



NRFC State Profile: Vermont

June 2016

This profile describes state and federally funded programs and policies that aim to strengthen families. These programs and policies support parenting and father involvement, promote strong family relationships, enhance fathers’ economic stability, and provide support during incarceration and reentry. The profile lists phone numbers and websites for the programs. This information was correct when the profile was written (in 2016) but may change over time.

Programs to Support Responsible Fatherhood and Strengthen Families

Responsible fatherhood programs focus on issues such as enhancing parenting and relationship skills, keeping fathers involved with their children, improving their economic stability, helping them pay child support, and generally helping to strengthen families.

The following state and federally funded programs are available in the state:

Organization	Services Provided	Description	Service Area and
Capstone Community Action	Fatherhood/Parenting Economic Stability	Capstone Community Action’s <i>Family Literacy Center</i> is a federally funded Head Start program. The program offers weekly prenatal and parenting groups, playgroups, and individualized support for students. Students at the center can earn their high school diploma and receive support with money management and housing.	Washington County, Lamoille County, Orange County (East and West), and Mad River Valley. Website with locations and phone numbers Main phone: 800-639-1053
Job Corps	Economic Stability	<i>Job Corps</i> is a federally funded job training program that helps low-income men and women ages 16 to 24 with educational and career goals.	There is one Job Corps center in Vermont. It is located in Vergennes. Website (802) 877-2922
Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA)	Fatherhood/Parenting	SEVCA is a federally funded organization that offers the <i>Fathering Initiative</i> program to support male role models in increasing their involvement in their child’s life. The program offers activities like movie nights, train rides, painting,	Serves the entire state. Website (802) 722-4575

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Organization	Services Provided	Description	Service Area and Contact Information
		and “Dinner with Dads”, which allows fathers to cook meals for their children.	
Vermont Adult Learning (VAL)	Economic Stability	The state funded Vermont Adult Learning provides skills training to help adults further their employment and personal goals. Services include English Language Learner classes, High School Completion Program, GED testing, work readiness, and college transition efforts.	Serves seven counties. Website with list of locations and phone numbers (800) 322-4004
Vermont Agency of Human Services	Economic Stability	The Vermont Agency of Human Services partners with five Community Action Agencies throughout the state. The Agencies assist individuals and families to achieve economic self-sufficiency through education, basic job skills and money management training.	Serves the entire state. Website (802) 241-2454
Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services (VCCVS)	Domestic Violence	The state funded VCCVS provides services, compensation, and restitution programs for victims of crime. Advocates support victims, guide them through the criminal justice process, and act as liaisons with state attorneys and agencies. Many advocates specialize in cases of domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse.	Serves the entire state. Website (802) 241-1250
Vermont Department for Children and Families	Fatherhood/Parenting	The Vermont Department for Children and Families provides 15 <i>Parent-Child Centers</i> throughout the state. Services include home visits, parent support, playgroups, parent education, and referrals for other community services. Some centers have father-specific training programs and support groups.	Serves 14 counties in Vermont. Website (802) 241-2131
Vermont Department of Corrections (VDOC)	Incarceration/Reentry Economic Stability	The Vermont Department of Corrections offers several programs for offenders preparing for reentry. Programs include work training, batterer’s intervention programs, cognitive therapy, substance abuse therapy, and responsibility planning.	Serves the entire state. Website (802) 241-2442
Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence	Domestic Violence	The state and federally funded Vermont Network provides technical assistance, public policy advocacy, and community outreach and prevention efforts on domestic and sexual violence issues. Services include shelters, legal	Serves the entire state. Website with programs by service area.

Organization	Services Provided	Description	Service Area and
		advocacy, statewide hotlines, medical assistance, and more.	(802) 223-1302
Vermont Resource Centers	Economic Stability	Vermont Resource Centers offer employment resources and a state job bank where unemployed workers, veterans, dislocated workers, and other Vermonters can get assistance with their job search, including skills assessments and training opportunities. The website includes additional employment resources and a state job bank.	There are twelve centers in Vermont. Website with locations and phone numbers.

