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 Paula Colbert or Lisa Rudiak 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 Shae Martin 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
Contact Tracy 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 479-4076. 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.

LGBTQ - Support Groups for Self-Advocates Who are Gay
There are 3 groups supported by RU12 and GMSA that meet once a week. Meetings are in St. Albans, 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 & 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 Lajenesse at 476-4811. Meetings are every other Thursday in Barre.

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 Lethridge at 775-1370. Meetings are on the 2nd Tuesday of the month in Rutland.

Speak Up! Addison County
Call Rebecca Holbrook at 388-3702. Meetings every other Thursday in Middlebury.

Strong Advocacy Voices & 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.

Windsor County Self-Advocacy
Call Debra Savery at 886-4567 x2708. Just getting started!

Lessons learned from the past 20 years:

1. More people are dating
2. People are getting married
3. More people are working
4. More people are volunteering
5. More people are doing professional jobs
6. More people are serving on local and state advisory boards
7. Self-advocates are testifying in the legislature
8. Local groups are putting on legislative breakfasts, luncheons, and picnics
9. More youth are in our movement
10. Self-Advocates raise funds for them
11. Self-Advocates provide trainings to staff that work for them
12. Self-Advocates get interviewed on radio and TV
13. Local groups host their own public access TV shows
14. More people with disabilities are going to college
15. Self-advocates are making movies about their life experiences
16. Self-advocates are making movies about their lives
17. Self-Advocates are making videos for YouTube
18. People are doing internships
19. Self-Advocates are traveling and going on vacations by themselves more
20. People are living more on their own

GMSA celebrates our 20th Anniversary! Speaking For Ourselves
In February 2014, GMSA brought on a super NEAT new staff member! Hilary Clark, a self-advocate from Fayston, VT, is the new Project Outreach Coordinator for the North East Advocates Together (NEAT) Project. This project brings self-advocacy organizations from VT, ME, MA, RI, NY, and NH together to help each other learn new skills and ideas for improving self-advocacy through using technology. Hilary’s hobbies are snowmobiling, Alpine skiing, learning how to play horse polo, watching her brother car race at Thunder Road, and playing tennis. She also coaches kids how to down hill ski race.

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

advocacy. It is who I am. Although opinions do not matter, learn to take criticism. Criticism allows you to strengthen yourself. Allow yourself to hear the pros and cons based on your character, you must listen to learn; learn to understand.

Speak up for yourself and own your words. When you advocate for yourself, you remove the blinds from people’s eyes for what they thought you were, to exactly who you are. The importance of self-advocating is to know that anywhere you want to get to in life is to be driven by your own charisma and beliefs. Understand who you are and what you are about.

All in all, self-advocacy boils down to strengths and needs. What are your capabilities and how can you utilize them. We learn everyday more and more about ourselves. Self-Advocacy is about growing in ways that we learn to strengthen our skills and utilize what we know. We must continue to learn to grow.

Being in a wheelchair has been a struggle. It is difficult for me to do the things that others do because other places are not handicap accessible. I’ve been in a wheelchair for as long as I remember and though it has not been easy, I just make the best of it and go day by day. I can remember the time I got stuck on campus because it was snowing the day before and I had to meet my dad in front of Campus Safety. On my journey I got stuck on snow underneath my chair. I tried my hardest to power myself out of the snow but good thing I did not stop trying. Just when I was about to quit, I freed myself from the snow. I feel that this is a great example of how encouragement always stayed in my mind and it motivates me to keep going when things get tough. If you’re someone like me going through the struggle, just know it’s going to be alright.
“Self-Advocacy is about Being True to You.”

By Nicole Sousis

Self-advocacy is an understanding of your strengths and needs. It involves your goals, knowing your legal rights and responsibilities; and then communicating those to others. I think advocacy is very important to me because it’s the action of representing one’s self or one’s view and interest. You should not let other people speak up for you.

You are your own person, capable of making your own decisions about your life. Self-advocacy is all about making your voice be heard and knowing you have the ability to succeed. It also gives you the chance to participate in decisions that personally affect you. To me it is important to stand up for myself when it’s needed; I have made this part of my everyday routine and this is what I believe.

A story that illustrates how my beliefs in self-advocacy were shaped was set in Burlington, VT at a conference that I attended. While I was there, I was present in some activities such as arts and crafts and games that had to do with advocacy. I also met a lot of new people and made a lot of new friends that I could connect with about this topic. What the conference led me to believe was everyone deserves to be treated with respect and love. Believing in encouragement has shaped me into the person I am today. It shaped me by making me stronger, and keeping me humbled and respectful to other and their opinions.

