THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
CENTER ON DISABILITY & COMMUNITY INCLUSION

Year in Review, 2021-2022

*Each year, we share how far we got with our annual priorities in five core areas: **Infrastructure, Research, Services**, **Academics,** and **Communications***.

And we ask for your feedback on what we accomplished.

[INFRASTRUCTURE](#)

[RESEARCH](#)

[SERVICES](#)

[ACADEMICS](#)

[COMMUNICATIONS](#)

INFRASTRUCTURE

We support people who work at CDCI, strengthen our partnerships, and evaluate our work. We had four infrastructure goals this year.

1. Create new ways for the community to give us feedback.

- This was the 4th year of our 5 year grant. To plan our next 5 year grant, we need to understand the needs of people with disabilities in Vermont.
- We have made more time in CAC meetings for feedback.
- We have spoken to more CAC members outside of CAC meetings.
- We are meeting with many more disability rights groups to see how we can support their work.
- We collected data on the attitudes of Vermonters toward disability.

Next fall and winter, we will share what we are learning and get your feedback. We will then use this to plan our next five years.

2. Improve recruitment for new positions to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- We now post job opportunities with the Vermont Professionals of Color Network.
- This year we needed to hire a new co-director for the BEST Project. 16 people applied. 14 identified as female, 2 male. 14 were white and two did not disclose their race or ethnicity.
- Successfully negotiated the hire of Sefakor Komabu-Pomeyie to teach EDSP 200 Global Studies in Disability this summer.
- Hired Sarah Kinor as an ASL instructor and educational consultant for the CARES Team. Sarah is Deaf and bilingual.

3. Partner with people from diverse backgrounds to create new projects.

Last year people in Vermont's Deaf community said they were concerned about our new [CDCI CARES Team](#) grant. They wanted the Agency of Education to talk with Deaf people before the grant was awarded. They were concerned our project would not understand or support the needs of Deaf students and families.

The CDCI CARES Team has spoken with many community members and groups.
- They created an [advisory committee to get feedback](#).
- They met with the Vermont Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf/Blind Advisory Council.
- They met with Linda Hazard, Director of the Vermont Early Hearing Detection Intervention Program and the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind Educational Services Program.

People at CDCI are working with diverse groups to create new projects and resources.
- Jesse joined the University Diversity Council. The goal is to include disability and accessibility in diversity, equity, and inclusion work.
- We helped share feedback from autistic advocates with UVM faculty who wanted training on neurodiversity.
- Audrey is creating [new accessibility resources](#) based on feedback from self-advocates and family advocates.

4. Support priorities with professional development.

- Most people at CDCI received training to do their jobs better (over 90%).

- Many shared that those trainings were focused on accessibility, universal design, or diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- CDCI held meetings to learn about many topics: accessibility, copyright law, online surveys, data on disability, disability representation on TV, assistive technology.
- The UVM Center for Teaching and Learning has asked UVM to help create professional development on neurodiversity.

Other infrastructure updates

We welcomed 11 new staff to the Center:

Jayson Capobianco *(I-Team)*	**Alicia Ayles** *(CDCI CARES)*	**Audrey Homan** *(Communications)*	**Pam Hoover** *(CDCI CARES)*
Nicole Howrigan *(CDCI CARES)*	**Sarah Kinor** *(CDCI CARES)*	**Hope Moulton** *(CDCI CARES)*	**Brianna Owen** *(CDCI CARES)*
Margaret Overman *(CDCI CARES)*	**Justin M.H. Salisbury** *Research*	**Cassandra Townshend** *(BEST/VTPBIS)*	

And three staff members retired:

Michael Giangreco
(EVOLVE PLUS)

Paula Manzi
(I-Team)

Sherry Schoenberg
(BEST)

INFRASTRUCTURE questions for CAC:

Many grants we apply for must be written in 1-2 weeks.

- **How can we make sure people with disabilities are part of planning?**
- **How could people on the CAC help give feedback?**

RESEARCH

We had four goals for research and evaluation this year.

1. Summarize two research studies using plain language.

A number of projects at CDCI created research summaries this year.

- Valerie summarized a study of parents' experiences of suspension and expulsion of their young children: the Promoting Inclusion, Exploring Supports (PIES) study. The summary is available as a narrated video, a poster, and a plain-text document (.pdf).
- I-Team consultants worked with the author of a textbook on supporting DeafBlind students, to create a summary of the textbook. The summary is available as a narrated video with ASL interpretation, a plain-text document (.pdf), and an illustrated study guide (.pdf).

