

## **Starting Points Begins the Conversation**

Submitted by Sherry Carlson, Conversation Facilitator

On September 29th, twenty-five Starting Points network leaders from across the state engaged in a conversation about the fragmentation of the early care and education workforce, national efforts seeking to address that fragmentation, and the possibility of building a more cohesive and recognized early childhood field of professional practice, both locally and nationally.

Participants in this VTEAYC-led discussion considered possible actions the field might pursue, as well as the benefits, barriers and challenges. Many agreed that a more cohesive identity and name for our profession is essential to building support for increased public investment in early care and education. Network leaders discussed how lack of clarity about the early care and education profession impacts children. One member stated, “if people had a clear vision of what we do, how we are trained and why we are important, parents would be less likely to choose unregulated care.”

The discussion turned to the challenge of accessing preparation and training programs. Participants wondered if individuals interested in an early childhood career would be better supported in a system that was more defined and standardized.

Celebration was also in order, as long-time early educators talked about how far we have come. One leader exclaimed, “Nobody ever calls me a babysitter anymore!” A 25-year veteran shared her optimism that her daughter, who had just opened her own early childhood program, will feel valued and recognized for this important work during her career because of the momentum that is building in the workforce at this time in its history.