

# PROFESSIONAL CAREGIVER NEWS

Vermont Association of Professional Care Providers • Community of Vermont Elders

## Inside this issue:

About Us	2
E-newsletter?	2
Direct Care Registry Update	2
Sen. Bernie Sanders Offers Support	3
Get Stuff – Cheap	4
Congratulating Dr. McCullough	4
Crisis Looms in Direct Care Workforce	5
Introducing Green Mountain Care	6
What's Next	8

## For Helene Rondeau 'Caring Is Priceless'

Helene Rondeau is a long term direct service professional who works with people with developmental disabilities. Her work in this field has been an evolution from being in a severe car accident in 1972 to barely surviving a brain aneurism 20 years later. Both of these hospitalizations and subsequent rehabilitations for intense health issues gave Helene a unique perspective on caregivers. These experiences along with the support of many people, ultimately led her to a career as a direct care worker.

Helene's first interest in direct care work began in the late 1970s when she worked driving a school bus for special needs students. She eventually began providing respite for the parents of one of her students. When the opportunity arose to go to college as an adult learner, Helene chose to major in special education and psychology and minor in gerontology. In 1992 while in college, Helene experienced a cerebral aneurism which left her unable to speak. Going through speech therapy to overcome aphasia, Helene developed a special interest with people having communication problems and learned to pay attention to the many non-verbal ways people communicate. That ex-

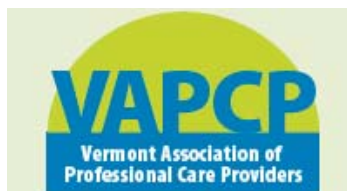


Helene Rondeau

perience along with volunteering with special needs students led her to her current position of 12 years at Howard Center, currently in a residential program for people with developmental disabilities.

Some people involved with the residence state that Helene brings humor, great advice, knowledge, compassion and "generosity of her spirit". One of the residents has nicknamed her "Short and Sweet" because of her small stature and giving nature. Alternately, Helene says that the people she cares for teach her great things about life, trust, honesty and the ability to look ahead, not dwell on the past. It is these relationships with

*Continued on page 7*



Supporting Caregivers, Improving Care



[www.vermontelders.org](http://www.vermontelders.org)

## E-Newsletter?

In order to maintain the quality of our newsletter but keep the costs of production down, we are considering sending the newsletter electronically to those members who prefer to receive it that way. If you would like to receive electronic copies of future newsletters just send an e-mail to [vapcp@vermontelders.org](mailto:vapcp@vermontelders.org) and tell us to what address you'd like us to send your electronic copy of the newsletter. It is also very easy to share your newsletter with colleagues and friends if you have an electronic copy.

(P.S. VAPCP also hopes to have a new web-site before the end of the year where we will post our current and back issues of the newsletter. If you are interested in working with the group who are planning this new web-site let us know.)

## Direct Care Worker Registry - Update

The Direct Care Worker Registry Advisory Group has been meeting with DAIL staff member Merle Edwards-Orr in recent months to finalize the requirements to go into a Request For Proposal (RFP). This RFP was issued at the end of January and two vendors responded with proposals to create and maintain the Vermont DCW Registry. Rewarding Work Resources of Dedham, Mass., was finally selected. The Advisory Group is focusing on a marketing plan for the roll-out of the Registry this coming fall.

*May spring  
flowers  
bring  
sunshine  
to your day!*



## About us

*The Vermont Association of Professional Care Providers is a nonprofit, membership organization dedicated to advancing the professional growth, employment opportunities and quality of life for people who provide personal care and support services in all home, community and healthcare settings.*

### VAPCP Board of Directors

Mohamed Basha\*, RN

Suzanne Braunegg\*  
President

Rachel Lee Cummings\*  
Vice President

Anne Devino\*, Secretary  
Kim Kilpeck\*

Dennis McCullough, MD  
Heather Merwin\*

Alex Pial\*

Tammie Schmitt\*, Treasurer  
Lorinda Smith\*

*\*These Board members are direct care or support workers.*

### Staff

Susan Gordon, Director

### Contact information

Vermont Association of  
Professional Care Providers  
VAPCP

PO Box 1276  
641 Comstock Rd., Suite 4  
Montpelier, VT 05601  
(802) 229-4731

[vapcp@vermontelders.org](mailto:vapcp@vermontelders.org)

## Strong Community Support for Direct Care Workers



Pictured left to right are Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., Diane McGill, a licensed nursing assistant at Chittenden/Grand Isle Visiting Nurse Association and Susan Gordon, Director of the Vermont Association of Professional Care Providers.

