GMSA Officers Election Results

By Kyle Moriarty

I want to start off by saying congratulations to all who ran. It was nice to see everyone who was interested in running for office. The results are in.

For president it is Randy Lizotte. He is our previous president. Randy was reelected. He is one of the founding fathers of the local advocacy group, Speak Up Addison County. He is now working to support Next Step Self-Advocacy of St. Albans. Randy is patient and understanding. Makes sure everyone’s voice gets heard. Exactly what we need in a president.

Our secretary is Lori Cyr. Lori is an active member of GMSA. She attends every meeting and pays attention and asks questions. She is the secretary for her local self-advocacy group, GATSA (Getting Acquainted Through Self Advocacy).

David Frye won the vice president election. He started GLBTQ group in Burlington. Those groups are now popping up all over the state. David shows good leadership skills doing all these groups.

Nicole Villemaire is our treasurer. She just graduated from Think College at University of Vermont and finished an internship at GMSA. She is an active member of her local self-advocacy group; Next Step Self-Advocacy.
GMSA, along with other partner organizations, attended an Anti-Racism Training facilitated by the Catalyst Project of San Francisco. The training was on how to strengthen relationships in our community, and build on vision of justice in our culture. The training explores how racism is not just about being prejudice but how institutions or different parts of our community such as schools, law enforcement, and work places, act to continue the pattern of inequality. This training also looks at the idea of “white privilege” and how that undermines our efforts to build strong, healthy communities.

As a young adult with Autism and a person of color, I strongly think it is important to have the disability rights movement and civil rights movement connected. Most of our members have not been around many persons of color growing up in Vermont. Now, the diversity in Vermont is increasing. We have more refugees, migrant workers, and people from other cultures making our state home. This is an opportunity for our membership to be more open minded toward individuals of other races. We need NOT see this as an “us versus them” issue. I strongly believe that groups should NOT be set against each other. We need to learn that we are ALL in this together.

Nicole LeBlanc
Comments

“I learned that racism has a lot to do with people’s attitudes toward society. This training has made us aware of our own biases and stereotypes that have come up in our organization like around the topic of refugees. For example, “Should those people be getting services since they haven’t lived here for a while versus everyone who has?”

Continued on Page 3
One thing that got my attention from this training was how the attitudes of racism are pretty close to the attitudes we face as persons with disabilities. Persons of color can be treated like we’re a problem while living our lives. For example, I was once questioned by the police while sitting on Main Street in Montpelier minding my own business. I don’t think that would have happened if I were a white person. Racial profiling by the police is an example of institutional racism.

Persons with disabilities face similar attitudes while speaking up for what matters to us. For example, when we stand up to budget cuts, sometimes we see the attitude that we are just takers of services. This contributes to attitudes that we are people that don’t deserve to live in the community like everyone else. In both of these situations, we can be seen as a problem to society. This is an attitude that needs to be fixed. Overall, it is important to become more aware of our attitudes about race and how it relates to our experience as persons with disabilities. I hope that moving forward people are more aware of the diversity increasing in Vermont. I would like to further see us open up our hearts and minds as a society.

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 disabilities.

GMSA
2 Prospect Street, # 6
Montpelier, VT 05602
1-800-564-9990
info@gmsavt.org
www.gmsavt.org
In July I did my first keynote presentation at the People First of Missouri self advocacy conference in Kansas City MO. The conference theme was LUAU: Listening, Understanding, Advocating and Unity. My title for my presentation was: **Control Your Own Destiny or Someone Else Will!**

When I was asked to do the keynote speech in Kansas City Missouri I felt “over the moon.” It was a nice wonderful surprise. I finally hit the jackpot after meeting Krystal and Laura in the District of Columbia at the Disability Policy Seminar in the hub of the political universe. It felt empowering to hit the jackpot.

The steps I went through to prepare for this speaking engagement were to:

- Draft an outline of what to say using the conference theme LUAU.
- Come up with a Subtitle: Control Your Own Destiny or Someone Else Will
- Tell my Life story of Low Expectation Syndrome and Bullying
- Talk about Civil Rights and Self Advocacy
- Make a PowerPoint Presentation on all topic slides.
- Scramble at last minute to finish my PowerPoint.
- Do Practice Runs
- Present in front of 130 people!

The next time I do this it would be nice to be under less pressure in the actual length of time I set aside to come up with the presentation. At times I felt pressured and stressed because of such a tight deadline. Making sure I schedule more time to prepare **Continued on Page 5**
Keynote Experience in Kansas City

would have been nice and would have made this project less stressful. Looking back it would have been better if I had spent more time on this assignment in June. That way I wouldn’t have been so crammed towards the end of July.

