

Thank you so much for your interest and support in learning more about creative ways we support our community members' mental health. I am thankful to have recently been introduced to Senator Lyons and I am humbled with the opportunity to offer testimony today.

To start, I always think it is important to share that I came to this work through personal experiences as many do. I live with Chronic Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from an unhealthy living situation in my late twenties, over a decade ago. I am from the Northeast Kingdom though my family is from Boston and New York City, and only my parents and I have made our lives in Vermont. I lived for close to 15 years in Manhattan and worked in the entertainment business with youth and family programming on Broadway as both a performer and a producer. I relocated back to Vermont seven years ago .

Due to the virtual nature of business these days, I have been able to build a [remote consulting company](#) now in its fifth year. Initially, my business met the communication needs of non profit-organizations and now has moved into the areas of mental health, suicide prevention, and general wellness communications and education on a local, state, and national level. I simply began hearing from the communities what they needed and have worked to utelize my networking and connections to answer that call.

I will share an overview of a few of the programs I work on here in Vermont.

Mental Health First Aid:

- **Adults helping Adults (18+)**
- **Adults helping Youth (6 to 17)**
- **Teens helping Teens (10, 11, 12 grades)**
 - MHFA helps people learn the signs and symptoms of a mental health difficulty and learn how to problem-solve alongside someone to help them advocate for their needs through a five step action plan similar to CPR.
 - The course is a 6 to 8 hour in-person or virtual training depending on the organizational needs.
 - This programming comes from the National Council of Mental Wellbeing based in DC.
 - Over the past eight years, [Vermont Care Partners](#), led by Simone Rueshemeyer, has received national funding to offer this training cost- free to Vermonters.
 - That state-wide Federal funding ran out in the Fall. Right now, the Agency of Education grants funds to VCP to offer youth and teen MHFA to Vermonters who work for or are employed by schools so they can access this training at no cost - currently through the end of June.
 - A cohort of trainers recently began meeting monthly with Vermont Care Partners to determine where and how this programming will continue in the State of Vermont.
 - The training started out in Designated Agencies, however, given the amount of support needed right now from designated agencies, someone such as myself has more flexibility to offer this training than someone with a direct service caseload.

Additionally, I partner with the [Center for Health and Learning](#), led by JoEllen Tarallo, and the [Vermont Suicide Prevention Center](#) on their programming and communications. I am a facilitator for their national suicide prevention and awareness program [Umatter](#).

Sunshine Silver Lining, Sunny Naughton
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As a friend to recovery, I work with Recovery Vermont as well as Working Fields. I also teach COPE through UVM which is a class for families going through parentage cases. I am trained as a Guardian Ad Litem, though I have chosen not to take on cases. Lastly, I am piloting an afterschool empathy program in the Northeast Kingdom.

Through these experiences, I hear a lot of things from my participants. Just this week someone shared that their pediatrician suggested they take their child to the ER in order to get immediate mental health care, as the waiting list for local mental health supports is now closed due to the length.

I am a creative problem solver and I am hopeful that Vermont will continue to be a leader in public health by taking a firm look at the mental health system, especially for our future generation of youth and young adults, and take new and innovative approaches to this work.

One way might be looking at the model of Recovery Coaching to see if there is a way to have mental health coaches that serve as patient advocates to work with families prior to their ability to access a medical provider. Our providers can also benefit from training and practice in trauma-informed care, empathy, and resilience. It took me almost a decade to get the mental health care I needed after my trauma, and I am a person with access, education, and the means to advocate. What are other people doing? People don't fall through the cracks on their own, systems allow them to.

Thank you so much for your time and please see me as a resource and advocat for the work you are doing in relation to the topics discussed today.

Sunny Naughton
Sunshine Silver Lining