

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

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

# ACCESS NEWS

**Winter 2013**

**NUMBER XXXV**

## Area Disability Advocates Rally at State Capitol - Meet with State Leaders

On February 5, more than 300 disability advocates from across the state assembled in the Well of the Legislative Office Building to advocate for action on legislation that would improve the quality of life and safeguard the civil rights of New Yorkers with disabilities.

Access to Independence sent a delegation of 12 advocates to participate in the New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL)-sponsored Legislative Day activities.

The team aimed to educate state leaders on pressing disability issues heading into this year's legislative session. That delegation also met with Sen. Jim Seward and representatives of Assem. Barbara Lifton and Assem. Gary Finch, all representatives of Cortland County residents.

The Access to Independence

delegation focused much of its advocacy on issues relating to the state's current budget negotiations and the importance of implementing systemic reforms to ensure that services and supports for people with disabilities are provided in the most integrated setting.

Aaron T. Baier, Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator, commented that "as New York continues to struggle with maintaining economic stability, legislators should focus attention on the substantial cost savings that could be realized by shifting State funding from institutional and other segregated settings to fully integrated services and supports in the community."

Baier explained, "Independent Living Centers (ILCs), such as Access to Independence, are essential to en-

sure that people with disabilities are served in the most integrated and cost effective settings by all service systems." For the fourth consecutive year, state legislators are proposing no increase for ILC's.

An increase in ILC funding carries no cost to the State because of the substantial savings generated by the services they provide. ILCs have conservatively saved New York taxpayers more than \$110 million each year, since 2001, as a result of avoided institutional care for people with disabilities.

The ATI delegation included Mary Better and Laura Eaton (Board Members), Aaron T. Baier, Mary E. Ewing, Audrey Jones, Phyllis Schrieffer, Chad W. Underwood and Jarett Withers (ATI Staff), four area youth and a consumer.



**Above:** ATI disability advocates met with Senator Jim Seward in Albany on February 5, 2013 to discuss pressing disability policy and budget issues. The group also met with representatives of Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton and Assemblyman Gary Finch.

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## NYAIL Announces 2013 Disability Policy Priorities

The New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL) recently announced its 2013 legislative priorities. Each priority aims to address barriers to community living and ensure the civil rights of people with disabilities are protected. Access to Independence is a proud Member and supporter of NYAIL and its 2013 agenda.

### HEALTH

- *Expand the authority and membership of the Medicaid Managed Care Advisory Review Panel. A4062 (Gottfried)*

The Medicaid Managed Care Advisory Review Panel (MMCARP) is charged by statute to advise the Dept. of Health on issues related to Medicaid managed care. With the expansion of Medicaid managed care to previously exempted or excluded people and implementation of the Health Benefit Exchange, which must integrate public program enrollment, the MMCARP membership should include people who bring expertise in access issues facing individuals with disabilities. The MMCARP should also expand its work to include the evaluation of service denials, effectiveness of grievance and appeal mechanisms, evaluation of data collection and reporting on health disparities, evaluation of implementation of consumer protections.

### HOUSING

- *Make discrimination by landlords based on a tenant's source of income illegal under State Human Rights Law. (S.168: Squadron)*

Landlords often reject tenants with rental subsidies, such as Section 8 and subsidies tied to the Nursing Facility Transition and Diversion and Traumatic Brain Injury Medicaid Waivers. Many people with disabilities rely on subsidies and other assistance programs to live independently in the community. Dis-

crimination based on source of income is illegal in New York City.

- *Incorporate inclusive design features in new residential housing that receives financial assistance for construction from federal, state, county or local governments. (S.3160: Krueger)*

Most existing housing stock was not built to meet the needs of people with disabilities or the aging. Housing built using inclusive design features would meet the needs of people throughout the lifespan and allow homes to be visitable to people with disabilities.

### CIVIL RIGHTS

- *Incorporate Title II of ADA into NYS Human Rights Law. (A.270: Paulin)*

Under the 1999 US Supreme Court *Olmstead* decision, people with disabilities are entitled to receive the services and supports they need to live in the community and avoid unwanted placement in nursing facilities and other institutions. The proposed legislation would clarify the scope of protections against discrimination by public entities, including in the provision of services, programs and activities. Public entities would be required to make reasonable accommodations and individuals with disabilities would gain critical access to the administrative enforcement mechanisms through the State Division of Human Rights.

