

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

September 19, 2016

CONTACT:

Emily Anderson
eanderson@ccs-vt.org
802.655.0511 x163

Mike Reilly
mreilly@ccs-vt.org
802.655.0511 x125

Local Nonprofit Agency Offers Unique Voter Registration Site in Colchester

(Colchester, VT) You don't have to go to a town hall to register to vote. Champlain Community Services (CCS), Inc., a Colchester-based nonprofit organization serving people with intellectual disabilities and autism, is promoting its offices at Fort Ethan Allen as a registration site.

"As a Specialized Services Agency, we are actually mandated to offer voter registration, but we're going a step further to actual engage community members and encourage them to register," said Elizabeth Sightler, executive director at CCS. "We hope it's an opportunity for our neighbors to stop in and get to know a bit more about us, while at the same time offering them a really important service – voter registration.

The agency plans a kick-off event on Tuesday, September 27 at Noon in recognition of National Voter Registration Day, and will offer walk-in registration from Tuesday, September 27 through Friday, September 30, from 12 to 2 p.m. each day.

Sightler said the initiative grew out of the work of Champlain Voices, a self-advocates group hosted by CCS. She noted the self-advocates are also organizing a Voter Education and Mock Election at CCS, scheduled for October 3rd.

Champlain Voices facilitator Emily Anderson said members of the self-advocacy group feel strongly about the project. "It raises the awareness of everyone's right to vote – a right some people have really had to fight for," she said. "For many, there's also a too-easy assumption that people with disabilities can't vote. That's not true. But in the broader sense, it reminds people that everyone needs assistance to make an informed choice when voting, particularly given the huge influence the media can have."

Anderson said Champlain Voices members brainstorm and then select activities to accomplish four goals each year, and the voter registration initiative was a choice for community service. "We're celebrating democracy and encouraging the community to vote," she said. "More important, we see participation in the process as an encouragement

for each of us to take stock of what's important in our lives. To identify which issues matter most to us – and have that guide our choice when we get our moment with the ballot.”

Champlain Voices has been active in reaching out to legislators and community leaders over the past two years, and for this project has forged partnerships with the League of Women Voters, Green Mountain Self-Advocates, and Disability Rights Vermont. Each of those organizations will participate in the Voter Education and Mock Election event in October.

Ultimately, Anderson hopes the project not only generates enthusiasm for the democratic process, but also raises awareness in the broader community about CCS and the leadership skills of the self-advocates themselves.

“Champlain Voices is a vibrant, thoughtful group that is at the center of this organization,” Anderson said. “In many ways, they are the heart of the CCS.”

CCS is nationally recognized for its supported employment program, Way2Work, and in 2017 will celebrate its 50th year of serving the community. It is a member agency of the United Way of Northwest Vermont.

Champlain Community Services is located at 512 Troy Avenue (Ft. Ethan Allen) in Colchester. The phone number is 802.655.0511. The website is www.ccs-vt.org.

#

ATTACHED PHOTO: Elizabeth Sightler, Executive Director, Champlain Community Services

PHOTO and INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES:

Kick-Off Event Tuesday, Sept. 27 at Noon (Speakers, actual registrations)

Available for Interview:

Emily Anderson (facilitator) and members of Champlain Voices self-advocates
Elizabeth Sightler, CCS Executive Director

Mock Election Event Monday, October 3 (Speakers, “voting”)

Available for Interview:

Emily Anderson (facilitator) and members of Champlain Voices self-advocates
Elizabeth Sightler, CCS Executive Director
Ed Paquin, Disability Rights Vermont (morning)
Karen Topper & Max Barrows , Green Mountain Self-Advocates (afternoon)
Sonja Schuyler, League of Women Voters (afternoon)