Voices and Choices Conference

April 25 and 26, 2023

Hosted by
Green Mountain Self-Advocates
2023 Conference Theme
Self-Advocacy:
Together We Stand

☆ We are not alone, we stick together.
☆ Friends helping friends to grow self-advocacy and create new connections.
☆ Respect is a cornerstone for true friendship

Bluebird Fairies make people smile, feel good and develop confidence to create positive changes in their lives.

Emily Anderson created these fairies for our 2023 Conference ~ www.bluebirdfairies.com
Schedule for Tuesday ~ April 25

Register for Voices & Choices in Conference Center 3:00 - 6:00

Pick up Hotel Room Keys at Hotel Front Desk 3:00 - 6:00

Art Workshop ~ Make a Collage in Exhibition Hall 4:00 - 5:30

Dating Advice with Katherine next to the art workshop 4:00 - 5:00

Share Your Hobby with Others outside of the Exhibition Hall 4:30 - 5:30

Make a 3-Minute Video with Max next to the GMSA store 4:00 - 5:00

2 drumming workshops with Burlington Taiko Drummers in Diamond Ballroom 4:00 - 4:50 and 5:10 - 6:00

Talent Show in Amphitheater 5:00 - 6:00

Dinner in Emerald Ballroom Theresa Wood Award 6:30

Dance in Emerald Ballroom 8:00 - 11:00
Map to Tuesday Events

- **Emerald Ballroom**
  - Dinner & Dance
  - 6:30 to 11:00

- **Lake Champlain Exhibition Hall**
  - Dating Advice
  - Art Project
  - Share a **Hobby**
  - **Talent Show**

- **GMSA Store**
  - Upstairs
  - 1st floor

- **Restaurant Pool**

- **PROMENADE**

- **Walk down a few stairs to get to Hotel Rooms**

- **Main Entrance**

**2023 Voices and Choices Conference**

**GROUND FLOOR**
Even though dating is not easy to talk about, we always feel comfortable with Katherine! She creates a safe atmosphere for us to ask questions and share our concerns.

**Workshops on Tuesday Afternoon**

**Together Collage - a Vision of Who We Are Now**

Come join us in creating a community collage together, that we can see ourselves and our dreams in, as we gather for our Voices and Choices Conference.

Making collages help us figure out what we want, what and who we love, and how to make our visions become reality. Let’s create a collage of images. Join us and create a vision for us as a vibrant, strong, colorful community of people:
- working together
- making our dreams come true
- getting our needs met
- and supporting each other to grow and move forward in life.

**4:00 to 5:30 Exhibition Hall**

**Suki Ciappara**

**Need Dating Advice?**

Max says, “I highly recommend Katherine as an awesome person to talk to!”

Even though dating is not easy to talk about, we always feel comfortable with Katherine! She creates a safe atmosphere for us to ask questions and share our concerns.

**Make a 3-minute Video With Max**

Max is easy to talk to. Have a conversation with Max about self-advocacy. Tell us how self-advocacy has made a difference in your life. Max will ask you easy questions. Talk about why it is important to belong to a group.

**4:00 to 5:00 next to the art workshop**

**4:00 to 5:00 next to GMSA store**
Winners share a prize dinner date at Monday’s conference banquet.

Sessions:
- 4:00 to 4:50
- 5:10 to 6:00

Diamond Ballroom

16 people have signed up for the Talent Show. Come cheer your friends on!

From rock climbing and collecting antiques to yoga and birding, these hobbies shared by self-advocates are sure to peak your interest. Hobbies relieve stress, build confidence and make you a more interesting person.

Burlington Taiko Drummers

2 Sessions
- 4:00 to 4:50
- 5:10 to 6:00

Diamond Ballroom
For so long, the disability rights movement talked about independence. The difficulty with speaking about people with disabilities in the realm of independence is that once perceived independence is achieved, that's what the able-bodied world expects of a person. "You wanted it. Now you got it. You can do it on your own."

For this reason, I now say interdependence. This term better describes the relationship that people have in general.

One thing that is lacking with our society today is the fact that there still is the idea that people with disabilities are the ones with needs. Some people think we don't give back to those that support us or that we have nothing to give to those that help us. That couldn't be further from the truth.
THE VERMONT DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL identifies and addresses critical issues affecting people with developmental disabilities and their families. Most of our members are self-advocates or family caregivers. Other members represent partner organizations or agencies in government.

WE’RE EXPERTS in disability-related issues. The federal Administration on Community Living funds your state Developmental Disabilities Council (THAT’S US!) to keep policy makers informed about disability issues.

