

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

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

# ACCESS NEWS

**Spring 2009 NUMBER XX**

## Radley Joins ATI Team

In April, Access to Independence hired Sharon Radley as Medicaid Waiver Service Coordinator. Radley has been approved to provide Service Coordination services to qualified individuals through the New York State Department of Health's Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) Medicaid Waiver programs.

In her new role, Radley will work with individuals in the community who are appropriate for skilled nursing facility level of care, but who prefer to remain in their homes and in the community.

Radley has already begun reaching out to the community to build collaborative relationships with other potential service providers.

Radley joins Access to Independence following more than 15 years experience in the human services field. Radley previously worked for the Cortland County Department of Social Services and for Madison- Cortland ARC.

For more information on ATI's Medicaid Waiver services, contact Sharon Radley or Susan Lewis at (607) 753-7363.



**Above:** Sharon Radley is ATI's new Medicaid Waiver Service Coordinator.

## ATI Awarded Cortland Community Foundation Grant

Earlier this month, the Cortland Community Foundation made a \$5,000 contribution to ATI's *Stardust Challenge* initiative. While the grant will support ATI's developing Youth Transition Program, it will also count towards the \$20,000 ATI is working to raise in order to secure a matching \$20,000 grant from the Stardust Foundation of Central NY.



The Cortland Community Foundation, which was established as a private foundation in 1998, aims to enhance the quality of life for those who live and work within the Cortland community.

## ATI Awarded State Grant: Access to Technology

On May 12, ATI received word from Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton that a legislative initiative in the amount of \$10,000 had been included in the 2009 - 2010 state budget, at her request, to help fund ATI's ongoing *Access to Technology* efforts.

ATI will use this year's award to purchase additional computer workstations, software and adaptive technology to support the agency's developing Youth Transition Program. The funds will help ATI to complete it's three-year, \$35,000 technology infrastructure upgrade by June 2010.

The Lifton grant funds will also count towards the \$20,000 ATI is working to raise in order to secure a matching \$20,000 grant from the Stardust Foundation of Central NY.

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**Above:** On Saturday, March 7, ATI hosted its annual Board/Staff retreat. This year's event featured: Debbie Nadolski, Director of the Cortland Regional Medical Center Foundation, and Karen Macier, Chief Development Officer for Tompkins-Cortland Community College. Many thanks Debbie and Karen!

## 2009 - 2010 State Budget Highlights - Disability Programs

The 2009-10 New York State Budget contained a number of victories for independent living centers (ILCs) and people with disabilities. Listed below are some budget highlights of particular interest:

**ILC Funding** - Funding for Independent Living Centers, such as Access to Independence, remains level for 2009-2010 at last year's rates. \$12,361,000 will be split among the state's 41 ILC's.

**Restoration of SSI cuts** - Thanks in large part to your endless calls, faxes, letters and emails, the Governor and Legislature have restored funding for the state share of SSI for people with disabilities.

**CDPAP** - The budget includes \$500,000 for expanding participation in the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPAP), including contracts with peer based programs to assist those eligible.

**Regional LTC Assessment Centers** - There will be a three-year demonstration program established with two long-term care assessment centers (one in NYC and the other elsewhere in the state). The new Centers will aim to consolidate and standardize the assessment and authorization process for home and personal care services.

**Cash and Counseling** - The Cash and Counseling Demonstration proposed in the Governor's Budget was rejected.

**Home care and personal care** - Previous cuts in rates were restored.

**Housing Subsidies** - An appropriation of \$2,303,000 was made available for housing subsidies to participants in the Nursing Facility Transition and Diversion (NFTD) Medicaid Waiver Program.

**Medicaid Buy-In Program** - There was no premium increase for people with disabilities who work.

**Elimination of barriers to Medicaid** - Barriers have been eliminated to the general Medicaid application, such as the asset test, finger printing and face-to-face interview requirements.

**Pharmaceutical Reforms** - Efforts to preserve Medicaid pharmacy benefits for people with psychiatric disabilities were successful. The proposal to expand the Preferred Drug List to include antidepressants was rejected. Proposals to eliminate EPIC Part D wrap and Medicaid wrap around coverage for dual eligible with Part D were also rejected. However, limits on frequency, amount and duration of Medicaid prescriptions was approved. The creation of a step-therapy approach for prior authorization was also approved.

