

GMSS REPORTER

Volume 8, Issue 12

July 2023

GMSS SPOTLIGHT



Solaria (Shawna) O'Connor, a GMSS AFC participant, was inspired by her experiences of playing and reading to children in the childcare her mother ran while she was growing up. With the support of her shared living providers Elke and Ernest Jones, O'Connor wrote and illustrated a children's book titled "Colorful Cats and What They Do." O'Connor printed copies of her story and gave one to her service coordinator, Jessica Lafountain. With her permission, Lafountain laminated and brought a copy to a local preschool for their classroom library. Shown are some photos of kids enjoying the story and O'Connor with a signed copy of her book she gave to her SLPs.

Jones selected to join new support project

A new state initiative, the Vermont Communication Support Project (VCSP), is underway and one of GMSS' employees was selected to get involved. Liza Jones was one of just six professionals across the state selected to join the project as a certified Communication Support Specialist (CSS). Liza received the certification training at the beginning of June and will undergo a short mentorship prior to becoming fully certified. VCSP is administered by Disability Rights Vermont and is funded by the Agency of Human Services (DCF, DAIL, DMH), Disability Rights Vermont, and the Vermont Judiciary.

VCSP is the first program of its kind in the nation, providing individualized accommodations to assist people living with a disability that affects their ability to communicate. The VCSP offers communication support from a certified Communication Support

Specialist (CSS) in court and administrative proceedings, as well as with attorneys or agency personnel meetings. VCSP recruits, trains, and certifies qualified individuals as Communication Support Specialists (CSS). The accommodations offered by a Communication Support Specialist support effective communication and are designed to help people overcome barriers to effective communication that are caused



LIZA JONES
Communication Support Specialist

by disability.

A Communication Support Specialist (CSS) is specifically trained to understand the communication needs of individuals living with a wide range of disabilities. A CSS understands communication barriers and the accommodations necessary to help overcome those barriers to ensure equal access to the justice system and state services. By helping participants identify the challenges and barriers to effective communication a Communication Support Specialist ensures an individual's full participation in the process to the best of their ability.

Way to go Liza! GMSS is proud to have you on staff as our Communication Support Specialist!

Want to know more? Or know someone who might benefit from this service? If so, please visit disabilityrightsvt.org.

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Taking a look into the future of GMSS

Dear GMSS Community, I am pleased to share the following updates with all of you.

Financial – In June, we continued to experience financial losses, many of which were needed in order to ‘cure’ recently discovered but (past) problems such as person-centered plan lapses and inconsistent awarding of (unofficial) benefits. We are now working diligently, and with systems in place, to ensure that person-centered plans are timely and complete. This will help us avoid similar ‘payback’ penalties in the future. Our revised HR policies were also approved by the Board in time for a July 1 roll out. This is important because, while maintaining support for what our employees value most, our benefits package is now aligned with what we can afford. It is also important because our employees deserve to have clear guidance as well as equal knowledge of what benefits are provided by the agency. I want to assure you that we are relentlessly searching for additional areas for improvement and addressing each one we find as quickly as possible. July 1 marks the start of our new fiscal year and we are set to begin with a clean budget that is intentional and responsible. Next year’s budget is going to be extremely lean but if we manage our spending carefully – as we are committed to doing – it will be practicable.

Regulatory – We have just this morning (June 26, as I write this) heard from the Department of Labor that they have removed the recommendation to “debar” GMSS. Debarment means you can’t enter into contracts with the state and that penalty would have forced us to close. We will still need to pay the \$27,000 penalty, but this concludes this matter and GMSS will not be forced to close as a result of the employee misclassifications. We will be meeting with Medicaid Fraud Residential Abuse Unit (MFRAU) staff on July 7 to share the details of our work plan and to show them in concrete detail the very significant progress GMSS has made in not quite four months. We will update you as soon as we know more.

