

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

Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.

ACCESS NEWS

Winter 2014

NUMBER XXXIX

ATI Awarded \$75,000 Grant

Last Fall, the New York State Education Department awarded ATI a three-year, \$75,000 contract to conduct statewide advocacy activities in support of the New York State independent living disability agenda. ATI was one of just fourteen centers to receive the award.

While the large majority of contract funds will be used to support staff salary and benefits, ATI is set to use a portion of the funds to hire nationally-renowned experts to train staff and Board Members and to help pay for travel expenses to send disability advocates to Albany, NY.

ATI staff will continue to coordinate with disability advocacy groups from across the state to promote the civil rights of all people with disabilities by disseminating action alerts, facilitating public education activities and engaging in community organizing activities.

ATI Calls For 2014 Volunteers

Earlier this month, ATI announced the opening of a number of exciting 2014 volunteer opportunities. Below is a summary:

Video Clips – Produce short video clips with a theme of “Faces of Independence”. These video clips would capture the spirit of independent living (people with a wide variety of disabilities overcoming structural and attitudinal barriers to enjoy life in the community).

Systems Advocacy – Participate in local systems change initiatives that (1) aim to identify (inventory) lack of access to people with disabilities (e.g., housing, transportation, medical facilities, sidewalks, businesses, etc.); (2) increase public awareness of these deficiencies; and (3) take action to facilitate change.

For more information on these initiatives, call: (607) 753-7363, or email: info@aticortland.org.

ATI Presents at TASH 2013

This past December, SUNY Cortland and Access to Independence joined forces to co-present a poster session at the TASH 38th Annual Conference in Chicago, Illinois on their collaboration with the Cortland County Area Agency on Aging in developing a community needs assessment on the unmet needs of individuals 60+.

Dr. Judy K. C. Bentley (SUNY Cortland Professor and former ATI Board Member) and Chad W. Underwood (ATI Chief Operating Officer) presented the framework for collaboration and shared the final report with interested attendees.

TASH is an international association of people with disabilities, their family members, other advocates and professionals who are joined in the effort to fight for a society where there is inclusion of all people in all aspects of society.

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ATI Advocates Join Others in Albany to Educate Leaders on Pressing Disability Priorities

Over the last three weeks, 15 area advocates travelled to Albany to educate legislators on pressing budget and policy priorities for people with disabilities. Specific areas of advocacy related to community recovery services, community-based mental health and aging services, elder abuse and transportation.

In addition to meeting with the area's state legislators, advocates met with officials from related State trade associations and governmental agencies. Advocates also participated in rallies and attended workshops that aimed to develop and promote a unified statewide voice.

On **January 28**, five area advocates joined more than 500 others from across the state to participate in the NYAPRS (New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services) Annual Legislative Day.

Advocates urged state legislators to reconfigure service systems and to reinvest Medicaid savings into proven home and community-based services.

Advocates told leaders that hundreds of millions of dollars remain spent on institutional services that should be spent on community recovery services like housing, employment, education supports, peer and family support, wellness and

crisis support services and self-directed services.

Advocates said that people with psychiatric disabilities want to and can live capably in the community and not in hospitals, adult and nursing homes, homeless shelters or in jails and prisons.

Community-based recovery services are for everyone and can help people with psychiatric disabilities to integrate into communities more independently by bringing supports to the home (supported housing), workplace (supported employment) and school (supported education).

On **February 4**, five area advocates, including representatives from ATI and officials from Cortland's Seven Valleys Health Coalition, travelled to Albany to participate in the 2014 Transit Awareness Day, sponsored by the New York Public Transit Association (NYPTA).

Advocates urged state leaders to increase funding for public transit in communities like Cortland, where public transit is limited and at risk of elimination due to recent Department of Health (DOH) changes in how it reimburses for medical transportation.

Also on **February 4**, four area advocates, including officials from ATI and the Cortland County Area

Agency on Aging, travelled to Albany to participate in the 2014 NYS Coalition for the Aging (NYSCA) Legislative Conference.

