



Who's Who and What's What in Vermont's Early Care and Learning System

An Overview



About Let's Grow Kids

Let's Grow Kids is a public awareness and engagement campaign about the important role that high-quality, affordable child care can play in supporting the healthy development of Vermont's children and the prosperity of our economy now and in the future. Science tells us that a child's earliest years are the most critical to healthy brain development. During the first years, a baby's brain makes more than one million new connections every second, building a foundation for all future development. Because Vermont's shortage of high-quality, affordable child care is a serious challenge for our communities and our economy, our goal is to gain public support leading to increased, sustainable investments that give all children the chance to reach their full potential. Let's Grow Kids is an initiative of The Permanent Fund for Vermont's Children.

www.letsgrowkids.org

About Vermont Birth to Five

Vermont Birth to Five (VB5) is a statewide initiative staffed by experienced early childhood professionals who work community by community to increase the availability of high-quality child care. Through close collaboration with statewide and community organizations, VB5 directly engages child care providers and early educators in projects designed to increase capacity and improve program quality and sustainability. VB5 is an initiative of the Permanent Fund for Vermont's Children, a nonprofit organization, with collaborative funding support from the A.D. Henderson Foundation, the Turrell Fund and others, whose mission is to ensure all Vermont families have affordable access to high-quality child care by 2025.

www.vermontbirthtofive.org

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A Letter from Let's Grow Kids and Vermont Birth to Five

Let's Grow Kids and Vermont Birth to Five are proud to share this report with you. Inside, you'll find an overview of who's who and what's what in Vermont's early care and learning system serving children birth to five. Our hope is that this report will help others in our state learn more about the system supporting Vermont's young children and their families.

Scientific research has shown that the earliest years of a child's life, from birth to age five, are a critical time for a child's development.¹ This is a time when experiences and relationships can impact the brain's foundation for future learning and social and emotional development. When young children have enriching experiences and supportive relationships, they are better able to build a strong foundation for success and development later in life.

Parents, early care and learning providers, decision makers, community members, organizations and the state have been working collaboratively to make sure our children have the strongest start possible and to enhance and improve Vermont's early care and learning system. Let's Grow Kids and Vermont Birth to Five are proud to be part of this work and this community.

We would like to thank the numerous people who helped to make this resource possible, including the entire Let's Grow Kids and Vermont Birth to Five teams, as well as our larger Permanent Fund for Vermont's Children family, and our partners, many of whom are highlighted in the following pages.

We hope you find value in this report and the resources and information that it provides for Vermont communities and families.



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Executive Summary

Serving children birth to age 5, Vermont's early care and learning system is comprised of many individuals, programs, coordinating bodies and initiatives. These diverse stakeholders help Vermont children access quality early care and learning programs and assist families in navigating and affording this complex system. Furthermore, many of these same stakeholders, along with other partners and organizations, do critical work in supporting Vermont's early childhood providers and professionals.

The child care and early learning programs that support children ages birth to five are possible because of a multifaceted system of dedicated early care and learning professionals, service specialists, program administrators, federal and state resources and many other critical system elements.

Research tells us that these first years are fundamental to preparing children for future success in work, relationships and life.² The cognitive, developmental and social growth that occurs during this time makes the environment in which children are cared for incredibly important.³ With more than 70% of Vermont children five and under likely to need some type of child care, the state's early care and learning system is a vital part of ensuring young children have access to high-quality options.⁴ Our goal for this report is to make information on this system accessible and easy(ier) to understand. The following list provides a brief overview of the key highlights for each chapter.

Early Childhood in Vermont

This section provides an overview of the age groups served by Vermont's early care and learning system.

- Infants, toddlers and preschoolers are the three main early care and learning age groups.

Early Care and Learning Programs in Vermont

This section lays out the different types of early care and learning programs and settings available to young children and families, and provides an overview of the members of the workforce that cares for and educates young children.

- There are various types of early care and learning programs that families can access when in need of child care and early education programming.
- These care types include but are not limited to informal arrangements with neighbors, nannies or others; registered family child care homes; licensed center-based child care; and pre-K programs.

Early Care and Learning Resources and Supports for Children and their Families

There are a number of referral, developmental and financial supports that exist for families and their children when it comes to accessing, affording and interacting with the early childhood system. This section provides more information on:

- Resources such as parent child centers, Help Me Grow, the Bright Future Information System; and
- Financial supports, such as the state's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP), which help families in need of assistance when paying for child care or early learning programming.

Resources that Support Vermont's Early Care and Learning Workforce

This section introduces a number of programs and supports that assist the early care and learning workforce in continuing their important work of caring for and teaching our youngest children.

- A number of professional development supports such as the Northern Lights Career Development Center and the Child Care Apprenticeship Program, as well as financial supports such as Child Development Division's training and education bonuses, assist early care and learning providers in advancing and staying in the field.

Guiding, Coordinating and Administering Vermont's Early Care and Learning System

This section outlines the agencies and coordinating bodies that facilitate, support and administer the early care and learning system in Vermont.

- From the Agency of Human Services and the Agency of Education, to Building Bright Futures, the state's early childhood public-private partnership, the early care and learning system in Vermont has many stewards of guidance and administration.

Advancing the System: Programs and Organizations that Move Early Care and Learning in the State Forward

This section summarizes the community- and advocacy-based organizations, as well as the instrumental funding sources, that aim to support and advance Vermont's early care and learning system and the children and families who access it.

- Organizations including the Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance and Let's Grow Kids are committed to advocating for early care and learning in the state.
- Federal funding sources including Race to the Top funds, Early Head Start Expansion and Preschool Expansion have been key elements in supporting early childhood systems in Vermont.

State Strategies and Recommendations for the Future System

This section outlines the work of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care, as well as the Building Vermont From the Child Up Summit and Think Tank processes.

- The Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care was charged with important work and made foundational recommendations for financing Vermont's future early care and learning system.
- Building Bright Future's Summit and Think Tank processes have continued the work of the Blue Ribbon Commission by mapping out a path forward for high-quality, affordable early care and learning for the state.

Introduction



Every child deserves a strong start. Access to high-quality early experiences in the first years is key to preparing children for success in school, relationships and life.

A child's brain develops rapidly during the first few years of life, forming over one million new connections every second.⁵ As these connections develop and are strengthened, the brain builds a foundation for future learning, skill-building and social-emotional regulation.⁶ The stronger the connections, the stronger the foundation for future learning and development.

The brain building process depends on quality early experiences. These experiences include nurturing, supportive relationships with adult caregivers; stimulating learning opportunities like reading, singing, talking and playing; a safe and stable environment; and quality nutrition.

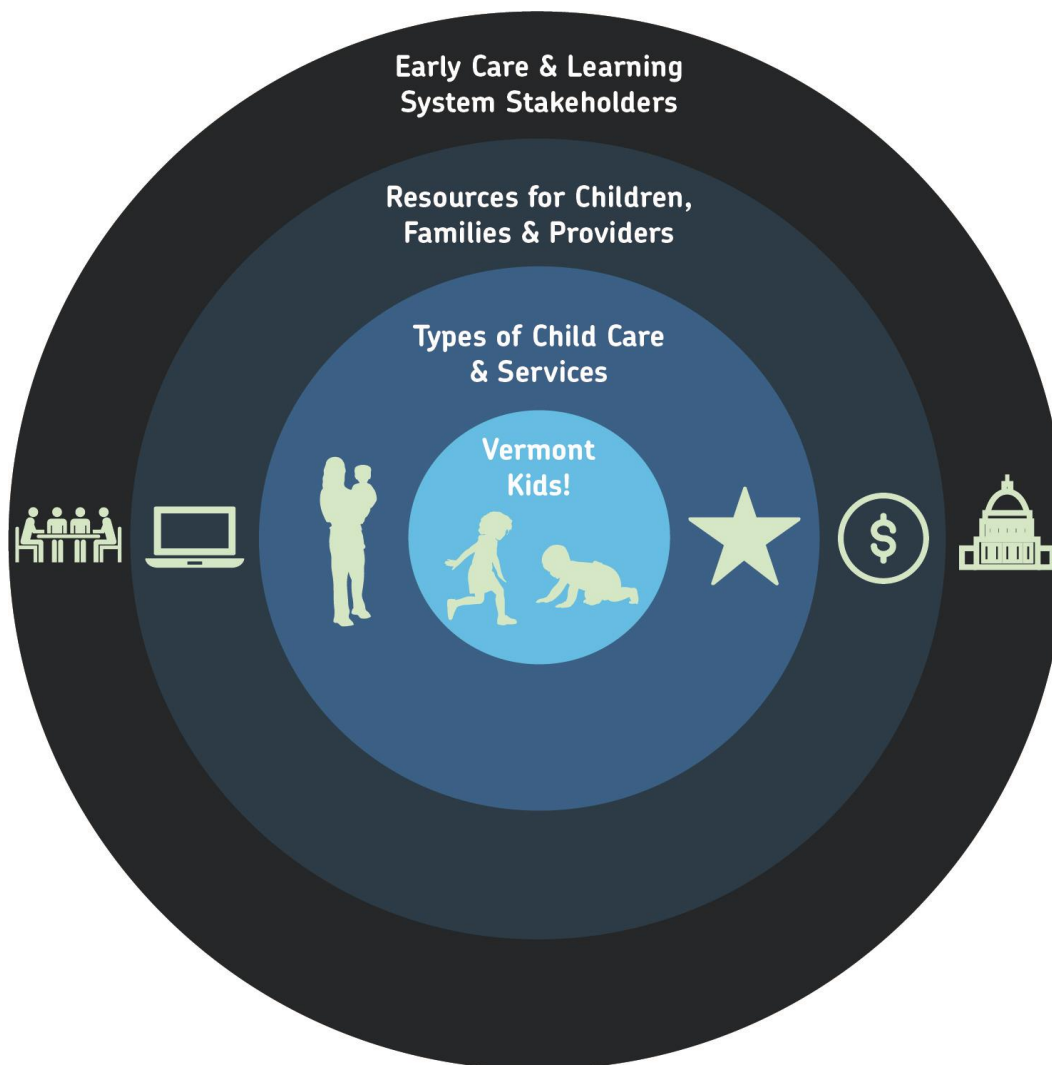
A child's brain develops rapidly during the first few years of life, forming over one million new connections every second.