**SHU Law** - The proposal to weaken and delay NY's law to end solitary confinement of state prisoners with psychiatric disabilities was rejected.

## Access to Independence Partners with 2010 Census

Last month, ATI met with a representative of the U.S. Census Bureau to develop a collaborative plan to ensure that the area's disability population is accurately counted in the 2010 Census. Here's why ATI has become a partner:

- Every year, the federal government allocates more than \$300 billion to states and communities partly based on Census data.
- ATI uses Census data for writing grant proposals.
- ATI relies on Census data to determine where there is a need for additional services.
- ATI relies on Census data to estimate the number of people who may need our services.

Between the months of April and June 2009, U.S. Census employees will visit every community during the first major field activity in preparation for the 2010 Census. By visiting addresses in every community, the Census Bureau will know where to send questionnaires and enumerators in 2010. Using hand-held computers, Census employees will walk through our community to identify the location of every housing unit.

This is how it will work: (1) Census employees will make a courtesy visit to each housing unit; (2) They will verify the address; and (3) They will capture the address and GPS location using their hand-held computer.



*Left: On Saturday, March 28, more than 50 ATI supporters flooded Cort-Lanes to help raise more than \$1,000 for the agency's Stardust Challenge initiative (Youth Transition programming). Many thanks to all of the participants, donors and sponsors for making this year's bowl-a-thon a success!*

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## ATI Board of Directors Announces Staffing Changes

Each year since its 1998 incorporation as the area's only independent living center, Access to Independence has forged ahead with implementation of new programs and services that promote increased independence for people with disabilities. Since 1998, ATI's staff and budget have increased by more than 300%, and the number of people served has increased by more than 500%.

In order to accommodate ongoing expansion of services to the community, the Access to Independence Board of Directors recently announced several staffing changes.

In April, the Access to Independence Board of Directors named Chad W. Underwood as its Chief Operating Officer. In his new role, Underwood will manage the agency's financial and operating systems, including grants development and compliance, fund development, implementation of earned income opportunities, information management and technology.

Underwood will work in concert with the Executive Director to identify and implement streamlined policies and procedures that aim to promote increased business efficiencies. Underwood will continue to oversee ATI's Systems Advocacy, Youth Transition and Work Readiness programs, as well.



*Above: Chad W. Underwood is ATI's new Chief Operating Officer.*

In February, Access to Independence hired Karen Sanford as Architectural Barrier Programs Assistant. Karen provides administrative support to the agency's Architectural Barrier Specialist for architectural barrier removal services provided through the DHCR *Access to Home* program, the DDSO, the TBI and NHTD Medicaid Waiver programs and the agency's earned-income, Accessibility Construction Services program.

Prior to taking on her new duties at Access to Independence, Karen was a dedicated volunteer for the agency. Karen facilitated craft classes, helped conduct outreaches throughout the community, participated in advocacy efforts at the local, state and national level, assisted with fund development efforts, co-taught arthritis self-help classes, facilitated the Multiple Sclerosis Support Group, and served as a Mentor in the agency's Peer Mentoring Program.

In October 2008, Access to Independence hired Scott Roman as the agency's part-time Bookkeeper. In that role, Roman administers the agency's fiscal records and reports, including accounts payable and accounts receivable. Roman maintains the agency's bookkeeping records and provides financial support to the agency for its various programs.

Roman brings to ATI an extensive array of skills that stem from his experience as Dispatch Shift Supervisor with the Tompkins County 911, as an appointed Fire District Treasurer with the Cortlandville Fire District, and as elected Department Treasurer with the Cortland Fire Department.