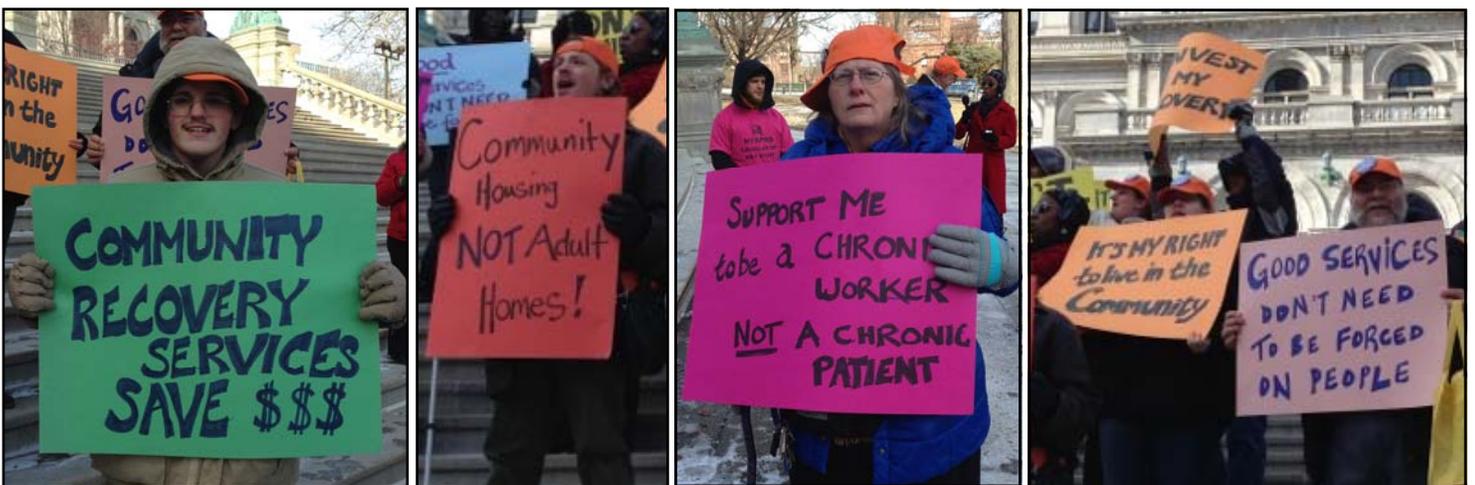
Advocates urged state legislators to increase funding for case management, elder abuse and adult day services. Advocates also urged state leaders to include the aging services network in emergency preparedness planning.

Advocates said recent budget cuts have threatened the infrastructure of community-based senior services which provide lifeline programs, including Meals on Wheels, senior centers, case management, elder abuse programs, transportation and social adult day care.

Although these community-based services are both needed and cost effective, they continue to come under budgetary attack.

On **February 11**, five area advocates joined more than 300 others from across the state to participate in the Families Together in NYS (FTNYS) Annual Legislative Day.

Advocates urged state legislators to ensure that youth and families have a say in the development of community-based services that aim to ensure that all youth have the supports they need to succeed. (*See related article on page 4.*)



Access Calls Upon Cortland Officials and Colleges to Contribute Funds For Public Transit

Over the past several months, ATI has actively engaged with the community to call for the improvement of transportation options for all residents throughout Cortland County. Since last Fall, Cortland's only public transportation system, Cortland Transit, has been operating with a 40% funding cut (\$450,000 yearly) as a result of changes to the state's Medicaid transportation management. The Cortland community is facing the total loss of public transit in the near future (or at the very least, severe cutbacks to service that diminish the civil rights of people with and without disabilities of all ages).

Last December, ATI sent letters to its state legislators, NYS Department of Health Commissioner Dr. Nirav Shah, and Governor Cuomo to let them know of the dire consequences of the State's change in Medicaid transportation reimbursement.

In January, ATI organized a meeting of community stakeholders to develop a strategy to ensure the continuation of public transportation. Those stakeholders included Cortland County Mobility Manager,

Jan Dempsey; Cortland County Director of Planning, Dan Dineen; County Legislator Sandra Price; Mary Beilby of the League of Women Voters; staff of Seven Valleys Health Coalition (SVHC) and Access to Independence (ATI); and community advocates.

As a result of the meeting, the group agreed to develop a public awareness campaign to educate the public and city and county legislators on the importance of public transportation. SVHC and ATI agreed to collaborate to develop and fund a print and radio ad campaign. Dempsey agreed to present at an upcoming meeting of the Cortland County City, Towns, Villages & Schools. SVHC and ATI also agreed to send advocates to Albany to meet with state legislators about the need for a solution.

By the end of January, ATI received a letter from the NYS Department of Health regarding its earlier correspondence with the Governor. As it turns out, it is very unlikely that the State (DOH or Cuomo Administration) will roll-back its Medicaid transportation changes.

As a result, ATI is currently pursuing a dual-pronged strategy: (1) encourage the state to pass legislation to provide temporary funding to communities impacted by the change in order to maintain public transit systems; and (2) encourage the City of Cortland, County of Cortland, SUNY Cortland and Tompkins-Cortland Community College to allocate adequate funds to not just maintain, but expand public transit into the foreseeable future.

