



For Immediate Release
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“Childcare In the Upper Valley: Challenges, Successes, and the Way Forward”

Two-part November Symposium Addresses Pressing Regional Problem

October 1, 2021, White River Junction, Vt. – Upper Valley employers and families both name access to high-quality, affordable childcare as one of the key barriers to prosperity in our region, especially for low- and moderate-income families. How can we increase childcare access and affordability in the Upper Valley so our families and workplaces can thrive?

That topic will be explored in depth in “Childcare In the Upper Valley: Challenges, Successes, and the Way Forward,” a free, public, two-part virtual symposium on November 3 and 17 for Upper Valley employers, policymakers, providers, parents, and others. The symposium is being planned and hosted by Vital Communities in partnership with the Corporate Council, Municipal Leaders, the Early Care and Education Association of the Upper Valley, Dartmouth-Hitchcock, and the Couch Family Foundation.

“Our goals for the symposium are to raise awareness about the complexity of this issue, to share information about initiatives that are underway, to explore potential new solutions, and to inspire and coordinate engagement,” said Sarah Jackson, Executive Director of Vital Communities.

Across the Upper Valley, families and employers report that they can’t find childcare providers who are admitting children this is because childcare providers cannot find staff and thus have to close classrooms and turn families away. A recent survey of providers found that in New Hampshire, 87% of childcare centers are experiencing a staffing shortage as well as 71% of childcare centers in Vermont. In the Upper Valley, of 25 childcare centers recently surveyed, 80% responded that staffing shortages as the reason they are enrolling fewer children; close to 90 early educator positions are vacant within those 25 centers. If families can’t access care, parents can’t return to work.

“Access to quality early education and childcare is essential for parents to return to work; and it is the most effective way to grow our next generation’s collective human potential. Child care plays a critical

role in our community and our economy. Having community leaders from nonprofit, business, civic and philanthropic sectors come together in a unified, community-wide approach to address the childcare crisis is a necessary first step if we are serious about getting families back to work,” said Brooke Freeland, Managing Director of the Couch Family Foundation.

Other members of the symposium planning committee underscored the issue’s urgency. Said Becky Parton from Dartmouth Hitchcock's Upper Valley Project Launch, "We hope that by bringing together employers, business leaders, the child care workforce, parents and community members that we can start to come up with solutions that work for the Upper Valley." Said Lebanon City Manager Shaun Mulholland, “We are losing highly trained, qualified staff because they cannot either find or afford adequate childcare.”

On November 3, “Part I: Impact on the Local Labor Market” explores why the childcare crisis is so complex, what the data is telling us, and what the NH and VT state governments are and aren’t doing. Presenters include Aly Richards and Michele Ash from Let’s Grow Kids; Christina D’Alessandro, NH State Director, MomsRising; childcare professionals affiliated with the Early Care and Education Association of the Upper Valley; and employers in the region who are seeing the childcare crisis impact their ability to retain and hire staff.

On November 17, “Part II: What is Working in the Upper Valley?” looks at effective childcare policy and programs around the Upper Valley, including solutions being implemented or explored by employers, communities, childcare professionals, policymakers, and philanthropists.

Information and registration are at <https://vitalcommunities.org/childcare>.

CALENDAR ITEMS

“Childcare In the Upper Valley: Challenges, Successes, and the Way Forward”

Part I: Impact on the Local Labor Market

Wed | Nov 3 | 8-9:30 am

Free, on Zoom

Learn why the childcare crisis is so complex, look at what the data is telling us, and hear what the NH and VT state governments are and aren't doing. Part of a two-part symposium on how we can increase childcare access and affordability in the Upper Valley so our families and workplaces can thrive.

Register at <https://vitalcommunities.org/childcare>.

“Childcare In the Upper Valley: Challenges, Successes, and the Way Forward”

Part II: What is Working in the Upper Valley?

Wed | Nov 17 | 8-9:30 am

Zoom

A look at effective childcare policy and programs around the Upper Valley, including solutions being implemented or explored by employers, communities, childcare professionals, policymakers, and philanthropists. Part of a two-part symposium on how we can increase childcare access and affordability in the Upper Valley so our families and workplaces can thrive.

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[Vital Communities](https://vitalcommunities.org) cultivates the civic, environmental and economic vitality of the Upper Valley. We bring people together, bridging boundaries and engaging our whole community to create positive change.

Learn more at vitalcommunities.org.