



Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.

# ACCESS NEWS

Summer 2016 NUMBER XLIX

## ATI Awarded \$90,000 Initiative for Statewide Systems Advocacy

Access to Independence (ATI) has been awarded a three-year, \$90,000 grant from the New York State Department of Education to continue its participation in the Statewide Systems Advocacy Network (SSAN), a grassroots advocacy network of Independent Living Centers (ILCs).

The SSAN provides a forum for ILCs from across the state to work collaboratively to achieve successful outcomes on statewide disability priority issues. While New York's ILC network comprises 45 ILCs, only 15 get specific funding to support this effort.

"Receiving this funding for the fourth consecutive cycle is truly a testament to the great advocacy work ATI staff and consumers undertake on behalf of all people with disabilities in our area and statewide. We are honored to be able to dedicate staff and resources to the facilitation of civil rights changes," commented ATI Chief Executive Officer, Chad W. Underwood, upon notification of the award.

## 2016 NCIL March & Rally at the Capitol

On July 26, five Cortland County disability advocates joined more than 1,000 others from across the country to march and rally support for disability rights. The advocates also met with staff of Representative Richard Hanna, and Senators Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand. With their limited time in Washington, D.C., the team focused their advocacy on pressing issues related to education, employment, healthcare, housing and transportation.

Although the day started at 2:00 am, advocates were well rested and prepared upon arrival to the nation's Capital. Before long, with water and signs in hand, the team set off through the city, en route to the Capitol Building, chanting, "we're here, we're loud, we're disabled and proud".

After a quick box lunch, advocates stepped up to the stage at the rally and listened to grassroots and Congressional leaders supporting our cause. After the rally, advocates shared their personal experiences and policy priorities with Derek Judd, staff member to Representative Richard Hanna. Finally, advocates joined with other New York advocates at a meeting with Alyson Northrup and Sarah Reingold from Senator Kirsten Gillibrand's office and Kelsey LaFreniere from Senator Charles Schumer's office.

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

### TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Individual Education Program Workshop .....	3
September is Emergency Preparedness Month .....	3
2016 NDEAM Upcoming Events .....	4
ATI Ready to Provide DSRIP Services .....	4
Prohibiting Discrimination in Healthcare .....	5
ATI Secures Funding for Housing Subsidies / Staffing .....	6
Housing Consortium Updates .....	6
Housing Policy to Help People with Disabilities .....	7
ATI CEO Elected to NCIL Board .....	8
2016 NYS Legislative Update .....	8
ATI Supports NCIL Voting Rights Priorities .....	9
My Internship Experience at ATI .....	10
Project Lifesaver at AAA .....	10
Social Security Updates .....	Insert Front
Medicare Home Health Care Coverage .....	Insert Front
Medicaid Buy-In for Working People .....	Insert Back
How does SSA Review Your Benefits .....	Insert Back



**Above:** ATI advocates met up with disability advocates from across the country prior to participating in the 2016 NCIL March and Rally in Washington, DC.

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All proceeds benefit Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.



## **Individual Education Program: Back-to-School Tips**

On August 17, ATI held a workshop for parents and students with disabilities to help them prepare for their forthcoming IEP and CSE meetings this school year. The workshop, entitled "Individual Education Program: Back-to-School Tips for Special Education," featured guest panelists who are experts in the field and who shared their insights into the special education process.

The workshop featured Elizabeth Williams and Erin Harvey, Education Advocates at ARISE, Inc. in Syracuse; Kristine O'Brien, Parent Outreach Specialist for Syracuse University Parent Assistance Center (SUPAC); and Chris Moore, Director of Special Education at Homer High School. The panel responded to some frequently asked questions as well as questions from attendees, including: what is the difference between an IEP and a 504 plan, who should attend a CSE meeting, what should be brought to a CSE meeting, and how to deal with conflict at a CSE meeting among others.

It is important that parent(s) and their student(s) attend every CSE meeting. It is these meetings that determine the path and accommodations for student academic success. If a parent is uncomfortable or does not know all of their options, they are allowed to bring an advocate along with them. An advocate can help a parent understand their rights and help ensure the student has a say in the process. It is very important to come to meetings prepared with written accommodation requests, lists of concerns, questions, and any relevant documents to your student's disability and needs.