We also changed the names of the research summaries based on CAC feedback:

CDCI RESEARCH Research done by someone at CDCI.	CDCI RECOMMENDED RESEARCH Research done by others.	CDCI RESEARCH SUMMARY Research done by others that we summarize.

2. Report on diversity and issues affecting people with disabilities.

Jesse shared racial differences in COVID-19 cases.

Amy Wheeler-Sutton served on the [Act 35 Task Force on Equitable and Inclusive School Environments](#). The goal was to make recommendations to reduce suspension and expulsion in schools. She helped write [Task Force reports](#) and [presented the final report to the Senate Education committee](#) (video).

The findings from the PIES study were presented as a poster at this year's AUCD conference in November.

We asked about [Vermonter attitudes toward disability on a statewide survey](#). This survey is called "The Vermonter Poll". Most Vermonters who completed the survey believed:

- People with disabilities have a LOWER quality of life.
- When students with and without disabilities are in class together ALL students benefit.
- People with disabilities contribute EQUALLY to the labor force.

This summer we will analyze the data to see if different groups in Vermont have different attitudes.

3. Identify and apply for new grants.

FUNDED:

- **CDCI CARES** – State contract to support students who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind.
- **SCOPE Vermont** – Small award with University of Wyoming to train doctors in Vermont on effects of opioids.
- **COVID-19 Vaccine Access** – Federal funding to promote vaccine access for people with disabilities. This was used to support Confident Care for Kids.
- **Public Health Workforce Funding** – Federal funding to have more people in public health focused on people with disabilities.

SUBMITTED:

We applied for a grant with the Vermont Parent Child Center Network to enhance services provided to children and families. We should hear in August or September.

4. Review how diversity, equity, and inclusion is part of research on people with disabilities at CDCI and UVM.

We will use our study on attitudes toward disability to better understand diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- The Vermonter Poll asked about race, ethnicity, gender, and age. It did not ask people if they have a disability. We advocated for them to add that question. Now everyone who uses that data can use it.
- We use this study to educate Vermonters about disability as part of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.
- And we will use this study to guide our work at CDCI.

We helped improve a UVM campus survey about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

RESEARCH question for CAC:

Sometimes we run out of time in our CAC meetings. For updates on research, are you are getting:

- **Too little information?**
- **The right amount of information?**
- **Too much information?**

SERVICES

We had four goals for improving our community services.

1. Partner with people from diverse backgrounds.

- We are bringing together diverse teams in our trainings and service.
- We are also supporting groups to work together better such as the [UVM Autism Collaborative](#) and [PedsProVT.](#)
- [Vermont Early Mobility](#) collaborated with the UVM Center for Biomedical Innovation. UVM students in physical therapy and engineering worked together to build a prototype power mobility vehicle.
- The new [CDCI CARES Team](#) created an advisory committee and professional working group.
- The [Vermont Interdisciplinary Team (I-Team)](#) continues to work closely with Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the New England Consortium on Deafblindness.
- Think College Vermont presented to a European task force.

2. Understand the diversity of who we serve.

We are learning more about the people we train.

Before trainings: Some projects are asking more questions of attendees during the registration process.

During trainings: Presenters and attendees share gender pronouns, visual descriptions, and other identity information during trainings.

After trainings: All projects ask attendees to complete a survey after each training.

- This year 350 attendees shared information about gender, race, ethnicity, and relationship to disability.
- Most identify as female, non-Hispanic, and white.
- Most do not have disabilities.
- Most do not have a family member with a disability.
- There is less racial and gender diversity in our attendees as compared to everyone in Vermont.
- And the diversity of people we train is very similar to teachers in Vermont.

3. Better understand how our work helps people in the community.

This year we tried new things:

- We learned more about who requests our services. We held office hours to support clients.
- We collected feedback on the accessibility of our trainings, as well as whether they help people learn more about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Most attendees reported that the trainings were accessible, and helped them learn more about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

NEXT STEPS:

Next fall we are planning a community needs assessment. There will be interviews, focus groups, and surveys to get feedback.

4. Support new health projects.

- [SCOPE Vermont](#) helps healthcare providers and educators learn about opioid challenges impacting children and families. SCOPE recently ran a Vermont learning series to share best practices.

- [CDCI CARES Team](#) began providing training and consultation services to schools to help students aged 3-22 who are Deaf, hard of hearing, or DeafBlind.
- [Confident Care for Kids](#) is a Vermont Family Network project to make vaccines easier for children with disabilities. We are helping them collect data from providers and families.
- A new [Assistive Technology Tryout Center](#) opened in Burlington.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to shape our work.

This continues to be a challenging time to work in healthcare, advocacy, and education. Staff and partners have shown a lot of creativity and resiliency.

