

GREEN MOUNTAIN SELF-ADVOCATES

30
YEARS

sharing our voice

Voices and Choices Conference



April 23 and 24, 2024

Hosted by

Green Mountain Self-Advocates

2024 Conference Theme

GMSA Celebrates

Our 30th Anniversary



- ☆ Friends helping friends to grow self-advocacy and create new connections
- ☆ Just be yourself; feel free to be who we are
- ☆ Never give up on your dreams—chase them with all you've got
- ☆ Nothing about us should ever happen without us



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

Emily Anderson created these fairies for our Conference ~ www.bluebirdfairies.com

Schedule for Tuesday ~ April 23



Register for Voices & Choices
in Conference Center

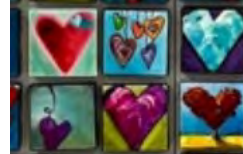
3:00 - 6:00



Pick up **Hotel Room Keys**
at Hotel Front Desk

3:00 - 6:00

Art Workshop
in Exhibition Hall



4:00 - 6:00



Telling Our Stories
in Exhibition Hall

4:00 - 6:00

Dating Advice with Katherine
in Exhibition Hall



4:00 - 5:30



Share Your Hobby with Others
outside of the Exhibition Hall

4:30 - 5:30



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

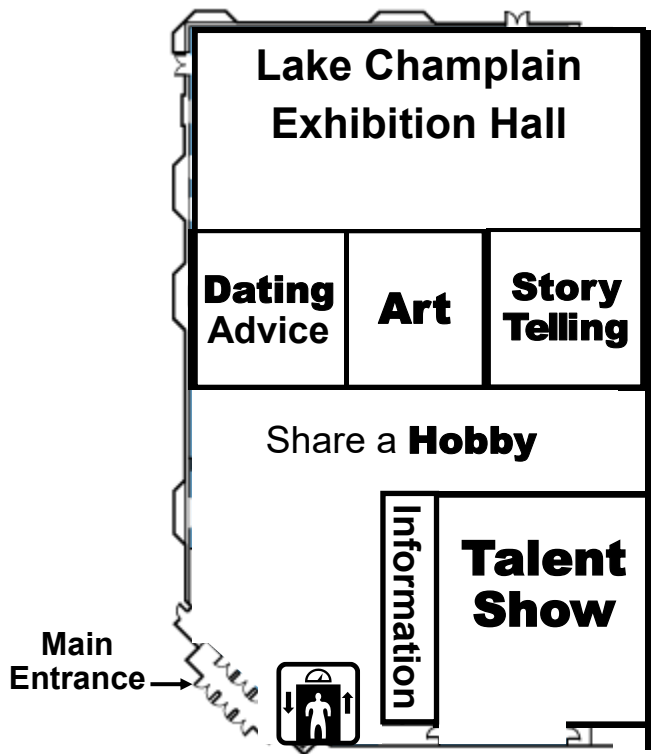
6:30



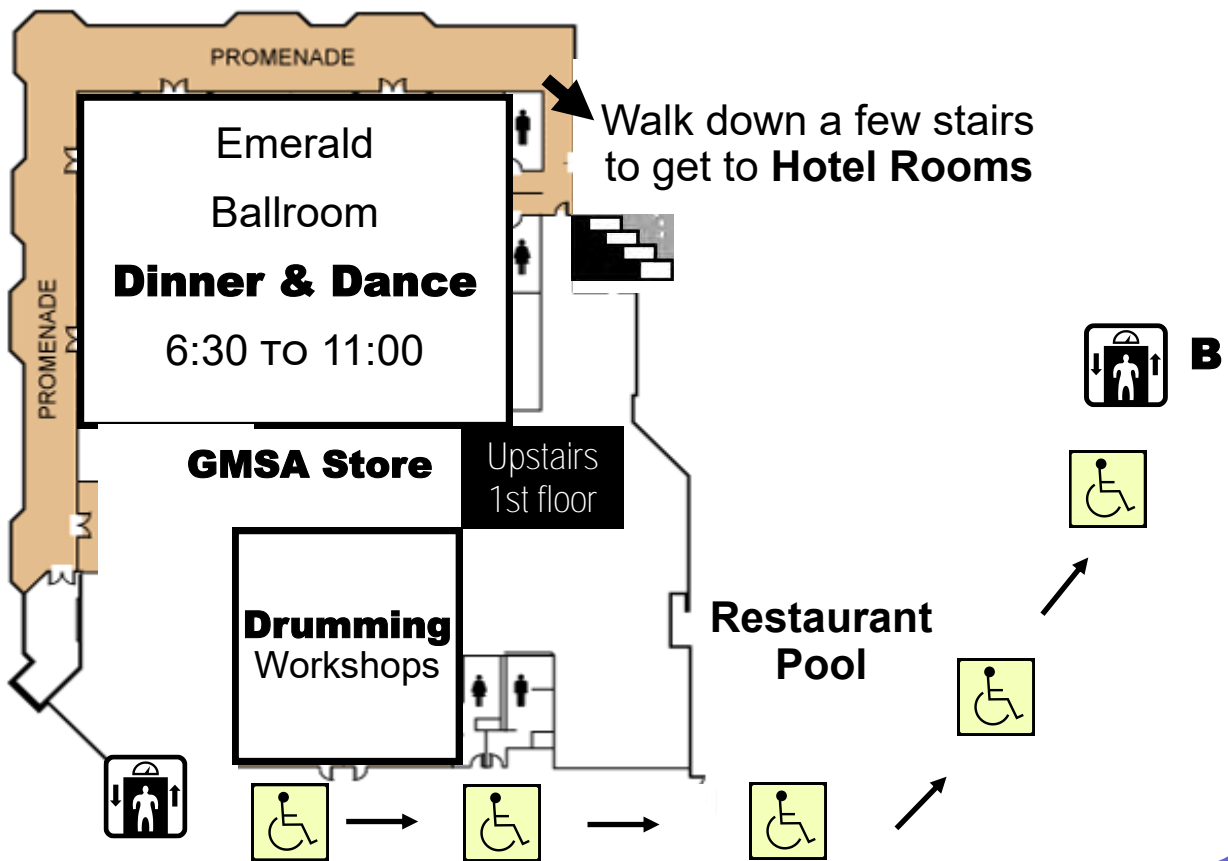
Dance in Emerald Ballroom

8:00 - 11:00

Map to Tuesday Events



GROUND FLOOR



Workshops on Tuesday Afternoon

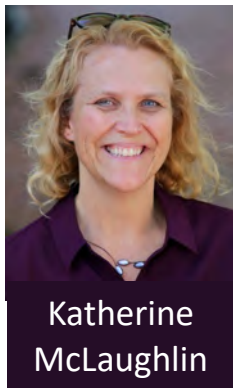
Telling Our Stories

Unlock the power of your own story in our fun workshop! We help you create your personal story using engaging prompts and props. You'll get the chance to stand up and share your story with others, either by talking to the group or being recorded on video. Whether you're already good at telling stories or you're just starting out, this workshop is for everyone. Bring your life experiences and dreams to share. You don't need any experience—just come ready to dig into the stories that make you who you are.



4:00 to 6:00 Exhibition Hall

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.

4:00 to 5:30

Art Workshop

Paint and decorate a heart.
Help us create a wall of hearts.



4:00 to 6:00

Workshops on Tuesday Afternoon

Share a Hobby

4:30 to 5:30
Exhibition Hall

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
And
5:10 to 6:00
Diamond Ballroom

TALENT SHOW

5:00
to
6:00
Amphitheater

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



Tia Nelis ~ Keynote



Tia Nelis is a well-known speaker and leader in the self-advocacy movement. She has been a President of Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) and also the President of People First of Illinois. She also served on the Illinois Developmental Disabilities Council. Tia works with Max Barrows to support the Self Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center (SARTAC).

She has years of experience training and speaking up to lawmakers and other officials to get better policies for people with disabilities. Tia recently got a certificate in Disability Studies from Syracuse University. She lives in Elmhurst, Illinois.