### EDUCATION

- *Include the history of people with disabilities as required curriculum in all elementary and secondary schools. (A.2006: Cusick and S.1703: Grisanti)*

In order to fully integrate people with disabilities into the community, societal attitudes toward people with disabilities need to change. Education on civil rights of people with disabilities is the foundation for ensuring these rights are protected and

attitudes changed. This bill would adopt a statewide curriculum to promote greater awareness and understanding of people with disabilities.

### EMPLOYMENT

- *Establish a small business tax credit for the employment of people with disabilities. (S.1907: Addabbo; and A.570: Cusick)*

Working age people with disabilities in the State have a 34.5% employment rate, resulting in an employment gap between people with and without disabilities of 40.9% (*Disability Matters*, Center for Independence of the Disabled New York, 2011). The tax credit created by this legislation would provide an incentive for small businesses to hire individuals with disabilities.

### TRANSPORTATION

- *Cap fares for paratransit at levels no higher than the base fares for transportation of non-disabled adults utilizing the public transit system. (S. 510: Espaillet; and A. 943: Kellner)*
- *Require transportation service providers, (e.g., taxis and limousines), to purchase accessible vehicles. (Not yet introduced.)*

The limited availability of accessible transportation services is a major barrier faced by individuals with disabilities. It often leads to unemployment, the inability to access medical care, lack of access to polling sites, and isolation. Many people with disabilities rely heavily on the provision of paratransit services; however, public transit budget woes have led to an increase in cost for such services. The paratransit bill would cap paratransit fares. In addition, the increased availability of accessible transportation options would result in considerable savings to the state Medicaid program

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

## ATI Holds Winter Social Night

On Wednesday, February 27, nearly 50 consumers, friends and family convened in the ATI Community Room for fun, games, music and food. Participants enjoyed a baked-potato bar along with hot dogs, soda and punch. Special thanks go out to Anderson's Farm Market for donating the potatoes and to Price Chopper and P&C Fresh Foods for donating gift cards for food and supplies.



*Above:* Nearly 50 people enjoyed an evening of fun and games at ATI's 2013 Winter Social Night. The potato-themed event included a baked potato bar and crafts related to potatoes. Save the date for ATI's Spring Social Night, set for Wed., May 15!



Access To  Independence  
OF CORTLAND COUNTY, INC.

**Date: April 20, 2013**

**Time: 11:00 am - 3:00 pm**

**Location: Cort-Lanes**

# BOWL - A - THON



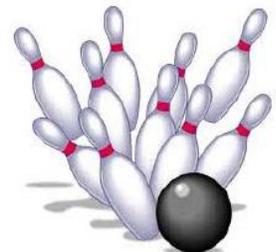
**Raise funds to help support ATI programming & advocacy efforts!**

**Bowlers bowl for free!**

**Teams welcome!**

**Food & drinks!**

**Door prizes!**



**SIGN UP TODAY! Call (607) 753-7363.**



Accommodations available upon request.

**All proceeds benefit Access to Independence.**

## Needs Assessment Identifies Significant Issues for New Yorkers with Disabilities

A statewide Needs Assessment conducted by the New York State Independent Living Council (NYSILC) as a precursor to its State Plan formulation for 2014 to 2016 identified significant issues for New Yorkers with disabilities. Brad Williams, Executive Director of NYSILC pointed out, "A background section of the report asked the question, what does it mean to be a New Yorker with a disability? The data we found is bleak."

"The statistics confirm what we've known in the community for years," stated Denise Figueroa, Chair of NYSILC and Executive Director of the Independent Living Center of the Hudson Valley. "We need a *call to action* if we are going to change the status of people with disabilities in this State." Some of the examples include:

- The employment rate for a New Yorker with a disability (ages 18-64) is 31.2% compared to 72% for a person without a disability resulting in a gap of 40.8 percentage points.
- Among civilians age 16 or older during the last 12 months, New Yorkers with disabilities earned \$10,903 less on average compared to a person without a disability (\$21,581 versus \$32,484).
- The poverty rate for New Yorkers with disabilities ages 18 to 64 living in the community is 28.6%, which is more than twice that of persons in our state without disabilities (12.3%).
- When comparing Statewide Employment and Poverty Rates by Type of Disability between three disability types (physical, sensory, and mental health), a mental health disability has the most challenging results, demonstrating the lowest employment rate of 25.3% and the highest poverty rate of 35.7%!
- For students with disabilities ages 14-21 during the last 12 months, it was reported that they left New York State schools for the following reasons: 52% (15,937) graduated with diplomas, 21% (6,277) received certificates, 26% (7,788) dropped out, and 1% (390) aged out or died.

