

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

Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.

ACCESS NEWS

Fall 2013

NUMBER XXXVIII

ATI Board of Directors Elects New Members / Officers

On October 15, 2013 ATI's Board of Directors elected five new Members to serve their first two-year term. ATI welcomed Clifton Fuller, Peter Morse-Ackley, Daniel Mullins, Janet Oechsle and Cheryl Williams. The Board also re-elected Elizabeth Haskins to serve a second, two-year term.

Following the election, the new Board elected new and returning Officers: Larry Pfister, Chair; Dr. Daniel Pukstas, Vice Chair; Cynthia Schlenker, Treasurer; and Elizabeth Haskins, Secretary.

Mary Ewing, ATI Executive Director thanked outgoing Board Members for their dedicated service and presented each with a Certificate of Appreciation. Outgoing Board Members included: Dr. Judy Bentley, Mary Betters, Gail Bundy, Laura Eaton, Garra Lloyd-Lester, Lisa Perfetti and John Suarez.

ATI Announces 2014 Priorities

The ATI Board of Directors adopted 2014 Agency Priorities at its October Meeting. Priorities included the following:

- Promote increased community awareness of disability issues, the lack of equal human and civil rights for people with disabilities, and the opportunities that exist to increase independent living for all.
- Update the Agency's facilities to promote improved staff productivity and a more positive consumer experience.
- Expand the Agency's capacity to provide demanded services to people with a wide-variety of disabilities, their families and caregivers, and other service providers.
- Expand Agency's capacity to promote an increase of accessible, affordable and integrated housing for people with disabilities throughout Cortland County and beyond.

ATI Awarded \$1 Million Grant: DDSO Assistive Technology

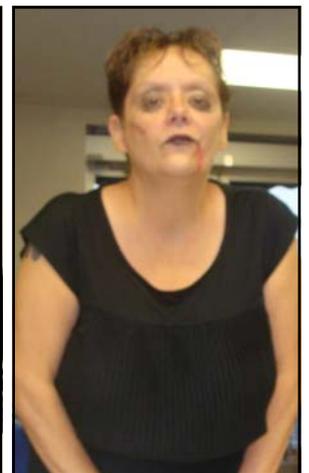
In early October, the NYS Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) awarded ATI a five-year, \$1 million grant to oversee assistive technology and home modification projects for consumers in the Central New York region (includes the following counties: Cayuga, Cortland, Herkimer, Lewis, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga and Oswego).

ATI plans to complete approximately 75 projects over the next five years, each of which will aim to enable a consumer to stay in their home in a safe and accessible environment. OPWDD consumers typically include people with developmental disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorders, and others.

ATI will begin executing the contract on January 1, 2014.

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Above: On Thursday, October 31, ATI hosted the community to its annual Halloween Social Night. Attendees sported costumes while participating in a variety of activities!

ATI Launches 2014 *Friends of the Center* Campaign

As the year draws to a close, many of us are looking forward to the holidays, to spending time with family and friends, and to the things we hold dear. At Access to Independence (ATI), our staff and Board are already looking at how we can increase our efforts to help our friends and family members with disabilities who continue to dream about the day they can fully enjoy all aspects of life in our community.

Although ATI receives grant funding from a number of sources, in today's environment, those shrinking funds have not kept pace with the rising needs of those in our community. That is why your donation and/or sponsorship is needed now more than ever.

Barriers persist and needs are unmet for too many people with disabilities in our community. Whether it be the lack of accessible housing and transportation, the absence of inclusive recreation opportunities or the shortage of employment opportunities, ATI's mission, vision and values have never been so clear.

During ATI's 2013 *Friends of the Center* Campaign, nearly 200 individuals and businesses invested more than \$20,000 to help ATI fill the unmet need in services for more than 350 people with disabilities. ATI worked with area youth to help them transition from school to work. ATI supported individuals in advocacy efforts to improve transportation, housing, and services for older individuals in our community. ATI loaned essential equipment to more than 100 people with disabilities throughout the year. ATI brought groups of advocates to Albany and Washington, DC to educate our legislators on the needs of people with disabilities in our community.

