

Addison County

Early Childhood Guide

A publication of the Addison Independent • April 4, 2024





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Changing the narrative from 'going it alone'

By **MEGAN JAMES**
Minibury Editor

When it comes to raising kids, it can feel like the Wild West out there. I remember the feeling of helplessness when, halfway through maternity leave with my first baby, my husband and I were still searching unsuccessfully for childcare. Were we supposed to have gotten on a waitlist way back when we found out I was pregnant?

Sociologist Caitlyn Collins, author of “Making Motherhood Work,” said on the “Ezra Klein Show” that parents in the U.S. “seem to be defined by a great deal of stress and overwhelm, unfortunately. For parents today, there’s an expectation that they are largely going to go it alone when it comes to working in the paid labor force and caring for their children.”

April is the National Month of the Young Child. My family survived the youngest “young child” years, despite the stress and overwhelm. But I still care deeply about the issues in the spotlight of this celebration month: early childhood education, home childcare educators, and postnatal healthcare.

These things matter to all of us. Childcare is a necessity if young parents are going to be part of the workforce. Supporting families at every stage makes us all stronger. We should be doing everything we can to cultivate a community that doesn’t make parents — or children — feel they have to go it alone.

In this special section, you can read about the 2023 Childcare Bill, which goes a long way toward making Vermont’s childcare system the most expansive in the country.

You can peruse a full directory of early education and childcare providers across Addison County.

You’ll hear from Darla Senecal of Building Bright Futures about the state of Addison County’s young children and families (spoiler: reading levels are down; poverty is up).

Local pediatrician Elizabeth Coogan writes about the countless benefits of reading aloud to your little ones and why bedtime with books is her favorite time of day with her own children.

And you’ll hear from Wren’s Nest Forest Preschool Educator Jen Olson about why the language around “daycare” has shifted.

“We have always recognized that education is at the heart of our work,” she writes. “We see ourselves for who and what we are: trained educators who carefully design developmentally appropriate, play-based learning opportunities for young children, and who continue our professional development and learning throughout our careers. That’s why we call ourselves early childhood educators.”

The goal Olson describes shouldn’t be hard to get behind: “Our audacious vision is a state and nation where each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality, affordable early childhood education, delivered by a diverse, effective, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce.”





The Ilsley Public Library renovation and expansion doubles the space for youth services!

Children and families will enjoy expanded collections, additional programs, and light-filled, dedicated gathering spaces for each age group.

New spaces include:

- Early Learning “Wiggle” Room
- Library Activity Room
- High School Students Room
- Middle School Students Room
- Roof Garden
- Family Restroom
- Lactation Room



Learn more

about the designs, funding plan, and project timeline at our informational meeting on April 15th at 7pm at MUHS or at ilsleypubliclibrary.org.

The bond vote will be at the Middlebury Town Offices on

**May 7th, from
7am to 7pm.**



The state of Vermont's children

By **DARLA SENECAI**,
Building Bright Futures
Regional Manager for
Bennington, Rutland and
Addison Counties

Each year, Building Bright Futures and Vermont's Early Childhood Data and Policy Center release a report on the well-being of young children and families in Vermont. "The

State of Vermont's Children: 2023 Year in Review" includes data specific to Addison County as well as a wealth of statewide data. The report also features the 2024 Policy Recommendations from Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network on how best to improve outcomes for young children and their families.

Spotlight on Third Grade Reading Levels

At recent meetings of the Addison County Early Childhood Regional Council, one set of data from "The State of Vermont's Children" has come up more than any other: our area's third grade reading levels. In Addison Central School District, 48.7% of all students and 26.3% of historically marginalized students were reading at or above a proficient level in spring 2022. In Mount Abraham Unified School District, these figures were 51.7% of all students and 26.3% of historically marginalized students, and in Slate Valley Unified Union School District, 33.3% of all students and 10.5% of historically marginalized students were proficient or above in reading.

Third grade reading proficiency is low not just in Addison County, but across Vermont. Statewide, 41.17% of all students and 25.3% of historically marginalized students were proficient or above. The numbers may not be a fully accurate measure of the reading ability of Vermont's third graders, however. Data collection was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The Vermont Agency of Education notes that in 2022, "there were pandemic-related challenges, such as educator shortages leading to insufficient resources to properly administer the assessments and the need to balance academic assessment with critical activities related to students' social emotional well-being. These issues may have impacted student performance or test participation, which makes comparing 2022 data to previous years far more difficult."


Poverty and a Living Wage

In 2022 (the most recent year for which this data was available), 23.4% of Addison County's families with children under 12 were living below the Federal Poverty Level, down from 30% in 2017. State-level data also show a decrease in the percentage of Vermont families with children under 12 living in poverty, from 17% in 2015 to 13% in 2020.

These figures do not tell the whole story, however. In 2023, the Federal Poverty Level for a family of four was \$30,000. Two adults working at Vermont's minimum wage of \$13.18 make \$54,828 a year, but the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's living wage calculator shows that the necessary annual income to meet the basic needs of an Addison County household with two adults and two children (before taxes) in 2023 was \$103,680. There are many families who are not classified as "living in poverty" under federal standards who nevertheless struggle to make ends meet.

As we observe The Week of the Young Child, I encourage parents, educators and anyone else who is invested in the well-being of Vermont's children to check out "The State of Vermont's Children: 2023 Year in Review," along with the many other early childhood resources at buildingbrightfutures.org. Addison County Early Childhood Regional Council meetings are open to the public and are held on the second Friday of each month. We often meet via Zoom, but our May 10 and June 14 meetings will be in person. I hope to see you there! To learn more, feel free to contact me at 802-377-0119 or dsenecai@buildingbrightfutures.org.








Free Books!

DO YOU KNOW A CHILD UNDER 5 WHO LIVES IN ADDISON COUNTY?

