

**Nothing More,
Nothing Less
For All People
With Disabilities**

Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.

ACCESS NEWS

Spring 2010 NUMBER XXIV

ATI Looks to Add Service-Oriented Staff For Programming

Earlier this month, Access to Independence launched efforts to increase its capacity to provide services in two of its key growth areas: Medicaid Waiver services and Architectural Barrier programming.

ATI began its Medicaid Waiver programming in April 2009 by hiring one part-time staff and delegating additional casework to existing staff.

“We have reached a point where we are not able to satisfy the demand for our services in these areas,” said Mary E. Ewing, ATI’s Executive Director.

ATI seeks a Service Coordinator and an Independent Living Skills Trainer to serve consumers of the Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Medicaid Waiver programs as soon as possible.

ATI also seeks an Administrative Assistant and an Architectural Barrier Specialist to provide assistive technology and environmental modification services to consumers of a variety of programs.

Access to Independence seeks individuals that demonstrate key qualities, including a commitment to the independent living philosophy, and a proven track record of providing high quality customer service to consumers with special needs.

Over the past several years, Access to Independence has undertaken dedicated capacity-building efforts to facilitate ongoing growth in strategic, consumer-demanded areas. ATI’s Board of Directors and related Committees continue to work to identify and implement additional such programming in a timely fashion.

ATI Collaborates With SUNY: Disability Needs Assessment

Access to Independence recently launched a joint effort with the SUNY Cortland Foundations & Social Advocacy Department to conduct a needs assessment of disability services in Cortland County.

“The purpose of the initiative is to identify what are the unmet consumer needs of disability-related services in Cortland County,” said Dr. Judy Bentley, ATI Board Member.

“The results should help ATI to improve its success in securing new grant funding; facilitate strategic decision-making with regard to existing or new services; and to improve resource allocation decisions,” said Gail Bundy, ATI Board Member.

The Needs Assessment will consist of three phases: staff interviews; focus groups with providers and consumers of disability-related services in Cortland County; and a community-wide survey of providers and consumers of disability-related services. Each phase of the study will comply with the strict guidelines established by the SUNY Cortland Institutional Review Board (IRB).

ATI’s Needs Assessment Ad Hoc Committee is overseeing the initiative. That Committee is comprised of Dr. Judy Bentley, Gail Bundy and Dan Mullins. Dr. Ji’ryun Kim of SUNY Cortland will provide quantitative expertise to the project.

ATI expects the study to be completed by December 2010.



Above: A group of area high school students try their hand at wheelchair basketball during the 2010 CACTC Youth Conference. Access to Independence co-sponsored this year’s inclusive event, which was held on March 27, at SUNY Cortland’s Parks Center Building.

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Access to Independence Plans Month-Long Celebration: 20th Anniversary of the ADA!

On July 26th, 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed into law the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) to ensure the civil rights of people with disabilities. The ADA established a set of mandates that aimed to eradicate the discrimination of people with disabilities.

Since that time, the ADA has expanded opportunities for people with disabilities in America; however the full promise of the ADA will only be achieved if public entities remain committed to their efforts to fully implement the ADA.

Therefore, in honor of the 20th anniversary of the American's with Disabilities Act, Access to Independence is planning to host several events and educational opportunities to celebrate the many achievements and abilities of individuals with disabilities.

This year our month-long ADA Celebration will kick-off on July 1st at 6:00 pm. ATI will be featuring a documentary film created by the New York State Independent Living Council (NYSILC) entitled: "HAVA in New York- The Long Road to a Fundamental Right". HAVA stands for the Help America Vote Act. NYSILC has led the fight for accessible polling sites and for voting machines that are accessible for all people in New York State. The documentary will be followed with discussion and advocacy strategies to ensure individuals with dis-

ability have the information they need to vote.

This year's annual ADA Celebration picnic will kick off on July 17th at 10:00 am with a "Stroll and Roll" march from Access to Independence to the Courthouse Park. Anyone who wants to walk, stroll or roll in their wheelchair, stroller or skates is welcome to join us as we recognize downtown businesses that have made changes to become accessible over the years.

Between 11:00 am and 4:00 pm, ATI will host the community to further celebrate the ADA. There will be a reading of the ADA's 20th Anniversary Proclamation on the Courthouse steps and there will be a keynote address by Kathy Urschel, a Para-Olympian silver medal winner in tandem cycling. There will be live music, additional entertainment by WXHC Hometown Radio, food catered by Linani's, inclusive games, ice cream from Schwan's, and much, much more!

