

Poverty & Opportunity Training Forum:

Illuminate

Workshop Facilitator Biographies

Auburn Watersong, Owner, Watersong Consulting

Self-Compassion & Resilience: Supporting Myself While Supporting Others

Building a Culture of Resilience

Auburn Watersong is the CEO of Watersong Consulting where she is a trauma-informed resilience development and burnout prevention consultant and coach for individuals, non-profit leaders, and organizations. Her lens is informed by her deep commitment to intersectional feminism and her lived experience as an Abenaki woman, a lesbian, a mother, a priest, and a survivor. She worked in the non-profit sector for more than thirty years with survivors of violence and abuse, the unhoused, the food-insecure, and those living with the effects of economic injustice. She has worked as a state-wide trauma and resilience director, a legislative policy director, a non-profit program director, a community organizer, an individual advocate, a trauma-center Chaplain, and a national trainer and speaker. Auburn is a ICF Certified Life Coach who holds a Bachelor's Degree in Women's Studies and a Master's in Divinity/ Feminist Theology.

Dave Dore & Sage Ruth, Co-Founders, Structural Integrity

Nonprofit Financial Management: Building a Foundation of Best Practice

[Structural Integrity](#) is a Vermont nonprofit providing consulting and technical assistance to mission-driven organizations looking to improve upon their operations practices. Founders **Sage Ruth** and **Dave Dore** have a combined 30+ years of experience as nonprofit finance and operations practitioners.

Sage Ruth has worked in nonprofit finance and operations since 2008, focusing on creating the operating conditions that let others feel supported, valued and able to focus on what matters most in their work. Sage holds a MBA from Harvard Business School and a BA in social studies from Wesleyan University. She has experience in financial management, grant management, facilities, technology, data systems, HR, people management and team building, and cross-organizational planning and alignment. Sage prides herself on her ability to bring fun and humor to work that could otherwise feel technical and dry. Originally from Middlebury, Sage now resides in Brattleboro with her family building things with wood, running, exploring local swimming holes, and organizing things on google drive.

Dave Dore has over twenty years of nonprofit financial management experience and believes strongly in the role sound financial management practices play in supporting strategic decision making and organizational planning and enabling organizations to operate with the flexibility and responsiveness the nonprofit sector demands. He holds both a MBA and a BS in Finance from Boston College and a Graduate Diploma in Professional Accounting from Suffolk University. Dave loves curating clear, accurate, timely and relevant financial information that brings numbers into nonprofit leaders' comfort zones. Beyond demystifying numbers, he centers the importance of building trust through transparency, enables financial management practices that advance programming and fundraising goals, and builds strong alignment and collaboration across program, development and operations teams. When not having fun strengthening the nonprofit sector, you'll find Dave and his family exploring, whether it be on skis, mountain bikes, kayaks and by foot, the beautiful outdoor spaces Vermont has to offer.

Greg Hessel, Founder, ReGeneration Resources

Building Trust so that People Want to Talk

Communicating with Different Styles

Greg Hessel is a trainer, coach, and consultant who helps clients throughout New England grow, change and manage conflict. Greg has over 25 years of experience coaching, consulting, and designing trainings that are engaging, fun, and applicable to participants' real-world experiences.

Greg is enthusiastic about making authentic connections with his training participants and consulting clients. He specializes in developing and delivering training that is relevant, pragmatic, and fun and helping groups that are stuck get unstuck. Additionally, he helps leaders increase engagement, improve morale, and identify and manage culture and change. His work includes team-building, facilitation, training, coaching, organizational assessments, leading change initiatives, managing conflict, facilitating strategic planning, and improving communication. His clients include nonprofits, family foundations, public sector agencies, and for-profit companies.

Indra Acharya, Independent Consultant & Denise Bailey, Director of Equity, Engagement & Advocacy, Capstone Community Action

Community Engagement: What Does it Mean to Be Invited?

