



VT-FUTRES
Fostering Understanding To
Reach Educational Success

Educate Local Communities Toolkit

Using the “No Decision About Me, Without Me” Video for Presentations with School Partners

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Sample Email for Setting up School Presentations Using “No Decision About Me, Without Me” Video

Hello Principal _____ ,

As the Resource Coordinator for the _____ District office of DCF Family Services, I am partnering with local schools to present trainings for school staff on supporting the educational stability and well-being of students impacted by foster care. I would be very interested in setting up a time to speak to educators for _____ school.

The basic training is 45 minutes and features a new Vermont video, "No Decision About Me, Without Me: School Stories of Youth in Custody". There will also be time for a short discussion on how DCF and schools can work together to best meet the needs of this population of students and help keep them in their local community.

Response to the presentations have been positive. The Special Services Coordinator at one school followed up with this email message, “Thank you very much for presenting to my staff yesterday. The information was powerful and clear. I loved that by joining us you physically demonstrated that we are working together to take care of these children.”

I would appreciate your help in setting up training time for your administrators and educators. Some schools are opting for me to present to a large group of school staff, while others are choosing smaller trainings for guidance counselors or special services teams. We particularly recommend Special Educators and Special Ed Directors join the conversation as so many of these youth are on IEP's. Who do you think would be the most appropriate audience at your school? Are there already established meetings we can join? We will do our best to be available at a time that works for your staff.

Thank you for your attention to this important topic and please let me know if I can answer any questions. I look forward to hearing from you.





Preparing for School Presentations Using “No Decision About Me, Without Me” Video

Goals:

- Help educators better understand students impacted by DCF involvement.
- Encourage staff to assist with recruiting local foster families, respite providers, transporters, etc.
- Enhance your relationship with that school/community.

Preparing for School Presentation:

- Email presentation request to Principals/school contacts. (see flash drive)
- Follow up and schedule training.
- Confirm who audience will be (Teachers? Guidance? Administrators? Special Ed?)
- Check that they have equipment to show video – with speakers!
- Think about DCF’s current involvement in that school. Who are the kids in care there? Are there difficult situations unfolding right now? What are some issues that school staff might bring up? Are there specific points you want to make?

Handouts: (All available on this flash drive)

- FAST FACTS (everyone)
- “Supporting Children in State Care: A Menu of Options”
- “MOU Guidance” (is audience in decision-maker role?)
- “What Teachers and Educators Can Do...”
- “Best Practice for School Transitions”
- District recruitment materials





Sample Script for Presenting “No Decision About Me, Without Me” Video to School Partners

1. Hello, my name is _____ and I am the Resource Coordinator with the _____ office of DCF Family Services. I asked to present to you today because DCF recognizes schools as important partners in keeping children safe and promoting their educational well-being. Together, as individuals and as a community, we work to support children whose family live’s are challenging. A big piece of helping these kids be successful in school and beyond in supporting their Educational Stability.

2. In the world of child welfare, Educational Stability means doing our best to maintain a student in their familiar school setting when they come into care, or move to a new living situation while in DCF custody. Keeping kids stable in their familiar schools is a very important part of helping them succeed academically and in life.

Historically, when a child came into foster care and was placed in a home in a new town, they were required by law to go to school in that new community. These school moves created additional trauma for these kids and also had a very negative impact on them educationally. The goal became to keep children in their familiar schools whenever it was in their best interest to do so. The 2008 and 2011 Fostering Connection Acts were passed to make this easier to accomplish. The objective was now to raise awareness about this issue, increase collaboration across Vermont and promote local foster family recruitment.