New this year, ATI is planning to host a vendor fair that will feature local and regional vendors who serve the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Another new event this year will be ATI's 2010 Art-Ability Exhibit, set for July 6th through August 31st at the Homer Center for the Arts. Original creative works by people with disabilities will be on display. Such artwork may comprise original

paintings, photography, poetry, sculpture, drawings, mixed media, and computer generated works.

On July 20th, ATI will host a workshop on the ADA, entitled: "Understanding the ADA".

ATI's last event in celebration of the ADA will be a Chamber of Commerce "Lunch and Learn" event. This event will take place on July 26th, the actual anniversary of the ADA.

For more information on any of ATI's planned events in celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact Fran Pizzola by phone at: 607-753-7363; or by email at: fpizzola@aticortland.org.

We hope that you take some time to celebrate with us the achievements of the past 20 years!

Eyes on the Future:

Vision Support Group

1st Thursday monthly

5:00 pm - 6:00 pm

ATI Community Room

Get support from peers with similar vision barriers.

Learn about assistive tools and technology.

For more information, contact Aaron Baier by phone: 753-7363, or by email: abaier@aticortland.org

CRAFT CLASSES

Every Thursday

1:00 - 3:00 pm

ATI Community Room

For more information, please call 607-753-7363.

Visit our website at:

www.aticortland.org

Email us at:

info@aticortland.org

Call us at:

(607) 753-7363

COMPUTER CLASSES

Basic: Mondays

Advanced: Thursdays

2:00 - 3:00 pm

ATI Computer Lab

For more information, please call 607-753-7363.



Call For Artwork

2010 Art-Ability Exhibit

Exhibit Dates: July 6 - August 31, 2010

Title: Celebrating 20 Years of the ADA!

**Venue: Homer Center for the Arts
72 S. Main Street, Homer, NY**

Submission Deadline: May 28, 2010

For more information on guidelines for submitting artwork, please contact Fran Pizzola, Community Education Coordinator, by phone at: 607-753-7363, or by email at: fpizzola@aticortland.org.

Accommodations provided upon request. Please call: (607) 753-7363.

Rental Assistance Supports Independent Living

As part of President Barack Obama's Year of Community Living, the departments of Health & Human Services (HHS) and Housing & Urban Development (HUD) have been working to provide housing support for non-elderly persons with disabilities to live productive, independent lives in their communities rather than in institutions. To help achieve this goal, HUD is offering nearly \$40 million in funding to public housing authorities across the country to fund approximately 5,300 Housing Choice Vouchers for non-elderly persons with disabilities, so they can live independently.

The only way Cortland County would be eligible to receive any of these funds is if the Cortland Housing Authority, the area's public housing authority, applies for the grant opportunity by July 7.

The housing choice voucher program is the federal government's major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Since housing assistance is provided on behalf of the family or individual, participants are able to find their own housing, including single-family homes, townhouses and apartments.

Free Computer Training for Unemployed

In Cooperation with the Microsoft Corp., the NYS Dept. of Labor (DOL) is now offering vouchers for E-learning training and select certification exams at no cost to you if you are currently unemployed.

Vouchers are being distributed at local One-Stop Career Centers as well as through a network of other state agencies until June 24, 2010. All vouchers must be redeemed or activated by that date.

Online learning vouchers, once activated, give users 12 months use of training from the date of activation. For more information, contact Sue Lewis at 753-7363.

Cortland Youth In Power Group

Achieve more with your abilities...learn how to succeed with your disability!

**Last Wednesday of Every Month
4:00 - 5:00 pm**

CYB - Teen Center, 35 Port Watson Street

For more information, please contact Aaron Baier by phone: (607) 753-7363, or by email: abaier@aticortland.org



Celebrating 20 Years!

Americans with Disabilities Act

When: July 17, 2010 — 11:00 am - 4:00pm

Where: Courthouse Park

RSVP by: July 9, 2010 — (607) 753-7363

ADA Sponsors:

First Niagara Bank

Business Sponsors:

Wal-Mart

Advocate Sponsors:

Alliance Bank
Bufano Contractors
George Bailey Insurance Company

We are seeking additional event sponsors!

