I’ve been a self advocate for about a year and a half. Since I’ve joined GMSA, I’ve been a member of different advocacy groups. I would like to talk about the student advocacy group I’m a part of which by the way is one of the newest advocacy groups in the state. The Bridging Program in general is a program in Chittenden County where students who are in their transitional years of high school can get out into the community and prepare them for life in the world. We also have an advocacy group, which started just in October 2015.

It wasn’t easy coming up with a name but our group is called Bridging Advocates Together (similar to Capitol Advocates Together). We are one of the way the youngest groups in the entire state with ages ranging from 16 to 21 years old.

The first ever officers election was a big day, after only just 11 months’ after becoming a self-advocate, I was elected the first ever president of Bridging Advocates Together, I’d never thought I’d say that. I used to be one of those advocates in meetings that wouldn’t contribute that much at all. I was elected president because my fellow advocates knew that this would be my group to shine. Since then, I have become a lot more comfortable being apart of all of my advocacy groups especially since I’ve been following in the footsteps of other advocacy group presidents. I do have to admit if feels great to be president.. It’s definitely not an easy job but I believe GMSA has changed my life for the better that I did not expect. I’ve learned a lot being a part of an advocacy groups. I’m finally able to speak up for myself and others with confidence. I hope I can inspire others to join GMSA so they can have the opportunity to speak up for themselves and take control of their lives.
I Love To Ski: My Job As A Racing Coach!

My name is Hilary Prescott Clark and I’m 30 years old. The hobbies that I love to do in the winter time are snowmobiling and Alpine skiing. I ride with my dad on the back of our snowmobile. I also can drive our snowmobile.

All of my life I have loved to ski. I have raced through the ranks of the Junior Race Program and I raced downhill in High School. When I got older I talked to my mom about working at the local mountain during the ski season. I wanted to work there because I loved to ski and share my passion of skiing with other people.

After talking to my mom we started looking for job openings at the mountain. Having my mom’s support made it easier to get a job. After a while we found the right job which was coaching kids of all ages how to race downhill. I was really excited to get this job because I love to work with kids.

For nine years now, I have been working at the mountain. The things that have gone well are learning to set up a race course. In order to set up a race course you need to bring gates up the chairlift in bundles of 20 gates. The race courses can change a lot which can be frustrating but my boss shows me what to do. I love to show the kids what drill we are working on. The older kids get to run a full length course. We have steep pitch; that’s why the younger kids get to run half of the full course.

I feel it’s rewarding when I get to see the younger kids grow up and see how much they have improved.

This year’s season was really difficult for my coworkers and me. It was a difficult season because of the variation in the snow conditions and weather. It took good team work to make it a successful season and because of that we all got coach’s bonuses.
I’m a Breast Cancer Survivor

By Marjorie Burns

My second cancer I found it by myself. I did a self-exam. I went to have a mammogram. They didn’t find nothing. I was still worried. Then I did a self-exam again, and I found a lump. I let Jacqueline (my home provider) know, and she called Dr. Mary Stanley.

I saw Dr. Stanley and she asked me to come back and have a biopsy. I said, “Get it done. Get it over with.” She tested it. It turned out to be cancer.

My second cancer, I had a lot of support from Mercy Connections and the church. I took a pretty picture of me and Sister Ann from Mercy Connections. She was a good support.

My second cancer I missed my mom because she wasn’t here for me. My sister, Cindy, kept calling after I had the surgery. Danielle went with me for one of my treatments.

My son asked me if I was alright. And my brother, Guy, and my sister-in-law, Jen, asked me if I was alright. They still came and got me that year for Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

When you get cancer sometimes your hair falls when you get treatment. Jayne went with me to get my hair cut. Jayne got her hair cut first, and then I got my hair cut second. We both shaved our heads. It was funny because I looked at myself afterwards and said, “WHOA!”