For more information on preparing for a CSE meeting and educational advocacy, please contact Aaron T. Baier, Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator, by phone: 607-753-7363, or by email: [abaier@aticortland.org](mailto:abaier@aticortland.org).

## **September is Emergency Preparedness Month**

In September 2015, FEMA Region 2 Representative Jim Flemming contacted Access to Independence (ATI) regarding ways to ensure that the access and functional needs of people with disabilities are considered and that people with disabilities are included in emergency planning initiatives. As a result, ATI heeded FEMA's advice and started facilitating a monthly Core Advisory Group (CAG) in partnership with Cortland County's Emergency Response and Communications Department.

Cortland County's CAG includes ATI staff members, volunteers and consumers, as well as staff members from the Cortland County Health Department, the Cortland County Area Agency on Aging, and the local and Syracuse Chapter of the American Red Cross. In addition, several concerned citizens with diverse disabilities, have been regular participants on the CAG.

Over the past year, the CAG focused its efforts on promoting collaboration to ensure Cortland County's emergency plan was fully inclusive of all people in the community. Initially, the CAG evaluated the status of the County's "special needs" (access and functional needs) Registry. However, the group determined that such registries were often ineffective. It is difficult to get people to enroll in the first place and it is even more difficult to keep the registry up-to-date as life circumstances change and people forget to report those changes.

As a result, the CAG redirected its efforts on planning a briefing in September to educate and provide best practices from experts in the field of independent living and emergency preparedness to service provider agencies who already work closely with individuals that have access and functional needs. The goal is to enhance service plans that providers have already developed with their consumers with a focus on teaching personal preparedness in times of emergency and to consider sheltering at home vs. leaving their home. In addition to the briefing, the Syracuse and Cortland County Chapters of the American Red Cross will conduct an emergency sheltering exercise. Stay tuned for an announcement soon on when this event will take place.

Members with diverse disabilities are still needed and welcome to participate in monthly CAG meetings. Meetings are typically held on the third Thursday of each month from 11:00 am – 12:00 noon at ATI's office. For more information, please contact Fran Pizzola, ATI Community Education Coordinator, by phone: 607-753-7363, or by email at [fpizzola@aticortland.org](mailto:fpizzola@aticortland.org).

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## 2016 National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Each year during the month of October, ATI joins with community partners to recognize National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) with a series of events. The 2016 NDEAM theme is "#InclusionWorks". This theme will set the tone for events and activities throughout the month.

### Save the Dates for these Upcoming Events!

#### Disability Mentoring Day!

On October 19, Disability Mentoring Day will offer youth with disabilities the unique opportunity to participate in job shadowing experiences. Through on the job mentoring, youth gain real world knowledge of the careers they are interested in pursuing after high school.

#### Employment First Workshop Series!

On October 6, Workshop 1 will focus on the importance of hiring people with disabilities in our community. People with disabilities remain the most underutilized workforce in our country despite the fact that we want to work and we can work. We want to empower our local businesses to tap into this workforce to enhance and strengthen their business.

On October 13, Workshop 2 will focus on empowering people with disabilities who are discouraged about their current unemployment status. While it may be easier to rely on public benefits, we need to show people with disabilities that those that are able to work, can do so without fear. People with disabilities have the right to work in inclusive jobs that utilize their skills.

On October 20, Workshop 3 will focus on employment rights and resources for people with disabilities. The American's with Disabilities Act offers civil rights related to employment, but there is also a myriad of resources available to help find and secure the job you need to be independent.

On October 27, Workshop 4 will focus on employment trends and future prospects. If you are still not sure "what you want to be when you grow up," then come learn about what the job market in Cortland County looks like today and what it will look like in the future. Learn about how you can fit your unique skills into this job market and find a long-term career.

For more information on NDEAM and events, please contact Aaron T. Baier, Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator, by phone at 607-753-7363, or by email at [abaier@aticortland.org](mailto:abaier@aticortland.org).

**#InclusionWorks**

### ATI Ready to Provide DSRIP Services

Access to Independence (ATI) has signed an agreement with the Care Compass Network to provide a series of services in conjunction with NYS's Delivery Systems Reform Incentives Payment (DSRIP) initiative. While ATI staff are already set to provide one service, two others are pending formal staff training, set for completion by mid-September.