Please call Fran Pizzola at 607-753-7363 to find out how you can support this year's 20th Anniversary ADA celebration!

Activities:

- * Stroll & Roll
- * Free Food and Drink
- * Live Radio: WXHC
- * Watermelon Eating Contest
- * Inclusive Games
- * Special Guests
- * Reading of Proclamation
- * Vendor Tables

Accommodations provided upon request. Please call: (607) 753-7363.

How the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act Will Help Americans with Disabilities

On March 23, 2010, President Barrack Obama signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act into law. The law includes a large number of health-related provisions to take effect over the next four years, including expanding Medicaid eligibility, subsidizing insurance premiums, providing incentives for businesses to provide health care benefits, prohibiting denial of coverage/claims based on pre-existing conditions, establishing health insurance exchanges, and support for medical research. Here is a quick synopsis of what it will mean to many Americans with disabilities:

Eliminates Discrimination in Obtaining Health Insurance: The Act will prevent any insurance company from denying coverage or charging more based on a person's medical history, including genetic information. Within a year of enactment, people who have health problems, but who lack access to health insurance, will be able to purchase a plan that protects them from medical bankruptcy.

More Affordable Choices: The Act will create a health insurance Exchange that will offer a wide variety of choices. The Exchange will offer standardized, easy-to-understand information on different health insurance plans so people can easily compare health plans to choose the quality, affordable option that is right for them.

New Options for Long-Term Supports and Services: The Act will also provide a new, voluntary, self-insured insurance program that helps families pay for the costs of long-term supports and services if a loved one develops a disability. The Act will create new options for states to provide home and community based services through Medicaid, enabling more people with disabilities to access long-term services in the setting they choose.

Make Health Care Accessible to Everyone: The health insurance Exchange will provide access to health insurance to those without job-based coverage and provide premium assistance to those who can't afford coverage, significantly increasing access to a choice of health insurance plans for individuals with disabilities. This will enable individuals to keep their jobs rather than giving up employment in order to receive Medicaid benefits.

Expand the Medicaid Program: The Act will expand the Medicaid program to more Americans, including people with disabilities. This expansion will assist low-income adults who have disabilities.

Lowering Costs by Rewarding Quality and Cutting Waste: The Act will put a cap on what insurance companies can require Americans to pay in out-of-pocket expenses, such as co-pays and deductibles, eliminate lifetime limits on how much insurance companies cover if beneficiaries get sick, restrict use of annual limits, require premium rate reviews to track any arbitrary increases in premiums, and crack down on excessive insurance overhead by applying standards to how much insurance companies can spend on administrative costs.

Preventive Care for Better Health: People with disabilities are less likely to receive preventive care and are more likely to be diagnosed with screenable cancers at a later stage. The Act will ensure that all Americans have access to free preventive services under their health insurance plans and will invest in prevention and public health to encourage innovations in health care that prevent illness and disease before they require more costly treatment. The Act will also improve access to medical diagnostic equipment so people with disabilities can receive routine preventative care.

Address Health Disparities: The Act will take steps toward eliminating disparities by improving data collection on health disparities for individuals with disabilities and improving training of health providers.

Improve Care for Chronic Disease: One in every 10 Americans experiences a major limitation in activity because of a chronic condition. The Act will invest in innovations such as medical homes and care coordination demonstrations in Medicare and Medicaid to prevent disabilities from occurring and progressing.



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Access to Independence Wants You!

ATI is currently accepting applications from individuals with and without disabilities to serve on its Board of Directors.

For more information, contact: Mary E. Ewing, Executive Director
Phone: (607) 753-7363; Email: mewing@aticortland.org

Urge U.S. Congress to Enact the Community Choice Act!

Even with the recent passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (see page 4), federal law requires that states provide nursing facility care in their Medicaid programs without a similar requirement for home and community-based services. The Community Choice Act (CCA) would level the playing field and give Americans real choice in long term care.

The CCA would allow individuals eligible for services in a Nursing Facility, Intermediate Care Facility for the Mentally Retarded, or Institutions for Mental Disease the opportunity to choose instead a new alternative, "Community-based Attendant Services and Supports." Services could be provided at home, in school, at work and in the community. Assistance would be available for a broad range of needs, such as bathing, dressing, meal preparation, money management and certain health related tasks. In addition, by providing an enhanced match and grants for the transition to "Real Choice" when the benefit becomes permanent, the CCA would offer states financial assistance to reform their long term service and support system to provide services in the most integrated setting.

