



June 2022

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Newsletter

VCSP Overcoming Barriers to Effective Communication

Changes for VCSP in 2022

Our longtime director, Lynne Cardozo, after celebrating her 10th anniversary as the VCSP Director, has transitioned from that position to start a new chapter in her life and career. Her last day as director was May 1st. Along with pursuing creative endeavors, she remains connected to the VCSP as our Senior Advisor and will continue to offer communication support services as needed. Lynne also remains committed to the national and international development of communication support programs. This leadership transition had been in the works for quite some time, and these changes have been completed while maintaining uncompromised service to our clients.

Jen Le Scouezec stepped into the position of VCSP Program Coordinator on March 1st and additionally has also trained and certified as a practicing CSS. She is well-qualified and excited to have this opportunity to manage the Project. Lindsey Owen, Esq. who was promoted into the position of DRVT Executive Director in 2021 provides strong leadership for the entire organization, including the VCSP.

We are very proud of the growth and development that the VCSP has experienced over the past decade and are confident that our work will continue to make an important difference and offer equal opportunities. We are grateful for excellent leadership with Lynne at the helm for all these years and Jen now taking the reins.



PROVIDING SPECIALIZED COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TO ASSURE EQUAL ACCESS TO OUR SYSTEM OF JUSTICE AND STATE SERVICES



What is a Communication Support Specialist a.k.a a CSS?

A Communication Specialist is an individual specifically trained to understand the communication needs of people with disabilities such as learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, mental health disorders, psychiatric disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, aphasia and others, including stroke and disease related disabilities.

They understand the challenges and barriers to effective communication and can help to overcome those barriers with effective accommodations.

Communication Specialists can assist individuals in their efforts to effectively

participate in court, administrative proceedings, and meetings.

What Can They Do?

Assess the communication strengths and challenges of the person with a disability.

Assist in developing a plan for accommodations that will support participants with communication and comprehension at hearings or meetings.

Model effective communication techniques, as well as strategies and tools for all individuals involved in administrative or judicial proceedings.



Frequently Asked Questions

Who qualifies for VCSP services?

The person who qualifies has a disability (an impairment that limits a major life function) that impacts their ability to communicate and is involved in a judicial or administrative process.

How does VCSP describe "communication"?

Communication may include comprehension, ability to express thoughts and feelings, ability to manage behavior in a way that may allow for effective communication, ability to understand written documentation, or any other variable involved with imparting or exchanging information in an interactive setting such as a DCF meeting or Court hearing.

Where are services offered?

VCSP assigns Communication Support Specialists (CSS) who offer services to qualified individuals at State administrative meetings/hearings and in all Courts in Vermont, except VCSP services are not available to criminal defendants in criminal proceedings. The hearing or meeting must be interactive.

What meetings/hearings can VCSP assist at?

A CSS may be authorized to assist a qualified individual at any interactive DCF, or other State administrative meeting/hearing or judicial proceeding. The individual must request the use of a CSS through the VCSP as an accommodation, and obtain the approval from a DCF District Director, appropriate State Director/Manager or Vermont's Chief Superior Judge. An estimate for the cost of a Communication Specialist's services must be approved for every meeting/hearing prior to accommodations being provided.

Who refers potential clients to the VCSP?

Anyone can refer a potential client to the VCSP, but typically referrals come from the individual with a disability, family members, case affiliated State employees, lawyers, judges, court clerks, court operations managers, and service or health care providers.

Does the client have to agree to the appointment of a Communication Support Specialist?

Yes. The VCSP will only assign a CSS to a person who requests VCSP services. The VCSP is a reasonable accommodation and cannot be forced upon a person with a disability.

What are some of the disabilities that make a person eligible for services?

There is a broad range of disabilities that have potential to qualify a person for VCSP services. The most important qualifying factor is that the disability affects the person's ability to communicate effectively. Many people who qualify for VCSP services have more than one documented disability. Some of the most common disabilities that we encounter that affect communication are Learning Disabilities, Developmental Disabilities, Psychiatric Disabilities, Mental Health Disorders, TBI -- Traumatic Brain Injuries, Intellectual Disabilities, PTSD -- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Stroke, MS -- Multiple Sclerosis, and many others.

Who submits the Motion for a Communication Support Specialist to the Court?

In order to be provided services in Court, a qualified individual must have a motion approved by the Court. The VCSP does not serve as an advocate and therefore does not submit motions for potential clients. It is usually the potential client, their

The CSS Team Has Grown!

The VCSP has recruited and certified an incredible team of Communication Support Specialists in 2022.

The VCSP can assign a Communication Support Specialist to provide support in court, administrative proceedings and/or meetings that may include attorneys, state personnel or providers across the state of Vermont.

The professional CSS team understands the challenges and barriers to effective communication that can be experienced because of a broad spectrum of disabilities, as well as the effects of multiple disabilities. While never providing advice or case advocacy, there is a clear and consistent goal on the part of the Communication Support Specialists to offer people with disabilities the support and accommodations needed to have a fair opportunity to communicate as effectively as they are able.

lawyer, or a service provider. A sample motion is available from the VCSP.

Who pays for VCSP assigned Communication Support Specialist services?

The organization responsible for providing reasonable accommodations to the VCSP client pays for the time and mileage used by the CSS to provide their service. The VCSP staff is responsible for securing the approved funding by providing cost estimates and requesting approval from the entity responsible for payment. If it is a court appearance, funding is requested from the Judiciary. If it is a DCF meeting, funding is requested from DCF. If it is a meeting with a client requested by a Public Defender, funding is requested from the Defender General's office.

