

NAMI VERMONT BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Slate of Candidates — FY2026

Melinda Bechtel - Jeffersonville, VT



I am an On-Air radio personality for 95TripleX/Star929. I earned a BS of Science, Business Management, Leadership & Development & PMP license. In 2021, I earned my degree from Champlain College with Magna Cum Laude honors. I am fluent in American Sign Language (CODA). I am a mother to many with one biological daughter who is 19 years old. My personal experience is with having a difficult time navigating resources for my child when she was in her youth development years, struggling with anxiety, and trauma, to not have available resources due to being ineligible because we weren't on any subsidies, or state care programs, or even her own consent to treat, when things were really tough. And having to navigate solely on my own, and finding other alternative resources, within my knowledge and what I felt was best for her and feeling alone while in this state of despair and chapters that had me wondering how I could do more for others in my community if they were to face the same obstacles. Now, being many years later and having found solutions, and being open to speaking about those struggles with other parents and amongst others who share their stories with me, then being in the same room as Kathleen and Stephanie and learning how I could have a voice within the NAMI organization. I finally feel the right time and people have been put in my alignment to work on and help bring solutions to the community so others do not have to feel alone, or try to navigate resources on their own, and that there is a team and organization here in Vermont that we/they can reach out too, along with hopefully helping change and add in some laws that will help parents actually be able to get their children care when they do need it and not with a minor having to give consent when unwilling to do so because that is not a choice that should be left to a child who is facing extreme battles in their own mind.

Stephanie Holden - Essex Junction, VT



My name is Stephanie Holden. I was born and raised here in Vermont. I attended Rice Memorial High School, and CVU, then Graduated from Lyndon Institute in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. I obtained my Bachelor's or Arts degree in Psychology and Legal Studies from Elms College in Chicopee, MA, then continued to graduate with a Master's of Social Work (MSW) Degree from UCONN School of Social Work in West Hartford, CT.

I returned to the Northeast Kingdom VT in 2017, and to Chittenden County in 2021. I'm a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) and provide mental health services to diverse populations in the community, including children and families. I have a passion for helping and advocating for others and for what is right. On my free time I enjoy volunteering in the community, coaching gymnastics and cheerleading, and spending time with my dog Milo. I especially enjoy spending time with children and being outside if the weather is nice. I have a history of managing my own mental health challenges, as well as supporting loved ones. I am also a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) and support the Community by providing mental health services for my career.

In the last few years, I have experienced the hardships of facing racism and disability discrimination in Vermont. This has motivated me to learn how to speak up, educate, and make change.

I am also on the board of the National Association of Social Workers Vermont Chapter (NASW-VT). In the last 1 ½ years I started doing Pageants and becoming more involved in our Community. I am also an elected Justice of the Peace in Essex Junction, VT and a member of the Essex Junction Democrats, and Board of Tax Abatement.

Terri Lavelly – St. Johnsbury, VT



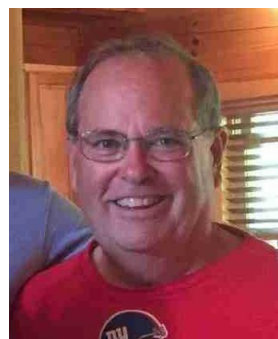
Terri Lavelly, MS, QMHP obtained her Masters in Management from Granite State College with a concentration in Behavioral Science. Terri has been employed at Northeast Kingdom Human Services Inc (NKHS) since 2004, supporting the mental health needs of the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont in a variety of different roles. As Co-chair of NKHS's Zero Suicide team, she delivers trainings around awareness, prevention, postvention and mental wellness. Terri is an active member of The Vermont Suicide Prevention Coalition, VT's 9-8-8 Coalition, The Executive Committee for the Statewide Strategic Plan and serves on many steering committees locally, statewide and nationally to support mental wellness. Currently she is the Training and Community Engagement Director at NKHS. She has been the team leader for Starting Over Strong VT, a program to support mental health needs of flood survivors in the NEK, in partnership with kuRRVve (the NEK's long term recovery team) since the floods of 2023, trained to deliver mental health supports by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In addition, she is also an active volunteer for The American Foundation of Suicide Prevention, serving as the Vermont Chapter Board Chair, field advocate, trainer and Newport Walk Chair.