"The system we have now is not adequate," said Chad W. Underwood, ATI Chief Operating Officer. The bus system currently runs

just 6 am to 6 pm Monday through Friday. Service to the more rural parts of the County is very limited. "This is not just an issue of economics, but it's a civil rights issue," said Underwood. "Access to transportation is not just critical for business (getting to work and spending money at stores), but it's also critical for people who don't drive or have the means to take a cab to participate fully in society (social, recreational activities).

Unlike so many communities across the country that do offer their residents public transit, the City and County of Cortland, and all of the towns throughout Cortland County do not contribute one dime to the costs of public transportation. And unlike so many communities across the nation that host one or more colleges and universities, TC3 and SUNY Cortland do not contribute one dime to the costs of public transportation.

"This is not right," said Underwood. ATI is set to launch a public awareness campaign with SVHC on the benefits of public transit: to the community's economy and its residents' quality of life.

Area Youth & Families Advocate for Improved Community-Based Services

On February 11, more than 300 family and youth advocates from across the state assembled at the State Legislative Building Complex in Albany, NY to advocate for action on legislation that would improve the quality of life and safeguard the civil rights of children and families in New York State.

Access to Independence sent a delegation of five advocates to participate in the Families Together in New York State (FTNYS)-sponsored Legislative Awareness Day activities. The contingent aimed to educate state leaders on pressing issues heading into this year's legislative session. That delegation also stopped in to visit with Senator James Seward, Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton and Assemblyman Gary Finch, all representatives of Cortland County residents.

Advocates urged state leaders to increase investment in the quality of services which children, youth and families in Cortland County receive. Specifically, the advocates encouraged state legislators to:

- Continue support of the Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs.
- Expand support of the Close to Home initiative to make it statewide. Advocates said it was essential that families have access to services close to home, rather than have to travel hundreds of miles to access them.
- Ensure that the Governor's Education Commission continues to provide for meaningful input from family and youth advocates, including stakeholders. Advocates said such input would result in more relevant and appropriate services and supports for students in need of special education services.
- Provide increased access to educational advocates for parents and youth who require special education services for their children. The group said that these advocates should work with the cross-systems children's services in each locality.
- Support legislation to revise state education law to include mental health as part of health education in NYS schools. Advocates noted that mental and emotional health was not currently required teaching material in high schools. Advocates said it was essential that youth become more aware, at an earlier age, of what emotional and mental health is, especially since so many don't learn about it until later in life (post-high school).
- Support Full-Day Pre-Kindergarten for the Highest-Needs Students. Advocates said that investing in high quality early intervention services for the highest-needs students would improve educational outcomes while reducing disparities. Studies show that school success is impacted by early intervention and experiences before kindergarten. Full-day pre-kindergarten, especially for children with needs, will have an impact on their school success and future.
- Increase funding for the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS). Advocates explained that the Governor's proposed budget would keep funding flat for OASAS. Advocates said it was critical for OASAS to have more resources to help combat the opiate epidemic that was affecting youth in all areas of the state.
- Expand the scope of the Governor's proposed Commission on Youth, Public Safety & Justice to not just focus on increasing the age of criminal responsibility, but to ensure that home and community-based services are available for youth and families to begin with.

Each year, FTNYS releases a Policy Priority Agenda which reflects the statewide sentiment of their constituents. Principles which guide the policy agenda include: 1) ensure youth and families are active participants in planning services for their family; 2) all children, youth and families must have timely and affordable access to services in the community; 3) children and youth must receive an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment; and 4) families should never have to relinquish custody of their children in order to receive mental health services.

Families Together in NYS is the statewide chapter of the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health and consists of a dedicated team of staff, board members and parent advisors. They work diligently to provide for families of children and youth with social, emotional and behavioral challenges. FTNYS collaborates with families, schools, policymakers and service providers to ensure families receive the services needed for their children. They host the annual legislative luncheon to allow families to have the opportunity to voice their concerns and ideas with policymakers.

Cortland County Housing Consortium Meets

This past December, ATI facilitated a quarterly meeting of the Cortland County Housing Consortium. In addition to updates from Board members of the recently merged Southern Tier Continuum of Care (now includes Cortland County), the group continued its strategic planning to encourage Cortland County to update its Consolidated Plan for Housing.

The group also welcomed Glenn Anderson, Owner of Empire Construction, and Margie Lann, newly appointed Director of Cortland Housing Authority.

At the meeting, the Consortium continued its discussion and review of Cortland's existing Consolidated Plan for Housing, created in 2002 with data from the 1990 Census.

