

# Nurturing Families

## THE RUTLAND COUNTY PARENT/CHILD CENTER

BY *Kim J. Gifford* • PHOTOS BY *Jill Leake*



Sometimes a name says it all. Sometimes there is more to tell. In the case of the Rutland County Parent/Child Center — one of 15 Parent/Child Centers located throughout Vermont — a name may not be enough to express the wealth of resources available through the organization to families in Rutland County.

Established in 1984, Rutland County Parent/Child Center is a community-based, private non-profit organization dedicated to supporting and meeting the needs of parents, children and families in Rutland County. Executive Director Caprice Hover summarizes their mission by

saying, “We primarily are an education-based center for families.”

Overseen by a 14-member board and employing 39 people, Rutland County Parent/Child Center offers a breadth of services, including early education for children ages six weeks to six years. The

organization also offers an alternative high school for teen parents, both men and women, through sending high schools throughout Rutland County. Accredited through the Department of Education, the program allows students to receive a degree through their sending high school.



There are presently 20 students in the high school program, which typically graduates 10 students a year. Hover relates a story about one of the male students who is presently working for them. "He came from a background where he was extremely at risk and really didn't have hope for his future," she says. "He came here and commented that we were 'non-judgmental and give people chances.'"

After finishing his degree he planned on entering the Marine Corps, but in the interim began filling in at the Parent/Child Center, developing an affinity for working with children. "He told us he'd rather get his associates degree in Early Childhood Development," says Hover. "That was a warm fuzzy one for us, but our high school program has a lot of those stories. Many of these kids still have a relationship with us, which to me says you have a solid program when the participants stay in touch and let you know what's going on."

In addition, the Rutland County Parent/Child Center offers early intervention education to children with developmental delays, behavioral delays or disabilities. "When they turn three we partner with the local school systems for EEE (Essential Early Education), but we build relationships with these fami-

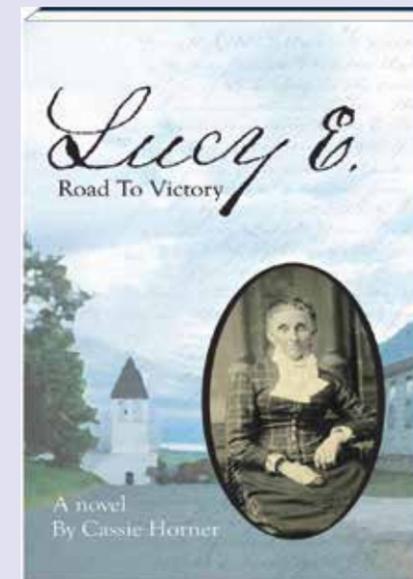
lies to allow them to transition into the school," says Hover. "We are there until they are ready to boot us," she jokes.

Rutland County Parent/Child Center also serves the Department of Children and Families in acting as case manager for families in the Reach Up program and for youth on family assistance. It also offers transitional housing for youth. It has 10 units of emergency housing and four recently purchased units for transitional housing that allows youth to move from emergency beds to more secure, stable environments on an 18-month basis.

Rutland County Parent/Child Center offers parent education classes as well as going into schools and talking on topics such as bullying to staff there. "I think what we are starting to become known as is the family center. Anything you can think of that a family might need, it's probably good to call us because if we aren't doing it, we certainly know who does," says Hover. "It's interesting because everyone traditionally knew us as the childcare place, but we are so much more than that. That's not even 50 percent of what we do. Fifty percent of my budget, maybe a little under, is for early education. The rest is these other really intensive case management services."

Funded primarily through grants as well as some state and federal funding, Rutland County Parent/Child Center serves a diverse population. "Sixty percent of our population is receiving some kind of assistance. The remaining 40 percent are from the general population," says Hover. The organization serves 3,000 people a year, children and parents combined. Much of the assistance is delivered in the families' homes.

Although numbers are important, Hover notes that success especially in areas such as early education is typically measured on a relationship basis. Testimonials from families who have worked with Rutland County Parent/Child Center certainly attest to this. Brandy Ellison of Rutland City first came in contact with the organization several years ago when she and her husband were out of work.



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“They were very supportive of us in getting us connected with programs to give us some assistance,” she says.

Since then her two children have been receiving childcare through the center. “I really feel super comfortable that when my children are in their care they are being treated as they should be. They don’t show any favoritism. What they do show is that all the children there are equally important,” she says.

Kate Cole of Fairhaven has sent all three of her children to Rutland County Parent/Child Center, including her middle child with special health needs. She praises the child-integrated services. “What always touched me is that when her therapist would come to the center there was

always a teacher who was willing to attend the sessions and learn the exercises that my daughter needed. This wasn’t something they had to do but it meant that they truly cared about her and her progress,” she says. “I can’t speak highly enough of the program and what it offers the community and kids who have special health needs and require services.”

At the heart of what they do, says Hover, “is help people succeed in their communities. We’re a nurturing organization.”

*Freelance writer Kim J. Gifford resides in Bethel, VT with her pug Vader and Alfe. Kim is also a memoir writing instructor at Lebanon College in Lebanon, NH and produces her own line of pug-related greeting cards.*



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