Last Fall at a Green Mountain Self-Advocates meeting in Randolph, we were making flags about our favorite support people. I made a flag that said: Jacqueline was a good support with my cancer. She and Jayne helped me with the cancer. Jacqueline went with me to one of my treatments.

I also got support from Jen. A lot of people said. “Boy, you have a good attitude. You don’t let it get to you.”
Getting The Job Done!

By Nicole LeBlanc

Employment gives people with disabilities a purpose in life. It showcases positive images and messages about people with disabilities. As my co-worker Max Barrows says, “Working shows how we give as much as we take.” Employing people with disabilities can help support a better bottom-line for businesses. For example, some studies show that people with disabilities have lower turnover rates than people without disabilities. Other studies report increased employee morale, productivity, and a greater acceptance for people who are different. When employers embrace diversity, everybody’s a winner.

Having a job moves people with disabilities out of poverty. We are more self-sufficient, buying the things we need and want to live fulfilling lives.

Employment goes a long way towards eliminating negative stereotypes about people with disabilities.

Emploving people with disabilities is going to become even more important in the near future because of the increasing number of aging baby boomers that are retiring. This trend will create a national workforce shortage. Who better to fill the void than people with disabilities who have a strong reputation of having a great work ethic?

To get more people working we need talented employment support professional to make good job matches. It helps to:

1) think outside the box when developing job opportunities.
2) let our strengths and interests determine what jobs we do.
3) have strong communication and negotiation skills which are needed in trying to carve out positions for people with disabilities.
4) be reassuring when people with disabilities or their families get worried about losing benefits like Medicaid, SSI, and so forth. Showing people the math that when you work, you make out better than just sitting on the couch.
Budget Cuts

By Maleia Darling

I am a student at Spaulding High School. I am autistic and use Augmentative Communication with supported typing as my main communication.

It is very important to me to have a facilitator to help support my arm while I type. If budgets for people with disabilities are cut then people like myself cannot have a real life. I get frustrated when the legislature takes so long to pass budgets especially when the budget is for someone’s chance to be healthy and independent. It is hard to imagine my life without a facilitator so I can speak type my words and be a part of society.

With budget cuts I feel that my life would be a miniature area with limited social and physical opportunities. All are so important and necessary for a successful and joyful life.

I worry that if budgets are cut then some socially and physically challenged individuals might not be able to have the opportunities they deserve.

If budgets are cut, there is a huge risk that people will not get the help that they need. They might need a support worker to help them be more independent and successful or they might need something more serious. I wish the legislature would take these important factors into consideration when trying to find more state money and not decrease the mental health budgets.

I feel that someone’s well being should always come first. If these factors are discussed then the state will not cut the mental health budgets so that they can be successful in reaching their goals.

I feel that people in the community need to come together to help vote NO against budget cuts and help the Senate look in areas other than mental health for the money. It is so very important to help people recognize that in order for people like me to meet their goals in life that we need someone to help us.

Thank you for reading my thoughts about budget cuts for mental health.

***Maleia Darling is a student at Spaulding High School in Barre, VT. She is interested in water because it is so refreshing and I like to do flips in it. She is a young adult with autism. Talking about autism and all the challenges are her drive. To keep up with Maleia, you can read her blog at http://maleiadarling.weebly.com/blog
Bluebird Fairies make people smile, feel good and develop confidence to create positive changes in their lives.

Bluebird Fairies, owned and operated by creative artist-inspirationalist Emily Anderson, offers products and resources to help others searching for tools to guide them through life’s challenges. www.bluebirdfairies.com

Emily Anderson created these work fairies for the 2016 Voices and Choices Conference. The theme is Think Work!

Emily serves individuals who are seeking to find greater meaning in their lives such as: their life purpose, positive support for feeling OK on a daily basis, and interested in self-improvement; as well as, assisting companies interested in promoting positive communication and creativity among their staff and organization.
Communication at Work  By Kyle Moriarty

I feel that everyone has the right to communicate. Sometimes a person’s form of communication can look very different. Whatever form of communication is used, everyone has the right to speak for themselves, to have a say or voice for themselves.

