

GMSA Board Meeting held on February 22, 2021 on Zoom

GMSA Officers (3): Randy Lizotte (president), Chad Cleverly (treasurer), Danielle Viau (vice-president)

GMSA Board Members (9): Erik Johnson (Vermont Choices), Marjorie Burns (BSAC), Hasan Ko (Champlain Voices), Tesha Thibodeau (Winds of Change), Taylor Terry (Capitol Advocates Together), Kris Medina (Communication Alliance), Antoine Polgar (Speak Up Addison County), Bret Sweeney (Bradford Self-Advocates), Jon Fitzgerald (Next Step Self-Advocates)

Self-Advocates (13): Rebekah Thompson, Levi Gardner, Cory Savage, Michelle Haberin, Caroline Gilen, Christopher Michael Bernier, Katharine Breunig, Jennifer Rainville, Amanda Daniels, Marshall Dennutt, Susan Mandell,

Allies (7): Lee Reilly, Jacob Weber, Wendy Summarsell, Mary Ruffing, Ross Almo, Jennifer Merrill

GMSA Staff (3): Karen Topper, Max Barrows, Karen Noone

Agenda:

#1 Goals – go over them one more time

#2 Five questions about diversity at GMSA

#3 Application from Skye Peebles to be a board member

#4 Reach out to board members to see who is on or off. Find out what people need to join us.

Meeting Notes

#1 GMSA Goals for 2021. Randy read the list of goals selected by the board on January 25th. See the January minutes for the list of goals.

#2 Five questions about diversity at GMSA.

Our Beliefs and Our Values

1. Our organization understands what the word culture means.

Culture means the way a group of people do things.

- What they believe, how they think.
- Their religion, music, or language.
- What is important to and for them.

People in our state are from a variety of cultural groups.

What is important to one person or group may not be important to another.

True

True some times

Not True

Don't Know

2. Our organization respects people from all cultures. We believe it is important to welcome people from different cultural groups.

True

True some times

Not True

Don't Know

3. Often people have different ideas about what having a disability means. Our organization knows that where a person is born and where a person grows up can shape what they think a disability is.

True

True some times

Not True

Don't Know

For example, people from Canada and people from Japan may have different ideas about what it means to have a disability.

4. Our organization knows that people have lots of different parts of who they are. Race, gender, religion and more are all part of a person.

True

True some times

Not True

Don't Know

For example, Jacob has an intellectual disability. He is also a gay, Black man who lives in a small town. Jacob is all these things at the same time.

5. Our organization knows that people are often treated unfairly based on how they look.

True

True some times

Not True

Don't Know

For example, if someone is dressed in old clothes, a store owner might assume that person has no money and try to keep them out of the store.

Max - Hasan and I have been thinking about how GMSA as a board and how our groups are doing when it comes to diversity. We want to make sure that every piece of the puzzle fits together, and that we understand each other.

Hasan - When you say something, some people might misunderstand you. So, we want to make sure we understand and to know a little bit about your everyday life. What can you do to help with this kind of thing? What can you do that makes it easy for a new person to walk in and join your group? It is for all of us to know what we need to do to be welcoming.

Topper – Max and Hasan have five questions today to help us get started thinking about diversity at GMSA. It is important to understand that there's no right or wrong answer.

Topper – it is helping us to figure out what we can do to get better at respecting people with all kinds of backgrounds. Like Max so beautifully said, it's kind of like a puzzle. And we want to just figure out what are the pieces of the puzzle we have to start working on more. And as Hassan said, to know what we need to do better so everybody can understand each other.

For the five questions think about Green Mountain Self-Advocates. Think about the board. When we meet once a month. Think about the people who work for Green Mountain Self-Advocates and think about when we have events like Voices and Choices. Think about how people get along with each other in your local groups.

Question #1: Does GMSA understand what the word culture means. So basically, the choice is true, true. Sometimes not true or don't know. And you can read the data and I can just read the definition. Culture means the way a group of people do things, what they believe in and how they think their religion, music or language, what is important to and for them and people in our state are from a variety of cultural groups. What is important to one person or group may not be important to another.

Max - Maybe we can start by asking, can people think about the different cultures that people belong to who are part of Green Mountain Self-Advocates? Like, here's an example, some self-advocates and allies are white, a few are Hispanic, Asian and Black.

So, there's different groups. Can you think of other groups?

- Native American. Justin and Kenny.
- We have people that are Abenaki that belong to Green Mountain.
- Are there those that are gay and some people that are straight, Yes, totally.
- What about three different religions, people belong to different religions
- deaf culture and people who type on iPads to speak

Again, Question #1, do you think that Green Mountain Self-Advocates, do you think that we understand what the word culture means?

- 8 people said True (for example: Yeah, it's 100 percent; It's true; Yeah it's true we know what culture means; Kris typed I believe this to be true.
- 6 people said True sometimes (for example: It's only true sometimes; Maybe we need to work on it a little bit more; Randy - I honestly think there's always room for improvement; true sometimes; OK, yeah, because we can always learn more about different cultures. Yeah; Yeah, that's true. There will always be somebody with a history new to us; That's a really good point. Yeah.)

