



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

Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.

ACCESS NEWS

Winter 2009 NUMBER XIX

ATI Mission, Vision & Values

The ATI Board of Directors adopted new mission, vision and values statements at its December 2008 meeting. "ATI's core values and purpose in the community remain unchanged in that we will continue to pursue and promote equality and opportunity for all persons with disabilities," said Mary E. Ewing, ATI's Executive Director.

ATI Mission Statement:

ATI empowers people with disabilities to lead independent lives in their community and works to open doors in the community to full participation and access for all.

ATI Vision Statement:

ATI will lead the community towards an all-inclusive future where discrimination and physical barriers no longer exist.

ATI Values Statement:

ATI believes that all people with disabilities should be able to enjoy the same opportunities as all other people, nothing more, nothing less. ATI believes that all people with disabilities have the right to: control their own lives, make their own decisions and direct their own affairs; have a choice in services, transportation, housing, education and employment; participate fully in the social, economic and political life in their communities; and contribute their unique talents and abilities as respected members of their community.

Breaking Ground: ATI Readies to Launch New Services

Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc. (ATI) has been "breaking ground" each year since its 1998 incorporation as the area's only independent living center. 2009 will be no different. ATI is forging ahead with several new programs that aim to increase independence for people with disabilities.

This year, ATI will begin providing a variety of services through New York's Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) Medicaid Waiver program. More specifically, ATI staff will offer independent living skills training, environmental modifications and peer mentoring services to individuals that seek diversion or transition from a nursing home to the community.

ATI will also begin providing a variety of services through New York's Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Medicaid Waiver program. More specifically, ATI staff will offer independent living skills training and environmental modifications services to individuals that experience a TBI and who require the services in order to transition from recovery back into the community.

ATI will begin offering several new services through New York's Office of Vocational and Education Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID), including Community Information Sessions for new VESID consumers, benefits advisement and coaching supports.

ATI is expanding its Accessibility Construction Services programs. ATI was recently awarded \$150,000 from the New York State Developmental Disabilities Service Office (DDSO) to provide environmental home modifications and adaptive technology to qualified individuals in Cortland County. ATI has also been awarded \$300,000 by the Department of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) to provide additional home modifications through its *Access to Home* program. ATI offers its expert accessibility construction services to all individuals, even those that do not meet the stringent financial requirements of various state programs.

Read about ATI's new work readiness and youth transition services on page 4.

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ATI Promotes Disability Agenda at Albany Legislative Day

On January 26, an Access to Independence (ATI) delegation joined more than 300 disability advocates from across the state in the Well of the Legislative Office Building to advocate for action on legislation that would improve the quality of life and safeguard the civil rights of New Yorkers with disabilities. ATI was one of 19 independent living centers from across the state to participate in the New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL)-sponsored activities that aimed to educate state leaders on pressing disability issues heading into this year's legislative session.

ATI's delegation to Albany included Mary E. Ewing, Executive Director; Chad W. Underwood, Systems Advocate; Susan Lewis, Independent Living Advocate; Aaron T. Baier, Youth Transition / Work Readiness Specialist; and Karen Sanford, Program Assistant.



Above: ATI staff met with Senator James Seward on Monday, January 26, to discuss pressing disability issues in Cortland County. The group also met with Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton, Assemblyman Brian Kolb and Assemblyman Gary Finch.

NYAIL Announces 2009 Disability Public Policy Priority Agenda

The New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL) has announced its 2009 Public Policy and Budget Priorities. These are priority policy and budget areas ATI will dedicate its efforts on throughout the year. For additional information on any of the priorities and their related pending legislation, please contact Chad W. Underwood by email at: cwunderwood@aticortland.org, or by phone at: 607-753-7363.