According to the US Census Bureau, more than 70% of Vermont children ages 5 and under have all available parents in the labor force.⁷ For the families of these children, balancing work and life means figuring out how children will receive these important, quality experiences during work hours. The National Survey of Early Care and Education has shown that parents and guardians utilize a number of different arrangements to meet the early care and learning needs of their children. Some families rely on relatives or friends to care for children while other families with at least two adults in the home may be able to split work schedules with one person working days and the other working

nights. For many families though, early care and learning providers play a central role in the care and development of young children.⁸

Even if a parent is not in the labor force, some families choose to use an early care and learning provider so that a child has the opportunity to play, learn and grow with other children her or his own age and to interact with other caring adults. The American Academy of Pediatrics notes that, “high-quality early education and child care for young children improves their health and promotes their development and learning.”

The structure and layout of this report is based on the diagram below. It represents the landscape of Vermont’s early care and learning system. At the center of this system are Vermont’s young children. The outer rings represent people, programs, organizations, and resources that are connected to Vermont’s early care and learning system. The more direct contact a program or provider has with children and families, the closer it is to the center of the diagram, and the system’s center. There are many potential ways to organize or understand this information. This is just one way to think about and picture such a complex system.



This structure will be used throughout the report to organize the many people, programs, organizations, and resources that make up the state’s early care and learning system.



Young children are the center point of the state’s early care and learning system. Every program, organization and resource within the system ultimately seeks to ensure that children’s needs are met with high-quality early care and learning opportunities.

Early Care and Learning Age Groups

Early care and learning arrangements for young children are typically based on a child’s age. This report focuses on three different age groups for children birth to five: infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

Each of these different age groups have different developmental and physical needs and, therefore, diverse needs from an early care and learning program. The specific age groups used in this report are based on those defined for use by regulated child care providers by the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF). The developmental differences between age groups affect the availability and cost of care.

Infants

Infants—children between 6 weeks and 23 months—require the most attention, support and one-on-one care of all three age groups. They are experiencing rapid developmental and emotional growth, making things like one-on-one attention, physical closeness and nurturing, and caregiver continuity important in any program serving this age group.⁹ Additionally, infants need significant physical support, such as diapering, feeding and monitored nap time. In child care programs, to best meet these needs, caring for infants in care requires a low child-to-staff ratio, making them the most expensive early childhood age group to care for. Given the cost of providing quality infant care, many programs have capacity for only a few infants.



Toddlers

Toddlers—children aged 24 through 35 months—like infants, also require a significant amount of physical care and support. During this development stage, children are rapidly discovering, learning and absorbing new knowledge from their environments.¹⁰ For toddlers, being read to, spoken to and given engaging and safe care and learning environments are necessary features of an early care and learning program. Toddlers in early care and learning programs also require a low staff-to-child ratio to support their developmental and physical needs.



Preschoolers

Preschoolers—3- and 4- year olds require less one-on-one attention. Their learning needs include developmentally appropriate play; open-ended and problem-solving activities; interaction and engagement with other peers for social and cooperative competence building; and environments that are rich in language, literacy and mathematics modeling.¹¹ These activities and other engaging modes of learning are important in giving preschoolers the tools they need for thriving in kindergarten and the rest of their educational experiences.





The next layer in Vermont’s early care and learning system includes the different types of early care and learning options that help to support children in their learning and development, and families in their work, scheduling and parenting needs.

Types of Early Care and Learning

Vermont families rely on different ways to care for their infants, toddlers and preschoolers, and may use varying types of care and learning arrangements to meet the needs of their daily lives and schedules. Some families choose to have a parent or guardian available to take care of children; opting not to work outside the home. For many families, especially families with only one parent or guardian, care by a parent or guardian is not an option. Some families with two caregivers in the labor force are able to provide care with “split shift” arrangements, so that one person is able to be home with a child at any given time. Other families rely on friends, neighbors or child care and early learning providers who are licensed or registered with the state to care for children throughout the week. These different care options can generally be described by two categories: informal child care and regulated child care and early learning.

Informal Care

In Vermont, child care provided by relatives, friends, neighbors or family helpers (such as a mother’s helper or nanny) is often called informal child care. This care is usually described in several different ways:

- **Family, Friends or Neighbors:** Some Vermont families rely on a relative, friend or neighbor to care for their children. Family, friend or neighbor care could be a grandparent who cares for a grandchild while a parent is at work, a neighbor who watches her or his own children while also

carrying for a neighbor's children, or a babysitter who watches a family's children in the family's home when a parent or guardian isn't able to be home.

- **Family Helpers:** Some families choose to hire an individual, such as a family helper or mother's helper, babysitter, nanny, or au pair, to care for their child(ren). Because family helpers typically care for a child or children from one family, they do not need to be registered or licensed with the state.

However, if informal caregivers want to regularly care for children from more than two families at the same time, they are required to become a regulated early care and learning provider in Vermont.¹²

Regulated Child Care and Early Learning

Regulated child care and early learning refers to early care and learning providers who have gone through a licensing process with the Vermont DCF's Child Development Division (CDD). The licensing process requires providers to meet certain health and safety regulations and programming guidelines (such as developmentally appropriate play time and activities that promote healthy development). The licensing process also requires the state to inspect programs to make sure they provide a safe and age-appropriate space and meet other regulations and guidelines for early care and learning.

There are several different types of regulated programs:

- **Registered Family Child Care Homes:** Also known as family providers or home-based providers, registered family child care homes provide early care and learning programs in the provider's own home. These home-based providers have gone through a licensing process with CDD to certify that they meet specific regulations that promote children's health, safety and development in order to care for a small group of children. Registered child care homes are the most common type of regulated, home-based child care in Vermont.
- **Licensed Family Child Care Homes:** As with registered child care homes, licensed child care homes offer a regulated home-based option for child care. The difference between registered child care homes and licensed child care homes is that licensed child care homes typically care for more than six children, with the support of an assistant. Like registered child care homes, licensed child care homes have received a license with CDD to certify that they meet specific regulations that promote children's health, safety and development. Since licensed family child care homes care for more children than registered family child care homes, they must meet additional regulations.
- **Licensed Center-Based Child Care and Preschool Programs:** Licensed child care centers and preschool programs care for children in a dedicated space that is not located in a home. These programs are also regulated by the state and have two or more staff who have specific training or formal education in early childhood care and education. Licensed child care centers offer many different types of programs, and may focus on a particular age group, such as preschool.

Members of the Early Care and Learning Workforce

There are many different types of early care and learning professionals and support staff who work to care for and teach Vermont's young children. The main categories of individuals who work in or with regulated early care and learning programs are listed below. However, there are many other types of professionals and staff that are critical to the early care and learning system.