Tia Nelis is the
Coordinator of Self-
Advocate Engagement
for TASH.

Tia Nelis uses her own
experiences with
disability to show how
important it is for people
with disabilities to feel
powerful and in control.

She can be reached at
tnelis@tash.org

Before working at TASH, Tia was a Self-Advocacy Specialist at the Institute on Disability and Human Development at University of Illinois at Chicago. Tia has been honored with the Burton Blatt Award by Illinois TASH, the Commissioner's Award from the Administration on Developmental Disabilities, and the Elizabeth Boggs Award from the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities.



Thanks to Our Super Advocate Sponsor



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.

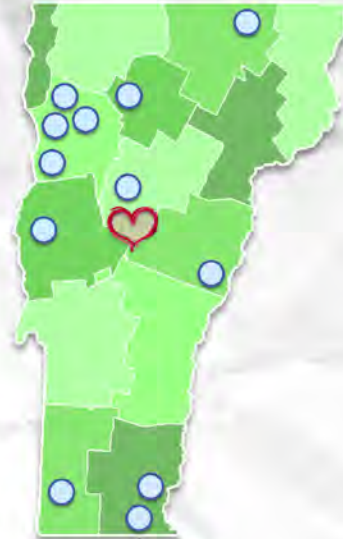
WE'RE EXPERTS in disability-related issues.

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](tel:8028281310) 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