ATI has already launched the provision of Community Navigation services, which aim to develop / expand community-based health navigation services to assist Medicaid Members in accessing healthcare services more efficiently (in-person, by telephone or by internet).

Upon completion of training, ATI staff will facilitate the completion of Patient Activation Measure (PAM) surveys by individuals who are uninsured, Medicaid recipients who are non-utilizers of the healthcare system and Medicaid recipients who are low-utilizers of the healthcare system.

Upon finalization of processes and procedures and completion of training, ATI staff will work to reduce the number of 30-day avoidable readmissions by working with individuals who have been admitted to the hospital by meeting with them in the hospital prior to discharge, following-up with them at their home following discharge and then following up with them several times by phone to ensure their understanding and compliance with discharge plans.

The purpose of the DSRIP initiative is to reduce unnecessary re-hospitalizations of people on Medicaid by a minimum of 25%. ATI is working with other providers throughout the Southern Tier but will focus its efforts in the Cortland County area.

For more information about ATI's planned DSRIP services, contact Chad W. Underwood, ATI CEO, by phone: 753-7363, or by email: [cwunderwood@aticortland.org](mailto:cwunderwood@aticortland.org).



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## Prohibiting Discrimination Based on Disability in Healthcare

Access to Independence (ATI) is working with disability advocates from across the country to urge Congressional action that would eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities when it comes to the access and delivery of healthcare services.

Comprehensive implementation and enforcement of nondiscrimination laws, regulations and principles would help to reduce healthcare disparities based on disability and to reduce the impact of societal prejudice and negative stereotypes on access to quality healthcare. Discrimination based on disability should be addressed through a combination of protection and advocacy enforcement efforts, regulatory development based on preventing disability-based discrimination, and policy work guided by the principle "nothing about us without us".

ATI is working with its Congressional leaders and the National Council of Independent Living (NCIL) to address the following:

- Discrimination due to inaccessibility of medical and diagnostic equipment or failure to provide effective communication and access to information to individuals with disabilities;
- Discrimination in policies and procedures concerning decisions to withhold or withdraw life-sustaining treatment, including but not limited to advanced care planning that discourages the choice to receive life-sustaining treatment based on messages suggesting that it is "better to be dead than disabled";
- Discriminatory "futile care" policies allowing providers to use quality of life judgments to overrule the decision to receive life-sustaining treatment made by individual, surrogate or advance directive;
- Discriminatory relaxing of constitutional and statutory constraints on the power of guardians to withhold or withdraw life-sustaining treatment from people with disabilities;
- Discrimination in organ transplant eligibility, organ procurement policies, and related services; and
- Discriminatory rush to judgment and denial of life-sustaining treatment of newly injured persons based on hasty and unsupportable diagnosis of "persistent vegetative state" (PVS) earlier than 90 days for an anoxic brain injury, or one year for a traumatic brain injury, and before careful testing consistent with guidance from research studies on misdiagnosis of PVS.

For more information on how you can help ATI prohibit discrimination based on disability in healthcare, contact Chad W. Underwood, ATI Chief Executive Officer, by email: [cwunderwood@aticortland.org](mailto:cwunderwood@aticortland.org), or by phone: 607-753-7363.

  
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## **ATI Secures Funding for Housing Subsidies / Staffing**

Beginning August 1, Access to Independence (ATI) secured funding to help older individuals and adults 18 and older with chronic disabilities who are enrolled in Medicaid, who are nursing home level of care as determined by the Uniform Assessment System (UAS), who are homeless or in unstable housing, who have spent at least 120 consecutive days in a nursing facility over the most recent two year period, and who have the ability to live safely in the community.

ATI is set to receive limited funding from the New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL) to support a part-time staff person who will work to identify housing opportunities for individuals who are in need of housing in order to leave a nursing home, as well as for those who have unstable housing after leaving a nursing home.

ATI will also have access to funding to provide rental subsidies and to process rental payments for approximately 450 eligible Olmstead Housing Subsidy (OHS) participants statewide, including funds for security deposits, moving expenses, household establishment, utility payments and community transitional services. The subsidy program will closely follow the current Section 8 Housing subsidy program.

ATI will assist eligible participants through all steps necessary for enrollment, including: filling out housing applications, obtaining household goods and/or support for moving expenses, arranging unit inspections, etc. ATI will work with applicants and/or his/her Transition Specialist, Service Coordinator (SC), Nursing Home Discharge Planner, Care Manager (CM), natural support, or advocate to ensure a support services plan is in place for program enrollment.

