

GMSA Board Meeting held on September 27, 2021



GMSA Board Officers (4): Randy Lizotte (president/Next Step), Danielle Viau (vice president/BSAC), Levi Gardner (secretary/VT Choices), Chad Cleverley (treasurer/VT Choices)

GMSA Board Members (11): Taylor Terry (Capitol Advocates Together), Hasan Ko (Champlain Voices), Tesha Thibodeau (Winds of Change), Jon Fitzgerald (Next Step), Erik Johnson (VT Choices), Kris Medina (Communication Alliance), Marjorie Burns (BSAC), Susan Mandell (alternate/BRAG), Caroline Gillen (SABE of Rutland), Amanda Daniels (alternate/Newport Self-Advocates), Chris Dubeau (COPS)

Self-Advocates (3): Lehana Guyette (CAT), Marshall Denutte and Adam Mozdzierz (VT Choices)

Allies (6): Lee Reilly, Lucy Stone, Pam Brown, Jacob Weber, Mary Ruffing, Suzi Rump

GMSA Staff (2): Karen Topper, Max Barrows, Karen Noone

Agenda:

- 10:00** – Introductions and Group Updates
- 10:15** – Planning for Officer Elections
- 10:30** - Voices and Choices Conference Contract with DoubleTree of Hilton
- 11:00** - Break
- 11:10** - The SIS, the new assessment
- 11:30** – Review of GMSA Goals and Progress

Group Updates:

- 1) BSAC:** We recently had a dance outdoors. We are currently meeting using Zoom since the increase in Covid due to the Delta variant..

- 2) Champlain Voices:** Peer leaders are mentoring high school students who participate in the Bridging Program that includes students from 5 high schools in Chittenden County.
- 3) COPS:** Working with Global Campus to teach classes self-advocacy. We have a new ally who is helping us to rebuild our group. We missed some meetings in the past year due to Covid and the lack of support staff.
- 4) VT Choices:** We had Officer elections for our local group. We cancelled our dance due to the increase in Covid cases. We are going to do a small group event in late October. We are meeting virtually once a week.
- 5) Winds of Change:** We met last week for the first time in a few months, we are trying to get back into the swing of things.
- 6) Next Step:** We had a picnic on 8/20/21 outdoors under a pavilion by the lake. 15+ people attended. It was the first time the group met in person in a while. We still meet on Zoom. We are trying to switch to a hybrid meeting once we find a place for people to participate via Zoom and in person for those who don't have internet access.
- 7) CAT:** Last year we met with the police chief in our town. We are in communication with the BRAG group in helping them get into contact with their new police chief. We are sharing the questions we came up with to ask our police chief. They are about communicating with people with disabilities.
- 8) BRAG:** We are meeting virtually and trying to plan to bring people together in-person in a way that is safe.
- 9) Communication Alliance:** Has not been meeting during Covid because of the difficulty of providing remote supports for communication. We lack staff and are in desperate need for higher wages. Many of us who type to communicate and need staff to help us type have completely lost our supports due to COVID. The only reason I can participate today is because my mother is supporting me.

Planning for Officer Elections

Randy Lizotte explained the process for running to be a GMSA officer. There are 4 positions available. Randy read and shared written versions of officer responsibilities. He reviewed the basic requirements of who is eligible to run. Today

we will begin to call for nominations. Nomination speeches will be at the December Meeting. Members will vote during December and January

The president will run and lead meetings or ask for a volunteer to run the meeting. They must be willing to share the spotlight. Be willing to represent the group. Be willing to listen to and respect the other person's point of view. Work with others to prepare the agenda, possibly at the Officer's meeting.

The Vice President will do the work of the President if the President is absent. They may be asked to represent Green Mountain Self-Advocates at meetings with other groups.

The Secretary will read the minutes at Board meetings. They will help with the e-newsletter and Facebook postings. They may be asked to represent Green Mountain Self-Advocates at meetings with other groups.

The Treasurer will present money reports at Board meetings 4 times a year. They will sign official documents and work on making our budget for the year. They will meet with GMSA staff once a month to review invoices and monthly financial reports from ARIS Solutions. She or he may be asked to represent Green Mountain Self-Advocates at meetings with other groups.

Board Officers are required to attend quarterly Board meetings and officer meetings held once a month. They may be asked to attend other meetings representing GMSA.

