What Does Independent Living Mean To You?

We believe that Independent Living means controlling and directing your own life. It means taking risks and being allowed to succeed and fail on your own terms. It means participating in community life and pursuing activities of your own choosing. Independent Living requires knowing what choices are available, deciding what is right for you, and taking responsibility for your actions. Independent Living means being as self-sufficient as possible. It means being able to exercise the greatest degree of choice in where you live, with whom you live, how you live, where you work, with whom you work and how to use your time.
Access To Independence Celebrates 20th Anniversary!

Access To Independence started in 1986 as a grassroots advocacy organization in Cortland. Several human service agencies, local government officials and concerned citizens realized a lack of physical accessibility throughout the County. They formed the Cortland County Accessibility Committee under the auspices of CAPCO (the local Community Action Program).

For nearly a decade, the CCAC spearheaded initiatives that aimed to combat the lack of accessibility, including a Downtown beautification sidewalk project and the Sheriff’s Accessible Parking Enforcement Program (SHAPE).

In 1997, with heightened awareness, the need for a centralized advocacy and resource center led to the creation of the Cortland County Access Center (CCAC), a satellite of the Ithaca-based Finger Lakes Independence Center (FLIC).

On May 11, 1998, Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc. (ATI) incorporated as a nonprofit organization in NYS with the following purposes: (1) To provide information and support services to people with disabilities, the community and organizations within Cortland County; (2) To provide guidance and advocacy to people with disabilities in all areas that affect their choice to participate fully and independently in the community; (3) To advocate for the removal of attitudinal and structural barriers that affect the inclusion of people with disabilities, including disability stigma; and (4) To increase public awareness of the needs of people with disabilities.

In 2001, thanks to advocacy efforts by the CCAC Membership, including Fran Pizzola and her family, ATI secured dedicated funding to become New York State’s 36th Independent Living Center (ILC), which Pizzola led. ILC’s are community-based, consumer-controlled, non-residential organizations that provide a variety of resources and advocacy for people with a wide range of disabilities. ILC’s are run by people with disabilities.

In 2002, ATI’s Executive Director, Mary E. Ewing, worked with Pizzola, Board Members and newly hired staff, to develop a sustainable organizational infrastructure, to launch the provision of resources and advocacy to people with disabilities, and to facilitate community collaboration around disability issues. Over the next seven years, ATI leveraged base funding to expand its service focus from information & referral, peer counseling, advocacy, nursing home transition and diversion and independent living skills training to include statewide systems advocacy, a ramp program, a loan closet of durable medical equipment and peer mentoring.

In 2009, ATI enacted its first-ever, five-year strategic plan, to implement streamlined financial and operational protocols, and to expand fund diversification efforts. Over the next five years, ATI’s staff and budget doubled and ATI expanded its service area to include 18 Counties throughout the CNY area. ATI launched the provision of Medicaid Waiver services, benefits counseling and youth transition services, and it secured its first of several regional contracts to provide assistive technology and environmental modifications for people with developmental and physical disabilities.

In 2014, Chad W. Underwood assumed the role of Chief Executive Officer. Since that time, ATI has generated more than $4 million for the Cortland Community, increased staff to 13, and grown the number of people served annually by 35%. ATI expanded its nursing home transition and diversion programming, launched new programming for long term supports and services and housing assistance, and implemented innovative public relations / community education strategies. In 2016, ATI launched its second five-year strategic plan which aims to address the ever-changing and unmet needs of people with disabilities.

While Access To Independence has no doubt evolved over the past 20 years, its core philosophy has not. ATI remains committed to fighting for the civil rights of people with disabilities, helping people live more independently in the community, and combatting the attitudinal and physical barriers that persist throughout society. More than anything else, ATI has lived-up to this commitment thanks to its rich history of dedicated staff and Board Members, both past and present.
ATI Appreciates Volunteers!

April is National Volunteer Month. Each year, Access To Independence appreciates the dedication of 40+ volunteers who donate 2,000+ hours of their time worth $50,000 to help people with disabilities!

On April 20, 2018, Access To Independence held a Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon to recognize its volunteers. ATI awarded certificates to volunteers who dedicated time to ATI during the 2017-2018 year and recognized them during the luncheon. ATI provided the following volunteers with special awards for hours served: Mickelle Lynch, Barbara Morris, Michele Quinlan, Braedon Sopp and Jarett Withers.