CCA is unique because it: (1) Includes provisions for hands-on assistance, supervision and cueing, as well as help to learn, maintain and enhance skills to accomplish such activities; (2) Provides services and supports based on functional need, rather than diagnosis or age; (3) Emphasizes consumer control and allows for an "individual's representative" such as a friend, family member, guardian, or advocate to assist with managing services; and (4) Covers transition costs from institutions to home settings, such as rent and

utility deposits, bedding, basic kitchen supplies and other necessities required for the transition.

Call our Congressional leaders and urge them to enact the Community Choice Act!

- Rep. Arcuri (202-225-3665)
- Sen. Schumer (202-224-6542)
- Sen. Gillibrand (202-224-4451)

Join Our Disability Advocacy Network!

- Keep up-to-date on current federal, state and local disability issues!
- Receive email alerts regarding pressing legislation and budget matters!
- Join more than 80 other local advocates and more than 1,000 statewide advocates in pressing for change!

Please call Chad W. Underwood at 753-7363 for more information.

NY's Medicaid Buy-In for Working People with Disabilities

According to a national survey, the #1 reason that people with disabilities give for not working is the fear of losing their essential medical benefits.

Did you know that New York's Medicaid Buy-In program for Working People with Disabilities (MBI-PWD) allows people to keep benefits, meet their medical needs and continue working?

Medicaid coverage is more comprehensive than many other programs, including private health insurance. Medicaid covers the costs of prescriptions, long-term care, and ongoing medical supplies. Medicare and some private health insurance companies do not cover all of these costs.

The term "Buy-In" is used because you are *buying in* (paying a premium) to the Medicaid program, as follows:

- If your net available income is below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), you will not have to pay any premium to get Medicaid through the MBI-PWD program.
- If your net available income is at least 150% but at or below 250% of the FPL, you will have to pay a premium to obtain your Medicaid through the MBI-PWD program.

There are two different categories of participants in NY's MBI-PWD: Basic Group and Medical Improvement Group. For both groups you must meet the age, work, citizenship or satisfactory immigration status, residency, income and resource requirements. Additionally, for the Basic Group you must have certification of a disability.

To be eligible for the Medical Improvement Group, you must have lost eligibility under the Basic Group due to medical improvement. You must also be working a minimum of 40 hours per month at no less than federal minimum wage.

Individuals must apply for the MBI-PWD at their local Department of Social Services (DSS) by completing an *Application for Public Assistance/Medical Assistance/ Food Stamps/Services*. In addition, the local DSS must conduct a face-to-face interview to ensure that you meet the basic program requirements.

For more information on the Medicaid Buy-In program or for assistance in applying for its benefits, please contact Susan Lewis, Certified Benefits Counselor and Independent Living Coordinator at 607-753-7363.

“With Help From a Friend, You Can Reach the Stars!”

The Access to Independence (ATI) Peer Mentoring Program (PMP) aims to help individuals with disabilities reach for the stars through development of their self-determination, self-advocacy and vocational skills. The PMP offers individualized work readiness training, job shadowing opportunities, and an opportunity to be matched with a Mentor, or another person who has successfully overcome their own personal barriers to secure and maintain employment.

Joyce joined the PMP in 2008 in a dual-role capacity. On the one hand, Joyce served as a Mentor and provided guidance to an individual to help them maintain their job at a local nursing facility. On the other hand, Joyce participated as a Mentee, as well, and worked to strengthen a number of her own personal and interpersonal skills.

Joyce started the PMP having already had a variety of exceptional work experiences. Joyce had attended school and secured two Associates degrees. She worked as a tutor to other students attending school at the same time. Joyce had also started a not-for-profit organization called: Women at the Well Ministries. That organization con-

tinues to provide supplies and necessities to seniors and individuals who are hospitalized. Joyce has also overcome a number of personal obstacles relating to her physical disability and as a cancer survivor.

Joyce used her existing skill set and past experiences while participating in the PMP. Joyce learned more about diversity as she attended workshops and support groups. Joyce learned that she possessed a new level of empathy and compassion which would be an asset to her in future endeavors.