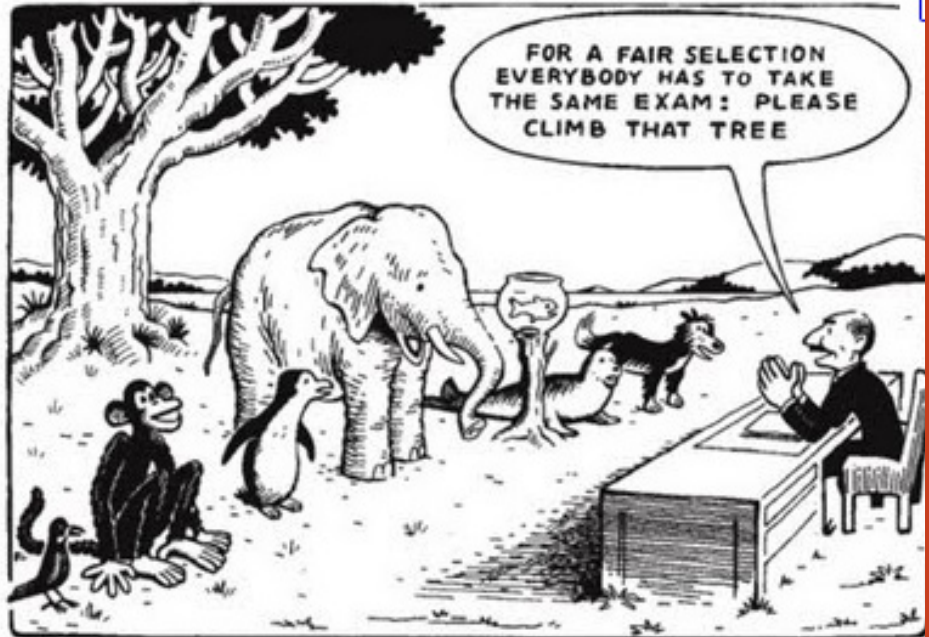
The Communication Support Specialists are independent contractors who bill directly to the responsible entity for payment of their services.

How does the VCSP determine a communication plan for a client?

Every person is considered individually when determining how best to offer communication support. By the time the VCSP appointed CSS meets with a client, there has usually been enough discussion to have a sense of some of the tools and support strategies that may be helpful and/or necessary. Often information about effective accommodations is obtained from the individual's treatment providers with the individual's consent. Some of the most important communication planning happens when the Communication Support Specialist meets with the client prior to the hearing or meeting and at this time there can be a collaborative discussion regarding a person's needs and supports. A 30 minute pre-meeting and post-meeting is scheduled before and after every hearing and or meeting.

What to do if there are questions or concerns regarding VCSP services?

The Program Coordinator can be contacted to address any questions or concerns.



In Person, Remote & Hybrid

As with many organizations, 2020 definitely brought with it some challenges in how we were able to deliver services. The biggest lesson we learned is to never underestimate a person's ability to connect and participate remotely in their hearings or meetings; presume competence!

We were able to adapt and offer valuable CSS support remotely and for many clients this continues to be the option they prefer. For others in person services are a necessary accommodation. We offer 3 different models of CSS support:

Remote

Everyone is virtual. The pre-meeting, meeting and post meeting is by phone or video.

In person

Everyone is in the same room or some are virtual but the CSS and the client are together in the same room.

Hybrid

The CSS is remote while the client is in person.

Need to Connect Someone with VCSP Services?

Call
888-686-8277

or

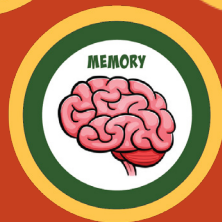
Email
csp@disabilityrightsvt.org

VCSP Services
are free and
confidential

[Learn More](#)

VCSP is a project of Disability Rights Vermont. For more information:
www.disabilityrightsvt.org

This project is made possible by a grant from the Vermont Agency of Human Services and with support from the Vermont Judiciary



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VCSP

Disabilities that can impact communication

There is a broad range of disabilities that have potential to make someone eligible for VCSP services. The most important factor is that the disability affects the person's potential ability to communicate as effectively as they are able.

Many people who qualify for VCSP services have more than one documented disability. Some of the most common disabilities that have qualified an individual for services include:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Agoraphobia
- ALS
- Anxiety Disorder
- Aphasia
- Asperger Syndrome
- Autism
- Bipolar Disorder
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- Cerebral Palsy
- Cognitive Processing Disorder
- Depression
- Developmental Disability
- Dyslexia
- Epilepsy
- Hearing Impairment
- Intellectual Disability
- Learning Disability
- Mental Health Disorder
- Multiple Personality Disorder
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Neur-ocognitive Disorder
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Panic Disorder
- Postpartum Mood Disorder
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Schizophrenia / Schizoaffective Disorder
- Stroke
- Stutter
- Substance Abuse
- Temporal Lobe Seizures
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Tourette Syndrome
- Vision Impairment

With so many ways to communicate, and with so many factors in play that influence our ability to communicate effectively, it is easy to see how disabilities could create challenges and barriers for communication to be effective.

50-60%
Of people that are eligible for VCSP services have more than one documented disability