

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

Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.

ACCESS NEWS

Summer 2017

NUMBER LIII

ATI Celebrates its Past, Continues Fight for Equal Rights

By now, you have probably heard that we recently celebrated the 27th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. During the month of July, Access to Independence (ATI) joined with other local, state and national disability groups to hail this momentous milestone.

ATI's Summer 2017 *ACCESS News* aims to highlight some of those celebratory events, to offer insight on available programming for people with disabilities, and to call people to action on barriers that persist for people with disabilities. This edition offers resources and advocacy for youth, adults and older individuals as they navigate community resources to achieve real independent living opportunities. Enjoy!



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QUARTERLY QUOTE:

*“Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much”
~Helen Keller*

Americans with Disabilities Act Turns 27!

In the 27 years since the passage of the ADA, there has been much progress made in removing structural barriers, such as increased accessible parking, curb cuts and ramps. And there has been progress with reducing attitudinal barriers to full participation in society. However, people with disabilities still face discrimination and stigmas that continue to severely limit their opportunities to achieve living an independent life.

This year, Access to Independence celebrated the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act by hosting two special events. These events highlighted advocacy, action, independent living and strategies undertaken by activists and advocates to uphold the purpose of the ADA: inclusion and the guarantee of the civil rights of people with disabilities to live independently, as they choose, just as is the right of every American.

On Wednesday, July 12, ATI hosted a lunch and learn panel discussion, titled "Making America Great for Everyone." Each speaker highlighted what advocacy meant to them, how it had affected change, and what more could be done to create positive outcomes for people with disabilities. One speaker, Gregg Beratan, CDR Policy Analyst, shared a recent experience in Washington, D.C., when disability advocates were arrested at a "die in". Gregg said civic actions such as this were critical and effective. He encouraged everyone to participate in activism. He explained how activism might be as simple as having coffee with someone, to participating in activist moments, to sending letters and emails or making phone calls to political leaders. Activism can occur at any level, anytime, to affect change in policy.

On Wednesday, July 26, Access to Independence celebrated the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act by hosting Brad Williams, a disability rights advocate and the Executive Director of the Albany-based, NYS Independent Living Council, (NYSILC). Brad spoke about the status of leadership in the disability rights movement and encouraged all attendees to become more civically engaged. NYS Senator Jim Seward greeted attendees and shared his thoughts on the positive effects of the ADA in the areas of transportation, employment and housing, among other areas.

Guests had the opportunity to tour ATI office space and to meet with Board Members, staff and volunteers. Everyone enjoyed ice cream, cupcakes and live radio from X101.5 radio.

Access to Independence believes that education, communication and the empowerment of people in the community will result in a more inclusive environment where people with disabilities experience the same opportunities as people without disabilities to secure a job, live in the community, and have access to education, healthcare and recreation, etc.!

Many thanks to all of this year's sponsors, without whose support, events would not have been possible. Special thanks to Walmart, Cortland Regional Medical Center, Tops Friendly Markets, Cortland Eye Center and Moscato Associates.





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Disability Advocates Rally at Capitol

On Tuesday, July 25, ATI staff joined more than 1,000 advocates in marching to the U.S. Capitol to participate in an historic rally to fight against the repeal of Obamacare and in support of civil rights for people with disabilities. The National Council on Independent (NCIL) facilitated the event in tandem with its 2017 Annual Conference on Independent Living.

Medicaid Saves Lives #SaveMedicaid #NoCutsNoCaps

Congress should reform Medicaid Long Term Services and Supports to better serve people with disabilities and low income communities. Instead of capping or cutting Medicaid through Block Grants or Per Capita Caps and giving states "flexibility" allowing them to deny Americans with disabilities their freedom. Congress should work with the disability community to implement real Medicaid reform: expand use of community-based services, demedicalize services, expand consumer-directed service options, and re-organize services to eliminate wasteful bureaucracy.

I Am A Pre-Existing Condition

Although the Affordable Care Act is flawed, it does provide critically important access to health insurance for Americans with disabilities. For example, it prohibits discrimination against people with pre-existing conditions; it requires insurance plans to provide essential benefits to ensure that people have the coverage they need; it created a Money Follows The Person (MFP) initiative that has liberated thousands of disabled people from institutions; and it established a Community First Choice Option to incentivize states with enhanced funding to provide long term supports and services instead of institutional services. Any changes to the law must preserve these components.

