Words Matter!  By Max Barrows

“The passage of the law eliminating the use of the “R” word in the Vermont Laws makes feel like I matter.”

_Maisie LeJeunnesse_

Green Mountain Self-Advocates worked on a Respectful Language Bill. This bill passed through the legislature this year. The purpose of the bill is to remove any demeaning language from state laws that refers to persons with disabilities. Our interest in passing a bill was is in response to Rosa’s Law, a federal law that eliminates the “r” word from federal laws and replaces it with the term intellectual disability.

Not so long ago, the term “Mental R#tardation” did not have any intention of putting down persons with disabilities, but times have changed. Now, in our everyday culture, the “r” word and other demeaning language is used as slang and to insult other people. Persons with disabilities say they have been insulted with the “r” word. We see this in school settings, movies, social networking and on the street. Other state self-advocacy organizations are currently advocating for respectful language and attitudes. GMSA felt like it was time to do the same.

This is a great opportunity for bringing awareness to the public on this issue and to educate people about the importance of being respectful. Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who don’t walk in our shoes. They’re not aware of how we feel, having to hear these words. I strongly recommend that more GMSA members contact their local legislators to thank them for voting for the Respectful Language Bill and tell them why this is important to you!
Green Mountain Self-Advocates

The purpose of Green Mountain Self-Advocates is for people with developmental disabilities to take control over their own lives, make decisions, solve problems and speak for themselves. We educate and make the public aware of the strengths, rights, wants and needs of people with developmental disabilities.

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Autism Awareness Event Held at White House

In late April, I was invited to an Autism Awareness event in Washington, DC. The location was in the West Wing of the White House. I was representing Self-advocates Becoming Empowered. Other partner organizations represented were Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, The Arc, Autism NOW, etc. The event was for people to come and speak on behalf of persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The focus was to gather information on how to better look at this developmental disability and speak up about how to better recognize Autism on a positive level. Along with partner organizations, I spoke up about the change that needs to happen among attitudes toward Autism. A lot of the attendees are strong believers of true inclusion of persons with Autism and Developmental Disabilities. The event went very well and it was a great opportunity to be a guest of the White House. The information that was presented will help me to look at Autism not as a medical issue needing a cure. Persons with Autism should not be viewed as needing to be fixed. Society’s attitude about including people with Autism needs to be repaired. I came back to Vermont excited to continue working on these issues!
Maisie LaJeunesse is a junior at Spaulding High School in Barre, VT. In 2010 and 2011, she worked as an intern at Green Mountain Self-Advocates writing articles about self-advocacy.

Over 40 years ago the terminology “feeble-minded” was replaced with “mental retardation.” How many of us have heard someone say “you R#tard” or “he/she is a R#tard.” It has an obvious slang meaning of stupid, and is a hurtful, negative insult. I hope the passage of Rosa’s law will reduce or eliminate the use of the “R” word.

Rosa’s law is a law that makes the wording of education, health and labor laws more respectable toward individuals with intellectual disabilities. President Barack Obama signed Rosa’s law into federal law on October 5, 2010. The effect of Rosa’s Law will be meaningful because it will remove words like “mental retardation” from federal statutes. These terms are hurtful and have been used to tease, taunt, label and stigmatize many individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Nina Marcellino, Rosa’s mom, found out that Rosa was labeled retarded at school. Rosa has downs syndrome, her three siblings do not use the “R” word and Mrs. Marcellino does not allow its use in her house. Nina joined other parents and her state delegate in the introduction of a bill to change the terminology in Maryland. Rosa’s 14 year old brother Nick said, “What you call people is how you treat them. What you call my sister is how you will treat her. If you believe she’s ‘r#tarded’ it invites taunting, stigma. It invites bullying and it also invites the slammed doors of being treated with respect and dignity.” His testimony explaining the need for a change in the terminology to the Maryland General Assembly had a great impact.

“Respect, value and dignity-everyone deserves to be treated this way, including people with intellectual disabilities,” said Dr. Timothy P. Shriver, Chairman and CEO of Special Olympics.
My trip to Boston

By Max Barrows

In July I had an opportunity to go to Boston to the Syracuse Institutes summer conference and present with Tracy Thresher. It was fantastic I had a blast.

did you meet any new people who were interesting?