Last week, I had the pleasure of visiting two of our participants at their home and their SLP expressed her wish that ‘everything could have been fixed already.’ I think she spoke for all of us! The fact is, though, that we are all working just as fast and hard as we can, and the length of time needed to make all the required changes is simply hard evidence of just how much work needed to be done to restore us to regulatory compliance, fiscal health, and person-centered excellence. And those are our goals. We recently completed an exercise with staff and asked them, among other things, to identify what it is that makes GMSS special. It was a powerful experience. The overwhelming commitment to making sure that the interests of the people we serve are at the heart of everything we do came through loud and clear! Person-centered excellence is why we’ve all chosen this work, and it is what fuels us to work so hard each day.

Board – At its June meeting, the Board of Directors voted in three new members. This expansion was necessary to strengthen the board’s capacity and, especially, to strengthen the voice of individuals served and their families. Please welcome Janet Bruner, Patty Grassetto, and Dave McAllister to the GMSS Board of Directors. With this rebuilding phase complete, the board will now resume a normal meeting schedule. They are launching that new schedule with an annual meeting which will begin at 5:30 on Thursday, July 20. This meeting will be in-person at GMSS. All are welcome to attend and there will be time built into the agenda for community members to ask questions or share thoughts. The GMSS



ELIZABETH WALTERS

*INTERIM
EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR*

website will be updated soon to reflect these changes and, moving forward, you’ll be able to find board information there including meeting minutes. I send my sincere thanks to Sarah Henshaw for her incredible leadership.

Path to Full Designation – Finally, I want to again share the data that was sent to the Commissioner and senior DAIL leadership team in our most recent monthly report. We can all be extremely proud because this data reflects that we are not just working hard but getting it right. In a recent meeting, I heard from one of the Division Directors, “This is exactly what we want to see.” Great work!” Go Team GMSS!

COMPLIANCE WITH SHARED LIVING HOME INSPECTION REGULATIONS

DS – 61 Total Homes [95% compliance]
58 Compliant (54 fully approved, 3 housing in progress and timely; 1 accessibility)

3 Non-Compliant (3- 5 year housing re-assessments, all in progress)

BI – 6 Total Homes [100% compliance]
6 Compliant (6 fully approved, 1 accessibility in progress and timely)

AFC – 44 Total Homes [98% compliance]
43 Compliant (43 fully approved, 1 accessibility assessment in progress and timely)

1 Non-Compliant Accessibility Assessment (PT ordered extensive equipment and then changed recommendations; still in progress.)

MONTHLY IN-HOME VISITS BY SERVICE COORDINATOR

Across all programs, 106 of 108 (98%) people receiving residential services had completed service coordination / visit notes for the month of May. One visit was missed due to illness and one due to team-specific issues that are being addressed.

Of the 106 completed visits, all were conducted in-home with the following exceptions:

- 1 – done virtually due to illness
- 2 – done at an alternate location to sup-

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Climate survey: In the words of employees

What has sustained you at work these three years?

- The people we serve and the need to provide them with the support and service they deserve.
- Getting a regular paycheck.
- I feel at home here.
- This job is close to my home.
- Watching the people we serve grow through success and challenges at their own pace.
- Building meaningful relationships with coworkers and other teams and participants.
- Teams I support, co-workers, and schedule flexibility.

What has kept you at GMSS?

- Faith in Elizabeth and current leadership team.
- Feeling that my voice is heard.
- The clients.
- A strong belief in our mission and our team.
- Sometimes staying for the “rebuild” can lead to better work environments and opportunities.

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port a specific need of the two participants COMPLIANCE WITH CMS REGULATIONS FOR CIR REPORTING

71% (10 of 14) of the CIRs submitted to DAIL in May were submitted on time and without error. All were reported on time but four contained minor errors such as incomplete address (‘home’ noted instead of a physical address), missing last name of a provider, or missing notation of guardian notification. Internal QA review captured each of these mistakes and feedback has been provided to staff where necessary. QA data is also reviewed at agency-wide management meetings so that all supervisors are aware of performance trends and prepared to support effective practices.