Your donation will help ATI continue to provide all of these unfunded services for people with disabilities in our community. It will support our efforts to increase awareness of disability issues, publicize the lack of equal human and civil rights for people with disabilities, and increase the opportunity for all people to live as independently as possible. Lastly, it will invest in our vision: "to lead the community towards an all-inclusive future where discrimination and physical barriers no longer exist".

Thank you for your generosity and support!

-- Mary E. Ewing, Executive Director

-- Chad W. Underwood, Chief Operating Officer

For more information on how you can become a friend to Access to Independence and support our 2014 efforts, please call (607) 753-7363, or email Mary E. Ewing, Executive Director (mary.ewing@aticortland.org), or Chad W. Underwood, Chief Operating Officer (cwunderwood@aticortland.org). ATI is a not-for-profit, 501(c)(3); therefore, your donation may be tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

2013 ATI Board / Staff Retreat

On Saturday, November 9, Access to Independence held its 2013 Annual Board / Staff Retreat. Board Members and staff convened at the SUNY Cortland Main Street Building to build momentum for a successful launch of 2014 initiatives.

ATI's 2013 Retreat continued its theme of "Faces of Independence." As such, Board and staff began the day with a team building exercise that aimed to shed light on what independence meant to each individual.

Holly Cargill Cramer of the Albany-based firm Association Development Group, Inc., facilitated a 105-minute full group session that aimed to provide useful, practical tools on how to engage our community in ways that create environments for greater understanding and investment in the independent living philosophy and the civil rights of people with disabilities. Board and staff learned best practices for promoting the independent living philosophy and increasing community awareness of disability issues.

Following lunch, Ed McCormick of the Poughkeepsie-based firm McCormick Management Consulting Services, Inc., facilitated a 90-minute session for staff on getting systems change results, including the use of tools to build grassroots support for such changes. Staff learned to maintain focus on ATI's vision as it aimed to build grassroots community support to achieve systems change.

At the same time, Deborah Fisher, CPA of the Cortland-based Port, Kashdin & McSherry Certified Public Accountants firm, spent 90 minutes with Board Members to share insight on intermediate Board responsibilities, including financial oversight, governance and managing a growing non-profit.

Many thanks go out to all Board and staff participants, as well as to each of the guest speakers.



2013 Harvest Moon Gala

On November 2, Access to Independence (ATI) held its 2nd annual Harvest Moon Gala event, at the SUNY Cortland Alumni House. The event raised nearly \$3,000 to benefit ATI advocacy efforts on behalf of people with disabilities who live or work in Cortland County.

More than 80 attendees enjoyed fabulous hors d'oeuvres, served by M&D Deli Central, along with a variety of beverages and desserts. Live entertainment was provided by virtuoso Will Sanders, who played the grand piano in the parlor of the Alumni House. Sanders' music fostered dancing and further revelry. ATI Board, staff and consumers were well represented at the event.

One highlight of the evening was a Silent Auction with more than a dozen themed baskets of goods. The donated contents included: dozens of gift certificates for local and regional stores, an overnight stay and brunch at a local bed & breakfast, a family photo session, tickets to see a Cortland Repertory play in 2014, hand-made quilts, wood products, etc. Each basket was valued at a minimum of \$100 – much more in some cases. Most bidders won their baskets at a substantial discount!

Many thanks go out to the 80 attendees, myriad event sponsors and the more than 40 area businesses and individuals that donated goods and services to the event. The event's success would not have been possible without your generosity!

ATI's Fund Development Committee is already at work considering the possibilities for next year's event. The 2014 Gala event is set for Saturday, November 1, 2014, at the SUNY Cortland Alumni House! Save the date now!