ATI will continue its work on the Cortland County Housing consortium to identify landlords, public housing, and private housing in the region which may be suitable for individuals enrolled in the OHS program in the future. As such, ATI will maintain a list of available housing in the region, including degree of accessibility, location, proximity to services, and rental costs.

For more information, contact Maria Mucaria, ATI Program Assistant, by phone: 753-7363, or by email: [mmucaria@aticortland.org](mailto:mmucaria@aticortland.org).

## **Updates from the Cortland County Housing Consortium**

On August 23, the Cortland County Housing Consortium (CCHC) met for its quarterly meeting to continue work on pressing housing issues and to discuss an upcoming housing initiative. At the meeting, David Yaman presented on a South Main Street market rate housing project, the group finalized a Cortland County Strategic Housing Plan for approval by the County Legislature and planned for a community-wide Housing Confab set for November.

First, David Yaman outlined his plans to redevelop the old Crescent Corset property on South Main Street, Cortland in partnership with Housing Visions. The redesign will be half commercial-use and half residential-use. Yaman's \$1.24 million proposal is set to begin later this year and will offer 46 one- and two-bedroom loft style apartments and new office space for local businesses.

Second, Kevin Pagini from the Cortland County Planning Department, offered a final revision of the long-awaited Cortland County Strategic Housing Plan. This Plan will help provide guidance to the Housing Consortium and to the community related to housing needs and resources as well as offer valuable data for future grant and development opportunities. Formerly known as the Cortland County Consolidated Plan in 2002, the new Strategic Housing Plan is now brought up-to-date with more current and relevant information that can be used to strategically address housing issues in the County.

Finally, the CCHC launched planning for a mid-November Housing Confab. The Confab will feature presentations and community forums targeted at some of the biggest housing issues that affect Cortland County. Confab discussion will focus around affordable and accessible housing, market-rate housing, homelessness and safe and decent housing standards.

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](mailto:abaier@aticortland.org).

## **Funds Available for Veterans with Disabilities**

Access to Independence (ATI) has funds available to help veterans with disabilities in the City of Cortland and throughout Cortland County to make their home accessible.

In addition to proof of having a disability that was acquired while on active duty, participants must meet certain income requirements. There is a five-year lien required for participants, though the payback amount decreases 20% every year.

For more information about ATI's architectural barrier programs, contact Shelley Knickerbocker, ATI Architectural Barrier Specialist, by phone: 607-753-7363, or by email: [sknickerbocker@aticortland.org](mailto:sknickerbocker@aticortland.org).

## Simple Housing Policy Would Help People with Disabilities

Three months ago, ATI staff began work with Tamara, who had made the choice to leave a nursing facility and return to living in the community. Over this time, ATI staff helped the 50-year-old apply for services and gather the supports she needed to ensure she was able to live independently and safely. While the majority of preparation was successful, the search for housing fell flat and the process stopped.

Tamara and her supports struggled to find a house or an apartment that was accessible to her physical needs and available within the required timeframe. When she did find a place that was accessible and available, the landlord told her that he would not rent to tenants who received Social Security benefits. This story is far too common and is rarely told publicly.

For many people with disabilities, seniors and people who live on a fixed income, housing is the most challenging part of living independently. Physical and attitudinal barriers severely limit the accessibility and affordability of our housing choices. As a result, hundreds of people in our community are forced into nursing facilities, trapped in their own homes, forced to accept substandard, unsafe or inaccessible housing, or are left completely homeless.

While these situations are unfortunate, there are solutions that can help mitigate these problems. It is important that Cortland County, the City of Cortland and the various municipalities adopt laws and practices that facilitate greater choices for housing and make it harder for landlord discrimination to occur.

First, the *Visitability* principle is that a non-resident using a wheelchair should be able to visit the home. A social visit requires the ability to get in the house, the ability to pass through interior doorways of the house and the ability to get into and use a bathroom. These features would also benefit the homeowner if they have a child with a stroller, have a large delivery, or acquire a disability later in life.