"Veterans with disabilities were recognized as the top underserved population," commented Judith Avner, Executive Director of the Brain Injury Association of New York State (BIANYS) and former NYSILC member. "The background data identified 232,805 veterans with disabilities in New York State. The need for education and vocational services as well as other supports is acute so these wounded warriors can pursue productive lives."

Alan Krieger of Krieger Solutions LLP, who helped facilitate the project, noted, "Based on a survey of almost six-hundred New Yorkers with disabilities, the most challenging needs or issues identified were: 1) Finances/paying bills, 2) Transportation, and 3) Employment." Krieger added, "When asked what services they needed most to live independently, they identified transportation, advocacy, followed by medical/health services."

The State's institutionalized population was identified for planning purposes. The chart, sectioned by county and defined institutional locations, identified **220,277** New Yorkers with disabilities in these various settings. "This data was not available to the public," stated Brad Williams of NYSILC. "As a credible initial attempt to define this population, we submitted the chart as testimony during the Governor's Olmstead hearings. Only the NYS Office of Mental Health maintains their data publically, online, with the information updated to indicate shifts in the population as people transition in and out of institutional settings. This should be the standard to which all other State agencies are held. Otherwise, NYSILC had to legally force the other State agencies to provide the necessary data."

Laurel Kelley, Executive Director of the Capital District Center for Independence, commented, "One project that we are looking to fund with our limited resources in the next State Plan is for capacity building projects to collaborate and help us better reach underserved populations." She concluded, "If our network can identify a portion of its limited resources to address targeted populations and issues, then we REALLY would like to see the NYS legislature and Governor make some of these needs a greater priority. The State IL contract hasn't received an increase in several years. Additional funds could be utilized to expand the capacity building projects across the State to the underserved populations. State government should be working on ways to reduce the gaps acknowledged in employment, poverty and income for New Yorkers with disabilities. Since the Governor has prioritized Olmstead planning, are there waiver funds available for advocates to transition people to the most-integrated setting?"



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[www.aticortland.org](http://www.aticortland.org)

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## State Olmstead Plan Progresses: Cuomo Establishes New Cabinet

*"People with disabilities have the right to receive services and supports in settings that do not segregate them from the community; it is a matter of civil rights." - Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo*

On November 13, 2012, Governor Andrew Cuomo established the new NYS Olmstead Plan Development and Implementation Cabinet. That Cabinet will make recommendations to the Governor about the creation of an **Olmstead Plan** for the State of New York.

What is an Olmstead Plan and why has Governor Cuomo established a new Cabinet, you ask?

The story of the Olmstead case begins with two women, Lois Curtis and Elaine Wilson. Both Lois and Elaine were women with mental illness and developmental disabilities. They were voluntarily admitted to the psychiatric unit of the State-run Georgia Regional Hospital. Following their medical treatment, mental health professionals stated that each was ready to move to a community-based program. However, the women remained confined in the institution, each for several years after the initial treatment was concluded. They filed suit under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for release from the hospital.

On June 22, 1999, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the unfair isolation (institutionalization) of persons with disabilities is discrimination and violates Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Court held that public entities must provide community-based services to persons with disabilities when those services are appropriate, desired by the individual and can be reasonably provided (**Olmstead Ruling**).

The Supreme Court said that placing a person with a disability in an institution is discrimination when the person can handle and benefit from living in the community. The Supreme Court also said that placing a person with a disability in an institution unfairly reduces their everyday life activities, including family relations, social contacts, work options, economic independence, educational advancement, and cultural enrichment.

The Supreme Court's Olmstead ruling effected every single state. Every state relies on Medicaid dollars to provide services for people with disabilities. Those dollars must comply with federal ADA regulations. The Supreme Court said that states must ensure that Medicaid-eligible persons do not experience discrimination by being institutionalized when they could be served in a more integrated (community) setting. In effect, every state's long term care system was in violation, including New York's.

The Supreme Court Olmstead ruling called on states to demonstrate compliance with the ADA by producing formal plans for increasing community integration. These plans are known as Olmstead Plans. The Court said that states should make 'reasonable accommodations' to their long-term care systems, but should not be required to make 'fundamental alterations'.