An Academic Coach at Harvard GSE, **Indra Acharya** was born and raised in a Bhutanese refugee camp in Nepal, where his family sought refuge from ethnic cleansing. As a child in exile, he led several advocacy and leadership initiatives focused on children's and human rights and educational opportunities, starting at the age of five. Indra resettled in Vermont in 2012, and ever since then, he has been involved in various local, statewide, and national policy and advocacy initiatives. A graduate of Winooski High School and Vermont Technical College's VAST program, Indra completed his higher education at Georgetown University (BA) and Harvard GSE (M.Ed.).

Currently, Indra serves as a Backbone/Integrator and Equity Consultant for THRIVE in the Barre health district as a part of the VT Community Health Equity Partnership grant. Previously, he designed and implemented various statewide programs and projects, such as the Covid Equity Fund for Vermonters without documentation (Vermont Community Foundation), engagement and empowerment of low-income individuals on climate justice (Community Action Partnership agencies), and BIPOC outreach for state budget priorities (Fund Vermont's Future campaign). Indra has also served as a consultant, coach, and facilitator for various non-profit and for-profit organizations, political campaigns, and educational institutions on policy, strategy, community engagement, and DEIB initiatives at the local and national level. He is currently a board member of ACLU-Vermont and a public engagement consultant/facilitator at the Vermont Climate Council.

Indra describes himself as a "troublemaker" and enjoys exploring nature.

Denise Bailey serves on the leadership team at Capstone Community Action. She is a member of the legal bar in Vermont, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. In addition to her work as an attorney, she has a long history of public service work, having worked for the Burlington School District, Vermont Center for Independent Living, Vermont Office of Child Support, and the Vermont Agency of Administration. Denise is a graduate of the Vermont Leadership Institute and has served on the board of the ACLU of Vermont, Disability Rights Vermont as well as the Governor's Workforce Equity and Diversity Committee.

Jason Parent, Executive Director and CEO, Aroostook County Action Program

The Good, the Bad & the Ugly: Behind the Scenes of Organizational Change

As Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer, **Jason Parent** leads Aroostook County Action Program. Jason holds a Master of Science in Business from Husson University and a Bachelor of Arts in Communication from the University of Maine at Presque Isle. He is a Certified Community Action Professional. Prior to joining ACAP in 2015, Jason held communication leadership positions in higher education and healthcare for nearly two decades. At ACAP Jason and his leadership team have positioned the Agency to become a national leader in advancing and adopting the Whole Family/ Two Generation Approach and a Comprehensive Service Delivery Model that involves working with families and individuals on all facets of their advancement, so they achieve greater economic independence and overall wellbeing. His is passionate about community involvement and volunteerism and currently serves on the boards of a number of organizations, including the Maine Association of Nonprofits, Coastal Enterprises, Inc, Aroostook Partnership, Aroostook Regional Transportation System, Aroostook Home Health Services/ Valley Home Health Services, Katahdin Valley Health Center, and is a past President of Maine Community Action Partnership. Born in Canada and raised along the border in Maine's northernmost region - the St John Valley - Jason's first language is French. He has been greatly involved as a volunteer leader in preserving, advancing, and promoting the area's Acadian and Franco-American Culture.

Jason Rouse, Director of Philanthropy and Communications, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity & Vicki Loomis, Communications Director, BROCC Community Action

Leveraging Electronic Communication to Tell Your Organization's Story

Jason Rouse joined the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO) as the Director of Philanthropy and Communications in June 2021. His work is informed by nearly 10 years of nonprofit fundraising and relationship management experience as well as backgrounds in social work and the arts.

Before joining CVOEO, Jason worked at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston where he was responsible for cultivating relationships with corporations, corporate foundations, and a portfolio of individual donors. Prior, Jason spent 3.5 years at Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston where he helped to secure over \$7.5 million in funding to support various mission-driven programs. Before his fundraising career, Jason built a deep understanding and macro perspective on the most pressing social issues in our country as a student at the Boston College School of Social Work.

