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Strong Families. Strong Futures.



Greetings, VFN family and friends!

It's November and the season of gratitude and giving has begun. Personally, I am counting my blessings in my leadership role here at Vermont Family Network. It has been a very busy autumn and our amazing staff have been going above and beyond to provide extraordinary support, information, and training throughout Vermont despite the continuing challenges of the pandemic. Our Puppets in Education Programs are expanding their virtual programs in schools, hoping that they will be able to get back to in-person offerings in 2022. Our Family Support team is responding to increasing numbers of calls about special education, mental health supports, and healthcare, providing knowledgeable and caring connections for all who contact us. We are about to launch our Annual Appeal and are excited to be leading into it with our annual Strong Families, Strong Futures fundraising event on November 9th as a virtual gathering for prospective new donors and our Giving Circle donors. I am immensely grateful to the generous individuals, families, and organizations who make this sustainability effort so promising for Vermont



Family Network---because of you, our future is brighter, and families and communities are better-served in these very challenging times. Wishing you and your loved ones a very happy Thanksgiving!

From the heart,
Pam McCarthy, M.Ed.
CEO/President

P.S. Be on the lookout for some exciting news in a special edition of the VFN newsletter in the next few days!

Mental Health and Social Media



VFN Family Support Consultants have been hearing from both families and professionals that children’s mental health issues have been especially challenging. Increased computer use in academics have led to higher usage of all virtual activities; social media has become part of our daily lives. While social media can facilitate connection and support for many, social media can also expose children to harmful behaviors, risky content, cyberbullying and predators, which can exacerbate mental health issues. Here are some suggestions to explore: [Parental Control guide for smartphones](#), [top Apps parents need to know about and resilience strategies](#), and [internet safety](#). Check out VFN’s [mental health resources](#) and [VFN’s Resource Guide to Bullying and Harassment](#). If your child is struggling in school and has mental health challenges, they may benefit from a [Coordinated Services Plan](#). Please contact the VFN Helpline at 802-876-5315 or info@vfn.org if you have questions.

Upcoming Sibshops

Our Sibshops are off to a great start! We welcomed our new Sibshop Facilitator Mindy Deibler to the group! Mindy is a trained Sibshop Facilitator who will be organizing and running most Sibshops this year. Also new to our team this year is our Junior Facilitator Jenny Mumley, volunteers Louisa Moore and Olivia Garry, both UVM students and our very own Puppets in Education team. Check out our [Facilitator’s Bio](#) page to learn a little more about the members of our team.



In October, we had our first in-person Sibshop in many months. We had fun navigating the corn maze at Whitcomb’s Land of Pumpkins and Corn Maze in Williston, using our decision-making and problem-solving skills to complete the maze in under an hour! [Sibshops](#) are for children 6+ who have a brother or sister with a disability or special health need. They provide an opportunity to connect, share a snack, and discuss the ups and downs of being a “sib,” all

while doing a fun activity at VFN or in the community. From ECHO to MetroRock, we'll be doing lots of cool outings and activities this year - check out our [Activities Description List](#) to see what, where, and when each Sibshop will be.

If your child wants to join us this year, please fill out our Sibshops [Registration Form](#). If you are not ready to commit but want to keep a pulse on our activities and updates for the year, you can email mindy.deibler@vtfn.org to be added to our Sibshops email distribution list.

Upcoming Sibshops that will be held at Vermont Family Network are:

- **November 13 - Attitude of Gratitude 1:00-3:30 pm**

At this Sibshop, we will enjoy some fun activities, crafts and treats all centered around the theme of Gratitude.

- **December 11 - Cookie Decorating 1:00-3:30 pm**

What better way to celebrate the winter season and holidays than with cookie decorating?! We will supply the cookies, frosting and fun decorations... sibs supply the creative vision! The theme of this Sibshop is Creativity.

News from the Puppets!



We are so grateful for the opportunity to support students, teachers, and families this fall. PiE has presented programs about Kindness and Worry to more than 700 people so far this school year and we have a great flurry of scheduling happening now. As we all know, it has been a stressful fall in schools, and we are thankful to be part of the support system. We are seeing first-hand how stretched schools are with contact tracing, teaching, keeping everyone healthy and safe, and providing normalcy for students. This is what we are hearing:

- *“Some students are having a hard time coming into school each day, struggling with where they are going after school each day, some are extra worried when they feel ill.” -1st Grade Teacher*
- *“Many students are coming into my office stating that they are not feeling well. Most cannot explain exactly where they don't feel well and if they do it is usually a stomachache or headache.” -School Nurse*

The faculty, administration, staff, and students are our HEROES! We hope the PiE programs provide some levity AND tools for dealing with worry. If you would like puppet programs in your school, please contact karen.sharpwolf@vtfn.org or visit the [VFN website](#).