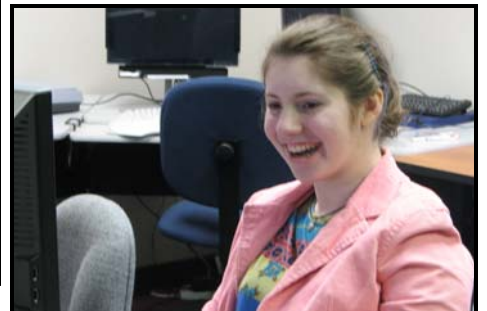
## Youth Volunteer at ATI

Matt King began job shadowing in October 2008 with the assistance of his American Sign Language interpreter and mentor, KT. Matt volunteers two times weekly. In addition to completing routine tasks such as vacuuming, cleaning windows and dusting, Matt has dedicated a portion of each visit to learn new computer skills and how to use the agency's Sorenson Videophone. He has even taught ATI staff basic signing to improve their ability to communicate with him.



*Above: Matt King cleaning windows.*

Since February, Hali Whyland has job shadowed with the assistance of her aid, Tammy. At first, Hali spent time to ramp up on ATI's programs and to learn about the Independent Living Philosophy. Since Hali expressed interest in developing her computer skills, over the past six weeks she has worked with her assistant and ATI staff to develop her Microsoft Excel spreadsheet skills. Hali is currently working on a basic database of contact information for teachers at each of Cortland's Elementary Schools.



*Above: Hali Whyland on the computer.*

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## ATI Works to Make Public Transportation More Accessible

During the Cortland County Transportation Advisory Committee's (TAC) April meeting, area disability advocates called upon County leaders to make public transportation more accessible.

"Our lives don't operate between the hours of 9 to 5," expressed Phyllis Schriefer, volunteer at ATI and a regular consumer of public transportation. Schriefer added that expanding the hours of operation and connecting to other transit systems would provide people with greater access to job opportunities, medical facilities, grocery stores and shopping outlets.

The driving force behind the disability advocates' remarks was the January 2009 Cortland County Transportation Needs Assessment. That report recommended expanded hours of operation, new signage for bus stops and shelters, and new routes to connect with surrounding cities. The report also suggested the pooling of community transit resources, including First Transit, SUNY Cortland Buses, JM Murray Center's Birney Bus, and others.

At the meeting, the TAC formed a new Transportation Expansion Taskforce to begin implementing some of the Assessment's recommendations. The TAC called upon ATP's Aaron Baier to work with local organizations that use their own transit systems to develop grant proposals to fund expansion efforts.

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

For more information on public transportation in Cortland, visit [www.firsttransit.com](http://www.firsttransit.com)

## Advocates Speak with Arcuri at Health Care Forum

On April 20, *Health Care for America Now* sponsored a Town Hall meeting with Congressman Michael Arcuri regarding quality, affordable healthcare. Health Care for America Now is a national group that works with hundreds of organizations to support quality, affordable health care for all.

I joined more than 60 community members to provide testimony on problems Americans are experiencing with health care coverage. The main theme of each testimony was that healthcare coverage is getting more and more expensive, it does not cover many needed treatments, and in most cases it will not cover preventative measures.

For example, over the past four years, I have been appealing my primary insurer's (Excellus BCBS) refusal to pay for a mattress that both my primary physician and physical therapist have recommended as a way to maintain my independence and health. Excellus has denied my request because I did not meet their medical protocols; I would need to have multiple, 7- or 8-centimeter pressure wounds on my body and be so sick that I would require bed-rest for at least 18 hours each day. Since I do not currently have any wounds, and since I have managed well in the past, Excellus contends that I do not need the mattress.

In my 27 years of living with a spinal cord injury and dealing with the complications of paralysis, I have had only one pressure sore,

and it was only 2-centimeters in diameter. However, the pain I felt from that small wound was enough to keep me in bed for a week. If I had multiple, 7- or 8-centimeter wounds on my body, I can guarantee you that I would be extremely sick, I would probably have to be in bed for more than 18 hours a day, and I definitely would not be able to work and pay for my health insurance. Does this make any sense?

So what can be done? Congressman Arcuri stated, "Every American deserves health care, and I plan to fight for every provision that would help us provide better coverage." As part of the stimulus package he has fought for \$1 billion for the formation of a new preventative medicine and wellness fund, and \$1.1 billion to evaluate healthcare services and treatment options.

