

Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council
Draft Quarterly Meeting Minutes ~ December 3, 2020
via Zoom

Present: Kaiya Andrews, Amanda Bianchi, Gina Carrera, Betsy Choquette, Anastasia Douglas, Melanie Feddersen, David Frye, Mike Gruteke, Carol Hassler, Hillary Hill, Terry Holden, Steve Kieselstein, Dion LaShay, Hannah Neff, Ed Paquin, Candice Price, Courtney Quinlan, John Spinney, Jesse Suter, Havah Walther, Crista Yagjian

Absent: Francoise Kahindo, Julie Arel

Support Staff: n/a

Guests: Bill Baylor with [FEI systems](#), Kirsten Capeless with [GT Independence](#), Selina Hickman the Director of the Developmental Disabilities Services Division

VTDDC Staff: Kirsten Murphy, Susan Aranoff, Chelsea Hayward

1. Welcome:

The Meeting began with an icebreaker at 10:05 am. Council members took turns talking about something good/new that's happened since the Council last met via Zoom. Some highlights included a blossoming lime tree, the "pet share" at Voices and Choices, taking a walk with the first snowflakes of winter, arts and crafts, horror movies, sharing snacks, and buying a house.

- Adopt Meeting Minutes from September: There were no changes.

Motion: Mike made the motion to adopt the Minutes from September. Dion seconded. **Motion passed: 18-0-0**

- Review Group Agreement for Zoom Meeting: Rules include: Mute unless you're talking; One (1) person talks at a time; and raising your virtual hand or real hand to speak.
- Assign Roles:
 - Jargon Buster was Steve Kieselstein
 - Timekeeper was Dion Lashay
 - Processor was Gina Carrera
 - Keeper of the Rudder was Mike Gruteke

2. Executive Committee Report:

- **Five-Year State Plan Update** –Courtney summarized all new developments since the previous Quarterly Meeting:
 - The Council hired a moderator to help see them through the Five-Year State Planning process. His name is Greg Hessel, and he is the founder and director of [ReGeneration Resources](#) from Brattleboro, VT.
 - There are three (3) Planning Teams, which will each meet four (4) times between now and the end of June. Each team has co-coordinators and the first round of meetings have been scheduled.
 - The final draft of the Goals and Objectives is due by March 25, 2020. It must go out for 45 days of public comment and the Council must consider and respond to the public comment.

Every Council Member will have the opportunity to talk about their goals and passions, Courtney said. Members must be mindful that not all the goals or objectives in the final plan will be what any one person wants. The Five-Year State Plan is a group effort and will reflect what the majority decide will be the best use of Council resources.

The DD Act charges the Council to work towards three broad, general goals. Each Planning Team will focus on one of these goals:

- **Building Capacity:** Team #1
The Council may address gaps in services needed by Vermonters with disabilities. This includes services that are not available and services that are available but not distributed equitably. Gaps may be caused by a barrier in policy, a lack of funds, or outdated practices, to give just a few examples. Under this goal, the Council must include one objective that addresses the needs of an underserved group of people with disabilities. Examples of underserved groups include New Americans, rural Vermonters, and people who are incarcerated.
- **Increasing Advocacy:** Team #2
The Council may use training, technical assistance, community organizing, coalition building, and other activities to increase citizen advocacy. The DD

Act reflects the philosophy of “Nothing about us, without us,” and the plan should describe how the Council will ensure that people with disabilities are involved at all levels in the decision-making that impacts their lives. Under this goal area, the Council must support a self-advocacy group, leadership training by self-advocates, and the involvement of self-advocates in coalitions.

- **Changing Systems:** Team #3

The DD Act does not task the Council with delivering services or with fixing services for specific individuals. The Council must focus on improving whole systems so that everyone using the system benefits. These systems can touch on any service area -- housing, transportation, assistive technology, childcare, etc.

Council Members took a brief break from the Agenda to introduce themselves to Director Selina Hickman.

Because there was not enough time, the following agenda items were tabled until the first round of Planning Team meetings.

- Review and expand Group Agreements**
- Role Play – “Step Up, Step Back”**

3. Presentation:

As part of the Needs Assessment required for the Five-Year Plan, the Council has been conducting focus groups with self-advocates and family members. A focus group is a discussion lead by a facilitator who asks a set of questions and records the answer. Often the facilitator meets with several groups and asks the same questions in order to gather lots of answers.