New this year, ATI presented two volunteers with longevity awards. Thank you to volunteer Dorothy Dumond for 16 years of service to ATI’s mission, vision and values! Thank you to volunteer Cheryl Williams for 11 years of service to ATI’s mission, vision and values!

Volunteers assist in many areas at Access To Independence. Whether you have one hour per month, one hour per week or one hour per day, we appreciate you! To learn about volunteer opportunities, contact Rachel Anderson, Community Education Coordinator, by phone: 607-753-7363; or by email: randerson@aticortland.org.

Above: Cheryl Williams & Dorothy Dumond receive award in recognition for their volunteer service to ATI.

ATI Celebrates Founding Day & Recognizes Staff Longevity

On May 11, Access To Independence Board Members and staff recognized the Agency’s 20th anniversary as a NYS nonprofit corporation by hosting former Board Members, volunteers and the community to a Celebration Open House. More than 50 community supporters enjoyed desserts and light refreshments while touring the Agency's offices and learning about the various resources and advocacy that each staff person offers.

ATI also recognized Scott Roman for 10 years of service to the Agency, as Bookkeeper. ATI presented Scott with a commemorative plaque in recognition of his dedication to the mission, vision and values of the Agency. Congratulations Scott on your milestone achievement!

Celebrate the ADA!

Join Access To Independence in celebrating 28 years since the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). ATI is pleased to announce the following events and activities during the month of July.

On July 12, 2018, Access To Independence will host a lunch and learn workshop about the history of the ADA, its relevance today, and threats to the future. Presenters will discuss how to preserve the framework for another generation so that we continue to move into a future that is accessible for all. The workshop is 11:00 am – 1:00 pm in the ATI Community Room. Call 607-753-7363 to RSVP.

Between July 16-20, 2018, our nation recognizes National Disability Voter Registration Week! As a voter with a disability, you have the right to have an accessible polling place with accessible voting machines. You have the right to vote privately and independently. Access To Independence staff is available to help people to register to vote year-round. On Thursday, July 26, 2018, from 3:30 – 5:00 pm, ATI will host its annual ADA Celebration. Join us for an ice cream social, live radio remote broadcast by X101, and a guest speaker. Call 607-753-7363 to RSVP.
Bowl-4-Abilities A Smashing Success!

On Saturday, March 24, more than 100 bowlers convened at Cort-Lanes to enjoy an afternoon of inclusive recreation and fun! Access To Independence hosted its annual Bowl-4-Abilities event to support unfunded programming for people with disabilities, including its Sunday Strikers bowling league. This year, Access To Independence raised over $5,000, the most ever for the fundraiser.

More than 20 teams (representing groups of individuals and area businesses) joined with dozens of individual bowlers to make the event a success.

The Walmart team took home the bedazzled King Pin Trophy for most money raised by a team. While Crown Park came in a very close second, everyone appreciated their enthusiastic spirit that accompanied their matching shirts and a vow to take the award next year!

ATI presented Marc Hamilton with an additional King Pin Trophy for raising the most money as an individual. Marc, a first time attendee, shared that he really enjoyed attending the event.

As always, this year’s event would not have been successful were it not for the many individuals and businesses that donated toward the cause. Special thanks goes out to this year’s Guardian Sponsor, McNeil Development Company. ATI also thanks the other 15 sponsors this year, the most ever for the annual event.

A final thanks goes out to all remaining sponsors, supporters, bowlers, Board Members, staff and volunteers who helped in any way and/or who participated. Stay tuned for a Save-the-Date for the 2019 Bowl-4-Abilities!
Access Salutes Supporters of People with Disabilities
By: Stacee Sholar, ATI Public Relations & Fundraising Coordinator

Access To Independence is fortunate to be a part of a charitable community where individuals, area businesses and other non-profits generously donate to its mission of empowering people with disabilities to live more independently. Like many other non-profit organizations in our area, we rely heavily on the community for its support.

In my role as Public Relations & Fundraising Coordinator, effective ‘public’ relations requires a focus on ‘personal relations’. Relationships with our donors require trust – trust between us and the donor, and trust between us and the people we serve. We build this trust by carrying through the mission, vision and values of the agency. We seek this financial support through event sponsorships, donation of goods or items for particular purposes, or unrestricted donations for unfunded programming.

As Access To Independence celebrates its twentieth anniversary, we honor all of the amazing donor relations we have. I recently connected with some area business donors to find out why they support us, what Access To Independence means to them, and why accessibility is important to their businesses.