WE’RE YOUR NEIGHBORS from across Vermont. With members from all walks of life, we represent a diverse range of experience living with developmental disability.

WE’RE AGENTS OF CHANGE. We work to advance public policies that bring people with developmental disabilities and families into the heart of Vermont.

Contact us to learn more about VTDDC, Vermonters with developmental disabilities, and what’s going on in the State legislature. Phone (802) 828-1310 and Email vtddc@vermont.gov
Schedule for Wednesday ~ April 26

**Breakfast** for Hotel Guests  
in Exhibition Hall  
7:00 - 8:00 am

**Register** for Voices & Choices  
in Conference Center Lobby  
8:30 - 9:30 am

**Awards:** GMSA Allies of the Year  
9:30 am to 10:30 am

**Keynote:** Mike Rogers  
in Exhibition Hall

**Morning Workshops**  
10:45 - 12:00 pm

**Lunch** in Exhibition  
12:00 - 1:00 pm

**Get Home Safe...Thanks for Coming!**  
3:00 pm
If you use a wheelchair and are going to Workshops #7 or #8
Take Elevator A to Floor 1
Next go down the hall past the restaurant, then take Elevator B to Floor G
(see on map below)

Walk down a few stairs to get to workshops #7 and #8
Wednesday Morning Workshops

1. **Communication Accessibility in the Workplace**
   **How Employers Can Meet Your Communication Needs**
   
   People with disabilities want to feel supported and included where they work. For this to happen, employers need to understand how people communicate. The presenters will share information on what employers can do to make their work places accessible for people who may not speak and use communication devices like iPads. **One of the presenters who uses an iPad to communicate will share her experiences of working with her employer to make communication easier for her in her job.** The other presenters provide communication training and support. They will share information on what communication partners can do to work with an employer to make communication easier.

   *Pascal Cheng, Grace LeChance and Lauren Barron*

2. **Talking About LGBTQ+, Disability, Relationships and Family**

   In this workshop Pauline and Fran will talk about the LGBTQ+ community and the lives of LGBTQ+ self-advocates. We will explain gender, sexuality, and different types of relationships. You will learn how you can be accepting of yourself, and LGBTQ+ friends and family.

   *Pauline Bosma, Francesco Hladysz and Oscar Hughes*

3. **30 Years Beyond Brandon: A Celebration and a Reckoning**

   Join Champlain Voices in celebrating the 30th anniversary of the closing of the Brandon Training School in 1993. This workshop will employ theater, movement, discussion, and breakout groups. People will leave with an understanding of what segregation is and its negative impacts. Participants will have opportunities to share stories of encouragement from today about their community connections and their meaningful jobs.

   *Champlain Voices Self-Advocacy Group*

4. **Dreams Can Come True and How Finbar Became Santa Fin**

   Come hear Finbar tell his story about how he became Santa Fin. Find out what steps he took to make his dream come true. We will show clips from the **HBO documentary Santa Camp**. Finbar and his mother Suki are featured in the movie. See a presentation with pictures of their journey. Do a few fun activities on how to take steps in your own life to make your dreams come true, too!

   *Finbar Ciappara and Suki Ciappara*
Making Individual Vision Boards

We all have Hopes, Dreams, and Goals. We often just hold them in our heads and hearts. In this workshop you will make your own vision board. Make a beautiful vision board to look at everyday. It will inspire you to work toward your hopes, dreams and goals, on a regular bases. It is something to use with person centered planning. It helps keep the goals in your ISA to be all about you! Vision Boards are a great tool for individual, groups, and projects to keep our vision in view.

Tesha Thibodeau and Mary Ruffing

Disability Doodles

Spend time with cartoon artist Teppi. Learn how self-advocates make drawings to show doctors how they are feeling. Use shapes, colors and words to describe what is happening in your body. You do not need to know how to draw. Draw your health story and map your body. It is fun and easy.

Teppi Zuppo, Kirsten Isgro, Lisa Rudiakov and Levi Gardner

How to Get a Job You Enjoy When You Have a Disability

In this workshop, Self-Advocates will learn skills to find, interview for, and perform at a job. Learn what to look for in a potential employer and job. You want to make sure it is a good fit for you! Now that you have the job, you will need to learn the ins and outs of keeping yourself and your employer happy with your performance.

Marje Burns and Jacob Weber

So, You Want to Be in Charge of Your Money!

Our workshop will explain what a guardian is and why a guardian might be appointed. But there are other ways to get the help you need to make decisions. That help can come from friends, family and support staff. Everyone gets help making decisions. Find out how to get help with solving some of the problems that lead to guardianship.

