

**Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council**  
**Draft Quarterly Meeting Minutes ~ March 28, 2024**  
**via ZOOM and In-Person**

Main Street Landing Performing Arts Center  
60 Lake Street, Burlington VT  
In “The Classroom” on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor

<b>In Person:</b> Amanda Bianchi, Kele Bourdeau, Justin T. Bear Deth, Anastasia Douglas, David Frye, Michelle John.
<b>ZOOM:</b> Kate Daly, Melanie Feddersen, Johnathan Gardner, Nazly Guzman, Candice Price, Adam Poulin, John Spinney, Collins Twing, Jesse Suter, Havah Walther, Crista Yagjian
<b>Absent:</b> Beth Sightler, Lindsey Owen, Danielle Brier, Betsy Choquette, Courtney Quinlan,
<b>Support Staff:</b>
<b>Guests:</b> Jennifer Garabedian, Jennifer Townley
<b>VTDDC Staff:</b> Kirsten Murphy, Susan Aranoff, Chelsea Hayward

## 1. Welcome:

Justin Thunderbear played his flute to open the meeting.

Anastasia called the meeting to order at 10:03 AM. She welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. There was a quorum.

- **Ice Breaker:**

Everyone introduced themselves, said their preferred pronouns, and practiced the ice breaker of “**inclusive self-descriptions.**” Members gave a visual description and shared how they identify themselves. Anastasia reminded members that there is no wrong way to describe oneself.

- **Assign roles:**

- The timekeeper was Kele.
- Chat Monitor was Michelle.
- Processor was Amanda.

- **Adopt Meeting Minutes from December 7, 2023**

**Motion:** David made the motion to accept the meeting minutes from December 7, 2023. Crista seconded. There was no discussion.

**Motion passed unanimously with two abstentions.**

## 2. Election of Vice Chair

- **Candidates**

- Justin Thunderbear Deth asked to serve as Vice Chair alongside Michelle John. Michelle said they work well together and live in the same town.

**Motion:** David made the motion to accept Justin and Michelle as Co Vice-Chairs. Kele seconded.

**Motion passed: 12-0-4.**

## 3. Policy Committee Report:

- **Visits with Congressional Staff**

Susan and Council members have recently met with staff from 2 of Vermont's 3 congressional offices to talk about how the DD Council's work and about issues impacting Vermonters with disabilities. Collins talked about VTDDC's meeting with Ina Backus from the Office of Senator Peter Welch. Michelle talked about meeting with Beth Stern from the Office of Bernie Sanders.

- **Legislative Update**

At the December meeting the Council adopted a platform with four (4) talking points. Susan said that 1/3 of Vermont towns did not pass their school budgets on Town Meeting Day. With the Education Committees at the legislature focused on school funding, she does not think there will be any movement on exclusionary discipline.

There were no pay increases for designated service agencies in Governor Phil Scott's budget. The agencies were level funded. Susan expects the House to propose a 3% budget increase for support staff.

There is positive progress in seeking funding to expand housing options for people with disabilities. Currently, existing housing programs give priority to

people who have been unhoused, farm workers, and refugees. However, the Council is seeking to add people receiving Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) to the list of priority groups. Susan has been hosting many family members and self-advocates who have come to the Statehouse to talk about the need for more service supported housing.

Anastasia asked for an update on the forensic facility. This facility is a locked setting for people with disabilities who have been accused of a crime but found “not competent” to stand trial. Susan reported that the Senate will likely pass a bill adding people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to the list of those served by the proposed facility. However, opposition to including people with I/DD is much stronger on the House side. Legislators are concerned that the proposed facility is very expensive.

Candice spoke about “the housing piece” of VTDDC’s platform. Candice was recently without a home, spending long periods of time in hospital emergency rooms or a hotel. As a person with a disability who uses a wheelchair, Candice was told that her only housing option was to move into a nursing home. Candice does not want to go to a nursing home. While she was being supported to live in a Burlington hotel, it took hours for her to get medical care for pneumonia. She could not breathe and was scared. A Council Member and a Council Alumni supported Candice to get her an ambulance.

Candice has finally been placed with a new home provider. She want to share her story with lawmakers.

- **ACTION ITEM.**

Susan and the Policy Committee asked the Council to make an addition to its legislative platform. Specifically, they want the platform to direct that the Council advocate for people with disabilities to be added to existing state housing programs as a priority population. There was discussion about how wide the definition “disability” was.

**Motion:** Justin made the motion to include people with disabilities in all State of Vermont Housing programs.

**Motion passed: 13-0-4.**

- **Disability Awareness Day**

Susan announced that Disability Awareness Day will be tomorrow, Friday, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024. This year the event will be more low key than it was before the pandemic.

#### **4. Membership Committee Report:**

The Membership Committee has interviewed several self-advocates and family members. Anastasia talked about the Council’s commitment to diversity and requirements in the by-laws.

- **Recommendations for New Members**

The Membership Committee recommended four (4) people to be recommended to the Governor for appointment to the Council. They are:

- Erika Smith is a parent and nurse.
- Scarlett Duncan is a parent and a member of the Special Education Advisory Panel.
- Silas Callison is a 23-year-old self-advocate, a graduate of Ohio’s Youth Leadership Forum, and an experienced public speaker.
- Jenn Townley is a parent, a graduate of the Vermont Leadership Series, and an active leader in the Developmental Disabilities Housing Initiative.

**Motion:** Anastasia made the motion to accept the Membership Committee’s recommendation to recommend the four (4) applicants listed above to the Governor for appointment to the DD Council. David seconded.

**Motion passed: 12-0-4.**

- **Some BIG Good-byes**

Anastasia thanked David, Crista, Courtney, and Havah for their commitment to the Council. She was thankful for their friendship, and their constant support and participation. Council members spoke fondly of their shared experiences with these retiring members.