EVERY child under 5 in Addison County can get a free book in the mail each month from local **Dolly Parton's Imagination Library** sponsor, Addison County Readers!

Register at addisoncountysreaders.org or scan the QR code.

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Upcoming classes with CSAC

Mindful Parenting Group

A parenting group emphasizing self-care and mindfulness as a means to self-compassion, and a more curious and effective interaction with kids.

The group will meet for 6 weeks, starting soon! Open to parents of kids of any age who are interested in receiving services at CSAC.

For information or to sign up, call Paul
 (802) 388-6751 ext. 475

Resource Parent Curriculum (RPC+) TIPS for Tuning In

A 10-week workshop for foster, adoptive and kin caregivers about the impact of trauma on the development, attachment, emotions and behaviors of the children and youth in their care.

The workshop provides a safe space for caregivers to access compassionate training; learn concrete strategies to manage daily and ongoing challenges; enhance relationships with their children; and build a network of support with fellow caregivers.

Wednesday evenings this Spring, 5:15 pm-7:30 pm.
 Facilitated by CSAC Youth and Family Outreach Clinicians.

Questions or want to register?
 Call Heather: (802) 388-6751 ext. 438 or Donna: (802) 388-6751 ext. 587

Breakthrough Parenting Curriculum (BPC)

A 10-week course for biological parents struggling to understand their child's behavior. Similar to the RPC+ class.

Contact Sarah for details on upcoming offerings:
 (802) 388-6751 ext. 274

Giving Voice to our Educator Identity

By JEN OLSON, Early Childhood Educator
Wren's Nest Forest Preschool
Vermont Advancing Early Childhood
Education as a Profession Task Force

Chances are you or someone you know have a connection to a young child. Perhaps you're a parent or grandparent, or a colleague, friend or neighbor of someone with a young child. It's also likely that you've heard or asked, "What are you doing for childcare?"

Over the years the verbiage has changed from daycare to childcare; with many people

and news outlets still using "daycare" in conversations and reporting.

I'm going to let you in on a ... not so little secret. Those terms are out of date. Whether you call it school, preschool or by its official name, **"early childhood education" — it's education and we're early childhood educators.**

We have always recognized that education is at the heart of our work. In the company of children, we call ourselves teachers and often refer to our programs as school. Many educators who've previously referred to themselves as daycare providers have had the courage to rebrand their programs with new names and invited families to join them in adopting more respectful language. We see ourselves for who and what we are: trained educators who carefully design developmentally appropriate, play-based learning opportunities for young children, and who continue our professional development and learning throughout our careers. That's why we call ourselves early childhood educators.

Within our programs, we post signs and write newsletters to invite families to join us; "Instead of 'daycare', we call it 'school.'" In conversations with community members we kindly offer, "You know, we've actually chosen to call ourselves early childhood educators."

I don't write "we" lightly.

I am a member of a task force of early childhood education professionals from all over the state, representing programs based in public schools, public and private centers, and family homes. In 2020, our task force began leading our fellow Vermont early childhood educators in learning about the nationally recommended roles and responsibilities of being an early childhood educator within an early childhood education profession.

While this work continues at a national level with key leadership from The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Vermont is a leader among several individual states already working to gain consensus from their workforce regarding alignment with the national recommendations for establishing an early childhood education profession.

In Vermont, our task force has been working since 2019 to build a shared knowledge base and gain consensus among our statewide workforce. This year, the task force's work continues with workforce engagement and outreach to build our professional identity. This includes envisioning the systems design and policy work needed to create a profession that works for all children, families, and early childhood educators.



JEN OLSON, WHO teaches youngsters at Wren's Nest Forest Preschool, is proud to call herself an Early Childhood Educator, and she urges others in her line of work to take pride and professionalism in their jobs.

In addition, early childhood education programs across Vermont are updating their websites, family handbooks, job titles and social media to reflect the professional language that the Vermont workforce has identified. We're setting the stage for families and community members to know who we are and what we do from their initial interactions with us, be it online or face to face.

Our audacious vision is a state and nation where each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality, affordable early childhood education, delivered by a diverse, effective, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce.

Every day we partner with children and families. Today is no different. We're asking you to join us, to call us by our professional name, early childhood educators, and help us elevate our work and our audacious vision.



Home-based care provides lots of learning

By **HEATHER ARMELL, Registered Home Childcare Provider**

Spring has sprung and the children are blooming in their thirst for knowledge. How do young children learn at registered home programs? Children are a part of a mixed age group learning from each other. They are not only learning while playing, but also by the teacher offering engaging learning experiences that make learning exciting.

What child wants to sit looking at workbooks to learn their letters or colors, when they could be singing a song or playing a matching game that is interactive and fun. If a child is playing and talking about having read the book “The Jack and the Beanstalk,” the teacher can facilitate extended learning. The children can plant beans, measure their growth and the teacher can ask the children open-ended questions such as, “What do beans need to grow?” This builds stronger language and facilitates full participation and involvement. The teacher may ask, “I wonder how many blocks tall the beanstalk will grow?” which can lead to the children to build with blocks and even measure each other. The older children can count the blocks while building. The younger children can bring more blocks, make smaller towers, and observe what their friends are doing.

Having a mixed age group gives the oldest children in the group the opportunity to take on leadership skills. They can introduce

ideas on how to start a group role play such as, “Do you want to be the mommy bear, and I’ll be the daddy bear? Who wants to be the baby bear?” Being together, they learn to include all their friends, even if it’s bringing an infant a toy to play with. The older children enjoy being a “helper” by getting a burp cloth or setting up paper and crayons for all to enjoy. The youngest children are learning skills by watching their older friends. They quickly want to learn to crawl and walk to keep up with their bigger friends. These bigger friends are there to cheer them on at every milestone and there to offer empathy for every bump and bruise.