ATI Computer Lab
Open Monday - Friday
9:00 am - 4:45 pm
For more information, call
(607) 753-7363.

NYS Olmstead Plan: Competitive Employment in Cortland County or Bust!

"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." - Governor Andrew Cuomo.

This year, Gov. Cuomo released his Olmstead Implementation Plan for serving New Yorkers with disabilities in the most integrated setting. This plan details how NYS will universally modify its service systems to meet the Olmstead standards. One area of focus in the plan is employment. The NYS Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), as a result of the Olmstead Plan, set forth a Transformation Plan which aims to transform NYS Sheltered Employment workshops into competitive community employment opportunities.

On October 28, ATI staff met with staff from the J.M. Murray Center and Cortland County Mental Health in a preliminary discussion on the impact of the OPWDD Transformation Plan on job seekers with developmental disabilities, the lack of adequate employment opportunities, and the need for improved business relations. This Employment Opportunities Taskforce (EOT) will continue to meet to identify and recruit local stakeholders in an effort to develop a strategic plan to make competitive employment in Cortland County work. While, earning minimum wage and having a meaningful job is what is expected, this will not be an easy task.

First, employment and vocational rehabilitation services in NYS must change their policies to become more inclusive and consumer-driven and to promote competitive employment and meaningful community involvement as outcomes. This means that the J.M. Murray Center and Employment Connection will need to increase resources to their Supported Employment Program. ACCES-VR (Adult Career & Continuing Education Services) will need to increase funding for these programs and increase their capacity to serve consumers with developmental disabilities. Other service providers, such as Access to Independence, will need to modify their programming to improve capacity for peer support and mentoring in employment. Most importantly, local businesses will need to open their doors to a larger workforce, be willing to work together with employment service providers, and keep an open mind about new and innovative ability-focused types of employment.

The Employment Opportunities Taskforce will meet monthly; the next meeting is set for Monday, December 2, 2013 at 8:30 am in Room 304 of the County Office Building. The EOT will continue work on the following priorities:

- Identify all local stakeholders affected by the OPWDD Plan and identify who needs to be part of the planning process.
- Develop new partnerships and relationships with area businesses and human resource departments through public awareness and education efforts.
- Provide education on competitive vs. sheltered employment, meaningful community activities, strength-based learning, and integrated employment to all stakeholders and community-at-large.

While the ultimate goal of the Olmstead Plan and OPWDDs Transformation Plan is to eliminate sub-minimum wage sheltered employment (piece-rate) and to ensure that all people with disabilities receive a fair minimum wage, there is much work to be done to make the transition smooth and seamless at the State level and more importantly, at the local level.

There are a few ways that the EOT is considering to help increase employment opportunities in Cortland County. Aside from new developments such as the Byrne Yogurt Factory, area service providers are considering new businesses in the area that are open to the public and run by people with disabilities. There are also opportunities for sheltered employment providers, such as the JMMC, to transform their business model to not only be integrated, but to pay workers minimum wage and to allow for people with disabilities to work alongside their non-disabled peers. Further, there will be new opportunities for a "Pathway to Employment" program through OPWDD which local providers are investigating as another option.

These changes come from more than just another government mandate; they come from years of advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities to improve their quality of life! While choice is important, allowing for the choice of sub-minimum wage sheltered employment is unacceptable. Access to Independence supports this change by NYS - People with disabilities want to work and deserve every opportunity to work in the most integrated setting.

For more information on the OPWDD Transformation Plan, the Employment Opportunities Taskforce, or on finding a job yourself, contact Aaron T. Baier, Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator, by phone at 607-753-7363, or by email at abaier@aticortland.org.

First Transit: If We Don't Use It, We May Lose It!