Despite the snowy, sloppy weather about 50 people - direct care workers, consumers, employers and other interested community members - made it a priority to attend Senator Bernie Sanders' special Community Meeting – Supporting Caregivers – Improving Care held in Montpelier on March 1st. This event was a joint effort by the Vermont Association of Professional Care Providers (VAPCP), the Community of Vermont Elders (COVE), the Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL) and PHI.

The meeting featured highlights of the recently completed Direct Care Workforce (DCW) Legislative Study Report. (See elsewhere in this newsletter for a summary of this report.)

Bernie opened the meeting, stress-

ing the important and vital work done by direct care workers, with these words, “If you’re going to attract people to this difficult and important work, you have to pay them a living wage, and right now we’re not.”

Susan Gordon, VAPCP Director, then gave some background about the diversity of the direct care workforce in Vermont and told what VAPCP has been doing to raise public awareness and provide support to workers. Commissioner Joan Senecal spoke next about the DCW Study Report and its key findings and recommendations.

Then Diane McGill, an LNA from the Chittenden/Grand Isle, spoke on behalf of all direct care workers. She was eloquent in her remarks about the challenges she faced in her daily work and the difficulty of affording health care cover-

---

**“If you’re going to attract people to this difficult and important work, you have to pay them a living wage, and right now we’re not.”**

– Sen. Bernie Sanders

---

age on direct care worker wages. Next, Jean Mankowski-Upham told the audience how important direct care workers are to helping her get through everyday tasks and maintain her independence. She also spoke about the problems with finding affordable health care.

Mohamed Basha, VAPCP Board Member and owner of TLC Nursing Associates, is an employer of direct care workers. He expressed his appreciation for the value of this workforce and urged others to support them and the recommendations of the study. Deborah Lisi-Baker, Director of VCIL, closed the panel portion of the meeting with an acknowledgement of what challenges we still face, but with a reminder of how far we have come with our programs in Vermont.

Bernie then opened up the meeting for questions from the audience. There was a lively exchange of stories and information that re-enforced all the issues raised in the DCW Study. He urged those in attendance to ask state lawmakers to hold hearings on the subject before the final budget is set.

## Get Affordable Assistive Technology at [getATstuff.com](http://getATstuff.com)

The Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Vermont Assistive Technology Program has a new web-based clearinghouse for affordable assistive technology, daily living and accessibility devices throughout the New England region. This site, [www.getatstuff.com](http://www.getatstuff.com), offers New England residents the opportunity to buy, sell or donate a variety of used products ranging from communication devices and wheelchairs to ramps and mobility devices.

The goal of the Assistive Technology Exchange in New England and the website is to get Assistive Technology devices that are no longer being used into the hands of people who need them. The site is the result of collaboration between Assistive Technology programs in the 6 New England states.

Types of items you may find on [www.getATstuff.com](http://www.getATstuff.com) are:

- Vision and hearing – for example, magnifying machines and assistive listening devices;
- Speech communication – for example, electronic augmentative communication devices;
- Learning, cognitive, developmental – for example, electronic organizers and specialized calculators;
- Mobility, seating and positioning – for example, walkers or power wheelchairs;
- Aids to daily living – for example, switch adapted small appliances or multi-sensory alerting devices;
- Environmental Adaptations – for example, lifts, lighting controls and ramps;
- Transportation and Vehicle Modifications – for example,

modified vehicles, hand controls, or extended directional mirrors;

- Computers and Computer-related – for example, alternative keyboards and mice, software and hardware that make computers accessible; and
- Recreation, Sports, and Leisure – for example, mono skis and tandem bikes, switch adapted toys and games, musical instruments, and adapted hunting and fishing equipment.

For more information, visit [www.getatstuff.com](http://www.getatstuff.com) or call the Vermont Assistive Technology Reuse Project coordinator at 1-888-827-2714. The Vermont Assistive Technology Reuse Project is funded through collaboration with the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, the Vermont Assistive Technology Program and the Vermont Parent Information Center.