Vicki Loomis joined BROCC Community Action in September 2019, right before the world changed with COVID-19. Because of this, she was quickly forced to reimagine how to fundraise and market our programs and services. Utilizing new and old media techniques, Vicki has helped BROCC be able to adapt quickly to evolving situations. Prior to joining BROCC Community Action, Vicki worked for a technology company on the West Coast & Washington, DC. When not at work, Vicki enjoys spending time with her husband and daughter.

Jenna Koloski, Director of Community Engagement & Alyssa Johnson, Community Visit Program Manager, Vermont Council on Rural Development

Facilitation Skills 101

Alyssa Johnson is the Community Visit Program Manager at the Vermont Council on Rural Development. In this role, she provides facilitation, technical assistance, and grant writing support to communities working to advance locally prioritized community and economic development initiatives. Prior to joining VCRD in 2021, Alyssa worked as the Economic Development Director for Revitalizing Waterbury. Alyssa graduated from UVM and lives in Waterbury, where she serves as Vice Chair of the Waterbury Selectboard.

Jenna Koloski has been the Director of Community Engagement and Policy at the Vermont Council on Rural Development since 2015. In that role, she coordinates statewide policy discussions on issues that impact rural communities and facilitates community-level prioritization for the future of Vermont towns. Prior to the work at the Council, she worked in several Vermont organizations focused on outdoor recreation, community development, and food security. Jenna studied Conservation and Biodiversity at McGill University and holds a Masters in Environmental Law and Policy from Vermont Law School. Jenna serves as the President of the Vermont Community Development Association. She lives with her family in Huntington Vermont.

Jennifer Herbert, Licensed Clinical Psychologist-Master, Clinical Director, Vermont Department for Children and Families

Organizational Health through Creative Leadership

Jennifer Herbert is currently Clinical Director for the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF). In her role at DCF, Jennifer leads proactively in the direction of innovating environments and processes serving youth and families in Vermont. She strives to bring a creative mindset to complex problems brought about by change, challenges the status quo, and hopes to facilitate the creative thinking of others. Prior to joining the state of Vermont, Jennifer had a private practice in downtown Burlington, and was a research clinician with the Anxiety and Health Research Laboratory at University of Vermont. She has 20 years of practical experience in the human services field in New York City and Vermont, and in Sweden, was creative consultant to the design team of a lifestyle company. Jennifer loves to learn and intellectually explore different subjects. She enjoys music, plays piano, trail running with her Irish Setter, thrifting, Comedy Club, traveling to new places, and lives in Montpelier with her fiancé, two kids, and two dogs.

Jessica Guardado, LICSW, LADC, Director of Supportive Services, Groundworks Collaborative & Libby Bennett, Executive Director, Groundworks Collaborative

Opening Conversations: Individual & Organizational Safety in the Face of Loss

Jessica Guardado, the Director of Supportive Services at Groundwork Collaborative, joined the Groundwork team after a long tenure with Rutland Regional Medical Center. Jessica brings a compassion and skilled approach to her role overseeing Healthworks Collaboration, the Case Management program, the Coordinated Entry process, and the Landlord Liaison program.

Libby Bennett is the Executive Director of Groundworks Collaborative. Libby holds a Masters in Intercultural Service Leadership and Management from the SIT Graduate Institute, a Certificate in Nonprofit Management from the Marlboro College Graduate School, and a B.A. from Smith College. Libby was a Peace Corps HIV Prevention Volunteer in Zambia '06-'09. She joined the organization in 2011 as a fundraising intern and later a Development Coordinator. Libby went on to serve Groundworks as its Director of Development & Communications, leading fundraising efforts and growth to sustain an expanding organization.

