

February 16, 2022, Human Services Committee Testimony by Randy Lizotte

Issues Impacting the Lives of People with Developmental Disabilities

I am Randy Lizotte. I live with my wife Jana in St Albans. We both have developmental disabilities but only Jana gets services from Northwest Counseling and Support Services. We have just as much right to as normal of a life as anyone else.

We are glad to see that there is proposed funding in the budget for peer support for people who experience mental health issues. And we want you to know that it is just as important to fund peer support for people who have developmental disabilities. My experience has been that I learned more from my peers than anyone else. When you get information from your peers, they don't sugar coat it they tell you how it is. It is helpful to get information and learn from a peer because they have been in similar situations as you. Please include people with developmental disabilities in funding for peer support.

I am the President of Green Mountain Self-Advocates. I started out being a leader not knowing what I was doing but I learned from all of those experiences. I didn't have the confidence when I first started out with advocacy. I had to have other individuals who saw the ability in me to be a strong mentor. And even that took quite a while to develop.

Self-advocates want more opportunities to be peer mentors. Last summer 40 self-advocates did 12 training sessions on person centered planning. We are learning how to support our peers to get ready for and be part of their planning meeting.

Self-advocates in St. Albans took mental health first aide training. We are getting better at supporting our friends. I want to tell a quick story about a self-advocate I will call Melissa. She gets DS services, and she lives with her boyfriend in their trailer. Anyways her cousin was in crisis. She kept getting kicked out of one residential placement after another. Finally, she went to live with Melissa for a while and was able to calm down. Sometimes we can do a better job than agency staff.

Thank you for listening to my testimony.