

Poverty & Opportunity Training Forum: **Compassion in Action**

Workshop Facilitator Biographies

Alicia Roderigue, Communications Coordinator, Office of Health Care Advocate, Vermont Legal Aid

Health Law in Vermont: 2026 Changes, Challenges, & Opportunities

Alicia Roderigue (she/her) is the Communication Coordinator for the Office of the Health Care Advocate (HCA), a position she has held since 2021. Alicia's journey at Vermont Legal Aid began in 2016 as a Justice for All AmeriCorps member, where she focused on outreach, education, and advocacy efforts. In 2017, she joined the HCA's Advocacy Team, where she worked on individual cases, with a particular focus on issues related to Dr. Dynasaur, MSPs, and IHIP. She is deeply passionate about exploring the intersection of immigration status and health insurance eligibility. Now a member of the Policy Team, Alicia is responsible for supporting health law-related training, coordinating clinics, and fostering partnerships with community-based organizations to enhance the reach of HCA's services.

Auburn Watersong (she/her), CEO, Watersong Consulting

Trauma-Informed Leadership for Uncertain Times *Sustainable Resilience: Supporting Your Long-Term Well-Being*

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,

Watersong, cont.

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 (he/him) & Sage Ruth (she/her), Co-Founders, Structural Integrity

Change Management Sustainable Growth

[Structural Integrity](#) is a Vermont nonprofit providing consulting and technical assistance to mission-driven organizations looking to improve their operations practices.

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.

David Melnick, LICSW, Director of the Transforming Trauma Collaborative, NFI Vermont

Reflective Practice: Building a Culture of Curiosity in High-Stress Human Systems (Part 1 and 2)

Dave Melnick is the Director of the Transforming Trauma Collaborative at the NFI Family Center. For the past 40 years, Dave has worked in a variety of clinical settings including outpatient, residential treatment, and in public and day treatment schools. Along with his focus on Developmental Trauma, Dave has expertise in family therapy, adolescence, attachment, Reflective Practices, and Trauma-Informed Systems. He has provided trauma-informed services to over 250 schools in Vermont, as well as those in NY and Quebec. In 2015, the Child Trauma Academy (CTA) acknowledged that Dave had completed NMT Training Certification through the Phase II level, and between 2017-2021 he was a Fellow at the CTA. Dave teaches graduate classes for the Vermont Higher Education Collaboration, and is a presenter and consultant in Vermont, New York, California and Canada.

Elizabeth Emmett, Director of Operations & Robin Kristoff, Strategy & Data Manager, Northeast Kingdom Community Action

Creating a Data-Driven Framework for Holistic Service Delivery

Elizabeth Emmett joined NEKCA in October of 2022 after earning her Master's Degree in Social Design from the Maryland Institute and College of Art (MICA). As an artist, designer, and educator Elizabeth leads with strategic visioning, systems thinking, and a human-centered approach. She is the Director of Operations at NEKCA and has been a part of the Whole Family Approach team at NEKCA for the past three years, central to the development of the tools, trainings, and outreach materials needed for NEKCA to implement the Whole Family Approach.

Robin Kristoff joined Community Action in 2023. She has been at the forefront of restructuring data management practices at NEKCA and implementing practices for data-driven programmatic decision making as a ROMA Implementor for the agency. She holds an M.A. in Communication Management from Emerson College, and is a lifelong resident of Barnet, VT.

Ferene Paris (she/her), Founder & Artist, All Hearts Inspirations

Dialogue with Keynote

Ferene Paris (she/her) is a storyteller and Black Haitian femme artist who creates heart-centered spaces through live performances, workshops, and community engagement. Known for living out loud with courageous truth-telling and vulnerable vibes, her work inspires stories rooted in love and purpose – inviting people to see themselves, one another, and their stories more clearly. In 2020, she founded All Heart Inspirations, her creative vessel for storytelling that builds belonging and sparks collective care. Since then, Ferene has curated over 200 offerings—from intimate community gatherings to keynote addresses and artist residencies—making meaningful impact within Vermont and beyond.