Communication has always been difficult for me. At work it can be especially challenging to communicate with bosses and co-workers. As a person who types to communicate it takes me longer to get out what I have to say. My advice is that to get what you need for support on the job you have to really advocate and make it clear that the success of your work depends on it. I am a person who cannot communicate without the use of an alternative communication device.

I could not do my job without supported typing. This requires a special keyboard and a trained job coach. It is important that my job coach is skilled in specific techniques to support me to communicate. When I get too anxious to be able to communicate, my job coach needs to know what to do to help me regulate my body. It takes a long time to develop a successful typing relationship with a support person. I am a really tense person who works best with calm people and some job coaches are not a good fit.

Communicating with the boss can be difficult as a person who does not speak. The time can go by too quickly before I am able to say something that I have on my mind. This can be frustrating when I am in a meeting because the topic may change before I get a chance to respond. Trying to type with my boss can be hard because it can take a long time and she is often very busy. The way I communicate best is by email because I can say everything I need to say all at once. It is a good way to get my thoughts heard and get feedback from my boss. It is also challenging to communicate with co-workers when you type to communicate. You will want to talk with them but they won’t know it because you can’t get their attention. The really hard thing is when you want to talk to someone about work and there isn’t a way to reach them. The way I work to communicate with co-workers is really with e-mailing. When there is something important to say, this really is the best way.

Having a job is what gives my life meaning. Even though there are challenges and frustrations, it is worthwhile.
If you have a disability, but you can do the important parts of a job, your boss cannot discriminate against you. There is a law called the ADA the American’s with Disability Act. One of the main things that the law says is that you cannot be discriminated against in employment. Someone cannot say:

- I don’t think you are capable of doing the job
- I don’t like the way you look
- I don’t like the way you talk

Now if you want to get a job as a nurse – you most likely need to have a degree or training as a nurse. So they can decide not to hire you if you do not have the training needed.

What are the most common types of job discrimination?

- Treating you different
- Paying you less for the same job
- Teasing you or harassing you
- Treating you like you can’t do your job when you really can
- Asking about your medical condition in an interview

What is not discrimination?

- Hiring someone who has more experience
- Firing you for:
  - Not doing your job
  - Coming in late without permission
  - Missing too many days

Can someone ask me about my disability in a job interview?

No. An employer cannot ask you if you have a disability even if they see that you have a disability.

But they can ask you if you can do the job. And also ask you to show them how you would do the job, with or without reasonable accommodation.

Do I have to tell my employer that I have a disability?

No. You do not have to tell anyone you have a disability.

...BUT if you want to be protected by the law you have to tell your employer that you have a disability.
To protect your rights speak up before you have a problem. Don’t wait until after you are fired. That will be too late.

What is an accommodation?
It is an adjustment or modification that helps you to do the job.

If you think you will need an accommodation when applying, tell the employer so that you are protected by the ADA if you are not accommodated.

Examples of accommodations
You can ask for changes in your job if the change is not too hard on or expensive for your boss and co-workers.
- Getting shown how to do your job instead of things in writing
- Working less hours
- Having someone help you if you have any issues
- Have a job coach
- Getting moved to a different, open job that you can do

How do you ask for an accommodation?
You can tell your employer or let them know in writing. You do not need to mention the ADA or use the phrase “reasonable accommodation.”

An employer cannot ignore you request. **BUT** this does not mean they have to make the change.