Keynote: Tia Nelis
in Exhibition Hall

9:30 am
to
10:30 am



Morning **Workshops**

10:45 - 12:00 pm



Lunch in Exhibition

12:00 - 1:00 pm



Burlington Taiko Drummers

Local Self-Advocacy Group
Awards in Exhibition Hall

1:45 - 1:30 pm



Afternoon **Workshops**

1:45 - 3:00 pm

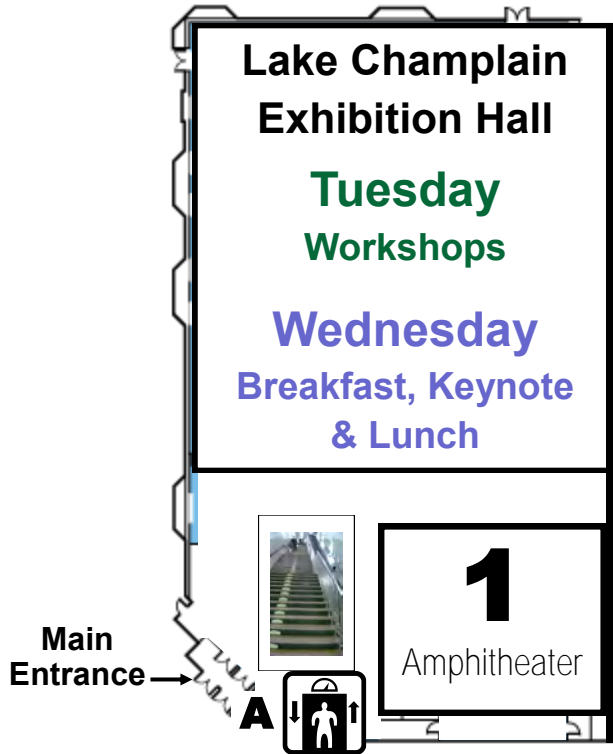



*Get Home Safe...Thanks for
Coming!*

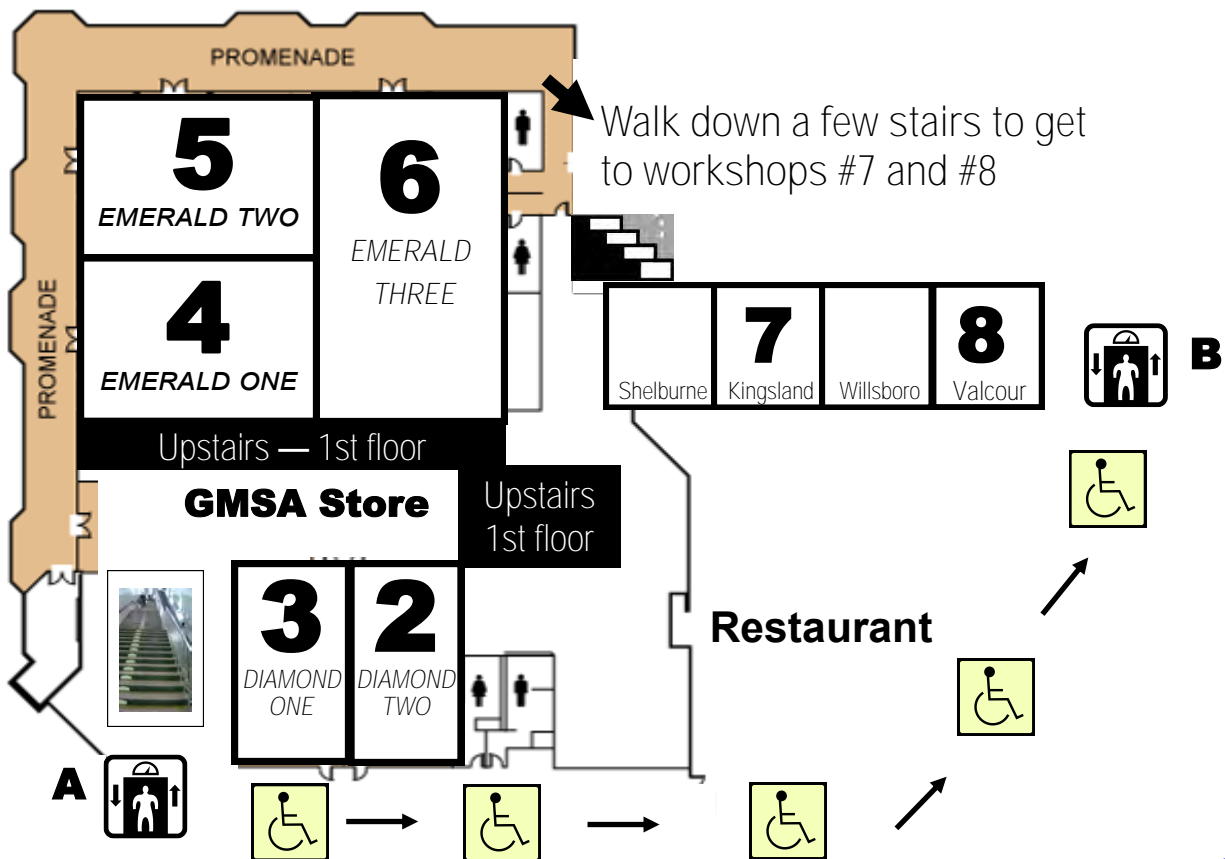
3:00 pm

Map to Wednesday Events

GROUND FLOOR



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)



Wednesday Morning Workshops



1 Communication Accessibility in the Workplace How Employers Can Meet Your Communication Needs

Amphitheater

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 presenter who uses an iPad to communicate will share their experiences working with employers to make communication easier on her job. The other presenters provide communication training and support. They will describe what communication partners can do to work with an employer to make communication easier.

**Pascal Cheng, Meghan Downey, Thad Dutil,
Nicole Villemaire and Amy Stowell**



2 How To Date Like a Pro

Diamond Two

Are you interested in finding a date? Is there someone you want to ask out? Dating can be very exciting & challenging. We will discuss how to move from just being friends to becoming a couple. Learn how to let someone know you are interested, ask someone out, and what to do if they say "yes" and if they say "no". It's all about dating like a pro.

Tia Nelis and Karen Topper



3 Know Your Rights

Diamond One

Many people with disabilities get services that help us live our everyday lives. Today we will talk about:

- ☆ What rights do I have when I get services?
- ☆ Who can I talk to if someone isn't respecting my rights?
- ☆ What rules do staff have to follow?