RIDE THE BUS! First Transit is the only accessible public transportation in Cortland County. The fixed route and dial-a-ride services, while scoffed at by some, are essential for many residents to go to work, attend medical appointments and have a life outside of their home. Without First Transit, people with disabilities will have to rely on their own two feet, taxi cabs, and even TLC Ambulance Service simply to get to non-emergency medical appointments. First Transit is in trouble, but we won't let them go without a fight!

In October, NYS implemented a one-stop call center for people who use Medicaid to pay for transportation to medical appointments. This service is called the Medical Answering Service (MAS). Due to miscommunications and unclear representation from MAS authorities, First Transit is now losing customers to area taxi companies. While MAS is supposed to offer consumers a choice in which service to use, it seems many long-time First Transit riders are being referred elsewhere. In the last month, First Transit has seen a drop from 20-30 medical trips per day to only 5 trips per day! That is nearly a 70% drop in ridership. If this trend continues, it is likely that First Transit will go out of business.

"We need to find new funding from a variety of sources and fit them together," said Sara Holl from First Transit. Currently, First Transit's primary funding source is the reimbursement from medical transportation. Cortland County does not contribute any funding to support public transportation. However, they do own the busses that First Transit uses. The local Transportation Advisory Council is looking into new potential funding streams to help supplement what

First Transit has lost to ensure that our community does not lose an essential public service.

"Ride the bus," said Jan Dempsey, Mobility Manager for Seven Valleys Health Coalition. "First Transit is for the public and is available to everyone." First Transit offers more than medical transportation for people with disabilities. They offer fixed route services throughout the County to help people get to work and to social activities.

People who wish to use First Transit as their medical transportation have the right to choose. When you call MAS, tell them you want First Transit. If you prefer to take the fixed route service to your medical appointments, contact MAS and they can send you bus tokens.

"Talk to your representatives," said Dempsey. "Call your County Legislator, City Alderman, State Assembly members and Senators - Tell them that you need accessible public transportation and that First Transit is the best we have." You can also get involved in a local Transportation Coalition to advocate for your needs and the needs of your community.

For more information, voice your concerns and get involved, contact Jan Dempsey by phone at 607-756-4198, or by email at jdempsey@sevenvalleyshealth.org.

Cortland Joins Continuum of Care

Thanks to ongoing advocacy efforts, Cortland will soon have access to funds to help combat homelessness. This past September, Cortland County merged with the Coalition for the Homeless of the Southern Tier NY, Inc. to gain access to federal Continuum of Care (CoC) funds.

The Southern Tier CoC contingent includes Broome, Chenango, Delaware, Otsego, and now Cortland Counties. The Coalition's mission is to support vulnerable individuals and families, prevent and eliminate homelessness, and strengthen and preserve the Continuum of Care.

The primary purpose of the CoC is to develop housing and related supportive services for people moving from homelessness to independent living. Program funds help homeless people live in a stable place, increase their skills or income, and gain more control over the decisions that affect their lives.

Mike Pisa of Catholic Charities of Cortland County, and Chad W. Underwood of Access to Independence have been elected to the Coalition for the Homeless of the Southern Tier's Board of Directors to represent Cortland County.

For more information, contact Chad W. Underwood, by phone: 607-753-7363, or by email: cwunderwood@aticortland.org.

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Disability Mentoring Day: 'Because We Are Equal to the Task'

This article was written by Jessica Wickham, a senior at Cortland High School and an intern at the Cortland Standard. This article was published in the Cortland Standard on Wednesday, October 23, 2013.

The air is thick with constant conversation, the tables filled with plates of food. One boy comes from a day of welding, a girl comes from a day of playing with children - and all come from a life filled with obstacles.

A young blind man tells them how to see themselves for what they can become, and a deaf DJ tells them to listen to their hearts. It's all part of Disability Mentoring Day, an event meant to help young adults with disabilities focus on their abilities and find future careers.

Organized by a group of local coordinators headed by Aaron Baier at Access to Independence, DMD gave students hands on experience in fields they'd like to pursue. An initiative by the National Association for People with Disabilities, DMD is one activity held in October as part of Disability Employment Awareness Month.