While our government representatives are seeking solutions to provide better health care coverage for all Americans, I believe every person should take action in two ways: (1) become involved in advocacy efforts to stay informed on issues affecting health care; and (2) add preventative, healthy living routines to your lifestyle, such as good nutrition and exercise. - Fran Pizzola, Program Coordinator

**Right:** Congressman Michael Arcuri responds to questions at the April 20, Health Care NOW! Town Hall Meeting at Cortland High School.



ATI's **Worksite Wellness** group meets every Wednesday from 3 - 4:00 pm. Participants take turns presenting topics and sharing healthy snacks.

## **“With Help from a Friend, You Can Reach the Stars!”**

Over the past two years, Access to Independence (ATI) has helped individuals with disabilities to successfully achieve their employment goals through its Peer Mentoring Program (PMP). The PMP offers one-on-one mentoring, job readiness training and peer support groups.

Mary, a Cortland County resident, has achieved a paramount goal of her own, community employment. Mary joined the PMP in July 2008 after learning of ATI through the area’s local Disability Program Navigator. Though her primary goal was to secure employment, Mary was uncertain about what direction to take. Mary sought guidance on childcare, deciding whether to work full- or part-time, and whether or not to disclose her disability to potential employers. While Mary had a diverse work history and many skills to launch a new career, her lack of self-confidence and determination was holding her back.

Shortly after joining the PMP, Mary began meeting with a peer mentor. Together they worked on stress management techniques and took steps to explore new career opportunities. Mary’s mentor gently encouraged her to take it one step

further. As a result, Mary participated in job shadowing experiences throughout Cortland and eventually applied for several jobs.

“I learned new techniques that helped me to improve my resume, job applications, and interviewing skills,” said Mary. “I went on a couple of interviews with no success, but I kept trying!” Mary’s interests included hospitality services, clerical work and human services. Mary used her networking skills to actively pursue job opportunities through Cortland Works Career Center, Employment Connection, and through the County Civil Service Department.

In April, Mary successfully secured employment at a local rehabilitation center where she now works with individuals with disabilities. Mary helps people to become more independent by teaching them basic life skills. “I’m thrilled to be working in a job where I actually contribute to the improvement of another person,” said Mary during a recent interview.

Mary continues to meet with her mentor, ATI staff and her network of community supports.

## **We Are Young, We Are Strong, We Are YouthPower!**

On April 14, Access to Independence (ATI) and YouthPower! partnered with the Cortland Jr. Sr. High School (CHS) to facilitate two workshops geared toward youth community involvement. More than 50 CHS students attended the workshops to learn about how they can engage community leaders to promote systems change on their behalf. Stephanie Orlando, YouthPower! Director, and Dally Sanchez, YouthPower! Coordinator, shared their experiences as youth advocates and discussed the history and future of the Youth Power! organization.

“Through community involvement, you can learn to advocate for your individual needs and for the needs of your peers,” said Orlando. “Building and strengthening advocacy skills while you are young will pay dividends for a lifetime, added Sanchez.

ATI is developing youth transition programming that aims to engage youth, to help them develop their leadership skills, and to give them a voice in the community.

YouthPower! is affiliated with Families Together in New York State (FTNYS) and with the National Youth Leadership Network (NYLN). YouthPower! has helped to develop youth networks throughout NYS including those in Utica, Chemung, Long Island, and Buffalo. YouthPower! affords youth a powerful voice on state and federal levels through direct meetings with state and national leaders.

For more information on YouthPower!, visit [www.ftnys.org](http://www.ftnys.org), or contact Aaron Baier by phone at: (607) 753-7363, or by email at: [abaier@aticortland.org](mailto:abaier@aticortland.org).

### **ATI Promotes Disability Awareness at Parker Elementary School**

On February 27<sup>th</sup>, Access to Independence partnered with Parker Elementary School to facilitate a Disability Awareness Day. ATI staff facilitated 10 workshops for Parker’s 300 students, grades K-6, and their 35 teachers. The workshops aimed to promote disability awareness and understanding of the independent living philosophy.

