

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

Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.

ACCESS NEWS

Winter 2018

NUMBER LV

The Future is Accessible!

Over the past 20 years, Access To Independence has evolved to become New York’s 18th largest Independent Living Center. Access To Independence provides services to more than 4,000 people each year and several of its 13 staff are nationally recognized for their advocacy and leadership in the independent living disability civil rights movements.

Access To Independence believes that all people with disabilities have the right to control their own lives, make their own decisions, and to participate fully in society. While much progress has been made over the years, attitudinal and structural barriers persist that prevent people with disabilities from enjoying the same basic civil rights as everyone else.

Access To Independence is dedicated to leading the community towards an all-inclusive future where discrimination and physical barriers no longer exist.

Access To Independence is committed to a future that is fully accessible.



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QUARTERLY QUOTE:

*“The best way to
PREDICT
the
future
is to
CREATE IT”*

A Year in Review: Access To Independence Maintains Steady Course

2017 was a successful year for Access To Independence. Whether it be the transformation of the Agency's staff to make it more consumer-driven across all disabilities, the increased focus on strategic partnerships at the local, state and national level, or ATI's provision of services to more than 4,000 people, there is no doubt that ATI is making a positive impact on the Cortland community.

For the sixth consecutive year, Access To Independence generated \$1 million in revenue to fund staffing and programming for people in our community last year. Not one dollar came from city or county tax coffers, providing ATI a very important opportunity to operate and advocate on behalf of all people with disabilities without having its hands tied by the politics of local bureaucracies. ATI will continue to rely on the generosity of individuals, nonprofits and businesses to sustain its work.

In 2017, Access To Independence secured \$40,810 in donations from 220 individual and business donors. This is the second highest amount of dollars raised from donations since ATI launched its Friends of the Center campaign initiative in 2008. Furthermore, ATI secured just over \$182,000 in new grant funds from a variety of sources, including \$35,000 to operate a housing subsidy program for Medicaid recipients in nursing facilities, and \$30,000 to collaborate with the Area Agency on Aging to expand work related to its NY Connects initiative.

In 2017, Access To Independence's staff increased from 11 to 13, a direct result of the Agency's implementation of strategic plans that resulted from its 2016 Community Needs Assessment. 9 out of 13 ATI staff are people with disabilities. Another three are caregivers of people with disabilities. ATI staff credentials include two Masters of Public Administration, two Masters of Social Work, a Certified Benefits Counselor, two Certified Aging in Place Specialists, and more than 100 years of experience working with people with disabilities to help them live more independent lives in the community.

In 2017, Access To Independence hired five new staff, including one to help Medicaid recipients in nursing homes transition back to the community. ATI strategically earmarked funding to hire a full-time Public Relations and Fundraising Coordinator, a part-time administrative assistant, and a part-time coordinator of social/recreational programming. Last, ATI restructured its Architectural Barrier Removal, Systems Advocacy, Community Education, Youth Transition and Work Readiness programs to make them more streamlined and consumer-focused.

In 2017, Access To Independence provided intensive services to 329 consumers between the ages of 5 and 96. Those consumers experienced cognitive (28%), physical (46%), mental (16%), and/or sensory (9%) disabilities. Just over one quarter of ATI's consumers were older than 60 years and another quarter were under the age of 25. ATI provided services to another 318 people with disabilities who were not consumers. ATI helped 28 people transition from or divert nursing home placement and facilitated more than 45 home modifications to make them accessible.

In 2017, Access To Independence staff invested more than 2,000 hours to fight for systems changes throughout the Cortland community. ATI increased community awareness of the lack of affordable, accessible and integrated housing options for people with disabilities; increased community collaboration on home health aide issues, emergency preparedness and disability employment; fought for increased public transit options; continued efforts to facilitate increased access to social and recreational opportunities throughout the County; and continued efforts to enact visitability and source of income law in the County.