Some 13 years after the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision, New York State continues to search for a way to bring the State into compliance. The state wasted more than a decade on its Most Integrated Setting Coordinating Council (MISCC). The MISCC was established in 2002 to bring governmental agencies to-

gether to work collaboratively on implementing an *Olmstead Plan* for New York. Until recently, it has been unsuccessful.

Numerous barriers have prevented New York from developing its Olmstead Plan to fully promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the community. These barriers include: financial constraints on Medicaid, the lack of affordable and accessible housing, labor shortage of home care workers and political pressure of institutional care facilities.

Under Cuomo's leadership, the state is now poised to carry out its responsibilities under Olmstead. Cuomo's new Cabinet will seek the guidance and expertise of stakeholders, including, organizations that advocate on behalf of people with disabilities, providers of services to people with disabilities, associations concerned with housing and employment for people with disabilities, academic institutions and local governments.

The Cabinet has already begun its work and is expected to submit a final report to the Governor on or before May 31, 2013, to make recommendations concerning establishment, implementation and coordination of the Olmstead Plan.

Access to Independence believes that all people have the right to control their own lives, make their own decisions and participate fully in society. Access to Independence empowers people to lead independent lives in their communities, and strives to lead the community toward an all-inclusive future, where discrimination and barriers no longer exist. As one saying goes, **"nothing about us, without us!"**

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

The Access to Independence (ATI) Peer Mentoring Program (PMP) aims to help people with disabilities make effective transitions in life. Whether it is from youth to adulthood, high school to post-secondary education or school to work, the PMP offers one-on-one peer mentoring, independent living and work readiness skills training, support groups, job shadowing, and advocacy services that are flexible to meet the needs of each individual.

Christina, a young lady from Cortland, joined the PMP in 2010 after encouragement from her parents. As a high school student, Christina struggled to stay focused in classes, fell behind in Global Studies and other classes, and had difficulty dealing with “drama” from her peers. Despite these barriers, Christina held dreams of going on to college and having a career working with children. When Christina joined the PMP, she was not only behind in her studies she was in danger of receiving an IEP Diploma. Neither Christina nor her parents realized that this would severely limit her after school.

Christina and her parents worked with a peer advocate from ATI to ensure that Christina was receiving the accommodations and opportunities she needed to reach her desired goal. Christina’s peer advocate attended her Committee

on Special Education (CSE) meeting with teachers and parents and provided one-on-one academic support to improve her grades.

“My parents, teachers and peer advocate really pushed for me to finish school and try to get my high school diploma,” Christina said during an interview. “I got discouraged because I couldn’t pass the Global Studies test and other kids caused so much drama; it was hard to focus.” With all of the support that Christina received she realized how important her education was and she did her best to ignore the drama and focus on her class work.

Christina also wanted to get experience in her desired career field. Through ATI, she participated in Cortland County Mentoring Day two years in a row and completed a summer internship at the YWCA day care center. Through these experiences she confirmed that her career interest was worth pursuing. She also discovered she needed to learn new skills related to child care, time management and communication. Christina continued to work with her peer advocate and community supports to develop these skills. She even became involved in ATI’s Youth in Power group.

In 2012, Christina chose to graduate with an IEP diploma and walk across the stage with her peers. But that was not the end of the story.

Christina continued to study and went back to school over the summer to finish what she started...she passed her Global Studies test.

“I did it!” Christina exclaimed. “I am so happy that I got a real high school diploma now.” Christina’s peer advocate, parents, teachers, and community supports are extremely proud of her for sticking with it.

“If a kid ever tells me they want to give up, I would tell them NO and to keep trying.” Christina is currently holding a part-time job at a local store and will begin her first semester at Tompkins Cortland Community College this fall. She plans to study Early Childhood Development. Congratulations and good luck Christina!



*Above: Christina has successfully overcome a number of barriers to graduate from high school. This Fall, she will begin classes at TC3.*

**ATI Computer Lab**

**Open Monday - Friday**  
**9:00 am - 4:45 pm**

**For more information,**  
**call (607) 753-7363.**

**The Wishing Wellness Center**

Hours of Operation  
Monday – Friday 11:00am-6:00pm  
Call for Information about Activities and Appointments



24 Church Street  
Cortland, NY 13045  
(607) 423-7472  
peers@wishingwellnesscenter.org

Peer-Run Community Support Services



*With help from a friend,  
you can reach the stars!*

## 2013 Benefits Changes - Social Security Announces Changes

Beginning in January, recipients of Social Security retirement, disability, or Supplemental Security Income (SSI), received a 1.7% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA).