Voices & Choices Conference

The officers led a discussion about delaying the Voices and Choices conference as an in-person event. GMSA signed a contract with the DoubleTree of Hilton to hold the conference in person in April 2022. If we cancel now we could be charged \$30,000. If we wait and cancel in less than 180 days before the event we could be charged \$45,000. We need to decide now. No one can say for certain what the Covid-19 infection rate will be in 6 months. The officers successfully worked with staff to move our contract with the Hilton to 2023. We did this to avoid paying \$45,000 in cancellation fees. The officers are interested in negotiating with the hotel to delay our contract until 2023.

Background details: In 2020 we cancelled our conference roughly 2 months before the event. We did not have to pay any fees for cancelling because

Governor Scott declared a state of emergency due to Covid. The problem is now the Governor has made it very clear that he will not declare another state of emergency due to Covid. The board can still support holding the conference virtually or possibly with smaller groups regionally. In any event, we need to deal with the re-negotiating our contract.

Chad Cleverley made a motion:

There is a lot of money on the line. GMSA staff will negotiate with the Doubletree Hotel staff to change our contract for the Voices and Choices Conference from April 2022 to April 2023.

Levi Gardner seconded the motion. The motion passed.

SIS (Supports Intensity Scale)

Vermont Care Partners asked GMSA to sign on to a letter they wrote to DAIL complaining about the SIS-A assessment tool. The officers reviewed the letter and decided it was not in the best interest of GMSA to sign on to the VCP letter. We drafted the following response.

The GMSA board has reviewed the VCP letter. And our response is complicated.

What is important to GMSA is that people who get services need to have more plain language information about the SIS. They need to have an opportunity to review the SIS and ask their questions about it ahead of time. We think this should be a top priority.

So, yes it would be good to have some time to develop plain language information about the SIS..

But, as far as signing the VCP letter, it does not make sense to our board officers to sign this letter because what is said in the letter has not been what we have experienced. Our board members that have done the SIS actually did not have any problems with it. Now to be honest their Supporters got a hold of a copy of the SIS and they took the time to go over it with them before they did it.

Overall, our board is most concerned about losing money in their budgets. We prefer to focus on how the state will use the results of the SIS to determine how much money is available to purchase services for an individual.

Board members commented:

- I am concerned that the state will use the score to determine how much money will I get for services.
- I feel like it's not about the person anymore. People's needs change on a day-to-day basis.
- There's a problem if we are not given the questions used on the SIS ahead of time. The assessment is not accessible.
- We all need to be kept up to date on its use in VT. We should see the questions ahead of time and review them with our entire team.
- People with disabilities should be given accessible information about this. We should know the questions ahead of time and the assistance to answer them.
- There have to be alternative ways for the SIS to be understood. Videos, audio. It has to be in plain language. It is part of the ADA to meet these accommodations.
- A bigger question for the agencies is where are all of the dollars that did not get used during COVID? I did not receive any direct support services for the past year, and I want to know where is the money that was in my budget? How did the agency spend that money that was to pay for services I did not receive?

GMSA recorded people's concerns. Max Barrows is co-chair of the DDSD state program standing committee. He will read these concerns during the October meeting.

Review of GMSA Goals and Progress

#1 Make sure people with disabilities have enough money	GMSA provided information in accessible language that helped people get their stimulus money.
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#2 Help people to connect to their legislators	Provided training on legislative advocacy during summer Leadership series. Hosted Lydia X.Z. Brown who taught 10 steps for effective advocacy. Posted her steps on our website.
#3 Provide ongoing COVID information in plain language.	Our basic information in easy read formats has been shared. We recently made a booklet about delta variant and explain booster shots.
#4 Help people get out of isolation.	We provide two zoom meetings a week for people to connect. We will research other options to reduce loneliness. We partnered on a grant proposal to address loneliness, but it was not funded.
#5 Help groups to meet regularly.	Sharing our Zoom account. Checking in with groups.
#6 Train people to be peer mentors for Person Centered Planning	Taught a 12-week course to more than 50 self-advocates. Next step designing peer mentor program and get funding to pay peer mentors
#7 Get better at working with people who use devices to communicate.	Need ideas about how to address this goal?
#8 Provide technical assistance on training support staff.	Secured new funding to do this from the state. Just completed making a plain language booklet about Ableism and Violence. Creating training about Ableism.
#9 Recognizing and responding to discrimination.	Working on a video and talking points on how to fight for fairness.

#10 Keep doing the VT Leadership training.	Did Leadership Summer School for graduates of the Leadership Program.
#11 Teaching teenagers with disabilities and others about their rights.	Just started new project with Youth Ambassadors training on alternatives to guardianship.