Free Our People - Institutionalization Is No Way to Live

Our nation's Independent Living Program has had tremendous influence for systems change in the delivery in cost-effective long term care services using home and community-based services and transition of youth. For decades, the Independent Living Program has been woefully underfunded and has not received additional funding. Between 2012 - 2014, Independent Living Centers provided services to more than five million people with disabilities, attracted over \$2.26 billion in private and public funding and transitioned over 13,000 people out of nursing homes and institutions. When combined with all other services, Independent Living Centers have saved state and federal governments billions of dollars.

For more information on how you can get involved in helping Access to Independence to achieve the passage of pressing Congressional legislation, to help people with disabilities realize their full civil rights, and to affect systems changes that lead to a world in which people with disabilities are truly valued equally and participate fully, contact Chad W. Underwood, ATI Chief Executive Officer, by phone: 607-753-7363; or by email: cwunderwood@aticortland.org.



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Nursing Home Transitions & Diversions: A Core Service at ATI

As an Independent Living Center (ILC), one of Access to Independence's (ATI's) five core services is transition: youth transition and nursing home transition. This article offers insight into what is involved in helping a person with a disability transition out of a nursing home into community-based living. After all, not only is it more cost effective for a person to receive services at home, but most people are happier and healthier at home. Imagine yourself in a facility where you have very few choices and your day is planned for you. For many people, this is not the life that they choose to live. For these people, finding a way to transition back to the community is a priority.

This is a story about Cheryl, a person who was institutionalized, but didn't need or want to be.

Cheryl lived at home with her family for most of her life. She lost her parents and then lost her sister who helped support her in the community. After her sister passed away, Cheryl was living alone in the family home and she soon injured her foot. Cheryl ended up in the hospital when her foot became infected. From the hospital, she moved to a nursing facility for rehabilitation.

The powers that be decided that Cheryl's home was not habitable and so they did not allow her to leave the nursing facility. Cheryl did not need to be in the nursing facility because she was very able to take care of herself. But Cheryl did not know who to turn to to get help to return home.

It just so happens that ATI has five staff who dedicate a portion of their time to helping such people. Cheryl's case was referred to ATI's *Open Doors* program. In no time, Anne Marie Piche, ATI Transition Specialist and NY Connects Coordinator, met with Cheryl to assess her needs and to determine what services and supports Cheryl would need in order to leave the nursing facility. Anne immediately connected Cheryl with Susan Lewis, ATI Independent Living Coordinator and Peer Transition Advisor.

Between Anne Marie and Susan, Cheryl was well on her way to getting the answers she needed. While Susan helped Cheryl locate and apply for new housing opportunities, Anne Marie helped her apply for services through the Nursing Home Transition and Diversion Medicaid Waiver program. Once approved, Cheryl secured a Service Coordinator and was on her way to a place of her own.

Cheryl's Service Coordinator helped her secure funding to furnish an apartment for her with the basics that she would need. The transition process took around 6 months from start to finish, and Cheryl now lives in an apartment of her own and is doing great! Cheryl loves her new home, has made many new friends, and is involved in many activities. Cheryl is able to live independently with a little help from her Service Coordinator and staff at ATI.

Cheryl truly appreciates the opportunities she has and the ability to make choices that let her be in control of her own life. She said the best part is being able to choose when to eat, sleep, go to bed and get up. These were some of the life decisions she missed while in a facility.

If you have a friend or a loved one who is in a nursing facility and who would like to transition back to the community, contact Susan Lewis, ATI Independent Living Coordinator, by phone: 607-753-7363; or by email: susan.lewis@aticortland.org.



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ATI Staff Attends ACUU Conference

In June, Access to Independence (ATI) sent staff to this year's ACUU Conference in Albany to develop relationships with providers of long term services and supports across the state. Consistent with its recent affiliation with the NY Connects initiative, ATI staff are now working with the Cortland County Area Agency on Aging to provide a variety of services and community outreach in an effort to expand a No Wrong Door approach for people with and without disabilities.

The 2017 Aging Concerns Unite Us (ACUU) conference featured several inspirational keynote speakers, including Marty Bell, Executive Director of the National Aging in Place Council, and Tom Kamber, founder and Executive Director of Older Adults Technology Services (OATS).

In addition to learning about innovative approaches happening across the country for older folks to age in place within their communities, staff gained inspiration from stories of older Americans finding meaning and renewed excitement in their lives through the Senior Planet Exploration, technology-themed community centers.