For individuals receiving SSDI or Retirement, Medicare Part B premium increased from \$99.50 to \$104.90. The Part B deductible also increased to \$147.00 for 2013.

Some individuals may qualify for assistance with the Part B premium depending on their income. The Medicare Savings Program helps lower-income Medicare recipients pay their premiums. Medicare Part D also has a program to help with premiums for lower-income individuals.

If you need help finding out whether or not you qualify, contact Susan Lewis, Certified Benefits Counselor and ATI Independent Living Coordinator, by phone: 753-7363, or by email: [slewis@aticortland.org](mailto:slewis@aticortland.org).

Beginning in January, the level of Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) increased to \$1,040 for gross earned income per month. This is the limit on the amount an individual receiving SSDI can earn per month without penalty after the nine months Trial Work Period (TWP).

Beginning in January, the TWP amount also increased to \$750. If an individual receiving SSDI benefits earns over \$750 per month, they will have used up one of their nine TWPs.

If you currently receive SSI or SSDI but want to return to work, help is available. Contact Susan Lewis, Certified Benefits Counselor, by phone: 753-7363, or by email: [slewis@aticortland.org](mailto:slewis@aticortland.org).

## ATI Urges County Housing Plan

On January 22, Access to Independence urged Cortland County to draft a new comprehensive housing plan to address the county's unmet need for more affordable, accessible, integrated housing.

Chad W. Underwood, ATI Chief Operating Officer, made the case during a meeting of the Legislature's County, City, Towns Villages and Schools (CCTVS) Committee.

The county's existing comprehensive housing plan is based on data from the 1990's and does not accurately reflect the community's current situation.

County Legislator Sandy Price, who chairs the CCTVS Committee, said she would recommend the county's Agriculture, Environment and Planning Committee to take up the idea. That Committee has taken no action as of yet.

# HOUSING ROUNDTABLE



**What:** Advocating for a Consolidated Plan for Housing in Cortland

**When:** Wednesday, March 27, 2013 (8:00 – 10:00 am)

**Where:** SUNY Beard Building - Room 203  
9 Main Street, Cortland, NY 13045

## ATI Wants You!

*ATI is currently recruiting interested individuals with diverse backgrounds, with and without disabilities, to serve on its Board of Directors.*

**For more information, please contact:**

**Mary E. Ewing, Executive Director**  
by phone: 607-753-7363; or  
by email: [mary.ewing@aticortland.org](mailto:mary.ewing@aticortland.org)

Access To  Independence  
OF CORTLAND COUNTY, INC.

**We are now accepting referrals to our NHTD & TBI Medicaid Waiver programs for the following services:**

- **SC (Service Coordination)**
- **ILST (Independent Living Skills Training)**
- **AT (Assistive Technology)**
- **CTS (Community Transitional Services)**
- **MA (Moving Assistance)**
- **EMODs (Environmental Modifications)**

**For more information, please contact,**  
**Mary E. Ewing, by phone: 607-753-7363;**  
**or by email: [mary.ewing@aticortland.org](mailto:mary.ewing@aticortland.org).**

## Creating Systems Change: A Slow and Steady Process: by Frances A. Pizzola

In November of 2010, I received a phone call from Maria DeSanta complaining about the lack of accessibility at the City of Cortland's Post Office. I asked Maria to write me a simple complaint letter as it is better to advocate for changes from more than one person's perspective.

In her complaint letter, Maria shared her personal experience of attempting to enter the Post Office while using a walker. She explained how the glass doors were so heavy and how impossible it was for her to open the doors while balancing herself with her walker. A man across the street noticed her struggling and came to her assistance. She explained to me that although this was helpful it was also a little embarrassing.

After receiving her complaint letter, I conducted an investigation of the Post Office and took photographs of the entrance doors. I followed up by sending a letter to Cortland's Postmaster. As with tracking any complaint letter, I waited a week and then made a follow-up phone call to the Postmaster to discuss corrective measures. After leaving several phone messages, which were never returned, I contacted a City of Cortland Code Enforcement Officer to discuss the situation. He informed me, that because the Post Office falls under the jurisdiction of the federal codes department he would not be able to assist us in this matter. Therefore the decision was made to file a federal complaint with the United States Access Board.

