

The Future is  
Accessible  
for All People  
with Disabilities

# ACCESS NEWS

Spring 2021

Issue 64



As our little corner of the world gears up for spring, hope is rising along with the temperatures.

Here at ATI, we've been celebrating as more and more friends, family, colleagues and community members receive their first and second COVID-19 vaccinations.

Since we're one step closer to seeing you all in person again, we've included a special survey with this edition to hear what you'd like to see from us post-COVID!

*Left: Snowdrop blossoms rise from the snowy ground.*

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## QUARTERLY QUOTE

*"With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts."*

- Eleanor Roosevelt

# The Future is Accessible and Flexible: What Lies Ahead For ATI



Dear Friends,

While the pandemic has slowed many areas of work and left people feeling isolated, it has not stopped people with disabilities from dreaming of a more accessible and flexible future. At Access to Independence, we are hopeful for a future where people with disabilities can continue their pursuit of independent living... even if it means doing things a little bit differently.

As an employer, the pandemic has challenged Access to Independence to explore new ways of doing business. We have enabled staff to work remotely, meet consumers in new virtual settings and even perform outreach online. However, virtual settings have proven to be inaccessible for many people without broadband internet and who do not have necessary access to transportation. These are the first areas we look forward to working on in a post-pandemic world.

Access to Independence has had to slow the pace at which we modify people's homes due to slow funding and due to slowdowns in manufacturing and supply chains. We have continued to provide these essential modifications throughout the pandemic, because two or three accessible homes is better than none. This is the second area that we will look forward to improving in our post-pandemic world.

One of the most requested and widely missed aspects of Access to Independence's services are our social events. We miss seeing people at our Craft Club, our movie nights, our ADA Picnics and at other in-person events. Social interactions are an important and beloved part of what we do for people with disabilities and our community. This is the third area that we are looking forward to in our post-pandemic world.

Access to Independence is already looking at these three areas – outreach and education, home modifications, and social events – and planning to make them a reality as soon as it is allowable. At the same time, we will not let go of the valuable lessons and technologies we have gained during the pandemic. We will continue to support a partially remote workforce and virtual events. However, we will also provide a location for people to participate who may not have had the opportunity before. We are looking into internet access point services and other ways to advocate for improved broadband access in our community.

Access to Independence is seeking ways to enhance and grow our Accessibility Modification Program so that we can provide more people with disabilities the ramps, bathrooms, and other adaptive technology that they need to be independent. We are anxious to assist the people that have continued to seek our services throughout the pandemic but who we have had to add to our waiting list. The demand for home modifications will not stop until universally designed homes become the norm in our community. We will look forward to making strides to this goal in the coming year and beyond.

Finally, we all are feeling the pain of not seeing our friends and families around the community. All of our staff and consumers continue to tell us what they want to do and ask for events that they are craving. We want our Sunday Strikers bowling league, our weekly craft classes, and other regularly occurring events to come back to our office and locations around the community. In our post-pandemic world, we look forward to bringing back a BIG Americans with Disabilities Act Picnic and hosting our first Universal 5.5K Race. While we don't know when, we are not giving up on making these events happen for all of us who cannot wait to gather with our friends and loved ones.

The pandemic makes us feel isolated, but Access to Independence wants to share a message of hope that we are here, we are not going away, and we are excited for a future that is accessible and flexible. We want all people with disabilities to be included and have the opportunity to participate in a community that continues to grow and learn together.

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



## VITA Tax Services Update for 2021

Was your 2019 income less than \$57,000? Do you qualify for the Earned Income Credit? If you meet either of these qualifications, IRS Certified tax preparers in the VITA program will prepare your taxes for free with a little help from Access to Independence!

### NEW FOR 2021: Online virtual tax preparation.

- Go to [getyourrefund.org/Cortland](http://getyourrefund.org/Cortland) and complete the questionnaire.
- Upload documents by taking pictures with your phone. Your volunteer preparer and reviewer will contact you with any follow-up questions.
- Once your completed return has been reviewed, you will be asked to take a look and be able to ask any questions you'd like. Once you have approved your return, VITA will e-file it for free.
- VITA can load your refund onto a prepaid debit card provided by a non-profit.

### NOT COMFORTABLE WORKING ONLINE? VITA is still doing drop-off services at ATI!

- Stop in to Access to Independence Monday-Friday from 8AM-4PM to pick up a packet
- Fill out the forms at home to the best of your ability
- Every Saturday until 4/10, Raimona will be in the parking lot across the street from ATI's office at 26 N Main Street to collect your packets. Stop by starting at 10:00 AM!