In 2017, Access To Independence staff also invested an additional 1,000 hours to fight for systems changes at the state and national level. ATI staff serve in key leadership positions on several governor-appointed state councils and on the National Council of Independent Living (NCIL).

Many thanks and much appreciation to all Access To Independence staff, Board Members and community supporters for making 2017 a transformational year for people with disabilities in Cortland County and beyond! Just the same, our work is not done. With your help and support, 2018 will bring even more progress in our fight for equality! And if you haven't heard yet, 2018 marks our 20th year of service to our community.

For more information, call Access To Independence at 607-753-7363.



Reasons People Get Involved with Access

By Stacey Sholar, ATI Public Relations & Fundraising Coordinator

Behind every non-profit, there is a group of dedicated people passionate about its cause. There are many great causes in the Cortland area serving those in need, the elderly, children and families, arts, education, history, and agriculture just to name a few.

As Access To Independence celebrates its twentieth anniversary, I was curious to find out why one supports our mission to empower people with disabilities to live more independently in our community. As Public Relations & Fundraising Coordinator, I have the opportunity to connect with not only members of the community but also the people that make up our agency, including volunteers, consumers and those who serve on our board of directors. I felt this was a great place to start in finding answers.

Board members volunteer their time, attention and energy to meetings, events and just about anything else that we ask of them. Their service to our day-to-day operations is priceless. But why do they really take time out of their busy lives for ATI? To find out, we surveyed them by asking three key questions: why they support us, what was their experience and what vision they had for the future.

When asked why they supported Access To Independence, Board Members spoke of our work with people with disabilities to offer them tools and resources to gain employment, to assist them with budgeting and to help them with their living arrangements, all with an eye towards independent living. One Board Member felt strongly that the goal was to “improve the quality of life for people with disabilities.”

Board Members shared a variety of experiences that they brought to the table. One individual has extensive experience in helping people with disabilities look for work through their own place of employment. Other reasons included having a family member with a disability and seeing the barriers they faced that prevented their access to opportunities that nondisabled people enjoy every day. Several Board Members indicated that their own disability allowed them to know firsthand the challenges one faces in the community and being proactive in helping to make lives more independent is the mission.

Board Members’ vision of Access To Independence is uniquely pointed towards securing full access to human and civil rights for all people with disabilities. Board Members expressed a need for more advocacy and increased collaboration with other community based organizations. They said ATI would lead the community toward an all-inclusive future free of discrimination and physical barriers.

Board Members support ATI primarily because they are affected by people with disabilities, whether having a disability or knowing someone who has a disability. Most also expressed a desire to just do some good for someone else.

The future is accessible. That is the dream that inspires and motivates us all to support Access To Independence, and we hope, it will inspire more community members to get involved. To find out how, visit www.aticortland.org, or follow us on Facebook.



ATI Offers Youth Transition Services

Did you know that Access To Independence offers youth transition services? If you are a student in Cortland County or the parent of a student in Cortland County who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan, we can help.

ATI youth transition services include advocacy at Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings and help with independent living skills that may be part of your IEP! Beginning in the school year during which a student turns 14 years old, the IEP starts to utilize sections relating to transition planning.

Transition planning in the IEP starts to look at specific skills students need in order to live independently from their parents, which could include goals such as going to college, getting a job, or moving into their first apartment. Each year the student will have several small measurable goals that will contribute to their ultimate long-term plan. For example, a student whose goal is to move into their own apartment when they are older may have small measurable goals such as learning to cook and being able to use an alarm clock to get themselves up on time without parental assistance.

Each goal in the IEP will have someone assigned that will help the student achieve these goals. Typically, it is the school district or the family of the student that helps with these goals. ATI transition services can become part of the IEP in achieving these measurable goals. By including ATI in the IEP process or CSE meetings, we not only assist with these goals, but we can advocate to be sure the student's voice is heard and that their IEP is clearly working towards their long-term plan.

ATI also coordinates job shadows. Planning for work or college after high school can be hard. Let us help! What are your interests for the future? ATI can connect students with professionals at local businesses and colleges to explore some of your ideas! By participating in on the job work experiences, students have the opportunity for mentoring by community professionals.