Jessica Marcotte, Resource Navigator, United Way of Lamoille County, Clarissa French, Executive Director, United Way of Lamoille County, Connie Beal, Working Bridges Director, United Way of Northwest Vermont & Blaire Haggett, Resource Coordinator, Green Mountain United Way

Resource Navigation: Models & Best Practices

Jessica Marcotte grew up in the NEK and is a fourth generation Vermonter. She has a BA from Williams College and a MPhil from the University of Western Australia. She worked in women's health for about 20 years before coming to UWLC. She lived out of the country for many years, so she is really enjoying living in Vermont again and serving the residents of Lamoille County through her work. She loves spending time with friends and family and their dogs, reading, watching movies, listening to music, and eating just about every variety of junk food. Her dad's mother was French Canadian and she hopes to start learning Canadian French someday soon.

Clarissa French's desire to serve her community began as a small child living in an inner-city neighborhood in Fort Worth, Texas. For many years she watched as her parents, neighbors, and classmates' families struggled to pay bills and meet basic needs. When she was in middle school, after each of her parents were laid off within a six-month time frame, they decided to do something drastic and relocate to Vermont. She's been here ever since. Clarissa received her Bachelors in Social Work from the University of Vermont in 2009 and has held various roles in human services in the years since. During her tenure at UWLC, she's been responsible for organizing events, creating and maintaining relationships with donors and community members, marketing, and social media. In her new role as Co-Director, she's excited to help UWLC move forward into a new chapter. She believes in the strengths and inherent gifts of all people and elevating the voices of those who are suffering to create a more fair and equitable world. Clarissa lives in Jeffersonville with her husband, two children, two dogs, and a cat. In her free time, she enjoys gardening, homesteading, historical dramas, and reading non-fiction. True to her Texas roots, Clarissa appreciates a good brisket taco and a big glass of iced tea.

Connie Beal supports employees in workplaces to navigate community resources to help with things like housing, transportation, childcare, financial resources, healthcare, and more. She is responsible for training development, innovation, community partnerships, and convening the Working Bridges employer network to identify and design strategies and pilots to elevate resources and identify gaps in supporting ever-changing needs of Vermont 2-1-1, a 24/7 health and human service helpline. She draws on experience in both nonprofit and public sectors, anti-violence, substance misuse prevention, and community public health. Connie holds a Bachelor of Psychology from Colby College (2003) and Masters of Public Administration from the University of Vermont (2008). She is also a graduate of Leadership Champlain, class of 2019. Offline and off work, you'll find her on a hiking trail, playing with her children, running for exercise, or sourcing her next piece of chocolate.

Blaire Haggett's passion is connecting to people and connecting people to a variety of things, places, and needs. She lives in Graniteville with her two kids, two dogs, and a lizard. She has lived in central Vermont her entire life and loves being a part of the changes and growth in this region.

Kevin Chu, Executive Director, Vermont Futures Project

Who is Vermont For?

Kevin Chu grew up in Vermont and is looking forward to growing old here too. He is the son of immigrants and spent most of his early years living and learning in Burlington. Kevin is a graduate of Middlebury College, where he studied the environment and education while also competing in track and field. Prior to joining the Vermont Futures project, Kevin worked at the University of Vermont, where he led efforts in recruiting for diversity, academic advising, communications, community engagement and economic development, and strategic planning. He is now the executive director of the Vermont Futures Project, a nonpartisan organization that is working to answer the mission question “How can we use data to support the evolution of Vermont’s economy towards a thriving future with opportunity for all?”. In 2023 Kevin was named the Distinguished Citizen by Champlain College and an 802 Diplomat by the Vermont Council on World Affairs.

