

Soon after I adopted my son I was offered monthly visits with an adoption counselor. Have someone to talk to every month who understood what it was like to have adopted a foster child? I jumped at the chance. The first few years it was primarily pleasant chats during visits, a chance for me to hear myself relate events, to voice concerns, and to sometimes figure things out just by saying them to someone.

After we moved a few hours north, we switched to another counselor, by then on Zoom or phone because of the pandemic (I preferred phone those days), and she was just as pleasant and helpful. Since then I've had two others, as people were promoted or moved to other jobs.

To a person, each of the counselors I have had has been empathic, helpful, steady, comforting. They have understood the needs of a child from a background of trauma, and the needs of a parent who started out parenting with a seven-year-old who couldn't read or write or count and at times spoke in broken sentences, and who more than like had some residual trauma from her own childhood. (Hint: At some point in parenting, it's inevitable that the parent's past trauma and the child's past trauma will be on a collision course.)

My adoption counselors have attended school meetings with me, in person or via Zoom. They have provided counsel and advice, lists of potential summer activities and camps and therapists, helped me with problems I did not know how to overcome.

They have been there when I was in the depths of despair, when I thought I could not go on, when things had suddenly reached a crisis level and I would not have known where to turn.

They have never judged, never been impatient, never let me down, never failed to respond.

I would not at this point have a functioning teenager who is working hard in school, is happy and well-behaved, has enjoyed wonderful summer camp experiences and is considering various careers, were it not for my adoption counselors.

They have at least twice seen me in the depths of despair I could not have imagined, and helped me over those hurdles into a better outcome than I believed possible.

I cannot adequately express how grateful I am for their help - for their advice, their constancy, their knowledge, their willingness to help, their just being there. It is and continues to be enormously helpful and much appreciated.

-Sara J. Henry

Dear Committee Members,

My family and I are an adoptive family living in Hartford, VT. When a judge decided that our foster child needed a permanent, safe family that could be there for him every day, our whole family made the decision to support B. Because B. had a very bumpy start in life, our family has needed a lot of support to really help him grow and heal. Navigating special education programs, behavioral health agencies, child care subsidy rules, and the many hurdles and pitfalls of becoming a new family together is terribly complicated. Parenting can be incredibly stressful for a typical intact family, but when parents create new family structures by adding a whole new sibling with their own preferences, fears, and needs, the pressure can skyrocket. Getting things "right" is a mile-high dream, and the stakes for just "not messing up" couldn't be higher.

Having a post-adoption coordinator has been a lifesaver for our family. Heidi is so smart and experienced, kind and patient. She has helped us navigate very complicated life choices, find new programs, and facilitate hard conversations with school. Heidi meets me where I am as a parent and helps me care for and advocate for my entire family so that we can grow together and meet everyone's needs in fair and loving ways. She has helped us practice hard conversations with our bio kids about the need for adoption in some families, about why adoptees have big feelings about having been adopted, and about the difference between making things equal or making things equitable in our house. Heidi has helped my husband and me feel comfortable asking for help so that we don't find ourselves in our own moments of crisis.

I implore this committee to please support the post-permanency program. Heidi has been a priceless resource to our entire family during the 2 years since our finalized adoption. I cannot imagine how much harder this process would have been without her, and if our family would have been able to weather the storms that naturally occur in adoptive family systems.

With gratitude,

Havah Armstrong Walther
Hartford, Vermont

Heidi-

This news about potential funding cuts for Post Permanency support is nothing short of tragic. Having adopted two children (brother and sister) to fold in with our three other children through foster care over 18 years ago, I can say the most consistent, constant support we have received through all that time is through the Easter Seals Post Permanency Program. Adopted children carry baggage-some silently, some with grace, and some who struggle with turmoil and trauma they can neither fully understand or control. Our two children unfortunately fall into the latter group. As we navigated (and continue to navigate) the difficulties that this struggle brings to our entire family, we have turned to all the services, agencies, and supports we could find. Mental health providers, schools, state agencies and community supports all offered help and we accepted. Among all those supports though, the most consistent and least agenda driven help came from Post Permanency through Easter Seals. As our kiddos aged out of certain programs or supports, or no longer fit a certain provider's criteria, Easter Seals Post Permanency Program was still there. When we were absolutely stuck and didn't know what to do, that's who we turned to time and again. It is no secret that we all are living in financially turbulent times and hard choices must be considered. But the help that the Post Permanency Program provided to all seven of us was literally a lifeline. I cannot imagine other families trying to make it without them.

