

NORTHWEST + CENTRAL VT PREVENTION NETWORK

MEETING NOTES

August 13th, 2026

10:00 – 11:30am

Meeting Goal

Providing an opportunity for people and organizations across Northwest and Central Vermont to come together to share information, make connections, and explore opportunities related to prevention of substance misuse and promoting wellbeing in our communities.

Welcome & Agenda Overview

Agenda:

Welcome/Intros

Prevention Partner Updates

Backbone Updates

The Vermont Kindness Project – Kimberly Pierce, Pam Mallet on the neuroscience of trauma

Group Discussion/Questions

Wrap up/Next Steps

Prevention Partner Updates

Marielle Matthews (Winooski Partnership for Prevention): Winooski Friendship Fair on 8/30 in Winooski. Free food, activities, soccer! <https://downtownwinooski.org/events/friendshipfestival/>

Eva Zaret (Central Vermont Prevention Coalition): Excited to announce Jess Bickford will be joining the Coalition as the Prevention Coordinator, starting 8/31. Huge thanks to the hiring team through this long process and to UWNWVT which is providing RPP funds for this position.

Nick Tataakis (VDH Prevention Consultant, Burlington): New nonfatal overdose data product from VDH: [Emergency Department Overdoses In Vermonters under age 25, 2021-2025 | VDH](#)
There was a statistically significant decrease in ED visits for overdose between 2021 and 2025 among youth. In 2025, the rate of unintentional nonfatal overdose visits was highest among those 15–19 years old.

Information on Safe Storage and Drug Disposal Options Like Mail-Back Envelopes, Local Drop-Off Kiosks and Semi-Annual Take Back Days: [Prescription Drug Disposal | VDH](#)
Check out and share [VDH's recent post on safe storage!](#)

Jill Sudhoff-Guerin (Maidstone PR, Campaign Director for Flavors Hook Kids, Coalition for Tobacco Free Vermont): Excited to welcome new Prevention Initiative Coordinator through the AmeriCorps VISTA program, Abby Becker, working with the Campaign. Also, the Campaign is having an in-person meeting on 9/1 at the Grange in Montpelier from 9-1.
<https://forms.gle/qXqxUk9wQssiV4ba6>



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Kimberly Pierce (Vermont Kindness Project): Great event hosted by Mosaic. Rainbow Harvest Fest on September 19th at the Statehouse Lawn. [Event link](#)

Chris Allen (Department of Mental Health): First meeting and wanted to introduce myself, Director of Suicide Prevention for the State of Vermont. Such a strong intersection between substance use and suicide. Feel free to reach out to connect! Christopher.M.Allen@vermont.gov

Desiree Kepper (Department of Health): Also first meeting, Youth Suicide Prevention Program Manager under Dpt of Mental Health. Was a part of the NEK coalition (region 3) and worked in prevention, excited to be here for this presentation.

Backbone Updates

5th Annual Prevention Summit will be on Thursday, October 15th at 40 IDX Drive in South Burlington. Historically this is our one time to get together in-person every year to look at the work ahead, celebrate successes, and connect. Save the date/registration coming soon.

We are hosting a Core Competencies Training in September, also at 40 IDX Drive. Still seats available but limited so register soon.

<https://web.cvent.com/event/ef40628f-61fb-47b5-b8a6-69445f475200/summary>

Our current AmeriCorps VISTA, Liv Peterson, is not here today but we are excited to announce Liv is staying on with the team as our full-time Prevention Initiative Coordinator!

Echoing Jill – welcoming Abby to the prevention community!

A few updates about our team restructuring:

-Amy Carmola and Megan Bridges are focusing on other areas of their work so will generally be not involved going forward but both have been a huge part of this team the past 5+ years, before the Prevention Network was even formed.

-Also, Beth Whitlock is now the Director of Prevention & Housing Initiatives and will be leading this team and this work.

-You may have seen that we are hiring for an Engagement Manager. Mahat is leaving! Wrapping up his work with UWNWVT and the VT National Guard's Counterdrug Program later this month and starting full-time with Nordic Soccer as their Technical Director.

<https://nordicsoccer.org/nordic-soccer-clubs-appoints-new-technical-director-mahat-abdullahi>

Congrats Mahat! We will all miss you and hope to see you around. We know you will continue your leadership in the field of prevention on the soccer pitch and in the clubhouse!

-And we are very excited to have Liv staying on with the team.



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The Neuroscience of Trauma/The Vermont Kindness Project

The VT Kindness project is about creating more hope by sharing information about trauma and resilience.

Kimberly: "When I learned about trauma 15 years ago, I left like up until that moment I was looking at everything through a straw. And it was like I could see a wide angle, Lense. When I learned about it, I shared a short documentary film in order to capture a lot of this, and I knew that it would help a lot of my patience as a medical provider."

What is the mission of the VT Kindness project?

- Translating the science of trauma and epigenetics for all Vermonters through grassroots community health and social work.
- The idea of transforming PTSD to post traumatic growth is absolutely possible.

Trauma education helps us see that all humans respond to trauma in predictable and measurable ways.

This knowledge is like a balm to the soul:

1. Removes stigma and shame of trauma
2. Creates hope: healing is possible
3. Increases sense of belonging, connection and compassion for the self and others
4. Provides a standard roadmap to wellness and resilience

What is the most important ingredient in healing trauma? Kindness. And there's actually research to show that being kind can actually reverse the stress response. And it calms the nervous system, lowers blood pressure, stress hormones, and inflammation down to the cellular level. Not only does it help the giver, it also helps the receiver or witnesser of kindness.