“Giving kids the opportunity to ask questions, and get honest answers is the best way to teach about diversity,” said Fran Pizzola, Program Coordinator at ATI. Pizzola joined Susan Lewis, Independent Living Advocate, and Aaron Baier, Youth Transition / Work Readiness Specialist, to talk with the students about their personal experiences with disability and to answer questions.

ATI facilitated the Parker school Disability Awareness Day thanks to grant funds awarded by the Ralph R. Wilkins Foundation.

## NY Prescription Saver Card

Have you been seeking relief from paying the full cost of your prescription drugs? On April 1, New York State began offering a Prescription Saver Card, a free discount card that may lower the cost of your prescriptions by as much as 60 percent on generics and 30 percent on brand name drugs.

Here's how it works: simply present your NY Prescription Saver Card to one of the 3,300 participating pharmacies statewide, and your price will be automatically reduced. Participating pharmacies, and the discounted prices for drugs, may be found on the website listed below.

The NY Prescription Saver Card is available to NY residents who are between the ages of 50 and 64, as well as to all residents with disabilities, regardless of age. You must also meet income eligibility guidelines: up to \$35,000 if you are single, or up to \$50,000 if you are married. If you currently receive Medicaid coverage, you are not eligible.

If you are interested in securing your NY Prescription Saver Card, call 1-800-788-6917, or download the application form online at: <https://nyprescriptionsaver.fhsc.com>. You should receive your card within two weeks of approval.

For more information, please contact Sue Lewis by phone at: (607) 753-7363.

## Medicare Premium Help

NYS offers several programs that may help pay some or all of your Medicare Part A and/or Part B premiums. The programs include:

Qualified Medicare Beneficiary Program (QMB) – helps pay Part A and Part B premiums and other expenses, such as deductibles, coinsurance and copayments

Specified Low-Income Medicare Beneficiary Program (SLMB) – helps pay Part B premiums only

Qualifying Individual Program (QI) – helps pay Part B premiums only

Qualified Disabled & Working Individuals Program (QWDI) – helps pay Part B premiums only

If your income for 2009 is at or below the income limits listed below, you may qualify for help.

If you qualify for QMB, SLMB, or QI, you automatically qualify for extra help paying the costs of Medicare prescription drug coverage.

If you would like to find out if you qualify for help paying your Medicare premiums, call Medicare at 1-800 633-4227.

Medicare Savings Program	Single - Monthly Income Limit	Married - Monthly Income Limit
QMB	\$923	\$1,235
SLMB	\$1,103	\$1,477
QI	\$1,239	\$1,660
QWDI	\$3,695	\$4,942

## Social Security Q & A: 2009 Economic Recovery Payment

**Q:** Who will receive the \$250 Economic Recovery payment?

**A:** The law provides for a one-time payment to certain individuals who receive Social Security, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Railroad Retirement and Veterans benefits. If you were eligible for one of these benefits at any time during the months of Nov. 2008 through Jan. 2009, you may be eligible.

**Q:** When will I receive the payment?

**A:** You should receive your payment by the end of May 2009. You do not need to do anything to receive the payment.

**Q:** How will I receive my payment?

**A:** Your payment will be delivered the same way you receive your Social Security or SSI benefit: by check, direct deposit, or Direct Express debit card. You will receive payment separately from your Social Security or SSI benefit; it will not be included with your monthly benefit payment.

**Q:** What should I do if I don't receive my payment by June 4?

**A:** After June 4, 2009, you can contact your local Social Security office or call 1-800-772-1213. Do not call prior to June 4, as the Treasury will be sending payments through the end of May.

**Q:** How can I get more information?

**A:** If you receive Social Security or SSI benefits, visit: [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov).

If you receive only Railroad Retirement benefits, visit: [www.rrb.gov](http://www.rrb.gov), or call 1-877-772-5772.

If you receive only Veterans benefits, visit: [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov), or contact your local VA facility.

For more information, please contact Sue Lewis by phone at: (607) 753-7363, or by email at: [slewis@aticortland.org](mailto:slewis@aticortland.org).

**Access to Independence now offers Independent Living Skills Training through the TBI and NHTD Medicaid Waiver Programs. For more information, please contact Sue Lewis at (607) 753-7363.**

## 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  
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