



Access To Independence of Cortland County, Inc.

ACCESS NEWS

Winter 2019

Issue 59

The Spirit of Inclusion

Belonging is a basic human need. We want to contribute and feel like our contributions to our community matter. It is a great feeling to know you have made a difference in the lives of others. Belonging is universal, allows us to pull together for collaboration. Inclusion on the other hand is a behavior not a feeling. Inclusivity creates an environment in which any and all people are welcomed, respected and supported. In an inclusive environment, all people are given the same opportunities with the same resources regardless of their abilities.

At Access, we empower people with disabilities to fully participate in our community. We can't do this without the act of inclusion. We become inclusive by cultivating a culture of change. Lasting change happens when we embrace our differences and build an inclusive community.

Check out this issue to find out how we are promoting inclusion and change in our community!

WE ARE
BETTER
TOGETHER



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QUARTERLY QUOTE:

"Inclusion elevates all."

~Elaine Hall

New Journeys at Access

By: Aaron T. Baier, Executive Director



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. We believe this because all people enjoy these same freedoms. With improved accessibility and with increased thoughtfulness to inclusion, our community is now closer to making this belief a reality for all people with disabilities.

This year, Access To Independence is making moves to strengthen and grow its services to our community. We are hiring new staff to strengthen our business practices, provide new services to people with disabilities and to continue our long-standing focus on advocacy. We are working to streamline our services and make them more accessible to the people who need them. We are also building new relationships with community partners so that we can work together on projects with shared missions and community focus.

In February, Access To Independence began hiring new staff to realign programming and the funding that allows us to provide those programs. First, we welcome Sherry Lewis, our new Finance Manager! Sherry will oversee agency finances and provide essential support to human resources and grant writing. In the coming months, we will continue recruitment to fill community education, employment, advocacy, public relations and fundraising positions. These positions will increase our capacity for service delivery and build funding capacity for new and expanded services over the next year.

This year, ATI is updating some programs. First, we are beginning new pre-employment and work readiness services with Adult Career & Continuing Education Services (ACCES-VR). These services will help youth and adults learn self-advocacy and soft skills to prepare for employment. ATI is also rebranding its home modification to the Accessibility Modification Program (AMP). Now with two full-time staff, AMP will continue to provide accessibility modifications to people with disabilities in Central New York.

Access To Independence is also continuing to build new partnerships and community connections. In February, we completed a stair lift with the help of a generous donor and grant funding. We are continuing to build a Home Repair Collaborative with partner agencies. Throughout the year, we will focus on these partnerships in the new Community Connections section of this newsletter (see page 3).

This is an exciting time for Access To Independence. While we have already begun to make changes in our community engagement, we want to stress that our mission to empower people with disabilities is strong and remains our primary focus. We are grateful to our community partners, our donors, sponsors and funders for making the work we do possible. As we continue to work together, we make the future accessible for all people with disabilities and ensure that our community is inclusive!



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COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

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Inclusion and Diversity in the Cortland Community
By Stacee Sholar, former Public Relations & Fundraising Coordinator

Access To Independence is focused on continuing its education and advocacy for people with disabilities. We will improve how we listen to our community. We will make a greater effort to work together with existing and new partners. I had the opportunity to speak with Cortland Police Officer, Jesse Abbott, Cortland's Community Oriented Police Officer in a recent interview. Officer Abbott shared his thoughts about inclusion and diversity in Cortland.

Stacee: *What do inclusion and diversity mean to you and why are they important to the Cortland Community?*

Officer Abbott: I once read a very interesting analogy on diversity and inclusion. Think of diversity as being invited to a party and inclusion as being asked to dance. The Cortland community is made up of many diverse groups. It is the dance or inclusion that strengthens us as a whole.

Stacee: *What are some challenges we face regarding inclusion and diversity?*

Officer Abbott: I think one of the biggest challenges is getting people to step out of their comfort zone. Life becomes routine. The more you surround yourself with diverse groups, the more you will learn about what they have to offer to our community.

Stacee: *What ideas do you have to help overcome these challenges? How will this make our community stronger?*

Officer Abbott: I am extremely thankful to be the Community Oriented Police Officer for our City. It is my job to strengthen and build existing and new relationships between the community and the police department. I am happy to share that this June, the Police Department will be hosting our first Community Outreach Picnic. Our committee is comprised of law enforcement, and many individuals from several diverse groups, including Access To Independence. Details will be released soon but remember, in order to strengthen and build ties in our community, we first need to step out of our comfort zone.



Above: Officer Jesse Abbott

Journey to Independence

By Sue Lewis, Independent Living Coordinator



Access has been working with a very motivated young man (*I will call him Jim*) who joined the Peer Mentoring Program in April of 2012. He was still in high school, and he felt he needed some help preparing for life after high school. Jim is legally blind and knew that he would be facing some obstacles once he graduated. He realized that getting assistance from people who have experienced some of the same issues he has would be helpful in his future planning. Jim was able to work with a Peer Mentor who was legally blind who had graduated college and was working full time. Jim was able to gain real life experience by job shadowing through the Peer Mentoring Program. Jim was also able to meet and talk with his mentor on a regular basis to help him through some of the obstacles he would be facing. Jim secured an internship with us provided by the New York State Commission for the Blind.

