

**Access to Independence  
of Cortland County, Inc.**

# ACCESS NEWS

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NUMBER XII**

### Independent Living Centers 2007 Disability Priority Agenda

In January, New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL) issued an agenda of legislative priorities for New Yorkers with disabilities, providing the framework for their advocacy activities this year. The top budget priority: Increase funding for Independent Living Centers (ILCs) by an additional \$5 million.

A critical part of the work of ILCs is assisting individuals of all ages with disabilities in transitioning from or avoiding unwanted placement in nursing homes or other institutions. A study recently released by the NYS Developmental Disabilities Planning Council looked at transition and diversion at six ILCs. They demonstrated an average savings of \$63,800 per person per year in Medicaid costs for each person transitioned into the community and \$83,000 in projected savings per person per year in Medicaid costs for each person diverted from nursing facility admission. The total savings to the state for the 499 people transi-

tioned or diverted during the period 2003 - 2006 was nearly \$34 million. ILCs are an essential part of the solution to successful restructuring of the long term care system.

After a four-year period of level or decreased funding, last year 36 ILCs split a minimal increase of \$1 million in state funding. This increase provided some additional ability for centers to address existing shortfalls, but funding has not kept pace with the increase in demand for services over the same period. This year, ILCs need a \$5 million increase to continue and expand their work providing people of all ages and disabilities with services that allow them to: (1) Develop skills to live independently; (2) Earn degrees, find jobs, and become self-sufficient; (3) Reduce their reliance on state and federal benefit programs; and (4) Stay out of institutions and participate in community life.

A complete list of 2007 NYAIL budget and public policy priorities are documented in this newsletter. For additional information on each of the priorities, refer to the NYAIL web site: [www.ilny.org](http://www.ilny.org).

### County Coalition Joins Nationwide Effort to Count Homeless

A Cortland coalition has recently identified 50 homeless persons in the County, according to Mary Beilby, Systems Advocate at Access to Independence of Cortland County. She and Rob Ferri, Architectural Barrier Specialist at Access to Independence, led a group of Cortland County Continuum of Care stakeholders and volunteers in two separate counts during the last week of January to identify the homeless.

A "point-in-time" survey of unsheltered homeless people in the County took place during a four hour stretch between January 30 - 31. Groups of volunteers spread out, checking railroad tracks, convenience stores, restaurants, laundries, and alleys. They were armed with surveys, informational cards that listed local service providers, and care packages that included a phone card, toiletries, a loaf of bread, and cans of food. Although only two surveys were completed, "there were a lot of anecdotal stories that people heard," said Mary Ewing, Executive Director for Access to Independence. "There were definitely signs that people have been in some of these places."

A second count focused on the sheltered homeless people in the County. During the last week of January, County service providers screened and interviewed persons who were residing in emergency shelters and transitional housing. This includes domestic violence shelters, residential programs for runaway and homeless youth, and any hotel / motel / apartment voucher arrangements paid for by a public or private agency because the person is homeless. This count identified 48 sheltered homeless individuals.

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**Special Insert:  
NYS Travel Disability Survey**



## Help Make Travel More Accessible

Do you hesitate to travel because of how frustrating it might be to get to a target destination? Well, you're not alone. In fact, according to a Harris Interactive survey conducted in 2002, people with disabilities would have almost doubled their spending on travel in the United States if hotels, airlines, theme parks and restaurants could have better accommodated their needs. The fact that people with disabilities spent \$13.6 billion on travel in 2002, but say they would have spent \$27 billion, says a lot about a rapidly growing demand for accessible travel.

"When you have a disability, planning a vacation takes extra effort and research," said Fran Pizzola, Program Coordinator at Access to Independence. In an article printed in the *Cortland Standard* on January 8, Pizzola wrote, "It is critical that you make accessibility needs known ahead of time to airlines, hotels, restaurants, etc. For example, if you use a wheel-chair or need assistance, when you book your flight you should inform your travel agent or speak directly with the airlines to make sure that your needs will be met. Wheel-chair users are not allowed to remain in their chairs, so consider requesting a seat near the front of the plane because of the extra leg room. The aisle is wider in that location allowing for more space while transferring into the plane seat. However the armrests on the front airplane seats do not flip back, therefore the airline staff

may have to lift the person with the disability over the armrest to get in the seat if they need assistance."

This is one example of how airplane design could be modified to make travel more accessible. "Over the years, the travel industry has adopted many changes to facilitate travel for people with disabilities, though there's still much room for improvement," Pizzola said.