On October 16, students with disabilities from Cortland, Homer and McGraw high schools shadowed employees at various job sites, from Frosted Bakery to Wal-Mart to Metro Design Associates graphic design company. Students spent a couple of hours receiving hands-on experience. There were activities such as making cookies (Frosted), stacking supplies (Cortland Veterinary Hospital). Playing with children (Child Development Center), welding (Suit Kote), and numerous tours of locations such as WXHC Oldies 101.5 radio, the Cortland Fire Department and the Cortland Regional Medical Center.

Students later gathered at Cortland Works Career Center for lunch. Guest speakers Devin Martinez and Geoff Herbert spoke about discovering and embracing one's potential, despite disabilities.

Martinez, 16, is a student at Cortland High School. He is legally blind, but didn't let that stand in his way. He overcame his disability, inspired by older individuals he saw in a nursing home doing the same thing.

"Everyone can be successful," Martinez said.

Having a disability is normal, he said, and it should never hold someone back from their dream. In order to engage his listeners, he used Skittles to initiate questions, one question per color. Through questions such as 'what are your favorite superheroes/colors/dream jobs' the students learned about each other, and saw that Martinez was right—having a disability doesn't make you "different."

Herbert can only hear about ten percent of that of a person with normal hearing. This served as a major barrier for him, especially because treating deafness is much harder than treating blindness, Herbert said. Speech therapy and lip reading enabled him to communicate and he pursued a career as a disc jockey, DJing at his high school radio station and then later at 107.9FM, where he was known as "Deaf Geoff," one of the few deaf DJs in the country.

Herbert later switched to reporting and production for Syracuse.com and the Post Standard and later was promoted to a full-time reporter, which he still is today. Herbert said one of the purposes of mentoring day is to dis-

cover what 'you want to do.' And: "If you didn't find what you want to do today, that's okay, because you got to find what you didn't want to do," he said.

He also made the point to do what you want to do with your life, no matter the obstacles.

Most participants said the event was a worthwhile experience and worth repeating. McGraw students were all attending this as their first year, and many said it was a good opportunity.

Funding for DMD was provided by Access to Independence, The Triad Fund and the Speiser Foundation. Wal-Mart was a national sponsor. Cortland Area Communities That Care helped provide funding for t-shirts, food and advertising.



2013 Disability Employment Awareness Month Events

In October, Access to Independence (ATI) recognized National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) with a series of employment-related events and activities for our community. More than likely, you have heard one or more of our radio ads that aired throughout the month on WXHC Oldies 101.5! The theme this year was: "Because We are Equal to the Task."

On October 3, 10 and 17, ATI facilitated its 2013 Annual Employment Conference. The three-day event welcomed job seekers with disabilities and offered tools, skill development, networking, and peer empowerment to further their job search and inevitable career.

"This was our most unique Conference ever," said Aaron Baier, Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator for ATI. "Each day of the Conference featured speakers and workshops focused on the unique needs of different disability groups." On October 3, job seekers with developmental disabilities heard from Michael Kennedy of the Self-Advocacy Association of CNY who spoke about how he overcame various tribulations throughout his life and helped participants plan for their own success.

On October 10, job seekers with mental health disabilities heard from Linda Martin and Chris Hyde of the Wishing Wellness Recovery Center in Cortland. While Linda shared an emotional story of depression and substance abuse that ended with the importance of our peers in recovery, Chris took participants to the next level with a workshop on how finding passion is essential to career success.

On October 17, job seekers with physical and sensory disabilities heard from local Mobility Manager, Jan Dempsey, who led an in-depth discussion on transportation and employment with participants. Followed by a workshop on motivation and career planning with Mickey Gibbons from SUNY Cortland, participants left with renewed enthusiasm for their job search.

Each conference session also featured area employers who shared their perspectives on employment and disability.