Other workshop topics related to the home health care crisis, aging in times of transition, Consumer Directed In-Home Care, innovative Caregiver programs, updates in managed Medicaid changes and benefits, and many more.

For more information on ATI's participation in the NY Connects initiative, contact Anne Marie Piche, ATI Transition Specialist and NY Connects Coordinator, by phone: 607-753-7363; or by email: apiche@aticortland.org.

ATI Welcomes New Staff

Over the last few months, Access to Independence (ATI) continued its transformation of staff to help fulfill the ever-changing, unmet needs of people with disabilities in our community and beyond.

Access to Independence promoted Todd Simmons from Peer Transition Advisor to Transition & Olmstead Housing Specialist. Todd is helping nursing facility residents in Tompkins County transition out of the facility back into community-based settings. Todd continues to travel statewide to provide peer services to others with disabilities, especially veterans.

Access to Independence also hired Rachel Anderson to serve as Independent Living & Community Education Specialist. Rachel will coordinate ATI's community outreaches, as well as coordinate the Agency's participation in the Emergency Preparedness Core Advisory Group (CAG) and the Taskforce for Increasing Disability Employment (TIDE). Rachel will also provide services to youth and adults.

Please join us in welcoming ATI's newest staff and family members!



Transition Planning 101: Getting started with IEP Transition Plans

Jennifer, a high school freshman with ADHD, wants to have a career in fashion design and needs help to find strategies to focus on this dream. Brian, a high school sophomore who uses a wheelchair, wants to be a politician and needs to learn about better ways to navigate his community. Stephanie, a high school junior who is Deaf, wants a career in software development and needs to find opportunities to learn that are easily accessible to her. Mark, a high school senior with Autism, wants to be a lawyer and needs to coordinate support services to get ready for college. Students with disabilities have dreams and needs and a solid plan for their transition will help ensure their success.

Transition means to move from one place to another. A transition can be smooth and easy or it can be complicated and difficult. Youth transition often refers to students with disabilities moving from high school to adult life and navigating post-secondary education, services, employment and social life within their community. This process is not always easy for youth or their families and caregivers.

On Wednesday, August 30, ATI will hold a workshop for parents and students with disabilities to help them prepare for their forthcoming transition planning meetings this school year. The workshop, entitled "Transition Planning 101: Getting started with IEP Transition Plans" will feature guest presenter Kristine P. O'Brien, Parent Outreach Specialist for the Syracuse University Parent Assistance Center (SUPAC). The workshop will take place from 11:00 am – 1:00 pm at Access to Independence, 26 N Main St in Cortland.

Kristine will provide attendees with an in-depth and youth-friendly presentation of the school-based transition planning process. While the process may seem complicated, Kristine will provide simple handouts and resources to help parents and youth understand the process and what they can do to ensure a successful transition from high school. Specifically, the workshop will offer information for students who have Individual Education Programs (IEPs). However, the resources presented in the workshop are beneficial to any student with a disability. Attendees will have the opportunity to ask questions and engage throughout the workshop to help participants understand transition planning and what it means for students with disabilities.

It is important that parent(s) and their student(s) attend every CSE meeting, where transition planning takes place. 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.

Parents and service providers should talk to their students about their interests and needs. While not all dreams are feasible, many unlikely ideas may be clues to other options that are just as exciting for the student. Talk about what the student might need to be successful, if they can think of possible ways to get what they need and if they can think of any barriers they might need to overcome. These topics will help parents and students start a conversation and begin their own planning process. This will make the in-school transition planning easier and help the school understand what resources and services they will need to provide. Dreams are exciting, so it is important to talk early and often and not shoot-down ideas. As with many people, the resulting discussion will help students identify a more realistic option based on their needs, abilities and desire for future education.

For more information on IEP planning, ATI's youth transition services and/or to RSVP for the upcoming Transition Planning 101 workshop, please contact Aaron T. Baier, Systems Advocacy & Architectural Barrier Programs Coordinator, by phone: 607-753-7363, or by email: abaier@aticortland.org.

Cortland County Housing Consortium

Upcoming Meeting Schedule:

Nov. 28, 2017: 8:00 - 10:00 am

Feb. 27, 2018: 8:00 - 10:00 am

May 22, 2018: 8:00 - 10:00 am

Aug. 28, 2018: 8:00 - 10:00 am

All meetings are held at:

Access to Independence

26 North Main Street, Cortland, NY

For more information,
call 607-753-7363,
or contact Aaron Baier by email:
abaier@aticortland.org.

