

ADA 101:

What Your Municipality Needs to Know about the Americans with Disabilities Act

Presenter Biographies and Contact Information

Emerson Wheeler (they/he) is the Health Equity and Community Engagement Coordinator for Disability Inclusion with the Vermont Department of Health. A health equity professional specializing in disability justice, they also are a photographer, writer, advocate, and maker. Emerson has extensive experience as an educator, having trained more than 450 public health and healthcare professionals on critical topics such as: disability and accessibility; diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging; and health equity.



The [Vermont Department of Health](#) helps Vermonters live fuller, healthier lives from birth through old age. Emerson provided an overview of Vermonters who live with some form of physical, cognitive, sensory, mental health, or other disability and provided us with a basic understanding of how disability intersects with multiple content areas, from employment and poverty to criminal justice reform and education.

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Stacy Hart (she/her) is the ADA Trainer, Information and Outreach Specialists for the Institute for Human Centered Design's New England ADA Center. Stacy sees her work as a continuation of making communities more accessible and inclusive of everyone. She provides training on the ADA including but not limited to employment and municipal obligations, emergency management, Section 504, state building code, and topical issues such as COVID-19, healthcare access, and people in recovery.



The [Institute for Human Centered Design](#) advances the role of design in expanding opportunity and enhancing experience for people of all ages, abilities, and cultures through excellence in design. Stacy provided an overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act and focused on the requirements for local governments. She discussed Effective Communication and strategies for achieving it; service animals; reasonable modifications of policies and practices; web accessibility; and the ADA's administrative requirements.

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Peter Johnke (he/him) is the Deputy Director of the Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL). He has been involved with assistive technology since first joining VCIL in 1990. Peter provides support and supervision to VCIL's programs to promote the dignity, independence, and civil rights of Vermonters with disabilities. He also helps the executive director serve as the public face of the organization. As a non-driver, Peter has advocated for expansion and improvements to public transportation and serves on national, state, and local transportation advisory committees.



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Cara Sachs (she/her) is the ADA Advocate for the Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL). Her focus is systems advocacy and providing technical assistance, training, and accessibility assessments as part of VCIL's Community Access Team. Cara is transitioning to using a powered wheelchair full time, while she is training her own multipurpose service dog named Kaya. They anticipate graduating as a team in April 2024. These experiences drive Cara's passion for doing advocacy around accessibility and service dogs, continuing to learn about ethical dog training, and educating the public about service dogs, especially atypical breeds like Kaya, a purebred chihuahua. Cara is also a certified life coach specializing in thriving with chronic illness. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and two certifications from the Institute for Professional Excellence in Coaching and is also a former American Sign Language/English interpreter.



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The [Vermont Center for Independent Living](#) is a nonprofit organization directed and staffed by individuals with disabilities. VCIL is committed to cross-disability services, the promotion of active citizenship, and working with others to create services that support self-determination and full participation in community life. Together, Peter and Cara highlighted how municipalities can make a good faith effort to address the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and discussed common pitfalls and best practices. They also helped us experience municipal programs, policies, services, and facilities from the perspective of neighbors and employees who live with disabilities.