- **Family Child Care Providers:** Licensed or registered family child care homes are operated by one individual. This provider may also hire one or several substitutes who are responsible for the program if the provider is unavailable. Additionally, licensed family child care homes can employ a:
 - **Family Child Care Assistant:** Assistants hold either a high school diploma or GED and have completed some early childhood specific coursework or certificate program within 12 months of their employment.
 - **Classroom Aide:** Aides hold either a high school diploma or GED and have completed a relevant college course or some other basic level of early childhood training within 12 months of their employment.
 - **Trainee:** Trainees are either 17 or 18 years of age and are enrolled or graduates of a State Board of Education-approved Human Service Certificate Program with a focus on early childhood.
 - **Substitute:** These individuals must be at least 18 years of age and hold a high school diploma or a GED.
- **Center Based Child Care and Preschool Programs:** Center-based child care and preschool programs usually employ a number of different staff that can include a combination of the following:
 - **Program Director:** All Program Directors must be qualified as Teacher Associates and, depending on the number of children a program is licensed to serve, may also need a certificate related to child care program management or college coursework related to program management for early care and education.
 - **Teacher:** Teachers must hold advanced training in early childhood education through a teaching license through the Vermont Agency of Education with endorsement in a field related to early childhood; or 12 months of experience working with young children combined with a bachelor's degree with a major or concentration specifically relevant to early childhood or a bachelor's degree with extensive coursework in early childhood or school age education.
 - **Teacher Associate (or Associate Teacher):** Teacher Associates must hold a high school diploma or GED. Additionally, they have completed specific types of advanced training in early childhood within the Early Childhood Career Ladder, or are participating in the Apprenticeship Program, among other options.
 - **Teacher Assistant (or Assistant Teacher):** Teacher Assistants hold a high school diploma or GED and have at least 12 months of experience working with young children. Additionally, they have completed some type of specific advanced early childhood training such as college courses related to child or human development, or a Child Development Associate (CDA), among other options.
 - **Trainee:** Trainees have completed either a GED or a high school diploma, or are enrolled in or have received a State Board of Education approved Human Services

Program Certificate with an early childhood focus. Additionally, like aides, they must complete some type of certification or coursework within 12 months. Unlike aides, they are permitted to be 15 years of age and up.

- **Classroom Aide:** Aides have completed either a GED or hold a high school diploma. Additionally, within their first 12 months of employment, they must have completed a relevant college course or another basic professional development course or certification related to early childhood.
 - **Substitute:** These individuals must be at least 18 years of age and hold a high school diploma or a GED.
 - **Business Administrator:** These individuals hold at least an associate's degree in business and manage the financial management and business operations of a child care center including the maintenance of a personnel file.
- **Wrap Around Support and Service Providers:** Many other service providers, coordinators and field experts help facilitate the delivery of additional resources and services available to families and children through the state (often coordinated by Children's Integrated Services [CIS]), their child care program or other organizations or programs. These individuals could include mental health therapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, behavioral specialists, intensive family based service providers, pediatricians, dental professionals, nutritional specialists and many other important service providers for children and their families.

Early Care and Learning Program Designations

Quality early care and learning experiences are important factors for the healthy development of a child's brain. Over the past 20 years, work has been done at the national and state levels to help early care and learning providers develop programs that offer high quality and valuable experiences for children. At the state level, Vermont developed a quality recognition and improvement system, known as STARS (STep Ahead Recognition System), to help parents understand how regulated programs go above and beyond basic regulations to support quality care and learning opportunities for children and to provide early care and learning professionals with clear benchmarks for quality and a pathway for improvement. Additionally, programs that are qualified to meet the needs of children and families with specialized needs are given designations by the state accordingly. At the national level, different early care and learning associations have developed programs to certify that a program offers a quality early care and learning program. Programs that are certified as meeting the national association's standards then receive accreditation from the organization.

Vermont STARS

STARS is Vermont's voluntary system for recognizing and supporting quality in early care and learning programs. It recognizes programs that are "stepping ahead" to go above and beyond the basic state regulations. Regulated early care and learning programs that participate in STARS receive a rating between one and five stars, where one star is the lowest level and five stars is the highest level. These ratings are based on points that a program can earn in the following five areas:

- ★ **Regulatory history**
- ★ **Staff qualifications and annual professional development**
- ★ **Families and community**
- ★ **Program practices**
- ★ **Administration**

STARS provides a clear path for providers to demonstrate a commitment to quality and continuously improve the quality of their program. However, it can take considerable time and resources for providers to gain points to increase their program's STARS level. Often, as the quality of a program increases, the cost of operating the program increases as well. To help providers continue to increase the quality of their programs, STARS includes bonuses for moving up in STARS quality designation system. Every time a program "steps ahead," the program is eligible to receive a bonus associated with the STARS level achieved. Additionally, programs that offer care and learning services to children from families who qualify for financial assistance from the state, financial assistance rates increase based on a program's STARS designation (see the "Financial Assistance Resources" section for more information on ways Vermont families can get help paying for early care and learning programs).

National Accreditation

In addition to, or as an alternative to, having a STARS level, some early care and learning programs pursue accreditation through national organizations. Information on a program's national accreditation is available through Vermont's [Bright Futures Information System \(BFIS\)](#), regional Child Care Referral Agencies, or through the national accrediting organization's website. National groups that currently provide accreditation in Vermont include the following organizations.

National Association for Family Child Care

The National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) offers the only national accreditation solely for family child care homes. Accreditation is awarded to family child care providers who meet a set of standards developed by NAFCC, which the group believes are hallmarks of a quality home-based early care and learning program. Home-based providers achieve accreditation through a process that evaluates all the various aspects of their program, including their relationships with children and families, the physical environment of the provider's home, what developmental learning activities are incorporated in the provider's program, whether a provider meets safety and health regulations, and

the provider's professional and business practices.¹³ In Vermont, the Vermont Child Care Providers Association (VCCPA) provides technical assistance and support to programs interested in pursuing NAFCC accreditation.

National Association for the Education of Young Children

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), one of the nation's leading membership organizations for quality care and learning, advances the quality of early childhood programs for children birth through age eight by connecting policy, practice and research.¹⁴ Within the early care and learning community, NAEYC accreditation is seen as a significant achievement that is a sign of a high-quality program. To achieve accreditation, programs must work through a multi-step process centered on 10 core standards based on scientifically-informed best practices for a quality early care and learning program.¹⁵ In Vermont, the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VtAEYC) provides technical assistance and support to programs interested in pursuing NAEYC accreditation.

National Early Childhood Program Accreditation

The National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA) is an accreditation program founded by the National Child Care Association in 1991.¹⁶ NECPA-certified programs are evaluated based on comprehensive standards to determine if a program offers a quality early care and learning experience for children. These standards, updated in 2017 to represent the most current research, are based on recommendations from the American Public Health Association and American Academy of Pediatrics National Health and Safety Performance Standards and the National Academy of Science's Committee on Family and Work Policies, along with other indicators. Additionally, NECPA key concept areas are developed based on leading national research, which has shown a direct, statistical relationship between a concept area and improved outcomes for children.

Specialized Child Care and Early Learning Programs

Some registered or licensed providers have received advanced training to meet the needs of children and families with several different types of special needs. The programs that can meet these needs are known as specialized care and learning programs. These designations are set and regulated by Children's Integrated Services (CIS), which ensures that providers are appropriately trained and prepared to best support children and families by providing high-quality care, mitigating the effects of toxic stress, supporting families or providing any other services children and families may need. In addition to having providers with specialized training, these programs must also have 3 or more stars. Not all specialized care programs are qualified to meet all of children's and families' needs; however, programs can specifically be qualified to provide one or more of these types of specialized care and learning:

- **Specialized Child Care:** Specialized child care and early learning providers who offer this type of care are able to provide care and learning for children with special physical, behavioral or developmental needs.
- **Protective Services Child Care:** Specialized providers who offer this type of care serve children and families where abuse and/or neglect has been documented and who have open cases with the Family Services Division of the Vermont DCF.

- **Family Support Child Care:** Specialized child care providers who offer this type of care work with families experiencing significant stress in areas such as shelter, safety, emotional stability, substance abuse and children’s behaviors.

Specialized child care coordinators can be contacted for assistance in finding or accessing this care. Contact information for regional coordinators can be found [here](#) or in Appendix A.

Other Types of Early Care and Learning Programs

Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start is a federally funded program that serves low-income children and their families. This type of program is often referred to as a two-generation program because it works with children and their parents or guardians. The Head Start program encompasses two age groups. Early Head Start provides early, continuous and intensive child development and family support services to children birth to three and their families, as well as pregnant mothers.¹⁷ These support services include education on healthy child development, child care and health screenings. Head Start works with children three to five years old who are not age-eligible for kindergarten by supporting their growth in language and literacy, cognitive development, social and emotional functioning and more through a high-quality preschool program. Head Start also includes health screenings and family support.

Both Head Start and Early Head Start provide a comprehensive range of education, child development, health, nutrition and family support services to enrolled children and their families. These services include health, education, medical, vision and dental screenings and follow-up care for eligible children and families.¹⁸ The federal standards required by Head Start ensure high-quality—generally 5-star—programming and services for families and children.

In Vermont, seven community-based organizations operate seven Head Start and five Early Head Start agencies that deliver services in classrooms and family homes. Head Start and Early Head Start serve many children and their families in partnerships with private child care providers and public schools. During the 2017 Federal Fiscal Year, federal Office of Head Start funding supported 1,473 young children, pregnant mothers and their families in Early Head Start and Head Start programs in Vermont.¹⁹

Universal, Publicly-Funded Pre-K

In 2014, the Vermont General Assembly passed Act 166, commonly referred to as Vermont’s universal prekindergarten (pre-K) law. Act 166 expanded upon efforts started in 2007 to make pre-K programs, also referred to as preschool or early education programs, available to all three- and four-year-olds, and five-year-olds not age-eligible for kindergarten. The program provides free tuition for 10 hours a week of pre-K programming for up to 35 weeks per year (the typical length of the school year in Vermont). This is a voluntary program and families can choose if and how their children participate.