Every City, Town and Village in Cortland County should encourage home developers to incorporate Visitability design features into their plans. This should be a requirement for every home that is built with public funds. Further, municipalities should incentivize retrofitting homes with Visitability features through local tax credits. Visitability policy is taking hold all over the country and has even been adopted in the City of Auburn.

Second, affordable housing is hard enough to find without being denied because you receive Temporary Assistance, Social Security or have a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher. While discrimination based on a person's Source of Income (SOI) is illegal in New York City, Westchester and Nassau County, and the Cities of Buffalo and West Hamburg, people in the rest of the State are still vulnerable to discrimination based on their SOI. Again, this only further limits housing options and unfairly impacts people with disabilities, seniors and anyone who must live on a fixed income.

The solution here is simple. Make discrimination by a landlord based on a person's SOI illegal. Fair Housing Law already prohibits discrimination based on a person's race, age, gender and disability. It is vital that SOI be added to this list to ensure that everyone has access to affordable housing that meets their physical and financial needs.

So, what can you do to help? Contact your County Legislator, City Alderperson and municipal leaders and tell them how important housing is to you. If you are affected by either of these issues, share your story. Some of our leaders do not believe that housing is an issue. Let's make sure that they know the reality and take steps to fix these issues.

For more information on Visitability, Source of Income discrimination or to get help contacting your local policymakers, please contact Aaron T. Baier, Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator at Access to Independence, by phone: 607-753-7363, or by email: [abaier@aticortland.org](mailto:abaier@aticortland.org).

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## ATI CEO Elected to NCIL Board

Last month, Members of the National Council of Independent Living (NCIL) from New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and Guam elected ATI Chief Executive Officer, Chad W. Underwood, to serve as their Regional Representative on the NCIL Board of Directors.

NCIL is the longest running national cross-disability, grassroots organization run by and for people with disabilities. NCIL advances Independent Living and the rights of people with disabilities. NCIL envisions a world in which people with disabilities are valued equally and participate fully.

Founded in 1982, NCIL represents Independent Living Centers, such as ATI, Statewide Independent Living Councils and other disability rights organizations that serve hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities in every state and territory of the country.

An outcome of the national Disability Rights and Independent Living Movements, NCIL was founded to embody the values of disability culture and the Independent Living philosophy, where consumer control prevails. Consumer control means that people with disabilities are the best experts on their own needs and have crucial and valuable perspective to decide how to live, work, and take part in their communities, particularly in reference to services that powerfully affect their day-to-day lives and access to independence.

Since its inception, NCIL has carried out its mission by helping Members to build their capacity to promote social change, to eliminate disability-based discrimination and to create opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in the legislative process to affect change. NCIL promotes a national advocacy agenda set by its membership and provides substantial input and testimony on national disability policy.



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## 2016 New York State Legislative Update

While the 2016 New York State Legislative Session has drawn to a close, it was a busy and successful year for Access to Independence (ATI) and local disability advocates. Below is a brief recap of some of the results of our advocacy efforts this year.

First, the Assembly and Senate passed legislation (A.0707/S.8110) that will allow advanced home health aides to perform advanced tasks under the supervision of a registered nurse. This has been a top priority for the past several years as it will help many more individuals to leave nursing homes and other institutional settings and move back into the community. Further, this legislation is key to full implementation of the Community First Choice Option. It awaits signature by the Governor.

Second, the Assembly and Senate passed legislation (A.9303B/S.6943A) to create a tax credit for homeowners and landlords who retrofit their properties using Visitability design standards (see article on page 7).

Third, no assisted suicide legislation passed this session. ATI strongly opposes the sanctioning of assisted suicide because it only serves to belittle the value of life for people with disabilities. ATI stands with other advocates in saying, "We Are Not Dead Yet!" This legislation will no doubt pop-up again next year, so please urge your state leaders to oppose it.

Fourth, a bill that would allow Transportation Network Companies, such as Uber and Lyft, to operate in New York State did not pass this session. While this bill was controversial, ATI supported the introduction of these companies in our community to help expand the availability of public transportation. One major concern that still remains, however, is that this new transportation must be accessible for people with disabilities.

Finally, the Legislature did not increase funding for Independent Living Centers this year, despite strong efforts from ATI and advocates, as well as a major push from Senator James Seward and Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton. ATI relies heavily on state funding to operate and will surely push for an increase next year.