Home childcare is more than just a place for your child to learn. It is a second home where they can grow, learn, and become part of an extended family. By being in a home childcare, children can bond with their teacher for up to five years or more if the provider offers afterschool care. Through these nurtured, reliable relationships with their provider and peers, each child has a foundation to promote learning, skill building and independence along with social skills to make them future successful adults.





We believe

All children and families should have access to high-quality care and education to ensure they become happy, engaged community members.



Proudly serving the community since 1970 with 3 early education programs in Addison County (East Middlebury, Middlebury, and Orwell) as well as an afterschool and summer school age program.

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 MISSION AEROSPACE OPEN THRU MAY 12	 CIRCUIT CIRCUS FESTIVAL APRIL 20 - 28	 HANDS-ON SCIENCE EXHIBITS

This outdoor classroom provides tools for social-emotional learning

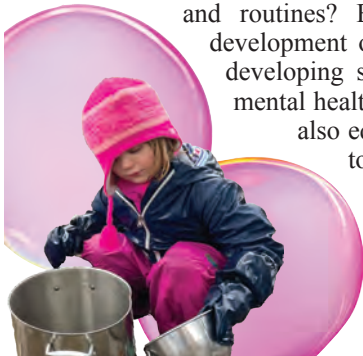
By JESSICA CURTO

Beneath a tree, at the edge of our outdoor classroom, there is a blanket with a box filled with self-regulation tools. There is a feelings chart, a breathing ball, books, and sensory toys. This is “the calm corner,” a safe place to feel big feelings and learn how to self-regulate. At the beginning of the school year our class made a community agreement that the calm corner is a one-person space, meaning only one student at a time may occupy it. When a child needs space or is having a challenging feeling, they may choose to go to the calm corner. When the teachers see someone in the calm corner it’s a signal for us to check in and see if they want or need adult support. The calm corner is a safe haven for everyone and it is deeply loved by the teachers, students, and families at our school.

The calm corner is just one of the many ways we incorporate social emotional learning into our everyday experiences at Wren’s Nest. We also focus our curriculum towards this lens by reading stories that help students process challenging feelings and social situations that arise in our community. Mindful breathing is a tool we use throughout the day, especially during transitions. We have social and emotional tools attached to our backpacks, so we can lean on these supports when we need them on our daily hikes into the forest.

Here’s the catch though, you can’t teach what you don’t know. Teaching self-regulation skills often requires educators to learn those skills themselves and to make sure they are regulated when supporting children with big feelings and emotions. Our team is committed to doing this work ourselves and creating a system that supports this. Part of that system is “checking in and checking out” when one of our teachers needs support or space to regulate. We have a code word we use when we need to take a break. When another member of the team hears it, they step in with no questions asked. We take space and use the same tools we teach our students, to ensure that we are showing up mindfully and responsively.

Why do we make such an intentional effort to incorporate social-emotional learning into our everyday experience and routines? Because we value supporting the development of the whole child and believe that developing self-regulation skills leads to better mental health outcomes for people of all ages. It also equips students with the skills needed to be in an optimal state for learning. Our hope is that with our guidance and support, the students at Wren’s Nest will gain the skills they need to be resilient, confident, and independent long after they leave our care.



MiniBury

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE ADDISON INDEPENDENT

*Stay in the Loop with MiniBury:
Your Ultimate Guide to Family
Fun in Addison County!*

For more than a decade, MiniBury has been the go-to source of local information for folks raising children in Addison County. Parents and caregivers rely on MiniBury to give them the latest scoop on local family-friendly events, playgroups and storytimes, after-school programs and summer camps.

The most-visited page on MiniBury.com is the events calendar, which is updated regularly and includes recurring events such as playgroups, story times, after-school drop-in programs, open gyms, plus all the special family-friendly events that make our community such a great place to raise kids. Check it out!



Did you know MiniBury sends out a weekly email newsletter — and that it was named the No. 1 Outstanding Newsletter by the New England Newspaper and Press Association in 2021?

Each newsletter is packed with the latest news that local parents and caregivers can use, plus a little heartfelt, sometimes silly, intro from MiniBury's Megan James about life as a parent in our little corner of Vermont.



Sign up at minibury.com/sign-up-for-our-e-newsletter or scan the QR code!



Follow MiniBury on Instagram and Facebook to keep tabs on all things baby and kid-related in Addison County. We post alerts when summer camp and after-school program registrations open, when playgroups are canceled, or when Junebug is clearing out its winter gear. Our most popular posts are the events roundups we publish every Thursday morning so you can plan your weekend.





WHEN SHE TALKS with parents, Porter Pediatrician Elizabeth Coogan, M.D., encourages them to read to their children daily, which aids brain development and builds language skills.

Reading to your kids is a lifelong gift

By **DR. ELIZABETH COOGAN**

One of my favorite times of day as a parent is curling up with my kids to read to them at bedtime. In addition to being a rare time in our busy lives when we can have a quiet moment together, this routine helps ensure that my kids are exposed to books and language every day. In my practice as a pediatrician at Porter I also make sure books and reading are part of my daily routine with patients.

I make this a priority because reading out loud to children, especially in the first three years of life, is critical for healthy brain development. Research shows that reading with children from birth is associated with improved language skills in kindergarten, increases interest in reading, and makes children more motivated to learn when they enter school. Reading, along with singing and talking, is also a wonderful way to strengthen parent-child relationships and creates positive parenting experiences through which children learn from their parents and those around them.

Unfortunately, the majority of kids in the United States are not read to daily, and children from low-income families are significantly less likely to be read to daily. Furthermore, one-third of American children start kindergarten without the appropriate language skills they need, which continues to impact their learning through elementary school and beyond.