By taking the time to explore their career and education options, students can direct their IEP meetings to be sure they are getting the most from their education to prepare for life after high school. Even if students only have very general ideas on the type of work in which they are interested, we can help them explore options related to that topic. Some students have general ideas such as an interest in cars or working with animals, while others have very specific ideas such as nursing or blueberry farming. ATI can work with students to provide meaningful experiences to explore their interests.

For more information on ATI Youth Transition Services, contact Rachel Anderson, Community Education Coordinator, by email: randerson@aticortland.org, or by phone: 607-753-7363.



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'Cabin Fever' Event Showcases Storytelling

On Wednesday, February 28, 2018, Access To Independence hosted its 1st Annual "Cabin Fever" Social Event. In addition to a mock snowball fight with socks as the "snowballs," Lumber Jack Stew and Biscuits, door prizes, and opportunities to meet with old friends and make new ones, ATI's Katrina Martin facilitated a storytelling bonanza!

Storytelling is an ancient form of entertainment that is still relevant in the modern world. Katrina offered participants some ideas on how to make their stories memorable. Consider these tips, as offered by Marci Alboher in "5 Tips For Telling Better Stories," and Sean Buvala in "Storytelling Tips for Better Storytelling Today".

1. Tell stories you like.
2. Choose a story your audience can understand and enjoy.
3. Have a beginning, middle and ending.
4. Keep it simple. Don't overwhelm.
5. Openings and closings are important. Memorize the beginning and ending of your story. Improvise in the middle.
6. Make eye contact with your audience.
7. Make your gestures easy and calm.
8. Use a strong, confident voice.
9. Don't rush, but don't go so slowly that your audience becomes impatient.
10. Resist the impulse to tell the story's "moral". Let the story speak for itself.

Leading up to the storytelling, participants had an opportunity to create their own "Talking Stick". A talking stick has long been part of the storytelling tradition. A person who holds the decorated stick is the one who has the floor for speaking. Talking sticks can be small or large. There are no rules for what items must be included. Sticks can be as individualized as their creators!

For more information on social events, call Katrina Martin at 607-753-7363.



Bowling for a Purpose

On Saturday, March 24, Access To Independence will host its annual Bowl-4-Abilities event to support unfunded programming for people with disabilities. ATI will hold the event at Cort-Lanes on route 13 in Cortland from 1:00 – 4:00 pm.

If you are interested in participating as an individual or as a team, go online or visit our office to complete a registration form. We ask that each bowler raise at least \$25 in pledges (\$100 team). Participants will have the opportunity to bowl two games at no cost. As in years past, there will be food and great prizes.

Access To Independence plans to award prizes to teams and individuals for a variety of different contests, so start collecting your pledges now! Even if you are not a bowler, please come show your support by cheering on your friends and family and purchasing a 50/50 raffle ticket.

Sponsorships are still available, starting at the \$100 level. We depend on our community for support, and sponsorships are a major way in which we raise funds for the cause, so please consider donating.

We hope to see you all on March 24th for this community event, all in support of people with disabilities! For more information on the upcoming Bowl-4-Abilities event, contact Stacey Sholar, Public Relations & Fundraising Coordinator, by phone: 607-753-7363, or by email: ssholar@aticortland.org. You can also visit www.aticortland.org for more information, to sponsor the event, or to register.

Craft Club Updates

The Access To Independence Craft Club meets every Wednesday in the ATI Community Room, from 9:30 am to 10:30.

During the month of January, ATI celebrated Chinese Astrology's recognition of 2018 as the Year of the Dog. Craft Club participants demonstrated their creativity and had a lot of fun painting watercolor pictures of dogs and dog relatives, such as wolves and foxes. During the final session of the month, participants painted pictures of famous dogs such as "Lassie," "Rin Tin Tin" and others.