In Vermont’s pre-K system, families may choose to enroll their child in a program that best meets the child’s and family’s needs. Parents have the option to choose a program that is operated by a school or a privately-operated pre-K program that has been approved by the Agency of Education to participate in the state’s pre-K program. School-operated programs are those that are operated by a public school. Privately-operated programs can include family child care homes; center-based child

care and preschool programs; Head Start classrooms; programs operated by private schools; and programs operated by a center-based child care and preschool program but hosted in a classroom in a public school. Both school-based and community-based programs must meet certain standards to participate in the state's universal, publicly-funded pre-K program. Pre-K programs that meet these standards can apply to receive a designation of being prequalified to participate in the publicly-funded pre-K program.

To be approved to participate, programs must have achieved a STARS quality recognition level of at least 4 stars with two points in each quality assessment arena, or 3 stars with an approved plan to get to 4 stars with two points in each arena or 5 stars within three years. Religious child care programs are not eligible to become prequalified pre-K programs because Vermont's universal pre-K program is considered a public education initiative. Using a mix of school-based and community-based programs is considered a national best practice, supporting families in choosing a program that works best for their needs and helping to ensure that families throughout the state have access to pre-K programming.²⁰

Regardless of a family's choice of program, parents or guardians fill out paperwork with their school district for their child's approved pre-K program to receive tuition payments.

Early adoption of Act 166 began with a limited number of school districts during the 2015–2016 school year. The program was implemented statewide during the 2016–2017 school year. During the 2017-2018 school year, more than 8,800 children accessed the pre-K program.²¹

Early Care and Learning Resources and Supports for Children and Their Families



There are many important resources that support families accessing the early care and learning program that works best for their child. This portion of the system includes many referral, developmental, and financial supports for young children and families in Vermont.

Early Childhood Care and Learning Information for Families

Finding an affordable and available early care and learning program can be a challenge for Vermont families. Knowing where to learn more about early childhood development and ask questions about care and development programs and resources is not always an easy process to navigate. There are several resources available to help families learn more about early care and learning programs and other early childhood tools.

Bright Futures Information System

To learn about early care and learning providers, Vermont families can use Vermont's [Bright Futures Information System \(BFIS\)](#), an online directory of regulated child care providers throughout the state. BFIS is operated by the Child Development Division of the Department for Children and Families at the Agency of Human Services. Families can search for providers based on criteria that include the age of the child, the town or county where the family is seeking care and the hours that care is needed. Information on quality, regulatory details, accreditations, special services and other additional features are also available.

Community-Based Child Care Referral Agencies

In each AHS district in Vermont, there is a community-based child care referral agency that can help families make child care arrangements. These referral agencies maintain an active list of regulated early care and learning providers in their region. Agencies have trained staff—child care referral specialists—who can help families find a provider that meets a family’s needs. To help identify potential child care providers, specialists may ask parents or guardians questions such as the age of the child who needs care, if the child needs care in the family’s hometown or near a place of work, the hours care is needed, or if the child has any specialized needs. Referral specialists can also link families to other community services and family support programs and can assist families when applying for the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP). Contact information for Vermont’s child care referral agencies can be accessed [here](#) or in Appendix B.

Parent Child Centers

The Vermont Agency of Human Services’ DCF supports 15 parent child centers (also known as family centers) throughout the state. These centers serve as a community resource for information and support for families with young children. Parent child centers also provide a range of services depending on location, including parent education opportunities, playgroups, home visits to families with young children who request or need home-based support, and center based child care programs. This programming builds on families’ strengths while promoting wellbeing and healthy starts for children. A number of parent child centers are also licensed center-based child care programs. Contact information for Vermont’s parent child centers can be accessed [here](#) or in Appendix C.

Help Me Grow

Help Me Grow Vermont (HMGVT) is part of the national Help Me Grow program, which seeks to ensure all young children receive developmental screenings to support healthy development. In Vermont, families, pediatricians, child care providers, and others can connect to HMGVT through a variety of resources including calling Vermont 2-1-1, a hotline operated by the United Ways of Vermont, through text message and [the HMGVT website](#).

If someone looking for early childhood resources calls Vermont 2-1-1, they will be connected with a trained HMGVT child development specialist. Specialists can walk a parent or a child care provider through a basic early childhood development assessment and help connect families in need of services with programs such as CIS or parent child centers. HMGVT will also provide referrals to playgroups, parent education resources, pediatricians in the family’s area, community-based child care referral agencies and other resources. HMGVT child development specialists are available Monday through Friday from 9 AM to 6 PM. If you have a question outside of the specialists’ usual hours, you can leave a message any time by calling 2-1-1. You can also seek the services’ help by texting your ZIP code to “898211,” which will connect you to a specialist during regular hours. HMGVT child development specialists and all Vermont 2-1-1 staff, volunteers and interns maintain the confidentiality of personal information.

Other components of the HMGVT system include outreach to health care and early learning providers to train them in developmental monitoring and screening with timely connection to services for all children; family and community outreach to engage and educate families about child development, and build collaboration among community providers and services; and ongoing data collection and analysis to promote quality improvement, identify systemic gaps and bolster advocacy efforts.

Early Care and Learning Coordinating Resources

Children's Integrated Services

Children's Integrated Services (CIS) is a part of the Child Development Division at the Department for Children and Families in Vermont's Agency of Human Services. CIS is a unique model for integrating early childhood health, mental health, evidence-based home visiting, early intervention and specialized child care services for pregnant and postpartum women and children birth to age six who qualify. Women and children who qualify include, pregnant mothers with a condition or risk that may impact their baby's health, children birth to 3-years of age who have disabilities or developmental delays and children birth to 5-years of age with social-emotional or behavioral challenges, among other qualifying circumstances. The model is designed to improve child and family outcomes by providing family-centric holistic services, effective service coordination, and flexible funding to address prevention, early intervention, health promotion and accountability.²² There are 13 CIS intake teams in Vermont hosted by community organizations. CIS teams are made up of a variety of early childhood and family support staff including a coordinator, child care coordinator, early interventionist, mental health clinician, maternal and child health nurse and a family support worker.

A family's individual CIS team can help identify and enroll children in specialized child care programs and request child care financial assistance, share positive parenting strategies, conduct nurse home visits with pregnant and postpartum women, support young children and families who have experienced trauma, and provide developmental screenings and early intervention services (IDEA Part C). Services are primarily provided within a family's home or in a child's early care and learning program.²³ A list of CIS coordinators by district can be found [here](#) or in Appendix D.

Child Development Clinic

The Vermont Department of Health operates the Child Development Clinic. The Child Development Clinic provides free developmental evaluation services for children who are thought to have a developmental concern, cognitive disability, autism spectrum disorder, or a known condition affecting development, and assists with early intervention and education recommendations, including referral to Early Intervention or Early Childhood Special Education Services if needed.²⁴ Families can be referred to the clinic for advanced evaluation by a health care provider, their local CIS team, HMGVT or their local child care referral agency. Once a child is referred to the clinic, developmental screenings are conducted through interactive, play-based activities that are fun and engaging for children. The clinic's main office is in Burlington, but it also offers regional sites throughout the state. More information about the Child Development Clinic and its services throughout the state can be found [here](#).

Early Learning Support Programs

Early Intervention IDEA Part C

One part of CIS is Early Intervention, Vermont's IDEA Part C program, which provides early intervention services for children with special needs from birth to age three. IDEA stands for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a federal law, and Part C refers to the section of the law related to supporting the care and learning needs of children under three with special needs. Children are eligible for Early Intervention if they have a developmental delay or a diagnosed medical condition that has a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay.²⁵ If a family is unsure whether a child has a developmental delay or a medical condition that may impact the child's learning, they can

contact their pediatrician, or call their regional [CIS](#) team to seek help, support and potentially a referral to other clinic-based resources. IDEA Part C services are coordinated by the regional CIS team through an Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP). In Vermont, this process is known as “One Plan.”