To help address these disparities and promote early literacy in our office at Porter Pediatrics in Middlebury, we participate in a program called Reach Out and Read, or ROAR. ROAR is a national nonprofit organization that provides books to give out at routine visits. At every

check-up from age six months through five years providers give children a new book to take home. In addition to adding a fun, positive spin to visits (that can otherwise sometimes be scary at this age), we use this opportunity to discuss the value of reading out loud with parents and children. Since we started this program in October of 2022 we have given out more than 2,000 books. Funding comes primarily from ROAR directly and is supplemented by Porter Pediatrics and local community donors.

Here are some tips for families to help children love to read:

- Make reading part of your everyday routines, including car rides, bedtime and waiting for appointments. Keeping a book handy in your car or diaper bag can make this easier.

- Visit your local library. We are lucky to have wonderful libraries in Addison County with librarians dedicated to having a full collection of books for kids of all ages. Bringing kids to the library and letting them choose books that interest them will help keep them engaged.

- Remember, any reading is good reading! Reading a few minutes at a time, letting children hold and turn the pages of books, and simply talking with them about the pictures on the pages are all valuable.

Editor's note: Elizabeth Coogan, M.D., works with babies, children and families at Porter Pediatrics.



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Coming Soon: Childcare tuition assistance for more Vermont families

Progress toward Vermont's childcare solution is underway as Act 76 rolls out. This year, over 7,000 more families will become eligible for childcare tuition assistance from the state. Here's what you need to know:

How Act 76 Lowers Childcare Costs:

Act 76 expands the income eligibility criteria for Vermont's childcare tuition assistance program (known as the Childcare Financial Assistance Program, or CCFAP). Beginning in April 2024, the state will help more Vermont families pay for childcare as a result of this eligibility expansion. In October, the eligibility criteria will expand again. The result is more affordable childcare for the majority of Vermont families.

In April, eligibility expands from 350% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to 400%. By October 2024, families earning up to 575% of FPL will be eligible for tuition assistance. That means a family of four earning up to \$179,400 may qualify. Read more about the eligibility criteria online at tinyurl.com/ChildcareEligibility.

How Do I Access Lower Childcare Tuition Payments?

Newly eligible families will need to apply for tuition assistance (CCFAP). After a family enrolls, the state directly reimburses the childcare programs that their children attend. As a result, the family's out-of-pocket tuition bills are lower.

Visit the state website tinyurl.com/ChildCareMoneyHelp to view the eligibility requirements and contact your regional community childcare support agency (CCCSA) for assistance.

What Else Do I Need To Know About Tuition Assistance?

The true cost of childcare is unaffordable for most families, and many childcare programs survive on tight margins trying to make their programs affordable to families. This is unsustainable for families and childcare programs, resulting in many parents leaving the workforce and program closures.

That's why Vermonters asked for long-term, sustainable investments in childcare. It gives our youngest children the best start and provides families with access to a critical service so they can thrive and participate in the workforce.

Many families already qualify for Vermont's tuition assistance program and use it to access more affordable childcare. With the expanded income eligibility, the state is helping thousands more families afford this essential service. And because Act 76 invests directly into childcare programs by reimbursing childcare providers closer to the true cost of care, program quality and capacity will also grow.

Investing in childcare is not only the right thing to do for our children, but it will also allow hundreds of Vermont parents to reenter the workforce, boosting the state's economy in the long run as well.

Additional resources:

- Learn how Act 76 will impact your family online at tinyurl.com/Act76Vt.
- Learn more about childcare financial assistance from the state and how to apply online at tinyurl.com/ChildCareMoneyHelp.
- Find your local childcare support agency here to help navigate Vermont's childcare system online at tinyurl.com/AgencyPartners.
- Learn about tax breaks, employer reimbursements, and other potential resources to help pay for childcare online at tinyurl.com/HelpPayingChildcare.

Editor's note: This article came from Let's Grow Kids.



Addison County Early Childhood Sites

Name	Ages	Schedule	PreK Partner	Town	Notes/Contact Info
Quarry Hill School	3-5	School Year/school day	Yes	Middlebury	quarryhillsschool.org office@quarryhillsschool.org
Otter Creek Child Center	6 weeks-5	M-F Year Round	Yes	Middlebury	ottercreekcc.org office@ottercreekcc.org
College Street Children's Center	6 weeks-3	M-F Year Round	No	Middlebury	cscdirector228@gmail.com
Evergreen Preschool	3-5	School year/half day and full day	Yes	Vergennes	Evergreenpreschoolvt@gmail.com
MAUSD Early Education Program	3-5	School year. 10 hour/week program	Yes	Bristol	lindsay.hance@mausd.org
MAUSD Early Education Program	3-5	School year. M-F 8am-5pm	Yes	Bristol	heidi.bullock@mausd.org
Wren's Nest Forest Preschool	3-5	School Year M-F 8am-4:30pm	Yes	Bristol	info@willowell.org
Carolyn Fogg ★	Birth-12	School year M-F 7am-4:30pm	No	Monkton	cfogg1979@gmail.com
Starksboro Cooperative Preschool	3-5	School year + summer program half day (7:30am-1pm) + full day 7:30am-4:30pm	Yes	Starksboro	starkscoop@gmail.com
Aurora Preschool	3-5	Year Round 7:30am-5pm	No	Middlebury	auroralearningcentervt@gmail.com
Bristol Family Center	6 weeks-6 years	M-F Year Round	Yes	Bristol	bristolfamilycenter.org, awhitcomb@bristolfamilycenter.org
Addison County Parent Child Center	0-5	School year, 8am-4pm and M-F, 8-4 in summer	Yes	serving Addison County in Middlebury, with transportation	dbailey@addisoncountypcc.org
Bridge School Preschool	3-5	Full year 8am-3:30pm (hopes to include aftercare until 5 by next year)	Yes	Middebury	emilylambert@bridgeschoolvermont.org
Mountain Road Preschool ★	0-5	Full year 7:15am-4:45pm M-F	Yes	Addison	mountainroadpreschool@yahoo.com
Misty Scott ★	6 weeks - 12 years	Full Year, M - F 7am-5pm	No	Vergennes	ckcc@comcast.net 802-877-6977 3 STAR Provider facebook.com/ CuriousKidsChildCareMistyScott
Evelyn Burlock ★	6 weeks - 12 years	Full Year, M-F 7am-5pm	No	Vergennes	eburlock27@yahoo.com 802-877-2506
Mary Johnson Children's Center	3 months - 5 years	Full Year	Yes	Middlebury	office@mjcvt.org mjcvt.org
Middlebury Cooperative Nursery School (MJCC)	3-5	Full Year	Yes	East Middlebury	office@mjcvt.org mjcvt.org
Orwell Early Education Program (MJCC)	3-5	School year	Yes	Orwell	office@mjcvt.org mjcvt.org