Policies to Promote Responsible Fatherhood

Paternity Establishment

Establishing paternity gives a child born outside of marriage the same legal rights and privileges as a child born to married parents. Children gain access to family medical history and rights to inheritance, fathers’ medical and life insurance benefits, social security and veterans’ benefits, and child support. In addition, Native American children gain tribal enrollment rights.

Paternity establishment in Vermont is called parentage. To establish parentage in Vermont, parents may file a Voluntary Acknowledgement of Parentage form with the Office of Vital Records. This form can be obtained at hospitals and birthing centers, Vermont courts, and the Office of Child Support (OCS). If one parent denies paternity of the child, the other parent may pursue legal establishment of paternity through the Family Division of Superior Court (also known as family court). Under these circumstances, a court may order genetic testing. If the mother and child are receiving assistance from the state, or if the mother has applied for child support, OCS will pay for the genetic test, and the court will order a time and place for the parents and child to appear to take the test. Otherwise, the court provides information on laboratories and their charges, and leaves it to the parents to arrange and pay for the testing themselves. If either parent does not appear for a scheduled court hearing or a genetic test, OCS or the parent who is present may ask the court to issue an order establishing paternity, parental rights and responsibilities, and child support, without the input of the other parent.ⁱ

Child Custody

If unmarried or divorced parents cannot reach agreement concerning child custody or visitation, a legal order can be made through the court system. Either parent may be granted custody of the child, or both may share equally in physical custody and/or decision-making responsibilities. There is no legal connection between payment or non-payment of child support and rights to visitation.

In Vermont, in cases of divorce, separation, or paternity establishment, a family court will issue a court order about parental rights and responsibilities, including legal and physical custody of a child, and the visitation schedule for the child. Custody decisions are made in the best interest of the child. If a court orders that one parent has sole physical custody of a child, the court will order a visitation schedule for the noncustodial parent, which may consist of supervised visits only.ⁱⁱ

Child Support

The Federal Child Support Enforcement Program was established in 1975 as Title IV-D of the Social Security Act to locate noncustodial parents, establish paternity and establish and enforce child support orders. General services available in all states and territories include voluntary in-hospital paternity acknowledgement, genetic testing, explanation of state guidelines for determining child support orders, and review of child support orders at least every three years at the request of either parent. State child support offices are responsible for the collection and distribution of child support payments and can modify orders when appropriate. If a parent is behind in their payments, the office may use enforcement tools such as license revocation (including drivers, professional, recreational or occupational licenses), seizure of assets, property liens, passport denial, and federal and state tax refund offsets.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Office of Child Support (OCS) is run by the Vermont Department for Children and Families. To apply for child support, a parent must fill out an application and mail it into OCS. OCS must work through the court, and once they file a motion the court notifies both parents, schedules a case manager conference, and schedules a hearing before the magistrate or judge. During the case manager conference, the OCS case manager attempts to have the parents come to an agreement about child support. If the parents cannot come to an agreement, the case will move to a hearing. The court would then calculate the amount each parent should provide in child support based on documents provided by the parents, recommendation of OCS staff, and the Vermont Child Support Guidelines, which take into account both parents' income and any other child support obligations they may have. Support orders may be modified at any time if a significant change in circumstances has occurred. Otherwise, child support orders may be reviewed for modification once every three years. Go to the [website](#) or call (800) 786-3214 for more information.