Early Childhood Special Education Services

A child is eligible for Vermont’s Early Childhood Special Education Services (ECSES) if the child is between the ages of three and five, and she or he has a developmental delay or has a medical condition diagnosed by a licensed physician that may interfere with learning and future success at home, in school and in the community. After turning three, a child who has received Early Intervention services may be eligible for ECSES. ECSES are administered by a family’s school district at no cost to parents.²⁶ If a child is determined to be eligible for ECSES, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) will be developed for the child that outlines what special education and services the child needs and how the family’s local school district and other partners will help the family secure and participate in these services. The IEP is assigned a case manager who is often a child’s care and learning provider (also referred to as a child’s essential early educator) to oversee the implementation of the IEP.²⁷

Vermont Family Network

The Vermont Family Network (VFN) is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering and supporting families of children with special needs. By providing families with a strong start, lifting family voices for positive change, and advancing inclusive communities, the VFN seeks to ensure that every Vermont family can help their child reach their potential. As the Chittenden County Children’s Integrated Services (CIS) Early Intervention program, VFN provides direct support services for eligible families of children birth to age three who have or are at risk of having delays in their development. The organization provides skilled family-to-family support, information and connection for families of children and youth with disabilities/special health care needs. Through a number of leadership development opportunities and legislative advocacy tools, VFN offers families the resources necessary for self-advocacy and promoting positive systems change on behalf of Vermont children with differing abilities.

Financial Assistance Resources for Families

To help make child care more affordable for families and providers, Vermont offers a combination of state and federal resources that help families pay for care and learning.

Child Care Financial Assistance Program

Vermont’s Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP), administered by the Vermont Child Development Division, helps eligible families pay for child care for children age six weeks up to age 13 (or up to age 19 if the child has special needs). The program is funded through a combination of state and federal funds and pays all or part of an established rate directly to an early care and learning provider. Families may choose any regulated early care and learning provider who is willing to accept payments from CDD. CDD pays higher rates to programs that participate in STARS because, as explained earlier, it costs providers more money to offer higher quality (higher star level) programs.

To be eligible for the program, a family's gross monthly income (how much the family earns before any taxes or deductions are taken out) must be less than 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (see Appendix A for the full eligibility chart), and parents must have a reason for child care services (called an *approved service need*), such as work or attending school.²⁸ The current income guidelines and approved service needs can be found on DCF's Bright Futures website and can help families determine if they are eligible for the program and how much of a benefit they would receive.²⁹

When a family is eligible for assistance, the state will pay a percentage of the appropriate reimbursement rate directly to the early care and learning provider. The state pays a higher rate to providers who participate in STARS. Payment rates are based on the child's age, the type of provider and the authorized hours of care. The other portion of the cost of care, the copayment, is the family's responsibility and is paid directly to their child care provider.

In addition to supporting families in need of financial assistance when paying for child care, CCFAP also supports children in protective custody.

Reach Up and Reach Ahead Child Care Assistance

Reach Up is Vermont's name for the federally funded Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. Families receiving Reach Up are eligible for child care assistance so that a parent can work, pursue approved education, or, if approved, look for a job.³⁰

Reach Ahead is the state's program to help families transition from Reach Up or the Post-secondary Education program. Families participating in Reach Ahead may be eligible for child care financial assistance.³¹ If a family with a young child or children participates in Reach Up or Reach Ahead, they may be eligible to receive 100% of the CCFAP reimbursement rate to help toward their child care costs. To receive care and learning financial assistance, families participating in either program can ask their case manager to submit an authorization for child care to a family's local child care eligibility specialist.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Similar to how CCFAP provides families with financial assistance for child care, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a federal program that provides eligible children and adults with nutritious meals and snacks by assisting care providers with the costs associated with offering food. In Vermont, CACFP is administered by the Vermont Agency of Education.

CACFP is a voluntary program and not all regulated early care and learning providers in Vermont participate. If a child's early care and learning provider does participate in the program, the provider will ask families to complete paperwork to determine if a family is eligible for CACFP. Participating child care programs submit paperwork to be reimbursed for part of the cost of providing snacks and/or meals to eligible children. Payments are made by the Vermont Agency of Education directly to early care and learning providers, making it similar to many of the Financial Resources for Providers listed below. Ultimately, it ensures that many young children in Vermont are provided with nutritious meals.

To be eligible for the program, a family's gross monthly income (how much the family earns before any taxes or deductions are taken out) must be less than 300% of the **Federal Poverty Level** and parents must have a reason for child care services.

Tax Credits

Vermonters have the option of taking advantage of various state and federal tax credits to offset some of the cost a family pays each year for early care and learning programs. The following information provides a general overview of tax credits related to child care and learning, and is not intended to serve as tax advice. Tax advice may be available through [your local community action agency](#), tax preparer or accountant.

Federal Tax Credits

The federal government offers several different tax credits for families with children, but the primary credit related to costs associated with early care and learning programs is the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit. The federal Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit is designed to help families who have a child or children age 12 or younger or other qualified dependents and who pay for early care and learning programs so that all available parents in the household can work or look for work. Families can claim up to \$3,000 in expenses for one child and \$6,000 for two children per year. The credit is worth between 20 percent and 35 percent of these expenses, depending on a family's income.³² This tax credit lowers a family's tax liability.

THE FEDERAL TAX CREDIT IN ACTION

The Deen Family – Amina, Peter, Sam and Avery

Sam (infant) and Avery (preschooler) go to a 4-star center-based early care and learning program full-time. Amina and Peter both work and have an adjusted gross combined income of \$49,200 per year. Last year, Amina and Peter paid \$20,976.95 (after tuition assistance) for Sam and Avery to attend a full-day, full-year early care and learning program. The federal government allows Amina and Peter to claim up to \$6,000 of Sam and Avery’s qualified early care and learning expenses on their federal taxes.

To determine their tax credit, Amina and Peter used the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit worksheet from the IRS—Form 2441—to determine what percentage of their eligible expenses (the \$6,000 noted above) can be used to determine their credit. According to Form 2441, based on Amina and Peter’s income, they can claim 20% of their allowed early care and learning expenses.

$$\begin{array}{r} \$ 6,000 \\ \times .20 \\ \hline \$ 1,200 \end{array}$$

This means that the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit reduces the amount of taxes Amina and Peter owe by \$1,200.

The LaPorte Family - Rebecca and Charlie

Charlie (infant) goes to a 4-star, home-based provider full-time while Rebecca works. Last year, Rebecca paid \$896.29 (after tuition assistance) for full-day, full-year child care for Charlie.

The federal government allows Rebecca to claim up to \$3,000 of Charlie’s early care and learning expenses on their federal taxes.

For tax year 2016, Rebecca had an adjusted gross income of \$20,424. To determine their tax credit, Rebecca uses the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit worksheet from the IRS, Form 2441, to determine what percentage of their eligible expenses (the \$896 noted above) can be used to determine their credit. According to Form 2441, based on Rebecca’s income, she can claim 32% of their allowed early care and learning expenses.

$$\begin{array}{r} \$ 896 \\ \times .32 \\ \hline \$ 287 \end{array}$$

This means that the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit reduces the amount of taxes Rebecca owes by \$287.

Vermont Tax Credits

Vermont offers two different tax credits for certain families who use early care and learning programs. Families may use one of the two options, but not both.³³

Vermont Low Income Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit

The Vermont Low Income Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit is a refundable tax credit that allows families who meet certain income criteria to deduct 50% of the Federal Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit from their tax liability. This allows families to reduce the amount they are expected to pay in taxes. With the Low Income Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, families are not only able to lower their taxes, but they also get money back if their credit totals more than what they owe in taxes. Let's say that a family is expected to pay \$200 in taxes to the State of Vermont before they calculate their Low Income Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit. If they determine that 50% of their Federal Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit is \$250, this means that they will not owe any Vermont taxes and will receive a \$50 refund from the state.

In order to qualify for this credit, a family must be eligible for and receive the federal tax credit and:

- Have an Annual Gross Income (AGI) of:
 - \$29,999 or less if the family files taxes using a Single or Head of Household filing status
or
 - \$39,999 or less if a family files taxes using a Married Joint or Civil Union Joint filing status
- Use a registered or licensed child care or early learning provider who has a quality recognition level of at least 3 stars or is nationally accredited. For tax year 2016, there were 792 child care programs in Vermont that met these criteria.³⁴

Percentage of Federal Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit

For families who make more than the income limits set for the Low Income Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, but who still qualify for the Federal Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, the State of Vermont offers the non-refundable Percentage of Federal Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit. Families who meet these criteria can deduct 24% of their Federal Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit from their state tax liability. However, if this amount is more than what a family owes in taxes, the family will not receive the remaining amount back as a refund.³⁵

Other Family Financial Assistance

In some cases, early care and learning providers may choose to offer their own financial assistance to children and families. For some providers, this means that they offer a discounted rate if a family has more than one child enrolled with the provider. In other cases, some providers offer partial or full scholarships or sliding fee scales for their programs to help make care and learning accessible for families. Still others may choose not to collect the difference between the child care financial assistance reimbursement and the actual cost of tuition.

Resources that Support Vermont's Early Care and Learning Workforce

In addition to resources and supports for families, Vermont's early care and learning system also includes numerous programs that aim to support members of Vermont's early care and learning workforce. These resources help early care and learning providers enter into and pursue professional development within the early childhood field. Many of these resources also assist providers in improving upon the quality of their programs.