Claudia Pringles - Montpelier, VT



Claudia Pringles is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin Law School, and she was drawn to Vermont for its values and quality of life. She opened her Montpelier law office in 2008. Her primary practice areas are estate planning, special needs planning, trusts, wills, guardianship, and probate. She is the mother of two, including a daughter with moderate to severe autism. Claudia also serves as a trustee for special needs trusts, including for individuals with mental health needs. Since she moved to Vermont in 2004, she has been a vigorous, effective advocate for Vermonters with disabilities. Her advocacy efforts included helping enact and lead the expansion of a landmark Vermont law mandating that private insurance or Vermont Medicaid pay for medically necessary therapy for persons with autism and other developmental disabilities. Following the passage of the law above, Claudia continued to advocate for its implementation, as many barriers still remained to accessing services. She returned to the State House to ensure the passage of another law requiring the licensing of behavioral therapists. This requirement would enable individuals on Medicaid to access behavioral therapy. She brought together long-time political adversaries to pass the Vermont State Board of Education, Rule 4500, which regulates the use of restraints in Vermont schools. Claudia's efforts toward bettering the lives of Vermonters with autism and their families have been so many and so effective that she is a recipient of the prestigious Advocacy Award presented by the nation's largest and most influential autism advocacy organization, Autism Speaks.

Chip Siler - Guilford, VT



I have lived in southern Vermont with my wife Judy since 1998. I retired in 2022 which allowed me to spend a lot of time working as a volunteer with NAMI Vermont. My professional life before retirement included working as a mechanical engineer in the petro-chemical industry and, for the last 23 years as the Facilities and Health and Safety Manager at a firm manufacturing optical filters for use in biomedical research and astronomy. I was a member of the Board of Directors at the optical firm. I bring years of experience and training from this work to share in my volunteer work with NAMI.

I am a former Board member and Board President. I facilitate Family to Family classes as well as the Basics class, the Southern Vermont Family Support group and the Mental Illness and Recovery workshop. I am a state trainer for Family to Family and Family Support Group facilitators. I am an active member of all the committees. I have been off the Board for the last year taking a break from Board activities as required by Board rules. I look forward to re-joining the Board and continuing to help the mental health community in Vermont.

I am the parent of two children that live with mental illness and co-occurring alcohol issues. My wife and I, about 13 years ago, discovered NAMI-VT at a time when we were in crisis and needed information and support. We found both at NAMI-VT and have been working as volunteers for NAMI Vermont ever since.

Marie Willette - Brattleboro, VT



I am a native Vermonter. I graduated from Hinsdale High School in NH, married early, and rapidly had 4 children. I worked in my husband's electrical business as office manager/bookkeeper for many years. After divorcing in the mid 1980's, I raised my children doing bookkeeping for various small businesses. Highlights were town accountant for the Town of Rockingham, VT and bookkeeper/ program assistant for Our Place Drop-in Center in Bellows Falls, VT. I also attended CCV and in 1998 I graduated with an associate's degree in liberal studies with a concentration in accounting. My daughter blessed me with a grandson in 1989, which I was raising, and I decided to continue my education. He went to New England Kurn Hattin Homes, and I attended Simmons College in Boston where I majored in economics. In 2001, I began working for Fitz, Vogt and Assts. as chef manager for several of their accounts. In 2009, I became kitchen manager for Brattleboro Senior Meals, Inc., which was basically the operations manager for the Meals on Wheels program in that town, answering only to the executive director. I retired in 2019.

I worked with Dr. Joyce Burland back in 1991 when the Family Education Course was just getting started. I taught the course for 3 years. I also took the support group training. I was a previous NAMI Board member, although unsure of dates.

My ex-husband was symptomatic of serious mental health issues. He refused any treatment or help, undiagnosed and untreated. Three of my four children succumbed to chronic mental health issues. My son died by suicide at 42, and my daughter overdosed at 50 during the pandemic. My oldest daughter's current diagnosis is schizo-affective disorder and is treatment resistant. I have a long, storied past with mental illness issues.