

Summer 2024



Dear parent,

As you may know, the mental health of young people in our community is a significant concern of educators and health care providers throughout the state and likely you all too! The rates of mental illness, suicide as well as drug abuse and overdose have increased over the past two years among children and adolescents, and it's become clear that the usual approaches to addressing these issues may not be sufficient.

Local schools, the health care system and our communities are working hard to help support our kids, get them higher level help when needed and pick up on warning signs readily. This progress, however, is not happening fast enough and we have a lot of healing to do. Together we'll develop resources to help them outside of the classroom and outside of the doctor's office. Our plan is to engage kids to help other kids, by harnessing their insights and using their voices and experiences to teach others through media narratives.

Each and every young person has a dream, has potential and does not need to suffer, and the power of their stories cannot be underestimated. Our plan is to share these powerful narratives in the form of a media project, called "A Vermont Story." The narratives can be used by kids and families, in schools, in community events to stimulate discussion and spread hope among ourselves and our neighbors.

I am asking your child to be part of "A Vermont Story." This would involve, primarily, participation in an on-camera interview. The interview will be casual, in a familiar place, with discussions for recording and sharing. Once the material is obtained, our team will work towards editing and production with the final product available sometime in 2025.

Please carefully consider your child's participation in this project. The people behind "A Vermont Story" are pursuing this project to help children throughout the area, and both the organization and the people involved are disclaiming any liability for emotional hardship or other damages. We believe your child may have something of value to offer others, but you know your child best. If you believe their participation would be embarrassing or traumatic to them, please take that into account when talking with them about joining the project and deciding whether to participate.

If you and your child are willing to help out and be a part of "A Vermont Story", attached to this letter is a Release Form. As the parent/legal guardian, you will need to sign the release form. Importantly, I want to highlight that, although certain people involved in "A Vermont Story" may be health care providers or educators, the project is separate and apart from any role as a physician, educator, or social worker. Any on-camera conversation would not, of course, be confidential, like a conversation with a doctor or a school counselor would be. These conversations are for a different purpose—helping other kids—which means that the stories are to be shared as a source of hope for others.

Every kid, no matter what the age, has already lived a lifetime of journeys, with ups and downs, challenges, victories and sometimes disappointment. By talking through your child's story, our

goal is that other kids will see positivity, not necessarily perfection, and be inspired to hope for a better tomorrow.

Feel free to reach out with questions or concerns.

Sincerely Yours,  
A Vermont Story team  
Elizabeth Hunt, MD, FAAP  
Laura Pacheco  
Teresa Scott, PhD.  
David Marlow