Professional Development and Program Support for the Early Care and Learning Workforce

Northern Lights Career Development Center

The Northern Lights Career Development Center offers resources and career planning for early care and learning providers and professionals throughout Vermont. Northern Lights also collects and shares information on professional development. As providers gain education and experience, they can apply for level certificates based on Northern Light's career development ladder system: the more experience, skills, and education gained, the higher the designation received in the career development ladder system. The Northern Lights Career Development Center is operated by the Community College of Vermont and is supported by the Vermont CDD. In 2018, this program is expected to continue to evolve and new developments will be posted to Northern Lights' [website](#) as they are announced.

Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VtAEYC)

The Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VtAEYC) is the state affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), referenced in the National Accreditation section of this report. VtAEYC offers a range of programs and services for its members and to early care and learning providers in Vermont.

- **Technical Assistance and Mentoring:** Like Vermont Birth to Five, VtAEYC offers early care and learning providers free technical assistance and mentoring services, including helping programs achieve NAEYC accreditation and advance through the STARS process, and hosting an annual conference that offers skill-based and content-based workshops, presentations from issue experts, and resources for Vermont early care and learning professionals.
- **T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Program:** T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Helps) Early Childhood is an evidence-based, outcomes-driven national program that offers financial assistance for early care and learning providers to achieve certificates or degrees in early childhood education through a cost-sharing model. VtAEYC is the administrator for the program in the state.

Vermont Child Care Industry and Careers Council

The Vermont Child Care Industry and Careers Council (VCCICC) is a statewide non-profit organization that works to enhance the knowledge, skills and status of early care and education providers. The Council does this through several different programs.

- **Child Care Apprenticeship Program:** In partnership with the Vermont Department of Labor and area child care programs, VCCICC coordinates an apprenticeship program for new, full-

time early care and education workers who want to increase their education and experience in the field. Through the program, employers match less experienced staff with mentors in the workplace for formal training in their classrooms. The apprentice learns on-the-job in addition to taking college classes offered at Community College of Vermont locations throughout the state. During their apprenticeship, students are well prepared to complete their Child Development Associate credential, and after completing the apprenticeship, participants earn a Child Development Specialist certificate from the Vermont Department of Labor. Thanks to a new partnership, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Vermont, a scholarship program, is now available to participants in the Child Care Apprenticeship Program.

- **College Courses and Certificates of Proficiency:** Along with the Child Care Apprenticeship Program, VCCICC has developed a sequence of six college courses offered through the Community College of Vermont. These courses are offered free of charge to participants of the Apprenticeship Program and are designed to be accessible for working individual's schedules. Additionally, VCCICC offers "Certificates of Proficiency" to students enrolled in high school technical centers' Human Services or Early Childhood Programs. These certificates, allow students just entering the field to demonstrate their attained knowledge and skills in specific areas.

Vermont Birth to Five

Vermont Birth to Five (VB5), an initiative of the Permanent Fund for Vermont's Children, was formed in 2015 to combine two programs—Vermont Birth to Three and the Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative—in order to work toward ensuring that every Vermont child has access to high-quality, affordable early care and learning by 2025. VB5 helped jumpstart the quality of Vermont's early care and learning programs. To meet the needs of Vermont's young kids and families, VB5's 2018 projects will focus on:

- **Program start-up and expansion:** Through its Make Way for Kids program, VB5 will partner with communities to create new high-quality child care spots by offering short-term financial and technical assistance that supports local expansion, quality improvement or program start-up.
- **Shared Services:** Consistently achieving high-quality and viability is a challenge for early care and learning providers in rural states. Child care programs can become stronger—offering better service to kids and families and enhanced work experiences to educators—by working together to share business and programmatic resources through Shared Services hubs.
- **Professional networks:** Early childhood educator networks, like Starting Points groups, are a valuable and sustainable way for providers to receive ongoing professional training and support. VB5 will focus on leadership development and increased participation to maximize the value of these networks to the field.
- **Workforce development:** To provide kids with what they need, the early care and learning field must attract, train and retain skilled educators. VB5 will continue to provide support to providers working to increase their skills and qualifications through individual and group coaching and technical assistance from skilled, experienced early childhood professionals.

Starting Points Networks

A collaboration between the Child Development Division and Vermont Birth to Five, Starting Points Networks are regional member-based groups that hold regular meetings for early care and learning professionals to engage and connect with peers in their field. They offer professionals the opportunity

to participate in peer-to-peer support, professional development and facilitated discussions about best practices.

Business Resource Center at the Vermont Community Loan Fund

Vermont Community Loan Fund's (VCLF) Business Resource Center provides financial and business coaching services to early care and learning providers who participate in their loan programs to make sure program directors and providers have access to all the business tools they need to succeed. This includes assisting providers with financial capability training, strategic planning, forecasting and managing cash flow, marketing support and other aspects of business management to promote the viability of early care and learning programs.

Hunger Free Vermont

Hunger Free Vermont (HFVT) works with early care and learning providers across Vermont by providing trainings and technical assistance around the importance of adequate nutrition in early childhood. Trainings include basic nutrition education for providers to pass along to parents, how to create pleasant mealtime environments in childcare, creating healthy relationships with food, introducing flavorful nutrition to children under three, and hands-on cooking classes. The trainings and technical assistance provided are appropriate for any providers, whether or not they provide meals or snacks or utilize CACFP, a state-administered, federally-funded program that provides free or reduced meals and snacks to children from lower-income families.

Vermont FEED: A Farm-to-School Project of NOFA-VT and Shelburne Farms

The Vermont FEED (Food Education Every Day) Project provides training, resources and coordination for a variety of farm-to-school initiatives including those focused in early childhood programs. Through its early childhood work, Vermont FEED seeks to connect programs serving young children to nutritious, local food and ensure that early childhood professionals have the tools and resources they need to integrate farm-to-early-childhood practices through their curriculum, kitchens, and family and community engagement work.

Vermont Child Care Providers Association (VCCPA)

The Vermont Child Care Providers Association is a nonprofit, professional organization that provides peer support for child care providers in the state. VCCPA represents child care providers and promotes provider peer-to-peer connection, mentoring, and technical assistance in order to support the quality of the state's early care and learning programs and children's experiences with high-quality care.

Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium

As part of Vermont's Race to the Top Grant, the Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium gathers higher education leaders—representing institutions that offer early childhood programs—to collaborate on the needs and best training tools for the early care and learning workforce.

Financial Assistance Resources for Providers

STARS Financial Incentives for Providers

To help providers offset some of the costs associated with operating a quality program, STARS offers providers financial incentives every time a provider "steps ahead" in the system. While these financial

incentives are helpful and important for providers, it is important to note that they in no way compensate for all the expenses providers incur by increasing the quality of their program.

Child Development Division Training and Education Bonuses

As providers complete care and education training, they may be eligible to receive professional recognition bonuses. These bonuses are awarded when a provider earns a Level Certificate on the early childhood career ladder, or meets other Vermont credentials or certificates. Additionally, CDD awards College Tuition Grants for early care and learning providers pursuing college courses related to working with children. There is also a grant or “bonus” available for programs that achieve national accreditation as well as grants available for programs to cover the fees associated with becoming accredited by these national organizations. Finally, there is a grant program which assists providers in covering the cost of a GED Assessment. These grants are processed through VtAEYC and aligned with the Northern Lights Vermont Early Childhood Career Ladder.

Early Care and Learning Loan Program

In addition to the Business Resource Center, VCLF provides loans to early care and learning providers who may not qualify for a loan from a traditional lender. VCLF loans support providers in starting, growing and advancing their programs to increase access to high-quality, affordable early care and learning opportunities for Vermont’s children and families.

Guiding, Coordinating and Administering Vermont's Early Care and Learning System



The state's early care and learning system is administered and coordinated by a number of organizations, agencies and departments that support children, families and providers in a variety of ways. Additionally, the work of a public-private partnership and a collaborative early childhood action plan coordinate the system holistically while moving it forward for Vermont's young children.

Vermont's Early Childhood Framework and Action Plan

Over the years, those involved in early care and learning in Vermont engaged in conversations about how to enhance the care and learning system for Vermont families and reached a consensus that the state needed a clear vision and goals to ensure that all Vermont children received a strong start. In 2013, Vermont adopted a vision statement to guide the state's efforts related to early childhood, "to realize the promise of every Vermont child."³⁶ This vision statement served as a central point in the state's creation of the Early Childhood Framework and the Early Childhood Action Plan. The Framework outlines the guiding principles of Vermont's vision for early childhood and the Action Plan is a set of shared goals and priorities, revised annually, for strengthening early childhood systems and outcomes in the state. The Early Childhood Framework and Action Plan tie together local, state and federal resources related to early care and learning that need to work together to support Vermont's young children. The Action Plan provides an opportunity for a diverse set of participants to come together with a common agenda to collaborate toward a shared vision, with shared accountability, for that future.