We have increased our use of remote meetings, trainings, and events. Many projects reported the ability to connect with a greater range of people and to meet more frequently using hybrid models and virtual technologies.

We noted increased needs related to students returning to school. This included increased selection of equipment, positioning supports, AAC trials and devices, environmental assessment.

We have a collective professional development goal to improve our familiarity with accessible technology features. We are also aiming to make our materials more accessible.

SERVICES questions for CAC:

The COVID pandemic increases risk and isolation. How can we better meet with and support people?

We are trying to learn more about people we help. What else do you think we should learn?

ACADEMICS

We had three goals for improving our teaching this year.

1. Partner with people from diverse backgrounds.

We hired a self-advocate to be the teaching assistant for our *Culture of Disability* course.

We worked with two out-of-state scholars who have disabilities. Together, we are developing two new courses:
- *Controversies in Disability Studies*
- *Disability Policy and Self-Advocacy*

Winnie is in leadership roles with two statewide groups:
- Chair of the program committee & board member at [Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL).](#)
- Co-chair of the executive committee, and chair of the education committee at the [Statewide Independent Living Council](#) (SILC).

2. Create a new course on Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities.

There is a new *Global Disability Studies* course this summer. Sefakor Komabu-Pomeyie is teaching it. She is a self-advocate.

Think College Vermont students partnered with the UVM Integrative Health and Wellness Coaching program.

Winnie is working with SILC to create new community learning.

3. Help people with disabilities and providers understand how our teaching can help with their careers.

We're designing an internship program for job-seekers with disabilities to network and develop skills with CDCI and our community partners.

We're exploring options for scholarship funds for people with disabilities to take courses and workshops at UVM.

Winnie partnered with All Brains Belong to hold a student and family forum on inclusive education. She will share a report with the public. Winnie will use this information to set academic priorities next year.

Other academics updates

- *Culture of Disability* was taught in Fall 2021 & Spring 2022.
- *Disability Studies and Media Representation* taught for the Honors College in fall 2021.
- *BEST Summer Institute Course* is online this year.
- Winnie has been asked to collaborate on a NIH research grant.
- [Winnie received the 2022 Jackie M. Gribbons Award!](#) This award is for community service and leadership from the College of Education and Social Services.
- Think College Vermont had 14 students this year. Six students graduated and we expect 11-13 students to enroll in Fall 2022. Think College Vermont coordinator Bryan Dague created a slideshow to celebrate the graduating students and their peer mentors.

COMMUNICATIONS

We had four goals for improving how we share and spread information about disability.

1. Update and improve the CDCI website.

With input from the CAC and the help of the UVM Web Team, we redesigned the entire [CDCI website](). It has anew navigation menu, and new pages for Infrastructure ("About Us"), Research, and Academics. 19 of 20 existing project website have been completely redesigned.

NEXT STEPS:

We'll continue to update project websites on a monthly basis. We're looking forward to the results of our annual website satisfaction survey.

2. Create and publish a podcast featuring stories from people with disabilities and their families.

We created a video podcast to go with our monthly newsletter, "CDCI Connects".

Beginning in January 2022, we recorded 8 episodes:

1. **Pam Cummings & Rachel Wright**
2. **Winnie Looby & Sefakor Komabu-Pomeyie**
3. **Ming M. Canaday**
4. **Winnie Looby & Kinda Abujbarah**
5. **Ariana Cano (The Nature Conservancy of Vermont) & Bridget "Bird Diva" Butler**
6. **Melissa Cronin & Rachel Cronin**
7. **Bryan Dague, Nicole LeBlanc, and Alan Kurtz** (Available June 12).
8. **Stirling Peebles** (Available July 12).

And 8 of our 14 podcast guests so far identify as people with disabilities or family members of people with disabilities.

NEXT STEPS:

Once we have an editorial board, they'll choose a permanent name, and we can put the podcast on iTunes and Spotify. We have three more episodes scheduled to be recorded this summer.

3. Projects will create short videos explaining their services.

So far, 8 of 20 projects have finished their videos, and 4 more will be finished by the end of June.

NEXT STEPS:

We will continue to work with projects until all 20 have completed an explainer video.

4. Build an online database of resources from all projects at CDCI.

- The database will be built in WordPress. We've given access to WordPress to 6 of the projects to begin building and testing.
- We're learning that we need to provide professional development and support to projects with this work.
- We are learning how much accessibility training we need to provide to projects.

NEXT STEPS:

We'll work with projects over Summer 2022 in building the database together. The goal will be to have the database publicly available by the fall.

COMMUNICATIONS question for CAC:

How would you like to be involved with communications next year?

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Thank you for your feedback.