## Congratulations Dr. Dennis McCullough on new book

Congratulations to VAPCP Board Member Dennis McCullough, M.D., on the recent publication of his new book, “My Mother, Your Mother.” Dr. McCullough has been an “in-the-trenches” geriatrician for 30 years. He is a graduate of Harvard Medical School and serves as a faculty member at Dartmouth Medical School. His decades-long interest in elders prompted him to join the VAPCP Board of Directors to help support better elder care in Vermont.

Dr. McCullough’s new book answers the question, “What’s the right thing to do for mom or dad as they get older?” In this book, Dr. McCullough focuses on the fastest growing group of elders, those over age 80. These people experience more diseases, more disability, and more need for support and careful judgments.

Diseases that once ended lives relatively quickly have been changed into chronic illness, chronic debilitation and extended years of decline. Geriatric specialists, like Dr. McCullough, have learned that this particular group of elders has the highest likelihood of benefiting from care that is more measured and reflective, which actually stands back from rushed, in-hospital interventions and slows down to balance thoughtfully the separate, multiple and complex issues of late-life.

In this comforting and much-needed book, he recommends a new approach to healthcare decision-making, which he terms “Slow Medicine.” Dr. McCullough shows a great sensitivity to all caregivers faced with caring for a loved one in their final years. For more information see [www.mymotheryourmother.com](http://www.mymotheryourmother.com).

# Why the Direct Care Workforce is Headed for a Crisis

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the two fastest growing occupations this year in terms of rate of growth of ALL occupations are direct care job titles - Home Health Aides (slated to grow at an annual rate through this year at 5%) and Personal and Home Care Aides (slated to grow at 4.9% through this year).

And yet, Vermont is facing a growing crisis: the number of us who need direct care and support is outpacing the growth of the direct care workforce. Baby boomers are aging; the number of children diagnosed with cognitive disabilities such as autism is growing; those of us with physical disabilities seek more independence; and, medical advances continue to enable us to live longer, manifesting more complex needs.

At the same time, the number of “traditional” caregivers – women aged 25-54 – is slowly declining. Simply said, we do not have enough direct care workers to meet current and future needs for care and support. As a result, Vermont is challenged to identify and implement effective ways to attract (recruit) and keep (retain) a high quality and stable direct care workforce.

## Legislative Study

The Legislative Study of the Direct Care Workforce was funded by the Vermont Legislature and COVE and was directed the Commissioner of the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) to gather information and develop informed policies and practices to address the workforce shortage. The research focused on the issues of workforce quantity and availability, quality, and stability across care and support settings and consumer populations, as well as, the financial issues that will need attention.

## Research Results Highlights

The Legislative Study of the Direct Care Workforce, which included survey responses from 1,700 direct care workers, clearly tells us the following:

Wages matter:

Only one half of direct-care workers report that they expect to receive a raise. Given the forces of inflation, without annual cost-of-living increases, caregivers lose — already low — income by staying in this work over time.

But...

The higher the wage, the longer caregivers stayed in the direct-care profession.

Benefits matter:

Only one-third of direct-care workers in Vermont receive health coverage as an employment benefit.

But...

Workers with health coverage remain in their jobs for 2.5 years longer than those without it.

Training matters:

Only 42 percent of direct-care workers report receiving formal job training

But...

Direct-care workers stay in their jobs significantly longer when satisfied with the preparation and training they receive.

Career development matters:

Direct-care workers in Vermont are dissatisfied with their current opportunities for advancement. No standardized or portable Licensed Nursing Assistant II or Personal Care Attendant II curricula and credential currently exist

But...

National research shows that when career ladders provide recognition and advancement opportunities for workers they remain in the profession.

## Conclusion

Individuals who provide direct care to help us negotiate the tasks of daily living answer a calling: they come to work each day to help others. These workers care deeply for those of us who live with developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, or the challenges brought on by aging. To insure that the growing need for direct care is met, Vermont must develop effective strategies for attracting and keeping direct care workers.