Between 2012 and early 2015, the Vermont Agency of Education, DCF and the Vermont Family Courts worked together on a grant-funded project called VT-FUTRES, the purpose of which was to share strategies to help keep our foster children local and learning. The project had several elements including: data collection, working on cross-system policy, community education, developing resources for DCF staff and engaging young Vermont alumni of the foster care system. Additionally, DCF Resource Coordinators such as myself, the foster parent recruitment arm of DCF, were brought in because finding new foster families in the towns where there are kids coming into custody is an important element of the state’s goal of well-being for students in care.

exciting outcome of the VT-FUTRES project was the video, “No Decision About Me, Without Me: School Stories of Youth in Custody”, in which five Vermont youth share their educational experience while in state custody. Made at the suggestion of the students, this short documentary shares their story and highlights why educational stability is receiving so much attention. I’d like to share the video with you now and afterwards there will be time for comments and how _____ school can help.

3. Show VIDEO

4. What are your thoughts? Any questions about what the kids or professionals in the video had to say?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

a. Why did the kids in the video move around so much?





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DCF works very hard to minimize the number of moves a child makes. There was not always such a strong emphasis on keeping kids stable. Most of these youth came into custody prior to the passing of the Fostering Connections Act which pushed the system to much more emphasis on reducing home and school changes.

b. Communication with DCF is sometimes frustrating. We don't know what's happening with a child at our school.

I appreciate that it can be very frustrating if you don't hear back from someone at DCF. All of us, schools and social workers, are doing their best to meet the needs of the kids with not enough resources. That is not an excuse, but simply a comment that we all have good intentions and are doing our best. If you have reached out to the child's social worker and are not hearing back I would encourage you to contact their supervisor. (it has been very successful when RC's have offered to have schools call them directly if they can't reach a busy social worker.)

c. What about transportation from one school to another?

DCF is ultimately responsible for the transporting a child from one town to another so they can remain in their familiar school, but the reality is they can't do it without the support of schools, foster parents and others. As folks in the video described, plans are made to fit each individual situation. School personnel often help. (Give local example here.)

e. Why was this child placed with their grandmother across the state?

(Discuss DCF's mandate to place child in Kinship Care AND how research shows that if the choice must be made between keeping a child in their familiar school or placing them with family, keeping them with family is usually the more important.

f. Our school has made several reports about a child. Why has DCF not removed them from their parents? We're frustrated!

First, I appreciate how much you care about your students. I know it's hard to see a child whose home life is difficult and not be able to do anything about it. We DO get your reports and they are taken seriously. (Explain about DCF intake system here.)

5. One additional point we like to share with schools. As the legal guardian, DCF is responsible for seeing that there is an Educational Best Interest Determination done for a child in foster care. This means gathering input from the child, caregivers, school personnel, and others about the child's situation and using that to determine where the child will be educated. There is a new Best Interest Determination form, usually referred to as the BID, that is starting to be used and social workers will be asking for school input. There are many factors that go into making this decision.

If it is determined that the student will go to school in a town other than where they are living, the social worker will then send an Educational Stability Request letter to the Superintendent.

6. What teachers/schools can do to support kids in foster care? There are a number of ways school staff can help these kids.

-Provide them with consistency and structure. Transition times may be difficult so prepare child for them.





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- Greet the child and check in with them personally.
- Provide the child with an “advocate” or go-to support person whom they can reach out to on a very regular basis.
- If the child needs to transition to a new school, help ensure that that transition is well-planned, clearly communicated, that good-byes are said and that it occurs at a logical point in the school year.

7. I have mentioned foster parent recruitment a few times already. The reality is that when a child comes into custody, and they are not going to be able to live with a family member, schools are an important resource to find local homes. I may very well come to you to ask for ideas. I do this NOT because we are expecting teachers or PA’s to become foster parents, but because you know this child AND your community. You are our connection to people who might be able to provide this child with a home that allows them to stay in their familiar educational setting.

Some school personnel do choose to become foster parents, which is great. There are children in Vermont living with teachers, coaches, bus drivers, principals, nurses, afterschool providers, neighbors, family members, etc. You are the best situated group of people to make these caregiver placements happen.

And if you or someone else would like to support a child, but becoming a foster family is not realistic, there are other ways. We need people to help with transport, provide respite, take a child to an appointment, be a guardian ad litem or an educational surrogate. We have a sheet that lists a variety of ways people can be involved in a child’s life, as well as other recruitment materials.

8. Any questions?