The VT Kindness project offers trauma education to small groups, at community events, through professional trainings, home visits, and peer support groups. The idea is to just give the general public kind of a basic trauma 101 through brief presentation, free film screening, and discussion, and hopefully food and childcare.

Pam is a social worker (BSW, Med) and worked for DCF for a long time and is now a social worker at the Maplehill School. In Pam's experience working for the state, much of what they have to offer clients and kids they worked with was not kindness informed or trauma informed but based on punishment and trying to get compliance. At the Maplehill School, the science of trauma guides our work.

Kimberly (PA) was a medical provider for 35 years in a primary care practice and similarly felt very frustrated with the system which was not integrating this information. In 2013 she learned



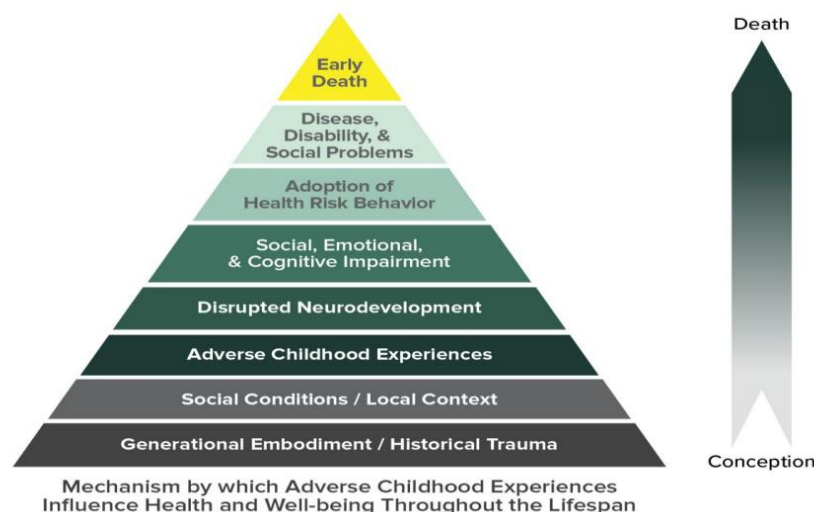
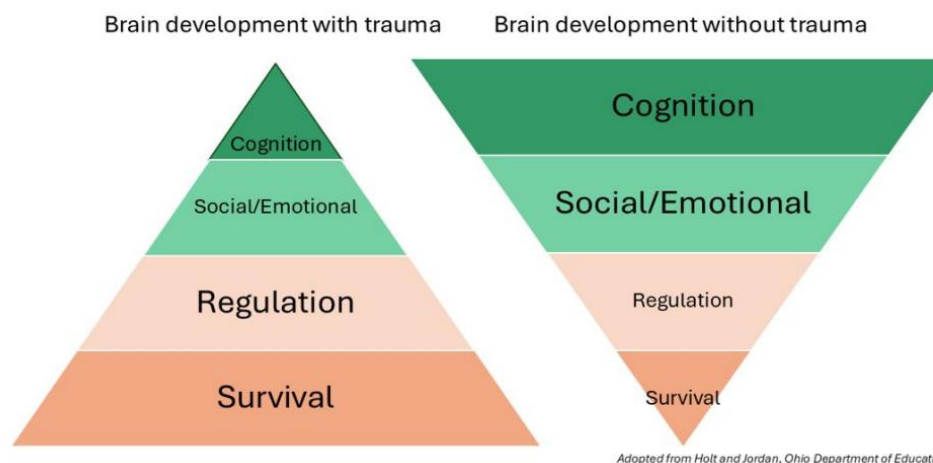
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about the science of trauma and tried to integrate it into the primary care but was told by the medical system, “you can’t do that.” Worked with a PhD nurse practitioner student who came in for a screening on the medical feasibility of doing a screening as part of an office visit.

“We also want to say that neither one of us are experts in trauma, but we have become expert in talking to people about their trauma and helping them sort through it and create meaning.”

Local news clip: <https://www.mynbc5.com/article/ace-study-confirms-link-between-many-adult-health-problems-childhood-traumas/19636489>

Development Trauma: Unpredictable early childhood trauma perpetrated by a caregiver.



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Learning the science of trauma helps break the cycle. The cycle includes intergenerational trauma, familial trauma, educational trauma, medical trauma, systemic trauma. Our hope is that we can elevate people with trauma.

Mindfulness Muscle

Memory = Neuroplasticity

Slowly but surely creating healthy neural pathways by finding your "thing."

What can you do to support the Vermont Kindness Project?

-Spread the word about TVKP

-Support future events of TVKP as we raise awareness about trauma and the neuroscience that leads to resilience.

-Help fund/create the next film-highlighting educational trauma in public schools / and alternative trauma and kindness informed school - Maplehill School and Farm

Group Discussion/Questions

Eva: one thing that is important to note is that we know from the YRBS that approximately ~30% of Vermont high school students report having lived with a parent or caregiver who had a problem with drugs or alcohol, which is an ACE.

Sally is a fan of the Maple Hill School, her son benefited from this amazing place.

NIH article on ACEs: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7190431/>

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Wrap up/Next Steps

Next month's meeting will be on **ZOOM**, NOT Teams on September 10th, 10:00-11:30am. We will send an updated link.