Emergency Preparedness Core Advisory Group

Upcoming Meetings

Nov. 16, 2017: 11:00 - 12:00 Noon

Feb. 15, 2018: 11:00 - 12:00 Noon

May 17, 2018: 11:00 - 12:00 Noon

Aug. 16, 2018: 11:00 - 12:00 Noon

All meetings are held at:

Access to Independence

26 North Main Street, Cortland, NY

For more information,
call 607-753-7363,
or contact Rachel Anderson by
email: anderson@aticortland.org.



Housing Consortium Makes Steady Progress

The Cortland County Housing Consortium met on Tuesday, August 22, from 8:00 – 10:00 am to discuss next steps for several initiatives started earlier in the year. These initiatives included the Continuum of Care for homelessness, next steps for the County Consolidated Plan for Housing, Visitability, and the finalization of plans for the October 3, Housing Confab.

Shari Weiss, of Catholic Charities of Cortland County, updated Members on her organization's recent efforts to assist people with disabilities who are homeless in Cortland County through the development of 10 new units of barrier free housing. The Consortium received updates from providers and discussed ways to measure, monitor and eliminate homelessness throughout the County.

Consortium participants continued discussion on next steps given the recent adoption of a revised Consolidated Plan for Cortland County. One significant improvement to the plan included the development and inclusion of more than a dozen goals to improve housing in the community. Participants continued an ongoing discussion on the facilitation of a Substandard Housing Assessment and decided to secure additional community input on prioritizing the goals at the upcoming Housing Confab.

Aaron Baier, of Access to Independence, updated Members on his organization's ongoing efforts to secure legislative buy-in on visitability. Aaron reported that he had met with Members of the Housing Committee of the City of Cortland Common Council to discuss the matter. He said that Council Members agreed to consider a resolution to encourage improved visitability implementation in new development.

Last, Members of the Housing Confab Committee reported the completion of their planning relating to a Tuesday, October 3, 2017 event: "Housing in Cortland County: Present Realities, Pragmatic Solutions." According to Jackie Leaf, of Seven Valleys Health Coalition, the purpose of the event is to engage the public on housing issues and to secure input on planning for the future of housing in Cortland County. The free event is set for 10:00 am – 2:00 pm at Grace Christian Fellowship, 1250 Fisher Ave, Cortland, NY 13045. The event will feature six presenters and conclude with an opportunity to contribute to the prioritization of goals listed in the County's Consolidated Plan for Housing. For more information on the October 3, 2017 Housing Confab, call 607-753-7363, or email: housingconfab@aticortland.org.

The Cortland County Housing Consortium meets quarterly. Meetings are open to the public and all are welcome, including consumers, families, caregivers, developers, service providers, and government representatives.

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

ATI Gears Up: 2017 National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Each year, Access to Independence (ATI) joins with community partners who are engaged in increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities to recognize National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). This year, ATI is working with the community's Taskforce to Increasing Disability Employment (TIDE) to host a series of events throughout the month of October. This year's theme is "Inclusion Drives Innovation".

NDEAM Kick-Off Event

On October 4, the TIDE group is planning to kick-off NDEAM with a breakfast celebration to recognize local businesses and human service agencies that support people with disabilities, as well as people with disabilities that have successfully overcome barriers to achieve integrated, competitive employment. This event will feature guest speakers, awards and the opportunity to network with other attendees. Stay tuned for details on time and location!

Employment First Workshop!

On October 11, Access to Independence will facilitate a workshop on the employment first philosophy and on empowering people with disabilities who are discouraged about their current employment status. Guest presenters will facilitate a community dialogue on the status of disability employment in Cortland County, the barriers to employment opportunities for people with disabilities, and ways to expand the employment first philosophy. Access to Independence encourages the general public, human service agency representatives, business leaders and people with disabilities to participate in this awesome opportunity.

Disability Mentoring Day!

On October 18, the TIDE group will facilitate its annual Disability Mentoring Day for youth with disabilities. Every year, more than 50 youth from throughout the County have 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. In order to participate, youth must be in 9th-12th grade and have permission from their parents to participate.

The purpose of National Disability Employment Awareness Month is to educate the public about disability employment issues and to celebrate the many and varied contributions of America's workers with disabilities.

The history of National Disability Employment Awareness Month traces back to 1945, when Congress enacted a law declaring the first week in October each year "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week." In 1962, the word "physically" was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

For more information on NDEAM and the October events, please contact Rachel Anderson, Independent Living & Community Education Specialist, by phone: 607-753-7363, or by email: randerson@aticortland.org.



