

Apr 7, 2026

Dream Cooperative Board Meeting

Attended: Heidi Clopton, Alyssa Oluwalana, Dawn Fry, Mark Wilson

Attachments 📎 Dream Cooperative Board Meeting

📄 Notes - Dream Cooperative Board Meeting

Meeting records 📄 Transcript

Summary

Ali Russel's Capstone project presented resource gaps for neurodiverse individuals, detailed program planning with a needs assessment, and established key organizational and financial structures for the Dream Cooperative.

Capstone Project and Needs Assessment

The capstone project, "Building a Community for Participation," identified critical resource discrepancies in the Upper Cumberland community for neurodiverse individuals and those with IDD aged 10 and older. Needs assessment data showed 80% of caregivers and 92.9% of therapy professionals rated the Dream Cooperative as a critical community need, focusing primarily on socialization and life skills.

Program Planning and Partnerships

Foundational program planning included developing a grant template, a sustainability handbook, and a logic model to map resources and outcomes. Program scheduling was structured to separate individuals 18 and under from those 18 and over, utilizing rented space from the Grove Healing Collective for activities.

Financial and Governance Decisions

The board approved that purchases under \$300 are automatically approved, with expenditures over that amount requiring written board approval. The organization is actively pursuing American Job Center grants and planning major fundraising initiatives, including a golf tournament and a documentary screening, to secure funding.

Details

- **Capstone Project Overview:** Ali Russel presented her capstone project, "Building a Community for Participation," which spanned 14 weeks and was student-led alongside a site mentor and a faculty mentor. The project aimed to apply occupational therapy (OT) based practice and research skills to the Upper Cumberland community, specifically addressing the need for resources after observing discrepancies in resource availability compared to Chattanooga ([00:00:00](#)). The target population for the Dream Cooperative includes individuals who are neurodiverse or have intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), aged 10 and older, focusing on the transition to adulthood ([00:01:27](#)).
- **Needs Assessment Findings:** A needs assessment was conducted through literature review, a community profile narrative, one-on-one caregiver interviews, and surveys of therapy professionals ([00:01:27](#)). Literature supports the need for the cooperative, highlighting the importance of facilitating a successful transition to adulthood with lifelong supports, not just in childhood ([00:02:32](#)). Caregivers' biggest need was for socialization opportunities with peers, which was also found to be beneficial for individuals with IDD through engagement in community-based activities ([00:03:44](#)).
- **Community Need and Service Gaps:** Survey results indicated a critical need for an organization like the Dream Cooperative within the Upper Cumberland region, with 80% of caregivers and 92.9% of therapy professionals rating it as a critical community need ([00:04:52](#)). Therapy professionals identified limited resources, lack of family support, and restricted opportunities for socialization or job training as the biggest gaps for clients transitioning out of pediatric therapies. A significant concern is that the most common outcome for clients transitioning out of activities is remaining at home with limited meaningful engagement ([00:06:17](#)).

- **Prioritized Service Areas:** Therapy professionals rated key service areas for the cooperative, with the two highest-rated being socialization with peers and life skills, mirroring the priorities identified by caregivers. These findings provide a starting point for prioritizing programming efforts, indicating strong alignment on which services are most valuable to the client population ([00:07:28](#)).
- **Program Planning Documents:** The presenter completed foundational program planning by creating a customizable grant template, researching potential funding opportunities, and developing a spreadsheet of applicable grants. A comprehensive sustainability handbook and programming overview were also developed, detailing organizational structure, goals for the first year of programming, client referrals, funding, and marketing strategies ([00:08:42](#)). A logic model was created to visually map out resources, activities, and anticipated outcomes to serve as a roadmap for the program's operation ([00:10:00](#)).
- **Website Development and Testimonies:** A website was created to consolidate information about the Dream Cooperative ([00:10:00](#)). A suggestion was made to feature "Dream Makers" (donors) and their stories, which could include personal testimonies about the positive impact of the organization's work ([00:11:13](#)). The website also contains a section with nonprofit resources, including a public Google Doc for community resources in the Upper Cumberland area to help families find information easily ([00:12:14](#)).
- **Community Outreach and Partnerships:** Efforts are underway to connect with Vice Mayor Luke Eldridge to potentially add a link for special needs families on the city of Cookeville's webpage, which currently lacks this resource. A comprehensive learning module toolkit, structured around key OT-based service areas like life skills, work skills, and arts, was developed to provide two and a half months of planned programming for a Monday, Wednesday, Friday operating schedule ([00:14:06](#)).
- **Programming Structure and Focus:** The planned programming will not require all participants to attend the same module at the same time; instead, classes will be available based on individual interests gathered from surveys, which may be small groups or one-on-one sessions ([00:17:26](#)). Social events, such as game nights and cooking, will be larger group activities. A partnership with the Grove Healing Collective will provide community-center space with amenities like pool tables and a large kitchen, with an agreement for hourly rental ([00:18:26](#)) ([00:20:45](#)).