First and foremost, direct care workers must earn a livable wage. Second, workers should receive some degree of employment benefits. Beyond that, provisions such as training, quality supervision and opportuni-

*Continued on page 7*

## Introducing Green Mountain Care and Catamount Health

If you're uninsured, now is the time to check out your health coverage options. Green Mountain Care is a family of low-cost and free health coverage programs for Vermonters and is offered by the state of Vermont and its partners. Green Mountain Care provides uninsured Vermonters with access to quality, comprehensive health care coverage at a reasonable cost.

Some of the programs you may know – such as Dr. Dynasaur and Vermont Health Access Plan (VHAP) – and some are new, like Catamount Health which includes Premium Assistance and Employer-Sponsored Insurance (ESI) Premium Assistance. Prescription Assistance is also available for uninsured Vermonters and those with insurance such as Medicare.

Together, Green Mountain Care programs equal the most comprehensive group of state-based health coverage programs Vermont has ever seen. Learn more about these programs or find answers to questions you may have about what program may be best for you by going to [www.greenmountaincare.org](http://www.greenmountaincare.org) or call 1-800-250-8427.

Here are some details about Catamount Health.

### **New! Catamount Health (premium assistance now available!)**

Catamount Health is a new health insurance plan that became available for enrollment on October 1, 2007 and is offered in cooperation with the state of Vermont, by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont and MVP Health Care. It provides comprehensive, quality health coverage at a reasonable cost no matter how much you earn. You may also get help paying your premiums based on your income.

### **Who can enroll?**

Catamount Health is designed for Vermonters age 18 or older and families who are not eligible for existing state-sponsored coverage programs such as Medicaid, Medicare or Vermont Health Access Plan (VHAP) and who have been uninsured for 12 months or more or have recently lost their insurance because of a life change such as a divorce or loss of a job. You're likely eligible for Catamount Health if you are an adult making more than \$1,307\* a month (higher for larger

Monthly Individual Income*	Monthly Premium
\$1,307 - \$1,742	\$60
\$1,743 - \$1,960	\$90
\$1,961 - \$2,178	\$110
\$2,179 - \$2,395	\$125
\$2,396 - \$2,613	\$135
More than \$2,613	\$393.11** (no premium assistance)

\* You may still qualify if your monthly income is up to \$200 per month higher if you have earned income and/or child care expenses (higher for larger households).

\*\*Subject to change.

households) or a parent making more than \$1,612\* a month (higher for larger households) and do not have access to insurance through your employer (Although you may be eligible even if you have access to your employer insurance if your monthly income is \$2,613 or less).

### **What services are covered?**

Benefits include doctor visits, check-ups and screenings, hospital visits, emergency care, chronic disease care, prescription medicines and more.

### **How much does it cost?**

Premium assistance is available for Catamount Health based on income and eligibility. Monthly premiums range from \$60-\$393 based on income (see chart below), office visit co-payments are \$10, prescriptions range from \$10-\$50 and deductibles are \$250 for individuals and \$500 for families (in network).

### **New! Employer-Sponsored Insurance (ESI) Premium Assistance**

Uninsured Vermonters can also get help with paying their employer's health insurance premiums if you

*Continued on page 7*

## Green Mountain Care and Catamount Health Explained

*Continued from page 6*

meet all of the following criteria:

- You are eligible to enroll in Catamount Health or the Vermont Health Access Plan (VHAP);
- Your income is less than or equal to \$2,613\* a month for one person (higher for larger households).
- Your employer's plan has comprehensive benefits; and
- It is more cost-effective for the state to provide premium assistance to enroll in your employer's plan than to provide premium assistance to enroll in Catamount Health or VHAP.

\* You may still qualify if your monthly income is up to \$200 per month higher if you have earned income and/or child care expenses (higher for larger households).

There may be a program for you, no matter how much you earn. Call 1-800-250-8427 to find out which program is right for you. (*The source for this article is greenmountaincare.org.*)

VAPCP is committed to informing our members and all direct care and support professionals about resources that may be beneficial to them. Since Catamount Health is a new state-sponsored program we would be interested in hearing about your experiences with it.

### Helene Rondeau and a 'job well done'

*Continued from page 1*

clients that guide her passion for her work. She has savored watching them make personal strides, become more involved in their communities and most importantly, becoming more self confident. Helene feels that one of her greatest strengths is being a voice for the consumers with whom she works.