Donors consistently reported that ATI “provides supports to those who wish to gain independence which is a benefit to the recipient and to society.” One area business supports Access because they believe we work to enhance the lives of so many people with disabilities in our community. Cortland Regional Medical Center, is a proud supporter and stated that “Without the tireless efforts to be the voice for people with disabilities, our community would suffer greatly.” Donors overwhelmingly recognize the value and importance of empowering people with disabilities to make their own choices.

Business donors expressed that people with disabilities face many different hurdles in our community and that when they think of us, they think inclusion. Every person has the right to have an opportunity to live, work and thrive as a contributing community member. As stated by some, ATI provides resources and supports to help people achieve these goals. Also, supporters felt that ATI would advocate for people with disabilities when this basic civil right is not being met. Another supporter shared that programs for training, education and removing physical barriers stood out in his mind.

Accessibility is important to our business contributors for a variety of reasons. Cortland Eye Center, shared that they wanted all of their patients and employees to feel comfortable and well cared for in our community. David Reed, of CNY Business Law stated that “Anyone I meet is a potential client….but if potential clients are not able to be out and about in our community, it is unlikely I will meet them.” He went on to say, “That is not good for my business or for our community.” A number of donors agreed, having accessible businesses is important to the economy in our area. People with disabilities have income to spend and having all the same choices as anyone else will only strengthen our community as a whole.

The future is accessible for all people with disabilities. As Access To Independence embarks on another 20 years, we take this opportunity to thank all who support us. For more information on how you can support us, contact me, Stacee Sholar at 607-753-7363 or by email, sholr@aticortland.org.
My Internship Experience: By Braedon Sopp

An internship can be the best way for a student to sharpen their skills and to gain valuable career experience. When choosing Access To Independence for my internship, I knew that it was the right choice because of my previous experience with them.

In the Fall of 2015, I took a course that allowed me an opportunity to complete a short internship at the agency. During that time, I helped finalize the agency’s community resource guide for youth with disabilities. The experience was very fruitful, and offered me positive guidance and a healthy work environment.

My Spring internship this past semester was no different. I created / edited brochures, collected data on the home aide shortage, developed a professional support group reference card service, and much more. Through very constructive feedback from team members, I improved my critical thinking and organization skills, both will contribute to my future career.

In addition to learning from my assigned duties, I provided administrative support to help facilitate the Cabin Fever and Bowl-4-Abilities events. I also attended the NYAIL Legislative Awareness Day in Albany to advocate for independent living and disability rights issues. All of these experiences illustrate how ATI supports the academic growth of college students and offers students valuable internship opportunities.

I am graduating from SUNY Cortland this month with a degree in Human Services; and it only feels right to add “and my internship experience at Access To Independence”. Thank you Access To Independence for providing me with an opportunity to improve my life and the lives of people with disabilities in the community.

Quinn Awarded Cortland Rotary Award

The Rotary Club of Cortland awarded John Quinn, Jr. with its Pride of Workmanship award during its luncheon in April.

John serves as Access To Independence Senior Accessibility Design Specialist. Over the past two years John has substantially contributed to the facilitation of nearly 50 home modifications to make them more accessible to people with disabilities.

Congratulations to John for your commitment to helping people with disabilities and for your dedication to the mission, vision and values of Access To Independence!

Access To Independence Reveals Independent Living Award Recipients

Access to Independence recently awarded 4 graduating seniors the Mary E. Ewing Award for Independent Living in the amount of $150 each. Local seniors from Cortland, McGraw, Marathon and Cincinnatus submitted applications. Cincinnatus had 3 very competitive applicants.

In order to qualify for the award each student must have a disability, be on track to graduate from a high school and have plans to transition into independent community living, begin work or continue on to higher education. Applicants were asked to answers three questions; Describe barriers encountered while living with a disability and how they overcame it, describe what independent living means to them and describe their plan after graduation. All shared plans to go on to college or a trade school to further their education.

Congratulations to Alexandra Myers of Cortland, Mason Jones of McGraw, Vannessa Zurbruegg of Marathon and DeeAnn Witty of Cincinnatus!

We wish you continued success!
My name is Anne Marie Piche and the program I work with at Access to in the Open Doors program. I help people living in nursing facilities to return to their own homes or other independent living situations. It can be difficult for someone living in a nursing facility to get access to information. This is where Open Doors comes in.