Her artistry has been featured on Vermont Public (Brave Little State, Homegoings, Vermont Edition) and Seven Days' Stuck in Vermont, with her Homegoings feature earning a New England Emmy nomination. Prior to All Heart, Ferene spent 15 years in Student Affairs, shaping orientation and residential experiences centered on student voice and belonging.

Indra Acharya, Independent Consultant & Sophi Veltrop (she/her), Communications & Engagement Coordinator, Vermont Climate Action Office

From Presence to Partnership: Deepening Community Engagement Ethical Storytelling for Impact and Advocacy Staying Mission True in Shifting Policy Landscapes

Indra Acharya was born and raised in a Bhutanese refugee camp in Nepal after his family fled ethnic cleansing under Bhutan's authoritarian monarch. From early childhood, he engaged in advocacy and leadership work focused on human rights, children's rights, and access to education. After resettling in Vermont in 2012, Indra became active in local, statewide, and national policy and advocacy efforts. He holds a B.A. in Government with a minor in Philosophy from Georgetown University and an M.Ed. in Policy and Management from Harvard Graduate School of Education. Indra currently serves as an Academic Coach at Harvard Graduate School of Education and works as a consultant and instructor of practice specializing in policy, advocacy, community engagement, leadership, and DEIB strategy. His work spans nonprofit, public, and private sectors – including health equity, climate justice, and statewide policy initiatives. He serves on the board of ACLU-Vermont and is a public engagement consultant for the Vermont Climate Action Office.

Sophi Veltrop serves as the Communications and Engagement Coordinator for the State of Vermont's Climate Action Office. She helps the office to communicate with Vermonters and hear directly from communities in ways that can inform state climate policy.

Jenna O'Farrell, Executive Director & Nancy Powers, Director of Early Childhood Education & Family Services, Northeast Kingdom Community Action

Whole Family Approach

Jenna O'Farrell joined the Northeast Kingdom Community Action team in 2018 to serve as Executive Director. She served as a co-principal of the St. Johnsbury School and managed several specialized independent schools for Northeastern Family Institute of Vermont. She has over twenty-five years of experience that includes early education, school administration, non-profit management, and leadership. She holds a Master's Degree in Education and a Bachelor's in Political Science. Jenna is a licensed Vermont educator and holds an elementary teaching and principal endorsement. She serves on the Vermont State Board of Education and is an Incorporator at Northern Vermont Regional Hospital.

Nancy Powers has over 20 years of experience in education. She served 15 of those years in Vermont's public-school systems, where she has experience teaching and coaching educators from Pre-K through 5th grade, supporting instructional growth and high-quality learning environments. Nancy holds a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership and a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education with a concentration in Early Childhood Education. Her work is grounded in a commitment to strong early learning systems and meaningful support for children, families, and educators.

Mike Ohler, Director of Resident Services and Homelessness Prevention & Darien Barton, Service Coordinator, Champlain Housing Trust

Housing Social Work: It's Really About Getting to Know People

Mike Ohler is the (first) Director of Resident Services and Homelessness Prevention Initiatives. He began at CHT in 2018 as the Guest and Residence Services Coordinator. As the Resident Services program grew, he became the Resident Services Manager, and then eventually the Associate Director of Resident Services. Before coming to CHT he worked at the Burlington Housing Authority for fourteen years; first as the Offender Reentry Housing Specialist, and then as the Team Lead for the Housing Retention Team. He is also an Adjunct Professor of Sociology at Saint Michael's College and an Instructor of Sociology and Social Work at the Community College of Vermont.

Darien Barton has worked in human services for roughly 14 years scattered across fields and roles – including applied behavior analysis, developmental service for adults and children, and group and residential home supports and supervision. Darien’s expertise is grounded in advanced education in Social Work and Criminal Justice as well as professional and lived experience.