Yes the doctors doing the research and the other professors from Syracuse. I got to speak with them with Lillianne. They were interested in movement patterns and typing. Lillianne is the physical therapist from our school.

did both your Mom and Dad go?

My parents were very proud of me both of them had never experienced something like that. My mom was overwelmed especially when she heard Tracy talk. He read every paragraph out loud.

My mom had a hard time but my dad and i had fun but didnt get much sleep.

was there a pool at the hotel?

I swam everyday. I like the city I wanted to go see a red sox game with my dad but we didn’t get to go. I don’t know if my autism could have handled that.

Being at the conference in Boston gave me great opportunity to prepare and present material in a much larger forum. I had an important audience and it was a much bigger group to talk to. Although it produced a lot of anxiety i used my support systems to help me through Tracy Thresher was the best. I met great and influential people. It gave me new opportunity for advocacy work.

The conference gave me the voice to speak up strongly for students with autism and they should have access to FC much earlier in life then i did. I am determined to crusade on and speak up for those who cant until they can. I want to meet Anti someday from the movie.

I met Henry from Florida he uses FC and we were able to type together and he said they were coming to Vermont to find out more about self advocacy.

My most favorite/memorable part of the trip was When i was able to meet some of the research doctors and tell them how much fc has changed my life. i enjoyed meeting and talking with henry.
A heart-felt thank you from GMSA to the Council for funding this newsletter and our organization overall!
The Advisor’s Role

Tips On What To Do

☆ Give advise to the group when asked
☆ Treating people with respect means being open to all the options we suggest
☆ Have creative ideas—think outside of the box
☆ Look at the person as a person not at their disability — Focus on our strengths
☆ Feel comfortable with people with all different kinds of disabilities
☆ Believe that labels hurt us: mental retardation, client, consumer
☆ Talk to us like other people
☆ Help us get to meetings
☆ Show us how to make our own decisions—even if you do not agree.
☆ Encourage us to speak out for what we want to do
☆ Give and take criticism
☆ Encourage us to use our own words
The Advisor’s Role

More Tips On What To Do

☆ Go to all the meetings
☆ Be our equal not our boss
☆ Remind us about group agreements
☆ Listen
☆ Find ways to help everyone get involved
☆ Make sure everyone knows when and where the meetings are happening.

PLEASE

 tà Don’t run the group
 tà Don’t have a closed mind
 tà Don’t take over for the leader
 tà Don’t tell us what we should do
 tà Don’t make decisions without the members
 tà Don’t assume that everyone agrees
 tà Don’t talk too much
 tà Don’t do too much for us
A Few of the Great Resources at www.gmsavt.org

Get the Life You Want: A Transition Toolbox

This toolbox helps self-advocates, support people, and families to plan for the transitions self-advocates make as they move into independence and adulthood during high school. The checklists cover topics that range from voting to relationships and job-searching. These are an excellent resource to help get organized for the adventures ahead!

Peer-to-Peer Guide on Domestic & Sexual Violence

People with developmental disabilities can be more at risk for abuse for many reasons. GMSA developed this guide to support self-advocates, staff, members, volunteers, and allies to know what domestic and sexual violence is and to know what to say and what to do when they hear about abusive situations.

Green Mountain Self-Advocates Handbook

GMSA supports over 20 local self-advocacy groups in Vermont. This handbook is the basic guide we give to all local self-advocacy groups to help them start and run their groups. The handbook outlines best practices for how to organize your own self-advocacy group. It includes information about how to: 1) Run meetings 2) Problem-solve 3) Set goals 4) Pick officers 5) Find an advisor 6) Fundraise, and 7) Include support staff in group activities. This tool is a great resource to help self-advocates form their own groups and be organized and

Getting Your Message Across: Communicating with People with Intellectual Disabilities

This manual is a reference book to be used to help local and state self-advocacy groups form meaningful partnerships with advocacy and provider organizations. The manual will help people with and without developmental disabilities to work side-by-side to improve services and support for people with developmental disabilities. It includes tips on how to make information cognitively accessible.