Thank you to all of our keynotes and workshop presenters for sharing their time, experiences, and guidance.

Thank you to Melanie Carr from Pall Trinity Micro Co., Brad Totman from Tompkins Trust Co., and Julie Thomas from Lavish, for their time and encouragement.

Thank you to all presenters who offered information about resources and opportunities for job seekers, including: ACCES-VR, Cornell University, Cortland Works Career Center, Employment Connection, the Go Getters, Madison/Cortland Arc, NYS Commission for the Blind, and OCM BOCES

The 2013 Employment Conference was sponsored by the Speiser Fund, the Triad Foundation, Inc. and numerous individual donors to ATI.

ATI Holds 2013 Community Business Leader Luncheon

On October 24, Access to Independence (ATI) facilitated its 2nd Annual Community Business Leader Luncheon for local employers at the Main Street SUNY Cortland building in downtown Cortland.

The luncheon featured Barry Tatters, Workforce Development and Business Relations Representative for Adult Career & Continuing Education Services (ACCES-VR) and Beth Welch, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the NYS Commission for the Blind (NYSCB), who spoke with area business leaders about the financial incentives and human resource potential of hiring people with disabilities.

"While disability may present barriers to employment, today's technology makes it easy to provide an appropriate accommodation," said Welch during her presentation.

Tatters added, "It's easy to raise a desk or rearrange a workspace to meet someone's needs."

A common misconception of most business leaders is that hiring someone with a disability will be costly; but that is not always the case. In fact, most of the job accommodations don't cost a dime.

An employee or employer may contact ACCES-VR or NYSCB for assistance with securing appropriate accommodations.

For more information, contact Aaron T. Baier, ATI Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator at 607-753-7363.

The 2013 Community Business Leader Luncheon was sponsored by the Speiser Fund and the Triad Foundation, Inc.

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What is Medicare Open Enrollment?

For Medicare eligible individuals, there is a period of time each year called the Medicare Open Enrollment Period. For anyone receiving Medicare, it is an important time to review your coverage and decide if you need to change any of your coverage.

Medicare has 4 different categories. Medicare Part A covers hospital stays and very limited nursing home visits. Medicare Part B covers doctor's visits and medical tests (x-rays, blood tests, etc.). Medicare Part D covers prescription drugs.

One more program, Medicare Part C or Medicare Advantage Plan, is a different way to get your Medicare coverage. You can enroll in a Medicare Advantage Plan, and it takes the place of traditional Medicare Part A and Part B. Some of the Medicare Advantage plans also offer prescription drug coverage. The choice to switch to an Advantage plan can be confusing, and it may be to your advantage to consult a Benefits Specialist if you are over age 60. These specialists can be found at your local Area Agency on Aging.

You can change your Medicare Part C (Advantage Plan) each year between October 15 and December 7. If you decide to switch from an Advantage Plan back to original Medicare, you can do this from January 1 to February 14 of each year.

If you are enrolled in a Medicare Part D (prescription plan), you can switch plans between October 15 and December 7 each year. You can go to www.medicare.gov and input your medication information (name of medication, dosage and amount) into the database and find out what plan would be the best for you.

If you missed your initial enrollment period for Medicare Part A and Part B, you can sign up during General Enrollment from January 1 to March 31 each year. **But remember, if you do not sign up for Medicare Part B when first eligible, you may have to pay a penalty that will increase your Part B premium each month.**

All of the Medicare programs can be confusing and overwhelming, but getting the correct information to make an informed choice is very important. Checking out your options at www.medicare.gov can help with these choices.

If you are unable to check the Medicare website, and you are 60 years old or more, you can call your local Area Agency on Aging at 607-753-5060.

If you are unable to check the Medicare website, and you are under the age of 60 years, you can call Susan Lewis, ATI Independent Living Coordinator and Certified Benefits Specialist, at 607-753-7363.

