



**EDUCATION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Wednesday, December 16, 2020 | 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.**  
**Teleconference**

**Commissioners present:**

Kellie Campbell, Sarah Mell

**Commissioners absent:** Nancy Brooks

**Advisors present:**

Jen Horowitz of Let's Grow Kids, Charlie Gliserman and Amy Russo-Perler of Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance, Morgan Crossman of Building Bright Futures, Amy Brady of Voices for Vermont's Children, Lisa Townsen of Vermont Women in Higher Education,

**Staff present:**

Hannah Lane

**Presiding:**

Kellie Campbell

**Recording:** Hannah Lane

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**Called to order at 9:00 a.m.**

Amy Brady shared about the proposal to create an Office of Child, Youth, and Family Advocate. Vermont is the only New England State without this kind of role. New Hampshire has had excellent results. Designing the office after the New Hampshire model, and worked with partners, hosted a listening series, partnering with the Root Social Justice Center this fall, met with families, foster children, and listened. What would a child-focused system look like? Conversations lasted many hours, and it's important to understand the depth of people's experiences. The work needs to center on families, youth, foster families, families of origin, and kinship care providers. Recognizing that creating this office isn't going to change anything, we need broader systemic reform. Heard about significant trauma among families and kids, and that the trauma was magnified once the state got involved. Foster families are having challenging situations.

DCF workers report systems aren't designed to support good work. The data systems from the 1980s.

Morgan – Looking for different opportunities to see how your field data can be incorporated into the action plan. How do we make sure we're capturing all of the experiences of children and families.

Lisa – what are the barriers to making this happen?

Yes, funding is the largest barrier. There is also a philosophical question: If we're not fully funding our system, is it right to layer on additional accountability? What they've seen is that this office in other states has helped identify cost savings and funding priorities. \$300 - \$350k for this office to begin with. The other barriers have been DCF being somewhat opposed in the past. In other states, DCF workers have found the office helpful. Family service workers work very hard, and often get a lot of criticism and bad press, and DCF has been concerned about the psychological safety of the workers. They are moving on this a bit as they look into what's happening in other states. The offices, when effective,

depersonalize the process and look at the systems and the bigger picture that creates barriers to good outcomes. The other opposition is about creating additional government offices, and too much bureaucracy.

The system is designed to ask families to be vulnerable, and when it's most strained, it becomes self-protective. It doesn't show its vulnerabilities, and so it's hard for outsiders to have a good look. We currently can't really get a good look at the big picture, and this is an opportunity to do that and move the system in the right direction. The correct staff is really important. Focusing a lot of time and consideration on who makes the hiring decisions.

Voices for Vermont's Children is working right now on distilling their information down. The stories are overwhelming. In the next week, they will have updated materials. Independence is really important, as well as the authority to access all materials.

Morgan – Look at Act 104 to see if there is accountability language to pull.

Amy Brady - This is the right moment for the office. The system was originally designed as a tool to punish poor families and used to assimilate native people. Even though our current system has a different mandate, there is a historical legacy that makes it challenging for good work to be done. There is a multi-generational component to the system. It's hard for some families to trust the supportive program offerings. The systems designed to protect and serve children often fail those children. Families United has done a great job of holding listening sessions and talking about how unintentional bias continues to impact

Morgan – We've just released our 2020 Needs Assessment and VT Strategic Plan. Hannah will share out with the group. In the next two weeks, we will release our 2020 version of How Are Vermont's Children & Families. In January, we expect to launch Vermont's Early Childhood Resource & Data Center. The website will be VermontKidsData.org (not live yet), in partnership with UVM. What should we be collecting? How do we operationalize that and how do we share that out? UVM College of Education & Social Services, seeking funding.

The [Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan \(VECAP\)](#) is the state's early childhood strategic plan for all things serving families prenatal through age eight. The updated plan has 4 goals and articulates a strengthened vision for Vermont's early childhood system.

The VECAP is informed by [Vermont's 2020 Early Childhood Needs Assessment](#), another significant tool for decision-makers to use to strengthen the early childhood system. The report highlights 8 themes including data gaps, chronic underfunding, and limited family engagement. For those interested in system integration and understanding how programs and policies impact children and families, a data gap table shows the gaps in the existing knowledge base and what information must be prioritized to inform policy and service provision.

Amy Russo-Perler, VCEAA is working on putting together our legislative agenda, and this conversation is helpful.

Jen – Previously there was Vermont Insights by BBF, which drew down data from the state and share it. Transitioning this by building capacity. The State used to have more full-time data analysis positions, and some of those have been phased out. We need an independent analysis to leverage a robust way of doing data analysis and independent evaluation. Quebec has a good model, Louisiana as well.

LGK is finishing a white paper for their legislative agenda, will have that on Monday. Phasing introduction of that in over a series of webinars for the general public and legislators.

Kellie – I have questions about telehealth, has that created more of an access barrier?

Jen – Access to health insurance. Most programs don't offer health care, and as they are being laid off, losing money to pay for health insurance. This is an increasing need.

Sarah - "There's been some information gathered by OneCareVT: <https://www.onecarevt.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/OneCare-Telehealth-Survey-Results-6.18.20.pdf>"

Sarah – “OneCare is a collab between UVM Med and Dartmouth, I believe”

Kellie – The funding for higher education in the wake of COVID, would love to see some data about the COVID-Relief dollars and where they went. Who did they go to? What were they used for? What does this tell us about the need?

Morgan – I can bring that back to FEMA, that’s been something they’ve been working on – thinking about what data analysis is needed and what would be helpful for Vermont to know about COVID relief spending.

### **VCW’s Listening Project Data**

Hannah shared VCW’s Listening Project Reports, highlighting key themes.

Sarah “Anecdotally, 7 of my 15 students in English Composition at CCV this semester chose to write their argumentative essay on the need for “free tuition” for higher education / reduced tuition/inequity around access to higher education (particular focus on how FAFSA is set up)”

Morgan “Here are the most updated stats on child care: 62% of infants, 27% of toddlers and 30% of preschool-age children do not have access to any full day, full year regulated child care programs. 78% of infants, 56% of toddlers and 51% of preschool-aged children do not have access to full-day, full-year high-quality child care programs”

Jen – “\*those are all percentages for children likely to need care”

Morgan – “Kellie, in partnership with FEMA, BBF is putting together a workshop series on Data 101, data literacy, using data to inform decision-making, etc. It will be available for folks across New England and will emphasize the importance of data! ”

Sarah “Forgive me, I’m full-on in CCV end-of-semester grading mode here, so can’t help but see parallels. Another of my students wrote about the need to pay early childhood educators better and on par with their elementary educator colleagues, particularly as they accrue the same level of debt by achieving a Bachelor Degree

Sarah – This reminds me of the Champlain College program with childcare, which has graduated so many people who otherwise wouldn’t have been able to participate.

How do we define “access”?

Representation is so critical.

Access doesn’t equal success.

Equality vs. Equity.

**Adjourned at 10:02 a.m.**