

FAMILY INTERVIEWS

January 2021 - February 2021
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What we did: As a part of the *Where Are the Children?* project, a childcare enrollment survey conducted July 2020 - September 2020, we followed up with families - to listen to their stories, and hopes and dreams for their young children. We reconnected with the early educators/directors who completed the original data survey and asked them to help contact families who might consider being interviewed. After arrangements were made, Susan interviewed 15 families from around the state.

Why we did it: We wanted to hear directly from families with young children who were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal was to better understand the needs of Vermont families with young children during the pandemic, to focus on what families needed and wanted to create balance - where work, family time, and their children's learning and development were attuned to their hopes and dreams.

How we did it: We developed a set of interview questions that asked parents to share demographic information about the number and ages of their children, social/learning settings and hours their children were outside their homes; their 'ideal situation' in relation to childcare and education; their hopes and dreams for their children in 5 years, and what they felt they needed to realize that vision. Interviews, primarily by telephone, were arranged and conducted at the convenience of the families. The data from the interviews revealed the following.

What we learned: Families interviewed had children who spanned a range of ages from 18 months to 18 years. All but one family had one or more children in the 18 month - 5 year range, and a few were expecting a new baby in the coming months

Children were in a range of settings including parent-child centers, private childcare and preschool, public school, afterschool, and family home childcare. There was almost an equal split between children in care-school full-time vs. those families with part-time arrangements. Those with part-time schedules did so for a variety of reasons, including:

- financial (couldn't afford what they ideally wanted)
- early childhood programs and schools not in session full-time (hybrid learning schedules)
- one parent working at home and providing care (virtual learning).

When asked what their *ideal situation* would be in terms of addressing their work-childcare needs several themes emerged, including:

- more flexibility in hours available - to align with work schedules
- transportation and travel considerations - support in accessing ways to transport their children and proximity of school/care, home, and work, and siblings being in different sites
- affordability - cost as a factor in how often and where children could attend

Parents shared their hopes and dreams for their children *5 years from now*. The vast majority expressed wanting their children to be:

- well-adjusted
- kind, generous
- happy and healthy
- able to build relationships.

Many mentioned their vision for a vibrant community that offered family-oriented activities throughout the year.

When asked what they needed to make their 5-year vision a reality, themes included:

- better coordination of services
- support from public schools (before/after care and Pre-K)
- support to provide activities and opportunities to build relationships in the community

The final question gave them the opportunity to share what they wanted policy makers, community members, funders and others to understand. A majority mentioned:

- schools as hubs of the community and activities for their children and their family
- increased funding to make childcare and family goals attainable
- employers and schools listening to and supporting the needs of families with young children

What's next: We developed a position statement (attached) to guide the next steps, as we create opportunities for public dialogue and action steps based on families' visions and goals.

If you have questions or would like to learn more about this project contact us at:

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