Lehana Guyette, Randy Lizotte and Karen Noone

Make a Short 3-minute Video with Max

Max is easy to talk to. Have a conversation with Max about self-advocacy. Tell us how self-advocacy has made a difference in your life. Max will ask you easy questions to get you talking about why it is important to belong to a self-advocacy group.

Filmmakers Donna Roberts and Gerald Hoffman with Max Barrows
Wednesday Afternoon Workshops

1. **The Highlights and the Successes of Think College Vermont**
   
   Think College VT is a program for students with intellectual disabilities. In this fun workshop, we will be doing some cool interactive work with audience participation. We will also listen to a panel from Think College Vermont alumni and students talking about their college experiences. They will discuss: academics, socialization, recreational activities, life skills, self-advocacy, and work experiences. They will share testimonials about successes in the Think College Vermont program.

   **Stirling Peebles, Taylor Terry and Nicole Villemaire**

2. **How to Get a Relationship Going and Keep It Going**
   
   There is no one right way. Do your best to be open and honest. Learn how you can be respectful and accepting of yourself. We all deserve respect. Too often relationships and sexuality are talked about from a negative point of view but we prefer to focus on the happiness associated with relationships and feeling sexy. In this workshop we will talk about:

   - Setting Boundaries
   - Feeling confident
   - Heartbreaks can be painful, take time to feel strong again

   **Katherine McLaughlin**

3. **Speak Up and Be Heard!**

   The Vermont Workers’ Center is a group of everyday people fighting for justice and human dignity. They are leaders of the Healthcare is a Human Right campaign. In this workshop, we teach how to speak up for what you believe. Join us. You can:

   - Tell your story
   - Make a poster
   - Learn or make up a chant or song

   We know it’s going to take a fight, and we’ll only win if we are organized.

   **Quinn Gilbert, Volney Gordon, Lehana Guyette, Zachary Hughes, Kate Kanelstein and Michele O’Donnell**

4. **Food Stretcher**

   Learn how to use the box of food you get from the Food Shelf to plan meals. We will introduce or review the MYPLATE meal planner to guide your planning. The self-advocates teaching this workshop meet once a week on zoom to share cooking tips and recipes.

   **David Frye, Marshall Denutte, Erik Johnson, Shae Martin and Karen Noone**
5 **Making Individual Vision Boards**  

We all have Hopes, Dreams, and Goals. We often just hold them in our heads and hearts. In this workshop you will make your own vision board. Make a beautiful vision board to look at everyday. It will inspire you to work toward your hopes, dreams and goals, on a regular basis. It is something to use with person center planning. It helps keep the goals in your ISA to be all about you! Vision Boards are a great tool for individual groups, and projects to keep our vision in view.

*Tesha Thibodeau and Mary Ruffing*

6 **Disability Pride and Issues of Identity: The Importance of Self-Advocacy**  

Love your disability. Own it!  
We are in the movement together.  
Activate self-advocacy in your life!  
Tell your story.

*Sefakor Komabu-Pomeyie, Ph.D.*

7 **Supported Decision-Making**

Supported Decision-Making is about who guides us on how to choose to live our lives. Lots of people will come to you with an opinion about what you should do. But we all want to have the final say in what happens in our lives. Learn steps you can take to learn to make your own decisions and still get all the help you need.

*Kirsten Murphy, Hasan Ko and Max Barrows*

9 **Do You Want to Be Your Own Guardian?**

Our workshop will explain what a guardian is and why a guardian might be appointed. But there are other ways to get the help you need to make decisions. That help can come from friends, family and support staff. Everyone gets help making decisions. Find out how to get help with solving some of the problems that lead to guardianship.

*Barb Prine Disability Law Project and Self-Advocates*
Throughout our lives, we all explore what it means to be human. We collectively discuss and think about what makes up a good life, including the responsibilities of citizenship, how to be of service to others, and our relationship to the natural world. These questions arise in our town halls, in our schools, in our backyards, on our village greens, and in our faith communities.

The humanities come to life through our connections with each other. They help us achieve a better understanding of the past, a stronger analysis of the present, and a more hopeful vision for the future.
Thanks to Our Gold Sponsor

Thank you to Herman Goldberg for your generosity and leadership to the self-advocacy movement in Vermont!!!

We are so grateful to have leaders like you!