If you need support to ask for an accommodation or deal with a problem at work you should ask for help!
Ask for help
- From your family or a friend
- Ask your job coach or VR to help you
- Call Legal Aid or Disability Rights VT

What can I do if I am getting harassed or teased?
- Ask your boss to help you make it stop
- Make sure your boss knows it’s going on

You can call GMSA at 1- 800-564-9990 to get help and advice
You can call Vermont Legal Aid at 1-800-747-5022. They can help you write a complaint. It is important to do it within 6 months but definitely within one year.
I was sixteen when I got my first job at the local ice rink. I supervised ice skaters, handled the concession stand and shoveled lots of snow. The accommodations that I got were assistance in handling cash and operating the concession stand. My job support at the time came from my high school. They helped me develop an easy system for handling money.

My parents both work at Shaw’s Supermarket. I decided to give it a try and got a job as a bagger. That experience was not so pleasant because I had a manager who was “hardnosed” and difficult to deal with. Within the first 2 weeks I was in tears after getting yelled at for not always greeting the customers. My parents had to intervene a lot and I went home many days with a stomach ache. I found out the hard way that it is important to find a job that is a good match with your skills.

I learned from these early jobs the importance of having a strong self-awareness about my strengths and challenges. This helps your team work with you to find the right job. As I know from past experience speaking up to authority figures is often a challenge.

Self-advocacy in the workplace is an essential skill for people to learn because it goes a long way in helping your supervisor figure out what you need in order to succeed in the world of work. I work for Green Mountain Self-Advocates to educate policymakers and advocate for disability rights.

The accommodations that I have at my job include a support person 50% of the time to assist in completing difficult paperwork, driving me to meetings and taking notes at meetings. My assistant helps me prepare for and stay organized when presenting to large groups of people. They taught me how to use an iPad. There are also many Apps that assist me in being able to carry out the functions of my job.

The accommodations that I find the most useful are having large print handouts at meetings, an IPAD to take notes with, and meeting preparation ahead of time so that I know what is going to be discussed. In conclusion, I hope that you find this information helpful in learning how advocate in getting your needs met on the job.
I am so happy to be writing you and I have so much to tell you. I was one of the people who testified at the Vermont State Budget Hearings on February 15th and then again as part of the Vermont Care Partners on the 25th for their press conference at the Vermont Statehouse in the hectic Cedar Creek Room. **What we are interested in, is fixing an agreement that has been broken. The state is not funding things that it’s obligated to run.** I know there was an agreement made when the state closed down the Brandon Training School and committed itself to the task of creating services that support people with disabilities to access their communities.

I have grown up in this era as someone who relies on the services these services provide. I am therefore an imbedded reporter.

Now that I attend the State Standing Program Committee on Developmental Services I see how hard people work to make things happen with not very much money. And those people have to make tough decisions that result in the people who work with me, a highly intelligent but difficult to access man, getting paid low wages.

I was astounded at the Vermont State Budget Hearings to hear how many other state programs had to get down on their knees and beg for money to adequately fund their work to make life possible and fruitful.

I have two easy requests.

1. Please read my speech.
2. Please go see Michael Moore’s movie “Where to Invade Next?”

I’m so glad I saw it. In it you see life in other countries where hot topic items like “Prison”, “Sex Education”, “Paid Vacation” and “Hitler” get handled with less focus on the money spent than the outcomes of good learning experiences and happy, well-adjusted people. But, you know what? In the end, that costs less too.

I hope some of you are happily returned from vacation. I trust others of you are planning yours.

Hope your dreams are moving you upward. [http://ccs-vt.org/?page_id=8018](http://ccs-vt.org/?page_id=8018)
Let’s discuss the importance of confidentiality as it relates to people with disabilities on the job. Confidentiality means being able to trust people to keep certain things private. To protect your rights on the job you may decide to tell a manager of a business that you have a disability and need accommodations or support to perform certain tasks or to get around to places. People should have control over the information they disclose and feel confident that the person that they disclose to is not going to tell anyone outside the workplace about their disability. Even if it is a great story about something I did at work, please remember it is my story to tell.

It is also crucial that my job coach does not talk to my employer without my permission. I want to be there when people are talking about me. When I am part of the conversation it makes me feel like I am in charge of my services. It can set a bad precedent if my employer is addressing issues about my job only to my job coach instead of directly to me. It is crucial that I get feedback from my boss directly and not just from my job coach.