The Consortium concluded that although development of a brand new Consolidated Plan might be cost prohibitive, the existing plan is out-of-date and requires a significant update at the very least.

The group agreed to increase public awareness of the inadequacies of the existing Plan and to send copies to County Legislators in hopes they too will agree that it is deficient.

ATI agreed to work together with Thoma Development and other stakeholders to develop and present a proposed plan of action to the County Legislature.

Further discussion revolved around the significant revenue brought to Cortland County from a number of different nonprofits and governmental entities for housing development programming. Economically, a solid Consolidated Plan for Housing pays for itself in dividends.

Over the past 10 years, community housing initiatives have brought more than \$28 million in grant fund-

ing to Cortland County and contributed to the development or improvement of safe, affordable, accessible, and integrated housing for more than 2,000 County residents.

An up-to-date Consolidated Plan for Housing will ensure that area housing providers are able to continue to bring new funding and programs for housing initiatives that are laid out in the plan.

While the Consortium continues to bring new stakeholders to the table, the group recognizes that not all stakeholders are engaged.

The group discussed the ongoing need for housing developers, homeowner and landlord associations, and City Council and County Legislature members to become engaged in the discussion.

The Cortland County Housing Consortium will meet quarterly during 2014. Dates are set for Tuesday, March 26, June 25, August 27 and November 26. Each meeting will be held at Main Street SUNY Cortland, 9 Main Street, Cortland from 8:00 - 10:00 am.

For more information on the Cortland County Housing Consortium please contact Aaron T. Baier, Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator, by phone: 607-753-7363, or by email: abaier@aticortland.org.

ATI Launches 2014 Survey of Consumer Satisfaction

On February 3, Access to Independence launched its 2014 survey of consumer satisfaction. For the first time ever, ATI is using a new survey methodology, designed by the NYS Independent Living Council (NYSILC).

On February 3, ATI sent emails to all of its consumers with email addresses asking them to complete a short survey online (Survey Monkey). All responses are confidential. ATI will send a second email reminder out to consumers later this month.

Throughout the month of February, a group of ATI staff will call consumers that do not have an email address to request their completion of the survey over the phone. While not mandatory, ATI hopes consumers will be willing to provide feedback on their experience with ATI.

Paper surveys are available at ATI's office for consumers who prefer not to complete one on the internet or over the telephone.

ATI plans to tally all satisfaction survey results by mid-March and then report back to its Board of Directors at its April meeting.

ATI hopes to secure completed surveys from 25% of its consumers. In past years, ATI has typically received feedback from less than 10% of its consumers (mailings).

ATI Computer Lab

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

**Computers are available
for consumers only.**

**For more information,
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ATI Joins with Community to Celebrate National Mentoring Month

“Be someone who matters to someone who matters.” Everyone matters - everyone’s life, education, career, and social goals are important. The journey towards our goals and the end result of that journey is more meaningful and fulfilling when we share that journey with a peer - with a mentor.

A mentor is someone who can guide and support another person toward their goals. A mentor can make a tremendous difference in whether we stay where we are or we “reach for the stars.” A mentor takes a little time each week to share their life and experiences with a youth or adult who needs help and direction.

Every January, Access to Independence (ATI) joins with the community to recognize National Mentoring Month. Together, we celebrate the contributions of volunteer mentors to the youth and adults whose lives they impact. Mentoring is a life-long process. Mentors teach us to be good citizens, guide us to be successful students, and even support us to reach our dream career.

In fact, the ATI Peer Mentoring Program (PMP) empowers people with disabilities to be more independent and to take a proactive role in reaching their goals. Through one-on-one mentoring, group activities and community learning opportunities, participants gain valuable information and insight about not only the challenges they will face, but also learn from other’s experience to effectively deal with those challenges.

“We need to meet people where they are at and begin the journey from there,” said Aaron Baier, Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator. “Each person has their own background and set of circum-

stances that affect their life - a peer mentor empathizes with that and can help a person move beyond their current circumstances.” Peer mentors for ATI may share a common disability or common career path with their mentee. These commonalities help the mentee and mentor relate on a much deeper level. A mentor who struggled with a math or reading learning disability may know innovative ways to help a student with similar challenges. A mentor who works in journalism will be able to provide concrete support and guidance to a mentee interested in becoming a reporter.

The ATI Peer Mentoring Program seeks mentors with diverse and unique experiences and who believe themselves to be successful. Disability peer mentors must have a disability, hold good values and beliefs, desire to help others, and have time that they will devote to mentoring. Most importantly, mentors must be prepared to enjoy the experience for it is the most rewarding activity you will ever do.

