20 Years Of Advocacy In Action!
Raising Our Voices To Increase Quality Of Life

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Hear us roar! Washing the habits of words of disbelief, to my competence and to yours. Hear us roar! I am an individual with a mind that thinks, a heart that feels, and a soul that knows each and every one of you possess the same thing!
LET’S MAKE SOME NOISE IF YOU WANT YOUR VOICE TO BE HEARD!!!!
Hello, my name is Kris Medina and I am a self-advocate! Thank-you for joining me at the 16th Annual Voices and Choices Conference!
Today we celebrate the Twentieth-Year Anniversary of Green Mountain Self-Advocates! All of you here today have added quality to this time of growth in our vast field of raising our voices!
Raising our voices to take action! Striving to make our voices heard for equal rights! Facing people together to create that same belief, and working together to help those own lives of quality and equality!
Action with forward movement, like a river moving to the ocean in its mighty power to become an infinite forceful entity. Encouraging our Vermont communities to learn about what self-advocacy truly means. That is what Green Mountain Self-Advocates has done over the last 20 YEARS!!!!!
Today I want to talk to you all about what self-advocacy means in our own lives, and how it affects our community as a whole. When people speak up, they are creating a much richer lifestyle for themselves.
Raising awareness to Presumption of Competence is vital in my work. People should never be looked upon as empty spaces. Presuming that one is not intelligent, just because of outward appearances is a tragedy. Judging ones understanding by their form of communication or ability to socialize is deadly.
Question the actions of those that hold some sort of responsibility over you. From guardians to politicians! Rise up and make your voice be heard! Tell your needs and get them met, and then join forces with others to help them get their needs met!
Let’s make some noise if you want your voice to be heard!!!
State your wants, dreams, and desires. State it with conviction, but wrap it with a layer of softness. What that means to me is, to advocate with a balance of respectful assertiveness.
It is our right as citizens of this society to speak freely and take action. It is our right as a person on this earth to advocate for ourselves and our fellow neighbor. Connecting with members of society and community only presents unity. Realizing that the power to make changes in this world, uses numbers!
It is imperative to reach out to connect with others. To know that your connection builds a bridge, a bond that can form huge change. It wasn't until I was introduced to Tracy Thresher, that I knew how vital it is to form relationships with people that share the same struggles, that share the same mission.
Perhaps others think that they are alone in this world of chaos, but conversing with other people with common challenges will invoke a different mindset. All of my life I have set goals for my personal gain. I have been very successful with academics and school.
While I am proud of all of my accomplishments, my work as a self-advocate gives me great incentive to keep speaking up. Rallying for equality is what I'm all about. Rallying for equality and ordering of acceptance.
Let’s give a shout out if you think you deserve equality!!!!
Typing is my voice and has been since I was very young. Living my life socializing in a much different way than the rest of my peers had its challenges. Typing opened peoples understanding of who I was, and opened many doors to new opportunities.
But there still were those non-believers, people that couldn’t see past my autistic ways. Measuring my intelligence by the words that uncontrollably flow from my mouth. Always presenting myself in a way that is more of a mask, than a vision of my true self.
I am a man of many experiences in my world with autism. Experiences that you all may be able to relate to. I might make movements that make people nervous, or say words that people don’t understand.
But these things do not define who I am. These things are not a measurement of my character. Going through life taking action for my beliefs and for others defines me! It shapes the form of the advocate that I want to be, and of the advocate that I am!
I am full of emotions from love, to pain, to joy. All of these emotions mold the root of my existence. I share this with you because I feel you can relate.
If you can relate, let’s hear that strong voice of yours!!! Are you all with me?
Working as a united field transitions us to become a force. A significant force to create change. Change that personifies all of our beautiful, individual qualities. Change that personifies the reality of equal rights.
Questioning who holds the key to your future will only elevate change for the better. Too often people with disabilities are not given the same opportunities. It’s time to change that way of just surviving; it’s time to rise up and live!
Don’t just sit there and let people unfold your destiny, you take the wheel and control the direction in which your life travels.
So how does one do that? Our minds may be overwhelmed with such massive action, but all it really is, is one step at a time.
1. THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT AND NEED IN YOUR OWN LIFE!
What dreams do you possess? Would you like to someday live alone or go to college? Talk about it! Speak your voice! It starts with you!
2. WHAT DO YOU NEED FOR SUPPORTS?
Each and every one of us needs help at some point in our lives. Never be afraid to seek accommodations. Accommodations are necessary to ALL people! For example, some people speak, or use a pen and paper, but I need a device to type out my in-depth thoughts.
3. WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU? Reach out! There are people and organizations in your community that can facilitate you to take action towards your goals!
4. LEARN YOUR RIGHTS!
When you have a disability, sometimes people say that we do not have the same rights. This is called discrimination, and it is against the law. You have a responsibility to educate yourself so that you get the same accommodations that are rightfully yours.
I quite often see people with disabilities standing more in the shadows, not knowing how to step into the light.
Confidence is key to moving past your barriers. If you believe in yourself, confidence will naturally follow. Walking these roads with a strong set of beliefs and attention to your dreams can lead you to many splendid places.
Of course there are hurdles along the way, but that is inevitable when creating change. To soar you must not be afraid to fly.
Rally for each other! Support each other to build volume in this historical disability rights movement!
Recognize that our state of Vermont has closed the doors to segregation and to institutionalization! Silent people did not assist in this. People that used the POWER of VOICE and VOLUME made this happen!
Quiet people live statically. This means there is little motion, making the only forward movement willed by others. Do you want to go through life as a mere shadow, or would you rather be a strong solid mass that characterizes power?
Talk to your peers, taking steps into the world of independence. Stepping peacefully and methodically towards a life that is open. One that is open to opportunity and possibility!
YOU ARE POWERFUL!!! Each and everyone of you hold your uniquely designed key! Are you the keeper of that key? Do you know which way it turns to unlock opportunity? Do you know that YOU ARE ALL CHAMPIONS!!!!!