MONITORING OF RESPITE PROVIDERS

The monitoring measures reported last

- The people.
- Flexibility with work/personal life.
- Faith in coworkers. Sink or swim together.
- Our names are also attached to GMSS so if it doesn’t succeed then I feel I don’t succeed.
- I like what I do (helping others), flexibility, support from co-workers with both work-related and non-work related challenges.
- I have a strong desire to support the agency’s moving forward. Greatly appreciate kindness, patience and flexibility in work. Love our GMSS family!

What is special about GMSS? What do we need to preserve/protect?

- Staying person centered.
- Our ability to look at an individual and determine out of the box ideas for how to best support them. Not subscribing to the “typical” ways of support.
- Our family-like relationships with co-workers.
- A culture that focuses on the wellness of employees and contractors.
- GMSS truly reflects our community

month remain in place. Random review of five notes was completed again this month and that review showed service coordinators have continued to attend to the respite oversight-related questions with care. Where new providers have been identified, outstanding training needs have been recognized and documented.

ADULT FAMILY CARE AND BRAIN INJURY PARTICIPANT REASSESSMENTS

AFC – 5 ILAs were due in May and all 5 were submitted within the required time frame. All program participants have current assessments in place.

BIP – 1 reassessment was due and was completed in May. An additional 1, not due until June, was submitted early. All program participants have current assessments in place.

INTAKE

As reported in our last meeting, the prospective AFC intake who had been targeted for a June 1 start date experienced

(Lamoille County).

- Size. Growth sometimes dilutes the core mission. Keep us “small.”

When we are doing it right, what will look different?

- Clients will be #1 priority.
- Solid policies, procedures, and standards in place and followed.
- Proactive not reactive.
- Amazing communication.
- Confidence in our work, less fear.
- There will be clear systems with if “a” then “b” and it won’t feel like 2 steps forward, 3 steps back
- Growth for all is promoted and encouraged.
- We will be able to think and act in the present, or ahead of time, instead of reacting to situations and client needs.
- There will be better communication and more transparency.
- Smiling faces on everyone.

From the staff meeting on May 24, 2023. Our thanks to Sharlotte Williams for compiling these notes.

a sudden, marked decline in health and went into the hospital and from there into a nursing home. The prospective DS intake remains in development but with a revised transfer date of July 1 rather than June 1, reflecting time needed for the current SLP to complete our pre-service training as well as discussion with the current provider agency. Additional prospective intakes are now in development.

In closing, I want to let you know that on Wednesday, Aug. 23, we will have an in-service day for all DSPs. With exceptions allowed for situations where a participant’s health or employment would be compromised, agency-managed community and employment supports will be canceled that day so that all DSPs can attend. Our DSPs work hard on the front lines to ensure that the people we serve enjoy the richest lives possible and taking this day to invest in and celebrate our DSPs will greatly benefit our community.

Thank you all for being a part of GMSS.

UPCOMING TRAININGS

* **Therapeutic Options** – new schedule, all dates in Morrisville. All sessions will be held from 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m.

- * Monday, July 24
- * Wednesday, Aug. 16
- * Wednesday, Sept. 13
- * Wednesday, Oct. 11
- * Wednesday, Nov. 15
- * Wednesday, Dec. 13

* **SLP Medication Administration Refresher** – all dates in Morrisville.

- * Monday, July 10 (2:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m.)
- * Wednesday, July 19 (10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.)

July Employee Anniversaries

EMPLOYEE ANNIVERSARIES

Jeanine Chalue – 2008 (15 years)
Alysia Coolum – 2022 (1 year)
Mary Ellen Platt – 2022 (1 year)
Nicole Russell – 2022 (1 year)
Lisa Tilton – 2016 (7 years)
Danielle Tinker – 2016 (7 years)
Elizabeth Walters – 2004 (19 years)

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Ensuring Our Neighbors with Disabilities
are at Home in their Community.

gmssi.org