When I receive a referral for the Open Doors program, I will come speak with you about options. Medicaid recipients may qualify for a Medicaid waiver program; Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) waiver, Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) waiver or Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) waiver. I will explain how to apply and what these mean. An additional option could be Managed Long Term Care (MLTC). These are managed Medicaid programs which can support you in the community; in a home or apartment.

I will help you submit appropriate applications, work with the nursing home social workers and discharge planners, collaborate with other health care providers, assist you with finding housing and follow through up to one year following your transition.

First I’ll ask you to sign consent for me to advocate on your behalf and to be part of the Open Doors program. Then, I will listen to your story; what physical and or emotional challenges we’ll have to consider, what resources you may have and what support you will need, and what your goals are. Then we come up with a plan. You are free at any point to change your mind. Nothing is obligatory.

I try to be very clear that following through on the steps of a plan can take time. Often more time than anyone would ideally like. However, getting started with step one is the beginning of the journey. Whatever the steps of the plan are, it will take perseverance to keep things moving and that’s what I’m here for.

Once we have everything in place and your transition to community living is nearing, I’ll complete a Quality of Life survey. The information you share is confidential and will help the Department of Health to gather information to evaluate how well the Open Doors program is working and whether people are happy and healthier at home.

When you have left the facility and are home, I will check in with you – frequently at first – and stay in touch for a year. We want to be sure that the services that we have set up are supporting you in the ways that you need to be successful.

For more information, call Access to Independence and ask for Anne Marie Piche. Or, contact me by phone: 607-753-7363; or by email: apiche@aticortland.org.
Governor Fails Independent Living!

On April 1, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced the final NYS Budget for fiscal year 2018-19. The Governor ignored the needs of people with disabilities, even after months of intense negotiations and widespread support. Advocates were shocked when all their top priority budget items were again absent, including a $5 million increase for independent living centers, a $3 million increase for Access to Home, and funding to bring to life the Office for the Advocate.

Since January, Access To Independence and local advocates joined with advocates from across the state to meet with state leaders to garner support for disability issues, which included a small business tax credit to hire people with disabilities, a visitability tax credit to promote barrier-free home design features and an increase in funding for New York’s No Wrong Door (NY Connects) program.

While advocates secured support from the NYS Board of Regents, NYS Education Department and both houses of the NYS Legislature, including presentations at Legislative Budget Hearings and Press Conferences, the final budget excluded all items.

Despite these shortfalls, Access To Independence does recognize some wins in this year’s budget. First, the budget included level funding for the No Wrong Door Program despite the risk of a major cut. Second, the budget included a $2 million increase to State Transportation Operating Assistance for upstate public transit systems, such as Cortland Transit. While small, these budget items do have a positive impact on our community!

Access To Independence will continue to advocate for the needs of people with disabilities in the coming months. We will focus on a number of Legislative Priorities, including a ban on housing discrimination based on a person’s source of income, the visitability and small business tax credits and opposition of legalizing physician assisted suicide. We encourage Cortland County residents to join us in this advocacy, meet with state leaders, send emails and letters, make phone calls and remember to VOTE.
Home Modifications Improve Independence

Access to Independence offers home modifications that aim to improve a person’s independence and allow them to stay in their own home. The modifications may include a ramp, stair lift or a complete bathroom redesign. The goal of the modification is to make the living space usable and accessible by a person with a disability.

Janet, a Cortland County resident, owned her own home and hoped she would be able to stay there after her disability began to limit her ability to use her older bathroom. Janet secured funding through ATI’s Access To Home program to address these barriers.

First, ATI’s John Quinn, Jr. facilitated an assessment of Janet’s home to determine specific barriers to her independence. He developed a scope of work with drawings, secured Janet’s approval, and put the project out to bid. ATI secured four bids, awarded it to the lowest bidder and oversaw the installation of a wheelchair accessible walk-in bathtub, grab bars for the shower and around the toilet, and the widening of doors throughout.

Upon completion, Janet was not only able to more easily move throughout her home and to actually use her bathroom, she was happy and said she felt more independent than she had in a long time.
Transition Forum for Educators

Are you an educator in the Cortland County area who works with youth with disabilities ages 14 -24? Access To Independence is hosting a Transition Forum with the BOCES RSE-TASC and RVR-CES Transition Specialists on Tuesday, May 29, 2018 from 8:30 – 11:00 am.

Learn more about transition and work readiness services available for area youth. Take a tour of ATI’s offices and learn about how Independent Living Centers might help you! Educators can register on MyLearningPlan under “Transition Forum.” Eligible participants will receive CTLE credit for attending. For more information, contact Rachel Anderson, Community Education Coordinator, at randerson@aticortland.org or at 607-753-7363.