During his internship, he was introduced to the Youth Power Program and joined the group. With each of these experiences, he gained more confidence in his own abilities and decided to enroll in college to improve his future employment opportunities.

Jim decided to work after classes and in the summer.

Jim was receiving SSI, but felt that he could use the real-life experience and the extra income that employment offered him. He started working and was reporting his extra income to Social Security as he was instructed. He ran into some problems with the way Social Security was counting that earned income and ended up with an overpayment. Jim came to me as a Certified Work Incentive Benefits Counselor to see if I could help. After researching his case, I realized that Social Security was not using the Student Earned Income Exclusion program to reduce his monthly earned income. Social Security has a work incentive that is used to reduce earned income for a student who is regularly attending school, college, or University. I was able to go back 2 years and prove to Social Security that Jim was not overpaid if they used the correct calculations. Jim's overpayment was overturned and he was able to continue receiving his SSI payment each month to help with expenses.



By using all the programs at Access To Independence that are available to him, Jim has been able to overcome obstacles that he faced to his journey to becoming an independent, self-sufficient adult. We are very proud of Jim for his accomplishments and appreciate the opportunity to be a resource to assist him in achieving his goals.



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Community is for Everyone

By Rachel Anderson, Accessibility Modification Coordinator



What is community? A dictionary definition of community is “a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.” To put it simply, community is a sense of belonging and inclusion. All people want to be able to live their lives and make their own choices from the smallest child to older adults. One of the ways to become a more inclusive community is to consider concepts of universal design.

Universal design is an intentional process of making everything accessible – both for people with disabilities and for people without disabilities. Universal design is most often used to help people age-in-place. Aging in place means that people try to remain in their own home for as long as possible before going into a nursing home or other institutional setting. One example of universal design is using lever door handles instead of door knobs. Lever door handles are useful for people of all ages and abilities.

For adults, if you are carrying groceries into the house, it is easier to use your elbow to open a lever door than it is to try to “free up a hand” to turn a door knob. For children who may need to clean their hands due to paint, mud, or whatever else they have been playing in, it is easier to open a levered door than it is to try to turn a doorknob that is now slippery and stained by paint from hands. For older adults with arthritis or other functional needs, it is easier to push down on a lever than it is to twist a doorknob.

Making small changes such as lever door handles are helpful to make everyone feel included no matter what age or ability. Small changes make a big difference. We make our community better by including everyone.

Bigger changes that can be made in our community include initiatives such as visitability. Visitability means that all of your friends are able to visit you in your home. Any one who wants to visit you can enter your home, pass through doorways, and enter a bathroom to use a toilet.

Visitability means making homes accessible for people who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices to move about. Not only does this make it easier for people to visit you who use a wheelchair, but it is easier for anyone trying to navigate a baby stroller. Visitability is a bigger change to make everyone in our community feel included.

For those bigger changes, Access To Independence offers accessibility modification services. For more information, you can contact us at 607-753-7363.



Above: An example of a recent accessibility modification. Installation of a wheelchair lift for Daniel Roundtree. Made possible through the help of a private donor and with dedicated staff at Access To Independence.

Mr. Roundtree can now safely leave his home for basic necessities such as groceries and doctor's appointments.



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Please Welcome Sherry Lewis!



Sherry serves as Finance Manager and brings a strong background in accounting and office management.

We are excited to welcome Sherry to the Independent Living Movement and to the our Community!

Let's Bowl!

Access To Independence



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Every Wednesday at 10:00 am

Taskforce to Increase Disability Employment

March 25, 2019 at 10:00 am

Coloring Club

March 12, 2019 at 2:00 pm

Emergency Preparedness Core Advisory Group

May 16, 2019 at 11:00 am

CNY Disability Support Group

March 13, 2019 at 4:00 pm

Cortland County Housing Consortium

May 28, 2019 at 8:00 am

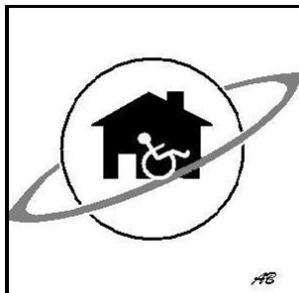
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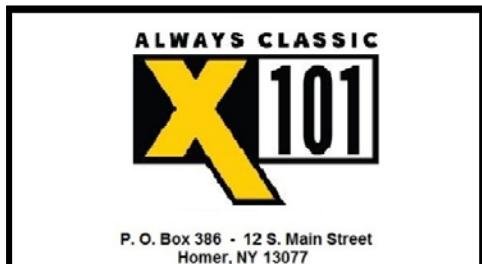
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