Devon Ayers, VT Legal Aid and Max Barrows



4 Dreams Can Come True and How Finbar Became Santa Fin

Emerald One

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

Wednesday Morning Workshops

My Vision Board



5 Making Individual Vision Boards

Emerald Two

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 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



6 Disability Doodles

Emerald Three

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, Jennifer Rainville, Aubrey Moyer, Lisa Rudiakov and Levi Gardner



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

Kingsland

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



8 The Rules Have Changed: With Able You Can Save More Than \$2000 and Not Lose Your Benefits

Valcour

Amazing, right? Have you heard about **ABLE Accounts**? Now, you can save hundreds of dollars without getting into trouble with Social Security or Medicaid. There are some rules to follow, though. Come and learn from examples of how an **ABLE account** works. Saving money can help you be more free and independent. We'll show you how to choose, start, and use an **ABLE account**.

Kirsten Murphy and Shae Martin

Wednesday Afternoon Workshops



1 All About the Bennies: A discussion of how **Social Security** benefits can impact a person's life. Amphitheater

Understanding social security benefits can be difficult. We would like to make social security less difficult for people with disabilities to understand. This workshop will be an interactive overview of the Social Security system.

Lee Reilly and Kerri Tatro



2 Tell All, An Insight into What YOU are Thinking Diamond Two

Champlain Voices is on a mission to understand what truly matters to individuals with Intellectual disabilities in their everyday lives. Through engaging discussions, interactive games, and opportunities to share your insights, you'll play an active role in shaping our research. **Plus, there's a chance to win a cool t-shirt!** Don't miss out on this exciting and meaningful session.

Paul Betz, Thomas Caswell, Whitley Draper, David Frye, Hasan Ko, Nicole Villemare, Mark Utter, and Emily Anderson



3 Speak Up and Be Heard! Diamond One

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.

Lehana Guyette, Zack Hughes, Amy Lester, and Kate Kanelstein



4 Look Through Our Eyes Training Emerald One

This is a workshop designed to help staff and allies learn the best ways to support the people they assist.

- We'll do an activity called "What Do We Have in Common?" to see what people with disabilities have in common with people without disabilities.
- Presenters will answer personal questions about their lives.
- We'll discuss principles of self-advocacy, focusing on important rules we live by such as: "Nothing about us without us."

Jonathan Fitzgerald, Randy Lizotte & Heather Raymond

Wednesday Afternoon Workshops

My Vision Board



5 Making Individual Vision Boards

Emerald Two

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

Emerald Three



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 How to Not Only Keep but Love Your Job!

Kingsland



Mark would like to share how he maintains his job after 19 years and still loves it — challenges and progress.

1. Tips for keeping employer happy
2. How to handle difficult coworkers and situations
3. Ways to relax when you are done work

Mark Manning

8 Do You Want to Be Your Own Guardian?

Valcour



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.

Rachel Seelig Disability Law Project and Max Barrows

Thanks to Our Gold Sponsor



VERMONT

**AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES
DEPT. OF DISABILITIES, AGING & INDEPENDENT LIVING**

*DAIL supports GMSA's ongoing efforts
to promote self-advocacy for people
with developmental disabilities*



Thanks to Our Gold Sponsor



**DISABILITY
RIGHTS
VERMONT**

CALL 800 - 834 - 7890



**Protecting the rights of people
with disabilities in Vermont
for more than 30 years.**

**We provide information, referral and
advocacy services, including legal
representation when appropriate, to people
with disabilities throughout Vermont.**

Thanks to Our Gold Sponsor



Think College!

**"The UVM Center on Disability & Community Inclusion:
supporting Vermonters with disabilities with access to
education, research, services and stories since 1974."**

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.



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
CENTER ON DISABILITY &
COMMUNITY INCLUSION

go.uvm.edu/thinkcollege

Thanks to Our Silver Sponsor



Lincoln Street, Inc.

Congratulations GMSA on 30 Years of Empowering Community Members throughout Vermont.

Thanks to Our Bronze Sponsors



**VERMONT
CARE
PARTNERS**

Supporting Vermonters to lead healthy and satisfying lives community by community.