My flight from Vermont to Kansas City went pretty smoothly. I had a new experience on the way there when I discovered I was seated in an Exit row seat. I asked the flight attendant to seat me in a different seat because I have autism and I am do not feel I am fit to assist in an emergency. This is an example of advocating just like in the conference theme of LUAU (Listening, Understanding, Advocating, and Unity). When I arrived at the Courtyard Marriott as the Keynote speaker I felt like I was some big shot from another state with lots of political and social capital. For the keynote, I talked about how I got involved in the self-advocacy movement and what it was like to grow up with Low Expectation Syndrome. I got the audience engaged about how to be somebody and how to speak up and see how they can take charge of their life just like I have. Getting up in front of 130 people and giving the actual speech was the easiest part of all.

I liked listening to the crowd share their stories. It was fun and engaging. Lastly I loved all the Rock-Star like round of applause I got and having people on the dance floor say, “hey I got to dance with the Keynote speaker?” Everyone there made me feel very included and welcomed. One thing that is nice about having a conference with a smaller crowd is that you get to know people better and there’s more opportunity for networking.

This was a blast and I look forward to doing more in the future.
I recently went to the Summer Institute on Communication and Inclusion (ICI). The 2013 ICI theme was Connection, Communication and Creativity. It was at Syracuse University, Sheraton conference center. I had a good time. I was able to work with my father on our typing skills. That is very important to me because that is how I communicate with people. I need to be able to communicate to advocate.

I enjoyed the keynote speaker on the first morning Elizabeth (Ibby) Grace. Her energy was a lot of fun. She had a positive message to her presentation. She told us how she struggled to keep her mind and body focused which we can all relate to. She also talked without needing a device, I am envious. Ibby also spoke to us with her device to show us that she isn’t all that different from us every day typers. I recommend reading her blogs.

I also enjoyed going to the showing of Mark Utter’s movie, I Am in Here. He is an inspiration to me. Seeing someone with autism show what it is like in their day to day life helps with our advocacy movement. It was good to see struggles so people are more aware of what it is we are really going through. Seeing Mark stranded hit close to home. I was forgotten about on a school bus once. It was scary.

I did a presentation with my communication alliance group. I shared how I am working for GMSA and how I have worked with our legislature. It felt good to share despite intense feelings of anxiety. It helped

Continued on Page 7
having our whole group together. Knowing that others were there to support me was key. I am glad we have the group we do because we all support one another in any situation. We also all have positive facilitators that support us in the way that we need to express ourselves and have a voice. I am looking forward to going next year. I recommend it to everyone who uses fc, because they will gain confidence in their abilities. It gives the typer and facilitator a chance to make their skills grow as a pair and move forward together. I’m grateful my facilitator was able to go because she is new and I think she brought back good skills to apply to our everyday typing. It is important to attend these conferences to gain knowledge and the control you need to grow in your communication skills.

Want to Learn More? Check Out These Links!

Tracy Thresher is a voice to listen to. Strong in the self-advocacy movement he is also a movie star. He is a mentor and very positive person. Always has a word of encouragement.
http://www.wretchesandjabberers.org/tracy/index.php

Larry Bissonette is another active self-advocate. He is an artist and movie star. Larry is a green mountain man.
http://www.wretchesandjabberers.org/larry/index.php

Ibby Grace is autistic. She has her PhD and is a teacher. She was a keynote speaker at the Summer Institute on Communication and Inclusion.
http://www.tinygracenotes.com/
This year we are celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the closing of Brandon Training School which was an institution where people with developmental disabilities were segregated from their communities beginning in the 1915 to its closing in 1993. We are also mourning the “Death of Inclusion” in VT. In 1993 Governor Howard Dean declared that we would support people with developmental disabilities to live fulfilling lives in the community with the support of their families and communities. Soon after Brandon was closed we closed our sheltered workshops and moved people to real jobs in the community. This has helped us become number 1 in the nation and inspire other states to be like Vermont in the field of developmental disability services. As the old saying goes, “Our Past is our future, Those who fail to learn from history will repeat it” by George Santana!

