAP team provides trainings on the impact of parental incarceration to DOC staff and community partners working with this population. Lund fundraises to deliver this part of the program which is a key element of providing the type of wrap around family support that we know is needed to deliver the services well. Lund also fundraises to cover the costs associated with trainings offered to community partners who serve children and families impacted by incarceration.

Another piece of my role in the facility is about building relationships with DOC staff and understanding the systemic pieces of how to implement a child centered, family focused program within this carceral setting, working with clients who are significantly impacted by Substance Use Disorder, complex trauma, and a wide range of mental health challenges. In this capacity, I meet regularly with staff including officers, case workers, and the facility management team, as well as other contractors within the building.

All this is to say that the space in which we support parent child contact has been intentionally and thoughtfully designed by KAP staff, as have the layers of supports that surround the families who utilize the services. From a client's first meeting at the KAP Orientation, to their program intake, a home visit with the family, or meetings with DCF, we are focused on thoughtfully meeting the best interest of each child entering the building.

The KAP space itself is set apart from the busier parts of the building. Walking down the KAP hall, visitors are first greeted by several murals. There is space to be active with yoga balls to bounce back and forth and a friendly game of gigantic Connect Four. The two-family visiting rooms are filled with color and textures to welcome children of all ages and developmental levels. Books, art materials, board games, and imaginative play materials are all accessible, as are the snacks that families may help themselves to.

There are two types of KAP visits: group and individual. Parents attending group visits have demonstrated an ability to self-regulate and to meet their children's needs in a group setting. However prepared the parent may be, there may be times when a group visit doesn't meet the needs of a particular child, and our assessment may be for an individual visit, with higher level of staff support.



The KAP space is an oasis within the facility, designed to be trauma informed and flexible to the needs of a wide range of families, which could include mothers of newborns, children with special needs, children whose parents will be incarcerated for a short time before leaving to treatment and ones who may be serving decades, families who will be reunified, and parents whose parental rights will be terminated while incarcerated. On top of that we have to consider that each family is unique, and will present with very different experiences and needs.

As one of the legislatively designated Parent Child Center's, Lund applies the family centered framework and approaches used by PCC's to effectively provide a Parent Child Center within a correctional facility. At the core, Parent Child Centers work with families to build protective factors and strengthen families using a variety of evidence based and evidence informed strategies and services. KAP builds on this framework to meet the unique needs of families impacted by parental incarceration.

Meeting the needs of Vermont's children impacted by parental incarceration is challenging work, and it is work that Lund remains deeply committed to as Kids Apart enters our third decade of the program.