★ = Home provider

Middlebury Afterschool Program (MJCC)	K-5th grade	Afterschool School Year Summer Weeks are FT	No	Middlebury	school-age@mjcvt.org mjcvt.org
Heather Armell ★	6 weeks-5years	Full Year, M-F 7:15am-4:30pm	No	Monkton	littleykes2007@yahoo.com
Bethany Hallock ★	Birth to 12	Full year, M-F, 7:30am-4:30pm	No	Ferrisburgh	gbthallock@juno.com
Donna Meacham ★	Birth to 12	Full year, M-F, 7:30am-4:30pm	No	New Haven	dondarmea@gmavt.net 802-453-5383
Lincoln Cooperative Preschool	3-5	7:30am-3pm some aftercare available	Yes	Lincoln	preschool@gmavt.net
Sunshine Childcare ★	Birth-5years	Full year, M-F, 7am-5pm	No	Addison	sunshinecc21@gmail.com
Jennifer Cyr Family Child Care ★	Birth-4 years	Year Round, Monday-Thursday	No	Middlebury	jennifercyr2@gmail.com jennifercyrfamilychildcare.com
Addison County Early Learning Center (Head Start)	16 months-5 years	preschool-school year, toddler classroom-year round, both M-F 8:30-2:30pm	Yes	New Haven	Peg Sutlive psutlive@cvoeo.org
ANWSD Early Education Program	3-5	School Year only 8:15am-1:15pm Extended Care 1:15pm-4:30pm	Yes	Ferrisburgh	Marcie Tierney mtierney@anwsd.org
Laura Weber ★	Birth - 12 years	Year round, M-F, 7am-4:30pm	No	Hancock	lmw15vt@yahoo.com
The Ark Preschool/Kindergarten	3-5	School year and summer program, M-F, 7:30am-5am	No	Waltham	arkdirector@victoryvt.org AGES: 3 years old to kindergarten during school year; 3-10 years old during summer
Cornerstone Preschool	3-5	School year M-F 7:30am-5am	No	Vergennes	office@cornerstone-prek.com
Bridport Central School Preschool	3-5	School year M-Th 7:45am-2:45pm	Yes	Bridport	Heather Adams, Preschool Director (802) 758-2331 hadams@acsdvt.org
Mary Hogan Preschool	3-5	School year M-Th 8:15am-2:15pm	Yes	Middlebury	Kim Forbes, Preschool Director 802-382-1438 kforbes@acsdvt.org
A.R.K. Child Care at Whiting	6 weeks - 5 years	M - F Year round 7:30am-5pm	No	Whiting	Rebecca Kerr, Program Director 802-623-7991 arkchildcare2018@gmail.com
Muffy's Family Child Care and Preschool Program ★	Infants - school age	M - F Year round 8am-4:30pm	Yes	Orwell	muffykgart@gmail.com 802-948-2561 (Leave message on answering machine)
Discovery Hill Child Care and Preschool ★	Infant - school age	Year Round - Monday-Friday 7am-4:30pm	Yes	Bristol	kidsfirstdhfcc@yahoo.com 802-989-1225
Stacey Rheaume ★	6 weeks to 12 years	M-F Year Round 7am-4:30pm	No	Salisbury	rrheaume5@yahoo.com 802-349-5082
Bridge School Preschool	3-5	M-F 8am-3:30pm with aftercare offered until 4:30pm, year round	Yes	Middlebury	emilylambert@bridgeschoolvermont.org 802-388-3498

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Spotlight on Family-Style Eating at the Head Start Addison County Early Learning Center

It's 11:30 a.m., and children and teachers are washing their hands and gathering around child-size tables to share a meal. Bowls of delicious home-cooked food are passed around and conversations unfold. "Please pass the green beans." "Johnny, would you like some chicken?" This homey scene is an important aspect of building community at Addison County Early Learning Center (ACELC) in New Haven.

This approach is called Family Style Meals. Head Start provides two meals and one snack per day, offering the five food components to promote children's health. Betsy, the cook on site, provides nutritious meals, including whole grain bread and pasta, fresh fruit and vegetables, and many homemade dishes.

Betsy has a contagious enthusiasm, a quick laugh, and a deep passion for caring for children and their health. She lives out her philosophy and approach through the work she does with children. Betsy shares her thoughts and experiences feeding children at ACELC:

Q. Why do you think family style meals are important?

Betsy: Family Style Meal service allows children to be more independent in their choices and portion sizes. They can regulate food intake and learn about a variety of different foods. Mealtime is a fun time for children to learn language and vocabulary and practice all kinds of developmental skills, including self-regulation and building community.

Q. Can you share a nugget or two from any recent professional development?

Betsy: At a recent workshop, a nutritionist was speaking about fussy or picky eaters. She said instead of calling them "fussy or picky eaters," let's call them "selective eaters." That just stood out to me because it sounds

humble and respectful too. I also learned that involving children with the mealtime by creating a list, shopping, preparing meals, setting the table, and cleaning up helps build their self-esteem and independence. I have learned so much at workshops, but just observing the children has taught me a lot.