HOUSING

- Incorporate the housing provisions of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act into state law. *A.6033, A.7138 and S.3956a of 2007-08*
- Establish standards for "visitability" in State law to require all newly constructed single-family houses, townhouses and ground-floor units of duplexes and triplexes built with public funds to be made accessible. *A.6837a of 2007-08*

CIVIL RIGHTS

- Incorporate Title II of ADA into NYS Human Rights Law. *A.2571 and A.6303 of 2007-08*
- Waive the State's sovereign immunity to claims under the ADA and Section 504. *A.7653 and S.6698 of 2007-08*

EDUCATION

- Establish a definition and standard for physical restraint in public schools. Require documentation by the school and written notification to the parent when restraint is used. *A.1862 of 2008*

MENTAL HEALTH

- Amend state Social Services Law Section 384-b to eliminate subdivisions (4)(c) and (6)(a-e), which permit termination of parental rights on the basis of mental illness or mental retardation.

ELECTION REFORM

- Eliminate provisions in Section 4-104 (1-a) of the NYS Election Law allowing waiver of polling place accessibility requirements. Require polling places to comply with ADA accessibility guidelines and ensure access surveys are conducted at all polling places. Require election workers to receive mandatory training in disability etiquette and use of Ballot Marking Devices (BMD). *S.6311 of 2007-08*

TRANSPORTATION

- Require transportation service providers, such as taxis, limousines and shuttle services, to purchase accessible vehicles or otherwise ensure that they have the capacity to serve people with disabilities. *A.8520 of 2007-08*

MOST INTEGRATED SETTING

- Ensure that all individuals with disabilities have the right to choose and receive services in the most integrated setting. Establish a presumption that community-based services are more appropriate than institutional or segregated settings. Require all State agencies to promote such integration through a plan and annual report. *A.7277 of 2007-08*

Independent Living Centers Save NY \$110 Million Each Year

According to the Rochester, NY-based Center for Governmental Research, Inc. (CGR), Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc. (ATI) and the state's other 39 independent living centers (ILCs), contribute a net savings to the State of \$110 million each year as a result of their services and the avoided institutionalized care for people with disabilities. In December 2008, the CGR released its study, entitled *Independent Living in New York State: A Needs Assessment*. That study further noted that "ILCs conservatively save New York taxpayers more than \$9 in deinstitutionalization costs for every state dollar invested in their operations."

Since 2004, ATI has transitioned or diverted 17 people from institutionalization for a total direct savings to the state of \$927,716, and an indirect savings of more than \$2 million compounded over the years. "And that's just the tip of the iceberg," said Mary E. Ewing, the agency's Executive Director, noting the myriad other services her staff provide to consumers, people with disabilities, and the community as a whole.

Ms. Ewing said that ATI empowers people to lead independent lives in their community and strives to open doors to full participation and access by all. "It's difficult to put a value on those services," said Ms. Ewing, noting that in 2008, ATI's Peer Mentoring Program had helped six individuals gain and maintain community employment and that its Architectural Barrier programs had facilitated more than 25 home modification projects. She said that "all people should have the right to control their own lives,

make their own decisions and to participate fully in society."

ATI's other services include information and referral, peer counseling, independent living skills training, benefits advisement, health and wellness programs, community outreach and education, equipment loans, computer lab access and training, work readiness training, and youth transition services. ATI also coordinates a network of 60 local volunteer disability advocates to facilitate local, state and national advocacy on disability issues.

Ms. Ewing said that Access to Independence is Cortland County's foremost disability resource, noting that eight out of its nine staff members are persons with disabilities. "All people with disabilities should have nothing more, nothing less than equal opportunity."

According to the CGR study, "Independent Living Centers are mission-driven, non-profit agencies that have demonstrated their ability to help position people with disabilities to become more economically self-sufficient and independent in their daily lives. They have been effective advocates in the lives of individual persons with disabilities and their family members, and have also advocated effectively for systemic changes in statewide policies, legislation and regulations."

In addition to ATI, there are two other ILCs in the Central New York area: the Auburn-based Options For Independence, Inc. (OFI), and the Syracuse-based, ARISE, Inc. Other near-by ILC's include the Ithaca-based Finger Lakes Independence Center, Inc. (FLIC), and the Binghamton-based Southern Tier Independence Center (STIC).