Miles Latham (he/they), Director of Artificial Intelligence, Agency of Digital Services, State of Vermont

Demystifying AI: Practical Applicability in Social Services

Miles Latham is the Director of Artificial Intelligence at the State of Vermont. Prior to joining the State, he previously worked as a Data Engineering Director for a quantitative consulting firm and as a statistical consultant for the United Nations. He holds a Master's degree in Public Administration from Columbia University.

Ron Dendas (he/him), Independent Consultant

Economic Mobility as a Vital Condition of Health: Why Partnerships with Health Care are Essential

Ron Dendas spent the last 30 years of his career working with communities to improve health and well-being. His focus has been on using granular (neighborhood level) qualitative and quantitative data, building transformational cross-sector partnerships, and authentically engaging and empowering context experts (community members) in order to address health and well-being inequities.

Sophie Veltrop (she/her), Communications & Engagement Coordinator, State of Vermont Climate Action Office

From Presence to Partnership: Deepening Community Engagement

Sophie Veltrop serves as the Communications and Engagement Coordinator for the State of Vermont’s Climate Action Office. She helps the office to communicate with Vermonters and hear directly from communities in ways that can inform state climate policy.

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

ROMA Clinic

Stephanie Davison is the Director of Quality Improvement at CVOEO helping the organization to improve systems, evaluate programs, manage reports, assess community needs, and more. Stephanie's background is in community development, working with middle school students, and mental health, working with adults and children with serious mentally illness through a county mental health center. These diverse experiences have helped her understand complexity, how and where systems overlap and led her to where she is today. Stephanie has a master's degree in counseling and human development, a doctorate in international development, and is a nationally certified ROMA trainer.

Terry Lavelly (she/her), Training & Community Engagement Director, Northeast Kingdom Human Services

Maintaining and Supporting Mental Health in Times of Uncertainty

Terri Lavelly, MS, QMHP obtained her Masters in Management from Granite State College with a concentration in Behavioral Science. Terri has been employed at Northeast Kingdom Human Services Inc (NKHS) since 2004, supporting the mental health needs of the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont in a variety of different roles. As Co-chair of NKHS's Zero Suicide team, she delivers training around awareness, prevention, postvention and mental wellness. Terri is an active member of The Vermont Suicide Prevention Coalition, VT's 9-8-8 Coalition, The Executive Committee for the Statewide Strategic Plan and serves on many steering committees locally, statewide and nationally to support mental wellness. Currently she is the Training and Community Engagement Director at NKHS. She has been the team leader for Starting Over Strong VT, a program to support mental health needs of flood survivors in the NEK, in partnership with kuRRVve (the NEK's long term recovery team) since the floods of 2023, trained to deliver mental health supports by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In addition, she is also an active volunteer for The American Foundation of Suicide Prevention, serving as the Vermont Chapter Board Chair, field advocate, trainer and Newport Walk Chair.

Will Eberle, Director of Weatherization, Capstone Community Action & Geoff Wilcox, Energy Services Director, Office of Economic Opportunity, State of Vermont

Health Homes, Happy People

Will Eberle, MPA has been a statewide and national leader in the mental health, homelessness, substance use disorder, and housing fields for nearly two decades. He is a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy public narrative program and Vermont Leadership Institute, and often provides keynotes, conference presentations, legislative and Congressional testimony, and subject-matter expertise on subjects related to housing and the social determinants of health.

Geoff Wilcox started working in the Weatherization Program in 1998 as an energy auditor for a local Weatherization Program, Central Vermont Community Action. He worked there for 9 years doing energy audits, quality control inspections, and as an operations manager before starting work for the State of Vermont Weatherization program in 2007. Geoff was the State monitor for Vermont for 2 years before becoming the state Weatherization Director, his current role. He has been BPI certified since 2005 and is currently QCI certified.