The Council has held 6 Focus Groups with family members from across the state; they have completed 2 out of 5 Groups for Self-Advocates. The Focus Groups are being led by independent facilitators and the information collected is anonymous, meaning that the names of the participants are not in the written summary. The standard questions used are: In services for people with I/DD,

- What needs to start happening?

- What needs to stop happening?
- What do we need more of?

Kirsten shared a few highlights from the family Focus Groups. The complete summary will be posted in the member Drop Box.

BREAK:

Lunch began at 11:45am. Members returned at 12:30pm.

4. Policy Committee Report:

- **Visits with Congressional Staffers:** The Policy Committee meets twice a month. Havah, the committee co-chair, reported that members met with staff from Senator Sander's office, Senator Leahy's office, and Representative Welch's office during the fall. The meetings were held on Zoom and focused mainly on support for the ABLE Age Adjustment Act, ADA accessibility, and personal stories and experiences.

“I felt like what we were saying was actually being digested and that they cared.” – Gina Carrera

- **Platform for the 2021 Session:** The Policy Committee drafted ideas for the Council's Platform for the 2021 Session. They recommend the following Platform Items:
 - Proposal 1: Independent Developmental Services Advocate
Vermont needs an independent Developmental Services Advocates, similar to the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Service that is available to people served by the Choices for Care program. The Developmental Services Advocate would: 1) receive, track, and address individual complains; 2) educate recipients of service about their rights; and 3) advocate for administrative and legislative changes that uphold the right of individuals in the Developmental Services System to make informed decisions about where and how they live.
 - Proposal 2: Protect Medicaid
Vermont must protect its Medicaid Program and ensure that there are adequate funds to address the healthcare and long-term support needs of

Vermonters with disabilities. The legislature should invest Medicaid dollars fairly to meet the needs of Vermonters with disabilities.

- Proposal 3: Apology/Reconciliation for Eugenics

The Legislature must apologize for the harm done by Vermont’s eugenics law to indigenous Vermonters, Vermonters of color, and Vermonters with disabilities. In addition to a formal apology, Vermont must create a truth and reconciliation process to identify and address the injuries inflicted under Vermont’s eugenics law and to raise awareness about the ways in which ableism, racism, and prejudice against indigenous groups continues today.

The Council discussed what “eugenics” means, the history of the Eugenics Movement, and the ways in which the ableist ideas supporting eugenics can still be seen today.

Motion: Havah made a motion to adopt the three proposals for the 2021 platform. Dion seconded.

There was a five-minute break so that members could think about their vote, check in with their buddies, or take a break. Vote was by roll call.

Motion passed: 15-0-1. In favor were Andrews, Bianchi, Carrera, Douglas, Gruteke, Holden, Kieselstein, LaShay, Neff, Paquin, Price, Quinlan, Suter, Walther, and Yagjin. Feddersen abstained.

- **Announcement: Comments on Special Education Rules** – Vermont’s Special Education rules are open for public comment until December 30, 2020. This is a rare opportunity to advocate for changes to the rules, including addressing two key issues:
 - Revising or setting aside Vermont’s “adverse effect” requirement for special education eligibility when the primary impact of the disability is social/emotional.
 - Requiring that districts obtain a parent signature on the Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Vermont Family Network, Vermont Legal Aid, and a few other organizations have submitted comments. Susan will submit comments on behalf of the Council by December 16. She invited Council members to connect with her if they want help in writing and submitting their own comments.

5. **Executive Director Report:** Kirsten provided a very brief report. VTDDC was recently awarded a \$27,500 grant from the Vermont Department of Health to purchase, pack, and distribute 2500 packs of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to children, teens and adult with disabilities and their family caregivers. The project must be completed by the end of December.
6. **Public Comment:** Because guests had left the meeting, there was no public comment.

7. **Summarize Meeting:**

Gina, the processor, noted that the meeting had gone smoothly with very few audio or video errors. She observed that members were passionate about “hot topics,” so conversation was sometimes heated but always respectful. This reflects how deeply members care about the issues and the work of the Council.

8. **Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 2:00 pm.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Chelsea Hayward