While Cortland Community Mentors - a collaborative effort of Access to Independence, Cortland YWCA and Cortland Preventions Resources - offers many opportunities to be a mentor locally, there are statewide and national initiatives for people to become more engaged in mentoring, as well.

The National Mentoring Partnership (MENTOR) is one online resource - www.mentoring.org - for mentors, mentoring programs and for anyone who wants to start a mentoring initiative. For more than 20 years, MENTOR has served the mentoring field by providing a public voice, developing and delivering resources to mentoring programs nationwide and promoting quality for mentoring through standards,

cutting-edge research and state of the art tools. Since MENTOR was founded, the number of quality mentoring relationships has grown from 300,000 to more than three million.

A mentoring relationship, in its simplest form, is a positive role model spending quality time with someone to enrich and enhance life. There is still a great need for quality mentors, locally, statewide and nationally. This January, and even throughout the year, take some time to learn about mentoring opportunities near you and get involved. Mentoring Matters, Pass It On!

For more information on ATI’s Peer Mentoring Program, or to become a mentor today, contact Aaron T. Baier by phone: 607-753-7363, or by email: abaier@aticortland.org.



Access To Independence
OF CORTLAND COUNTY, INC.

**Resources & Advocacy for
People with Disabilities**

26 N. Main Street
Cortland, NY 13045
(607) 753-7363
www.aticortland.org

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2014 Brings in Changes to SSI & SSDI

Well, it's another new year and for anyone receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits or Supplemental Security Income (SSI), you should be aware of recent changes.

SSDI and SSI are two distinct and different benefits. SSDI benefits are connected to your work record. For any person working and paying the appropriate taxes, SSDI benefits can be paid if you earned enough credits and your disability meets the Social Security definition of disability. SSI benefits are for people that meet the Social Security definition of disability but don't have enough work credits to qualify for SSDI benefits.

If you are unsure of which benefit you receive, you can call Social Security at 800-772-1213 to find out. You can also go to the Social Security website, www.ssa.gov/myaccount, and set up a my Social Security account. Once you have answered the security questions, you can ask for a benefit verification letter. This form will provide proof of your benefit amount and type, and your Medicare withholding amount. This is a great way to get a verification letter for other benefits like food stamps, HEAP, or Medicaid without having to call Social Security and wait for 1 to 2 weeks for your letter.

If you are receiving benefits, you know by now that there was a 1.5% cost of living increase this year. This increase can impact other benefits you are getting, so make sure that you contact the Social Services office and the Housing Authority in your area if you have not received notification from them.

For anyone receiving SSDI benefits and working, there are some changes in Social Security work incentives. This year, you can earn up to \$1,070 per month without losing your SSDI benefit (\$1,800 per month for individuals who are blind).

Social Security also gives an SSDI recipient 9 months in a 5 year period to earn any amount of money per month and still receive their SSDI benefit. This 9 month period is called the Trial Work period. A Trial Work period is any month the recipient works and earns over \$770 in 2014.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments have increased in NYS to \$808 for 2014. This amount can differ from state to state. New York State adds an \$87 supplement to the base federal SSI rate of \$721. This means that if you move to a different state, your SSI benefit amount could change. It is a good idea to check this out before you move so that there are no surprises.

The Medicare Part B monthly premium of \$104.90 will stay the same for 2014. If you are single and receive less than \$1,169 per month (\$1,571 for couples) in SSDI or retirement benefits and have limited assets, you may qualify for the Medicare Savings Program (reduces or eliminates premium).

If you have any questions regarding your SSDI or SSI benefit, or if you have questions about Social Security work incentives that protect your disability benefit payments while returning to work, give me a call: Susan Lewis, Independent Living Coordinator and Certified Benefits Specialist at (607) 753-7363.

Social Security Changes Procedures

Social Security offices no longer provide printouts to document proof of your Social Security number. If you need proof of your Social Security number and you don't have your Social Security card, you will need to request a replacement card by completing an application and submitting required documentation. Applications are available online at: www.socialsecurity.gov.

Social Security offices no longer provide copies of benefit verification letters. If you need a benefit verification letter, you will need to set up a "my Social Security" account online to print a verification letter directly.

Setting up an account on the Social Security website (ssa.gov) is relatively easy and doesn't take long. Once the account is set up, you can log into your account at any time from any computer with a username and password that you create.

For more information or for assistance in setting up a "my Social Security" account, set up an appointment with Sue Lewis, Independent Living Coordinator and Certified Benefits Specialist, by calling 607-753-7363.



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peers@wishingwellnesscenter.org

Peer-Run Community Support Services

HHS Strengthens Community Living Options

On January 10, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a final rule to ensure that Medicaid's home and community-based services (HCBS) programs provide full access to the benefits of community living and offer services in the most integrated settings.

