

11/29/23

To: Dr. Mark Levine and Members of the Opioid Settlement Advisory Committee

From: Linda E Johnson, Executive Director, Prevent Child Abuse Vermont

Thank you Dr. Levine and Members of the Opioid Settlement Advisory Committee, for inviting me to speak with you today about Prevent Child Abuse Vermont's Nurturing Parenting, (NPP), Strengthening Families, (SFP) and Circle of Parents Programs and how they can positively impact the lives of parents who struggle with Opioid addiction. Both the Nurturing Parenting and Strengthening Families programs deliver 18 week long intensive interactive curricula, with home practice, meeting for 2 hours weekly. Our Circle of Parents programs, are professionally facilitated peer led support

groups that meet weekly year-round for an hour and a half.

Our most asked for Nurturing Parenting Program is the Nurturing Program for Families in Recovery from Substance Abuse. The Strengthening Families Programs are proven effective for preventing substance abuse in the next generation, the children and teens of participants. In State fiscal year 2023, we delivered **61 programs** serving **516 parents**, impacting **1174 children and youth**.

All three prevention programs strengthen Protective Factors that address substance misuse and child abuse prevention for parents, children and youth.

These Protective Factors include:

- *High levels of empathy
- *Parent engagement
- *Parental disapproval of substance use

- * Nurturing parenting skills
- * School and community connectedness
- * Decrease in isolation
- * Knowledge of child development and
- * Knowledge of alternatives to corporal punishment.

Nurturing Parenting, Strengthening Families and Circle of Parents prevent substance misuse by promoting parents' mental and physical health, engagement in self care, having nurturing interactions with their children and conversations about drugs and alcohol starting at a young age.

We want you to know that over 80% of the families we serve are in treatment and recovery from opioid addiction.

Program participants are greatly economically disadvantaged. At least 70% have household incomes of 0 to \$25,000, and 50% have \$0 to \$15,000. All our programs are always free and

although they are free to the individuals we serve the cost to provide them is a huge financial burden to our non-profit.

When COVID began we pivoted from in-person groups to live group meetings on-line. This change made access very easy statewide. Parents tell us they prefer it. However, we have been asked by some partners to resume in-person groups and so we are beginning to organize and provide these as well. In particular Turning Point Centers, men's prisons and some Parent-Child Centers. Going forward we will offer a mix of both in-person and on-line programs.

Prior to COVID, the total number of programs we provided annually was about 60 and that included 15 to 18 in prisons and with Probation and Parole. Now we are providing 61 programs without any for the Department of Corrections. I am concerned that with this resumption, the increase in demand within

communities, we will not have the resources to meet the need.

Until the last 7 or 8 years 75% of the parents who attended were self referred. Now, 80% are referred by DCF, DOC and Family Court. This was a very big shift. We know opioid addiction is the primary reason. Our intake forms make this clear. The increased anxiety in children and parents leading to many already high risk families being even more fragile and severely challenged is a problem we see every day.

These challenges include increased use and exposure to opioids and other substances. 75% to 80% of participants have complex multigenerational trauma, most involving substance misuse in combination with mental health and or domestic violence.

Our programs incorporate a framework for understanding parent and child behavior in the context of substance misuse, disruptions to

attachment and child development, specifically addressing the impact of these experiences on parents, children and youth.

All three program models are well evaluated, well regarded national models, and are proven effective approaches to ending multigenerational trauma, including trauma endured by individuals and families struggling with opioid use disorder.

The Circles have been very successful in engaging diverse populations of parents. We have had Circles for: BIPOC Mothers, Afghani Mothers, Parents of LGBTQIA Youth, New Americans, and Circles for all Parents. In total we carried out 19 Circles this past year serving 188 parents impacting 417 children and youth.

All three programs survey parents' satisfaction seeking feedback weekly about their experience, progress and suggestions.

In addition, all parents are called by their program facilitator in between weekly group meetings to check in and see if their basic needs are being met and support their sobriety.

I want to share a couple of stories from participating parents and the impact they credit the programs had on their addiction and their families.

L is a mother in Opioid recovery who registered for our programs, while also closely approaching her due date! L has six children, two of whom are not currently in her custody. She recently has moved to a new town in order to support her and her partner's recovery. They hope to rebuild their sense of community and surround themselves with a better support system. Shortly after group began, this mom had her baby! Both mom and baby were healthy and thriving. Through 1:1 meetings we were able to support this mom in ensuring she didn't miss any curriculum, which was very important to her.

Her dedication and investment in the Recovery programing was extremely clear when she signed on while in labor! The group as a whole was able to send her well wishes and support. Since having her baby, she has been staying at home with her infant and 4 older children while her partner works long days. L shared that being in a new area, and also being home all day can feel isolating. When her partner arrives home in the late evening it isn't always an ideal time for her to get to talk about how she's feeling. She shared one day that "These groups allow me to feel connected to other people who are like me. I don't get out much and feel pretty lonely at times. We are all trying our best and having a sense of belonging and support each week while we learn together has been a big help. I feel like

it's a judgement free zone. I enjoy being able to share with others in the group things that have helped me. We all need some help sometimes." She also has shared that "Using rewards with my kids has been especially helpful in getting them to do chores and learn responsibility."

R is a single father of a 3 year old little girl. He was addicted to Opioids and has been sober for 8 months now, while unfortunately the child's mother is still actively using. When our group began, R shared that he had just began living at a sober house and had weekly visits with his child. Through our resource survey, as well as verbally in group he indicated that support in accessing resources would be of help to him. We shared many! Soon after this, the dad signed onto the group excited to share that he had been granted overnights with his child! While this was a bit nerve wracking, he was thrilled

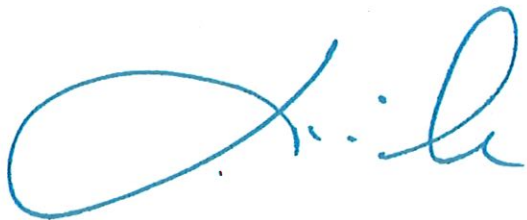
and utilized the support of the group for tips and tricks of toddler bed time. A few weeks later, he was elated to share that he had been accepted into a family group home with various resources to support his growth as a parent. He is able to have his child in this home and was awarded full custody! Not only this, but he was able to secure a new job that was closer to home and child care. Allowing him to save up for his own place for his family! He has shared that “having everyone here (in group) to cheer me on when I accomplish something feels so great”. Also, he has been able to navigate co-parenting with someone who is actively using and how that can be challenging at times. Participants were able to reinforce that his recovery and his child’s safety are the top priority. Reinforcing for this dad that he is doing the right things!

Investing in substance abuse prevention that works is a vital part of averting pain and loss of human potential now and in the next generation.

This is why we respectfully request your consideration of a grant of \$250,000 to ensure these programs will reach our most vulnerable families.

I welcome your questions.

For Children and Youth,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "L. Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and a smaller loop at the end.

Linda E. Johnson, Executive Director

Prevent Child Abuse Vermont

Ljohnson@pcavt.org

802 249 1983