Today, Joyce is working as an AmeriCorps volunteer through the Community Action Program of Cortland County (CAPCO). Joyce assists in the day-to-day operation of the McGraw Family Resource

Center. She facilitates and is a mentor to parents and youth who need assistance with food stamps, heating assistance and GED preparation, among others. She also advocates for families as they enter these systems.

Last month, Joyce received a Civic Engagement Award through SUNY Cortland for her work as an AmeriCorps volunteer. Joyce is planning to begin working as a mentor in the PMP again this summer.

Keep up the great work Joyce!

Disability Awareness Reaches Cortland County Youth

Over the past quarter, ATI has brought its Disability Awareness Day series to four more local schools.

- On March 24th and 31st, ATI facilitated the event for more than 250 students at St. Mary's Elementary school.
- On March 30th, ATI presented a workshop on Self-Determination for 25 special education students at Homer High school.
- On April 13th, ATI facilitated its History of Independent Living workshop to more than 300 Social Studies students at Homer High school.
- On April 27th, ATI facilitated its Disability Awareness Day for more than 400 students at Homer Elementary School.

Over the past several years, ATI has educated more than 2,500 youth throughout the community about the abilities that people with disabilities have. ATI's workshop series aims to teach students about the Disability Rights and Independent Living movements, and about the Americans with Disabilities Act. ATI tailors each workshop to suit the particular needs of a particular school, as well as to the age groups of students.

For more information on bringing Disability Awareness Day to your school, please contact Aaron T. Baier by phone at: 607-753-7363.



Left: Joyce Stanton has served as both a Mentee and a Mentor in the Peer Mentoring Program. Joyce has been with the program since 2008. In April, Joyce received a Civic Engagement Award for her work as an AmeriCorps volunteer. Way to reach for the stars!

**ATI Peer Mentoring Program
Every Thursday from 3:00 - 4:00 pm
ATI Community Room**

**For more information, contact Aaron Baier
by phone at: 607-753-7363,
or by email at: abaier@aticortland.org.**

ATI Delegation Protests Proposed Cuts to CDPAP

On March 10, 2010, an Access to Independence delegation joined more than 125 other disability advocates from across the state to fight budget proposals that threatened to cap personal care services. The delegation also opposed proposals that would have threatened people with disabilities and seniors' access to services needed to remain in their homes and communities.

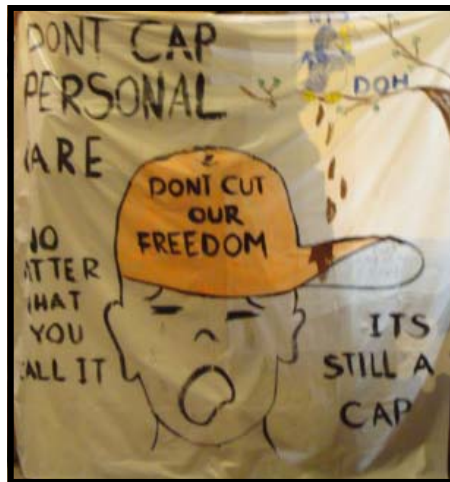
Laura Eaton and Mary Betters, ATI Board Members, and Chad W. Underwood, ATI Chief Operating Officer, greeted state leaders outside the Senate Chambers for nearly five hours. They handed out flyers and other information about how their proposed cuts would limit access to services for the most disabled, approximately 4,300 of the 68,000 people receiving personal care services, and force them into nursing facilities

Within a few days, Governor Paterson removed the proposed cuts from his Executive Budget!

Winter 2010 Social Night

On Thursday, February 18, Access to Independence held its 2010 Winter Social Night, themed "Fun in the Sun." As the dreary days of winter wore on, everyone needed a "pick-me-up" so we conjured up a nice beach scene in our heads with wonderful weather and had great fun! Attendees danced the hula, played games, ate food and socialized!

Access to Independence holds Social Nights at different times throughout the year to take a break from everyday life and to celebrate friendships. Each social night has its own theme. Refreshments are served and fun is had by all!



ATI Opens New Consumer Computer Lab

This past April, Access to Independence completed a revamp of its consumer computer lab thanks to a legislative grant from Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton.

ATI installed six new workstations with a variety of adaptive software, including *ZoomText*, *JAWS*, and *Dragon Naturally Speaking*. Each computer is equipped with Microsoft Office Professional 2010, internet access, and printing capabilities.