VCP network agencies specialize in providing intellectual & developmental disability, mental health, and substance use services and supports in your community. Our website is vermontcarepartners.org



All Brains Belong VT

Neuroinclusive Healthcare & Community

All Brains Belong VT works to make life better for people with all types of brains. We provide flexible ways to connect with community.

GMSA Ally of the Year 2024



We're honored to present to you the ally of the year.

June Bascom!

Throughout her years working for the state, June spent her time educating others about the challenges and injustices faced by people who need support to communicate, as a champion of the Vermont Communication Task Force.

By raising awareness, she challenged biases and misconceptions, and opened doors to true acceptance and understanding.

June showed us all how to use our positions of privilege to amplify the voices of those who are often silenced or overlooked.

June recognizes when to step back, listen, and learn. She allows us to lead, ensuring that our voices are heard, respected.

She is respectful, but is not afraid to question issues that seem unjust or

unfair. She goes out of her way to make sure that WE are at the table any time decisions are made about our lives and taken seriously.

Perhaps you have heard the saying; "If you don't know your history, it will repeat itself". June is a leader in educating the public about the history of the Brandon Training School and how the people who lived there were treated. This is her strong passion toward moving forward, but making sure that we all do not forget our past.

All of these qualities make June such a GREAT Ally to our movement. Thank you June for all you do to help make society fully inclusive.





Theresa Wood 2024 Citizenship Award

Respect Leadership Determination
Commitment Creativity Sense of Humor



Alice Goltz is an active member of Capitol Advocates Together. She works as a crossing guard for Montpelier Schools. Twice she was supported by local activists to run for City Council in Montpelier.

Alice shows respect for people she knows by standing up for them and helping them. One of our fellow CAT members found himself homeless and Alice helped him to get the services he needed.

Alice is a staunch advocate for Parental Rights. While the Bill she had introduced will not help her in her own life, she works hard to help make a difference for others.

While attending the Leadership Series Alice met the new representative from

Montpelier. Always in networking mode she seized the opportunity to ask him to reintroduce the “Right to Parent” bill. This bill gives people with Developmental Disabilities the right to parent.

Alice wants to make a difference in her community and demonstrated that by taking a risk and running for City Council.


Alice is very passionate about how people with disabilities should be treated. Anytime an issue comes up, she brings it to the table in our CAT group.


We are so glad to get to know her. She is such an awesome addition to our group. She brings enthusiasm to all of our group meetings.

A Tribute to 2024 Award Winners


Self-Advocates *creating circles*
Becoming 
Empowered *of support*
of Rutland
Advocate of the Year
JULIE BEEBE
Ally: GMSA