February's theme is landscapes and learning how to create depth in painting. The class still has room for a few more participants. To sign-up for ATI's Craft Club, call Katrina Martin: 607-753-7363.

ATI Opposes Physician Assisted Suicide

On January 22, Access To Independence's (ATI) Aaron Baier provided testimony to the Cortland League of Women Voters at its community forum on the legalization of physician assisted suicide in New York State. The purpose of the forum was to educate League Members in anticipation of their taking a statewide position on the topic. ATI vehemently opposes physician assisted suicide due to the dangerous precedent it would pose to people with disabilities and seniors.

While proponents of legalization stress purported safeguards and freedom of choice, opponents maintain that the risk is too great and abuse remains a real concern. During its presentation, ATI shared the major concerns expressed by Not Dead Yet, a national partner in the fight against physician assisted suicide.

First, there is a deadly mix between our broken, profit-driven health care system and legalizing assisted suicide, which will always be the cheapest so-called treatment. Direct coercion is not even necessary. If insurers deny, or merely delay, expensive life-saving treatment, then a person will be steered toward assisted suicide.

Second, elder abuse and abuse of people with disabilities is a rising concern. If assisted suicide is legalized, an heir or abusive caregiver may steer someone towards assisted suicide, witness the request, pick up the lethal dose and even give the drug. No witnesses are required at the death, so who would know?

Third, there is already an alternative. Anyone dying in discomfort that is otherwise not relievable may legally receive palliative sedation. This is where the patient is sedated to the point where the discomfort is relieved while the dying process takes place. So we already have a legal solution to any uncomfortable deaths, which does not endanger others the way an assisted suicide law does.

Fourth, diagnoses of terminal illness are sometimes wrong, leading people to give up on treatment and to lose good years of their lives. It also endangers people with disabilities, chronic illness and people misdiagnosed as terminal.

Fifth, Doctor shopping has become common practice in Oregon. If a person's doctor says no, that person can call the main organization that supports assisted suicide. Today it's called Compassion & Choices but it used to be called the Hemlock Society. They will refer you to assisted suicide-friendly doctors. They have been involved in 75%-90% of Oregon's reported assisted suicides. Shopping for another doctor who says yes will get around the law's weak safeguards.

Finally, legalizing any shape or form of assisted suicide would indicate to our youth and seniors that suicide is acceptable in our society and it would open the door to a dangerous path down the proverbial slippery slope of moral depravity. First assisted suicide, then what next?

For more information on physician assisted suicide, check out www.notdeadyet.org or contact Chad W. Underwood, ATI Chief Executive Officer, by phone: 607-753-7363, or by email: cwunderwood@aticortland.org.

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ATI Advocates for Critical NYS Budget Items

Each year, Access To Independence (ATI) mobilizes local grassroots advocacy to promote the needs of people with disabilities during the development of the New York State Budget.

This year, ATI is focusing its budget advocacy on areas consistent with findings from its 2016 Needs Assessment. The following are ATI's top budget priorities for the State's 2018 – 2019 Fiscal Year:

- \$5 million increase to its base funding for SFY 2018 – 2019, consistent with recommendations by the State Education Department and Board of Regents.
- \$1 million to fund a cross-disability tax credit geared toward small businesses to help encourage businesses to employ people with disabilities and to move the State forward with its Employment First initiative.
- \$9 million increase in funding for the Access to Home initiative.
- \$3.5 million increase in funding for the New York Connects initiative, and a separate line of \$8 million for ILCs.

ATI recently spearheaded the development of several resolutions that local coalitions approved relating to the State budget. ATI sent letters with the adopted resolutions to key State Leadership, including Governor Andrew Cuomo, Senator James Seward, Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton and Assemblyman Gary Finch.

The Cortland County Housing Consortium passed a resolution in support of the increase in funding for Access to Home and funding for the visitability tax credit.

The Cortland County Coalition for Long Term Care passed a resolution in support of the funding increase for the NY Connects initiative and funding to address the home care crisis by providing a living wage to home care workers.