### DON'T FORGET TO BRING:

- Your Photo ID
- Social Security cards or statements for everyone on your return
- All W-2 forms from all employers throughout the year
- Last year's taxes (if available)
- Information about tuition or student loan interest paid
- If you paid for child care: totals, provider tax identification number, name and address
- Any tax statements from retirement accounts or investment accounts
- Account numbers for direct deposit of your tax return

### NEED MORE SUPPORT?

- Call 211 and let them know that you need to meet in person to complete your taxes. Raimona will reach out to set up an appointment.
- Please be patient when scheduling in-person appointments—many VITA host sites are limiting use of their space due to COVID-19 restrictions.

***For more information about the VITA Tax Services program,  
call 211 or visit [cortlandfreetaxes.org](http://cortlandfreetaxes.org).***



## **Accessibility Modification Spotlight**

ATI's Design Specialist, John Quinn, has been working on one Environmental Modification (E-Mod) project in particular since 2017. Because of its complexity, we feel it needs to be spotlighted!

This one project was in addition to the average 60 E-Mod projects the Accessibility Modification Program has on its caseload each year. ATI's Accessibility Modification Program is akin to a Construction Services Department where we design, oversee and manage construction projects for peoples with disabilities.

Sent to Access To Independence by Governor Cuomo's Central Office, this project was the largest accessibility modification project to go through New York State's Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) to date.

The project, in brief, was to rectify an E-Mod that was poorly designed and poorly built back in 2014. Working with recommendations from the New York State Architect of Capital Projects, John designed a resolution that rectified the numerous issues. His design satisfied additional complexities of having to meet National, State, Local Building Codes, ADA Requirements, 2015 International Codes, 2016 Uniform Supplement, 2016 Supplement to the NYS Energy Conservation Codes.

John's design easily received a New York State Professional Engineers Stamp proving that the design meets and exceeds the aforementioned criteria and it was also approved by Governor Cuomo's Central Office to proceed forward.

John's extensive background in the Building Trades combined with the ability to use CAD programs (Computer Aided Design) allowed him to generate the detailed blueprints and specifications that rigidly adhere and guide the contractor on what and how to substantially complete the project per the plans and the Scope Of Work. The Scope Of Work are the blueprints and specifications written out and put into words.

Additionally, ATI's E-Mod Department oversaw and managed all phases of the project as we normally do with the assistance of Rachel Anderson, our Accessibility Modification Coordinator. Rachel effectuates the bureaucratic gyrations (paperwork and the processes) with the Waiver funding sources and this project in particular had more than normal due to it being the biggest project that has been done by OPWDD.

Just over one year ago, the project came to fruition and was completed, inspected and signed-off on by the local code officer, ATI, OPWDD and the home owner. Great work, John!

***For more information about the Accessibility Modification Program,  
call ATI at 607-753-7363.***

# Changes in Social Security Work Incentives for 2021

By Susan Lewis, Independent Living Coordinator

Every year, Social Security changes the work incentive earned income limits for people with disabilities receiving SSDI and who are working or who would like to go back to work. Here are the new numbers for 2021.

## Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)

Trial Work Period (TWP) = \$940

Every person on SSDI is entitled to a nine month TWP. During this nine month period, you can have unlimited earnings. But for each month you earn over \$940, you use 1 TWP. Once you have used all 9 of the TWPs, you will lose the ability to receive an SSDI check if your monthly income is over the SGA limit.

Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) = \$1310

For SSDI, the new Substantial Gainful Activity (the amount of money you can earn per month without affecting your SSDI payment) has increased to \$1310 per month. This means that you can go to work and earn up to \$1310 per month without losing your SSDI payment. If you earn over the SGA for more than 9 months, you will lose the eligibility to receive an SSDI check.

Extended Period of Eligibility (EPE):

If you work and earn over SGA for more than 9 months, you will not be eligible for an SSDI check. For 36 months after you stop receiving an SSDI check, you can contact Social Security any time your earned income is under SGA and you will receive an SSDI check for that month.

Expedited Reinstatement:

If you lost your disability status because of earned income, you can request that your check and your disability status are reinstated without a new application for 5 years after you stopped receiving an SSDI check. Social Security will reinstate your SSDI check provisionally for a period of 6 months while your case is being evaluated.

***If you have any questions about the SSDI work incentives for 2021, reach out to Sue at 607-753-7363.***





# EVERYTHING ACCESS!

Have you heard about our new COVID-19 Prevention kits? Thanks to our friends at the Cortland County Health Department, ATI was gifted four boxes filled with PPE and prevention supplies to distribute to community mem-

- 1 digital oral thermometer
- 1 spray bottle of hand sanitizer
- 4 disposable masks (2 adult, 2 youth)
- Alcohol wipes
- 1 pack of Lysol wipes
- Helpful handouts for mask use, flu prevention, vaccine info and more

## ADVOCACY UPDATES

Every January, the Governor releases his proposed Executive Budget for New York State. The New York State Legislature, which is made up of two branches—the Senate and the Assembly—then has the next few months to pour over the budget and propose any necessary changes before the final budget is approved on April 1. During this time, individual legislators take meetings with people who live in their districts to listen to their concerns and learn about the budget priorities of the people they represent. This is where ATI comes in, and where you can, too!