Social Security Announces 1.5 Percent Benefit Increase for 2014

Monthly Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for nearly 63 million Americans will increase 1.5 percent in 2014, the Social Security Administration announced recently.

The 1.5 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) will begin with benefits that more than 57 million Social Security beneficiaries receive in January 2014. Increased payments to more than 8 million SSI beneficiaries will begin on December 31, 2013.

Some other changes that take effect in January of each year are based on the increase in average wages. Based on that increase, the maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security tax (taxable maximum) will increase to \$117,000 from \$113,700.

Of the estimated 165 million workers who will pay Social Security taxes in 2014, about 10 million will pay higher taxes as a result of the increase in the taxable maximum.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) also reported that health care reform efforts are eliciting additional significant out-of-pocket savings for Medicare beneficiaries, pointing to zero growth in 2014 Medicare Part B premiums and deductibles, and more than \$8 billion in cumulative savings in the prescription drug coverage gap known as the "donut hole."

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!

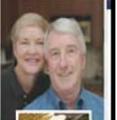
For more information, or to join our advocacy network, email: abaier@aticortland.org



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Advocacy Efforts Lead to Community Systems Changes: By Fran Pizzola, ATI Community Educ. Coord.

Access to Independence (ATI) is in the business of making a difference. We are agents of change, for structural barriers, systems and policies which impedes the full inclusion of people with disabilities.

As an Independent Living Center (ILC), ATI provides a set of four core services: Peer Counseling, Independent Living Skills Training, Information and Referral Services, and Individual and Systems Advocacy. While each service is very important, providing personal advocacy and systems advocacy is a key component to achieving full societal inclusion and the goal of personal independence.

ATI has made it a priority to spend a great deal of energy working to improve the community at large and the systems and policies that affect the lives of individuals with disabilities. Several of these changes are structural in nature, while others relate to changes in policies and procedures.

In more detail the definition of a systems change is: a process that shifts the way an organization or community makes decisions about policies, programs, and the allocation of its resources. Ultimately, the systems change affects the way the organization or community delivers services and supports its citizens and constituencies.

Every year, ATI works to achieve community systems change outcomes in six areas: Education, Employment, Health Care, Commerce, Social, and Citizenship.

ATI build relationships and partnerships with individuals, governmental agencies, community organizations, businesses and state/national networks and communicates with each to achieve such changes.

ATI's advocacy efforts have been very successful during the past year, leading to the achievement of 17 systems changes!

In Education Advocacy, ATI staff provided advocacy training to students at SUNY Cortland, which taught them how to identify barriers on campus and in the community. One such barrier was non-compliant accessible parking at SUNY Cortland. In August 2013, SUNY Cortland retrofitted the Corey Union parking lot to include two accessible parking spots with an access aisle in between the two parking spots.

In Health Care Advocacy, information on Access to Independence has been included in the Cortland Regional Medical Center discharge packet. In addition, ATI signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) under Medicaid Managed Care to provide environmental modifications to individuals with disabilities.

In Commerce Advocacy, several changes have been made; the Cortland Post Office installed a new automatic door to ensure its entrance is accessible to people with disabilities.

Continued advocacy by ATI led to First Transit providing expanded services on nights, weekends and to Virgil. In addition, four new busses which are compliant with ADA standards were purchased.

In August 2013, and as a result of direct advocacy by ATI and Catholic Charities, Cortland County merged with the NY-511 Continuum of Care, which includes Broome, Otsego, Chenango and Delaware counties. Cortland is now eligible for thousands of dollars to help mitigate homelessness.

In Social Advocacy, as a result of dedicated advocacy from ATI, the Cortland Free Library installed automatic doors at the library's new accessible entrance, and the Cortland city Youth Bureau-operated Beaudry Park Building was redesigned and constructed with an accessible entrance and restrooms, with the new location closer to the parking lot.

