



Celebrating 10 Years of Serving Vermont Families



Greetings, VFN Family and Friends!

Ten years! What an amazing milestone! Vermont Family Network, the blending of Parent to Parent of Vermont (P2P) and the Vermont Parent Information Center (VPIC), is alive and well!

I have had the privilege of leading this organization since it turned three, and have seen many changes in programs and funding over my seven years as CEO. But our core commitments to families of children with special needs, broadly defined, have remained rock-solid.

We are here to empower and support ALL Vermont families of children with special needs, statewide. We do this by giving families a strong start, lifting family voices for positive change, and advancing inclusive communities.

In the last few years, we have committed our organization to becoming more culturally and linguistically adept and have made strides to serve families in ways that meet their personally-identified needs. This is true across our Family Support and Children's Integrated Services Early Intervention programs as well as our newest "family member," Puppets In Education. I am excited that, at the ten-year mark, VFN is an even more "blended family." Building on the successes of the P2P/VPIC merger and the strengths, gifts, and abilities of our three core programs, we are better than ever!

I believe the future will bring many great new metamorphoses, especially as we work to develop our sustainable funding efforts for Strong Families, Strong Futures. The more we are able to rely upon strong collaborations and strongly invested employees, Board members, and donors, the more flexibly and responsively we will be able to respond to families throughout the state. I believe VFN's next ten years will be even better than the first, and I am excited to be working in an organization that truly lifts family voices, from the "littles" to the grandparents, and continues to challenge its "growing edges!"

Happy Birthday, VFN! Here's to a year of celebration!

From the heart,
Pam McCarthy

CEO/President



**Staff Reflections- Jan Hancock, VFN Family Support
Consultant**

Vermont Family Network is 10 years old! What a testament to Vermont

families that include children and adults with disabilities!

How did we get here? Some of our employees were not yet born in the 1970's and '80s when Parent to Parent of Vermont (P2P), Vermont Parent Information Center (VPIC), and Puppets in Education (PIE) were seedlings of ideas of three mothers determined to create nurturing communities for families and their children with special needs. Nancy Divenere envisioned connecting families so that no one would feel alone. The concepts of Support Parents and partnering with providers for family-centered care evolved into Parent to Parent. Connie Curtin recognized the need for inclusionary practices and expertise in Special Education as well as family partnering on IEP and 504 teams in schools. Vermont Parent Information Center offered assistance for families advocating for the academic and social needs of their children. Kids on the Block puppeteering was Mary Kay Dennison's door into children's lives to engage them in thoughtful conversations about differences and social inclusion. Now Puppets in Education puppeteers empower children to talk about difficult subjects and to change behaviors.

We're grateful for the founding parents of these organizations, and for Pam McCarthy who has nurtured the VFN organization into what we celebrate today!

Thanks to families, the merger of P2P and VPIC in 2008, and the more recent partnership with Puppets, worked because families believe in connecting with and supporting each other. We learn together, advocate for our children's and communities' health and well-being, and embrace the goal of helping all children reach their potential.





Staff Reflectons- Christine Kilpatrick, VFN Family Support Consultant

I was hired by Vermont Parent Information Center (VPIC) in 2001. VPIC specialized in information and support for parents of children with special needs as they navigated the education system. As a parent of a child with a disability I felt incredibly fortunate to have found such a supportive workplace. I loved my coworkers and enjoyed my job immensely and had nothing but deep admiration for our Director, Connie Curtin. Connie was and still is one of the most creative, intelligent, and passionate people I know. Over the years I had often sent families to our sister organization, Parent-to-Parent (P2P), for information and support regarding their children's special healthcare needs. This was P2P's area of expertise. I, myself, had used their services for a parent match when my daughter was first diagnosed and knew them to be kind, caring people- parents just like me. When discussions of VPIC and P2P merging first came up it made a lot of sense to me. As the merger process became a reality it was a whole lot of work-combining systems and traditions from two passionate organizations into one isn't always smooth and it can be scary and emotional, but we accomplished it!

I am proud to look around me today and see so many of the same faces that were there at the beginning of the merger process. As so many of us have had to fight hard for our children, we also had to fight hard for this organization as it came into being. As a result, families can now call one place to get the support they need- and that makes it all worth it. If ever there is a really challenging job to do -set it in front of parents of children with special needs and they will not give up. Failure it is not a part

of our vocabulary.





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