Topper - It's fine to score sometimes true. It just tells us we need to work on it a little bit more. It is important for us to make sure that we talk about what culture is.

Question #2 – Does GMSA respect people from all cultures.

- 10+ said True (for example: That's true; Yeah, that's very true; Yeah, true and important; Kris typed I believe this to be true also, yeah.

Question #2 – Do we believe it is important to welcome people from different cultural groups.

- 4 said True (for example, Yes we know; I can see how that's true; I just joined this group and I'd say you guys are very welcoming.)
- Most said True sometimes (for example: Yes but I think we definitely need to reach out to more people than who are here now; So just to talk to about this, more; It sounds like we need to do work on trying to make sure that we're welcoming; Yes it is the second part of the question. We believe it is important to welcome people. And maybe work on how we do it.)

Question #3 – All right, often people have a different idea about what having a disability means, Does GMSA know that? Where a person is born and where a person grows up can shape what they think a disability is, for example, people from Canada and people from Japan may have different ideas about what it means to have a disability.

- Yes, I believe I believe there's three disabilities, there's intellectual disability, there's dyslexia and there's learning disability.
- So, yeah, that's true.
- Yeah, it's really true.
- Levi asked: If someone is born in another country and they move to the United States is that the same thing? (Topper answered: Yes, for example someone born in the Dominican Republic might think a person with a disability can be a great farmer or fisherman. And then when they move to the United States, teachers tell the disabled person you will never be able to own a farm or own a boat and go out fishing by themselves.)
- Hasan - I would like to ask everybody if they understand this question. Think about the idea that different people have different ideas and what a disability is and what we can do.
- In Vermont, people with disabilities have jobs. But in other places people with disabilities live in institutions or nursing homes. In Vermont. most people believe they should live in the community. Some places say people with disabilities can date and get married and have children. Other places say no.
- Chad - It is hard to answer this question if you have never been to another country. The closest experience to this is if you never knew you had a disability and then you were tested and found out you had a

disability. It is more of an internal thing, like how you think about disability for yourself, but it is still fundamentally different.

- And it is not just about knowing you have a disability but also knowing about advocacy groups. My case manager for years never told me about you guys. So, I'm glad that you guys had taught this because I wanted to know it like a couple years ago, but I never got told by my workers. So, I'm glad that you guys bring the stuff up.
- And Developmental disability means that you've got your disability before you were 18 years old. If you get a disability later you might not get money or services.
- Yeah. What if someone was diagnosed with autism and they were an adult, but they've had it all their lives?
- Autism is a developmental disability. It is something that people have their whole life. It just wasn't diagnosed.
- Yeah, that's exactly what happened with me. I've had autism all my life and I was diagnosed at 15..

Question #4 – GMSA knows that people have lots of different parts of who they are. Race, gender, religion and more are all part of a person. For example, Jacob has an intellectual disability. He is also gay black man who lives in a small town. Jacob is all of these things at the same time. What do you guys think that our organization knows that people have lots of different parts?

- All who commented said True (for example: I think it's true, definitely true)

Question #5 – GMSA knows that people are often treated unfairly based on how they look.

- Hasan said he thinks this is True sometimes and we need to work on this a little bit. Then many people agreed with him.
- That's true, but I just wanted to say this kind of touches on number four in a way, because people are treated on assumptions based on the color of their skin, like.
- People would think that I'm just a white person, and that's not true because my father is Puerto Rican. They want to treat me like I'm white and that takes away part of who I am.

- Not only does it take away from part of who people are, but it could also put labels that aren't part of somebody, who they are.
- Yeah, I get I get exactly what you're saying. There's some intertwining here.
- I don't like how society views people who move a different way. It's like they think they're on drugs.
- Sometimes if you wear a hoodie, and if you're black, you could sometimes have that image of looking dangerous.
- Kris - Having autism has always been a challenge. People not accepting me because of my autistic tendencies and behaviors.
- Marshall said something happened at work. We asked him, do you think you were treated unfairly or was it just a misunderstanding. He said a misunderstanding. We asked if he had help to figure it out and get back to work. He said yes his case manager was meeting him at work.
- Susan - Everywhere you go, people put you down. Doesn't matter where you are, you get put down. Some people are half black and half white and they get put down. Or Spanish or Chinese. Doesn't matter what culture you're in, wherever you go, I have seen people be put down. One time I went to this restaurant and I and I asked for help to read the menu. And they refused. (Several people said I'm sorry that happened to you.)
- I have a friend who cannot talk but can hear and when they try to find a job, people refuse to hire them.
- When I was younger they used to make fun of me because I'm half Jewish.
- Topper - And that's why Hasan and Max are bringing up this issue, we want to make sure that we're always thinking about people and their culture and the different backgrounds people have. We want to make sure that we that we're paying attention. We don't we don't want anyone to feel like they're being left out or that they're not included. That's why we're talking about diversity.
- Danielle - This story reminded me of something that happened to me on a plane a long time ago. I was getting off the plane and I had my backpack up in the compartment. People were waiting while I was getting it down and the flight attendant told me to sit down and wait for everybody else to go by. Instead of helping me she sat there and told me to stay seated. It's just the way she handled it. She said I was not moving

fast enough or something. (People said - I'm sorry that happened to you, Danielle. Yeah, that sounded like that was rotten treatment. I'm glad that you wanted to share that.)