## 5. Prepare for visit with Jennifer Garabedian Director, Developmental Disabilities Services:

Susan gave a brief introduction. She described Jennifer's responsibilities as Director of the Developmental Disabilities Services Division. Members worked in pairs to answer the following questions.

**"When you think about developmental disabilities services in Vermont..."**

- What has to stop?
- What would you like to see more of?
- What would you like to see start?

## 6. Chair's Update:

- **NACDD Conference, Washington DC**

This year's annual conference for the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities will be in Washington DC. The Conference brings together staff and members from DD Councils throughout the United States. It is a great way to learn about all the work happening to improve the lives of people with I/DD.

The Council covers the cost for a group to participate in this conference each year. Anastasia asked members to let Kirsten know soon if they are interested in attending.

- **TIME to EVALUATE the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Kirsten left the meeting for a few minutes. Members took time to give their input for the annual evaluation of the Executive Director.

## 7. Lunch:

*Lunch went from 12:20pm to 1:00 pm.*

Council members chatted casually while they ate. The online meeting room was left open for remote attendees.

## 8. Developmental Services in Transition

Jennifer Garabedian attended the meeting in person. She has been the Director of Developmental Disabilities Services for 2 years. Previously, she worked at ARIS and at DAIL.

Council members and guests introduced themselves, and Susan summarized the activity the Council used to prepare for Jennifer. Members shared the top-five answers to each question.

### ○ **What needs to stop?**

“Stop last-minute plans from case managers and service providers. Advanced notice is best.”

“More support from my agency to help my emergency respite person.”

“Stop making people testify every year at the State House to get designated and specialized agencies their pay increases. It should just happen.”

“Stop waiting for things to become a crises before it’s dealt with. Prevention should be prioritized.”

### ○ **What would you like to see more of?**

“More mental health support for folks with disabilities!”

“More respectful, authentic representation in media and advertising.”

“More data on Vermonters with disabilities to assess needs, take action, and evaluate change over time.”

“More opportunities for people with disabilities to teach and be present in the community.”

“More training and refreshers for direct support professionals.”

### ○ **What would you like to see start?**

“If there is a need there should be fulfillment of that need.”

“Respite that’s wheel-chair accessible.”

“Peer residence, but with a natural setting so it just feels like adults living with their friends. A provider could be their roommate.”

“I work and have a small business. But with the cost of rent and how little I’m allowed to make... I can’t be a homeowner. It’s not fair.”

“Parents should be paid caregivers for their children instead of always sending a nurse who fills the same responsibilities and costs more.”

“Designated housing!”

Jennifer gave Council members an update on several topics, including some of topics members already gave feedback on.

- **Broader, respectful, authentic representation in media:**  
DAIL has \$500,000 for a marketing campaign designed to attract more people to the direct care workforce. The advertising will use pictures of real Vermonters, and DAIL will be looking for volunteers to participate.
- **More data.**  
Jennifer said that her department is working with providers to improve data collection. This will improve transparency about cost, what people need, and what people are receiving for services.
- **Training.**  
The Department of Developmental Services had \$200,000 dollars to “train external partners.” Designated Agencies and Specialized Service Agencies want to learn from “E-Badge.” It’s training known nationally with levels of certification. She said they are going through Vermont Care Partners to distribute the money. She was not sure if folks with disabilities participated in writing the training.
- **Increased hours and more staff availability.**  
Jennifer said she didn’t have an answer for this concern. Her department is considering a “caregiver registry,” but more research would be needed before building on the idea.
- **Paying parent caregivers of adults.**  
DDSD has proposed a policy for paying parents. The proposal was approved by the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid (CMS). She said there was a lot of caution going into “how it would be done” and soon the public would have 30-day to write personal feedback to the proposal.

## **9. Executive Director's Report**

Kirsten shared that the new Executive Director of NACDD will be Commissioner Jill Jacobs. Ms. Jacobs will leave her post at the Administration for Community Living. She begins her new role at NACDD on April 22.

David has been attending NACDD's discussion group for self-advocates. There is a different topic each month. Recently they talked about how to use social media to promote disability rights.

## **10. Public Comment:**

There was no public comment.

## **11. Summarize Meeting:**

As the Meeting Processor, Amanda said that the meeting was a good one. She said everything was covered.

As part of the wrap up, Justin told an Abenaki story about how Oodzee-hozo created the Adirondack mountains, the rivers, and Lake Champlain. To watch over the Lake, Oodzee-hozo turned into a small island, which is now called Rock Dunder.

## **12. Adjourn:**

The meeting adjourned at 2:23 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chelsea Hayward

Attachment A – Vote Roster



Name	Vote 1			Vote 2			Vote 3		
	Yes	A.	No	Yes	A.	No	Yes	A.	No
Kele Bourdeau	1			1			1		
Amanda Bianchi	1			1			1		
Danielle Brier									
Betsy Choquette									
Kate Daly									
Justin T.Bear Deth	1			1			1		
Anastasia Douglas	1			1			1		
Melanie Feddersen		1			1			1	
David Frye	1			1			1		
Johnathan Gardner	1			1			1		
Nazly Guzman		1			1			1	
Michelle John	1			1			1		
Lindsey Owen, Esq.	1			1			1		
Adam Poulin		1			1			1	
Candice Price				1			1		
Courtney Quinlan									
Beth Sightler									
John Spinney		1			1			1	
Jesse Suter	1			1			1		
Collins Twing	1			1			1		
Havah Walther	1			1					
Crista Yagjian	1			1			1		

Those in grey did not attend the meeting, were not present to vote, or passed their vote along to another Council member to share with the Council.