Friday ~ November 15th
20th Anniversary of the Closing of Brandon Training School Celebration
1:00 to 5:00
- Light Refreshments
- Self-Advocate Speakers
- Dance with a DJ

Killington Grand Hotel,
Killington, VT

Contact: 802-871-3065
Brandon Remembrance Day Reflection

By: Nicole LeBlanc

On a rainy cold Friday the 13th day I attended a remembrance day for the survivors of Brandon Training School. One of my most favorite parts of the day was being interviewed by NPR and talking about my life story and why people with disabilities need to live in the community. I empathize that the Olmstead decision is the law of the land as Sharon Lewis, Commissioner of AIDD says when she responded to VOR, an organization that wants to keep people with disabilities in institutions. Other things I described are how it feels like Vermont is heading backwards by saying that our system is unsustainable, and it feels like the state is abandoning the promise it made when Brandon closed in 1993. They promised that people would live in the community with the support of community based services and the help of their families. Now that promise could be broken by back breaking budget cuts and they say we can’t afford to fund the system adequately. In addition she asked me if I were born 50 years ago do I think I would have ended up at Brandon? I responded by saying “NO.” My father would have kept me at home. My favorite part of the day was looking in one of the old Brandon buildings! It brought back memories of my days in Job Corps. When I look at the pictures of all the beds lined up one by one in a room with a gazillion people, that is similar to what it is like at Job Corps where you have to share a room with 3-7 people in some cases. Worst of all you don’t get to choose who you live with just like in Brandon Training School or in any other state institution. I wish for the day when the U.S.A is free from institutions and congregate programs! We must Free Our People Now and Uphold the Promise of the Olmstead Decision and ADA! NO MORE BACK IN THE DAY!

I had the amazing opportunity to present with my mentor, Tracy Thresher and his other student, Maleia Darling, on Friday, May 30th at the statewide Voices and Choices conference. It was an awesome experience. We got to do individual presentations of our experiences. It felt good to be up on stage with them. Showing people the bond between mentor and his students. Gives people hope that they too can find someone to look up to and go to for advice.

I had my first time facilitator with me and she helped calm my nerves. Her positive attitude helped calm any nerves I had. It was an exhilarating experience. Spreading the mentoring word as a group was good for everyone to hear. It shows them that as a group, we can still help each other. Being on stage with my peers was good to show others the power of people banding together. It is a positive movement we are trying to start. Going to Voices and Choices has always been a lot of fun. Presenting is a totally different experience. It makes you realize the power your voice has. I hope to present next year as well.

HATS OFF to the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

A heart-felt thank you from GMSA to the Council for funding this newsletter, Voices and Choices and our organization overall!
Voices and Choices 2013

“We Are Vermont Strong”

Thanks for a GREAT conference! See you all again next year!

Save the Date!
Voices and Choices 2014
May 29th and 30th
Today the local group is marching in the 4th of July parade. What message do you want to give your fellow citizens of Montpelier?

We have a voice too. Just like you we want to be heard. We need to have a choice in everything we do.

Dream big - what are two ways you want to be more independent over the next year?

I want to be able to be an independent typer in the next few years. I have a lot of hurdles to cross first and I’m ready for them. Another goal is to be living on my own with a support person. I have wanted this for a while.

What messages do you have for the students who are graduated from Montpelier high school this past June?

I want to tell you all that you can do it. I went from a manic self-harming child to a typing regulated new person. Anything is possible. If I can overcome that you can overcome what obstacles get in your way.
Okay dream real big. Pretend that it is your 30th birthday. What is your big accomplishment? What did you do that made you proud between the years of 23 to 30?

I would tell everyone how I was able to become an independent typer. I am living on my own in a house with limited support staff. I would speak to everyone how easy it was to get to this place. I want to be able to tell people how many laws I have helped pass for everyone with a disability. I want people to look up to me like I look up to Tracy and be a role model for many people. I hope to have a big role in the self-advocacy movement not just in Vermont but nationwide.

Keep Up With GMSA Online!

Like us on Facebook!
www.facebook.com/pages/Green-Mountain-Self-Advocates

Tweet with us on Twitter!
www.twitter.com/VTGMSA

Watch us on YouTube!
http://www.youtube.com/user/GMSAVT
Message from the GMSA Board President

Over the next 2 years I hope to work with our members to educate the public and different organizations about who we are and what we do. We need to set up opportunities for veteran members to mentor new members. Also explore more ways to provide peer support over the phone and via Facebook.

Our goal is that Green Mountain Self-Advocates will be around long after I am dead and gone. To make that happen we need more people who are willing to say the things that need to be said that nobody wants to say!

If I could change one thing in this world it would be that Vermonters would be more understanding of people with disabilities. I want people to ask questions first before you make any assumptions.

Did you know that Green Mountain Self-Advocates won the lottery!

Well actually, what really happened is better than winning the lottery! This summer we welcomed Skye Peebles as a new full time ally to work for GMSA. Many of our members already know this talented, energetic, thoughtful and caring ally. Skye Peebles has been the creative spark behind our website and has spent countless hours writing winning grants proposals.