Rachel Edens, Director of Race, Gender, Equity & Accessibility, Vermont Department for Children and Families

Radical Candor: Compassionate, Effective Communication for Organizational Equity

Rachel Edens is an advocate, activist, educator, writer, and organizer dedicated to promoting equity for under-represented, oppressed, overlooked, and marginalized communities and individuals. Rachel believes in ensuring educational and access justice to individuals of all backgrounds. Her work focuses on advancing equity across all intersections of identity, educating for civic engagement, and community asset building. For over a decade, Rachel has consulted professionally in the areas of social and restorative justice, advocating for the rights of the chronically ill and disabled, and those facing geographic and environmental discrimination. A native North Carolinian, Rachel served as the inaugural Chief Equity and Human Rights Officer in Buncombe County, North Carolina. In her nine years as a relocated Vermonter, Rachel has worked as Assistant Dean and Advisor to First Generation and Low-Income Students and to Black Students at Dartmouth College and held community outreach and programming roles with Meeting Waters YMCA and the Vermont Humanities Council. In March of 2023 she joined the State of Vermont Department for Children and Families in the inaugural position of Director of Race, Gender, Equity, and Accessibility. Rachel holds a BA in English and African American Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a Masters of Public Administration from East Tennessee State University and is a doctoral student at the University of Massachusetts-Boston.

Rinku Sen (Keynote Speaker), Executive Director, Narrative Initiative

Keynote Clinic

Rinku is a writer and social justice strategist. She is formerly the Executive Director of Race Forward and was Publisher of their award-winning news site Colorlines. Under Sen’s leadership, Race Forward generated some of the most impactful racial justice successes of recent years, including Drop the I-Word, a campaign for media outlets to stop referring to immigrants as “illegal,” resulting in the Associated Press, USA Today, LA Times, and many more outlets changing their practice. She was also the architect of the Shattered Families report, which identified the number of kids in foster care whose parents had been deported.

Her books *Stir it Up* and *The Accidental American* theorize a model of community organizing that integrates a political analysis of race, gender, class, poverty, sexuality, and other systems. As a consultant, Rinku has worked on narrative and political strategy with numerous organizations and foundations, including PolicyLink, the ACLU and the Nathan Cummings Foundation.

Rinku's skill at taking big ideas live is legendary. Since the 1980s she has been bringing racial justice to feminism and feminism to racial justice, and fair economy to all of it. She has mentored dozens of organizers, community leaders, philanthropists and artists through her nearly 40-year career.

In her current role as the Executive Director of [Narrative Initiative](#), she leads a cross-functional team that weaves the power of narrative with other social movement strategies to achieve long term equity and justice.

Shalini Suryanarayana, Vermont State Office of Racial Equity

Local Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Initiatives

Shalini is a: Sister (one older brother), Wife (husband is Joe), Mother (boys are Otis, 18, and Ben, 17), Colleague (State of Vermont), Volunteer (Central Vermont Humane Society, Kellogg-Hubbard Library Reading Program for Kids), Friend to all dogs and most people, Environmentalist (not perfect, but always trying), Former Bus Driver and avid Motorcyclist.

She is from: India (born & earliest years there), NYC, Ann Arbor & the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Upstate & Central New York, and now happily residing on Abenaki land in Montpelier, Vermont.

She loves: Dogs. Pizza. Fresh air. Chai (the real chai). Hiking in the woods. Small town living. Holding hands. Learning. Sunshine. Travel. Open-minded people. Chocolate cake with chocolate frosting. Laughter. Scrabble. Unexpected joyful moments.

She dislikes: Drivers who don't use turn signals.

She wants to: Make a positive difference in the world.

Stephanie Davison, Director of Quality Improvement, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity

ROMA...what?

Stephanie Davison has been at the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO) for about three years. Stephanie works across the agency to manage the strategic plan, ensure that federal reports are submitted, assess needs, evaluate programs, and discuss ways that programs can be improved. Prior to joining CVOEO, Stephanie worked for Montana State University Extension as a 4-H youth development specialist. After 27 years in Montana, Stephanie moved back home to Vermont. Favorite things to do: sail, walk/hike, and just be outside. She loves dogs and sunshine.