

Childcare in the Upper Valley: Challenges, Successes, and the Way Forward



Session 2: What Is Working in the Upper Valley? ~ Presenter Biographies

Amy Brooks, Executive Director, Early Care and Education Association of the Upper Valley



Amy Brooks has been in the ECE field for more than 25 years, with previous experience as an elementary school educator. She has a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and elementary education and a master's degree in early childhood. She brings 20 years of experience as a director of an NAEYC-accredited center and teacher-trainer. Her particular passion is training teachers in using play-based environments with extensive experience using a Vygotskian (HighScope) approach.

David Watts, Human Resource Director, Kendal at Hanover



At Kendal, David maintains responsibility for overall human resource leadership, talent acquisition and retention, employee relations, compensation, organizational development, performance management, policy development, risk management, workers' compensation administration, benefits planning and administration, and labor law compliance. He joined the Vital Communities Board in 2021 and has also volunteered and served in leadership roles at David's House, the River Valley Human Resource Association, and Leadership Upper Valley. He is passionate about the wonderful region we call home and enjoys cross-country skiing, hiking, biking, gardening, and time with his family.

Shaun Mulholland, City Manager, City of Lebanon



Shaun is a longstanding public servant with twenty-seven years of leadership experience at the local, state and regional levels and he holds a master's degree in public administration from the University of New Hampshire. He was appointed as Town Administrator in Allenstown, NH in 2013, previously serving as its Police Chief. He has served Lebanon since 2018. He brings to Lebanon extensive experience in municipal government including strategic and capital planning, emergency management, personnel management, grant writing, and community-based advocacy at the regional, state, and federal levels. In 2015 he was named the recipient of the New Hampshire Municipal Association's Russ Marcoux Municipal Advocate of the Year and in 2010 was named the New Hampshire Emergency Management Director of the Year.

Rebecca Holcombe, Education Consultant



As a child, Rebecca was lucky enough to attend a Head Start program and warmly remembers her Head Start teacher. In later years, and a different program, Rebecca was suspended from preschool, and hopes that experience and her subsequent career are a reminder that children who are challenging can grow up to contribute to their communities. As an elementary school principal, Rebecca experienced firsthand how powerful partnerships between schools and early care and learning educators are to making sure every kid has a fair chance, no matter what challenge life presents. As Vermont's Secretary of Education, Rebecca oversaw implementation of Act 166, the bill that pays subsidies for every child who finds a Prekindergarten slot in a qualified provider. She is currently the Chair of the Norwich Child Care Committee, which was tasked with mapping the current child care landscape for Norwich and identifying possible strategies for supporting this critical sector. Today, she represents her own thoughts, based on that work, and does not speak for the committee.

Damian DiNicola, Chair, Subcommittees on Childcare/Early Childhood Education and Rural Education, Randolph Economic Development Council



Damian runs a solo law practice in his hometown of Randolph, VT, where he lives with his wife and two young children. He also serves as Vice-Chair of the Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation. He served as Co-Chair of the Randolph Region Reenergized (R3) economic development and tourism committee. He spent his college, post-graduate and early career in Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C., before returning to Vermont. During that time he spent over a decade practicing business litigation with a prominent national law firm in Philadelphia.

Brooke Couch Freeland, Managing Director, Couch Family Foundation



In her position at the Foundation, Brooke is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the Foundation and for advising the trustees on their philanthropic giving. Additionally, she consults for the United Way for Greater Austin, providing guidance and leadership on early childhood education policy and advocacy. Brooke developed her interest in public policy working as the legislative director for former Massachusetts State Senator Robert O'Leary, where she focused on pre-K-16 education policy. More recently, she worked as the communications director for Strategies for Children and the Early Education for All Campaign, an advocacy organization based in Boston. Brooke participates on the board of several nonprofits including Positive Tracks and Generation Serve and co-chairs the Grants Committee for the Women's Fund of the Austin Community Foundation. Brooke grew up in the Upper Valley and holds a BA from Colgate University and a MPA from New York University. She currently resides in Austin, TX, with her husband and two young daughters.

Matt Levin, Executive Director, The Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance



Matt encourages strong communication and collaboration among early childhood advocates in ways that inform a broad early childhood agenda and advance the Alliance's legislative priorities. He oversees Alliance advocacy, governance, and fundraising. He is a veteran legislative advocate, community organizer, and advocacy trainer who has worked on issues ranging from workplace rights to health care, environmental protection to low-income housing. He has worked in several regions of the country in roles as diverse as community organizer, state and federal lobbyist, management and organizational development consultant, and non-profit executive director. Since moving to Vermont in 2001, he has worked for organizations including Vermonters for a Clean

Environment, the Vermont AFL-CIO, and Vermont Conservation Voters. Matt has a Specialist Level II instructor certification with Vermont Northern Lights Career Development Center. He is a graduate of Williams College and lives in Berlin with his wife and two children.

Rebecca Woitkowski, Esq., Kids Count Policy Coordinator, New Futures



The mother of two young children and a lifelong New Hampshire resident, Rebecca's passion is advocating to ensure all NH Kids have a bright future. In her role with New Futures, she convenes and leads all early childhood policy and advocacy efforts. In addition she is Vice President of Family Support New Hampshire, a coalition of family resource centers and family-strengthening programs that share best practices to better provide for Granite State families. She also serves as Chair of the NH Wellness and Primary Prevention Council, created through bipartisan legislative efforts, which exists to facilitate and promote primary prevention and early intervention efforts at the state and local levels. Earlier in her career, she worked in private

practice focusing on civil litigation and family law. Her experience working directly with clients led her to seek out policy work to improve New Hampshire families' lives on a grander scale. Rebecca received her bachelor of arts degree in political science from Southern New Hampshire University in 2008 and her juris doctor from the University of New Hampshire School of Law in 2011.