Access to Independence is asking for input from people with disabilities who travel in New York State. The New York State Independent Living Council's (NYSILC) Travel Sub-Committee has created a consumer-based survey that seeks to identify accessibility barriers in New York State. This feedback will contribute to an improved understanding of existing barriers state-wide. It will help the travel industry better understand what changes need to be made to meet the growing demand for accessible travel. It will lead to greater awareness and inclusion for future travelers. Please complete the enclosed survey and help ensure this project's success.



## Emergency Preparedness for People With Disabilities

Do you have a disability or mobility limitation which can hinder your efforts to successfully evacuate your home or workplace in case of an emergency?

Emergency Preparedness for people with disabilities (PWD) and mobility limitations is becoming a priority in our nation, especially due to the senseless loss of lives of persons with disabilities which occurred during Hurricane Katrina.

Access to Independence is forming a committee to address Emergency Preparedness for PWD and mobility limitations, on the local level.

Now is the time to prepare. We have many resources to assist individuals in personal home evacuation plans as well. If interested in joining the committee please call 753-7363.

During power outages, National Grid will assist PWD in need of electric power. Qualifying categories of "life-support" include: Sleep Apnea, Kidney Dialysis, Suction-machines and Ventilators. Call National Grid at 1-800-642-4272 and ask for the "life-support" application.

## Removing Barriers to Improve 'Access to Home'

Renovations have been completed on four homes in Cortland County to keep people who have disabilities at home rather than in nursing homes, according to a recent article in the *Syracuse Post Standard*. ("Grant Aids Elderly, Disabled," 12/31/2006, p. B-6.) In total, about 20 homes in Cortland County will be renovated using \$200,000 in state grant funds.

"If you can see the look on the people's faces when the project is complete, it really makes it absolutely worth it," said Rob Ferri, Architectural Barrier Specialist for Access to Independence, the agency managing the grant.

"They can get in and out of their homes and in and out of their bathrooms and showers," he said. "It really changes lives. It gives people independence."

The grant money became available June 30 last year and the first project started in July. That project helped a City of Cortland woman leave a nursing home and return home, said Ferri. The woman is an amputee who uses a wheelchair. She was able to move into her son's home when a ramp was added and changes were made in floors, walls, and doorways to accommodate her wheelchair.

The Cortland County area, with its aging population and old housing stock, has a great need for this service.

"Most of the homes in Cortland County are 50 years and older," said Ferri. "Accessibility wasn't even thought of 50 or 75 years ago. The doors were very narrow, especially for the bathrooms, and the bathroom was the smallest room in the house. Now, when you have individuals with wheelchairs or walkers, they can't even get in the door, or if they can, there is no place for them to turn around."

There are 45 people on the waiting list for ramps and other modifications. The NY grant program, called Access to Home, can't help all those who need it, Ferri said.

## 2007 NYAIL Disability Priority Agenda

### Budget Priorities

1. Independent Living Center (ILC) Funding
  - Increase funding for ILCs by an additional \$5 million this year.
2. Health Care
  - Oppose proposals negatively affecting eligibility, benefits, coverage, and access to services for Medicaid beneficiaries. Eliminate the systemic bias leading to unwanted placement in nursing homes and other institutions.
  - Promote LTC reform that will not reduce coverage or access to services.
  - Provide rental/housing subsidies to participants in the new Nursing Facility Transition and Diversion (NFTD) Medicaid waiver program.
  - Expand coverage under New York's Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) program to people with disabilities under age 65.
  - Extend Medicaid wrap-around coverage for dually eligible people who are unable to obtain prescription drugs due to Medicare Part D regulations.
  - Increase access to comprehensive health care coverage for all New Yorkers with disabilities.
3. Housing
  - Create a housing trust fund for people with disabilities.

### Public Policy Priorities

1. Civil Rights
  - Incorporate Titles II and III of ADA into NYS Human Rights Law.
  - Waive State's sovereign immunity to claims under ADA and Section 504.
2. Housing
  - Incorporate housing provisions of Section 504 into state law.
  - Establish standards for "visitability" in state law to require most new single-family dwellings built with public funds to be made accessible.
3. Education
  - Place the burden of proof on school districts in due process hearings challenging the IEP or other aspect of a student's special education program.
4. Election Reform
  - Eliminate provisions in the NYS Election Law allowing waiver of polling place accessibility requirements.
5. Transportation
  - Require transportation service providers, such as taxis, limousines and hotel shuttles to purchase accessible vehicles or otherwise ensure that they have the capacity to serve people with disabilities.
6. Mental Health
  - Ban the use of solitary confinement in special housing units (SHUs) of people with psychiatric disabilities in state correctional facilities.