For more information on ATI's legislative priorities, please contact Aaron T. Baier, Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator, by phone: 607-753-7363, or by email: [abaier@aticortland.org](mailto:abaier@aticortland.org).

## ATI Supports NCIL Voting Rights Priorities

Voting rights for people with disabilities has long been a priority for the Access to Independence (ATI) Board of Directors.

It should come as no surprise then, that ATI is an ardent supporter of the top three voting priorities for the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL): election reform to maintain accessibility in the voting process; disability engagement in the development of new and innovative voting technology; and ensured accessibility and increased disability participation during the election cycle to build electoral power.

ATI will work with disability advocates across the nation to fight for these changes until the full electoral participation of people with disabilities is realized. ATI joins NCIL in looking forward to the day when people with disabilities are a powerful voting bloc.

In order to reach this end, there must be a high standard of integrity for the voting process, including:

- the right to independently read and mark a ballot in private;
- the right to access reliable and accessible voting technology and equipment;
- the elimination of difficult and discriminatory actions and attitudes towards people with disabilities during the registration, education, and voting processes by election volunteers and personnel;
- the removal of all architectural and physical barriers to polling centers;
- enforcement by the Justice Department to ensure the rights afforded to all citizens by America's voting laws are upheld equally for voters with

disabilities;

- the elimination of regressive and discriminatory voter ID laws that require a photo ID to cast a ballot; and
- removal of state guardianship laws that continue to be barriers in participation to the entire voting process, from registration to casting a vote, for people with disabilities.

In addition to these goals and standards, there is a need for effort to maintain the access that people with disabilities have already achieved. Election officials, campaigns and organizations that engage in voter education should make their websites more accessible and provide alternative formats for all voter education materials as spelled out in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Furthermore, the nation's voter registration system must be modernized to include a robust implementation of the agency-based registration requirements of the National Voter Registration Act.

For more information, contact Chad W. Underwood, ATI Chief Executive Officer, by email: [cwunderwood@aticortland.org](mailto:cwunderwood@aticortland.org).

## Cortland County Housing Consortium

### 2016 Meeting Schedule

August 23, 2016 8:00 - 10:00 am

November 22, 2016: 8:00 - 10:00 am

February 28, 2017: 8:00 - 10:00 am

May 23, 2017: 8:00 - 10:00 am

All meetings are held at  
Access to Independence  
26 N. Main St., Cortland, NY

For more information, contact  
Aaron Baier by telephone:  
607-753-7363 or by email:  
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## Join ATI's Disability Advocacy Network!

- Keep current on pressing disability issues!
- Receive email alerts on policy & budget matters!
- Fight for the civil rights of people with disabilities!
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## Bariatric Support Group Meetings

October 19, 2016

November 16, 2016

December 21, 2016

January 18, 2017

5:00 - 6:00 pm

ATI Community Room

607-753-7363

## My Internship Experience at ATI

My name is Elizabeth D. Wood and I am a young adult from the Ithaca area and I am a senior at Keuka College. I major in social sciences and humanities. Interning at Access to Independence (ATI) has allowed me to apply and continuously develop my psycho-sociological knowledge through vocational discipline, socio-political advocacy, and interpersonal compassion. In a nutshell, ATI has been a unique influence on the growth of my skills, knowledge, personal experience, and as an employment stepping stone for potential social-oriented careers for which one day I might apply.

Though I have three years of experience in various work-study positions and volunteer opportunities across NY, I had forgotten some very important occupational skills that, in working with ATI's empathetic staff, I was able to re-learn. I've gained both soft and hard skills throughout my summer by assisting in various projects (updating online and physical resources, attending workshops, and advocating for systems changes) all while I gained a better understanding of proper work communication, dress code, time management, and an intrinsic passion for disability rights.

One of the most influential hands-on events I experienced while at ATI was the 26<sup>th</sup> annual Americans with Disabilities Act celebration in Washington, D.C. Although it was a tiring trip full of activity, I benefited from the actual experience that confirmed and applied the advocacy-related theories which I had heard about in the office. It was inspiring and emotionally moving.

Although I know I may not have learned or improved my skills as much as I could have had I stayed with ATI longer, my experience surpassed my expectations of gaining vocational skills and completing personal goals. Thanks to such socially-important independent living enters, I am optimistic that I have become a more knowledgeable and helpful individual to the overall society. I hope that my volunteering has been just as helpful to the organization as it has been for me, and know that future interns will benefit just as much or more.