- Scheduling and Age Demographics:** The proposed schedule includes mornings (8 AM to 12 PM) for individuals 18 and under, and afternoons/evenings for those 18 and over, to avoid mixing age groups ([00:19:40](#)). Mondays and Wednesdays will likely feature structured activities, while Fridays may be reserved for social events and recreational activities ([00:20:45](#)). An additional goal is to offer a homeschool co-op in the mornings to provide an accommodating environment for homeschooled children who may face challenges in traditional groups ([00:29:55](#)).
- Workforce Grants and Financial Partnerships:** The organization is actively pursuing American Job Center grants to pay individuals aged 14 to 24 with disabilities to work at the cooperative in areas like gardening or pet care ([00:21:35](#)). Additionally, grants are available for individuals aged 55 and up to serve as paid assistants and help without the cooperative incurring direct labor costs ([00:22:45](#)). The partnership with the American Job Center allows clients to earn money while engaging in therapy, providing them with funds for rewards ([00:23:45](#)).
- Developing Life Skills and Specialized Partnerships:** The use of the community kitchen and planned inclusion of a washer/dryer will allow for activities focusing on daily life skills, such as cooking, laundry, and making a bed ([00:23:45](#)). A partnership with "On the Avenue" and the "Ability Machine" in Nashville is being sought to create a second location for them, offering opportunities in graphic design and advertising for neurodiverse individuals ([00:24:43](#)).
- Inclusivity and Religious Affiliation:** The cooperative aims to be welcoming to all, including those on the LGBTQ spectrum and individuals who may not feel comfortable in resources associated with specific faith-based organizations. While the organization's approach is positive, it will not push any specific religious agenda ([00:27:57](#)).
- Financial Planning and Board Duties:** The organization is navigating the process of accepting donations while awaiting 501(c)(3) approval, noting that donations will be retroactively tax-deductible once approved ([00:32:45](#)) ([00:34:26](#)). A decision was made to have multiple people on the bank account to ensure two signatures are available for checks ([00:51:55](#)). **Heidi Clopton, Dawn Fry, and Mark Wilson will be signers on the bank account.** The treasurer will help sign off on checks and keep accounts, with an agreement to explore using QuickBooks ([00:35:47](#)).

- Fundraising Initiatives and Committees:** The organization is planning two major fundraisers: a golf tournament, possibly at Honky Tonk in Sparta, to raise funds for a year of operation. Mark offered to help with the Golf Committee to secure sponsors ([00:36:52](#)). A second event will be screening the documentary *Lost Potential* featuring Temple Grandin at Tennessee Tech University (TTU), aiming to raise awareness about the employment challenges faced by neurodiverse individuals ([00:39:38](#)).
- Membership and Revenue Streams:** The organization is exploring the creation of membership tiers (\$30 or \$50 per month) to provide upfront budgeting for the year ([00:44:10](#)). They are also investigating whether individuals can use their Employment Community First (ECF) community funds for membership fees and activities ([00:45:23](#)). A non-traditional fundraising attempt will be a make-your-own-bouquet flower stand at the Unique Day event, seeking wholesale flower sourcing ([00:46:29](#)).
- Bylaws and Board Structure:** Dawn and the Heidi reviewed the articles of incorporation and bylaws, with the understanding that the bylaws are an internal document that can be changed by the board ([00:48:41](#)). All board members must sign the bylaws for the bank, but only the articles of incorporation must be filed with the Secretary of State ([00:49:48](#)). The board approved that purchases under \$300 are automatically approved, and purchases over that amount require written (email or text) approval from the board ([00:53:55](#)).
- Future Timeline and Space Setup:** The goal is to have things rolling by August or September, contingent on the renovation of the shared space at the Grove Healing Collective. The renovations will include creating calming spaces, a mini workout area, a kitchen, a mini apartment for life skills training, and an outdoor fenced area with a potential greenhouse for safe walking and nature engagement ([00:57:55](#)).

Heidi Clopton OTR/L

2026-05-13

Heidi Clopton, OTR/L

Dawn Fry

2026-05-08

Dawn Fry

Mark E. Wilson

2026-05-08

Mark Wilson

Alyssa Oluwalana M.S., CCC-SLP

2026-05-08

Alyssa Oluwalana

Audit trail

Details

FILE NAME	Dream Cooperative Board Meeting - 2026_04_07 17_04 CDT - Notes by Gemini - 5_8_26, 1_17 PM (1) - 5/8/26, 5:11 PM.pdf
STATUS	Signed
STATUS TIMESTAMP	2026/05/13 13:32:48 UTC

Activity

SENT	alyssaoluwalana@centerofdev.net sent a signature request to: Heidi Clopton OTRL (dreamcooperative1@gmail.com)	2026/05/08 22:11:34 UTC
SIGNED	Signed by Heidi Clopton OTRL (dreamcooperative1@gmail.com)	2026/05/13 13:32:48 UTC
COMPLETED	This document has been signed by all signers and is complete	2026/05/13 13:32:48 UTC

The email address indicated above for each signer may be associated with a Google account, and may either be the primary email address or secondary email address associated with that account.