Needs Assessment: Gaps Exist

According to the Rochester, NY-based Center for Governmental Research, Inc. (CGR), there are significant gaps in services and underserved geographic areas across the state for people with disabilities. According to the study, the five foremost services needed by consumers to live independently that were not being offered include: transportation and mobility services, medical services, housing services, employment services, and benefits assistance.

In December 2008, the CGR released its study, entitled *Independent Living in New York State: A Needs Assessment*. The Albany-based New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL) contracted with the CGR to conduct a needs assessment to determine service gaps and barriers to services for people with disabilities.

The report's other key findings include:

- People with disabilities in rural areas (including Eastern Cortland County) are particularly vulnerable in terms of access to disability services (lack of accessible public transportation).
- Disability services are spread throughout many State agencies and there is no unified voice. Disability services are not user-friendly.
- Persons with disabilities under the age of 22 are highly underserved or have needs that are not being met.
- Persons with sensory impairments are disproportionately underserved or have needs that are not being met.
- Persons with disabilities are poorly represented in the development and/or restructuring of systems of services and supports to meet their needs in the most integrated settings possible.

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Youth Transition News

Access to Independence (ATI) continues to develop its Youth Transition Program on several fronts. First, ATI continues to collaborate with the Cortland Jr. / Sr. High School on its Model Transition Program (MTP). Staff have participated in several MTP outreaches and trainings which aim to teach students, their parents, and staff about the tools and skills needed to transition successfully.

ATI is in the process of developing a series of workshops that will be held on April 7 for students and parents at CHS. Those workshops will promote techniques for students to learn to become better self-advocates. The event will feature representatives from New York's Youth Power! Group (Stephanie Orlando, Director, and Dally Sanchez, Coordinator).

"It's important for students to have the tools they need during transition," said Stephanie Orlando of Youth Power!. "It's also important for parents to play an active role in their student's transition."

For the second consecutive year, ATI is teaming up with the Cortland Area Communities That Care (CACTC) to co-sponsor its 2009 Youth Conference. The conference, themed *Celebrating Diversity*, is scheduled for Sat., March 14th at the Cortland Ramada Inn. Interested youth (in grades 6-12) may contact Kristin Case at 756-8970.

In other news, ATI is continuing to raise funds for its Stardust Challenge Campaign. ATI is working to raise \$20,000 to support its developing youth programs. The Stardust Foundation of CNY has agreed to match those funds upon the campaign's success. For information on how you can contribute, contact ATI at 753-7363.

ATI Offers Expanded Work Readiness Services

Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc. (ATI) is proud to announce expanded programming for its work readiness services. ATI aims to provide individuals with one-on-one training to improve independent living, work readiness and self-advocacy skills.

ATI now offers weekly Computer Classes geared toward individuals seeking employment or who need to improve their work readiness skills. Classes are Thursdays from 2:00 - 3:00 pm. Learn the basics of computer operation, setup an email account, search for jobs online, or learn to develop your own cover letter or resume. Contact Aaron Baier at 753-7363 to reserve your spot!

ATI facilitates regular job shadowing experiences for interested individuals. Job shadowing gives participants an opportunity to try new career experiences. Participating businesses have included: Edgewart Farms, Odyssey Networks, Tops, Cortland SPCA, Country Inns & Suites, Intertek, and Shaw & Boehler Florist.

ATI continues to offer workshops for those seeking employment and those who need to improve their work readiness skills. Workshops are held every Thursday at ATI from 3:00 - 4:00 pm.

ATI's Peer Mentoring Program continues to offer consumers an opportunity to work with peers towards reaching their employment goals. In addition to meeting regularly with a mentor, participants may attend monthly Peer Support Groups, which are held on the last Thursday of each month from 3:00 - 4:00 pm. If you are looking to secure employment and would benefit from a mentor's guidance and support, then this program is for you.

ATI is continually seeking qualified mentors to help others gain and maintain employment. If you are an individual with a disability and are successfully employed, you may have what it takes to make a difference. ATI offers monthly Mentor Training workshops. For more information on how you can become a mentor, contact Aaron Baier at 753-7363.