Q. Can you tell a story that illustrates how your job brings you joy?

Betsy: Watching the children grow and change brings me joy, which is hard to put into words. There have been times when a family member has come to me and shared how much their child enjoyed the food that was prepared at Head Start, or asked for a recipe because the child loved it. The families are always excited when they hear that their child tries new foods. When they see the changes in their child's eating habits, they are encouraged. And that makes me smile.

Q. Any advice for parents about how to support children's healthy eating habits?

- Children may need to see a new food offered 10-15 times before they try it.
- Show enthusiasm! Comment on color, texture, taste, and where the food comes from.
- Avoid insisting that your child eat the food. Keeping mealtimes positive is important.
- Show your child how to tune in to how their belly feels to support reading their own body.
- Appetites can change day to day; focus more on weekly habits.
- Sit together as a family, have conversations, and most importantly ... have fun!



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JOY AMONGST THE TREES

Maternal child health at ACHHH

Meet Barb Beatty, PT, and Megan Smits, RN, BSN, CTC, two professionals who work strictly with pediatric patients in the Maternal Child Health program at Addison County Home Health and Hospice, known as ACHHH. Smits has recently joined ACHHH and Beatty has been with ACHHH for 11 years.

As a registered nurse, Megan Smits assesses children, coordinates their care and provides support for families. She consults and collaborates with other professionals within the agency, other local agencies as well as health care providers.

She sets up care plans for each patient and aims to improve health care outcomes.

A certified lactation consultant, Smits works with moms before and after birth to assist with breastfeeding. She provides collaborative visits that can support moms throughout the entire time they're breastfeeding.

Smits reminds us that early intervention equals better outcomes and she encourages parents to get in touch with their physician if they have any questions or concerns. ACHHH's care begins with a physician referral.

"Working with families from the start and seeing growth and improvement in a few weeks is amazing," Smits said. "I know that I have used my skills to help parents actually learn to parent. I love to watch new parents become more confident and independent and knowing that I was a part of it is very gratifying. When

you are a first-time parent there is a lot that you don't know ... until you do!"

Barb Beatty has worked as a physical therapist at ACHHH for more than a decade. She provides care in patients' homes or other care settings. She focused on increasing flexibility and strength and helping children maximize their functional mobility and quality of life. Her patients included children with the diagnoses of torticollis, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy and other muscular skeletal challenges. An important part of Beatty's job is providing education to parents and she is delighted when parents become more empowered as a result of their work with her.

Beatty also collaborates with other professionals in the agency and in other community agencies.

Children are referred to her when they're not meeting developmental milestones, frequently identified by their doctors.

"I feel like most children, even those with significant challenges, progress over time and it is exciting to see kids get stronger and moving more easily," Beatty said. "I love the collaboration with different agencies for the benefit of the children under my care. We work together for their benefit and provide each child and family with wrap-around support. If you need that BIG HUG, we're there! I feel privileged to work in Addison County, where we all deeply care for children and want to do the right thing for them."



MEGAN SMITS



BARB BEATTY

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Early childhood education is now a viable career choice

By **HEATHER DUHAMEL** and **SHARRON HARRINGTON**

When Vermont's Legislature passed Act 76 in May 2023, it represented a major step toward fully funding our state's child care system as a public good. While the law takes effect, our organizations and others are working in partnership to build up the well-prepared early childhood education workforce Vermont needs. Public investment, plus programs and resources that support access to education and training, make a career in early childhood education more attractive than ever before.

Act 76 promises a \$125 million annual investment in Vermont's child care system. The law is being implemented in stages: over 2024, child care programs, families, educators, and businesses will all experience relief. The part that took effect in January sent funds to programs to meet needs like staff compensation, facility repairs and learning materials. In April, more families will become eligible for tuition relief; in October, eligibility criteria will expand again.

As each piece of the new law takes effect, it supports a high-quality child care system that is more affordable and easier for families to access. To meet the demand for care, Vermont needs more early childhood educators. The successful implementation of Act 76 relies on Vermont preparing a steady influx of early childhood educators to enter our workforce.

Organizations like the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children, state agencies and higher education programs, like Vermont State University and the Community College of Vermont, have made it easier for early childhood educators to enter the field, continue their education, reduce student debt and advance their careers. Resources are available for currently working educators and career changers as well as traditional students. Our innovative programs are essential to ensuring Vermont has well-prepared educators ready to work in our child care system.

Some of these pathways and resources include:

- In 2017, Vermont State University launched its Early Childhood Education Online Completion program, which allows students to complete a bachelor's degree online, at their own pace, and in just five semesters. In its first year, the program had 12 graduates. Since then, it has grown exponentially, and graduated 65 early childhood educators in 2023. More graduates means more prepared teachers and open child care slots throughout Vermont.

- The Student Loan Repayment Assistance Program for Early Childhood Educators helps retain educators who have already earned degrees. Working educators can receive up to \$4,000 annually in repayment assistance. In December 2023 alone, this program helped pay down \$120,000 in Vermont early childhood educators' student loan debt. Reducing this financial burden helps educators stay in the workforce while compensation catches up.

- The Curtis Fund Commitment scholarship offers students a chance to get paid to earn a Childcare Certificate from Community College of Vermont. The program covers the cost of tuition and fees



**SHARRON
HARRINGTON**



HEATHER DUHAMEL

and provides a generous stipend each semester.

- Comprehensive scholarships through the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Vermont Program supports working early childhood educators earning associate and bachelor's degrees, apprenticeships and Agency of Education Teacher Licensure with early childhood education/special education endorsement.

- A revamped Youth Apprenticeship Program for high school students interested in an early childhood education career provides paid, on-the-job training at sponsor programs.

- Gap grants offer up to \$1,000 to early childhood educators who face a financial obstacle that could keep them from continuing or completing college-level coursework.

- Vermont's higher education programs have worked together to align, so students preparing for a career in the childcare system can transfer credits more easily as they continue their education.