Our statewide network's biggest priorities for this year include increasing base funding for Independent Living, legislating #FairPay4HomeCare, protecting Medicaid services, and increasing funding for the Access To Home program.

**To keep up with ATI's advocacy efforts, join our Education Alerts list by emailing Ally at [amccabe@aticortland.org](mailto:amccabe@aticortland.org).**



*Above: Photo of two gloved hands holding a globe that is wearing a mask over a grey background. One glove is purple and the other is pink.*



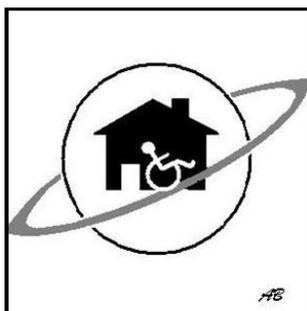
Above: Liz Nichols (Cortland County Health Department) and Aaron Baier (ATI) pose with new COVID-19 Prevention kits in ATI's Community Room.

Below: Photo of a hand-painted orange rock that reads STAY SAFE, BE KIND with white stars.



	<p><b>Cortland County Area Agency on Aging</b> <i>Your one stop connection to senior services</i></p>	
	<p>60 Central Avenue, Cortland, NY 13045 607-753-5060 • Fax: 607-758-5528 <a href="http://www.cortland-co.org/ofa">www.cortland-co.org/ofa</a> Email: <a href="mailto:cmeta@cortland.org">cmeta@cortland.org</a></p>	
<p><b>Offering Assistance in the following areas:</b> Medicare &amp; Health Insurance • Long Term Care Services Caregivers Support • Home Energy Programs Volunteer Opportunities • Home Delivered Meals Senior Centers &amp; Other Programs</p>		
		 

**Want to Volunteer?**  
📞  
**Call Us Today!**  
☎️  
**(607) 753-7363**



**Keep up with Everything Access!**

 **@CortlandATI**

 **@AccessToIndependence**

 **@Access\_Cortland**

# Access To Independence is facilitating a virtual COVID-19 Support Group!

Second Wednesday of every month at 4PM



- **FREE** to join
- **Accessed via Zoom or by phone**
- **A safe space to talk with others**

**WANT TO JOIN US?**

Call ATI at (607) 753-7363  
or email [info@aticortland.org](mailto:info@aticortland.org)

# The Future is Accessible!

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Access To  
Independence  
OF CORTLAND COUNTY, INC.  
26 North Main Street  
Cortland, New York 13045

PRESORTED STANDARD MAIL  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
CORTLAND, NY  
PERMIT NO. 49

# POST-PANDEMIC ACTIVITIES SURVEY

Community voices are important.  
ATI wants to hear yours!

*ATI is distributing this survey to gather community input surrounding future activities and events. It is available in multiple formats and there are many ways to participate.*

## **SURVEY QUESTIONS:**

1. What has been your biggest challenge during the pandemic?
2. What are you most looking forward to when the pandemic is over?
3. What type of content would you like to see in ATI's newsletter? Topics, photos, articles, games, etc.
4. What activities, social events, or workshops would you like to see ATI offer when it is safe to do so?
5. What are the best ways we can share information with you? Newsletter, Facebook, virtual workshops, in-person events, flyers, Twitter, Instagram, snail mail... let us know what methods work best for you!

## **WAYS TO RESPOND**

**ONLINE:** Take the survey at [surveymonkey.com/r/FDW63RJ](https://surveymonkey.com/r/FDW63RJ)

**ON PAPER:** Drop off or mail the above survey to our office at 26 N Main Street, Cortland, NY 13045. We are open 8-4 Monday through Friday.

**BY EMAIL:** Scan or send typed responses to [info@aticortland.org](mailto:info@aticortland.org).

**BY FAX:** Fax completed surveys to 607-756-4884.

**HAVE MORE TO SAY? FLIP THIS PAGE OVER!**



# COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP

Thursday, May 27, 2021 | 12:00–1:00 PM

Access To Independence & online via Zoom  
26 N Main Street, Cortland, NY 13045

*This hybrid workshop will be available online, by phone, and in person. Information gathered will be used to determine future agency activities and events. Limited seats available and all in-person attendees must adhere to COVID-19 regulations.*

Automatic captioning will be provided via Zoom.  
Kindly contact ATI for any additional accommodations.

**TO REQUEST AN IN-PERSON SPOT OR RECEIVE ZOOM INFO,  
PLEASE RSVP BY THURSDAY, MAY 20.**

Phone: 607-753-7363  
Email: [info@ATICortland.org](mailto:info@ATICortland.org)



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