For more Information on ATI's statewide advocacy efforts, please contact Aaron T. Baier, Systems Advocacy Programs Coordinator, by phone: 607-753-7363; or by email: abaier@aticortland.org.



JOIN OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS!

Access To Independence (ATI) is recruiting people with disabilities 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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Housing Consortium Releases 2018 Priorities

On January 26, the Cortland County Housing Consortium presented its 2018 Housing Priorities to participants of the annual Cortland County Housing Track Breakout Session. During the meeting, the group reviewed the priorities and developed strategies to ensure progress with the goals.

2018 Housing Priorities

- Provide quality affordable, accessible housing for all residents in all sectors (source: 2017 Housing Confab recommendations 1 & 2).
- Improve overall housing stock by making it more attractive and eliminating blight and zombie properties (source: 2017 Housing Confab recommendations 3 & 4).
- Launch facilitation of a three-year county-wide Substandard Housing Assessment (SHA) for inclusion in the Cortland County Consolidated Plan for Housing.
- Complete an analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing for protected classes.

Members of the Cortland County Housing Consortium developed these priorities based on strategic needs listed in the 2017 Cortland County Consolidated Plan for Housing, community input and discussion during its quarterly meetings.

The Cortland County Housing Consortium meets quarterly and invites community members concerned with housing to join the public meetings. The group seeks representation from all sectors, including County residents, housing developers, real estate businesses, property managers, government agencies and nonprofit organizations.

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.

CAG to Hold Emergency Preparedness Resource Fair

The Core Advisory Group (CAG) for Emergency Preparedness is hosting an Emergency Preparedness Resource Fair on Thursday, April 12, 2018, from 1:00 – 4:00 pm at the Cortland County Office Building Gymnasium. This free event will feature a variety of community organizations and emergency professionals, and it will offer tips and best ways to be prepared for an emergency.

One important piece in preparedness is to be sure that your emergency information is located on, or in, your refrigerator. If a first responder needs to enter your home for an emergency, the place they look for information is the refrigerator.

For more information, contact Rachel Anderson, Community Education Coordinator, by phone: 607-753-7363; or by email: randerson@aticortland.org.

Got rent?

The Cortland Housing Authority has a rental assistance program that may be able to help you!!

The Section 8 Housing Program helps qualified people meet their monthly rent bills by paying a portion of their rent directly to their landlord.

Interested persons may pick up applications at the Housing Authority offices located at 42 Church Street or 51 Port Watson Street Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm or

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



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Consumer Complaint & Appeal Process:

As a consumer of Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc. (ATI), you have the right to register a complaint or grievance regarding the services provided by ATI. There will be no reprisal to you for registering a complaint or grievance. However, as a consumer, you are expected to first discuss the complaint with the staff member in question. If the problem is not resolved to your satisfaction then you can file a formal grievance.

In the event you need to register a complaint or grievance, it should be done within 30 days of the incident. For more information about ATI's complaint and grievance process, call (607) 753-7363. You can file a complaint or grievance by writing, calling, faxing or emailing the Chief Executive Officer, who will respond to your complaint or grievance within ten business days.

Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.
Chad W. Underwood, Chief Executive Officer
26 North Main Street
Cortland, New York 13045
Phone: (607) 753-7363
Fax: (607) 756-4884

Email: cwunderwood@aticortland.org

In the event you are unsatisfied with the response, or in the event the Chief Executive Officer is unable to respond within ten business days, or in the event the complaint or grievance relates to the Chief Executive Officer, you may file a complaint, grievance or appeal to the ATI Board of Director's Executive Committee, who will respond to your complaint, grievance or appeal within ten business days.

Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.
Mary Beth Mathey, Board Chair
26 North Main Street
Cortland, New York 13045
Phone: (607) 753-7363
Fax: (607) 756-4884

Email: admin@aticortland.org

In the event you are unsatisfied with the response of the ATI Board of Director's Executive Committee, you may file a complaint or grievance with the NYS Education Department:

Donald McManus
NYS Education Department - ACCES-VR
89 Washington Avenue - 5th Floor, Room 580 EBA
Albany, New York 12234
Phone: (518) 408-4850 or (800)-222-5627
(voice/TTY)

Email: donald.mcmanus@nysed.gov

What is Medicare?