Herman Goldberg
Past President of GMSA
DAIL supports GMSA’s ongoing efforts to promote self-advocacy for people with developmental disabilities.
Since 2003, we have made it our mission to enhance the lives of individuals supported by service organizations by providing agencies the tools they need to focus on meaningful outcomes for the people they serve.
Thanks to Our Gold Sponsor

Think College!

The University of Vermont Center on Disability and Community Inclusion (CDCI) is proud to sponsor the 2023 Voices & Choices Conference.

Through our Think College Vermont program, we connect Vermonters with disabilities with a path to higher education -- including classes, peer groups, mentors, and skill training -- at the University of Vermont.

go.uvm.edu/thinkcollege
Thanks to Our Gold Sponsor

We provide information, referral and advocacy services, including legal representation when appropriate, to people with disabilities throughout Vermont.
HCRS strives to provide creative, collaborative, and compassionate health care services that are responsive to the needs of our communities.

HCRS envisions a community where people are inspired, empowered, and supported to lead healthy and meaningful lives.
Champlain Community Services (CCS) is in its 56th year of serving our community. Our goal is to build a community where everyone participates, and everyone belongs.
Finbar Ciappara from a young age, had a dream of becoming Santa Claus. He is featured in Santa Camp, a new HBO film. This documentary shows how Finbar uses his iPad to communicate. The movie is a magical portrait of how Finbar’s dream to be a professional Santa Claus came true.

Norman Stone wanted a job for a long time. Finally with hard work and perseverance he is now working at Star Theater. He is dedicated to his local group and supporting his peers.

Alice Goltz works as a crossing guard for Montpelier City Schools. In 2021, Alice was supported by local activists to run for City Council in Montpelier. Alice graduated from the Vermont Leadership Series and is an active member of Capitol Advocates Together.

Nancy Coles is very kind and supportive of her peers. She is not afraid to speak up for herself and the tender-hearted. Nancy is a dedicated volunteer delivering meals on wheels. She models giving back to our communities.

Suki Ciappara is a champion of making dreams come true. She is featured in a HBO documentary showing how she supports her son Finbar to achieve his dream of being a professional Santa Claus. Not only is she a loving, caring mother to her son, but she has really shown that she cares about all of us as individuals. She exemplifies that.

Kirsten Murphy shows that she really cares about us as individuals. She goes out of her way to make sure our voices are heard. She keep us all informed in ways that we can understand and actively participate. Kirsten models a true commitment to listening and educating herself about the views of people with lived experience.

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Join A Local Group!

Local Self-Advocacy Contacts

Call Max
1-800-564-9990
Max can tell you how to connect with a self-advocacy group near you
A Tribute to 2023 Award Winners

Advocate of the Year: Luis Acebo Jr.
Ally: Tanya Bryan

Advocate of the Year: Rosie Dumais
Vermont Choices
Ally: Bonnie Cleverley

Advocate of the Year: Chuck Dennis
Ally: Donna Quesnal

Advocate of the Year: Susan Mandell
Ally: Alex Tupper

Advocate of the Year: Patty Gibbons
Ally: Bonnie Belfield

Winners to be announced
A Tribute to 2023 Award Winners

**COPS**
Advocate of the Year: Chris Dubeau
Ally: Lucy Stone

**Capitol Advocates Together**
Advocate of the Year: Max Barrows
Allies: Laura and Steve Taylor

Advocate of the Year: Heather Raymond
Ally: Tammy Rheaume

**Winds of Change**
Advocate of the Year: Eric Perham
Ally: Eryn Lockkery

**GATSA**
Advocate of the Year: Renea Ross
Ally: Carrie Cota

Advocate of the Year: Amanda Daniels
Ally: Colleen Cole

**Champlain Voices**
Advocate of the Year: Mark Utter
Ally: Andrew Rea
Self-Advocacy is

A civil rights movement for people with intellectual disabilities

People speaking-up for what they think is important

Something everyone is capable of

Making your case and negotiating for what you want

Realizing you are not alone, joining a self-advocacy group

Knowing your strengths, being proud and feeling strong

Taking risks, trying new things

Self-Advocacy is NOT

A program

People sitting around and complaining

Only for people who can talk.

Keeping everything the same

Keeping to yourself

Putting yourself down

Playing it safe, doing the same stuff
Self-Advocacy is

- Going after your dreams
- Making decisions
- Making mistakes and learning from them
- Being part of your community
- Managing your emotions so others can hear what you have to say
- Being curious and asking questions

Self-Advocacy is NOT

- Sleeping through your dreams
- Other people making decisions for you
- Not taking any chances
- Staying home
- Staying angry
- Being questioned
Vermonters with intellectual and developmental disabilities speaking up for ourselves and others