

Strengthening Specialized Child Care Services

Vermont Early Learning Challenge Grant (ELCG): Project 8

What is Specialized Child Care Services?

Specialized Child Care (SCC) is part of the continuum of coordinated services offered through Children's Integrated Services (CIS) in Vermont communities. SCC offers an array of services and supports to families and children with identified specialized child care needs, and to child care providers and CIS specialists working with families to assure that these children experience success in child care settings that meet their needs. There is a Child Care Coordinator in every CIS region managing SCC services as part of the regional CIS Team.

What's new in SCC?

Vermont ELCG funding (Project 8: Strengthening SCC Services) provided an opportunity to strengthen and improve SCC, aligning it with standards and resources in Vermont's broader early childhood system. Since April 2015, CIS staff, Child Care Coordinators, SCC providers and other stakeholders have met regularly to develop and implement a plan to increase quality and consistency in SCC with the goal of improving services and outcomes for children with high needs.

Implementing the Project 8 Plan for SCC will:

- increase the capacity of Child Care Coordinators on CIS Regional Teams to sustain and strengthen SCC at the local level, including recruiting and supporting SCC providers to serve children and families effectively;
- require all SCC providers to document the quality of their programs by participating in the Vermont Step Ahead Recognition System (VT STARS) with a minimum of 3 STARS;
- improve the quality and consistency of professional development opportunities for SCC providers; and
- increase the financial differential SCC providers receive for meeting the needs of children accessing SCC services.

How will we get there?

The Project 8 plan for strengthening SCC includes a gradual implementation to preserve approved SCC provider capacity as an array of strategies to build and improve local services and capacity is implemented.

- CIS staff and Child Care Coordinators will regularly monitor data on regional capacity of SCC providers in relation to trends in the need for SCC placements for children.
- Child Care Coordinators will reach out to child care providers with 3 or more STARS to encourage SCC approval and participation.
- Existing SCC providers will receive targeted supports from qualified mentors to help them apply for STARS and achieve at least a 3 STAR rating.
- Approved SCC providers will receive evidence informed mentoring to help them build skills and develop knowledge and competencies to meet the particular needs of each child and family receiving SCC services.

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- Basic Training in SCC will be revised for consistency and content and be available for child care providers seeking SCC approval.
- A menu of engaging evidence-informed advanced training for SCC providers will be developed and expanded and available consistently state-wide.
- The role and capacity of Child Care Coordinators will be clarified and strengthened. Child Care Coordinators will work closely with families and state CIS and DCF staff to ensure a good match between approved SCC providers and individual children with identified needs. Child Care Coordinators will work to build the supply of high quality SCC in regions and help SCC providers access supports, work with specialists and families, and benefit from relevant professional development opportunities.

Proposed Timeline	January 2017	Child care providers applying for SCC approval will have to have 3 or more STARS to be approved.
	September 2018	All existing approved SCC providers will need to have 3 or more STARS or seek a time-limited variance to maintain approval. The SCC differential payment will increase from 7% to 10% of the CC FAP rate for SCC providers serving children participating in SCC services.
	January 2019	All children with identified specialized child care needs will be enrolled in approved SCC providers with 3 or more STARS who have the knowledge and skills to meet the unique needs of each and every child and their families. SCC providers will have access to mentoring and professional development opportunities to support their work with children and families with high needs.

Why Does It Matter?

Research indicates that children with high needs get the most developmental benefit from high quality early care and learning programs. That means programs that are well run, intentionally supporting children’s social-emotional development and providing engaging developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for each and every child. Staff in these programs are skilled and knowledgeable and have the supports they need to serve vulnerable children and families well. Strengthening SCC in CIS will have a positive impact on the healthy growth and development of children with high needs and help build protective factors in their families.

Improved and strengthened SCC services provides children with high needs and their families individualized placement in high quality early care and learning programs with enhanced supports to meet their particular needs. SCC also provides access to transportation, program consultation, early screening and other interventions that mitigate the negative impacts of toxic stress and advance the opportunity for each and every child to grow and develop to their best potential.