Graduation: Proficiency Based Grading and Extension of Services

[Act 77](#) provides all Vermont students

flexible pathways for high school completion including a proficiency-based system of grading. The Vermont Agency of Education has provided an [overview of proficiency-based grading and transcripts](#). Please note that if your youth with a disability is turning 22 years of age but whose implementation of a transition plan



within their IEP has been negatively impacted by the pandemic, the IEP team may apply for an [extension of time](#) in school. Our [Transition Toolkit for Youth with Disabilities](#) includes our newest publication - [Family Guide to Transition Services in Vermont](#) as well as a wealth of information that can help you and your youth transition smoothly from school to adult life. Please contact our Family Support Consultants at Vermont Family Network at 802-876-5315 or info@vtfn.org if you have questions about the transition process for your youth with a disability.

Why does VFN Send Surveys to Families?



Families who have contacted VFN Family Support Consultants may receive surveys about your experiences with us. We may ask you if we were helpful. We may ask if the information we shared was useful to your family. We may ask your opinion on a specific service.

Why do we send you these surveys? Firstly, we use families' input to help improve our services. Secondly, we are required by our funders to conduct surveys and report the results. VFN receives funding from entities such as the federal and state governments as well as private and philanthropic entities. Funders need to see the impact of their dollars. Do their dollars make a difference? By responding to our surveys, you answer that question. We know families receive many surveys through email. We would greatly appreciate your filling out the next VFN survey you see from us!

Advocacy Updates! VFN Working Alongside Family Advocates

Housing for Adults with Disabilities - VFN continues to support advocates who are urging the state to utilize the \$162M ARPA funds for developing a continuum of housing for adults

with disabilities. Family advocates are asking the state to develop a continuum of housing so that adult individuals with developmental or intellectual disabilities will have more housing choices. The next housing team meeting is on Monday November 15th at 3pm with the Developmental Disabilities Council. If you are interested in attending this meeting or learning more about how you can get involved, please email Robyn Freedner-



Maguire at freednermaguire@gmail.com.

Childcare - VFN family support team continues to hear from families across the state about the lack of access to childcare because programs do not have the training and resources to support children with disabilities or special health needs. Pam McCarthy, President and CEO of VFN, has met with Let's Grow Kids and Building Bright Futures to urge leading childcare advocates to elevate awareness of the challenges that families are experiencing and to collaborate on how to include specialized childcare more boldly as a key component to addressing issues that families are experiencing. If you have had your child kicked out of a program, asked to leave for the day because of behavioral issues or separated from the rest of their peers on a regular basis - this should not be happening, and your child is not alone. Please email Robyn Freedner-Maguire at freednermaguire@gmail.com to share your experience.

Children's Mental Health - VFN remains concerned by the long waits in the emergency room departments across the state and continues its advocacy with the Department of Mental Health, urging for more home and community-based services. Additionally, we are engaging in the [Mental Health Integration Council](#). If you have a story to share about your child's experience, please contact Robyn Freedner-Maguire at freednermaguire@gmail.com.

Upcoming Events - Register today!



SAVE THE DATE!

Save the Date for our 2022 Annual Conference - April 14, 2022
We are excited to announce that we will be bringing [Pete Wright from](#)

[Wrightslaw](#) to present on special education law and advocacy for a full day! We plan to hold an in-person conference at the Delta Hotel in Burlington and registration will be coming out soon.

Free Workshops

November 10 from 1:00 - 2:00 pm - "Special Education Rule Changes – What Does This Mean For Families?"

Marilyn Mahusky, Staff Attorney with the Disability Law Project at Vermont Legal Aid and Karen Price, Co-Director of Family Support at Vermont Family Network will discuss the changes in the Vermont Special Education rules that will take effect in July 2022. Among the changes are the definition of special education services and adverse effect, the addition of functional performance, increased parent voice and the elimination of the discrepancy model. Learn what this mean for your child's IEP.

[Register here.](#)

December 15 from 1:00-2:00 pm - "Post-secondary education options in Vermont for youth with developmental disabilities"

Vermont's Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) and Voc Rehab collaborate to provide post-secondary education (PSE) and work training for youth and young adults with developmental disabilities. Please join this PSE panel discussion to learn more about how the PSE services can broaden opportunities for young people with disabilities. In this workshop:

- You will become familiar with the three PSE support programs as they describe services that help young adults to attend Vermont colleges.
- You will meet staff from Project SEARCH who will describe this option for attending specialized vocational training at three host businesses.
- You will hear about independent living programs, where they exist and where they are being developed, and the lifelong learning options provided by Global Campus.
- Vermont's Supported Employment services for transition age youth and young adults will be reviewed.
- Each program will describe its application process and how funding is obtained to support participants.

[Register here.](#)

In case you missed our last series of workshops, you can find a full list on our [VFN website](#). Stay tuned as we add more workshops to our fall schedule!

We save workshops on our [website](#) and [YouTube channel](#).

Contact Us. We Will Listen!

Helping Vermont Families thrive for more than 30 years



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