Do you have an extra piece of adaptive equipment that you don't need?

Is there a piece of equipment that you do need?

Let us help bridge that gap.

Contact Access to Independence at :  
607-753-7363



### New Faces in the Office...

Access to Independence welcomes the addition of two new talented and dedicated members to its team.

Meet **Aaron Baier!** As the Peer Mentoring Specialist, Aaron administers a peer mentoring program that provides assistance to persons with disabilities interested in securing a job. The program focuses on teaching the skills needed to join the community workforce and on providing support vis-à-vis a mentor and various support groups. Aaron attends SUNY Cortland, where he expects to receive a Bachelors of Science degree in Psychology this May.

Meet **Shirley Martini!** As the Operations Manager, Shirley oversees office administrative matters, including bookkeeping, accounting, human resources, and fund development. She looks forward to a full year of fundraising events, including the upcoming "Freezer of Meat" raffle where the winner will be drawn at the Business Showcase this April. Shirley joins the office following several years in the local banking industry.

### Are You Eligible For These Energy Saving Services?

Did you know that CAPCO offers energy saving services at no cost to eligible renters, landlords, and homeowners? Check these out!

The **Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP)** focuses on energy saving measures, such as insulating floors, walls, & attics.

The **EmPower New York** program focuses on cost-effective electric reduction (ER) measures, such as lighting and refrigerator replacement, as well as other home performance (HP) strategies such as insulating and draft reduction measures.

The **R.E.S.T.O.R.E.** program offers emergency and unexpected repairs for major appliances, plumbing, electrical, chimney, septic tanks roofs, and other structures.

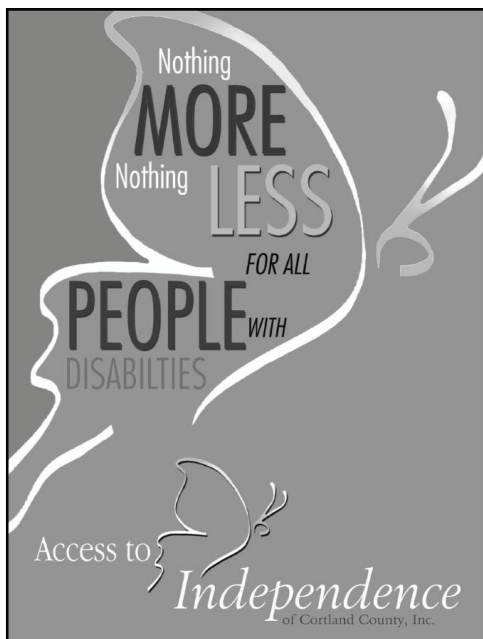
CAPCO is a non-profit human service agency. For additional information, contact CAPCO by telephone: 607-753-6781, or by email: [weather@capco.org](mailto:weather@capco.org).

**Board Members**

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Ray Ackerman, Board Secretary  
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Rik Daniels  
Debbie Geibel  
Tom Hartnett  
Rev. Jack Hepfer  
Helene Maxwell  
Peter Morse-Ackley  
Theresa Shutts  
Linda Stock

**Staff**

Mary Ewing, Executive Director  
Aaron Baier, Peer Mentoring Spec.  
Mary Beilby, Systems Advocate  
Kim Christie, Receptionist  
Rob Ferri, Architectural Barrier Spec.  
Sue Lewis, Indep. Living Advocate  
Shirley Martini, Operations Manager  
Fran Pizzola, Program Coordinator



**Visit our website at:  
[www.cilcortland.org](http://www.cilcortland.org)**

**Email us at:  
[maryew@odyssey.net](mailto:maryew@odyssey.net)**

**Phone/TTY: (607) 753-7363  
Fax: (607) 756-4884**

**Ongoing Events:**

Craft Classes

Tuesdays - 10:00 am - 12:00 pm  
Thursdays - 1:00 - 3:00 pm

Fibromyalgia Support Group

1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday Monthly - 5:30 pm

Mental Health Support Group

Wednesdays - 7:30 - 9:00 pm

Fun Night

2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday Monthly - 6:00 pm

Accessibility Committee Meeting

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday Monthly - 3:00 pm

**Upcoming Events:**

March 21<sup>st</sup> - Board Meeting - 4:00 pm  
April 10<sup>th</sup> - Board Meeting - 4:00 pm  
April 21<sup>st</sup> - Visit us at the Business Showcase!  
May 16<sup>th</sup> - Board Meeting - 4:00 pm  
May 16<sup>th</sup> - 20th Anniversary Celebration!  
July 27<sup>th</sup> - ADA Picnic!



**26 North Main Street  
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