Vermont is rewriting the story about careers in early childhood education. You've heard the old story about the talented and beloved early childhood educator who wasn't paid enough to make ends meet, so she left the work she trained for to earn a few more dollars working at a big box store.

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That happened too many times, with too many talented educators, to the detriment of too many families and our economy, for far too long. When public investment in child care lags, families face unaffordable high tuition that still doesn't cover what it actually costs to provide care to each child, and educators face below-living-wage salaries for specialized work.

Here's the new story: For the first time, young people considering career options can envision early childhood education as a viable and respected career, with low or no student debt, a living wage and opportunities to grow within the field.

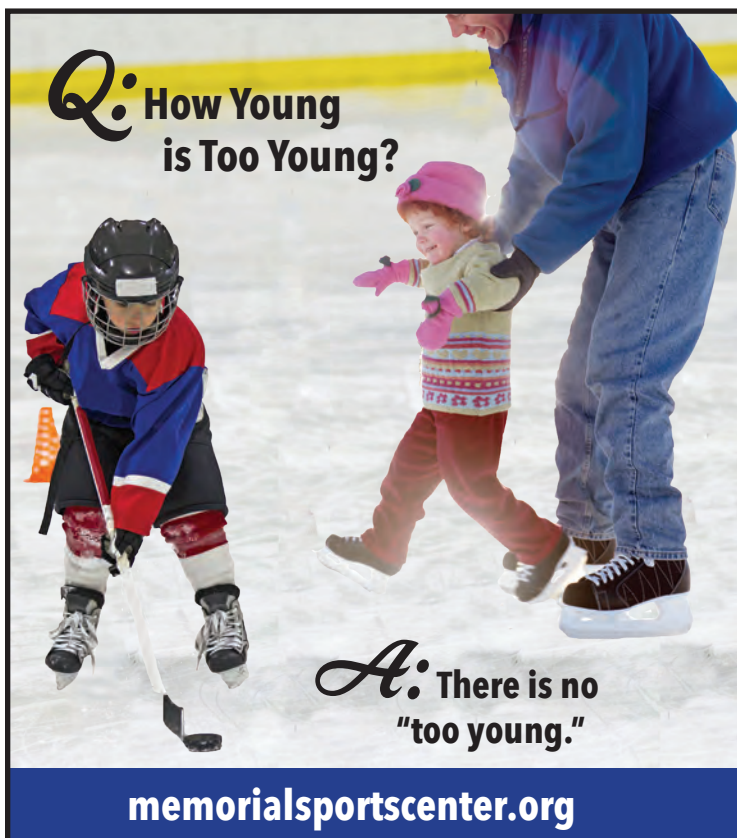
And we know the workforce is there, because enrollment in these early childhood education preparation programs is strong and growing. Well-prepared, well-compensated early childhood educators support children, families, businesses and all of Vermont. The successful implementation of Act 76, and the future of our state, depend on them.



Sharron Harrington of Arlington is the executive director of the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC). Heather Duhamel of St. Albans is a faculty member at Vermont State University and the program director of VTSU's Early Childhood Education Online.



Q: How Young is Too Young?



A: There is no "too young."

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The 2023 Child Care Bill

The 2023 Child Care Bill makes Vermont's child care system one of the most expansive in the nation.

This legislation will stabilize the sector and make a quantum leap in providing access to affordable, quality child care for all Vermont families who need it. The bill includes long-term, sustainable, public investment in Vermont's child care system. On an annual basis, the bill will invest \$125 million into the child care sector.

Affordability

About 7,450 more children and their families will have access to child care financial assistance!

Accessibility

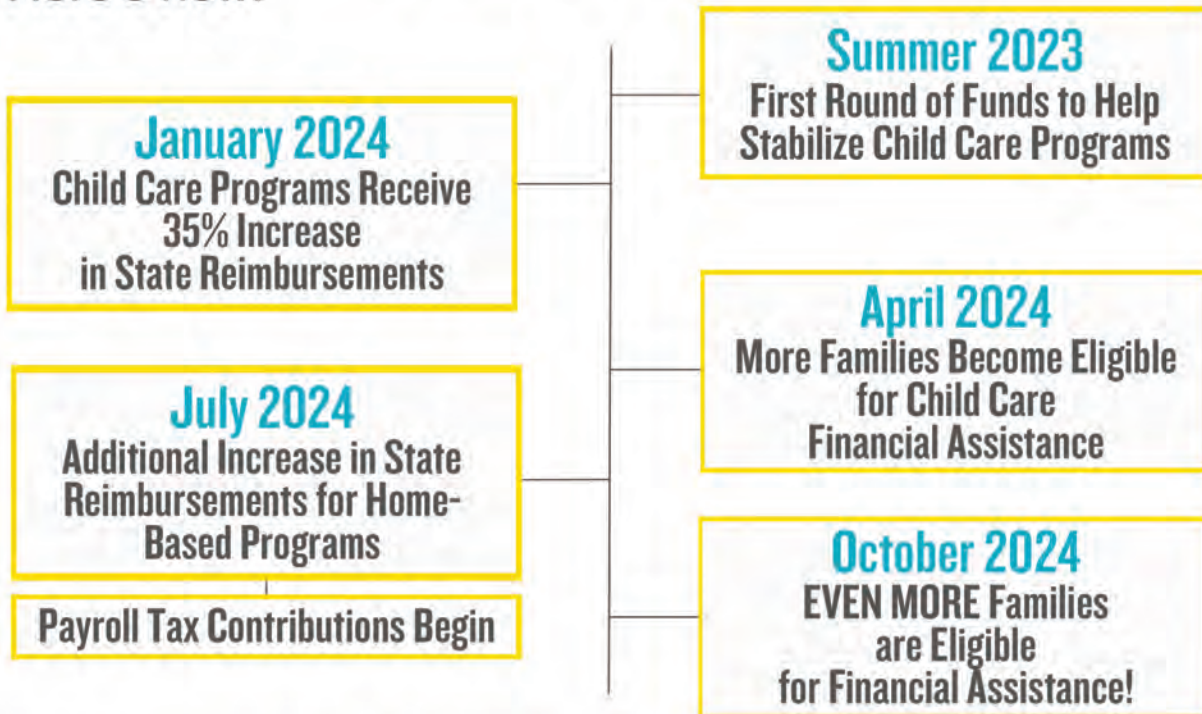
Increased state funding will help bolster child care programs' staffing and capacity.