One time I experienced my confidentiality being violated when my service coordinator wrote an email to my employer without including me. She wrote asking questions about a lost check and said, “Nicole should know better that. There is a fee when you cancel a check.” I felt left out, embarrassed and disrespected. People in the service system world and family members need to learn to grasp the concept of “Nothing about Me without Me.” It is not fun when people tell the whole universe your business. I understand that when abuse is disclosed it needs to be reported to Adult Protective Services. However in general, people should have control over the information that is shared about them with other people! As the old saying goes “Do unto others what you want done to you!”

One important tip I have for my peers is that you should advocate and always make it crystal clear who has written or oral permission to talk about you and discuss your disability. I am an avid supporter of spreading the word about presuming competence. Please do not make assumptions about what I can or cannot do. Always talk to people with disabilities first instead of talking to their family or support staff.
Green Mountain Self-Advocates, local developmental services agencies, and the VT Care Partners co-organized an event on the State House Lawn to celebrate Direct Support Professionals. We beautifully decorate flags about our support staff and displayed the flags around the State House gardens. Self-advocates from across the state spoke up about the important support staff in their life.
Hello friends my name is Conor Cleveland and I am from Montpelier, Vermont. I use facilitated communication as my main means of communicating. It is the one true way to say what I am thinking or wanting. It is often a long process that can get frustrating at times. Sometimes I need extra time just to get started. What I want is the connection of brain to body to be smooth and fluid. Some days are smooth and some are a struggle. I am a current member of Green Mountain Self Advocates and work for consumer rights. Being part of this group allows me to stand up for myself and others who cannot. I have had lots of help along my journey and this is a great way to pay it forward. When I am not advocating, I enjoy writing poems in my free time. Poetry is a way to express myself, and a way to clear my mind of the daily stress in life. I enjoy writing because it sets my mind free, and in them I can do whatever I want or go where ever I want. This poem shows the struggle and frustration that can be had using facilitated communication, but also the wealth of knowledge I have to offer.

**Dammed Up By Conor Isaiah Cleveland**

Sitting behind this desk.
Turning on the computer.
Finding my body and reach in space and time.
Lights turned down and door closed my mind begins to create a vortex of emotion.
Fire up the typing program.
Cue my attention to the screen.
Finger ready to push to the letter and express my knowledge.
Oh wait i have lost my thought.
Thoughts come and go sometimes they are free and sometimes trapped.
By the time an old idea floats to the top many more are waiting to replace it.
Like a lake dammed up, my mind is a reservoir holding gallons of knowledge by the thousands.
The flow from mind to paper is hard and obstructed.

Your thoughts flow swift and fast.
Only a few can be trickled out for me.
The dam should let my thoughts out like yours.
The process is difficult but not lost or hopeless.
My ideas are filling it up fast and its freeing to release them.
Just like water being lowered in the dam, my mind begins to leak losing a great resource.
Typing is my flood control.
It lets me lower the build up of stress and anxiety.
Like a dam i can only hold a certain amount until some is leaked and lost.
Please be patient with me as I begin to let the water flow.
My dam holds water in the form of thoughts, just like yours.
Structured the same different by far.
Connecting With Co-Workers

By Max Barrows

I would like to share with you my experiences with co-workers on a number of jobs I’ve had. My previous jobs were in the restaurant business. The interactions I had with co-workers were not close, but I was friendly to them and they were nice to me. I was not tempted to make friends at the time. When things would get busy, I would just focus on what I had to do. Most of the time, I was isolated from a lot of my co-workers since I was in the dish pit.