The respect I give is due in return. People will respect my understanding, knowledge, and exposure to self-advocacy. Self-advocacy is about being true to you. I am an advocate for self-

6 Questions for Randy Lizotte on Being a Professional Peer Advocate

Randy Lizotte currently works at Northwestern Counseling and Support Services in St. Albans, Vermont as a Peer Advocate.

1. What is your job like? What do you do every day?
   We do a lot of office work but my job is exciting because we never know when we are going to be asked, no told, to drop everything we are doing and focus on peers or being asked to meet with clients on their team or treatment meeting.

2. What kind of activities do you work on with peers?
   We get to help them achieve their goals. If their goal is to see friends and or family more we help them figure out how to that.

3. What do you like about working with your peers?
   Helping them change their quality of life whether it’s little things or big things.

4. What have you learned in this job?
   I have gotten more of an education in this job than any other job I had before. I have learned not to make assumptions about anyone because I was proven wrong on many occasions.

5. What kind of things do you teach others at your job?
   I think the most important thing I have taught both staff and clients and advocates is out of the box thinking.

6. What advice do you have for other self-advocates who would like this type of job?
   I would tell them to go to their agency with confidence and really highlight their strengths and talents.

NEXT UP: In the Fall Newsletter we will hear from Nicole Villamiere, another Peer Advocate working in Vermont. Stay tuned!
They helped me transition. At one point, right before I moved, I went into a deep depression. I prayed that my life would end because I was so unhappy. My team came together to help me get back on track. Because I spoke up for myself and didn’t give up, I live in a home that seems to be a perfect match. I have very nice home providers. I am more independent and feel like I’m finally an equal.

I joined self-advocacy three years ago. It took a lot of time for me to become comfortable speaking up for myself. I’m not as anxious anymore. If I have a problem, I go to a friend or my home provider and try to work it out as soon as possible. In the past, I would hurt myself, but after learning skills from my self-advocacy group, I have become a stronger person.

I want to let people know that you don’t have to be afraid to make changes in your lives. You can talk to a friend, your service coordinator, or any other person you feel comfortable with. The more you speak up for yourself, the better your life will become. Some of us have a hard time saying things. If you keep things locked up inside, it’s easy to make yourself sick. We all deserve the right to be happy in our lives. We’re the only ones who can make that happen. So stand up, be strong, and take control! Not only can you help yourself, but you can help others.

I’m living proof. I am the happiest that I have ever been!

In September 2014, GMSA will host a fabulous 20th Anniversary Gala! Watch our website and Facebook page for details!
Facilitated communication (FC) is typing to communicate.

I need the assistance of a facilitator. They are there to help me realize where my body and arm are in space. They also help me get control and get my jumbled thoughts out.

When I first started living with my home provider, life was good. I was still scared and nervous, but began to get comfortable with the new person. Then after a few years I started to get jealous of another person in my home. I didn’t feel like we were equals. I was afraid to tell my home provider and service coordinator how I was feeling. I knew it was time for a change, but I was not sure how to make that happen. I was afraid that if I said anything that someone would put me in an institution. So I kept quiet.

That was until I joined our local self-advocacy group and learned how important it is to stand up for myself. After one year I felt comfortable trying to work things out with my home provider. I was determined to find a new home. My life has changed so much in the past few months. I had support from my guardian and supervisors at the agency.

I had a lot of facilitators which made things hard. While I was learning everyone’s different facilitating styles I was still learning my own movements. Some days it was too much for my body to handle.

Facilitated Communication
By Kyle Moriarty

FC has given me hope. When I wasn’t typing I was acting out. Pushing and hitting my Mom. I was also going after my support staff at school. Now that I can type I have an outlet. I have a way to let people know how I am feeling instead of acting out. Having trained staff helps me move towards independent typing. I am glad to have a facilitator who can support me at work. That is my biggest priority.
I was hired by Green Mountain Self-Advocates to do a project with The University of Vermont’s Center for Disability and Community Inclusion (CDCI). This project I’m doing is to record some life histories of self-advocates aged 18-30. As I work for GMSA we will use video and photos to capture the footage we need to make the life history stories come alive. I will be recording their life history and they will be telling the world about their life history since early childhood. The life histories are going to be posted on the CDCI website.

