



Hello, my name is Jess Kell, and I'm here today representing Lund, where I have served as the Kids-A-Part Parenting Program Coordinator for 16 years. The mission of Lund is to help children thrive by empowering families to break cycles of poverty, addiction, and abuse. Kids-A-Part, specifically, seeks to reduce the traumatic impact of parental incarceration on children and families. This particular program is effective in that DOC invests in Lund's family centered, child centered and trauma informed services to be delivered within their facility. What Lund brings to the work is recognized as different than what DOC's area of expertise is.

Within the women's facility, where we've been contracted to provide services since 2003. We offer a continuum of services for incarcerated mothers and their minor children and families to achieve the goals stated above. In addition to providing family centered parent child contact, parenting groups and support in the facility, KAP services also include enhanced case management which is tailored to the individual's needs of each family and considers factors such as length of stay, and the unique context of the relationship with their children and family, including potential involvement with the Department of Children and Families.

These services are also guided by the trends which we observe over time, especially the collateral impact of the Opiate Crisis on Vermont's children. More than half of the women who have accessed KAP services so far this fiscal year have current DCF involvement, or have previously had their parental rights terminated. Thus, our current work in the facility is heavily focused on coordination of services with DCF and other community partners as these cases move through the system, and providing emotional support for the moms as a Termination of Parental Rights becomes likely. This is different than what the population looked like even 10 years ago, where we saw the majority of the women still having custody of their minor child.

From our work with the DIVAS program of the VT Network, we understand that coercion and exploitation place a significant barrier in a woman's access to treatment and programming in the community, including her ability to attend visits and meetings that pertain to her children. Our collaboration with the Network, as well as our other program partners Vermont Works for Women and Mercy Connections, are an imperative component of this work that supports justice involved women and their families, in particular those who are impacted by violence, trauma, substance use and mental health challenges- which in increasingly the profile of incarcerated Vermont women.

As we consider women's the pathways to incarceration, the question arises of what impact earlier access to targeted and specific services may have on them and their children. We know that prevention and front-loading services reduces the need for high end and costly systems such as incarceration. In KAP for example, in the facility, a woman and her family have access to enhanced case management. If she had had access to this same family centered case management in the community, from her first involvement with the Criminal Justice System, might she and her children have different outcomes? And what might gender responsive post release services do to prevent re-incarceration?

The Residential Program at Lund provides long term treatment for pregnant and parenting women with SUD and co-occurring MH diagnoses. This is just one example of programming which is available, and yet referrals are underutilized as a preventative intervention. Lund also has a range of programs



available to parents, children and families in the community including Substance use and mental health treatment and Home Visiting services which are both gender responsive and family focused.

We ask you to consider that Kids-A-Part is uniquely situated to provide you expertise as you consider how increased targeted and preventative services in the community to help address some of the critical needs of justice involved women and their families could be a critical alternative to building a larger women's facility where it is almost certain that Vermont will see increased numbers of incarcerated women. These are some of the most vulnerable families in the state of Vermont, and yet our current services for them are designed to respond to critical incidents, rather than to offer supports earlier on, which may help avoid further trauma, that is then compounded across generations.