Being part of a team, sharing workloads and sometimes challenging situations has allowed Helene to stay focused on clients as her main priority. In addition to agency trainings, she tries to mentor new staff and substitutes as they start work. She feels that long term direct care workers are a great source of knowledge and experience, one that is often undervalued. Helene states that giving and receiving respect from clients, co-workers and superiors is very important to the care giving field. Receiving a livable wage is something Helene would like to see improve for all direct service workers, though despite it, she states "Caring is Priceless". Such devotion, generosity, caring and professionalism remind us that there are still GREAT people in the care giving field. People who need acknowledgement, respect and gratitude for a job well done! Thank you Helene!

### Direct Care Crisis Looms

*Continued from page 5*

ties for advancement can improve workers' satisfaction and willingness to stay in this profession. The findings from this Vermont study are supported by findings from other research initiatives conducted here and across the country. What we learned in the 2001 Paraprofessional Workforce Study remains constant: direct care workers engage in this profession because they want to work with, help, and make a positive difference in other's lives.

The 2001 Paraprofessional Staffing Study recommended the formation of a direct care worker organization or association to support workers and further the development of this vital workforce. The Vermont Association of Professional Care Providers (VAPCP) has since been established and become essential in raising awareness about the profession, providing training opportunities for all direct care workers, advocating for direct care workforce issues, and supporting opportunities for leadership development. This study is another critical step in the process of understanding and strengthening the direct care workforce in Vermont. The Vermont Association of Professional Care Providers (VAPCP), if resourced and supported, can continue to serve as a sustainable vehicle for workforce development.

*(This article includes excerpts from the Legislative Study report.)*

## What's Next.....

- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>April 21</b><br>5:30 – 7:00 | <b>VT Association of Professional Care Providers<br/>Board Meeting</b><br>VAPCP offices at COVE<br>641 Comstock Road, Suite 4, Berlin |
| <b>May 19</b><br>5:30 – 7:00   | <b>VT Association of Professional Care Providers<br/>Board Meeting</b><br>VAPCP offices at COVE<br>641 Comstock Road, Suite 4, Berlin |
| <b>June 16</b><br>5:30 – 7:00  | <b>VT Association of Professional Care Providers<br/>Board Meeting</b><br>VAPCP offices at COVE<br>641 Comstock Road, Suite 4, Berlin |
| <b>July 21</b><br>5:30 – 7:00  | <b>VT Association of Professional Care Providers<br/>Board Meeting</b><br>VAPCP offices at COVE<br>641 Comstock Road, Suite 4, Berlin |

**Contact Bob Swartz at 802-748-2506 for more information about the following Northeastern VT Area Health Education Center Programs.**

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>June 18</b><br>3:30 – 7:30   | <b>Geriatric Medication Topics for Direct Care Providers</b><br>Woodbury College, Montpelier   |
| <b>June 20</b><br>8 – noon      | <b>Geriatric Medication Topics for Direct Care Providers</b><br>Springfield College, St Johnsbury  |
| <b>August 19</b><br>3:30 – 7:00 | <b>Review Course for Direct Care Providers Taking the HPNA<br/>Palliative Care Certificate Test</b><br>Central VT Home Health & Hospice Conf Room, Barre |

**Contact Kate Hughes at 802-295-8822 for more information about the following Community College of Vermont Programs.**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>April 25, 26 &amp;<br/>Aug. 23</b><br>10:00 – 4:30         | <b>Self-Esteem for Caregivers Workshop</b><br>CCV Upper Valley, 145 Billings Road, White River Jct.             |
| <b>5 consecutive Sats<br/>starting June 28</b><br>8:30 – 5:30 | <b>Caregiver Training for Personal Care Attendants</b><br>CCV Upper Valley, 145 Billings Road, White River Jct. |

**Contact Martha Miller at 1-877-347-1419 for more information about the following ElderWise Program, The Independent Professional Caregiver (NOTE: Cost is \$800 or VSAC Grant eligible).**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Sept. 6 – Nov. 8</b><br>Saturdays, 9:00 – 4:00<br>Brattleboro                | <b>May 5 – 16</b><br><b>August 4 – August 15</b><br><b>Nov. 3 – 14</b><br>Monday through Friday, 9:00 – 4:00<br>Middlebury |
| <b>June 2 – July 10</b><br>Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, 5:30 – 9:30<br>Burlington |  |
-