Coordinating the Vision: Building Bright Futures

Building Bright Futures (BBF) is Vermont's early childhood public-private partnership established by law to monitor the state's early care, health and education systems and to advise the Administration and Legislature on policy and systems improvements. BBF operates as a backbone organization for collective impact at the state and local level by convening stakeholders and community members with a common goal of meeting the diverse needs of all Vermont children and families. To achieve its mission, BBF:

- Serves as a steward of the Action Plan. BBF Action Plan Committees align with the framework's goals, to drive this work forward and monitor progress on the Action Plan's annual work.
- Convenes the Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council (SAC), a group of cross sector early childhood leaders from across the state, as well as members of the Administration. The SAC sets its annual priorities based on the Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan and serves as an advisory body to the Administration and Legislature on early childhood policy.
- Supports 12 BBF Regional Councils, which work locally to identify gaps, share best practices, strategize and support a response to community issues through their regional action plans. Regional councils also create community engagement opportunities to foster positive change for young children. Councils advise the BBF SAC on local issues, needs and bright spots to strengthen both local and statewide systems of care, health and education.
- Hosts Vermont Insights, an interactive website and data portal that provides valuable information about the well-being of the state's children and families. Its information is aimed at helping communities, policymakers and leaders make the most informed program and policy decisions possible.
- Produces an annual report on the well-being of young children and families in the state, *How Are Vermont's Young Children and Families?*

Agencies, Departments and Individuals that Coordinate and Oversee the State's Early Care and Learning Programs

Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS)

The state's Agency of Human Services coordinates many of the programs and resources that support Vermont's families in accessing things such as child care, health care and other related services. Under AHS, the Department for Children and Families (DCF) and, within it, the Child Development Division (CDD), oversees many of Vermont's early care and learning programs. The CDD aims to help Vermont families and children access high-quality and sustainable services and care options. It oversees the licensure and regulations of Vermont's early care and learning providers as well as the state's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) and the universal pre-K program, Act 166, which they coordinate with the Agency of Education.

Vermont Agency of Education (AOE)

The Agency of Education (AOE) oversees the state's public education system, including school districts and supervisory unions, and ensures that Vermont students have access to high-quality and equitable educational experiences. Additionally, the AOE contributes to the early care and learning system by managing the state's universal pre-K program in partnership with AHS. It also coordinates ECSES and IDEA Part B and Part C, including assessments, which help families access the resources and assistance they need for their young children, in addition to administering CACFP

Supervisory Union and School District Early Education Coordinators

Supervisory unions and school districts sometimes have early education coordinators who help facilitate towns' and districts' early care and learning partnerships and services. This role can include coordinating school and center-based pre-K activities and common curriculum and supporting the implementation of special education services for families with young children.

Advancing the System: Programs and Organizations that Move Early Care and Learning in the State Forward



Several community- and advocacy-based organizations, as well as critical funding sources, support moving the early care and learning system forward in Vermont. These programs often seek to support current work and innovation occurring in the state, while pushing the system toward an even brighter future for children and families.

Advancing the Vision

Several different community outreach and advocacy organizations in Vermont are committed to collaborating to advance issues related to early care and learning. In addition to those listed here, a number of other groups described elsewhere in this report do important work related to advocating for early childhood and early care and learning issues, including the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children, VCCPA, the Vermont Family Network, Hunger Free Vermont and other partner organizations.

Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance

Formed in 2000, the Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance is a statewide advocacy coalition of early childhood professionals, parents and employers committed to improving public policies that impact young children from birth to eight on issues of health, safety, food, economic security and early care and education.

The Alliance crafts an annual Legislative Agenda in partnership with early childhood organizations, provides year-round advocacy support and facilitates meaningful interactions with policymakers at key times during the decision-making process.

The Alliance is a membership-based organization and has both individual and organizational members. More information on the Alliance and its members is available [here](#).

Let's Grow Kids

Let's Grow Kids (LGK), an initiative of the Permanent Fund for Vermont's Children, is a public awareness and engagement campaign about the important role that high-quality, affordable child care can play in supporting the healthy development of Vermont's children during their first five years—the most important years for laying a foundation for success in relationships, school and life. Because Vermont's shortage of high-quality, affordable child care is a serious challenge for our communities and our economy, LGK's goal is to gain public support leading to increased, sustainable investment that gives all children the chance to reach their full potential.

Voices for Vermont's Children

Voices for Vermont's Children is a statewide membership organization of several hundred individuals and organizations. Membership dues and contributions support their advocacy, outreach and community organizing efforts on behalf of Vermont's children and youth.

Voices addresses the full spectrum of child, youth and family issues—from child care and access to health care coverage for children and youth to juvenile justice and child welfare.

Supporting the Vision

To support the state's vision for early childhood and the Early Childhood Framework and Action Plan, the state has secured federal funding to strengthen its overall early childhood systems and early care and learning industry, as well as specific early childhood programs.

Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Grant

In January 2014, Vermont was awarded a \$36.9 million grant through the federal government's Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge initiative. The Early Learning Challenge was designed to help states build a high-quality and accessible early childhood system that promotes school readiness for all children, particularly those with high needs. To ensure that positive impacts on early learning and development opportunities endure beyond the funding provided by the grant, the focus of every state's Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge grant is on developing the systems that support early learning and development programs rather than investing in direct services. The grant was originally awarded to support Vermont's efforts to strengthen its early childhood system from 2014 to 2017, but the state has been granted a no-cost extension that will allow it to continue using available funding through 2018.

The Vermont plan focuses on strategies to:

- Improve quality and accessibility of early learning and development opportunities;
- Invest in a highly skilled workforce through professional development;
- Empower communities to support young children and families; and
- Strengthen our capacity to ensure we are making a difference.

These strategies support many of the early care and learning programs and resources discussed earlier in this report, and are helping to ensure that Vermont has a firm foundation upon which it can continue to build systems and resources to help realize the promise of every Vermont child.

Preschool Expansion and Development Grant

In addition to receiving the federal Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge grant, in 2014, Vermont was awarded a \$33 million, four-year Preschool Expansion Grant by the federal government to support the state’s efforts to make pre-K available to all Vermont families. The Preschool Expansion Grant provides specific funding to support pre-K programs serving low-income four-year-olds. The grant is helping to expand services so that these targeted programs can offer full-day programs, improve quality and increase their capacity. The implementation of this grant and the support it provides directly to programs began in 2015 and will continue until 2019.

Early Head Start–Child Care Partnership and Early Head Start Expansion

Also in 2014, Vermont received Early Head Start–Child Care Partnership and Early Head Start Expansion awards. As noted earlier, Early Head Start partners with early care and learning providers to provide care in a family’s local community. The Early Head Start–Child Care Partnership award provides critical funding for this service, and the Early Head Start Expansion award is helping to support early care and learning providers in offering full-day, full-year programs.³⁷



Recognizing that early care and learning access and affordability are challenges facing many Vermont families, Vermont has undertaken two innovative initiatives to begin to address these and other challenges in the state's early care and learning system.

Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care

In 2015, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 58 to create the Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care. The Commission was tasked with evaluating Vermont's current system for early care and learning and exploring funding mechanisms, national trends for child care assistance programs and other important potential elements for rethinking Vermont's early care and learning system. The Commission was comprised of administration officials, community members and organizational stakeholder representatives. In late 2016, the Commission concluded its work and published its findings in a final report. The report included many important conclusions about early care and learning programs in the state, and concrete recommendations for next steps the state should undertake to strengthen and support Vermont's early care and learning system.

Key Findings:

- It is expensive to provide high quality child care.
 - Estimates showed that the annual cost of providing high-quality child care in Vermont could range from \$35,000–\$41,000 for infants to about \$15,000 for preschoolers.
- CCFAP could be modified to ensure that child care is affordable for the majority of the state's families with young children by adjusting income-eligibility guidelines to be based on the state's basic needs budget model, expanding eligibility and increasing assistance.
- It would take an additional investment of at least \$206 million per year to implement a high-quality early care and learning system in which all children, birth to five, likely to need care have access to a high-quality, regulated early care and learning program.

Recommendations:

- The state should make annual incremental investments immediately in high-quality, affordable early care and learning;
- Building Bright Futures should lead a process to design and implement Vermont's future early care and learning system; and
- The state should continue to investigate potential financing mechanisms to support the early care and learning system.

Building Vermont's Future From the Child Up

Given the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendation that Building Bright Futures lead a process to design and implement the state's future early care and learning system, in May 2017, the organization launched a comprehensive design process, Building Vermont's Future From the Child Up, with support from the Permanent Fund for Vermont's Children.

The initial phase of the design process was facilitated using an appreciative inquiry framework with the help of specialists from the David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry at Champlain College. A steering committee with a diverse membership that included extensive stakeholder engagement collected Vermonters' visions for a future system, and the phase culminated in a two-day summit that produced concrete ideas for components of a future system.

In the second phase of the design process, the ideas created at the summit will continue to be refined by the Building Vermont's Future Think Tank, which will develop a comprehensive blueprint for the state's future early care and learning system as well as complementary policy recommendations. These findings will be presented to the Vermont Legislature by January 2019.

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Appendix A – Specialized Child Care Coordinators

From the Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families, Current as of May 2018.