Randall School Disability Awareness Workshops

On November 25, 2008, ATI staff facilitated a morning program and six workshops for Randall School's 300 students. The workshops aimed to promote disability awareness. The workshops were made possible through a grant from the Homer-based, Ralph R. Wilkins Foundation.

Right: Fran Pizzola and Aaron Baier speak with students at Randall school.



2009 CACTC Youth Conference (Open to youth in grades 6 - 12)

Saturday, March 14 - 2:00 to 8:00 pm

Ramada Inn, Cortland, NY

Call Kristin Case at 753-3021 to reserve your spot now!

“With Help from a Friend, You Can Reach the Stars!”

The Access to Independence (ATI) Peer Mentoring Program (PMP) aims to help individuals with disabilities develop work readiness skills and to secure community employment. The program offers a flexible curriculum that allows individuals to work towards their goals at different paces.

One participant, Rob, joined the PMP in 2006 as part of his rehabilitation plan at Cortland Re-Entry Program. Rob’s traumatic brain injury and history of substance abuse left him facing barriers of anxiety, depression, poor memory, and insecurity of his abilities. Rob and his case workers felt that peer supports and work readiness education would benefit him as he worked to achieve his goals. Despite the barriers Rob faced, he had a strong self-determination to better his abilities and his future.

Over the past two years, Rob has actively participated in PMP workshops, support groups, and job shadowing experiences. When asked about the benefits of the PMP, Rob said, “Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance, the five P’s”. Though Rob may not use every skill he learns immediately, he continues to hone those skills knowing that one day, he will be ready to attack the goals he sets for himself.



In August 2007, Rob began volunteering at a nursing facility as a Recreation Assistant. At that time, Rob’s duties included socializing with residents, taking them for walks, and supervising while they take medications. This was a major milestone for Rob; he had to balance his time for programs and volunteering. With help from his peer supports, Rob learned firsthand how to deal with everyday stress that he encountered.

“I learned to implement healthy coping techniques to address my increasingly hectic schedule.” These coping techniques and the support of his peers has helped Rob feel more comfortable with new responsibilities. Rob and his mentor practiced anxiety relief techniques in large groups to help him adapt in new or different environments. Rob loves the work he does while volunteering and has even taken on more hours.

Today, Rob continues to volunteer, attend PMP events, and will soon transition out of the Cortland Re-Entry Program. After his transition, Rob’s first tasks will be to use his independent living skills and resources to secure a place to live, then seek VESID assistance to complete higher education. Rob says that he will stay in touch with his mentor and use his peer support network to help ensure his successful transition.

Rob’s future employment goals are to be a substance abuse counselor and to use his own experiences to help others stay on the right track. Rob admits that he could not have accomplished what he has without peer support and is grateful for the assistance.

Good Luck Rob!

Left: Rob Vega, PMP participant.

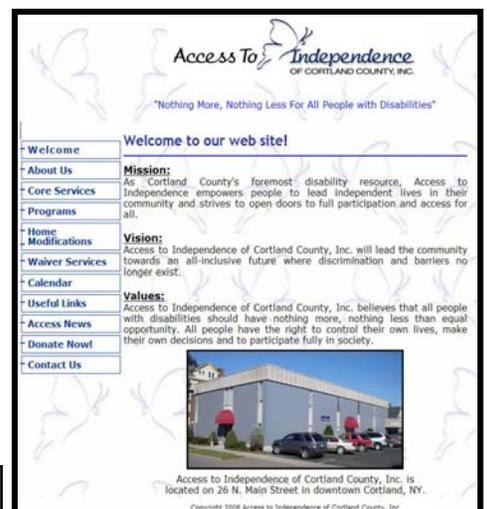
WWW.ATICORTLAND.ORG

Have you visited ATI’s web site recently? If so, you may have noticed some pretty significant changes. Last year, Nick Pizzola of Plan First Technologies, Inc., donated countless hours of labor and expertise to revamp ATI’s site to make it more user-friendly. All of ATI’s programs and services are now just a click away!