Telling a life history story will be a great way, so the world can get to know you in a professional and personal side of you. By telling a life history people will be educating professionals and everyone in the world about who you are as a person. This project will help young self-advocates to have more self confidence and trust other peers. Another great reason why this project will be beneficial for self-advocates and for other professionals is to listen to “fresh perspectives” from new self-advocates. This is a great opportunity for a few self-advocates and have a spot light on them on the CDCI web site. I encouraged the older self-advocates to nominate the younger self-advocates. **Keep a watch out for the Life Histories—coming in Summer/Fall 2014!**
to learn coping techniques that would enable me to stay in a noisy, bright class without having a total meltdown.

I have some advice for my friends. We all have to cope with stress in our lives. I don’t struggle with language arts but fluorescent lighting flickers in front of my eyes and distracts me. You like to talk a hundred miles an hour but are scared that silence means you are alone. I can’t understand what you talk about so fast and I love the calm of silence. What we have in common is wanting to belong, to be wanted and valued. We are all the same, we all need to cope and be patient of ourselves and each other. Coping is the same for all of us, we just have different issues to cope with.

We leave here in the next few months to go to high school. Will we have a whole bunch of stress? Undoubtedly. Our lesson learned at Barre Town will still apply at high school. We will need to cope and deal with stress, happy or sad events as they may be.

**GMSA Self-Advocates Speak at Governor’s Signing of Respectful Language Bill on March 21, 2014**

When Governor Peter Shumlin signed the Respectful Language Bill (S. 90) on March 21, 2014 he asked four advocates from Green Mountain Self-Advocates to speak at the ceremony. The four self-advocates spoke from their hearts about the importance of the State of Vermont using respectful language when talking about all Vermonters. Here are some of their words...

**Randy Lizotte, St. Albans, Kyle Moriarty, Montpelier, VT**

“If you have people around you who focus on what you’re good at, your strengths and less on your weaknesses you accomplish things a lot easier. This begins with the words that people use. Words can lift you up or put you down. Thank you for celebrating with us today.”

**Max Barrows, Worcester, VT**

“It’s not just about changing the words we use in our laws. It is about dignity and respect of people with disabilities. Our goal is to change the minds of the people in our community. On how they view a person with a disability. When you meet a person with a disability we want you to see us as people and not just what you see at first which may be our disability.”

**Stirling Peebles, Montpelier, VT**

“You can’t control what people say, but they can’t control how you feel inside. We are human beings and we want to be respected just like you. When we hear bad words it’s like a knife ripping through our hearts. Words hurt. I would like to thank all the supporters who helped to make the Respectful Language Bill a reality. This is one step on how we can make a difference together.”
SELF-ADVOCACY
By Lisa Rudiakov

I’m a self-advocate from a while back. I have lived in Bennington, VT for at least 18 years. I’m originally from the Bronx. In the Bronx, looking back, there were no programs that had to do with Self-Advocacy or being a Self-Advocate or for that matter, Developmental Services. My services helped me realize that I could speak up and speak out for services. Health and well-being through United Counseling Services helped me realize all that. My health was not very good. Back in my life I wasn’t in the best shape. My blood pressure was on the verge of being high. I had high cholesterol and I was a smoker to boot. As the weight and quitting smoking took place everything went in normal ranges. I have not smoked for almost 8 years the third time around. I also lost 100 pounds as well. I contribute it to the people that worked for United Counseling Services. I became better and better in health and wellness and the encouragement came from God, family, friends, and church, family events, and outreach. Also by meeting the Governor of Vermont at a meeting I went to for the Vermont Developmental Disability Council. They were very gracious to hire me on as a member of the council. Governor Shumlin is a very nice gentleman. I never had met him before, it made my life worthwhile. He likes to talk about Health Reform and how it affects Vermonters.

My Reflection
By Maleia Darling

I came here as a young wild child, adrift in my own world of sensory stimulation. The concept of school, the idea of learning to read, write and do arithmetic, weren’t on my agenda. I was different. I was the beautiful blond little girl with big beautiful eyes. I was also the girl who bolted out the door at any given time. I was the girl who screamed at random, but couldn’t speak to tell you what was wrong. I was autistic.

Don’t get me wrong. I am still autistic but not as wild as I used to be. I have used my time well at Barre Town, and it is quite evident through my writing. What I have learned here is more than language arts and irrational numbers. I had to learn to cope in a world that is oh so out of my comfort zone. I had to break through my world of autistic jumbled nerves and take on the task of being social.

When I was little, like in first grade, all I heard was “Maleia, put with same.” I had to match pictures together as if matching items or words was a measure of intelligence. (By the way, it is not.) I knew I was smarter than most of the people I worked with. I am pretty sure they knew that too and matching items was a test of my ability to focus, motor plan and overcome the sensory disturbance common to people with autism. My job as a young student was...