The rule, as part of the Affordable Care Act, supports the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Community Living Initiative. The initiative was launched in 2009 to develop and implement innovative strategies to increase opportunities for Americans with disabilities and older adults to enjoy meaningful community living.

Under the final rule, Medicaid programs will support home and community-based settings that serve as an alternative to institutional care and that take into account the quality of individuals' experiences. The final rule includes a transitional period for states to ensure that their programs meet the home and community-based services settings requirements. Technical assistance will also be available for states.

"People with disabilities and older adults have a right to live, work, and participate in the greater community. HHS, through its Community Living Initiative, has been expanding and improving the community services necessary to make this a reality," said HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. "It will help ensure that all people participating in Medicaid home and community-based services programs have full access to the benefits of community living."

In addition to defining home and community-based settings, the final rule implements the Section 1915(i) home and community-based services State Plan option. This includes new flexibility provided by the Affordable Care Act that gives states additional options for expanding home and community-based services and to target services to specific populations.

The rule also amends the 1915 (c) home and community-based services waiver program to add new person-centered planning requirements, allow states to combine multiple target populations in one waiver, and streamline waiver administration.

Partial Local Property Tax Exemptions for Seniors / PWD

If you own a home outside the city of Cortland and you are either 65+ or a person with a disability, you have until March 1, to apply for a partial local property tax exemption. If you live in the city of Cortland, you have until August 1.

In order to qualify for the disability exemption, you must have evidence of your disability and meet certain income, residency and ownership requirements.

The basic exemption is a 50% reduction in the assessed value of the legal residence of the qualifying person with a disability. For the basic exemption, the law requires each county, city, town, village or school district to set the maximum income limit at any figure between \$3,000 and \$29,000.

Localities have the further option of giving exemptions of less than 50% to persons with qualifying disabilities whose incomes are more than \$29,000. Under this option, called the "sliding-scale" option, a qualifying owner can have a yearly income as high as \$38,000 and get a 5% exemption in places that are using the maximum limit.

When a property is owned by one or more persons, and one or more of the owners qualify for multiple exemptions, the owners have the option of choosing the more beneficial exemption.

For more information, check with your local assessor or the clerks of local governments and school districts involved to determine which local options, if any, are in effect.

VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE (VITA) OFFERS FREE TAX PREPARATION

To schedule an appointment, call the Cornell Cooperative Extension at (607) 753-5077.

Eligibility Requirements:

Single with no dependents & earn less than \$30,000

Single with dependent(s) & earn less than \$52,000

Married & earn less than \$52,000

Cuomo Fails to Make Employment for People with Disabilities a Priority

An excerpt from Bruce Darling's (Center for Disability Rights) analysis of Governor Cuomo's 2014 State of the State Address.

In his 2014 State of the State Address, Governor Cuomo highlighted how he has worked hard over the past three years “to restore our state as a model for the nation and demonstrate the impact an effective and responsive government can have on the lives of its people”. He outlined his agenda for the coming year and promised that “Working together, we will build on this progress to create an even brighter future for all New Yorkers.”

Even though 34% of New Yorkers have disabilities, Governor Cuomo's address had relatively little to say to the Disability community. Even so, there are opportunities embedded in his proposals that could improve the lives of New Yorkers with disabilities.

Although “unemployment is down in every region of the state and New York has the most jobs in its history,” the situation isn't as bright for people with disabilities who have an unemployment rate over 13 percent, which only includes people with disabilities who have been actively seeking employment during the four weeks prior to being surveyed. In reality the number should be higher as many people with disabilities – who face repeated rejection by potential employers – have simply stopped trying to find work. In fact, only 17.8 percent of people with disabilities were employed according to a report released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. In contrast, 63.9 percent of non-disabled individuals were part of the workforce. New York clearly needs to include peo-

ple with disabilities in its job creation efforts.

Governor Cuomo proposed that New York State take steps towards establishing up to a five percent goal in the awarding of state contracts to service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses. This proposal would provide new economic opportunities for veterans with service-connected disabilities, but overlooks the fundamental reason these veterans have faced difficulty in their reintegration into the economy – they are people with disabilities.

The Governor points out that, nationwide, post-9/11 veterans have an unemployment rate of 10 percent, failing to recognize that statistically veterans with disabilities actually have better prospects for employment than non-veterans with disabilities. The Disability community has repeatedly urged the state to expand the Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprises (M/WBE) program to include people with disabilities, but we have been told that was undoable. It is clear the state has the ability to expand the program but is choosing not to. CDR urges Governor Cuomo to do so and expand the scope of his proposal to include all people with disabilities.