It can be difficult to understand the difference between Medicare and Medicaid. They are both health insurance plans run by the government, but they have very different qualifiers and cover varying services.

Medicare is part of the FICA tax that is deducted from your pay check, and your eligibility depends on whether or not you earned enough credits from work. You can enroll in Medicare at age 65, or earlier if you qualify for SSDI.

There are several parts to Medicare:

- Medicare Part A covers hospital stays and is usually free for anyone who qualifies for Medicare, though there are some rare exceptions to this.
- Medicare Part B covers your doctor visits, medical tests, and durable medical equipment.
- Medicare Part D covers your prescription medication and is provided by private insurance companies.
- There is also a Medicare Part C that gives you the option to use an approved private insurance company to provide your Medicare coverage.

If you qualify for Medicare coverage, you will receive a letter from the Social Security Administration letting you know when you will be eligible and how to sign up. If you don't enroll when you are first eligible for Part B and Part D, you will pay more later because of late enrollment fees.

Medicaid is a need-based program that has strict guidelines regarding the amount of income and resources you can have to qualify. Medicaid provides coverage for older people, people with disabilities, and some families with children. Each state has its own eligibility rules and decides which services to cover.

In New York State, Medicaid coverage has many different names. Your plan could be Fidellis, Total Care, VNA, ICircle, or State Plan coverage. It is important to know what kind of Medicaid you have because each plan can have different coverage. For more information, call Susan Lewis, Independent Living Coordinator, at 607-753-7363.

Hyper Reach Emergency Alerts Sign-up Today

What: Hyper Reach is an emergency system for all of Cortland County. When you sign up, you will receive a telephone call or text message when there is an emergency alert in your area. When signing-up you can also indicate if you might require special assistance during an evacuation.

Why: Hyper Reach is the fastest way for emergency management professionals to get the word out if there is a major disaster such as flood, blizzard, or other hazard that may cause the need for people to evacuate or shelter-in-place.

How: Go to the following website to sign up for Hyper Reach service: <https://secure.hyper-reach.com/comsignupw.jsp?id=46962>. If you do not have internet access, use the Access to Independence Computer Lab to sign up for Hyper Reach. The computer lab is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 am – 5:00 pm.

For more information, contact Rachel Anderson, Community Education & Outreach Coordinator, by phone: 607-753-7363; or by email: randerson@aticortland.org.

VITA Tax Filing Assistance

Access to Independence is hosting the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program again this year, every Saturday and Sunday through mid-April.

Last year the VITA program offered free tax preparation service to more than 700 taxpayers in the Cortland area. The program is set up to serve at least another 700 taxpayers again this year.

If you make less than \$54,000 per year and/or qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit, you are eligible for free tax preparation. Check out the VITA website at: www.cortlandfreetaxes.org to find the location nearest you and to check out what information you will need to bring with you to your appointment.

Once again, you can call 2-1-1 to schedule an appointment for tax preparation. If that number doesn't work in your area, try calling: 877-211-8667. Walk-ins are welcome at Access to Independence only; all other locations are by appointment only.

If you are concerned that you might not be able to have your taxes done in person, there is a drop-off site at NBT bank in Marathon where you can review your taxes with a volunteer, drop them off to be prepared elsewhere, and arrange to pick them up and review them when they're done.

Emergency Preparedness Core Advisory Group

Upcoming Meeting Schedule:

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

August 16, 2018
11:00 am - 12:00 Noon

November 15, 2018
11:00 am - 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 email: randerson@aticortland.org.

Cortland County Housing Consortium

Upcoming Meeting Schedule:

February 27, 2018
8:00 - 10:00 am

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

August 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 email: abaier@aticortland.org.



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