#3 Application from Skye Peebles to be a board member

Chad (treasurer) read an application from Skye Peebles to be a GMSA board member. Up to 90% of the GMSA board members are people with developmental disabilities. We also have a few board members who do not have developmental disabilities. These are called Ally Board Members. Skye is applying to be an Ally Board member

Chad reminded the board that this is something that they have to vote on. Here are some of the answers she wrote on her application.

Why do you want to be a GMSA board member?

Skye wrote she loves stories and resources that GMAC brings to Vermont and the rest of the world. She strongly believes in nothing about us without us and self advocates leading the way.

What skills do you have that will help GMSA?

- Skye worked for GMSA for many years running many of our grants and projects
- She led a training for the board about our budget and managing GMSA's money.
- She has worked for two nonprofits and has taken classes on managing nonprofit organizations, fundraising grants, fundraising grant writing.
- She has been part of GMSA fundraising events and has written quite a few grants.
- She created our websites, press releases and newsletters
- She has been part of the state House advocacy days & writing policy handouts.

Chad then asked if anybody wanted to talk about Sky and pro and con ideas about her being a board member.

Someone asked, "Is this a paid position or will she volunteer? Randy confirmed that she would be a volunteer.

- Skye has both experience with us and she is well qualified.
- I think Sky would be an amazing addition to our board. I've known her for so many years, and at Voice and Choices conference the best part was doing dancing with her in the flash mobs.
- I know her pretty good. We did some things together. I want her on the board
- I've only met her once, but I have to say that I think she is a really kind person.
- She is always willing to help like anywhere or with anyone who needs help from her.
- It sounds like she has a lot of great qualifications
- Skye always talks to me every time and I always tell her good job.
- She's a perfect advocate. She's a perfect advocate for the board.
- She would take her time and is patient to listen to everybody. She would take her time to actually introduce herself, to get to know you and stuff like that. She asked me to be a part of flash mobs and I did that for enjoyment, and I do like it. She cares to make everybody be a part of the board meetings and when we go to the conferences and stuff.
- I've worked with Sky a lot, and she's easy to work with, she follows through. She has a lot of great ideas and I especially like that she is youthful.
- I think Skye is a nice person. I've known her for a while, and I think she would be great for this.
- I think it would be great to have her because she has known us for a long time to. I mean, she used to come to the GMSA meetings, and I did activities with her.
- She's very personable.
- She finds something to talk about with every person that she that she runs into.
- I think Sky would be a good fit for the GMSA board because she's a very hard worker.
- She understands us. She is a really hard worker, and we know her dedication to us. So, I think she would be a perfect good addition to the board.

- She's an awesome person.

Randy said it looks like the discussion is over and called for a vote.

Randy made a motion for Skye Peebles to become a board member.

Randy asked board members to say “Aye” and also raise your hand if you vote yes.

Randy asked does anybody oppose and no one spoke or raised their hand.

Motion passed.

The vote was unanimous. All board members voted yes to accept Skye Peebles as a board member.

Topper clarified, Skye is going to come to these meetings and be part of the board. She will join us at least 4 times a year and she may volunteer and do other things with us just like you do. It is a little different because she does not represent a local group. For example, Hasan you come, and you represent Champlain Voices and Eric represents Vermont Choices and Taylor, she represents Capital Advocates Together. Skye will be on the board. She will not be representing any local group. She will just be on the board.

Randy, we got one more item here in the last 15 minutes. the last item on our agenda this morning is **#4 Reach out to board members to see who is on or off. Find out what people need to join us.**

TO DO: Carolyn was asked if she belongs to the Rutland group. She said not really, but I would love to. GMSA staff will follow up and connect Carolyn to SABE of Rutland.

At today's meeting there was nobody from:

- Bennington
- GATSA
- SAVY
- Newport

- Rutland

Chad - I think we should have a combination of officers and staff should probably try to do this. Staff give the officers contact information to get a hold of people. And you guys can do some outreach to the groups that need to elect a board member.

Topper - So, like one example, we really need somebody from BRAG to be an official board member. Member of BRAG are always meeting with us on zoom we just need the group to decide who's going to be their official board member.

Kris Medina - is the communications alliance being represented?

Topper – No so it would be fabulous if you could be representing them.

Randy clarified - So when it says board members only, on our schedule it means we have stuff to vote on. It's just the board members that get to vote. However, anybody can go to the meeting and it's actually better if you do have other members of your group go to these meetings because then you can consult with them if there's something to vote on.

Kris Medina - I had not had access to my work Gmail account for almost a year. Two weeks ago, my Mom contacted my former case manager to get the Password. So, I would love to stay on representing Communications Alliance.

Topper - Sounds fabulous and Chris, if it's all right with you, we can add Sharon's email, too, since you have not had any staff since COVID-19 and your mother is supporting you. That way we can make sure that the communication always gets through.

Kris - Yeah, good.

Randy ended the meeting.