The United States Access Board enforces accessibility standards issued under the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, which requires that buildings designed, constructed, altered, or leased with certain federal funds must be accessible. In 2008, the Cortland Post Office underwent accessibility alterations by installing a new ramp on the south side of the building. However they did not install automatic door openers at that time.

I have been asked numerous times by individuals, "Why doesn't every building have an automatic door on it?" Unfortunately, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) does not require buildings to have automatic doors installed. Under the ADA, a door is required to have an accessible doorknob, (a lever handle or a handle where a wrist can be looped into it) and a door opening force which is less than 8 pounds per pressure for an outside door and 5 pounds per pressure for an inside door.

In April 2011, ATI filed a formal complaint with the US Access Board. All correspondences which were sent to the postmaster and the photographs taken as evidence were included with the complaint. Throughout the year, I made several phone calls to US Access Board to follow up on our complaint. However, it took the Access Board another year to assign our complaint to Mr. Jeffrey Hill, a Senior Compliance Specialist at the Office of the General Counsel at the United States Access Board. On January 31, 2012, he sent ATI a letter, stating that he would conduct an investigation of the matter and determine whether the facility was subject to such standards as we outlined in our complaint letter.

Throughout the following months, I made several calls to Mr. Hill regarding the status of our complaint. Then in April 2012, Mr. Hill confirmed that he had received site drawings of the Cortland Post Office from the federal agency conducting the investigation. In August 2012, I contacted Mr. Hill once more about the status of our request, but still no answers. In September 2012, I started working with Jessica Andrianos, a student from SUNY Cortland. I provided her with advocacy training and some background on the complaint. Jessica joined in our advocacy efforts by making additional phone calls and sending e-mails to Mr. Hill and his supervisors.

Finally, in November of 2012, I received an e-mail correspondence stating that the U.S. Postal Service found that the door configuration, specifically maneuvering clearances at the Cortland post office did not comply with the ADA and indicated that correction would be taken by the end of the year! The doors are now accessible!

As you can see, creating a systems change in our built environment takes a lot of persistence, effort and follow through. It also provides satisfaction and hope. Satisfaction in knowing that measures are in place which guarantee full inclusion for people with disabilities and hope in a brighter future for all people to encounter less struggles in this world.



*Above: Maria DeSanta demonstrates how improved accessibility at the Cortland Post Office benefits everyone.*

## New Online Services Available My Social Security Account

Social Security announced that it is expanding the services available with a my Social Security online account that people can use beginning in the working years and continuing throughout the time they receive Social Security benefits.

Beneficiaries can now access their benefit verification letter, payment history, and earning record instantly using their online account. Beneficiaries can change their address and start or change direct deposit information online.

Social Security and SSI recipients with a my Social Security account can have instant access to their verification letter which serves as proof of income to secure loans, mortgages and other housing, and state or local benefits.

People age 18 and older can sign up for an account at [www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount). Once there, they must be able to provide information about themselves and answers to questions that only they are likely to know.

After completing the secure verification process, people can create a my Social Security account to get a personalized online Social Security statement. The online statement provides eligible workers with secure and convenient access to their Social Security earnings and benefit information and estimates of future benefits they can use to plan for their retirement. It also provides links to information about other online services, such as applications for retirement, disability benefits and Medicare.

For more information or for help signing-up, contact Susan Lewis, Certified Benefits Counselor and ATI Independent Living Coordinator, by phone at: 753-7363

## Join NY's Disability Advocacy Network!

- Keep current on pressing disability issues!
- Receive email alerts on policy and budget matters!
- Fight for the civil rights of people with disabilities!
- Join 1,000+ statewide advocates to fight for change!

**For more information, or to join our advocacy network, email: [abaier@aticortland.org](mailto:abaier@aticortland.org)**

## Still receiving your federal benefits by paper check?

As of March 1, 2013, the Social Security Administration will no longer issue paper checks to anyone receiving federal benefits.

If you are still receiving paper checks, you will need to switch to one of two options. You can either get your check direct deposited into a bank account, or you can use a debit card issued to you by the Social Security Administration

If you choose direct deposit, your check will be deposited electronically into your bank account. You can go to [www.godirect.org](http://www.godirect.org) to sign up for direct deposit if you have internet access, or you can call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 to sign up. You will need your bank account routing number and account number when you sign up. It may take as long as 60 days for Social Security to make the change so sign up early.