Expanding the M/WBE program to include people with disabilities could have a significant impact on their lives and fiscal independence. Because of the difficulty they have securing employment, people with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to be self-employed than their non-disabled peers. As a first step, when the state conducts its disparity study to examine the equity in contracting for service-disabled veteran small business owners, it must

concurrently study and report on non-veterans with disabilities.

Governor Cuomo should then follow the lead of Governor Markell (DE) and the National Governor's Association to develop a comprehensive plan to increase the employment of people with disabilities. The Governor could incorporate other initiatives in this effort, such as allocating some of the funding from his proposed fourth round of Regional Economic Development Council awards to projects that focus on the employment of people with disabilities. He could also make a portion of the corporate tax rate change for upstate businesses contingent on hiring a specific percentage of disabled employees. It is imperative that the state work with the Disability community to make employment a reality for people with disabilities, so we too can benefit from the Governor's efforts to improve the state's economy.

To read the full text of the CDR analysis online, visit: www.cdrnys.org.

Join ATI'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

ATI Announces 2014 Local Disability Priority Advocacy Agenda

For the first time, ever, Access to Independence has developed an annual Local Disability Priority Advocacy. ATI maintains a master list of advocacy needs (new and old) while it continues work to eradicate the structural and attitudinal barriers that persist in our community.

However, because ATI has just 11 people on staff, it is fundamentally unable to independently identify every single new or persistent barrier in our community.

That is why ATI will **DEPEND ON YOU** to keep us posted of new or persistent barriers!

ATI has separated its Local Disability Priority Advocacy Agenda into six broad categories: Education, Employment, Health Care, Commerce, Social and Citizenship. This Agenda will aim to guide the Agency's local systems change and advocacy efforts throughout the year and ATI will evaluate the Agenda on an annual basis to add or remove new priorities.

ATI's 2014 Local Disability Priority Advocacy Agenda comprises the following initiatives:

Education: ATI will identify the need for up-to-date student resource guides, which include information on ATI, in 5 county school districts. Through direct advocacy, ATI will ensure development of a Community Transition Guide and collaborate with Cortland County school districts to distribute the Guide to students with disabilities.

Employment: ATI will collaborate with local businesses to promote and facilitate Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Business Trainings and assist businesses to make these trainings a regular part of their staff training/orientation.

Health Care: ATI will advocate for increased access to local medical offices, facilities and locations. ATI will periodically review and inventory these facilities and rate each on accessibility to the public. ATI will advocate to ensure that identified access gaps are filled.

Commerce: ATI will provide advocacy and activism efforts which aim to resolve local public transportation issues. Cortland County must retain an accessible and affordable public transportation system, not only for medical appointments, but for employment and daily living needs. Further, Taxi Cab companies in Cortland County must offer some form of accessible travel.

Social: ATI will advocate for increased access to local tourist, recreation and faith-based facilities and locations. ATI will periodically review and inventory these facilities and rate each on accessibility to the public. ATI will advocate to ensure that identified access gaps are filled.

Citizenship: ATI will provide advocacy and activism to ensure that Cortland County develops a new and up-to-date Consolidated Plan for Housing. ATI will continue work vis-à-vis the Cortland County Housing Consortium to engage the community, County legislators and businesses. An updated Consolidated Plan for housing will benefit people with and without disabilities, younger adults and seniors, and workers and businesses.

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

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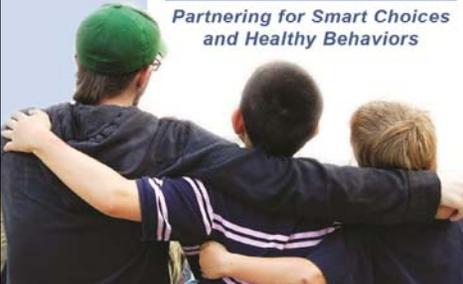
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EC EMPLOYMENT CONNECTION

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Intake Specialist/Work Incentives Practitioner
607-756-0246 / 607-756-8070 x 2841

Email: kellyg@jmmurray.com
4059 Route 281 Cortland, NY 13045
FAX 607-756-6380

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ATTORNEYS AND COUNSELORS AT LAW

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The Cortland Housing Authority has 380 high quality apartments available in its senior/ disabled and family developments throughout Cortland County. A single person could earn up to **\$34,400** and a family of five up to **\$53,050** and still qualify to live in one of our apartments.



We have senior/disabled **efficiency** and **one bedroom** apartments located in the City of Cortland. We also have **one bedroom** senior/disabled units in Homer, McGraw, Marathon, Truxton and Cincinnatus.

