



Freedom Dance Party

*Green Mountain Self-Advocates
celebrating 29 years of peer support*



*ZenBarn
Waterbury, VT*



Program

5:00 pm Ice Breaker, Bonfire and Cash Bar



All About Me ice breaker & photo-op!

Grab a cocktail with some friends!

Check out the bonfire outside.



5:30 pm Wood-Fired Pizza and Salad

Find a table and get your fill of delicious food and great company!

6:00 pm Dance to the Grift Band

One of the very best party bands in Vermont!



7:00 pm Time to Speak Up

Special guest—Representative Theresa Wood.

Let's celebrate! Brandon Training School has been closed for 30 Years. Our communities need us - we bring so much to where we live and work.

7:30 pm Back to the Dance Party! (until 8:00 pm)

Thanks for coming and get Home safe!



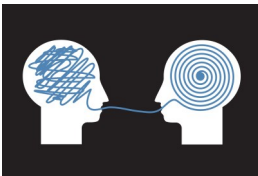
Some of GMSA's Many Achievements in 2022 and 2023

Co-presented a series of *Sexuality Webinars for People with Developmental Disabilities* with Katherine McLaughlin and a team of national self-advocates.



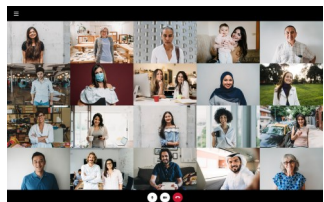
Peer mentoring support for hundreds of self-advocates who belong to 20 local self-advocacy groups.

560 people attended the 24th Annual Voices and Choices Conference. Our 2-day conference is the largest Vermont event for people with disabilities.



More than 5,000 people across the USA trained on writing in Plain Language

We host a weekly Zoom meeting with more than 50 peer leaders from more than 35 states!



Some of GMSA's Many Achievements in 2022 and 2023



16 peer leaders supported to speak up on 14 boards and advisory committees.

We created and run a website with 398 resources and stories about self-advocacy. The total lifetime users of our website is more than 112,000.



Three events with the White House!

Presented 60+ disability and racial justice events for government workers, businesses, faith communities, , healthcare providers, medical and college students.



Training for Board Members on Board Money Management.



Larry Bissonnette

Many years ago most of my existence was spent behind the institutional walls of Brandon Training School.

I am free of those walls now but attitudinal walls are still very much placing large, enveloped by ignorance, jackets of segregation around the lives of people with disabilities and especially, those that don't speak.

All of us self-advocates must make waves of change pour over malls and places of leaders of government, moving mountains and clearing paths of acceptance.

Larry Bissonnette
Artist and Activist



Testimony By Susan Aichroth To the Vermont Legislature March '23



Being in Brandon Training School was like a prison. Like when you go to jail like a criminal. My parents didn't want me. They thought I was a problem child.

At Brandon, I spent all my time chasing other clients. The staff were not around. Every day was basically going from the workshop back to the dorm. That was my whole life. I didn't have any friends. I just felt like a criminal. And I knew other people felt that way too.

Not many people had choices of what they did and how they did it. There was a men's cottage and a women's cottage. I have been through a lot. I got molested. I got abused. I got thrown down on the floor. Nobody cared about me. Nobody looked out for me. I had to look out for myself.

Now I live in Shelburne. Everyone should be in the community learning things and getting support. I want people to look at reality. Reality means how things really are. The truth is that people with disabilities have gifts and should not be shy.

It was hard to learn how to speak up. I was afraid. People would laugh at me. But I kept speaking up. And eventually, I got to speak at public meetings and conferences.

And guess what? When I spoke up at meetings no one made fun of me. In fact, they appreciated and encouraged me. People wanted to hear my voice. My message to other people with disabilities is to speak up, you can do it.

FAIRY
THAT SUPPORTS
SPACE FOR OTHERS
TO BE WHO THEY ARE



A topographic map of Vermont with various self-advocacy groups labeled in white boxes with black borders. The map shows the state's terrain, including mountains and water bodies. Key geographical features labeled include Mt. Mansfield and Camel's Hump (4,083').

Newport Self-Advocates

Next Steps Self-Advocates

GATSA: Getting Acquainted Through Self-Advocacy

Champlain Voices

SAVY: Strong Advocacy Voices & You

Vermont Choices

Burlington Self-Advocacy Club

Capital Advocates Together

Bridging Advocates Together

Communication Alliance

Friends Helping Friends

Speak Up Addison County

Strong Wings

Randolph Area Peer Support

Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered of Rutland

Dream Catchers

Connections of Peer Support

Winds of Change

Bennington Friends of Friends

Brattleboro Advocacy Group