Patrick Dakin
943 Post Farm Road
Royalton, VT

Hello Heidi,

I don't have time to write anything extensive but the bottom line is that the support and experience I got from JoAnn last year, saved Dan's life. With her experience and willingness to help me research mental health care, funding and providers, I would not have been able to get Dan enrolled in Midwest and perhaps would have lost him to Suicidal Ideation turned into action. JoAnn and I worked around the clock for several weeks to get this life saving service in place while Dan experienced horrible mental health care in the ER and Brattleboro retreat. Thanks to the Southern site of NFI and acceptance to Midwest in Indiana. . . and most importantly our ability to get him off Medicaid and on Tricare so we could pay for it all was lifesaving.

Hope this helps. Trish Rafter

Dear Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for continued funding for post-permanency services in Vermont, including the work provided by organizations like Easterseals. While I am submitting this testimony anonymously due to its public nature, the experience I am sharing is very personal and reflects the real impact these services have had on my family. Over the past several years, my wife and I took guardianship of our young son, a child who came into our lives from a very troubled background. Like many others in similar situations, we entered parenthood without prior experience and had to navigate a sudden and often overwhelming transition.

During this time, Easterseals has been incredibly important to us. They have helped us access programs, provided educational materials, and served as a steady and reliable sounding board as we worked through challenges we were not prepared for. The representatives we have worked with over the years have been consistently supportive, thoughtful, and responsive. It is difficult to fully express how much that has meant to us. Because of Easterseals, we have been better equipped to meet our son's needs. Their support has reduced stress within our family, increased our awareness of available resources, and helped us build the skills needed to be better parents. For individuals like us, who were thrust into parenting in a very short period of time, this kind of guidance has been essential.

We feel strongly that funding for programs like this is critically important. Without post-permanency support, many children who have already experienced instability are at risk of falling through the cracks. Without the right resources, families may struggle to provide the level of care these children need, which could ultimately lead to greater challenges and costs for the state.

Investing in these services helps ensure that children can remain in stable, permanent homes and gives families the tools they need to succeed. It is not just helpful support. It is necessary.

We are deeply grateful for the role Easterseals has played in our lives, and I strongly urge you to preserve funding for these programs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

A Vermont Parent

To Whom It May Concern:

My family has received post-permanency support services from Easterseals for over eight years. During this time, their expertise and support have been imperative in helping me care for my two children, who were adopted from foster care.

Through this program, I have gained a deeper understanding of how early childhood trauma affects development. Easterseals has provided essential funding for needs not covered by insurance, referred us to specialized services and educational courses, and helped me navigate my children's educational advocacy. They even assisted with a short-term therapeutic placement for my oldest child during a period of increased aggression. Most importantly, this agency has given me the tools and confidence to be an effective advocate for my children.

While I have learned a great deal, my family's needs continue to evolve, and I still consult with the program at least monthly. I ask that you please consider the needs of the many vulnerable children and families who rely on these vital supports to overcome challenges. My family would not be as successful as we are today without the services provided by Easterseals.

Kindly,

Joannah Roush

My husband and I became foster parents in 2019 to our now adopted son Niklaus . Niklaus was six months old at the time he was placed in our home. Covid followed not long after and we were both at home with our two older biological children as well as Niklaus. We struggled financially as many did at that time and still do until this day. Niklaus is a Child a special needs child who requires an extensive amount of care. He is level three autism and is nonverbal. He is now a seven-year-old and attends the NECC program at Molly Stark in Bennington, Vermont Easter Seals has been a support to our family in many different ways. Such as helping form a coordinated service plan at UCS along with school, etc. to keep everyone on the same page with Niklaus and all of his services . Checking in monthly or more, as well as some financial assistance with electric and respite care for Niklaus when we ran out. Easter Seals also helped by supporting us through applying for the state to increase our adoption subsidy with everything in the economy and the cost of living going much higher than it was when we adopted Nick at three years old , as well as the the fact that his needs are now more with age. There are already very minimal supports and services for children like Niklaus in our area. He cannot attend a typical childcare setting so we have to use our respite funding through the state which runs out months early , for summer breaks as well as school vacations, half days, etc. Adopting children through the state of Vermont is a big decision and can be very life altering such as it was for our family, but Easter Seals has been one of the only constant supports through him being in custody of the state of Vermont up until right now. It has been a blessing. I would be very fearful to lose this support. Maggie LaCasse

The Easter Seals program has been very helpful to us. When we contacted them in regards to problems we were having at school with our son, they were responsive and worked with us. The person who worked with us gave us very good advice and was able to even come to meetings at the school to assist us in the difficulties we were encountering there. We have been able to have

ongoing support from Easter Seals in regards to our son's school and his activities. They were able to help fund some of the extras he enjoys participating in which was a big financial help to us. I know that there are a lot of families out there that are going through things and having the assistance of a program like Easter Seals makes a difference in helping to cope. I hope they are able to be fully funded so that they can continue to assist families through their difficult times.

Rena Kingsbury