Bennington

Rose Morrison
Sunrise Family Resource Center
PO Box 829
238 Union Street
Bennington, VT 05201
Phone: 802-442-0059
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rmorrison@sunrisepcc.com

Brattleboro

Tonya Kangas
Winston Prouty
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Brattleboro, VT 05301
Phone: 802-257-7852 ext. 312
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tonya@winstonprouty.org

Burlington

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Child Care Resource
181 Commerce Street
Williston, VT 05495
Phone: 800-339-3367 x141 (in state)
802-863-3367 x141 (out of state)
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Hartford

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319 US Route 5 South
Norwich, VT 05055
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Middlebury

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Addison County Parent Child Center
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Morrisville

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Morrisville, VT 05661
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Fax: 802-888-5392
cwade@lamoillefamilycenter.org

Newport

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Northeast Kingdom Community Action
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Newport, VT 05855
Phone: 802-334-7316 x206
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lsweeney@nekcavt.org

Rutland

Courtney Mason
Vermont Achievement Center
88 Park Street
Rutland, VT 05701
Phone: 802-773-4365 x111
Fax: 802-773-9656
cmason@vacvt.org

St. Albans

Laurie Hayford-Saborowski
The Family Center of Northwestern Counseling
& Support Services
60 Lake Street, Suite 100
St. Albans, VT 05478
Phone: 802-782-5763
lsaborowski@ncssinc.org

St. Johnsbury

Kim Buxton
Umbrella, Kingdom Child Care Connection
1216 Railroad Street, Suite C
St. Johnsbury, VT 05819
Phone: 802-748-1992 x327
Fax: 802-748-1405
kim@umbrellanek.org

Springfield

Lori Johnson
Springfield Area Parent Child Center
6 Main Street
North Springfield, VT 05150
Phone: 802-886-5242 x246
Fax: 802-886-2007
lorij@vermontel.net

Washington

Dori Oatley
Family Center of Washington County
383 Sherwood Drive
Montpelier, VT 05602
Phone: 802-262-3292 x122
Fax: 802-262-6071
dorio@fcwcvvt.org

Appendix B – Child Care Referral Agencies

From the Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families, Current as of May 2018.

Addison

Addison County Child Care Services at Mary Johnson Children's Center
81 Water Street
Middlebury, VT 05753
Phone: 802-388-4304

Bennington

Bennington County Child Care Association
238 Union Street
Bennington, VT 05201
Phone: 802-447-3778

Caledonia/Essex (South)

Kingdom Child Care Connection at Umbrella
1222 Main Street, Suite 301
St. Johnsbury, VT 05819
Phone: 802-748-1992, 1-800-916-8645

Chittenden

Child Care Resource
181 Commerce Street
Williston, VT 05495
Phone: 802-863-3367, 1-800-339-3367

Franklin/Grand Isle

Family Center of Northwestern Counseling & Support Services
130 Fisher Pond Road
St. Albans, VT 05478
Phone: 802-524-6554
Fax: 802-527-1126

Lamoille

Lamoille Family Center
480 Cady's Falls Road
Morrisville, VT 05661
Phone: 802-888-5229

Orange/Windsor (North)

The Family Place
319 US Route 5 South
Norwich, VT 05055
Phone: 802-649-3268, 1-800-639-0039

Orleans/Essex (North)

Northeast Kingdom Community Action, Inc. - Parent Child Center
70 Main Street, PO Box 346
Newport, VT 05855
Phone: 802-334-7316

Rutland

Vermont Achievement Center
88 Park Street
Rutland, VT 05701
Phone: 802-773-4365 (Child Care Financial Assistance), 802-747-0033 (Child Care Referrals), 1-800-775-2390 (General)

Washington

Family Center of Washington County
383 Sherwood Drive
Montpelier, VT 05602
Phone: 802-262-3292

Windham

Winston Prouty
209 Austine Drive, Vermont Hall
Brattleboro, VT 05301
Phone: 802-257-7852

Windsor (South)/Windsor (North)

Springfield Area Parent Child Center
6 Main Street
North Springfield, VT 05150
Phone: 802-886-5242, 1-800-808-4442

Appendix C – Parent Child Centers

From the Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families, Current as of May 2018.

Addison County

Addison County Parent Child Center

126 Monroe Street
PO Box 646
Middlebury VT 05753
Phone: 802-388-3171
Fax: 802-388-1590

Bennington County

Sunrise Family Resource Center

238 Union Street
PO Box 1517
Bennington VT 05201
Phone: 802-442-6934
Fax: 802-442-1663

Caledonia and Orleans Counties

NEKCA/Parent Child Center South

115 Lincoln Street
St Johnsbury VT 05819-2449
Phone: 802-748-6040
Fax: 802-748-6042

NEKCA/Parent Child Center North

70 Main Street
Newport VT 05855
Phone: 802-334-7316

Chittenden County

Lund Family Center

76 Glen Road
PO Box 4009
Burlington VT 05406-4009
Phone: 802-864-7467
Fax: 802-864-1619

Milton Family Community Center

PO Box 619
Milton VT 05468-0619
Phone: 802-893-1457 or 802-893-6502
Fax: 802-893-1776

The Janet S. Munt Family Room

20 Allen Street
Burlington, VT 05401
Phone: 802-862-2121

Franklin and Grand Isle Counties

Family Center of Northwestern Counseling & Support Services

130 Fisher Pond Road
St. Albans VT 05478
Phone: 802-524-6554
Fax: 802-524-1126

Lamoille County

Lamoille Family Center

480 Cady's Falls Road
Morrisville VT 05661
Phone: 802-888-5229
Fax: 802-888-5392

Orange County

Orange County Parent Child Center

693 VT Route 110
Tunbridge, VT 05077
Phone: 802-685-2264, 1-888-685-2264
Fax: 802-685-2278

Rutland County

Rutland County Parent Child Center

61 Pleasant Street
Rutland VT 05701
Phone: 802-775-9711
Fax: 802-775-5473

Washington County

Family Center of Washington County

383 Sherwood Drive
Montpelier VT 05602
Phone: 802-262-3292
Fax: 802-262-6071

Windham and Windsor Counties

Early Education Services of Windham County

130 Birge Street
Brattleboro VT 05301
Phone: 802-254-3742, 1-800-427-3730
Fax: 802-254-3750

Windsor County

The Family Place

319 US Route 5 South
Norwich VT 05055
Phone: 802-649-3268, 1-800-639-0039
Fax: 802-649-3270

Springfield Area Parent Child Center

6 Main Street
North Springfield VT 05150
Phone: 802-886-5242
Fax: 802-886-2007

Appendix D – CIS Coordinators by District

From the Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families, Current as of May 2018.

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Family Center of Washington County

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shaneo@fcwcvt.org

Bennington

Sunrise Family Resource Center

244 Union Street
Bennington, VT 05201
Fax: 802-447-6487
Kelly Belville, 802-442-6934
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Brattleboro

Winston Prouty Center for Child and Family Development

209 Austine Drive
Brattleboro, VT 05301
Alison Wheeler, (802) 257-2101 x314
alison@winstonprouty.org

Burlington

Howard Center

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Burlington, VT 05401
Fax: 802-488-6901

Child Care Resource

181 Commerce Street
Williston, VT 05495
Sharon Halnon
shalnon@childcareresource.org

Middlebury

Addison County Parent Child Center
PO Box 646
Middlebury, VT 05753
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Morrisville

Lamoille Family Center

480 Cadys Falls Road
Morrisville, VT 05661
Carol Lang-Godin, 802-888-5229 x141
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Newport

Northeast Kingdom Learning Services, Inc.

55 Seymour Lane, Suite 27
Newport, VT 05855
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Michelle Maitri-Mudita, 802-334-5335
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Rutland Area Visiting Nurse Association

PO Box 787
7 Albert Cree Drive
Rutland, VT 05702-0787
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St. Albans

The Family Center of Northwestern Counseling & Support Services

130 Fisher Pond Road
St. Albans, VT 05478
Fax: 802-524-1126
Heather Wilson, 802-524-6554
heather.wilson@ncssinc.org

St. Johnsbury

Northeast Kingdom Learning Services, Inc.

1222 Main Street

St. Johnsbury, VT 05819

Fax: 802-748-6319

Erin Dobbin, 802-748-6586

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Springfield

Springfield Area Parent Child Center

6 Main Street

North Springfield, VT 05150

Fax: 802-886-2007

Stacey Sanderson, 802-886-5242

staceys@vermontel.net

White River Junction – Hartford Area

The Family Place

319 US Route 5 South

Norwich, VT 05055

Fax: 802-649-3270

Kelly Wallace, 802-649-3268

kellyw@the-family-place.org

White River Junction – Orange County Area

Orange County Parent Child Center

693 Vermont Route 110

Tunbridge, VT 05077

Fax: 802-685-2278

Monique Braman, 802-685-2264 x204

monique@orangecountypcc.org

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