If you don't have a bank account, you can sign up for a Direct Express debit card. The Direct Express card is a debit card you can use to access your benefits, and you don't need a bank account. With the Direct Express card program, Social Security will deposit your federal benefit payment directly into your card account.

You can use this debit card just like a bank debit card to pay bills, and make purchases anywhere a debit MasterCard is accepted. There may be ATM withdrawal fees if you don't use a network ATM machine. Visit [www.usdirectexpress.com](http://www.usdirectexpress.com) or call 1-800-333-1795 to get more information and to sign up for the Direct Express debit card.

If you are still unsure of what to do, contact Susan Lewis at 753-7363 for more information or help signing up.

**Access To  Independence**  
OF CORTLAND COUNTY, INC.



Accessibility Construction Services  
26 North Main Street  
Cortland, NY 13045



607-753-7363

***We are your Accessibility Experts!***

## Person-Centered Services: An Example of ATI's Service Coordination Philosophy

In 2009, Clif decided to return to the Cortland area. However, due to diabetes, a minor scratch on his heel kept getting worse until he developed gangrene. He had no choice but to have his leg amputated. Clif considered getting a wheelchair, or prosthesis to replace his leg, but didn't know how to go about doing this.

Clif moved into his mother's house, but it was not readily accessible to a wheelchair. His diabetes was out of control, and he also suffered from arthritis, high blood pressure and heart disease. He was not able to live alone, at this point. Clif needed help deciding what to do with his life, how to manage his medical issues and adjust to his new circumstances.

Clif's mother had heard about ATI's Loan Closet of medical equipment, and came in to borrow a wheelchair for him. Clif began the process of becoming a participant in New York State's Nursing Home Transition & Diversion (NHTD) Medicaid Waiver program. The first step was getting a Service Coordinator to help him manage all of the changes and challenges in his life. Clif interviewed with ATI and chose us to provide

this service. Clif says he never knew about many of the services and resources available until he became involved with the Waiver program.

One of Clif's major difficulties was getting in and out of his house to go to dialysis appointments three times a week. While he drives, it was impossible for Clif to access the lower level of the house where the garage was located. His 70 year-old mother had to shovel snow so that he could get out in the winter months! The bathroom was also very difficult to maneuver.

Clif and his mother worked with ATI's Architectural Barrier Program to resolve these problems. ATI staff visited the home, made recommendations and developed a scope of work for the proposed changes. Clif's input was a large part of this process, and both he and his mother approved the final product. ATI modified the bathroom to make it accessible to Clif, adding a roll-in shower with grab bars, and an accessible sink and toilet. A stair-glide was installed on the steps to the garage so that Clif could get to his car.

Recently, it became difficult for Clif to get his wheelchair in and out of his car. His Service Coordinator

is now working with him to explore getting a wheelchair accessible van, with a lowered floor and a ramp or lift. There are a wide variety of vendors, vehicles and options available to choose from, and the process can be daunting. Clif's Service Coordinator is helping him explore these resources.

When asked what his Service Coordinator does for him, Clif says she finds the resources and information to help him with any problem. She helps him interpret and respond to official and governmental correspondence, such as letters from Social Security. She has taken him to look at vans and see the options available. His Service Coordinator assisted Clif with housing issues and accessibility modifications. She helped him to set up aide services to assist with his personal care and household chores. She has even taken the time to teach him some basic computer skills.

Thanks to the services that ATI and the Medicaid Waiver provide to Clif, he is now able to live more independently. He is able to live alone, function on a daily basis and get around in his community. In fact, last summer he drove to North Carolina to see his kids.

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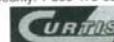
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**Leadership & Advocacy - Youth can Change the World**  
Wednesday, February 13, 4:00 - 5:00 pm

**Determination + Planning = Success**  
Wednesday, March 13, 4:00 - 5:00 pm

**Support Your Community - Get Involved**  
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**Leadership & Advocacy - Take Control of Your Life**  
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**Goal Setting & Time Management Tools for Success**  
Monday, March 25, 4:00 - 5:00 pm

**Make Money & Keep It!**  
Monday, April 22, 4:00 - 5:00 pm

**Skill Building - Learn New Tricks to Beat Old Habits**  
Monday, May 20, 4:00 - 5:00 pm



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