## Do You Know About Project Lifesaver

Last month, ATI staff shut its doors for two hours and traveled a few blocks over to the County Office Building to meet with key staff at the Cortland County Area Agency on Aging (AAoA). In addition to sharing in-depth information about ATI's various programs and services, ATI staff learned a great deal about the programs and services offered by the AAoA. Check out one of their cool programs:

**PROJECT LIFESAVER:** Project Lifesaver is a public safety program that helps locate missing persons who are at risk for wandering. Common participants are individuals with memory loss disabilities such as Dementia or Alzheimer's, or people with certain developmental disabilities such as Down Syndrome or Autism.

After an application is completed and approved, an individual is provided a transmitting device (like a wrist watch) to be worn 24/7 on the arm or leg. The individual's caregiver checks the transmitter daily. The AAoA would take a digital photo of the individual in the event a situation arises.

In the event a person wanders off, the caregiver would contact 911 to give a detailed description of their last known location. The Sheriff's office would then use their equipment to pick up the signal from the missing person's transmitter.

For more information on Project Lifesaver or other programs offered by the Area Agency on Aging, contact Carole Leach, AAA Program Specialist by phone: 753-5060.

## Got rent?

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## Social Security Updates

The Social Security Board of Trustees recently released its annual operating report. Here are some excerpts from that report:

The report shows that, as a whole, Social Security is fully funded until 2034, and after that it is about 75% financed. Considered alone, the DI (disability insurance) is projected to become depleted sooner than the combined Social Security funds. Legislation signed into law last November averted a near-term shortfall in DI. With that small, temporary reallocation of the Social Security contribution rate, the DI fund will now be able to pay full benefits until 2023, and the retirement fund alone will be adequate into 2035.

Lawmakers have many policy options to address the shortfall, such as: increasing contribution rates, lifting the cap on earnings subject to contributions, drawing on the other revenue sources, lowering benefit amounts, or a combination of changes. Lawmakers should act soon to address the long-term shortfall and preserve the reserves that yield interest income to help pay future benefits.

As we approach this election season, find out where your area elected officials stand on bolstering the Social Security program and make sure they know how you feel about it.

For more information on Social Security benefits, contact Sue Lewis, ATI Independent Living Coordinator by phone: 753-7363, or by email: [susan.lewis@aticortland.org](mailto:susan.lewis@aticortland.org).

## Medicare Home Health Care Coverage

Many Medicare beneficiaries frequently ask whether or not they qualify for home health care coverage. The answer is yes, but only under certain conditions.

First, and most important, the home health care services must be ordered by a doctor and coordinated through a home health care agency.

Medicare covers the following types of care:

- Skilled nursing services – Medicare pays in full for part-time skilled nursing care, which is care that can only be performed safely by a licensed nurse. Part-time means that care is provided up to seven days a week for no more than eight hours per day and 28 hours per week.
- Skilled therapy services – This includes physical, speech, and occupational therapy provided by a licensed therapist. Note that occupational therapy is only covered if you also need physical or speech therapy. You will not qualify for the home health benefit if you only need occupational therapy.
- Home health care services – This includes services provided by a home health care aide if you also need skilled care. Home health aides provide personal care such as help using the bathroom. If you only need personal care, you will not qualify for the home health care benefit.

Under the home health care benefit, Medicare also covers medical social services, such as counseling; medical supplies, such as catheters; and durable medical equipment, such as a wheelchair or a walker.

It is important to note that although the home health benefit covers the services of a home health aide when skilled care is also needed, it does not cover 24-hour care. The home health benefit also does not pay for meals delivered to your home or homemaker services, such as grocery shopping.

Medicare covers home health care if:

- Your doctor has certified that you are homebound, meaning it is very difficult for you to leave your home and you need help doing so.
- You need skilled nursing services on a part-time basis and/or skilled therapy.
- You have a face-to-face meeting with a doctor within the 90 days before beginning to receive home health care or within 30 days after the first day you receive care. Your doctor must sign a certification of home health care and re-certify it every 60 days.
- You receive the home health care from a Medicare-certified home health agency.

Always check with your doctor first to find out if you will qualify for home health services covered by Medicare.