The Family and Medical Leave Act

The federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) protects employees who have worked with the same organization for at least twelve months and worked at least 1,250 hours within the past year. It contains provisions for both fathers and mothers to take time off after the birth or adoption of a child, or during a serious illness, without fear of losing their jobs. Employees in companies with 50 or more employees are entitled to up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave, over a one-year period, to care for a new child, recuperate from a serious illness, care for a seriously ill family member, or handle issues arising from a family member's call to active military duty. The FMLA also gives employees the right to take up to 26 weeks of leave to care for a family member who is seriously injured or becomes ill while on active military duty.^{iv}

Vermont FMLA benefit laws are similar to the federal laws, but employers with fewer employees must provide benefits than the federal requirements, and some part-time employees are entitled to FMLA leave.^v Vermont law also provides an additional 24 hours in 12 months to attend to routine or emergency medical needs of a child, spouse, parent, or parenting-law, or to participate in children's educational activities.^{vi}

Head Start

Head Start is a federally funded school readiness program for young children from low-income families. The program, currently delivered by about 1,700 local organizations – public and private, non-profit and for-profit – provides preschoolers with comprehensive services, such as education and health screenings, with the goal of building their skills across five school readiness domains: language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical development and health, and social and emotional development. Head Start encourages the role of parents (both mothers and fathers) as their child's first and most important teachers. Programs build relationships with families that support positive parent-child relationships, family well-being, and connections to peers and community. Early Head Start, also managed by the federal Office of Head Start, is directed toward children up to the age of three and their parents. While the program is federally funded and managed, local agencies make decisions regarding service delivery based on the specific needs of their communities; for example, some may opt to include home-based services for families in their programs. Most states have multiple Head Start programs providing services for fathers.

To find information on Head Start programs in Vermont, go to this [website](#).

Policies to Promote Economic Stability

Child Care Assistance

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) works with states to provide support for children and their low-income families. Subsidized child care services are available to eligible families through certificates (vouchers), grants, or contracts with providers. Fathers and mothers may select a child care provider that satisfies applicable state and local requirements, including basic health and safety requirements.^{vii}

The Child Care Financial Assistance Program in Vermont helps eligible families with the cost of child care. To be eligible for assistance, families must have an accepted service need for child care and meet the income guidelines. Applicants can submit applications online or complete paper applications and submit them to their local community child care support agency. In addition to this program, families may take advantage of child care tax benefits, scholarships or sliding fee scales, or employer funded services that may support working families with the rising child care costs.^{viii}

Rental Assistance

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides rental assistance to low-income families and individuals through a number of methods. HUD subsidizes privately owned apartments, allowing low-income tenants to rent them at reduced rates. In the Public Housing program, local housing agencies manage rental housing for low-income tenants, while HUD provides professional and technical assistance in their planning, development, and management. The Housing Choice Voucher Program, better known as Section 8, provides eligible families and individuals with vouchers that they can use to pay for all or part of the rent at housing units of their choice. Generally, eligibility for the HUD rental assistance programs is based on annual gross income, assets, family size, and other considerations such as elderly or disabled status. Local housing agencies generally set the fixed eligibility rules for their regions, determine assistance amounts, and manage waiting lists for assistance.^{ix}

The Vermont State Housing Authority (VSHA) administers a Project-Based Voucher and Moderate Rehabilitation program. Both of these programs are project specific housing rather than open market. Tenants are selected from a waiting list, owners and/or managers determine suitability, and VSHA determines eligibility for participation in the program. The subsidy is attached to the housing unit and not to the family. Therefore, if a family vacates a Project-Based Voucher or Moderate Rehabilitation unit and still wishes to have a subsidy, they must reapply under a different program.

The Shelter Plus Care program provides rental assistance for homeless people with disabilities. Supportive services, at least equal in value to the rental assistance, must be funded from other sources. The Family Unification program promotes family unification by providing rental assistance for families for whom the lack of adequate housing is a primary factor in the separation, or threat of imminent separation, of children from their families. Program eligible households are referred to VSHA by the Department of Social and Rehabilitative Services. The Mainstream Housing program funds rental assistance for non-elderly disabled families. Its primary purpose is to enable disabled families to rent affordable private housing.^x