Our members are drawn to her kind and supportive spirit that makes us feel our dreams are possible. Key your eye on Skye as she takes us to new heights!
David Frye Honored for Leading Statewide GLTBQ Self-Advocacy Support Groups

David Frye, Vice-President of GMSA, is the coordinator of RU12?’s LGBTQ Disabilities Rights Network of Support Groups. David was given the Vermont Pride Award for Individual Activism on May 4, 2013 at the RU12? Community Center 15th Annual LGBTQ Community Dinner. His important work includes creating support groups and endless hours of outreach. His goal is to connect LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning) Vermonters with disabilities. Groups meet weekly at the following locations:

**Tuesdays at 4:30pm in Burlington**
RU12? Community Center, 255 So. Champlain St., Suite 12

**Wednesdays at 5:30pm in St. Albans**
Northwestern Medical Center, conference room 4

**Second Wednesday at 3:30pm in Morrisville**
Centennial Library, Copley Room

**Thursdays at 3:00pm in Burlington**
The Wellness Co op, 43 King St.

**Fridays at 11:00am in St. Johnsbury**
Unitarian Universalist Church, 47 Cherry St.

If you aren’t able to make it to an RU12? Disability Group you can join an online group through Pal Talk Monday nights 7:00pm-9:00pm in the Vermont Chat GLBTQ And Disability chat room. Want more information? Call 802-860-7812.
Local Self-Advocacy Contacts

**Advocates for Action**
Call Tammy Maberry or James Paradis at 376-6964. Meetings are the 1st Thursday in Bellows Falls.

**Bennington Peer Support**
Call Melanie Brunina or Lisa Rudiakov at 442-5491. Meetings are the 3rd Wednesday of every month in Bennington.

**BSAC - Burlington Self-Advocacy Club**
Call Jayne Weber or Christen Georges 488-6500. Meetings are every other Friday in Burlington.

**CAT - Capitol Advocates Together**
Call Kaiya Andrews or Karen Noone at 272-9864. Meetings are the 2nd Thursday every month in Montpelier.

**Champlain Voices**
Call Justine Cuce or Paul Nichols at 655-0511. Meetings are every Monday in Colchester.

**Communication Alliance**
Call Tracey Thresher or Rachel Perkins at 479-2502. Meetings are the 1st & 3rd Wednesdays in Barre.

**COPS - Connections of Peer Support**
Call Liz Peets or Cristy Golec at 866-1833. Meetings are 1st Monday night of the month.

**Families First Peer Group**
Call Greg Masterson at 464-9633. Meetings are in Brattleboro.

**Friends Helping Friends**
Call Wendy Capobianco or Rachel MacMartin at 479-2502. Meetings are on 2nd Wednesday and 3rd Thursday evening of the month.

**GATSA Getting Acquainted Through Self-Advocacy**
Call Lori Cyr or Patti Mack at 888-5026. Meetings are every 1st or 3rd Mondays of the month.

**LBGTQ - Support Groups for Self-Advocates Who are Gay**
There are 4 groups supported by RU12 and GMSA that meet once a week. Meetings are in St. Albans, Morrisville, Burlington and St. Johnsbury. Call David at 238-2685.

**Next Step Self-Advocates of St. Albans**
Call Sydnee Boyd or Randy Lizotte at 782-8694 Ext. 102. Meetings are the 2nd and 4th Fridays in St Albans.

**Our Drop In Center**
Call Stephanie DeCesare or Nate Compo at 334-7310. They are their every day during the week in Newport.

**RAMB - Rockin’ Advocates of Montpelier or Barre**
Call Jen Olsen or Maisie Lajenesesse at 476-4811. Meetings are every other Thursday in Barre.

**RAPS - Randolph Area Peer Support**
Call Lisa Martel or Dan Dunn at 728-4476. Meetings are twice a month on Tuesday in Randolph.

**Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered of Rutland**
Call Lisa Lynch or Tammy Letheridge at 775-1370. Meetings are on the 2nd Tuesday of the month in Rutland.

**Speak Up Addison County**
Call Michael Kilbreth or Rebecca Holbrook at 388-3702. Meetings every other Thursday in Middlebury.

**SAVY - Self-Advocates Voices or You**
Call Patty Grassette or Gina Brown at 888-2417. Meetings are on Friday twice a month.

**Vermont Choices**
Call Levi Gardner or Heather O’Rourke at 748-6350 Ext. 1113. Meetings are every Wednesday in St. Johnsbury.