If you have questions about whether or not home health care will be covered by Medicare, please call Sue Lewis, ATI Independent Living Coordinator, at 753-7363.

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

For more information, please contact:

**Chad W. Underwood, Chief Executive Officer, by phone: 607-753-7363;  
or by email: [cwunderwood@aticortland.org](mailto:cwunderwood@aticortland.org).**

## Medicaid Buy-In for Working People with Disabilities

Many people with disabilities who are interested in getting back into the workforce do not do so because they fear the loss of their Medicaid coverage due to an increase in their income. Other people with disabilities worry that commercial or employer-based health insurance might not provide them coverage for services and supports that allow them to work and live independently, such as personal assistance services.

People with disabilities, whether you work or not, should be aware of these changes, especially if you are thinking about increasing the number of hours you work, or if you are thinking about returning to the workforce. The Medicaid Buy-In for Working People with Disabilities (MBIWPD) program is still a viable Social Security work incentive.

The MBIWPD offers health care coverage to people with disabilities who are working and whose earnings and resources might otherwise make them ineligible for Medicaid. The package of benefits is the same as traditional Medicaid.

The MBIWPD can provide traditional Medicaid, which generally includes doctor's visits, prescription medications, hospitalization, and additional home and community-based services, including personal assistance services.

You can enroll in the MBIWPD even if you have Medicare and/or employer-based health insurance coverage. If you have significant health care costs, the MBIWPD can help by providing wrap-around coverage to your Medicare or employer coverage. The MBIWPD can also help cover the cost of Medicare or employer insurance premiums and co-pays. One of the most important services that Medicaid can provide is personal

assistance services. Medicare and other insurances either do not cover these services or cover them with restrictions.

You do not have to receive disability benefits (SSDI, SSI) to qualify for the MBIWPD, but it makes the approval process easier. If you do not receive SSDI or SSI, but can prove that your disability meets the SSA definition of disability, it is still possible to receive Medicaid through the MBIWPD work incentive program. The Medicare office would determine your disability status for the purpose of Medicaid eligibility only.

It is still possible to become enrolled in other health coverage during your disability determination process. If you qualify, you may be able to receive other coverage, such as subsidized coverage through the Health Care Insurance Marketplace.

The MBIWPD does not require a minimum number of hours of work to be eligible, but there must be some work each month. Individuals may work full-time, part-time or be self-employed. Volunteer work does not count as eligibility for MBIWPD. You will need to provide proof of earnings and employment when applying for and maintaining approval for MBIWPD.

You can apply for MBIWPD at your local Medicaid office. For Cortland County, that would be the Department of Social Services. You cannot apply through the NY State of Health Marketplace, but the navigators can assist by providing information on where and how to apply.

For more information on the Medicaid Buy-In for Working People with Disabilities, contact Susan Lewis, ATI Independent Living Coordinator, by phone: 753-7363, or by email: [susan.lewis@aticortland.org](mailto:susan.lewis@aticortland.org).

### How does Social Security Review Your Disability Benefits?

When you receive disability benefits, the Social Security Administration (SSA) will periodically conduct a review of your condition to make sure you still qualify for blind or disability benefits. With the right information, you can be prepared when this happens.

When your case comes up for review, SSA will send you a letter asking you to come to your local Social Security office. SSA will ask you about how your medical condition affects you and whether or not it has improved. SSA will also ask you to bring information about your medical treatment and any work you have

performed since SSA decided you were disabled. If you are unable to visit your local office, you will be asked to mail the information into the office.

A disability examiner from your State's Disability Determination Services will request reports from your medical providers, and will review the information in your case. If the medical evidence is not complete or current, SSA may ask you to have a medical exam at no cost to you.

SSA conducts a disability review of your case approximately every three years depending on the nature and severity of your medical condition and whether it's expected to improve. If SSA doesn't expect im-

provement, they will review your case every 7 years.

If SSA finds that your medical condition hasn't improved and is still preventing you from working, you will continue to receive benefits. Your benefits only stop if the evidence shows your medical condition has improved and you are able to work regularly.

If you disagree with the SSA decision, you can appeal their decision. SSA will explain how to file this appeal when they notify you of their decision.

For more information, or for assistance with a disability review, call Sue Lewis, ATI Independent Living Coordinator, at 753-7363.