All of my bosses were pretty protective of me like everyone else. Really, it is their job to make sure work environments are safe. I haven’t experienced being harassed. Some co-workers, as well as my boss, observed me having conversations with myself, and were curious to know why. At first, it was a bit embarrassing and I would struggle with whether or not I should answer. Later, I found a way to explain why I talk to myself without saying what my disability was. If anything, I didn’t feel that the co-workers were giving me a hard time. They were just very curious.

Language can be a problem. I only heard the “R” word a couple of times on my previous jobs. I expressed my opinion with a co-worker, but that conversation didn’t really go anywhere. I know today that the “R” word is a huge issue for some other people on the job. For example, a couple of self-advocates I know said it’s used quite a bit by people they work around. They have expressed how uncomfortable they feel when they hear it. One Self-Advocate said they would speak up about how they felt toward the “R” word to their boss and co-workers. It is important to speak up about it in a way that people can understand, without being too offensive. Another self-advocate said that they get the message from their boss to deal with it themselves. Today, I work for a disability rights organization. So, the relationship I have with my co-workers is much easier. It’s good to have close friends at work, but there is one thing you should be aware of. You need to balance how much you socialize with your co-workers with sticking to the work you are required to do. In relation to this, I do remember a boss on a previous job set a rule that was one person on break at a time. That way, not too many people would be standing around when things needed to be done.

My advice is if you have close friends from work, you can make plans to spend time with them outside of work to maintain a good relationship. For example, there is going to the movies, going bowling, going out to eat, or playing cards. So, working is worth it, despite some of the social challenges around co-workers.
Local Vermont Self-Advocacy Contacts

**Advocates for Action**
Call Tammy Maberry at 463-3532 ext. 3147. Meetings 1st Wednesday in Bellows Falls.

**Bennington Peer Support**
Call Tina Hesler 442-5491. Meetings are the 3rd Tuesday of every month.

**Bridging Advocates Together**
Call Emily Andersen at 238-4540. Meetings are two Fridays a month in Burlington.

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

**CAT - Capitol Advocates Together**
Call Kaiya Andrews or Karen Topper at 249-6659. Meetings are 2nd Thursday in Montpelier.

**Champlain Voices**
Call Emily Andersen at 238-4540. Meetings are every Monday in Colchester.

**Communication Alliance**
Call Tracy Thresher or Rachel Perkins at 479-2502 ext. 557. Meetings are the 1st & 3rd Wednesdays in Barre.

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

**Dream Catchers**
Call Kate Tibbs at 775.2381. Meetings are 4th Friday in Rutland.

**Friends Helping Friends**
Call Joseph Mahr at 479-4076. Meetings are on 4th Monday during the day and 3rd Thursday evening.

**GATSA Getting Acquainted Through Self-Advocacy**
Call Danielle Cote at 888-5026. Meetings are 1st & 3rd Monday in Morrisville.

**LGBTQ - Support Groups for Self-Advocates Who are Gay**
3 groups facilitated by the Pride Center that meet in St. Albans, Montpelier and Burlington call David at 503-2251.

**Next Step Self-Advocates of St. Albans**
Call Randy Lizotte at 782-3407. Meetings are the 2nd and 4th Fridays in St Albans.

**Newport Self-Advocacy Group**
Call Pat Warner at 334-7310. Every other Thursday in Newport.

**Rockin’ Advocates of Central Vermont**
Call Jen Olsen 476-4811 room 134. Meetings are Thursdays once a month in Barre.

**RAPS - Randolph Area Peer Support**
Call Joan Carmen at 728-4476. Meetings are twice a month on Tuesday.

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

**Speak Up Addison County**
Call Rebecca Holbrook at 399-4798. Meetings three Thursdays 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 Jacqueline Beer at 748-6350 ext. 1121. Meetings on Wednesdays in Lyndonville.

**Wild Hope Advocacy Group**
Call Greg Masterson or Sara Salasin at 275-4919. Meetings every Tuesday in Brattleboro.

**Windsor Self-Advocates**
Call Mary Ruffing at 674-2539. Meetings 2nd Monday in Windsor.