In Citizenship, as a result of ATI's involvement in the Statewide Systems Advocacy Network (SSAN), advocacy efforts by ATI and many other disability organizations led to the appointment of disability rights leader Tom Perez as Secretary of Labor.

In addition, ATI was involved in affecting change to a new recruitment policy for the New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB). The new recruitment policy for membership to their State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) incorporates proactive diversity tools to help the SRC reflect NYSCB's consumer base.

There are no quick fixes when making a systems change. In fact, meaningful change can take years to achieve. The good news is, ATI follows the NYS Independent Living Council's priority agenda and has also developed a local priority agenda which will guide our efforts towards a national, state and local community in which structural and attitudinal barriers no longer exist for people with disabilities.

For more information on how you can get involved in helping facilitate systems changes in our community, contact Aaron Baier, Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator, or Fran Pizzola, Community Education Coordinator, at 607-753-7363.

Assistive Technology & Environmental Modifications Promote Independent Living For All

Assistive technology (AT) and environmental modifications (E-Mods) have the potential to increase independence, safety, and quality of life for individuals with disabilities. Many people may become trapped in their homes or locked out because of a disability that prevents them from being able to physically access their home.

Assistive technology such as environmental control units that allow a person with a disability to turn on and off lights, answer the telephone, and open the door can increase independence significantly.

Environmental modifications such as ramped porches, wide hallways/doorways within homes, and bathrooms equipped with grab bars and bath chairs can provide for safety and independence as well as "aging in place" for individuals with disabilities and the elderly.

Whether it be AT or E-Mods there are several common terms that you should be aware of:

"Accessible design" generally refers to houses or other dwellings that meet specific requirements for accessibility. These requirements are found in state, local, model building codes, and the regulations of the Fair Housing Amendments

Act of 1988, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Standards A117.1-1998, and the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines. These regulations, guidelines, and laws dictate standard dimensions and features such as door widths, clear space for wheelchair mobility, countertop heights for sinks and kitchens, audible and visual signals, grab bars, switch and outlet height, and more.

"Adaptable design" allows some features of a building or dwelling to be changed to address the needs of an individual with a disability or a person encountering mobility limitations as he/she ages. Essential design elements such as wider doorways and halls and barrier-free entrances are included as integral features, while provisions are made for features to be "adapted" (modified or added) as needed.

To meet the definition of "adaptable," the change must be able to be made quickly without the use of skilled labor and without changing the inherent structure of the materials. For example, bathroom walls may be designed with additional supports for the future installation of grab bars. Cabinets

under sinks can be designed to be removable whereby the storage space under the sinks are replaced for knee space for wheelchair users.

"Visitable design" refers to homes that are not only accessible to guests with disabilities visiting the homes of nondisabled hosts, but to the future needs of the nondisabled residents as well. "Visitability" is an advocacy movement proposing that when feasible, basic access to all new homes is a civil right.

Access features essential to visitable homes are a zero-step entrance, accessible hallways, and bathrooms with doors wide enough for a wheelchair user to enter. Such features make a home visitable to guests with disabilities and can help a resident adapt in his/her home should the resident's needs change due to a disability or reduced mobility (from aging, for example).

For more information on how the use of assistive technology or environmental modifications might improve the independent living of you or someone you know, please contact Audrey Jones, ATI Architectural Barrier Program Coordinator, by phone: 607-753-7363, or by email: ajones@aticortland.org.

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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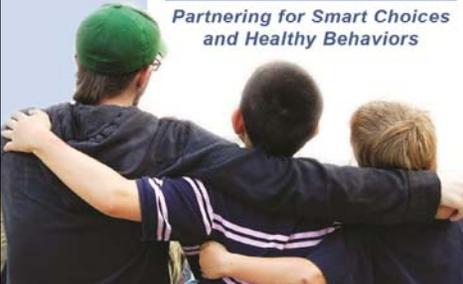
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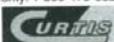
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