Quality

Sustainable funding will lead to increased investment in Vermont's early childhood education workforce.

Implementation Timeline

The 2023 Child Care Bill will help families and child care programs utilize significant additional investment in Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program. Here's how:

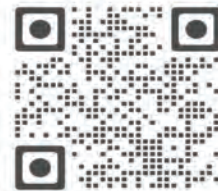


Laying the Foundation for Future Success

The 2023 Child Care Bill also:

- Sets the stage for minimum pay standards for early childhood educators
- Addresses resource shortages for children in child care with special needs

Learn more about
the bill here.



WIC: A program designed to give you a healthy start

You've probably heard of "WIC," a program that helps families with young kids. Formally, it is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, or WIC.

WIC is for income-eligible Vermont residents who are pregnant or just had a baby, and children up to age 5. Parents, grandparents, foster parents, and legal guardians can apply for their children.

Since it began in 1974, the WIC program has helped millions of families get a healthy start. In 2024, WIC is celebrating 50 years of service providing nutrition support during pregnancy, postpartum, and the first years of life.

WIC is a public health nutrition program coordinated through the USDA. WIC provides nutrition education, nourishing foods, breastfeeding/chestfeeding support, and healthcare referrals.

New families are welcomed to the program in person at their nearest WIC clinic. After the first visit, WIC appointments are scheduled about every six months and can often be completed over the phone or by video. During these appointments, families talk with a nutritionist about health and nutrition, infant and child feeding, and learn about resources in their community. Between WIC appointments, families complete a nutrition education activity, choosing from a variety of offerings such as cooking workshops, grocery store tours, help with picky eating, playtime activities for kids, and other online options.

WIC provides families with healthy foods to buy each month on a WIC EBT card that can be used at WIC-approved grocery stores. Participants choose foods their family likes to eat, including fruits and vegetables,

cheese, milk, yogurt, eggs, breakfast cereal, whole grains, beans, peanut butter and infant foods. Vermont WIC offers local and organic options.

When a family chooses WIC, they have access to Vermont state parks and museums, farmers market coupons, and nutrition professionals to support their growing family.

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Being an Early Educator is an extraordinary gift that allows you the opportunity to support children and families through the most important developmental stages in life. Being an early educator isn't for the faint of heart; it requires

dedication to being a lifelong learner and a strong advocate, and the ability to adapt to a constantly evolving environment.

There are a few fundamentals that are consistently at the heart of our field, and they include the ability to build authentic trusting relationships with every child we work with and support each child in feeling valued and capable each day. As an educator, we work hard and take great pride in carefully observing the children in our care, noticing the development of their abilities, and, alongside their families, we develop goals.

Believing in the true capabilities of children and presenting them with real opportunities to explore and create is monumental in how we support children's learning. There is a tremendous amount of joy in introducing the arts of needle felting and sewing to four- and five-year-olds, and supporting them in independently using real tools. It's not always easy but we are there beside them to wonder, challenge, support, and celebrate each milestone great or small.

I am grateful that my career allows me to support children in discovering the world around them, taking new risks, and finding comfort in a safe, accepting environment. The relationships that are forged as an early educator hold so much meaning and create a lifelong impact, I am grateful to live in this small community where I have the opportunity to see the awesome adults that these incredible children grow to become.

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Local ECE networks provide support and connection

By QUARRY HILL SCHOOL

Childcare directors and family home providers have access to local networks that provide time for collegiality and connections every month.

The Addison County Directors Network and the Addison County Home Providers Network monthly meetings are facilitated by local leaders in the profession and offer opportunities for our local early educators to network and share professional development. Collectively we stay abreast of state issues regarding regulations and new protocols as well as pending or legislative changes.

Our local networks are part of a statewide system of networks that is funded by grants administered by the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC).

Being connected locally, regionally, and at the state level means we have conversations that bring the early childhood education (ECE) professional cohesion and a broad understanding of issues that impact children, families and educators in Addison County and Vermont.

Local network initiatives this year include promoting the Week of the Young Child (April 6-12) and professional development. Topics of early special education, reflective supervision, and working with clay in an early childhood setting are a few of the workshops that have been offered. These professional development opportunities mean Addison County early educators are collaborating with and deepening relationships with local experts as we learn more about specific areas of interest. And the learning and the connections mean higher quality and better outcomes for the children in our programs.

Monthly meeting topics also include discussions of quality, capacity, subsidy, nature based curriculum, waitlists, and licensing questions.

The professional connections we have through our networks means we are better equipped to support each other, families and children.

The Addison County networks are led and facilitated by Su White and Linda January of the Directors Network and Cookie Danyow of the Family Home Providers Network.



Champlain Valley Head Start

Preschool & Child care programs

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Classrooms	<p>Preschool, ages 3-5 years Toddlers, ages 15-36 months</p> <p>For families in Addison County. CVHS also has classrooms in Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. Ages vary by site.</p>
Home Visiting Program	<p>Weekly visits with a Home Visiting educator at your home for 90 minutes.</p> <p>For families with children from birth up to age 5 in Addison, Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. Also available for pregnant individuals.</p>
Family Connections Program	<p>Parents and children meet twice per week for enrolled playgroup in downtown Burlington.</p> <p>For families with children from birth up to age 3 in Chittenden County. Also available for pregnant individuals.</p>



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