Getting to Know the ABLE Act

The ABLE Act allows certain people with disabilities and their families to save funds in a tax-advantaged savings and investment account. Similar to a 529 College Savings Account, anyone can contribute to an ABLE account belonging to a qualified person with a disability, including friends, family and the individuals themselves.

For the first time in the history of public policy, the ABLE Act recognizes the extra and significant costs of living with a disability and provides a savings tool to address them. Congress signed the ABLE Act into law on December 19, 2014, after nearly a decade of national, state and local advocacy efforts.

**What is an ABLE account?**

ABLE accounts are tax-advantaged investment accounts that help qualified individuals with disabilities and their families to save for disability-related expenses. The funds in the account grow -free, and owners do not have to factor distributions made for qualified disability-related expenses when determining eligibility for federally funded means-tested benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid.

**Why is there a need for ABLE accounts?**

Millions of individuals with disabilities and their families depend on a wide variety of public benefits for income, healthcare, and food and housing assistance. To qualify for many of these benefits (SSI, SNAP, Medicaid), a person must have limited financial resources. For example, eligible people must not have more than $2,000 in cash, savings, retirement, or other items of significant value when they apply for SSI benefits. ABLE accounts allow certain people with disabilities to save funds well over these limits without losing eligibility for benefits.

**Who is eligible to open an ABLE account?**

The ABLE Act limits eligibility to people who realized a disabling condition prior to turning 26. If a person meets this requirement and already receives SSI or SSDI benefits, they are automatically eligible for an ABLE account. If a person is not an SSI or SSDI recipient, but meets the age of disability onset requirement, they may still be eligible to open an ABLE account. To do so, a person must meet Social Security’s definition and criteria for significant functional limitations and receive a letter of certification from a licensed physician.

**What can ABLE account funds be used for?**

Account owners may only use ABLE account funds to purchase “qualified disability-related expenses.” A "qualified disability expense" is any expense related to the designated beneficiary’s blindness or disability that helps them to increase or maintain their health, independence and/or quality of life. Examples of eligible expenses include: education, housing, transportation, employment training and support, assistive technology, personal support services, healthcare expenses, financial management and administrative services, and other expenses.

For more information on ABLE accounts, contact Susan Lewis at 607-753-7363.
CORTLAND HOUSING AUTHORITY

The Cortland Housing Authority has 350 high quality apartments available in its senior/disabled and family developments throughout Cortland County. A single person could earn up to $38,400, and a family of five up to $59,200 and still qualify to live in one of our apartments.

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

Our large family apartments (3, 4 and 5 bedrooms) are located in the City of Cortland. We also two and three bedroom family apartments scattered throughout the county in Homer, Trumansburg, McGraw, Cincinnatus and the City of Cortland.

There are short waiting lists for apartments in most of our developments.

Call 607-753-1771 today for an application

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Cortland, New York 13045
26 North Main Street

6th POSTAL FLAP
CELEBRATING 28 YEARS!
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Anniversary Events

ADA Lunch & Learn:
Thursday, July 12: 11:00 am - 1:00 pm
History, Present Realities & Future Threats

ADA Celebration:
Thursday, July 26: 3:30 pm - 5:00 pm
Panel: Reflections on Impact of ADA
Ice Cream Social           Celebration Cake        Live Radio Broadcast

Please RSVP by July 6, 2018.
Call (607)-753-7363.

Accommodations available upon request.

26 North Main Street, Cortland, NY
(607) 753-7363
www.aticortland.org
2018 ADA Celebration Sponsorship Form
Celebrating 28 years of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)!
Access To Independence of Cortland County Inc.
26 North Main Street, Cortland, NY

Company Name: ____________________________________________________________
Contact Name: ____________________________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________________________________
Email: ___________________________________________________________________
Website: __________________________________________________________________
Telephone/Fax Number: ______________________________________________________

Business & Individual Sponsorship Levels

_____ $50 - Friend - mention in program

_____ $100 - Patron - above plus name on welcome poster

_____ $250 - Benefactor - above plus recognition in welcome poster

_____ $500 - Guardian - above plus logo on event banner

PRINTING DEADLINE: Friday, June 29, 2018

Please mail completed forms & payments to:
Access to Independence
26 North Main Street
Cortland, NY 13045
(607) 753-7363

Please make checks payable to: Access to Independence

*All donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.