

THE MANY PATHS TO A CAREER IN PEER SUPPORT

Families Empowering Families

Brought to you by:

The Vermont Federation of Families for
Children's Mental Health

Who We Are

The Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health exists to support families and children where a child or youth, age 0-22, is experiencing or at risk to experience emotional, behavioral, or mental health challenges. The Federation is committed to:

- Providing families needed emotional and informational support.
- Advocating for families and children to receive needed supports and services.
- Promoting the creation of a full array of easily accessible, high quality, family-centered services needed on a state and local level.
- The Federation collaborates with schools, communities, governmental, and private agencies, and other advocacy organizations to achieve these ends

Our Vision

Our vision is that children, youth, young adults and families experiencing or at risk to experience social, emotional or behavioral challenges are:

- ▣ Connected to Peers for support
- ▣ Receive practical information
- ▣ Have access to and get the resources they need and want

The Family Movement



Some History

- ▣ 1933: Five mothers of children with developmental disabilities in Cuyahoga County, OH organize to protest schools' exclusion of their children. Result: A special class in the public school.
- ▣ 1950: 42 parents and others meet in Minneapolis on behalf of children with developmental disabilities. Result: Establishment of the ARC

- ▣ 1949: Parent of a child with cerebral palsy founds the United Cerebral Palsy Association
- ▣ 1960s: Parents of children with mild to severe retardation sue the state of Pennsylvania to obtain a “free and appropriate education” for all students with disabilities.

- ▣ ARC members, professionals, and other parents continue to lobby hard for federal legislation for children with disabilities. Result: The education for All Handicapped Children Act, now known as the IDEA. The IDEA contains provisions requiring parents to be members of IEP teams, to participate as educational decision makers, and to have the right to due process.

Vermont History

- ▣ 1980s: One Vermont mother, dissatisfied with mental health services for her child, starts researching and advocating. She forms the Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, which became an official non-profit in 1990, to support children with MH challenges
- ▣ ARC had a state chapter (and regional chapters) and helped with closing down Brandon Training school for children/adults with developmental disabilities
- ▣ VPIC was established to help families struggling with the new IDEA laws and special education
- ▣ P2P was established for families to have peer support with children with special health needs

Today in Vermont

- ▣ ARC has only one chapter in Rutland
- ▣ VPIC and P2P are now combined to form the Vermont Family Network
- ▣ The Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health is still here and going strong

The Family Driven Movement



The full definition

Family-driven means families have a primary decision making role in the care of their own children as well as the policies and procedures governing care for all children in their community, state, tribe, territory and nation.

This includes:

- Choosing culturally and linguistically competent supports, services, and providers;
- Setting goals;
- Designing, implementing and evaluating programs;
- Monitoring outcomes; and
- Partnering in funding decisions.

Guiding Principles of Family-Driven Care

1. Families and youth, providers and administrators embrace the concept of sharing decision-making and responsibility for outcomes.
2. Families and youth are given accurate, understandable, and complete information necessary to set goals and to make informed decisions and choices about the right services and supports for individual children and their families.
3. All children, youth, and families have a biological, adoptive, foster, or surrogate family voice advocating on their behalf and may appoint them as substitute decision makers at any time.
4. Families and family-run organizations engage in peer support activities to reduce isolation, gather and disseminate accurate information, and strengthen the family voice.
5. Families and family-run organizations provide direction for decisions that impact funding for services, treatments, and supports and advocate for families and youth to have choices.

6. Providers take the initiative to change policy and practice from provider-driven to family-driven.
7. Administrators allocate staff, training, support and resources to make family-driven practice work at the point where services and supports are delivered to children, youth, and families and where family and youth run organizations are funded and sustained.
8. Community attitude change efforts focus on removing barriers and discrimination created by stigma.
9. Communities and private agencies embrace, value, and celebrate the diverse cultures of their children, youth, and families and work to eliminate mental health disparities.
10. Everyone who connects with children, youth, and families continually advances their own cultural and linguistic responsiveness as the population served changes so that the needs of the diverse populations are appropriately addressed.

My Path



A Path of Purpose and Safety



It Starts With Self-Advocacy

- ▣ Know your child's disability
- ▣ Learn how to be part of a team, and lead your team to better outcomes
- ▣ Adapt to team parenting styles vs. natural parenting styles
- ▣ Learn about special education rights, 504 rights, and disability rights
- ▣ Take care of yourself
- ▣ Become your own case manager, learn how to keep everything straight and organized
- ▣ Learn the Vermont System of Care and what your child might be eligible for

Peer to Peer Support/Advocacy

- ▣ Ability to support other families in crisis
- ▣ Ability to be non-judgmental, confidential, and ethical
- ▣ Know the importance of mentoring and supervision
- ▣ Know how to advocate for families while empowering them to advocate for themselves
- ▣ Increase your knowledge of various disabilities
- ▣ Know how to use your own experiences to empower others without overshadowing their own experience; let them make their own decisions