ATI's Consumer Computer lab is open to the public Monday through Friday from 9:00 am - 5:00 pm. Classes are offered throughout the week for both beginners and advanced users. For more information, call 753-7363.

2010 Bowl-a-Thon Success

Access to Independence held its 4th Annual Bowl-a-Thon fundraiser on Saturday, March 27, 2010 at Cort-lanes. More than 100 participants bowled at this year's event. In addition, 20 area businesses donated door prizes and another 6 businesses sponsored this event by making a contribution. Many thanks to all the businesses that donated to this year's Bowl-a-Thon. Also, many thanks to all of the bowlers for securing sponsors and for raising funds to help ATI continue to provide resources and advocacy for people with disabilities.



Barrier-Free + Accessible Design + Assistive Technology = Universal Design: Part III

Universal design is a relatively new concept that emerged from "barrier-free," "accessible design" and "assistive technology." It relates to the idea that all products and environments should be usable by everyone, to the greatest extent possible, regardless of age, ability, or situation. It relates to people who are young or old, with excellent or limited abilities, and in ideal or difficult circumstances. In short, universal design accommodates limitations.

There are four common aspects to universal design that apply to your home: **Flexibility:** making your home adaptable to your needs as they change over your lifetime; **Simplicity:** ensuring things remain accessible with housekeeping, storage, entertaining, home maintenance and routine daily living; **Stylish:** keeping the home beautiful and comfortable while being accessible; and **Safety:** eliminating risk factors that may lead to accidents in the home.

There are a number of low-cost universal design techniques that you could incorporate in your kitchen. In the kitchen area the essentials that you should be looking for are:

- Enough clear counter space to set down dishes next to all appliances and cupboards
 - Make sure there is plenty of open floor space to maneuver
 - If your kitchen is limited in size eliminate clutter and loose carpets and items that one could trip over
 - Change your faucet to a lever handle with an anti-scald feature
 - Counters and work surfaces at different heights, rounded corners not sharp edges on counters
 - Open space under the sink to allow for a seated user (cover pipes to eliminate burns)
 - Raised platform for the dishwasher to reduce bending and kneeling
 - Easy access to storage, use pull out units, shelves, lazy Susan in corner areas
 - Adjustable height cupboards
 - Good lighting over the sink and counters
 - Lastly appliance controls that are easy to read and reach or can be operated by touch
- Other things worth considering

may be a pantry-type closet with roll out shelving; stove or cook top with controls in the front of the unit; extra outlets for small appliances; sink drain placed toward the back, rather than the middle which allows for more storage under the sink or for a seated user; color contrast edging on the front edge of counters to avoid spills and bumps; if you have linoleum make sure it is non-slip or skid-free; and outlets that are located for ease of use.

In our next newsletter we will talk about Universal Design in the laundry area. Until then, do not hesitate to contact our own Universal Design expert, Rob Ferri, ATI Architectural Barrier Program Coordinator at 607-753-7363.

Access To  Independence
OF CORTLAND COUNTY, INC.



Accessibility Construction Services

26 North Main Street
Cortland, New York 13045
Phone: (607) 753-7363

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Having difficulty with daily activities?

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History of falls? / Fear of falls?

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Got rent?

The Cortland Housing Authority has a rental assistance program that may be able to help you!!

The Section 8 Housing Program helps qualified people meet their monthly rent bills by paying a portion of their rent directly to their landlord.

Interested persons may pick up applications at the Housing Authority offices located at
42 Church Street or 51 Port Watson Street
Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm
or

Call 607-753-9364 or 607-753-1771 to request to have an application sent by mail



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The Cortland Housing Authority has 380 high quality apartments available in its senior/ disabled and family developments throughout Cortland County. A single person could earn up to \$31,800, and a family of five up to \$49,100 and still qualify to live in one of our apartments.



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Our large family apartments (**3, 4 and 5 bedrooms**) are located in the City of Cortland. We also have **two** and **three bedroom** family apartments scattered throughout the county in Homer, Truxton, McGraw, Cincinnatus and the City of Cortland.

There are short waiting lists for apartments in most of our developments.



Call 607-753-1771 today for an application.

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We construct permanent ramps and also install temporary ramps. All ramps comply with ADA / ANSI Codes, as well as all local building codes.



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