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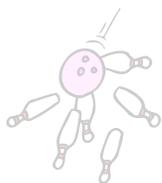
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- Way2Go Cortland Transportation Info
- HealthyNow Family Lifestyle Resources
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Pick-Up Your Sponsor Sheets Today!
Cort-Lanes - 1-100 - 4:00 pm
Saturday, April 12, 2014

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ATHLON**

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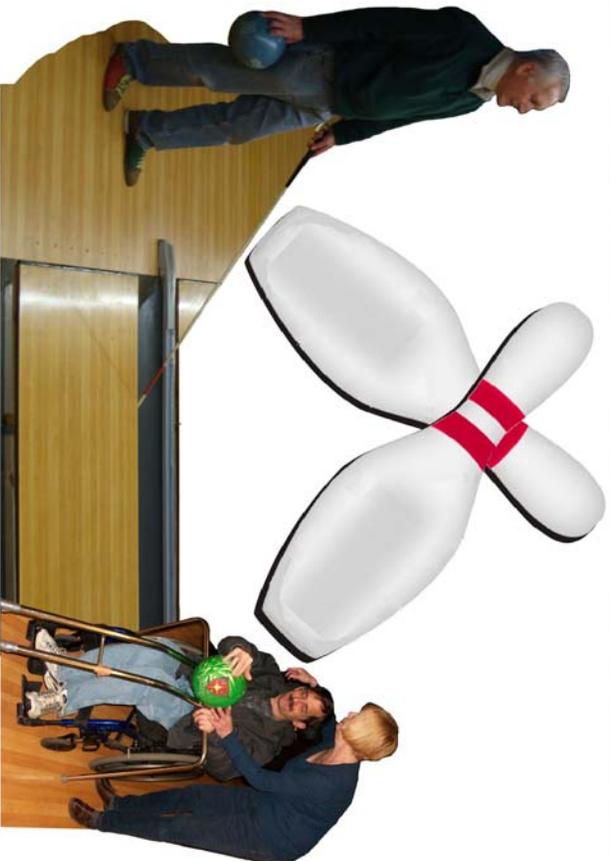
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Access To  Independence
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Date: April 12, 2014
Time: 1:00 - 4:00 pm
Location: Cort-Lanes

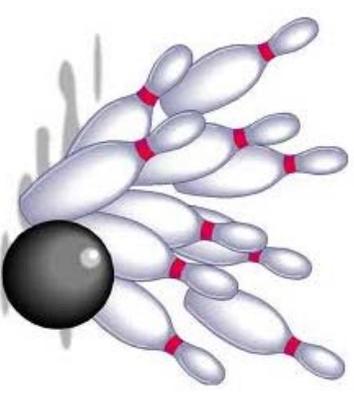
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Participants bowl for free!

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- **8th Annual Access to Independence Bowl-a-Thon – April 12, 2014**
Support more than 150 consumers, friends, and family enjoy a half-day of bowling, food and door prizes at this inclusive recreation event.
 - Yes, we will sponsor this event with \$100!** (20 sponsors needed)
- **24th Anniversary: Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Celebration – July 26, 2014**
Support our annual event that celebrates the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
 - Yes, we will sponsor this event with \$100!** (30 sponsors needed)
- **9th Annual Employment Conference – October 2014**
Support our annual event that provides independent living skills training and networking opportunities for individuals with disabilities seeking community employment.
 - Yes, we will sponsor this event with \$100!** (10 sponsors needed)
- **3rd Annual Gala – November 1, 2014**
Support our premiere annual ‘friendraiser’ and celebrate our accomplishments and look ahead to future endeavors with friends, family and caring community members, while enjoying exquisite food and live entertainment.
 - Yes, we will attend this event! Tickets are \$50 each. Number of Tickets: _____**
- **Advocacy & Civic Engagement – full year**
Support the cost of sending advocates to Albany, NY and Washington, DC to advocate for pressing disability legislation and civil rights issues.
 - Yes, we will sponsor disability advocates with \$150!** (10 sponsors needed)
- **Newsletter – Access News – February, May, August and November 2014**
Help us to distribute quarterly newsletters jam-packed with useful information to more than 3,500 people!
 - Yes, we will sponsor the newsletter (business card ad) with \$100!** (20 sponsors needed)
- **Website – full year**
Help us to continue maintaining our website and Facebook pages.
 - Yes, we will sponsor the website with \$75!** (10 sponsors needed)
- **Community Room – full year**
Help us to continue offering the community access to our large community room for functions or meetings.
 - Yes, we will sponsor the ATI Community Room with \$500!** (3 sponsors needed)

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