Systems Advocacy

- ▣ Know the ethics and responsibility of being the voice for other people
- ▣ Become a member of advisory boards, committees, etc.
- ▣ Be able to tell your story with purpose and meaning to influence and improve services for others
- ▣ Help develop a Peer Support System of Care with Certified Parent Support Provider funded by Medicaid

Core Competencies of a Certified Parent Support Provider

- ▣ Ethics
- ▣ Confidentiality
- ▣ Effecting change
- ▣ Current on children's behavioral health treatment and prevention information
- ▣ Educational and IDEA information
- ▣ Communication
- ▣ Parenting for resiliency
- ▣ Advocacy in and across systems
- ▣ Empowerment
- ▣ Wellness and natural support
- ▣ Local Resource Information

Ethics

- ▣ This requirement includes the basis for the Code of Ethics prescribed to Parent Support Providers. In this domain, there are three broad areas of knowledge: compliance with laws and regulations, duty to persons served and duties to the profession.

Confidentiality

- ▣ Trust between the family members and the Parent Support Provider is built on the foundation that the family member maintains control of all shared information.

Effecting Change

- ▣ Parent Support Providers are tasked with helping family members engage with formal services and informal supports. Often, they are called after a crisis or when the family has been unsuccessful in finding effective services. The Parent Support Provider must help the family act on strengths, use barriers or set-backs to increase resiliency, and establish routines to maintain wellness.

Behavioral Health Prevention and Treatment Information

- ▣ Even though Parent Support Providers provide peer-to-peer and parent-to-parent services, they still need to have enough information about clinical services to assist family members in understanding their child's, youth's, or emerging adult's needs and services. They need to be sufficiently conversant in the behavioral health language and concepts to assist the parent in navigating the continuum of services and interacting with the many professionals in health, social services, and educational agencies.

Education Information

- ▣ A child or youth's predominant social and cognitive focus is school. This is the most likely environment where they meet their peers and are challenged to expand their intellectual and vocational curiosity. Completing secondary school is a major contributor to succeeding later in life. Many students will benefit from some aspect of special education programming. Parent Support Providers are likely to need to prepare parents in becoming more aware of the opportunities and issues raised by special education regulations, school social environment, alternative education mechanisms, and post-secondary education. Parent Support Providers are also likely to be the bridge to school personnel who may need more familiarity with the student's needs and the interplay between behavioral health issues and educational success.

Communication

- ▣ Parent Support Providers must be proficient in win-win communication. Their major tasks center on either communicating information to parents or helping parents communicate with other parents, children, teachers, administrators, or health professionals. They act as translators between parents and professionals until parents have enough practice to interpret and communicate for themselves in planning and evaluation meetings about their own child and in general children's mental health policy meetings. They teach, coach, and empower parents and other family members. Related to other domains, they also use verbal and non-verbal communication to benefit from supervision.

Parenting for Resiliency

- ▣ The primary goal for Parent Support Providers in assisting parents is to ensure that they continue to have hope and effectively use family and community support and skills in parenting children to become empowered and effective adults.

Advocacy in and Across Multiple Systems

- ▣ In order for children to receive the services they need, often parents must coordinate multiple programs and agencies. Parent Support Providers assist parents by teaching or coaching them how to navigate through the programs that may not be clearly identifiable, may not coordinate with other funding sources, or may not be attuned to that particular family's needs. Advocacy is geared to coaching the parent and family members so that all participants are viewed as equals with professionals, coordination exists across various programs, and funding sources are improved for that family and other families who will follow.

Empowerment

- ▣ The role of the Parent Support Provider is to build sufficient emotional and physical support around the parent so that he or she can and will sustain their positive parenting role. Additionally, the Parent Support Provider may assist parents to help other parents or assist professionals to effect change in how services for children and youth are planned, delivered, or evaluated.

Wellness and Natural Supports

- ▣ Children's mental health is built on pillars of self-care or self-management, positive adaptation skills and nurturance. Parent Support Providers assist parents in acquiring and practicing the skills necessary for parenting children, adolescents and young adults to learn coping skills, gain competencies, and increase their resistance to stress. Parent Support Providers also need to ensure that parents and family members are engaged with their family and community of choice, in addition to or as an alternative to formal services.

Local Resources

- ▣ Services and supports for children and families are configured differently from state to state and in various locations. Parent Support Providers must know what the local services and supports are in their state.

The Federation's Approach to Peer Support

- ▣ Listen, listen, listen
- ▣ Share your lived experience in a purposeful way, when it fits, and safely
- ▣ Listen some more
- ▣ Suggest possible solutions or next steps
- ▣ Help families make informed decisions and then support them in the decisions they make

The Federation's Commitment

- ▣ Families will be **heard**
- ▣ Families will know they are **not alone**
- ▣ Families will have **possible solutions or next steps**

Every Path Has Power