**October is National Disability
Employment Awareness Month**
"At work, it's what people can do that matters!"

*Our community should define a person by their
abilities not their disabilities! People with
disabilities bring valuable skills to the workforce!*

ATI to Host Niagara University Expert on Regional Emergency Preparedness

Access to Independence (ATI) is set to host a Niagara University-sponsored workshop on "Emergency Management: Access & Functional Needs - Disability Awareness Training" on Tuesday, September 12, 2017 from 9:00 am – Noon in the ATI Community Room. This is a free event and a light lunch will be provided. This workshop is open to people in the disability community, disability advocates, and individuals who have a role in emergency response including law enforcement and other first responders.

David Whalen, Project Director at Niagara University's First Responder Disability Awareness Training and New York's Access and Functional Needs Trainer will facilitate the presentation. Dave founded Disability Awareness Training (DAT) in September 2004 and specializes in training law enforcement and emergency responders, among others. Dave is a past member of the NYS Independent Living

Council where he chaired their emergency preparedness statewide committee.

Mr. Whalen's presentation will identify the responsibilities of both emergency personnel and advocates for persons with disabilities during an emergency. It will thoroughly discuss the four modules related to an appropriate and successful response to an emergency, including: Disability Awareness Training, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) specific to Emergency management, Emergency Plan content, and inclusive planning and active participation.

Topics to be discussed include: Disaster Preparedness and Planning, The ADA relative to Emergency management and response, Access and Functional Needs defined to include Universal Design, understanding how the whole community concept is imperative to proper response to individuals with disabilities, community resources and other

materials that assist Emergency Management in proper response, the NYC lawsuit and its ramifications statewide.

Being prepared for an emergency is essential. With drastically changing weather conditions, who knows when the next flood, tornado, snow storm, or other disaster might strike. Come learn what you can do to be prepared in the event of an emergency! For more information or to RSVP, call 753-7363.


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ATI Looks to Expand Social & Recreational Programming

One of the many key findings from the Access to Independence 2016 Community Needs Assessment was that there is a lack of social / recreational opportunities for people with disabilities in our community. Over the past few months, ATI staff have been working diligently to develop capacity to help fill this unmet need.

Over the past several years, ATI has held social events as an opportunity for our consumers with disabilities to connect with each other and participate in fun, inclusive social activities which help them to get out of the house and be a part of their broader community. In mid-August, ATI hosted the community to its 1st Annual Summer Beach Party Social Event. While the highlight of the event was the building of sand castles with varied sand molds, there was also music, food and door prizes.

Katrina Martin, ATI Program Coordinator, coordinated all aspects of the event, including development of the concept and fundraising to support the event's costs. Many thanks go out to all of the volunteers and donors, without whose support, the event would not have been possible. Stay tuned, as Katrina is already hard at work planning the next event set for this November!

Over the past few months, ATI staff have also been working with an active group of parents of people with disabilities to develop the framework for the continuation of the "Sunday Strikers". Beginning September 17 and continuing through December 17, ATI will support bowlers with disabilities of all ages and their families as they bowl and enjoy camaraderie at Cort-Lanes, from 12:00 Noon – 2:00 pm. Games are \$3.00 each and shoes are included. For more information and to register for this league, please call: 607-753-7363; or email: info@aticortland.org.

ATI staff are continuing discussion and capacity building efforts to launch even more programming in the coming months and year, including a craft classes, periodic lunch or dinner events, movie events and social drop-in hours. If you are interested in helping to plan for these and other initiatives, or if you would like to donate money to support the costs, please contact Chad W. Underwood, ATI Chief Executive Officer, by phone: 607-753-7363; or by email: cwunderwood@aticortland.org.



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



JOIN OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS!

Access to Independence (ATI) is recruiting interested individuals with diverse backgrounds in finance, fund development, nonprofit management and/or program development to serve on its Board of Directors.

For more information, please contact:

Chad W. Underwood, CEO

by phone: 607-753-7363; or

by email: cwunderwood@aticortland.org



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2017 6th Annual Masquerade Charity Gala Sponsorship Form

Friday, October 27, 2017 (6:00 - 9:00 pm)

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Company Name: _____

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_____ I would like to donate goods for use in the silent auction (value of
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PRINTING DEADLINE:

Thursday, October 13, 2017

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