In addition to the new look, you may notice a number of new pages. ATI’s web site now offers pages dedicated to each of its programs, including its various Architectural Barrier programs (Home Modifications) and its anticipated Medicaid (Waiver Services). Even more, there are links on every page that allow you to email staff with specific questions.

With the new pages you will find innovative features to make your visit to the web site more convenient. The new *Calendar* page will keep you up-to-date on monthly events and groups, while the *Access News* page gives you access to all agency newsletters and a new *Classifieds* page.

Are you interested in making a contribution to ATI? Through the *Donate Now!* link, you can make a contribution online or download a form to mail in your donation.



NY Prescription Saver Card Program: Frequently Asked Questions

Beginning in April, the new NY Prescription Saver Card Program will be operational.

1. Who is eligible for the NY Prescription Saver Card? The new discount card is for NY residents aged 50-64, with a Social Security disability, an annual household income up to \$35,000 for singles and up to \$50,000 for married couples and who are NOT receiving Medicaid benefits.

2. Is there an enrollment or application fee? There are no fees to join the NY Prescription Saver Card program.

3. What drugs are covered? Are diabetic supplies included? The discount card covers the same drugs that are covered by the Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) program. This includes all prescription drugs, insulin and insulin syringes/needles. (Test strips and glucose monitors are not covered.)

4. Can the NY Prescription Saver Card be used with other drug coverage or discount cards? No. The member can have other drug discount cards or coverage along with the NY Prescription Saver Card, but only one card may be used for each purchase.

5. Can individuals on Medicaid use the NY Prescription Saver Card? No. Medicaid recipients are not eligible because New York's Medicaid program provides more comprehensive coverage of prescriptions and some over-the-counter medications.

6. If an individual has Medicare Part D or other insurance, can they use the new card for drugs

not covered by the plan? How about for deductibles and the "doughnut hole"? If the member is under age 65 and has Medicare Part D, they may use the discount card instead of their Part D plan, but they cannot use the discount card and another insurance card for the same purchase.

If the member has Medicare Part D and is in their deductible or "doughnut hole," they can use the NY Prescription Saver Card instead of their Part D card to get the discount on their purchases. According to Medicare, they can get credit for these purchases toward their deductible or out-of-pocket limit by sending in the paper receipt to their Part D plan; the pharmacy cannot bill the plan directly.

7. Can EPIC enrollees use the NY Prescription Saver Card while they are in the deductible or "doughnut hole" status, or for drugs that are not on their Medicare Part D plan formulary? EPIC enrollees will not be eligible for the NY Prescription Saver Card. The card is for those under 65 or who have a disability, while EPIC is for those 65 and older.

8. Can the NY Prescription Saver Card be used to help pay for Medicaid spend down purchases? No. If an individual is enrolled in Medicaid, even for spend down, they are not eligible for the discount card.

9. Can pharmacists enroll eligible individuals into the program? Applications may be taken over the phone, as well as by mail and via an electronic website. Pharmacists are encouraged to assist customers to complete an application if possible.

ATI's **Worksite Wellness** group meets every Wednesday from 3:00 - 4:00 pm to work on goals to become healthy. Participants take turns presenting on topics and sharing healthy snacks.

ARTHRITIS SUPPORT GROUP WINTER/SPRING PROGRAM

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3/24/09

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4/28/09

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5/12/09

Foods, Presented by Pam Schepis, RD

The Arthritis Exercise Group meets on Wednesdays from 2:00 - 3:00 pm.

Free Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Available

Cortland County's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) is now available to help taxpayers file their returns. The program is staffed by volunteers and is open to taxpayers with income under \$41,000 per year. Both Federal and New York State tax returns are completed and electronically filed by the program.

All volunteers working with the program are required to take a series of IRS tests before they are allowed to complete returns.

Anyone who is interested should call 607-753-5077 to make an appointment. When setting up an appointment, you will also be given a list of items to bring with you to your appointment to ensure that your return is prepared accurately.

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JM McDonald Sports Complex

May 30, 31 & June 1, 2009: NYSW Soccer Final Four Championships
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