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Food Stamp program, provides low-income individuals (both men and women) and families with funds delivered in an electronic benefit transfer card, or EBT card) that can be used to purchase food. SNAP is administered within the Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Services and is federally funded, but applications, delivery, and outreach are handled at the state or local level. In general, individuals and households are eligible to receive SNAP if they have less than \$2,250 in countable resources and earn less than 130 percent of the poverty line in gross monthly income. However, characteristics of recipients (for example, age or disabled status) can affect eligibility requirements, and states have flexibility in determining eligibility, particularly with regard to what is considered a countable resource. In many states, individuals over the age of 18 and

under the age of 50 are limited to three months of SNAP benefits every three years unless they are working or in a work or training program 20 hours a week. Some states have waivers to this rule for all or part of the state – for detailed state eligibility requirements, consult the [state SNAP agency](#).^{xi}

SNAP recipients in Vermont can use the Vermont Express electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card to use SNAP benefits at most stores that sell food. In order to qualify for this benefit program, applicants must be a resident of Vermont and have a current bank balance (savings and checking combined) of under \$2,001 (or under \$3,001 if one or more members of the household is age 60 and over or has a disability).^{xii}

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program grants federal funds to states for developing and implementing their own welfare programs that provide assistance and work opportunities to needy families.

Low-income Vermonters may apply for TANF benefits through an online application, by mailing in a paper application, or in person at an Economic Services Division (ESD) district office. *Reach Up* is the financial assistance portion of the state’s TANF program. *Reach Up* benefits are restricted to a five-year lifetime limit. Additionally, those who only need temporary help, are likely to be self-sufficient in four months or less, and meet certain eligibility requirements, may receive benefits through the *Reach First* program, which provides short-term cash benefits. When receiving TANF benefits, adult family members are required to participate in employment activities. A case manager will work with the family to create a family development plan that maps out the adults’ work goals and the steps to be taken to achieve those goals. When the *Reach Up* benefits expire, recipients are automatically enrolled in a different program called *Reach Ahead*, which is a transition between *Reach Up* and full employment. *Reach Ahead* benefits are restricted to a two-year lifetime limit.^{xiii}

Other Helpful Resources

Vermont Department for Children and Families

For more information on state services provided to families and children, visit the Vermont Department for Children and Families’ [website](#).

Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

Vermont Network is a resource on domestic and sexual violence issues that provides technical assistance, advocacy for public policy, and community outreach and prevention efforts. The network connects individuals with shelters, legal advocacy, statewide hotlines, medical assistance, and other services on their [website](#). Individuals can also call the statewide domestic violence hotline at (800) 228-7395 or the sexual violence hotline at (800) 489-7273.

References

- ⁱ For more information on Paternity Establishment in Vermont, see <https://www.vermontjudiciary.org/gtc/Family/SharedDocuments/Pamphlet%2006.pdf> and <http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/FSD/Policies/88.pdf>.
- ⁱⁱ For more information on Child Custody in Vermont, see <http://www.vtlawhelp.org/child-custody-and-visitation-parental-rights-and-responsibilities>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ For more information on the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, see www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css.
- ^{iv} For more information on the Family and Medical leave Act, see <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs28.pdf>.
- ^v For more information on FMLA in Vermont, see <https://www.dol.gov/whd/state/fmla/vt.htm>
- ^{vi} For more information on FMLA in Vermont, see <http://labor.vermont.gov/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/WH-14-Parental-Family-Leave-Poster.pdf>.
- ^{vii} For more information on the Child Care and Development Fund, see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/about/what-we-do>.
- ^{viii} For more information on Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program, see <http://dcf.vermont.gov/benefits/ccfap>.
- ^{ix} For more information on Rental Assistance, see http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/rental_assistance.
- ^x For more information on Rental Assistance in Vermont, see <http://www.vsha.org/vsha-programs/rental-assistance-program/>.
- ^{xi} For more information on SNAP and to find services in your state, see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/apply>.
- ^{xii} For more information on SNAP in Vermont, see <http://www.benefits.gov/benefits/benefit-details/1356>.
- ^{xiii} For more information on TANF in Vermont, see <http://www.tanf.us/vermont.html> and <http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/ESD/Report/TANF-Renewal-2015-2018.pdf>.