Advocate of the Year
Amy Guinard
Ally:
Brittany Horton 

Advocate of the Year
Bill
Simonson 
Ally:
Brenda
Smires


Advocate of the Year:
Raymond Bapp
Ally: Robert and Lynn
Bushman

Advocate of the Year:
Wren Young
Ally:
Jasmine Stratton 


Advocate of the Year:
Lyndsey Brooks
Ally: Darcy Mendez

Advocate of the Year:
Jaime Feliciano
Ally:
Helen Paquin 

A Tribute to 2024 Award Winners

COPS

Advocate of the Year:
Regina Coonradt
Ally: Donna Merrow

**Capitol Advocates
Together**

Advocate of the Year:
Caroline Gillen
Allies: Karen Topper

Advocate of the Year:
Heather Raymond



Ally: Lynn Stanley

**Winds
of Change**

Advocate of the Year:
James Paradis
Ally: Karen Chandler

GATSA

Advocate of the Year:
Kelly Donahue
Ally: Darlene DeRoehn

Advocate of the Year:
Christine
St. Pierre
Ally:
Colleen
Cole

**Newport
Self-
Advocates**

Champlain Voices

Advocate of the Year:
Paul Betz
Ally:
Emily Anderson



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

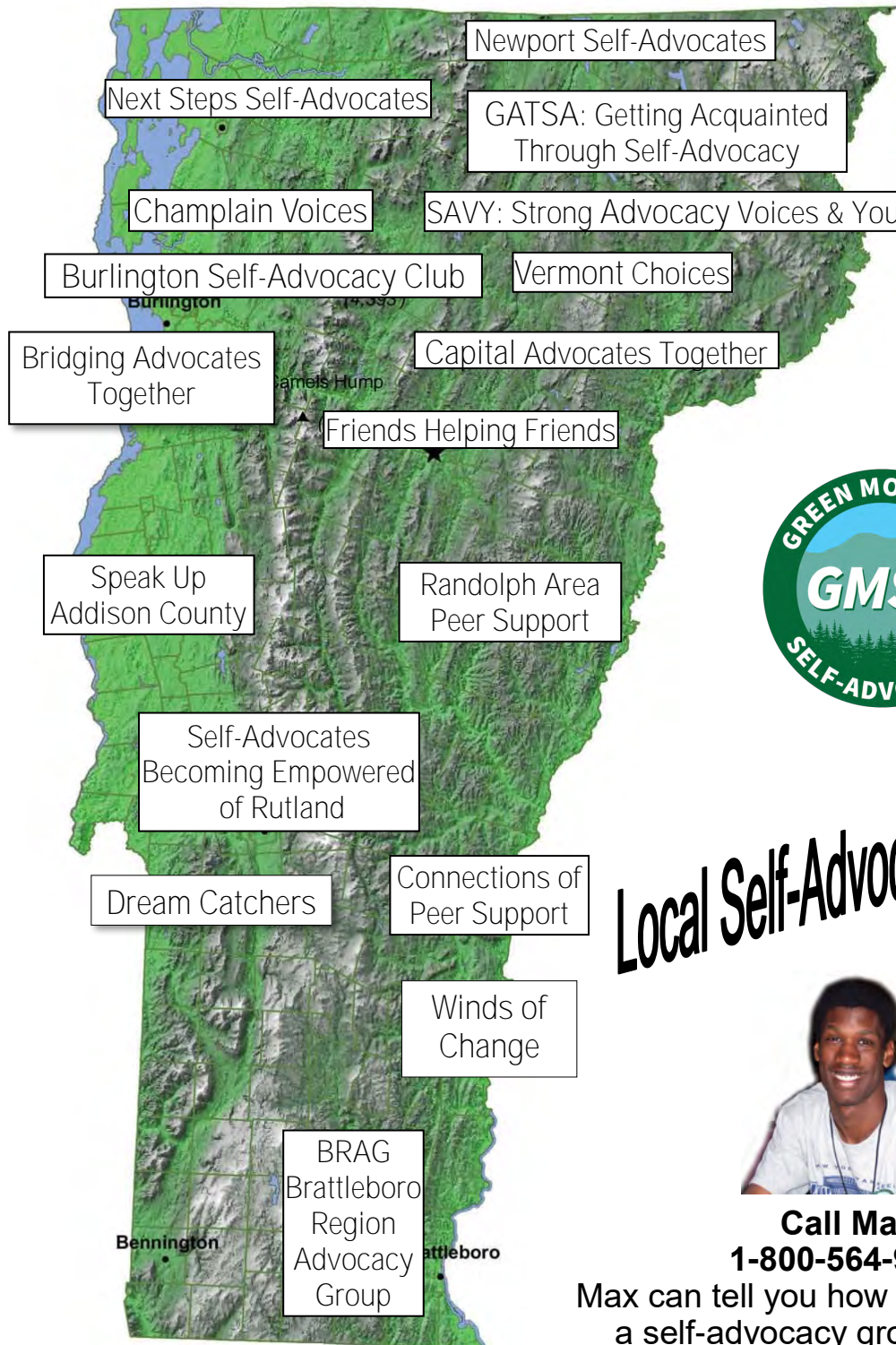
Not taking any
chances

Staying home

Staying angry

Being questioned

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



Vermonters with intellectual and developmental disabilities speaking up for ourselves and others